

2006

# A textual analysis of the role of women in historical fiction for young people

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# A textual analysis of the role of women in historical fiction for young people

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this textual analysis of the role of women in historical fiction written for young people was to identify whether the portrayal of women in contemporary historical fiction varies from pre-Feminist era historical fiction. This researcher's goal was to seek examples and compare the portrayal of women in novels written before and after 1970. Twenty-four novels were selected from historical novel bibliographies. Twelve novels written before 1970 and twelve written after 1970 were read and any identified patterns were included in the sorting process. Research questions seeking resolution were: how were women portrayed in historical fiction written for young people before and after 1970 and can changing patterns in the portrayal of the role of women in historical fiction be identified? Emerging themes in the portrayal of women in historical fiction written for young people identified in novels from both time periods by this researcher's textual analysis include: that there are few examples of females taking masculine roles, female characters who endure the absence of a male character resulted in two patterns; independence or displaced dependence, few female characters were portrayed as having a formal education or as a problem solver, most female characters were portrayed as a wife or mother, and undiagnosed mental health issues seemed to be ascribed to female characters. The research question can changing patterns in the portrayal of the role of women in historical fiction be identified could not be confirmed or rejected as examples of emerging themes in the portrayal of women in historical fiction were found in novels from both time periods.

A Textual Analysis of the Role of  
Women in Historical Fiction  
for Young People

This Graduate Research Paper  
Submitted to the  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
Division of School Library Media Studies  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

University of Northern Iowa

By

Jennifer Youngblut Gassman

August 2006

This Research Paper by: Jennifer Youngblut Gassman

Titled: A Textual Analysis of the Role of Women  
in Historical Fiction for Young People

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

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Date Approved

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Graduate Faculty Reader

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Date Approved

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Graduate Faculty Reader

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Head, Department of  
Curriculum and Instruction

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Women have always played a role in literature, especially literature for young people. Literature mirrors society and societal values. It also enforces these values. The problem with this is that, even with the profound effect that the feminist movement of the 1970s had on American culture, society is still primarily male dominated and much remains for women to gain cultural equality.

In American society, women are not valued as literary characters or writers. Osterhaus (1987) summarizes that most well known and well respected writers throughout history have been men, resulting in “images of women in literature that are products of a creative process that has a limited perspective” (p.1).

Literature therefore, has the potential to recreate and redefine the role of women. With this said one wonders if young people’s literature portrays women accurately and if it reflects social historians new theories on how women have impacted history.

This research paper is a quest to identify the portrayal of the role of women in literature. It is an analysis of a fraction of historical literature written for young people to see if changing patterns can be identified in the portrayal of the role of women in contemporary historical fiction versus pre-Feminist era historical fiction. There are four distinct components shaping this analysis: historical fiction, feminism, how the study of history is influenced by feminism, and how reading affects young people’s development of self.

### *Historical Fiction*

The historical novel as a literary genre evolved and rose to heights of popularity in the early nineteenth century with the novels of Sir Walter Scott in England, as well as other authors in other countries, such as Alessandro Manzoni in Italy (Adamson, 1987, p. xiii). Manzoni discussed the difficulties of creating a work of art that incorporates both fact and fiction. He identified the form of historical fiction as concrete narrative using dialogue with precise date, places, and events. The content, he asserted, included customs and art, as well as social and economic class distinctions. Moreover, he traced the development of the historical novel back to the genre of the classical epic (p. xiii).

Lukacs (1965) assess Scott's novels by generalizing about values of historical fiction that relate directly to the values in historical fiction, as a genre, for children and young adults. The main character must be an ordinary figure because only the everyday life of people,

the joys and sorrows, crises and confusions," can portray the broad "being of an age." When the reader sees the "personal destinies of a number of human beings coincide and interweave within the determining context of an historical crisis..., the historical crisis is never abstract. (p. 41)

Lukacs begins to evaluate the genre itself by generalizing:

What matters therefore in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should reexperience [*sic*] the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in



historical reality. And it is a law of literary portrayal which first appears paradoxical, but then quite obvious, that in order to bring out these social and human motives of behavior, the outwardly insignificant events, the smaller (from without) relationships are better suited than the great monumental dramas of world history. (p. 42)

Children and young adults, like all other readers, will transact with texts that evoke responses from them. Aesthetic historical fiction with its added dimension can, perhaps, evoke even stronger responses from them (Adamson, 1987, p. xiv). Historical writing, often set during times of tribal or national difficulties, perhaps more than any other literary genre, places characters in situations where they must make specific choices to accept or reject responsibilities imposed upon them. “When characters react according to unspoken but humanly perceived sets of myths and rituals, the reader can gain insight from both their failures and successes” (p. xv). Historical fiction not only relays accurate historical background by incorporating known facts, but also presents heroes and heroines who expand their consciousness (p. xv).

The best fiction surpasses interesting narrative by having something extra that catches the reader’s imagination. The reader must sense that the writer has not provided all the answers—in fact, may not even have stated all of the questions.

Lukacs believes that the hero of historical fiction must be a “personality complete” psychologically “in order to fulfil [*sic*] his historic mission in the crisis” of the novel (p. 38). In other words, the historical fiction reader must view the novel’s hero as a whole, or complete, person to believe that they were capable of meeting the obligation their role has in the historical events set within the novel. A closer examination of some

of the patterns in the historical novels for children and young adults reveals a mythological formula of the hero and heroine facing perils and obstacles during their quests for happiness and good fortune.

Adamson describes a three-step monomyth:

1. The protagonist's initial separation from the tribe or family, sometimes occurs not by choice but by circumstance.
2. The protagonist faces psychological ordeals.
3. The protagonist must return to the society from which they separated.

“Thus, protagonists, after separating either physically or psychologically from their homes, surviving their initiations, and returning home from their quests, complete the ritualistic patterns of maturation” (p. xix). Historical fiction provides protagonists with whom to identify, family life and social mores for comparison, and quite often a mystery plot to hold the reader's attention. Such protagonists permit readers to “experience a sense of closure in the aesthetic text and a hope of success in their own lives...often evoking responses in readers that linger long after the text has returned to its shelf” (p. xix).

### ***Feminism***

From the nineteenth century to the present, feminists have organized to end what they perceive as the historic misconception that men are superior to women. Feminists have endeavored to prove that social inequality is not ordained by the laws of God or nature, but results from societal conditions that can and should be changed (Harding, 1986, p.13). Feminists seek legal, political, educational, and other reforms that will allow

women to choose lives that are compatible with their own interests and talents rather than accept those imposed on them by family, church, or stereotype.

Not all feminists pursue identical goals (p.13): For example, some want the right to devote themselves wholeheartedly to home and family and still be considered as valuable to society as any corporate executive, while others want the right to use their skills to fullest advantage in the business or academic worlds. Additionally, race, social class, sexual preference, and personal values divide feminists. They often disagree strenuously about priorities for the women's movement and whether to use radical or more moderate tactics to achieve their ends. Ultimately, however, they all seek the goal of equality for all women.

### ***How the Study of History Has Been Influenced by Feminism***

“Groups of feminist scholars began in the late 1960s to define themselves by a particular choice of subject—women—and by the goals and methods of social history” (Buhle, 1993, p. 319). An early feminist scholar, Gerda Lerner (1969), explained that feminist historians and social historians shared an interest in people outside of the power structure. “As long as historians held to the traditional view that only the transmission and exercise of power were worthy of their interest, women were of necessity ignored” (p. 3). She also argued that there was no “underlying conceptual framework” for women's history (p. 4).

Most feminist scholars did not want to see women's history become just an off-shot of social history. “Feminists observed that the new social historians continued to make men and men's affairs the main component of their analyses” (Buhle, 1993, p. 320). Feminist scholars set out to define a distinctive conceptual framework for women's

history. The main problems were similar to those facing other social historians: redefining and reevaluating the major periods of American history, formulating the basic categories of social analysis, and testing theories of causation or social change (p. 320).

Lerner argued that as production moved outside of the household, the workplaces of men and women diverged. “In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the home was turned into the realm of woman, while the workplace became the public domain of men” (p. 29). As a result of this article, feminist scholars reassessed the meaning of major events and periods of American history in terms of women’s status.

Buhle (1993) explains:

As feminist scholars began to demonstrate the vitality of sex as a category of historical analysis, they surpassed other social historians in grappling with the theoretical subtext of their own enterprise: the grounds for considering women a discrete group. Although most scholars conceded that all women throughout American history shared a status secondary to men’s, they nevertheless rejected the concept of “oppression” as a foundation for historical analysis. The patent difference between the situations of the plantation mistress and female slave undermined all notions of common oppression. As Lerner’s essay showed, a period of history or a major event also held divergent meanings for women of different classes of the same race. It was clear in these instances that individuals or groups of women may claim greater interest with (or even share power with) men of their class, race, or ethnicity than with other women. (p. 321)

Thus, early feminist scholars rejected the defining of women by caste or class and insisted that women were in a category by themselves. Although scholars insisted that sex carry the same weight in historical analysis as race or class, they nevertheless maintained that it was the intersection of sex and other social categories that stood at the forefront of feminist endeavors (p. 321). By the early 1970's feminist scholars had introduced gender as a fundamental category of historical analysis. They argued that the relation of the sexes, like those of class and race, were "socially rather than naturally or divinely constructed and constituted the heart of their new scholarly inquiry" (p. 322).

### ***How Reading Affects Young People's Development of Self***

Bezanson and Norland (1992) suggest that children's literature is rhetorical, as reading begins the process of discovering the uncertain, questioning what one already knows, and establishing the boundaries of what is possible for the reader. "Through literature, children are taught attitudes and actions appropriate for themselves and their society" (p.1). Luckens (1982) maintains that books help children discover themselves and explore the world. She comments, "words are merely words, but real literature for any age is words chosen with skill and artistry to give the readers pleasure and to help them understand themselves and others" (p. 9).

According to McCallum (1999), ideological frames within which identities are formed are inextricably bound up with ideas about subjectivity. Concepts of personal identity are formed in dialogue with society, with language, and with other people, and while this dialogue is ongoing, adolescence is happening. This is a period during which notions of selfhood undergo rapid and radical transformations.

It should come as no surprise...that ideas about and representations of subjectivity pervade and underpin adolescent fiction.” Conceptions of subjectivity are intrinsic to “narratives of personal growth or maturation, to stories about relationships between the self and others, and to exploration of relationships between individuals and the world, society or the past. (p. 3).

McCallum points out two corollaries to her observation.

1. The formation of subjectivity is dialogical. An individual’s consciousness and sense of identity is formed in dialogue with others and the discourses constituting the society and cultures s/he inhabits.
2. The formation of subjectivity is thus always shaped by social ideologies (p. 3).

### ***Problem Statement***

Social historians have recently explored the roles women have played in American history. Their conclusions have reshaped the way we look at historical significance. This change in emphasis in the importance of women to history may not be reflected by contemporary historical fiction written for young people.

### ***Research Questions***

The questions this author will seek to answer in this analysis are:

1. How were women portrayed in historical fiction written for young people before 1970?
2. How are women portrayed in historical fiction written for young people after 1970?

3. Can changing patterns in the portrayal of the role of women in historical fiction be identified?

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this study will be to explore the portrayal of women in historical fiction written for young people. The study will investigate if the portrayal of the role of women in historical fiction for young people changed as a result of the feminist movement of the 1970s.

### ***Definitions***

**Feminist movement**-- a movement to secure legal, economic, and social equality for

women. It has its roots in the nineteenth-century women's movement, which sought among other things, to secure property rights and suffrage for women.

The modern feminist movement, often said to have been galvanized by the publication of Betty Freidan's book *The Feminine Mystique*, began in the 1960s (Hirsch, 1993, p. 299).

**Historical fiction**-- recreates a particular historical period with or without historical

figures as incidental characters. It is generally written about a time period in which the author has not lived or no more recently than one generation before its composition (Adamson, 1987, p. ix).

**Social History**-- emphasis on the ostensibly private arenas of the family, household, and

community. By introducing the concepts and concerns of the behavioral and social sciences, and geographical mobility, social historians considerably

expanded the terrain of historical investigation (Buhle, 1993, p. 319).

**Subjectivity**—that sense of a personal identity an individual has of her/his self as distinct

from other selves, as occupying a position within society and in relation to other selves, and a being capable of deliberate thought and action (McCallum, 1999, p. 3).

**Women's History**-- is both a world view and a compensatory strategy for offsetting the male bias of traditional history. It is an intellectual movement of seriousness and considerable range, which aims for a new synthesis which will eventually make its continuation unnecessary (Lerner, 1979, p. xv).

### *Assumptions*

This author assumes that there is enough young people's historical fiction available to make a thorough analysis of the role of women in this genre of young people's literature. Assumption is also made that the impact of feminism on our social conscience affects our interpretation of history. This author will analyze twelve books written prior to 1970 and twelve written after 1970.

### *Limitations*

This analysis will be limited to only those material reviewed by this author. All materials will be historical fiction intended for young people, ages 12-16. All material will be set in America from 1866-1900. All material can be found in the library media centers of the Union Community School District located in LaPorte City/Dysart, Iowa or through the Iowa inter-library loan agreement.

### *Significance*

A study of the portrayal of the role of women in historical fiction is significant for many reasons. First is that young women are influenced in their self-perception by what they read. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) investigated women's way



of knowing and identified five perspectives from which women view themselves and the world around them. She and her colleagues were interested in the arena of women's thought where values are cultivated and "the obstacles women must overcome in developing the power of their minds" (p. 3). They were upset with the assumption that pedagogical techniques that worked for men also worked for women. "We believe that conceptions of knowledge and truth that are accepted and articulated today have been shaped throughout history by the male-dominated majority culture" (p. 5).

The five perspectives they developed were based on years of interviews with women, from all backgrounds, throughout the United States. The goal of their research was to identify the events that were "catalytic in shaping the way they viewed themselves and their minds" (p. 4). The perspectives identified by Belenky as women's ways of knowing are: *Silence*, *Received knowledge*, *Subjective knowledge*, *Procedural knowledge*, and *Constructed knowledge*.

Silence is a perspective from which women see themselves as having no voice or mind and subject to external authority. Received knowledge is a perspective from which women see themselves as receiving knowledge from external authority but not able to make their own knowledge. Subjective knowledge is a perspective from which women see knowledge as personal. Procedural knowledge is a perspective from which women take part in objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge. Constructed knowledge is a perspective from which women see knowledge themselves as creating knowledge and valuing both objective and subjective knowing.

Belenky sums up their research by suggesting we look at the "politics of talk" (p. 156), both within the family and at school. We need to look at the forms of discourse that

are permitted and encouraged and those that are minimized and prohibited (p. 156). We also need to model behavior by allowing our own thought process to show in our discussions. Young women need to be able to recognize the comprehension and understanding processes we all go through in order to recognize their own capabilities.

Women have been taught by generations of men that males have greater powers of rationality than females have. When a male professor presents only the impeccable products of his thinking, it is especially difficult for a woman student to believe that she can produce such a thought...Women students need opportunities to watch women professors solve (and fail to solve) problems and male professors fail to solve (and succeed in solving) problems. They need models of thinking as a human, imperfect, and attainable activity. (p. 216-217)

Secondly, it will show the different roles that women are given in young people's literature. Thirdly, while young women learn to envision women's roles in reading, surely young men do as well. So both genders would benefit from honest portrayals of women in history. It will also help social historians and feminists see if their contributions to American history are being reflected in contemporary literature for young people. Lastly, it will help professionals (teachers, media specialists, both public and private, and their administrators) and non-professionals (parents or anyone else a reader might encounter who would have an influence on their reading selections) who are in the situation of helping children choose literature to understand these implications and encourage thoughtful consideration of material selection.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Related Literature

“Book experiences introduce the unknown, clarify and refine the known, and define the parameters of choice for one’s attitudes and behaviors” (Bezanson and Norland, 1992, p. 1).

Literature has the potential to recreate and redefine the role of women. This researcher’s goal is to identify the portrayal of the role of women in historical literature written for young people and to determine if the researcher will observe changes in the patterns of the portrayal of the role of women in contemporary historical fiction from that of pre-Feminist era historical fiction. There are three areas of research relating to this study: feminist thought, feminist literary perspective, and the portrayal of women in literature for young people. It is not this researcher’s purpose to have a long discourse on the feminist movement other than to recognize its importance in seeking social equality for women in the mid to later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The investigation of the role of women in historical fiction has been a relatively un-explored (or under-explored) adventure. However, important research has been done in areas of feminist thought, literary perspective, and the development of self. Feminist thought explores the ways in which women develop, defining recurring patterns in stages of development that speak for a unique world view. Feminist literary theory recognizes the importance of women, past and present, as producers and consumers who represent the female contribution to the literary world (Stallman, 1998, p. 15). The development of

self is the discovery of one's personal identity and the processes through which each individual makes the connections that will shape their world perspective.

### *Feminist Thought*

“We need to appreciate cultural history for what it can offer: an insight into the habits of mind, the competing logics, and the critical debates, of a particular era” (Kern, 2004, p. 1).

Kern (2004), in a meta-analysis of different perspective on women's history, found extremes in generations concerning the future of the study of women's history. Kern had identified a problem in that the connective tissue between the generations of feminists was frayed. The older materialist generation felt that the archive they built had been “minded to produce incomprehensible scholarship” by the younger deconstructionist generation (p. 1).

This analysis of feminist historical writing, from these two generations, attempted to find common ground between the two generations. The researcher assessed the writings of popular feminist historians from the older generation such as Gerda Lerner and Nancy Isenberg. From the younger generation she assessed writers such as Tera Hunter and Joanne Meyerowitz. Each historian's writings were probed for any common themes.

Lerner's concerns were that the literary turn in women's history has resulted in a shift away from the social, political, and organizational history of women. She found the category of class is widely ignored, interest in identity is high, interest in historiography and theory is low, the present looms larger than the past, much of women's history is not yet documented and that she sees a lack of a paradigm “by which we order past events so

as to find the true relationships between women and men as agents in history (p. 2).”

Meyerowitz noted the decline of social history as a conceptual home for women’s history and the growing impact of the new field of gender analysis (p. 4). They both argued that cultural history is a logical outgrowth of early conceptual frameworks for women’s history.

Isenberg focused on the feminist critique of American political culture, centering on the broad political limitations of citizenship such as due process, self-protection, and rights within the home (p. 2). She argued that America’s legacy of conquest created a political climate where the exercise of the power of the strong over the weak was justified as a valid, natural expression of democracy. Hunter discussed cultural representations of African Americans women’s working conditions, labor militancy, and subtle strategies of resistance (p. 4). Isenberg and Hunter persuasively demonstrate the constructions of gendered and racial identities carried real-world material consequences in the form of barriers to citizenship and public health (p. 4).

Kern concluded from her analysis that it is acceptable to precede without a unifying paradigm in feminist thought. She suggested that the greatest legacy of feminist historians is in “originating a field of women’s history that continues to inspire new generations of scholars (p. 4).”

Jose (2004), in a meta-analysis of the beginnings of modern feminist political theory, found that modern feminist political theory has been framed in terms of already established political philosophies. Jose had identified a problem in that “feminist political thought was represented as having its genesis in the minds of significant men thinkers (p. 1),” and therefore having nothing original to offer. “In the 1970s and 1980s,

accounts of past feminist ideas, especially challenges to traditional views of women's rights, came to be explained in terms of hyphenated feminisms such as liberal-feminism, socialist-feminism, Marxist-feminism, anarcho-feminism, and so on (p. 1)".

This analysis of the writings of nineteenth century political theories sought to find and compare the genealogy of modern feminist political theory within their discourses. Jose assessed the writings of influential political theorists such as: James Mill, Charles Fourier, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and John Stuart Mill. Each theorists' writing was probed for his treatment of women. Jose describes a discursive trope used by each of these theorists that links the idea of "women's emancipation with the idea of social progress (p. 2)".

Mill's (1773-1836) use of the trope was traditional. If society made it possible for men to improve themselves, then they would promote improvement in their women. It is very clear that women would not enjoy the same social space as men. "By being helpmates to men women would gain a degree of social recognition and freedom similar to that which accrued to men (p. 5)". In Mill's idea of feminist theory, women were significant only because men's sense of progress was defined by women's elevation and social improvement.

Fourier (1772-1837) also regarded the extent of women's emancipation as a measure of social progress. He saw that societies built themselves around social structures and relations that stifled human passion. He also believed that civilization attempts "to deny the passions in love and sex, especially for women...In his view, civilized society denied women the liberty to acknowledge and exercise their passions. Women could only realize these legitimately, if at all, through marriage (p. 6)". Fourier's

use of the trope linked women's liberty to their sexual freedom. His idea of feminist theory was sexual liberty for women, without a shift in men's social and political power. He still envisioned women as the weaker sex, assuming most women would continue their natural role as helpmates to men (p. 6).

Marx (1818-1883) and Engels (1820-1895) writings were very similar. They both accepted that providing women freedom gave society freedom. Their use of the trope was similar to Fourier's, only they didn't link women's social freedom to women's sexual freedom. For Marx and Engels, "women's liberation could be achieved by bringing women into the domain of the social where history is made, where social relations are constructed, and nature is transformed. By controlling and transforming nature, by going beyond the domain of necessity, men made history, and in doing, emancipated women to the freedoms enjoyed by men (p. 8)". According to Jose, where Marx and Engels failed was in assuming that the sexual division of labor was a fact of nature and not society (p. 8).

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) did not accept political subordination of women. J.S. Mill's use of the trope linked women's social and political emancipation with the general improvement of society (p. 9). He advocated a "principle of perfect equality," which led him to argue that the aim should not be to enable women to replicate men's power. Jose summarizes Mill's argument:

This would simply result in women developing the same crippling values and characteristics of the tyrant, since men, in Mill's view, were as corrupted by their power over women as women were oppressed by that power. Rather, the social, legal, and political basis for men's power should be removed so that the relations

between the sexes in marriage should be a school of sympathy in equality, of living together in love, without power on one side and obedience on the other. (p. 10)

Jose argued that J.S. Mill still failed, as Marx and Engels, to discuss the political implications of the division of labor. He does praise J.S. Mill for being the one theorist to oppose the legal subordination of one sex over another (p. 10).

Jose sums up the analysis by concluding that although significant gains have been made in understanding the development of modern feminist theory, it is still a contested field of study. “Just as mainstream scholars in earlier decades were reluctant to concede any legitimacy to feminist scholarship, it remains the case today that theory with a distinctly feminist orientation (including feminist political theory) still has to struggle for recognition (p. 12)”. Jose concludes by arguing for a more positive, “less masculinist”, account of the history of modern feminist political thought by not treating it as a derived subset of men’s political theory (p. 12).

Buhle (1993), in a meta-analysis on feminist approaches to social history, found that feminist scholars have contributed heavily to the discussion about the meaning of history. Buhle had identified a problem in that historians “continued to make men and men’s affairs the main components of their analyses (p. 320)”. She argued that in the 1960s there were a growing number of works on marriages, families, and other social institutions that could not help but note the presence of women. “Yet these otherwise useful studies did not advance a systematic analysis of women’s experience or provide a conceptual framework suited to feminists’ goals (p. 320)”. In defining their enterprise as a history of social relationships, feminist scholars wanted to set up a framework for the



study of social relationships. Buhle's goal was to analyze feminist historian's writings and identify early attempts to construct a conceptual framework.

Buhle focused the early part of her analysis on the writing of Gerda Lerner. Lerner insisted that women were in a category of their own, due to the movement of production from outside of the household. With the male and female workplace split, value was assigned to the one making money, primarily men. "Women became the singular guardians of home and family but in consequence lost their productive role and the status and authority it had previously conferred upon them" (p. 321). Because of Lerner, feminist scholars started reflecting on history in terms of the status of women. An offshoot of this early framework was the discussion of class formation. By the early 1970s, "feminist scholars had introduced sex as a fundamental category of historical analysis. They argued that the relation of the sexes, like those of class and race, were socially rather than naturally or divinely constructed and constituted the heart of their scholarly inquiry" (p. 322).

Another feminist historians' writing that Buhle analyzed was Mary Ritter Beard. Beard argued against the idea that women's history was a struggle to gain political acceptance. She promoted the idea that "women stood at the very center of civilization" (p. 323). Beard felt that women historically held power as nurturers. In the private arena of home and family, women upheld survival. She argued that women's "affairs equaled and perhaps even outweighed those of men on the scale of historical significance" (p. 323). Feminists took two ideas from Beard's work. One, that private life directly determines all historical development and second, that the pursuit of women's history is vital to human survival (p. 323).

Buhle concluded her analysis with the idea that feminist scholars, in the end, rejected the idea of a conceptual framework for the study of social relationships. In doing so, feminist scholars have made the “theory of history as important as the practice of history” (p. 331). They did this by joining other social historians in shifting the emphasis from the “elites to ordinary people, from the great events of political history to the experiences of the anonymous masses” (p. 331). They also questioned the concept of historical progress or development, saying that the majority of the world’s population couldn’t identify with these terms (p. 331).

### ***Feminist Literary Perspective***

If she reads as a woman, she is constrained by her by her own femininity and, therefore, unable to fully imagine a male protagonist. She becomes the “other.”

If she reads as a man, her experience of maleness is limited to and constructed by the text. She can never truly identify with the male protagonist. (Stallman, 1998, p. 2)

Stallman (1998), investigated the ways in which young women read stereotypical female characters in traditional American literature written by male authors and found that young women held positive attitudes about the role of women in society and are unaffected by stereotypical models in literature. Stallman had identified a problem in existing works on the feminist approach to reading. She felt there were “unanswered questions concerning the actual reading experience of young American women whose life experience has been constructed by the modern society and culture in which they live” (p. 5).

Stallman examined the literary responses of ten young women in a Florida public high school 11<sup>th</sup> grade advanced placement language and composition class. After reading: *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Portrait of a Lady*, by Henry James, and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, she used discussion, focus groups, and journal work to solicit the young women's responses.

In the reflective process of reading, the young women discovered aspects of themselves which were previously unknown. By using reader response as a mirror, it was possible to observe attitudes that reflected feminist viewpoints, to see whether or not the young women were imagining autonomous roles for themselves. (p. 8)

Stallman used a method of layered reading where videotape transcriptions of focus group meetings were analyzed for four different purposes: *understanding the dialogues, listening for a sense of self, listening for the voice of resistance, and listening for the autonomous voice*. She adapted this method from the work of Brown and Gilligan (1991). She also focused on four research questions for her inquiry: How does a young woman view stereotypical roles for female characters in traditional American literature, what kinds of roles is a young woman able to imagine for female characters, does what a young woman reads, as well as the way she reads, impact her view of the world and herself, how are her viewpoints about herself and the world mirrored in her literary responses (p. 50).

The young women's focus group dialogues and journal responses indicated that they were very resistant to stereotyped roles for female characters that did not reflect equitable positions for females in society. They also showed resistance to women in

abusive relationships, women with morally corrupt characters, and women as objects of public ridicule. What surprised Stallman was that the young women reinvented female roles to fit their individual perceptions of women in modern society and that they were positive in their worldviews, “assuming that equality and intellectual freedom were the natural rights of all women” (p. 127). Stallman recommends more research in the area of feminist literary theory and secondary education in order to give educators a more complete understanding of the ways in which young women approach traditional literature and the viewpoints which they derive from reading it (p. 139).

Cornillon (1975), in a meta-analysis examining the need for feminist criticism and how best to fill that need, found that feminist criticism is needed to restore objectivity to literature that has been distorted by sexism. Cornillon had identified a problem in that masculine bias affected the creation and consumption of literature throughout the literary establishment, including publishers, critics, professors, and librarians. Her goal was to use the expanding range of developing feminist criticism and use it to identify “books that would study literature as being writings about people by people and read by people, a collection that would pay some attention to the relationship between writer and reader, work and reader, work and writer” (p. 22).

Cornillon focused on the idea that we look to literature, especially fiction, “for answers, for models, for clues to the universal questions of who we are or might become” (p. 1). She argued that the answers are not there because we have been alienated from ourselves and from literature, by the biases of what we have been taught and the biases incorporated into the works.

Her research became a collection of essays dealing with the emergence of feminist literary perspective. She chose the essays because they “illustrate the beginnings of new directions for women in reading and understanding fiction, and therefore new directions and depths for women in their personal paths” (p. 22). She designed a model where essays were divided into four sections depicting the roles women have been forced to assume in society, including literature: woman as heroine, the invisible woman, the woman as hero, and feminist aesthetics (p. 23).

Cornillion’s analysis revealed the need for a literary information retrieval system. Her lists of bibliographical materials were arranged alphabetically by title and coded to the following categories: type of literature, copyright status, language of original composition and/or country of origin, author information, availability for classroom use, period of composition, and themes or topics by which the work can be grouped with others (p. 122).

### ***The Portrayal of Women in Literature for Young People***

If I claim that women internalize the male idea of the feminine and create themselves in the shape of that idea, then it would appear to follow that there would be no difference between perceptions of the female by male and by female novelists, and that there would be no difference between the idea of the feminine and the reality of the female. But there are differences in both cases. The difference is that in the male culture the idea of the feminine is expressed, defined, and perceived by the male as a condition of being female, while for the female it is seen as an addition to one’s femaleness, as a status to be achieved. (Cornillion, 1975, p. 28)

Bezanson and Norland (1992), in a textual analysis of children's stories, found that "literature helps determine the parameters for choices children eventually make in their definition of self, their recognition of other, and the nature of their relationships" (p. 6). They were concerned that children's literature, intentionally or not, affects its reader's worldview. They questioned if children's literature is rhetorical, as rhetoric alters an individual's attitude or actions (p. 1). They had two goals for their analysis, first to examine the rhetorical nature of children's literature and to then provide a rhetorical analysis of two children's works.

Bezanson and Norland assumed that there is enough educational research to support that idea that children's literature is rhetorical. They evaluated the writings of children's literature experts such as Glazer and Luckens. According to the researchers, "through literature, children are taught attitudes and actions appropriate for themselves and their society" (p. 1). Both Glazer and Luckens maintain that books are written with the intention of presenting role models, self-exploration, and world exploration (p. 1).

Bezanson and Norland chose two books, *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein and *The Mountain That Love Bird* by Alice McLerran, for a textual analysis. Silverstein's book was chosen for its popularity and likelihood that it would be purchased by an adult and read to a child. McLerran's book was chosen for the opposite reasons. "The persuasive focus of both stories centers on relationships, specifically, the definition of self and the recognition of other" (p. 3).

Both books make important comments on the relationship of female characters to others. "Perhaps no relationship defines our self and our recognition of others more than the relationship between genders. And through literature, children explore and test the

nature and parameters of these relationships before forming their own relationships in adulthood” (p. 3). In both books the female character is a caregiver and nurturer.

In *Tree*, the Apple Tree willingly sacrifices herself as solutions to the Boy’s problems. She is unconcerned with the cost to herself or of getting nothing in return. According to Bezanson and Norland, the Boy’s happiness is the rhetorical part of the story. The reader of *Tree* never questions how the Apple Tree feels about losing herself. In fact, at the end of each exchange the reader is told the Tree is happy. Even at the last exchange the tree was not happy, only because she had nothing left to give the Boy (p. 4). “Silverstein may well be tapping into a deeply held cultural myth that the nobility of being female come from willingly nurturing another until one’s self is absorbed” (p. 4).

In *Mountain*, the female character is a bird and the male character is a mountain. When the mountain asks the bird to stay she refuses, but agrees she or her daughters (called Joy) will return each year. Joy makes this promise because the mountain cared enough about her to ask her to stay, but has nothing to offer to sustain her life. “Though she would not sacrifice her own life or the lives of her children, she becomes committed to nurturing the development of the mountain” (p. 4). Joy and her children return each year bring seeds that start roots, giving the mountain hope. Eventually Joy returns and there are now enough trees for her to build her nest and stay. According to the researchers, creation is the rhetorical focus of *Mountain*. “From the mutual recognition of the other develops not only an environment capable of fostering life, but the emergence of Mountain’s self” (p.6).

There are big differences in way the characters relate to each other in these stories. *Tree* continues to sacrifice herself, even though it consumes her. Her gifts, only

give short-term solutions to the needy Boy. Soon she has nothing left, but her own destruction. Joy's gift of herself to Mountain nurtures, becoming the life source for both. Her gift is creation (p. 6).

Bezanson and Norland conclude their analysis with the idea that adults often choose literature to share with children for the wrong reasons (such as popularity). There is the possibility that some adults might choose literature that they think is good and unconsciously teach stereotypical values. "As adults we must accept responsibility for the choices we make in the books shared with children since ultimately our choices tell us both something about the rhetoric of relationships" (p. 6).

Tyon (2000), in a textual analysis of the portrayal of Native American women in fiction for young people, found that Native American women were not portrayed accurately based on current demographic data. She was concerned that Native American women are stereotyped in literature for young people and that these inaccurate portrayals do not represent the true Native American culture. "An American's idea of Native Americans is traditionally based on what it wants to see, not on what is real. Stereotyping, by its implications, does not take into consideration the uniqueness, complexity and diversity of Native American cultures" (Tyon, 200, p.2-3)

Tyon analyzed 20 works of literature written for young people published between 1989 and 1999, of which 23 adult female characters were analyzed. The demographic data that she focused on were Indian families headed by a female, younger women who graduated from high school, women in the work force, and Native American population that lives in an urban area. None of these categories were represented accurately in the



literature analyzed by Tyon. In addition, research showed none of the traditional stereotypes.

Tyon's research also showed that none of the sampled literature, written by both Native and non-Native authors, presented the traditional stereotypical characteristic of Native American women such as modest, loyal, mysterious, or White man's helper (p.34). She observed that "the portrayal of Native women has to be free from stereotypes and that realistic portrayals of the women are depicted in the books" (p. 36).

Tyon sums up her analysis with a caution that even though stereotypes of Native women are not widespread in young people's literature, we have to be careful not to replace old stereotypes with new ones (p. 37). She recommends the need for female protagonists with broad lifestyle representations, more male-female Native American interaction, and more portrayals of contemporary Native American issues (such as tribal rights and loss of tribal language) (p.37).

Ristau (2004), in a content analysis of the changing role of female protagonists in girl series written after the women's movement, found that stereotypical female roles are seen as normal to pre-teen and teen readers (p. ii). She was concerned that contemporary girl series literature did not reflect changes in women's roles. "The role model Nancy Drew created in the first part of the century, by personifying active, intelligent young women of the twentieth century may differ from the female protagonist of series novels set in the 1980s and 1990s, after the Women's Movement" (p. 28).

Ristau analyzed 25 novels, 5 novels from each 5 different girl series. She focused her analysis on the number of times ideas of feminist perspectives in parental roles, protagonist as an independent problem solver, females not in a caregiver role, and

references to hair, clothing, make-up and physical appearance were mentioned in each novel. The importance of Ristau's analysis is that many young females who read these series books are given messages about the role of females.

Ristau found that only 20% of her sample presented examples of feminist perspective in parental roles (p. 28), while 72% of her sample presented females in caregiver roles (p. 30). Opposite these findings and a true mixed message for young readers (this researcher's opinion), she found that 56% of her sample had a female solving problems on her own, while 44% of the sample had a female solving problems with the help of a male (p. 29). 100% of Ristau's sample had multiple references to clothes, hair, make-up, and physical appearance (p.30).

Ristau sums up her research with the idea that as a teenager she was once an avid reader of girl series. "The researcher found the novels to be engaging and quick reads as a teen, but did not find them racy or full of stereotypical gender messages" (p. 36). She was surprised by the messages being sent to young readers (p.36). Ristau recommends for further research evaluating one whole girl series and also analyzing a boy series for how females are portrayed (p. 38). She also recommends a study on the impact both series and non-series novels have on teens (p.38).

McKinney (1995), in a textual analysis of the quality of strength in female characters in popular young adult realistic fiction from 1967 to 1993, found that girls find their identity in relationship to others. McKinney was concerned that in all the recent research in women's way of developing voice and self-knowledge, there was nothing about the qualities of female characters in young adult literature. The goal of her research was to identify these qualities and how these qualities affect finding an identity

and being independent. She also wanted to see if there were any patterns in how female characters in young adult literature develop their sense of strength (p. iii).

McKinney chose thirty young adult novels with female protagonists from two time periods, 1967-1980 and 1981-1993. She chose 20 passages from each novel and analyzed them using a coding process she developed. The coding process was based on a model designed by Belenky et al. (1986). McKinney adapted Belenky et.al.'s five women's ways of knowing to adolescent females. She found that young women develop knowing on a continuum based on the strength of their inner voice to provide knowledge and the power of others to create the self-knowledge of the individual.

Received knowledge was the most significant category in McKinney's analysis. "Although there may be a inner voice at work, the outer authority has the power" (p. 40). According to McKinney, young women think that knowledge is outside of themselves, belonging to someone else. They see themselves as only being able to recreate and then carry out the knowledge. Therefore, they wait on others to confirm their success or failure (p. 40). Also falling into this category is the idea that women are "received knowers." They are often able to be good students, but do not transfer knowledge. They learn to accept without questioning. "It is the element of questioning that might threaten disconnection for some girls. In school and relationships, asking questions can appear to be both a threat to authority and a way of showing submission" (p. 41).

McKinney concludes her analysis with several ideas about how young women develop their voice. Characters from both time periods were able to construct a way of knowing that allows them to find a stronger relationship with others without loss of self. All of the characters were able to find their identity in relationship to others and having

independence did not mean separation and isolation. McKinney also believes we need to pay close attention to language, both spoken and unspoken or external and internal (p. 80). “By looking at the knowledge that gets internalized, at the struggles that girls have with finding their own voice and convictions, we can hopefully come to understand what constitutes real strength for girls” (p. 80). Girls also need to know that their inner voice can support them even when others cannot (p. 80).

When they are disconnected from those they love and need, they must go inward where they work to find themselves. They work to find ways to develop an identity, but they seek to establish their sense of self in harmony with others. (p. 81)

### *Summary*

“One may not like to believe literature possesses the power to alter a reader’s point of view. But children’s literature is written to entice, motivate, and instruct” (Bezanson and Norland, 1992. p. 2).

This chapter has provided an overview of the three strands of research that this author believes influences the methodology of her analysis. First, feminist thought led to the feminist movement. Second, the feminist movement led to many different feminist literary theories about how women and women’s issues should be interpreted and what women’s influence has been both socially and historically. Third, the portrayal of women in literature for young people and how it might impact the reader.

By combining these strands of research into a textual analysis of the role of women in historical fiction for young people, this researcher’s goal is to identify any patterns in the role of women in said literature. As a result of the early writing of Gerda

Lerner “feminist scholars reassessed the meaning of major events and periods of American history in terms of women’s status” (Buhle, p. 321). Women’s status or how women exercise power is where this researcher will begin her textual analysis.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

As the literature review demonstrated, there are many ways of exploring literature from a feminist perspective. This researcher's goal is to identify the portrayal of the role of women in historical literature written for young people. This analysis seeks to identify whether the portrayal of women in contemporary historical fiction varies from pre-Feminist era historical fiction.

Social historians have recently explored the roles women played in American history. Their conclusions have reshaped the way we look at historical significance. This change in emphasis in the importance of women in history may not be reflected by contemporary historical fiction written for young people.

#### ***Methodology***

To enable this researcher to identify any changing patterns in the portrayal of women in historical fiction for young people, she has chosen to do a textual analysis. Textual analysis is a type of qualitative research "where questions are under continual review and reformulation" (Creswell, 1994, p. 71). It is her belief that a textual analysis will allow any patterns to be identified.

This type of analysis calls for the researcher to approach the data with no set categories in mind. The categories and sub-categories will develop as the researcher sorts and codes the data during a sorting process. Through this process, data groups itself and generates categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.55).

As one sorts one codes-by color, letter, or number the themes and concepts found in the data (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p.137). A working outcome will develop as the

process happens, describing the patterns and relationships being discovered (Westbrook, 1994, p. 250). Coding has been described as a systematic way of developing and refining the interpretation of data (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p. 136); it is, in a way, a defining process. Since analysis and coding are occurring at the same time (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 101), the researcher is constantly reworking categories, hypotheses, and findings. This type of research is truly ongoing. The end comes when the sorts yield no new properties of the categories, what Glaser and Strauss call “theoretical saturation” (p. 61). As the sorting process goes on, it is important to broaden definitions, as this will reduce the number of categories, clarify the hypotheses, and remove irrelevant material (p. 110).

Qualitative research requires the researcher to develop categories, make comparisons, and be open to explanation of the findings (Creswell, 1994, p. 153). The goal of all qualitative research is to create meaning (Pauly, 1991, p. 11). As meaning becomes clear, it is recommended the researcher keep track of emerging themes and hunches (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p.131).

### ***Procedure***

This researcher will use as her population literature written for young people listed in two bibliographies: *Recreating the Past: a Guide to American and World Historical Fiction for Children and Young Adults* (Adamson, 1994) and *America in Historical Fiction: a Bibliographic Guide* (VanMeter, 1997). Twelve novels written prior to 1970 and twelve novels written after 1970 will be chosen. The search will be limited to novels listed the bibliographies that could be obtained by the researcher, either in her school library media center or through Iowa’s interlibrary loan agreement. This

researcher decided to focus attention on the American pioneer frontier. A time period needed to be chosen to limit the search. The years in focus will be 1866-1900. This time period was chosen as it was the end of the American Civil War and there was an increase in westward expansion. This researcher also feels that there will be lots of opportunity to find a variety of literature concerning women in the American pioneer experience. All novels will be set in this time frame and intended for young people ages 12-16. Each novel will have a female character as a primary or secondary character.

In beginning the textual analysis, novels from the two time periods, pre- and post-1970 will be kept separate and read together in a block. This researcher will keep index cards regarding each novel. Each novel will have recorded its title, author, and publication date. Each novel will also have recorded its female character's name and if they are a primary or secondary character. The main body of the card will summarize what the female's role is in the plot and what the female character has to do with the plot of the novel.

Throughout the sorting process, this researcher will keep a journal to record her impressions. Recorded in the journal for each sort will be thoughts from the sort; what the sort tells the researcher, comparing and contrasting time periods, possible conclusions, and what categories might this sort suggest for future sorts.

For the first sort, this researcher chose from the summary of her literature review. This researcher is interested in examples of women's roles in the American pioneer frontier. Specifically, she looked for examples of females taking masculine roles. The novels from the two time periods will be kept separate during this sort.



Sorting will continue until the researcher reaches sort saturation. At this point, the researcher will describe her conclusions and infer connections to the findings of the studies in the literature review. Any selection or analysis problems will be discussed. Patterns will be discussed concerning the researcher's findings. The conclusions of the researcher will be analyzed to see if they both fit and work. By "fit" and "work" this researcher means the same as Glaser and Strauss. These authors explain, "By 'fit' we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by 'work' we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study" (p.3).

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis

A textual analysis of twelve historical novels with settings in the American frontier period written for young people written prior to 1970 and twelve novels written for young people after 1970 was undertaken by this researcher in order to identify examples of women's roles portrayed in the American pioneer frontier. In order to have a starting point for the sorting process this researcher chose a topic from the summary of her literature review. In the literature review there was discussion on feminist thought and women's emancipation as a measure of social progress. The question sought by this researcher to begin the sorting process was what emancipated a female? The first thought for this researcher was that a female must somehow equal or meet the standard for what was typical. So to this researcher the female character must meet the standard for typical male behavior of the time period. To simplify this broad spectrum of male behavior, this researcher specifically looked for examples of females taking masculine roles. The novels from the two time periods were kept separate during this sort.

In novels written prior to 1970, five examples of a female taking a masculine role were found. In *Let the Hurricane Roar* (1933), a young wife seeks a job to provide for herself while her homesteading husband is away working. The mother in *Old Yeller* (1956) also provides for her family while her husband is away working. *Miss Morissa* (1955) tells the story of a fully independent female doctor on the Nebraska prairie and *True Grit* (1968) takes the reader along as a young woman searches for her father's killer.

*Little Town on the Prairie* (1941) tells the unique story of a pioneer farmer with all daughters, one who must work to help the family survive the hardships of the frontier

In novels written after 1970, two examples of a female taking a masculine role were found. In *Colorado Ransom* (1992) a woman helps defend a gold mine from a take over by her friend's murderer and *Night of Shadows* (1990) tells the story of a female police jail warden who solves crimes.

Few examples of a female taking a masculine role could be found during this sort. There appear to be more examples of a female taking a masculine role in novels written prior to 1970. Older novels might therefore portray more independent women or women in less traditional roles. It appeared from the first sort that the absence or loss of a male character (be it father or husband) resulted in two patterns independence or displaced dependence. Since independence is seen as a masculine role and was the subject of the first sort, the second sort therefore became a search for examples of female character with displaced dependence.

For the second sort, this researcher looked for examples of a female with displaced dependence or who were dependent on others, especially for survival on the pioneer frontier. In novels written prior to 1970, five examples of female survival on the pioneer frontier, with help, were found. In *A Distant Trumpet* (1960) a young army wife experiences life in a pioneer Arizona army fort and a similar story is told in *Lieutenant's Lady* (1942) where the young army wife experiences life in a pioneer Montana fort. Both *Giants in the Earth* (1927) and *My Antonia* (1918) portray women in an immigrant pioneer homesteading experience. In *Spoilers* (1906) a young woman survives in an Alaskan mining town.

In novels written after 1970, eight examples of female survival on the pioneer frontier, with help, were found. In three of these novels: *Between Earth and Sky* (1996), *Prairie Songs* (1985), and *Prairie Widow* (1992), the female character is left dependent on someone else after her husband dies on the pioneer frontier. Similar stories are told in *Colorado Ransom* (1992) and *Jenny of the Tetons* (1989); here the female is left dependent on others after the murder of her parents on the pioneer frontier by Native Americans. *High Trail to Danger* (1991) takes a young girl on a search for her father in a Colorado mining town after her mother dies. *Lily* (1992) and *Sweetbitter* (1994) both tell the story of young love and survival on the pioneer frontier, the relationships are both made tougher through disapproval by the young girls' family of the male in the relationship.

Novels from both time periods have similar examples of female survival on the pioneer frontier with help from others. Most of the females needed help surviving after the death of a husband or parent. Few female characters ended up completely independent. This enforces the idea of females always needing help and support from others for survival. The next thought process for this researcher was seeking what a female needed to be independent, mainly an education.

For the third sort, this researcher sought examples of a female receiving a formal education. In novels written prior to 1970, three examples of a female receiving a formal education were found. In *A Distant Trumpet* (1960) a young army wife is the privileged daughter of an army major who has completed finishing school. Both *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941) and *Miss Morissa* (1955) show a female in a profession, teacher and

doctor respectively, that requires training and certification. None of the novels written after 1970 mention a female character receiving a formal education.

The older novels were more likely to portray a female as having received a formal education, although both *A Distant Trumpet* (1960) and *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941) portray the female character as still being dependent on a husband or father. *Miss Morissa* (1955) does show the main character struggling with the idea of losing her independence by marrying. If she were to marry she would lose her ability to be free to treat her patients at a moment's notice, therefore promoting the idea that a female can't have a job and a marriage. Perhaps not establishing a female character as having received a formal education reinforces the idea of females being dependent on others. If a female has received an education for the purpose of a profession, she cannot marry and continue the practice of her profession. The researcher's next thought process was about how a female would survive on the pioneer frontier, even if she were dependent on others. Regardless of a formal education, this researcher feels that the female character must have some problem solving abilities in order to survive the pioneer frontier.

For the fourth sort, this research sought examples of a female as a problem solver. In novels written prior to 1970, eight examples of a female as a problem solver were found. In *Let the Hurricane Roar* (1933) the female character has to deal with a grasshopper swarm and getting a job to provide for a young baby while her husband is away working. *Old Yeller* (1956) also has the mother working while the father is away on a cattle drive. *Miss Morissa* (1955) tells the story of female doctor on the pioneer frontier who also made a homesteading claim. *The Lady* (1957) has a female character who uses others to unwittingly solve her problems for her. In *Spoilers* (1906) there is a

young woman who helps save Alaskan gold mines from corrupt businessmen. *My Antonia* (1918) has a young female who becomes an unwed mother and has to work to provide for her child. *True Grit* (1968) has a young teen working with a bounty hunter to help locate her father's killer. *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941) has a female character who becomes a teacher to help send her blind sister to a college for blind students.

In novels written after 1970, six examples of a female as a problem solver were found. Both *Between Earth and Sky* (1996) and *Sister* (1990) portray female characters who have to help their families after the death of a family member. Four other novels, *Colorado Ransom* (1992), *High Trail to Danger* (1991), *Jo and the Bandit* (1992), and *Night of Shadows* (1990) have female characters who help solve crimes. Both time periods have similar examples of a female as a problem solver. The novels written before 1970 seem to portray females who make bigger sacrifices in solving problems. This researcher feels that novels from both time periods seem not to portray working for money outside the home to contribute to family survival as a true problem solving skill. Also, books written after 1970 seem to glamorize the female as a problem solver only if she is fighting crime. Even when the female's problem solving skills saved the day, she was not portrayed as a hero.

To continue the sorting process this researcher went back to an idea that emerged from the first sort. Older novels were more likely to show a female character in a less traditional role. This idea made this researcher interested in examples of the portrayal of women in more traditional roles. To this researcher the most obvious traditional role for a female is that of a wife or mother. The next sort therefore became a search for examples of a female character as a wife or mother.

For the fifth sort, this research looked for examples of a female character in a traditional role of wife or mother. In novels written prior to 1970, eight examples of a female character as a wife or mother were found. These novels were; *A Distant Trumpet* (1960), *Let the Hurricane Roar* (1933), *Giants in the Earth* (1927), *The Lady* (1957), *The Lieutenant's Lady* (1942), and *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941), *Old Yeller* (1956), and *My Antonia* (1918). In novels written after 1970, four examples of a female character as a wife or mother were found. The novels were: *Between Earth and Sky* (1996), *Dragon's Gate* (1993), *Prairie Songs* (1985), and *Prairie Widow* (1992). The older novels were more likely to have a female character as a wife or mother. If being a wife was the most obvious traditional role for this researcher, she thought the next sort should seek examples of a female in a nontraditional relationship for the time period, such as living with man or being an unwed mother.

For the sixth sort, this researcher looked for examples of a female character in a nontraditional relationship. This sort was limited to female characters believed to be over eighteen years of age. In novels written prior to 1970, there was one example of a female character in a nontraditional relationship. *My Antonia* (1918) tells of a young woman who becomes an unwed mother.

In novels written after 1970, four examples of a female character in a nontraditional relationship were found. *Colorado Ransom* (1992) had a female character who had never been married but had lived with two different men. *Lily* (1992) portrayed a young woman who was on the run with her outlaw boyfriend and engaging in sex. They were married only after she became pregnant. *Jenny of the Tetons* (1989) portrays a relationship between a European man and a Native American who were not legally

married, but stayed together until death. *Sweetbitter* (1994) also portrayed a female character in a sexual relationship without marriage and the male character was also a Native American. Post 1970 novels were more likely to show a female in a nontraditional relationship. The post 1970 also seemed more likely to mention or describe sexual relationships.

For the seventh sort, this researcher wanted to continue with the idea of what might have been considered traditional for the time period on the American pioneer frontier. This researcher thought she would find most female characters would have a religious preference, considering the time period she was exploring. For this sort, she looked for any example of religion or religious belief on the part of a female character. In novels written prior to 1970, four examples of a female character portraying a religious preference were found. These novels were: *Giants in the Earth* (1927), *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941), *Miss Morissa* (1955), and *My Antonia* (1918). The religious preference expressed most was Protestantism. In novels written after 1970, two examples of a female character expressing a religious preference were found. *Between Earth and Sky* (1996) a preference for Protestantism is expressed. In *Jenny of the Tetons* (1989) a preference for Native American earth reverence is expressed. Older novels were more likely to mention a religious preference on the part of a female character. The next sort category that emerged was a surprise to this researcher. Undiagnosed mental health issues seemed to be ascribed to female characters in both time periods.

For the eighth sort, this researcher sought examples of females with undiagnosed mental health issues. In novels written prior to 1970, four examples of females with undiagnosed mental issues were found. In both *A Distant Trumpet* (1960) and *The*



*Wonderful Country* (1952) a female character commits suicide. *The Lady* (1957) portrays the main female character as having extreme highs and lows with uncontrolled behavior patterns, perhaps bi-polarism. *Giants in the Earth* (1927) portrays a young immigrant mother who shows extreme signs of post-partum depression, which continues into an ongoing depression, after the birth of her fourth child, the first on the pioneer frontier.

In novels written after 1970, four examples were also found of females with undiagnosed mental issues. In *Prairie Songs* (1985) there is an implied suicide (runs outside crazy after a blizzard lasts for several days and found frozen later) after the death of an infant. In *Prairie Widow* (1992) a female character enters a deep depression after the death of her husband. Both *Between Earth and Sky* (1996) and *Sweetbitter* (1994) portray female characters that have mood swings, personality changes, and uncontrolled behavior, perhaps bi-polarism. Only *Between Earth and Sky* (1996) portrays the female character seeking help for her mental issues and that is to ask her mother to take her child in. It is then implied that she goes away to an institution, but doesn't mention what happens after this. Neither time period ever identifies a mental health issue. With this unexpected finding the researcher stopped the sorting process

In summary, ideas concerning the portrayal of women in historical fiction written for young people that emerged for this researcher during the sorting process were similar to ideas of women's roles in the review of literature. Some of these portrayals of women characters in historical fiction were: few examples of females taking masculine roles, women characters were often dependent on others for survival, few female characters were portrayed as having a formal education, female characters were not portrayed as problem solvers, and most women were portrayed in a traditional wife or motherhood

role. The unexpected theme that emerged from the sorting process was that undiagnosed mental health issues seemed to be ascribed to female characters.

## Chapter 5

### Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

#### *Summary*

The purpose of this textual analysis of the role of women in historical fiction written for young people was to identify whether the portrayal of women in contemporary historical fiction varies from pre-Feminist era historical fiction. This researcher's goal was to seek examples and compare the portrayal of women in novels written before and after 1970. Twenty-four novels were selected from historical novel bibliographies. Twelve novels written before 1970 and twelve written after 1970 were read and any identified patterns were included in the sorting process.

Research questions seeking resolution were: how were women portrayed in historical fiction written for young people before and after 1970 and can changing patterns in the portrayal of the role of women in historical fiction be identified?

Emerging themes in the portrayal of women in historical fiction written for young people identified in novels from both time periods by this researcher's textual analysis include: that there are few examples of females taking masculine roles, female characters who endure the absence of a male character resulted in two patterns; independence or displaced dependence, few female characters were portrayed as having a formal education or as a problem solver, most female characters were portrayed as a wife or mother, and undiagnosed mental health issues seemed to be ascribed to female characters. The research question can changing patterns in the portrayal of the role of women in historical fiction be identified could not be confirmed or rejected as examples of

emerging themes in the portrayal of women in historical fiction were found in novels from both time periods.

### *Conclusions*

Ideas concerning the portrayal of women in historical fiction written for young people that emerged for this researcher during the sorting process were similar to ideas of women's roles in the review of literature. Some of these portrayals of women characters in historical fiction might give us insight into a young reader's emerging image of women and with further study the very foundation in which a young woman's sense of self is developed. One theme emerging from this researcher's textual analysis was that there were few examples, in historical fiction analyzed, of females taking masculine roles. In novels written prior to 1970, five examples of a female taking a masculine role were found. In novels written after 1970, two examples of a female taking a masculine role were found.

Another emerging theme was female characters with displace dependence or who were dependent on others, especially for survival on the pioneer frontier. In novels written prior to 1970, five examples of female survival on the pioneer frontier, with help, were found. In novels written after 1970, eight examples of female survival on the pioneer frontier, with help, were found.

Few female characters in this textual analysis were portrayed as having a formal education. In novels written prior to 1970, three examples of a female receiving a formal education were found. None of the novels written after 1970 mention a female character receiving a formal education.

Female characters were not portrayed as problem solvers. In novels written prior to 1970, eight examples of a female as a problem solver were found. In novels written after 1970, six examples of a female as a problem solver were found.

Most female characters in this textual analysis were portrayed in a wife or motherhood role. In novels written prior to 1970, eight examples of a female character as a wife or mother were found. In novels written after 1970, four examples of a female character as a wife or mother were found.

Female characters were also rarely portrayed as being in a nontraditional relationship. In novels written prior to 1970, there was one example of a female character in a nontraditional relationship. In novels written after 1970, four examples of a female character in a nontraditional relationship were found.

The most unexpected theme that emerged from this textual analysis was that undiagnosed mental health issues seemed to be ascribed to female characters in both time periods. In novels written prior to 1970, four examples of females with undiagnosed mental issues were found. In novels written after 1970, four examples were also found of females with undiagnosed mental issues.

Based on these themes this researcher cannot either confirm or reject her original research question of whether changing patterns in the portrayal of women in historical could be identified. This unpredicted outcome is not satisfying to this researcher as she was hopeful for a clearly identified changing pattern in the portrayal of female characters that was in line with the emerging research of the historical significance of women in American history and society. She was also hopeful that novels written after the Feminist movement would portray stronger female characters. One is left with disappointment and

concern that contemporary fiction does not accurately reflect contemporary historical research about the contributions of women to the American pioneer frontier.

### ***Recommendations for Further Study***

Based on this researcher's textual analysis, she feels there is a need for studies on how the portrayal of women in historical fiction affects the reader's image of women. Also, there is a need for studies on if the portrayal of women in historical fiction is historically accurate. Information from studies of this type will help writers portray realistic characters in realistic situations. Understanding how a reader interprets the portrayal of a female character will help researchers understand how this piece fits into the puzzle of how a young woman's sense of self develops.

Other areas of analysis recommended by this researcher would be to break down the demographics into specific cultural groups such as Native American or African American. A textual or content analysis of the portrayal of the role of women in historical fiction based on a specific cultural group would be interesting. Further study would also be recommended for any of the themes that emerged from this textual analysis such as women in nontraditional relationships and females receiving a formal education.

The major theme emerging from this textual analysis that this research would like to see examined the most would be female characters having undiagnosed mental illnesses. What is it about the American pioneer frontier that drove people crazy? Is this same theme identifiable in others such as males or children? Does this same theme transfer over to novels set in other time periods and places? Two final recommendations for study would be a similar textual analysis to this one except breaking down the methodology further by comparing male vs. female authors' portrayal of women in

historical fiction and analyzing the interaction of female characters with each other and its affect on the reader's image of women.

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## Appendix A

## List of Novels

## Pre 1970

1. A Distant Trumpet by Paul Hogan      1960
2. Let the Hurricane Roar by Rose Wilder Lane      1933
3. Giants in the Earth by Ole Rolvagg      1927
4. The Lady by Conrad Richter      1957
5. The Lieutenants Lady by Bess Streeter Aldrich      1942
6. Little Town on the Prairie by Laura Ingalls Wilder      1941
7. Miss Morrissa, Doctor of the Gold Trail by Mari Sandoz      1955
8. My Antonia by Willa Cather      1918
9. Old Yeller by Fred Gipson      1956
10. Spoilers by Rex Ellingwood Beach      1906
11. True Grit by Charles Portis      1968
12. The Wonderful Country by Tom Lea      1952

## Post 1970

1. Between Earth and Sky by Karen Osborn      1996
2. Colorado Ransom by Susan Harmon      1992
3. Dragon's Gate by Laurence Yep      1993
4. High Trail to Danger by Joan L. Nixon      1991
5. Jenny of the Tetons by Kristiana Gregory      1989
6. Jo and the Bandit by Willo Davis Roberts      1992
7. Lily by Cindy Bonner      1992

8. Night of Shadows by Edward Gorman 1990
9. Prairie Songs by Pam Conrad 1985
10. Prairie Widow by Harold Bakst 1992
11. Sister by Ellen Howard 1990
12. Sweetbitter by Reginald Gibbons 1994

## Appendix B

## Textual Analysis Form

**Title:**

**Author:**

**Year:**

**Female character (primary or secondary):**

**Role in plot:**

**Sort ideas:**

## Appendix C

## Textual Analysis Form

Pre 1970

**Title:** A Distant Trumpet

**Author:** Paul Hogan

**Year:** 1960

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Laura Greenleaf Hazard (primary), Kitty Mainwaring (secondary), Jessica Prescott (secondary)

**Role in plot:** Laura is child of army privilege who ends up at a remote Arizona fort with her army lieutenant husband in the 1880's. Kitty is a destroyer, never happily married, possibly suffers from mental health issues-ends up committing suicide. Jessica is the smart older army wife who Laura looks to for coping and survival as a young army wife. Jessica always does the right thing.

**Sort ideas:** most number of female characters in the novel, traditional story roles (wives), Native American culture, survival on the frontier with help from others (not much of survival story told from female perspective, mostly from male perspective), mental health issues

**Title:** Let the Hurricane Roar

**Author:** Rose Wilder Lane

**Year:** 1933

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Caroline (primary)

**Role in plot:** new, young (16-18 years old) wife on prairie, pregnant with first baby homesteading with husband. Left alone for the summer and fall while husband works in the East. After grasshoppers eat their crops, she gets a job to help pay for family needs. She learns she can be self-sufficient.

**Sort ideas:** survival on the frontier, displaced dependence, traditional role (wife)

**Title:** Giants in the Earth

**Author:** Ole Rolvagg

**Year:** 1927

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Beret Holm (primary)

**Role in plot:** Norwegian immigrant in 1873 South Dakota. She can't adjust to life on the prairie, doesn't like the pioneer lifestyle-dreams often of home. Slowly goes "crazy" with birth of fourth child-then comes out of fog long enough to send husband on a death mission to get a minister for a sick neighbor during winter of 1880-81.

**Sort ideas:** survival with help, traditional role (wife and mother), religious preference-Lutheran, mental health issues

**Title:** The Lady

**Author:** Conrad Richter

**Year:** 1957

**Female character (primary or secondary):** La Dona Ellen Campo y Johnson (primary)

**Role in plot:** Rich woman of Spanish/English descent in New Mexico. Always has everyone else help solve her problems-major issue is land wars between cattle and sheep owners. Husband, son, and brother are murdered by competition. Sister married to competition helps her out in the end. Told from perspective of her young male cousin.

**Sort ideas:** traditional role (wife), mental health issues

**Title:** The Lieutenants Lady

**Author:** Bess Streeter Aldrich

**Year:** 1942

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Linnie Colsworth Stafford (primary)

**Role in plot:** Orphan follows army officer (cousin's former fiancé) North (Dakotas and onto Montana). He marries her to protect her and they end up in love, she is torn as to his feelings.

**Sort ideas:** Survival with help, portrayal of Native Americans, sought her own adventure by choosing to travel North

**Title:** Little Town on the Prairie

**Author:** Laura Ingalls Wilder

**Year:** 1941

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Laura Ingalls (primary)

**Role in plot:** Young woman in Dakota Territory wants to be a schoolteacher to help family send sister to college for the blind. 1880's

**Sort ideas:** survival with help from family, yet gains a profession, education

**Title:** Miss Morissa, Doctor of the Gold Trail

**Author:** Mari Sandoz

**Year:** 1955

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Morissa Kirk (primary)

**Role in plot:** Young female doctor on Nebraska prairie in the 1870's. Raised on work farm, goes to college, builds a practice and watches area change. She homesteads and feels she must chose between profession or marriage.

**Sort ideas:** fully independent, education

**Title:** My Antonia

**Author:** Willa Cather

**Year:** 1918

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Antonia Shimerda (primary)

**Role in plot:** a young boy, Jim Burden's, reflection of young immigrant girl from Bohemia on Nebraska prairie. Ends up a hard worker, has a child out of wedlock, marries and has a big family. He feels her life really reflects the prairie and how hard works gets people far.

**Sort ideas:** survival with help, nontraditional role, religious preference (Catholic)

**Title:** Old Yeller

**Author:** Fred Gipson

**Year:** 1956

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Mama Coates (secondary)

**Role in plot:** family in Texas, late 1880's, left alone for summer while Father is gone on a cattle drive.

**Sort ideas:** survival, traditional role (wife and mother)

**Title:** Spoilers

**Author:** Rex Ellingwood Beach

**Year:** 1906

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Helen Chester (primary)

**Role in plot:** Innocent girl delivers message of conspiracy by Uncle and partner to Alaska. Roy Genister, who is the aim of the plot to take over his gold mine, aids her. She eventually learns of the plot in time to stop her marriage to partner and help save the town's gold mines from Uncle.

**Sort ideas:** survival, problem solver

**Title:** True Grit

**Author:** Charles Portis

**Year:** 1968

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Mattie Ross (primary)

**Role in plot:** in Arkansas and Oklahoma a 14-year-old hires U.S. Marshall to find her Father's killer. She goes along on the adventure.

**Sort ideas:** nontraditional role, survival, wronged (will solve her own problem)

**Title:** The Wonderful Country

**Author:** Tom Lea

**Year:** 1952

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Ellen Cotton and Louisa Rucker (very secondary)

**Role in plot:** Ellen is Army wife who commits suicide after an implied affair while husband was gone. Louisa is a Texas Ranger captain's daughter who is loved from afar by Martin Brady, the main character.

**Sort ideas:** mental health issues



Post 1970

**Title:** Between Earth and Sky

**Author:** Karen Osborn

**Year:** 1996

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Abigail Conklin (primary)

**Role in plot:** From age 20 to death, story told in letters to sister, Maggie back home in Virginia. Tells story of life on wagon trail and hardships in New Mexico.

**Sort ideas:** survival, traditional role (wife and mother), mental health issues

**Title:** Colorado Ransom

**Author:** Susan Harmon

**Year:** 1992

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Olivia Palmer (secondary)

**Role in plot:** after parent's death, she survives in pioneer Colorado, when "boyfriend" is murdered for his gold mine; she helps his nephew fight murderer

**Sort ideas:** survival, nontraditional role (unmarried in relationship), property owner

**Title:** Dragon's Gate

**Author:** Laurence Yep

**Year:** 1993

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Cassia (secondary)

**Role in plot:** doesn't fit criteria, stays home in China to help run family business while husband and adopted son come to California to work in gold mines and build railroads.

**Sort ideas:** cultural understand, problem solver (doesn't take place on American pioneer frontier)

**Title:** High Trail to Danger

**Author:** Joan L. Nixon

**Year:** 1991

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Sarah Lindley (primary)

**Role in plot:** 17-year-old looks for missing Father in Leadville, CO. Looks for clues as she finds herself in increasing danger.

**Sort ideas:** survival with help, orphan, problem solver

**Title:** Jenny of the Tetons

**Author:** Kristiana Gregory

**Year:** 1989

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Carrie Hill (primary) and Jenny Leigh (primary)

**Role in plot:** Carrie is taken in by Leigh family after family is attacked by Native Americans on wagon train. Jenny is Native American woman married to white trapper

and hunter. Jenny heals Carrie's wounds and they develop a friendship while traveling in Teton Mts. Carrie begins to see Jenny as a mother substitute and respects her Native American ways.

**Sort ideas:** survival with help, masculine role, nontraditional role, religious preference (nature)

**Title:** Jo and the Bandit

**Author:** Willo Davis Roberts

**Year:** 1992

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Josephine Eleanor Elizabeth Whitman (primary)

**Role in plot:** Orphaned, she and brother go live with uncle for summer until another aunt can take care of them. Uncle is judge and community is rocked by bandits. Jo is able to draw sketches of bandits who robbed the stage she is on. She befriends the youngest who is forced into crime and helps prove his innocence

**Sort ideas:** orphan, problem solver

**Title:** Lily

**Author:** Cindy Bonner

**Year:** 1992

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Lily DeLony (primary)

**Role in plot:** 15-year-old runs family as mother is dead. Torn between taking care of family or following her love, an outlaw. Matures in understanding of the lifestyle she has chosen by leaving home. Marriage to boyfriend after pregnancy is implied.

**Sort ideas:** fully independent, survival, nontraditional relationship

**Title:** Night of Shadows

**Author:** Edward Gorman

**Year:** 1990

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Anna Tolen (primary)

**Role in plot:** Widow who is jail matron gets involved with "babysitting" a gunfighter-who is then thought to be a murderer. Using her skills from her detective research she investigates the crime. Falls in love with fellow policeman.

**Sort ideas:** educated herself, problem solver, still a love story involved

**Title:** Prairie Songs

**Author:** Pam Conrad

**Year:** 1985

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Louisa Downing (primary), Clara Downing (secondary), and Emmeline Berryman (secondary)

**Role in plot:** Young doctor's wife on Nebraska prairie told through the eyes of young neighbor Louisa. She loses a baby and suicide is implied. Very lonely, mother of Louisa (Clara) recognizes this and tries to involve her by getting her to tutor her children.

**Sort ideas:** Survival, traditional role (wife and mother), mental health issues

**Title:** Prairie Widow

**Author:** Harold Bakst

**Year:** 1992

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Jennifer Wandermeer (primary)

**Role in plot:** woman left widowed on Kansas prairie. Mother who never wanted to leave home.

**Sort ideas:** survival with help, traditional role (mother), mental health issues

**Title:** Sister

**Author:** Ellen Howard

**Year:** 1990

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Alena Ostermann (primary)

**Role in plot:** Oldest daughter helps family after mother takes sick with loss of baby. Must leave school and learn ways of household. Realizes she has hope for future.

**Sort ideas:** problem solver, education (doesn't finish-some self education is implied)

**Title:** Sweetbitter

**Author:** Reginald Gibbons

**Year:** 1994

**Female character (primary or secondary):** Martha Clarke Sweetbitter (primary)

**Role in plot:** told in varying viewpoints between Martha and Reuben Sweetbitter (half white, half Chowotac Indian) who meet and fall in love. They are on the run from her family, marry, and have children. A rich, childless woman who befriends Martha and allows them to live in her carriage house and work for her protects them. He must abandon his life to be accepted by hers because she becomes more mentally unstable, she has "manic" behavior.

**Sort ideas:** survival with help, mental health issues, nontraditional relationship

## Appendix D

## Sort Journal

**1<sup>st</sup> sort**

Females taking masculine roles

Pre 1970

Let the hurricane roar-looks for job while husband away working, deals with homesteading and grasshoppers

Miss Morissa-doctor on the Nebraska prairie-fully independent

True Grit-searches for father's killer with bounty hunter

Old Yeller-father gone on cattle drive, mother works on own

Lieutenant's Lady-travels by river alone

Post 1970

Colorado Ransom-helps to defend gold mine from takeover by boyfriend's killer

Night of Shadows-female jail matron solves crime

High Trail to Danger-searches/travels alone looking for father

Thoughts

Few examples found, more examples of masculine roles in pre 1970 books. Possible conclusion-older novels show more independent women/less traditional roles. Future sort thought-women surviving on land with help from others or dependent on others for survival.

**2<sup>nd</sup> sort**

Females dependent on others for survival (displaced dependence)

Pre 1970

A Distant Trumpet-army wife experiences life in Arizona army fort

Giants in the Earth-homesteading Norwegian community

Lieutenant's Lady-young army wife in Montana

Little Town on the Prairie-homesteading experiences of an all daughter family-daughter works to help pay for blind sister schooling

My Antonia-immigrant homesteading

Spoilers-Alaskan mining town, young woman helps save mines from corrupt uncle

Post 1970

Between Earth and Sky-New Mexico homesteader

Colorado Ransom-knows land and mines, surviving since parents murdered

Jenny of the Tetons-learns to live on land with help from Native American woman after death of parents

High Trail to Danger-looks for missing father in mining town  
 Lily-life on the run with outlaw husband  
 Prairie Songs-Nebraska prairie young mother and wife are neighbors  
 Prairie Widow-Kansas homesteader's husband dies  
 Sweetbitter-young mixed-race couple on the run, protected by rich woman who they work for

### Thoughts

Pretty even-similar situations where female needs help-after the loss of parents or husband-go from one protector to another (displaced dependence). Possible conclusions-woman always thought of as needing help or support from others to survive. Future sort ideas-females that seemed to be somewhat independent in 1<sup>st</sup> sort seemed to have an education-how many females have education.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> sort**

Females with education

#### Pre 1970

A Distant Trumpet-privileged daughter of army goes to finishing school, lots of high-society training  
 Little Town on the Prairie-training for/passes test to be a schoolteacher  
 Miss Morissa-doctor

#### Post 1970

Sweetbitter and Sister-implies education put nothing specific mentioned

### Thoughts

Thought newer novels would have more examples of educated women. Conclusions-older novels show better/more positive examples of education among female characters (is this a true representation?) No education enforces the idea that women need others for survival. Future sorts-despite educational status, females still need to a problem solver to contribute to survival, even displaced dependence, on the pioneer frontier.

### **4<sup>th</sup> sort**

Female as a problem solver

#### Pre 1970

Let the Hurricane Roar-deals with grasshoppers on homestead, finds a job to provide for young baby while husband is away working  
 The Lady-uses others to help solve problems, manipulator  
 Little Town on the Prairie-becomes a schoolteacher to help provide a college education for blind sister

Miss Morissa-doctor/homesteader  
 Old Yeller-mother helps save family from rabid animals  
 Spoilers-helps solve crime/save mines from corrupt uncle  
 True Grit-helps find father's killer, negotiates with adults

#### Post 1970

Between Earth and Sky-must run homestead after husband disappears  
 Colorado Ransom-helps save mines  
 High Trail to Danger-looks for father  
 Jo and the Bandit-helps solve crime using art skills to draw sketches  
 Night of Shadows-widowed jail matron helps solve crime  
 Sister-helps family after mother gets sick

#### Thoughts

Similar examples, no extremes except older novels characters seem to make more sacrifices. Is problem solver the same as taking masculine roles? Working for to provide for family isn't seen as problem solving. Crime fighting seems to be biggest role portrayal for females. Possible conclusions-no real differences other than type of sacrifice made, females not seen as heroes. Future sort ideas-females in traditional roles.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> sort**

Females in traditional role of wife or mother

#### Pre 1970

A Distant Trumpet  
 Let the Hurricane Roar  
 Giants in the Earth  
 The Lady  
 The Lieutenant's Lady  
 Little Town on the Prairie  
 Old Yeller  
 My Antonia

#### Post 1970

Between Earth and Sky  
 Dragon's Gate  
 Prairie Songs  
 Prairie Widow

#### Thoughts

Older novel more likely to have a married character. Future sort-nontraditional relationships. Future study-relationship of mother-child, wife-husband effect on reader.

**6<sup>th</sup> sort**

Nontraditional relationships (female over 18)

Pre 1970

My Antonia-lives with man, has child alone

Post 1970

Colorado Ransom-lives with boyfriend

Jenny of the Tetons-Native American/White trapper relationship, not traditional marriage

Lily-outlaw boyfriend on run/having sex before marriage-marriage after implied pregnancy

Sweetbitter-mixed-race couple Native American/white sex before marriage

Thoughts

Post 1970 novels were most likely to show nontraditional relationships and mention sexual relationships. Future sort idea-religious preference

**7<sup>th</sup> sort**

Religious preference

Pre 1970

Giants in the Earth-Lutheran

Little Town on the Prairie-Christian

Miss Morissa-Christian

My Antonia-Christian (Protestant and Catholic)

Post 1970

Between Earth and Sky-Protestant

Jenny of the Tetons-Native American Earth Worship

Thoughts

Thought religion would be mentioned more considering time frame. Religious preference is expressed more in older novels. Future sort ideas-mental health issues.

**8<sup>th</sup> sort**

Undiagnosed mental issues

Pre 1970

A Distant Trumpet-destroyer/manipulator-never happy-commits suicide

Giants in the Earth-depression/post-pardum

The Lady-manipulator, mood swings (pi-polar)

The Wonderful Country-suicide after implied affair

Post 1970

Between Earth and Sky-daughter has mood swings/personality changes (bi-polar) does seek some help

Prairie Songs-implicit suicide after baby dies

Prairie Widow-can't deal with life after husband dies

Sweetbitter-mood swings/personality issues (bi-polar)

Thoughts

Surprised mental issues not identified and dealt with in newer novels. Why isn't it ok to discuss or explain mental health issues? What is it about life on the frontier that made people crazy? Were just as many other people crazy on the frontier? No future sort ideas.