THE INFLUENCE OF READING FICTION ON ADOLESCENT FEMALES

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ABSTRACT


This study was designed to determine to what extent the self-selected reading choices of adolescent girls are currently influencing, or may in the future influence their beliefs, behaviors, or self-esteem. Fifteen subjects completed quantitative and/or qualitative measures. Quantitative data analyzed what specifically each girl was reading and determined if the books may have caused changes in their feelings in the respective areas. Some significant results were found. Qualitative data asked girls to answer open-ended questions regarding their reading habits and feelings about character behaviors/ actions. Quantitative data was analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA, and qualitative dated was generalized, noting unique or minority responses among participants, which is addressed within.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION** ................................................................. 1  
The Need for the Study ............................................................................. 2

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW** .................................................. 4  
Gender ........................................................................................................ 4  
Changes in Reading Habits ..................................................................... 9  
History of Patriarchy in Literature .......................................................... 28

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY** ...................................................... 48  
Methods ..................................................................................................... 48  
Variables .................................................................................................. 49  
Procedure .................................................................................................. 49  
Limitations ............................................................................................... 50

**CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION** ................................... 51  
Results ..................................................................................................... 51  
Discussion ............................................................................................... 52

**CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS** ....... 57  
Summary .................................................................................................. 57  
Conclusions ............................................................................................. 58  
Implications ............................................................................................. 58

REFERENCES ............................................................................................ 59  
APPENDICES ............................................................................................. 63
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Language is needed for common communication within a society. Unless the transmission of the language is problematic, it is generally ignored. Language transmission passes on the social structure of a society. It traps children into a social order which is no longer accepted by many and is obsolete. Many people within society want to move beyond the differentiation of male and female roles, but because children adopt the linguistic practices of adults, the social order of previous generations is solidified early in their lives (Davies, 1989). Until children understand the way the world works, they disrupt the accepted social order and undermine what seems obvious to adults. One of the most important assumed principles is that there are two genders, and they are different. Children learn what it means to be male or female through a dependence on the world around them. The world confirms stereotypical beliefs of gender (Davies, 1989). According to Davies (1989), “Stories provide the metaphors, the characters and the plots through which their own positionings in the social world can be interpreted” (p. 44). The stories in which children are taught to read generally present a reality-based look at the world. In a majority of stories used in the teaching of children, men tend to be the active subjects; women are wives, supportive yet passive to their husbands. This realism reinforces social norms which our society has outgrown (Davies, 1989).
Reinforcement of gender norms continues into adolescence and young adulthood. According to Orellana (1995), sex refers to the biological distinction between males and females. Conversely, gender refers to the concepts of masculinity and femininity. Often gender is not differentiated from the biological distinction of men and women. Sex does not change; there are only two sexes whereas gender differences depend on geography, culture, and era. Most children come to school with a preference for literature prescribed to them from the time of birth. These preferences are acquired by what each child has witnessed in life and in literature. According to Collins-Standley, Gan, Yu, and Zillmann’s (1996) study, children’s play and socialization factor largely into what children come to enjoy in books. As early as two years old, children make gendered decisions about the types of stories they would like to have read to them.

**The Need for the Study**

Until the early 1990s, adolescent girls have been ignored by psychologists and academics. Pipher (1994) reported that Simone de Beauvoir postulated that girls realize their expected place in society is behind men as early as adolescence. Girls grow to resent this loss of power, and they are conflicted between their childhood desires of independence, their true selves, and society’s expectations of them to be feminine. In *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir (1948) wrote, “When man makes of woman the Other, he may, then, expect to manifest deep-seated tendencies towards complicity. Thus, woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she
feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the Other” (p. xxvii). Men benefit from alienating women as the Other, which subordinates them, although they are equally needed in the continuation of life. To the man the Other is “everything he is not and that he longs for, his negation (de Beavoir, 1949, p.143). She continues to say that the Other is his reason for living. Acceptance of being the Other is complied to by women because men need her, and she, as the Other, is believed to be evil, but men know that without the Other there cannot be good. She yearns for him because she is trained to believe that by yielding to a man and producing his offspring, she gains his goodness (de Beauvoir, 1949).

Adolescence is a time when multiple factors begin to collide creating struggling young women. Personal thoughts and preferences along with the influence of popular culture influence girls during the time they are becoming young adults. According to Pipher (1994), “It’s a time of marked internal development and massive cultural indoctrination” (p. 26).

Many studies, as late as 1995, did not focus on the differences between females and other females but instead focused more on the dichotomy of male-female differences. Although the differences between the sexes are important, it leaves a void in the information available about what happens when girls read and how reading can affect each female differently (Orellana, 1995).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Because language is needed for common communication within a society and because the transmission of language also passes on the social structure of a society, children become trapped within an obsolete social order. One of the most important assumed ideas in the social order is that there are two genders and they are different. Children learn what it means to be male or female through a dependence on the world around them, and the world confirms stereotypical beliefs of gender through folklore and anecdotes. The more realistic the stories are the more they reinforce outdated social norms (Davies, 1989).

Children as young as two years old make gendered decisions about the types of stories they would like to have read to them which reinforces gender norms that will continue into adolescence and young adulthood (Davies, 1989).

Gender

Gender order is a term used to describe the relationship between masculinity and femininity. The way that factors such as gender, race, class, age, and sexual orientation intermingle determines one’s pecking order in social circumstances (Young & Brozo, 2001).
The idea of gender has changed over time, but what has remained stable is that people need to classify things including other people; a person cannot help but to compare himself or herself to other creatures. A man determines women are different than himself and other men, thus they are the Other. This differentiation is as old as the creation stories that are now considered no more than mythology like Gaea and Rhea of the Greeks. Furthermore, women have played a dual role throughout all of history. She is the good and the evil, queen of heaven and empress of hell, creator of life and collector of the dead (de Beauvoir, 1949). This dual role has been expressed by the Greeks through Pandora and Athena and the Christians through Eve and Mary, the mother of Jesus. This illustrates how women are expected to be everything a man desires: an idol, a servant, and a mother (de Beauvoir, 1949).

Many teenagers are trying to figure out what it means to be a man or a woman. Teenage boys who are trying to determine what masculinity means to them may rely on “faux male role models presented in popular media” (Crowe, 2002). These boys then attempt to adapt the model they see in the media to their own lives. Their behaviors and attitudes reflect those portrayed within the movies, television shows, and music which they consume. Novels can help teenage girls understand the minds of some teenage boys—in some cases the novels may help a girl protect herself from the destructive behaviors some of these boys might present: date rape, drugs, or physical violence (Crowe, 2002). In addition, for some young adult males, reading certain novels might provide critical examples of the consequences males may encounter for their actions and the probable repercussions of their actions on their victims (Crowe, 2002).
Boys, striving to be *alpha males* or *real men*, often take on characteristics that other men before them have displayed. Some examples of these characteristics include, “liking action filled plots, identifying with male characters and not female ones, and selecting books and other texts written by and about men as they participate in school and other social contexts” (Young & Brozo, 2001, p. 320). Pipher (1994) suggested that curriculum needs to be revised to teach the history of both genders, not just that of males. Furthermore, “‘Manhood’ needs to be redefined in a way that allows women equality and men pride” (Pipher, 1994, p. 290). She went on to suggest that American society needs to find new ways to teach boys to be men. The media and advertising depicts to adolescent boys that violence and the objectification of women is the norm and is expected. Americans need to teach their children to interact with people of the opposite sex through reinforcing positive experiences. Providing opportunities for young adults to interact promotes understanding of the issues of the opposite gender and it may dilute the ignorance adolescent males and females have about one another. Schools are one place where these opportunities should be cultivated.

Public institutions, like schools, need to become more inviting for girls. This can be accomplished by including stories about women who are strong—of mind and body—and about women in many different work environments (Pipher, 1994). In the past thirty years, there has been an increase of female writers and interesting, female characters. This is very important for girls due to the major physical, social, and psychological changes occurring to them during adolescence (Blackford, 2004). Adolescent girls who were happy-go-lucky in childhood become moody and irritable. As Pipher (1994) described, “They crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle” (p.
The optimism and perseverance of girlhood is lost, and girls lose the desire to take risks and search for answers to their questions. “They lose their assertive, energetic and ‘tomboyish’ personalities and become more differential, self critical and depressed” (Pipher, 1994, p. 19). Pipher (1994) goes on to report,

Most preadolescent girls are marvelous company because they are interested in everything—sports, nature, people, music and books. Almost all of the heroines of girls’ literature come from this age group—Anne of Green Gables, Heidi, Pippi Longstocking and Caddie Woodlawn. (p. 18)

Even when de Beauvoir (1949) wrote the Second Sex it was obvious girls change psychologically, physically, socially, and emotionally between the ages of the ten and twelve. They begin to lose some of the freedom childhood allowed them, and they begin to be restrained by the mundane tasks expected of young ladies. The restraint leaves them restless. Girls begin to use their unused energy daydreaming. While indulging within their fantasies, they imagine themselves as heroines. They identify with the role of the victim, for some of their fantasies mimic fairy tales. Girls pretend they are adopted and they seek the love and adoration of their fathers (de Beauvior, 1949). Therefore, Pipher’s (1994) statement rings true:

Fairy tales capture the essence of the phenomenon. Young women eat poisoned apples or prick their fingers with poisoned needles and fall asleep for a hundred years. They wander from home, encounter great dangers, are rescued by princes and are transformed into passive and docile creatures. (pp. 19-20)

Although girls in early adolescence cannot fully comprehend what they are experiencing they note the difference. The power void girls feel is overwhelming to them; they are
inundated with images of successful men: principals, senators, presidents, lawyers, and CEOs. Girls notice that much of the music and literature studied in school are from the minds of old, dead white men. Most girls are incapable of understanding the long running history of patriarchy; thus, many of them take their omission from history personally (Pipher, 1994). Girls do not understand that men have always been the dominate force within Euro/American society. Although in many ancient cultures, female gods, like Ishtar of Babylon and Isis of Egypt, were the dominate gods to which all other gods subordinated, society did not mimic this. Female gods were beyond human; better than any mortal was. As for mortals in primarily Euro/American culture, men have always been dominant. They controlled the written language and thus the laws. They were able to write laws confirming their own dominance over women. The mystical power of women’s life giving ability was twisted into the black magic of death. She was once represented as the giver of life, Isis, Ishtar, and the Virgin Mary; however, later she became Pandora, Eve, and Mary Magdalene. The symbolic dove became the serpent. Men twisted the good behaviors of women into accomplishments of men while leaving women with only the negative aspects. Pythagoras postulated that god created a duality of humankind. He believed men were the light and order within the universe leaving women to be the bearers of darkness and chaos. De Beauvoir (1949) concluded that men have taught women that if she subordinates herself to a man, she will gain the goodness and holiness he possesses.

Adolescent girls do not connect to the ideals of feminism because they misunderstand its goals. Their desire for the world is equality, but most do not realize that equality is the main ideal of feminism. Often girls do not detect the sexism existing
within their school, nor do they realize that the harassment they feel about their looks or behaviors is sexism. Moreover, they do not understand the sexism of other aspects of their day-to-day lives: more men are school administrators and textbook writers or editors than women. Textbooks, where the knowledge students are prescribed to learn is held, send a strong message of male superiority.

Pipher (1994) explained in *Reviving Ophelia* that she and her daughter experience the disregard of women on the part of men when reading classic literature. In reading Tolstoy and Norman Mailer, Pipher felt that these men did not even like women. While helping her daughter read Aristotle, a school assignment, the daughter said to Pipher that Aristotle did not respect women, nor was he fond of them. Pipher went on to wonder what it meant to her daughter to know that one of the most revered men for his intelligence in history was sexist. An important question to ask is, what is the disdain which is evident in classic literature teaching adolescent girls?

**Changes in Reading Habits**

According to Zipes (2001), after World War II in 1945, the British occupying Germany attempted to ban the publication of Grimms’ fairy tales. The British attributed many of the crimes against humanity committed by the Nazis to the supernatural and immoral nature of the tales. This movement did not last very long. Over time, the Grimms’ tales, embedded within all of European society, far outweighed even the significance of other authors like Charles Perrault and Hans Christian Anderson. During the post World War II era, adults felt that Grimms’ fairy tales seemed to be inappropriate for children; however, society has eventually come to accept the fairy tales as appropriate for all age groups. One of the reasons fairy tales are significant is due to the historical
development of culture throughout the world which they represent. Thus, the Grimms did not title their collection of stories as German fairy tales because they were keenly aware of the fairy tales’ international applicability (Zipes, 2001).

Television, movies, video games, and advertising are the modern texts telling children what to think about the world. Most commonly, the aforementioned texts are fictional or fictionalized. Zipes (2001) claimed, “…the sociocultural conditions for learning how to read and reading any kind of text from corporal bodies to printed bodies of text, have become both commercialized and specialized” (p. 35). Media have taken over the lives of today’s youth. Children are still consuming fiction, but they are doing so in a way that does not always require picking up a book. For those children who are reading, they are influenced to read books by peer pressure, home life, and their immediate surroundings. There are many gifted writers publishing work for students of varying backgrounds, but the majority of children reading those novels are not the intended audience. White, middle class children, their parents, educators, and college students are the populations who are reading most of the novels written for working class, minority, and other oppressed children (Zipes, 2001).

Adults are expected to be proficient readers, but if a child is unable to gain the skills required to become an efficient reader during his or her youth—because other media which uses less abstract symbols and thus requires lesser thinking skills—the child will not gain the skills he or she is expected to possess by adulthood (Johnsson & Jonsson, 2006). Benton (1995) suggested that the amount of television a child watches correlates rightly or wrongly with their ability to become fluent readers. Fluent readers have spent more time reading, and children who are watching more television have less
time to gain the fluency of their non-television-watching peers. Through his research, Benton (1995) discovered that television and video games provide a stereotyped image of reality and limit imagination and creativity, so contemporary children are less able to imagine what they read. Furthermore, Benton’s (1995) research indicated a correlation between children who cannot picture what they read to poor behavior and sociological understanding. With more fiction consumption via television and video games, the nature of reading has changed; what was read in 1971 was not being read in 1994. Children progressively read fiction that is more world-wise, adult-like, and problem specific, focusing on the complex dilemmas of adults’ personal lives (Benton, 1995).

Eighth grade students are reading fewer classic texts and many more contemporary, popular culture texts. The reading list of a student in the early 1970s included many titles predating the twentieth century: Little Women, Black Beauty, and Treasure Island topping the list (Benton, 1995). In 1994, fewer of the choices were dated classics and most were from a book series. Many of the books were published by Point Horror including author R. L. Stine, whose books made the list six times. In addition, many other novels by authors whose names are not as popular filled the list (Benton, 1995). The popularity of these books is suspected to be their easy reading nature and the collectability of them (Benton, 1995). The popularity of the Point Horror novels is attributed to the nature and development of the adolescent child. The novels play into the deepest fears of pubescent children by stirring the emotions of the child in regard to sexuality, identity, mortality, and jealousy. Benton’s (1995) major concern was the depth and detail of the violence in these books. The authors write as if they enjoy violence, which may be detrimental to the development of well-balanced young adults.
Serial novels are not all horror; some series novels are romances. Benfer (2003), a child of the 1980s was an avid reader of the serial novels by Francine Pascal: Sweet Valley High. She believes the series is what taught female readers of her generation how to be beautiful and good. For many, the novels showed teens how they would never measure up to the idealized perception of perfection. The readers now in their late twenties to early forties are grown up, but the women of the novels have not. Pascal’s series was innovative because her characters started as juniors in high school, but as the popularity of the series grew so did the marketing. Novels were written to target elementary school students, Sweet Valley Kids; middle school students, Sweet Valley Twins and Sweet Valley Junior High; and high school students who had read all of the Sweet Valley High books or were just bored by them, Sweet Valley University, SVH Senior Year, and a series about Elizabeth studying abroad were published.

Benfer (2003) stated, “The Sweet Valley High novels I love are perfect, undiluted artifacts of what we thought perfect, undiluted teenage girlhood should look like in the eighties” (pp. 46-47). Pre-Sweet Valley High, few novels were written for adolescent girls. Nancy Drew was one of the few novels written for females predating the 1980s. Benfer read the novels as historical fiction although they were written during the time they described. These were the novels of the generation before Benfer’s. She said that by reading Nancy Drew she knew why her mother continued to believe that wearing white after Labor Day and having a purse that did not match one’s pumps was a disgrace. Additionally, she understood why her mother believed that propriety was acting in a way deemed appropriate and anything else was “flashy,” and why poor women entering
upscale clothing establishments or wearing jewelry that appeared beyond their means was a sure clue they were roguish. Benfer (2003) stated,

You won’t find out much about how actual people live by reading serial fiction from random decades. But you will find out how they aspired to live: the house they must build, clothes they must wear, and cars they must drive to become the Joneses; what their mothers are telling them about modesty, boys, and sex; who they are supposed to marry and what jobs they are supposed to take and how, exactly, they are supposed to get there” (p. 48).

Literature, like Sweet Valley, was intended for adolescents and preadolescents: girls who do not have their own lives yet. Middle school aged girls want to be high school girls, so they read these novels to learn how to act like a high school student. “They are the training bras of literature; books that teach young girls how to be older girls before they get there” (Benfer, 2003, p. 48). The books that teach girls how to be teenagers are eventually outgrown, but that author they grew to love, who may have been a ghostwriter, taught them “the essence of middle-of-the-road idolized teenage life” (Benfer, 2003, p. 48). The Wakefield twins were familiar because they were perfect descriptions of what was pictured in the monthly magazines. “And it goes without saying that it’s a catalog meant to cause immediate panic in anyone who does not fit the ideal” (Benfer, 2003, p. 51). She remembers feeling left out because her natural looks were not even close to that of the Wakefield twins; consoling herself, she decided, “…in the world of Sweet Valley High, I would be described as a petite, porcelain-skinned brunette with striking blue eyes” (Benfer, 2003, p. 51).
Consumerism is embedded into these novels because it tells girls how they ought to look, reinforcing patriarchy, and in the development of another generation of consumers. Girls reading these novels learn that pretty girls end up with the desirable boyfriends, and to become beautiful one must wear the right clothes and cosmetics. Furthermore, not only will she acquire the desirable boy, but also she will win over the rest of the girls, gaining popularity (Christian-Smith, 1993).

Serial romance novels marketed for adolescents illustrate accepted behaviors for women. They are instruction manuals describing how to care for others by becoming sensitized to their needs, concerns, and problems. They also illustrate how women should act collaboratively within society rather than seeking their own agendas. Serial novel authors write with a power to influence the beliefs of their readers. Publishers dictate the formula for a particular series novel, and these formulaic texts reconfirm patriarchal views, ensuring the continuation of them into future generations of soon-to-be-adults (Christian-Smith, 1993).

One of the most influential serial novels of the 1980s and 1990s was the Sweet Valley High series. The publishers prescribed a world of California cool through identical twin protagonists. The series gave girls two identities with whom to identify, Jessica, the fun-loving star of the series, or Elizabeth, the boring, smart girl. Illustrating different personality types, the two heroines give girls the impression they may choose their own path, but (in a close reading) the text clearly shows that people do not change and that one is either fun-loving and popular or hardworking and dependable (Benfer, 2003). Reading novels of this generic and formulaic type have both short-term and long-term effects on women. In the short-term, girls are trained to read texts in a certain way;
therefore, they acquire more cultural cues from the texts. In the long-term these texts help define what behaviors and actions are acceptable in particular situations (Christian-Smith, 1993).

Because of its lowbrow nature, serial romance novels, like Sweet Valley, were criticized by librarians and teachers, but their opinions mattered little. The “super edition,” Perfect Summer sold so many copies that it made the New York Times bestsellers list for paperback fiction. This was the premier of young adult literature popular enough to earn a spot on that elite list (Pattee, 2008). Sweet Dreams and Wildfire were also popular series novels published during the 1980s while television shows like The Facts of Life and movies like Sixteen Candles dominated the media. These book series, television shows, and movies were, “…both a reflection of the Regan era and a clear response to the darker and more realistic YA fiction published in the late 1970s and early 1980s” (Pattee, 2008, p. 416). Sweet Valley was fresh and exciting during a renaissance of adolescent fiction in the areas of the serial novel and television sitcoms. The novels, first published in 1983, were the most popular teen novel series of the twentieth century. The last Sweet Valley series novel was published in 2003, but the hiatus was short; in the spring of 2008, Francine Pascal’s original Sweet Valley High novels were re-released with an update in an attempt to make them popular and modern once more. The additions included adding blogs, modernized cars, and slang (Pattee, 2008). The books re-emerging now, like in the early 1980s, will stand in contrast to the other young adult literature being published, but unlike the 1980s this fiction may not regain notoriety among adolescent females because the updated novels have not changed enough. Gone now is the optimism of the 1980s, and the more contemporary series books
with which the Sweet Valley series now competes have a cynical view of the world, much like the modern adolescent. While the middle class fantasy was just out of reach of the readers in the 1980s, the fantasy is now more extreme—Upper Eastside New York City and exotic boarding schools are settings where modern adolescents escape to. Because of this, the renovation of the Sweet Valley series may not be enough to equal or surpass its previous popularity (Pattee, 2008).

After reading novels of this type in their youth, adult females become disenchanted with romantic young adult literature because it no longer provides an escape into the fantasy world of romance. Flanagan (2008) felt just this way about young adult romances until reading the Twilight series, a very popular series amongst adolescent girls in the late 2000s. The books Flanagan (2008) chose as an adolescent allowed her to escape from her own mundane world. Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* was the first book since adolescence that enabled her to escape the modern world and be engulfed within the story. *Twilight* reminded her of the books read in her girlhood, and she felt embarrassed by the strong emotions it evoked within her. She wanted to read more because she was able to feel the passion of the characters. Reading about Bella awoke a “physical passion” and emotional confusion within her, and she once again felt the vulnerability of first love (Flanagan, 2008). Bella is an old fashion hero, reminiscent of a simpler time. Edward, the main love interest in the series, treats Bella well and not at all like how Dracula, another vampire, treats the objects of his desire. Edward seems to feel genuine affection for Bella. The Twilight saga is a story about a boy who loves a girl so much he does not want to ruin her and a girl who loves him so much she is willing to give up everything for him (Flanagan, 2008).
Twilight is a vampire novel; thus surrendering oneself to the vampire is metaphorically giving up one’s virginity. No author has written so well about the passion adolescent girls feel in love, sex, and longing as Meyer has. The series is not preachy; it is not out rightly didactic, but it is devoted to the lust Bella feels for Edward and to Edward’s attempt at restraint. The supernatural undertones conceal any didactic messages while still promoting traditional Christian morals. Adolescent girls who would not normally read romance novels devour the four book series because they are intrigued and can relate to the dilemmas Bella faces. Readers grapple with her indecision until she ultimately makes the morally correct decision in line with Christian values (Flanagan, 2008).

Unlike Twilight, Prep is a story about a girl who does not make morally correct decisions. She does not have an Edward to be her conscience. The girl has one of the most fundamental needs of teenage girls today: to know if the boy she loves and has been intimate with reciprocates her feelings of devotion. She wants to know that he will not replace her with someone else. This topic is not even broached in the Twilight series because Edward refuses to do anything to hurt Bella, nor does he want to be intimate with her until they have followed the traditional rites of religious morality (Flanagan, 2008).

Reading, Gender, and Society

Education of the Gendered Reader

According to Cherland (1994), some researchers are misled to think that reading is separate from society because they view reading as a “purely psychological process” (p. 5), but she suggested that “much is learned when researchers embrace the idea that every person is a part of culture, part of society, and that each person participates in
cultural norms that determine how they act as readers” (pp. 5-6). Because reading is a social practice and gender is a social construction, the two are interrelated. This is evident in how women understand a text in comparison to how men understand the same text. A woman’s background and experiences differ from a man’s; therefore, her identity and the formation of that identity will differ from his. Thus, the two genders may be reading the same words, but each will understand differently what the words mean to him or her (Cherland, 1994). In a society dominated by men, women are excluded as the Other (Benfer, 2003). The idea of the Other is abrasive to young women because to accept this position she must decide to give up her freedom and youthful fun to take on the role as the Other. For example, in *Little Women*, Jo, Laurie’s childhood playmate, is never considered as a prospective wife when in his adulthood he is looking for love. He sought Amy, Jo’s younger sister who through the novel, even in childhood was prepared to give up youthful games (de Beauvoir, 1949).

Due to women’s exclusion as the Other, male-authored texts possessing a male perspective became the great literature of the past (Cherland, 1994). De Beauvoir (1949) was one of the first to postulate that idea. She stated, “Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth” (p. 143). According to Cherland (1994) not much has changed. Women are expected to be educated, but to leave important decisions to men, and the representative reader is still assumed to be male. Hence, it is not surprising that to understand texts as they are written, a woman must take on the male mindset and become the Other against herself (Cherland, 1994).
Lloyd (1998) suggested that gender is learned socially. He identified the many contextual clues that girls and young women learn in order to become the socially appropriate version of a girl. Romance novels, preferred by girls, add to the gendered information that adolescent girls who read acquire. Through reading romance novels, girls learn there are few acceptable roles for women. The reward for choosing to live as the Other is the love of the perfect boy. Romance novels teach females to put male interests before their own, and they also illustrate the need for girls to lie, cheat, or steal to get the man she wants. All of these efforts are made in order to acquire the security and affluence of the traditional nuclear family. Moreover, romance novels have been criticized for their role in teenage promiscuity. According to Christian-Smith (1993), the high sexual tension within the books leaves adolescent girls with unrest and sexual desire leading to the unexpressed sexual aggression that girls then need an outlet to release.

Lloyd (1998) explained that adolescent romantic literature attracts girls who are trying to escape life’s problems, but in their safe escape-world these girls encounter literature that illustrates a sexist, patriarchal view of life causing them to see that their lives will be unfulfilled without a man. Furthermore, the novels dictate that motherhood is a necessary part of a life in order to be considered successful and that a woman’s rightful place in the world is to care for her family at home. Thus, Lloyd (1998) concluded that allowing girls to choose their own reading materials may be detrimental because girls often choose books which perpetuate their marginalization and disempowerment (Lloyd, 1998). For instance, The Babysitters’ Club of the 1990s showed the expectations society has for girls. Girls, according to these novels, were meant to be part of a group and to take care of children, and because of the realistic nature of the books preadolescents and
adolescents make the assumption the books represent how the world is or should be. Because they are believable, children use them as models of reality (Christian-Smith, 1993). Until one is capable of thinking for one’s self and constructing his or her own views of reality, they take other people’s ideas as truth. Taking for granted that the way it has been is the way it should remain is a fundamental idea of cultural abuse. Bly (1996) said:

Cultural abuse is seen as normal behavior. It is so normal that when I have complained of it, otherwise nice people bring out the three classic responses of bullies: ‘Don’t be so sensitive’; ‘You have to have a sense of humor, you know’; and, ‘Aren’t you making an awfully big mountain out of an awfully small molehill?’ They would be right, if what we grew up to be were only an amalgam of inborn traits. Some cultural abuse is so cheery that we may fail to see it as cultural abuse. In fact, when we do identify it, our clue is not what the abuser has said but the blank inexpressiveness of the victims. How liberally and in what sensible tones cultural abuse still gets handed out! (Bly, 1996, pp. 33-34).

She illustrated an example of cultural abuse from a religious pastor who explained to complaining homemakers that some people were meant for littler lives while others are called to live lives with a bigger purpose. The pastor crushed the dreams of the women with his religious authority rather than help the women to find their greater purposes in life (Bly, 1996). By crushing their dreams, he added to the misconceptions used in the further development of their egos.

How a child’s questions are treated plays a large role in the development of his or her ego. Children are curious beings, and their ego develops through either honest
answers to their queries or answers which deceive them; a combination of this occurs throughout childhood. Researchers are still attempting to understand ego development, and they are still unsure how development and ethical maturity are interrelated (Bly, 1996). Often parents, as agents of society, lie to their children. They tell them the same lies that were told to them by their parents that were told to them by their parents. For instance, women have been bribed into complacency for countless millennia because of the perpetuation of the lies repeatedly told by each generation of adults through their traditional stories, myths, and literature (de Beauvoir, 1949). These lies are what supposedly keep families, nations, and societies happy. Nevertheless, these beliefs are obsolete. What was once a truth has become a lie. When a person accepts that the lies are obsolete, he or she upsets society’s elders and is criticized by his or her peers, and yet he or she begins to care for and understand the population of the world (Bly, 1996).

**Reading Voice**

Bly (1996) suggested that when reading a text a reader hears multiple versions of his or her own voice. If read quickly he or she understands only the most dominate voice, the proper voice, the one developed by exposure to society, but if one takes time to read and understand the text more thoroughly, the reader will sympathize with the other voices which are generally more altruistic. Reading is a process of knowing one’s own feelings and ideas, but then consulting outside of one’s self to compare one’s own feelings to another’s.

Consulting in good faith is about as civilized a behavior as any that human beings pull off. All parties to a consultation agree to do no lying. They try hard to surface any secret agendas. When it is not the blind leading the blind and when it is not
corrupt, consulting is wonderfully gratifying to both asker and adviser. (Bly, 1996, p. 60)

The potential to think morally is an innate human trait. It is as accessible as the potential for intellectual thinking, but both are dependent on the state of one’s mind. Adults can model potentially positive or negative traits. The interpretation and development of these traits and their effect on the child depends on which experiences are more dominate from his or her life. Bly (1996) explains, “The human brain is both hard-wired, like animals’ brains, and soft-wired; that is, much of our thinking depends not on pre-birth programming but on what our psychological habitat is like, if there has been any at all” (p. 68). Some of one’s psychological programming lies within what one reads.

Tradition in the field of literature always warns against mining instances from fiction or poetry to illustrate social theory. The scholars concern, a good one, is that the readers won’t open heartedly enter the world of the poem itself or the world of the story itself, but instead will read it with a mind only looking for proofs of ideas already implicit in his or her mind. Scholars are right to fear and dislike that practice. (Bly, 1996, p. 208)

Traditional readers only believe what they want to believe, and they generally use reading as an escape from reality: a second life—something outside of themselves. Reading about a particular subject area does not bring about social change within an individual. It sensitizes a person to an idea, but without follow up of the feeling or idea the sensitization is eventually lost (Bly, 1996). For girls who repeatedly read serial romance novels, researchers must ask, are these novels validating an idea primed in a previous novel? Christian-Smith (1993) believed that reading and rereading the same ideas
contributes to the continuation of culturally defined gender roles. If this is true, reading does influence who a person develops into, but there is more to psychological development than reinforcement. After examining one’s self and his or her own moral development at a particular stage—or that or that of a literary character—one can more fully understand either character with whom he or she wishes to be compared or with one’s self at a particular stage of moral development. Researchers are uncomfortable with both of these processes because they are anecdotal, but it would not be literature if it did not tell what happened to someone one day in a way in which people can relate (Bly, 1996). “Literature is half about how life goes along—the love affairs, the adventures of work, the journeys made, the illnesses finally succumbed to—and half about how the good guys”…and bad guys lead their lives and make choices (Bly, 1996, pp. 210-211). The good are rewarded through positive description, and bad are condemned though negative description. The idea of morality within a novel is admirable, but readers do not necessarily develop into better people because of what they have read about angelic or demonic characters.

**Consumerism and the American Girl**

Commercialization and consumerism are now international: name brand jeans and hit music are crossing international borders as if there were no borders. The media young adults are getting in different parts of the world is more and more the same. Howard (1998) argued that even though there has been three decades since the enlightenment of feminism, many girls are still struggling to construct positive images of themselves. Increased violence against girls and women in the mid to late 1990s was a cause to reexamine the messages being sent to adolescents. This was not just a trend in North
America but in other modern nations of the world too; Germany and Iceland were experiencing the same trends as Canada and the United States in regard to violence towards girls. Previously girls from different countries had little in common, but commercialization and consumerism is opening the borders and connecting them worldwide. Products that may have objectified females in only one region before can now objectify them without the constraint of political borders (Howard, 1998). Girls are constantly being inundated with their own desires being shaped, packaged, and marketed to them through texts that promote the continuation of patriarchy (Christian-Smith, 1993).

**American Girl Corporation**

Products like the American Girl books and dolls deserve the critical attention of adults to examine the true purpose of the products. Companies for profit serve their own self-interests by convincing parents and caregivers of young girls that their products promote positive girlhood ideals. American Girl immerses girls in consumerism from a very early age. A study by Blackford (2004) researched the children who owned American Girl products as well as the parents who purchased them. During an interview, one of the mothers excitedly and eagerly showed Blackford (2004) the new Kirsten doll she had just received in the mail for her daughter. The reason for purchasing the Kirsten doll rather than any of the other dolls in the series was that the daughter and the doll shared the same heritage. When asked, the daughter showed little interest in the American Girl books and in Kristin’s story. The girls in Blackford’s (2004) study showed little interest in playing with the dolls. They were more interested in arranging them in their rooms to be aesthetically pleasing. According to Marshall (2008),
Some might argue that American Girl is not as bad as other materials on the market, or as offensive as Barbie or Bratz dolls. This argument misses the key features of what makes this phenomenon so insidious: how corporations play on the feminist and/or educative aspirations of parents, teachers, girls, and young women and turn these toward consumption. American Girl is less about strong girls, diversity or history than about marketing girlhood, about hooking girls, their parents and grandparents into buying the American Girl products and experience. (Marshall, 2008-2009, p.18)

Although the novels put up the front of telling true American history, the American Girl series minimize the negative effects of war and conflict within history even when the story is from the point of view of the oppressed. The history presented in the American Girl books ignores the negative side of history and presents a clean, “whitewashed” version of history. The stories show a melting pot of assimilation of minorities; this is not an accurate version of history or the treatment of minorities and women within American culture. The books present racism and war as things that the United States has overcome rather than issues with which it still continues to struggle. Because the books focus on the national history rather on the history of girls and women within the United States, the life lessons the books could teach about discrimination or activism are lost. Controversial history is omitted. For example, Josefina is a Mexican American girl telling the story of the Mexican-American War. She lived in Mexico before the conflict erupted. The story glosses over the many rights lost by the new American citizens when they were included as part of the United States: Mexican women were able to hold property as their own before their inclusion within the United States. Other omissions include labor tensions
eased by the help of a real girl during the 1930s and the experiences of a Japanese American girl and her family incarcerated during World War II by the American government (Marshall, 2008).

**Consumerism and Series Novels**

The American Girl company is not the only (series) book utilizing consumerism. According to Christian-Smith (1993), romantic fiction marketed for young adult girls lends itself to consumerism creating a generation of material girls. She goes on to say that romance novels are like a business deal, “desire packaged between slick covers” (p. 4). Books for females teach consumerism; girls are taught that clothes and cosmetics are the gateway to discovering and acquiring romance. Consumerism reaches further indeed with the Harry Potter novels because both boys and girls were dazzled by Rowling’s Harry Potter. Researchers must ask, is this consumerism the same as other serial novels?

Jack Zipes (2001) asked, “How is it possible to evaluate a work of literature like a Harry Potter novel when it is so dependent on the market conditions of the culture industry” (Zipes, 2001, pp. 171-172)? Current literature becomes or does not become a bestseller based on what is promoted in the mass media. Some books are marketed towards children in a particular age group more than another book. Books with more marketing and media face-time tend to become more popular. To become a phenomenon, books have to be conventional; they must fit the general design of the norm. Each of J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter novels is conventional. Harry Potter is an archetypal hero; his friend Ron and Hermione are the sidekicks, and Dumbledore and Hagrid are the fatherly figures who give guidance to the struggling hero. Harry Potter is a complex fairy tale novel, and the plots of the Harry Potter novels follow the customary fairy tale story;
however, they are more complex because modern society, media, and other literary
genres influence an author during the writing process (Zipes, 2001).

Zipes (2001) suggested that children and adults alike may be able to identify with
Harry Potter because the media inundates us with fear of evil: identity theft, robbery,
homicide, and rape are a few of the real world Voldemorts we each face in life. He went
on to say, “Just as it is difficult to place our finger on evil in the real world, evil is elusive
in the Harry Potter novels, and yet it lurks around every corner and on almost every
page” (p. 181). According to Linda Jerome of the La Crosse Public Library, without
Harry Potter many of the other wildly popular fantasy series novels currently flying off
the shelves would not have been possible. Harry Potter proved the buying power of teens.
Harry Potter books topped the New York Times Bestseller list for an unprecedented
amount of time, thus creating a New York Times Bestseller list for young adult literature
(Jerome, L., personal communication, June 12, 2009).

Books are a novelty. Corporations like Mattel and Disney are marketing their
products on television, in movies, and more and more with or within books. People
purchase Barbie or Cinderella because they are guided to by marketing. After purchasing
the item, the corporation expects consumers to acquire a personal attachment to the
product. Phenomena generally follow a predictably typical pattern: books and series
must be formulaic, predictable, and ordinary. It must follow the standards of the mass
media—it must “conform to conventionality” (Zipes, 2001, p. 175). Zipes (2001)
explained that books are “formulaic and banal” and only distinguishable from each other
because of their publishing label—brand names, like other consumer products, books are
now associated with a brand (p. 7). Not only do these brands produce books, but also they
are conglomerate companies trying to sell other types of products: food, toys, or television shows. Book companies claiming to publish respectable books, like the Scholastic company, do not always follow through. Scholastic marketed Wildfire, the first serial romance novel for adolescents (Christian-Smith, 1993).

**History of Patriarchy in Literature**

**Fairy Tales and Religious Texts**

The canon of European fairy tales, the ones that are still told today, perpetuate the patriarchal views of the society that created them (Kuykendal & Strum, 2007). Religious stories are similar to fairy tales because they also perpetuate the patriarchal views of the society in which they were first told (de Beauvoir, 1949). What women have come to believe they can or cannot accomplish may very well be a reflection of the fairy tales they grew up reading and loving (Kuykendal & Strum, 2007). The fairy tales that exist from oral tradition, predating written literature, portray most women as passive, submissive, dependent, and self-sacrificing. The men of these stories are the opposite: dominate, powerful, and active (Kuykendal & Strum, 2007). The stories set up men and women as opposites, and they teach girls from an early age that to get a man is the ultimate goal while the strategy to reach this goal is achieving the impossible: socially defined beauty (Parsons, 2004).

Fairy tales in patriarchal society reflect weak women. When the women are not portrayed as weak, they are the villain, the evil stepmother, stepsister, or a witch. Fairly tales generally portray women who possess power as being evil; thus, in order to defy the traditionally weak roles of women in fairy tales the woman must give up her virtues. Only occasionally does a positive female character appear in these stories, but the woman
is never quite human: She is Glenda in the Wizard of Oz or the fairy godmother in Cinderella. Thus, the good women are fictional—not based on reality (Kuykendal & Strum, 2007). In addition to being unreal, she is unable to teach the protagonist how to help herself; she merely gives gifts to the protagonist showing that a weak, mortal woman is unable to help herself. It also perpetuates the isolation of women. Not only are women to be separate from men, but they should not be friendly towards other women (Parsons, 2004). There are no friendly women in fairy tales aside from the protagonist. She is alone in her quest.

Fairy tales, first told through oral tradition in a majority of cultures, teach children about the world. It is speculated that not all fairy tales that were ever told upheld the patriarchal view, but those that were told and retold gained popularity and the others slipped into the void. Therefore, the fairy tales that we currently know, and that the Grimm Brothers made popular in publishing the stories, does not represent all tales of its genre. They are examples of selection and silent revision of texts. The texts that did not uphold the values of society were changed or forgotten (Kuykendal & Strum, 2007). The problem with traditional fairy tales is that they perpetuate cultural norms that are no longer contemporary. Fairy tales preach cultural norms to children from the time they are read their first book; many books for young children are based on fairy tales of old. The books and tales carry on shared beliefs about one’s culture and are important for the socialization of the child (Kuykendal & Sturm, 2007). The fairy tales affect the way a child is treated by his or her own peers and the adults around him or her. In addition, they influence the expectations of the child’s future behavior. “As children grow, they use information from their parents, peers, school, literature, and the media to form theories on
how men and women are supposed to behave. Literature in general, and fairy tales in particular, gender children” (Kuy kendal & Sturm, 2007, p. 38). The Cinderella phenomenon still rings true. Women seek marriage with the ideal of being taken care of by their husbands. Prince Charming brings Cinderella up to his own social status and living standards—generally greater than her own—which she may never attain on her own even working hard all of her life (de Beauvoir, 1949).

Religious texts like the Bible do this too. The Virgin Mary illustrates the ultimate defeat of women when she kneels down before her son. Her glorification is earned through her subordination. By kneeling down to her child, she freely accepted her inferiority (de Beauvoir, 1949). The acceptance of inferiority takes different forms. On one hand, the mother bows down to her own son, but, on the other hand, creation myths reiterate the non-essentialness of women. In Genesis, Eve was made after Adam; she was made from him, and she was made for him. Thus, she was not created in the same manner as he. She was created for the same reason the animals were created, for Adam’s pleasure and companionship. Because she was an afterthought, created to be a companion for him, she is naturally submissive because she, like the animals and plants, was created for man to rule. She is no different from the birds, bugs, and beasts. For this reason de Beauvoir (1949) said the following statement is still true, “No man would consent to be a woman, but every man wants women to exist” (p. 141). Because of the Genesis myth, men alone believe they were meant to be and women were serendipitous.

Just as gender roles have been dictated in religious stories, children’s stories teach children gender roles. They learn about masculine and feminine roles based on how characters are treated and act within the stories. Nonetheless, children cannot understand
reality through traditional fairy tales because actual men and women often must do more than just what is prescribed for them by traditional gender roles and stereotypes. These behaviors are not presented in traditional fairy tales; thus the roles that real people play can be confusing for children learning gender roles from the canon of European fairy tales (Kuykendal & Strum, 2007). In the 1960s, researchers in the United States began to study affects of gender stereotyping in popular children’s books. Many of the studies revealed patterns illustrating male dominance and female subservience. It appeared children learned gender bias from the texts, and certain texts had a detrimental affect on the self-esteem of children. Furthermore, perceptions of what their own and others’ abilities and potentials in life may be were influenced by the texts to which children were exposed (Kuykendal & Strum, 2007). Kuykendal and Strum (2007) reiterate well the ideas of Christian-Smith (1993). In “Constructing and Reconstructing Desire” printed in Texts of Desire, Christian-Smith (1993) stated that books help adolescents develop their identities by providing a multifaceted mirror for them to peer into. The mirrors in books meant for boys illustrate the working world as the road to success while the mirrors in books meant for girls show romance and heterosexuality as the gateway to a successful life, ultimately dooming them in a culture where hard work is viewed as the only route to success.

**Popular Literature of the 1980s**

Francine Pascal’s Sweet Valley High series attempted to mirror the idolized American family of the eighties. Like television moms, Alice, the mother of the twins, had a chic up-and-coming career in interior design. She had a master’s degree and her husband, an architect, liked to remind people of that. Women of the eighties worked for
the joy of working, ignored were the families where the mother’s income was necessary or not glamorous. The novels were a picture of perfection, “In the Superwoman decade, the perfect mother—even one whose profession is literally decoration—is supposed to be, or at least seem, equal to her husband” (Benfer, 2003, p. 49). Pains are taken to show the division of household labor. Ned, the father, and Steven, the older brother, both take turns cooking for the family. The writers intentionally try to show that the masculinity of Steven and Ned are not diminished by daily household responsibilities as mundane as folding laundry (Benfer, 2003).

This attempt by the writers to display a sort of equality between sexes breaks down in another novel when the children are afraid Alice may be pregnant. After the girls divulge their belief to Steven, he offers to drop out of college to help support the family. Benfer (2003) suggested this undermines family equality in regard to chores and work. The idea of equality is difficult for the writers to maintain because the ideas of parenthood and childrearing are still thought to be more important to women than are their careers. Benfer (2003) illustrated this idea by discussing a scene in *Rumors* SVH #37, Elizabeth, Jessica, and Alice discuss delaying childbirth to later in life or avoiding it all together to focus on one’s profession. The women are aghast by the idea, and one of them even suggests that being a man would be easier because they do not have to make difficult decisions about fertility and family planning. Researchers should ask why men do not need to make these same difficult decisions because they too are partners in the process of procreation and childrearing.
**Contamination of Fairy Tales**

Contamination of a fairy tales results when something is added to the story, which makes it new again, makes it relevant (Zipes, 2001). In the world of film, fantasy, and fairy tales, things have changed. In Disney’s animated film *Peter Pan*, Peter takes Wendy into his imagination. He takes her to Neverland. It is his imagination doing the creating, not hers. In *Return to Neverland*, Wendy’s daughter is taken by Jane to Neverland. This shows a change in paradigm because a female is taking another female into the land of make-believe (Blackford, 2004).

When Davies (1989) wrote *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales*, feminist books were not yet available in bookstores. The books used to teach children reinforced the traditional sex roles of males and females. Because of this, children at this time were still being led to believe in traditional gender roles. Stories told to children are necessary for their development because they teach what is acceptable of each gender. In Davies’ (1989) study of feminist texts and schoolchildren, she determined that children who had working mothers were better able to identify with feminist ideals than those whose mothers’ work resided within the home. For her study she used the feminist fairy tale *Paper Bag Princess* which was only completely understood by children, male and female, who had mothers working outside the home and had fathers accounting for more than the traditional amount of household chores (Davies, 1989). According to Kuykendal and Strum (2007) attempting to create feminist fairy tales by merely reversing the traditional male and female roles does not create feminist fairy tales, but fractured fairy tales. Fractured fairy tales are the product of superficially changing a fairy tale through role reversal. Stories that are reworked this way do not fool children, and children do not
want to emulate these strong female characters. When feminist fairy tales are built like the original fairy tales were, from nothing, the stories are more believable and liked by children. A true feminist fairy tale is defined as one where the protagonist, male or female, is empowered (Kuykendal & Strum, 2007).

Fairy tales help to build the foundation for the dichotomy between the gender roles of men and women. In a media-obsessed culture, Disney princesses are everywhere for little girls to idolize and dream about becoming. Disney’s princesses, however, do not create gender bias within our culture solely through the nature of their very existence, yet because Cinderella, Snow White, Pocahontas, and Mulan are some of the earliest media presented to children, the images remain for a lifetime. Parents believe because it's Disney, it is safe. Nonetheless, the absence of mothers or the negative portrayal of motherly figures coupled with the necessity for a man to save the damsel undermines the feminist perspective and solidifies the subservience of another generation of women (Parsons, 2004). Within these modified fairy tales, women are prizes to be won. Without a captive princess or damsel in distress, society is left without a need for a prince to save the day. The idea of Prince Charming is timeless. Perseus won Andromeda; Orpheus was able to woo Euridice; and Troy won Helen (de Beauvoir, 1949).

The idea of a wealthy gentleman marrying the beautiful, pastoral heroine gratifies both men and women. Wealthy men desire someone to dote upon because without someone to spend their fortunes on their money is useless, and women desire escape from what plagues them; money often leads to financial security, that sometimes is confused for safety. Cinderella stories are popular in prosperous countries like the United States and are still influencing modern society. Some have even been modernized into motion
pictures. *Citizen Kane* is a twentieth century American adaptation of the traditional Cinderella fairy tale. Kane is Prince Charming glorifying himself through saving the lounge singer from a poor unappreciated existence. Kane wanted to liberate, redeem, and provide for her, but in allowing him to do this, she becomes subjugated to him.

Sleeping Beauty is another example of the negative portrayal of women manifested within society. Sleeping Beauty is at the mercy of Prince Charming to wake her from whatever evil has overcome her. His attempt to free her from bondage gives him pleasure in several ways: overcoming the evil, giving her the gift of her freedom, and her freely choosing to be dominated by him. By choosing to be dominated by him she dooms their relationship because men enjoy the adventure and challenge of the chase more than they desire the *prize*. For her to win him over, she must be willing to argue intelligently before conceding to his point of view. Without the idea of the chase, he gets bored, and without the idea of destiny, she is not wooed. A man’s true victory is when a woman freely acknowledges him as her one, true destiny. Once Sleeping Beauty has fallen in love with the noble knight, she ends the game which was keeping him interested in her. By marrying him, the princess is transformed into a servant. She is conquered; he has won his prize; and the game has ended. De Beauvoir (1949) concluded that since the rise of chivalric love, it is not surprising that marriage kills the passion and desire of chivalric love. Disney undermines the lessons of equality that society believes it is teaching its young, yet Disney is not all to blame, for the stories of the animated films are generally based on traditional fairy tales that would be popular regardless. Fairy tales are ideas of the past told and re-told in a way that seems romantic, allowing many people to believe that *happily ever after* really does exist (Parsons, 2004).
There is a certain formula that is expected from fairy tales (Parsons, 2004). If the formula is broken and something else is inserted into its place, many have a hard time reading and understanding it. Not to include the traditional heterosexual relationship is something that is very difficult for some to read and even to write (Parsons, 2004). Consider *Cinderella* as a story about getting away from one’s evil stepfamily without the handsome prince; where would the traumatized, abused girl go to escape? Without the element of romance between a poor girl and a young prince, the story would fail to become a fairy tale. Contamination of fairy tales is the process of changing them and making them into something different (Zipes, 2001). The story changes with the goal in mind of making it stronger based on the current culture.

**Fiction and the Modern Fairy Tale**

“One of the difficulties in reading fairy tales and fairy tale novels is that you know from the beginning that evil will be overcome. A fairy tale is not a fairy tale that does not have a happy end[ing]” (Zipes, 2001, p. 182). The previous statement was not always true, but in modern versions, the fairy tales have been forever contaminated. Because of Disney some contaminated fairy tales have been transformed into happier stories when it comes to the end, and people now expect a happy ending. Rowling keeps up the happy ending façade in each of her Harry Potter novels. Zipes (2001) also accused Rowling of *conventionally* repeating much of the same sexist and white patriarchal bias of classical fairy tales. Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight series also uses elements of the traditional fairy tale. A divorced parent is the modern equivalent to being an orphan in traditional fairy tales. Dealing with divorce begins a story about a girl who has more independence than she would like, is vulnerable, and is in danger. Moreover it is a story
about a girl who must come to terms with the sexuality of her parents. Adolescence is the
time a child would like to believe his or her parents are asexual. Thus, confronting the
sexuality of his or her parents is not only a challenge, but it is very unpleasant.

For female characters, the only other thing equal to divorce in a modern story is
relocation. The crux of modern stories is that when a girl is forced to move during
adolescence the chance of recovering is slim. The protagonists take drugs, drink alcohol,
or perform acts of prostitution. Examples of this are found in Are You There God it’s Me,
Margaret or Go Ask Alice (Flanagan, 2008). Because prepubescent and pubescent girls
are narcissistic, they believe their emotional anguish is the worst of anyone and that they
are the only one experiencing physical, emotional, and psychological change. Girls have
intense relationships with friends during this time because they have the shared
experience of a change in life. They believe that adults would not understand how they
are feeling at this time in their lives, and the loss of these intense friendships in middle or
high school is very traumatic, which is why many stories for girls begin with divorce,
relocation, or both (Flanagan, 2008).

Media and its Affects on the Self-esteem of Girls

Culture has changed since the 1950s; information about sexuality was limited, and
television showed married adults sleeping in separate twin beds. By the 1990s, nothing
was taboo; sex, drugs, and alcohol all became acceptable topics for prime time television.
Movies have also changed. In the 1950s, by the end of the movie, the couple would fall in
love and finally kiss just before the film ended. By the 1970s, the progression was sped
up, and couples fell in love and had sex before the film ended. By the early 1990s, the
order of events no longer resembled that of the 1950s films. Couples met, had sex,
argued, and then possibly fell in love by the end of the film. The media disregards what is recommended for couples to do in order to remain physically and emotionally healthy. Pipher (1994) concluded, “The Hollywood model of sexual behavior couldn’t be more harmful and misleading if it were trying to be” (p.244).

According to Pipher (1994), the image of females in the mass media needs to become more realistic. The media leads girls to believe that self-destructive behaviors are sophisticated while self-control and restraint are linked to characters who are at the bottom of the social food chain (Pipher, 1994). In Hollywood, films are now mostly functioning only as another form of oppression for women. According to de Beauvoir (1949), films illustrate wild, American women being tamed by the “wholesome brutality of her husband or lover” (p. 349). Female writers too conveyed this aspect of romantic love, for instance in L. M. Alcott’s Little Women, Jo only began to fall in love with her future husband when he reprimanded her for a mistake. Researchers should ask if women were actually wooed in this way, or if it was propaganda intended to maintain the status quo. Pipher (1994) summarized, “It’s a murky place; the personal and political are intertwined in all of our lives. Our minds, shaped by the society in which we live, can oppress us. And yet our minds can also analyze and work to change the culture” (pp. 26-27).

Stages of Moral Development

Bly (1996) suggested six stages of moral development which align with the theories of other developmentalists like Piaget, Kohlberg, and Kitwood, but she is uncertain, as some have been, that each stage is necessarily linked to chronological human age. She is certain, however, that an individual will reach each stage when he or
she is ready. The question remains that if a person does not reach a certain stage of development by adulthood, will he or she be able to develop further or is he or she stuck in that stage of development for the rest of his or her life? Piaget strongly believed an adult will forever remain in the stage which he or she had achieved by the end of childhood, but modern theorists are open to the idea of life long development. Once entering a stage of moral development a person will not regress into a simpler stage unless he or she is brainwashed or has been interfered with neurophysiologically (Bly, 1996). Psychotherapy found that during the twentieth century some women were unable to develop their own beliefs or interests because expectations of their social class and gender dictated that they care for the well being of others before their own. After therapy, these women were able to struggle through all six developmental stages and eventually reach the final stage: the ability to help another person without stifling their own personality. Once the years of cultural abuse are stripped away, the person she may have been without the influences of culture become evident (Bly, 1996).

Reading Like a Girl

When reading, girls can have simultaneous points of view related to the story. The question some scientists, like Bender-Slack (2009), are asking is, can reader response theory be separated from how one gender reads differently than the other? Her research indicates that if a student is taught reader response theory, then he or she may not realize he or she is using it when reading a text. In reading *Catcher in the Rye*, sixteen-year-old Olive explains that she feels several ways at once about the text and its main character and narrator, Holden. In one way, she relates to Holden; she can see his point of view because they are both teenagers, so she relates to his feelings of loss of control. At the
same time, she realizes that she would not do the things that he is doing. She is using a relational connection, seeing where Holden is in his mental health and comparing herself to him. By doing so, she realizes that she is much better off than he is. Her self-presence exists while she is reading from this perspective because she can see that she would make different decisions if she were in his position. Third, she sees herself outside of the context of the book. She realizes that her life is different than Holden’s because in this book he is wandering around in New York City unsupervised and making decisions which are unrealistic to her. Blackford (2004) defined the way women read perfectly when she wrote, “Fantasy depends on your point of view” (p. 39). She goes on to say that many girls are able to escape while reading the Harry Potter novels because they are unable to relate to the world of magic, witches, wizards, house elves, and werewolves. For Blackford, however, the story is inside her world of experience because she is a teacher and is immersed in school every day. She cannot escape in the Harry Potter novels, for it reminds her of her daily life.

Another way girls read is by seeing themselves relatively outside of the novel. Sometimes a girl reads a text and sees herself in the position of narrator instead of in the position of the protagonist. According the eleven-year-old Vanessa in Blackford’s (2004) study:

[Reading *Harry Potter*] I felt like I was in the audience. I don’t picture myself like seeing myself. I just think I’m in the story, like floating above them or something. Watching what they’re doing. In *Harry Potter* I think I’m just watching them [...] I don’t picture me right there. I just think I’m there. Just I
don’t see myself. And they’re friends with me and stuff, just they don’t care how
I look or anything (pp. 19-20).

Vanessa sees herself as part of the narrator. She is outside of the story, but the omniscient
point of view allows her to feel like part of the main characters inner circle of friends.
From this point of view, the reader’s relationship with the narrator supersedes the
relationship with the protagonist or any other character. Bender-Slack (2009) said of
Blackford’s (2004) research:

In her study of how girls ages eight to sixteen made meaning of texts, Holly
Virginia Blackford found the following: girls weren’t necessarily pulled to read
about female characters; girls separated the moral universe of the text from the
moral code of their lives; girls visualized a world rather than a limited character
subjectivity; girls read for a “radical experience of difference”; and girls read
horror and desired to embody the form rather than the victim, who is usually
female, as a way to deny identification with the female character. (p. 18)

The literature that girls seem to like the most have very little to do with their lives.

Blackford’s (2004) data was useless when she determined that girls do not enjoy
literature about girls like themselves because one of her original assumptions was that
girls would be interested in reading about other girls who are like themselves. It turned
out that girls wanted to read literature that let them escape from their dull or stressful
lives. This finding contradicted more than thirty years of teachers’ wisdom. It was
commonly believed that students wanted to read about people who were like themselves
or who they wanted to be, but instead of confronting problems similar to their own, some
girls escape by reading fantasy. Some girls compared reading fantasy to the drugs their
peers used, yet reading fantasy goes deeper than escape for most. Girls intentionally choose worlds that are alien to them. Thus romance novel are popular for early adolescent girls because it is outside many of their realms of experience. “The actually fantasy texts can often close these [fantasy] worlds or reinvent and reestablish patriarchal control, but because these girls are American optimists, they pay more attention to the notion of possibility embedded in the form” (Blackford, 2004, p. 62). Flanagan (2008) suggested that girls have a secret emotional life, in which they go to when they are sad, silent, or lonely. The place where they daydream, sitting bored in school. Flanagan (2008) said:

She is a creature designed for reading in a way no boy or man, or even grown woman, could ever be so exactly designed because she is a creature whose most elemental psychological needs—to be undisturbed while she works out the big questions of her life, to be hidden from view while still in plain sight, to enter profoundly into the emotional lives of others—are met precisely by the act of reading (p. 111).

Reading is a tool for some girls because they are escaping the constant demand for them to be good, and the domestic demands of their families, but by reading they are being good. By reading girls are also making up for the deprivation of emotion they may feel in their daily lives (Christian-Smith, 1993). Both adolescent and adult females report reading romance fiction for generally the same reasons: first, they want to escape a problem at home; second, it is more interesting than nonfiction or textbook reading; third, reading is a pleasurable form of entertainment; and finally, reading romance fiction teaches them about love and romance. Romantic fiction formulated into fantasy directs
the desire of females to an object of the opposite sex (Christian-Smith, 1993). Girls relate to the Twilight series because it is a place in which they can escape, for a moment, an hour, or even a whole day. It opens a world that allows them to feel the happiness and pain Bella feels and to learn what real-life relationships might be like (Flanagan, 2008).

When reading, girls generally do not use the same relational self that they use in real life when comparing themselves to other people. When they read, they get lost within the book enjoying the ability to lose themselves and leave their own world behind. To most people, good literature is experienced like a movie in one’s mind; when it gets their attention, they can actually see the action in their mind. They enter a virtual world (Blackford, 2004). When girls use a relational narrator, they like the idea that they can relate to the stories through a strong narrator’s voice: Laura Ingalls or Anne (of Green Gables) provide the idea of girl power. Some young females like this because it combines a voice they can relate to, but a world that is very different from their own. They like Laura Ingalls Wilder’s narratives or L. M. Montgomery’s novels for their pastoral settings. They are able to connect to the story because the young protagonist lives during a simpler time when things were safer (Blackford, 2004).

Adolescent girls crave stories about women in their lives. This is the age when they put up posters of athletes like Mia Hamm or Danica Patrick, actresses like Hilary Duff and Dakota Fanning, and singers like Ashley Tisdale and Miley Cyrus, but more importantly, girls are interested in adult women who they feel they might emulate; women they know and who they believe are successful (Blackford, 2004). Girls find the coming of age novels that were important to adolescents in previous generations boring and didactic. In a world of information on-demand, these girls know more about
growing-up and handling the change in their lives than any other generation preceding them. Adolescents “seek a relationship with an aesthetic form” (Blackford, 2004, p.12). Gothic literature, which has recently become popular once more, has been written by both male and female authors. It is an important genre for female authors who desire to express the fear of patriarchal discrimination leading to the dual role of women in literature: monstrous and crazy (Blackford, 2004). “We can never abandon an issue that affects the formulization of self and identity in girls and young women” (Howard, 1998, p. 18). The older the girls become the less confident they are about their intelligence and other positive attributes. Having the feminist point of view and struggle for more than thirty years should be promoting a more positive outlook on the female youth, but it seems that girls are still struggling to find their own niche in the world. Patriarchy and the media are still telling young girls that their worth is tied to their physical appearance, yet according to Bly (1996) people do not change based on what they read in literature. Reading merely provides the opportunity to construct one’s own meaning of culture and its role in his or her daily life. “Reading is a social practice which children seek to understand their own places in the world” (Christian-Smith, 1993, p. 42).

Frank Norris’ writings, which were popular and read by many, did not keep wealthy businessmen from cheating working men, and Daddy Warbucks of the “Little Orphan Annie” comic did not change the behaviors of businessmen who left their children to be raised practically without a father during the 1930s. “Literature without reflection is wonderfully ineffective against white collar predation. If it were effective, every estate lawyer who read Dickens’s Bleak House would have taken the case of Jarndyce v. Jarndyce to heart and refused to bleed families dry in estate cases” (Bly,
Literature without reflection makes the situations it presents normalized, which is often ironic because people doing the misdeeds feel, “validated, understood, even glamorized. If authors are writing about what they do, then what they do must be big—or at least real. Authors don’t write whole books about cleaning up after a meals-on-wheels spread, after all” (Bly, 1996, p. 79). Thus, students struggle to find validation in their daily activities and life in general. During adolescence, teens question reality. Girls begin to look at the world through various fragmented points of view. Sometimes adolescents use literature to ask and explore questions that may be deemed unacceptable in their own world: race, gender, class, or sexuality (Christian-Smith, 1993). They wonder what reality is. Vampire fiction poses questions to the reader about reality and the unknown. In addition, teens like the blend of adventure, fantasy, and romance because it fulfills their desire for what is taboo (Meloni, 2007). For instance, the “forbidden romance” in the Twilight series by Stephenie Meyer captures the rush of first love, the thrill of danger, and the excitement of keeping a perilous secret (Meloni, 2007). Although *Twilight* is a fantasy novel, it is even more clearly a romance novel, and many of the romantic situations can be interpreted as situations in modern, real-life relationships (Meloni, 2007). While reading romance novels, girls generally identify with the young girl in love. They feel what the smitten protagonist is feeling (Christian-Smith, 1993). A fourteen-year-old girl in Christian-Smith’s (1993) study reported, “My favorite part is when the girl and guy first kiss. It gives me a squishy feeling in my stomach, sorta like I’m actually there, being that girl that’s gettin’ kissed” (p.59). The reader’s response is an approval and reinforcement of the relationship between the sexes. The subjects in Christian-Smith’s (1993) study were constantly seeking the affirmation of
heterosexuality, and they wished for this kind of romance in their own lives, even if the heterosexual relationships already in their own lives were physically, emotionally, or verbally abusive. Christian-Smith (1993) concluded that girls wanted to best boys within real life, but they were also afraid to do so because society deems assertiveness as anti-feminine. Girls were afraid to be too assertive lest they alienate the boys. This battle is a popular conflict in teen romance novels, but the submissive girl wins the boy.

So, What Should Children be Reading?

Students should be encouraged in school to read many different kinds of literature rather than being pushed toward boy books and girl books. Giving the option to children may open them to new genres that both boys and girls can enjoy. In the classroom, teachers should choose texts from all genres which positively (or negatively) represent both genders equally (Young & Brozo, 2001). There may be an idea of incongruence between what children and teens like to read and what adults perceive they like to read (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1998). Books winning awards like the Newbery and Printz are not books in which most children are interested. Adolescents want to read books that focus on their own interests. Scary stories, animals, and sports are three of the most popular categories both genders enjoy. Worthy, Moorman, and Turner’s (1998) study concluded that motivating kids to read may be best accomplished through encouraging them to read what they want whether that be a magazine, newspaper, comic book, or an adult horror novel, but by allowing this generally means that girls will not be reading quality literature.

Quality literature is not to teach morals to young adults, but it is to allow them, “a chance to experience moral dilemmas—not in the quick fix superficial style of
television but in a way that invites us to engage with characters living out life’s vexing dilemmas” (Howard, 1998, p. 18). Because there are so many novels authored by both men and women portraying strong women as individuals who are able to problem solve without the aid of a knight, there is hope. What girls really need to read about are female protagonists defined outside of the cultural norms of gender and sexuality. After teaching and becoming a parent, Howard (1998) wondered how he could help in the reconstruction of curricula to promote positive self-identities among adolescent girls. “Understanding how our culture shapes young girls’ identities requires us to be sensitive observers” (Howard, 1998, p. 18). Carol Bly (1996) believed that literature, due to its narrative, allows readers to understand complex psychological truths which in turn helps to explain the moral reasoning of humans.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Methods
Participants in the study were adolescent girls who chose to participate from private schools in an upper Midwestern city with a population of about 50,000. All participants were in grades 7-12 during the 2008-2009 school year. The primary investigator used several methods to acquire research participants. Middle School participants (grades 7 and 8) were invited to join the study by their homeroom teachers. Homeroom teachers read the letter aloud in class, which was sent home to parents in each girl’s family folder. High school participants (grades 9-12) were invited to join the study through a short presentation by the primary investigator. Female students were offered a consent form and parent letter. Forms were collected by language arts teachers and the primary investigator over the next four weeks.

Materials
The tools used to collect data were a short interview, conducted by the primary investigator, and a survey, proctored three times during the study.
**Variables**

Dependent variables were the grade/age of the participant, and the version of the survey approved for the grade level by the school.

The survey and interview attempted to measure changes in the beliefs, behaviors, and self-esteem of the participants over time. Participants completed the three identical surveys at least one week apart, and those who consented to be interviewed scheduled an appointment between the second and third survey.

**Procedure**

Students completed the same survey three times over the course of the study. In general, the surveys were administered every two weeks. Some variance in the time between surveys occurred due to student illness and extra curricular participation. Between the second and third survey, students were invited to be interviewed by the primary investigator. Most students chose to participate in the interview.

Surveys taken by middle school students were completed under the direct supervision of the primary investigator in a quiet room. Surveys taken by high school students were completed during a lunch period with the primary investigator present but not strictly watching over each student. High school students completed their surveys in the cafeteria while eating lunch. Students were instructed to read and answer the questions independently, so to answer in the most honest way possible. This request was not
entirely followed by all participants, but most participants took the suggestion and answered the survey in a serious manner.

**Limitations**

In this pilot study the imitations were as follows:

- the number of participants was low
- the primary investigator was a female researching the implications of what female adolescents read
- initial use of this survey
- participants self identified to be included in the interview
- all participants were enrolled in private schools
- all participants were from the same Midwestern city with a population of about 50,000
- the survey questions were heterosexually geared
- the survey environment varied, dependent on grade level
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

After analysis, there were a few areas where the data indicated a significant change over time, although it might have been believed that the group of participants was not large enough to indicate a significant change.

Throughout the study, there were 100 different times when a participant changed her answer. A change in answer is considered any change of response among the three surveys. There were three kinds of changes marked: change between survey one and two, change between two and three, and changes between both one and two, and two and three. Of the 100 incidences of change, 55 only were a change in answer from the first survey to the second survey; 28 were only a change in answer from the second and third survey; and 17 were incidences where the participant not only changed her answer one time, but also changed it a second time.

Similar results were recorded for time interacting with primary genre. Self-esteem (p=0.674) and beliefs (p=.796) did not yield significant results, but behavior (p=<.0005) did. The interaction between time, age category, and primary genre did not indicate significant changes for any of the three measures.
Tests of between subject effects yielded only one category that had significant results: primary genre on behavior (p= 0.021).

Results from the interviews were as expected; each girl had her own ideas, but overall many girls were insecure about whom they were and who they were going to become. Some expressed a connection to the lives of the characters in the books read, and a desire to do thing similarly or differently than the characters, while others felt that the stories were too unrealistic to compare to their own lives. An overview of the answers is included in Appendix A.

**Discussion**

**The Surveys**

The results are unreliable for several reasons. One of the factors adding to their inaccuracy is the size of the data set. A much larger data set would provide more opportunities to see a more reliable difference in the responses over time. A larger data set would also help show more differences over time and age group than what was statically significant. Another factor is the environment where the surveys were completed. Because high school students were able to complete the survey during their lunch period in a crowded cafeteria, they may not have been as honest as if they may have been in a solitaire environment. Students were advised to take the survey seriously and not share their responses with their peers, but this was not strictly followed for every survey. Finally, the length of time for the study in the way it was set up required more time than was available.
The girls’ answers indicated that they are in a stage in life where they do not necessarily know how they are going to act, what they will believe, or how confident they are about certain things. Because the girls are in such a state, many different things are influencing them. Based on this study, it is not possible to know what was influencing them to think, believe, or act in a certain way. According to Pipher (1994) during adolescence, girls begin to struggle with what is means to become adults and the American culture inundates them with media. Television, movies, video games, and advertising are telling children what to think about the world. Most commonly, the aforementioned texts are fictional or fictionalized (Zipes, 2001). Based on what they are reading I can speculate that the fiction they read caused the change, but a more in-depth study is needed to determine other media is not the reason for the change in any particular girl’s response.

Although the study did not entirely yield the hypothesized results, the literature shows that generally what girls read does influence their future behaviors. Additional research and a better research model may have replicated the findings of Appel and Richter (2007) and Diekman, McDonald, and Gardner (2000). Diekman, McDonald, and Gardner (2000) found that young women who read two page sections of romance novels identified with the behavior of the text they read. If they read about a sexual encounter where the couple used condoms, they were more likely to respond with positive intentions of using condoms in the future. If they read about a sexual encounter where condoms were not used/mentioned, they were more likely to negatively indicate the use of condoms in future sexual encounters. According to Appel and Richter (2007) what is read in fiction may change the ideas, beliefs, and behaviors of readers in the long term.
which coincides with the anecdotal evidence which has been illustrated throughout the years as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853) has been attributed to helping to change the beliefs of Americans about slavery and to igniting the Civil War (Appel & Richter, 2007). Appel and Richter (2007) argued that because fictional texts are written with the intent to entertain rather than to persuade, they more easily influence the reader’s beliefs and behaviors, especially if the reader is able to be “transported” or *get lost in* the book. Because to get caught up in the story implies the suspension of doubt of certain ideas, the reader is more vulnerable to persuasion. Furthermore, this type of persuasion is believed to be persistent, and once the knowledge is separated from the cue, the idea is remembered as more reliable (Appel & Richter, 2007). Though in order to have the ability to get caught up in a story, one must be a fluent reader.

Becoming a fluent reader in today’s society is becoming more difficult according to Benton (1995) because the amount of television a child watches correlates with their ability to become fluent readers. Through Benton’s (1995) research, he discovered that television and video games provide a stereotyped image of reality and limit the creativity and imagination needed, so contemporary children are less able to *imagine* what they read. So what needs to be asked next is, are these students less influenced by what they read because they are not experiencing the transportation or sensation of being lost in the book.

One of the more recent programs using the idea of literature being able to change the behaviors and ideas of youth is the Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL) program. In *Finding a Voice* by Trounstine and Waxler (2005) the two summarized the program and note the positive impact it has made on criminals. Facilitators select
literature to be talked about in a seminar format. Criminals with a certain severity of
crime can be sentenced to this “book club” as an alternative punishment. Current addicts,
rapist, and murders are not eligible for this alternative sentencing, but have also shown
improvement in programs initiated for inmates inside such institutions. They use
literature to alter the ideas and behaviors of criminally minded youth. Their mission is to
alter the behaviors and rehabilitate juvenile delinquents into upstanding and useful
community members. Trounstine and Waxler (2005) addressed their philosophy that
changing lives may seem like too big of an idea to actually be accomplished, but they
believe and have shown that taking part in this program is a great first step in the life
changing process. “CLTL contends that through literature we can more deeply
understand ourselves and our human condition” (Trounstine & Waxler, 2005, p.5). They
affirm that merely reading from the book list will not elicit the necessary reflection
needed or a change in lifestyle. The participant needs to become actively involved in
discussion and deep thinking about the themes and plot to access the full understanding
of themselves and of the human condition. Without reflection and effort, change cannot
be expected from the participants because this reformation will not occur without it. For
many readers, caregivers have taught them how to engage with a book and so they do this
already, but many criminals come from low-income families where story time was
superfluous, so they never gained the reading skills necessary to enjoy or interact with the
story (Trounstine & Waxler, 2005). The founders of CLTL could very much sum up their
program with this blanket statement: “Literature was empowering. Discussion enhanced
that power. The process of reading led to reflection. Reflection often led to change”
(Trounstine & Waxler, 2005, p. 6). Trounstine and Waxler’s (2005) research validates the ideas of my research goals.

**The Interviews**

The interviews with the girls yielded the best information. Even girls who were not readers indicated a connection to characters and certain behaviors from books they have read. One of the interview questions asked girls to explain the meaning of “typical” and to determine if they felt they and the characters in the books they read were typical. Responses on the meaning of typical varied greatly, but many responded that typical was what most of the other kids at school were doing. Many of the girls felt they were not typical, that they did not exactly fit-in at school. One girl responded that she did not know what typical was because everyone is different in her opinion. Half of the respondents did not believe they were typical, but the reason they believed or did not believe they were typical varied. Teens tend to have an unrealistic view of what their peers are doing, and thus they have a skewed view of what typical is, if there is such a thing. One of the most mature responses came from one of the younger participants who was asked what typical was. This girl realized that there is no way to generalize all of humankind, or particularly female-kind, into one mold because there are too many differences based on individual culture, religion, or locale. She was indicating that no one should say that because more people do or believe a particular thing that is better or worse than another person or group of people doing or believing something else.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

Children learn what it means to be male or female in a world which confirms the stereotypical beliefs of gender. This is accomplished through media, like folklore and anecdotes along with literature, television, and video games. The more realistic the portrayal of the media is the more the obsolete social norms are reinforced (Davies, 1989). Reinforcement of gender norms continues into adolescence and young adulthood, but it begins much earlier. Children as young as two years old make gendered decisions about the types of stories they would like to have read to them (Davies, 1989). Because of this truth, adults need to begin paying attention sooner to what is being presented to children.

Because of the aforementioned research, the idea of the study presented in this thesis is pertinent, but the design and number of participants in the study do not provide for certainty in the accuracy of the results. The results, however, should not be entirely discounted because they do indicate a change in self-esteem over time. These results indicate that the idea for the study is pertinent, but more research is needed to determine to what extent it is pertinent. Enlarging the sample size and revamping the research design would provide for more reliable results.
Conclusions

Based on the information in the literature review and discussion, further research is needed. Because adolescence is a time when multiple factors begin to collide creating struggling young women, more in-depth research is needed to sort through all of the implications of fiction on adolescence girls. According to Pipher (1994), “It’s a time of marked internal development and massive cultural indoctrination” (p. 26). What is known is that among personal thoughts, preferences, and culture, girls become young adults and that girls are influenced by what they read, but to what extent reading influences the reader is uncertain due to the over inundation of media on youth.

Implications

Further research is needed to determine the length of time needed to change the attitudes, behaviors, or beliefs of girls. A longitudinal study would better determine if what the girls are reading now, during adolescence, will still be affecting them as young adults and into adulthood. It would be important to determine if and how their reading patterns changed over the years. Researchers should ask: does what girls read at the ages of 12 to 17 influence what they will be reading at 20 or 30 years old? This question is important because if that is the case the books being presented to children in adolescence would carry even greater importance. For instance, do adolescent romance novel readers correlate to women who read Harlequin novels later in life, and if so, do these women have a different perspective on what is required to be in a relationship?
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND COMPLIED RESPONSES
1. How do the behaviors of the characters and action of the story make you feel about yourself?

The way that the behaviors of the characters and the action of the story influenced the interviewed teenagers in a variety of ways, but the most popular response was that it depended on what they were reading or the actions of the main character of the book. Some of the responses included being able to “step into their [the character’s] shoes” or attempting to mentally tell the character not to do something they are doing.

2. Do you feel you are typical?

The results were split. Six girls believed they were typical, while the other six did not believe they were typical, one even answered the question by asking, “What does typical mean?” A few were unsure but tried to explain why. One participant responded that she was closer to her family than other kids at school were to their families, thus making her not typical. Another student responded that each person is like a snowflake, everyone is different, so there are no truly normal people or outcasts.

3. Are the characters in the books you read about typical?

Most of the books the participants read identified that the characters in the books they read were typical. Only three students responded in the negative. Two other students included a statement about how it depended on the book, or they were not sure if the characters were normal.
4. How do you judge what is typical?

Students identified being typical as having everyday problems and doing what the group does most of the time. One student identified it as having virtue and doing what the majority of people would do in a particular situation. Having friends, being social, going to social events, having crushes and insecurities were identified as being typical behaviors for teenage girls. One girl indicated that, “no one’s life is perfect.” She went on to say that no one is weird, for each person has a different base personality which affects how she reacts to struggles in daily life; everyone has the same emotions, but what triggers those emotions may differ from person to person.

5. Do you feel the characters you read about make good or bad choices? Please explain.

The characters the girls read about make bad choices in the beginning but learn from their mistakes. One student suggested that when a character makes a bad choice that is what makes the book interesting to read.

6. Is your behavior similar to that of the characters?

The girls’ answers were split between yes and no responses. Those who felt like they could connect with the characters said it was because they were reading realism or the characters were about the same age or younger than they were. One girl responded that stories about younger characters are easier to relate to because she has “been there” and has experienced similar situations that arose as being of that younger age. She said that if
they were real teenagers that she could have met them in her life by now, which made the book more real.

7. How do you identify with the behaviors of the characters?
Responses varied on this questions. It truly shows that people are individuals because none of the participants answered in the same way. One girl declared that she likes when the characters take risks because then she can vicariously participate in situations that she would never actually want to do in real life. Another said they feel lost when reading because sometimes they can relate and other times they cannot relate at all. Yet another girl said, “[I] see myself as the character, usually as the main character, or their close friend.” Another girl explained that she connected to the novel through the emotions it made her feel, but she could not relate to novels about situations she had not experienced, like taking drugs or being in love.

8. Please identify some of the behaviors to which you can relate.
The behaviors to which the girls can relate were generally connected to emotions that accompany a variety of behaviors and activities. Common responses were dating, stress, arguments with friends, helping others, making the right choices, going to school, and peer pressure. One girl responded that when she “becomes” the character while reading, she can feel what the characters are feeling even if she had not experienced that particular experience: “If some killed their parent and see why they are angry and confused…you’re that person, so you feel what they feel.” On the contrary, another girl
responded that while reading *My Sister's Keeper* that she could not relate: “[I] couldn’t say if she made the right choice or wrong choice because I haven’t been in that situation.”
Survey

Directions: Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

Some may be challenging, but do your best to answer them as close to your true feelings and beliefs as possible. **Circle one response for each question which represents your answer.** Please choose only one response for the “Yes/No” questions. *Other questions will indicate if you may select more than one response.*

1. Identification Code____________________
2. Date____________________
3. Age___________School____________________________________
4. Do you choose to read fiction without being asked to by a parent, teacher or other adult? Yes No
5. How often do you read? (choose one)
   (a) 2 or more hours every day
   (b) 1 hour every day
   (c) less than an hour every day
   (d) a few times a week for more than an hour
   (e) a few times a week for less than an hour
   (f) less than one time per week
   (g) never

5. What was the last fiction book you read by choice?
   Title____________________
   Author (if known) ________________
   When did you complete it? __________
6. Are there any series books you enjoy? Yes No

7. Which ones? **Circle** all of the letters of the series books which you **enjoy** below.

8. **Underline** the series books in which you **have read** one or more books in the series.
(a) American Girl
(b) Babysitters Club
(c) Sweet Valley
(d) Nancy Drew
(e) Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants
(f) Princess Diaries
(g) Love Stories

9. **Circle** the following authors you **enjoy** reading.

10. **Underline** the authors who have written books you **have read**.

(a) Nicolas Sparks
(b) J.K. Rowling
(c) Dan Brown
(d) Danielle Steele
(e) Michael Crichton
(f) Stephen King
(g) Jodi Picoult
(h) Lurlene Mc Daniel
(i) Chris Crutcher
(j) Avi
(k) Lois Duncan
(l) Robert Cormier

(m) Dean Koontz
(n) Sherman Alexie
(o) Laurie Halse Anderson
(p) Sara Zarr
(q) Judy Bloom
(r) Walter Dean Meyers
(s) M.T. Anderson
(t) Nancy Farmer
(u) Karen Hesse
(v) Stephenie Meyer
(w) Other

11. I watch the following television shows (**Circle** the letters for all that apply).

(a) Gossip Girl
(b) 90210
(c) Greek
(d) Secret Life of the American Teenager
(e) House, MD
(f) Gilmore Girls
(g) The Office
(h) Heroes
(i) Smallville
(j) Lost
(k) American Idol

(l) So You Think You Can Dance?
(m) Dancing with the Stars
(n) Survivor
(o) Big Brother
(p) Real World
(q) The Mole
(r) Will and Grace
(s) Friends
(t) What I Like About You
(u) Lincoln Heights
(v) Kyle XY
(w) Sister, Sister
12. Circle the letter of the types of stories you prefer to read (Circle all that apply.).

(a) history      (l) mystery
(b) travel       (m) biography
(c) plays        (n) humor
(d) sports       (o) folktales
(e) science fiction (p) how-to books
(f) fantasy      (q) car stories
(g) adventure    (r) art books
(h) romance      (s) westerns
(i) detective stories (t) religious stories
(j) war stories  (u) supernatural occurrences
(k) poetry       (v) other_____________________

13. I feel intelligent.  
   Yes  No

   Yes  No

15. I feel I am an equal to the boys in my class.  
   Yes  No

16. I feel I am smarter than most boys in my grade.  
   Yes  No

17. All boys are good at sports.  
   Yes  No

18. I feel I am weak.  
   Yes  No

19. I eat when I am sad or angry or afraid.  
   Yes  No

20. I believe most boys get better grades than most girls do.  
   Yes  No

21. I fee confident enough to ask out a boy I like.  
   Yes  No

22. I believe boys should always pay on dates.  
   Yes  No

23. I like to read novels.  
   Yes  No

24. I can learn a foreign language easier than my classmates.  
   Yes  No

25. I feel confident reading my English textbook.  
   Yes  No
26. I feel I need to wear makeup to be beautiful. Yes No
27. All girls are good at sports. Yes No
28. I feel boys are more independent than I am. Yes No
29. Sometimes, I cut myself. Yes No
30. I believe most girls earn better grades than most boys do. Yes No
31. Girls can be football players. Yes No
32. If I didn’t get asked to the prom, I would still go. Yes No
33. I feel the boys in my class are smarter than I am. Yes No
34. I believe boys and girls are equally smart. Yes No
35. I feel I am too fat. Yes No
36. I feel strong (girl power). Yes No
37. I feel confident reading my math textbook. Yes No
38. I like to read nonfiction books. Yes No
39. I have stopped eating because I have wanted to lose weight. Yes No
40. If I didn’t get asked to the prom, I would ask the boy I like. Yes No
41. I have hurt myself in the past (on purpose). Yes No
42. I feel I am of a good body size. Yes No
43. More boys are better at sports than girls are. Yes No
44. I feel most boys are stronger than I am. Yes No
45. I feel confident in reading my science textbook. Yes No
46. I have purged (made myself vomit) after eating. Yes No
47. I believe girls can ask out a boy on a date. Yes No
48. Girls can be as good as boys at skateboarding. Yes No
49. I like to read newspapers. Yes No
50. I think the male body is better proportioned than the female body. Yes No
51. I believe I am athletic. Yes No
52. I feel I am too thin. Yes No
53. I feel I am independent (I make most of my own choices.). Yes No
54. I believe boys should always drive on a date. Yes No
55. Sometimes, I want to hurt others. Yes No
56. Girls can be wrestlers. Yes No
57. Boys can play softball. Yes  No
58. Men can stay home and take care of the children when the women are at work. Yes  No
59. Men should earn more money than women. Yes  No
60. It is okay for boys to play with dolls. Yes  No
61. I would not mind talking to you about my reading habits. Yes  No
62. Is there anything else about the content of your reading that you would like me to know?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Please note if any of the previous questions made you feel badly about yourself. If you feel the need to talk about what concerns you, please see your school counselor.