TRAITS AND STEREOTYPES OF MALE PROTAGONISTS IN HIGH FANTASY
NOVELS AS COMPARED BY GENDER OF THE AUTHOR: A CONTENT
ANALYSIS

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A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master in Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April, 1999

Approved by:

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Advisor

Meuchel, Aimee. Traits and Stereotypes of Male Protagonists in High Fantasy Novels as Compared by gender of the author: A Content Analysis. A Master's paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April, 1999. 44 pages. Advisor: Brian W. Sturm

This paper examines the roles author's gender plays in the physical and personality development of male protagonists in high fantasy literature. Five books by female authors and five books by male authors published between 1990 and 1998 were subjected to latent content analysis in this study. This study concludes that females focus on describing the physical characteristics of males, but male authors focus more on personality development.

Headings:

    Fantasy literature

    Content analysis - Young adults' literature

    Men in literature

    Young adults' literature – Evaluation

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I.   Introduction:

"Fantasy creates hope and optimism in readers. It is the pure stuff of wonder, the kind that carries over into everyday life and colors the way readers perceive things around them. I think everyone could use some extra hope and wonder as we rocket toward a new millenium"(Pierce 1993, 50).

Fantasy literature conjures many images for people from escapist drivel to respected literature. While not a new genre (first recognized in *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll), it has not been well accepted by literary scholars. Few studies have been done analyzing fantasy literature, or more specifically, young adult fantasy literature. Many papers and articles have been written on different topics involving fantasy literature, but little research has been performed or published. Because of this, I decided to research high fantasy novels with young adult protagonists. Once I researched male protagonists, I decided to determine if and how an author's gender defines and limits character.

1. Problem:

Studies analyzing fantasy novels with female protagonists within them have been published; however, when looking for information on male characters in fantasy fiction, only one study included males, and no study has been performed exclusively on male characters. Perhaps it is assumed that male characters are the predominant characters in

high fantasy, and there is no need to study them. Also, possibly due to the women's movement, studies have been done looking at women in all forms of literature, and conclusions have been drawn from this research. This type of research, however, has not extended to looking at male characters in literature, although this may involve interesting stereotypes and information as well. Research of male characters, regardless of genre, has not been published, and, therefore, the results of a study of this type could have as much import in the field of fantasy literature and women's studies as a study on female characterization.

2. Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to determine whether young adult male characters are stereotyped and developed differently depending on the gender of the author. Recent, high fantasy novels were examined (post 1990) if they contained male characters aged 12-20. These limitations were placed due to the large number of high fantasy novels that are published each year. I specifically did not want to analyze only the best authors or award winning books. Books that can be found in the local library that a young adult may pick up and read, regardless of their literary value, were equally important to me.

For the purpose of this study, young adults and fantasy were defined in general terms. High fantasy consists of "fantasies set in Otherworlds, specifically Secondary Worlds, and which deal with matters affecting the destiny of those worlds"(Clute and Grant 1997, 465). Fantasy differs from science fiction in its general lack of technology. Many of the worlds that are developed are similar to what we may imagine as medieval times.

"Young people between the ages of 12 and 18 are considered young adults. They are trying to decide who they are and what they want to do in their lives"(Troy 1991, 36). People of this age are going through many tumultuous times. Relationships with their parents are changing; they are trying to determine who they are, where they want to go, and what they stand for in life. Most people at this stage read above their age group and definitely do not want to read about younger characters. Thus I looked at books with characters between the ages of 12 and 20, rather than the defined young adult age limits.

3. Genre of Fantasy

"A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms"(Clute and Grant 1997, 338). Fantasy novels present an alternate reality in which it may be easier to present difficult issues and disturbing topics without the heavy overtones of a moralistic message often found in realistic novels.

> Fantasy has also been labeled escapist literature, and, of course, it is in several ways. Fantasy allows readers to escape the mundane and to revel in glorious adventures. For some readers, escape is all that's demanded. For other readers, venturing on those seemingly endless quests, encountering all those incredible obstacles, and facing all those apparently tireless antagonists to defend the good and defeat the evil lead to more than mere reading to pass time. The escape from reality sends those readers back to their own limited and literal worlds to face many of the same problems they found in fantasy (Donelson and Nilsen 1997, 161).

This genre may allow young adults to see another solution to problems they deemed unsolvable or impossible. Think of a young man facing an evil sorcerer who has the love

of his life entrapped in a dungeon deep beneath the earth. This may make peer pressure seem paltry in comparison and help the teen to face up to his problems at school.

The characters may be simply described and intended to represent any person reading the book. Generic characterization is important so that the reader can easily relate to the person being represented. "The characters of fantasy are largely people or beings of a common nature. They might be any one of us in the tale-and that is precisely the point. We are not asked to stand on the outside and survey this tale from a detached perspective; we are asked to enter into it so that the story becomes ours. Thus we find characters quite like us"(Timmerman 1983, 29). The characters may not be well-developed so that young adults can better see themselves in the protagonist's shoes.

The protagonist (whether male or female) in these novels is often ordinary, living life as he knows it, satisfied with the status quo. Suddenly he is put to work fulfilling a quest he may care nothing about and most likely does not completely comprehend. The quest will challenge him physically and emotionally and in the end, after the typical fulfillment, cause him to see the world in a different light.

> If villains need to be vague then heroes must be human, wrestling with the sacrifices they have to make or trying to ease tensions between the various peoples they represent. It is primarily this interaction between those on the side of good, rather than with their opponents, that allows the heroes to change and grow….A diversity of heroes on the quest provides needed balance, just as it echoes the real relationships that help teen readers grow (Caywood 1995, 152).

This typical scenario helps young adults live through their own trials and tribulations by exposing them to a greater world view and may shed new light on good and evil in their own reality. Somehow reading about another's problems and fight to solve them can help a teen to regard his own life with the new understanding that endless possibilities are out

there if he puts his mind to it. "Young readers seem to come away from the characters'

mishaps not depressed but energized, as if the protagonist's struggle was something they

survived as well"(Pierce 1993, 50).

Young men in today's world have a difficult path to walk. Stories in the media

often portray youth, especially boys, as criminals or in a negative light. Also, there are

few positive role models in popular media, outside of sports figures (not necessarily

positive role models), for them to emulate. Today's world is filled with problems that we,

as adults cannot solve. So we, instead, are passing them onto the next generation, in

hopes that they will be able to save the world. In the fantasy genre, however, no matter

how grim the protagonist's scenario, no matter how hopeless his plight, he fights on. A

strong protagonist's will to fight and overcome the odds can help transform a young

> Young people have the time and emotional energy to devote to causes, unlike so
> many of us, losing our revolutionary (or evolutionary) drive as we spend ourselves
> on the details and chores that fill adult life. They take up causes, from the
> environment, to human disaster relief, to politics….YAs are also dreamers; this is
> expected and, to a degree, encouraged as they plan for the future. Their minds are
> flexible, recognizing few limits. Here the seeds are sown for the great visions,
> those that will change the future for us all. We give our charges goals, heroes
> whose feats they can emulate, and knowledge of the past, but they also need fuel
> to spark and refine ideas, the same kind of fuel that fires idealism (Pierce 1993,
> 50).

Tamora Pierce is known for her novels featuring young girls as the protagonist, but her

idea applies to all readers of fantasy.

Characters in fantasy novels have progressed since the days of Frank Baum and

Lewis Carroll. Many of the books written involve generic characters, as described earlier,

but others include multifaceted and complex individuals. Unlike John Timmerman,

Charlotte Spivack writes of the strong characterization trend in fantasy novels. She

believes that characters are being better defined, yet not limited to traditional gender roles.

> Just as major women characters are often both masculine and feminine in their
> abilities, both expert with swords and devoted to peace, so male characters are
> also complex with their aggressive natures modified by sensitivity. At the same
> time, those traditionally male traits of pride, sexual prowess, and desire for
> domination are often subjected to negative scrutiny. In short, the traditional roles
> of both men and women are reevaluated and recreated in these works (Spivack
> 1987, 8).

4. Significance of the Fantasy Genre:

Fantasy is a genre to which people are exposed beginning at a young age. "High

fantasy indeed quickens the heart and reaches levels of emotion, areas of feeling that no

other form touches in quite the same way. Some books we can enjoy, some we can

admire, and some we can love. And among those books that we love as children, that we

remember best as adults, fantasy is by no means least"(Alexander 1971, 582). Most of the

picture books published involve some aspect of fantasy from animal speech to magic or an

incredible world that will never exist. This earlier exposure then leads up to tried and true

books like *The Wizard of Oz, Alice in Wonderland,* and the Narnia series by C.S. Lewis.

These books expose children to an alternate reality, a different way of solving problems,

and help to develop vivid and colorful imaginations. Perhaps best of all, in most fantasy

the good guy always wins or succeeds at whatever trial he is facing. "Much of the appeal

in modern fantasy resides in its optimism for humankind. The human spirit may be

maligned but it will endure. It may be tested, but it will be found worthy. In an age

acutely pessimistic about the human race, fantasy remains adamant in its belief that man is

worthy. There may be bad men among us-fantasy never denies this-but somehow even the

feeblest of creatures can individually confront them"(Timmerman 1983, 101-2). Even as adults, we still appreciate the challenges fantasy literature presents to us. The alternate world or reality may be difficult to understand or follow, depending on the story, but it is also always new and different from our mundane daily existence.

Cathi Dunn MacRae, for her recent publication, Presenting Young Adult Fantasy Fiction, performed a survey on teens to determine what type of fantasy young adults preferred. She found 81% preferred alternate world fantasy to other subgenres of fantasy. Humor came in second, and third was everyday world magic (MacRae 1998, xvi). In alternate world fantasy, the reader can recreate himself and become what only his dreams allow, which is perhaps why it is so popular among readers of fantasy literature.

> Fantasy, more than any other genre, is a literature of empowerment….In fantasy, however short, fat, unbeautiful, weak, dreamy, or unlearned individuals may be, they find a realm in which those things are negated by strength. The catch-there is always a catch-is that empowerment brings trials. Good novels in this genre never revolve around heroes who, once they receive the "Spatula of Power," call the rains to fill dry wells, end all war, and clear up all acne. Heroes and heroines contend as much with their granted wishes as readers do in normal life (Pierce 1993, 51).

There are no easy answers in fantasy literature. The hero almost always faces a difficult quest, often one he did not ask for. Inevitably he would like to give up and go home, but some inner fire keeps him going until the end when the quest is resolved, and then he can live happily ever after. However, this is not an easy genre with pat answers to the difficult questions; instead, it is creative and helps the reader to look at problems in a new light. "The text trains us, word by word, to perceive reality-and shifting reality-in certain ways; it makes us pick from all possible outside realities the particular outside realities that make narrative sense of the text itself. Thus is created an inside reality, the moment-by-moment

changing reality experienced by the reader. It is important that we recognize that the

fantastic comes not from mere violation of 'the real world,' but from offering an

alternative to the real world"(Rabkin 1979, 19). This alternative may be a beautiful world

or an ugly gray place; only the author can determine what reality to create for his

characters. There are definitely patterns in much of fantasy literature, but even within

patterns or genres, only an author's imagination limits his creation.

> Fantasy, along with science fiction, is a literature of *possibilities*. It opens the
> door to the realm of "What if," challenging readers to see beyond the concrete
> universe and to envision other ways of living and alternative mindsets. Everything
> in speculative universes, and by association the real world, is mutable. Intelligent
> readers will come to relate the questions raised in these books to their own lives.
> If a question nags at youngsters intensely enough, they will grow up to devise an
> answer-to move their world forward, because ardent souls can't stand an
> unanswered question (Pierce 1993, 50).

Exposure to alternate worlds and unbelievable adventures are just a few of the wonderful

advantages to reading fantasy literature.

5. Character

Characters are possibly the most important part of a book. The plot may be

ineffective, the setting unclear, but if the protagonist is believable and likable the author

may have a book someone will want to read. If a character cannot be related to or

understood, the book itself becomes difficult to enjoy and recommend to others. Fantasy

authors walk an especially thin line. The protagonist may be of another species or have an

extremely unbelievable task set before him, but in the end, the reader must be able to relate

to and understand him. Fantasy novels follow a pattern. Each author has many individual

choices, but the protagonist almost always has a quest to fulfill that has been passed to him

by a greater being. Does this equal predestination or does the character have a choice in

which path he follows?

> One element of characterization that can trip up authors and their heroes is
> predestination. In a supernatural showdown, prophecy can heighten suspense and
> foreshadowing, but to be effective it must be cryptic and murky….Heroes who
> can't lose aren't very heroic, and those who never question whether they're up to
> the challenge or on the right course have no validity in teens' lives ….In the long
> run, it's a hero's weakness, inexperience, fear, and occasional foolishness that
> convince readers they too can confront seemingly overwhelming odds (Caywood
> 1995, 152).

This seems to be a difficult task, yet most fantasy authors do it well. The hero inevitably

questions himself and his goals in many different manners, but he always goes on a quest,

whether it is to save the world or find an occupation.

> Heroes must prove worthy of their quest, although early in the story they may be
> fumbling or unsure about both themselves and their quests. The quest may be
> ordained, required, or occasionally, self-determined. The hero may briefly confuse
> good and evil, but the protagonist ultimately recognizes the distinction. When the
> obligatory battle comes between the powers of good and evil, the struggle may be
> prolonged and the outcome in doubt. But eventually good prevails, although the
> victory is always transitory (Donelson and Nilsen 1997, 160).

The victory is temporary because so much of fantasy is series work. Today the quest is

won; tomorrow a new fate befalls the protagonist. It is always exciting and shifting, yet in

the end, predictable, which is why the protagonist is the most important part of the story.

Without great central characters like Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien or

Garion in *Pawn of Prophecy* by David Eddings, readers would not have continued reading

and enjoying these series and recommending them to other readers of fantasy literature.

In fantasy novels, the quest is usually thrown at an unsuspecting, naï ve person.

On the other end of the spectrum is the villain, who is world-weary and power hungry. He

has seen too much and had too little to say about the world around him. This takes us

unavoidably back to the good versus evil question that is almost always present in fantasy novels. In this case, naivete represents good and pessimism is evil, thus the need for young protagonists. "But naivete in fantasy is always a good thing which suggests that the character has retained a willingness to wonder, has not been despoiled by the world's affairs, has not been made hard-bitten and cynical of life. And these latter characters, the pragmatists, the despoiled, the hard-bitten and cynical are often the villains of fantasy"(Timmerman 1983, 35).

II.   Review of Research Literature

Studies researching fantasy literature are scarce. Only two published studies and two master's papers were found that remotely concerned themselves with the topic of this paper. Two of the studies relate to the role of female characters, and one to the role of males. Many personal opinion articles and books have been published discussing many varied topics in fantasy literature, but few research studies.

In their 1992 paper, "Is there a Typical YA fantasy?: a Content Analysis," Dowd and Taylor identified forty fantasy titles and selected twenty-five percent with which to do their research. Interestingly, in all of the studies discussed here, theirs is the only one with an extreme predominance of female authors (86%). In their study, they looked at character, conflict, theme, setting, point of view, fantasy subgenre, and the presence of magic to determine "typical" fantasy novels. After defining the characteristics and analyzing the selected books, they discovered alternate world fantasy is most common, characters were round and dynamic (60% were female protagonists) and person-to-person conflict is most typical. Also no common theme was found, but in 21 of the 25 novels, the setting was found to be integral. Seventeen of the titles dealt with magic, and suspense was the most common mood or feeling. Twenty-three of the novels were from a single point of view and fourteen of those (61%) were in third person. Dowd and Taylor

concluded that "although there are similarities among recent fantasy books, there is also such a variety within the genre that fantasy, as represented by this sample, does reject and deny 'pigeon holes'"(53). This study set an important precedent in researching fantasy novels. They, too, used content analysis and looked at characters in fantasy fiction.

The second published study of fantasy is also a content analysis looking at images of women in young adult science fiction and fantasy over three decades. Du Mont (1993) performed a content analysis of forty-five young adult science fiction and fantasy novels: fifteen each published in 1970, 1980, and 1990. Generally in every year looked at, the number of male and female authors was about equal (eight out of fifteen in 1970 and 1980 (53%) were male authors and six out of fifteen in 1990 (40%) were males). She looked at primary and secondary characters regarding gender, occupation, education, characterization, and more specifically eight ways of categorizing female characters from peripheral/nonexistent to independent individuals. In all time periods more male characters than females were the protagonists, but active female characters increased from 45% to 78% over the time periods studied and passive female characters decreased from 55% to 22%. Also, women gained more occupations in more recent publications; however, in only one novel was a male character (an android) a homemaker. Du Mont also found that while male characters had many different occupations, few were in peripheral traditional female occupations (secretaries, homemakers, and nurses). The number of men defined by intelligence decreased from 71% to 57%, and in the 1990 novels, men were beginning to be characterized by physical beauty and emotional strength, which applied only to women in previous decades. Her results were fascinating, especially regarding the changes in how male characters are being defined. It is not particularly

positive, however, that men are now being defined in ways only women were before, by beauty and emotions. While it is good to recognize that men can be beautiful and also have emotions, taking them to the level to which only women have been subjected is demeaning for both sexes. It would be better to bring women up, rather than lower men down. It is also notable that while Du Mont set out to look at female roles in fantasy novels, she also studied the male roles and gave those results as well.

Barbara Way Peeler's master's paper (1987) looked at traits and values of heroes in high fantasy literature for children. She selected thirty novels (10 authors, 8 of whom were men) and analyzed them for heroic characters regarding economic status, physical and emotional immaturity, reluctance to act, homelife, physiological values, egotistic values, playful values, fearful values, and altruistic values. After defining each of these, 55% of characters were found to be of low socio-economic status, 65% were physically immature, 90% were emotionally immature, and 74% were not reluctant to act on their respective quests. Seventy-seven percent were displaced from their homes. Peeler concluded in her study that the most important and common trait for heroes is selflessness. While her study looked exclusively at children's literature, it is interesting to note her results.

The final study looked specifically at the treatment of female characters in fantasy novels. Sexton (1983) looked at role, physical description, age, moral alignment, sexual role, power, protagonists' attitudes toward women, dominance/submissiveness, race, and occupation. Attractive, good women were found to be most common (68% between 1970 and 1977, whereas only 41% were portrayed as such prior to 1970). While Sexton's results are often not clear or impressive in significance, she strongly believed women play

a lesser role in fantasy novels and are "young, attractive in appearance, and of a generally

good moral alignment" (56). She also writes that dominating, evil women are more

common than good dominating women, and she believes that strength in a good woman

character is believed to be unpopular by authors of fantasy novels. It is interesting to note

that of the novels she analyzed, 30 of the 40 (75%) were written by male authors.

III.   Methodology

1. **Methodology**:

This study uses the methodology of latent content analysis. Stereotypes and development of male characters are analyzed to determine whether or not author gender bias plays a role.

2. Research Questions:

The major hypothesis of this paper is that there is a difference in character development based on the gender of the author, specifically:

1. Stereotypes exist for male protagonists;

2. Female authors are more descriptive of a protagonist's physical being;

How is the character described physically?

3. Female authors are more descriptive of a protagonist's personality;

How is the character's personality developed?

4. Female authors describe family and supporting characters in more depth than

male authors.

3. Scope:

This study examines high fantasy novels published between 1990 and 1998 with a young adult male protagonist. It examines stereotypes, physical descriptions, and personality development of the main character and the manner in which these characters are presented, and compares them based on the author's gender.

4. Limitations:

This study does not discuss manifest content analysis. It is a latent content analysis. "Manifest content is the visible, surface content-of a communication…latent content of the communication is its underlying meaning"(Babbie 1995, 312). Only male characters of the defined age were examined, and no heed was paid to novels with female protagonists. No one author's works were looked at in depth, and novels that were co-authored were excluded.

5. Procedure:

I first developed a set of criteria based on my definitions of high fantasy and young adults to limit the number of books included in this study. Each book had to be a high fantasy novel with a male protagonist aged between 12 and 20. If no discernible age was given, the character had to have the feeling of a young adult based on other description. Determining his age when none was given was based on circumstances surrounding him. Did he live at home? Was he learning a trade? Were girls nonexistent or was he showing the first signs of interest? Was he developing physically at a fast pace? While the ages looked at may be construed by some to be above or below the standard young adult age,

no definitive age range has been set by any one authority. Therefore I looked at books

where the protagonist was entering or leaving adolescence. I also wanted to look at

current publications, rather than a selection throughout the history of fantasy fiction. This

last factor was added so that most of the books could be easily found and were not just

award-winners or perennial favorites, but rather some titles that are not of the highest

literary standard or the most common choices.

A list of novels from which the final ten were chosen was developed through two

major sources. First, *VOYA*'s annual list of Best Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror was

examined to see if any of the books listed in each year's report fit my criteria. Second, a

request was sent to three listservs (pubyac, childlit, and yalsa-bk) describing the nature of

the books required for the study and asking for title suggestions. This resulted in dozens

of books being suggested, sorted through and either discarded or added to the list if they

met all of the criteria. I also looked through some fantasy bibliographies to determine if

more titles existed, but I found these to be relatively worthless due to their publication

date, scope, or limited annotations. I did not include Arthurian Fantasy, which is also

High Fantasy, because while set in a mythical world, it is based on earth. However, I did

include books set within both earth and other worlds, if the book was primarily in the

other land, due to the commonness of this type of plot.

Thirty-six novels (18 each by male and female authors, see appendix A) were

selected based on these criteria, and from that list, ten were chosen for the study. The

books were chosen due to their availability at two public libraries (Chapel Hill Public

Library in Chapel Hill, NC and Missoula Public Library in Missoula, MT). As each book

was read, a form (Appendix B) was filled out looking for different characteristics as they

appeared in the book. All descriptions of the character's physique or personality were

written down, as well as occupational, familial, and supporting character information.

While reading through each novel, I examined them for instances of character

development. These instances range from a word (weak, strong, intelligent, etc.) to a

statement ("I had bragged without shame about my skills in every wine store in the

city"(Turner 1996, 2)), and each was written down on a form for later analysis. Any

background details or information on supporting characters was also written down.

After I finished reading each novel, I then coded the results. I wrote down each

instance described in a table with just male or female above it for author's gender. I

counted and totaled the number of instances for each author, totaled again with gender as

a factor and without, and then averaged the number of instances for each category. I then

broke down the results further and put each instance into a narrower category (i.e. eyes,

hair, skin, facial characteristics, etc). I put those results in a table by gender and by totals

to determine patterns and averages. Once I finished looking at the results, I began to

analyze them in order to draw conclusions.

IV.   Analysis

Of the ten books I read, only five gave a specific age. These ages ranged from 12 as a low to 20 as a high, with two books having a fifteen year-old protagonist. Of the five with no given ages, all of the protagonists seemed young due to life circumstances or descriptions about them. Perhaps the reason that no age is given is so they will appeal to a wider audience. For example, a fourteen year-old may not read a book with a twelve year-old protagonist, but if he can imagine the character is the same age or older than him, the book is more acceptable.

I next looked at the physical description of characters (see Graph 1 and Table 1). All of the books had some type of description, but the amount and what was described varied widely. Only one male author used more than four instances to describe his protagonist's physique, where all of the female authors used at least six specific instances, with an average of seven instances. Male authors averaged 4.4 descriptors, but that was mainly due to one author. Without his work, the males would have averaged 3.25 instances of physical description per novel, thus falling to less than half of what female authors write.

Graphs are not available in PDF format.

Table 1

Physical Descriptors of Protagonists			
	Male Authors (5)	Female Authors (5)	Total (10)
Eyes	20%	80%	50%
Hair Color	40%	80%	60%
Face	40%	60%	50%
Skin Color	0	40%	20%
Strength	60%	60%	60%
Weakness	40%	40%	40%
Height	20%	60%	40%
Earrings	0	40%	20%

Physical description itself ranged from facial to body. Five authors mentioned eyes (four of whom were females) and six mentioned hair color (again four females). Where five writers mentioned the face or some facial characteristic (scarring), only three were females, but only two authors mentioned skin color, both of whom were female.

When using words about the physical development of the protagonists, six authors used words like "active", "strong", "energetic", split equally between the male and female authors. Also, when the character was described as weak, four authors used this, again split half and half by gender of the authors. A character could be described as strong and weak in the same book depending on external circumstances of the plot. More female authors described a character's height than males (three out of four comments) and two of the protagonists had earrings, both from female authors.

The study of personality development (Table 2 and Graph 2) was much more difficult to ascertain than physical descriptions. Whereas physical instances were expressly written down and described, characteristics about personality were not always so, thus the need for latent rather than manifest content analysis. Often a feeling is related

Graphs are not available in PDF format.

in the book through conversation rather than description, and thus no specific instances are given. Also looking for similarities in the ways of describing personalities is extremely difficult.

I was surprised at the results of this question. I felt that, as with the physical descriptions, females would outweigh males in the number of instances used to describe personality. On average, however, a male author used 8.2 instances to describe the personality of his protagonists, whereas female authors only averaged 6.6. One female only used four instances to describe the character's personality, with a high of eight from another. The least amount of description for a male was six instances with a high of ten. Intelligence of the protagonists and attitudes was what was most commonly written about. Six characters were described as "intelligent" with three males and three females using or implying the term. Four characters were "determined": three male authors and one female. "Stubborn" described three protagonists: two males and one female (a good characteristic for a hero facing poor odds on the battlefield). In five of the books, a major theme was increased self-understanding by the young male. Of these books, four were by male authors. Two of the protagonists were "braggarts" and "extremely arrogant", both by female authors. Three males were "observant": two female authors, one male. Exceeding politeness or kindness was demonstrated by four characters (three male authors). Interestingly, all of the characters were extremely brave, important for a hero.

Table 2

Personality Characteristics found in Novels			
	Male Authors (5)	Female Authors (5)	Total (10)
Brave	100%	100%	100%
Intelligent	60%	60%	60%
Determined	60%	20%	40%
Stubborn	40%	20%	30%
Self-understanding	80%	20%	50%
Braggarts	0	40%	20%
Observant	20%	40%	30%
Politeness	60%	20%	30%

Looking at the different occupations of the protagonist produced interesting results. Four of the characters were apprentices in their chosen occupations (merchants, heros, genies, and goldsmiths). Three females and one male had apprentices for protagonists. Also two of the characters were royalty, one each by gender, and three were already established in their profession (two males, one female).

Homelife (Graphs 3 and 4) was another interesting question posed in this study. Often in fantasy novels, it seems that the main character comes from nowhere or is an orphan with no understanding of his roots. In this analysis, three novels had no mention of fathers (2 males, 1 female), three had abusive fathers (all female authors), and in two books the fathers were either dead or died during the book (both males). In only two books was a supportive father described, one each by gender. When describing mothers, four of the novels had no mention (two females, two males), two were dead (one each), and three were shown as caring (two females, one male). An overview of the families presented included one child abandoned (male), one exiled from his tribe (male), two had siblings (male authors) and the rest did not mention an extended family.

Graphs are not available in PDF format.

Graphs are not available in PDF format.

In the category of quest, the results varied much more than just saving the world as it is known. Only two of the protagonists are responsible for trying to save the world (one each by gender), whereas the rest involved much more self-involved quests: trying to find their place in the world or prove themselves worthy of some task set before them. The most common underlying theme was that of gaining a better understanding of self and becoming an adult.

The last area involved looking at the supporting characters (Graph 5) who helped the protagonists along their various paths. Only one book, written by a female, had no true supporting characters that took part in the quest by the protagonist. Of the others, five had love interests (three females, two males), and six books had support by animals (both magical and non-magical) written by two females and four males. Interestingly, six books had examples of male support, 2 female authors and 4 males. Female support (non-love interest) was in seven of the ten books by three females and four males. Five books had supporting characters who showed disdain to the protagonist but stood by him. Three of the characters were males (2 female authors, one male) and two were females (one each by gender).

Other interesting findings show two books were written in first person (one each by gender), one book was considered Christian Fiction and eight of the books involved magic of some type. Also eight of the books were set completely in other worlds, with two doing a cross between our world and a fantasy land.

Graphs are not available in PDF format.

V.   Summary of Results

During my study of this subject, I believed I would find that women outweighed men in all areas I was researching. Happily, I was proven wrong. Women do use more descriptors than men in physical characteristics, but men use more than women in personality. From this, I suggest that women depend more on physical portrayal to relate to their readers, while men develop more personality for their heroes. Teens reading these books may not notice a difference in the description, but it is pleasant to discover that male authors rely on personality (even if the stereotypical male-brave and intelligent). Female authors relying on the physical characteristics of males (hair, facial features, earrings) are perhaps playing to the female rather than male reader.

In family life, the real differentiation comes with abusive fathers and caring mothers, both of which are used by female authors. I find this fascinating and somewhat stereotypical. Overall male authors either did not mention parents or they were dead so they did not need to be explained. Supporting family members were scarce or nonexistent and the protagonist was often left to his own devices, thus making him stronger. Perhaps this is due to the marginal role many parents play in their own adolescents' lives. Teens reading these novels may not be able to relate if the protagonist had a close, loving relationship that the reader is not experiencing.

Females seem to use more female characters both in love interests and supportive roles. Males use other males, animals, and non-love interest by females.   The supporting roles are especially important because young adults are very dependent on their peer groups for approval and disapproval. This show of support for a protagonist directly reflects back on the reader, who is also searching for support and needing to know that friends are available. Thus it is vital that books show supportive characters to represent real life and normalize what teens themselves are experiencing.

VI.   Conclusions

Male authors develop male protagonists differently from female authors. Perhaps male authors are more comfortable developing personalities for male characters because they have survived adolescence and know what young males experience during this time in their lives. Where male authors develop personality and friendships, female authors describe physical characteristics and love interests.

As a female, it is difficult for me to imagine what most males are thinking or how their minds work. I would find this especially difficult as an author trying to make sense of a psyche I have never experienced. This may be why females rely on physical traits and supporting characters, rather than personality development. As a teenage girl, I wanted to know how boys thought, looked and what interested them in young females. Female authors tend to portray these interests in their male characters. They give them a love interest. There is depth and detail on physical appearance. There are not many details of personality and deeper emotions, however, by female authors.

Male authors have lived through being teenage boys. They understand the thought process, changes, and emotions of young males. They can, therefore, better describe them in print. Eighty percent of the books by male authors described increased self-understanding by male protagonists, whereas only 20% of female authors include the same

characteristic. The books by males seem to include more journies of self-awareness than novels by females. I feel this is because male authors are aware of what it is like to be a teenage male and can therefore relate the experience more thoroughly than can female authors.

I believe that the books written by male authors provide a model that young males read to gain understanding about their growing up experiences. The authors create a journey for their protagonists that involves evil, temptation, and questioning beliefs, just as young people experience every day. The male authors get into the psyche and experience and show the male reader one possible path in life for him to take. These books may not change lives, but they may add to the experience and understanding a young male reader has about his adolescence.

Many of the books lacked parents. All of these authors found a way to explain the lack of parental figures: either through not mentioning parents or the parent is dead. This lack of parents makes it easier for the authors to send the protagonist off on his wild adventures without having to explain the typical rules most teens live by. I was not surprised at the lack of parents in these novels.

To make up for the lack of parents, the authors include supporting figures in various forms. These characters often take the place of parents, at least partially, in the roles they play. They make sure the young man stays on his designated path and does not get into too much trouble. They provide friendship, advice, and understanding. They listen and offer a helping hand when needed. Without the supporting characters, the quest often could not be fulfilled. They prove that we all need support around us, people to look up to and get help from, in order to fully live our lives. We are not individuals

floating in the ocean alone; we all have networks of family, friends, and coworkers to help us in our lives. While the protagonists may not have active parents in their lives, other characters make up for this lack of support.

These books take the reader into a different, often difficult, world where fierce creatures or evil people await the chance to take their lives or futures from them. All of the male protagonists fight valiantly and, in the end, fulfill their quest. These positive examples lead teenagers to believe they can get through their personal struggles, whether large or small, and defeat them as well.

Perhaps male authors in other genres, too, delve deeper into the male psyche than female authors. Further research is required to know if this is the case. This study is just one step into discovering more about male characters and how they are written and portrayed by authors.

VII. **Suggestions for Future Research**

There is a great deal of research that can be done in both the area of fantasy and also male characters. A more in depth study on male characters in other genres could render interesting results. An interesting study could develop the prototypes for these characters and look at different fantasy novels for inclusion of them.

The differences in characterization by males authors as compared to females is a fascinating topic. I do not know which type is preferred by which gender reading the books. Fantasy is one genre that has a following of both male and female readers, although more females than males are typically attracted to fantasy. A future study could look at what readers of this genre prefer in their characterization. Do they enjoy the physical characteristics or personality development more? It would take this study one step further.

Looking at male protagonists in science fiction rather than fantasy could also be a worthwhile study. How are the characters in science fiction developed? Are female authors more likely to develop physical characteristics rather than the personality of the young male? Comparing the results of the two studies could provide fascinating results.

Works Read in this Study

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Clayton, Jo. 1996. *Drum Warning.* New York: Tor Books.

Costikyan, Greg. 1993. *By the Sword.* New York: Tom Doherty Associates.

Dexter, Susan. 1994. *Prince of Ill Luck.* New York: Del Rey Books.

Friesner, Esther M. 1993. *Wishing Season.* New York: Macmillan.

Locke, Thomas. 1994. *Light Weaver.* Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.

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Shetterly, Will. 1993. *Nevernever.* New York: Tor Books.

Turner, Megan Whalen. 1996. *The Thief.* New York: Greenwillow.

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Appendices

Appendix A

List from which titles were selected

(Gray titles were read for this study)

Author	Title	Year
Males		
Alexander, Lloyd	Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen	1991
Alexander, Lloyd	Iron Ring	1997
Alexander, Lloyd	Arkadians	1995
Bakken, Harold	Fields and the Hills	1992
Beagle, Peter	Innkeeper's Song	1993
Brust, Stephen K.	Phoenix Guards	1991
Carver, Jeffrey	Dragon Rigger	1993
Costikyan, Greg	By the Sword: Magic of the Plains	1993
Goodkind, Terry	Wizard's First Rule	1994
Jacques, Brian	Martin the Warrior	1994
James, Cary	King and Raven	1997
Jordan, Robert	Eye of the World	1990
Kelleher, Victor	Brother Night	1991
Lawhead, Stephen	In the Hall of the Dragon King	1990
Locke, Thomas	Light Weaver	1994
Pullman, Philip	Subtle Knife	1997
Shetterly, Will	Nevernever	1993
Watt-Evans, Lawrence	Blood of a Dragon	1991
Females		
Cherryh, C.J.	Cloud's Rider	1996
Cherryh, C.J.	Fortress in the Eye of Time	1995
Cherryh, C.J.	Goblin Mirror	1992
Clayton, Jo	Drum Warning	1996
Dexter, Susan	Prince of Ill Luck	1994
Downer, Ann	Books of the Keepers	1993
Friedman, C.S.	Black Sun Rising	1992
Friesner, Esther	Majyk by Accident	1993
Friesner, Esther	Wishing Season	1993
Hobb, Robin	Assassin's Apprentice	1996
Luenn, Nancy	Goldclimbers	1991

Norton, Andre	Mark of the Cat	1992
Radford, Irene	Glass Dragon	1994
Schwartz, Susan	Shards of Empire	1996
Whalen Turner, Megan	The Thief	1996
Willey, Elizabeth	Well-Favored Man	1993
Zambreno, Mary Francis	Journeyman Wizard	1994
Zambreno, Mary Francis	Plague of Sorcerers	1991

Appendix B

Methodology

Bibliographic Information:

Author's gender:

Publication year:

Character name:

Character age:

Physical Description:

Personality:

Occupation:

Role in story:

Homelife/Background:
    a) parents:
    b) economic information:

Quest:

Supporting characters:
    a) Names/Ages:

    b) Role to main character:

    c) Gender:

    d) Attitude toward main Character:

Appendix C

Synopsis of titles in order read

The Thief. Turner, Megan Whalen.
Gen, a young thief is suddenly released from prison in order to steal Hamiathes' gift, a stone that makes the ruler of Eddis official, for the King of Sounis who wishes to make the Queen of Eddis his bride. Gen successfully steals the stone, gives it to the Magus (King's Scholar), and steals it again. In a surprising twist to the story, Gen is the Queen's Thief for Eddis and it was his intent all along to return the gift to her.

Iron Ring. Alexander, Lloyd
Tamar is the young king of Sundari. He is visited in a dream by a neighboring king and foolishly pledges to forfeit his life during a friendly betting game. He goes on a quest to find the king and turn over his life and on the way meets a large cast of characters who all help each other to defeat an evil king and restore the world to right. He then finally makes it to the king of Jaya and learns that he does not have to die, just rule his kingdom well. It was all a test to teach him more about the world.

Drum Warning. Clayton, Jo
Lyanz is heir to his father's merchant business when his world is thrown in to chaos due to the forthcoming confusion on Glandair and Iomard. Many mages are trying to kill him to gain the power he will have, but he is blessed by at least one god. The book is convoluted with many other characters and the part they will play in the upcoming adventure, but in the end he makes it to safety in the Vale for his future education.

Nevernever. Shetterly, Will
Ron (aka Wolfboy) is a human who has been transformed into a wolf man by a magician fairy named Leda. He can't speak and is the freak of freaks in Bordertown, a place filled with freaks. He is trying to protect Florida (the heir elf to Elfland) and return himself to normal with the help of many friends. He ends up losing Florida (who is really Leda) and chooses not to return to his normal body when given the choice. Not a true high fantasy in the traditional definition, but meets my qualifications.

Light Weaver. Locke, Thomas
Dan (aka Daniel) gets into an automobile accident and finds himself existing in two worlds. In the fantasy world, he is deemed a knight and set on a quest to save himself from the darkness (Satan) and go towards the light (God). In the earth world, he is trying to save himself as well. An odd book without a lot of depth and heavy religious overtones. Dan is not given a lot of choice, there is little action. Overall, his quest seemed predetermined and uninteresting.

The Blood of a Dragon. Watt-Evans, Lawrence
Dumery is a young man in search of a profession. After being turned away from wizardry and various other professions involving magic, he becomes determined to be a

dragon hunter. However, the one practicing dragon hunter in the world is really a farmer, raising and slaughtering dragons for their blood. After many unsuccessful attempts to join the hunter, Dumery realizes he will never become what he wants. He begins a journey home and on the way meets the oldest dragon in the world with whom he forms a partnership for her blood.

Goldclimbers. Luenn, Nancy

Aracco is an apprentice goldsmith, but he longs to be a goldclimber. He believes that his family desires this for him as well as he is an only child and must carry on the family footsteps. However, as the story develops, his parents really want him to find his own path in life and be happy. Aracco does not realize this until he takes a challenge to find a mystical city and on his journey he discovers that he must follow his path in life and that everyone will love him regardless.

Wishing Season. Friesner, Esther

Khalid is a young genie in training. He is very self-assured and egotistical. Due to this he gets trapped by a human for not following the rules of the genies. It takes a female genie and a cat to get him out of his situation and make him appreciate others.

By the Sword. Costikyan, Greg

Nijon is a young man beginning his trek into manhood when different events set him upon a very different path than he had imagined. After being cast out of his tribe, he must make his own way in life, which his father, the god Mongoose, has preordained to him. Through many adventures, he finally discovers his own happiness and destiny.

The Prince of Ill Luck. Dexter, Susan

Leith is a young man plagued by bad luck. His father tried to kill him at birth due to his differently colored eyes, instead he was dedicated to the priesthood of the Lady (the moon). When she did not accept his vows, he was sent back to his family who wanted him gone. He was shipwrecked upon a foreign land where he met his horse-companion, Valadan and the duke's daughter Kess. There he goes on an adventure to rid himself of his bad luck and find his friend Kess' mother.