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Abstract

Talking around the text: Everyday information exchange in book discussion groups

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Book clubs, or book discussion groups, have become wildly popular in recent years, but the modern manifestation of this phenomenon has not been studied in an information exchange context. This exploratory study noted the types of information exchanged within a book discussion group, including information about the book being discussed and everyday information not related to the book. Everyday information is information related to everyday life, events, and happenings. This study also examined how the structure and rules of a book discussion group is formed, and how this structure facilitates information. The relationships between group members were noted and analyzed to determine correlations between other variables in the study. This study used Fisher's Information Grounds theory to frame a discussion of the role everyday information plays in relationship-building in book discussion groups.

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Introduction

A group of people come together in a space - a living room, a library, a bookstore, an office. In their hands they carry a book. In front of them on a table are other books they've brought from home. Seated, facing each other in a circle, they talk about the books. After an hour, or two hours, they stop talking, and everyone gets up and leaves. Next month, or next week, the process is repeated. That's it. That's a book club. Or is it?

The hostess moves frantically around her living room and kitchen, setting out cups and saucers for the coffee, plates for the pies, and puts the finishing touches on a cheese tray. She sets the wine glasses out, and opens up two bottles of wine. Her doorbell rings, to signal the first book club member has arrived. A couple, both in their sixties are standing at the door. The hostess says "well, hello!" and welcomes them in. They find their way to the couch in the living room, talking to each other and the hostess about everyday things, the weather, the walk over, and news from a meeting of another community organization in the neighborhood. Minutes later, the doorbell rings again, and thus it goes for the next twenty minutes. Book club members, from their 40s to their 80s arrive in ones, twos, and threes. While people come in, they set their bags of books down that they've brought with them. They take the books out of their bags and begin sorting them on a large table in the back of the living room. It's summertime, so there are no coats to hang up. But everyone begins conversations with people they see. People catch up with each other, asking people how they are, didn't you just get back from a trip? Others are thanking each other for recommending a book at the last meeting.

People in ones and twos and threes make their way to the adjacent open kitchen area. Wine has been poured by the hostess into the waiting glasses, which people pick up at their own pace. People begin to eat the cheese, and other savory snacks the hostess has spread out. After everyone has taken their cheese plates and wine glasses, the hostess says, "okay, let's get started". People for the next few minutes find their seats in a circle composed of a couch, armchairs, piano bench, and rocking chair. They pile their books onto the coffee table in the middle of the circle. People begin talking, first about a

popular bestseller, then about a movie that just came out. Several conversations are going at once. Then it appears the meeting really begins.

The hostess starts. She picks up her books, and one by one, gives a "book talk" about each one. People interject with questions about the book, or just to comment on whether they liked the book or not. The first "book talker" talks about a recent trip to Europe, and tells a story of someone she met there, which was the reason she read this particular book. She tells a story of an insight she gained from meeting someone from a different culture, and then, about how reading about her culture in a book deepened her respect for this other person. She then goes on to book talk a mystery she had read, comparing it to another popular bestseller. She does this for five books she has brought with her. After her book talks, she offers her books to whomever wants to borrow them. People quickly, with little conflict, pick books they would like to read. Then the next book talker starts, and the pattern is repeated, with slight variations in the type of "everyday" talk that is interjected into the book talks. In the end, everyone leaves with at least one, usually more than one, book to read for next time. Some of the variations of everyday talk that interweave with the book talk are: politics, families, the neighborhood, or a memory from the past. At the end of the meeting, members confirm plans for the next meeting, make announcements about neighborhood activities, and then break into side conversations in ones and twos and threes.

People gather their books, purses, and other belongings. They leave, some together, others alone. Over the next month, the members will see each other at other neighborhood organizations, the grocery store, or walking around the neighborhood for exercise. Some will go to a play together, others will get together to try a new restaurant. The next time they meet, the pattern repeats itself, except at this meeting, time has passed, the members have interacted with each other, and their relationships are just a little bit deeper. Over the years, these relationships could become even more deep. They might celebrate Christmas together, or tell stories about their deceased loved ones during an annual Day of the Dead ceremony. They might help each other move, or attend a new child's christening. They might even be together so long, that eventually, they will attend

each other's funerals. They might begin to think of each other as good friends, or even like a family.

There is a significant difference between my first and second description of a book discussion group. It is the second description that this study is based on: the book discussion group as a space where unique everyday information is shared and in the process, relationships are deepened and extended in ways that would not have been possible without the book club.

Book discussion groups have become wildly popular in recent years, but the modern manifestation of this phenomenon has not been studied in an information exchange context. In the course of this research, I studied the exchange of information within book discussion groups, which included information about the book being discussed and everyday information not related to the book. Everyday information is information related to everyday life, events, and happenings (IBEC, 2006). I examined how the structure of each book discussion group was formed, and how this structure facilitates information exchange. The rules of each book discussion group were also examined: whether they were formed from the collaboration of the group members, whether they were guided by external guidelines, or a combination of both. The relationships between group members were also noted, and correlations with other variables revealed.

In this study, I broadly use the term "information exchange" to mean all types of information exchanged within the group: information about the book being discussed, everyday information related to the members' daily lives, information about events in the broader community, discussion of ideas and events affecting members of the group and the broader community, or any other types of everyday information exchanged within the group.

This research builds on previous research by Fisher in Information Grounds theory in the library and information science field. This theory proposes the notion that people exchange information as a byproduct of simple social interaction. As a relatively new theory, it warrants application in new research in order to further develop and refine it. My research uses this theory as a lens through which to examine how a structured

group can act as an information ground where information is exchanged. A structured group is a group structured around a particular theme or format, such as a discussion group or study circle. I reveal patterns of information exchange within this structure and attempt to illuminate the factors of a social structure that facilitate and hinder information exchange. This study aims to provide a better understanding of the role of information exchange in the structures of book discussion groups or in other social organizations where discussion of a topic is the central activity.

Chapter I: Literature Review

There are a variety of disciplines and types of sources that supported the theoretical framework of this project. I read literacy studies, communications, literary criticism, and human information behavior theories. I also looked at library literature, which tended to focus on the how-to aspect of book clubs, but not as much at their purpose and role in reading culture as a whole. Because I was unable to observe book clubs within a library, however, I tended to not focus on this literature as it reflected a slightly different reality than I was observing.

Due to the popular nature of this activity, I found much useful literature from the popular press, some of which I included. I felt this was appropriate in order to give some cultural context of book clubs. These included reader's guides, a history of salons produced by the editors of the Utne Reader, and book club manuals. I avoided literature on electronic or online book discussion groups because I did not include those groups in this study. I also avoided literature on groups in schools, and for school-age children, because I only observed adults for this study. I also avoided, except for one Canadian study, non-U.S. studies. I did this intentionally as I believe book clubs would behave differently in different cultural contexts.

Literacy: Oral, Literate, and Visual

I am positing that this work rests in several useful theoretical frameworks: information grounds, women's way of knowing, and social literacy. One of the most significant and cited recent theorists in literacy is Brian Street, in particular his work titled *Social Literacies.* Here I will discuss how his work relates to book discussion groups, and the type of popular literacy they represent. Street synthesizes a body of research that shifts focus away from cognitive consequences of literacy acquisition to a "broader consideration of literacy as a social practice" (Street, 1995).

Building on Heath's concept of literacy events, which I define later, Street moves to the concept of 'literacy practices', which "refers to both behavior and the social and cultural conceptualizations that give meaning to the uses of reading and/or writing.

Literacy practices incorporate not only 'literacy events', as empirical occasions to which literacy is integral, but also folk models of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them" (Street, 1995, 2). He is attempting to move literacy research away from generalizations about the nature of language to the understanding of literacy practices in a 'real' social context. For this reason, I will further explain his theories, as they pertain to my research. Comparing ethnographic studies of literacy in multiple cultures, Street recognizes that literacy is part of a social system, all knowledge is social, and that literacy events are a mix of oral and literate features which can occur in everyday communication. In book discussion groups, the exchange of everyday information is informed, influenced, and in some way "touched" by the central text or texts being discussed by the group.

In the collection of essays titled, *The Making of Literate Societies,* the question was asked, "What role does literacy play in social development?" This question is particularly relevant to book discussion groups as their ancestors, literary societies, played such a significant role in the growth of libraries and other public literacy institutions. Another way to ask that question is, "What role do book clubs, as places where reading and literacy happen, play in social development?"

The collection of essays *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy* delves into research into the differences between oral and literate (text-based) literacies and traditions. The three major points from this collection that are applicable to this research are: the differences between oral and literate traditions, communication strategies, and literacies. My assertion is that book clubs combine the oral and literate strategies into their literacy practices and this affects the types of everyday information shared. The second major concept from this work that I discuss is of a literacy event and how it relates to book clubs. My final point that I make from this book is that these concepts are based in culture, and that there can be no universal line drawn between oral and literate practices.

In an essay titled *The Oral/Literate Continuum in Discourse*, Tannen gives an overview of the different paradigms various researchers (Bateson, Havelock, Olson, Ong, Goody and Watt) have used in conceptualizing the difference between oral and literate

traditions. She concludes there is not a sharp line between the two, but that instead, traditions fall on a continuum. The significance of this, according to Havelock, is that "the difference between oral vs. literate tradition, respectively, is not just a habit of expression but represents a difference in approach to knowledge and thought." (Havelock, 1963; Tannen, 1982, 1) In literate society, knowledge is seen as facts preserved in written formats. And in oral traditions, Ong points out formulaic expressions, such as sayings, clichés, and proverbs, are the "repository of received wisdom" and act as a way of signaling shared knowledge (Ong, 1967; Tannen, 1982, 1). Another feature of oral tradition is that it stitches together formulaic expressions into what he calls a 'rhapsodic' experience. In literate tradition, however, thought is linear, analytic, and sequential. Olson points out that "truth, in oral tradition, resides in common-sense reference to experience, whereas literate tradition resides in logical or coherent argument." He says that the oral sense of truth comes more naturally, which is why people have a hard time distinguishing between a conclusion that is logical vs. one with which they agree.

Ong states that 'knowing' in oral tradition is "achieved through a sense of identification with the speaker or characters in the spoken discourse." (Ong, 1967; Tannen, 1982, 2). In a larger sense, oral tradition emphasizes shared knowledge and interpersonal relationships between speakers. In book clubs, there is an emphasis on identification with other members of the group. Bateson states that the way speakers communicate this relationship reveals the metacommunicative function of language whereas literate tradition, with it's emphasis on the information or content of language, gives rise to an idea that words carry meaning all by themselves, and that it is their prime function to do so (Bateson, 1972; Tannen, 1982, 2). In the **Discussion** section, I explain how these ideas supported what I observed in this study.

In an essay titled *Protean Shapes in Literacy Events: Ever-shifting Oral and Literate Traditions*, Shirley Brice Heath further blurs the line between orality and literacy. She uses the concept of a "literacy event" as a conceptual tool in understanding the co-existing relationships between spoken and written language. This is particularly important to understand for book clubs, which use spoken language to discuss written

language. Understanding the oral tradition helps us understand the types of communication, the types of information exchanged, and the types of relationships formed in book clubs.

Heath defines a literacy event as: "any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role." (Heath, 1982; Tannen, 1982, 93). She states there are rules and structures for literacy events that vary from situation to situation. One requirement for a literacy event is that one or more parties have some level of reading ability. Speech acts or speech events are the basic units of language used to express meaning and intention (Littlejohn, 1999). Speech events "are appropriate within certain literacy events. Speech events may describe, repeat, reinforce, expand, frame or contradict written materials, and participants must learn whether the oral or written mode takes precedence in literacy events." (Heath, 1982; Tannen, 1982, 93). Also to consider, speech events have their own rules that vary from situation to situation. In book clubs, rules are mainly concerned with regulating speech. One interesting historical byproduct of literacy that should be considered is that in some cases, the introduction of literacy to a community allowed for greater social control from literate elites as well as resulted in less political activity as people began to think less of themselves as measured against a widespread norm (Heath, 1982; Tannen, 1982, 114).

Visual literacy is another type of literacy that is important to consider in group discussions of texts. An ERIC/RCS report on visual literacy uses a definition of visual literacy set forth at the first National Conference on Visual Literacy in 1969. Visual literacy is defined as "a group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing, and at the same time, having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret visible actions, objects and/or symbols, natural or man-made, that he encounters in the environment." (Ladevich, 1974).

Related to the idea of visual literacy is the cognitive neuroscience concept known as "speechreading". Speechreading is the process of extracting important linguistic cues from a talker's face. According to a study done by Hall et. al., "the many cognitive

operations required to understand spoken sentences from a talker's face are mediated by an extensive network of brain activity." This brain activity tends to be concentrated in the left hemisphere which controls language processing. (Hall, 2005) The implications for book clubs are interesting. As talk is the main activity of a book club, and people derive satisfaction from "good talk" at book clubs, then understanding how talk is facilitated is important to consider. The face to face environment vs. the "static screen" environment of the online world would predict that the talk would be different between a face to face group and an online group.

Reading

Reading, and particularly readers' advisory – the overall programming umbrella that covers connecting readers to books read for pleasure - has been a well-covered area in the professional literature in LIS. Recent empirical studies (May, Shearer) combined with more philosophical musings (Chelton, Wiegland) have shed light on the value of promoting services for pleasure readers. The value of this type of reading happening in group settings is that readers are able to relate stories to their personal lives, and use this information as a means for self-examination, and sometimes self-transformation (Radway, 1991).

In Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, he argues people organize themselves into large and small "imagined communities" in order to orient and affiliate with each other. Cultural texts of all kinds work as agents to help forge imagined communities by providing common sets of experiences, including the reading of shared printed texts, and meeting as groups on public property and in cultural spaces (Wiegland, 2000). Rifkin states that we are moving away from the "age of information" to an "age of access" where communities develop bonds through shared "webs of meanings" that focus on play, rather than work. "Play is what people do when they create culture," Rifkin says. "It is the letting free of the human imagination to create shared meanings. Play is a fundamental category of human behavior without which civilization could not exist" (Rifkin, 2000). The concept of "urban tribe" which was referenced by one of the participants in this study is a similar concept.

Book Discussion

Long explores the tension between the private act of reading and the public act of discussing the book with other people. She approaches this from a socio-cultural perspective. In her study, much like my own exploratory study, she found that until recently, these groups were invisible as subjects of academic research. She does not attribute this to an ignorance of their existence, but to an overt dismissal of their importance as creators and consumers of culture. She makes the assertion that culture plays a role in the group behavior (Long, 2003, 17). She also explores extensively the links between women's reading groups and civic activity. She refutes Robert Putnam's assertion that participation in reading groups has declined, drawing doubts about his empirical method (Long, 2003, 18).

Janice Radway's work on reading as a nonhierarchical activity is useful in studying the nature of group reading. Radway points out that traditional interpretations of reading begin with the author, and have the readers radiating outward. This type of interpretation leads to the idea that reading is a hierarchical activity, with the work of the author at the top (Long, 2003, 20). A reader-centered theory would stand this interpretation on its head. According to Long, "a reader-centered model focuses our attention on reading as one kind of cultural practice, a form of behavior that performs complex personal and social functions for those who engage in it" (Long, 2003). This has particular implications for the analysis of women's talk about books. As Long puts it, "they are supporting each other in a collective working-out of their relationship to the contemporary historical moment and the particular social conditions that characterize it." This is beyond the most often cited (by members) reasons for joining a book group which are: one, to talk about books and learn more about books that "I wouldn't normally read", or in other words, extending the literary horizon and two, social companionship with people who are intellectually stimulating. This first reason of understanding one's place in the world is, in essence, the value of reading. But how to quantify this is more difficult. Long impressionistically demonstrates this final value, and I saw hints of it

during my observations, but without more extensive surveys and rigorous research, it is difficult to be certain.

History of Book Clubs

The history of book clubs is a difficult one to trace as it involves tracking private, often times secret, organizations who sometimes, but often did not, keep records of their activities. Compounding the lack of documentary evidence is the fact that book discussion groups have only until the last ten or so years been taken seriously by academic research, thus affecting the success of publishing studies about book clubs as well as library collection development of primary and secondary source materials about book clubs. However, there has been some good introductory work done in tracing the history of literary clubs. There are a few historical case studies of individual book clubs that helped give me an historical overview of common trends in book clubs. These book clubs were in places as diverse as St. Louis (Gregory, 2001), Port Clinton, Ohio (Myers, 1997), the United States in general (Silverman, 1997), and Norwegian-American immigrant communities (Keillor, 1992).

Elizabeth Long's *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* is one such work. Combining qualitative research with historical research, she traces the history of book clubs in Texas and connects them to their present day descendants. As a sociologist, she examined the social aspects of reading and how shared reading practices contribute to the creation of a community. She focuses, not on the exchange of everyday information, but on the central activity of a book club - the interpretation of the book. In social reading, she observes that readers "move into and out of the text" and thus take meanings relevant to their own lives (Long, 2003). She states, however, that it is the act of being able to "control" the text that stimulates pleasure in reading and social bonding that is intellectually stimulating and empowering. This activity is supported by my observations of book clubs, as well as Farr's observations and study of Oprah's Book Club.

Why should we examine the history of book clubs? There are several reasons. One, book clubs and literary societies played a significant role in the history of libraries,

bookstores, and other literary establishments. They also figure prominently in U.S. women's history, as they relate to the broader activities of literary society members in other civic activities, such as public health campaigns and women's rights activism. They also figure prominently in the history of women's education, particularly in 19th century United States. Charlotte Emerson Brown, in a 1906 address to the General Federation of Women's Clubs explained the connection between club activity, particularly reading, and their external civic and philanthropic work.

> The influence of the club, which is felt so helpfully in its efforts to improve existing conditions, could never have been so potent without the preparation and study which had gone before, for thought and knowledge must ever precede practical work. A knowledge of nature and nature's laws, a study of the experience of the race, a comprehension of the development of the human soul, with its ideals, its aspirations, its temptations, its limitations, must be reached before there can be a sympathetic understanding of conditions or effective work in philanthropy or reform (Gere, 1997, 215).

Another excellent study of this history is Anne Ruggles Gere's work *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920.* Both she and Long posit that social interaction and involvement encourages literacy, whereas isolation discourages. This is an unusual position to take, and turns on its head the typical view of reading as a solitary activity. Both Long and Gere cite the experiences and testimonies of women's club members to support this claim (Gere, 1997). It has particular relevance for this study because it is in this social interaction that the exchange of everyday information takes place. As I explain in the discussion of data, the most common everyday information exchanged is on the topics of travel and politics and current events. Second to that is information about families and personal lives. This reveals that in book clubs today, as in book clubs of the past, members are situating their personal lives into the current historical moment, and learning from the each other through social interaction. While current club members exchange this type of

information in a casual, more informal manner, historical club members attempted conscientious study of social problems, history, and other topics. As Gere (1997) notes, "Clubwomen wanted different things, depending on their social locations, but for all clubwomen literacy connected with social and political struggles to transform the goals and conditions of their lives.".

Gere explores the social interaction aspect in some detail. Some of the major relevant points she makes concern how all activities of the clubs are social in nature. She explains that club women's literacy practices "embodied their love, liking, and care for one another" (Gere, 1997, 19). They exchanged, "information about one's actions, beliefs, or emotions … [and] their experiences as wives and mothers as well as their travels and other experiences outside the home; they shared their religious creeds along with their beliefs about higher education for women, suffrage, and a range of other issues; and they expressed affection for one another" (Gere, 1997, 40). From these accounts it is evident that the topics of everyday information exchange were not much different in the past then they are today.

Book clubs today share some features of the women's clubs of the 19th century (Farr, 2005). But, it is important to note that book clubs reside within a larger, much longer, tradition of small group structured discussion. In *The Joy of Conversation: the Complete Guide to Salons*, author Jaida N'ha Sandra gives a history of salons and the role they have played in politics, art, and cultures as a whole. She gives various examples of these small discussion groups, of which the book club is one type, from various cultures: the Parisian salon, the American salons, such as Thurman's Harlem Rennaisance salon, the Algonquin Round Table, Rahel Levin's Berlin salons, the Spanish and Latin American tertulia, the ancient Greek symposia, and the Kuwaiti diwaniyeh. What is most interesting about the latter two discussion groups is that specially designed places were built into private homes for the purpose of holding these types of structured conversations, which I explore further in the **Place** section.

Oprah's Book Club

It is important to at least mention Oprah Winfrey in a discussion of book clubs as she has had such a huge influence on the way current book clubs are structured. Even those book club members who shun her book club, and her taste in books, still feel the influence of her national club. The Oprah Book Club is a national online book club linked to her popular daytime television series. There have been a few articles written about her book club, and one dissertation, which was later published as a book. In the book *Reading Oprah: How Oprah's Book Club Changed the Way America Reads*, Farr traces the rise of the current most influential book club in America right now. She examines the phenomena from a sociological and literary criticism framework, and traces how the club has influenced literary taste. Farr states that Oprah's Book Club was a success because "it recognized and embraced how Americans read and value literature" (Farr, 2005, 85). This meeting of readers where they already were is one component of the popularity of Oprah's Book Club.

But there is another reason why people both joined Oprah's Book Club, as well as referenced her book club as either an inspiration, or information source, for their own book club. Oprah's name has been turned into a verb in common American usage. Various manifestations of this are: "oprahfication", "oprahify", or like "going postal", "going Oprah on you." "Oprahfication" can be defined as the "titillating public discussion of the personal, the disclosure of private emotion for mass consumption on national TV" (Farr, 2005, 53). This public disclosure of personal information is what drives some people away from book clubs, as well as draws some people in. As Farr states, this implies that reading has a social function, which is quite different from the "traditional, high cultural idea of reading as an individual intellectual pursuit" (Farr, 2005, 53). She goes on to critique the view of reading espoused by theorists such as Harold Bloom who denigrate the social function of reading by stating:

> The effects of social reading may arguably be indirect – the reading act itself is still, technically a solitary one – but studying social reading has convinced me that

> the choice of books, the purpose of the reading, and its results can be collective to the extent that Bloom's distinction between social and selfish becomes irrelevant. There is no solitary praxis for book group members. Even *how* we read when we're alone, what we notice and what questions we ask, is affected by the lingering presence of other group members' voices (Farr, 2005, 54).

In the collection of articles *Reading sites: Social difference and reader response*, the only article that treated the subject of book clubs was one about the Oprah Book Club. Kaufman states a successful text in her club is one that "sent a reader back into his or her own life, a text that made a reader rethink his or her life and that led to some type of change on the reader's part." (Kaufman, 2004, 228). This type of personal and transformative reading is the type of reading often associated with book clubs. In this work, I am not critiquing the type of literary interpretation or development of taste in this work. But I found it useful to note the acknowledgement that personal experience, which can be expressed by everyday information, is part of the reading experience in a book club. As a few of the groups I studied used Oprah's suggestions to guide their selection of books, it is important to note her influence. The books she suggests make good book discussion books because they force personal reflection.

Oprah, in her book clubs, also talks about strategies she uses in comprehending a text (Kaufman, 2004, 233). This was a common topic of conversation among the book club members I witnessed. They either discussed how long it took them to read a book, or other strategies, such as researching material about the setting of the book, using a dictionary, etc. Oprah, and book clubs in general, as guides to better reading strategies is another topic altogether.

Reader's Guides

The publishing industry and the reading public have always changed in response to each other. Publishers present books that will sell, that will cater to the public's aesthetic taste and information needs. And in response, the reading public seeks out

books that the publishing industry presents, and as studies have shown (McGinley, 2001) are responsive to promotional tactics employed by the publishing industry.

Publishers' response to book clubs, and book clubs' response to the publishers, is no exception. The recent surge in popularity of book groups has been noticed by the publishing industry. A wave of popular press books about book clubs, how-to manuals, book club cookbooks, and discussion guides have been published to fill this perceived demand (McGinley, 2001). As Elizabeth Long (2003) points out, book clubs respond to the "economic power of the publishing industry and the cultural authority of the critical establishment."

There is debate about the usefulness of reader's guides, or discussion guides. Obviously, publishers believe they are providing a product that people either need or want, as can be evidenced by the proliferation of new novels with book discussion group questions and guides included in the book. One group I observed used these questions to stimulate discussion. Without a more systematic approach, it is impossible to determine how many people and groups use them. But there is some literature on the subject. Baron states in an article titled "I teach English – and I hate reader's guides" that the questions offered by publishers are "useless". He states that the questions "aren't difficult, and answering them won't lead to a sounder mind" (Baron, 2002).

The tension between everyday readers' taste and commercial response to it and the critical authority held by academia plays out in a discussion of book clubs. As Long, Radway, and others have pointed out, academia has not paid significant enough attention to the everyday reading practices of those outside the academy. But examination of this everyday reading practice reveals that the cultural authority of the academy is not held in as high of esteem as the cultural authority of other readers' life experiences. This is particularly evident in book clubs. Book clubs today are no longer the place where women seek to gain access to a higher education. Women now outnumber men in U.S. universities. Instead, for many, book clubs are a place to read books for pleasure and to enjoy social interaction with intellectually stimulating people, versus reading for edification (Freeman, 2005).

Readers' guides, as published by the commercial book publishing industry, offer instructions for everyday readers. It has been argued that the commercial guides, who's survival depends on positive response and eventual adoption, are more responsive to the needs and habits of everyday readers because it is commercially viable for them to do so (McGinley, 2001). However, it has also been argued that readers who utilize these guides adopt their recommended reading practices, instead of developing their own (Baron, 2002).

In the section on reader-response theory, I explain how book groups form independent interpretations of the text. However, for groups that do use reader's guides, sometimes called discussion guides or book club guides, there is a reference to an outsider's line of inquiry into the text. There are strong opinions either way about these guides. Some feel (Baron, 2002) that they stifle the independence of interpretation, which many members receive satisfaction from. Others feel that they are a way of delving deeper into a text that a group on its own perhaps could not achieve. An interesting future research question would be whether the desire for independent interpretation vs. guided interpretation correlated with educational level.

Roles and Gender

The roles people take on in small group discussions are interesting to note. While my study concentrated more on people's relationships with each other, and whether there was any correlation between their relationships with each other and the types of information they shared with each other, it is also interesting to note from a sociological perspective the role gender plays in book clubs.

Devlin-Glass looks at the role of gender in determining literary authority. She notes that who controls literary authority also controls the amount of research and respect a particular subject receives in the academia. She looks at this from an Australian perspective, but the similar Anglophone literary histories between Australia and the U.S. make her findings applicable to a U.S. setting. One of her most interesting points is how women use identity politics to center their discussions of popular fiction.

In the *Book Group Book*, a collection of essays written by members of book groups, Robin Neidorf traces the origin of her involvement with book groups to her mother, who herself belonged to a book group. She even states, "before I knew what literature was, I knew book groups." She suggests from her experience that women "are not only more likely to read literature, they are also more likely to seek out the ways to discuss it." While this statement relies on anectodotal evidence, it does reflect at least a common stereotype, which might have some truth to it, that book groups, and group discussion of literature, are dominated by women. This gendered attitude about group reading can be traced back to the 19th century, and the roles women and their associations played in the culture at large. Even Oprah's Book Club, with the emphasis on closely read texts and carefully prepared foods is taking on the characteristics of these clubs from the past (Farr, 2005, 57).

Beach (2000) posits that readers construct their own roles adopting a way of reading that is constituted of ways of knowing and believing. In other words, how people interpret a text is informed by their personal ideological and knowledge systems. They also adopt roles in the group based on others' ways of knowing and believing, so that those who are in opposition or agreement with each other will adjust their ways of reading to accommodate the other.

Information Behavior

In an English abstract to a paper written in Hebrew, S.B. Arbib (2000) states that social information science can contribute to six channels of activity in the field. One of the six is the development of community projects, such as book clubs and self-help sections in libraries. Arbib then states that the Social Information Scientist can, in a critical way, contribute as both an initiator and a creative and active worker to contribute to the community. I hope that this research can serve in a small way a similar function.

The main information behavior theory that this research is using is Information Grounds theory. Other relevant theories are: Reader Response theory, Small World Network Exploration, Theory of Serious Leisure, Strength of Weak Ties, and Women's Ways of Knowing.

Information Grounds

Information grounds are "synergistic environments temporarily created when people come together for a singular purpose but from whose behavior emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information" (Fisher, 2005). The people that attend information grounds are generally consistently present and have identifiable social roles, "people or actors who are expected in that setting and play expected social roles, including those connected to information flow"(Fisher, 2005). Fisher first defined information grounds in her study of everyday information sharing at elderly foot clinics. Since then, studies, including this one, have tested the information grounds theory across varied populations (Fisher, 2006). While research has been done to identify basic characteristics of information grounds, studies, such as this one, are needed to understand the phenomena in more depth, as well as how information grounds can be adapted and designed to facilitate better everyday information flow.

There are seven main identified characteristics of an information ground. These are:

1) Information grounds can occur anywhere, in any type of temporal setting, and are predicated on the presence of the individuals.
2) People gather at information grounds for a primary, instrumental purpose other than information sharing.
3) Information grounds are attended by different social types, most if not all of whom play expected and important, albeit different, roles in information flow.
4) Social interaction is a primary activity at information grounds such that information flow is a by-product.
5) People engage in formal and informal information sharing, and information flow occurs in many directions.
6) People use information obtained at information grounds in alternative ways, and benefit along physical, social, affective, and cognitive dimensions.

7) Many sub-contexts exist within an information ground and based on people's perspectives and physical factors; together these sub-contexts form a grand context.

Reader Response Theory

Reader response theory came into prominence during the 1970s as a rejection of New Criticism. The reader-oriented approach reexamines the orientation of text and reader. With a foundation in M.H. Abrams' argument from *The Mirror and the Lamp,* (1953) reader response explains the place of the literary text can be understood in terms of four basic coordinates or relations: the *expressive*, which is the relation of text to its author; the *pragmatic*, which is an explanation of the text that has a moral purpose; the mimetic, which is the explanation of art as an imitation of the world; and the *objective*, which is the relation of the text to itself as a self-contained autonomous object (Abrams, 1953). Both Elizabeth Long and Janice Radway adopted reader-response theory as a theoretical framework in their ethnographical studies of popular reading practices.

As book clubs are grounds for popular reading practices, it would be impossible to ignore reader-response theory. When observing the book club meetings, I noted how the members referred to the text, and how they worked out its meaning, or made sense of the text, as a group. A reader-centered theory as opposed to a text-centered theory is important to consider for this particular activity for two reasons. One, readers in book clubs work outside of a formal academic setting, and therefore outside a consensus of meaning that can develop in an academic canon that uses the peer-reviewed process to determine if not a consensus of one meaning, at least a consensus of a few meanings. As Radway and Long both observed in women's reading groups, book groups develop a consensus, or groups of consensuses, within their own small world.

Ross states that in reader-response theory, "the text's meaning is thought to be constituted by the reader's activity in bringing certain horizons of expectations to the text, in selecting which features of the text to attend to, and in responding to these features." (Ross, 2005, 305). A book that has been particularly influential for LIS researchers interested in reading as a form of information behavior is Louise Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*. This work outlines a theory of reading as a transaction between different

points. She states that the reader "brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements, in a never-to-be-duplicated combination, determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text"(Rosenblatt, 1995, 30-31). There are two parts of this definition of reading that have relevance for book discussion. One, the bringing of past experiences, moods, etc. or in other words, the universe of life experiences, knowledge and personality that everyone lives within and the interaction with other people's life experiences and personalities create the second relevant point; a never again to be duplicated combination which leads to a never again to be duplicated experience with the text.

Rosenblatt developed what she called a "transactional" theory, which allowed her to continue to respect the author's intentions and the text's powers, while also respecting the responses of readers to a text. This communication between text, author, and reader is an accurate description of the type of literary interpretation that exists in book clubs. Rosenblatt was influenced by Dewey and other pragmatic philosophers so that in her practice, she was more interested in turning students into better readers than turning them into the disciples of the singular "right reading" of a text (Booth, introduction, x, Rosenblatt, 1995). She looked at the historical moment, and saw that historical and social context affects how readers interpret a text and how writers write a text. She emphasizes the experiential nature of reading.

Book club members relate their personal lives to the text they are reading. In information behavior terms, the members share personal information as a means of making sense out of a text. This type of literary interpretation allows for a personal reflectiveness that reading the text for itself, as New Criticism suggested, does not allow. This ability to internalize the ideas of a book, making them relevant to your personal universe, allows the reader to enter a transformative process of re-evaluation of personal ethics and beliefs. Rosenblatt states that the whole personality is involved in the literary experience and "literature enables the [reader] to live through - and to reflect on - much that in abstract terms would be meaningless to him." (Rosenblatt, 1995, 173). Encountering the universe of ideas in books allows the reader, as Rosenblatt puts it, "to

know more intimately perhaps more than would be possible in actual life, many personalities."

This type of personal encounter with books is part of Rosenblatt's "transactional" notion of reading. Another important concept to note within this larger concept is that reading takes place in social context (Beach, Heath, Rosenblatt, Street). In book clubs, members develop patterned means of sharing responses to the text that act as threads between everyday experience and text experience (Beach, 2000). One of these patterned means is the sharing of their own real-world experiences and everyday information.

Women's Ways of Knowing

Based on the influential book *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986) this theory examines women's information behavior as distinguished by their experiences as a woman. Belenky uses the term "knowers" and defines several types of knowing: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge.

I chose this theory to discuss for several reasons. One, historically, literary groups that had the most impact on public literacy were run by, or were solely participated in, by women. These early women's organizations developed independent structures, communication and information exchange strategies, as well as unique contributions to society at large due to their proscribed roles as women. Two, book clubs today are still dominated by women. While this statement is difficult, if not impossible, to prove due to the private and informal nature of so many book clubs, anecdotally this is a true statement (Reynolds, 2005). While women's experiences in the early 21st century are very different from women's experiences in the late 19th century, there are still differences between men's and women's experiences. This leads to the conclusion that if women have unique information exchange and communication strategies, than organizations dominated them will reflect this. I focus on two aspects of book clubs within this theory: types of everyday information exchange and relationships.

Serious Leisure

Serious leisure is part of a larger body of work on everyday information behavior. Serious leisure, as opposed to casual leisure, is "the systematic pursuit of an [activity] participants find so substantial and interesting that in the typical case they launch themselves on a career centered on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge, and experience" (Stebbins, 2001, 3). There are some essential qualities of serious leisure that relate to book clubs: proactive knowledge acquisition, social and personal benefits, strong identity with their community, and a unique ethos or culture.

Book Club Studies

Elizabeth Long's study of Houston book groups is the major study on book discussion groups. It proved useful to compare her findings to my preliminary findings. She provides an illuminating perspective on the social use of reading for women in reading groups. While she does discuss how reading affects women's lives, their formation of identity, and their interpretation of culture, she does not however outline in detail the everyday information that is shared at reading groups. This type of detailing of everyday information can provide a quantitative foundation to make the sociological assumptions that she makes. It can also illuminate the importance of information exchange in the context of reading literature, which is in itself a form of information exchange. She does illuminate how reading a text can be the anchor that grounds and guides a conversation. The best illustration of this concept was said by a participant in my study, who stated that the conversation extended out from the book like tendrils into the lives of each member.

Long first discusses several useful theories of reading to provide a framework for her investigation into the social uses of reading and reading groups. She then outlines the history of white women's clubs and reading groups in the United States, and particularly in Texas, concentrating on their positive contributions to women's identity and the literary infrastructure of Houston, Texas.

In a small study done in Melbourne, Australia of members of four Council of Adult Education reading groups, Devlin-Glass examined how members of the groups

approached literary authority. Devlin-Glass gives a brief overview of the history of scholarly research (or under-research) into book clubs. According to Devlin-Glass, the reason for this neglect is that reading groups occur in private homes and outside of institutional frameworks and are composed mainly of women. Also, women readers have battled a perception that their choice of reading material is "light and frivolous" and not worthy of serious study, a view which many women have internalized (Devlin-Glass, 2001). She goes on to examine how women form identity in their groups, and how they act "somewhat resistant to being managed by the cultural 'mainstream.'" Women self-legitimate by situating their ideas in their culture, avoiding aesthetic, or "literary" talk, and constructing "provisional collaborative identities using books". The power of this type of communication and identity formation is how the group is able to form their own unique culture. She characterizes this as a confrontation against the elitism of the "intellectual class" (Devlin-Glass, 2001).

The most interesting aspect for my study is Devlin-Glass' statement, "their social practices are the more intriguing because of the cohesiveness and loyalty such groups engender and longevity they often experience." She claims there is a lack of research into these social practices as well as the point where text selection and group talk join, and it this nexus that she examined most closely in her study (Devlin-Glass, 2001). This study helped me contextualize my research into the research of others on book clubs. The social practice that I examined in my study is the exchange of everyday information.

Another intriguing result of her study is the number of women who classified their group reading activity as educational (generally older women) vs. pleasurable (generally younger women). While she was mainly concerned with the concept of taste, she recognizes that some women "have different needs met by books from those of the providers themselves, and nonaesthetic needs." She also noted a trend in Australian book group reading habits that was similar to what I observed in the book groups' selection of materials; "the high incidence of books dealing with what the academy might term multicultural or "orientalising" fiction, or fiction which seeks to understand other cultures as a primary focus." More than one member in my study stated that she was interested in travel, or books about people she knew nothing about. Devlin-Glass speculates this

interest in the other signifies that groups are engaging in conversations and debates over contemporary issues. Another similar finding is that book groups engage in a different type of book talk than what occurs in academic settings, but they are not overtly critical of academic book talk. Devlin-Glass pointed out that the women in her study "take literary authority very seriously, without feeling the need to contest it, or give any particular thought to its construction via their education or the literary institutions to which they are bound, but also that their version of literature is quite different from that of the academy."

The Great Books Program was part of the larger Adult Educational Program. With its roots in socialist thought of the 1920s, the Great Books Program strove to bring to the "masses" the "great books" of the Western canon. The National Opinion Research Center commissioned several studies of the Great Books Program in the 1950s and 1960s. They examined the demographic characteristics of people in Great Books Groups, their roles in the group, the structure and process in the group, as well as their external family and community roles. A separate section of the research reports deals with their intellectual abilities as well as their ideological belief system. What this study does not evaluate, or value, is the exchange of everyday information and its role in the formation of social bonds between the members. The researcher (Davis, 1957) puts into opposition the different results of participants ranking the effectiveness of the book club: the more "sociable" elements of the group discussion are *not* the "kaffe-klatsch" type, but "include such *cerebral* [emphasis mine] things as learning what the great minds have to say, analyzing and criticizing arguments, expressing ideas, and gaining self-insight." This would seem to devalue the more everyday "kaffe-klatsch" elements of book groups. Edward Fitzpatrick, president of Mary Mount College, wrote a critique of the program in 1952 titled, *Great Books: Panacea or what?*. He critiques at length the type of discussion and reading that occurs in Great Books groups as not having enough depth or intellectual vigor. Many studies (Devlin-Glass, NORC) focus on the formation of taste and aesthetics in book clubs.

There is much discussion of why people join book clubs, and how it shapes the formation of new identities, and role formation, but little to no discussion of the sharing

of everyday information. However, everyday information exchange is alluded to in several works about book clubs. For example in Devlin-Glass, Slezak, Long, and Farr, the idea that women developed a dual focus on both the book and each other, and that this "you're amongst friends" environment allowed them to speak with more confidence and have more faith in their intellectual abilities. As one writer, when describing the Great Books program put it, "people seek rewarding social and intellectual outlets for their leisure time" (Gendler, 1997).

Another writer, writing for the *U.S. Catholic*, states that book discussion groups offer more than a chance to talk about books. They reflect a "yearning for community, self-improvement, and even spiritual growth." She also states the "reading community creates a safe-even sacred-space, encouraging participants to reflect on their own experience and allowing them to share it openly." Sharing of all types of information leads to "a real joining of human hearts." This author does not consider personal and everyday information to be off-topic. Instead, she says, "It's the literature asking us to look imaginatively at these characters, and then we look at our own lives imaginatively too-reading literature teaches us how to read our own lives, so it's a natural move to the personal." This allows members to engage with the literature in a self-reflective way, which can lead to personal transformation. In one group described in this article, each meeting begins with a "check-in" on the status of the members' everyday lives. Here is an example of everyday information exchange being formalized into the structure of the meeting. Other book groups interviewed for this article speak about the group as a place for both intellectual stimulation and a place to deepen the relationships between members. There is also the value of "being heard". The act of listening, and making sure every voice is heard was echoed by a few of the groups I observed. The longest-standing group I observed, the Foreign Language Club, even had a rule about making sure no one talked over another person.

Smaller exploratory studies have been done on book clubs by library and publisher researchers. One example of a smaller quantitative study is one done in Vancouver, British Columbia. In this study, the findings showed that members join book clubs in order to connect with other people, increase their knowledge, nurture their love

of books and share bonds of community (Sedo, 2002). Smith (1996) examined the patterns of discourse in book clubs as they compared to classroom literature discussions and found the social aspects of clubs, equality amongst the members, and the spirit of cooperation as central factors to their success. He found that the clubs allowed members to not only learn more about themselves, but to also gain insight into their fellow members, many of whom they considered friends, as well as intellectual equals.

Profiles of clubs are numerous, and there are many lessons to be learned from these case studies for practitioners. But as I stated before, the exchange of everyday information in these groups has not been seen as a worthy area of study. I hope that by referencing earlier works (Long, Radway, Smith) on the value of interpretation of books by relating them to the personal, that this research will move a step further, and allow book club members and facilitators to "open up the floor" to everyday information exchange as a tool for social bonding.

Book clubs in the Workplace and in Libraries

While I focused on the social aspects of book clubs, it is important to note that there are other purposes for belonging to a book club. Learning is for many, especially those familiar with the related study circle, the main reason to belong to a book group. However, even when learning is the main reason for joining a book club, the social bonds that are formed will often keep people coming back. As I discuss in the **Findings** section, the workplace groups that I encountered thought both learning and social aspects were important in the group.

The book club has made its way into the workplace as an effective tool for continuing learning, increasing social interaction amongst workers, and as a fun activity. I observed one workplace book club and corresponded with, and was on the email list, for another, though I was unable to actually observe the second group. But from the conversations I had with members of both groups, their reasons for joining and continuing their participation were very different from each other, and a little different from private book clubs which I discuss later.

There is some literature on this topic. Nisonger (1997) discusses how book groups can be used by library workers to evaluate books for collection development. Flood and Lapp (1994) discuss the uses of book clubs in a school setting for professional development of teachers. Both the intellectual and the social aspects are emphasized as strengths in book clubs. Also, the type of textual interpretation that is identified with book clubs, relating the text to personal experiences and also paying attention to the personal responses of other group members to the text, is seen as a good professional development tool because it forces participants to evaluate their own work as well as hear the experiences of their fellow teachers. For teachers, book clubs play another role, which is allowing teacher book club participants to become more aware of their literacy processing and thus, more aware of teaching and learning. They also create an environment that welcomes participation and diverse points of view, further expanding participants' repertoire of experiences and bettering communication between teachers (Flood and Lapp, 1994).

Most public library systems today offer some sort of book discussion group activity. The types of book discussion groups offered by libraries vary from face to face clubs set in the mornings, afternoons, and evenings which cater to different populations, online discussion groups, email discussion groups, language learning book clubs (for both ESL and English speakers learning another language), and more. According to Long, women's clubs founded 85 percent of the libraries in the United States (Long, 2003, 52).

As I studied groups in Seattle and Atlanta, it is useful to understand the history in these two areas of book discussion groups and libraries. In Everett, WA, the Everett Woman's Book Club in 1894 petitioned to have a free public library system. According to the Georgia Library History Project, in 1894, the Georgia Teachers Association organized "reading circles", many of which eventually became school libraries. In 1867, the Young Men's Library Association of Atlanta was established and in 1897, the Georgia Library Club, forerunner to the current Georgia Library Association, was established. This organization was headed by the Young Men's Library Association of Atlanta and the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs. The latter played an important

role in advocating the establishment of the Georgia Library Commission, a statewide advisory body for communities wishing to establish libraries. In 1900, the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs began a statewide campaign to promote libraries, including traveling libraries. This is only a brief history of the link between book clubs and libraries. Long, Gere, and others have written with more depth and breadth about Progressive Era clubs, both women's and men's, as well as the twentieth century Adult Education Movement.

Relationships

Smith (1996) examined the patterns of discourse in book clubs as they compared to classroom literature discussions. He noted that the social aspects of clubs is an essential part of their success. I utilized the concept of social capital to determine the levels of relationships of book club members' social networks within the group. Using the name generator method, written about by Nan Lin (Johnson, 2005; Fisher, 2005) , I asked participants what types of information they shared in the group, as well as who among the group members would they rely on for certain types of activities. This measured the amount of social capital built into the book clubs. Used in Fisher's *Information Grounds* theory, which states that "people who get together in diverse groups are more likely to meet people from different social or work backgrounds" (Johnson, 2005; Fisher, 2005) this interaction gives people the ability to form more social capital.

In a larger context, examining the relationships between members, and the types of support they provided for each other, falls into the types of research in social capital. Experimental social psychologists have uncovered striking evidence, he notes, "that even the most casual social interaction can have a powerful effect on reciprocity" [Putnam, 2000). Reciprocity is the thread that connects people, according to Putnam. This is supported by my observations of the groups where the relationships were strong between each other.

Conclusions

Overall, a study of book clubs must examine perceptions of the value of literacy and information exchange. While recent scholarship into everyday information behavior has begun examination of the latter, and scholarship into literacy has a long history (Ong, Street, Tannen), there has been little examination of the types of information exchange connected with reading in groups (Long, Radway). Reading in book groups is a discursive practice (Heath, Long, McGinley, Radway, Street), socially constructed, and ever-changing depending on context (Fisher). Book clubs also incorporate a variety of sources of information into the conversations: book reviews, movies, television, other books, and life experiences.

The model of text interpretation in book clubs is similar to what Abrams described in his seminal work *The mirror and the lamp: Romantic theory and the critical tradition.* Below is a representation of his model of textual interpretation.

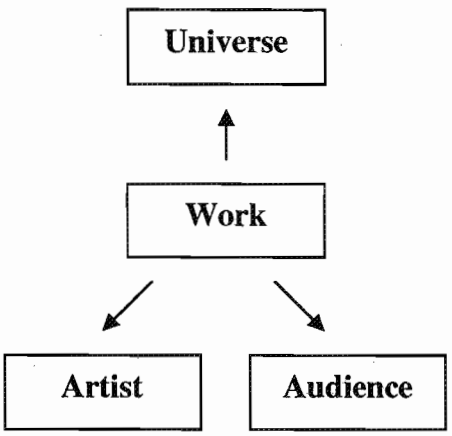

Figure 1: Abram's Model of Textual Interpretation

In my model of book club textual interpretation (see **Figure 2**), the Universe represents life experiences, knowledge, and all memories of informational events in the readers' and

writer's life. The Work is the text itself, the Artist is the writer, and the Audience is the reader or readers. While Abrams had the arrows pointing in only one way, another way to visualize it, and more appropriate to the book club experience is represented in **Figure 2.** One thing he did not consider is the effect the audience would have on the writer, or the work, but as reader-response theory has shown, as well as the centuries-old practice of writers interacting with literary societies, the writer is influenced by the reader (Flint, 2006). In the **Discussion** section, see **Figure 2** for the model of textual interpretation that I developed for book clubs.

A theory of discursive practices owes much to discourse analysis, which posits that language is socially shaped and socially shaping, or constitutive (Fairclough, 1993). In this study I was more interested in the relationship-building aspects of communication, or the metacommunicative (Bateson, 2000) aspects of communication. However, I examined book clubs in the context of information grounds theory, which also posits that information sharing is dependent on setting.

Chapter II: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand how book clubs act as information grounds. I wanted to study patterns of information exchange and how physical space affects this exchange. Therefore, it made sense to use a methodology similar to what Fine (2003) calls a "peopled ethnography". In this type of methodology, the understanding of a setting is derived through detailed vignettes, interview abstracts, field notes, and the texts that group members produce. Thus, I studied book clubs in their natural settings, doing field research to map out the types of everyday information that are shared in the groups' settings. I felt that neither a survey nor other quantitative methods would have captured this information because people may not be conscious of when they are sharing everyday information, according to my definition. The only way to truly capture the types of everyday information exchanged was to be a participant observer at group meetings, as well as through one-on-one interviews where I could ask follow-up and clarification questions that are not possible through other techniques.

Sample

Using a nonprobability snowball technique, I utilized personal contacts, who then led me to other non-personal contacts, to recruit participants for this study. I chose this method for two reasons: one, time constraints did not allow for an exhaustive search for participants; and two, due to the private nature of these groups and the subsequent difficulty in locating private groups, snowball technique was the only way to gain entry into the private groups. For the public bookstore groups, I was more purposive in my sampling. I selected groups that were in long-standing, sustained community spaces, and therefore had well-attended book clubs. I felt that observing groups that had a life history to them was important so that I would have something to observe and analyze.

I chose to study groups in two different urban areas, Atlanta and Seattle. I chose these two cities for three reasons: one, I have personal contacts in both cities because I

have lived in both cities; two, because I have worked in the book industry in both cities, I was familiar with the literary infrastructure of both places to be able to map out where people and books would intersect; and three, both cities were listed in the top ten of the study titled *America's Most Literate Cities*. While the *America's Most Literate Cities* study did not include book clubs into their index, I made the supposition that cities in the top ten would have a lively book club culture. In the end, I observed two groups in the Atlanta area, and four in the Seattle area. I chose two bookstore groups, one workplace group, and three private groups. Amongst the groups, I chose groups that had a diversity of the following attributes: book selection, structural rules, membership demographics, and length of existence. I explore in more depth these attributes in the **Club Profiles** section.

There were limitations to this technique. By relying on personal contacts, I limited the amount of diversity of the group members. Also, because I was using ethnographic techniques, I was unable to study a large sample. A larger-scale study would combine a survey with more ethnographic data collection. I would utilize a combination of sampling techniques by instead relying on snowball technique from members who participate in publicly advertised book clubs. In this way, I could map out from the literary infrastructure *nodes* (bookstore, libraries, community centers, etc.) where private, workplace, and public book clubs exist.

Data collection

I employed naturalist data collection techniques through participant-observation. I also conducted ethnographic data collection through interviews and content analysis of newsletters and websites produced by the present day book clubs. I applied an observation checklist (see **Appendix 4**) during observations. After coming home from an observation, I wrote in my field log while my observations and impressions were still fresh in my mind. During the observation, I sat to the side of the group, and did not speak. Besides announcing my presence to the group, and gaining permission again to be there at the very beginning (as I had gained permission prior to arriving at the group, this was the second time I asked for permission), I tried to be as "invisible" as possible. For

this reason also, I chose not to record the book discussion group meetings as I believed that would have added another layer of observer effect, and would have negatively affected the amount of everyday information that people exchanged.

Data I collected included:

- drawing a map of the room and the locations of people and objects, as well as describing significant characteristics of the place
- noting the number of participants and their gender
- noting the time of the start and finish of the meeting, as well as the time of significant points during the meeting
- noting the percentage of time book talk occurred
- transcribing significant quotations of people's conversations
- noting the types of information exchanged, and the number of each type of information exchanged
- noting the book discussed as well as other books mentioned
- noting sources used to procure books
- describing the book interpretation portion of the meeting

At the meetings, I asked the group if anyone would be interested in participating in an interview. The most difficult groups to find someone to interview were the bookstore groups. After I found one to three participants from each group to interview, I set up a time and place to interview them. Usually, the interviews took place at least a week after the observation. Interviews were conducted from a prepared interview guide (see Appendix 3). In general, the questions were about how book discussion group members structure their groups and how they give and receive information (i.e. everyday information related to the members' everyday lives, information about events in their community, discussion of ideas and events affecting members and their community, or any other types of everyday information exchanged within the group). All the interviews occurred face to face, except for one which I had to do over the telephone. I audio-recorded all the interviews with a digital audio recorder, then transcribed and coded the

interviews and observations (See Appendices 1 and 2). I later used the field logs, interviews, and observations to inform the concepts in the **Discussion** portion of this paper.

Data Analysis

The units of analysis in this study were the conversations during the book club meeting where information was exchanged. Within this larger unit of analysis, I broke the types of information down into book and non-book types of information. The unit of analysis was particularly difficult in this study. Oral information, because of its communicative and metacommunicative function, provides unique challenges for the researcher. As there was a social context for all the sharing of information, recording that social context became important. The aspects of social context that are important in oral communication are: the relationships between the speakers, the setting they are in (including, the physical space and the sponsorship of the meeting), and the purpose of their gathering. There are also all the personal contexts that individual members bring to each meeting such as: their relationships with their families, co-workers, friends, and neighbors, their feelings about books and book discussion, and in general, their entire life experience which they incorporate into their discussions of a text. In order to capture some of the social context, I tried to examine the types of relationships members identified, the physical space and sponsorship of the meeting, as well as general information about the structure, rules, and length of membership in the book group. I captured less of the personal context. I noted specific age of some of the participants, but not all. I noted where some of the participants were from, but not all. And I noted educational level and profession of some of the participants, but not all. I did note the number of literature experts in the room at the end of each meeting by asking the group.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the reliability and validity of this research, I employed methods recommended by Erlandson (1993) and Babbie (2007). Face validity, as defined by Babbie (2007, 146), is a measure that is valid "on its face", whether or not it's adequate. Construct validity, as defined by Babbie (2007) is based on the logical relationships among variables. The strength of field research for this topic is it provides a form of validity that other types of research don't have simply because it provides the means for me, the researcher, to "be there". It also provides a context for better understanding the true nature of a phenomenon.

So for this study, I noted the types and amount of everyday information exchange and then examined how it correlated with the level of relationships identified by book club members. However, I also relied on interviews and observations to give me a more complete picture of the everyday information exchange in book clubs. It was here that I learned more of why people share the types of information they do, as well as, the phenomena of everyday information connected by "tendrils" to the discussion of the book.

Reliability was improved by consistent note taking during the observations, exposure to multiple settings for the same phenomena (i.e. book club meetings), and comparing themes as they emerged from the data from previous studies of book clubs. In my notes I ensured that my findings could be understandable to others by employing "thick description" (Erlandson, 1993). I drew maps (see Appendix 5) of the sites including position of furniture, group members, facilitators, and public access points. I also took detailed notes on the time of day, the order of arrival of members, the style of furnishings in the space, and any background music or noises that could have interacted with the group. Even though I did not audio-record the observations, I did right down key quotations that I thought were significant to my research questions. I recorded this information so that I could provide a descriptive context for my findings.

I further ensured trustworthiness by employing triangulation techniques (Erlandson, 1993). I checked data from my observations against data from the interviews I held with participants after the observation. I then compared themes that I had read

about in both similar studies of book clubs, as well as concepts that I had seen from literacy studies against themes that I saw were emerging from my data. I also conducted "expert" interviews, where I interviewed people who had some sort of professional role in book clubs. I asked them questions relating to my research questions, and compared their responses to themes that I had seen emerging from my findings.

Another technique I employed in order to support credibility was analysis of referential adequacy materials which Erlandson (1993) defines as "context-rich, holistic materials that provide background meaning to support data analysis, interpretations, and audits." I obtained them primarily through unobtrusive measures. I collected brochures from the bookstores that described the bookstore clubs, as well as looked at their websites. For private clubs, I was invited to be on two e-mail lists for a short period of time, which allowed me to observe the communication between members outside of the group meeting time and space. This technique was useful for understanding not only the history of these book clubs, but also their documentation and communication strategies as well. For the clubs that had documentation, it was particularly useful as a check against information members' gave me during interviews.

Finally, I had a fellow MLIS student who was familiar with research practices read my initial drafts, and provide detailed feedback about interpretation of data and conclusions I had drawn. The discussion with my peer allowed me to check that my understanding and conclusions were reliable and verifiable.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the personal nature of information exchanged in book clubs, I was careful to employ rigorous ethical standards in data collection. At all times, I made clear to the group that I was conducting research. Any notes I made excluded any direct identifiers of the people being observed. Because I knew personally some of the members of the groups, I was very careful to not discuss any of my observations with any participants in the study. I also felt that it was possible that participants would feel that their privacy was being invaded by being observed and by giving answers about how they exchange information within their group. To address this concern, I included this information in

both the information and consent forms. Individuals were under no obligation to participate and could have withdrawn at any time. For the observations, I always gained consent from the entire group before arriving at the meeting for observation. For the bookstore groups who have a much more porous membership, I gained the permission of the facilitator, and then, at the time of the observation, announced my presence and purpose to the group, and asked if anyone was uncomfortable. If anyone had said yes, then I would have left. While this may have caused some observer effect, I felt ethically it was important to announce my presence to the group, especially since I was not participating in the group discussion. After completion of this paper, I destroyed the transcripts and audio-recordings of the interviews. Collected data remained in my hands and any links between study code numbers and subjects were kept separately during the study and were destroyed after the study was completed. The names of individuals were given pseudonyms in all written products. In the case of observation, I made every effort in the written products to protect the anonymity of people observed in various places; no direct identifiers were used in any descriptions.

Book Group Profiles

Condo Club

This monthly private, mixed-gender, mixed-age, predominantly white group, has met for three years. All but two of the members live within the condo community. Of the two non-condo residents, one lives in the same Atlanta-area neighborhood, and another lives in a nearby neighborhood. Started as an activity for members of the condo, the founder of the group modeled the group's structure on that of a book club she participated in while living in South America. Instead of everyone reading the same book, each member brings the books he or she read for that month and presents them in the form of "book talks" to the rest of the group. They then exchange the presented books based on people's reading interests. This group is highly involved in other community activities and socializes with each other outside of the group, such as going to restaurants and the theater together. Meetings are held at members' houses on a shared rotation pattern that ensures that all members host a group meeting at some point.

Spanish Learning Group

This private, mixed-gender, mixed-age, mixed-race group has been together for around 15 years. All live in the Seattle-area, in various neighborhoods. All but one member lives north the downtown area. The core group members originally met in a Spanish class held at University of Washington's Extension program. They credit their early cohesiveness to a strong teacher in this class, from whom they began learning Spanish by reading literature in Spanish. After she got a job elsewhere, they continued to meet to learn grammar and practice their Spanish. They at one point, as a group, hired a native language Spanish speaker to act as a facilitator/teacher, but after 6 months decided as a group that they did not need his services. It was at this point they decided to combine their interests in reading literature with practicing Spanish, and formed the book group as it is now. They meet once a week in members' homes, and discuss in Spanish a book. Each week, a number of pages is agreed upon to read. This group has formed very strong friendships with each other, and as one group member put it, they celebrate "milestones" together. They also participate in lots of non-book discussion activities together: annual Día de los Muertos parties, annual Christmas parties and white elephant gift exchanges, group trips to neighboring cities. There are "honorary" members, generally spouses and partners of members, that do not participate in the discussion meetings, but are invited to all the parties. This group communicates primarily by email. Meetings are held at members' houses in a somewhat fixed pattern like the Condo Club. The exceptions are that certain members who live in neighborhoods a long distance from the majority of the group only host book club meetings once a year, due to the length of transportation time for most of the members to that member's house.

Teacher Club

This all mixed-age, all-white, all-women's group workplace book club has existed for one year. All but two of the employees in the elementary school are women where this group meets. Most of the members are teachers, and one is the school librarian. As the club is open to anyone in the school, new members will often drop in. The book club

meets in the school media center. They read primarily fiction and books are chosen by consensus during group meetings. No documentation was kept by this group.

All Women's Genre Club

This private, all women's group has met for seven years. They read only mysteries and serve food and beverages at each meeting. A few of the members are friends apart from the group, but in general most only socialize during the group meeting. A few met each other through their work. They did not necessarily meet through the workplace, but through work-related activities. This group was formed by the founder who, when she entered her 50s, wanted to develop more female friendships. All the women are over the age of 40, and all are "professionals", with at least an undergraduate degree. Two of the members are librarians. Books are chosen by an individual in the group. Members take turns choosing books for the group to read. They also rate the books they've read according to a rating system they devised. After rating the book, they post their ratings onto their website. They meet once a month at member's houses on a fixed rotation cycle so that all member's host a meeting on a regular rotation.

Third Step Club

This bookstore book club meets once a month in the bookstore during the evening. The bookstore itself opened four years ago in its current location. It is a second location for another bookstore in a different part of the city. A professional facilitator runs the book club. Every meeting, there are new members that appear. However, there are regular members that have been coming for at least a year. Anyone can come to a meeting. The members I observed were diverse in age, though were mostly white. This may change however from one meeting to the next, as meetings are open to anyone, and often members will drop in for one, and then never come back. There were a few men, but the most of the members were women. A regular newsletter and website is produced that list books read, and to be read, by the book club, as well as announcements about times of meetings. They read both fiction and non-fiction. Books are chosen by the facilitator.

City Bookstore Club

This bookstore book club meets once a month in the bookstore during the evening. It is one of several book clubs hosted by this bookstore. A professional facilitator, who is also the owner of the store, runs the book club. Every meeting, there are new members that appear. However, there are regular members. The longest-running regular member has been coming for one year. This member was also a member of the Third Step Club as well. There was a diversity of ages in the meeting I observed, but not in ethnicities. There were a few men, but most of the members were women. A regular newsletter and website is produced that list books read, and to be read, by the book club, as well as announcements about times of meetings. They read both fiction and non-fiction. Books are chosen by the facilitator.

Chapter III: Findings

Introduction

In this section, I show my findings. I only include a few tables, and instead rely on narrative to explain most of the data. I do this because, though I gathered information on several variables in the course of the interviews and observations, I am concentrating on only a few variables to make my major argument: the amount and type of everyday information exchange correlates with two variables, place and relationships.

Everyday Information Exchange

Called chit-chat, gossip, or everyday information (IBEC), the exchange of everyday information is a large part of the activities in a book group. One member of the condo group stated that gossip was an important type of information exchange. A member of the Foreign Language Group stated that the exchange of everyday information was important "in terms of keeping our relationships with each other." Some groups discuss medical information, and others do not. When asked why book club members are good sources of certain types of information, in the Foreign Language Group, a participant stated the reason was "I think that everybody is very culturally aware and well read ... Movies, and traveling, really aware of the wider world." For the book club members I observed, who are generally college-educated, well-traveled, and working or retired "professionals", everyday information, defined as information related to everyday life, events and happenings, will reflect their everyday activities. Examples of these activities include attendance of cultural events, travel, community improvement, as well as shared activities with families and friends.

Types of Everyday Information

I categorized the non-book information that appeared in the interviews and observations into the categories outlined in Table 1. I also asked whether people felt this information was trivial or important. This question always produced an interesting response. Some said that the information was "trivial" but that trivial information was important because it helped maintain relationships. In Table 1, I show whether a type of

everyday information was present, and whether members felt that everyday information was important or trivial. It is important to keep the caveat I previously mentioned in mind when looking at this data. It is also important to note that this data is based on observation of one group meeting, and one or two interviews with members from each group. Just because a type of information was not shared at one meeting, it might have been shared at another. It is important to keep in mind the exploratory nature of this study.

Table 1 Everyday Information Type

EI	Everyday Information Type
EIC	Everyday community information.
EIE	Everyday entertainment information.
EIG	Everyday gossip information
EIT	Travel
EIPO	Politics
EIPI	Personal information (death, sickness, etc.)
EIM	Everyday medical information.
EIS	Everyday social information (parties, trips, etc.)
EITR	Everyday information trivial
EII	Everyday information important

Table 2 Types of everyday information exchange for each participant group

Types of Everyday Information Exchanged	**Foreign Language Club**	**Teacher Club**	**City Bookstore Club**	**Third Step Bookstore Club**	**Condo Club**	**All Women's Genre Club**
Everyday community information.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Everyday entertainment information.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Everyday gossip information	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Travel	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Politics	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal information (death, sickness, etc.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Everyday medical information.	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Everyday social information (parties, trips, etc.)	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Everyday information trivial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Everyday information important	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

One member stated that gossip was a valuable type of information exchange. He said it allowed him to "keep up with" the people in the group, as well as the people in his condo community. He mentioned the aging of the population, and how at a previous meeting he asked the group to discuss the need for attention and care for a group of widowed women living in the community. At the book club, he said they spend time talking about condo issues. He justifies this type of talk by stating that the book club is a condo activity. For this club, this type of talk also extended outside the community. As a participant described it: "[Gossip] flows through exercising together, taking walks, all

those sorts of things." He valued gossip as "essential information, because we're talking about human beings and relationships." The same reason was cited by a member of the Foreign Language Group as well. He also stated that community information, for example service opportunities at the local library, were important to share at book club as well. Opposing this, a group member of the City Bookstore Club stated that personal information, and sometimes even political talk, was "peripheral" and he actively avoided it. This leads to the conclusion that certain book groups are less potent information grounds than others.

In all the groups but the City Bookstore, the subject of travel was a frequent topic of non-book information. Members discussed their own travel experiences and often selected books based on a member's recent travel experiences. Also, they would relate book information to information from their travels. In both the Foreign Language Club and the Condo Club, book talk would be suspended if a member had come back from traveling in a place that was of interest to the rest of the group. Members in these groups described past meetings where instead of talking about a book, the recently returned traveler would talk about his/her trip, or information about the country he/she had traveled to. I found this connection to book discussion and adventurous traveling an interesting one. Several members stated that their fellow book club members were good sources of travel information.

In the framework of information behavior of serious leisure activities, book clubs exhibit a few of the same types of information seeking that other serious leisure participants exhibit. In book clubs, knowledge acquisition is focused on information about the books being discussed, supplementary materials about the book's author, historical setting, etc., and thirdly - the focus of this study – everyday information shared by group members. The social and personal benefits of book club participation include, sometimes, deeper friendships with fellow members and increased knowledge of ideas and community information. And finally, there are "rules of conduct" that seem to apply, with degrees of variation, to all the clubs I observed and read about in accounts of book clubs. One member even described their group as an "urban tribe."

Relationships

I categorized the different types of relationships into four types, and then an overall category of dependable or not dependable. I also noted whether members were allowed to flow in and out (see Table 4). Table 3 shows that each club explicitly described their relationships with each other according to four categories: family (or like family), friends, acquaintances, and strangers. Except for the strangers category, I derived these categories from how members identified their relationships during the interview. I observed the line between acquaintance and stranger is sometimes blurry. Some members may have recognized other members, particularly in the bookstore clubs, but they may not have remembered their names, or known any personal information about them. I coded these as stranger relationships. I defined dependability based on the answers to questions that asked what types of support members would give each other. It is possible that they did not tell me all the different ways they view the relationships between book group members. Like all the data collected in this study, a much larger sample would have given a more definitive view of these relationships. A more extensive study would have to be done in order to approach this topic.

Table 3 Types of relationships between members

R	Relationships
RSP	Respect for intellectual abilities
RFA	Family (or like family)
RF	Friends
RA	Acquaintances
RST	Strangers
RD	Dependable
RND	Not dependable
RI	New members able to flow in

Table 4 Types of relationships between members for each participant group

Identification of Types of Relationships Between Members	Foreign Language Club	Teacher Club	City Bookstore Club	Third Step Bookstore Club	Condo Club	All Women's Genre Club
Respect for intellectual abilities	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Family (or like family)	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Friends	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Acquaintances	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Strangers	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Dependable	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Not dependable	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
New members able to flow in	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

The Foreign Language Club stated their relationships involved respect for the intellectual abilities of their fellow group members, and that the group members were like family and dependable, and members are able to flow in and out. The Teacher Club did not state respect for intellectual abilities, though they did comment on the quality of the discussions. They see themselves as acquaintances, or co-workers, who do not engage in social activities outside of work settings. They did say, however, that their fellow group members are dependable. Both bookstore clubs answered similarly to questions about the types of relationships in the book groups. Both stated that members were able to flow in and out, much more frequently than any of the other groups. They also both indicated a respect for other group members' intellectual abilities. They classified the other group members as both strangers and acquaintances. This was due to the ever-changing membership of the group, though a few core group members did attend on a regular basis. They also classified the relationships as not dependable. The final two private groups – the Condo Club and the All Women's Genre Club – also gave exactly identical answers. They both respected the intellectual abilities of their fellow members, considered their fellow members friends and dependable. All the private groups stated that while members could stop coming, then come back, new members could not easily flow in.

The types of relationships described by the different interview participants varied from group to group. One member of the Foreign Language Club felt that she could rely on her fellow group members for "support in all life situations." Other types of relationships that are formed are centered on books. For example, in the Condo Club, a member said "I know in book club who is going to read what I bring, because I know their interests and their reading habits as well as I know mine. So we really now just bring books for each other that we know specifically." He later on described his fellow group members as neighbors and as friends. But he qualified his definition of the word friend:

> I think that all these people are friends, but when you talk about friends, we're such an isolationist little society, we all get into our little niche. I suppose I am not typical, in that I have a very close circle of people in my life that I trust, and if I were sick at 3 in the morning I would not hesitate to call one of them. None of these people [in the book club] are in that circle of friends. Then there's a circle beyond that that are people that I see, socially, that I communicate with frequently, that I'm interested in, keep up with, but there's not that level of intimacy. That's where this group is for me, in that second circle. And then there are varying degrees out beyond that, but I do count them as friends.

In the Foreign Language Group, the participant stated that a lot of the members in the group did not have family in the Seattle area. She cited that as a reason why perhaps some of the close bonds had formed.

Another aspect of relationships that I tested was whether people saw each other in non-book club settings. The answers to these questions were varied. In the Women's Genre Club, some members, who considered themselves friends before the club began, saw each other frequently in social and non-social settings. Some members worked together. Other members only saw each other at the meetings. In the Foreign Language Club, some members were spouses, so of course saw each other all the time. But for the rest of the members, seeing each other in non-club settings was an intentional act. Sometimes people would bump into each other, but it was more rarely as they lived

dispersed in densely populated areas. In the Condo Club, there were frequent encounters in non-group settings. There are three possible reasons for this: one, they all, except for two, lived in the same condominium; two, most members were involved in other community activities together; and thirdly, they lived in a small city within a larger city, and thus there was less dispersion, even though the population density is comparable to the region where the Foreign Language Club is.

I also asked about the types of activities that members participated in outside of book group meetings. This varied, but many members would do what I labeled as entertainment activities together. For example, they would go see a play, or eat at a new restaurant, or go see a movie together. One group had regular holidays that they spent together and had created rituals around. Shared outside-book club activities tended to be associated with the arts. It was as if the members knew each other in one milieu, one where they discussed literature which is part of the "arts", and so they extended their relationships into that same milieu.

I asked if there was anything that the member could rely on other group members for. Some said that they couldn't think of anything, others said that if they were sick, they could rely on their fellow members to visit them in the hospital, cook them a meatloaf, or in general, be supportive. In the Condo Club, when a member had had leg surgery, other members would wheel her in her wheelchair to the book club meeting as well as help walk her dog and do other "neighborly" things for her. In the Foreign Language Group, two members said that they could help you move, a kindness that was apparently very important to them as both spoke at length about it.

Probably the most important relationship for many of the group members in all the clubs is the relationships they develop about books. Nearly half of the members I interviewed stated that they enjoyed talking to certain people because they enjoyed either their taste in books, or they enjoyed learning about other group members' tastes. In the Condo Club where book exchange is part of the activity, members have learned what other people's reading tastes are, and bring books for specific members.

Correlating to both satisfaction, and membership exclusivity, was the perceived intelligence of group members. Five interview participants mentioned how smart they

felt their fellow members were. In the words of a member of the Condo Club: "I think they are a very swift group." Diversity is another valued trait of book group members. Long treats this subject in depth from a sociological perspective in her works. Essentially, my observations were that the groups were ethnically and economically homogenous, and in general politically homogenous. However, I was surprised to notice the great range in ages in all the groups. The diversity of life experiences that this gives a group might be the diversity they were referring to. Also, I observed intra-group diversity in professed reading tastes (i.e. some only read mysteries, others only non-fiction, etc.) and professions (except for the workplace groups).

Roles

I indicated roles when it was only a single, or few, people performing the activity. The reason for this is because I wanted to map the balance of responsibility in each group. Book procurement only refers to someone who facilitates procurement or actually procures for the group. If all group members were responsible for their own book procurement, then I did not indicate this as a role. The same is for book selectors. I also indicated whether, *in general*, roles were static or rotated. The private groups and workplace group all exhibited rotated roles, some formally rotated so all members shared responsibility and others informally so that only those members who volunteered took responsibility. The bookstore groups exhibited static roles. Historian refers to someone who not only keeps the records of the groups, but who remembers the "oral history" of the group. I saw this role in only one group, and the profession of the historian was as an actual historian. This was also the longest running group, so there was an actual history to keep track of. Founders played a similar role to historians since they were with the group since its beginnings. However, they did not always take on the role as historians. Communicators and secretaries serve similar functions. A Communicator is someone who handles outside communication, such as making sure everyone knows when and where the next meeting is. A Discussion Guide Creator was someone who created supplementary materials for the group to help either with the comprehension of the text or for facilitating discussion. The guides included: vocabulary lists (Foreign Language Club), discussion questions, author-related information, and notes about historical

context. The bookstore groups presented highly-produced, in both paper and web form, guides for discussion. The private groups were less formal, and guides were on note cards, or scratch pieces of paper. If I were to study each of these groups longitudinally, then I probably would have observed other formats.

In the Condo Club and All-Women's Genre Club, there are two formalized roles, host and facilitator, and then there are a number of informal roles, such as communicator. Two members of this club used the word "relaxing" or "relaxation" in reference to the fact that the roles in the group were rotated. For this group, whose major motivation for meeting was social, relaxation was an important concept. In the two bookstore clubs, there was a professional facilitator, paid by the bookstore, to facilitate the meeting as well as take care of all group-related communications outside of the meeting. In the Foreign Language Club, the rotated role of host, historian, scheduler, communicator, facilitator, and mediator were informally shared by the group. Roles were assigned to whomever volunteered. In the Teacher Club, no clear roles were apparent, though the two founders of the club did take more of a leadership role in taking care of outside communication. Unfortunately, I only know this through my interviews, as both founders were absent from the meeting I observed.

Table 5 Types of roles identified in book groups

RO	Roles
ROH	Historian
ROF	Facilitator
ROFO	Founder
ROBP	Book procurement
ROC	Communicator
RODG	Discussion guide creator
ROS	Secretary
ROHS	Host
ROSE	Book selector
ROS	Static roles
ROR	Rotated roles

Table 6 Types of roles identified in book groups by participant group

Roles	Foreign Language Club	Teacher Club	City Bookstore Club	Third Step Bookstore Club	Condo Club	All Women's Genre Club
Historian	X					
Facilitator			X	X		X
Founder	X	X	X	X	X	X
Book procurement	X		X	X		
Communicator	X	X	X	X	X	X
Discussion guide creator	X		X	X		X
Secretary	X					
Host	X				X	X
Book selector			X	X		
Static roles			X	X		
Rotated roles	X	X			X	X

Place

The only questions I asked about space specifically were where meetings were held and whether the meeting place rotated on a regular basis. Sometimes the answers to this question were buried in answers to other questions. There were a variety of answers to this question. The private groups I observed all rotated between members homes. One group had a regular schedule of people whose homes they rotated through. Another group only hosted meetings according to who volunteered for the host responsibility. The bookstore groups both had regular times and place, which allowed for people to just drop in. The workplace group met regularly at the workplace which also allowed people to just drop in (a reason that was explained during a meeting time). However, during the meeting I observed, they were talking about future meetings being held in other locations, such as a coffeehouse. When I interviewed one of the group members several weeks later, she said that they had met in a coffeehouse, but that they were probably going to go back to meeting at work.

In the Condo Club, the types of beverages and food varied between houses. This affected the type and amount of talk during the social chit-chat hour as well as the book

discussion hour. As one member described it, "there are a few people who enjoy alcohol and get very gregarious. Those meetings can be longer because they will float cocktails for awhile until finally somebody says, can we get started."

Geographical proximity also plays a role. In the private groups I observed, most of the members lived in close geographical proximity to each other, with the exception of a few members who had moved away to further neighborhoods. In one group, all but two of the members lived in the same condominium complex. In the Foreign Language Group, around half the members lived in the same neighborhood, with the rest living in neighboring neighborhoods, except for one who lived in a neighborhood on the other side of the city. Geographical proximity makes transportation to the meetings a less onerous task which in turn motivates continued participation. I was unable to gain reliable data on the geographical proximity of members in the bookstore groups. But I did overhear several members state they had either walked or rode their bicycles to the meeting, which indicates relatively close geographical proximity.

Geographical proximity also seemed to affect the amount of outside the book club information sharing. The Condo Club had high frequencies of instances of outside the club shared activities and information sharing. There might also have been some cultural differences between the Atlanta groups and the Seattle groups, but without making stereotypical judgments about the difference in gregariousness between Southerners and Northwesterners, that aspect is difficult to determine.

Literature Background

I asked participants whether they had a literature background which I defined as anyone who had a degree in a literature-related field or had worked in a literature-related career: English majors, English teachers or professors, journalists, librarians, bookstore workers, etc. I was unable to gather good statistics on this question for the group members as a whole, but of the seven people I interviewed, only two had formal literature backgrounds. In Table 7, I show my estimated results to this question from what I could infer from the interviews and observations. These statistics are not entirely reliable, but I included them anyway. All the interview participants were college-educated, but I did not ask if they had ever had to take an English class. The assumption I made was that

they at one point had had to take a literature course, whether in high school or college, but that this did not define them as literature experts. The reason I wanted to gather this information was I wanted to see if background in literature affected the types of information shared at book clubs, and the percentage of time devoted to talk about the book. During some of the observations, I gathered information about educational background, but not in all of them. The most difficult groups to gather information about were the bookstore groups. This was because the relationships between members and the facilitator was one that respecting the privacy of the members was important, which did not make it easy for me to gather information. If members noted their profession or educational background during the meeting, however, I noted it in my observation notes.

One interesting piece of information that came through this question is even though people may not have "done" literature for a living, many of the people in the groups had incorporated literature into their lives. An example of this would be from the Condo Club. A member who was a retired justice system employee, described his reading habit in relation to his former work. He said, "you wait in a courtroom for the judge to show up, or the jurors to show up, or the attorneys to show up, you're always waiting for something. So I read as a habit in the courtroom, so I would read two or three books a week just waiting on things to happen. So I've always been a quick reader. I read books, several books at a time." Three participants stated that they read "better" books since joining the book group. However, all the members, to varying degrees, were already active readers. As a member of the Condo Club put it, the "only rule we have is that you have to love to read."

Table 7 Percentage of members with a literature background by participant group

Literature Background	Foreign Language Club	Teacher Club	City Bookstore Club	Third Step Bookstore Club	Condo Club	All Women's Genre Club
Majority of group members had Literature Background		X	Unknown	Unknown		
Minority of group members had Literature Background	X				X	X

Experts

This brings up the other issue that came up in several of the groups: experts. Groups with a professionally diverse group tended to give each other expert status based on their professional career. For example, in my book club, the doctor has the final word on all health issues. And, subsequently, a lot of personal medical everyday information is shared in the group. In the Condo Club, a member with a background in psychology gave her "stamp of approval" on a book about psychology that another member had brought to the meeting. The former justice system employee was the expert on crime procedurals in the same group. In the Foreign Language Club, the historian was given the task of being the group's historian. I did not determine why this phenomenon of deferring expert status to different members of the group. But, I would speculate that the high education levels and professional status of all the members of the groups I observed instilled in all of them a respect for the knowledge that can be attained through education or professional experience.

Exclusion and Inclusion

One way to refer to groups is as open or closed. I defined purely open groups as ones with no membership rules and which anyone could come, without prior permission or invitation. A purely closed group was one that did not allow any new members into the group. It is difficult to state whether groups are purely closed or purely open. Some groups practice closed group practices, such as not inviting new members into the group. But others were more subtly closed, meaning new members could join, but only by invitation. Other groups were completely open. These were the groups that were held at a workplace and bookstore. Groups were somewhat open, meaning they did allow new members into their group, but they did not advertise and new members were allowed in only if they were "sponsored" or invited by a current group member. In general, definitions of closed and open group membership existed on a continuum.

Several reasons were given for maintaining a closed group. One was to maintain a sense of camaraderie and personalities that allows for sustainability of the group and prevention of conflict. As a member of the Foreign Language Club put it, "I've been a little hesitant to invite people because it is like, I don't want to jinx it, because I do really like it." Other reasons cited for not inviting new members to the group is worry about size and fitting everyone into one room and everyone getting a chance to speak. These were real concerns as they had implications for how to arrange the furniture and how people were situated in relation to each other. In the Condo Club, space was a major factor in not inviting new members. As one member stated, "we just don't want it to get too big because most of us don't have the room, for the seats."

Whether people can see each others faces has implications for group dynamics and language processing, as I discussed in the section on speechreading. In one group I observed, there were around thirty people present at the meeting, an unusually high number for that group. I heard many members express dissatisfaction with the large size as too unwieldy for a good group discussion. People were seated in several rows around a central row, which caused some people to have their backs turned to other people. I observed the most number of side conversations in this group meeting than in any other

group meeting. Part of the reason for this large size is because it was a public bookstore meeting, and the two bookstore groups I observed did not practice exclusionary tactics.

Sometimes schedule conflicts cause members to not continue their participation. In the Condo Club, occasional schedule conflicts were tolerated, but repeated conflicts were not. As one member put it, "we're interested in people being faithful." But when asked how the group dealt with a situation like this, the member stated that they were not interested in confronting the individuals. Their strategy mirrored the strategy employed by other groups I observed: they wanted to just let it "evolve". There seems to be an emphasis in many of the groups on avoiding direct confrontation, especially about rules or structure.

While more informal tactics of exclusion are practiced by some book clubs, other book clubs practice more overt tactics. In the South American Club, which the founder of the Condo Club used to be a member of, a member had to be seconded by two or three people. The Condo Club member who was a former participant in the South American club, stated that also, because she was English, she was a "shoe-in". She also stated that there was a "social class" aspect to the group. She gave as an example her South American cousin (the English member is married to a South American man) who she thought would be a good fit for the club as she was an "avid reader". However, when she tried to join, she was told she had to wait. According to the Condo Club member who told me this story, the reason she had to wait was because her cousin was from a prominent leftist political family and there were members in the group who were "rightist". So both being English, and having the "right" political affiliation affected the demographic makeup of this particular club. In book clubs, and women's clubs, of the 19th century, this type of exclusion was common. Many Southern white women's clubs excluded women of color from their groups, and even went so far as to continue these types of exclusionary tactics in the public literacy projects they sponsored (i.e. public libraries). Present day book clubs do their own version of this vetting. A new member that does not match certain criteria will either be asked to leave, will leave on his/her own, or will prove to be such a disruptive presence that the book club will stop existing.

Another aspect of exclusion and inclusion is the presence of visitors to the group. The Condo Club had visitors frequently attend their groups. Because they did not all read a book together, it was easier for a visitor to just drop into the group. For other groups, this was more difficult. But though visitors were not as welcome in other groups, all but the Teachers Group had heard of instances in their group where visitors were allowed to attend. The reason for this might be because the time of the meeting is mid-afternoon, after the teachers had finished with classes, and it was inside the school, which would be difficult for a visitor to just come and drop by. Also, the members of the Teachers Group were all teachers, and a non-teacher visitor might have upset the balance of the group.

Dissension, Disruption, and Conflict

Political differences can cause major tensions in a group. Where those differences do exist, several members noted them. In the case of the Foreign Language Club, a member who was more conservative than the politically liberal group was asked to leave the group because "he would get into arguments with people in the group about different political things." The other reason cited for this action was "he was completely opinionated to the extent that he didn't want to entertain anyone else's thoughts." Other members in this particular group tried to "stabilize" the conflict because they were self-described as "egalitarian", meaning they tried to give every voice and opinion equal weight. The problem with this approach in this setting is that in order to have a peaceful discussion, there must be a shared value system. Political speech is very personal for many people, and reflects their fundamental values. When these values are challenged, conflict can erupt. As one member stated about the politically conservative member, "he would just get into the hugest arguments, and people who were the nicest people just had the biggest clashes with him." He was labeled too disruptive and asked to leave the group.

Another response to political or ideological divisions within the group is for one member to try to start a dialogue and persuade another member to see another viewpoint. The Condo Club had a particularly poignant story of one member whose sexual identity

challenged another member's stereotypes about his sexual identity. In the participant's words:

> I found this year, that I suddenly had become the enemy of a great number of people who fear who I am. And there's no communication. And when I realized this, I felt a great sadness. Because I thought, how did this happen. I'm no one's enemy. I don't understand. And then I started talking about that, and it's one of the things we started talking about in the group. And just within this tiny nucleus of people, someone in the group was just really adamant about the division between us, that we don't see things the same way. And my immediate response to that was, how in the world do you know how I see things? I don't understand how that happens? How could you know? So it started a dialogue. And as a result, I've been introducing books like crazy this past year, some of which quite rankle and irritate particularly one person in the group who refuses to read them. And I bring them specifically for him, because I want him to see that there's more than one view on this issue."

He later stated that the conflict with this other member had taught him conflict resolution and coping skills. He said, "I can let him talk and listen to what he has to say, and I can feel that's okay, I don't have to rebut what he says. Because I suppose before, I'm sure a few years ago, I would have had to say, well but … And get my points in."

A third strategy for dealing with conflict over potentially divisive or disruptive speech is to avoid certain topics. One member in the Condo Club stated that they try to avoid religion and politics as topics of conversation. But this was a change. As the group became less homogenous politically, the less frequent were occurrences of political speech. As one member put it:

> What was so interesting about recently, when we started off, we were all Democrats, there's a very nice [man] that joined, and we smelt … a very avid Republican. Since then, I've found out, that he didn't vote for Bush. He

> suddenly realized he was in a hotbed of Democrats, it was very, very funny. so I think we don't talk about it anymore. You have to be careful when new people come in, you know. I think we've just given up on Bush anyway, it's not even worth talking about.

Disruption is a common theme in characterizing conflict in book discussion groups. While some level of dissension seems to be tolerated, when it causes the act of talking to end or unravel, then a cohesive group will try to move away or actively purge the disruptive element out of the group. Sometimes this disruption has its source in a person, but other times its source is a particular rule. In the All-Women's Genre Group I observed, in conversation with the founder of the group, she expressed her dismay at what she described as the "rigidity" of the group. While she had formed the group around reading a particular genre, she had decided early on that the discussions were not satisfying what she wanted to get out of the group. When she suggested they include another genre to their reading list, they balked at the idea. Though she was the founder, she decided to take a hiatus from the group. There was also a disruptive member in that group that was described by one member as "domineering". She also described "the general tone" of the discussions as "competitive". But instead of asking this member to leave, the member who felt "domineered," left the book group.

There is less tolerance of disruption in the private book groups for a set of reasons. One, people do not want to bring conflict in their homes. As a founder of the Foreign Language Club stated, "this is our homes. This is not school, this is our homes, and we don't have to have [a disruptive member] in there." Rarely were there consequences for breaking a rule, but occasionally there were. In the Foreign Language Club, there was a briefly present rule that if someone spoke in English, they had to put 25 cents into a jar that was kept to fund club activities. But that rule phased out.

There is often a self-correcting order that regulated behavior in the clubs. The bond between people was cited by one member as a check against bad behavior. As one member put it, "I think we all know each other well enough, we're all good enough friends with each other that we don't necessarily need to have that [consequences for

breaking a rule]." But in this club, there was still a need for a formalized self-correction activity. As one member put it, "every once in awhile there is the self-correcting as far as you know, this whole thing with the list of rules. And that was more so people could feel like if they had a concern ... it was more about pre-empting anybody from being hurt, sort of acknowledging someone might have been hurt."

In large part, the private groups self-regulate. One of the unspoken rules at the Teachers Club is that members at least start the book before the meeting. If someone hasn't started the book, according to one member, she will be "real quiet and then give input at the end about what book to read next." When I asked if the book ever expresses some sort of condemnation for the person that had not read the book, she replied no and said the group was easy-going.

Another theme that came up twice in the interviews with participants is the idea of sharing information that is challenging to people's personal belief systems or to people's sensitivities. Both times this came up was around the theme of homosexuality. In one interview, the participant was homosexual, and in another the participant was heterosexual but talking about an experience reading a book with homosexual themes. In the first case, conflict was caused because a member had views about homosexuality that were offensive to another member. In the second case, the book's themes were described as too "raw" for some members, and thus they chose to not discuss the book at all. In the first case, the two members had a stronger relationship with each other, and one member tried to continue a dialogue with the other in order to try to change the other member's mind, or at least get him to acknowledge his viewpoint. In the second case, the group chose to avoid the conflict all together by not discussing the book. The difference between the two situations was that in the first conflict, one of the major players in the conflict identified himself as homosexual, and in the second, none of the members identified themselves as homosexual.

Structure

Of the people that I interviewed about their book groups, all but one stated that they did not have rules. But in the course of the interview, they outlined unspoken rules that governed the groups. This might reflect the egalitarian nature of the groups. Formal

rules might imply some sort of hierarchy, which would contradict the informal, social nature of the clubs. The one that stated they did have rules stated they had documented the rules. This was also the longest-running book group I encountered. They had been meeting on a weekly basis for almost 15 years. They also were more overtly concerned with learning and intellectual stimulation, vs. social interaction as an objective of the group. It is interesting to note as well that the all-women's genre group also had a formal structure, including a time to rate the book they read at the end of the meeting. The founder of the group told me when she formed the group, she was looking for a way to develop friendships with other women. She said "I was in my 50s, and when I looked around, I saw that I didn't have any good female friends. So I started a book group." But because of the rigidity of the structure of the group, she felt that she had not developed close relationships with the women in the group. It eventually led to her leaving the group for a year.

In two of the groups, the initial structure of the group was informed by the founders' previous experience with another book group or discussion format (i.e. a language classroom and a previous book group). In two of the groups, the initial structure of the group was informed by a book group guide. One group cited the guide as Rachel Jacobsohn's *The Reading Group Handbook : Everything You Need to Know, from Choosing Members to Leading Discussions.* In one group, the founder stated that the group was based on the structure of a previous book group, but when she described the two groups, their structures were very dissimilar. The only similarity between the two groups is that all the members did not read the same book for discussion. Instead, everyone brought the books they had read that month to the meeting, did "book talks" to the rest of the group, and then exchanged books with other members.

The indicators I used to define the concept of structure were: defined roles, rules, types of talk is regulated, and book selection. For roles, I indicated there was structure there are defined roles either for that meeting or in the life of the group. Examples of roles include facilitator, host, recorder, communicator, etc. The presence of rules also indicates structure. Examples of rules are: book talk and non-book talk being regulated. For example, in the Foreign Language Club, a rule existed that no one could speak in

English after the first fifteen minutes of the meeting. This ensured that the purpose of the club, to discuss literature in a foreign language, was adhered to. One person talking at a time and going too fast, such as jumping around from page number to page number without letting the group follow along in the text. The type of talk being regulated was another form of structure. In the City Bookstore Group, the facilitator stated at the beginning of the meeting that sharing personal information was not appropriate.

Sometimes economic context determines book selection structure. One of the founders of the Condo Club described the structure, specifically book selection, of her current book group as based on a book group she had belonged to in South America. There she said:

> We all read different books because ... there were very, very hard times. It was really a third world country then, you couldn't get books. Everything was restricted, you couldn't buy refrigerators things like that. And this club was formed in the First World War. It was an English book club. But because of the shortages, the idea of everybody to try to get the same book was impossible. So everybody contributed books, passed it around, and gave their opinion. The only difference was that everybody had to give a thesis once every two years.

In the case of the South American Book Club, scarcity of books determined the format of the book club. However, this member enjoyed this format for other reasons, which is why she replicated the idea of not everybody reading the same book. She said, "the only way that I'm interested in having anything to do with it, is if we read different books, and pass opinions on them. And that way you read books you would never dream of reading." This demonstrates a motivation to read and discuss a wider array of books, and at the same time save some money. The money issue is interesting to note. The majority of the members were professionals, or retired professionals, in the middle to upper middle class income bracket. However, the fact that many of them are retired and on fixed incomes, might have made them more conscious of money issues.

In general, the book clubs described themselves as loosely structured. Self-motivation of members seemed to be an ingredient for the continued activity of a book club. For example, several members developed rules individually. For example, there is the 50 or 100 page rule. This rule states, if you're not interested in a book in the first 50 or 100 pages, then don't bother finishing the book. The only instance I heard of this rule was in the Condo Club. This might be because the group doesn't select books together, but instead, members share their individual reading habits.

Documentation

The recent incarnations of book groups tend to not document in paper nearly as much as the reading or literary groups of the pre-Internet age. Email communication has created a whole new layer of documentation. Few of the clubs, however, keep the email communications. The result for researchers is that there are less primary documents to analyze. The result for the group is that there is no tangible history of the group. A future question would be to examine how this lack of tangible history affects their sense of identity as a group. Email is used more for communication then documentation.

But not all present-day book clubs avoid keeping records. In the Foreign Language Club, the founder is a historian. She, along with other members, has kept records and has files in her house. There is not much organization to the files, but it might prove to be a future project. I asked the Foreign Language Group what the value of keeping a list of all the books they had read. The participant responded:

> to get an idea of what all we've read and remembered. Like, wasn't that the book, some of them run together. We read a bunch of books that were set during the Mexican revolution and they all kind of ran together, I have them all upstairs, but in terms of the titles. It's a sense of accomplishment too, when you see all the books that you've read. And it's also an ability, not that we would forget and read one over again, but that we like that book, I like that author, let's see if we can find some more by that person.

Documentation aids in selection of new reading materials and provides a tangible source for group feelings of satisfaction.

Before and After Group Activities

All the clubs I observed reported no after group activities, but they all reported pre-meeting socializing, usually at the place and time of the meeting. This was such an important activity, that a few groups even set aside time at the beginning of the meeting for "catching up" with each other. In the Foreign Language Group, this time was strictly regulated. The reason cited for this is the frequency (weekly) that the group sees each other, so there is less catching up to do and there is sensitivity to the fact that people need to get home in the evenings. Bookstore groups reported few to no after group activities. Most of these groups also classified themselves as acquaintances instead of friends. All the private groups reported few to no after group activities. This does not reflect whether they socialized outside of the group meeting, however. The evening meeting time for most of the meetings, and the fact that most meetings were held on a weekday when many members had to work the next day, led most members to want to just go home after the meeting was over.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction with the book group was indicated by a positive answer to the question: What makes the book group special to you? This question might have biased them, because it assumes that the book group is special to them. However, when I asked the question, most of the participants could immediately come up with answers to the question. Others had to struggle to find an answer, and would answer, with little enthusiasm, with answers like "oh, I like to talk about books" or something to that effect. Because I was not specifically testing for this, I cannot conclusively talk about this aspect of book club activity, but it might be interesting for future research to explore levels of satisfaction amongst book group members.

One aspect of belonging to a book group that multiple participants listed as a factor that led to satisfaction was being exposed to books they wouldn't otherwise read. Another factor that affects satisfaction is the social interaction. For one member of the

Condo Club, the best part of the experience was the people and the intellectual stimulation they offered. In the Condo Club, one of the members described the value of the book club for him: "I look on my book club as being almost sort of hedonistic, as something fun that I love doing, it's a self-supporting sort of activity for me. I do it purely for pleasure." All the people I interviewed showed a high degree of satisfaction with the group. The people I spoke with, but did not formally interview, in the Women's Genre Group, expressed a lesser degree of satisfaction with their group, which I explained in another section.

Time

Time of the meeting is an important factor for many of the members. The private groups and bookstore groups met exclusively during the evenings, and the workplace group met in the afternoons, directly after the workday ended. One workplace group which I communicated with, but was unable to observe, met during the afternoon during working hours. This group, whose email list I was on for several months, used the book group as a means of professional development. The evening groups accommodated people's daytime work schedules.

Correlating with time, as mentioned above, were people's work and other life commitments. There were several book clubs I encountered that had a high number of members who were retired from their professions. There was a sense that they had more time to devote to some of the administrative functions of the club, but there is also a sense that they were more heavily involved in other activities as well. A member of the Condo Club had a standing weekly commitment on book group nights which he dropped out of for the book group meeting. Another member of the Condo Club referred to her other activities and how she would like to cut back: "it's just ridiculous to have so many things to do when you're supposed to be spending your time smelling the roses."

Age

Aging also has an effect on book clubs. A member of the Condo Club commented on the aging of the members of the book club: "A third of us now are geriatric in terms of our needs. Some of the widowed women that I have known for the

entire time that I've been here [in the condominium] are now in their eighties, they don't go out in the evening, they're not as mobile, they have walkers, canes that sort of thing. Their eyesight is failing, their hearing is going. Social opportunities for them are limited because their participation is limited. And they don't read as much anymore." Other clubs, also commented on the aging of its members. The Foreign Language Club had to be sensitive to those with hearing disabilities.

All the groups I encountered had members with a wide range of ages. In groups that had a smaller range of ages, such as the All-Women's Genre Club, there was more exchange of medical information between members. While I did not ask why this was so, I speculate that people might be comfortable sharing medical information with someone who is closer to their age, and might be experiencing similar physical issues. Age might affect the types of information shared, as different generations have different outside experiences that they bring to the discussion. However, this study does not answer this question conclusively.

How much time is spent talking about the book?

One of the biggest jokes about book clubs is that people don't really talk about the book at all. My experience in my book club is that about half of the time is spent in social chit-chat, and the other half the time spent talking about the book. We do talk about other books, but there is not a strict rule about sticking to the book selected for that meeting. The amount of time spent talking about the book varied in the groups that I observed. Most spent at least half the time talking about the book. Some groups instituted rules, for some groups these rules are "unspoken", that limits the amount of social chit-chat to the beginning of the club meeting. This is to ensure that some mention is made of the book. As a member of the Foreign Language Club stated, before they instituted the rule, if someone who had not been there for a long time arrived at the meeting, they would spend the entire meeting catching up on that person's life, and not get around to the book at all. For them, that proved to be unsatisfying, as one of the reasons they continued to participate in the group was to practice their language skills and discuss books.

Even groups that stated that sociability was one of their reasons for participation, have the same sort of unspoken rule. And for some, the social chit-chat drives them away from a particular group. They prefer more structured group environments where the amount of book talk is more regulated. As a member of the Condo Club answered when I asked what types of information did people discuss when they had veered away from book talk: "I don't know, I don't listen. I want to hear what people say about the books." She also stated that there was a member who was the "strong man" who kept everyone on track to talk about the book. What was interesting about this, however, is that in my interview with the member she referred to, he stated gossip and community information as important information to be shared at the book club meeting. For most of the private groups, however, they recognize this as part of their meeting, and regulate the time to everyday information exchange to the beginning or end of the meeting, usually over food.

But there is some time spent talking about the book in all the groups. According to a member of the Teacher Group, the central organizing principle of the group is "the general topic of the book and how it made you feel or how you interacted with the story." I talk more about this in the reader-response theory portion of the literature review, but this type of book interpretation is the dominant type of book interpretation I observed in the book clubs.

In Table 8, I noted the amount of time spent talking about books at the meetings. I began recording time at the scheduled start time of the meeting, and stopped when the book group members indicated the meeting was over. I noted the approximate length of the meeting (give or take 15 minutes).

Table 8 Percentage of time spent talking about the book by participant group

Amount of Time Spent Talking about the Book	**Foreign Language Club**	**Teacher Club**	**City Bookstore Club**	**Third Step Bookstore Club**	**Condo Club**	**All Women's Genre Club**
Length of Meeting	**2 hours**	**1.5 hours**	**2 hours**	**2 hours**	**2 hours**	**2 hours**
0-25%						
26-50%						
51-74%		**X**			**X**	**X**
75-90%	**X**					
91-100%			**X**	**X**		

Book Selection

In looking at book selection, other information emerged about people's feelings about certain types of books. I am choosing to not include that in this report as I am focusing more on the relationships between people, and how it affects their everyday information exchange. I outline in Table 9 the types of methods used for selection of books, and in Table 10 which club used which types of methods.

The Teacher Club was the only group I interviewed that admitted to using Oprah's website to select books. This group also used the web to find other book group websites to aid in selection of books. During the observation, I also observed word of mouth and group member recommendations as strategies for aiding book selection. What is interesting to note about the Teacher Club is how information discussed in the book group made its way into the rest of the workplace. Information about books would sometimes be emailed to the two founders from teachers who were not participating in the book group, and these books would be considered. Also, outside of the book club but in the workplace, book club members would share information about books, and exchanged everyday information, with non-group member co-workers.

Table 9 Types of methods used for selection of book/s

SE	Selection of book
SEC	Consensus
SEST	Structured turn taking
SEUT	Unstructured turn taking
SEBLI	Individual-produced book list
SEBLG	Group-produced book list
SEBP	Book pitches
SEII	Individuals Interests
SEOS	Outside sources (book reviews, Oprah, bookstore facilitator)
SEWM	Word of mouth
SEMB	Not one book selected

Table 10 Types of methods used for selection of book/s by participant group

Method of Book Selection	**Foreign Language Club**	**Teacher Club**	**City Bookstore Club**	**Third Step Bookstore Club**	**Condo Club**	**All Women's Genre Club**
Consensus	X	X				
Structured turn taking						X
Group-produced book list	X	X				
Book pitches					X	
Individuals Interests	X	X			X	X
Outside sources (book reviews, Oprah)		X	X	X	X	X
Word of mouth	X	X	X	X	X	X
Facilitator Chosen			X	X		
Mult. book selected					X	

Communication

I looked at not only everyday information exchange in group meetings, but also outside-meeting communication. Email, then telephone, were the two principal means of outside communication between group members. The only group that relied heavily on the telephone was the Condo Club, which was comprised of older individuals. I was able to observe several group members e-mail communications over the course of this study. Groups that used e-mail shared more information, both everyday (including personal) and book-related, outside of the meeting.

Initial awareness

I asked members to tell me from where or whom they first heard about their current book group. I asked this question to discover the types of prior relationships that existed before the group was formed, which in turn might correlate to the prevalence of sharing of everyday information. Some groups have multiple initial awarenesses, because as new members joined later, different recruiting methods were used. I deleted certain codes, such as from a family member, because no participants stated that source as their initial awareness. This supports the idea that weak (or in this case weaker) ties can bring new information into people's lives.

Table 11 Initial awareness of club by book club members

IA	Initial Awareness of club (codes can be used in conjunction)
IAFR	From friend
IAA	From advertisement or other public announcement
IAM	From book club member
IAC	From co-worker
IC	From a class

Table 12 Initial awareness of club by book club members by participant group

Initial awareness of club	**Foreign Language Club**	**Teacher Club**	**City Bookstore Club**	**Third Step Bookstore Club**	**Condo Club**	**All Women's Genre Club**
From friend	X				X	X
From advertisement or other public announcement			X	X	X	
From book club member	X	X			X	X
From co-worker		X				X
From a class	X					

Chapter IV: Discussion

Introduction

This study reveals certain correlations between type of place, types of relationships, and amount of everyday information exchange in book discussion groups. The complexity of book club organization and book club talking, however, signifies that there are multiple layers, and multiple contexts within which people and information flow and interact. Defining causality between these variables is thus difficult to demonstrate.

I use the term book discussion group and book club interchangeably. A useful definition of book discussion groups is: *a social gathering of individuals who meet to discuss books*. There is no good documentary evidence of the number and prevalence of book discussion groups. In a 1999 Gallup Poll, "relatively few Americans belonged to a book club". However, this claim has been contradicted by the sales of book discussion related materials, the numbers of libraries and bookstores that offer book discussion groups, the popularity of Oprah's Book Club as well as her choices of books, and the anecdotal evidence presented in newspapers and popular press publications that claim that we are now in an "age of book clubs".

In a book club, the functional information is book talk. This includes information about the author, the book itself, and the any background information on the book (such as information about a time period or setting). Everyday information includes all non-book information directly before, during, and after the meeting. I outline the categories of everyday information I observed in Table 1.

There are two main trajectories that relationships can develop in a book club. The first one involves the ever-deepening friendship that occurs when people of like enough mind, and shared experiences, interact on a regular basis for a length of time. But not always. Sometimes relationships are not deepened, and exist at the level of familiar strangers for years. Why do some book clubs lead to deeper relationships, and others don't? Or why do some book clubs lead to animosity between members which eventually destroys the club and others can report infrequent or no conflicts at all? While this study

does not answer this question definitively, I can reveal some correlating factors that might shed light on these questions.

The amount of everyday information exchanged in book clubs is positively correlated with deeper relationships between members in the book club. The common sense conclusion would be, the longer people know each other, the more likely they are to share information about themselves, and therefore, the deeper their relationships. But this is not always the case. In many book clubs, people do not share everyday information with each other. Therefore, though they may have met for a long length of time, their shared experiences in the book club are limited to a discussion of the text that does not connect to a shared expression of their personal lives. The club members that did have deeper relationships with each other had carved out the space in their clubs for the exchange of everyday information. They also met on a regular basis for a long length of time. This would lead to the conclusion that intentional sharing of everyday information could be the key to forming deeper relationships in the book club.

Another important aspect of everyday information exchange to note is that everyday information often had connections or, in the words of a member of the Teacher Club, "tendrils" connecting the everyday information to both information about the book and the interpretation of the text. Everyday and book information, to varying degrees, flowed between members in a spontaneous manner. Some book clubs allowed for more spontaneous sharing of everyday information, while others regulated the sharing of everyday information. For those clubs who allowed more spontaneous flow, the club was identified as a social activity. For those who regulated the information flow, the club was a learning activity first, then a social activity second.

Textual interpretation

In **Figure 2**, the circle represents the Universe, within which the audience, artist, and work exist.

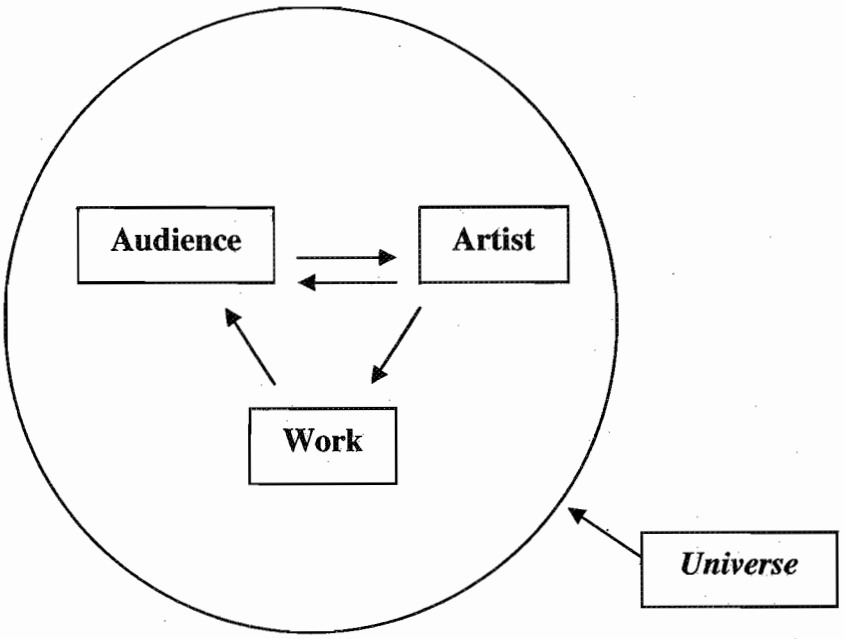

Figure 2: Book Club Model of Textual Interpretation

In the book clubs I observed, members referenced their personal experiences extensively in discussing the book. As I discuss in the **Reader Response** section, relating books, and the ideas from the books, to their own personal experiences and belief system was the most common form of interpretation I observed. In historical book clubs, this was the primary form of interpretation as well. The book club had a functional use; not only were people gathering to further understand books, they were gathering to further understand themselves, and the world around them. Amongst the more cohesive and longer-standing clubs, such as the Foreign Language Club, there were jokes and phrases used that referenced a shared knowledge base that they had developed as a group.

References to rules, which were referred to in a sort of shorthand, could also be considered this type of shared knowledge. Most of the groups had at least one person who was the "historian" of the group. Someone who remembered, or who had kept track of, the books that had been read, as well as the ins and outs of various members in the group. The level of knowledge sharing between the historian/s and the rest of the group varied. Some groups were almost completely ahistorical in that people dropped in and out, and sometimes without even sharing their names. These tended to be public book clubs.

I observed both metacommunicative and communicative uses of language in the book clubs in this study. It is possible that conflict could have arisen with these two functions of language collide. In some participants' interviews, they discussed their relationships with each other as the primary glue that kept them going back for each meeting. They also stated that the purpose of the book club was to develop social relationships; hence, the book talk, the principal activity of the book club, had a metacommunicative function of conveying meaning about their relationships. For participants who stated that they did not want to hear all the personal information that some book club members shared, and that they wanted to just "talk about the book", they were utilizing the communicative function of language which conveys information or content. The small sample size of this study does not conclusively demonstrate a correlation to gender and literature expert status to use of one of these two functions of language. However, in this preliminary study, more women utilized the metacommunicative function. There was discernable correlation between use of language and literature expert status.

Book clubs use a combined form of oral and literate traditions. People communicate information to each other about the book, but they will often use formulaic phrases from either literary criticism (which was not a shared literate experience in the group, but could have been a literate experience of that individual in the past) or the group's history together. In the discussion, people build off each other's statements (speech events) to either affirm, negate, or create a new speech event. This happens in both the sharing of book and everyday information.

While many book group members do bring an education in literature to the table, the emphasis in interpretation tends to be focused on the experiences of the book group members, not using the methods of formal criticism that are used in academia. A reader-response theory in this case allows for a type of text interpretation that is locally (meaning not by a canonical interpretation) controlled. Book groups are not purely outside the academic realm. Members will often bring articles from the popular press, book reviews, historical pieces, author biographical information, etc. While these types of extraneous resources are not often cited in academia, they are often produced by people with an academic training. And again, members often bring that style of criticism to a book group meeting, but in the meetings I observed, I did not see any overt use of literary criticism terms. The interpretation of the text tended to be in relation to people's experiences and other books or films they had read or watched. There was no theorizing, but there was philosophizing. In other words, members were looking for something to learn from the text and from the group that had relevancy to their lives. They were not talking about books for the sake of talking about the book.

Communication

Using the concepts of speech and literacy events, I examined the types of information that was shared in book clubs. Heath (1982) observed there is a tension between speech and text, and which is given a higher status or takes precedence. This is difficult to consider when trying to analyze how people discuss fiction, which is by definition untruthful. In my observations, people dismissed, or "took precedence", over the text when their personal experiences contradicted the veracity of the experiences of characters in the fictional novel. This leads to a discussion of authority: who or what has authority in a book discussion group? The literature about book clubs is that they are egalitarian in nature. However, in small groups, subtle power differences are evident. For example, in book clubs that had rules that regulated speech. However, as was pointed out by Heath (1982), literacy, and I would say in particular reading alone, allowed for greater social control from literate elites as well as resulted in less political activity as people began to think less of themselves as measured against a widespread norm. Looking at this study from a critical standpoint, supporting an oral culture that

resists uniformity, supports critical understandings of literate artifacts, but also incorporates the broader universe of ideas in the literate tradition is a means of counter-acting this type of negative self-realization.

Relationships, Textual Interpretation, and Information Exchange

What is certain is that book group members make new connections to books, to other people, and to a world of ideas that is larger than their own. Everyone brings their own universe of knowledge to a room, and for one or two hours discusses a book. In a reader-centered theory of reading there is no central idea of the book but the book is recreated through each person's own experience of the book. This decentralization of authority is interesting to note in the age of Oprah, who gives her own type of authority. But even though she offers a more authoritative interpretation, she encourages readers to make their own interpretations of the book. And even without her encouragement, people would. I observed a bookstore book group that had read James Frey's Million Little Pieces. I observed the group the day after a Smoking Gun story appeared, debunking the "facts" of the book became national news. Reading this controversial "memoir" about the author's battle with drug addiction however was a powerful experience for many readers in this group. Many in the group expressed what they thought and felt about the book before and after reading The Smoking Gun story. At the beginning of the meeting, the facilitator showed a videotaped recording of Oprah's interview with James Frey. This was Oprah's first interview with Frey, and had been taped before The Smoking Gun story was sent out. The meeting was the largest attendance the facilitator could remember. The facilitator had sent out on an email list to the members the story so it could be discussed at the meeting. People took the story very seriously in the sense that for many, the truthfulness of it mattered very much. There was a strong passion amongst a few members about the use of the word "memoir". What was striking however, that before the national media mill had shaped public opinion about this event, people were working out on their own how they felt. The reactions were as diverse as the people in the room. And the facilitator, at the end of the meeting, took an poll of the room to ask if their minds had changed about the book after discussing it.

Some said yes, and others said no. What was clear was that there had been a collective work at situating themselves in the present historical context, an activity that Long observed in women's reading groups.

Another interesting point to bring up here, and one that is often seen in book groups, was the sharing of personal information. One book group member I interviewed stated that he was uncomfortable with people sharing personal information in groups, which is why he became a regular of public book group meetings, where he said there was less sharing of personal information. The facilitator of the book group even warned the attendees (members) that this was a *public* meeting and that sharing of personal information should be kept to a minimum. Even with that warning, people shared personal stories of drug addiction in themselves or their families, something which a discussion of a memoir is apt to lead to. But for those who were publicly working out their personal connections to the book, they were more overtly situating themselves in the present historical context, or at least in the author's life experience. If others were doing the same, it was internally.

Some group members said they now "understood" better the life of a drug addict, which is another personal interpretation. For those, the book served as an instructional guide, a place where they could learn from the experiences of the author. A book group can magnify that experience as members bring their own relevant experiences to the discussion. Underlying this is the belief held by members that the personal experience is a valuable teaching tool. But not all members believed in this value. From my study it was difficult to determine whether this difference in belief was delineated along gender lines or other attributes.

Oral information

As I said in the data analysis portion of this paper, oral information is a difficult type of information to analyze. Unlike information on the printed page, the boundaries of the information are difficult to map. It is difficult also to even determine what information is in the context of oral communication because there is a host of verbal and non-verbal types of information that can be communicated via a simple verbal exchange.

When examining oral information, separating the information from its social and personal context causes you to lose what the actors bring to it. (These ideas were developed by members of a research conversation, that I participated in, about oral information, April 14, 2006 at the University of Washington).

For this reason, a point that I wanted to examine further is the idea that people bring their own personal context to meetings and how it interacts with the social context of the meeting itself. While I do not point to any variables that may cause the types of information exchanged in book groups, I do note variables that *may* cause or affect the types of information shared. Further research might be able to illuminate further causality. I will look at roles, purpose, relationships, and structure.

In a book group, members develop roles that are different from the roles they play in other parts of their lives. This "trying on of new hats" in the historical book clubs, was a significant part of members' satisfaction with the group, as it related to their own personal growth. This was the social context for those clubs. However, the personal context for those, mainly female, members is that they were, for the most part, denied access to higher education and satisfying professional development, and thus they took the learning, leadership, and social activist opportunities of their clubs much more seriously. However, in present-day clubs, the women (and men) are not denied to the same extent opportunities in higher education and professional development, thus their personal context is different. The social context is different as well, as they have chosen and developed aspects of the club to match this new purpose of book clubs.

This leads the second point I want to discuss which is the purpose of book clubs. For the clubs that I observed, the purpose was largely social, though all of them cited learning or reading as another purpose of the club. As members meet for a specific purpose, they will be motivated to share information that will achieve that purpose. This is a functional, goal-oriented way of looking at information. But since book clubs are a purposeful group, versus a spontaneous, non-purposeful group, then looking at information in this way is appropriate.

The relationships people had with each other were formed from both the personal and social contexts. The variety of relationships in the clubs I observed were: friends or

acquaintances before formation of the club, friends or acquaintances or friendly strangers after the formation of the club, co-workers, and family members (usually spouses). I was unable to determine the difference in oral information shared between people who had relationships with each other prior to the formation of the club and those who met at the club. However, the club that extended their activities beyond the club meeting, and hosted holiday parties and special events, incorporated the personal contexts, or personal lives, of the members to an extant that the other clubs didn't.

The structure of the book group also affected the amount and types of information shared. For example, some groups regulated certain types of information sharing to a certain time of the meeting, either before or after the book discussion. And some groups warned that personal information would not be appropriate. This affected the types of relationships formed within the group as well. Further research might illuminate better how people felt about these rules, and the role these rules played in how comfortable members felt about expressing their opinions in book information sharing.

Information Grounds

The focus of this study, however, is identifying the aspects of book clubs that make them information grounds. There are seven main identified characteristics of an information ground. These are:

1) Information grounds can occur anywhere, in any type of temporal setting, and are predicated on the presence of the individuals.
2) People gather at information grounds for a primary, instrumental purpose other than information sharing.
3) Information grounds are attended by different social types, most if not all of whom play expected and important, albeit different, roles in information flow.
4) Social interaction is a primary activity at information grounds such that information flow is a by-product.
5) People engage in formal and informal information sharing, and information flow occurs in many directions.

6) People use information obtained at information grounds in alternative ways, and benefit along physical, social, affective, and cognitive dimensions.
7) Many sub-contexts exist within an information ground and based on people's perspectives and physical factors; together these sub-contexts form a grand context.

Book discussion groups in their modern format meet all seven of these criteria. They are predicated on the group members' presence, and can occur in various places. Book group members gather for the instrumental purpose of discussing books, though everyday information flows throughout the book discussion. Different social types attend book discussion groups. Specifically, book discussion group members are not limited by profession, educational level, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. Book discussion groups are a social leisure activity with social interaction valued as an activity. There are a few exceptions, such as workplace groups. But even in the workplace groups, social interaction amongst co-workers is considered part of the value of the group activity. Members engage in information sharing on multiple topics: book information, philosophical or personal belief and idea information, everyday information, which includes, travel, political and current events, shopping, family, and a multitude more. The first two types of information – book and philosophical – could be labeled formal because it is this type of information sharing that matches the stated purpose of a group. The last group of information types, which could be broadly classified as everyday information, are more informal. It is this second type of information that tends to be regulated by structural rules regulating the amount of it allowed in a book discussion group. People expressed multiple and alternative uses of all this information away from the book discussion group. And finally, contexts and sub-contexts, such as relationships between members, subtle factors concerned with physical space, and the book itself, contribute or hinder information exchange and flow. Combining all these characteristics together, it is obvious that book discussion groups act as information grounds.

Diversity

It was interesting to note that members, though their clubs were ethnically homogeneous, still described their book clubs as "diverse". It later became apparent they were referring to diversity in age, profession, experiences, and ideology. In some cases, a difference in ideology caused so much conflict, that members were forced to leave the group.

Intergenerational learning is an aspect of book club activity. As I discussed earlier, the greatest diversity I observed in the book clubs that participated in this study was in age. While participants in my study did not specifically state that intergenerational learning was a byproduct of participation in a book club, in another study conducted by Lohman, et. al., this was found to be the case. In this study, students in a geriatrics program course, students participated in book discussion groups that consisted of both students and the elderly. The outcome of the study indicates that "the intergenerational group experience resulted in positive mutual benefit among students and elders." (Lohman, 2003).

Place

In much of the guides to book clubs, place and how to choose an appropriate place is treated in depth. This is heartening for my study as I posit that place, and sponsorship, of a book club affects the type of talk that happens. According to Sandra, choosing a place is "one of the most significant decisions your group will make."

According to Sandra, salons were named after a "conversation chamber" (Sandra, 1997) in the home. The private space reflects the personality of the owner, and provides a degree of privacy and protection. People might feel safer to express more outrageous opinions in an environment such as this, though this is not always the case. Rules of etiquette, and the guest-host relationship, might inhibit the talk in a private home. Place alone does not affect talk. The personalities of the book club members, the political and social climate of the times and how it affects how open talking can be, and the compatibility of the group members to each other also play a significant role. However, place can make or break a book club.

Sandra also states that libraries, coffeehouses, and cafes have also played a significant role in salons. In fact, the tertulia was almost exclusively held in public spaces. One of the most famous tertulias in Madrid was held at a public fountain (Sandra, 1997). It was this type of public meeting place that Robert Putnam lamented the loss of in his book *Bowling Alone* (Putnam, 2000). According to Sandra, the advantage of public places as meeting places are "the open, freely mixing ambience of a public meeting place can add a steady stream of newcomers with new ideas to your meetings." This is interesting to note in comparison with the two "public" meetings I observed. While they were held in a public space, pains were taken by the facilitator to close off the space so that people could not just wander in. In terms of place, they are more highly structured than the tertulias that Sandra describes.

Sandra also states that meeting at a regular location is important. She states that "site consistency helps the salon maintain its sense of continuity. Members can easily find their way to the salon month after month, and those who have been absent for a while can effortlessly return. A regular meeting place also helps people relax, ... at a fundamental level, people develop feelings of affection for a familiar place" (Sandra, 1997, 51). Findability is an important concept to note around place. One group I observed which met in their workplace had some dissension when one member proposed they meet at a coffeehouse instead of in the workplace. The argument was that those who might want to drop by at the last minute wouldn't be able to find them.

For private groups that rotate locations, it was less important to have the same place as to have a schedule of places. Having the same location in a private setting places an undue burden on one member of the book club. In looking at early Parisian salons, and their later American descendents, the most successful salons were run by women who did it almost as a full time activity. The women held their salons usually nightly, or several times a week, and it took over their lives. Most people who belong to book clubs today do not have the time or inclination to host people to that degree. The frequency, and changing of place, probably has a comparative effect on the type of talk exchanged, but without a deeper historical look at the salons and a broader look at book clubs today, that is difficult to determine.

Changing places works with a close-knit group of people and depends upon an excellent communication system, Sandra states. This leads us to examine the relationships between members as the more primary factor than place. In groups that do change places, there tends to be closer bonds between the people. This might also lead these groups to practice more exclusionary practices, so as to manage both the size of the group as well as to simplify communication. I talk more about exclusion and inclusion in another section.

An aspect of place that I was unable to find any literature on is how the details of visual and architectural space affect the types of information shared, and the satisfaction people have about the conversation. For book club practitioners (which includes members and professional facilitators), details such as how to arrange the furniture are important to consider. Anyone who has hosted a party knows how these things can make or break a successful social gathering. Sandra has an entire section on décor and seating. Details she considers are: comfort of furniture, strength and location of lighting, and arrangement of furniture. How people are seated can affect not only the conversation, but also the authority structure of the group. For example, according to Sandra, circles are more inherently egalitarian in contrast to a person sitting at the head of a table which allows for that person to control the conversation.

Other design factors, such as acoustics and background noise are issues. Privacy is an issue as well, as well as conflicting with management of public spaces. Shaw (1996) wrote about library building design, and how architects should start building spaces for social reading. Wiegand (2003), a researcher in American Studies, wrote about the need for more research in the LIS field examining the relationship between place and meaning. He outlined the more philosophical aspects of place that should be in a library, grounding his speculations in the ideas of Jurgen Habermas about the public sphere and later researchers who grounded their work in his, such as Robert Putnam. He lists aspects of a place that should be considered in public libraries, a list which could be applied to a place for book clubs. For example, he lists that libraries as place should incorporate the ability to:

1) exchange social capital in its various and diverse forms;

2) foster reciprocity;
3) facilitate social honesty and trust;
4) develop relationships (personal and group);
5) learn civic lessons;
6) construct "imagined communities."

For reading he lists:

1) social bases for reading (and especially the reading of popular
2) fiction);
3) construction of "imagined communities";
4) sharing of cultural experiences;
5) creation of "webs of meaning";
6) processes of "self-authorization" and "self-fashioning";
7) values readers place on reading for pleasure, empowerment,
8) intellectual stimulation, and social bonding.

All of these activities take place in book club discussions. Libraries should support programming, such as book discussion groups, that supports the overall goal of making the library a valued community space.

Conclusion

The study of book clubs in an information grounds context provides a useful framework for understanding how this type of research can inform practice. Understanding the role of everyday information exchange plays in relationship building is important to understand the motivation for people to frequent certain settings or group activities. Book groups are already being used as activities for professional development, in not only library and education fields, but in corporate settings as well. It would appear that the value of the discussions that occur in these groups resides not only in the discussion of an important or relevant text, but the everyday information is shared in "tendrils" connected to the text allow for a more significant and relevant information exchange for the book group participants. Future research could be done to address

questions about the efficacy of book clubs as both a tool for learning and a tool for community building.

Chapter V: Future Research

This study introduced more questions than answers. Several directions for future research occurred to me during the process of completing this study. Below, I explain some of these ideas for future research. For this project, I focused on American book clubs, though an interesting future research project would involve cross-cultural comparisons of book clubs. A future study would also examine book club activity with a more ethnically diverse sample and relate it to the history of book groups in various U.S. ethnic minority communities. It would be interesting to examine whether ethnic diversity within clubs affects information exchange. Another future question would examine book clubs in rural communities, and in communities with low literacy levels.

When I asked the question, "When did you first hear about this thing called a book club?", no one was able to answer this question. Most people join clubs because they have heard about the current incarnation of this cultural phenomenon. A question for future research would be to determine how aware are current book club members of their historical precedents. Another interesting future research question would be whether the desire for independent interpretation of books, without the help of discussion or reader guides, or guided interpretation correlated with educational level.

Using Brian Street's concept of "social literacies", a question for future research would be to compare everyday information exchange in similar group settings where a book is not the central focus of information exchange. This research might show that the types of everyday information exchange exhibit subtle differences. Also, an aspect of place that I was unable to find any literature on is how the details of visual and architectural space affect the types of information shared, and the satisfaction people have about the conversation. An interesting study in the future would look more in detail at this, perhaps through controlled observable studies.

Another area of future research and tool building is in the topic of literary infrastructure. While researching this topic, I asked the question of myself, what cultural, social, economic, and geographical factors must exist, and in what combinations, for a lively book club culture to flourish? And more primary then book clubs, what factors

must exist for a culture of pleasure reading to flourish? This question is particularly relevant for future work I will be doing in developing literacy programs in rural and small city libraries in Guatemala next year.

I began to try to answer this question by examining the literary infrastructure of Seattle and Atlanta, which are similar in many ways. Both are home to several universities with creative writing programs, numerous bookstores which include new, used, chain, independent, and specialty/genre, multiple public library systems, writers in residence, and newspapers. Seattle has more used bookstores than Atlanta, and actually boasts of neighborhoods with several bookstores together within walking distance of each other. Atlanta is more of a car city and such concentrations of bookstores are more rare. I began to map out, using GIS methods, where these literary "nodes" existed, and how they correlated to the geography of education, income and ethnicity. I soon realized however that this was beyond the scope of this current project, and would require much more time to fully realize. As well as a template for creating a map of literary infrastructure, I would in the future like to create an index that measures the literary activity of a place, similar to the America's Most Literate Cities, but for other countries as well. This index might take into account different forms of literacy, such as signs, oral traditions, and community spaces where literacy occurs in measuring the true literary infrastructure of a place.

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Appendix 1: Interview Codebook

Codes	Definitions
A	Affiliation of club
AB	Affiliation of club is bookstore
AP	Affiliation of club is private
AW	Affiliation of club is workplace
ABC	After Book Club Activities
ABCY	After Book Club Activities Yes
ABCN	After Book Club Activities No
B	Biography
BA	Age
BAN	From Atlanta No
BAY	From Atlanta Yes
BLBY	Literature background yes
BLBN	Literature background no
BRT	Retired
BFB	Family background
BSY	From Seattle Yes
BSN	From Seattle No
BCA	Book club activities
BCBCS	Before book club socializing
BCSF	Shared food (potlucks, dinner, snacks)
BCT	Themed activities related to book
BI	Book (being discussed) information
BID	Book information discussed
BILT	Literary terms used
BIA	Book author discussed
BIE	Exposure to books one wouldn't normally read
BIP	Book-related personal information
BS	Book Sources
BSB	Bookstore
BSL	Library
BSPF	Personal Friend or Family
BSGM	Group member
BSO	Amazon or other online source
C	Outside Communication
CE	Email communication
CT	Telephone communication

D	**Documentation**
DBL	Book list
DGW	Group website
DN	Newsletter
DBR	Reviewed Books
DRU	Documented rules
DML	Membership list
DSA	Selection aid
DG	Guides produced by group to help with interpretation of text (word lists, discussion questions, character lists, etc.)
DRA	Rating System
DI	**Disruption**
DIM	Disruptive member
DIR	Disruptive rule
DIV	**Diversity**
DIVY	Members say group is diverse
ED	**Education**
EDHS	High School Education
EDC	Undergraduate College
EDM	Masters Level and above
EDT	**Education Type**
EDTL	Literature related degree
EDTNL	Non-literature related degree
EI	**Everyday Information Type**
EIC	Everyday community information.
EIE	Everyday entertainment information.
EIG	Everyday gossip information
EIT	Travel
EIR	Religion
EIPO	Politics/Current Events
EIPI	Personal information (death, sickness, family, etc.)
EIM	Everyday medical information.
EIS	Everyday social information (parties, trips, etc.)
EITR	Everyday information trivial
EII	Everyday information important
EX	**Someone expelled from group**
EXY	Yes
EXN	No
G	**Gender**

GF	Female
GM	Male
GO	Group orientation
GOC	Closed
GOO	Open
GS	Group structure
IE	Information Exchange
IES	Single person shares everyday information to group or just one other person
IEE	Exchange of everyday information. Specifically, two or more people exchange information.
IA	Initial Awareness of club (codes can be used in conjunction)
IAFR	From friend
IAA	From advertisement
IAM	From book club member
IAC	From co-worker
LM	Length of Membership
LML	Length of membership long (more than half total time of club's existance)
LMS	Length of membership short (less than half total time of club's existance)
M	Members
ML	Member asked to leave
MCI	Members involved in other activities
MC	Core group
MH	Honorary Members
MR	Membership Rules
MRN	Rules No
MRY	Rules Yes
MRC	Member must be capable of conversation
MRF	Membership is fluid (members can come and go)
MRA	Ask group before asking another to join
OA	Outside activities
OAP	Parties
OAEX	Exercise
OAC	Church
OAT	Travel
OAR	Retreats
OAS	Shopping
OACO	Community volunteer activities
OAE	Entertainment (plays, movies, etc.)
OAB	Birthdays

OAM	Milestone events (christenings, showers, funerals, etc.)
OAPA	Personal activities where member is involved (this includes poetry readings where member is performing, fundraiser member is putting on, etc.)
OAB	Bumping into them randomly
OAH	Holidays (Christmas, Halloween, etc.)
P	Place
PCS	Community space
PB	Bookstore
PE	Eating or drinking establishment
PPH	Private house/residence
PEL	Email list as place
PS	Place static
PR	Place rotates
PW	Workplace
R	Relationships
RSP	Refers to other people as smart
RFA	Family (or like family)
RF	Friends
RN	Neighbors
RA	Acquaintances
RD	Dependable
RND	Not dependable
RST	Strangers
RC	Consequences for breaking rules
RCY	Yes
RCN	No
RD	Rule Development
RDC	Consensus
RDF	Founder
RDO	Oligarchy of a few
RO	Roles
ROH	Historian
ROF	Facilitator
ROFO	Founder
ROBP	Book procurement
ROC	Communicator
RODG	Discussion guide creator
ROS	Secretary
ROSE	Book selector
ROHS	Host
ROS	Static roles
ROR	Rotated roles
RJ	Reason for Joining

RJBT	Talk about books
RJS	Social reasons
RJIS	Intellectual Stimulation
RJL	Learning
RJC	Community involvement
SE	Selection of book
SEC	Consensus
SEST	Structured turn taking
SEUT	Unstructure turn taking
SEBLI	Individual-produced book list
SEBLG	Group-produced book list
SEBP	Book pitches
SEII	Individuals Interests
SEOS	Outside sources (book reviews, Oprah, bookstore facilitator)
SEWM	Word of mouth
SEMB	Not one book selected
SR	Structural Rules
SRY	Structural Rules yes
SRN	Structural Rules no
SRP	Proscribed structural rules from outside source
SRBT	Amount of time spent talking about non-book information rule
SI	Sources of Information
SIG	Sources of information good
SIB	Sources of information bad
ST	Satisfaction
STY	Satisfaction yes
STN	Satisfaction no
T	Time of meetings
TM	mornings
TA	afternoons
TE	evenings
TW	weekly
TM	monthly
TO	other
TR	Transporation to meetings
TRB	Bus
TRC	Car
TRCA	Carpool with other book club members
TRWA	Walk alone

TRP	Parking is an issue
TRWO	Walk with others
TR	Traditions
TRY	Traditions yes
TRN	Traditions no
VI	Visitors
VIW	Visitors Welcome
VINW	Visitors Non-Welcome

Appendix 2: Codebook for Observations

B	Biography
BA	Age
BAN	From Atlanta No
BAY	From Atlanta Yes
BLBY	Literature background yes
BLBN	Literature background no
BRT	Retired
BFB	Family background
BSY	From Seattle Yes
BSN	From Seattle No
ED	Education
EDHS	High School Education
EDC	Undergraduate College
EDM	Masters Level and above
G	Gender
GF	Female
GM	Male
RU	Rules
RUY	Reference to rules yes
RUN	Reference to rules no
H	History
HY	Reference to history yes
HN	Reference to history no
P	Place
PCS	Community space
PB	Bookstore
PE	Eating or drinking establishment
PPH	Private house/residence
PEL	Email list as place
PS	Place static
PR	Place rotates
PW	Workplace
T	Time of meetings
TM	mornings
TA	afternoons
TE	evenings
TW	weekly

TM	monthly
TO	other
RA	Rating System
RAY	Rating System Yes
RAN	Rating System No
A	Affiliation
AP	Private
AB	Bookstore
AW	Workplace
M	Membership
MY	Membership rules Yes
MN	Membership rules No
EI	Everyday Information Type
EIC	Everyday community information.
EIE	Everyday entertainment information.
EIG	Everyday gossip information
EIT	Travel
EIR	Religion
EIPO	Politics/Current Events
EIPI	Personal information (death, sickness, family, etc.)
EIM	Everyday medical information.

EIS	Everyday social information (parties, trips, etc.)
EITR	Everyday information trivial
EII	Everyday information important
BI	Book Information
BS	Book Sources
BSB	Bookstore
BSO	Amazon or other online source
BSL	Library

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

"Text and Talking:
Information Grounds and Information Exchange in Book Discussion Groups."

Interview Guide

Hi. My name is Emily Inlow. I'm from the Information School at the University of Washington. I'm conducting research for a master's thesis. I have a few questions about your book group. These questions should take between 45 minutes to an hour. All questions are optional. Thank you very much for participating.

[Preliminary Matter]

What is your age? What is your profession? Do you have a formal literature background?

Where are you from? How long have you lived here?

How long have you belonged to this book group?

How did you first hear about this book group? Why did you join?

Do you have a group website?

[Organizational Structure]

What is the main structure of the book group meeting? How often do you meet? How do you get to the meetings (tests if this has a social aspect)?

Are there rules for belonging to the book group? (open or closed membership) *If it is closed by gender*: Why? What about this particular membership rule do you like? What about it do you dislike?

Are there consequences if someone breaks a rule? Has the group as a whole ever had to ask someone to leave the group?

How did the rules for the book group develop? Were they mutually agreed upon or did someone else decide the rules before you joined? Do you follow any prescribed structure that you learned about from other sources, such as "how to form a book group" books or a bookstore how-to kit?

How do you select a book to read? How long do you take to read the book?

What do you do after the meeting?

Have you ever belonged to a different book group? How is your experience with this book group similar? How is it different?

[IG: social characteristics]

What is your role in the book group?

Have you ever told anyone else about the book group? Do you bring other people to the group meeting? (outsiders, visitors, etc.)

Do you socialize with the book group members outside the book group meeting? Do you see them in other settings?

Do you feel like your fellow book group members are friends, acquaintances, or something else?

How well do you feel you know the others in your book group? How well do you feel they know you?

What would cause you to miss a meeting?

[IG: information exchange]

Do you usually spend the whole meeting talking about the book? If not, what percentage would you estimate is the average amount of time you spend talking about the book?

When you are not talking about the book, what subjects do you talk about? What kinds of things do you learn about at this place?

Is there any type of information you won't talk about?

How useful is the information that you learn at the book group meeting?

Is the information trivial or important (or both)?

Do you ever talk about things that you learn at the book group meeting with people in other places? If you do, what sorts of things do you talk about?

Do you think your fellow book group members are a good source of this type of information? Why?

For what else do you rely on your fellow book group members? Have you done anything for your fellow book group members?

[IG: final words]

What is your favorite/funniest/most memorable memory of the book group?

What makes the book group special to you?

How would you describe the book group to a stranger?

Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 4: Observation Checklist

"Text and Talking:
Information Grounds and Information Exchange in Book Groups."

Observation Checklist

[General]

Date

Physical Description of space

How many people are there (number as it will probably be a small group)?

Do people arrive at different times?

[Groups & Group Dynamics]

General survey of groups within book club: group composition, group size, and details listed below.

Are there mixed-age groups?
Are there similar-age groups?
Are there mixed-gender groups?
Are there same-gender groups?
Are there mixed-profession groups?
Are there similar-profession groups?
Is it random?
(This information will be gathered by having participants write on index cards at the beginning of the meeting their occupation, education background, and age).

Do groups form within the book club group? What is the seating pattern of those groups?

Is there a shift in distribution or population of the gathering over time?

(Include diagrams of layout, people, and groups)

[Individuals]

What is the spatial distribution of individuals? Do individuals sit with other individuals? Are alliances made as discussion progresses? Do these alliances correlate with spatial distribution of individuals?

Social butterflies: are there certain people who float from group to group?

Are there certain people who facilitate introductions and/or mediate communication between groups or individuals?

Do certain individuals project an air of authority, host status, or some other form of elevated status? Do they make announcements? Is this a rotating role, or a role that is determined by the structure of the club?

[Behaviors]

Activities: what are people doing? (eating, talking, preparing food, etc.)

What sorts of extraneous events or interruptions are happening throughout the gathering? For example, does the phone ring, do other members of the family interrupt the meeting, do neighbors stop by?

Is there a division between men and women? For example, do men and women sit together? Do they agree or disagree about points in the discussion?

[Conversations]

What are people talking about?

How long does it take for members to start talking about book? The beginning of this conversation will be noted when everyday chitchat stops and formal discussion of book begins. For example, this could involve discussion of characters and plot as well as themes related to the book. I will be familiar with the book being discussed so that I am better able to follow the thread of the conversation.

Do some people have literature backgrounds? Is there a division between those who have literature backgrounds, and those who do not?

Are (certain) people referred to by a title? What level of formality vs. informality is there in conversation?

Are people talking about subjects outside the book club and chosen book?

What percentage of time is spent talking about the book vs. about other subjects?

Are people giving advice to each other?

How does the meeting end?

[Method notes]

What worked? What didn't? Did the fact that I was observing cause any adverse situations or somehow affect people's reactions?

My own final questions: does gender and literature background play a role on how information is shared in a book club? By literature background, I mean formal education or work experience that involves literary criticism and discussion of literary works.

Do people's types of relationships to each other affect their information exchange. I will determine this through the interviews and my observation of the group.

Appendix 5 Maps of Book Club Meetings

These maps show the layout of each meeting I observed. I included the position of people, major pieces of furniture, doorways and other avenues for foot traffic, food, and rooms, when multiple rooms were involved.

Map 1: City Bookstore Club

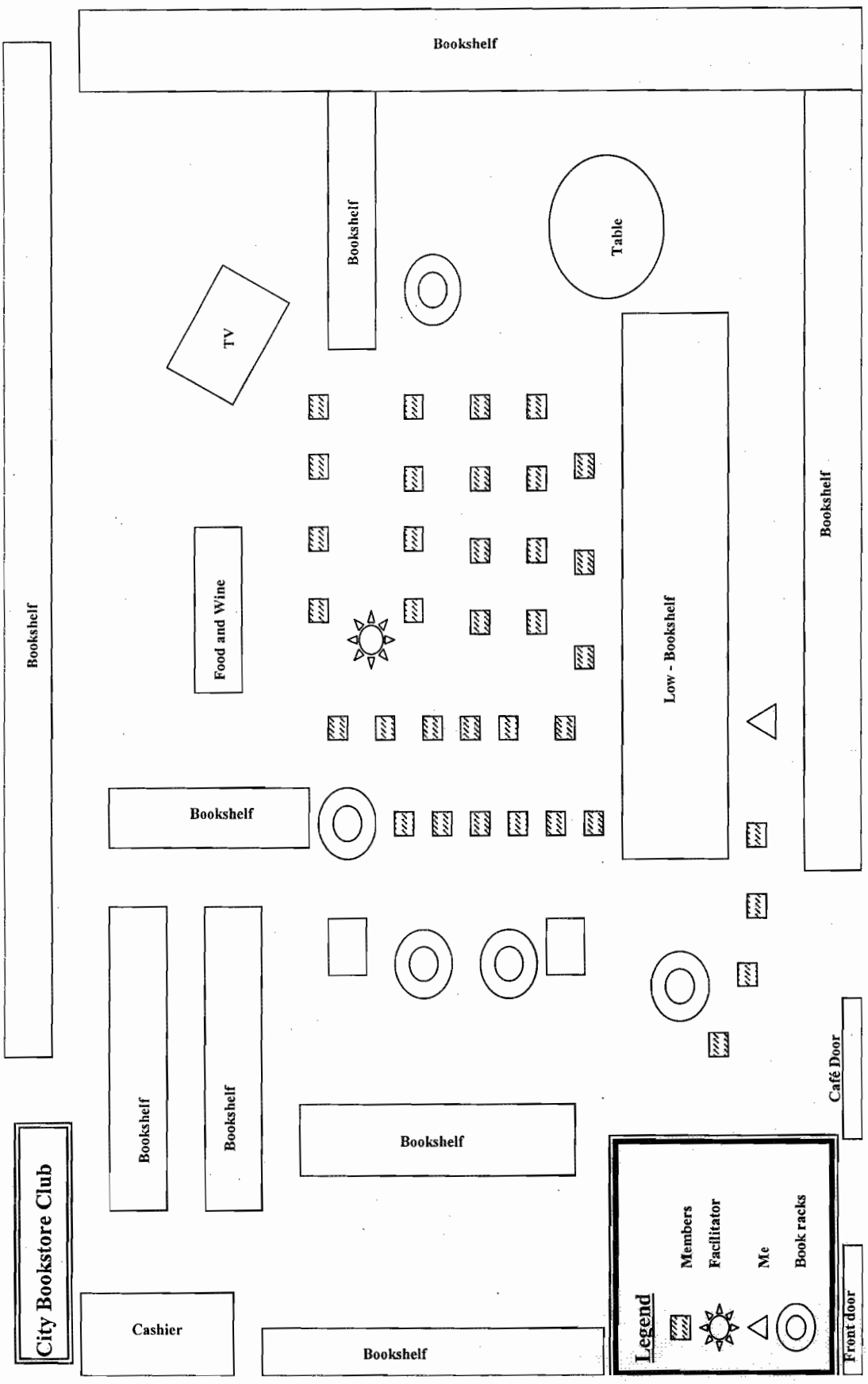
Map 2: Foreign Language Club

Map 3: All Women's Genre Club

Map 4: Teacher Club

Map 5: Condo Club

Map 6: Third Step Bookstore Club


Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Table
TV
Food and Wine
Low - Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Café Door
City Bookstore Club
Cashier
Bookshelf
Legend
Members
Facilitator
Me
Book racks
Front door

Front Door

Wall

Hallway

Legend

Members

Me

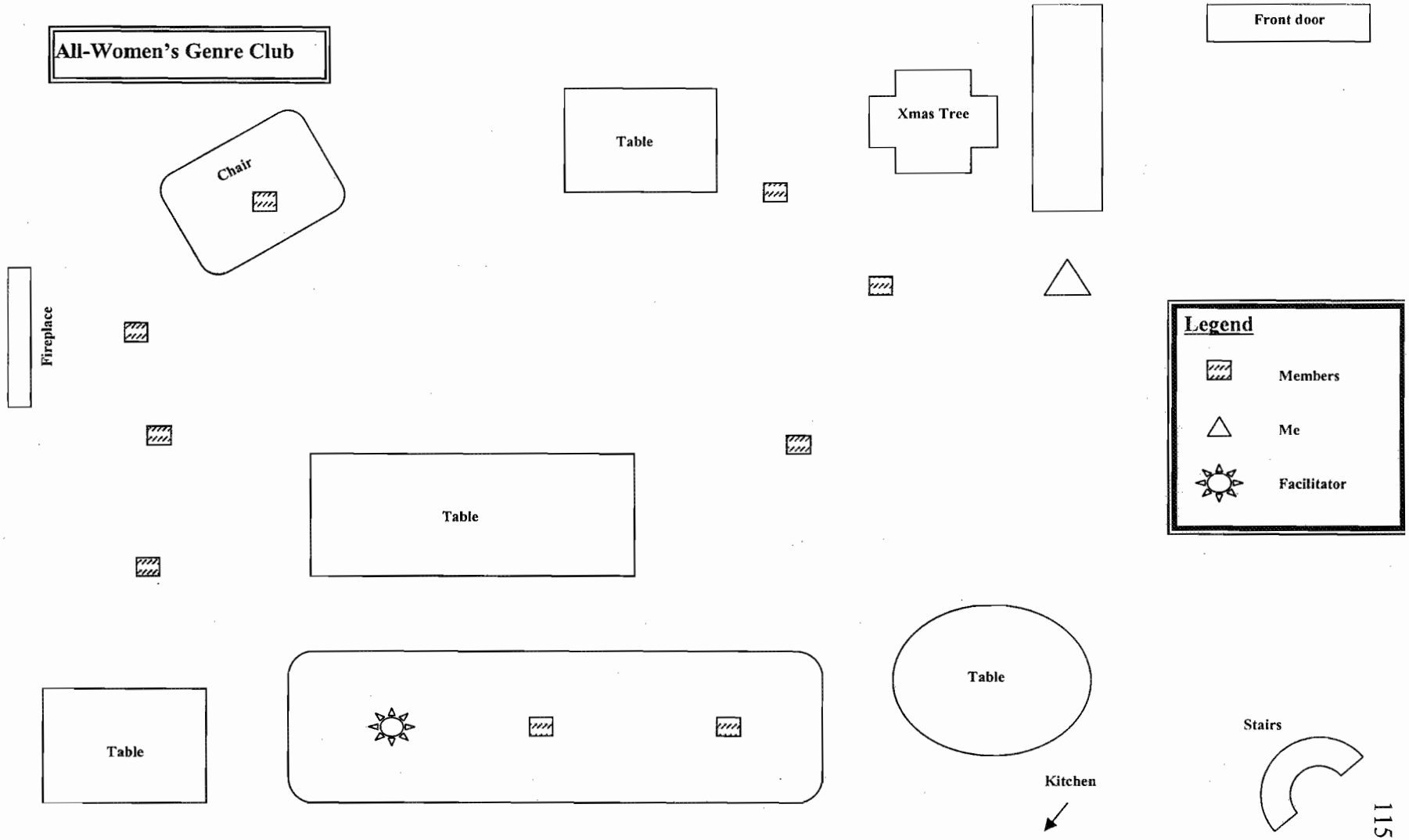
Food

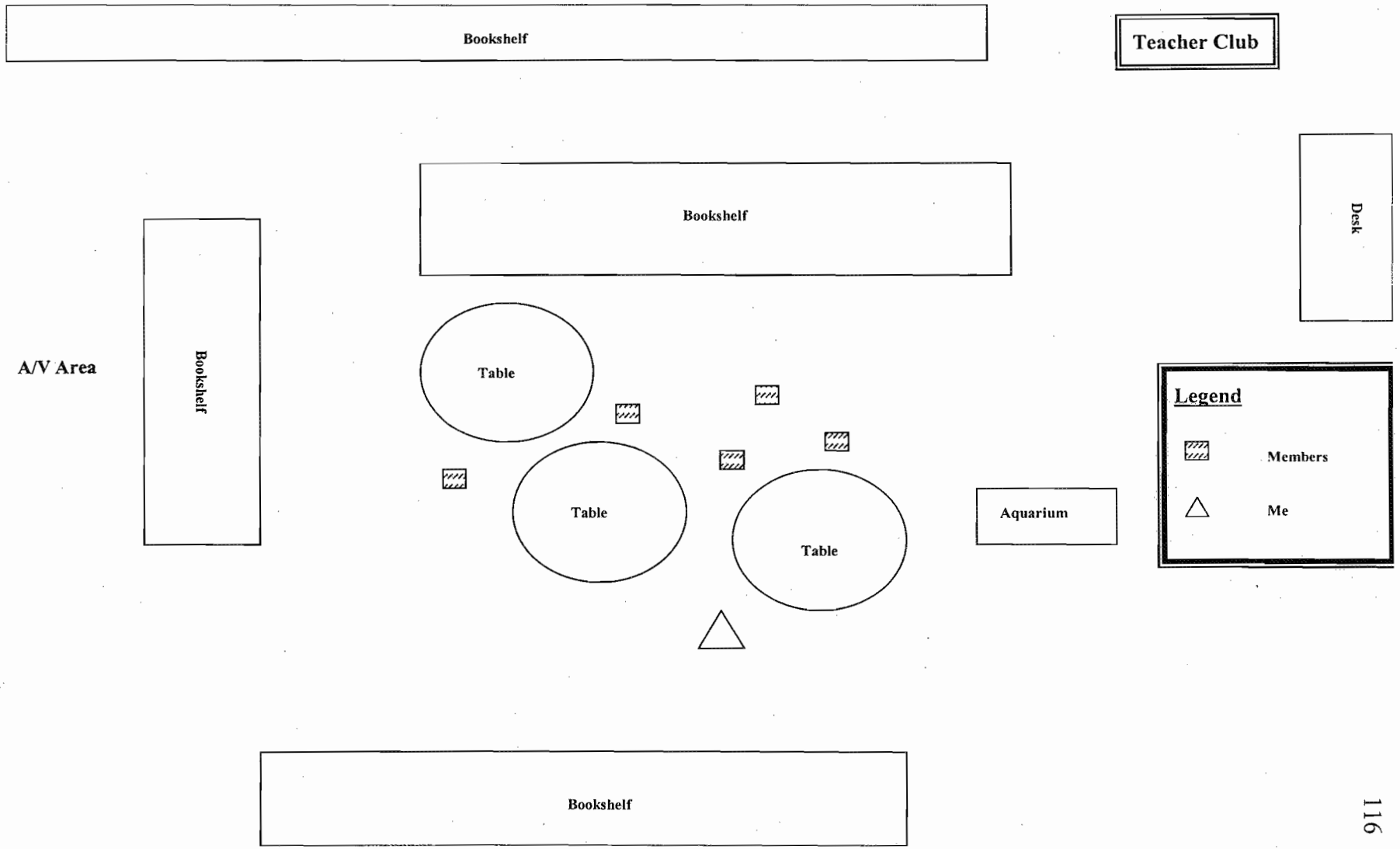
Kitchen

Trunk

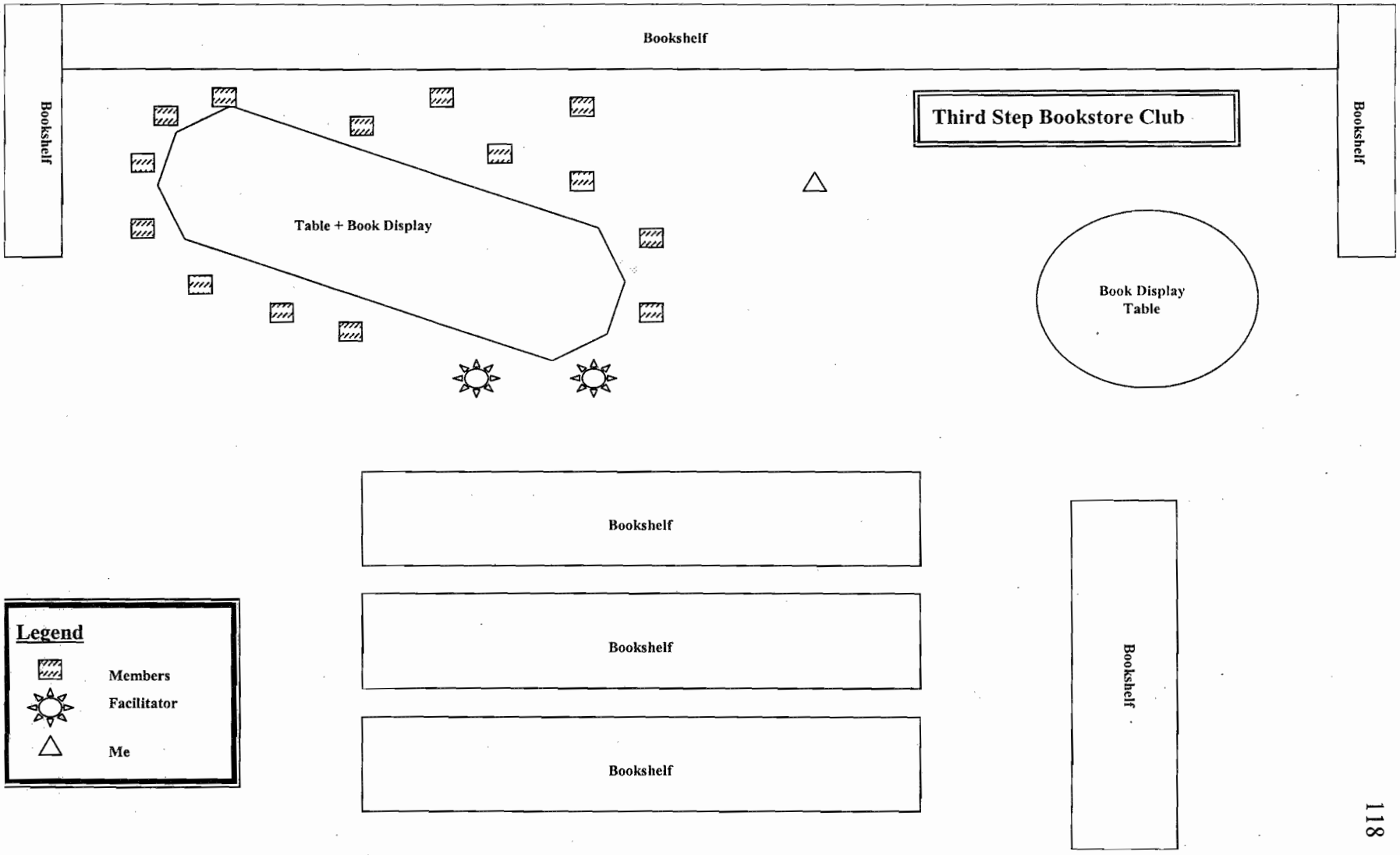
Couch

Foreign Language Club


All-Women's Genre Club
Front door
Chair
Table
Xmas Tree
Fireplace
Legend
Members
Me
Facilitator
Table
Table
Table
Kitchen
Stairs


Bookshelf
Teacher Club
Bookshelf
Desk
A/V Area
Bookshelf
Table
Table
Table
Aquarium
Legend
Members
Me
Bookshelf

Legend
Members
Me
Food
Books (Piles)
Condo Club
Piano
Piano Bench
Chair
Fireplace
Table
Couch
Couch
Table
Kitchen
Hallway


Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Table + Book Display
Third Step Bookstore Club
Book Display Table
Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Bookshelf
Legend
Members
Facilitator
Me