

YOUNG ADOLESCENT FEMALES'

CHOICE OF THRILLER

NOVELS

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Stephen King (1983), in his book Danse Macabre, states

Horror appeals to us because it says, in a symbolic way, things we would be afraid to say right out straight, with the bark still on; it offers us a chance to exercise (that's right; not exorcise but exercise) emotions which society demands we keep closely in hand (p.31).

The recent trend of thriller or horror novels has swept into the adolescent and pre-adolescent age groups. A review of articles indicates a resurgence of adult interest in horror or "tales of the crypt" and that phenomenon appears to have reached young adolescents. Horror stories are not a new occurrence, though, because they have existed since Horace Walpole wrote The Castle of Othanto in 1764 (Cerasini, 1989). Mary Shelley, with her novel Frankenstein (1919), influenced the creation of monsters and the beginning of an era dealing with creation, scientific experimentation, and exploration of characters.

Following the interest of monsters and building upon historical background, Bram Stoker wrote Dracula (1897). The real Dracula was Vlad IV, a fifteenth century Transylvanian who impaled 23,000 victims and supposedly drank his victim's blood or

dipped his bread into a bowl containing their blood. Radu Florescu, a Boston College historian, who for 27 years has studied the real Dracula, found the grotesque acts of Dracula revealing: 1) he cut off his wife's hands, 2) he boiled and skinned people and 3) he buried people alive (DiDomizio, 1994).

With the highly acclaimed horror film of Bram Stoker's Dracula in 1992, renewed interest in reading horror or thriller novels appeared to be on the rise. Vampires, werewolves, ghosts and witches emerged "in all their glory" with tales or stories built upon superstitions, real circumstances, or actual historical figures (Heller, 1987). Stephen King, with his confrontational novels, writes about the roots of discrimination which are simply roots of monstrosities spread deeply in our society. King speaks of oddities such as the 400-pound executive who buys two airline tickets so he may occupy two seats with the armrest removed or a "southpaw" who finds himself misplaced in a right-handed society, a reflection in the mirror of life (King, 1983). Society created these monsters!

Surprisingly, adolescents are becoming part of the adult horror cultural group. Although some of Stephen King's novels prove to be too long, sophisticated or difficult for youth, the young are acquiring their introduction to the fascination of horror through films or thriller novel series made especially for the teen-age audience (Lamanna, 1994). Book clubs such as Scholastic, Tab and Troll cater to the popular culture fad by providing the availability of The Fear Street series, Point Thrillers 1 and 2, Phantom Valley, Freddy Krueger and others (Kies, 1994). Fewer romantic novels appear on the monthly book order blanks; instead thrillers are encroaching the once-acclaimed romances

such as Sweet Valley High (Isaacs, 1992). Gender appears to make no difference in the ordering preference of the thriller books either.

Linda K. Christian-Smith (1987, 1990) evaluated how popular fiction can play an active role in the formation of gender identities. By offering adolescent females visions of what constitutes femininity, the romance novels gave the females a chance to engage with experiences they hoped to have, encouraged dreams of love as described in the novels, and actively critiqued the male and female relationships. The females wished for domestic femininity but were confronted with conflicts: the dominance of males and the subordination of females, the active versus passive roles of the female, and the "good" girl versus the "bad" girl images (Roman & Christian-Smith, 1988, p. 76-101). Mary Huntwork (1990) also found similar conflicts in her study of the *Sweet Valley High* series. The fantasy of the romance fiction influenced the "young women's self-conceptions through complex and often contradictory processes" (Christian-Smith, 1990).

However, the interest of females in popular culture films from novels by Stephen King, Bram Stoker, Anne Rice, V.C. Andrews, and renewed attention in Alfred Hitchcock's works acknowledge an interaction with horror themes and the fear instinct (Thompson, 1991). Rejection and exploration of reality are touched upon in the "unsaid" and "unseen" culture of universal status (Olsen, 1986). Linda K. Christian-Smith (1987) stated that females read romance novels and formed gender identities. However, limits were directed toward the heroine in the areas of power and authority which provide patriarchal/matriarchal battle for self development (Pace, 1992). In order to achieve an identity the females reading the romance novels formed a relationship with the characters (Kelly, 1991), became a part of reality with situations presented in the novels (Honaker, 1993),

and the type of community the fiction constructs. The shift of the female in novels showed a female with control, influence, and power, which was in direct opposition with what the authors wanted: a daring adventure hero. The female characters offered spiritual and emotional fulfillment and individual development instead. Similar concepts could be addressed for thriller novels.

Effects of Reading Horror Novels

My interest with the thriller novels became one of skepticism until I began reading various offerings from adolescent book clubs and students' solicited books from their personal libraries. As I read the horror genre, I found a world of shock: crimes with descriptive, exact and accurate details, graphic yet exciting scenes to mentally engage the youth in the thrills of the plot and the feelings of the characters, and even houses, not homes, of security filled with ghosts, vampires, monsters, and all types of evil forces (Christenbury, 1993). My interest became a concern when the American Federation of Teachers published an article dealing with the horror of R. L. Stine (West, 1995). Diana West voiced her uneasiness about the sensations exploited from youth, the pornographic implications of blunt "fixes" to plots, and the literary void of content. Perhaps the desensitization of the young adolescents in reading such formula books of non-enrichment and contemporary junk staples will cause another problem for teachers.

Today, mass media is a concern for the child's image of himself. Reading which is a continual process of identification presents many images, not always positive. The

bombardment of graphic scenes and descriptions from television, magazines, films, music and books only guide children to the adult world of maturity, identification and lasting impressions (Arbuthnot, 1966). The horrors of murders, famine, explosions, wars, deaths and other atrocities prevail daily. The real-life situations engulf the attention of the youth and a value system from which to choose: good versus evil. Even though horror emerges through all types of media, Sullivan and Donoho investigated the developmental reading interests of 79 gifted students from rural and urban Arkansas schools. They asked about pupils' leisure reading selections and the influential people who recommended books to be read. Different patterns of grade levels 7-12 were represented. Results indicated that horror fiction was the students' popular choice and Stephen King, their favorite fiction author; even Edgar Allan Poe was a favorite poet, although he is considered an author of classic works (Sullivan & Donoho, 1994).

Books encourage students to explore their own feelings, thoughts and emotions. The power of literature permits the reader and text to interact, but in a personal way. The individual unites everyday experiences with the text and draws upon identity, peer approval and interests (Rosenblatt, 1978). The adolescent seeks answers, insights and ego identity. Parent-adolescent relationships also appear to influence the exploration of self-identity (Papini, Seby, & Clark, 1989). Since adolescents seek independence, they distance themselves from their parent(s) and this severance appears to facilitate the identity exploration and formation. During the identity exploration and formation process, the adolescents learn to make their own decisions, alter their relationships with their parents by assuming equal status rather than dominance by the parents, and increase

interactions with peers (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). In a research study by Meeus and Dekovic (1995) four age groups (1,249 males and 1,450 females) were given identity questionnaires which broke down into three categories: relational, school and occupational identity. Age groups were: group 1, 12-14; group 2, 15-17; group 3, 18-20; and group 4, 21-24. Each category addressed commitment and exploration. Results indicated that for females relational identity is more important than school or work identity in all age groups. "Girls base their self-definition more on relationships, as do late adolescents" (p. 942). Also, peers do replace parents as important social support for development or relational identity.

Because the once two-parent family is not a traditional picture, the one-parent head must deal with emotional, material, and social problems of the adolescent, violence included (Wilson, 1995). The external forces of the world create an inner loss for the adolescent; striving for independence replaces the tie to parent(s) and focuses on "I" (Dalsimer, 1985). Choices of what friends to have, books to read and relationships may change and characterize the period of upheaval and turmoil. The female's search for her "self" is through realization, exploration and compensation. Through bibliotherapy, Henry Olsen suggests that adolescents have an opportunity to identify a problem, as well as to develop individual self-concept (Olsen, 1975). Reading about a problem and understanding possible ways to find a solution may help teens seek similar help or answers to questions they might have.

The Young Adult (YA) novels do well by being brief and simple, yet direct and honest. The struggles of a teen's life are focused on themes such as death or sports (Small, 1992).

However, the quality of the YA books is diverse and the thriller novels considered those of questionable literary value. Cossette Kies indicates horror series often exhibit "poor writing, cardboard characters, stupid dialogue and gross details," as well as fairly low low reading levels (Kies, 1984, p. 234). Yet, even good readers read the thriller novels. The popularity of the horror genre can be of good quality if the contents would improve. Meanwhile, the thrillers keep being published and new authors added to the familiar list of "hot" names. Publishers and authors offer mass quantities of thriller books that follow formula plots, fill money coffers, and are of questionable literary quality.

Female Roles in Adolescent Fiction

A review of the literature about what topics adolescent novels encompass with the female role reveals the following: the female is usually weak, submissive, a "good" girl, one caught in a traditional sexual role and searching for identity (Christian, 1984). Even in European fairytales, the females are stereotyped as passive, dependent, and helpless (Rutherberg, 1990; Serafimidis, 1994). In most cases daughters were supposed to shape themselves as forgiving, angelic, emotional beings like their mothers (Agee, 1993). The female in the fifties was portrayed as a helpless maiden who chased after her love and pined if rejected. In the eighties the female is seen as an independent, educated and an equal to the male counterpart; she is honest, courageous, faithful, but not necessarily beautiful. The male calls this period the "Woman-the-Enemy" or male dread era since the female was not subservient or dependent upon him (Fonseca, 1993). The readers see a

fantasy of themselves—having it all: a job, relationship, and the perfect man (Brown, 1989). Instead of being satisfied with traditionalism, adolescent females appear to seek something else in thriller novels—identity (Monseau, 1994). Family problems—divorce, separation, and desertion—can be entwined in the horror stories (Gifford, 1980). Characters leave home in order to attain control—of their lives, as well as others (Ward, 1983).

In search of control, female adolescents as part of a social trend seek a way to cope with life's horrors—home's vulnerability (place where we allow our guard to "take a rest"), timelessness and fear of the unknown (King, 1983, p. 266). For these females Sala (1993) writes stories with weird cartoons which contain forbidden experiments, vampires, grotesque scenes, and secret organizations and then utilizes a masked detective to solve cryptic cases. Hopelessness is tossed aside and creepiness becomes the genre. In fact, Cerasini (1989) states that "splatterpunk horror" is evident. ("Splatterpunk horror" is graphic, explicit and contains excessive amounts of bloodshed and gore.). King writes of three levels of horror: 1) terror, that which is unpleasant speculation and causes one to ask what might have happened, 2) horror, that which invites a physical reaction and is the epitome of terror; it goes beyond reality and 3) revulsion, the monstrosity that contains splatterpunk, gore, and "gross-out" material (King, 1983, p. 25). As Tom Savini (1995) has stated at a Conjuraton VI meeting, "the ultimate high is the grand illusion, the dream of a magic show in its finest."

Within the realms of home, the young females seek refuge and solice in the readings of thriller novels. Research findings of Christian-Smith (1988) reveal more: gender

discrimination or inequities, as well as construction of young females' personal identities (Airey, 1994). In Airey's research of fifteen-year old females, she found that dilemmas encountered by females from generations before are still prevalent in today's society: the double standard, fear of a bad reputation and unfair grounds for bargaining with regard to sex. The conclusion was that a dichotomy exists between discourse for self and other, an identity crisis. Lesko (1988) also compiled data about the ways in which young females formed personal identities. However, she drew upon the values and expectations of a Catholic high school (St. Anne) for her research. The "rich and populars" (those who participate in everything), "burn-outs," "apathetics" (of which many subgroups consisted), and "outcasts" were a structure built within the students' environment, the school. The Catholic school with its rituals (i.e. homecoming rally and pep assembly) illustrated the site "of identity-creation, as well as of training and competition..." (p. 147).

Identity Construction

As Simone de Beauvoir stated, "one is not born a woman, but rather, becomes one" (1973, p. 301). This view of femininity indicates that a female is constructed under cultural and political laws which establish, regulate, and shape the self. The Other, woman, is compared to man. However, man is the predominant individual with power and position and feminists look at the patriarchal system with its certain privileges and assertive powers as sending a message of inferiority to females. Rousseau states that woman's purpose in life is to counsel, console, lead and make life pleasant for man (in

Lerner, 1993). Woman is to be content to learn "her duties" and to carry them out cheerfully. Daly (1978) states that this concept is the prevailing religion of our world. The submission to the patriarchal demands, however, can create conflict in identity formation (Gilligan, Ward & Taylor, 1988). The idea that "once a girl, always a girl" (von Franz, 1975, p. 206) sends a message that sex determines the "self-identity" which is based upon social attitudes, political pressures, and principles of conformity. Females will always be in baby pinks because society demands certain attributes and "femaleness." The maternal aspects of females, dependency upon the strong patriarch model, sexual relationships and educational tracking create the fallacy that females can only be what Man or society wishes.

The adolescents' socioeconomic status plays an important role in the formation of identity also. The students are aware of the "haves" and the "have nots" and use the values which influenced them in shaping their "selves" but not shaping their lives (Pearlman, 1995). Society expects certain traits and particular roles to be played by the females. The females realize what is expected of them and what demands are placed upon them to fit to the mold created by society. The quest for being individual and unique is a search for "self." The image painted of the female is a clone of many others who have come before her and even after her. Society's values do not form the females' lives but make an impact upon their identity formation. The young adolescents wish to be a part of the postmodern world where conformity is muted and meanings "are ours as opposed to theirs" (Fiske, 1992).

According to Chodorow (1978), identity for the individual is masked through child-centered philosophy which actually protects class distinction, social order, and bureaucracy. Females are immersed in a technological society but are expected to play the roles society perceives. However, the individual reaches an understanding of "self identity" and permits an analysis of practices imposed upon him/her by society (Annandale, 1994).

Economic hardship, such as low income, is one factor which affects "self" because relationships with others impose restrictions which affect self-esteem, usually negatively (Camilla, Jacques & Clark-Tempers, 1995). Those who "did not have" were made to feel inferior or of another "peck-order" group. The distinguishing money factor emphasized the social order and created the positive or negative effects of self-esteem. Even fear, alienation, and dissolution of personality can break down the "self" (Ahern, 1974). It is through fear, terror and horror that emotions arouse strong feelings and cause one to look at society and its beliefs. The horror or thriller fiction is a mirror world which reflects a contradiction of society's values and assumptions; woman becomes an impersonal being seeking her identity in the world around her (Bleiler, 1983). The adolescent, living in a traumatic stage of maturation, seeks the culture of "others" and the escape from expected societal values (Twitchell, 1992). The horror myths present entry, not escape, into the subconscious world of imagery, the uncanny, powerful feelings and distortions of real life (Twitchell, 1985). Terror links to the loss of self and horror withers the self into "its own bloodstream—choked by alien salts" (Messent, 1981). The adolescent gazes upon the mirror seen at an odd angle and looks upon a true reflection and new perspective of life

(MacAndrew, 1979). Life is a haphazard presentation of dreams and inner self; life is not what it appears to be. The perceptions through which one has lived can be reshaped by new experiences and one's continuing existence. The process impacts lives just as novels or texts reshape perceptions of life through descriptions. The unconscious mind is the "self" which becomes a threat to society's daily routine.

... the entire field of horror and the supernatural is a kind of filter screen between the conscious and the subconscious; horror fiction is like a central subway system in the human psyche between the blue line of what we can safely internalize and the red line of what we need to get rid of in some way or another. (King, 1979, p. xxii)

Popular culture, "the art of making do with what is available" is a part of the social, political and economic system (Fiske, 1992, p. 15). The social values, fads and trends disappear as quickly as they appear. "What is popular today will not be popular tomorrow" (Fiske, 1992, p. 130). The romance novels read by females during the last decade are no longer "hot" but the thrillers or chillers are. What causes this sudden interest?

If one reflects upon the film industry, novels and other media presentations, life is seen through the vulgarities of adult life by language and print. The commodities produced, circulated and sold to the consumer are used to construct meanings of self, social identity and social relations (Fiske, 1992). The surge of vampire-mania, the "vamp" look (black lipstick, dark hair, black nail polish and white or pale powdered faces), songs, monster toys and horror movies and novels became fashionable. What the system provides are industrial, cultural commodities which show a struggle process -

social implications, one's search for personhood through identity, social order and relations to texts.

Horror in Popular Culture

Reaction or action to the horror genre is seen with the many choices available to adults and teens. Popular culture utilizes horror to reveal illusions of the bizarre and the abnormal. "Tales of the Crypt," originally from comic books of the fifties, appears on television, in teens' thriller books (Courtney, 1995) and in messages relayed through songs such as *Bloodletting* by Concrete Blond or *Thriller* by Michael Jackson. The coming of monsters is echoed in the rap performed by Vincent Price in the *Thriller* song:

Darkness falls across the land
The midnite hour is close at hand
Creatures crawl in search of blood
To terrorize y' owls neighborhood
And whosoever shall be found
Without the soul for getting down
Must stand and face the hounds of hell
And rot inside a corpse's shell
The foulest stench is in the air
The funk of forty thousand years
And grizzly ghouls from every tomb
Are closing in to seal your doom

And though you fight to stay alive

Your body starts to shiver

For no mere mortal can resist

The evil of the thriller. (Jackson, 1982)

The monsters lurk in the merchandizing of commodities to lure the public to its world of power plays—those of subcultures (nonconformists versus conformists and have's versus have-not's) and social differences. The dreams, imaginations, nightmares and escape mechanisms become realities instead of fantasies. What do teens "see" in the monster or thriller themes which appear to be adult oriented topics considered taboo? Do they seek acceptance as "almost adults" or do they seek to create identities with disregard to society's rules? Are they "in" or "out"? The pleasures appear to be ones of contradiction and represent the oppressed.

The perceptions through which one has lived can be reshaped by new experiences and one's continuing existence. The process impacts lives just as novels or texts reshape perceptions of life through descriptions. Language then becomes the vehicle to form meaning from the lived experiences. It becomes home for communication.

Language in Horror Novels

The language shapes our consciousness and allows our perceptions of the lifeworld to reshape our realities and fantasies. Hermeneutics, the study of interpretation, interacts with the individual and the world-in-text. The language in horror novels marginalizes

females (Martel & Peterat, 1994), segregates races (Castenell & Pinar, 1993) and designates power structures (McLaren, 1991). It offers complexities, interwoven relationships and constructions by the reader, not the author (Fiske, 1992). Although the reader of a novel is given details about characters' feelings and motivations, the texts reveal hidden truths and acknowledge social relevances. "The meaning of a text is the possible and actual ground of thought and action; it is what the reader makes out of what she finds when she reads. Meaning in this sense is not in the text" (Pinar, et.al., 1995, p. 436). The relationship between the reader and the text is an active and engaged process; it is a being-in-the-world with others, phenomenologically (Pinar, et.al., 1995). It is the reader who chooses to bring back meanings and interpretations from the world of the text.

However, understanding how texts make meanings requires a methodology which allows for an inquiry process. Utilizing semiotics, a science devoted to signs, Ferdinand de Saussure worked with signs as a part of the language system (Wyschagrad, et.al., 1989). Each verbal sign is combined into two elements: the signifier (letters and words of written or spoken language) and the signified (the concepts or meanings which the signifiers represent). The signified is not an object but a mental representation of the thing (Barthes, 1968). The classification of the signifiers is merely the structuralization of the language. The classified units are then placed in syntagmatic relations or chains according to rules. Because a word can be exchanged for an idea or compared with other words, the phenomenon of signification and value (of words) leads to the production of meaning (Barthes, 1968).

Within that meaning are two planes: syntagms, which are combinations of signs, associations and groups united by classifications, and paradigms, which are relationships that determine the rules for selection of particular words or vocabulary (Barthes, 1968). Meaning is the difference between the linguistic chains of signifiers and is constituted by the difference between the chains. The structuralism denies that any human ever goes beyond language to get at the thing itself. "Signifiers refer to signifieds—not to things" (Wyschagrad, et.al., 1989, p.11-12). The linguistic paradigm (or set of limits) is also embraced by Lacan. Lacan (in Muller & Richardson, 1982) drew upon Saussure and made a distinction between speech (parole) and language (langue). Language is a synchronic ("seen all at once") structure which governs patterns of linguistic meaning. These units of meaning could be in combination through sequential relationships or by selection or displacement in which meaning occurs by mutual exclusion.

All language has an effect, yet a difference exists between what the speaker/reader means and what the speaker's/reader's words mean. The signifiers produce signification (meaning) and that meaning is constructed retroactively (Sarup, 1992). For example, "You're saying this, but what are you telling me?" (Sarup, 1992, p. 90). Words such as teacher, woman and girl have meanings but are constructed with other words and in varying contexts. Therefore, the differences in language are illustrated by two meanings: a surface or literal meaning and an underlying or implied meaning.

The semiotic structures allow for communication and conveyence of meanings. Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadman and Paul Ricoeur place the reader, observer or interpreter in the center of understanding conversation or dialogue with a text. By

communicating with texts, one deals with the nature of "being" and "knowing" (Doll, 1993). Heidegger explains this conversing as active immersion in the lifeworld; "it is existence within a culture bounded by history and language, which shapes us as much as we shape it" (Heidegger in Doll, 1993, p. 150).

According to Lacan (in Sarup, 1992) language is one which many interpretations appear; it is an uninterrupted language structure with an orderly system that allows for changes of varied readings and readings of readings. Language follows a systematic format, yet provides various interpretations and meanings from a single strand of words. Printed words on a page reveal a message that can be interpreted by the reader who brings prior knowledge and experiences to the reading experience. Obvious messages are read but personal experiences bring other meanings to the text. Meaning becomes an end product of semiosis where readers project their personal meanings into the texts as reflections of their language systems (Sless, 1986) and lives.

Denotation and connotation become the meanings of language which play upon external and interpretative contradictions. Values and relationships are contained in the texts; therefore, reality is created through information operating within cultural, popular codes which then shape behavior (Silverman, 1983). Unconsciously people misinterpret, perceive, generalize, and deal with the world (Berger, 1984).

Through contrasts or differences, changes in meaning, ambiguity or multiple meanings complicate or confuse issues too. Such is the case of thriller novels. The interpretations vary according to the codes, connections between codes in the texts, as well as the analyzing of meanings. Just as "comics are an important and significant means toward

understanding American character and culture" (Berger, 1984, p. 56), so are thriller novels.

Identity (personal, national, gender or race) is also connected to signs and codes. The text reveals codes through individuals and illustrates the political, social and economic viewpoints of the world that are imposed on the reader through popular literature. The phenomenon of the thriller novel lures the youth to look at a world in a different light: meanings are created and objectified by the process of projecting knowledge and expectations. What is produced or shared becomes the view of reality for the reader.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess why young adolescent females read thriller novels and what effect do the thriller novels have upon the construction of the young adolescent females' identities. Because of the trend of adolescents' reading romance, adventure and animal stories to *Dungeons and Dragons*, Tolkien and C.S. Lewis novels and now thriller books, the nonviolent scene is turning into a gruesome crime or sensationalized writing marketed to the youth of today. Since reading is an intimate act which allows one to turn the language into a reality of his or her own and to experience a world in which the reader is in charge, books are influential to home life (Chambers, 1993). "Every story, every poem, every piece of literary writing carries a message, even if the writer doesn't know it's there. All works of literature are moral systems." (Chambers, 1993, p.12). I believe that the literature adolescents read for pleasure is a

search for the realities of their world, currently one filled with violence, gruesome and graphic details not found or described in the literary classics or anthologies found in the classroom. The easy reading, short lengths, enticing covers and marketing gimmicks add to the excitement of reading the next episode in the series of books written by the author. However, teachers and parents are warned: "The *Fear Street* series involves teen-agers mixed with murder and mayhem." (Donahue, 1995, p. 6). Even Radecki stated:

In the past 20 years violent books have been more intensely sadistic and gruesome than anything ever making the bestseller list in American history. Satan and horror themes have become commonplace after being non-existent before the 1910's. It is clear that modern readers of popular fiction are entertaining themselves with more hate-filled, sadistic and gruesome material than any previous generation of human beings in world history. (Radecki, 1988, p.3)

To the adults who write the thriller novels, the goal is marketing to a powerful and legitimate consumer group which has an annual combined income of nearly \$15 billion, \$11 billion of which they spend on food, beverages and play items; the youth influence the more than \$160 billion of the household budget (Liebeck, 1994). Despite the money and selling potential of adolescents, marketers need to be aware that they are treating those future workers as half-size adults (Kim, 1994). The child disappears and youth is lost to early adulthood.

A concern is that the themes of horror are nothing more than adult topics stated in simpler terms. As long as children and adults behave alike, fewer topics will be unfit or taboo for society to leave for those later years; everything goes (Meyrowitz, 1987). With

the school boards concerned with book banning of classic books, the contemporary thriller novels focus on real life issues—violence, divorce, single-parent homes, step-children, and all which affect an adolescent who has enough trouble "finding herself" (Louie & Louie, 1992). This researcher sought to discover if the thriller themes have an effect or play a key role upon adolescent females' femininity or place in the world, regarding sexuality, work, power, and violence or abuse.

As Christian-Smith (1990) found in her study, adolescent romance fiction allowed females the chance to escape from the pressures of home, school and an uncertain future. Exploration, experimentation, autonomy and confusion are part of that formation process (Stringer, 1994). Seeking to find selfhood, adolescent females look for a role model, not necessarily a parent (Crago, 1993). Wishing to be recognized and accepted, adolescent females may mimic heroines whom they have read about in novels, seen on television or in the movies or successful persons from real life ("Learning to Know Ourselves", 1994). Seeking an individual identity, the adolescent female is aware of the world around her and she explores the new world of popular culture which offers alienation from traditional values. Chaos threatens her visions for the future, but she realizes that the changes occurring within her provide a root in her challenge to discover her "self" (Vogel & Creadick, 1993). By reading novels, the young adolescent female chooses to expand her world into understanding the complexity of a sexist, patriarchal realm. Most novels are written in one voice (a tribute to "greatness" and literary value) and usually shown through one perspective—that of a white and usually male (Obbink, 1992).

D'Angelo (1989) analyzed ten adolescent post-1980 novels and found that primary female characters attempted tasks of practical and abstract skills which demonstrated future planning. Since the young adult novel was introduced, the age of the main character and the reader is important to the themes and characterizations presented. In post-1980 novels, adolescent females showed independence and strength; they were able to deal with a crisis in a mature manner and become wiser for their efforts. The tasks emphasized were: 1) achieving economic independence, 2) selecting and preparing for an occupation, 3) preparing for marriage and family life, 4) developing intellectual skills, 5) desiring socially responsible behavior and 6) gaining values and ethics (Havighurst, 1952). The strong, primary role models in the young adult novels provide positive images for the period of life which begins with puberty and seeks self identity. Because adolescent females search for understanding of their identities and changing values, literature fulfills the need (Kaplan, 1984). In the postmodern society the search for "self" is conceived by language discourse as read in literature and has an effect upon identity (Oseen, 1993). The novels' influence on the females may be positive or negative and may stress identification or rejection of oneself. Living in postmodern times which deal with multiple interpretations, orderly disorder, creation and transformation gives a different perspective on characters and their thoughts. Since themes and characters in contemporary novels provide an impact on adolescent females' thoughts, images, and behavior (Jenkinson, 1987), what influence do thriller novels have? I attempted to discover adolescent females' identity formations portrayed within the plots presented in thriller novels.

Research Questions

- Why do young adolescent females read thriller novels?
- What meaning can be attached to the plots presented in thriller novels?
- How do the young adolescent females' interpretation of the thriller novels influence their identity formation?

Summary

Horror is an old genre, but the thriller novels aimed at young adolescents is a new market for selling thriller books. With the fad of horror in songs, videos, films and even makeup, popular culture includes the numerous thriller novels to the list of solicited merchandise. The vulgar, demeaning language aimed at females from the movies and adult market appear in quick-fix plots and poor literary content of the adolescent thriller novels.

The female seen as a weak, submissive person who is abused and a victim in thriller fiction seeks to find her "self" in the world of literature. The young adolescent females display an interest in the thriller novels which offer escape and excitement. Leaving a world filled with social values, rules and pressures, the females enter a world of experimentation, exploration and autonomy. Seeking an identity in a Man's world, the females face society's demands and values seen in the horror genre. The females'

interpretation of what she finds is her perspective of "being in the world" and "being of the world" (van Manen, 1984).

Assumptions

- 1) Young adolescent girls are seen in submissive and traditional roles in thriller novels.
- 2) Thriller novels offer something to their female readers.
- 3) The adolescent female reader is offered role models and real-life situations through literature from which she can shape and form her identity.

Definition of Terms

In this study an interpretation of terms was provided by implementation of the following definitions:

1. **terror**—a cause of anxiety; an unpleasant speculation
2. **horror**—anything which causes a physical reaction and is of intense or extreme apprehension; goes beyond reality
3. **revulsion**—that which disgusts or creates a strong reaction of distaste
4. **thriller novel**—a literary work which causes one to experience sudden feelings of excitement, such as shivering, trembling, and tingling
5. **tales of the crypt**—narratives or stories based upon some real or imaginary events dealing with death and burial places

6. identity formation—feminist theory which incorporates race, gender, class and social values in the construction of one's "self" or individuality

Scope and Limitations

The scope of the study was to focus on current adult horror plots presented in adolescent thriller novels which are being published in series in astounding numbers. Based upon the research done by Christian-Smith (1988), Lesko (1988) and Sarland (1994a & b), who interviewed middle school students about their feelings in reading *Point Horror* books, the researcher explored the plots divulged in thriller novels (Appendix A). Then the researcher questioned adolescent females as to why they read such novels and what effects they have upon their construction of identity or self.

This study was limited to novels in written text. Horror films and television programs dealing with the supernatural and unknown are two examples of media which reveal feminine popular culture issues and choices to readers. To include those media avenues would have made the study very lengthy and time consuming.

Another limitation was the number of new series "popping up" as consumer marketing strategies focus on big business. The vast numbers of series made it impossible to focus upon all series since similar types continue being published.

Organization of Study

This study has five chapters. Chapter I is an introduction of the study. In it are stated the background, purpose of the study, assumptions, guiding questions of the research, definition of terms, and scope and limitations.

Chapter II contains a review of literature related to feminine identity formation, marketing techniques, and adult and adolescent horror plots and topics. Excerpts from novels are included.

Chapter III is a presentation of the methodology used in the qualitative study. An initial survey and interview form which were used for data gathering analysis are described.

Chapter IV is a presentation of the results which were determined by analysis of the data provided through interviews, taped sessions and notes. The general survey and interview results are tabulated in three tables which are included in the chapter. A summary of the results is given also.

Chapter V contains the conclusions of the study and suggestions for further research. References and appendices follow.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Why Read Horror?

John Wooley defines horror as "fear fused with wonder. This is a particularly human emotion" (1996, p.1). With such fear is a little violence which creates horror and arouses human's weakest emotions. "Horror is meant to scare" (Kies, 1995, p. 143). Fear, fright, terror, horror—all emotions which may vary in intensity but are universally known. However, what may be feared by one person may not be feared by another. Horror is about Good versus Evil; it's a way of explaining reality and logic yet manipulating emotions and disruptions in our lives (Seldman, 1992). Horror is a fact of life; it is ordinary people confronting extraordinary threats (Masterton, 1994). The fear of helplessness, death, betrayal and the unknown—makes us anticipate the worst psychological catastrophe. It can be a pleasure or fun; it can be humorous. Yet it can also be dreaded (Masterton, 1987).

With such a variance of feelings, why would anyone want to read horror novels? To be entertained is one answer. To escape from reality is another reply. The local and national news reports flash the latest crimes, display graphic gore and release details of

murders, terrorists, and other crimes. The portraits of depravity leave us tense, distraught, and uneasy because the stories are real. The news is not an emotional outlet; it does not provide relief (Koontz & Karlson, 1993). Horror surrounds our daily lives but does not end. Horror films, literature and songs provide real-life settings, credible characters, reflections of one's own anxieties and social and political issues (Masterton, 1991). The imagination creates the scenes and engages the characters in scenarios which are hideous or too frightening to believe. The sudden shocks and surprises make the reader want not to believe that what is happening could happen. The fear of brooding evil and the believable characters in a horrific situation add to the meaningful journey into the realm of the unexpected. An escape to the world of fear allows for abnormality, superficiality and uncontrollability (Bowden, 1976). The fears are numerous and diverse for the reader who wishes to wander in a new lifeworld (Greene, 1973).

Real life is frightening! Serial killers such as John Wayne Gacy who murdered 33 young men and boys and buried their bodies under the house illustrate the grim, violent side of reality (Tanner, 1994). Just as violent are gangs that are vicious and attack anyone who interferes with their illegal drug trade and lethal weapons ("American gangs," 1994). Even malls are no sanctuary for safety: car thefts, vandalism, drug dealings on telephones, and customer attacks are common, daily occurrences in places like Los Angeles and Chicago (Hazel, 1992). The dead are even targets for robbery: in Haiti thieves bash in above-ground tombs to attempt to confiscate jewelry on the corpses and the iron and bronze handles of the coffins. The skeletons or corpses are left scattered ("Rampant Grave Robbing," 1994). The dead aren't safe either!

Violence takes its toll upon youth today, also. Almost one out of ten schoolchildren said they had been shot at some time in their lives ("Violence," 1993). Who would do such a thing, you ask? What do you call the 39 schoolboys in Kenya who raped and murdered their classmates (Chua-Eoan, 1991)? Monsters of our society is the reply.

The horrors which are seen create fear, but so many creep upon us it's scary. Think of the "flesh-eating" bacterium streptococcus A and HIV. The threat of viral warfare and plague are just as apparent (Goldman, 1995). A world filled with nightmares, monsters, death and unknown menaces is humanity's horror.

Why, then, do people and particularly adolescents read thriller or horror novels? "It's fun to be frightened for a moment. The unsettling horrifying instant is a magnificent, electric jolt from the predictable present" (Cooper, 1992, p. 340). The escape from the everyday chores, jobs, stress and grief is not complicated by the pains and ills of reality. The universally accepted feature of childhood is that "horror myths prepare us for adulthood" (Twitchell, 1987, p.145-146). The childhood fears of abandonment, darkness, helplessness, pain, betrayal, mockery, death and monsters are real (Barron, 1990; Kelly, 1991). Of course not all are escaping reality; some are fascinated with the terror. It may reflect social and aesthetic values, upheaval in power, disrespect for adults and economic implications. "Horror is sometimes the only way of reacting to the world around us" (Newman, 1994, p. 32).

The true appeal to the horror genre remains elusive. Usually horror fiction ends with a note of hope and evil is overcome by good. The concerns of where our environment can lead us to is frightening. Why one chooses to read horror fiction is a matter of taste.

Originally aimed for the adult market, horror novels now target young adolescents. The gruesome covers which once gleamed on adult horror books now sport the teen books. The "splatterpunk" gore and grisly blood scenes appear to be the rage for YA horror series. Kids like the thrillers, "knife-in-the-birthday-cake " package (Killheffer, 1993) and shock values. Horror is the current mainstay of YA books which are aimed also at middle graders, students in fifth through eighth grades. The creepy stories have twists, surprises and unexpected details. Catchy titles, gleaming covers and reasonable prices keep students buying, as well as reading.

Identity Formation

It is through reading that readers relieve themselves of fantasies and leave the real world. Through personal interpretations of what is read, the contents reveal and mask any unconscious conflicts or associations. The reading act involves and allows minds to be transformed into another world, leaving burdens behind and searching for a place or identity in the story (Erlich, 1975). In the imaginary world changing attitudes and interpretations develop within the mind of the reader (Rosen, 1995). Associations or identification with groups or characters in the thriller novels aid in the exploration or search for "self" or identity.

Critical feminists, such as Lesko (1988) and Christian-Smith (1990), explored gender socialization of feminine groups and subgroups, as well as identity formation. Hidden messages and the effects of specific social, economic, and political relations can aid in the

construction of self identity with lowered self-esteem for females (Martusewicz & Reynolds, 1994). For example, in China the birth of a male has been considered "a great happiness" but the birth of a female, "a small happiness" (Jones, 1995, p. 118). Is the message apparent?

However, in adolescent thriller novels females escape the control of the authorities and resist the practice of making everyone the same—stripping "their ethnicity, race, and sex"—thus denying their self identity (Aronowitz in Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 200). Because of patriarchal control the female is seen largely excluded from historical and moral channels and, therefore, seeks refuge in literature. The female voice is absent from many representations of being a role model for the world, and through literature the male voice dominates the narratives. The females' voices are not heard in the thriller novels but crushed by the male's overpowering push to be leader. "Women are objects of desire/exchange/conflicts" and only assume the male personae (Aronowitz, p. 210). This becomes a part of popular culture, "the art of making do with what is available" (de Certeau in Fiske, 1989, p. 15). Young females read to secure a source of pleasure and ultimate freedom. Barthes states that "the reader at the moment of reading loses the separate identities and becomes a new personality that is individually theirs and then challenges context and meaning" (in Fiske, 1989, p.51). Adolescent females can lose themselves in the thrillers and become "new" identities which defy society's rules and conformities. With the pleasures of identification "with characters and situations and remaking of the text in fantasy", the reader creates a relationship with the Other (Christian-Smith, 1990, p. 142).

Only when there is an Other can you know who you are ...

And there is no identity...without the dialogic relationship to the Other.

The Other is not outside, but also inside the Self, the identity

... Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself. (Hall in Giroux, 1994, p. 59)

The inclusion of popular culture in young females' lives and their readings in existing curricular structures impact their identity formations, as well as resistances and subjectivities (Reynolds, 1992). Adolescent females read thriller novels as part of a fad or trend and either accept or reject what is offered in the readings or plots. Within the literary readings for pleasure, escape and fantasy young females seek the contradictory position of becoming adults "in chronology, biology, and appetites" but still remaining adolescents in structural values, power and autonomy (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p.137).

Theories about self (self-esteem, self-identity, self-worth and self-image) include the developmental aspect. Levinson (1978) and Freud (in von Franz, 1975) categorized stages of development while Bernard (in von Franz, 1975) attributed two spheres: that of woman and man. The two spheres were intersected so that some qualities of self identification were found in both men and women: conformity and socialization. Females were concerned with personal relations, allowed emotions to override reason, emphasized relationships as more important than understanding and planning for control of external forces and fit into particular fields of the job market. Males, on the other hand, were concerned with tasks, achievement, control of the external environment, individualism, and affective neutrality. Therefore, males fit into particular jobs because of their

characteristics. Their "self" was designated by the sphere and attributes qualified by the given concepts.

However, Jung searches the awareness features dealing with relations between individual consciousness and unconsciousness (Hoelscher, 1985). These awareness features are self-knowledge and knowledge of things created. The self is actually an "illumination of the mirrored ego" which loses itself in numerous images (von Franz, 1975, p. 176); it allows the self to make collective, conscious identity with perceptual and attitudinal reflections. The adolescent female sees her "self" reflected in the mirror and realizes her own image is what she perceives as one which has been created by society's unwritten laws. Unconsciously, she strives to find truths about herself and to become an identity within her realm. She rejects the image that society wants and seeks her own reflection of "femaleness."

A feminist theorist, Grumet (in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995) derives the basis of self-formation as relationships. She bases it upon Lacan: language is always the "other" and that at the basis of self-formation is an estrangement — the other, a "not-self" (1995, p. 378).

The desire for the other is one of grasping power, which is the language and its order. The gratification of acquiring the power needed to find one's "self" goes unfulfilled. That knowledge becomes an understanding that the self is a "knower-of-the-world" (Grumet, 1992, p. 30). The self establishes a link to the world through three "selves": public, private and secret. In the public eye, self-identity is linked to social structures of economic, religious and political activities. The private self refers to close relationships to

peers, friends and family. The most intimate, secluded, mysterious and imaginative is the secret self (Roach-Higgins, 1995). This composite contributes to identity and sense of self. The sense of self and individuality are constituted by the language, which is the Other that "knows" (Mellard, 1991). The unconscious is formed by the No! which is dictated by the male voice heard in the patriarchal language of literature. Taubman (1993) explains that identity emanates through language and relationships of words; the words become vehicles of meaning, knowledge and understanding which involve "self" to become a part of the world. Because the world, its meaning and reality are exemplified through language, the "Other" knows the rules, systems and transformations which affect the unconscious "self." The male voice is heard in thriller novels and commands the literary outcomes of the female through systematic language which manipulates words and alters or changes meanings to allow for conformity to society's order. For protection of her identity, the female only displays her public "self," conceals her private "self" but is not eager to reveal her unconscious "I."

Mann (1994) sees the self as part of the quantum (a mechanical perspective): not "with the world, but also 'of it." The self is actually a participant-observer in the universe. As part of three dimensions, reflexivity, bodiness, and time, the self is the union of subject and object. Reflexivity is the body and mind which envelop feelings in the conscious and are constantly changing because of time and the changing self. Thus, the female search for self blossoms in dimensions of social relations and intertwines with leaves of life (Hoffman, 1994). Butler (1990) states that identity involves socially instituted norms and is assured of self or personhood through sex, gender, and sexuality. For females, the drive

for self-knowledge is more than a search for "I"; it is a way to exorcise the canonization of male texts and marginalization of females into oppressed silence (Obbink, 1992).

Thriller novels exemplify the cultural values and norms of the times.

Marketing

The publishing industry, realizing the market and adolescent interests, conducts massive marketing strategies to gain access to develop series which deal with "pop life" (Roman and Christian-Smith, 1988). The book trade is part of the communication business which, in turn, is part of the larger scope, capitalism (Rosen, 1995). Romance novels were the example which showed the surge of romantic series after marketing research indicated a strong area of consumer commodity. Because of much competition among publishers, many have offered variety, rather than just romance. Similar marketing strategies are being used in the thriller novels and series (Nilsen, 1993). Consider the current *USA Today's* top 50 booklist, which has R. L. Stine with five of his books mentioned. The New York Times Book Review listed the books being bought for children and the books children bought themselves in 1994. Divided into categories, six were listed. Series books noted *Goosebumps* as number one and number four as *Fear Street*, both by R. L. Stine (Lipson, 1994). As an author with over 70 million books in print, many of Stine's *Goosebumps* series books are on the weekly best-seller lists (Johnson, 1995). Even bookstores cite R. L. Stine as the starter of the thriller craze in 1986. To the publishing industry that meant soaring retail sales which went from \$360

million in 1988 to \$555 million; more than half of those sales came from series (La Franco, 1995). Ann Rucker of Barnes Noble Bookstores, Inc., stated that more publishing companies are jumping on the bandwagon, too (Anderson, 1995). Random House started a series called *Supermodels of the World*; Bantam Books followed with *Bloodlust* and *Unicorn Club*. Simon & Schuster engulfed the older adolescents with Stine's *Fear Street* (La Franco, 1995). But the surprise of all is that Nancy Drew, mystery sleuth of the 50's and my old time favorite, is now offering *Ghost Stories* through The Triumphet Book Club October, 1995 monthly book club flyer.

Since the average reading level of thrillers for Young Adolescent (YA) books is approximately sixth grade, teens enjoy the easy reading. Those YA thrillers aimed at grades 10-12 have an eighth grade reading level (Makowski, 1994). Because most thrillers or series are in paperback form, many adolescents buy their own copies. If a market is available for something in the postmodern era, then companies will market it (Chambers, 1993). Statisticians mention the current, flooding market of teens' reading materials for more readers than ever before assures book companies that YA novels will flourish with admissible subjects as long some reaction can be evoked. "Ethnicity and race, issues of faith and religion, markers of gender and sexuality, problems of home and society, choices of politics and belief, concerns about money and the future" are evident in the YA literature (Aronson, 1995). Because more teenagers will dominate the percentage of population from now until 2010, their buying power is of interest to book companies (Aronson, 1995). The increased numbers of adolescents is a boom for sales people who cater to the teenage book market.

What do the publishers do to entice the youth of today to buy their series? Marketing gimmicks are numerous. One ploy is to write to your favorite author because he wants to hear from you. This approach is being used for *Fear Street's* author, R. L. Stine. In addition, you might be chosen to interview an author if your favorite is chosen and then you'll be personally contacted ("Kids Today", 1994).

Sweepstakes are also a way to tempt readers to buy a particular book because it contains information about how you might win a round-trip airfare for two, hotel accommodations and transportation; or have a walk-on part in the *Goosebumps* TV show on Fox; or win one of 50 *Goosebumps* books signed by the author (Stine, 1995). Another sweepstakes offered one grand prize winner a trip to Nickelodeon's Studios in Orlando, Florida (4 day/3 night weekend trip for 2 to 4 persons), three prizes of a collection of ten Nickelodeon videos, 25 Clarissa board games, or 50 one-year subscriptions to the Nickelodeon magazine. To find out the details about the contest, one had to have either access to the book which had details or one must purchase the novel (Derby & MacHale, 1995). Another contest was listed on the cover of Stine's book, *The Beast 2* (Stine, 1995). Prizes awarded were sponsored by Paramount Parks, United Airlines, and Minstrel Books. The collaboration of multiple marketeers provides more enticement for the youth to buy the novel which includes the official entry form (no copies allowed) so the adolescents can enter the contest. Prizes awarded are one trip for three to Paramount's King's Island (home of the BEAST roller coaster) or Paramount theme park, four single-day admission tickets to the Paramount theme park nearest you, and 25 autographed copies of *The Beast 2*. Again, the ploy is to sell the books through gimmicks.

Another way used to gain the attention of adolescents is at the breakfast table or in the supermarket. In collaboration with cereal companies, special objects might be included in the packaging, gameboards provided on the box itself or something offered for a special price. One such case is General Mills Honey Nut Cheerios offerings. Within the packaging are three free milk caps from *Goosebumps* series and television show. The adolescents are urged to collect all six. On the back of the box is a "really creepy milk cap board game" if you dare to play. The side panel offers a Goosebumps T-shirt for \$5.99 plus only one UPC symbol from Honey Nut Cheerios. (By the way, that box even has the UPC the adolescent needs.) Of course the T-shirt has the *Goosebumps* distinguishable lettering in brilliant green on a black background. "Wear it if you dare!" is the ad's warning. With so much offered on one package, how can an adolescent resist having a parent buy the cereal? Better yet, maybe the adolescent has the grocery money and is purchasing cereal for the family. Six different milk caps are offered, so one should buy another box of cereal to get the others. The cereal company and the book publishing merchandisers profit in just one sweep!

Because of the popularity of the Nickelodeon TV show, *Are You Afraid of the Dark* book series became a hit overnight. To lure new buyers to the teen thriller market, special offers were made by The Trumpet Club: a glow-in-the-dark bookmark, a Ghoul Gazette newsletter, a RIP (Rest in Peace) eraser and ghost pencil, a HORROR ZONE CLUB membership card, and a full color *Beware of the Snake's Venom* poster. The \$5.95 fee entitled members to all merchandise plus delivery direct to one's home. Cancellation of membership can occur at any time (Trumpet Club flyer, October, 1995). Not to be

out-done, Thrills & Chills Club for the *Goosebumps* series offered a six-part bag of fright: Thrills & Chills magazine, a *Goosebumps* book #1, Railway Ghosts and Highway Horrors, a collectors book #1, *Ghosts*, Tales from the Cryptkeeper poster and an 8" skeleton key chain. All that for \$5.95 and delivered to your home (Arrow Book Club flyer, October, 1995)!

Publishers try to capture new readers to the market by offering a free book in conjunction with consumer purchases of a product. Kraft makes such an offer with one's purchase of two (2) 8-count or three (3) 5-count packages of Kraft's Handi-Snacks. By sending the proofs of purchases from the packages, store-identified receipt with dates between 1/1/96 and 7/31/96 and special completed form, the *Goosebumps* book The Abominable Snowman of Pasadena will be sent free! Imagine eating and enjoying a snack, yet knowing that a free book will be included in the deal.

Another way to keep the same market of consumers is by trapping them into buying the next book by two methods: one is providing a "to be continued" at the end of the book (Pike, 1995) or two is by tempting the reader with a short passage or scene from the next series book (Philbrick & Harnett, 1995). Even a simple listing of the recent series' books is a way to bait the reader into buying the most recent one or to get a copy so as to be up to date with having read all (Black, 1994).

Another sales strategy is to catch the attention of a future buyer. One way is by creating a different cover: glow-in-the-dark or holograms. When Zebra Books improved sales by using holograms on its romance novels, the company was encouraged to do the same for its horror novels. The cost for a hologram is 1 1/2 cents to 3 cents per square

inch of material to produce. The cost is more than traditional 4-color printing, but the difference in sales revenue makes up the economic variance through increased sales (Kalish, 1987). Phoenix Color, a company which makes bookcovers, anticipated the trend for elaborate, intricate and attention-getting book covers and is reaping the benefits. Its clients are Simon and Schuster, Random House and Putnam Publishing, ironically also publishers of teen's books. The sales for book covers has grown 27% in 1993 to \$42 million and surpassed \$50 million in 1994 (Ferris, 1994). Obviously, book covers are eyecatchers.

Television programs like Nickelodeon use commercials to sell products related to the series or books: cards entitled "Real Monsters" are an example. Merchandise such as candy or gum contain trading cards which are part of a series relating to horror books. The bookstores help with the sales of horror books by providing free bookmarks which list all the titles of a particular series and begin with the question, "How many cool titles have you read?" (Parachute Press, 1995).

If an adolescent has a computer with CD-Rom, modem and receives World Wide Web (WWW) through an online company, then a visit can be made to *Strange Matter* by typing in the required format: <http://www.strangematter.com> (Engle & Barnes, 1995). Information consists of the latest news, fan club information, contests, graphics, downloads and more. Imagine the fun found at a moment's notice!

The *Graveyard School* series employs another strategy: word searches at the end of the book (Stone, 1995). Even *Zodiac Chillers* for horoscope followers has a questionnaire at the end of one of its books. "Your opinion is important to us, and we'd

love to hear from you" (Ellis, 1995). If you are one of the first 1,000 readers whose response is returned, a moon and star necklace is yours! Competition to be the first to read the most recent novel, to receive the awarded gift or prize and to join a certain club and be in an elite group is part of the marketing strategy to keep adolescents buying the thriller series. Since the 1980's, the growth in sales of children's books has taken over other categories as top sales (Piirto, 1989).

Another recent trend for selling children's books is the party plan. Similar to Tupperware parties, individuals buy a company's merchandise, hold a party to sell the product, and recruit others to do the same. The buyers get discount rates, bonuses based on sales, as well as points or incentives. The company Usborne earned \$3.5 million in 1994 through parties. The biggest market was to home schoolers (Dunleavey, 1995c). The lucrative market taps into homes and often creates new bookstore clients.

According to Children's Market Research Inc., youngsters ages 6-14 spend approximately \$7 billion and influence another \$120 billion a year in family spending ("Sports drink," 1993). Of the 27.4 million teenagers in 1991, their buying power meant they were the richest teenagers ever. That has not changed: in 1993 an increase of 20% a year has brought that total to \$154.4 billion (Boyd, 1994). Teens want instant gratification, gifts, coupons and promotions (Eisman, 1991).

Tapping into the youth market means diversity. The premise is that different consumer groups possess various attitudes, interests and behaviors, so that marketing must address these issues. Direct mail is one option (Stipp, 1993). But the newest ploy aimed at teens is thriller novels written in another language (Sinclair, 1994). Scholastic, a publisher of

children's books, has been selling English-language books to private schools in Mexico for several years. Now Scholastic is expanding its range by offering the *Goosebumps* series in Spanish. With international publishing accounting for 23% of its current sales, that figure will obviously jump (Kindel, 1993). In the United States the *Goosebumps* series sales average 1.25 million copies monthly (Graham, 1995). Imagine what the additional market will offer book companies in sales receipts, as well as the book stores and other stores which carry and sell the thrillers.

Probably the obvious plan is publicity. Newspapers provide free advertising with the weekly booklists of the top 50 retail books sold nationwide. USA Today does this and an expanded list of 150 sellers can be found on the Internet (<http://www.usatoday.com>). For the past two years, Stine has held a dominate spot in the top 50 (Hainer, 1995). Some examples of what marketing pitches show is a pattern which the public sees. For example, using random weekly samplings from USA Today, horror or thriller novels by R. L. Stine did dominate the lists: October 4, 1995—#3 The Haunted Mask, #29 A Shocker on Shock Street, and # 47 Give Yourself Goosebumps; November 9, 1995—#1 The Headless Ghost, #5 Tick Tock, You're Dead!, and #15 The Haunted Mask; January 11, 1996—#8 How I Got My Shrunken Head, #32 Trapped in Bat Wing Hall, and #33 The Abominable Snowman of Pasadena. The biggest week in 1994, R. L. Stine had 24 out of 150 books on the USA Today list of best sellers ("Ghost Writer," 1994). Obviously, the teens like what they read or the sales people know how to entice consumer teens.

Another way in which publishing companies sell their products is by providing incentives for customers and participation bonuses for retailers, distributors, and delivery

truck drivers. Bantam Books held such a marketing scheme in 1989. By holding a sweepstakes and having trade incentives, additional display space was made available for three books a month which were being promoted. Bookstores, supermarkets, drug chains, and discount outlets were included in the mass appeal. Three lucky winners for eleven months were awarded a Chevrolet automobile: the customer from the drawing, each store manager who sold a winning-entry book and the distributor who serviced the store (Skolnik, 1989). Of course, the winner was really Bantam Books who spent \$7 million of which \$500,000 was allocated for the sweepstakes; sales definitely increased.

Bookstores also wish to sell their merchandise and have found a way to lure new customers into their shops. B. Dalton, Doubleday's parent company, changed its cold, classical library motif for a warm, cozy, inviting one. By having open aperture glass storefronts, shoppers were gazing inside to the different wood tones and homey feel of the place. The high-back fabric wing chairs and tables also enticed shoppers to read and rest. The result is a 15% to 20% increase in sales. The buyers must like the change. Marketing is important to all aspects of selling books to the public, including the growing group of consumer teens.

Placing books in the most unlikely places also provides surprising channels for sales. Did you ever think of buying books in a Bed, Bath & Beyond outlet? How about the Avon catalogue or gas station? Catalogues are used to accompany a product or theme which books may contain. For example, a children's catalogue, *Hearth Song*, had a jumprope; the book publisher included a book of jumprope rhymes, *Anna Banana* for sale. A gas station (Petro Canada) provided a promotion with books for its customers.

Avon's book program. with approximately five million copies of its catalogue distribution gives orders in "tens of thousands" (Dunleavy, 1994b).

Organizations and associations also buy thousands of copies of books to give away . Displays are another source of enticing buyers: colorful corrugated racks offering groupings of books according to themes, seasons, holidays and interests. This accounts for 10% of backlists and 75% of the company's revenues or over \$100 million (Dunleavy, 1993b).

Imitating the adult book clubs, Children's Book of the Month Club (CBOMC) offers children ages 10 and up the choice of buying main titles. Members are only obligated to buy three books a year. The negative option basis means that a parent gets to choose which books and how many books to order each cycle; they simply mark "no" on the order form. Currently CBOMC has five distinct groups from infant to age 12. Doubleday Children's Book Club has two, a smaller scale than CBOMC (Dunleavy, 1994a).

Because book publishers are now part of larger conglomerates, they have created integrated media companies which market not only books but dolls, movies, videos, clothing, china, etc. The licensing permits millions of books to be sold, as well as stunning merchandised products to accompany them (Dunleavy, 1995a). Exploitation can be found in numerous locales: superstores, gift stores, retail chains and cable networks like QVC and HSN. One point most publishers, buyers and booksellers agree upon is that children's publishing has come to mimic adult trade tactics with intense competition, double-digit returns and plenty of bestsellers (Dunleavy, 1993c).

The unexpected children's market which doubled and then doubled again fifteen years later is worth close to \$2 billion today. Bestsellers are not enough to keep up with competitive companies or outlets. Therefore, new strategies keep being used on children's books. As Craig Virden, publisher of Bantam's Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers said, "'Bunny eat bunny' has become dog eat dog" (Dunleavy, 1995b, p.44).

Portrayal of Females in Thriller Novels

Although marketing has done well with its research and strategies, little research has concentrated on the feminine identity formation or the interpretations of thrillers novels being read by adolescent girls. Investigations about adult and adolescent females reading romance novels, the portrayal of females in literature and media, and the changing status of females in society have been noted worthy of recognition in the struggle for feminine awareness. Pearson & Pope (1981) compiled literature from British and American works and placed the writings into two categories: heroine and hero. Under the category of heroine three subcategories exist: the virgin, mistress and helpmate. For the hero three subcategories also exist: sage, artist and warrior. Writings in various literary periods classify women and treat them in numerous ways depending upon their classification. The virgin, a symbol of chastity, represents the nonsexual female who is an embodiment of mother love but appears to wait for her reward, the male. The older virgin, spinster, is a reject who for reasons not always given has rejected the male reward. Both virgins are seen as living in a timeless world of an empty life.

However, the mistress or fallen female is called a "whore with a heart of gold" (p. 56). She doesn't win because if she controls, she is condemned but if she wants respect, she must marry. Either way she loses. The mistress is a projection of qualities which others can't accept in themselves; she is the dark woman, a mystery and evil. She represents the threatening mystery of the unconscious.

However, the helpmate is the ideal female and sexual partner. She represents the opposite of the male and conscious mind; she is of the unconscious. She is seen as the Other, supporting the characteristic of man's life (Pearson & Pope, 1976). She provides order, freedom and sexual pleasure. She is the caregiver, passive participant, and she possesses no rank (Winston, 1994). Nevertheless, if her "self" is criticized for not contributing to the social, economic, political and moral order of society then the result is negative. Her negative self-image leads to dehumanization of herself and even others. She becomes subservient and loses sight of her "self."

The last three categories involve females who understand the world but have some restraints. The sage appears passive as a silent listener and watcher. She possesses woman's intuition and because of that is wise (Pearson & Pope, 1976). The artist, a natural extension of the world's traditional roles, relates to literature, music and the visual arts. Reality and appearance are vital to her knowledge. She understands the social implications of power and illusions, which she can create. The complete female is the warrior, an uncontrolled free person who influences the world around her. Her leadership, independence and wisdom are not controlled by society's norms. However, she is unlikely to change society because she is friendly and cooperates, rather than competes, with men.

The warrior becomes her own creator because she invents the "self" she wishes to be. She is forming her own identity as she selects what she wants.

Since most research about the females' roles in literature have been in adult and classic literature, I chose to use contemporary thriller novels being read by adolescent females. By investigating adolescent females' presentation in the thriller books, I focused upon the impact that thriller novels have upon adolescent females' femininity and identity formation.

This review examined the literature with the present study's assumptions that: 1) adolescent females are portrayed in submissive, weak, and traditional roles, 2) thriller books offer something to the female readers, and 3) adolescent females are offered role models and real-life situations through literature from which they shape and form their identities.

Adolescent females wish to be accepted by peers and want to be identified with characters in novels—either emotionally or hopefully seeking what is considered appealing. Those females who read thriller books are continuing a trend from the early twentieth century. Although religion is not mentioned much in contemporary novels, other forms are (Cotton, 1989). Dixon (1993) traced alternative religion in the English culture from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century to find that females were involved with mysticism and occultism. This trend is also seen in the thriller novels.

R. L. Stine's first book in the *Fear Street* series (Appendix A), The Betrayal (1993a), is based upon witchcraft. A mother and her daughter are accused as witches and burned at the stake. However, the father, William Goode, is the actual practitioner of the black arts.

My wife and daughter were innocent, William thought bitterly as he chanted.

They were innocent. But I am not. They had no knowledge of these dark arts.

But I have practiced them well.

Whispering the ancient dark curses, he began to scratch signs of evil in the dirt floor.

He was breathing hard now, his heart pounding in his chest. Under the satin hood he

glared, unblinking, at the ancient symbols he was scratching in the dirt. A given smile

formed on his trembling lips. *Innocence died today, William Goode thought as he*

summoned the spirits of evil he had summoned too many times before. Innocence

died today. But my hatred will live for generations. The Fiers shall not escape

me. Whenever they flee, I will be there. My family's screams shall become the

Fiers' tortured screams. The fire that burned today will not be quenched—until

revenge is mine, and the Fiers burn forever in the fire of my curse! (p. 73-74)

Thus begins the sign of the *Fear* ("Fier") *Street* series with a theme of revenge and the thriller mode. According to Tennant-Clark, Fritz & Beauvals (1989), occult participation does have an impact upon adolescent development.

The *Phantom Valley* series by Beach (1992) encompasses much of what R. L. Stine writes. In *Stranger in the Mirror*, Stacy and Tracy James travel through time by a special power which is provided by a new moon. The time-travel is only possible when an image is brightest as portrayed by a full moon in a specially designed mirror carving. In this story the females dominate the tale, but weaknesses are shown with the unknown and the past which involve death.

Windsor (1993) approaches the thriller novel with fear of the unknown. In The Christmas Killer, inserted "Him" chapters (monologues from the stalker-killer) occur to create suspense, searching of one's inner thoughts, and death-stalking. "Blood is beautiful" (p. 254) creates an illusion of red—a bright poinsettia color—just in time for Christmas. Three dead people create an air of suspense as "Him" hunts his victim. The female, Rose, fights for her life and struggles to be independent despite the help of her brother, Jerram, and an adult, Miss Mackey. Rose reminds them that "...you'd better remember that I'm alive, and I have a brain..." (p. 210). Even Rose's mother states ... You're nothing special, Rose... "You're an ordinary human being!" (p. 213). Rose, the female, is cast in a role which portrays her as a weakling who possesses nothing special and one who needs advice/help from adults or a male.

Another book, Teacher's Pet, by Cusick (1990), reveals the struggle for attention and love. Kate Rawlins wins a fiction contest and attends a workshop with her teacher, Naomi. However, entangled in a web of unusual circumstances, Katie barely escapes with her life. As an inquisitive, yet daring protagonist, she fights off a male's assault, flees and successfully saves herself. Kate allows herself to demonstrate her abilities to explore her courage, initiative and "strength" as a protector of her values.

The lure of horror is also shown in *The Return of the Vampire* by Cooney (1991). As Stephen King mentioned, the obvious monsters appear in modern attire; justly so in *The Return of the Vampire*. Devnee, the female protagonist, succumbs to a vampire who grants her wishes to be loved, accepted, smart, beautiful, kind and strong. In exchange for her wishes the vampire slowly drains the lives of those female victims from

from whom he has taken the qualities Devnee desired. Devnee realized, almost too late, what she was becoming - a selfish, jealous person without a shadow - almost a vampire. She admits, "I just needed character. I was weak. ... Now I'm strong. I know I have to get things myself... I am strong..." (p. 164). However, even rewritten fairy tales by Angela Carter create a haven for the upheaval and deconstruction of feminism with monsters. The monsters challenge the powers that "be" and try to make sense of the world.

Since many female adolescents choose to read thrillers or horror novels, preferences for particular books send a message to the publishers. The cycle begins. Advertising, bookstore promotions, librarian "teasers," and word of mouth become structured presentations of "got to read" books. Feminism is apparent, but in what way?

Real Life Themes in Thriller Novels

The attraction of thriller novels is just a fad, which begins when a facet of one's personality has been unexpressed or unexpressable. "The fad provides the means, or the excuse. Fads are all about fantasy....Consequently, when somebody does something that fits our fantasies and needs, we suddenly find it very exciting" (Beyette, 1989, p. 2). Therefore, the spectrum of age range encompasses pre-middle school to adults when reading thrillers. From *Goosebumps* to Stephen King's novels, the horror fad is making an impact in society (Fronius, 1993). Issues appear to be discreetly hidden in the context of horror, thrills, and power.

Many of the issues found in the thriller series and novels are taken from actual newspaper accounts and created into stories. For example, the shopping mall, a meeting place for teens and center of activity illustrates the consumerism pop culture phenomenon (Fiske, 1989). The unlimited shopping, teen insecurities, fantasies, and desires also are entwined with the type of relationships teens form (Montgomery, 1992). Actual accounts of "mall slashers" appear rampant even after the attacks have subsided (Kendall, Koziol & Dardick, 1991). Therefore, thriller stories such as The Mall by Cusick (1992) are believable.

Even tales of vampires are newsworthy. Newspaper accounts become storylines for thriller novels. For example, in 1992 a family cemetery revealed the Walton family of 29 people who believed in vampires and exhumed bodies and burned them because the family felt vampires were the cause of their misfortunes. Teeth were filed in points. The spread of tuberculosis was thought to be a part of the vampire's curse. When family members involved the aid of 1000 residents of the town to help rid them of the curse, the town obliged for fear of the evilness spreading to its inhabitants (Libby, 1992). Fears and horrors of real events become novels for young adolescents. The females are portrayed as followers of traditions, fads and group expectations.

The adult world of fantasy is, in some ways, real to the adolescent females. Black magic and witches exist in the real world (Stasio, 1991). Halloween, a traditional holiday, which is associated with spooky stories, ghosts, witches and goblins encourages one to deal with fears and enjoy a "good, safe scare" (Freeman, 1992). The female witches which delight or scare young children in literature appear in their covens which abound in

the world. Actual practices of the unknown are seen in New Orleans with its shops of horror: voodoo, occult, physics and priestesses of the healing arts. What have these in common? Domination, thirst for power, control, self-denial, repression and sick love (Auerbach, 1993). Even the association of groups provides identity and individuality for those who care to be like the others. The relationships provide identity of "ours" versus "theirs" in society (Willis, 1991).

Another factor in the thriller novels is that some are autobiographical. Take Anne Rice's vampire novels. Claudia, the little girl in Interview with the Vampire, is based upon Anne's daughter Michelle who died from leukemia at age five. The mother who dies of consumption is a reflection of Anne's mother who died of alcoholism when Anne was fifteen (Daspin, 1993). The female represented in Rice's novel is an innocent child yearning to become an adult as she "tries to age" into the adult vampire world. However, Claudia is doomed to an eternal life of youth and frustrating searches for a way to achieve adulthood. She can never become an adult because her destiny was doomed as a child when she was "taken" by the male vampire. But what of the issues? The vampire Lestat becomes a rock star while worrying about the meaning of life, theology and art. Blood not only drains the vitality of its victims but the memory and vivid imagination (Kendrick, 1992). Rice uses the traditions of vampire myths and succeeds in creating an elegant creature who seeks a higher status of identity (Benefiel, 1995). Is this the horror of reality? In Cooney's vampire trilogy (1991;1993), does the young woman seek the loss of memory or does she seek escape from harsh reality by accepting a "new" way of life? With whom or what does the reader of the thrillers identify?

Of the monsters lurking in the pages of thriller novels, issues of social and moral judgments create havoc. The creation of monsters reveals sensitivity to social issues. Frankenstein was created because of a thirst for knowledge, but what surfaced was the rejected child syndrome. The Frankenstein story, written when Mary Shelley was a teenager, is the story of a mad scientist and his pathetic creation which is rejected by society because of his appearance. Seeking love and acceptance from females in the towns, Frankenstein's monster finds repulsion, fear and rejection instead. The females do not identify with his "kind" or type; he is an outcast, but the females are not. Therefore, he seeks revenge upon his creator. Hatred appears between the creature and the creator (Simmons, 1994). Loneliness was the ultimate doom for the creature or death.

In the case of Little Pet Shop of Horrors (Haynes, 1994a), the cute pet was actually a child captured under a spell and held captive to people's wish for a certain kind of pet. Logic is not part of this scenario, but the attempt is to show the emotions revealed in the horror of human experiments. The child becomes a pawn in the clutches of an adult who transforms the child into a pet for sale. This allows the adult to control the identity of the child, either male or female. The identity is forced upon the child just as society inflicts its rules or acceptances upon those searching for their "selves." Escape is difficult and identity is masked in another form. Individuality is lost but feelings are not. Even *jouissance*, or ecstasy, is promised, but it is false (Rogers, 1993). (Also, note the similarity of the title to the adult horror film, *Shop of Horrors*.)

Another form of horror lurks in the school food in Back to School by Haynes (1994b). Unusual delights are eaten by the students and teachers alike, except for one who has

allergies and must eat a restricted diet. Roaches, caterpillars, and unthought of delicacies are placed in the school cafeteria food and unusual things begin to happen. However, the food which many cringe at the sight or sound of can be cultural oddities. For example, many people in the world eat rodents, pigeons, reptiles, sharks, insects, and even fish sperm. In exclusive New York restaurants offals are served; offals are animals' innards. Examples are calves' brains, blood sausage, and chicken livers. In China, it is not unusual to eat camel humps, cats, snakes, armadillos, and bears (Hall, 1991). Even in Vietnam, dog, cats, leopards, bears, turtles, porcupines, monkeys, lizards, river otters, and wild birds are eaten daily (Wills, 1995). Unusual concoctions can be found in books such as Midnight Snacks: The Cookbook that Glows in the Dark, or Roald Dahl's Revolting Recipes (MacRae, 1995b). Food is seen in many fiction and nonfiction books as symbolic of power (Dunne, 1994). Cultural or faddish foods mentioned in thriller books appear to establish groups of people whose identity is closely associated to what they eat. Groups may be formed to be "in" with a fad - that of being a vegetarian, for example. Perhaps a group consumes particular foods to be noticed or to reject society's norms. Groups then become a focus of identity status. It's rightly so in Haynes' (1994b) novel entitled Back to School. Does the revulsion of what is not culturally accepted a horror or an explanation for identity with certain groups of eaters?

Since the teen reading market is focusing on horror, what types of themes are being emphasized? Amazingly, some themes are relevant today even from a list of themes from dime novels of the 1845-1910 period (Chilcoat & Gasperak, 1984). Common characteristics of current adolescent novels reveal taboo topics from earlier periods

(Huey, 1985). In today's thriller novels Stine usually has scary twists, Pike's books are gorey with pools of blood and gun-shooting teens, Stone's are spooky with an emphasis on dreams, and Peel's are a fantasy of time-traveling spooks who possess villains. The *Goosebumps* series (Stine, 1993d, e, f, g, h) are aimed at middle-school readers while *Fear Street* books are for the older teens and are more graphic. In fact, for students 8-10 years of age, Stine created another series, *Ghosts of Fear Street*, which was released in the summer of 1995. Pike also released a series *Spooksville* for middleschoolers in August, 1995. In the fall of 1995 Random House released *Zodiac Chillers*.

Others who normally do not deal with horror also have joined the bandwagon: *The Baby-Sitters' Club*, Colville's books, and others (Anderson, 1995). Even a television presentation of this genre appears on Saturday mornings! However, do not think that series are the only thrillers available. Many books appear as a trial or an experiment for the author. Pascal (1994), Beere (1993), Windsor (1993), Elfman (1993), and McFann (1994) are authors who try to become like their peers by joining the growing number of writers for chillers and thrillers. Hoh (1992, 1993), Littke (1993), Hawkes (1993), Schorsch (1993a, b), Welch (1992a, b), Adams (1992), Pine (1993) and Bates (1993) are some who joined the enormous flux of thriller writers because the novels sell. The books are everywhere but in the classroom curriculum. However, D.C. Heath Company is attempting to enter the classroom with a middle school literature unit entitled *A Dark and Stormy Night* (1995). Authors such as Poe and Colville are represented. Is this a start for the thriller series?

Summary

Horror appears in everyday life and appears in young adolescents' novels. Readers wishing to be entertained and wanting to escape from reality do so by engulfing themselves in the literature which guarantees to scare and frighten. Once geared toward adults, the horror novels now aim for adolescents. Marketing gimmicks, promotions, television programs and merchandise which advertise series of thrillers add to the popular culture fad. To be "in" is cool, acceptable and a way to find one's self.

Females search for their identities through the characters in the thrillers. The weak female appears to need the male to help her solve the dilemma or to save her. However, the female readers read with caution as society puts forth its social rules and regulations seen in the thrillers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I describe the methods which were utilized for this hermeneutical, phenomenological study of adolescent females who read thriller novels. Hermeneutics, the study of interpretation between an individual and the world in text, and phenomenology, the study of lived experience, reveal what the adolescent females perceive and understand of issues and themselves, as personal and cultural beings. The formation of identity or "self" was explored through personal contact interviews. The assumptions and rationale underlying this study did not lend themselves to measurement, scientific solution, predictability, or standardized outcomes. Two qualitative methods were chosen: a preliminary survey and indepth interviews. These selected methods best fit the requirements of the research study. By first using the survey, screening of possible female participants for the indepth interviews was possible.

The initial questionnaire survey was used to identify young adolescent females from the population of young adolescent males and females who read thriller novels. The purpose in gathering information also from males was for comparison of numbers of adolescent

males and females who read thriller novels. The study participants were able to recall books they had read, authors they favored, plots they liked and approximate numbers of books they owned. The knowledge gained from this procedure aided with the indepth interview process.

The indepth interview provided data about personal identification with characters, themes or plots presented in the thriller novels. Questions asked during the indepth interview were based upon information gathered from the initial survey. The use of notes and a tape recorder for accuracy and exploration of responses which might lead to additional knowledge not considered were employed. Each adolescent's ideas, interests and/or perspectives were varied (Tuckman, 1988) and provided reasonable insights about thriller novels, adolescent females' feelings about the portrayal of female characters and what influenced "self" or identity formation.

This study assessed why young adolescent females read thriller novels and with whom or what the adolescent females constructed their "self" identities. The complexities of "traditional" assumptions about females may be explained by the young females' perceptions of society's values and the females' understanding of reality.

Participant Selection

Selection of the participants was from a rural middle school, grades 6 and 7, with a population of 893 students of which 142 were minorities. Permission to conduct the study of young adolescent females was obtained from the Public School District (PSD) and the

Institutional Review Board (IRB). The PSD and IRB required that consent forms from parents and students be obtained before any research began. For examples of the forms and permission letters see Appendices B and C.

The selection of the school was based upon my familiarity with the school, the students, and faculty and staff since I had been a full time faculty member there for ten years. Having taught Reading and Language Arts during that time, in addition to many years prior, made me aware of reading trends. Therefore, as a witness of the reading materials which students were purchasing from bookclubs, checking out of the library, sharing with others and requesting me to buy certain ones, I noted an interest for thriller books in the young adolescent females.

Because no Reading classes were offered in the seventh grade, sixth grade Reading and seventh grade Language Arts classes were employed for the study. Students were informed they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Grades were not to be affected by this study nor any grades given. A deadline of one week was given to return the permission form to the participating teacher. Participating teachers were notified of their responsibility to collect permission forms until the researcher returned to the classroom, approximately one week later. Only those participants who had returned signed parental permission forms were permitted to take the survey. From the results of that initial survey, selected adolescent females who had read three or more thriller books for pleasure from a total of ten read were asked to take home a parental permission slip for involvement in the indepth interview portion of the study.

Survey

Similar to Christian-Smith's (1990) format, a simple yes or no format for the initial survey was used (Appendix D). Several questions were similar to those used by Radway (1984) and Christian-Smith (1990). Categories relevant to the thriller novels used were types of books read most frequently, places books were obtained and with whom one discussed the plots.

Oral directions, used by the participating teacher or researcher, for administering the survey are found in Appendix D. Since the survey took approximately ten to fifteen minutes to administer, little class time was lost for the students or teachers participating in the study.

The survey method has been used by Samuels (1982) who employed a national survey to determine the status of the young adult novels in the English classroom, grades 7-12. This study surveyed a random sample of teachers to acknowledge what they knew and how they felt about young adult novels.

Mullarkey (1987) used the questionnaire process for pre- and post-tests to gain insight about individualistic bibliotherapy. This method helped determine whether females seemed to achieve more identity than males, if emotional involvement by an adolescent would result in catharsis and if adolescents could achieve self-discovery. Also, this method established that adolescent's personal lives could relate to fictional characters. This study's initial, structured survey of ten questions was administered to 364 adolescents, 146 males and 218 females. The purposive and directive sample population allowed for

the researcher to use questions as selected categories which identified emerging themes (Erlandson, et.al., 1993). Four questions asked for additional information, rather than just a yes or no response. Questions 2, 3, 5 and 10 asked for short answers to clarify any outstanding responses. The purpose was to discover or verify what I had inferred about thriller novels. The extensions of the four questions provided a basis for more variables and collections of new data of any hidden assumptions or constructions. The initial survey eliminated those students who did not read thriller novels and narrowed the number of eligible females who could be contacted for the second phase of the study.

Interviews

Indepth interviews (Appendix E) consisting of eight open-ended questions and one factual short answer were used to gather data from those females participating in the second phase of the study. The structured questions helped determine major relationships and patterns where much was not known (Kerlinger, 1973). Divergent questioning or probes allowed pursuance of certain thoughts or explanations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Stephen Arthur Small (1985) used the interview process to guide his research questions: 1) How is the parent-adolescent relationship affected by age and sex or both? and 2) What relationship exists with the child's self-esteem and parents' level of stress—support, control—autonomy and conflict?

Sarland (1994a and 1994b) utilized the indepth interview method with seventh grade males and females of Bignold Middle School, Norwich, in his research for the *Point*

Horror series. He discussed plots, themes of isolation and family or community groups in his indepth interviews.

An investigation that utilized indepth interviews based on a structured questionnaire plus call-in data collected on a telephone-answering machine, and a questionnaire filled out by parents was conducted by Foster (1986). In her study she sought to discover what reading interests gifted fourth and fifth grade students expressed and selected for personal reading.

The brief review of these and other studies illustrates the skillful techniques of interviewing, investigating perceptions, and questioning methods. The use of mechanical devices such as answering machines or tape recorders to record exact responses permits precise, transcribed notes. Taped interviews for accurate, detailed records (Neuman, 1991) were used in this study.

My role as that of a participant-interviewer involved the interaction of the interviewee and the interviewer for questioning purposes (Neuman, 1991). Behavioral situations such as nonverbal communication with expressions, use of arm gestures or body movement or contortions were noted on a structured interview sheet for each participant. Any such movements or expressions that revealed conflicting messages, discomfort with a particular question or possible confusion were observed.

Book Selection

Books chosen for this study were not on any recommended booklists, but were chosen because students ordered them from bookclubs or recommended that I buy them for my library. A variety of authors was chosen to give diversity of topics and to widen the reading gap within the age and interest levels.

I used the thriller books as a basis of understanding plots and themes presented, as well as the portrayal of females. Not being a reader of horror books, I wanted to explore those books which were enticing adolescent males and, especially, females to rush for the newest book in a series or one by a particular author. The thriller books provided insight about issues aimed at teens, the literary quality (or lack of it), meanings or interpretations derived from the plots and/or themes and the role of female characters.

Procedure for Collection

The administering of surveys and interviewing began once permission was granted by the PSD and the IRB. All surveys were completed within one week after participation forms were returned. The indepth interviews were conducted after school was out for the summer. Contact of consenting participants was by telephone to set up appointment times and places. Individuals were contacted three times during the day (early morning, noon and late evening) in order to give every opportunity for participating in the study. Interviews were completed in one and one half months.

The indepth interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, in the public library, or a place convenient for the interviewee. Interviews were scheduled for half hour sessions, although most took longer. Traveling to and from various locations also restricted time allowances. Interviews usually took longer than thirty minutes because the interviewee desired to tell as much about the thriller novels as possible. A series of eight open-ended questions and one factual question were the focus upon young adolescent females' feelings on feministic attitudes and thriller novels.

The interview questions were designed to gain access to knowledge, opinions or values, and emotional responses (Patton, 1980). The purpose of the study was explained in detail before the participant was interviewed (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Permission to tape the interviews was granted with the signed parental consent form (Appendix C). The letter assured that anonymity would be preserved. The atmosphere of the interview was more like a visit or conversation with a purpose (Webb & Webb, in Burgess, 1984).

Rapport and trust was built by familiarity with some of the respondents or the respondents' familiarity with me. Participants were asked to identify themselves on tape by a pseudonym of their choice (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). This pseudonym was used throughout the study when referring to the participant.

During the interview, notes were taken to highlight exact quotes on specific details whenever it was deemed necessary. These notes provided clues to some major points, as well as to ensure quality and reliable data (Erlandson, et. al., 1993). Only one set of notes was made. Any initial impressions were recorded and later, any missed details or possible reactions (Fetterman, 1989) noted.

Tapes were transcribed by an independent source, as well as by the researcher (Measor in Burgess, 1985). The independent source returned all tapes and transcribed interviews to the researcher (Dexter, 1970). From the typed interview notes, data were retrieved and exact quotes used as much as possible.

Participants were given a signed agreement which stated that all tapes, data, surveys and research of any kind related to them and their participation in this study would be destroyed immediately after the researcher completed and met all requirements for the study. No identifying information would be part of the tapes or written records. All taped and other data related to the interviews were kept in a locked briefcase and stored in a locked desk until this study was completed. None of these data were kept where the participants or school personnel accidentally would discover them.

Survey Analysis

The initial survey of ten yes or no questions from the adolescent male and female participants were tallied according to grade level and sex. Code numbers were given as identification for teachers' classes. For example, E3 would indicate a particular teacher's third hour class; this provided a check of students who were sixth or seventh grade participants since specific teachers only taught one grade level. This systematic method meant that data could be traced to original sources, thus providing an audit trail and confirmability. Surveys were first divided into two groups by grade level and sex: those who read thriller novels and those who did not. Eight subcategories resulted: four for

sixth grade participants and four for seventh grade participants. The survey questions from those subcategories then were tallied onto other survey sheets. Totals for each question were given in terms of sixth and seventh grade males and females who read thriller novels and those who did not.

The last question of the survey included an open-ended inquiry in addition to the yes or no response. The purpose of the open-ended question was to discover any major relationships or to provide a basis for more categorized data (Erlandson, et.al., 1993). Those responses were added on individual pages to the tally sheets. Some direct quotes were noted; others were given as themes, or topics. According to Miles and Huberman (1984) a theme or pattern is something which occurs frequently and is consistent in a specific way. Many separate pieces of data from the survey questions were combined to provide themes in the analysis process.

Interview Analysis

Interviews were tape recorded and notes taken by the researcher. The participant was informed of the procedure before starting the interview process. The materials supported credibility by providing contextual materials which provided data analysis. The tape recordings ensured that everything said was caught on tape and notes taken to ensure that observations were not overlooked. Each participant's interview was the basis for collecting themes according to nine structured questions, which provided the categories. The interviewer and interviewee followed the structured questions as a guide,

but probing questions allowed for divergent and interpretive ideas. If a participant wished to view the interview questions, a copy was provided. As Bogdan and Taylor (1975) state, the interactive, face-to-face encounters allow for gaining insight and information from the participant as it relates to their lives, experiences or situations. Stenhouse (in Burgess, 1984) does not advocate using structured interviews in qualitative research; however, the questions acted as a guide for other interactive questions. The indepth interview was vital for gathering information which provided data, observations and interpersonal, social and cultural aspects of the environment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Analysis of qualitative data is an ongoing process and a search for general statements and relationships among categories of data. With a basis in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the source of generating ideas and themes came from the data; this discovery method allowed for expansion, links and interrelationships of emerging themes. By continuously analyzing notes, formulating ideas or themes, the background literature was used for review purposes.

Glaser and Strauss's (1967) "constant comparison" method was used for analyzing data. This research methodology allowed categorized data (the structured interview questions) to be compared to other categorized data. Inferences drawn from readings of thriller novels, responses to the survey questions and responses of the interviewed female participants permitted for comparison of categories and emerging themes.

Questions used as categories of thought were summarized as key words or major headings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) on 4x6 cards. Each question was coded a different color. Within major categories emerging themes surfaced; these provided new data

which were placed on new cards or highlighted in another color on the current cards. Ideas not fitting into a category were set aside into a miscellaneous pile and evaluated when all information had been processed. Clusters of information, subcategories, causes and consequences, interactions and conditions were considered for relationships, links or extensions of major themes (Neuman, 1991). The process of refining or looking for new themes or similarities and contradictions was done three times until, upon the fourth examination, no new information was revealed. Reevaluation of the miscellaneous pile of cards was included each time to see if any themes could be consolidated or eliminated. The process of sorting, evaluating, reevaluating and analyzing data resulted in a set of themes which presented participants' views and interpretations. This reconstruction procedure allowed for methodological soundness and the establishment of credibility (Erlandson, et.al.,1993). Raw data (interview guides, notes and tapes), data analysis products (notecards) and information relative to the development of the interview were records which enhanced an audit trail for credibility and dependability. The audit files reveal the key questions which guided the study, the original interview notes, the tapes used for accurate quotes, the tallying sheets used in conjunction with the notecards, transcriptions and copies of all resources.

Hermeneutics, the study of interpretation of text or messages, was used in this study. Guiding questions inquired what meanings were presented to the females who read thriller novels. The females' interpretations of the imaginary world of thriller novels provided understanding and making sense of their lives so that they could construct "who they are." The use of language, storylines and reasons for exploring the horror genre

revealed challenges about the ways young adolescent females think, act or speak. Hermeneutics is about "finding" oneself, while, at the same time, losing oneself (Short, 1991). The indepth interviews allowed the researcher to unlock the consciousness of the females' human experiences and gain access to understanding their sense of the world. Their interpretations gave voice to features of their lives ordinarily silenced or unheard.

Summary

The hermeneutical, phenomenological study utilized two methods of inquiry: a survey and indepth interviews. The initial survey was used for identification of those who read thriller novels. Adolescent males participated for number comparisons of males versus females who read thriller novels. From the initial survey, young adolescent females who read three or more thriller novels from a total of ten were informed of the opportunity to be included in the second phase of the study, the indepth interview.

Analysis of the data involved tallying categorical questions of the survey, transcribing tapes of the indepth interviews, reviewing notes and sorting cards for emerging themes. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) "constant comparison" method was used. Data were reviewed four times until no new themes could be found.

Females' interpretations of thriller novels were noted as a study of hermeneutics, the meanings or messages received or described by the reader. Through the interviews the females were able to reveal their understanding of the world depicted in the thriller novels.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Surveys

Participants returned 364 surveys (164 or 45% of the 364 for sixth grade; 200 or 55% for seventh grade). Forty percent (146) of the total surveys were returned by males and 60% (218) by females. This higher return rate among females is similar to the results of Fronius (1993) who found that more girls than boys completed her survey. Results are discussed by questions. Responses to the ten survey questions are reported in Table 1 (page 70) and 2 (page 77). Responses to questions six through ten are in Table 2.

Question 1

1. Do you read mystery books, thriller books or "tales from the crypt" type books?

Of the 364 combined sixth and seventh graders, 80% reported reading thriller books. From this group of readers 89% of sixth and 73% of seventh graders reported reading thriller books. This is in agreement with Isaacs (1992) who found that middle schoolers like suspense and horror stories. The figures differ somewhat from Banks'

TABLE 1

**PERCENTAGE (ACTUAL NUMBER) OF PARTICIPANTS
WHO READ THRILLER NOVELS BY GRADE LEVEL AND SEX**

QUESTIONS	6TH		7TH		6TH + 7TH	
	M (63)	F (101)	M (83)	F (117)	M (146)	F (218)
1. Do you read mystery books, thriller books or "tales from the crypt" type books?	89 (56)	89 (90)	59 (55)	77 (90)	76 (111)	83 (180)
2. Are you familiar with any series of thriller books?	89 (50)	86 (77)	91 (50)	77 (69)	90 (100)	67 (146)
Series:						
Goosebumps	66 (37)	36 (32)	62 (34)	44 (40)	61 (71)	40 (72)
Fear Street	14 (8)	42 (38)	16 (9)	27 (24)	15 (17)	34 (62)
3. Do you read thriller books by any particular author?	75 (42)	78 (70)	69 (38)	66 (59)	55 (80)	59 (129)
If so, by whom?						
Author:						
R. L. Stine	61 (34)	73 (66)	58 (32)	53 (48)	45 (66)	52 (114)
S. King	9 (5)	1 (1)	27 (15)	9 (8)	14 (20)	4 (9)
C. Pike	2 (1)	3 (3)	0 (0)	6 (5)	1 (1)	4 (8)
4. Do you obtain the books from						
a. public library	66 (37)	29 (26)	25 (14)	37 (33)	46 (51)	33 (59)
b. school library	80 (45)	50 (45)	51 (28)	48 (43)	66 (73)	49 (88)
c. book store	41 (23)	42 (38)	53 (29)	53 (48)	47 (52)	48 (86)
d. book club	13 (7)	13 (12)	15 (8)	7 (6)	14 (15)	10 (18)
e. home	34 (19)	39 (35)	49 (27)	52 (47)	41 (46)	46 (82)
f. other:						
friends and relatives	20 (11)	10 (9)	11 (6)	9 (8)	15 (17)	9 (17)
Wal-Mart	4 (2)	0 (0)	2 (1)	0 (0)	3 (3)	0 (0)
book fair	0 (0)	2 (2)	2 (1)	0 (0)	1 (1)	1 (2)
5. Do you own any thriller books?	91 (51)	94 (85)	93 (51)	87 (78)	92 (102)	91 (163)
If so, approximately how many?						
1-5	21 (12)	53 (48)	13 (7)	36 (32)	17 (19)	44 (80)
6-10	23 (13)	14 (13)	20 (11)	21 (19)	22 (24)	18 (32)
11-15	13 (7)	11 (10)	9 (5)	6 (5)	11 (12)	8 (15)
16-20	9 (5)	7 (6)	7 (4)	10 (9)	8 (9)	8 (13)
21-25	5 (3)	1 (1)	9 (4)	3 (3)	7 (7)	2 (4)
26-30	0 (0)	6 (5)	4 (1)	3 (3)	1 (1)	4 (8)
31-40	5 (3)	0 (0)	4 (2)	1 (1)	5 (5)	1 (1)
41+	4 (2)	1 (1)	7 (4)	3 (2)	5 (6)	2 (3)

(1986) who found 57% of sixth and 65% of seventh graders read thriller stories. It appears that a larger percentage of sixth and seventh grade students are reading thriller novels now than in 1986. However, Banks' total population for his study was 844 students from ten New York metropolitan secondary schools in grades six through twelve, whereas this study's population of 364 was from one rural middle school of grades six and seven.

Another notable difference is the increase in percentage of readers from sixth graders to seventh graders in Banks' study. Present results show the opposite: the percentage of readers drops from sixth to seventh grade. Developmental changes in females may account for this difference. According to Bosma & Jackson (1980), between the ages of twelve and sixteen females' mental and physical development fluctuates from crisis and turmoil to a much broader and less problem-centered world. The adolescent females are concerned with less exploration and more with their own commitments, self-esteem and control. The sixth grade females may be exploring the thriller novels for answers to everyday problems and conflicts. The fewer numbers of seventh grade females reading thriller novels may indicate that they feel they have control or power over their lives and situations and less use for exploration of fictional problems and solutions. The text does make a difference. Erlich (1975) sees the reader as one whose mind is transformed from the text. By reading thriller novels, the females develop a sense of what is expected from society, peers and adults. The anticipated feminine roles, realistic responses to situations and believable goals are embedded in the texts. The females become aware of their identities and changing expectations from adults and develop some aspect of identity

formation (D'Angelo, 1989). The backgrounds of the readers, the immersion of the environment and the texts allow the females to form their own "I's". The seventh grade females may be more aware of what is expected from society than the sixth grade females because they have explored the texts and made their own decisions. The seventh grade females may be forming their identities and not relying on others for answers, whereas the sixth grade females are still searching for "me". Also, the diverse populations of the samples may account for the differences.

Question 2

2. Are you familiar with any series of thriller books?

Question two about familiarity with a particular series of books indicated that males identified specific sequels or series as frequently as females in the sixth grade. However, a difference was seen at the seventh grade: 91% of the males and only 77% of the females were aware of thriller series. The marked difference seems to be consistent with traditional explanations of developmental patterns associated with acquisition of sex roles (Lynn, 1969). As children grow older, their environment influences their choices. The environment may become less female-oriented and more male-oriented. Therefore, the inference that males play an important part in society and many of society's privileges are given to males increases the females' awareness of the advantages and limitations set in society. As Finders (1997) found in her research of junior high females, books were used to monitor and sustain social roles which were in opposition with adults and schools'

authority. Finders (1997) also found that adolescent females carried or supposedly read books by R. L. Stine and Christopher Pike because it was "cool" or a marked social status. Possibly, the females in the present study did not have such a group solidarity for social status and, therefore, did not need to read or carry thriller books or be concerned with the male expectations and roles in society as portrayed in the novels. Overall, 90% of males and 67% of females from combined sixth and seventh grades were acquainted with thriller series.

The series most frequently mentioned was *Goosebumps*, which is in agreement with the findings of Lipson (1994) and Johnson (1995). The second most frequently recognized thriller series was *Fear Street* by R. L. Stine; this is similar to the findings of La Franco (1995). This also concurs with Scholastic's and Archway/Pocketbooks' figures for numbers of books sold to date (Bates, 1994). However, fewer males identified the series than females. Smith (1996) mentions that the *Fear Street* series is more intense horror than *Goosebumps* and that developmental factors play a role in adolescent's preferences in literature. According to USA Today (1996, January 11) and Anderson (1995) the middle school age group is definitely reading R. L. Stine's series or has knowledge about them.

Many singular votes were cast for other series such as *Strange Matter*, *The Predators*, *Tales from the Crypt*, *X Files* and *The Beast*. Seventh grade adolescent females cast four votes for *The Babysitter's* and two votes for *Nightmare Hall*.

Question 3

3. Do you read thriller books by any particular author? If so, by whom?

The third question confirms the information about knowing a particular author.

When asked if the participants read a specific author, more than half of the males and females read thriller books by a definite author. R. L. Stine was the most frequently acknowledged author. Following Stine's popularity, Stephen King and Christopher Pike were two authors cited. Receiving less than 3% of the votes were B. R. Wright, M. H. Clarke, J. L. Nixon, Hitchcock, D. Koontz, D. Hoh, J. Fielding, L. Duncan and M. C. Engle. Other names were V.C. Andrews, M. D. Hahn and M. Crichton.

The adolescents appear to be reading books which are either in a series or by a definite author. Loyalty to one particular author can be interpreted as faithful readers who purchase or read those works solely because they are written by that person. The loyal adolescents avidly read each new book of the ever growing numbers in the series. Even the creation of new series for appeal to different age groups, the frequency with which certain author's books appear on book lists and the media which sells its product through other merchandising markets emphasizes the popularity of a particular series or author. The most prominent author who writes thrillers for adolescents is R. L. Stine and the participants appear to be loyal readers of his thriller books.

Question 4

4. Do you obtain the books from a. public library, b. school library, c. book store, d. book club, e. home or f. other?

Question four asked where students obtained their thriller books. The school library was the most frequent response in the sixth and seventh grades. The second place mentioned was a book store. Following the bookstore were the public library, home, book club and then others, such as relatives, friends, book fairs and specific stores. A major difference was noted between the sixth grade males' and females' first choice of where they obtained books. Eighty percent of the sixth grade males obtained thriller books from the school library, but only 50% of the females did. According to Sarland (1996a), middle school teens who read the *Point Horror* series purchased their books from Scholastic book club. This differs from the present results.

Another difference was the increased percentage of males and females from sixth to seventh grade who brought books from home. According to Killheffer (1993), the horror motif now encompasses other categories: vampire romances, vampire detective series, gothic horror fantasies and even science fiction. Whatever category of book is available, males and females can find them in thriller novels today. Also, the maturation and development of teens may account for the awareness of what texts may offer (Erich, 1975). Many students are forced into adult roles before they are supposedly considered adults. Males and females may take on the roles of mothers and fathers to take care of their siblings while moms work outside of the home or an absence of a parent

may cause young adolescents to acquire more mature-like qualities. They "mature" because of situations put upon them. Also, the environment and friends encompass rules and expectations which influence development and awareness of elements in their surroundings. Texts offer them what they want and diversity is available to all.

Christian-Smith (1990) found that females who read romance novels brought them from home, libraries, or mail order bookclubs, in that sequence. Because many females' mothers or sisters read romance novels, the books were available in the home. The results of this study show that females who read horror novels acquired their books from home only after obtaining them from the school library or purchasing them at a bookstore. Possibly the thriller books are not available in the home or not being read by the female members of the household.

Wal Mart, a specific store chain, was mentioned by 3% of the males but never mentioned by the females. Since the thriller books are sold everywhere, a particular store which uses displays, offers discounts or provides incentives is a part of the marketing strategy used by book companies to entice readers to continue their sales (Dunleavy, 1994b & 1995c). Maybe the name of a specific store was not important to females.

Question 5

5. Do you own any thriller books? If so, approximately how many?

When asked if they owned any thriller novels, males and females responded equally. The number of books owned by an individual ranged from one to more than

forty-one. Males had more books in the six to ten range while females possessed more in the one to five category. However, twice as many males than females owned forty-one or more books.

TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE (ACTUAL NUMBER) OF PARTICIPANTS
WHO READ THRILLER NOVELS BY GRADE LEVEL AND SEX

QUESTIONS	6TH		7TH		6TH + 7TH	
	M (63)	F (101)	M (83)	F (117)	M (146)	F (218)
6. From a total of ten books which you have read, would more than three be of the following?						
biography/autobiography	7 (4)	18 (16)	22 (12)	33 (30)	14 (16)	26 (46)
romance	4 (2)	41 (37)	4 (2)	34 (31)	4 (4)	38 (68)
adventure	66 (37)	67 (60)	67 (37)	78 (70)	67 (74)	72 (130)
sports	52 (29)	12 (11)	49 (27)	12 (11)	50 (56)	12 (22)
science fiction	38 (21)	3 (27)	47 (26)	28 (25)	42 (47)	29 (52)
fantasy	16 (9)	50 (45)	24 (13)	49 (44)	20 (22)	49 (89)
thriller/horror	68 (38)	86 (77)	80 (44)	91 (82)	74 (82)	88 (159)
other	21 (12)	16 (14)	4 (2)	14 (13)	13 (14)	15 (27)
7. Do your parents ever buy thriller books for you?						
Yes	63 (35)	68 (61)	64 (35)	57 (51)	63 (70)	62 (112)
8. Do you discuss the plots with your...						
friends	36 (20)	61 (55)	27 (15)	47 (42)	32 (35)	54 (97)
Mom	16 (9)	41 (37)	20 (11)	27 (24)	18 (20)	34 (61)
Dad	11 (6)	38 (34)	13 (7)	16 (14)	12 (13)	27 (48)
9. Do your parents know what topics are covered in the thriller books?						
Yes	61 (34)	68 (61)	62 (34)	76 (68)	62 (68)	72 (129)
10. Do you believe the thriller novels offer something to you?						
Yes	39 (22)	72 (65)	60 (58)	64 (58)	50 (55)	68 (123)

Adolescent males appear to keep their books, possibly do not share or trade and purchase or receive many as gifts which they do not intend to discard. The females keep some books, but they may share with their friends, obtain more from the school and public libraries and not purchase or receive as many as gifts. Their intention appears to be reading but not possessing or keeping many of the thriller books.

Question 6

6. From a total of ten books which you have read, would you have read more than three of the following: biography/autobiography, romance, adventure, sports, science fiction, fantasy, thriller/horror or other?

From eight given categories of books, males and females selected thriller/horror as their first choice. Both sixth and seventh grade males and females selected adventure stories as their second best. A difference occurred in the third place: males selected sports stories while females chose fantasy. Results which differed from those of Banks (1986) were percentages from thriller novels and sports. Banks found that 57% of sixth grade males and females read horror novels and 65% of seventh grade males and females did so. The present results were 77% for sixth grade males and females and 85% for combined seventh graders. The percentages for sports in the combined seventh grade were meaningful. According to Banks' results, 60% of male and female seventh graders read sports books, but this study's results showed only 30% did so. Diversity in Banks' population may account for the difference.

Fantasy was not identified for separate grades in Banks' study because the significance was negligible. Adventure was listed first choice in Banks' findings, whereas my results listed thriller/horror books as first. The results indicate a change in the trend of reading from adventure as number one in 1986 to reading thrillers or horror in 1996. This trend is part of popular culture (Fiske, 1992).

Question 7

7. Do your parents ever buy thriller books for you?

The adolescent males and females responded that their parents did buy thriller novels for them. Males were consistent for combined sixth and seventh grades with 63%. The females differed slightly between the sixth and seventh grades: fewer females in the seventh grade stated that parents bought thriller books for them. However, the total percentages were similar for combined sixth and seventh grade males and females.

The adolescent males do not appear to change their interest in reading the horror genre from sixth grade to seventh grade because their parents are still purchasing thriller novels. A difference occurs with the females. It appears that the adolescent females are not asking parents to purchase thrillers, the interest in the genre is waning or the parents have decided not to spend money for purchasing books. Possibly the females think that they can share what they have with their friends or get the latest book at the library. The parents may also feel the expenditure is excessive since so many new books are on the bookshelves and the series continue to produce more.

Question 8

8. Do you discuss the plots with your friends, Mom, or Dad?

Results indicated that adolescents discussed plots with their friends most. Moms were the second choice, but sixth grade females were more prone for discussion than the males. Dad was the person with whom all students were least likely to discuss plots. These findings are similar to Christian-Smith (1990) who categorized her subjects into five groups: mother/female guardian, sister, teacher, friend(s) and other. She found that students were more likely to discuss plots with females, particularly moms who also read romance novels.

Friends, peers who usually share common interests, trust each other to be listeners of their problems and concerns. The discussion of what they read is part of that trust. Peers understand codes of secrecy and the importance of listening to each other. The adolescents seek those who care to listen and help them find answers.

Moms have been considered nurturing persons who listen, care and help those in need. Having discussions with sons and daughters about the thriller novels and the issues or problems presented, Moms display their ability to foster a caring attitude. Dads, however, display their disregard to the adolescents' concerns and even ignore what their sons or daughters question. The adolescents receive the silent treatment. Dads give the perception that what adolescents have to discuss about thriller books is not important.

Question 9

9. Do your parents know what topics are covered in the thriller books?

Only the "yes" responses were tabulated. Males and females responded in a similar manner that their parents knew what topics were mentioned in thriller novels. The results are in agreement with Harris (1996) and Dunleavey (1993c and 1994b) who found that parents are aware of what the subject matter is in thriller books.

Since the participants state that their parents are aware of the topics in thriller novels, it can be assumed that the parents acknowledge their acceptance of the horror genre. Because life contains everyday horror scenes, the thriller novels depict what is reality with a mixture of imagination. The "okay" from adults who are in charge of their children's lives allows for the exploration into the world of real-life scenarios. Adults have given approval to the depiction of life's hidden agenda: the violent, aggressive, competitive world obsessed with power and rules. The imaginary characters and thrill-seeking adolescents search for answers to the next phase of their lives - the adult world. The adults in their lives had demonstrated a way to find their answers - through reading thriller novels.

Question 10

10. Do you believe the thriller novels offer something to you? If yes, what do they offer?

Question 10 revealed a difference in two areas. The first was between total males

and females. Females were more likely than males to feel that thriller novels offered them something: 68% of the females and 50% of the males.

The second distinction was between sixth grade males and females. Twice the percentage of females to males responded that thriller novels offered them something. These results agree with those of Christian-Smith (1990), who found that romance novels offered the readers reflection of issues and dilemmas pertinent to them. Nadeau and Niemi (1995) even stated that in order to understand oneself, one must understand others and seek autonomy.

In reply to what novels offer, many answers were given. Examples of some sixth grade males' replies were: "It gives me a chance to daydream about the book." "I believe they offer a new world and a place to go." "You feel like you are the person in the book." Examples of sixth grade females' answers were: "a way to escape stress." "They offer you a chance to be indulged in a horrible (sic) event that gets your heart beating." "... to let you know what kind of things can happen in life." "... ways to deal with what happens." "They give you an imagination and what could happen to you." "Be careful!"

The seventh grade males offered many diverse replies: "a way to imagine death." "... a chance to see a plot developed through horrific events that scare the character as well as me." "... a chance to be in tight and sometimes scary situations." "Nightmares!" "... a break from reality."

Seventh grade females cited: "... enjoyment, inspire me to write, help me to use my brain while I'm studying to uncover the mystery." "A chance to escape what's happening in my life and pretend I'm someone else." "The novels offer more excitement in

my life." "They let you dangle and use your imagination." "They offer me a sense of on-the-edge-of-your-seat."

All groups commented that thriller novels offered adventure, excitement, imagination, entertainment and suspense. Masterton (1991 & 1994) agrees that horror novels offer basic and genuine fear, vivid worlds, daring imagination, shock, suspense, surprise and believability. Also, Mellon's (1990) results showed that seventh through twelfth graders read for entertainment in a variety of ways: problem solving, escape, pleasure and interest. The results confirm what they found.

Interviews

Nine structured questions were used for the adolescent females' interviews and are found in Appendix E. Of the 180 survey responses from sixth and seventh grade adolescent females who read thriller novels, those who read at least three and up to ten were selected to participate in the indepth interview. Of those, 61% (55) of the sixth and 49% (44) of the seventh grade females qualified. Each participant was notified by telephone. Three attempts were made to contact eligible participants at different times of the day. Some were never reached, others were at camps or spending the summer with a relative or the adolescent females chose not to participate. From a total of 40 sixth grade and 44 seventh grade females, fifteen females in each grade agreed to take part in the second phase of the research. Interviews occurred at the most convenient place for the students: at the public library, at home or a place designated by the females. Participant

permission forms were signed and a promise to destroy data upon completion of the study was given to the females. The females were given a copy of the nine structured interview questions so they could feel comfortable with the topics and interviewer. The females were asked to select a name for anonymity. The interviews were taped and transcribed and notes taken. The results of the indepth interviews follow. (Table 3, page 85).

Sixth Graders

Question 1

1. Do you have a favorite author or particular series of thriller books you read for pleasure?

Ninety-three percent of the adolescent females responded that R. L. Stine was their favorite author. The popularity of R. L. Stine as an author is verified by USA Today's weekly listing of Best-selling books (1995 & 1996). The results of Sarland's study (1994a) showed that seventh grade middle school youngsters had a favorite author, R. T. Cusick with the *Point Horror* series. Christian-Smith (1990) also found females loyal to individual romance writers like Stella Pevser, Ellen Conford, Norma Fox Mazer and Francine Pascal. Results are in agreement with Dempsey's (1983) findings which state that popular horror and science fiction works are at a cyclic high again.

TABLE 3
PERCENTAGE (NUMBER) OF INTERVIEWED
FEMALES BY GRADE LEVEL

QUESTIONS		6TH	7TH
1.	Do you have a favorite author or particular series of thriller books you read for pleasure?		
	Author: R. L. Stine	93 (14)	67 (10)
	Christopher Pike	0	20 (3)
	Series: Goosebumps	40 (6)	47 (7)
	Fear Street	60 (9)	40 (6)
2.	Why do you read thriller novels?		
	Excitement, suspense, action	93 (14)	93 (14)
3.	What are some plots or themes from the thriller books which you have read?		
	Death, killings, suicide, abuse (violence)	67 (10)	67 (10)
4.	How do you feel when you read these thriller novels?		
	Excited, scared	100 (15)	87 (13)
5.	What role do young adolescent girls portray in the thriller novels?		
	Major characters	93 (14)	73 (11)
6.	How do you think the adolescent girls are treated in the thriller novels?		
	Not treated well	47 (7)	60 (9)
	Popular versus unpopular	47 (7)	0
7.	What message do you think the thriller novel is sending to its readers?		
	Apparent but varied messages	73 (11)	60 (9)
8.	How do the stories or topics affect you as a female adolescent?		
	Affected (varied answers)	60 (9)	67 (10)
9.	With whom have you discussed the thriller novels?		
	Friends	87 (13)	40 (6)
	Mom	80 (12)	67 (10)
	Dad	20 (3)	33 (5)
	Brother	20 (3)	20 (3)
	Sister	7 (1)	27 (4)
	Cousin	7 (1)	7 (1)
	Aunt	0	7 (1)

Question 2

2. Why do you read thriller novels?

When asked why they read thriller novels, 93% of the females stated they were exciting and suspenseful. Emily said, "They give me something to do when I'm bored ... They make it exciting." Stacey commented, "... they're exciting and you can't put the book down. ... You just want to know what's happening ..." Kiwi explains, "... they keep you on your toes. You don't want to put the book down because you want to know what happens." Selena equated thrillers to "... mysteries and I love mysteries. It scares yourself (sic) and you don't know what's happening." The comments confirm what Christenbury (1993) found: young adults enjoy horror novels and the shift from other forms of literature indicates the definition of horror has changed from unexplainable or supernatural evil forces to those things which can be more readily explained; therefore, the horror novel is more like a mystery or detective story. Others have found similar results: (Dunleavy, 1993c & d; Donahue, 1995, June 15; Barish, 1992).

Question 3

3. What are some plots or themes from the thriller books which you have read?

Participants reported that plots of thriller novels focused on death, killings, or suicide. Sixty-seven percent related stories which contained violence. Dionne retells The Fire, "... It was the New Year's Eve dance ... and this girl ... wanted to see her best friend, but

... she couldn't find her. ... These people came in there and they had a gun. ... They were fixing to shoot them—it was a joke. It was her best friend and her friends. They were just playing a joke. And that was long, long time ago. ... Then she comes back and kills everybody and they wanted to know why." Elizabeth mentions The Beach where "... people are being killed. They don't know who it was or anything. ... It usually ends up being a lifeguard that is jealous of another lifeguard." Another book which involved killings was The Knife as summarized by Stacey, "It's about this girl ...; she's working at the hospital. And there's this new addition... Well, there's this thin, little boy that she really felt sorry for ... She goes in there and visits him and brings him a teddy bear. ... The volunteer is told to stay out of the room and she finds out that a man had killed someone in that room. And ... in every room there's a mystery and there's a dead body. There's something and everyone wants to get out because it's a bad hospital." A nurse is the guilty one who ... "gives them shots and kills them." The killing or murder theme is verified by West (1995), Makowski (1994) and Kies (1992).

Question 4

4. How do you feel when you read these thriller novels?

When asked how they felt when reading thriller novels, 100% of the females stated they were excited or scared. Stacey admits, "I read them at night and I don't want to go to sleep." She admits she doesn't have nightmares. "I just think I'm going to." Alex said, "Some parts I feel like really scared and you want to hide under your covers." Kendra

mentioned that she felt "... good because I like to be puzzled by something ..." Selena stated, "I scare myself by reading when I don't want to read. I don't want to read because it's too scary, but then I read it and I scare myself ..." This confirms what Balter (1989) found in his study of children's fears: reading horror novels is one way for kids to enjoy being scared, yet in control.

Question 5

5. What role do young adolescent girls portray in the thriller novels?

When asked what role young adolescent girls portray in the thriller novels, 93% of the females said major characters. As a major character though, traits for those females differed with each respondent. Bell found them "... strong ... probably about my age—12 or 13 ... smart ..." Stacey found them "... Powerful girls ... greedy." Alex describes the girls as "... pretty lovable ..." Amber said, "She's daring ... stands up for herself and ... for her friend and is a good friend." Kendra found the "... mostly snobby ... turn up their noses to other girls." Kiwi felt that the girl was a main character, but the role is shared with a boy. "... There's usually a boy and a girl; they're either brother and sister or they meet each other and they're friends. Those are the main characters." Elizabeth agreed with Kiwi, "They're usually a boy and a girl for the main character." Emily found that the girls were "... sometimes ... a main character, ... in their teens, usually 13-16." Selena reported, "They're usually the ones who try to figure out the mystery." Allison also found that, "The main character may be the one who helps figure out what happened." Amy

saw the girls as "... in their teens ... and want revenge." Sarah described the females as "Mostly heroes." These findings are contradictory to those of Christian-Smith (1990), who found the female as a weak, submissive person in her study of romance novel characters. According to Forest (1993), nontraditional roles are slowly being introduced into current literature. The passive female character is becoming a person who struggles, grows and attempts to conquer evil. In their interviews the sixth grade females reported female characters as strong, powerful and daring. The female protagonists were the sleuths who figured out the mystery and were leaders seeking answers or solutions to problems.

Question 6

6. How do you think the adolescent girls are treated in the thriller novels?

A distinct variance occurred when the participants were asked how they thought girls were treated in the thriller novels. Forty-seven percent of the adolescent females felt the female characters were not treated well. This is in contradiction with the previous answer in which they felt the females were portrayed as main characters. According to Christian-Smith (1990), oppositional texts which go against the conventional portrayal of stereotyped characters allow the reader to examine dominant and opposing cultural elements. The struggle to be different from the norm involves the female as a heroine, yet in the thriller novels the female still is exploited by others in society, usually males. As part of popular culture, fiction enunciates the desires, dreams and fears of females, yet

represents the struggle of women in the patriarchal world (Daly, 1973). The females interviewed illustrated their opposition to the treatment of fictional heroines. Allison commented, "... I don't think they're treated well, because it's usually somebody that wants to hurt them ... the guys are mean to them. They're (the girls) more helpless than guys. They can't fight back that easily unless they're like rough girls, tougher." Kiwi stated, "... the girls are put right behind the guy. ... He's the one that gets thanked from the teachers. ... People think that boys are stronger and usually that's true in later years, but at my age it's pretty well even. When we get older, usually boys do tend to be stronger than girls, but everyone has that feeling that boys are better." Amber found that "... the guys are ... mean to them, kind of sexist ... guys can do this and girls can't." Selena mentioned that "... they get treated really mean because they're the ones who are victims and they get hurt and ... scared ..." Elizabeth stated, "... the author really makes them sound wimpy; I don't think that's fair. Like they're scared of everything." Jessica explained, "... they're mostly afraid. They're kind of ... wimps."

Despite the helpless wimp treatment of female characters in the thriller novel, 47% found a class of popular versus unpopular girls. Dionne said, "... some of them are popular at school. Some are ... picked on a lot. ... Usually they're popular and pretty." Stacey agreed, "They're... popular. ... they have a lot of friends." Emily acknowledged the popular versus unpopular groups: "... they were treated just like a queen or princess ... or really treated bad ... like dirty trash." Amy revealed that the girls were popular because "... boys always like them. ... sometimes they (the girls) get what they want ... or they try to." Kendra explained that the "... parents usually spoil the girls ... "but"... they're

usually snobby." The findings confirm Lesko's (1988) research of the haves and have-nots or popular and unpopular students.

Question 7

7. What message do you think the thriller novel is sending to its readers?

The adolescent females were asked for any messages the horror novels revealed to them. Seventy-three percent stated that a message was apparent, although the messages varied by individuals. Selena felt "That the same things can happen to us." Allison echoed concern with "... be careful of others and what they may try to do. Always watch what you're doing." Alex agreed with Allison, "... it's something I would do." Elizabeth also felt "... pay more attention ... be more careful ...". Monique said that some books have a message "... like don't do this, but do this." Kendra stated the message was "... to always tell the truth. ... think of other people." Amy declared, "It's ... telling us, people can be different." Amber believed the message was "... be careful ... of strangers." Jessica compares the message to fantasy tales: "... life is not a fairy tale. These things could happen ...". Dionne indicated "... that we can do most anything we want to." Emily expressed, "... be happy with who (sic) you are. Don't try to be other people." Sarah remarked, "... always have a solution to a problem." Since the messages are constructions by the reader as affirmed by Fiske (1992), they are different to each.

Question 8

8. How do the stories or topics affect you as a female adolescent?

Sixty percent replied that they were affected by thriller novels. Sarah had mixed feelings about the novels, "Sometimes it's boring and I wish I hadn't read it, and sometimes ... I want to read it again. They make me feel like girls have more power." Emily felt that "... it sounds like I've heard this kind of story ... and ... this could happen in the real world ..." She continued by explaining she'd get "... a little better security for everybody." Elizabeth voiced her concern because "... there are people who are really crazy out in the world. ... I guess I'm a lot more careful when I'm by myself ... more alert." Kendra explained that "... it scares me ... makes me think of things ... that I hope don't happen to me." Bell goes beyond the point of being scared; she can have nightmares: "I dream ... sometimes that I'm one of the characters in the book." It's more like a nightmare "... if I read it late at night." Therefore, Bell prefers to complete the stories during the daylight hours. Alex stated that she was "... concerned ... at some of the stuff." Allison related, "It can affect me in a lot of different ways depending on what book it was. It will make me more scared ... of what might happen but that could happen to anybody."

Question 9

9. With whom have you discussed the thriller novels?

Eighty-seven percent of the females discussed thriller plots with their friends. Kiwi

stated, "Those are usually people that read it ..." Allison mentioned, "I know my friends are more apt to listen so I'll tell them more so maybe they'll read it." Monique said, "My friends, usually my best friend." Alex explained, "My friends ... they normally want to read it ... and I'll tell them." Kendra clarified her reason to tell friends, "I just tell them what kind of topics it's about ... and they would probably like it." Amber remarked that, "I say ... if you like that book, you have to read this because it's really good. Or you ought to read this book; I read it and it was really good." Emily replied that, "... sometimes I'll talk to my friends if they've read that book ..."

Eighty percent of the females discussed the thriller novels with their moms. Kendra replied that her mom "... thinks they're too scary, but most of the time she doesn't say anything." Bell told of her mom's thoughts, "Sometimes she thinks it's gross what happens to the people." Kiwi explained that, "I told my mom what I've read and sometimes when I've read something funny, I'll read it to her." This result is in agreement with that of Christian-Smith (1990), who found that females related more to other females when discussing plots of romance novels.

Daughters did not have much interaction with their dads when discussing thriller novels. Only 20% of the females reported speaking with dad. Alex stated that dad sometimes will "... give me the money to buy it (a book) but I'll pick out the one I like." Selena stated that her dad would listen to her tell the plot and he would reply with, "That sounds pretty neat," or "That sounds pretty scary; maybe you should read another book like that again." Amy even explained why she doesn't discuss the novels with her dad (and mom): they are "... so tired when they get home from work."

Other people with whom the females discussed the thriller novels were brothers (20%), sister (7%) and cousins (7%). Females do not discuss thriller plots with males as much as they do with other females. This is also in agreement with Christian-Smith's research findings (1990) of romance novels.

Seventh Graders

Question 1

1. Do you have a favorite author or particular series of thriller books you read for pleasure?

Sixty-seven percent of adolescent females responded that R. L. Stine was their favorite author. Nicollete stated owning "... probably around 100 'cause I have a box of books that's got *Fear Street* and my Christopher Pike and my *Goosebumps* books right in there." Brandy confessed to having "... maybe about 30 to 40." Jodi stated that she owned "... at least 20." However, she admitted she had owned more but "... then after I finished those I gave them to one of my teachers." The popularity of Stine confirms USA Today's weekly listings of Best-selling books (1995 & 1996).

Christopher Pike was the second favorite author cited by 20% of the adolescent females. Seven percent named others such as V. C. Andrews, Stephen King, Diana Hoh and M. H. Clarke. Only 7% named no particular author. Results are in agreement with Dempsey's study (1983), which showed that horror is at a cyclic high. This is exemplified

by the numerous horror remakes of classical movies such as *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, books put onto the cinema screen by spooky storytellers such as Stephen King and magazines and paperbacks aimed at teenagers or persons beyond their adolescent years (Cerasini, 1989 & Dunleavy, 1994b). Even R. L. Stine has his *Goosebumps* stories on weekly television programs (Andersen, 1995).

Question 2

2. Why do you read thriller novels?

When the females were asked why they read thriller novels, 93% mentioned suspense, excitement, action and being scared as reasons. Shay explained, "... cause they interest me and I like ... the excitement. ... You can actually feel like you're in the stories ... and can see everything happen." Melanie brought out, "They have a lot of suspense in them ... I get all tensed up and get excited about what I'm going to read next. I can't put the book down because I'm so into it." Adriadne commented, "I think it's cool to be scared ...; you can feel like you're there and feel like you're the person ..." Cassandra sought "... adventure ... so I go to that other world ... and seek challenges." Jodi liked the "suspense" because "... it makes you think sometimes ... like what's going to happen next." Brandy liked "... how it scares me but doesn't scare me totally, just sort of gives me little chills." Ann expressed "... they're exciting ... 'cause ... they have things popping out ... and you can't keep your hands off the book." The comments are in agreement with what Elizabeth Massie (1987) found when she asked seventh grade students to answer an

open-ended questionnaire about why they liked horror books: "Being scared is fun because it's exciting." "I get chillbumps and they feel good." "It's creepy and scary and I like it."

Question 3

3. What are some plots or themes from the thriller books which you have read?

Participants reported the plots of thrillers focused on death, murder and abuse.

Sixty-seven percent of the females told stories which contained killings. Kelly related a story about "... a couple of friends (who) like to play practical jokes on other friends. But then they go too far and kills (sic) one of them ...". Ariadne related one of Stine's *Fear Street* books which was a sequel. It was "... about this girl and her friend's sister died ... she finds out who killed her (the friend's sister) and then the person knows that she knows he killed her friend's sister. He tries to kill her." Laci told of a babysitter who was in trouble: "... someone murdered the child ..." "The father was suspicious of her and "... he tried to kill her because he thought she had killed the baby, but he fell off a cliff " before he could kill her. Connie and Carrie told the same story from the *Goosebumps* series. Carrie started, "... There was a boy who wanted to take piano lessons and he went to this school that turned out to be really freaky ... The guy who owned it was chopping off people's hands and making them play the piano ..." "There was a ghost ... in the house. He (the owner) would wake up at night and hear the piano playing. He'd go down and see the lady playing the piano. Then she'd turn around and be(come) this ugly

face and she wouldn't have any hands." Connie concluded the story with "... after one boy got away, he had an orange drink and he spilled the can on the guy and the guy just melted. The rest of the people's hands just disappeared." Abuse and killing or murder themes are confirmed by Kies (1992) and West (1995).

Question 4

4. How do you feel when you read these thriller novels?

Eighty-seven percent of the females responded that they were scared or tense.

Laura expressed her thoughts, "Sometimes I get scared because I think I'm that girl or the person that is being chased." Ann stated, "I feel excited like I'm right there ... with them." Connie qualified her feelings, "Well, sometimes I get the chills. If it's just more of a scary book ... (I) get chills; ... I just feel weird." Julie justified her feelings, "I get scared sometimes if it's night time. I get a little nervous." Kelly felt the same as Julie, "Well, sometimes if I read them at night, I get really scared." Melanie also told of her fear, "... at night I feel kind of scared." She continued to explain why she reads in bed with a flashlight, "I have to get up to turn it (the light) off and I don't want to get up after I read the thriller novel. ... after I read a scary book, I turn it (the flashlight) off when I'm done." Shay revealed, "I feel like I'm actually seeing everything and I just can't put the book down ... I get chills sometimes." The element of fear is confirmed by Masterton (1987) who stated "... creating an atmosphere of fear is far more important (and far more difficult) than creating a moment of disgust. It is the atmosphere of brooding evil that

will make your horror novel successful ... the feeling that you implant inside your reader's reluctant mind the terrible threat that is hanging not only over your character but over him, too."

Question 5

5. What role do young adolescent girls portray in the thriller novels?

When asked what role adolescent females portrayed in thriller novels, 73% responded that the females were heroines, main characters and strong. Brandy stated, "Most of the time they're main characters when something is happening to them. Usually the guys are just people ... out to get them ..." Ariadne summarized her thoughts, "Usually, they're pretty important ..." Melanie expressed that the females were "... heroines ...because they would solve the mystery." Carrie said, "... They're usually the good guys ... and they try to find out who the killer is ..." Kelly disclosed, "... they are the main characters ... They are usually there all of the time." My findings are in contradiction to Christian-Smith (1990), who found females in romance novels portrayed as minor characters struggling with patriarchal demands and household chores. Because the females in thriller novels are seen as major characters, they are not doing housework or seen in the traditional role of nurturer and subservient to man. The female is portrayed as a strong character who has her own agenda, independence and will to do as she pleases. She can do it on her own; she can think, act and be what she pleases.

Question 6

6. How do you think the adolescent girls are treated in the thriller novels?

The adolescent females contradicted the idea of a main character when 60% stated the female characters were not treated fairly, with much respect or as intelligent people. Ariadne mentioned, "... people exploit them. ... they are outcasts ...". Brandy explained, "... I think that it's ... unfair. ... maybe ... girls just can't fight back the threats ... the authors might think girls are wimpy ...". Shay saw another view of girls' treatment in novels: "They're always running from something. ... boys are mean to them and ... they're always abused ...". Kelly rationalized that females "... are treated like ... wimps ... 'cause most of the people ... are picking on the ... girls because they're by themselves ... they're sorry targets ... because guys are macho." Connie also stated, "...they're treated like the people who are going to get killed ... They're victims." Julie added to the list of descriptors: "... people ... think they're crazy" but the females are told that "... they're crazy." Although the females thought the adolescent females in the thriller novels were treated as major characters with the ability to solve crimes and be involved in action and adventure, the distorted picture of the females being abused physically and mentally is an example of ambivalent identifications: the good girl (major character with positive attributes) versus the bad (unacceptable, not popular and weak or passive). This view of the female is similar to what Christian (1988) found, that women were seen as obedient, subservient to the male and a keeper of the hearth.

Question 7

7. What message do you think the thriller novel is sending to its readers?

When questioned about messages the thriller novels might be sending to its female readers, 60% interpreted various meanings. Julie stated, "That girls can be strong and take care of themselves. They don't need people taking care of them." Nicolette expressed, "... just because you may be a female or just because you may be smaller than others or different ..., it doesn't mean that you can't accomplish things." Connie related, "... try to stay with other people; don't be alone ... there's less chance of being kidnapped or hit by a car." Ariadne thought two messages were evident in the thriller books: "... you should be imaginative. ... be more independent. Don't depend on people as much. Don't let people make you feel like you're less than you are." Laci commented, "You need to watch out for stalkers." Ann related, "If there's a message, it's mostly to the boys. ... not to do things you're not supposed to do." According to Fiske (1992), messages are interpreted by the reader and, therefore, varied. This study's results support those of Fiske because the adolescent females had individual ideas about what message was being sent to the reader.

Question 8

8. How do the stories or topics affect you as a female adolescent?

Sixty-seven percent stated they were affected by the topics or messages. However,

each was impressed differently. Nicolette replied, " ... that could happen to me." Jodi said, "I can relate to them or ... something that could happen." Laura mentioned, "... sometimes I get upset." Brandy stated, "... they make me more aware ... that some of the stuff could be happening." Shay answered, "I feel sorry for them (the characters) because I don't think anyone should be treated like that (beatings)." Connie expressed, "It gets my mind off things." Stephanie reflected, "... it makes me think how I treat my friends and family." Carrie remarked, "It makes me want to read happy books sometimes because it ... makes me nervous about things." Michelle replied that she felt like the girls were "... heroes ... kind of like good girls that have more power ... not as airheads."

According to Smith (1996), the thrillers are transient things which provide uncertainty, danger and mastery. The scary stories boost adolescent's confidence and allow for management of the real world. These findings are in agreement with that of Smith.

Question 9

9. With whom have you discussed the thriller novels?

When asked with whom they discussed thriller novels, sixty-seven percent replied mom. Shay admitted talking to her mom who "... talks about the romance ... in there." Ann told her mom, "This is good ... and she read them ... and she says, 'you're right'." Nicolette stated, "usually I tell mom." Ariadne mentioned that "I don't really discuss them with anybody except my mom." Kelly replied that her mom was "... Glad you read a

book." This concurs with Christian-Smith's (1990) findings of adolescent females who discussed romance novels with females, especially moms.

Forty percent of the females stated they discussed thrillers with friends. Jodi related that "... we read it (the book) at the same time and we talked about it." Julie said, "I have a friend that likes to read a lot, too, and we talk about the stories together."

Thirty-three percent shared plots with dads. Cassandra tells her dad "... but he doesn't really pay attention." Kelly talked to dad but "... dad's not really into thrillers."

Fifty-three percent discussed the books with relatives, such as brothers, sisters, cousins and aunts. Nicolette shared plots with her eleven-year-old sister who listens to outcries from Nicolette when the plot becomes very intense. "... she'll beg me to tell her so I'll tell her." Michelle talked to her brother and two male cousins, sixth and seventh graders, "They say they thought it was a good book, too, and they discuss the ending." Shay enjoys talking with her aunt who has read the thrillers by V. C. Andrews. Shay stated, "... my aunt doesn't think I should be reading them because of ... romance and ... beatings ..." This finding is similar to Radway (1984), who found that females discussed romance novels with friends, relatives and moms; dads were the least mentioned on the list for discussing novels with females.

Summary Statement

Adolescent males and females are reading thriller novels. The favorite author of the middle school adolescents appears to be R. L. Stine with his popular series,

Goosebumps and *Fear Street*. Most of the horror books are being obtained from the school library, rather than home; this is a possible indication that the horror genre is not one being read at home.

Adolescent males and females read thriller books for excitement, suspense and action. Most of the interviewed females liked being scared and would read more for the thrills. Surprisingly, sixth and seventh grade females felt that thriller books offered them something else, a message. However, each received a different message pertinent to her life.

The majority of those who read the thriller books own at least one and as many as forty-four. Many parents do purchase the horror books for their adolescents. In fact, most students stated that their parents knew what topics were covered in the thriller books. The males and females did interact with their friends, moms and dads to discuss plots of thriller books. However, discussion between female friends appears to decline from sixth to seventh grade. This might be because the problems presented in thrillers are not important or relevant to the seventh grade females at that particular time in their lives or the females have found other means of solving their dilemmas. Possibly they may have found another means of searching for excitement, suspense and action. However, sixth and seventh graders were least likely to talk to Dad about the books or plots.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate why young adolescent females read thriller novels and what role the novels offer in the construction of identity. Contemporary literature, which adolescents read for pleasure, is usually not found in basal readers or content area books and is ignored, banned or selectively chosen for use in public/school libraries and the classroom. However, many of the adolescent males and females surveyed are reading thriller novels and are motivated to read more of the horror genre. Although the adolescent thriller novels are not in the curriculum, students obtained their books from school and public libraries, as well as from bookstores from which their parents often purchased the thriller novels.

An initial survey of ten questions was administered to adolescent middle school males and females. The responses from that survey guided the second phase of the research. From the survey results a list of adolescent females who read thriller novels was used as a source for obtaining female participants to be interviewed. This chapter discusses results of the present study and offers recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Answers to questions which guided this inquiry are given in summary. Thriller books used to explore the plots and the way in which females are portrayed are cited to establish evidence of the topics and representations found in a variety of multi-age levels of the thriller novels.

Why Adolescent Females Read Thriller Novels

Most of the adolescent females in this study report they read thriller novels for excitement, suspense and action. Dionne, a sixth grade participant, said she read thrillers "... because they're exciting." Alex, another sixth grade participant, stated, "... They're exciting and full of suspense and I like that." Other sixth grade participants also found the thriller novels exciting. Amber acknowledged, "... because they're fun , exciting and fun to read." Stacy admitted, "... they're exciting and you can't put the books down." Selena stated, "... I like the suspense." Even seventh grade female participants liked the excitement provided in thriller novels. Adriadne said, "... I think it's cool to be scared..." Stephanie thinks "... they're interesting ... it makes you feel like you're on an adventure." Julie remarked, "... it's excitement ... but it's just for fun." Ann stated, "... I think they're exciting period!" Shay admits liking the thriller novels because of "... the excitement." Kelly feels the thrillers have "... more action in them." Even Connie agrees, "There's more action." Michelle believes "... they're scary." Brandy mentioned, "I like how it scares me..." Sixth and seventh grade females responded similarly. Some equated the thrills as those found in mysteries: the tension of discovering what's going to happen next. In R. L.

Stine's (1995) *The Beast* 2 James, a character in the book, relates the background of the roller coaster, The Beast, "... People said that a ghost haunted The Beast at night. Of course, people only make up that story to scare themselves." (p. 3). Although James doesn't really believe in ghosts because he feels it's just a story, he states, "... I don't exactly invite adventure. But when it comes my way, I'm pretty excited by it." (p. 3). He even taunts a girl, "... Why come here if you don't want to be terrified? It's fun!" (p. 7).

Appearing brave when afraid is a challenge so others may not know the weakness or fear of an individual. For example, Walter, in *A Tale from Camp Crypt* (Courtney, 1995, p. 26) displays his fear openly, "...Sn-snake! Everybody, look out! It's a snake!" Even with an adult's reassurance that the snake is harmless, Walter continues with ... "It - it's a snake! ... Kill it!" His fear and excitement reveal his loss of control. Many adolescents relate to the fear of certain insects, animals and the unknown. As Lueptow (1984) found in his research about 33 types of fears people displayed, adolescents feared things in their environment. Some of the fears are dreaded, even though the acknowledgement of the fear appears foolish to some, as in Walter's case. He was embarrassed that his fear of snakes seemed foolish to the adult, but being scared was real to him. Allison, a sixth grade participant, related that if the situation were too realistic in the thriller novels, "... it will make me more scared. ... It will make me more scared of what might happen but what could happen to anybody."

Camp Fear by Carol Ellis (1993) tells of excitement and fear of an adolescent's days at summer camp. Counselors, as well as the campers, have fears and uneasiness about the roommates, food, cabins and planned activities. As Rachel stated, "... There's

nothing like sitting around a camp fire hearing about bears and stange noises and scary groundskeepers to wake you right up." (p. 15). " ... She remembered summer camp very well. The boys liked to scare the girls and hear them shriek." (p. 29). However, camps offer the "screams of your life" too. Stacey who had been on a lake with some other counselors was tossed overboard and screamed for help. Terry asked, " ...Is she scared of the water? ... If she's scared of water, why did she go out in the boat?" Terry replied with " ... Because I'm not scared of boats!" (p. 44). The reality of the unexpected problems and fears play havoc with the adolescent's quest for maturity. Reactions to fears become part of life's daily occurrences. The thought of what would happen if ... enters the realm of fiction and is related to real life. As Freeman (1992), a researcher, who investigated young adult literature which was hidden under the bed or in the closet, mentioned everyone needs a good, safe scare once in a while. The thriller novels do provide excitement through action and realistic drama.

The female adolescents in this study said they read thriller novels to be scared and excited. As Elizabeth, a sixth grade participant, stated, "... I like being scared. ...You see situations people are in and how they can get out of it. So, therefore, when you're in a scary situation, you can just refer to that situation in the book." Even Jessica, another sixth grader, expressed, "I just like being excited ... excited, thrilled." Carrie, a seventh grader, expressed, "Well, they're exciting and suspenseful. ... they end with everything resolved." Brandy explained, "... I like how it scares me, but it doesn't scare me totally, just sort of gives me little chills." Stephanie, also a seventh grader, indicated that "... they make you feel like you're actually there. It makes you feel like you're going on an

adventure." The reality of problems and situations may be for a character in the book, but the tension, fears and actions are real. The drama and action in the stories create an atmosphere which leads to excitement and suspense as Melanie, a seventh grader, related, "I get all tensed up and get excited about what I'm going to read next ... They have lots of suspense in them ..." The everyday occurrences may not be part of their reality, but the fears, excitement and problems could be those of someone else.

Identity Formation Constructed By Young Adolescent Females

Adolescent females in this study see the female character portrayed as a major character in thriller novels. The thriller novels usually portray a pair of protagonists (a male and female) or a strong adolescent female with leadership qualities. Some sixth grade participants added their thoughts. As Kiwi, a sixth grade participant explained, "... there's usually a boy and a girl - they're either brother or sister or they meet each other and they're friends and those are the two main characters." Other sixth grade participants saw the female as a main character. Emily stated that the female is sometimes "... a main character, sometimes it's just a sister or something like that." Amber expressed, "... a lot of times they are the main characters and their friends. There is always at least one girl in the role in the whole book." Selena expressed, "They're usually the ones who try to figure out the mystery." Amy mentioned "... they're major characters." Stacy noticed that they are "... powerful girls." Amber noticed "... a lot of times they are the main characters... They're (sic) always at least one girl in the role in the whole book. ... She's daring and

stands up for herself." Alex thought the female was "... probably the main character and probably pretty lovable..." Sarah even went so far as to cast the females as "... mostly heroes." Bell stated, " I see main characters ... a lot of main character girls." Jessica responded that girls are "... mainly the main parts." Allison also felt the girls portrayed in the thriller novels "... usually ... play the main character."

Adriadne, a seventh grade participant, mentioned that "... usually, they are pretty important." If a male protagonist were present in the thriller novel, Selena, a sixth grader, stated, "...They're usually like the scary, mysterious people chasing them, or sometimes they get blamed for a lot of things." Elizabeth, a sixth grade participant, felt that the male is "... usually played as a macho person." According to Sarland (1994a), who researched *The Point Horror* series being read by middle school students, the protagonist was always male. However, the focus of this study encompassed many series and the protagonist was female or with a male partner. Lynn's (1969) research of preference for same-sex characters in novels noted a significant increase in males' preference for same-sex characters but a significant decrease in preference among females during their teen years. The explanation seems to be consistent with developmental patterns related to sex roles. Because of society's hidden roles and privileges to males, the environment becomes more male-oriented and less female-oriented. Although the present study did not find as many male protagonists in the thriller novels, males were present, usually in a secondary or sharing position with the female protagonist. Possibly the adolescent females in the current study did not value the male role as much as the female role. However, the feminine protagonist appeared to make an impression upon the reader's concept of the role model.

Although the leading character was a female and shown to be a heroine, strong and independent, a discrepancy was noted. The female readers saw a female character who was physically and/or mentally abused. The patriarchal theme of weak, submissive or abused women as seen in horror novels and movies still persists in the present Young Adolescent thriller novels. However, the female readers "see through" the written words; the oppositional meanings are obvious to the sixth and seventh grade females. The female character is actually weak and submissive and still in a traditional male-dominated world. Dionne, a sixth grade participant, explained that "... some are ... picked on a lot." Amber, also a sixth grade participant, stated, "... sometimes the guys are ... mean to them, kind of sexist." Amy suggested that girls "... get treated differently. ... the girls are ... innocent." Monique felt it's "... kind of like she's lesser (sic) than other people because of how the author decides to portray her." Selena mentioned, " They usually play the victims of the story." Kiwi declared, "... the girls are put right behind the boy. I don't think the girls don't (sic) get as much credit in the books." Allison stated, "... the boys are mean to them. They try to hurt them." Jessica voiced, " ... authors always have to use girls. ... they think girls are the perfect part to be scared." Alex expressed, "... they can be treated kind of mean." Alex continued, " If they're treated normally, of course, it wouldn't make a very good book."

Seventh grade participants also stated similar findings. Nicolette detailed, " In a couple of books I read, the boys have been treated differently than the women because there were some people who ... thought the only place for women was in the home... Since she was a woman that was out of the home, why did she need any help 'cause she

was tough enough to be out of the kitchen? That was exactly, actually what they were saying too! ... That's one more way they're treated unfairly." Carrie noted that the girls were "... usually... the people getting killed." Melanie commented, "... the girl is a 'fraidy cat'." Brandy remarked that the girl "... can't fight back. ... I guess that some writers, not just R. L. Stine, ... think that ... girls are wimpy and they can't fight back the threats and everything." Michelle expressed, "... they play the ones who are so scared and they don't know what they are doing. ... they mostly portray girls as airheads." Connie stated bluntly, "They're victims!" Kelly asserted that the girls in thriller novels "... are treated like ... they're wimps ... 'cause most of the people in the stories are picking on the main character of girls (sic) because they're always by themselves... cause they're easy to get instead of boys." Cassandra expressed, " They're afraid; they're scared. They're not sure of what you should do." Laci declared, "... they're not treated with much respect." Adriadne felt "... like people exploit them. ... They're victims." Shay related her view to the V.C. Andrews series she was reading, "... they're always abused ... and people are mean to them and tease them." Julie remarked that the girls "... feel stupid." Even though the authors give the female protagonist an important part in the thriller novels, most young adolescent females understand or interpret the hidden curriculum.

Emma in *The Tale of the Nightly Visitors* (Derby and MacHale, 1995) was tackling vampires who had overrun the town and were seeking all citizens as their victims. Emma "... had been in a dangerous and gruesome situation and hadn't panicked, at least not totally." (p. 116). She resolved, "... I'm not giving up ... " (p. 124). Lex, the leader of the vampires, asks Emma "... You like adventure, don't you? ... Once you are with us, you

will have the most amazing adventures you can imagine." (p. 135). The male vampire states, "... I am far too smart ..." But Emma replies, "... I may not be as smart as you, ... But there's one thing I'm much better at than you. ... I'm really good at telling time." (p. 136). Although Emma has outsmarted the vampire, she admits that she is not as smart as the male, who in this case is a vampire. As Elizabeth, a seventh grade participant, observed in the thriller novels "... girls are supposed to be scared of everything", but in this case, the female was not afraid to confront the vampire, yet she admitted not being as intelligent as the male.

In *The Fog* by Caroline Cooney (1989) Christina a seventh grader was sent from her Burning Fog Isle home in Maine to a mainland school. "Christina had a tremendous sense of her power. Like granite she was: stone and rock. Her small body did not seem like something from the seventh grade. More like something cut from the quarries of the islands of Maine." (p. 208). However, "... She was only a seventh-grader. She knew nothing." (p. 209). In this scenario, the adults control the pupils who are housed in their inn during the school year. Mr. and Mrs. Shevvington, the principal and one of the teachers of the school, monopolize and control the lives of those who live with them at the inn. Although Christina thinks she is in charge of her life, she is mentally abused by the adults who embarrass her in class, control her with their orders and punishments and push her to rebel against the system. The ongoing saga continues in the next book. Christina is only one of the many adolescents seeking adulthood, power and autonomy (Giroux and Simon, 1989). Shay, a seventh grade participant, related how some people

tease and abuse others, including her, " they tease them; ... that's what people do to me too. Everyone tells me it's because they like you."

In *Point Crime's School for Terror* going to school meant a struggle to survive for the females. Death was everywhere: Alison and Miss Sagan drowned, Kate was electrocuted with her own hairdryer which was tossed in the tub and Susie was pushed off the edge of a second story balcony. The killer was Lynsey who was jealous of those females who appeared to like Mr. Slade, the English teacher. Brandy, a seventh grade participant, remarked, "... that girls maybe can't have their own way of thinking ... and are wimpy. ... they can't fight back the threats..." Allison, a sixth grade participant, noted that the girls in the thriller novels purposely commit planned abuse, "... they take them off some place, acting like they're really good friends and stab or shoot them." Rather than a friend, the friend becomes a murderer.

Abuse by a male is apparent in *The Snowman* by R. L. Stine (1991). Although Heather has been a friend to Bill Jeffers (nicknamed Snowman because of his white hair), she found that something was not quite right. Heather complained about her verbally abusive uncle and then discovered that Snowman killed him by strangulation. However, this was not something new to Snowman because he had already killed his own father. Heather, as the strong female protagonist, finds herself in a difficult dilemma when she refuses to give any more insurance money to Snowman. She is knocked out by Snowman and awakens in darkness and cold:

I'm not blind. I'm inside something. I'm wrapped inside something. She tried to move her hands, but the shock of pain made her stop. They were still tied. Her feet were

tied, too, she realized. ...He's wrapped me in something hard and cold. And I can't move, can't break out. ...She could feel tapping and pounding on her back. A familiar thudding sound. The sound of snow being packed. ... suddenly she realized where she was. I'm packed in snow. He's packed me in snow. I'm inside a snowman."

(p. 170-171).

However, being an intelligent adolescent, she uses her creative talents to find a way out of her tomb of death. Luckily she has a butane lighter in her pocket. Twice she strikes it, but it doesn't work. Her prayers are answered on the third strike. A small hole opens her way to enlarge it and create a means of escape. Snowman doesn't escape his fate, because he accidentally catches on fire and is severely burned. He is taken into police custody for the murder of his father. However, Heather is saved because of Ben, a male friend, whose hunch alerted the police and saved Heather. Nicolette stated that "... just because she (a female) was smaller doesn't mean that there's something she can't do." Sixth grader, Kiwi, observed that the male is "... the one to save the day. He's the one that gets thanked from the teachers." The female is not acknowledged as a heroine.

As Allison, a sixth grade research participant stated, ... " the guys are mean to them (the girls)". Jessica, a sixth grade participant, used the word "wimps" to describe some of the female protagonists. Even Stine used the term in a description of what a girl does: "... she wimps out" (1995, p. 29). Brandy, a seventh grade participant, accuses the author of thinking girls are wimpy. She even accuses R. L. Stine for using stalking as a way to threaten girls, " ... he and other authors might think that ... girls can't fight back the threats." Connie, a seventh grade participant, added that the females were victims.

Although abuse is apparent in society, the role of the female in thriller novels follows the traditional horror genre of the female in a victimized role. The current adolescent female appears strong, but she is weak in many situations with a male usually in control. According to Christian-Smith (1990), the females in romance novels are passive and "keepers of the hearth." The thriller novels demonstrate some of the glorification of the patriarchal domination. Sarland (1994b), in his research of the *Point Horror* series, described the female protagonists as victims and detectives. A distinct feature of the series is that three or four males are usually suspects. Although the series involved as a basis for this study did not find as many males evident, the male figure was obvious. In fact, he was sometimes the "hero" of the story. Kiwi, a sixth grade participant, declared that, "...it's always the boy who does the rescuing and he's the one to save the day." The boy in the thrillers, according to Elizabeth, a sixth grader, is ... "usually played as a macho person." Stine (1995) uses James to explain that girls can't make it without males: "... She'd be a mess without me." (p. 29). Livvie in *The Stepdaughter* (Ellis, 1993) is saved from being killed by her stepfather, who had taken another identity because he had killed his first wife and daughter. In the nick of time, Joel enters the scene and ruins the stepfather's plans. "He won't come after you. ... He'll never be back. ... He wouldn't dare. He's gone off somewhere and he'll never come back here. You're safe now." (p. 213). The male has saved the day even though the female had the strength and courage to fight an adult who was stronger and more powerful than she. *The Mall* (Cusick, 1992) with its mazes and underground passages creates a haven for terror. Trish is watched and targeted as a victim of a love-crazed male named Athan. Athan takes Trish against her will to the

underground world of a mall. Luckily, her boyfriend Wyatt follows and saves her:

"...who's the hero around here? ... I mean, who shot the bad guy? Who saved the girl?

Not that it seems to make any difference to anyone." (p. 211). The females who read the thriller novels are given the traditional theme of the Prince Charming or good guy who saves the female, although she appears to be strong and independent. The Women's Liberation Movement has not made an impact upon the role of the female characters in thriller novels. The female, although seen as cunning and powerful, has a long way to become "mistress" of her life.

Portrayal of Females

The adolescent females in this study say they read thriller novels to seek excitement and to be scared. The power, strength, escape and popularity females seek in thriller novels are seen in texts which send conflicting messages to readers. Oppositional meanings are obvious to most of the adolescent females: be strong and independent, yet be weak, submissive and dependent. "Be a good girl", yet display your independence while following society's rules, expectations and limitations. The dualistic choice is desire or fear. As Giroux, Simon & contributors (1989, p. 81) stated "... fear is also a desire - to be in the place of the Other..." The norm or society's rules dominate the popular literature of the times - in this case, thriller novels. The adolescent females' desire is to discover who they are, but not who they are not. The sixth and seventh grade females know they are not "wimps" as portrayed in the thriller books. The identification with characters,

situations and text in "fantasy" represents a struggle for the adolescent females in an ideological and utopian popular culture world.

The females seek to discover a "me" within the society they are entrenched. The pressures from peers and adults create havoc upon the females who want to be the perfect example of femininity. Allison, a sixth grader, knows that "... guys can protect themselves and girls aren't as easily protected. They're more helpless than guys. ... They can't fight back that easily unless they're rough girls, tougher." Kiwi said, "... I guess ... people think that boys are stronger and usually that's true in later years, but at my age it's pretty well even. When we get older usually boys do tend to be stronger than girls, but everyone has that feeling that boys are better. ... I think the boys and girls are even when it comes to brains." Selena even mentioned, "... it's more realistic that girls get more scared than guys. Most guys just think things are jokes." The girls "think seriously." Amy sees the girls as "... popular" and having "boys always like them." Amber realized restrictions placed upon her as a female, "... guys can do this and girls can't." Dionne commented how girls are "... usually ... popular and they're pretty. ... and treated like gold." However, Dionne admitted that "... it depends upon the people that surround them." Stacy even saw the female as "... popular ... they have a lot of friends and boyfriends." Sarah thought that the "... girls are mystery solvers." The adolescent females appear to "... always have a solution to a problem." Bell remarked that the females "... can speak ... like regular people." Seventh grade females also expressed their reactions to the females' portrayal in the thriller novels. Brandy stated that the female "... can't fight back. She has to take it." Jodi expressed that the females were treated "... like every other day people. ... you can be

nice to them ... but you also can get into fights with them." Cassandra said, "... it's kind of being pushed into doing something, but if you don't, I'm still your friend." Shay reported that the females were "... always running from something." Laura mentioned "... other people always want to kill them." Melanie declared the girls in thrillers as "... chickens." Ariadne expressed that "R. L. Stine ... makes the women in his books dependent on other people."

Just as Dionne and Stacy remarked, popularity is noted in the thriller novels. Those less fortunate suffer the consequence of being in the "other" group, the have-nots or the unpopular. Lynsey expresses her dissatisfaction with her life in *School of Terror* (Beere, 1993): "... You've got your stupid home and I haven't got a home because I'm a stranger in it. Nobody likes me, nobody wanted me - ..." (p. 132). Some feel that they need to change to be a part of a social group. Roxanne in *The Vampire's Promise* (Cooney, 1993) believes she needs a new image:

Roxanne had been sitting on the floor playing with her hair. She had been growing it out forever and ever, and it was finally below her shoulders, but now that she had it, she couldn't stand it. Long hair was such a pain. She was ready to cut it short again. Shorter than even the boys wore their hair. She wanted a new persona: sharp, bright, vivid demanding. No more of this sweet romantic stuff. Roxanne wanted to make waves. Astonish people. Set trends. (p.5)

Even Anya in *The Fog* (Cooney, 1989) wants a change:

... Anya hated being poor. She hated her tiny house. its shingles curled from the salt air, white trim peeling, enormous piles of lobster traps filling the little yard. Anya

dreamed of cities: skyscrapers, escalators, high fashion, and taxis. She worked hard in school; striving, striving, striving to put Burning Fog Isle behind her and become someone else. (p. 5)

However, some females are not content with just changing; some want everything. In *The Return of the Vampire* (Cooney, 1991), Devenee mentions how some girls have it all:

...lots of girls have it all. ... Aryssa ... She has everything because she has beauty.

If I had beauty ... I would have buddies who really love me ... All it takes is to be beautiful, but I was born plain and I will never have a chance to be anything else.

Still ... I want it all. (p. 53)

As adolescent females search for identity, the groups to which they belong assume a certain accepted style of dress, particular traits, revealing mannerisms and recognizable attributes. Just as Selena stated that girls "... think seriously...", so do the members of a select group. The Scorpio Society in *Zodiac Chillers* (Ellis, 1995) were females who were born under the Scorpio sign of the Zodiac. They are "... chosen by destiny ... Scorpions are special ... Ruled by Pluto, Scorpions are passionate. Powerful. Loyal ... And Scorpions are fearless. A Scorpio takes chances ..." (p.69). The females accept their chosen destinies as links to acceptability in an exclusive group. They are the "haves" of Lesko's (1988) Catholic high school and social queens in Finder's (1997) junior high. But what of those who are not so fortunate, the unpopular or "have nots"? Liza was such a person in *Sixteen Candles* (Pine, 1993). She was a "... fat, unpopular girl from Pitney Docks." (p. 5). Krishna in *The Last Vampire* (Pike, 1995) states ..."You are what you are. I am what I am." (p. 139). The sacrifices one makes to belong to a group or to be

like others create problems. Sometimes the person gives up what is the backbone of her belief system. In the case of the vampire Krishna, he states that he has sacrificed "... the love of God." (p. 13). The hopes, desires and wishes to be others or like others only brings grief. "The most content people are those who expect nothing, who have ceased to dream." (p. 91). The opportunity to succeed in society is to be part of a group - to be acknowledged as "being of" the "in" group. To the adolescent females, the self-sacrifices may be uniform dress apparel, tolerable attitudes, succumbing ideals and condescending personalities. Outsiders are forced to reevaluate their "wants" and "needs" and question the group's identity. Whom can one trust? Sarland (1994a) pictures the protagonists in the *Point Horror* novels as both child and adult: they are torn in an identity crisis. They are forced to solve their own problems, but it is a struggle to do so. Society places its restrictions upon the females in their roles and quest for identity because of cultural limitations.

"Being a good girl" is not always good enough. Bethany in *Be Mine* (McFann, 1994) sums it up with "... You can't live your life to please them. You owe it to yourself to find out what you want." (p. 205). The search for "I" is seen in the thriller novels with the conflicts and struggles the females confront. Sarah, a sixth grader, noted that the females in thrillers attempted to solve mysteries. Bell, another sixth grade participant, also noticed that the main character "... kept asking questions and asked about things." The desires to be "me" produce inquiring questions and unanswered issues. The influence of thriller novels makes the depictions of the female characters an important issue. Females need to be seen in a positive image. Because the images portrayed in thriller books depict females

in leading roles but allow them to be victimized, the characters reflect what society and reality acknowledge: an understanding towards females and their experiences is not shown as a prominent concern. Ming, a female character in The Dead Game (Bates, 1993) finds herself upset in the rankings of her senior class. She had been number one until a set of male twins, Austin and Adler, had transferred from a private school where they ranked as number eight and ten in their class. Their parents looked for a place where the twins would have no Honors classes and their sons could move up in the senior class rankings. Ming states

... Their parents are rich enough to move anywhere, and they picked here for a and A's final semester just so the boys can take top honors. Austin will graduate number one, and Adler is number two.

And you're number three, Linnie thought grimly. Not valedictorian. Not salutatorian. Nothing. (p. 4).

Although Ming had worked four years to achieve the number one spot in her graduating class, she was ousted in rank by male transfers who came to a school which did not offer advanced classes and moved them to the top of the class. The female was victimized by an educational system which allowed unequal measurements to be used as justification for rankings in scholarly work. Ming was not able to remain the number one student in rank because she earned it for four years of hard work; rather, she lost it to a system which placed emphasis on a grading system which distinguished the "have's and have not's" - those with wealth who play a game of what they can obtain with the power they have. In this case, ranking was the payment for the males. The female was victimized

and society accepted the justice of the system. The ambitious female who fought the conventional system to achieve a career or pursue a goal and a special place in society's structure was discouraged by one single placement, a rank. As Walkington (1991) found in Ibsen's and Rich's novels and poetry, women's social roles were limited by the power of men. The biases against a woman's right to a vocation are shown in the expectations of women to remain the nurturer, the domestic caretaker and to accept a less important position in society. The struggle to attain success and approval for honor is difficult. Cassandra, a seventh grade participant stated, "Sometimes I feel like I'm reading about myself ... because I'm a teenager going through teenage problems." The struggles of everyday life - to achieve success in the classroom, parental pressure to do well in school and peer pressure to be in particular groups - create problems which are difficult for any adolescent to solve.

Another type of approval is the image of the female, not for her personality or intelligence, but as a conquest. Elizabeth stated that the main male in the thrillers is "usually played as a macho person." He displays his strength and popularity in groups. Darlene Riggs, a waitress and college student, is flattered by Robert Q. Parker's lure of "Honey, you can take anything you want. Help yourself." (Hoh, 1993, p. 5). One of the group of girls discussing Robert Q's fan club of female admirers, Iaan states, "... The guy's a jerk. Always tossing money around as if he owned his own bank. He talks too loud, drives like a maniac, and gives new meaning to the term pushy." (p. 4). Hailey, another girl at the table mentions, "... He's a star on the tennis team, he manages the campus radio station, he belongs to the best fraternity on campus, and look at the crew of fans

surrounding him." (p.5). Hailey continues with "... he's got the perception and sensitivity of a Q- tip. (p.5-6)." "... he dated and discarded girls like used tissues. His little black book must be the size of an unabridged dictionary." (p.7). The female, Darlene, in this scenario is being charmed by an expert in the field of scoring females on his list of followers or conquests. The female is not being seen as an individual with feelings, thoughts or ambitions, but rather as a conquest to be added to a list of others who become just another name in the growing book " the size of an unabridged dictionary". The image of the male as a conqueror and one who plays games points out the attitude toward females: they are to be submitted to society's list of exploited people. According to Adriadne "... people exploit them(females). ...They're kind of treated as ... below people ... outcasts. ... they are targeted." Just as Robert Q targets his latest conquest - the waitress - he treats her as if he were an idol or one with whom she should be acquainted.

Society also allows women to compete for a place in the home. In Stine's *Fear Street* saga The Burning (1993c), Julia and Hannah are arguing. "I hate you, Hannah," Julia replied quietly, calmly. "I want you to die." ... "Why should you be the hostess?" "...Why should I not be the pretty one? The charming one? Why should I not be Father's favorite? Why should I not take Mother's place? I am the oldest - and the smartest." The fight to achieve a place in the home presents a dilemma for two sisters. The oldest, because she is the first-born, feels it is her right to be the "Other", the mother of the household. Rank in the home is seniority. However, why does competition need to exist? Nicolette, a seventh grade participant, noted "...In a couple books I read, the boys have been treated differently than the women because there were some people who were, they

thought, the only place for women was in the home..." The male is the man and head of the household and permits females to fight for a position in his "kingdom". Being a favorite, or "Daddy's girl", means special treatment and maybe precious rewards. The females are victims of his reign because they struggle to be the "chosen one" or favorite. As Daly (1973) stated in her study of the patriarchal reign, man controls and dominates the world.

Messages

Adolescent females utilize their prior knowledge and current environmental influences to decode messages specifically designed for them. Each message was unique to the females and shaped their perceptions of the world around them. Through hermeneutics, their interpretations constructed the lifeworld of realities and fantasies. The meanings signified by the adolescent females are culturally shaping them as they become immersed in texts and their own world experiences. Because literature allows readers to enter the world of others, relationships and understanding others and self is a way of forming identity. The information obtained from the horror genre creates a value system and operates with a social code, which can then shape behavior (Berger, 1984).

Some adolescent females felt that the thriller books offered them various messages. Because of personal experiences and perspectives of the world around them, the females gave varied points of view. Some felt the novels warned readers about society's ills; others felt that understanding themselves offered suggestions on how to better prepare

themselves for the world in which they live. Understanding relationships, complex life situations and interpreting textual messages offered the females a chance to look upon behaviors and attitudes of society and the connection to communities of other adolescent females.

Monique, a sixth grade participant, stated that the message she received was "... don't do this but do this...". She felt she was being directed or guided to what is right from wrong or what is acceptable or not. Elizabeth stated, " Maybe ... we don't have to be scared of everything all the time." Society expects one to follow the rules, which are based on conformity. Emily mentioned that "... just because you're a girl doesn't mean you'll go down as dirty scum... be happy with who (sic) you are. Don't try to be other people. ... because if you try to become someone else, you just might end up being worse ..." The social norms and values are perceived by the reader and allow her to discover the world around her (Vogel & Creadick, 1993). Even Allison, another sixth grade participant, felt the message was "...always watch what you're doing." The unwritten, moral code is exemplified through the words which signify meaning constructions to the reader. Traditional values are given, but alternatives are present. Amy even declared, "It's telling us - people can be different ..."and so they ..."get treated differently." Monique emphasized, "They warn you about some things. ... like telling you stories to scare you enough to help you decide better things you can do so you won't end up in a similar situation." Allison commented, "To be careful of others and what they may try to do. Always watch what you're doing. ... just check it out and see." Dionne asserted, "... that we can do most anything we wanted to ... Like if we wanted to be on

top of the world, we could if we wanted to. We can try real hard ... by get(ting) big jobs."

Kendra stated, "To always tell the truth. Think not to be snobby and to think of other people." The female can choose from multiple interpretations and reflect on the social and aesthetic values presented.

Ariadne, a seventh grade participant, believes, "... they're trying to tell you that you should be imaginative you should be more independent. Don't depend on people as much. Don't let people make you feel like you're less than you are." In this case, Ariadne receives a message which implies that as a female she needs to seek identity as an individual - seek autonomy. Nicolette, also a seventh grader, pointed out, "... because you may be smaller than others or different than others, ... doesn't mean that you can't accomplish things." Julie added to that idea, "... girls can be strong and take care of themselves. They don't need people taking care of them. ... even boyfriends ... don't do much." The language and its meanings are establishing an understanding of "self" or the "other" as explained by Lacan (in Grumet, 1995). The female knows what she reads and views herself as part of the world which presents reality. Her identity focuses upon her experiences, involvement with the environment and the feminine characters presented in literature. The female selects what she wants from the written words and applies the meaning to her relevant surroundings. However, as Connie, a seventh grade participant, states, "... be careful ... don't be alone... ." Connie feels the image portrayed in thriller novels requires some reservation, analysis and understanding. The accounts of murder, suicides, HIV, flesh-killing bacteria and other horrors send caution signs. The world is not always a safe place to be. The home, usually thought of as "... a kingdom, responsibility,

comfort, total world ... is an extension of ourselves; it tolls in answer to one of the most basic chords mankind will ever hear. My shelter. My earth. My second skin. Mine." (King, 1983, p. 272). Life is not so simple. The unbelievable fantasies of the thriller novels open the secure and safe doors to the adults' world of hostility, violence, inequities, and uneasiness. The parental abuse which Shay, a seventh grade participant, described from a V.C. Andrew's book makes "...you ... actually feel like you're in the stories and ... can see everything happen." Cassandra, another seventh grade participant, stated "...Sometimes I feel like I'm reading about myself ... because I'm a teenager going through teenage problems." Connie also emitted a warning, "... stay with other people; don't be alone." Laci was more specific in her interpretation, "You need to watch out for stalkers." Sixth grader, Selena, warned, "That the same things can happen to us. That you can be home in that situation and ... it could happen to you" Amber solicited advice, "Just be careful ... of strangers." Jessica also admitted, "These things could happen... stalkers, killers... ." The adolescent female recognizes herself in some of the situations presented in the thriller plots. Michelle, a seventh grade participant, discussed solutions to problems, "You can find one." (solution). Focusing on relevant topics and situations, the adolescent female perceives an image of her world and shapes her identity. The thriller novels permit the adolescent female to explore the offerings of the fictional writings and construct her cosmos of reality. For Ann, a seventh grader, the ... "message, it's mostly to the boys ... not to do things you're not supposed to do." The female's engagement in the reading process involves emotional reactions to the text, characters and roles. Like Radway's

(1984) adolescent females who read romance novels, the adolescents in this study read to understand themselves and their femininity.

Book Sources

In this study adolescent males and females did not get their thriller books from home. The parents do purchase the thriller books for the female adolescents although the school and public libraries were designated as places most frequently used for obtaining the horror genre books. An implication is that the horror genre may not be read at home. Given in order, most are obtaining copies of the thrillers from the school library, bookstore, public library and home. Parents even purchase books for their adolescents but do not appear to have many in the house which the adolescents read. Most adolescents own at least one copy of a horror novel, either purchased or given as a gift from a friend or relative. The marketing strategies of conglomerate companies must be working. The glitzy covers, the holograms, free gifts, enticing contests with wonderful trips, lures of owning special t-shirts and fan club memberships are allowing companies to franchise other businesses to join with them in a rewarding enterprise. Parents join the frenzy by buying the latest book for their children, permitting them to send in for special products, paying for the latest gimmick of merchandizing sales and even consuming food which has labels that contain certain proofs-of-purchase needed to send away for free books or gifts not found elsewhere. Because the books are mainly paperbacks, the cost is not prohibitive for most budgets. Those adolescents who have little means to buy the thrillers share with

their friends or some are given as gifts. Even older brothers and sisters pass their copies to younger relatives. Some even give them to their teachers. Another source of thriller books for those who don't have the means to buy many is the library. The school library is the most convenient place for those who live far from the public library. However, for those with transportation, the public library is the second choice.

The marketing groups try to make the thriller books accessible and place them in some unusual places: Avon catalogues, gas stations, linen stores and feed stores. If one couldn't travel far, the mail delivers through the book club plan. Even television exploits the books. The availability of the thrillers makes them easy to purchase, reasonable in cost and great for profits. Adolescents can find the books within their reach, because they are within reach somewhere. Buying, sharing and obtaining thriller novels appears to be easy for adolescents, although parents appear not to have any of the genre at home. Either the students don't let their parents know that they read the genre or they keep them at school to trade or share.

Authors

The most frequent thriller book author mentioned by adolescent males and females was R. L. Stine. However, Stine's popularity with females appears to wane in the seventh grade. As Wilhelm (1997) found R. L. Stine leads to Stephen King, Ray Bradbury, or Ursula Le Guin. Sometimes R. L. Stine leads to King and Stine (other series). Even other materials are offerings, such as movies and comics. The adolescents are involved in the

popular culture world with the horror genre. As adolescents read certain series or particular authors, they begin to see a pattern in the plots or themes or the reading becomes too easy. They move on to other authors or series to achieve satisfaction, rather than boredom. Their tastes or interests change as they move from one stage to another or one grade to another. The quest for identity or solutions to problems may not be a priority. The social groups to which the females belong may also have an influence in what they read. As Finders (1997) found in her research, the seventh grade females carried Stine or Pike horror novels as part of their status identity. Maybe some of the choices for Stine are not just because he is the favorite author, but because he becomes an identification for a social group.

Discussion of the Novels

Dad was the least mentioned person with whom adolescent males and females interacted for discussion about the thriller novels. Work schedules and interest were reasons given for not discussing the novels with Dad. Friends were cited by the females as the first source of discussion. Females found that Dads were not interested with listening about thriller plots when they came home from work. The adolescents felt their Dads were too tired to listen or wanted time to themselves or to relax. The male as head of the household shows the power and desire of listening to what he feels is important. The thriller novels' plots and messages are irrelevant to him and his place at home. He displays his power by not acknowledging the importance of his daughter's excitement or fears. She

as a female has no power in his realm of society (Daly, 1973). The male chooses what he desires; the female is obedient and follows orders or hidden messages - the silent treatment, an oppressive meaning.

Just as Radway (1984), Finder (1997) and Christian-Smith (1990) found in their studies, the present study found that adolescent females tend to discuss books' plots and themes with their friends and with their moms. Because moms were once girls who also struggled through contradictory times and readings, understanding issues and the desire to listen are apparent. Since the women's movement in the 1970's, women have struggled to be heard about issues of women's education, rights and jobs. The traditional picture of the passive, obedient woman and housewife was demonstrated in literature during the 80's. The mothers of today's female adolescents listen because they know what it is to be silenced or oppressed. They know how women can be marginalized by a husband's demands and silenced by empowered space in the patriarchal structure of the family (Fiske, 1992). The "little woman" is the servant in the home. The quotation "the home is a man's castle" reflects the order of authority and male role in society. Even today a girl child is not a "great" happiness but a "small" one in China (Jones, 1995). The hidden message is clear: a female is not valued. The mothers and other females listen to each other discuss thriller plots because they are aware of the need for assertive feminine role models and understanding listeners. In order to understand themselves, the female adolescents try to understand their mothers or other females. Rejection or selection is a choice the adolescent makes. The mother, as a nurturer and care giver, teaches and suppresses many of her needs to satisfy others' needs. The adolescent female observes her

female model and attempts to establish her own identity. Through the characters, the female adolescent chooses her example of femininity. Michelle, a seventh grade participant, sees her role model as "... heroes. Kind of like good girls have more power ...". They are not seen as "... airheads." Laci, another seventh grade participant, sees the female as "...pretty strong because she's smart for her years." Kelly, another seventh grade participant, rejects the feminine image given: "They are treated like ... wimps. ... Well, most people think of girls as being a whole lot different from guys because guys are macho instead of girls." Kelly indicates that the female is not weak nor much different from the male. A sixth grade participant, Amber, sees the female as "... daring, stands up for herself and stands up for her friend and is a good friend." Kelly seeks what she desires in herself. Kiwi, a sixth grade participant, perceived that "... girls are put right behind the boy. ... it's always the boy who does the rescuing and he's always the one to save the day. ... He's the one that gets thanked from the teachers ..." ... I guess they (people) think that boys are stronger and usually that's true in later years, but at my age it's pretty well even. When we get older, usually boys do tend to be stronger than girls, but everyone has that feeling that boys are better." Kiwi has rejected the notion that adolescent females are not strong as portrayed in the thriller novels. She apparently feels that during the adolescent years of her life, the strength between males and females is similar. The adolescents' desire to reject the macho male image portrayed in the novels only strengthens the females' wishes to be heard loud and clear: females are important and should be heard. Dads, listen!

Conclusions

This study reveals that thriller novels offer something to the female readers. In their search for identity, the novels provide an escape, as well as an open door to society's "silent, hidden" rules for social, educational and economic demands. The accepted or patriarchal domain of traditional ideologies is present in the thriller books.

As a result of this study, several conclusions are apparent. An analysis has provided details which help to answer the questions posed about thriller novels and the young adolescent females' interaction with the texts and meaning.

Acceptable Versus Unacceptable

The use of the strong and weak or good and bad themes in the thriller novels provide examples of what is socially acceptable. Popular culture has fads or trends which dictate what is "in" and what is "out" (Fiske, 1989). The reading of the horror genre is "in" for the young adolescent girls in this study. It is a way to explore society's demands and search for identity within a group as part of a phenomenological world (Willis, 1991). The "have's" and have-not's" found in Lesko's study (1988) and the social queens and cookies in Finders' study (1997) point out that adolescent girls seek to be associated with a group. The portrayal of females in leading roles, group associations and victimized persons in thriller novels reveal society's picture of abuse, killings and quests for answers to unexplainable phenomenon. The females in this study admitted they were reading thriller

novels but saw a discrepancy in the roles of the females. They were not treated well, but were cast as winners or leaders. The thriller novels involved oppositional readings that revealed the fears and wishes of the females, and at the same time made the females question the motive of the author who placed the females in such a role. The males were seen as powerful and the females as "wimps" or weak. The thriller novels allowed the female adolescents to escape to a world of conflicts, fears and desires but exploited the societal demands which are present. What the female finds acceptable is not necessarily that which governs society. Although readers interpret texts in diverse ways, the texts constrain reader's activity through their form and content (Rosenblatt, 1991). The thriller novels encroach upon the reader's belief systems (Dobson, et.al., 1985) and attempt to shape their responses with established solutions and accepted messages. The endings of the novels were quick resolutions which even had male heroes who resolved problems.

Recommendations

This study provides insight into why adolescent females read thriller novels. Educators deny access to popular culture books for use in the classroom through textbook and tradebook selections. Parents, activist groups and educational organizations provide "acceptable" booklists for classroom guidance and mandatory adherence. One implication is that educators are not relating to the popular cultural world of the youth; denial and ignorance seem to prevail. This study suggests that educators need to look at the popular literature being read by adolescents. Based on the results of this study reading some of the

thriller novels can help educators understand why the books appeal to the adolescents. Much can be learned from the students and the books they are reading. Thriller novels are being read at an important time of a female's life, her adolescent years. With conflicts abundant in her life, the female has concerns about dilemmas which reflect male-female relations or constructions of her image. The portrayal of female characters as strong, yet weak does not satisfy the reader; she wants changes and models which are positive images. Value systems and society's demands convey messages to its readers through examples, plots and behavior of the characters. With realistic horrors of society evident in many of the series' books, the problem of dealing with some issues presents an upheaval in values.

Parents may feel that students should only read the classics or those books which they read as students when they were in school. That is no longer an easy solution since many classics have been put on banned lists or removed from libraries. Parents need to be aware of the various movements to control what is being read in the classroom and what will be allowed on the library shelves. Attending meetings which announce banning of books or censorship will permit parents to judge for themselves what is permissible in the classroom or library. Quotations taken out of context must be judged wisely. Context is important for clarity and understanding. This study suggests that parents should read what their adolescents are reading, discuss issues which are important to them and exchange thoughts about the topics presented and recognize that females have a right to be heard.

Parents also need to understand that adolescents usually read many types of materials. This study suggests that adolescent females read the horror genre for a variety of reasons. Even though a student appears to read books from one author, parents might point out other authors who write in the same genre or suggest some who cover the same topics. What is it that interests the females in reading those particular novels? How are females portrayed? What are some major issues covered in the plots? This study suggests that parents discuss the novels with their adolescents so that an understanding about the issues and concerns of male-female relations, portrayal of female characters and identification with characters are examined critically.

It is recommended that Dads take an interest in what their daughters read because they have little time for discussions with their daughters. Maybe a closer bond will occur between the two. Dads may even understand what constitutes femininity through reading and discussing the novels. New insights for the male may be acknowledged when the adolescent female voices her concerns of the restrictions placed upon her. The "double standard" which allows males to "sow their oats," but frowns upon the females doing the same tightens the leash which the males control. "Boys will be boys", but girls are cast into the dungeon of despair for rebelling and going against the system's rules. Females are still subordinate to masculine power. Violence, physical and verbal abuse occur daily and the texts reinforce the realities.

It is suggested that Dads listen to the females and understand that popular texts, such as thrillers, offer a plurality of meanings. The relevant meanings are those produced from

the text by the reader and the other is presented by the text. Social discrimination of females is displayed in texts which allow for the "double standards" and patriarchal reign to continue. It is suggested that Dads consider making meaningful sense of the texts and maintain an understanding of the feminine issues presented by the females. This is important to the adolescent females because they are constructing their "place" in the world. They seek identity in groups, acceptance in society and, most of all, a voice in their life-world. Understanding society's rules is difficult, but interpreting messages which offer many meanings creates confusion and sends mixed messages to the females. Dads can be helpful by explaining reasons for society's expectations, why texts portray females in such roles and how males can understand the feminine issues and strive for change.

This study suggests that if an adolescent is reading thriller novels, teachers and parents should encourage the habit of reading. Even though the books may not be award winners, the student is still mastering reading and coping with everyday life. Poor readers gain confidence and eventually fluency in their reading. If parents are concerned with the reading genre, introducing other options, such as literary award winners which have similar topics or books that may lead to other genre, might be helpful. Selecting books as options rather than requiring or banning certain books allows the adolescent choices and diversity. Realizing that thriller novels offer experiences which help females form their identities, parents can become aware of the conflicts which the adolescent females wish to resolve. However, thrillers are only one experience in an accumulation of many which shape the females' lives. Because certain topics may be considered taboo, parents can discern what is appropriate for their adolescents.

This study suggests that that horror genre might not be read in the homes because the adolescents are not obtaining the books from home. Although horror may not be acceptable or liked by parents, keeping an open mind is important for understanding issues and concerns. What one likes is not necessarily another's pleasure. Providing guidance and support and acknowledging females' choices of reading materials, parents can begin to examine the motivations behind particular selections.

This study recommends that teachers examine their goals in reading preselected thriller books and allow for diversity in the curriculum. Choosing a popular book, author or series and selecting one book representative of the times, teachers might provide a comparison of similar themes with good literature (Angelotti, 1984). This study suggests that thriller novels be examined critically and compared to quality literature. Acting as a guide, the teacher could present the literary comparison to include the role of females, social implications, and patriarchal themes. The horror genre might include the study of plot, characterization, viewpoints and writing style. Discussions referring to relevant issues and providing a basis for exploration of topics represented in the novels would allow for issues to be addressed. The promotion of non-stereotyped models would provide opportunities for multiple perspectives to be heard; even females' achievements being emphasized hold promise for awareness. By offering positive female images and strong role models, teachers provide connections to the real world. Through exploration of plots, relevant patterns during particular eras would better prepare adolescents to see the changes which have occurred. Author's style, use of descriptive words and aesthetic qualities would offer investigations about social, as well as economic and political,

implications. A variety of different genre presented for study might enlighten the knowledge that some texts do constrain social roles and the females' place in the world.

Because classrooms are structured to meet the developmental needs of males, more than females, it is suggested that teachers focus on varying instructional techniques which don't use competition for grades as a basis for learning. Providing social settings that acknowledge females in positive ways helps develop good feelings about themselves: their self-esteem, achievement and participation. This study suggests that being quiet, passive and attentive is not acceptable for females; this displays the message that females are inferior and should be invisible. Uniformity of the sexes is not a desired outcome from social settings; such a pedagogy would acknowledge and encourage social constraints already placed upon adolescent females.

This study suggests that educators need to be aware of social pressures which promote bias and exclude current issues. The success of censorship groups that ban such books as Snow White and create standards for all exclude many books through selected biases ("Fewer Attempts," 1995). Anti-censorship groups like People for the American Way might be helpful in providing guidelines for selections. Through careful selection some thriller novels might be suitable to include in a classroom curriculum. Using professional journals such as School Library Journal, Journal of Reading, English Journal, The Alan Review, and Booklist will help in selecting suitable books for the classroom. Involving librarians, parents and students in the selection process would aid in promoting understanding of the genre. Exclusion of popular culture books from the classroom sends a message to the females that what they read is not important or that empowerment is the

goal of the educational process. Preconceived ideas about popular culture books, such as thrillers, reinforce faulty interpretations of what females obtain from them. Educators, librarians and parents need to listen to what the females are saying. Discussing thrillers allows for understanding the issues which concern adolescents. As females search to be "somebody" in the world, they also seek the meanings of acceptance and denial. By listening, classroom teachers and librarians can provide what is needed in the females' quest for identity.

This study recommends that society examine the restrictions it places upon the females. The horror genre which depicts the real chasms of life controls the females' place in the social structure. The classifications, expectations and discriminations send messages that exonerate the positions and inferior status of females. Justification by empowerment and patriarchal rules creates a conflict and struggle for the females who wish to be "me", different from mothers, yet accepted by society. The horror genre reveals the tragedies of life and the soothing reality that all returns to normal. Beere states, " Life returns to normal as soon as possible, as people can't survive with nightmares in their head. It is a human trait which enables the rest of the world to surmount tragedies" (1993, p. 44). Thrillers place readers into a situation which can be resolved. Hope is the "light at the end of the tunnel."

Since only females were interviewed, I recommend that males also be. This study focused on the feminine viewpoints of the thriller novels, but the masculine view needs to be studied, also. In a patriarchal domain, do young adolescent males react and follow the traditional standards that society displays? The search for "self" identity might be

revealed through interviews and interpretations of the texts. What meanings do the males derive from the text? How are males portrayed according to adolescent males? What do they think of the females' portrayal? Assumptions about what the adolescent males think may be a different perspective if the participants were minority males, rather than white males.

Since this study was limited to one middle school, I recommend that more than one school population be used for further study. A study of rural school adolescents or a comparison of rural with urban adolescent populations would possibly reveal diversity. Even different regions of the country might offer varied responses to the questions. Composition of racial, ethnic and gender classes would allow for diversity of interpreted meanings.

One issue not explored in this study was differences between racial and economic groups' responses. As found in most adolescent novels, the characters are usually white and from middle-class families (Sarland, 1994b). The lack of role models from all classes and varied ethnic groups allows for little identification for minorities. An investigation of minorities' responses about thriller books might be enlightening.

Since literary trends occur as part of popular culture, a future study might focus on historical cycles of literature. Exploration of female images in various genre during specific eras, recurrence of particular themes, social and economic implications, and textual analysis of fiction and nonfiction might provide insight to why such literary cycles occur.

Adolescents can become "hooked on books" which are considered fads. A study of the relationship between reading popular novels to student achievement could provide insight for reading instruction, evaluation, and individual reading programs. Factors such as motivation and incentives which influence reading habits might be included in the study.

The intent of this study was to understand adolescent females' reasons for reading thriller novels. Through interpretations of the printed text, varied messages revealed the beliefs and life-world experiences of the females' worlds. With the shaping of their worlds, they shape their own identities. This study recommends that thrillers be acknowledged as texts which hold the females captive, but which demonstrate oppositional messages of varied meanings.

Reflection

I believe educators should include contemporary literature in their classroom curricula. The choice does not need to be a battle of what is "good" and what is "bad".

Although I have always avoided reading horror stories, the overwhelming interest of my students with the genre made me want to discover what was enticing them to read the books. What I found was a world of science mixed with fantasy and mystery. Although the adolescent novels were mild compared to some of the adult literature, the reasons for reading the texts were numerous for both age groups. I realized that as a teacher, I too, was biased in my thinking and my educational background. My college literary courses covered contemporary authors, but not those such as Stephen King. Even college educators wouldn't teach about "trashy" novels or bestsellers. Why did my literary classes ignore the current literature which the public was reading? I did not want to give my personal censorship to what others might enjoy as many of my instructors had done.

This study revealed more than that of course work, but also personal feelings. I understand the patriarchal domain much better. I have explored my own childhood and am still trying to understand my father, the perfect example of the male world versus the Other. The roles portrayed in the adolescent thriller novels still maintain the traditional standards of societal pressures for a masculine world. The blindness which prevails and the cloak which hides the truths only create confusion to the feminine world.

For me, this study opened new perspectives about the treatment of females in society and the issues confronting them. The continual treatment and glorification of life's horrors

need to be addressed in classrooms where it is currently silenced or "hidden." The movement to ban books only silences what needs to be explored - reality in a diverse world which plays games with two sets of rules: masculine versus feminine. Females have a right to be heard!

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
NOVELS READ FOR THIS STUDY

Novels Read for This Study

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Date</u>
Adams, N.	<i>Horrorscope</i>	Harper Paperback	1992
Bates, A.	<i>The Dead Game</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1994
Beach, L.	(Phantom Valley) <i>Stranger in the Mirror</i>	Pocket Books	1992
Beere, P.	(Point Crime) <i>School for Terror</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1993
Behrman, C.H.	<i>The Lancaster Witch</i>	Willowisp Press	1993
Black, J.R.	(Shadow Zone) <i>Good Night, Mummy!</i>	Bullseye Books	1994
Cooney, C.B.	<i>The Fog</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1989
Cooney, C.B.	<i>The Vampire's Promise</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1993
Cooney, C.B.	<i>The Return of the Vampire</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1991
Courtney, V.	<i>A Tale from the Crypt</i>	Bullseye Books	1995
Cusick, R.T.	<i>The Mall</i>	Pocket Books	1992
Cusick, R.T.	<i>Teacher's Pet</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1990
Derby, K. and MacHale, D.J.	(Are You Afraid of the Dark?) <i>The Tale of the Nightly Neighbors</i>	Minstrel Books	1995
Elfman, E.	<i>The Very Scary Almanac</i>	Random House	1993
Ellis, C.	<i>Camp Fear</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1993

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Ellis, C.	<i>The Stepdaughter</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1993
Ellis, C.	(Zodiac Chillers #2) <i>The Scorpio Society</i>	Random House Sprinters	1995
Haynes, B.	(Bone Chillers) <i>Little Pet Shop of Horrors</i>	Harper Paperback	1994
Haynes, B.	(Bone Chillers) <i>Back to School</i>	Harper Paperback	1994
Hawkes, R.	<i>Hall Pass</i>	Avon/Flare Book	1993
Hoh, D.	<i>The Train</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1992
Hoh, D.	(Nightmare Hall) <i>Deadly Attraction</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1993
Kehret, P.	(Frightmares) <i>Cat Burglar on the Prowl</i>	Minstrel Books	1995
Kilworth, G.	(Point Paperback) <i>The Rain Ghost</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1989
Littke, L.	<i>The Watcher</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1993
McFann, J.	<i>Be Mine</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1994
Pascal, F.	(Sweet Valley High) <i>A Deadly Christmas</i>	Bantam Books	1994
Philbrick, R. and Harnett, L.	(The House on Cherry Street #1) <i>The Haunting</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1995
Pike, C.	(Spooksville #1) <i>The Secret Path</i>	Minstrel Book	1995
Pike, C.	<i>The Last Vampire #3: Red Dice</i>	Archway Paperback	1995
Pine, N.	<i>Sixteen Candles</i>	Berkley Books	1993

			179
Schorsch, L.	<i>Tales of the Living Dead</i>	Checkerboard Press	1993
Schorsch, L.	<i>Evil Tales of Evil Things</i>	Checkerboard Press	1993
Smith, L.J.	<i>The Vampire Diaries: A Trilogy</i>	Harper Paperback	1991
Stine, R.L.	(The Fear Street Saga #1) <i>The Betrayal</i>	Pocket Books	1993
Stine, R.L.	(The Fear Street Saga #2) <i>The Secret</i>	Pocket Books	1993
Stine, R.L.	(The Fear Street Saga #3) <i>The Burning</i>	Pocket Books	1993
Stine, R.L.	(Goosebumps) <i>Stay Out of the Basement</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1992
Stine, R.L.	(Goosebumps #5) <i>The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1993
Stine, R.L.	(Goosebumps #6) <i>Let's Get Invisible</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1993
Stine, R.L.	(Goosebumps #7) <i>Night of the Living Dummy</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1993
Stine, R.L.	(Goosebumps #8) <i>The Girl Who Cried Monster</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1993
Stine, R.L.	(Ghosts of Fear Street #1) <i>Hide and Shriek</i>	Pocket Books	1995
Stine, R.L.	<i>The Beast 2</i>	Minstrel Books	1995

Stine, R.L.	<i>The Snowman</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	180 1991
Stone, T.B.	(Graveyard School #6) <i>Camp Dracula</i>	Skylark Book	1995
Watermill Press	<i>Midnight Fright: A Collection of Ghost Stories</i>	Troll Associates	1994
Welch, R.C.	(Twisted Tales) <i>The Slithering Corpse and Other Sinister Stories</i>	Checkerboard Press	1992
Welch, R.C.	(Twisted Tales) <i>The Dripping Head and Other Gruesome Stories</i>	Checkerboard Press	1992
Windsor, P.	<i>The Christmas Killer</i>	Scholastic, Inc.	1993

APPENDIX B

IRB FORM

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

182

Date: 04-18-96

IRB#: ED-96-116

Proposal Title: YOUNG ADOLESCENT FEMALES' CHOICE OF THRILLER
NOVELS

Principal Investigator(s): Kathryn Castle, Lenora R. Crowder

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

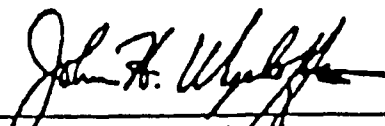
ALL APPROVALS MAY BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
AT NEXT MEETING.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR ONE CALENDAR YEAR AFTER WHICH A
CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD
APPROVAL.

ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR
APPROVAL.

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reasons for Deferral or Disapproval
are as follows:

Signature:


Chair of Institutional Review Board

Date: May 2, 1996

APPENDIX C
PERMISSION FORMS

Letter of Consent

Dear Parent:

In cooperation with Oklahoma State University, I will be conducting a research study dealing with why young adolescent girls read thriller novels. Your son/daughter's participation will enable the researcher to assess the reasons why adolescent girls read the thriller novels. The results will make a significant contribution to understanding why the adolescent girls choose to read thriller novels and what impact the feminine role models have upon the readers in their self-identity formation. No determined risks or expenses are evident for your son/daughter.

This study will involve a brief, initial survey of approximately ten minutes during class time either at the beginning or end of a class period. From this short questionnaire, selected adolescent girls who read thriller novels will be interviewed for approximately one half hour, either before or after school or on weekends. As a participant, the young girl will be interviewed with a set of structured questions regarding why she reads thriller novels and what self-identification she makes. All interviews will be tape recorded and will remain confidential.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your son/daughter may withdraw from the study at any time. Should he/she choose to withdraw, the decision will not be held against him/her. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym and an identification code number that will be used to identify his/her responses. The only persons who will have access to the data will be the researcher, Lenora R. Crowder, and her advisor, Dr. Kathryn Castle. All information will be held in the strictest confidence.

If you have any questions, you may contact Lenora Crowder at (405) 624-3534. You may also contact Dr. Kathryn Castle at (405) 744-7125 or University Research Services, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74074; (405) 744-5700.

I have read the above information and understand the purpose and procedure of the study. My signature indicates that my son/daughter may participate in this study.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

Letter of Consent

Dear Student Participant:

In cooperation with Oklahoma State University, I will be conducting a research study dealing with why young adolescent girls read thriller novels. Your participation in this study will enable me to assess the reasons why adolescent girls read the thriller novels and what impact the feminine role models have upon the readers. The results of this study will make a contribution in understanding the reasons young adolescent girls read the thriller novels. No risks or expenses will be involved for you.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time. Should you choose to withdraw, your decision will not be held against you. You will be assigned a fictitious name (pseudonym) and an identification code number which will be used to identify your responses. The only persons who will have access to this information will be my advisor, Dr. Kathryn Castle and me, Lenora R. Crowder. Everything you tell me will be held in the strictest confidence.

If you have any questions at any time during this study, do not hesitate to contact me, Lenora R. Crowder at (405) 624-3534 or my advisor, Dr. Kathryn Castle at (405) 744-7125. You may also contact the University Research Services, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74074, telephone (405) 744-5700.

I have read the above information and understand the purpose and the procedure of this study. My signature below indicates that I have voluntarily agreed to take part in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Promise to Destroy Data

Dear Participant,

Your voluntary participation in this study is greatly appreciated. Your responses and all related data concerning this study will be destroyed upon my completion of studies at Oklahoma State University.

Thank you for your help in this research study.

Sincerely yours,

Lenora R. Crowder

I, Lenora R. Crowder, promise to destroy all tapes, notes, and related data regarding this study and its participants.

Lenora R. Crowder

APPENDIX D
SURVEY AND DIRECTIONS

Oral directions for Survey

The purpose of this survey is to determine what type of novels you read for enjoyment. This is an untimed questionnaire.

Note in the upper left hand corner are two columns labeled grade and sex. Mark an X on the appropriate blank for grade, either 6th or 7th and make an X on the blank M for male and F for female.

Now look at the two columns marked Yes and No. To answer the questions, make an X in one of the two columns. To change your answer, either erase or cross through your other answer.

One term may need an explanation: thriller novels. These are fiction books which stir the imagination, may contain monsters or aliens, and contain fear or terror in its plots.

When you have completed the survey, place your pens or pencils on the desk. I will collect the surveys when everyone is finished.

Any questions? (Pause. Allow time to answer any questions, if needed.) Then...
"You may begin."

Survey

6th ___ 7th ___ M ___ F ___

Code Number _____

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
1. Do you read mysteries, thriller books or "tales from the crypt" type books?	___	___
2. Are you familiar with any series of thriller books? If so, please name the series: _____	___	___
3. Do you read thriller books by any particular author? If so, by whom? _____	___	___
4. Do you obtain the books from	___	___
a) public library?	___	___
b) school library	___	___
c) book store	___	___
d) book club	___	___
e) home	___	___
f) other (please specify) _____	___	___
5. Do you own any thriller books? If so, approximately how many? _____	___	___
6. From a total of ten books which you have read, would more than three be of the following?	___	___
a) biography/autobiography	___	___
b) romance	___	___
c) adventure	___	___
d) sports	___	___
e) science fiction	___	___
f) fantasy	___	___
g) thriller/horror	___	___
h) other	___	___
please specify _____		
7. Do your parents ever buy thriller books for you?	___	___
8. Do you discuss the plots with your friends?	___	___
mom?	___	___
dad?	___	___
9. Do your parents know what topics are covered in the thriller books?	___	___
10. Do you believe the thriller novels offer something to you? If so, what? _____	___	___

APPENDIX E

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview

1. Do you have a favorite author or particular series of thriller books you read for pleasure? If yes, who is the author or what is the series?
2. Why do you read thriller novels?
3. What are some of the plots or themes from the thriller books which you have read?
4. How do you feel when you read these thriller novels? Explain.
5. What role do young adolescent girls portray in the thriller novels? Cite examples from stories you have read, if possible.
6. How do you think the adolescent girls are treated in the thriller novels? Why?
7. What message do you think the thriller novels is sending to its female readers? Explain.
8. How do the stories or topics affect you as a female adolescent? Why?
9. With whom have you discussed the thriller novels? What responses did you get? Why?

VITA

Lenora Revaca Crowder

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

**Dissertation: YOUNG ADOLESCENT FEMALES' CHOICE OF
THRILLER NOVELS**

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Education: Graduated from Thornton Fractional South High School, Lansing, Illinois, June 1959; received a Bachelor of Science in Education degree from Eastern Illinois University in May 1964; received a Master of Education degree from the University of Arizona in May 1978; received a Specialist in Education degree from the University of Arizona in May 1986. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education with a major in Curriculum and Instruction at Oklahoma State University in July of 1997.

Professional Experience: Classroom teacher at Steger Illinois Public Schools in Steger, Illinois, December 1963 - June 1964 ; Classroom teacher at Pine Valley School District in Williamsport, Indiana, August 1964 - May 1966; Classroom teacher at Southwestern High School in Lafayette, Indiana, August 1964 - May 1969; Title I Reading teacher at Amphitheater School District in Tucson, Arizona, August 1978 - May 1986 (also Head of the Reading department from August 1982 - May 1986); Classroom teacher at Stillwater Public Schools in Stillwater, Oklahoma, August 1986 - May 1996; Graduate Assistant, Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma, August 1996 - May 1997.

Professional Memberships: Phi Lambda Theta; Phi Delta Kappa; Kappa Delta Pi; Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; Association for Childhood Education International; Kappa Kappa Iota