

1988

## Growing Up Too Fast

Cynthia Rapp Hartman  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## Growing Up Too Fast

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#### Abstract

A content analysis technique was used to examine 16 children's books to determine whether the growth and development of the 24 main characters fit the growth and development of real-life children of the same chronological age.

Books published since 1982 with main characters who were eight, nine, ten, and eleven years of age were selected from Booklist and Best Books for Children. Descriptions and actions of the main characters were examined in the categories of general behavior, self-concept, social relations, and school orientation. Four hypotheses relating to these four categories were rejected and the researcher concluded that as depicted in the 16 books analyzed children are not growing up too quickly.

The factors that affected the study were the lack of such categories on the profile instrument as family situation, clothing attitudes, and subjective wording of the developmental profile instrument.

Growing Up Too Fast

A Research Paper

Presented to the

Faculty of the Library Science Department

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of the Degree  
Masters of Arts

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Cynthia Rapp Hartman

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Read and approved by  
Elizabeth Martin

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Leah Hiland

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Accepted by Department  
Elizabeth Martin

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Description of the Problem

Childhood is by definition the absence of adulthood (Greenleaf, 1978).

Adults can earn their own living, set up their own household, reproduce children and enjoy all the privileges that go with being a full-fledged member of society. Children cannot do these things. At some point they will be able to, but that point has fluctuated from as young as eight to as old as thirty, depending on the standard of the group. (Elkind, 1978, p. xiii-xiv)

Just a generation ago, children were playing games, such as marbles, jacks, or hide and seek. According to Nell Postman you no longer see any child over the age of nine playing these games (1982). Today's children spend much of their time watching television, seeing things that they are not mature enough to see, dressing in clothes that are replicas of styles worn by their parents, and participating in sports that until recently were available only to adolescents and young adults. Watching Little League baseball is now like watching major league baseball. The little leaguers have uniforms, spectators, umpires, and playoffs just like the big leaguers.

Today's idea of childhood got its start during the Renaissance period. During that era children were considered infants until they achieved the command of speech; only then did the child enter the stage of childhood. This stage lasted until the child reached the age of seven. The 1600's brought about a great deal of change in the public's view of childhood and in the educational system. A more formal education was becoming a vital part of the Renaissance period and at this point it was clear that school learning was becoming synonymous with childhood. Before this change took place children

over the age of seven served an apprenticeship with one of the local businesses. This apprenticeship was a means of attaining a trade for life without learning to read or write.

As childhood became a social and intellectual category, stages of childhood became visible. Toward the end of the sixteenth century the clothing for children began to show a remarkable change from that of adults. Until the beginning of the seventeenth century each child in a family was given the same name as other members of the family, but then the families began giving each child his/her own unique name. The 1740's marked the beginning of a new literature, a literature written exclusively for children.

Formal education led to reorientation of parents' relationships to their children. The parents' task became that of making their children Godfearing, literate adults. The economic conditions of the time played a role in intensifying society's consciousness of children and making them socially visible. All these developments were signs of an emerging new class of people known as children. The children of the time spoke differently, spent days differently, dressed differently, learned differently, and in the end thought differently from adults (Postman, 1982).

From the Renaissance period until recent years childhood has been refined and nourished into our own times (Postman, 1982, p. 46). But recently society's idea of childhood has changed. Children are no longer children; they are miniature adults (Elkind, 1981), hurried children (Elkind, 1981), children without a childhood (Winn, 1983), tiny adults (Snyder, [1980]), or they have survived the Pearl Harbor method of growing up (Winn, 1983).



### Purpose of the Study

The researcher conducted this study to find out whether literature written for and about children concurs with such opinions of childhood as voiced by David Elkind, Neil Postman, and Marie Winn. As stated briefly in the introduction each of these persons has a different name for the same basic problem. What is happening to our children's childhood? The three authors feel children are growing up too quickly, losing their childhood identity for various reasons, and gaining adulthood before they are mature enough to handle it. This researcher gathered evidence which would support or refute these opinions about childhood. The researcher also wished to find out whether or not children's childhood is disappearing in the books they read. Is the growth and development of children in the books forcing them and, consequently, children to lose their childhood identity?

### Statement of the Problem

This study examined the contents of fiction books for children published since 1982 to determine whether the growth and development of the characters fit the growth and development of real-life children of the same chronological age.

The questions investigated were:

1. What general behavior traits are included in fiction books for children ages eight through eleven?
2. What self-concept characteristics are included in fiction books for children ages eight through eleven?

3. What social relations characteristics are included in fiction books for children ages eight through eleven?
4. What school orientation characteristics are included in fiction books for children ages eight through eleven?

### Hypotheses

1. Sixty percent of the main characters in the books analyzed will exhibit more of the general behavior traits or a majority of the same, at least one year ahead of his or her chronological age.
2. Sixty percent of the main characters in the books analyzed will exhibit more of the self-concept traits or a majority of the same, at least one year ahead of his or her chronological age.
3. Sixty percent of the main characters in the books analyzed will exhibit more of the social relations traits or a majority of the same, at least one year ahead of his or her chronological age.
4. Sixty percent of the main characters in the books analyzed will exhibit more of the school orientation traits or a majority of the same, at least one year ahead of his or her chronological age.

### Assumptions

This researcher assumes children in our society are being forced to grow up too quickly, taking on adult roles before they are mature enough to handle them. The researcher believes there is evidence in

the content of a variety of media to endorse this assumption that children are growing up too quickly in our society today.

This researcher assumes that, if realistic fiction does portray real life situations, the children who read realistic fiction are gaining ideas and impressions of growing up and the world around them from these books. After reading a book and seeing in what activities the character was participating, a child may wish to do the same activities even though the activity is beyond the social developmental stage of the child.

### Definition of Terms

Children, for the purpose of this study, are young persons between the chronological age of eight and eleven years.

Realistic fiction may be defined as imaginative writing that accurately reflects life as it was lived in the past or could be lived today. Everything in such a story can conceivably have happened to real people living in our natural physical world, in contrast to fantasy where impossible happenings are made to appear quite plausible, even though they are not plausible" (Huck, 1987, p. 464).

Children's literature is books that are read and enjoyed by young people in the third through sixth grades, or ages eight through eleven.

Main character is a child or children who play(s) a major role in the plot of a book.

Social development is "The process of learning behaviors accepted and expected by society" (Gibson, 1978, p. 505).

Psychological development is the gradual growth or advancement of the human mind in the affective or cognitive functions.

General behavior traits are common attitudes, motivations, physical development, and behaviors.

Self-concept is one's perception of one's individuality.

Social relations are learning behaviors expected by society in the child's relationships with peers, parents, teachers, siblings, or other persons.

School orientation is a child's behaviors and attitudes about school and in school.

Chronological age is the age of a person determined by counting the number of years from birth to the present time.

### Limitations

The researcher limited the sample of books to children's contemporary realistic fiction books. No other media forms were considered for study. This study was limited to books that contained at least one main character between the ages eight and eleven.

The necessity to limit the number of books used in the sample was based on the large volume of children's contemporary realistic fiction available. The researcher used 16 books selected from two sources that recommend books for ages eight through eleven or grades three through six and have been published since 1982.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Related Literature

Childhood for many centuries has been a stage of growth all by itself, but in today's society children are growing up quicker than ever. The gap between childhood and adulthood is closing so fast some wonder if there is any difference between the two. Kay Vandergrift (1980) states in her book that "childhood may indeed be so difficult that no adult could or would tolerate it. Perhaps children suspect this and try to rush into growing up because they sense adulthood is easier" (p. 2). In another point of view about growing up, Marie Winn (1983) states:

It might seem to some that minimizing the gap between childhood and adulthood and treating children with greater equality represents a step up for them, a liberation from a semi-enlaved state into one in which they are endowed with rights like adults. But treating a child in an equal way, as if he were another adult, contradicts the underlying social realities of the parent-child relationship and ignores the innate, developmental differences that exist between the two. The new concept of the child as equal and the new intergration of children into the adult life has helped bring about a gradual but certain erosion of those boundaries that once separated the world of children from the world of adults, boundaries that allowed adults to treat children differently than they treated other adults because they understood that children are different. (p. 194-195)

An excellent example of this erosion between childhood and adulthood is in some very startling crime statistics between 1950 and 1979. During this time period the rate of serious crime committed by those children younger than fifteen increased one hundred ten times, or eleven thousand percent (Postman, 1982, p. 3). Postman also stated that:

Twelve- and thirteen-year-old girls are among the highest-paid models in America. In advertisements in all

the visual media, they are presented to the public in the guise of knowing and sexually enticing adults, entirely comfortable in the eroticism. (1982, p. 3)

What are the reasons for the disappearance of childhood (Postman, 1983), children without a childhood (Winn, 1983), hurried children (Elkind, 1981), miniature adults (Elkind, 1981), or tiny adults (Snyder, [1981])? Each of these noted psychologists, educators, or authors has a different term for this childhood phenomenon but all feel the reasons for the changes in childhood are basically the same, and these reasons will constitute a major part of this literature review.

American society has done a great deal to bring about the changes in childhood that have surfaced in the last three decades. In the 1960's parents were beginning to feel that if their children were not top achievers in school, they as parents would look bad. This same belief was later felt by society as a whole. Our society felt that, if children were not presented with certain curriculum at an early age, valuable time would be lost.

This new emphasis on early academic achievement was brought about for three basic reasons. The first one was the attack on progressive education in the 1950's. Educators found, when searching through curriculum materials used in our schools, that the material was very outdated. A new push began to update the old material and to begin to teach the new material at an earlier age.

The second reason for the new pressure for early academic achievement was the launching of Sputnik by the Russians. Heaven forbid that the Russians should do something ahead of the Americans! The launching brought about a big push in the science and mathematics

curriculums. After the launching, children were being pushed to achieve early in these two areas.

The civil rights movement of the 1960's brought to the surface the third reason for the push for early academic achievement in our schools. The movement showed the American people how poor our disadvantaged students were doing in school. Headstart, the federally funded program for disadvantaged preschoolers, was the result. Headstart was started to give socially disadvantaged students a jump in learning so that when they entered kindergarten they would not be so far behind the socially advantaged students.

Most of these changes in the curriculum in our schools have not been all that bad for our students, but there is one subject field in particular where the changes may have been harmful and forced children to grow up too early. This subject area is sex education. Sex education was added to the curriculum of most high schools during the 1950's. According to David Elkind (1981) sex education began as a way to correct the many misconceptions and misinformation that high schoolers had about sex (p. 48). In the sixties, sex education curricula began to explore the aspects of human sexuality, and even a greater change is seen in the sex education programs of the present time according to Elkind (1981). The new goal for today is sexual adjustment (p. 59).

The new programs aim to help young people feel more comfortable in expressing the many facets of their sexuality as a normal and healthy part of their lives. Because of this emphasis upon sexual adjustment, the new programs sometimes seem to be condoning, if not advocating, teenage sexuality. (p. 59)

These programs have been and will continue to be appropriate for high school students, but are they appropriate for students ten- and

eleven-years-old? Students at a younger and younger age are being exposed to things before they are ready. As Elkind says, "Inevitably, however, the conviction 'earlier is better', which dominates today's educational climate, means that such programs will be and are being used with pre-teen and young teenagers who may be given more information than they want or need" (p. 59).

Today's educational program is similar to industry's according to Elkind (p. 48). The school administrators are under pressure, placed on them by their individual school boards, to produce a better product (students). School administrators, though trained, forget what they know about individual students and expect them all to be filled up with knowledge as if they were each an empty "pop bottle". If the bottles are not all filled, the administrator puts pressure on the operator (teacher) who in turn puts pressure on the students. This factory emphasis, according to Elkind, ignores individual differences in mental abilities and learning rates, therefore, causing the child to hurry (p. 48). If the child is unable to keep up with others in his/her class, he/she is regarded as defective and is then labelled learning disabled, brain damaged, or hyperactive.

Our society in its quest for early adulthood has brought about changes in children's dress, children's organized sports, and summer camps for children. Three or four decades ago boys in America were wearing short pants and knickers until the time in their life when they began shaving. Girls were not wearing makeup or nylons in this same time period. Today it is not unusual to see children wearing the same designer clothes as their parents. One can go into a department store and purchase Geuss jeans or Christian Dior layette gowns and



blankets for the fashionable baby of the 1980's. Espirt, a California clothing company which began as an adult-only clothing manufacturer, now also makes fashions for children. It is not unusual to see the same clothing line in the children's department as one sees in the adult department. If we as a society hurry our children to dress like adults, can we expect anything else than to have our children imitate adult actions?

Children are expected to become competent at a very early stage in organized sports. The new level of competence expected of young boys and girls is the same level that in the past was expected of high schoolers. Sports competence is also visible in the summer camps offered for child athletes. Camps are offered in tennis, baseball, wrestling, basketball, and other competitive sports. Parents can also send their children to camps that offer training in foreign language, dance, music, aeronautics, and computers, to name a few. These programs are like the educational system that treats children like "pop bottles" that need to be filled with knowledge. The demands on children to excel in these areas are moving toward the notion of the child as a miniature adult (Elkind, 1981, p. 6).

The change in the programs of summer camps reflects the new attitude that the years of childhood are not to be frittered away by engaging in activities merely for fun. Rather, the years are to be used to perfect skills and abilities that are the same as those of adults. Children are early initiated into the rigors of adult competition. Competitive sports for children are becoming evermore widespread and include everything from Little League to Pee Wee Hockey. The pressure to engage in organized, competitive sports at camp and at home is one of the most obvious pressures on contemporary children to grow up fast.  
(p. 9)

Another reason for the change in childhood is a change in the roles of parents. Until recently, strictly defined roles existed for

parents and their offspring. Today, children want to be treated as equals rather than a "helpless and dependent being" (Winn, 1983, p. 49). In times past parents operated with authority and confidence. Parents kept tight reins on their children until the children reached the middle teens. Children at this point began questioning their parents' authority. Parents set down strictly defined rules for children to follow and, even though the child tried to buck their parents' authority, parents stood up to the child and disciplined him/her if necessary. Children trusted parents and their authority. Today according to Winn (1983), that trust is no longer in existence. After Watergate, children lost their trust and respect for adults. Children found out that adults cheat, lie, and break the rules; therefore, they do not deserve any trust or respect. Watergate motivated children to believe that their parents, like the politicians, cheated, lied, and broke the rules; therefore, they could not be trusted or respected either. Winn feels this saga can be taken a step further:

Children don't have a feeling of trust and belief in us parents because we adults no longer have that feeling of trust in any sort of authority ourselves.... And so we're unable to treat our children with the kind of certainty and authority that might make their lives seem as simple as ours once did. (p. 51)

As parents, adults promote the premature emotional and behavioral growth of their children. The first way parents hurry children is to put their own needs ahead of their children's needs. Parents think children are endlessly flexible and able to adapt to adult needs, schedules, interests, and perspectives. They expect children to adapt to adult roles more than they adapt to the child's life. A good example of this type of adult adaptation is when parents expect their

child to be the best student, the best gymnast, or the best softball player. If the child is good at one of these sports or in school and the parents have encouraged the child to be good, the parents feel this will make up for any failures the parents have in their job or in activities outside the home. Parents are making their offspring a surrogate of themselves (Elkind, 1981, p. 29). Parents can take pride in a child's success and blame the coach or teacher rather than themselves for a child's failure.

This "surrogate self" can be unhealthy for the child. Children like their own games and their own rules. The competitive sports that parents are pushing the children into interferes with the learning processes that take place in the child's own games.

Parents hurry their children to grow up too quickly when they think of their children as a "status symbol" (Elkind, 1981, p. 37). During the fifties a majority of the mothers of America stayed home and played the role of housewife and mother, just like was seen on the television shows, such as Leave it to Beaver or Father Knows Best. If a woman chose to work outside the home instead of pursuing the traditional role of housewife and mother, she was looked down upon by other members of society. Today the reverse is true; most women must work outside the home to help support the family. In today's society it is very difficult to live comfortably on one income. But the fact remains that many young mothers are stressed by their conflicting desires to stay home with the children rather than work and be a liberated person. For the mothers who do choose to stay home, the temptation to expect their children to be the best at everything may be a justification for their not working. This justification puts a

great deal of stress on children, an expectation that they must live up to the almost impossible goals set by their mothers.

The mother who stays home with a preschooler may hurry the child to read before he/she begins school so that she has a justification for staying home. Mother is then able to tell her friends that her child was reading when he/she started school. According to Elkind (1981) this pressure to read is strictly a parental need. Studies show only one to three out of one hundred children read proficiently on entrance to kindergarten (p. 29).

A majority of families in the United States today have both parents working. Statistics show fifty-one percent of the mothers of school-age children work, whereas in 1948 only twenty-six percent of the mothers worked (Elkind, 1981, p. 38). Because of the large percentage of working mothers, a large percentage of children must adapt to their parents' schedule. The children must get up early and be dressed, fed, and taken to a babysitter or day-care center very early in the morning. Children with their limited powers of adaptation are put under a great deal of stress in this situation. As children grow older their own schedules become loaded with piano lessons, swimming lessons, sports practice, or church activities which add more stress to their lives. The child is expected to keep the schedule straight and many times be responsible for getting to their destination on time. These are responsibilities that most children are not ready to handle. Their schedules are better suited for an adult.

Parents of the eighties are treating their children as equal partners in the family rather than have parent-child relationships

(Elkind, 1981, p. 41). School-age children must fend for themselves. They get up on their own, dress on their own, make breakfast, clean up after themselves and, on top of all that, get themselves to school on time.

The equal partner syndrome is obvious in the jobs kids are responsible for around the house. The household chores are divided equally among parents and children. No longer is making a bed, doing dishes, or taking out the trash the only jobs parents give children. Children of today are doing the cooking, the grocery shopping, and the cleaning of the house. Children are doing these jobs before they are ready for this huge responsibility.

Divorce in American families is responsible for almost half of the children under eighteen living in single-parent homes (p. 41). Single-parenting contributes to the hurrying of children to grow up. Unfortunately, since single-parents do not have another adult in the home with whom they can talk about problems, they begin confiding in their children. Most youngsters lack the experience and intellectual and emotional security to be of much help to the single-parent. Confiding in children as young as eight puts them under undue stress and hurries them to deal with adult problems before they are ready.

Children of divorce have a new feeling of abandonment when the father goes on to a new relationship and then loses contact with his children. Children must grow up quickly to deal with this new fear of abandonment that has been placed on them before they are old enough to handle it.

Divorced mothers also force their children to grow up quickly when they expect children to condone a situation that other members of society will not accept. This happens when a mother finds a new boyfriend, and the new boyfriend spends the night or moves into the house permanently. Children are fighting a double standard because the parents, up to this point, may have taught their children that this situation was wrong. Now children are expected to accept what their mothers are doing, but not consider it wrong.

Media, including television and books, are the third factor which induces children to grow up too quickly. According to Neil Postman (1982), television erodes the dividing line between childhood and adulthood in three ways: (a) it requires no instruction to grasp its form; (b) it does not make complex demands on either mind or behavior; and (c) it does not segregate its audience (p. 80).

Since television does not require any special instruction, commercials are all written and performed in a simple form making the message understood by the youngest member of the audience, the child. McDonald's commercials are as simple to grasp as a Xerox commercial. In truth, there is no such thing as children's programming. Everything is for everybody (p. 79).

Television is a harmful medium to children. It "does not require verbal encoding and decoding to extend our experiences, it is very accessible to children and hurries them into experiences not open to them before" (Elkind, 1981, p. 72). There is much to be said about exposing our children to new experiences. How many times on TV does the child see someone murdered, a perfect robbery

executed, or their favorite soap opera characters nude and in bed together? Are these the kinds of experiences we want children to see? It is very difficult, almost impossible, to instruct children in good morals when all they have to do is turn on the television to be instructed in sexual experiences and criminal actions. Programs are not age-graded; there is no "R" rating on the daytime soaps or violent programs seen on nighttime TV. Seeing and hearing things that were meant for adults is contributing to children growing up too quickly.

Television does not make complex demands on either your mind or behavior but serves as an excellent babysitter. Mother comes home exhausted from work. When she gets home, the children have a million things to tell her about their day, supper needs to be prepared, and she would love to sit and relax for just a few minutes. One way to have a few minutes of peace and quiet is to set the children in front of the television. Mother and Dad do not have to establish rules to follow at this time because the children are so engrossed in the programming that parents can ignore them. Television brought peace, but it also brought a whole set of problems with it, according to Winn (1983). "Television's presence in the home has contributed to the out-of-control feeling so pervasive among parents today" (p. 43).

It's easy availability as a child muser, baby-sitter and problem solver has altered long-established child rearing patterns, allowing parents to coexist with their children without establishing those rules and limitations that parents once had to impose on children simply for survival's sake. Before television, parents had to make sure that their kids could be relied upon to 'mind' when necessary, not to interrupt adult conversation, not to demand attention when the parent was busy or instant gratification of their every wish;... It was crucial ...

that children learn how to behave in acceptable, disciplined ways. Television, however, provided an easy alternative to parental discipline. Instead of having to establish rules and limits, ... instead of having to work at socializing children in order to make them more agreeable to live with, parents could solve all these problems by resorting to the television set.  
(p. 45)

Now what are parents going to do? The price is high because the children who have not had rules to follow now look at themselves as an equal with their parents. The children are no longer children; they are children without a childhood (Winn, 1983).

Television advertising does not make complex demands on either one's mind or behavior. In fact, commercials are very rarely made for the adult. Commercials are made for children. Advertisers feel if one can "hook" children, one "hooks" the parents. When children see a cereal or toy commercial on television, they pressure parents into buying the product the next time they go to the store. This phenomenon of treating children as consumers, such as seen in cereal and toy commercials, further groups children with the adult population (Elkind, 1981, p. 78). Parents are often misled by the children's abilities and may purchase the products they suggest, only to find out later the purchase was not the best choice. "Television hurries children by treating them as consumers, as if they were adult wage earners with the capacity to see through the deceptions of advertising and to make informed choices" (Elkind, 1981, p. 79).

Books, particularly books that are classified as realistic fiction or contemporary realism, are encouraging children to grow up too quickly. The contemporary problems faced by children in this literature is causing a great deal of trouble according to Elkind (1981), "The new literature for children presses them to grow up fast



Intellectually--to know more about the poor, the disabled, the sick, and the emotionally troubled" (p. 83).

Children's literature has changed with the times. "Between 1900 and the 1980's, vast changes have taken place in our society and, as in the past those changes have influenced children's books and are reflected in them" (Sutherland, 1986, p. 7).

Contemporary realistic fiction are "stories about growing up today and finding a place in the family, among peers, and in modern society. All aspects of coping with the problems of the human condition may be found in contemporary literature for children" (Huck, 1987, p. 464). The problems child characters are encountering in children's literature "reflects much of the conflict and controversy in our society regarding moral standards and life-styles" (Sutherland, 1986, p. 7).

The content of contemporary realism books has changed greatly in the last ten to twenty years. During the 1970's, topics like divorce, venereal disease, physical handicaps, and sexual activity were all taboo subjects for children's books (Elkind, 1981, p. 82). The subjects today include those just mentioned and death, children's legal rights, or any subject that "serves children in the process of understanding and coming to terms with themselves as they acquire 'human-ness', or illuminates experiences that children have not had" (Huck, 1987, p. 465).

This new realism according to Elkind (1981) hurries children in two ways:

The task of self-discovery is more difficult when children are presented with the problems and difficulties of others before they have had a chance to find meaning in their own lives. Because many children are never exposed to material

like fairly [sic] tales, they are deprived of a literature that would help them make sense and give order to their experience....

Young children pushed to be made aware of the whole range of society's ills may not have much chance or opportunity to find themselves. This is the major stress of the literature of young children aimed at making them aware of the problems of the world about them before they have had a chance to master the problems of childhood. (p. 83-84)

Stating the other side of the realistic fiction issue for children, it

...does provide many possible models, both good and bad, for coping with problems of the human condition. As children experience these stories, they may begin to filter out some meaning for their own lives. This allows children to organize and shape their own thinking about life as they follow, through story, the lives of others. (Huck, 1987, p. 466)

Content analyses of children's books are limited in number. However, according to Tekla K. Bekkedal (1973) "content analysis has provided interested adults with concrete information about various aspects of content in children's books, and there are indications that recent and ongoing research will provide information about an increasing variety of subjects" (p. 110).

The content analysis of children's books can be grouped into three subject areas: (1) studies of human relationships depicted in books, (2) studies on values and cultural content, and (3) studies concerned with the portrayal of specific racial and ethnic groups in books (Bekkedal, 1973, p. 110). Five studies that fit in the human relationship category were cited by Bekkedal. Only three studies that are concerned with realistic fiction will be discussed.

Ruth Green did an analysis of the American family in twenty-seven realistic fiction books. The books were chosen from recommended titles on widely-accepted book lists and in reviewing journals. The

researcher looked at settings, members of the family, family activities, and family situations and problems. The family described most often was the immediate family unit, parents and children, with the mother as a full-time housewife. A majority of the books had a rural setting with a few examples of life in the city or suburb (Bekkedal, 1973, p. 111).

John P. Shepard did an analysis of the treatment of the characters in sixteen books described by adults as books chosen most often by middle and upper elementary grades. Six categories were used to describe characters. These categories included race, nationality, and socio-economic status, which were divided into positive and negative, giving a total of six. Shepard concluded that the male and female characters were white, clean, healthy, handsome, Protestant Christian, and middle-class (Bekkedal, 1973, p. 111).

The third study described by Bekkedal (1973) was conducted by Alma Homze. In her study, Homze assessed the relationship between adults and children and the child-to-child relationships described in seventy-eight realistic fiction books with United States settings. The books were selected from Book Review Digest from 1920 to 1960. When analyzing the books Homze looked at background information, such as sex of child characters, family units, occupations of adults, socio-economic status of characters, and ethnic identification of characters. Homze finished her study with the following conclusions. Books described a child's world where children direct their own activities in a world viewed predominantly populated by white, middle-class Americans. Homze also noted a trend toward smaller

families, increased mobility of characters and a movement from rural locations to urban locations (p. 111).

When doing the literature search, the researcher was unable to locate any other research studies or dissertations that were about children growing up and how growing up is related to contemporary realistic fiction for children. During the extensive search for research reports the researcher did find a related study. The study was done by Mary F. Compton and Juanita Skelton.

This particular study was designed to (a) identify the fifteen most popular realistic fiction books among middle school students in a representative sample of 116 middle schools, and (b) analyze these books in terms of 26 problem-concerns of young adolescents. (1982, p. 639)

The 26 problem-concerns were categorized into three areas: personal, Intrafamily, and interpersonal. The fifteen most popular books were rank-ordered. The content analysis yielded a total percentage of each book devoted to each problem-concern. No statistically significant relationship was found between the rank order of a book's popularity and the portion of the book devoted to the problems of early adolescence.

As this researcher was investigating the topic, no published evidence was found to support the premise that the children who Elkind, Postman, and Winn feel are growing up too quickly are turning out all right as adults. It is the opinion of this researcher that the topic of children growing up too quickly is such a new topic that psychologists, educators, and researchers do not have for study a generation of adults who were considered to have grown up too quickly as children.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

Content analysis is a specific research methodology in which a detailed description of the contents of a carefully selected group of books is based on a very systematic, objective study of a specific aspect of each book. Its accuracy is based on its being highly quantitative and objective. (Sutherland, 1987)

"Content analysis can be used to describe the contents of communication 'messages' in novels" (Busha & Harter, 1980, p. 171). Some of these messages might be the themes used, such as love, hate, friendship, hardships, growing up, etc. By investigating these themes, the researcher can move away from subjective opinions based on recollections of individual titles to an objective description of the contents of a systematically selected group of books (Bekkedal, 1973).

The researcher does the analyzing of the content by using a predetermined list of categories.

Categories are used to describe as objectively as possible the content of books, magazines, television, or any other means of communication, visual or oral. Categories are compartments (whose boundaries have been explicitly defined) into which units of content of various types are placed. Categories are the classes into which material is grouped for the purpose of analysis. (Budd, 1963, p. 10)

Upon completion of placing the units of content into the proper categories, the researcher can begin to quantify and order the categorized units. Then the researcher is ready to analyze, compare, and interpret the recorded data.

Children gain a great many ideas and impressions of the world around them from the books that they read. This makes it very important for adults to know the kind of world that is portrayed in the books children read. Content analysis can help to provide a more

comprehensive view of today's world as pictured in children's books (Bekkedal, 1973).

The researcher selected 16 contemporary realistic novels written for children and analyzed them for their portrayal of children growing up. The novels were selected from two different types of materials selection sources. One was the retrospective bibliography, Best Books for Children, edited by John T. Gillespie and Christine B. Gilbert (1985). This source was chosen by the researcher because of the editors' stated purpose. "The primary aim of this work is to provide a list of books, gathered from a number of sources, that are highly recommended to satisfy both a child's recreational reading needs and the demands of a typical school curriculum" (p. xi). Some of the other sources used to compile this bibliography were the 1981 edition of Best Books for Children, Children's Catalog, The Elementary School Library Collection, as well as the current periodicals School Library Journal, Booklist, Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, and Horn Book (p. xi-xii).

The researcher assumed that this source recommends only the best books available because of the lengthy list of recommending sources used to compile the bibliography. The books used from this source were listed under the section "Growing into Maturity." Books from the lengthy list were selected by the following criteria: (1) the book must have been recommended for grades 3, 4, 5, or 6, and (2) the book must have been published since 1982.

The second source was the current selection periodical, Booklist. The researcher chose Booklist because "its primary purpose is to provide a guide to current print and nonprint materials for small and medium-sized public libraries and school library media centers. All

materials reviewed are recommended for library or media center purchase" (Booklist, 1985, p. 2).

Since Booklist recommends all books reviewed for purchase, the researcher assumed all books about children growing and maturing were appropriate for this study. The issues from the years 1983 through 1987 were used to select books that fit these categories: (1) The book must have been recommended for students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7, (2) The book had to come under the heading of contemporary fiction.

The list of titles gathered from Booklist and Best Books for Children was greater than the 16 that were analyzed in the study. To narrow the list to the number of books needed for the sample the researcher looked at the book review and/or the book itself to see if the main character was eight to eleven years old. The researcher continued to look for main characters who were eight to eleven years old until the researcher had four books with characters at each age level.

The novels used were available in the Black Hawk Elementary School Media Center in Waterloo, Iowa, the University of Northern Iowa Library Youth Collection, or the Waterloo, Iowa, Public Library.

The developmental profile instrument (See Appendix A) was developed by the researcher using David Elkind's book, A Sympathetic Understanding of the Child (1978). The purpose of this book is:

...an attempt to provide a brief survey course of child development to 'lay' teachers, those without formal training in child psychology and education. What was needed, it seemed, was presentation of salient facts about the emotional, intellectual, and social development of children in nontechnical language and in a nontechnical format. (1978, p. ix)

According to Elkind (1978), there are four facets of growth and development of children during elementary and junior high school.

These are physical development, sexual differentiation, psychological development, and social development. Physical development includes height and weight gains of a child. Sexual differentiation is the amount of sexual interest. In the elementary years children are gradually learning of sex, the appropriate behaviors, attitudes, and manners (p. 74). "The major psychological issue of middle to late childhood period is the conflict between the child's desire to grow up and his desire to stay a child" (p. 74). Psychological development is such things as wanting to grow old enough to go to a movie or the shopping mall by yourself or with friends and not with your parents, or young enough that quarreling and roughhousing with your siblings is an acceptable behavior for a child of thirteen. The fourth facet, social development is "the process of learning behaviors accepted and expected by society" (Gibson, 1978, p. 505).

In A Sympathetic Understanding of the Child, the author devoted three chapters to age profiles of three periods of a child's life, infancy and the young child, the child, and the adolescent. These age profiles were used by the researcher to form the developmental profile instrument for this research study.

The age profiles developed by Elkind (1978) include all four facets of growth and development discussed earlier. The profiles for infants and the young child contain more information concerning the physical growth than one finds in the profiles for children age six to eleven. The reason for this emphasis is because the infant eighteen months old has tripled his/her birth weight. The child who is ten does not make those kinds of weight gains. The gains in height and weight are not that great from year to succeeding year to



include all of them. Age ten is also a time when there are great individual differences. More physical characteristics are included in the profiles when the child begins to reach puberty.

In the introduction to the age profiles Elkind (1978) expresses a concern of professional child watchers that individual differences and growth patterns for every child are different, making it difficult to prepare a common list of characteristics for a particular year in the life of a child. Naturally, there will be some overlap, but Elkind feels confident that the characteristics for each age will give the lay person enough information to know whether a child's behavior is appropriate for his/her age. One of the problems Elkind thinks may occur, because of the arbitrary time unit chosen, is that some behaviors show a more significant change in two or three year intervals rather than one. Another reason one year intervals were chosen was because it works conveniently with the system of division used by the schools. Children are placed in grades by age, making one year age intervals best for a book that would be used by educators and parents.

The age profiles the researcher chose to use were the chapters with ages six to eleven and the age profile for age twelve in the adolescent chapter. The researcher did not use the profiles for the child age six and seven, but did use the eight through eleven profiles from that chapter. These age profiles were used because the books to be used for this study were those books recommended for students in grades three through six. Grades three through six are the corresponding grades for ages eight to eleven.

Elkind's age profiles were written in essay form and the researcher assembled the information onto a usable instrument.

Elkind divided the profiles by age first and then by four sections; general behavior traits, self-concept, social relations, and school orientation. The researcher used these same four categories on the developmental profile instrument. The next step was to put Elkind's information for each age and section into chart form, making it easier to manipulate the sections into one usable instrument. All four sections were placed under each separate age. For example, age eight included the information for an eight year old's general behavior, self-concept, social relations, and school orientation. Upon completion of a chart for each age the researcher then moved the information so that all general behavior traits for all ages were listed under one section entitled General Behavior.

The developmental profile instrument was used with each of the main characters in the books that were analyzed. As the researcher read each book the developmental traits each main character displayed were checked on the instrument. The categories for which data were gathered for each main character in each book were: (1) general behavior (outgoing personality, increased appetite, and enthusiasm); (2) self-concept (self-confidence, friendly and cooperative, and belligerent attitude); (3) social relations (jobs around the house, feels favoritism, and friendly and cooperative with parents); (4) school orientation (gives up art, complains of poor memory, competition between students great). All these categories were further sub-divided by age.

To make the analysis of character traits more accurate the researcher checked the developmental traits of each main character at the same chronological age or one or more years above or below the character's age.

## Chapter 4

## Analysis of the Data

The 16 books analyzed in this study on children growing up too fast contained a total of 24 main characters that fit the criteria for this study. The number of characters is displayed on Table 1 by chronological age and sex. Of the 24 characters, 11 were male and 13 were female. The chronological ages of the characters were eight through eleven years old.

Table 1. Number of Characters by Chronological Age and Sex in Sixteen Books

Age	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
8	4	2	6
9	3	4	7
10	3	4	7
11	1	3	4
Total	11	13	24

In order for the hypotheses in this study to be accepted, sixty percent of the main characters in the 16 books analyzed needed to exhibit more developmental traits in each category on the developmental profile instrument or a majority of the same, at least one year ahead of his or her chronological age.

In the category of general behavior traits (see Table 2) 100% of the six eight-year-old main characters analyzed exhibited developmental traits at the eight-year-old level. Data show 100% of the nine-year-old characters analyzed also exhibited general behavior traits that are normal for nine-year-olds. Differences in the general

Table 2. Number and Percentage of General Behavior Traits of 24 Characters

Chronological Age of Characters	General Behavior Traits Ages					Total
	8 No. %	9 No. %	10 No. %	11 No. %	12 No. %	
8	6 100.0					6
9		7 100.0				7
10			5 71.4	2 28.6		7
11				3 75.0	1 25.0	4

behavior traits occur in the ten-year-old characters. Five (71.4%) characters studied exhibited general behavior traits appropriate for their chronological age and 28.6% exhibited eleven-year-old general behavior traits. The two characters that exhibited general behavior traits one year above their chronological age were Arlo Moore in I'm Going to Be Famous and Jenny Reed in The House on the Hill. Both children were very loud and defiant of adult authority when they each yelled at one parent. Arlo was mad at his Dad because he ordered him to call off the bets he had made with his siblings. Arlo did not call off the bets; they were now done secretly behind his Dad's back. Jenny yelled at her mother because she thought it was ridiculous to wear a dress on the long bus trip to visit her Dad. "I won't be comfortable" she yelled at her. Another interesting eleven-year-old trait both children displayed was their willingness to take chances. Jenny crawled through a basement window many times to gain entrance into a locked, empty house on the hill, and Arlo continued to defy his parents orders by participating in the contest to break the Guinness Book's record for eating bananas. Arlo also took chances at school

when he practiced eating bananas in the boys' restroom and during sustained silent reading class.

Eleven-year-old main characters also showed differences among the four characters studied. Three (75%) of the children at this age level exhibited normal general behavior traits for their age. One child did exhibit traits that would more likely be seen in a child one year above this child's chronological age. Jonathan Peterson in the book Inside Out was a remarkable eleven-year-old. He displayed such character traits as outgoing, enthusiastic, generous and a sense of humor. Emotionally Jonathan's family had a lot to deal with. Four-year-old James Peterson was diagnosed autistic. Many times Jon found it necessary to defend his brother when others thought he was crazy and retarded, but Jon knew he was not. The situation with James was becoming difficult to handle without professional help. The family knew it was time to enroll James in a special school for autistic children. Putting James in school was a financial burden for the Petersons. Jonathan saw a need to help and did something about it. He raised a small amount of money to be donated to the school. The school was so pleased by his actions that the news media was invited to the presentation. During his speech and the questions he answered, Jon showed character beyond his eleven years.

Three or 12.5% of the 24 main characters analyzed exhibited general behavior traits at least one year ahead of their chronological age. To accept the first hypothesis fifteen of the 24 main characters would have to display traits at least one year ahead of their chronological age to constitute sixty percent; therefore, this hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3 shows the number and percentage of self-concept traits of the 24 main characters analyzed in this study. As one examines the data, one can see that the hypothesis concerning the characters' self-concept traits was rejected by the researcher. The hypothesis stated that sixty percent of the main characters analyzed would

Table 3. Number and Percentage of Self-Concept Traits of 24 Characters

Chronological Age of Characters	Self-Concept Traits Ages					Total
	8 No. %	9 No. %	10 No. %	11 No. %	12 No. %	
8	6 100.0					6
9		6 85.7	1 14.3			7
10			7 100.0			7
11				3 75.0	1 25.0	4

exhibit more of the self-concept traits or a majority of the same, at least one year ahead of his or her chronological age. Only two of the 24 characters exhibited traits at least one year above their chronological age. These two characters were a nine-year-old and an eleven-year-old.

All six eight-year-old characters exhibited self-concept traits at their appropriate age level. For nine-year-old characters, six of seven (85.7%) children exhibited the normal self-concept traits for children their age. One child, Joshua Bates in The Flunking of Joshua T. Bates, displayed traits generally exhibited by a ten-year-old. Joshua was responsible for himself every afternoon after school until his parents arrived home at 5:30. Joshua was able to handle this responsibility which is characteristic of a ten-year-old. Being the

best baseball player and playing for the Baltimore Orioles were dreams of Joshua's. His dream was heightened by his classmates who felt he was the best baseball player they knew.

Seven characters were ten-year-old children and Table 3 shows that all seven (100%) exhibit the self-concept traits of children their same chronological age. The children in the eleven-year-old group show the same numbers and percentages that were indicated on Table 2. Three children showed normal developmental traits for eleven-year-olds. Twelve-year-old traits were shown by one of the eleven-year-old characters. First losing her mother when she was four and now losing her father when she is 11, Izzy Cummings in Underdog has dealt with too many deaths in her short life. But this made Izzy very mature. Izzy was hoping to live with one of her two stepmothers, but neither one can accept the responsibility of an eleven-year-old. She goes to live with an aunt and uncle in San Francisco who do not have any children of their own and Izzy's arrival seems a burden to their busy lives. Izzy gets very assertive and begins going places, without telling anyone, looking for a dog she owned when her mother was alive. Izzy relates successfully with adults, a characteristic of her relationship with Mrs. Firestone, the lady who was supposed to know where her dog was.

The number and percentage of social relations traits of the 24 characters is shown on Table 4. The eight-year-old characters for the previously described traits showed 100% of the children exhibiting general behavior traits and self-concept traits of an eight-year-old child. As shown on Table 4, four of the six characters (66.7%) exhibited eight-year-old social relations traits while two of the children displayed the social relations of a normal nine-year-old.

Table 4. Number and Percentage of Social Relations Traits of 24 Characters

Chronological Age of Characters	Social Relations Traits Ages					Total
	8 No. %	9 No. %	10 No. %	11 No. %	12 No. %	
8	4 66.7	2 33.3				6
9		6 85.7	1 14.3			7
10			7 100.0			7
11				4 100.0		4

These two eight-year-olds were Raymond in Herbie Jones and Lucas Cott in Class Clown. Ironically, both of these books are about school. School is difficult for both, and each picks a different way of acting to compensate. Raymond does everything he can think of, including coming to school dressed in a suit and tie and wearing "Charlie" cologne, to get out of the bottom reading group. Lucas is a bright student who just can not "get it together". Instead of working at it Lucas acts like the clown. Peer pressure was a great motivator in both boys' behavior, and peer group relationship is a strong motivator for liking school and good attendance for the nine-year-old.

Six (85.7%) of the nine-year-old characters displayed nine-year-old traits and one child exhibited traits a ten-year-old might exhibit. Miranda Corbett was trying to save the world, and she went out of her way to act older than she really was. Miranda thought it was important to become involved in a cause and put forth as much effort as possible. The cause Miranda undertook was a LatchKey Program for children who were left at home by themselves. Her organizational skills and enthusiasm were beyond her years and her program, but with the help of neighborhood grandparents that Miranda



recruited, she was very successful. The seven ten-year-olds and the four-eleven-year old characters showed normal social relations traits for children their same chronological age.

The data displayed on Table 4 indicate that three of the 24 main characters analyzed exhibited more social relations traits, or a majority of the same, at least one year ahead of his or her chronological age; therefore, the researcher rejected this hypothesis.

The researcher was not able to use five of the characters in the 16 books analyzed in the category of school orientation. The authors of these books chose not to put the character in a school environment, making it impossible for the researcher to make judgements about their school orientation developmental traits. The data on Table 5 represents 19 characters instead of the 24 included on the other tables.

Table 5. Number and Percentage of School Orientation Traits of 19 Characters<sup>1</sup>

Chronological Age of Characters	School Orientation Traits Ages					Total
	8 No. %	9 No. %	10 No. %	11 No. %	12 No. %	
8	3 75.0	1 25.0				4
9		5 100.0				5
10			5 83.3	1 16.7		6
11				4 100.0		4

<sup>1</sup> Five characters were in books without a school environment.

The hypothesis for the school orientation category states that sixty percent of the 19 main characters analyzed will exhibit more of the school orientation traits, or majority of the same, at least one year ahead of his or her chronological age. The numbers and

percentages on Table 5 show that this hypothesis was also rejected. Of the 19 characters analyzed, only two (10.5%) exhibited developmental traits at least one year ahead of their chronological age. Three (75%) of the eight-year-old characters analyzed exhibited the school orientation traits of a normal eight-year-old. Lucas Cott mentioned earlier in the social relations section also showed school orientation traits beyond his eight years. When children are nine, academic achievement becomes especially important. Children begin to rank each other from the "brightest" to the "dumbest" students. Lucas was bright, which was pointed out to him frequently, but just could not perform that well in school. He would be motivated in the morning before he left home, but upon arrival at school Lucas would realize he forgot his homework. He always told himself he would do better that day, but he did not stick to that philosophy very long.

Nine-year-old school orientation traits were exhibited by 100% of the nine-year-old characters analyzed. Five (83.8%) of the ten-year-olds exhibit the school orientation traits of a ten-year-old and one (16.7%) exhibited the normal eleven-year-old traits. Jenny Reed liked school because her friends were there. She lived in a small community, and school was out for the summer. Most of her friends lived in the country, and the only way she could see them was in school. Her mother worked and did not have a car; consequently, Jenny did not have any way of getting to any friend's house. All four (100%) of the eleven-year-old main characters displayed normal eleven-year-old school orientation developmental traits.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Recommendations and Summary

#### Conclusions

Considering the fact that all four hypotheses were rejected, one can conclude that children as characterized in the 16 books are not growing up too fast. As the researcher read the sixteen books used in this study it was very difficult to make judgements about the character's clothing on the checklist. Several authors made references to clothing in their books. In The House on the Hill, Mildred Masters tells how Jenny wears lots of clothes that a rich girl, Hilary, has outgrown. Both Jenny and her mother wish that she could have her own new clothes, but since Mrs. Reed is a single mother, she just does not have enough money to do that. At one point when Hilary's mother told Jenny she had a sack of clothes ready for her to pick up, Jenny wanted so badly to say that she did not need them. But she did not because she knew she would not be getting any others. Wearing the hand-me-downs to school caused problems for Jenny. Hilary would make comments about everything Jenny wore. Hilary would say her parents bought that dress for her tenth birthday or for so and so's birthday party and then everyone in school knew Jenny was wearing one of Hilary's hand-me-downs.

What other people wear was a trait by which nine-year-old Veronica Schmidl judged her friends in Veronica the Show-off. Veronica felt that everyone should wear clothing that was fashionable and wearing anklet socks with ruffles and patent leather shoes like Hilary wears to school was "not cool". Veronica thought to herself when she saw them "no wonder she doesn't have any friends" (Robinson, 1982, p. 9). Veronica also felt that what a person wore and telling

others was a way to impress them and make new friends. Unfortunately, in the opening scene of the book Veronica mentions to Kimberly, a classmate, that she has a sweater identical to the one Kimberly was wearing. Veronica gets caught in a lie because Kimberly informs Veronica that her mother made the sweater by hand, making it impossible for Veronica to have one just like it.

As mentioned in the analysis of the social relations traits, Raymond in Herbie Jones wore a suit and tie to school one day. Raymond was sure he could impress his teacher, and she would move him out of the bottom reading group. Herbie tries to tell Raymond that he does not think it will work, but Raymond is not convinced. Clothing was an important part of the story, also.

Kimberly Slocum in Thatcher Payne-in-the-Neck wished she had a new dress for her Dad's wedding, but her dad had not given it a thought. Kimberly did not ask him either because she knew her Dad was trying to scrape together enough money for a honeymoon, and she knew he could not afford a new dress for her. Kimberly became even more upset about wearing a dress that was too small when Thatcher came in a new pair of trousers, shirt and tie. After the wedding her stepmother promised to take her shopping for new clothes. But the shopping did not get done as soon as Kimberly hoped because the purchase of the new house and all the errands that go with it interfered.

These are just four incidents where clothing was a very important issue concerning the maturity of a child's character. When the researcher read about these important incidents there was only two places on the profile instrument that could be checked. Of the four examples illustrated only one could be marked on the profile

instrument. This researcher feels this is one of the most obvious reasons why the general behavior traits hypothesis was rejected.

Another important reason why all the hypotheses were rejected was because the profile instrument failed to list any place where the researcher could record the home situation or the problems the character encountered in the plot. As mentioned earlier, Elkind (1981) says children are pushed into knowing all about the problems of society by reading realistic contemporary fiction. The children need time to master their own problems of childhood before they take on others (p. 83-84). In the 16 books used in this study only nine had main characters that came from a two-parent home. Of these nine, one child was staying with an aunt and uncle because her parents were in Europe on a newspaper assignment and another lived with a father who was mentally ill and a mother who was trying to keep the family together through their difficult time. In three of the 16 books the child or children had lost one or both parents to death. In the remaining four books the child or children lived with a divorced mother or stepfamily. In many instances children who read these books can relate to the problems of the main characters, but many times, as Elkind stated, these situations are more than some children need.

A third factor contributing to the rejection of the hypotheses was the subjective wording of some of the traits on the profile instrument. The wording was difficult to understand, and whether a trait was checked or not was partially judgemental by the researcher. Some general behavior traits were difficult to interpret. An eight-year-old child was said to be active and expansive in mood and style, but how active must he/she be before the trait is marked on the

Instrument? Does one hour of physical exercise a day constitute an active or passive child?

### Recommendations

Further study could be done in this field, as books about children growing up continue to be written for children and young adults. The lack of any studies found in the field of children growing up too fast indicates a need for further study. A study of children growing too fast could be expanded into the adolescent and young adult literature. This researcher feels that the adolescent problem novels might contain data that would indicate main characters are displaying developmental traits ahead of their chronological age.

When the original methodology was developed, the researcher intended to use Booklist to select books published in the years 1986 and 1987 only. When the researcher looked at the book reviews for specific characters that were ages eight and nine, the number that fit the criteria was limited. In order to find enough eight- and nine-year-old characters the issues of Booklist for the years of 1982-1985 were added to the methodology. Even with these extra years added it was still difficult to find books that had at least one main character who was eight- or nine-years-old. Books containing characters that were ten and eleven were not difficult to find. This researcher recommends if a replication of this study is done, the study begin with characters who are ten-years-old and continue with older children through adolescence.

The developmental instrument used in this study should be modified or redefined for additional study. The trait descriptions should be more specifically defined so that the researcher uses less subjective

judgement in the analysis. If categories such as after school activities, clothing styles and attitudes, and the home situation and problems of the characters were included, the profile instrument would be more usable for an analysis of children's lives as represented in contemporary fiction.

### Summary

A content analysis of 16 contemporary realistic fiction books, published since 1982, was done to determine whether the growth and development of the 24 main characters fit the growth and development of real-life children of the same chronological age. General behavior, self-concept, social relations, and school orientation traits were examined for each of the main characters who were eight, nine, ten, or eleven years of age.

Books written for children with characters of these ages or in grades three through six were selected from the selection sources, Booklist and Best Books for Children. The books used in the study were located in three libraries: Black Hawk Elementary School Media Center in Waterloo, Iowa; the Waterloo, Iowa, Public Library; and the Youth Collection in the University of Northern Iowa Library.

The hypotheses in the four categories of general behavior, self-concept, social relations, and school orientation stated that sixty percent of the main characters in the books analyzed would exhibit more of the traits, or a majority of the same, at least one year ahead of his or her chronological age. Upon analysis of the data, all four hypotheses were rejected.

Since the data collected indicated that all hypotheses were rejected, one could conclude that children, in grades three to six, as

deplcted in contemporary fiction, are not growing up too fast.

Because some aspects of children's lives, such as family situations and clothing concerns, were not included in this study, this analysis of growing up too fast was not comprehensive.



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Appendix A

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**Appendix B**

## Developmental Profile Instrument

Author: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Publisher: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Copyright \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_, Character \_\_\_\_\_, Character  
 Physical Age \_\_\_\_\_ Physical Age \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_

**GENERAL BEHAVIORAL TRAITS**Eight year old

- \_\_\_ outgoing, seeks new experiences
- \_\_\_ active and expansive mood and style
- \_\_\_ more productive interaction with adults
- \_\_\_ judgemental attitude-in response to open evaluation he/she adopts aggressive attitude
- \_\_\_ separate boys and girls games
- \_\_\_ attitude toward opposite sex combination of attraction & hostility
- \_\_\_ enormous curiosity-discover, collector, looks at catalogs, wants things, barter & trades, nature & people, eavesdrops on adult conversation, interest in other lands & children, interest in earlier time

Nine year old

- \_\_\_ increase in maturity & refinement of behaviors
- \_\_\_ judgemental- greater objectivity & discernment
- \_\_\_ accepts & ignore parental mistakes
- \_\_\_ less frequent & controlled outbursts of emotion & impatience
- \_\_\_ chooses own activities- become deeply involved
- \_\_\_ gives impression of calm, steadfastness & responsibility
- \_\_\_ depth of consideration & sense of fairness- accepts blame & responsibility
- \_\_\_ distinguishes between damage done & the intention that led up to it
- \_\_\_ increased awareness of sex & appropriate behaviors- girls very aware of clothing and appearance- want the most expensive & fashionable-boys are disdainful of clothes & cleanliness-battles with parents over cleanliness

Ten year old

- \_\_\_ halcyon (calm, peaceful) period in human development-high point of balance & adaption
- \_\_\_ short lived & quickly forgotten periods of extreme anger, depression
- \_\_\_ boys-rough treatment given to clothes
- \_\_\_ care taken not to lose things
- \_\_\_ physical maturation- girls-more sexually advanced, taller & heavier than boys, rounding & softening of contours begins, rounding in

breast area, tightening & protrusion of nipple, concerned about bodies, menstruation, & sexual activity

boys-concern with bodily changes are less marked

\_\_\_remarkably stable youngsters-except girls concern about approaching maturity

\_\_\_fears & anxiety all-time low

\_\_\_relations w/ parents, teachers, peers, all-time high

#### Eleven year old

\_\_\_marked increase in activity level, can't be still

\_\_\_increased appetite

\_\_\_good appetite for new experience, knowledge about people & world

\_\_\_loud, boorish, rude, forgets manners

\_\_\_takes chances

\_\_\_defiant of adult authority, quarrels frequently

\_\_\_rather emotional, subject to outbursts of rage, peevishness, & moodiness

\_\_\_touchy & unpredictable

\_\_\_overt behavior shown at home

\_\_\_friendly, lively, & pleasant in public

\_\_\_handle with understanding by firmness

#### Twelve year old

\_\_\_outgoing, enthusiastic, generous, emotions go to extremes

\_\_\_relatively uncomplicated emotionally

\_\_\_open, friendly, endowed with a sense of humor

#### **SELF-CONCEPT**

##### Eight year old

\_\_\_self-confident

\_\_\_curious about self, nature, & others

\_\_\_tries himself/herself on others

\_\_\_distinctive behaviors & traits

\_\_\_loves dramatic play- discovers himself/herself

\_\_\_feels impact of social status, clothes, appearance differences

\_\_\_friendly & cooperative

##### Nine year old

\_\_\_self-confident & exhibits self-control

\_\_\_organizes & budgets time-gives sense of self-importance

\_\_\_involved in many activities

\_\_\_makes self-derogatory remarks shows emotional security & self assurance

\_\_\_admits to negative qualities, expresses without guilt

##### Ten year old

\_\_\_less interest in self-evaluation

\_\_\_accepts his/her strengths & weaknesses without worry

\_\_\_feels 10 is good age, not too old or young

\_\_\_feels responsibility & freedom, right amount

\_\_\_romantic age looking forward to adulthood, marriage, & career

\_\_\_ideal models- parents, famous movie stars or athletes

\_\_\_self-accepting -likes what he/she can do and how he/she looks

\_\_\_self-acceptance is heightened by peers, family, school attitude

Eleven year old

- press toward activity- consequently careless, often yelled at & disciplined
- belligerent attitude
- renewed doubt & sensitivity about self
- searching for self definition- criticizes & accuses parents in confrontations
- admits general fault but not to specifics
- differ w/ parents about career choice, want to be famous
- thinking about marriage & qualities of future mate (kindness, understanding, & honesty)

Twelve year old

- assertive
- goes places on his/her own
- looks at family & himself/herself more objectively
- self-centered
- erratic behavior, rapid shifts from mature to childish
- critical of appearance
- difficulty accepting praise
- relates successfully to peers & adults

**SOCIAL RELATIONS**Eight year old

- friendly & cooperative
- less persistent at home
- helps at home only when feels like it
- wants mature jobs- cooking & baking- setting table or picking up - forget it
- concerned about parents' attitude toward child
- eavesdrops for clues of attitude
- discovers parents aren't perfect & make mistakes
- looks forward to family vacations
- attitude toward is complex & ambivalent- very demanding
- less maternal & paternal than 7 yr. old in attitude
- dominant motive for school is to see friends
- close friends exciting
- friends based on personality instead of play activities
- friendly & polite to strangers- uses social manners unprompted
- likes to meet new people & go to new places

Nine year old

- quarrels less & demands less parental attention
- self-motivated in many activities
- accepts responsibility of simple chores without being bribed
- own friends more important- nags parents less when bored
- gets along with younger siblings- teenagers think they are nuisance
- close friendships of same sex continued & strengthened
- overt verbal hostility between sexes-boys always fighting & yelling, girls laughing & giggling
- boys- organized games & clubs about various activities
- peer group relationship strong motivator for liking school & good attendance
- friendly & accommodating relationship with parents



Ten year old

- family is the greatest
- enjoys family outings-doesn't resent time spent w/ family & not friends
- respects & likes parents
- go out of way to be helpful
- spontaneous in their show of affection & concern
- discovers new qualities & values in parents-particularly in sports & games
- doesn't get along well with siblings
- likes & enjoys friends
- sex differences in friendship patterns begin to emerge
  - boys-move in loosely organized groups, play competitive sports, may have a particular friend but lots of switching around
  - girls- smaller numbers, more intense friendships, more serious "falling out" among friends, don't speak to each other as consequence
- enthusiastic about group activities like scouts, little league
- form groups which have secret meetings, codes, password, etc.
- short lived high moral standards regarding secrecy & helping others

Eleven year old

- challenges authority
- feels favoritism
- friendships based on mutual interest & temperament
- boys- one best friend & group of friends who play together
- girls- part of small group, all good friends, pairing less frequent
- both interested in opposite sex
  - girls- talk about boys, describe them in great deal, enjoy boys behavior because it is expression of positive interest & primitive effect to gain attention & to be attractive
  - boys- show interest by joking, teasing, & showing off

Twelve year old

- gets along with father
- daughters develop flirtations, worshipping attitude toward father
- participates less in family activities
- aware of parental criticism toward child
- makes joking criticisms of parents
- girls romantically interested in boys, express in talking
- girls say they have boyfriend, boy usually unaware
- boys frightful creatures to girls
- girls- great interest in making friends, friendships are indiscriminate with girls, able to get along with almost any other girl
- boys- say they have a girlfriend, girl usually unaware, many friends, take pride in number of best friends

**SCHOOL ORIENTATION**Eight year old

- social rather academic attractiveness toward school
- good attendance- eager to make up work missed
- spontaneously talks about school
- social concern for friends greater than for teacher
- independent worker - help needed occasionally

- \_\_\_ children gossip - send notes
- \_\_\_ discipline needed when interruptions get out of hand
- \_\_\_ constantly evaluates own work- critical of artwork
- \_\_\_ gives up art - knows discipline necessary to be good
- \_\_\_ sensitive about his/her poor subjects
- \_\_\_ defends himself/herself when teased or snickered at
- \_\_\_ builds negative ideas into self-concept because of way peers treat him/her

#### Nine year old

- \_\_\_ motivated in morning, does forget homework or books occasionally
- \_\_\_ doesn't hesitate to give teacher hard time when he/she knows what he/she wants
- \_\_\_ materials & information attractive
- \_\_\_ independent worker- doesn't always ask for help when needed
- \_\_\_ academic achievement very important- children rank order each other
- \_\_\_ competition among students great-slow or bright students singled out
- \_\_\_ mastered mechanics of reading & math-use to gain information, for solving problems & for games & recreation
- \_\_\_ sloppy writing
- \_\_\_ children complain of poor memory
- \_\_\_ reads books & does math on own when purchasing books

#### Ten year old

- \_\_\_ responsible student- likes school
- \_\_\_ accepts assignments & gets them done without distraction
- \_\_\_ likes, accepts authority & knowledge of teacher
- \_\_\_ teacher must be fair & not partial, firm but not strict, schedule activities & keep to schedule to be liked
- \_\_\_ books-like being read to, enjoy adventure, mystery by both sexes, girls prefer feminine hero, animal stories as well
- \_\_\_ short attention span, lacks stick-to-itiveness
- \_\_\_ more superficial- facts & memorizing names, rather than cause & explanation
- \_\_\_ prefers to soak up information rather than integrate or digest it

#### Eleven year old

- \_\_\_ school & child are often a problem
- \_\_\_ high energy level & criticalness makes it difficult to sit still without disturbing others
- \_\_\_ enjoys school because friends are there
- \_\_\_ specific about what they want & do not want to learn
- \_\_\_ delights in rote abilities
- \_\_\_ trouble understanding relationships & complex combinations of events

#### Twelve year old

- \_\_\_ enjoys reading sport, adventures, & classics
- \_\_\_ love stories & animal stories considered childish
- \_\_\_ watches less tv than a year ago- prefers mysteries & comedy programs
- \_\_\_ boys- sport minded, watch professional sports avidly
- \_\_\_ girls-lose interest in sports
- \_\_\_ strong attitude of hate or love of school
- \_\_\_ lots of restlessness, daydreaming, & general fooling around

\_\_\_ responds to strong teacher, teacher with little skill will lose control

\_\_\_ difficult time working together as group because they want to express themselves