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LIS 9410 – Individual Study

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Boys and Reading

1. Introduction

In this paper I explore and answer the questions: *Are boys less engaged and enthusiastic about reading than girls? How do we know this?* I first became interested in the reading attitudes, behaviours and literacy levels of boys when doing a work term at the Ontario Library Association as their Forest of Reading Librarian earlier this year. The Forest of Reading is Canada's largest recreational reading program for children. The culmination of this program is The Festival of Trees which hosts thousands of children from across the province who come to celebrate reading and Canadian authors (OLA, www.accessola.com/forest). Seeing how excited so many young boys were to meet their favourite authors and how enthusiastic they were about the nominated books, I was inspired to do an in-depth study about the reading engagement of boys.

Like David Booth, author of *Even Hockey Players Read: Boys, Literacy and Reading*, I was amazed at the number of resources and research studies that have been published in recent years regarding the underachievement of boys in reading and literacy compared to girls (Booth 2002, 8). This issue has been referred to as "the boy problem," (Ross, McKechnie and

Rothbauer 2006, 87), “the boys’ literacy crisis” (Watson and Kehler 2012, 43) and even “The New Boys Movement” (Smith and Wilhelm 2002, 4). With a growing body of literature about boys, reading and literacy (Jones, Hartman and Taylor 2006, 11; Knowles and Smith 2005, ix), I wanted to explore these concerns to find out if there is indeed a cause for crisis, and if so, why?

I begin with a discussion of the main issue while also highlighting its importance for boys and for libraries. I then explore the three main themes I found in the literature as to why boys are lagging behind girls in reading and comment on critiques of each approach: (1) literacy as feminized, (2) the emphasis on biological differences, and (3) the hierarchy of reading. Other themes discussed include the rejection of “schoolish” forms of literacy and William Brozo’s (2010) notion of male archetypes. I explore the following gaps in the literature: (1) the lack of historical context and (2) the absence of concrete research regarding the benefits, or lack thereof, of reading so called “sub-literature.” Finally, possible solutions are highlighted and a reflective conclusion is offered.

2. The Issue and Why it Matters

Many of the resources concerned with the literacy of boys cite national and international statistics that make it clear that boys do not meet the same standards as girls in terms of reading and literacy (Booth 2002; Brozo 2010; Henry, Lagos and Berndt 2012; National Literacy Trust 2012; Smith and Wilhelm 2002; Spence 2006; Sullivan 2009; Sullivan 2014; Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006), while others explain the reading gap is evident in most of the industrialized world (Knowles and Smith 2005, xi; Withers and Gill 2013, 1). Other resources approach the issue already assuming the reading gap exists. It is widely accepted that boys have

the lowest scores on standardized testing for reading (Brozo 2010, 3; Knowles and Smith 2005, xiii; Ontario Ministry of Education 2004, 4; Smith and Wilhelm 2002, 1), are generally less enthusiastic about reading than girls, read less than girls, value reading less than girls, and identify themselves as nonreaders significantly more than girls do (Booth 2002, 22; Gordon and Yu 7; Jones and Fiorelli 2003, 9; National Literacy Trust 2012, 21; Ontario Ministry of Education 2004, 4; Smith and Wilhelm 2002, 11; Sullivan 2009, 14; Withers and Gill 2013, 35). This is the context in which the "moral panic" about boys' reading skills and attitudes has developed (Watson and Kehler 2012, 43). With that said, it is important to keep in mind that boys are not a homogenous group – not *all* boys are struggling with reading and identify as nonreaders (National Literacy Trust 2012, 6).

Judging from the sheer volume of research and commentary, it is certainly clear that this issue matters a great deal to academics, teachers, librarians and parents—but why? There are a number of reasons. First are the life benefits that stem from reading. Reading enhances emotional intelligence and fosters curiosity and life-long learning (Withers and Gill 2013, 17). Engaged readers are more likely to stay in school. This can help limit the number of school dropouts which is linked to underemployment, criminal behaviour and poverty (Brozo 2010, 3; Withers and Gill 2013, 36). Reading for pleasure can also enhance the understanding of other cultures and perspectives, increase the rate of community participation, and expand general knowledge (Clark and Rumbold 2006, 8). The benefits that come from reading are critical to future success in life, especially in today's society. To be literate today is much different than what it meant to be literate in the nineteenth century. A college or university degree today, is what a high school diploma was back then. More than any other time in human history,

proficiency in literacy matters. The ability to read and write is significant to daily functioning in modern society including being an active and informed citizen, running a household and performing on the job (Booth 2002, 18; Clark and Rumbold 2006, 5; Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006, 3; Smith and Wilhelm 2002, 17; Sullivan 2009, 15; Withers and Gill 2013, 33). In a wider sense, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) highlight the importance of literacy by explaining that it is our facility with language that truly makes us human (3). This is why the underachievement of boys in literacy is a justified and important issue that many different groups of people are concerned with: there is a lot at stake (Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006, 3).

For libraries, reading is at the foundation of what we do. Reading is connected with many of the functions integral to the public library including reference services, collection development, readers' advisory services, storytime programming, other literacy programming, book clubs, and the promotion of leisure reading materials (Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006, 5). Understanding "the boy problem" and finding ways to make reading enjoyable for boys is important to what we do and what we stand for as a profession. It is not surprising then, that a great deal of research from the library field has been published about boys and reading.

3. Literacy as Feminized

One of the main themes I found in the literature is the idea that literacy is feminized (Booth 2002; Knowles and Smith 2005; National Literacy Trust 2012; Newkirk 2002; Ontario Ministry of Education 2004; Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006; Spence 2006; Sullivan 2009; Sullivan 2014; Withers and Gill 2013). This feminization is cited as being one of the reasons why

boys reject reading and struggle with literacy in school. Many researchers have found that although we may *say* reading is for everyone, we *show* that reading is just for girls. Boys are more likely to see their mothers read than their fathers and boys are more likely to have their mothers read to them than their fathers (Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006, 91; Spence 2006, 20). Studies also show that in general, mothers are far more involved in school activities than are fathers (Withers and Pam 2013, 90). Looking at statistics from the United States, 75% of teachers from kindergarten to high school are female and 90% of elementary school teachers are female (Sullivan 2009, 30). The 1999 *Statistical Abstract of the United States* document showed that in 1998, 83.4% of librarians were female and in 1996, 79% of graduating library school students were female (Piper and Collamer 2001, 406). In Canada, approximately 65% of educators are female (Spence 2006, 26). On an international level, one study by UNESCO revealed that females account for 60% of all educators in twenty-one countries out of the twenty-nine that were surveyed (Spence 2006, 26), though the specific countries that were surveyed are not highlighted, nor do we know the statistics of the other eight countries. The National Literacy Trust (2012) agrees that this issue is international in scope, but notes that many countries in Asia and Africa are left out of these statistics (10). Other resources state that females dominate the field of literacy education (Booth 2002, 18) and also hold the majority of positions in the writing, editing and reviewing process of children's books (Jones, Maureen and Taylor 9), but these resources do not outline the scope or context of their research. The overrepresentation of females working in the education, library and literacy sectors in North America may also privilege girls' learning styles and reading preferences in the classroom. Some studies look at standardized testing at school and assert that these tests may actually be biased

too, privileging the narrative writing in which girls excel (Newkirk 2002; Smith and Wilhelm 2002, 3).

When most of the interactions that boys have with reading are with females, they assume that reading is an activity for girls (Spence 2006, 20; Sullivan 2009, 29). Studies show that common responses from boys when asked about reading attitudes and preferences is that reading is for girls or for "sissies" (Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006, 91). In other words, the feminization of reading often conflicts with boys' sense of masculinity (Brozo 2010, 13). Christopher Spence outlines the "boy code" and explains that part of being masculine is not being feminine (21). For example, the "boy code" states that boys should be strong and not show weakness, boys should take risks, and boys should not express their feelings (Spence 2006, 21). If reading is indeed perceived as feminine, boys will try their best to avoid it (Booth 2002, 18; Jones and Fiorelli 2003, 9; Smith and Wilhelm 2002, 12). These notions of masculinity and identity can undermine literacy achievement in boys (National Literacy Trust 2012, 24).

Proponents of the notion that literacy is feminized highlight the lack of male role-models as a major factor influencing the underachievement of boys in reading (Henry 2012, Lagos and Berndt 145; National Literacy Trust 2012, 4; Newkirk; Ontario Ministry of Education 2004, 30; Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006, 91; Spence 2006, 11; Sullivan 2009, 31). These researchers call for more males to get involved with literacy in schools, libraries and at home. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2004) in particular emphasizes the profound influence role-models have on children (30). If boys start to see the males in their lives read with enjoyment, they may start disassociating reading as a strictly female activity.

Watson and Kehler (2012) critique the notion that literacy is feminized. In general they believe that by defining literacy as a boy issue, a more nuanced approach to literacy achievement is denied (46). Watson and Kehler (2012) argue that by virtue of their sex, females are being blamed for the underachievement of boys in literacy (46). They believe identifying boys as victims of a feminized literacy environment harkens to the gender politics that existed prior to the feminist movement (45). Sokal and Katz (2008) argue further by showing that the call for more males in the education system to tackle the literacy issues of boys is not fully justified. They found no strong correlation between the literacy performance of boys who were taught by male teachers in comparison with female teachers (Sokal and Kats 2008, 88). Watson and Kehler (2012) and Sokal and Kats (2008) question the current notion that literacy is feminized and call for a wider understanding of boys, school and literacy.

4. Biological Differences

Another prevalent theme in the literature is the idea that biological differences between males and females can explain why boys are lagging behind girls in literacy and reading – the essentialist approach. Research suggests that girls' brains develop faster than boys' brains (Booth 2002; Knowles and Smith 2005; Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006; Smith and Wilhelm 2002; Spence 2006; Sullivan 2009; Sullivan 2014; Withers and Gill 2013). The lag in the development of boys' brains is said to start in kindergarten and end in the last few years of high school. So, during the majority of school, girls' brains are more mature and better-developed than boys, especially in the area of language (Sullivan 2009, 25; Sullivan 2014, 3). Girls' brains are said to have an extra language-processing center that boys' brains do not have, located in the frontal lobe of the brain (Booth 2002, 15). Other studies show that girls have more neural

connections between the left side and the right side of their brains enhancing the communication between both sides. This is important as reading and literacy require both sides of the brain to work together (Sullivan 2009, 25). Finally, the left side of girls' brains – the side where the processing of language takes place – is also said to be more developed than boys (Spence 2006, 14).

In addition to brain development differences, there are other biological differences that can explain why boys are lagging behind girls in literacy and why boys are less engaged with reading than girls. These differences touch on hormones, learning styles and psychology. Sullivan (2009) explains that boys are more physical and active than girls are and thus require more kinetic energy for brain stimulation (25). When boys start puberty and start experiencing higher levels of testosterone, they become even more active (Spence 2006, 17). Smith and Wilhelm (2002) similarly highlight the fact that boys are more active and more inclined to take risks and engage in aggressive behaviour (5). Spence (2006) explains that this inclination to be active and competitive lends itself better to sports and team environments than individual activities such as reading (17). Withers and Gill (2013) agree that boys require more movement and activity than girls and also reveal that most girls are auditory learners, which fits better with traditional school teaching styles, while boys tend to be kinesthetic learners (73). In terms of psychology, girls internalize while boys externalize. In other words, boys are explorers, they seek to understand the world around them by getting out there and experiencing it for themselves (Sullivan 2009, 27; Sullivan 2014, 20). Some researchers cite the denial of these biological differences as a reason why the literacy skills of boys are not improving (Withers and Gill 2013, 6; Sullivan 2009, 24). Withers and Gill (2013) explain that in our quest for equality, it

has become politically incorrect to acknowledge fundamental differences between males and females (24). Sullivan (2009) further explains that our society has been so concerned that biological differences have been used as justification to discriminate against females in the past, that these differences are often denied or discredited (24).

The degree to which biological differences can explain the reading gap between boys and girls is not agreed upon among researchers (Withers and Gill 2013, 74). Some researchers call for classroom changes to account for these biological differences, including starting boys a year a later than girls in kindergarten (Sullivan 2014, 4), while other studies discredit the biological explanation arguing that "the boy problem" is not that simple. The National Literacy Trust (2012) highlights countries such as Chile and the Netherlands where the reading gap between boys and girls is not prominent. This dismisses the biological argument by showing that the issue is not an international phenomenon; it must be something our society is doing in North America that is pushing boys away from reading and literacy (National Literacy Trust 2012, 5).

5. The Hierarchy of Reading

The hierarchy of reading materials was the most prevalent explanation as to why boys may be underachieving in literacy and why they may be less engaged and enthusiastic about reading (Booth 2002; Brozo 2010; Dorion 2003; Gordon and Yu 2008; Jones and Fionelli 2003; Jones, Hartman and Taylor 2006; Knowles and Smith 2005; McKechnie 2006; National Literacy Trust 2012; Newkirk 2002; Ontario Ministry of Education 2004; Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006; Smith and Wilhelm 2002; Spence 2006; Sullivan 2009; Sullivan 2014; Withers and Gill

2013). These researchers contend that in most cases, boys are reading, just not the types of reading materials that are valued in schools and libraries. Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer (2006) look back to "the fiction problem" when fiction was looked down upon and readers were thought to improve and develop from reading fiction novels to "truer" narratives of biographies, history and science (11). They contend that "the fiction problem" has been replaced by "the boy problem" and that the same arguments made against fiction in the 1880s and 1890s, are now being made against the types of reading materials that boys generally prefer, mainly, non-fiction, informational texts, graphic novels, video game manuals, newspapers and magazines (13). The hierarchy of reading places narrative fiction and classic literary works at the top and magazines, graphic novels and game manuals at the bottom. The reading materials that boys enjoy are seen as "sub-literature" (Booth 2002, 25; Newkirk 2002, 70). In school, the same books have been used to improve literacy skills and establish reading habits for decades across North America including *Catcher in the Rye* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Booth 2002; 25). The very books that boys generally dislike are used in the classroom and the books they enjoy are not used or available in school libraries (Spence 2006, 19). This approach questions the foundation of "the boy problem" by asserting that many boys do in fact read, and enjoy it (McKechnie 2006, 66; Spence 2006, 20). The real question then becomes, what *counts* as reading?

Booth (2002) found that although most of the boys in his study read a great deal, they did not read novels and often had feelings of guilt and shame about this (25). It is clear that not only is this hierarchy of reading common among teachers and educators, but also among boys themselves. Sullivan (2004) cites the largest obstacle to helping boys become better and more

engaged readers is the perception of what is considered reading both by boys and by the adults in their lives (59). Once boys understand and believe that they are reading, their reading confidence and self-esteem will start building (Sullivan 2004, 60). Proponents of the hierarchy of reading urge educators and librarians to ensure the reading preferences of boys are available, encouraged and are not looked down upon (Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006, 34, 93).

6. Rejection of Schoolish Forms of Literacy

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) offer a different explanation for the underachievement of boys in literacy and reading: the rejection of schoolish forms of literacy. Through their research, they found that boys rejected schoolish forms of literacy because it is future-oriented, it lacks immediate functions and it emphasizes information that is not valued beyond the classroom (84). Their study showed that boys saw literacy and reading as educational tools, not an activity to enjoy and to be passionate about (94). Smith and Wilhelm explain that the boys in their study rejected school literacy because they valued immediate experiences. In other words, boys participated in and were passionate about activities where the outcomes came immediately and the focus was on the present, not the future (62). This explanation touches on one of the themes I found throughout the literature. It relies on the idea of essential differences between boys and girls, of certain characteristics that are common in boys and not girls. The idea that boys value immediate experiences somehow more than girls is evidence of this. It also touches on the hierarchy of reading. If more informational texts were used in the classroom, such as current sports magazines or a manual about how to fix a bike, maybe boys would see the

immediate use and value in the literacy taught in school. Because these types of texts are generally overlooked in school literacy in favour of narrative texts, boys reject it.

7. Male Archetypes

Another answer to the "the boy problem" comes from William Brozo (2010) who explains that we can reaffirm boys' masculinity in books through introducing them to stories that provide positive male archetypes (14). In the west, some of the most popular male archetypes can be found in fairy tales, for example, "the hero" who comes to the rescue (Brozo 2010, 15) or "the king" who represents male greatness and leadership (Brozo 2010, 31). Brozo's goal is to create entry points for boys to engage with literacy and to highlight certain types of characters that make "good books" for boys (15). He makes reference to prominent psychiatrist Carl Jung and his investigation into the unique nature of the male psyche (15). In this way, Brozo also touches on aspects of the essentialist approach basing his ideas on the notion that male and female psyches are different, and thus, boys and girls prefer different types of stories and characters.

In his explanation of male archetypes, Brozo talks about the "right texts" (14) and "good books" (15) for boys making it clear that he works under the assumption that there is such a thing as the "right text" for boys. I do not believe this is the case. As quoted by Henry, Lagos and Berndt (2012) in their article "Bridging the literacy gap between boys and girls: An opportunity for the National Year of Reading 2012", "a good book for a boy is one that he wants to read" (145). I believe we should be moving away from prescribing certain books and stories to boys and instead, encourage them to choose their own reading materials. And though I

acknowledge that readers' advisory services for boys provide useful reading suggestions, choice has been found to be a strong factor in creating a positive, engaged reader (Knowles and Smith xviii; Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006, 7; Stauffer 2007, 418; Sullivan 2014, 35).

8. Gaps in the Literature

In reviewing the literature about the underachievement and lack of engagement of boys with reading, I found several gaps. First, the lack of historical context surrounding "the boy problem," and second, the absence of research regarding the benefits, or lack thereof, of reading so called "sub-literature."

Although many resources touch on aspects of history, for example, how what it means to be literate has changed greatly from the nineteenth century to today, or the ideas behind "the fiction problem," or how justifications of female discrimination based on biological differences have made it politically incorrect to speak of essential differences between males and females, a historical account specific to "the boy problem" does not seem to exist. Sullivan (2009) does make an important connection to history when he highlights the struggles girls once had in math and science. He explains that the education system recognized the issue and made changes to solve it, mainly, by focusing on the specific learning styles of girls and by promoting math and science to girls (6). In Sullivan's words, "In this brief history, we find the hope and blueprint for addressing the reading gap that boys face today" (7). Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer (2006) also acknowledge this history (87).

When extending my literature review to historical accounts about boys and reading, I found Kathleen McDowell's 2009 article, "Toward a History of Children as Readers, 1890-1930."

Paulette Rothbauer 14-8-7 1:11 PM

Comment [1]: You might also wantto see Lyons's "Children who read good books usually behave better, and have good manners": The Founding of the Notre Dame de Grace Library for Boys and Girls, Montreal, 1943". Also, Christine Pawley's work on Osage, Iowa

McDowell's study is dedicated to looking at the reading preferences of children throughout history. Unfortunately, it is quite generalized and does not look specifically at the reading engagement of boys. Kristine Åse Tveit's 2012 comparative study, "Reading Habits and Library Use among Young Adults," also touches on the history of children's reading preferences by comparing her study to one completed in the 1930s, though again, this study is quite generalized and with such a small sample size, results do not garner wider implications.

It is Suzanne Stauffer's 2007 article, "Developing Children's Interest in Reading," that provides a useful historical analysis about some aspects of "the boy problem." Stauffer explains that much of the research available about children and reading are vague and quite generalized. She also notes that rarely were statistics given that separated boys and girls making it difficult to comment on the reading behaviours of boys in the late 1880s and early 1900s (403). Stauffer reveals that even in the 1930s, studies showed that girls read more fiction than boys, and boys read more non-fiction than girls (407). These preferences were confirmed in the 1960s when more studies were published about the reading preferences of children (411). Of particular importance is the historical account of the "Nation at Risk" in the 1980s and 1990s in the United States. Stauffer highlights the fear of psychological effects on boys based on the content they were reading. This fear was developed as a result of violent crimes committed by young men, most notably the Columbine High School massacre that occurred in Colorado (415). Notions of the "unsocialized male" became widespread and violent movies, video games, comic books and graphic novels were blamed for violent crimes committed by males (415). Understanding this historical context adds to the discussion by providing a possible

reason as to why the hierarchy of reading exists. Maybe this is why educators, librarians and parents fear and discredit the alternative reading materials that boys generally prefer.

The second gap in the literature also has to do with the hierarchy of reading. I found myself asking: Is this hierarchy justified? Is there evidence that prove students achieve higher levels of literacy when they read narrative as opposed to when they read magazines and graphic novels? The only study I reviewed that touched on this was Sullivan's 2014 book "Raising Boy Readers." In a brief paragraph, Sullivan explains that there may be some justification for the hierarchy of reading. Quoting two psychologists, he states that reading fiction provides readers with certain social skills not found in readers who primarily read non-fiction. However, Sullivan does note that non-fiction, especially narrative non-fiction, also improves social skills to some degree (57). More research concerning the specific outcomes of certain types of texts is needed to provide further insight into the hierarchy of reading, and hopefully, to dismiss the hierarchy altogether.

9. Possible Solutions

Paulette Rothbauer 14-8-7 1:16 PM
Comment [2]: This is a really useful departure point and one that has the most to offer to potential readers of an article based on this paper. I would recommend expanding this considerably to highlight and evaluate programs that you find especially laudable.

There are many solutions offered to help combat the reading gap and improve the literacy and reading habits of boys. A number of studies emphasize the importance of bedtime stories in creating a positive relationship with reading. Reading aloud to your child is one of the most important factors in laying the foundation for your child's future success in reading (Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006, 73). Another important factor is choice, allowing boys to choose their own books and reading materials (Knowles and Smith 2005, xviii; Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006, 7; Sullivan 2014, 45). Making reading a social activity where boys can

share their reading experiences is another way to help transform boys' attitudes towards reading (Henry, Lagos and Berndt 2012, 145; Ontario Ministry of Education 2004, 26). In Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) study, the boys agreed, "It's always better with friends, always" (42). Knowles and Smith (2005) suggest using a buddy program to increase the social aspect of reading (xviii). Other solutions include using rewards, competition and sport in reading programs for boys (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009, 21; Palmer 2008, 80; Toronto District School Board 2013, 1). Technology has also been cited by some researchers as having the potential to help boys develop their literacy skills (Henry, Lagos and Berndt 2012, 143; Ontario Ministry of Education 2004, 40). Sullivan (2014) explains that choice is enhanced using technologies such as e-readers as boys can choose reading materials without peer pressure and without worrying what others may think about their preferences or skill-level (45).

Other programs have strived to make reading "cool" and more socially acceptable for boys. One such program is called "The Cool Guys Reading Club." This program was formed in response to the reading gap. The book club is based on the Karate belt system. When students achieved the level of black belt, they received a free pizza lunch. The coordinators got the popular boys in school to promote the program and to participate in it. Teachers reported seeing boys who never used to read, checking out books at the school library (Welldon 2005, 44). This program was a huge success as it incorporated reward, competition, sport and shared experiences while also creating a "cool" factor surrounding the book club. Another example of a successful program is "The Reading Champions." Participating readers worked to complete three levels of achievement by completing fun, literacy-based activities. Like "The Cool Guys Reading Club," this program also encouraged popular boys with a lot of peer influence to

participate. These are the students that have the greatest ability to transform reading attitudes (Batty and Clark 2010, 7). Finally, as mentioned above, many researchers cite the importance of male-role models in changing current reading behaviours among boys (Henry 2012, Lagos and Berndt 145; National Literacy Trust 2012, 4; Newkirk; Ontario Ministry of Education 2004, 30; Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer 2006, 91; Spence 2006, 11; Sullivan 2009, 31).

10. Conclusion

Reflecting on the many explanations, critiques and solutions offered in relation to the underachievement of boys in literacy and their lack of engagement with reading, it is clear that a widespread agreement about the apparent reading gap is unlikely without further investigation and research. Are boys less engaged and enthusiastic about reading than girls? With conflicting research and possible bias in standardized testing measures, I am still unsure. As outlined in my discussion about gaps in the literature, there needs to be more research about the history of boys and reading as well as studies that look at the literacy benefits of different types of reading materials, if any. As well, more international and comparative studies are needed to narrow the focus of “the boy problem” and to determine why certain countries struggle with improving the literacy of boys and others do not. Filling in the gaps can help bring about a more nuanced and holistic explanation of the current landscape of the reading skills of boys. Once we understand if and why the issue exists, we can formulate appropriate strategies and solutions.

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