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## **Child abuse in contemporary children's literature : a critical multicultural analysis.**

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**CHILD ABUSE IN CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A  
CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL ANALYSIS**

A Dissertation Presented

by

**ALBERTINA NAVARRO RIOS**

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**

May 2006

Child and Family Studies Program  
School of Education

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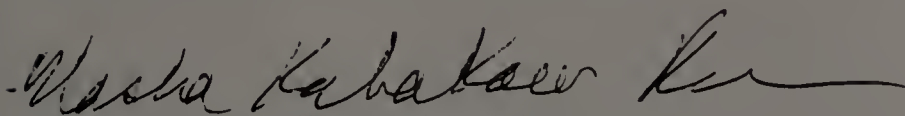
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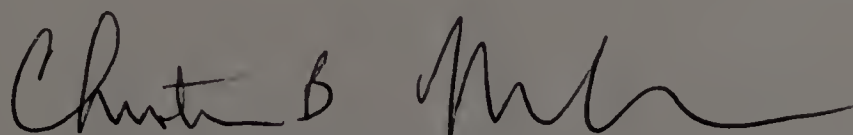
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## DEDICATION

In loving memory of my parents, Albertina Rios and Andres Navarro, my brother Luis,  
and of my dear friend Valerie Melara Pereira.

To my sister, Carmen Irene, a role model of kindness, love and strength and my  
guidepost for everything.

To Manuel, Maria Jose and Irene Maria, I couldn't love you more if you were my own,  
this is for you.

To GOD in whom all things are possible.

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## ABSTRACT

### CHILD ABUSE IN CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL ANALYSIS

MAY 2006

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Child maltreatment is an issue that affects approximately three million children, the consequences of which have been documented in numerous empirical studies.

Books are of vital influence in children's lives and they can either help or hinder the ways children deal with problems. Although research exists on the portrayal of persons with disabilities, stepfamilies, gay families, adoption, and foster care, a critical analysis of the portrayal of child abuse in children's literature has not been located in book, dissertation, or research form.

This study examines children's literature dealing with child abuse themes using criteria developed by Masha Rudman (1995), based on the work of psychologists, social workers and educators. It analyzes how well the books adhere to the criteria as well as the thematic effectiveness of the books. It looks into who is taking part in the abuse and who is interrupting it.

The methodology employed here is a critical multicultural analysis (Botelho, 2004) where personal and societal power are examined as well as how the books handle issues of culture and class. This study provides a foundation for further research in this

field as well as providing a resource for teachers, librarians, counselors and families on this topic.

I examined in depth fifteen books in which child abuse took a prominent part. The books ranged in age of intended readership from preschool through junior high, with the majority of the books aimed at readers eleven years old and above. My methodology included multiple readings of the eighteen selected texts (originally I read thirty books and culled those that either were not compelling reading, did not address the issue of abuse in a satisfactory manner, or had the potential to broadcast negative elements and harm precisely those children whom we are trying to help).

After an intensive analysis of each of the eighteen books sorted into categories of sexual and physical abuse I note patterns of resilience, childhood as a social construction and children's agency. I provide conclusions based on the analyses of the literature, and suggest recommendations for further research.

I also include an annotated bibliography of forty five books containing abuse. It is my hope that this study will provide a model for examining any books on abuse for potential use with children.

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## CHAPTER I

# CHILD ABUSE IN CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL ANALYSIS

### Introduction

“We have been abusing, maiming, and killing our children for as long as history has been recorded...” (Breiner, 1990, p.1). The acknowledgement that there is a problem of child maltreatment is relatively new in Western society, although there is historical evidence that children have long been murdered, abandoned, incarcerated, mutilated, sexually exploited, beaten, and forced into labor by their parents and caregivers (Aries, 1962; Helfer & Kempe, 1968; Ziegler & Hall, 1989; Breiner, 1990). For instance, in colonial America, children were flogged to instill discipline, and even in early 19<sup>th</sup> century, children routinely worked 14-hour days in mills and mines (Daro, 1988). Breiner (1990) notes that “infanticide and child abuse predate our civilization by centuries. They are ancient problems, often more apparent in the great civilizations of our past than they are now. Our abuse may be modern, but it is abuse, nonetheless.” Even in 21<sup>st</sup> century United States, where there are laws designed to protect children, children are still regarded as the property of their parents.

The emergence of official definitions of unacceptable treatment of children has helped to elicit and sustain efforts by authorities to protect children (English, 1998). Because they have important policy implications, however, definitions of child maltreatment continued to be passionately debated. Gelles (1989) contends “twenty years of discussion, debate and action have led me to conclude that there will never be

an acceptable definition of abuse, because abuse is not a scientific or clinical term. Rather it is a political concept.”

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act enacted by Congress in 1974 and known as Public Law 93-247, defines child abuse as the “physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of a child under the age of eighteen by a person who is responsible for the child’s welfare under circumstances which indicate the child’s health and welfare is harmed and threatened thereby” (Cicchetti & Toth, 1993; English, 1998). Of particular note, is that this definition specifies that only parents or caregivers can be perpetrators of child abuse. Abuse by other individuals, whether known to the child or strangers is considered assault (English, 1998). Further research concerning the definition of child abuse (Giovannoni & Becerra, 1979; Knudsen, 1988; McGee & Wolfe, 1991; Cicchetti, 1991) indicates that maltreatment definitions are not static, they are shaped by political, social, economic, and scientific factors.

For the purpose of this study, I have operationally defined child abuse as any physical, sexual, emotional or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child either by a parent, a relative, a guardian or any person who is in contact with the child. This definition also encompasses the intent of harm, the effect of the abuse on the child and, the consistency with which the abuse is perpetrated.

Since child maltreatment is an issue that deeply affects approximately 3 million children (NCCAN, 2003), it is critical that it be represented and reflected in children’s literature. Literature lends itself to teaching about sensitive topics for many reasons: fictional stories are interesting; children sometimes find it easier to talk about literature



than to talk about their own lives, literature provides a springboard for the discussion of emotions (Goldman, 1993, 1994; Pardeck, 1989; Rudman, 1995); and literature cannot only teach facts but also influence affect (Monson & Shurtleff, 1979; Bower, 1990). Furthermore, because children's literature provides many children with their only opportunity to become acquainted with certain socially relevant issues, such as adoption, child abuse, death, divorce, loss, separation, children's books can be used to introduce children to particular groups of people (Wagoner, 1984; MacDonald, 1993) or to certain ideas (Bawden, 1980).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although not numerous, child abuse themes have appeared more regularly in books written for young readers since the 1980s. Because research in this thematic area is still emerging, few research studies have been conducted that assess the impact of these books on their readers. Furthermore, since books are individual creations of members of society it is expected that these authors will be influenced by the cultural values of their society. Therefore, this study is an attempt to study children's literature that deals with child abuse themes so as to understand the social and cultural values informing the writing, embedded and transmitted by these authors. It will analyze, not only the thematic effectiveness of the books, but will also use critical literacy to place the books societally.

Rooted in the work of Paolo Freire, critical literacy calls for radical pedagogical change in the way we think (McDaniel, 2004). In his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000), Freire elucidated that exploited people do not recognize their own oppression. He wrote, "as long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their

condition, they fatalistically “accept their exploitation” (p.64). According to Freire, the solution is implementing a liberating education where teacher and student roles are redefined, teachers learn and learners teach. Students would not be considered as passive receptacles of information, rather they would be encouraged by teachers to question their worlds.

There a number of definitions of critical literacy. One of the most understandable and concise explanations is the one offered by Shannon (1995).

Critical perspectives push the definition of literacy beyond traditional decoding or encoding words in order to reproduce the meaning of text or society until it becomes a means for understanding one’s own history and culture, to recognize the connections between one’s life and the social structure, to believe that change in one’s life, and the lives of others and society are possible as well as desirable, and to act on this knowledge in order to foster equal participation in all the decisions that affect and control our lives. (p. 83)

Critical literacy then transcends the conventional notions of reading and writing to incorporate critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one’s world. Definitions of critical literacy by and large deem “text” to be anything that can be “read,” and that leads to endless possibilities.

In addition to Freire’s influence, critical literacy is also founded on the sociocultural theory of language, that challenges readers to think about the relationship between language and power (Gee, 1996).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study will be to determine how children’s literature portrays child abuse situations. In order to accurately and responsibly portray child abuse situations, authors of these books must attempt to understand the circumstances of real life child abuse situations. This study presents a critical analysis of the issues of child

abuse as they are portrayed in children's literature from 1980-2005 and investigate if the books demonstrate any correlation to real life child abuse situations, as determined by the professional literature on child abuse. The purpose of this study is first to examine current children's literature about child abuse according to specific characteristics, and to discover what has and has not been realistically portrayed about child abuse in children's literature between 1980 and 2005. Furthermore, this study will provide much needed resources for teachers, librarians, and families on this topic, adding to the body of knowledge on media designed for children, and children's literature in particular.

To achieve this objective, the following research questions will be investigated:

1. How is child abuse depicted in children's literature?
2. What are the social messages or discourses conveyed by books that deal with the topic of child abuse?
3. Who is taking part in the abuse and who is interrupting it?

In addressing these questions I will apply Rudman's (1995) criteria stated in her book, *Children's Literature: An Issues Approach* where she writes that the problem of abuse "is so widespread, it is necessary to help children understand how to prevent abuse or, at the very least, recognize and report it" (p. 352). In an attempt to help adults establish what are the most constructive materials, Rudman (1995) presents criteria to consider when evaluating children's books that deal with child abuse. Books should:

1. never blame the victim

2. reflect the fact that abusers represent all classes, all economic and social backgrounds, and both genders. The norm should not be that they are poor and non-Caucasian [people of color].
3. Avoid easy solutions, which are not helpful or realistic. Happy endings that occur without hard work and knowledgeable interaction make for poor literature and convey harmful messages.
4. suggest alternative ways of getting help.
5. avoid graphic scenes of abuse and violence

While these guidelines are rigorous, and not all books will meet these criteria, they are particularly useful when analyzing children's books about child abuse.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Research in children's literature is a relatively new academic field (Hearne, 1988). Hearne states that the field is also an interdisciplinary one, which may involve scholarship in the areas of literature, education, media, librarianship, sociology, history and art, with each discipline bringing a different emphasis. The research, which is most prevalent, however, exists in forms of bibliographies as opposed to analysis of children's literature. Hearne, editor of *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, stated that annotated bibliographies, surveys and collections are by far the best developed aspects of the field. They may concentrate on subjects (such as the *Museum of Science and Industry's Basic List of Children's Books*), on themes (such as *More Notes from a Different Drummer: A Guide to Juvenile Fiction Portraying the Disabled*), issues (such as *Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks*), or general recommendations for reading (such as *The Best in Children's Books*).

Rudman (1995) recommends that a critical inquiry of children's books in light of how they deal with contemporary social problems and conditions is as important as historical and literary perspectives. Given that books are an important influence, Rudman (1995) states they can either help or hinder the attempt to construct suitable bases for attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, according to Rudman (1995), it is essential that a critical approach be included in the repertoire of texts available to learners.

Although research exists on the portrayal of persons with disabilities, stepfamilies, gay families, adoption, and foster care, a critical analysis of the portrayal of child abuse in children's literature has not been located in book, dissertation, or research form. This study intends to provide a foundation for further research in such an important field as well as provide a resource for teachers, librarians, and families on this topic, adding to the body of knowledge on media designed for children, and children's literature in particular.

I will begin with a review of the major bodies of literature describing child abuse and its effect on children's development, child abuse in children's literature, and bibliotherapy in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 I will discuss the methodology to be used. Chapter 4 will be a critical analysis of the literature for children on the topic of child abuse, and in Chapter 5, I will present findings, and a list of recommendations for professionals and parents as well as suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Child abuse is a social problem with serious consequences for a child's development. Literature is a powerful medium that allows children to learn and, given the influence of books (Rudman, 1995) on young readers, it is essential that the issue of child abuse be accurately portrayed in children's literature. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss research on child abuse and its consequences on child development, as well as how abused children and abuse in general are represented in children's literature. In addition, research on bibliotherapy and its approach in dealing with child abuse will be discussed. In order to address the incidence and prevalence of child abuse in children's literature we will first uncover the societal construction of childhood, and how this construction has shaped how we regard children.

#### The Construction of Childhood

Historical studies of the conception of childhood gained momentum with Aries' (1962) historical account of family and the construction of childhood. His work explicitly stated that there was no acknowledgement of childhood until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and it wasn't fully developed until the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Pollock, 1983). Although his work is hotly contested, it sparked a wave of studies on the implications of when children were recognized as children in their own right and not either little adults or property to be used at will.

The works of Corsaro (1997), James and Prout (1997), James, Jenks and Prout (1998), and most recently Jenks (2005) agree that Aries' seminal work, while sparking controversy about the historical evidence for his statements, also has laid the

foundations for the “new history of childhood” (Corsaro, 1997, p. 48). Thus, a review of Aries’ history of childhood will facilitate situating children in a historical context.

Aries contends that there was a period known as “coddling period,” which fully materialized in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The coddling period was quickly followed by the period in which childhood was seen as a time for discipline and preparation for adulthood and became known as the “moralistic period.”

While not completely accepted by some researchers, and at times strongly criticized by other historians, Aries’ work became a generator of interest in the history of childhood and the family. Other scholars (Demos, 1970, 1973; Hunt, 1972; de Mause, 1976; Trumbach, 1978) have been more concerned not so much with the concept of childhood as with attitudes toward children in the course of time. Pollock’s (1983) research on the parent-child relationships of the 17<sup>th</sup> century found that when direct primary sources such as diaries, autobiographies and newspaper reports, rather than indirect evidence (for example, paintings and letters) are used in studying childhood, the picture that emerges is a less negative one than ones proposed by Aries (1962) and, later DeMause (1976). Findings resulting from Pollock’s (1983) research and analysis of 500 British and American diaries, autobiographies and similar sources, contradict both Aries’ thesis that there was no concept of childhood and DeMause’s claim that there was widespread evidence of child maltreatment until the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Corsaro, 1997).

Pollock’s (1983) findings revealed that to a certain extent “nearly all children were wanted, ...and parents revealed anxiety and distress at the illness or death of their children” (1983, p. 268). Pollock also concluded based on her findings, that the parent-

child relationship was reciprocal, where parents not only influenced their children, but were also influenced by them.

Corsaro (1997) suggests that while Pollock's data reveal some weaknesses, she also sheds light on the beliefs that protection, love and socialization are vital to humans' continued existence, and along with Aries' work, has significantly contributed to the work of other historians in their pursuit of a better understanding of the complex and vital world of children.

The new history of childhood examines the recent cultural, economic and social changes that significantly impact children and their families. In his study of the sociology of childhood, Corsaro (1997) focuses on how changes in contemporary family structures (i.e. increased divorce rates, the rise of single mother and blended families, and the growing gap between the rich and the poor) are affecting childhood. In addition, Corsaro (1997) ponders the incongruity of placing children at the center of the discourse even as their voices go unheard.

Similar to Corsaro's (1997) notions of the new history of childhood, some sociologists and social historians Coontz (1992, 1997), and Sidel (1992) as well as the work of Stacey (1991) make a case for a new definition of family, where the goal is to examine how children as a social group have been affected by the societal and economic changes since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the new history of childhood, the child, according to Jenks (2005) has become "a subject in its own right, a source of identity and, more than this, a promise of the future good. The child has come to symbolize all that is decent and caring about a society." (p. 60). Considering Jenks' vision of the child as a promise for the future and



situating him or her within a broader cultural context, how can we explain the recent increase in child abuse and the subsequent upsurge of interest in the field? Just as this section has briefly outlined the evolution of the child, in the next section I provide an overview of the evolution of child abuse.

### Child Abuse

The preceding section highlights the central tenets about the construction of childhood. These views are: (a) childhood as a category of persons, was not until fairly recently, regarded as important; (b) the evolution of childhood has influenced our care for children through the development of ideas and theories of human nature; (c) that by and large the childhood experience in modern society is better than it used to be.

Nevertheless, what these tenets do not explain is the unparalleled incidence of child abuse in Western society today. Moreover there seems to be widespread ignorance about who the abusers really are. As Jenks (2005) indicates, there are far fewer occurrences with stranger than with people who have everyday relationships with children. As Gelles and Cornell (1985) have stated, the family is one of the most dangerous places for children to live in. A report by the Bureau of Justice of the U.S. Department of Justice on Family Violence Statistics including Statistics on Stranger and Acquaintances documented family violence has remained constant over the last 10 years. Statistics from the report indicate that 93.7% of family violence is committed by a parent against a son or daughter versus an estimated 23.2% of stranger violence (United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005).

Child abuse is not a recent phenomenon, nor is it a novel event. There has never been any historical period or particular culture where children have not been exploited,

sexually abused or been victims of physical and psychological violence (Kempe & Kempe, 1978; Jenks 2005). The relatively recent upsurge in interest regarding the prevention and treatment of child abuse is because society's thinking around this topic has evolved considerably over the past decades. Prior to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century maltreatment of children in the United States rarely raised concern, in part society viewed discipline, even harsh forms of discipline and corporal punishment as a parental right (ten Bensel, Rhedinberger, & Radbill, 1997).

The context of child abuse includes societal, cultural and socioeconomic factors, as well as those closest to the child's social world –the parent-child relationship and the family. To understand the developmental importance of child maltreatment, we have to recognize how parents' failure to provide nurturant, sensitive, available and supportive caregiving makes any form of maltreatment particularly harmful to child development (Cicchetti & Olsen, 1990).

Until recently, violence against children and other family members has been considered a private matter, with its consequences inadequately recognized. In the eyes of the law violence between strangers was considered far more damaging and to have more serious consequences than violence against a member of one's own family. What we know today is that there are several ways in which family violence occurs, ranging from mild acts, such as name calling and abusive language, to more severe ones such as physical assaults that include fists and weapons (Wolfe, 1999).

Child physical, sexual and emotional abuse not only threaten a child's personal safety, but also infringes on the child's immediate environment as a safe haven and

cause parents to be unavailable for either physical or emotional caregiving (Margolin, 1998).

Bancroft & Silverman (2002) have studied the psychological characteristics of perpetrators in order to assess the risk to children. An in-depth study of the literature on exposure to violence and child abuse has indicated a significant increase in the rate of child physical abuse (review in McGee, 2000) and child sexual abuse (McCloskey, Figueredo & Koss, 1995, Sirles & Franke, 1989, and Paveza, 1988). Bancroft & Silverman (2002) report a significant increase in the combination of both physical and sexual abuse, perpetrated by fathers. They suggest that this phenomenon may be due to the deterioration of the relationship between the parents, resulting in the mother's inability to monitor the perpetrator's parenting or to protect the children from the ensuing retaliatory tendencies on the part of the father.

Bancroft & Silverman (2002) further maintain that in order to predict potential risks to children it is important for people in the helping professions to evaluate the potential abuser's history with childrearing approaches such as timeout, reprimands, deprivation of privileges, scolding, spanking, etc. Undertaking of this history would also include inappropriate touching, or reports by teachers or neighbors of bruises or suspicious behavior. Well trained professionals should be able to observe manifestations of possible abuse. These risks must be carefully considered as research studies (McGee, 2000; McCloskey et. al., 1995; Sirles & Franke, 1989, and Paveza, 1988) indicate there is substantial overlap between battering and incest perpetration.

Although women are also perpetrators of physical and sexual abuse, the majority of the studies that have been conducted in this field, indicate that the majority of child

abusers are men. This imbalance is supported by the prevalence of male abusers in children's literature. In all but two of the books analyzed, the character that inflicted either physical or sexual abuse upon the child was male.

This is a field that requires further investigation as we have conflicting information about what happens to the family in cases where the child is removed from an abusive situation. For the most part, when the child is removed from an abusive home environment, he or she will be placed in foster care. This can prove to be detrimental to the child on many levels. As we know from research findings (citation needed), children usually blame themselves for the abuse, and to be taken away from his or her home while the rest of the family remains together presents a serious dilemma for the child who has been abused.

### **Effects of child abuse on children's development**

How do we know what impact child abuse may have on the victims' development? Research over the last three decades has contributed to our understanding of the influences of growing up in a family in which abuse exists, and has provided us with ideas about what types of treatment might be appropriate for children who endure child abuse.

In this section, I will review a number of the studies conducted to research the myriad problems associated with child abuse.

Carlson (1984) conducted research with battered women and their children residing in shelters. She examined the clinical impressions of shelter workers of children's adjustment difficulties after experiencing violence in the family (Elbow, 1982; Hughes, 1982; Carlson, 1984). These early studies restricted to residents of

shelters, indicated that children exhibit a high level of stress-related disorders, including physical health problems; externalizing or acting-out problems, internalizing disorders, fear, anxiety and social isolation, reflecting low self-concept. Recent research has expanded beyond occupants of shelters and focuses on obtaining precise and comprehensive descriptions and explanations of children's adjustment and development (Rossman et. al, 2000).

Literature on child abuse suggests that experiencing abuse has long lasting effects on personality development, in particular in the areas of self-concept and aggression. In two early empirical studies conducted by Kinard (1980) and Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981) the effects of child abuse on children were investigated.

Kinard (1980) found that when compared to a group of non-abused children, children who had been exposed to abusive behavior manifested serious problems in emotional development. Likewise, Rosenbaum's and O'Leary's study on the immediate behavioral and emotional impact of family violence found that children whose mothers were abused were more likely to exhibit behavior problems in both conduct and personality areas than children in the comparison group.

Wolfe, Zak and Wilson's (1986) study on the impact of exposure to family violence on children's adjustment revealed that while there were no significant behavior problems overall, children who had experienced family violence engaged in fewer social activities and exhibited lower school performance. Subsequent studies (Hoffman-Plotkin & Twentyman, 1984; Kaufmann & Cichetti, 1989) linked physical abuse with aggressive behavior during play with peers.

Not all studies, however, have found a link between exposure to child abuse and externalizing problems (Margolin, 2000). This has led researchers to suggest that investigations into child maltreatment cannot fully account for the roles of co-occurring risk factors (e.g., substance abuse, parents' psychopathology, parents' unemployment) and pre-existing characteristics like temperament and personality that children bring to the situation.

Social learning explanations also provide a theoretical link between the experience of physical abuse in early life and later development of aggressive behavior. Experiencing repeated physical abuse teaches the child aggressive behaviors and acceptance of aggression as a norm (Dodge et. al. 1997).

It can be argued that harsh and uncontrollable punishment, as well as parental rejection found in abusive home environments may cause learned helplessness, ineffectiveness, anxiety, and depression in children. Children may interpret not only their world as unsafe, but that they themselves, are also unworthy of being kept safe (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, 1990).

A growing body of literature indicates that abused children experience withdrawal and depression as well as increased aggressiveness, argumentativeness and hyperactivity (Christopoulos et. al., 1987; Davis & Carlson, 1987; Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson & Zak, 1986; Wolfe, Zak, Wilson & Jaffe, 1986). Toth & Cichetti (1996) found that maltreated children have lower self-perception scores as measured by Child's Behavioral Checklist (Achenbach, 1980). Similarly, Tong et. al. (1987) found that children who had been sexually abused rated themselves lower than their comparison group on self-concept regarding intellectual and school status, physical appearance and

attributes, anxiety, and popularity. What is significant in these studies is that both studies reported a pronounced effect among girls, who were more likely in these two samples to have been abused by a relative or acquaintance.

Sexual and physical abuse has also been associated with fear, separation anxiety, somatic complaints, and avoidance behaviors (Dykman et. al., 1997; Kendall-Tackett et. al, 1993). Some researchers (Wolfe, 1989; Putnam & Trickett, 1997) report links between abuse and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but no other form of anxiety.

The literature (Ayoub, 2001; Perry, 1997; Perry, et. al., 1995) on the psychobiological effects of abuse suggests that the human brain is dramatically affected by early experience (Weiss & Wagner, 1998), and that there are critical periods during which the central nervous system is particularly responsive to specific types of experiences (Margolin, 2000). Effects of abuse may affect children's arousal and ability to react appropriately to stress. Perry (1997) reported that children exposed to trauma have alterations in overall arousal, increased muscle tone, increased startle response, and sleep disturbances.

Research studies conducted by Terr (1991) indicate that physiological consequences of abuse are closely linked with symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a disorder in response to a recognizable, serious stressor characterized by specific behaviors such as re-experiencing the event, avoidance and psychic numbing, and increased arousal (Terr, 1991; Margolin, 2000). PTSD is considered a unique disorder because a key feature of the classification involves the external world. According to the research conducted in this area the person must have been through a potentially life-threatening event or one that threatened his or her basic

physical integrity. Based on studies conducted on children who have settled in the United States fleeing political violence (McCloskey and Southwick, 1996), as well as studies investigating urban children who experience community and criminal violence (Martinez and Richters, 1993), findings indicate that about half of the young survivors of violence meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD (McCloskey and Southwick, 1996).

PTSD symptoms have been linked with sexual and physical abuse (Deblinger et. al., 1989; Green, 1993, Sadeh et. al., 1993). In their studies with children who exhibited PTSD symptomatology, Emery & Laumann-Billings (1998) found that an earlier age of abuse increased the risk of PTSD.

### Resilience

It has been established by research (Kempe & Hefler, 1963; Jaffe, 1990; Wolfe, 1993; Edleson, 1999; Cichetti & Toth, 2000; Margolin, 2000) the serious disruptions in the development of children caused by child abuse. A number of studies indicated that certain children develop unexpected strengths in the face of adversity. These children are described as resilient because they “defy expectation by developing into well-adapted individuals in spite of serious stressors in their lives (Luthar & Ziegler, 1991, p.6). The concept of resilience, was developed with the purpose of explaining why some children do well under less than favorable conditions and to understand the processes that account for these outcomes (Masten, 2001).

A study conducted by Jouriles, Murphy & O’Leary (1989) found that while the majority of children exposed to abuse exhibited adjustment problems, there was a significant number who did not exhibit these problems. A more recent study conducted by Grych (2000) on a sample of 228 children identified as having been abused,



indicated that children had different levels of variability in the areas of emotional and behavior problems. A large cluster of children (31%) reported no problems in their emotional and behavior domains, while an additional 18% were found to experience mild distress in the same social areas. This variability in children's outcomes seem to indicate that not all children are affected by child maltreatment in the same way. Therefore, we see a need to study the variables that mediate or moderate children's exposure to abusive situations.

Resilient children have been described as children who function adequately (Garmezy, 1991) after recovering from trauma and have a capacity for self-repair. Hughes et. al. (2001) suggest that the term "survivors of adversity" is more likely to describe resilient children because of the absence of psychopathology does not indicate that all is well or that these deficits will not appear later in life.

Masten & Coatsworth (1998) have suggested two questions that need to be addressed in order to distinguish resilience from other kinds of circumstances. These are: 1) has there been significant threat to an individual, on that implies high risk status? and 2) as an outcome, is the quality of adaptation or development positive? Masten & Coatsworth (1998) go on to suggest that parenting qualities, intellectual functioning and socioeconomic are some predictors and moderators of competence and psychopathology. Fantuzzo and Boruch (1997) identified an age older than 5 years as a characteristic of a child associated with lower risk of negative of outcomes. A study by Graham-Berman & Levendosky (1998) found that parental or adult competence provides a protective function for children who have been abused.

Werner's (1993) influential work studied children's vulnerability, or their susceptibility to negative outcomes after having been exposed to risk factors, such as poverty, stress or maltreatment. According to Werner's (1993) findings, resiliency is the result of children successfully coping with risk factors.

The studies conducted on resiliency describe several protective factors that promote competence in children at risk. Protective factors are defined as "moderators of risk and adversity that enhance good, that is developmentally appropriate outcomes" (Werner, 2000, p. 116). Most researchers in this field explain the importance of the parent-child relationship in developing competence. In the United States, parents with warm, yet structured child rearing practices, who also have high expectations for competence, are strongly linked to success and resilience in children at risk. When such a parent is unavailable, competence is linked to another caregiver who serves in a surrogate or mentoring role to the child (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Self-regulation or the ability to control one's attention, emotions, and behaviors has also been found to be a protective factor according to Masten & Coatsworth (1998). These researchers also found that self-regulation emerges early in children's development and is shaped by a child's experience and disposition.

Werner & Smith (1982) also found that a child's personality or temperament is an important predictor of children developing into a competent, confident and caring adult.

Much work needs to be done in the area of resiliency and child maltreatment. Questions of definition of resilience, risk, vulnerability and protective factors need to be

addressed. However, the concept of resilience is extremely useful in our understanding of the development and functioning of children who have abused.

### Child Abuse in Children's Literature

Child abuse is not a new subject in children's literature and in recent years with heightened interest in the consequences of child abuse, there has been an increase in the number of books for children that deal with specific forms of abuse. These books fill a real social need. Some children will become aware of child abuse and its consequences, and may recognize that a chum or schoolmate is being abused and is in need of help. In some cases books that deal with this topic might help the children who are abused to recognize the abusive behavior and report it.

Literature is a powerful medium through which children learn. Literature represents culture, and it too has changed over the years (Norton, 1987; Murray, 2000; McDaniels, 2001). Many early children's books emphasized concepts of religious morality and socially appropriate behavior. Moore & Mae (1987) ascertain that these books were unabashedly didactic and not particularly literary. Children were not portrayed with problems, they were the problem. During this period the Bible and religious stories were a large part of children's literature.

In contrast to the early books written for children (Norton, 1987, Murray, 2000), the social dimensions of the 1960s had a dramatic impact on children's books. The problem novel became particularly popular (Moore & Mae, 1987). Children's books changed from a religious focus to one that promoted entertainment or self-discovery. While many children's books still entertain through fantasy, horror, or adventure, other children's books now cover a wide range of social topics such as adoption, death,

divorce, and homelessness. According to Schank (1990) a critical part of learning from stories is to allow children to express their personal experiences or personal stories.

Senchyna (1998) indicates that people who have experienced trauma, view reading as a way to connect with the self and the world. For some it is a “mirror and a door in” while for others, literature is like a mother, it soothes and comforts (Senchyna, 1998).

According to Rudman (1995) it has been the expectation that books written for children over the age of twelve would include issues relating to real life problems. Yet books for younger children have, until recently, tried to protect them from the difficulties and socially relevant problems that they face. Rochelle (1991) asserts that the genre of realistic fiction for children began to take a serious place in schools and public libraries in the 1960s. It was during this time that children’s literature, just like the concept of childhood, began to change in its definition.

Depictions of personal violence are more prevalent in novels for young adolescents of middle and high school age than for young children (Dresang, 1999). This originates from the belief of “the child-as-innocent-and in-need of protection” ideology. This, however, does not take into consideration Nodelman’s (1997) admonition that what reading experience a child is “ready for” is a much more complex issue than age or even maturity can indicate.

The abuse depicted in children’s literature has changed in nature, with plot and character, becoming more bold and graphic. In the past the themes of incest and abuse were merely hinted at, whereas in the current literature these are central to the characters of the story. Tomlinson (1995) explains that this kind of violence is justified in children’s literature as it provides a “deeper understanding of past events and present

conditions” (p.40). He further adds that this violence should not be gratuitous, but must be an integral part of the story being told.

Bettelheim (1975) believed that stories enabled children to find their identities. In his book, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Bettelheim states that fairy tales play an important role in the healthy development of children, claiming that nothing is so enriching as traditional literature (Bettelheim, 1975). He maintains that it is through traditional tales that children, according to Bettelheim, develop solutions to their problems. Children according to Bettelheim (1975) learn that while struggling with difficulties is unavoidable, it is possible to conquer them if they are confronted directly.

Even though I have decided not to include specific analysis of folk and fairy tales in the data collection and analysis, I believe that understanding how classical literature such as myths, folks and fairy tales dealt with abuse are an important foundation for this study. The following section is an overview of the classics, folks and fairy tales and how they have portrayed child abuse in the literature.

#### *The Classics, Cautionary Tales, Folks and Fairy Tales : An Overview*

Rooted in oral tradition, folk and fairy tales have transformed from one generation to another. Drawing on various aspects of society, folktales have provided a means of expression for contributing entertainment while at the same time imparting caution, fears and values to adults and children. For example Jack Zipes (1994) in writing about French fairy tales in his book *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale*:

*“At the beginning, the literary fairy tales were written and published for adults, and though they were intended to reinforce the mores and values of French civilite, they were so symbolical and could be read on so many different levels that they were considered somewhat dangerous: social*

*behavior could not be totally dictated, prescribed, and controlled through the fairy tale, and there were subversive features in language and theme. This is one of the reasons that fairy tales were not particularly approved for children.” (p. 14)*

While folk and fairy tales have maintained important pieces of their originally storyline, they have also developed elements specific to each culture (Boudinot, 2005). Bettelheim, Warner and Zipes, all enthusiasts of folk tales agree that it is difficult to determine the exact origins and originator of folktales. In effect, according to Zipes (2001), “the literary fairy tales have evolved from the stories of oral tradition, piece by piece in a process of incremental adaptation, generation by generation in the different cultures of people who cross-fertilized the oral tales and disseminated them” (xi). Given that fear and violence have permeated all levels of society throughout the world, it is not surprising that such themes exist in folk and fairy tales. Some few examples: monsters who eat children, child beatings at the hands of parents, spells and curses on beautiful maidens illustrate the cruelty, fear and violence manifested in folk tales. While the purpose of some of these tales was to instill caution, others demonstrated how to discipline children effectively (Boudinot, 2005).

Cautionary tales can also be traced to cultures all over the world and like as folk and fairy tales they also use fear to warn children from danger. Livo (1994) cites examples of cautionary tales such as “Basket Woman,” a Native American tale about a cackling ogress who creeps up on children when they are out past their bedtimes. Whacking their heads with a crane, she collects their bodies, puts them in her basket to drop them later in a pot of boiling water, and cooks them for dinner. This tale warns children of the threat of being kidnapped if they stay out too late. In Nigeria, the

“Mommy Water” is a tale told to scare children from water ways and village wells. The story as told to children, is about a woman named “Mommy Water” who cries out for her lost child, and lives in the water. If she finds children, the story continues, that are wandering near the river, she will reach out from the water and grab their leg, dragging them with her to the water. (Livo, 1994).

We must keep in mind that perceptions of fear and violence change from generation to generation. Marina Warner examines these perceptions in her book *“From the Beast to the Blonde*, stating that in order to completely understand folktales, we must be aware of the context in which it was told and written. Bruno Bettelheim (1975) asserts that the fear and evil encountered in fairy tales is offset by forces of good. If tales present good and bad in a balanced way, it will be easier for children to judge independently. Psychologists and psychiatrists who have studied folk and fairy tales to investigate whether or not children are influenced by the cruelty, fear and violence depicted in these stories, have found that it is not so much that children are affected by what they the words, but rather by how the material is read or presented that makes a significant impact.

Of fear and violence in fairy tales, Cross (1991) writes “I think [violence is] crucial to the nature of children’s fiction. Death and danger and injury are hard, definite, dramatic things. Either they have happened, or they haven’t. They change you. Real life is like that, too.” (p. 45).

In her article, *Problems and Possibilities: U.S. Research in Children’s Literature*, Hearne (1988) writes that in the United States of America, the topic of child abuse is still limited in the education and library literature that pertains to children’s

books. She maintains that "although several terms such as: "child welfare," "cruelty to children," "discipline of children" showed up in the Cumulative Book Index, the term "child abuse" did not appear until 1976." (p.29) Findings in research conducted by Garbarino (1988) and Brinson (1994) indicate that before 1964, there were no contemporary children's books that identified abused victims as such; 8 titles were found between 1965 to 1969, from 1970 to 1974, 15 titles; from 1975 to 1979, 24 titles were found; 36 titles from 1980 to 1985, and from 1985 to 1987, 54 titles. Hearne (1988), Garbarino (1988) and Brinson's (1994) research list a few dissertations that touch on related areas such Gloria Blatt's (1972) *Violence in Children's Literature: A content analysis of a Select Sampling of Children's Literature and a Study of Children's Responses to Literary Episodes Depicting Violence*; Teresa G. Posten's (1976) *Pre-Adolescent Needs and Problems as Seen in Family life Fiction Published Between the Years of 1965 and 1975: A Content Analysis*. Hence, it was difficult for researchers to study child abuse in children's literature, until more books on the subject were made available.

Many of the articles on child abuse that are found in the library literature place current books on child abuse in context by explaining that children have long been victims of an adult-dominated society although standards for what precisely constitutes child abuse have been evolving throughout the years. Some articles describe in detail a number of laws that allowed for the abuse of children, such as the Massachusetts Bay Colony's Stubborn Child Law that was known for recommending the death penalty for "bad" children. This law was instituted in 1646 and repealed in 1973. Other articles



discuss child labor laws that existed in America and Europe in relation to the different types of child abuse currently existing (Brinson, 1994)

Among the small body of literature that deals with criteria for what constitutes a good book on child abuse are the works of Rudman (1976; 1995), Polese (1989), Baggett (1985) and Hearne (1988). These authors have listed several criteria for evaluating children's fictional books on child abuse. Central to their argument is the notion that children's books should present such a sensitive subject from a child's perspective; and that these young readers should not be asked for understanding beyond their years, nor be bludgeoned with graphic descriptions of abuse. Furthermore, they ascertain that stories that reveal a child's strength as well as his vulnerability, are better able to help young readers be prepared to deal with crises in their own lives. In addition, emotions, even painful and ambiguous ones, must be presented honestly. This way stories will not make unrealistic promises nor destroy the reader's hope for the future.

Furthermore, Hittleman (1985) recommends books that deal with child abuse in a direct manner, and include the potential of abuse from a known person as opposed to books that deal merely with interactions only with strangers. Hittleman (1985) also believes that books on child abuse that draw on perspectives from adults suggest to young readers that it is possible to grow up and lead a normal life. Robinson (1985) emphasizes the importance of realism in child abuse books, stating that books should not place such a relevant subject in the "realm of fantasy."

Some literature examines, albeit briefly, how well certain children's books realistically depict child abuse situations (Brinson, 1994). Belcher (1983) cites 18

books, listing the abused child's gender, the perpetrator's relationship to the child, the race of the child and the type of abuse. Baggett's (1985) investigation of child abuse in children's literature found that in most cases the events and circumstances depicted in the stories were substantiated by research findings. There were other articles found that provide brief annotations of child abuse in children's literature, but did not attempt to analyze their characteristics in any depth.

Another theme that emerged in the literature was that of access to children's books on child abuse. VanMeter (1991) discusses how libraries often do not include books on sensitive materials as child abuse, and if these materials exist, they tend to be inaccessible due to an absence of appropriate subject headings. An earlier study by Garbarino revealed that the term "child abuse" was not used in the Cumulative Book Index until 1976, and that Children's Book in Print places a few of the most obvious child abuse books under the heading of Child Welfare.

Much of the literature on child abuse recommends the use of bibliotherapy as a way to help children work through their recovery in the process of dealing with abuse.

### **Bibliotherapy**

Bibliotherapy literally means treating through books. This approach is as ancient as the sign above the entrance of an ancient Greek library that reads "The healing place of the soul" (Zaccaria and Moses, 1968). Bibliotherapy is a means of helping children come to terms with loss, for books have been tools for preventing and solving psychological problems for as long as both books and problems have existed (Rudman, 1995). People have since found inspiration and solace in the printed word (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1992)

Known by a number of different names, including bibliocounseling, biblioeducation, and bibliopsychology, bibliotherapy has been advocated since the 1940s by Drs. Karl and William Menninger as a treatment tool. The term bibliotherapy, according to the *Dictionary of Education*, is defined as “the use of books to influence total development, a process of interaction between the reader and literature which is used for personality assessment, adjustment, growth, clinical and mental hygiene purposes; a concept that ideas inherent in selected reading material can have a therapeutic effect upon the mental or physical ills of the reader” (Good, 1966). It is therefore clearly implied in this definition that in addition to being used as a treatment tool in clinical settings, the bibliotherapeutic approach can also be a helpful tool when working with children experiencing developmental and adjustment difficulties (Pardeck and Pardeck, 1992). Pardeck & Pardeck (1989, 1990) consider this approach particularly effective in education settings when dealing with social issues such as adoption, divorce and abuse. This approach has been considered helpful for various reasons. According to Pardeck & Pardeck (1984), bibliotherapy allows children to read about other children who have experienced problems similar to theirs and offers them solutions. Pardeck & Pardeck (1984) ascertain that through these stories children read how problems were overcome, and, therefore, are able to apply what they have learned to their real-life experiences.

### **Applications of the Bibliotherapeutic Approach**

As a process, bibliotherapy allows for flexibility when working with children in larger settings, such as the classroom. It offers children the opportunity to be both proactive and reactive. Some children will read books to learn how to handle situations

before they happen. Others will find that it is at times possible to overcome a problem that they are currently experiencing.

By making books available in the classroom or actively integrating them into the curriculum, many children can benefit from the insight they provide (Grindler, Stratton & McKenna, 1997). According to Marshall (1998), children's picture books provide an effective vehicle for creating environments of open communication and respect with young children, especially when exploring cultural perspectives and human differences.

Teachers can, through books, initiate discussions about the broad spectrum of social realities, that range from adoption, to abuse, to homelessness, that significantly impact children's lives (Owens & Nowell, 2001). Storybooks that include concrete examples in a story format, allow children the opportunity to become aware of the situations around them, as well as supporting those children who see their personal lives actively reflected in these books. Marshall (1998) believes that it is through books that children begin to understand their own personal uniqueness and background, at the same time that they begin to value the uniqueness of other children who may be different from them.

Picture books about issues such as moving or the birth of a new sibling have been readily available. In recent years, books about abuse, death, divorce, separation, disability, diseases and other social issues have drastically increased in availability (Bernstein, 1989; Ayala, 1999).

### **Bibliotherapy and Child Abuse**

In the case of child abuse Pardeck (1990) and Naitove (1985) maintain that the use of conventional treatment techniques with abused children is difficult. This is due

to the fact that children who are victims of abuse experience difficulties establishing trusting relationships. They are frequently in fear of being hit for doing the wrong things (Green, 1978). Stember (1978) found that abused children are more likely to suppress curiosity and independent action out of fear of being punished.

Given the difficulty abused children have with developing a trusting relationship in a therapy setting, Pardeck (1990) perceives bibliotherapy as offering an innovative approach. Pardeck (1990) further maintains that even though most children who have been abused are not verbal and find no enjoyment in reading, bibliotherapy can still be a useful approach. He recommends that for those children who cannot, or who refuse to read, books can either be read into tapes or be read to them, while encouraging them to share their feelings.

Chronological and emotional ages are considered to be important criteria when choosing books to be used in bibliotherapy. For the preschool child books with many illustrations and a simple format are preferred, while the older children find books with greater character development more appealing (Pardeck, 1990). Rudman, Gagne and Bernstein (1993) indicate that books allow children to cope with the number of unexpected changes that occur in their lives. Reading provides children the opportunity to identify with characters in books that experience problems similar to theirs, and allows them to call upon solutions that were once thought to be impossible (Rudman et al., 1993). They further maintain that it is this identification process that helps children feel less isolated in their problems, and realize that they are not after all, alone in their plight.

Not only does reading help children feel less isolated and identify with characters in books, but also offers them the language to express their pain. Through books children can find the venues and ideas to find help as well as a medium to share their problems with others thus becoming receptive to those who share the same experiences (Rudman, Gagne, and Bernstein, 1993).

### **The Bibliotherapy Process**

Irrespective of the sensitive nature of the issue being addressed, the maturity level of the audience, the specific details of the story, and the medium being used, there is an underlying process that characterizes books used in the bibliotherapeutic process (Jalongo, 1983; Pardeck, 1993) The stages first used by Shrodes (1949) in conjunction with bibliotherapy are: identification, catharsis, and insight. Jalongo (1983) states that theoretically the process follows a consistent pattern in which the reader or listener initially senses a common bond with the story's character, then the reader/listener, by shares vicariously in the dilemma of the character of the story, and finally has the opportunity to reflect upon personal circumstances and internalizes some coping mechanisms (Oustz, 1991).

While it is clear that bibliotherapy is heavily grounded in Freudian psychotherapy, as it is evident in the advanced stages of the process, in particular the stages of abreaction and catharsis, Pardeck & Pardeck (1986) maintain that bibliotherapy also draws on one of the tenets of learning theory: individuals learning by imitation. They further maintain that once applied to bibliotherapy, fictional characters then become positive models. They see this as particularly beneficial for those children who lack positive influence in their social environment.

Pardeck and Pardeck (1986, 1989, 1993) deem it unnecessary to emphasize the advanced stages of bibliotherapy, abreaction and catharsis, and insight and integration in the work with children. Thus, the process of bibliotherapy they consider the most beneficial approach with children is identification and projection, as they help children deal with minor adjustment problems and in particular, dealing with developmental growth.

Since bibliotherapy is not yet fully recognized as a therapy treatment, and it exists as a tool in many areas of therapy its views have only been accepted in an informal way. It is considered by some unwise to look to bibliotherapy as a cure. There are some who believe that only those professionals in the fields of psychodynamics, neurosis and psychotherapy should assume responsibility for this process (Rudman et. al., 1993).

Those who advocate the process of bibliotherapy are of the opinion that in order for it to become more effective, parents, therapists, or other responsible adults who are interested in incorporating bibliotherapy into the lives of children to help them cope with abuse there are four steps considered basic in this process: identifying the problem, book selection, presentation, and follow-up. These four steps revolve around the child's needs and require great sensitivity on behalf of the adult (Karel, 2002).

### **Identifying the Problem**

Rapport, trust and confidence are three essential conditions that need to be established even before the process of bibliotherapy can begin. Pardeck (1994) considers that both the guiding adult and the child need to identify and agree upon the problem(s) to be examined. It is only after these preliminary discussions that the

selected book that is most appropriate should be introduced to the child (Pardeck, 1994).

### Selection

Advocates of bibliotherapy (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1987; 1989) maintain that both therapists and parents alike must consider several factors when selecting a book to help a child cope with consequences of abuse. One of these factors that needs to be taken into consideration is the child himself or herself, in particular the child's chronological age, emotional age, reading level as well as any special needs of the child that are related to reading (Karel, 2002). For the selection of books to be effective and help the child understand the situation, the genre of the books must also be suitable. Generally, preschool children favor books with more illustration and simple format. As the child's age increases, books should contain greater character development and include more details. Children usually will be more interested in reading or hearing a story that include characters that are fairly close to their own age (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1989).

Once the needs of the child have been considered, it is essential that an accurate analysis of the book itself be conducted. Pardeck (1994) maintains that a book should not give the child a false sense of hope in a situation, and that it must also provide honest information about the problem. For example, books about children who have been abused should avoid sensationalism and lurid details (Rudman et. al., 1993). Books that deal with issues of child abuse must try to maintain objectivity in the plot rather than contribute to the violence and hysterics that surround this emotionally charged subject (Rudman, 1995). Some researchers also believe that it is important for books to contain believable characters and situations (Pardeck, 1994). Rudman's



(1995) work, *Children's Literature: An Issues Approach*, offers several important criteria for the storyline and particularly characters for books used to help children cope with abuse. It is also essential for books to distinguish behavior characteristic of abusive relationships from expression of affection. It is also important that books avoid the use of happy endings that are accomplished without hard work and are not realistic solutions (Rudman, 1995). To further help children relate to the characters presented within the book, Rudman (1995) suggests other criterion to be used in books that include, but are not limited to, proposing alternate ways of asking for help, limiting the use of graphic scenes of abuse and violence, reinforcing the idea that the recovery process is not a simple one, but rather a complex process that is usually long-term and that it is not always accomplished. One important criterion suggested by Rudman (1995) is that books on the topic of abuse should include ways in which the cycle of abuse was broken.

### **Presentation**

Once the book(s) have been carefully selected by the adult, taking into consideration the child's needs, the next step in the bibliotherapy process follows - presentation. This stage simply refers to the selection of an effective method by which to present the book to the child. This is considered a simple process when working with young children, although many therapists recommend suggesting rather than prescribing books to older children (Pardeck, 1994).

## Follow-Up

Pardeck (1989) suggests that for bibliotherapy to be truly effective, adults involved in this process need to allow children to express their feelings in order to resolve the issues that confront them. Bibliotherapy is considered to be more effective with young children when combined with role-playing and play therapy, as this provides them the opportunity to express their feeling and concerns (Pardeck, 1993).

### **Availability of Children's Books that Deal with Child Abuse**

While the concept of parents and therapists using the bibliotherapy process to help abused children cope with and overcome the cycle of abuse is not unusual, it is difficult to locate works of fiction that meet the criteria for an effective, well-constructed and helpful book that deals effectively with the subject of abuse. There are a great number of children's books that provide relevant information on this topic, as well as other books that oversimplify the issue.

There are some nonfiction books that offer children factual advice for children on how to deal with child abuse. In most cases, these books are used as a preventative tool since they contain, among other things, advice about appropriate and inappropriate touching by adults.

Pardeck (1993) maintains that when using bibliotherapy with abused children, one must be clear that this approach should be used in the appropriate manner, recognizing that traditional therapies do not always work with abused children. It is further suggested by Pardeck (1993) that bibliotherapy be considered as a supportive therapy rather than the therapy of choice when working with maltreated children. Drawing on the work of Thompson and Rudolph (1988), Pardeck (1993) offers the

following guidelines when implementing the bibliotherapy approach with children who have been abused:

1. Be prepared to become totally involved with the child in order to prove that people can be trusted.
2. Be able to provide a good role model by demonstrating consistent and positive behaviors in the interactions with the child.
3. In addition to establishing a positive and trusting relationship with the child, provide close attention to building and reinforcing the child's self-concept.
4. And finally, the most important dynamics of the relationship with the child is to allow him to express his/her feelings in a nonthreatening environment.

Rudman (1995) adds that it is essential that books that deal with the topic of child abuse not place blame on the victim.

### **Effectiveness of Bibliotherapy**

Advocates of bibliotherapy believe that it is the nature of the process that makes it an effective one when working with children. Given that the reading process is a private one, there are no external pressures, and therefore growth takes place (Bernstein, 1989; Rudman et. al., 1993). The reader can visit and revisit the scenes depicted in a book as many times as needed at his/her own pace, allowing him/her a better understanding of the personal experiences described in the story (Marshall, 1998). At the same time there are instances where children may feel the need to keep certain subjects a secret, as might be the case with child abuse. Bernstein (1989), Pardeck (1993) and Rudman et. al. (1993) indicate a need by the child to run through several solutions to his/her dilemma without observation or interference by others. When the

child chooses to process his/her problem with others, characters in the story are then able to provide a protective boundary. Instead of speaking about him/herself the child can instead decide to speak about the character, even as they reveal their emotions to themselves and others (Rudman et. al., 1995).

Children who are trying to cope with difficult situations in their lives often feel isolated. Reading about characters with similar problems may help to strengthen the child's feeling of belonging. The child may experience a sense of comfort by realizing that he or she is not alone in his/her suffering.

### **Limitations of Bibliotherapy**

There are many limitations to the process of bibliotherapy. Rudman et al. (1993) maintain that there is very little empirical evidence as to the influence that the reading materials have on the individual, therefore the imaginary alliance between the reader and the fictional characters of the story may rely on intention rather than research. Therefore, one must not rely on this approach as the only solution. Bibliotherapy cannot solve all problems and sometimes may well accentuate fears and promote rationalization in place of change (Pardeck, 1993). Furthermore, Gold and Gloade (1988) suggest that the reasons for the lack of effectiveness of bibliotherapy with fiction do not lie with the books themselves, but rather with the results of the research itself.

Research on fiction is certainly very difficult due to the number of variables involved and the difficulty of control. Reading fiction cannot be easily separated from other sensory experiences over the real time necessary for its process. The complexity of human "attitude," "perception," or "belief" is such that isolating and measuring the role of a reading experience in producing a cognitive shift is likely to be a discouraging activity. On the other hand, the appetite for fiction is

ancient and widespread and suggests an important role in human cognition (as cited in Pardeck & Pardeck, 1998, p. 6).

Despite its limitations, support for the bibliotherapy approach has increased in the 1990s. Those who advocate this approach have found it to promote emotional catharsis, active problem solving, and provide insight into problems. Pardeck & Pardeck (1998) have stated that bibliotherapy has been effective when used with juvenile literature in the work with children of blended families and when dealing with the problems of homeless children. Finally, researchers in this field (Bernstein, 1989; Pardeck, 1993; Rudman et. al., 1993) believe it is essential to bear in mind that bibliotherapy is not a solution for all problems.

It is also important to recognize that while bibliotherapy may provide insight into problems, it is also considered prescriptive in its approach. Schrank & Engels (1981) suggested that bibliotherapy be viewed only as a tool to be used only when it contributes to satisfactory outcome overall. Crago (1999) states that the chances of bibliotherapy will be greater if it is understood as an opportunity for affirming and extending an individual personality rather than being a cure or a way of changing a person.

Since reading provides the comfort of knowing that one is not alone and is also a vicarious experience, there exists the possibility that a child will seek his or her privacy and safety than to experience rather than the a counselor or therapist's office (Crago, 1999). Furthermore, Crago (1999) maintains that it is easier to put a book down than it is to leave a counselor or therapist's office.

Finally, while one must consider both the benefits and the limitations of the bibliotherapeutic process, it is also essential that we keep in mind that children, in

particular young children, may have difficulties confronting their abuse directly. In this case, books that have been appropriately selected by an adult guide may be helpful in helping the child through his or her recovery (Rudman, personal communication 2005). In the same way, books may also provide children, who themselves have not experienced abuse, the opportunity to think about and discuss this topic, and at the same time provide much needed support to their afflicted peers (Rudman, personal communication 2005).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Informed by the work of Botelho (2003, 2004) and Botelho & Rudman (forthcoming), this study is a critical multicultural analysis of child abuse in children's literature. A critical approach requires readers to interrogate the power structures that discriminate against certain groups and privilege others. "Stories told or written for children are often indicators of the dominant values within a society. Various times and cultures reveal various attitudes, not only toward children but also towards life and society" (Moynihan, 1988, p. 93).

This study contributes a process by which to analyze the effectiveness and quality of the books in which child abuse is rendered in children's literature. In order to examine how abuse is portrayed in literature, I use a multilayered lens drawing upon criteria generated by experts in bibliotherapy, psychology, sociology and critics of children's literature. I also include an inquiry into how power is assigned and played out. I apply the criteria designated by Rudman (1995) who asserts that "an issues approach to children's literature builds in an examination and clarification of values; it also fosters the development of those skills defined as critical reading, comprehension and critical thinking." (p. 6)

This study includes books written for audiences of kindergarten to 9th grade, in the genres of non-fiction, picture books, short stories, novels, memoirs, and poetry.

Roderick McGillis (1996), one of the theorists upon whom Botelho (2003, 2004) builds critical multicultural analysis, states that all reading is political, suggesting that utilizing a critical lens will not only encourage readers to elucidate their ideological

position, but will also reveal political and ideological positions of the text. Critical multicultural analysis (Botelho 2003, 2004; Botelho & Rudman, forthcoming) uncovers systemic structures that maintain repressive social practices and, as further stated by Botelho (2003, 2004), Botelho & Rudman (forthcoming) once these social inequities are revealed, new social worlds can be re-imagined. As Freire (1970) indicated, critical literacy is about reading the “word and the world” and doing something about it.

### Data Collection

The collection of children’s books I used to conduct this study is intended for children between the ages of 4 and 14. The first step toward the completion of this study was to gather a list of existing children’s literature about child abuse. In order to do this, I used Rudman’s (1995) annotated bibliography included in Chapter 11 of *Children’s Literature: An Issues Approach*. I conducted other database searches of the Comprehensive Children’s Literature Database, Forthcoming Books, and the most recent issues of *Children’s Books in Print* and the website of *The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*. Additional information was gathered from books and journals concerned with children’s literature, such as the *Horn Book Magazine*. The following sources were also used in compiling the list: *Children’s Catalog* and its supplements, *Elementary School Library Collection*, and *The Best in Children’s Books*.

The subject headings used in searching these sources included “child abuse,” “child maltreatment,” “sexual abuse,” “physical abuse,” “abuse,” and “neglect.” These specific keywords were searched in the online catalogs of the University of Massachusetts Amherst and at the Amherst Jones libraries. Next, the online catalogs at the University of Massachusetts were searched using Library of Congress subject



headings “Child Abuse – Fiction,” Child Maltreatment – Fiction.” Concurrently, I contacted experts on children’s literature for names of additional children’s books in which child abuse was portrayed, as well as recommendations for books which should not be included in the list. To this list I also added recommendations from social services agencies in the area such as the Child Development Center in Northampton and the Children’s Advocacy Center in Baystate Medical Center in Springfield.

Upon completion of the list of existing children’s literature on child abuse, and once the text collection was gathered, I analyzed the books for whether or not they met the study’s general criteria, that is, (a) whether they featured characters in the United States who had been abused, (b) whether the story portrayed a real life situation, (c) if the story was written at the readability level of elementary school children from kindergarten to ninth grade, (d) that the story was in circulation or available in 2005.

After reading a description of each book along with critiques and reviews of the books, I noted a pattern of three different categories of abuse, that enabled me to group the books according to emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. These patterns were then analyzed in light of the recommendations by experts in the fields of child abuse, children’s literature and bibliotherapy to establish how well they complied with these expert recommendations. The criteria and guidelines utilized are:

Rudman’s (1995) criteria for evaluating books dealing with abuse:

1. never blame the victim or expect a child to shoulder the entire responsibility for stopping the abuse.
2. reflect the fact that abusers represent all classes, all economic and social backgrounds, and both genders. The norm should not be that they are poor and

non-Caucasian [people of color] (This criterion can only be met if there is sufficient number of books assembled in the collection).

3. Avoid easy solutions which are not helpful or realistic. Happy endings that occur without hard work and knowledgeable interaction make for poor literature and convey harmful messages. For example, if the abuser magically reforms at the end of the book without any apparent intervention, this would broadcast detrimental expectations for the child reader.
4. suggest alternative ways of getting help. For example, provide models for how people sought and received aid and also include community resources that the child can access.
5. avoid graphic scenes of abuse and violence.

#### Analysis of the Data

After a first reading of the books, I gathered them according to categories (emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse). I then re-read the books using Rudman's (1995) criteria, and culled those books that violated many of the key criteria. I then sorted the books into categories of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse and wrote a brief summary of each book. It became apparent that emotional abuse was evident in every book. On the other hand, it was difficult to locate books in which the only abuse was emotional, and so for the purpose of this study I decided to focus on the two categories of physical and sexual abuse making sure to incorporate the emotional aspects into each analysis.

I then conducted a third reading of each group of books, and this time to followed it with a brief analysis of each book. I charted the story grammar of each book

(including title, author, genre, age, type of abuse and themes and patterns) and the emotional content of each story, e.g. in *Laurie Tells* we find emotions of guilt, shame, anger, loneliness and empowerment. After a fourth re-reading of each group of books, I started comparing and contrasting the books within each category. I then re-read the books once more, and this time applied an in-depth analysis using Rudman's (1995) criteria interlaced with Botelho & Rudman's (forthcoming) power continuum. A final reading of the books was done in order to see if I could draw conclusions not only on the isolated individual books, but on the categories and the entire collection of books.

I took each of the seven criteria determined by Rudman (1995) and asked the following questions of each book:

1. Is the child blamed for the abuse? Is there subtle blame? Is there self-blame?
2. Does this story reflect the fact that abusers represent all classes, economic and social backgrounds? Are both genders represented? If they, how are they represented? Is the treatment of the various characters equitable? Are there stereotypes in the way certain classes, or economic and social backgrounds are portrayed?
3. Does this book avoid easy solutions? Is the ending realistic? What kind of message does this story convey? Does it give the child reader false hopes? Does the ending provide opportunities for discussion?
4. Does the book provide alternative ways of getting help? Does it offer a list of resources easily accessible to children? To parents? To educators? Does it mention the importance of telling someone about the abuse?

5. Does the story avoid graphic scenes of abuse and violence? Is the language used certain to instill fear in children?

After thoroughly analyzing each book to answer these questions, I then applied the power continuum (Botelho & Rudman, forthcoming) to each book:

1. Oppression - who exercised it? What was its nature?
2. Collusion - did collusion exist? If so, who was colluding in the story? What was the nature? Did the characters who colluded benefited from the situation? Were the characters passive observers? Bystanders?
3. Resistance – which character(s) employed resistance against the abuse? What was its nature? What caused the resistance? What was the effect?
4. Agency – did character(s) attain agency at any point in the story? How? What form did the agency take?

The analysis consisted of two phases. The first, was to determine whether or not the books met the criteria for selection established by Rudman (1995). I separated the books into categories of physical and sexual abuse. A multilayered critiquing followed, including the application of sociological lenses, psychological filters or lenses and the power criteria established by Botelho & Rudman's (forthcoming): 1) oppression; 2) collusion; 3) resistance; and, 4) agency.

### **Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

This study includes books for children from preschool age to early adolescence. It explores in-depth two types of child abuse: a) physical abuse, and b) sexual abuse. It also address emotional abuse embedded in the stories.

Although I focused on books where the setting was the United States, I have made one or two exceptions, and I will discuss them within the context of the study. Books that were selected for the analysis were mostly centered in the United States.

The text collection also covers genres such as: non-fiction, memoirs, narratives, realistic fiction, poetry, and picture books.

Although fairy tales (e.g. *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*), folktales and some of the best known classics (e.g. *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* and *The Little Princess*) contain allusions to child abuse, I do not include them in the present study. (See recommendations for further research). I will focus on more contemporary work specifically dealing with child abuse. I allude to fairy tales as well as to cautionary tales in order to create a timeline that illustrates how childhood was valued, but I do not analyze them in-depth. No folk tales were included in the study nor were long ago classics. Initially I intended to focus my study on books dealing with abuse that were written specifically for children between ages 3 and 5. However, as I sampled a certain number of books, most of the books for young children did not meet the criteria, so I focused on books for older children between ages 8 and 14. No more than three books for young children were included.

Of a sample of over 30 books on child abuse, I selected 18 books on which to conduct an in-depth analysis. I restricted these books to those that dealt with family and interpersonal violence. These criteria excluded books that dealt with government sponsored abuse. Due to the nature of my research questions, I did not include books that dealt with either slavery (because it is societal and systemic abuse rather than an individual abuse) or books dealing with gang related peer abuse (these may be

considered for further research). My focus is on the individual child and his or her family.

### The Researcher in the Study

I have not found it easy to give a good explanation for my commitment to the field of child abuse. On several occasions, in fact, I have tried to persuade myself to abandon this endeavor to those whom I believe are more qualified by their expertise and/or knowledge to conduct research in the field. However, when I consider my lived experiences instead of expert scholarship and knowledge, I know I can speak my piece on the subject. I say this not only because like everyone else I have been a child, but also like so many others, I experienced my first encounter with abuse at a young age. To this day the experience and the circumstances remain vivid as I now think about them. On many occasions I have wondered why the incident shaped me in a way I had not expected.

It seems to me that I became a teacher at least in part because I wanted to make sure that children who also had experienced similar circumstances, and who at some point in their lives had felt they had been treated as less than fully human, had felt invisible (yet, one more indignity from which we must be delivered before we become aware of our own suffering), or had learned to be ashamed of their rage and grief, found in me and in my classroom what Garbarino (1990) and other researchers have firmly identified and established as the protective relationship that would enable them to find constructive answers (to their situations) and help them become emotionally healthy.

I approach this study from my perspective as a middle/working class ethnic minority, well educated, Hispanic. At the age of 28 I moved to the United States to

pursue my undergraduate degree in Virginia. There were many things that I liked about living in the U.S., in particular a sense of independence and a lifestyle that I felt was more congruent with my life at that point. However, the transition from living in Honduras to my years in the United States was filled with a range of emotions that included but were not limited to feelings of inferiority and isolation. One of the most difficult things was the feeling of being thought of as less intelligent because of my ethnicity. I attribute my acculturation to some resilient aspects of my personality. I have become fully bicultural and am able to walk in both worlds.

As an early childhood teacher I committed myself to help my students develop their proficiency in English and knowledge of American culture, while at the same time valuing their native language and culture. One of my goals as an educator is to empower children by helping them recognize the value of education, and to critically interrogate the social structures in which they live. I also view education as a medium by which children cannot only learn but question issues of power, history, as well issues of individual and collective agency (Giroux, 1992).

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Because of the prevalence of abuse in our society, a critical analysis of the way literature treats child abuse is necessary. In this chapter I will provide an extended analysis of 18 books on abuse and discuss the implications of using books to address this serious and pervasive problem. The books selected for the study have been divided according to two categories of abuse: physical and sexual. A brief summary of each book is included. Each book is analyzed according to a set of criteria established in Chapters I and III. My purpose is to examine how abuse is rendered in each book, and to determine how each book could be used with youthful readers.

The data here consist of books about abuse and the analysis will reflect how the evolution of abuse is treated and how society provides, or does not, support systems for survivors of abuse. Grounding my study in the theoretical framework of critical multicultural analysis (Botelho & Rudman, forthcoming), I will examine:

1. How child abuse is depicted in children's literature?
2. What are the social messages or discourses conveyed by books that deal with the topic of child abuse?
3. Who is taking part in the abuse and who is interrupting it?

These findings will be discussed in Chapter V.

To illustrate how child abuse has been constructed over time and how we as a society have begun to understand the consequences for children victims of abuse, I have organized the analysis of the books under each heading in chronological order. In addition to Rudman's criteria for evaluating books that deal with child abuse, I will also



examine what are the implications for the adult reader; the implications for the community and society, and what are the implications for the child.

The following tables will guide the analysis of my text collection.

Table 1 (see Chapter III)

<b>Criteria for evaluating books dealing with child abuse (Rudman, 1995)</b>
1. Never blame the victim
2. Reflect the fact that abusers represent all classes, all economic and social backgrounds, and both genders.
3. Avoid easy solutions, which are not helpful or realistic. Happy endings that occur without hard work and knowledgeable interaction make for poor literature and convey harmful messages.
4. Suggest alternative ways of getting help.
5. Avoid graphic scenes of abuse and violence.

Table 2 (see Chapter III)

<b>Four levels of power in Critical Multicultural Analysis (Botelho &amp; Rudman, forthcoming)</b>
1. Oppression
2. Collusion
3. Resistance
4. Agency

### Physical Abuse

Abuse in all its forms has damaging consequences for the children, but physical abuse is the form of maltreatment that results in visible wounds. Physical abuse can escalate from a light spanking to a brutal beating that will result in irreparable damage.

The characters in the stories I have analyzed, all have encountered physical abuse at the hands of either a parent or someone they trust and as a consequence exhibit a range of characteristics associated with its effects.

*Dorp Dead* was written in 1965 and since reprinted in 2003. It was considered by several reviewers to be a groundbreaking book, in that it dealt with child abuse at a time when the term "battered child" (Kempe & Hefler, 1963) had recently been defined. Furthermore, the topic of abuse had not yet achieved the significance it did in subsequent years. This story centers around the life of eleven year old orphan, Gilly Ground, a young boy who is placed as an apprentice with the eccentric town ladder-maker Mr. Kobalt. Gilly happily anticipates leaving the orphanage and having his own room. As he settles into his new routine as apprentice to Mr. Kobalt, Gilly does not realize he is no longer interacting with other children, his only companion besides Kobalt, is a dog named Mash, but at first Gilly enjoys the solitude and the established rapport with the dog.

Mr. Kobalt barely speaks to Gilly, and when he does, it is only to give him orders. Gilly tries to engage Mr. Kobalt in conversation, without results. As days go by, whenever Gilly ventures into town, he realizes he is being called "Silly Gilly, Kobalt's goblin!" (p.42) He is afraid he is becoming as eccentric as Kobalt. On one of his early trips to the village, Gilly meets a stranger, who is quiet but kind to him. Gilly refers to him as The Hunter.

One day, Gilly notices small drops of blood on the floor. He discovers they belong to Mash, and that they are a result of a beating from Kobalt. Gilly begins to suspect that things might not be so idyllic as he first thought. He asks Kobalt why he beat Mash, and Kobalt responds "Mash must learn to die." (p.56) Shortly after that incident, Gilly begins to realize that he has become Kobalt's prisoner, and what's more he is as disposable as Mash, who has been left outside to die.

As Gilly ponders about his future, should he stay under Kobalt's cruel household, or go to a city orphanage, he encounters The Hunter once again. Worried about the cage Kobalt is rebuilding—a cage where Mash used to be kept—Gilly begins to devise his escape. One night he realizes that his only hope of survival is to escape immediately, even if he loses his life in the attempt. After Kobalt has gone to bed, he escapes. Gilly makes it outside, but the relief is short-lived as Kobalt has come after him. As Kobalt is about to hit Gilly with a hammer, Mash comes to his rescue, attacking Kobalt. Both Gilly and Mash leave Kobalt lying on the ground and make their way to the village. Gilly understands that there is one thing he needs to do in order to leave his past. He stops in front of Kobalt's square stone house and with a sharp-edged pebble scratches two words "DORP DEAD!" (p. 88). These words, are for Gilly, "an ending before his beginning." (p. 88). It is not until much later, after The Hunter has adopted Gilly and Mash, and Gilly is now attending school that Gilly recognizes he misspelled the word drop.

Narrated in first person, and through metaphors of cells, bars, and cages, the author Julia Cunningham provides the reader an extraordinary look into the pain, the loneliness and the desire for genuine affection that children who are physically abused experience. This story aptly points to the powerlessness and lack of agency abused children know so well.

Far from being a manual on how to deal with abuse, this story utilizes elements of a psychological thriller throughout the plot. This sometimes makes the message of the narrative confusing. In looking at how the story meets the criteria one sees that in a

story sequence, Gilly wonders if he is becoming an eccentric like Mr. Kobalt. Other than that, there are no references to placing blame on Gilly for the abuse.

We can infer from the information in the book that the community where the story develops is working class. The description of Gilly's living conditions both at the orphanage and at Mr. Kobalt's house, also give us a clear idea of their barebones day to day existence.

There are no genders represented in the story other than the male characters. The book does not present a realistic ending. We do not have a sense of how things were resolved after Gilly's quasi-attack by Mr. Kobalt. How do Dorp and Mash end up living with The Hunter? We know very little about The Hunter; he is a stranger who approaches Gilly in the solitude of the forest. The message of trusting a stranger is confusing, and for younger children, may be dangerous. Possibly due to the fact that the story was written in 1965, when we still knew very little about child abuse and what was needed to provide support, there is no mention of what one can do to find help or as an ally to provide alternative ways of finding support. A new edition of *Dorp Dead* was released in 2003, and one would hope it includes sources of support for anyone who identifies him or herself with the main character of this story.

As for including graphic scenes of abuse and violence, there are two incidents where, even if the abuse and violence are not described in detail, they are implied forcefully and can be upsetting for a young child to read without the proper support from adults.

In summary, this book, while considered groundbreaking for dealing with child abuse in 1965, nevertheless requires clarification in certain passages, such as the one

where Gilly encounters The Hunter. Moreover, how does Gilly become The Hunter's son? What has happened to Mr. Kobalt? Who is helping Gilly deal with the effects of abuse? How is Gilly coping with the consequences? Are there any support systems available to him? These are questions one must consider when making use of the book.

*The Bears' House*, a National Book Award nominee, is a story written by Marilyn Sachs that deals with physical and emotional abuse as well as neglect. The child abuse that occurs in this story is in the form of sibling abuse and bullying. It is poignant and heartbreaking. At the center of the story is a young girl who dreams of winning her teacher's Bear House at the end of the school. At home she is physically abused by her siblings, abandoned by her father, neglected by her mother and ostracized at school by her classmates. At times she is even physically abused by her classmates.

Fran Ellen, the main character, is fascinated with her teacher's bear house and daydreams of how different her life would be if only she had a family like the bears'. At home things seem to be falling apart with her mother under a serious depression, and depending on welfare. This is complicated by her siblings not pulling their weight helping at home, except for her older brother. She fears being separated from her siblings, in particular from her baby sister whom she adores and takes care of. At school, her teacher is becoming suspicious of her frequent absences during recess.

Because she lives close to school, Fran Ellen usually goes home to check on her baby sister and her mother. One day her classmates tell on her and her teacher begins to question her, demanding that her mother meet with her. When Fran Ellen can no longer lie her way out, her teacher visits her home and sees what has been troubling Fran Ellen all this time.

Miss Thompson, the teacher, continues to ask about her family; when will her dad be back, how is her mother feeling, and is their aunt Marcie staying with them? Fran Ellen lies, she is more concerned with what is going to happen to the bears' house now that summer is getting closer. She is now more involved in the story life of the bears than in her own life, with the exception of Flora, her baby sister.

Acknowledging Fran Ellen's efforts to change -- she is no longer involved in fights with her classmates and has stopped sucking her thumb, Miss Thompson tells the class that Fran Ellen has won the bears' house. The children are not happy with the decision and in their cruel way promise all ways of retaliation to Fran Ellen, who in turn does not care, as she plans to be inside her apartment the entire summer. Since nobody agrees to help Fran Ellen carry the house home, Miss Thompson does and when she enters the apartment discovers Flora with an ugly rash and being fed Kool Aid. Miss Thompson realizes the ordeal that Fran Ellen has been going through trying to keep her family from being separated. She knows what she must do, and so does Fran Ellen. They will be separated and placed in foster homes. Knowing this, she turns to the bears' house and begins interacting with the play dolls as if they were real. One is left with the idea that this fantasy world is now her reality.

This story successfully draws attention to the effects of an inadequate social support systems that force children to shoulder adult responsibilities. This deftly crafted story allows us an intimate look at the angst of a young girl when she faces being separated from her family. Is there equitable representation of economic class, social background and gender in this story? We can conclude that the family struggles financially since the father left. We know Fran Ellen's mother is out of work and

depressed. There are references to Fran Ellen's unkempt appearance and to her attempts to have her siblings cooperate in maintaining order in the house. The story is made all the more poignant because it is written from Fran Ellen's perspective and, essentially she is a lovable child.

The ending of the story is not a happy one. It suggests that rather than face the dismantling of her family, Fran Ellen prefers to inhabit the fantasy world of the Bear family. The conclusion to this story leaves the reader to question whether or not Fran Ellen has had a psychotic episode. How delusional is she? To what extent is she losing touch with reality and immersing herself in the world of the Bears' House. What this story does very well is point out how detrimental it is for a family to have no family or community support in a time of crises.

*December's Tale (1976)* is another story written by Marilyn Sachs. It takes place in the 1940s and tells the story of Myra Fine who, along with her younger brother Henry, is placed in foster care. They are both unhappy and abused by their cruel foster mother, Mrs. Smith. At the center of this story is Myra's admiration for Joan of Arc. Myra identifies with her so much that she has conversations with the imaginary Joan of Arc. Her mother has abandoned them twice and it seems like the second time she leaves them is for good. Her family life is a debacle, her father is remarried to a woman with two children of her own and expecting a third one. Thus, his reasoning for placing his two young children in foster care is his lack of money and the need to care for his new child.

In the care of Mrs. Smith, Myra cries a lot. The only time she is not crying is when she is having conversations with Joan of Arc. Myra also relies on her friend Mrs.

Singer, an older woman who has always been kind to her and Henry. Mrs. Singer is trying to convince Myra's father to take his children to live with him. Meanwhile, at their foster home, Myra's brother Henry is being physically abused by Mrs. Smith. There is nothing Henry can do right. She always finds a reason to beat him, excusing it by saying it's for his own good. Henry has learned to hit her back, even though the beatings are stronger afterwards. Soon, Mrs. Smith beats Henry for no reason at all. The story reaches its climax when even though Myra has done something to infuriate Mrs. Smith, she takes her anger and frustration out on Henry and beats him with a belt buckle until he is almost unconscious.

Myra takes Henry, who is seriously beaten and they leave Mrs. Smith's house. Myra calls on Joan of Arc to help them, but realizes it is up to her to take charge and protect them both. She promises Henry that never again will she let anyone hurt him. The story ends with the two siblings at Mrs. Singer's door on the *Shabbes (Jewish Sabbath)*.

The plot of this story is highly sensitive in that it depicts physical abuse, and child neglect and episodes that are almost psychotic. While not physically abused in the story, Myra experiences neglect from her father and abandonment from her mother. Left in charge of her younger brother, she blames Henry for everything that goes wrong in their life. Myra's only way of coping is through her imaginary conversations with Joan of Arc.

In similar fashion to the *Bears' House*, *A December's Tale* contains fantasy as a way of coping with circumstances beyond the character's control. While Fran Ellen



dreams of having a life like the one led by the Bears, Myra in this story wants to save the world or do something of significance, like Joan of Arc.

The author is careful not to place blame on either Myra or Henry for their abuse and neglect. In effect, she draws our attention to the plight of some children placed in foster care during the time period in which this story took place.

A working class background is depicted in the story. Mrs. Smith, Myra and Henry's foster mother, occupies the back rooms of the office that she cleans. She receives checks from the state to buy food and clothing for Myra and Henry. Her actions towards Myra and Henry give a clear picture that the main reason she took them in was to receive compensation from the state to supplement her income. From the beginning of the story, we learn that both young children have been placed in foster care because their father has remarried, his new wife is expecting a baby, and he cannot provide for his children.

As Myra's conflicting feelings of anger and hate for her brother, foster family and at times for her friend, Mrs. Singer, escalate, Henry's physical abuse intensifies. The development of the story does not provide easy solutions to their dilemma. Myra is faced with making difficult decisions for a child her age. She realizes the danger her brother is in, she has gone through the proper channels calling the social service agency for help with no results. Rather than seeing her younger brother continuously abused, she makes the decision to leave. This is not in any way an easy solution, or, to my view, contrived. The message conveyed by its conclusion can be confusing but not dangerous. To some readers, the ending might seem unrealistic, but the high numbers

of runaway children in our society attest to the difficult decisions some children are faced with at a young age.

The abuse is graphic. It is difficult for one to read about a young child being beaten with the buckle of a belt to the point where he is left almost unconscious. Although the author did not include specific details of the physical abuse, the picture is clear.

What is significant after reading this story is the open-endedness. Much is left unresolved that leaves the readers imagining different scenarios involving the Myra and Henry. What will happen at Mrs. Singer's? Will she take them in? If so, for how long will they stay? What about Henry? Will he be able to recover emotionally? What will happen to Myra? Will she seek solace in her friendship with an imaginary Joan of Arc? Or another strong female character perhaps?

Myra's feelings of anguish, conveyed by the author Marilyn Sachs, makes this story seem very realistic. The young child's attempts to make sense of her parents' abandonment, and her confusing feelings about her younger brother, (she likes his spirited nature, yet she resents him for having to take care of him), make an impact. We want to root for Myra and Henry because we watch them endure what no child should, abuse and neglect.

Written by Muriel Stanek and illustrated by Helen Cogancherry, *Don't Hurt Me Mama* (1983) tells the story of a young girl and her mother dealing with child abuse as a consequence of the mother's alcoholism. From the narration in first person by the young girl, who, like the mother, remains nameless throughout the story, we learn that they are just the two of them. The father left earlier that year and changes ensued.

They could not afford to continue living in their house anymore and moved to a smaller apartment in the city. Since moving to their new home they no longer enjoy the same activities as before, such as going to church and socializing with other church members.

Finding herself out of a job, the mother becomes depressed and begins to drink. It is then when the physical abuse begins, sometimes for no apparent reason. One day while waiting for her mother, the child befriends an older neighbor Sarah, and her dog, Sam. The mother arrives home shortly after, drunk once again and the child puts her to bed. The next morning the child accidentally spills some milk and the mother hits her with a belt. Immediately the mother regrets the incident and tries to apologize to her daughter.

At school the child is sent to the infirmary by her teacher. The nurse becomes concerned as she sees the bruises on the child's arms and legs. She asks the child "how did this happen?" and the child refuses to tell. She gently asks her "Did someone beat you?" "Was it your mother?" After the child admits that indeed it was her mother, the nurse assures her that it was not her fault and explains how her mother is having many problems and that they need to find her some help. The child feels comforted by the nurse and safe enough to talk to her again. That afternoon the child's mother is waiting for her after school and once again apologizes for hitting her earlier that day. The child finds comfort in her mother and hugs her. Her mother then explains that she has spoken to a social worker, who accompanied her to a community health center. A job is in the works for the mother. An arrangement is made with their neighbor Mrs. Hawkins to watch the child while her mother attends meetings at the community health center.

The story ends with the mother and child once again attending church. This ending leaves the reader with the assumption that the mother has found support in the community group she attends and the child has found in the school nurse an ally whom she can trust.

The illustrations in this story are neutral; they do not contradict the text and are in keeping with the narrative. They display emotions as the story unfolds: sadness, anger, shame and happiness, which would appeal to young children. The story also showcases brief episodes in their lives before the mother began to drink. The story does not place blame on the young child for her physical abuse, but it does illustrate the feelings of guilt that characterize children who suffer physical abuse.

The school nurse character is an ally to the young child. First, she lets the child know she is not to blame for her mother hitting her with a belt, and later she helps the mother find support in a community health center.

The ending of the story happens too fast, too soon. We do not have a clear sense of how the process works. Whom did the school nurse contact to gain the mother entry to the support group? Knowing well how the bureaucracy of social agencies works, what expedited the process to have a case worker meet with the mother?

On the other hand the story does leave the reader with awareness that the abuse was a result of the mother's drinking problem, triggered by her depression, loneliness, and isolation. Although this does not justify the physical abuse, it does provide one explanation for the abusive behavior on the mother's part. Furthermore, it allows us to consider the difference that proper support systems make in a situation as the one presented in this story.

The book seems almost intended to be a manual for children who are being abused. The story line is thin. Because of this it is hard to become involved with the characters. The book does not have an emotional impact on the reader and the ending is too facile to be truly effective, but the messages of the importance of the outside community are useful.

*Don't Hurt Laurie (1977)* written by Willo Davis Roberts is narrated by Laurie, the main character, and deals with the physical abuse she experiences at the hands of her mother. Laurie is 11 years old, she lives with her mother Annabelle, stepsiblings Tim who is eight and Shelley who is four, and her stepfather Jack. When the story begins, Laurie is being treated at the hospital for an injury to her hand. As she leaves the hospital with her mother, an attending nurse at the reception desk comments on previous visits Laurie has made to the hospital either a broken collarbone, a broken arm, a burn. Laurie can't do anything right according to her mother. There is always an excuse for her to get beaten.

Her stepbrother Tim knows about the abuse, and while he asks Laurie why she has not mentioned it to anyone before, for a long while he does nothing to help. The stepfather is unaware of what is happening, probably because he frequently is away on business trips. Laurie realizes how often they have to move to a different neighborhood, and therefore a new school. It usually occurs when someone at the hospital recognizes Laurie from her many trips to be treated for one injury or another. This is a picture of a repeatedly abused child.

The family moves this time to a duplex, where Laurie once again starts attending a new school. She also meets George, a young boy who suffers from a bone disease

and is in and out of the hospital often. Together with Tim, they establish a friendship with George, until Annabelle becomes suspicious and resentful of the friendship. She forbids Laurie to continue the friendship. When Laurie refuses, Annabelle proceeds to beat her. This time Tim intervenes to protect Laurie, and gets hit by Annabelle with a poker. Laurie and Tim flee to his grandmother's house taking Shelley with them. It is here that Laurie and Tim tell Nell, (Tim and Shelley's grandmother) of Laurie's physical abuse at the hands of her mother.

When confronted by both Nell and Jack, Annabelle denies it and blames Laurie for her injuries. The story ends with Annabelle going to a medical facility to get treatment, and the children, including Laurie, spending the summer with Jack's mother Nell. Jack uses Annabelle's own abuse as a child to excuse her abuse of Laurie.

The author is clear about not placing blame on Laurie for the abuse. Laurie is shown as a complex character. She also comes to life as an individual. Laurie recognizes that the abuse is wrong, and at the same time understands there is little she can do about her situation given that she is only eleven years old. However, that doesn't stop her from leading her life as normally as possible, making new friends at school and her new neighborhood while at the same time hoping her stepfather will take notice of her dilemma.

There are few descriptions given of their home. We know only that it is in an apartment building. The interactions at home are also sparse. When Annabelle addresses Laurie it is only to reprimand and belittle her. It appears the author does not want to waste time on details that are of no importance to the story. The setting becomes more detailed when the children are playing in the nearby woods. We hear

about the details of the creek, the trees, the flowering bushes. The interactions between Laurie, her stepbrother Tim and their new friend are also more animated in this setting. The settings are closely linked to Laurie's, Annabelle's character and slowly reveal each of the characters to us.

The story is fair in reflecting both genders. We have just enough information to know that the father is a traveling businessman, that Annabelle does not work out of the house, and they seem to move quite frequently. We do not, however, get a clear sense of the diversity of their community. The few drawings in the story do indicate that all the characters are white.

The conflict escalates from the opening sentence in the story and keeps building until the resolution. In relation to the seriousness of the topic, the solution is too fast paced. The stepfather who has lived in the same household as Laurie for six months has no indication of the abuse she is suffering. This in itself raises questions – how did the father remain ignorant of the abuse? Why didn't Laurie's bruises raise any suspicions in him? These are clear examples of collusion, which I will discuss in more detail in my conclusions.

The younger stepbrother Tim, eight years old, does not have a first hand account of the physical abuse, but questions why Laurie gets hurt so easily and finally discovers the reason. Although Tim is aware of the abuse, he also colludes by remaining silent.

Laurie herself also colludes in her own abuse. She thinks about telling, but does not speak to any responsible adult about it. The solutions are real in terms of having the mother get medical help and confront her own abuse issues, they just happen to easily. We only know that Annabelle was abused as a child. This does not justify the severe

beatings she inflicts on her daughter. It only suggests one of many possibilities for its occurrence.

Carolyn Coman's, Newbery Honor book and National Book Award finalist, *What Jamie Saw* (1995) is a story told from eight year old Jamie's point of view and it chronicles what happens the day Jamie, his mother and his baby sister Nin leave their abusive home to start a new life. The introduction of the book begins with "When Jamie saw Van throw the baby, saw Van throw his little sister Nin, when Jamie saw Van throw his baby sister Nin, then they moved." (p. 7). This scene serves to set the stage for an atmosphere of fear. Further personal abuse and violence can be expected.

The story then proceeds to describe a few days in the lives of Jamie, his mother Patty and his baby sister Nin, as they temporarily move in with their friend Earl and try starting a new life. As Jamie, his mother Patty, and his baby sister Nin are fleeing their home, Jamie is afraid he forgot his magic book and trick back in the house and as he is close to falling asleep he asks his mom "Did you bring my magic?" and then again with real urgency, "Did you bring my magic?" (p. 17) It is not until his mother answers "Yes," "it's in the bag," (p. 18) that Jamie feels the pounding on his heart stop and falls asleep.

As the story continues, Jamie finds comfort in the presence of Earl. He continually wishes for Earl to be more than his mother's friend, particularly has no memories of his father and has ambivalent feelings towards Van. The book never explicitly defines child abuse; however, through Jamie's day to day account of their lives as well as a few recollections of their past life, the reader has insight into what has led the family to flee to the woods in New Hampshire. The story of Jamie and his



family is not one that assures readers that there is safety in childhood if one behaves well. Home and family are not guarantees of a sheltered life. The concept of violence and its consequences are important and realistically depicted in this book, in particular the scenarios where, despite the fact that Van is no longer in their lives, Jamie and his mother remain prisoners in their own home by the fear they experience. As Garbarino et al (1991) observed, "In Western culture, childhood is regarded as a period of special protection and rights." Family, home and community, usually regarded as safe havens for children, become war zones for characters like Jamie.

In one of the scenes in which, at the insistence of Jamie, his mother takes him to the carnival, it all seems to be going well until they see a man who looks very much like Van. Both Jamie and Patty are paralyzed until they realize the man is not Van. The mere suggestion that Van could have found them causes Jamie to vomit. Thus the effects of violence do not end; family life does not return to homeostasis. The threat of personal violence continues.

According to Garbarino (1991), young children who find themselves in situations of personal or community violence "make sense" of their environment by relying on help – an object, real or imaginary-, thereby gaining competence and symbolic strength. Jamie's set of magic tricks become his totem. These give him confidence that all will be well and he will be safe. In her review of the book, Alice Casey Smith states "His love of magic tricks, illusion, and a sleight of hand sustain him through the bad times" (p. 128)

This idea of representational competence and symbolic strength is what Coman provides Jamie in this story as can be observed near the story's ending. Van arrives at

the trailer while the mother is in town. Jamie, having by this point gained internal courage, confronts Van and protects his baby sister, Nin. Patty arrives from the store to find Van in their home. She tells Van to leave and as he is leaving turns back and says, "I'll come around some other time." Jamie holds his breath and hears his mother say: "No. Don't you do that. Don't come around." (p. 123) Without a word Jamie bursts out crying and continues to cry in big sobs, without being able to stop, even when his mother embraces him and tells him everything will be alright. As his crying subsides, and his sister Nin is taken care of, Jamie now feels he has some stability some stability.

Rudman's (1995) criteria establish that books that deal with child abuse must present a balanced perspective. *What Jamie Saw* does not explicitly blame Patty for the abuse they endure and with the exception of the opening sentence it avoids graphic scenes of violence. It does, however, place the responsibility of keeping the family safe on Jamie, and in this case it does reflect some real-life situations where children make sense and survive the most dire of external circumstances by gaining representational competence or resilience.

*Cracker Jackson* (1985) a book by Betsy Byars, is narrated by eleven year old Jackson. The story is about Jackson's relentless efforts to help his ex-babysitter Alma leave her abusive marriage before she or her infant baby daughter is seriously hurt.

As the story begins, we find Jackson opening a pink envelope with yellow roses on the flap addressed to him. He takes out the sheet of paper and reads and stops breathing. "Keep away, Cracker, or he'll hurt you." Jackson knows who sent him the letter. There is only one person who calls him Cracker, his ex-babysitter Alma. Jackson's narration takes the reader a few years back to when he was five and Alma

became his babysitter. Things were better for Alma then, before she met her husband. Back in present time, Jackson has seen Alma in town with a black-eye. He worries about her and the baby's safety. In this story, we also learn about Ralph, Jackson's classmate and best friend. Ralph is the one Jackson confides in, this time about Alma's abusive situation at home. When his friend Ralph, asks him why he continues to care so much, he cannot come up with an answer. Still he cares and will do whatever it takes to help Alma and her daughter. Cracker enlists the help of his friend Ralph to help him, and though his mother is becoming suspicious of his activities, he refuses to tell her what is happening to Alma.

One day Jackson confides in his father, who in turn calls Jackson's mother to inform him of what Jackson is trying to do. Ms. Hunter, Jackson's mother, who has never approved of Alma, decides to visit Alma and see for herself what is happening. Before the visit occurs, Jackson gets a call from Alma and she tells him her husband Billy Ray has just hit the baby. Mrs. Hunter and Jackson try to help Alma into a shelter for battered women. Alma agrees to go, but as they are on their way, she decides to go back to Billy Ray. Finally, one day Billy Ray beats Alma and the baby so severely they both end up in the hospital, and the prognosis for the baby is not good.

This time when Jackson and his mother offer to help relocate them both, Alma accepts. Toward the end of the story Jackson receives a pink envelope with flower on the flap. It is addressed to him and it is from Alma. She wants to let Jackson know that she is doing well and so is her baby. She has a steady job and has begun a new life.

This story underscores the importance of taking a stand for important issues, as are child abuse and domestic violence. Jackson realized from the beginning he had to

do something to stop Alma and her baby from being abused. It would have been more realistic if instead of intervening by themselves, they would have enlisted the help of a more knowledgeable adult. Nevertheless, the plot is powerful. The ending is realistic in that it demonstrates the importance of friendship as well as of community support. It also provides a model in the mother. She refuses to collude and helps Jackson resist Alma's abuse.

The author, Betsy Byars, has created a caring friendship between Jackson and his friend Ralph. She has interspersed their interactions with light humor amid dealing with the serious issues of domestic violence and child abuse at the same. Ralph helps Jackson protect Alma and her baby initially. He is also there to lend him moral support when Jackson's mother has forbidden him to get involved in the situation. We see Ralph with his antics trying to get Jackson's mind from worrying too much about Alma's dilemma. The genuineness of their friendship is evident through the author's writing, and will make for a strong connection with young readers. Jackson's mother is portrayed as strict and at the same time caring mother. At first we feel as though she does not really care much for Alma, and disapproves the choices she made. Her demeanor as rendered in the story as stern, yet as the story unfolds we come to see that how she helps Jackson stop Alma's abuse. She also provides Alma with emotional support and makes an effort to be non-judgmental about Alma's earlier choices.

The book sensibly depicts both working and middle class background. It describes Jackson's lifestyle and surroundings and contrasts it with Alma's more modest living conditions. We get a sense from the description of the community that it

is mostly a white, middle-class community, with some lower income neighborhoods. There is not enough information about the diversity of skin color.

The resolution of the story is not quick and easy and it does portray real life situations. During Jackson's first attempt to help Alma and her baby leave her abusive home life, Alma changes her mind as they are driving out of town. This is demoralizing for Jackson who fears for her and the baby's safety. Alma herself is colluding in her own abuse. It takes an almost fatal beating from her husband that leaves her infant daughter in serious danger for Alma to realize that she needs to protect herself and her daughter. This is in keeping with what research has shown is characteristic behavior of women victims of domestic violence.

Going through the process of seeing Alma and her baby in the hospital, of moving out of her house and moving away from the town, makes the story real. In addition, it makes the characters as well as the subject of child and wife abuse complex and multidimensional. This well written ending also highlights the different options that exist for anyone who is involved or knows of someone involved in an abusive relationship.

The appeal of this book lies not only with the character development but mostly with the potential it has to promote a critical discussion among readers.

In An Na's *A Step from Heaven* (2001) we learn about four year old Young Ju Park who is getting ready to leave her country, Korea and immigrate to Mi Gook – United States- with her family. At the same time Young feels sad to leave her beloved grandmother behind. As she is flying to the United States, Young imagines that Mi Gook –as she refers to the United States- is only a step from heaven. Everything is new

for Young Ju as she arrives with her parents to the United States. She can't speak English, has a difficult time understanding her teacher and she continues to miss her Hamoni (grandmother). As she grows and becomes acculturated to her new country, her parents, in particular her father, fears that she will become too "Americanized".

Their transition to a new country is difficult. The family encounters language barriers and cultural differences. They leave their insular family. Young Ju enjoys going to school and the learning that takes place, however she has conflicting feelings about her ethnicity. Her father, Apa, works two jobs, as a gardener and as a custodian in a lawyer's office. Young's mother, Uhma works in a kitchen of a restaurant. They live with Apa's sister and her husband for a short while and later move into the second floor apartment of a house.

The family as Young Ju has known it begins to disintegrate. Her father hates his job, resents the language, the new customs they have to learn, and feels inadequate. Her mother remains optimistic and wants a better life for her family. Soon after her younger brother is born, Young, by this time in second grade begins to lie about family events. She befriends an American girl and begins to learn many of the American customs her father disagrees with. As the family experiences more financial difficulties, Apa becomes physically abusive towards Uhma.

The reader learns from Young's narration that things at home are not what they expected. Apa refuses to buy a house and keeps the family living in the same apartment they moved into years before. Not only is Apa venting his frustration and anger on his wife, but by the time Young's younger brother Joon is eight or ten years old, he too is the recipient of Apa's abuse. He beats Joon "to remind him how to be a man." Apa has

also begun to drink more and more. The tension and physical violence in Young's household begins to escalate. At the same time Young has established a close friendship with a classmate who is white, and of whom her father disapproves. He maintains that Young is becoming "too American," and forbids her to continue her friendship with Amanda. Young not only maintains the friendship, hiding it from her parents, but also refuses to allow Amanda and her parents to learn about her family. She pretends to live in an upper-scale neighborhood, and has told lies about her family.

As Young Ju grows older and assimilates more into the American culture, her father's bitterness and disappointment with his life escalates. There are more instances of physical abuse against her mother and her brother. One day this aggression is directed towards her. Her father waits for her as she returns from meeting with her friend Amanda. He interrogates her about her whereabouts then proceeds to call her a liar and beat her up. Uhma, no longer silent, intervenes. The beating escalates to the point where the police need to take Apa away. In the last chapter we learn that Apa has returned to Korea, Uhma, Young Ju and her brother have moved to a house of their own and Young Ju has received a scholarship and is ready to leave for college.

This is one story about physical and emotional abuse that provides us with insight into the difficulties that some families who immigrate to this country face in terms of culture, family expectations and language.

One quality that stands out in this book is the authenticity of the story. It is particularly interesting to see how the author handles the cultural differences and the language. I found the writing in this book to be excellent. The language is richly

descriptive and allows us to see the United States through the eyes of a four year old Korean girl.

The author is careful not to blame Uhma, Young Ju, and Joon for the physical abuse they endure, and also avoids blaming Apa for his abusive behavior. She does not excuse it, but through the tightly woven events in the story makes us participate in the unraveling of the family.

There is so much wisdom to this story, often conveyed through the words of Young Ju, and through Uhma's telling silences. The author, An Na, shows the deep connections that bring families together. She is also able to relate through this story the complexities of belonging to a cultural that is not the mainstream. She is careful to present the circumstances that bring about the unraveling of Young Ju's father. We feel his discontentment, his frustration at not being able to provide a better life for his family, and we can see his disappointment in his son.

Though the characters in the story collude when they do not speak out against the abuse of their mother, we can feel both Young Ju and Joon's looming defiance. The conflict unfolds gradually in every chapter of the story until it culminates in Apa beating Young Ju, which leads to Uhma finally resisting and standing up against Apa's abuse.

Straus & Gelles' (1990) research on violence in American families was one of the first comprehensive studies to shed light on the damaging consequences of physical violence, in particular the strong correlation of frequent corporal punishment as a precursor to child abuse. Following this influential work, Straus (1994) conducted research of over nine thousand families specifically on the use of corporal punishment



(i.e. an occasional slap) by American families. In his book *"Beating the Devil Out of Them,"* Straus (1994) indicates that at the developmental level, the use of corporal punishment increases the likelihood that young children will model physically aggressive behavior in their environment. At a socio-cultural level, Straus (1994) suggests, corporal punishment creates a climate that supports violence to correct transgressions.

Physical child abuse has been associated with significant negative physical and psychological consequences for young children. Such negative consequences have been found in the physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and social domains (Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus, 1994; Kantor, 1992).

In the cognitive domain, children generally exhibit decreased intellectual and cognitive functioning; deficits in verbal facility, memory, perceptual-motor skills, and verbal abilities and poor school achievement (Friedrich, Enbender, & Luecke, 1983; Hoffman-Plotkin & Twentyman, 1984; Fantuzzo, 1990). In the socioemotional domain, Youngblade & Belsky, (1990) and Cichetti & Barnett (1991) found inconsistent behaviors in the parent-child interaction, expressed in increased avoidance of and resistance to the parent. Physically abused children also exhibit poor social interactions with peers as well as with adults (Kinard, 1982; Salizinger, Feldman, Hammer, & Rosario, 1993).

Lastly, there exists evidence that school-aged children have been found to exhibit lower levels of self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness and depression (Allen & Tarnowski, 1989; Fantuzzo, 1990).

## Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse has been defined as an “act of a person (adult or child) which forces, coerces, or threatens a child to have any form of sexual contact or to engage in any type of sexual activity at his or her direction (in Rudman 1995). Although most survivors and victims of sexual abuse are females, the last national incidence study (1988) found that approximately 22 percent of abused children were boys. Counter to popular belief the perpetrator is likely to be someone the child knows and trusts (Rudman, 1995)

There are controversies associated with reports of sexual abuse, such as children fabricating reports of child sexual abuse as was implied by Douglas Besharov, the first director of the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (1985). Besharov attributes the increase in the numbers of false accusations to the heightened publicity that surrounds child abuse. Highly publicized cases such as the McMartin Preschool case, one of the longest trials in U.S. history (Barnett, Perrin & Perrin, 1997), where seven child care workers were accused of sexually abusing some 360 children over a period of several years (Victor, 1993), suggest that accusations of child sexual abuse made by children, are fabricated. Current research (Perry, 1992) indicates that children by the age of 10 or 11 years, are no more susceptible than adults (Saywitz & Snyder, 1993). For children, the conflict in reporting stems from the fact that the perpetrator as mentioned earlier is usually a person who is known to the child and in most cases, a person he or she trusts. It is then, important to help children make a distinction between what are harmful secrets that must be revealed to an adult who can help them.

Guilt and shame are two reasons that prevent children from reporting abuse. In most instances children feel they are to blame for the abuse, that they are responsible and deserving of such treatment and they in some fashion have provoked the incident. It is crucial that children know that nothing in their behavior has prompted any sexual abuse.

The following stories all depict child sexual abuse. Some of the books are intended for more mature audiences because of the graphic scenes depicted in the story. The picture books included in the section are designed to be read by an adult—parent, caregiver, teacher—to young children.

*Chilly Stomach* (1986) is a picture book narrated by a young girl of about 8 years old. She says that whenever her Uncle Jim “hugs me and kisses me on the lips, I get a chilly stomach,” yet “when Daddy and Mommy kiss me I feel nice and happy and cuddly.” The reader may not understand clearly what has happened to make the narrator want to sleep over at her friend Jill’s house whenever Uncle Jim spends the night. She merely states, “One night I told Jill my secret about Uncle Jim” and now “Jill understands.” The narrator decides she will tell her parents, although she says “I’m scared they won’t believe me” and “maybe Mommy and Daddy won’t like me anymore.” She tells the reader, “I want them to know,” but we do not see the parents’ reaction.

The book does not define the problem of sexual abuse explicitly, and an adult explanation is needed. The pictures are colorful and attractive; they portray the characters, including Uncle Jim, realistically without presenting frightening situations.

What this book aptly points to is that unlike perpetrators of stranger-rape or abduction, a child molester does not resort necessarily to extreme violence, because he or she is someone known to the child and whom the child trusts. In *Chilly Stomach*, the author portrays the child molester, in this case the uncle, as an ordinary-looking character, which reinforces reality.

This book, geared towards a young audience, does well in introducing an abuse incident with sensitivity and care. The ending does not describe the parents' reaction, we see them as they answer the phone, and the young girl is watching. We anticipate that the parents will validate the young child's feelings and reassure her that she is not to blame. As with any good book, this allows for a number of discussion possibilities. What can parents do to validate their child's feeling about a situation as this one? What can they offer as an explanation to young children in particular about sexual abuse?

The introduction to *No More Secrets for Me* (1983) starts with, "It's not fair, but it happens. Someone you know, or someone you like or someone in your family touches you, and you don't like it. It doesn't feel good the way hugging and holding hands do."

The book consists of four stories, each depicting a different degree of sexual abuse. This book contains scenarios that might be frightening to some children, such as a stepfather who touches his stepdaughter "all over" and a camp counselor who tries to get a boy to take off his bathing suit. Each episode suggests an appropriate response, which entails saying "no" and telling an adult. However, in each case the solution seems unrealistic because in each case, the victim is immediately believed by an adult.

The pictures are somewhat lackluster and uninteresting, and the depiction of a male babysitter touching a young girl in bed is awkward and potentially disturbing.

*Laurie Tells (1994)* written by Linda Lowry tells the story of Laurie for whom monsters and spooks are no longer scary. It's her father who scares her. As the story begins, Laurie recalls earlier times when her and her father would play with the leaves every fall. She continues to remember those times juxtaposed with recent unhappy memories of her father touching her. Laurie provides detailed description of the first time her father sexually molested her. How he continued to touch her body even when she was crying and how he would not stop. Throughout all of this she wonders why he won't stop even as he hears her cries.

As Laurie continues her story, past memories of happier times are interwoven in her recounting of her father's sexual abuse. Salient is a time when Laurie recalls how she got lost one day on her way back from kindergarten, and suddenly there was her father, and she once again felt loved and safe.

She tries to reconcile how the same hands that protected her are the ones who now touch her everywhere against her will. Anger comes through in her narration; anger is "eating her away." She knows she can't hide it and feels the need to tell, but recalls what happened the first time she told her mother. Her mother tried to rationalize/justify the behavior by stating "of course he touches you, he gives you back-rubs." She tells her she "is imagining things," that her father would "never, ever do a thing like that" because "he loves her" Laurie realize/recognizes that she can't hide the abuse any longer, she has to tell.

As she sits by the lake and watches the leaves go by in the waves of the lake, she ponders about the people she knows in whom she can confide. Not her grandmother who reminds Laura of her mother who didn't believe her, or her next door neighbor either – he is a friend of her father. Her music teacher is too nice to believe that something so terrible has happened to Laura, but then her aunt might believe. Laura recalls how she has stood up to her father at times, and doesn't always laugh at his jokes. The doubts materialize, what if ... her aunt tells her father, what will her father do to her then? How will he hurt her?

She decides to tell her aunt. After her aunt takes her home it is not easy for Laurie to tell her what is bothering her. After some time Laurie tells her aunt how her father has been molesting her, how her mother won't believe her, and how ashamed and guilty she feels. The aunt responds that even though she doesn't exactly know what to do; she will protect her from her father and get her some help.

This story reaffirms research findings that indicated that in almost 95% of the cases of child sexual abuse, the perpetrator is known to the child, in addition to being someone that is depended upon and trusted. In Laurie's case, this person is her father. Just as in real-life situations, Laurie also refuses to report the incest initially, and her situation is terrifying. When it becomes untenable and she confides in her mother, her mother's reaction is to deny the abuse. The mother needs this denial as a way of dealing with excruciating emotions, but this strategy ultimately compounds the damage suffered by Laurie.

Research indicates that when a child reveals the abuse and it is not believed, he or she will usually not make any more attempts at disclosing, which only increases the

feelings of guilt and confusion the child already has. These destructive emotions are intensified by feeling that one is alone and completely different from one's peers.

Masha Rudman (1995) persuasively argues for us to reassess our values and priorities when she writes,

In all cases of abuse and addiction, society plays a large part in setting the conditions for potential abuse. Television, cinema, popular magazines, and many books glorify exploitative sex, convey the impression that the practices and perceptions of drug use are automatic and acceptable, that thinness is the ideal body condition, and that there are easy ways to gain popularity and success. Until educators parents, and people responsible for packaging these messages change their priorities, children will continue to be confused about appropriate sexual behavior, attracted to artificially induced highs, and vulnerable to binge-and-purge eating habits. Frank discussions of literature presenting recommendations counter to these messages can help (354-55).

Linda Lowery the author of *Laurie Tells* ends the book with a note to readers where she emphasizes the importance of anyone who is experiencing a similar situation to tell about what is happening.

Clearly there are changes that need to be made. We cannot avoid the topic of child sexual abuse simply because it makes us uncomfortable—instead we should use the feelings of discomfort as warning signs that the issue of child sexual abuse must be acknowledged. It is important to break the cycle of abuse by creating an environment

in which “taboo” subjects can be openly discussed, and accurate information is readily available.

*Learning to Swim: A Memoir (2005)* is a non-fiction book written in verse. The author, Ann Turner, writes about a summer vacation during her childhood when she was molested repeatedly by a neighborhood boy, Kevin. This poetic narrative is interwoven with stories of her father teaching her to swim, and picking blueberries with her mother and siblings. The author uses her experiences learning to swim as a way to frame her attempts at recovering from the trauma. “and I didn’t even know/ I could say/ no.” are the words that haunt the story, as Turner recalls Kevin’s repeated abuse. The book is divided into three sections, “Sailing,” “Sinking,” and “Swimming.” Each of these sections is a vignette of her healing process and they emerge as a metaphor for the summer when she was six years old. In “Sailing,” the author tells about beginning her summer vacation with her family, anticipating learning to swim. It ends with her neighbor, Kevin, taking her upstairs under the false pretense of reading her a book. “Sinking” is the account of the abuse over the course of most of the summer, and her failures at learning how to swim. This section ends with Ann’s mother asking her about what kind of stories Kevin reads to her. It is then when she tells her mother.

“Swimming” begins with the author’s mother assuring her that Kevin will never hurt her again. This begins her journey towards her recovery. What Ann Turner conveys so genuinely is the angst and confusion sexually abused children experience amidst the pain of hiding a secret, and not being able to tell anyone about what is happening. The author clearly conveys the message of how important it is to tell, to get the words across. Writing about her feeling of shame and loneliness, Ann Turner



emphasizes the rewards of the healing process. A moving and powerful book that lingers long after one finishes reading it.

*Gillyflower (1994)* This young adult story is about incest. Gilly (Gillian) is the older of two sisters and she is being sexually abused by her father. We learn about the abuse through Gillian, who narrates the story. At home, her mother works night shifts at the hospital while her father is out of work. We learn through Gilly that at school she is quiet, reserved and she is also a good student. Gillian has a younger sister, Honey, whom she takes care of after school while her mother is at work. In order to cope with her secret, Gillian fabricates a fantasy world where Princess Julianna lives. The author, Ellen Howard, appears to have created Princess Julianna as Gillian's alter ego. Gilly retreats to this fantasy world whenever her father asks her to "keep him company." Princess Julianna is everything that Gillian is not, she is pure, she is pretty and she is good. Most importantly, there are no beasts to threaten her. Outside of her fantasy world, the beast is her father. He has been sexually abusing her for over a year, and Gilly fears that her younger sister Honey is also being molested by her father.

One day while playing at her favorite garden spot, behind the rhododendron, a new family, the Gibbs, move in. They are everything Gillian's family is not. Here, the author has contrasted both families, by describing the Gibbs as a loving and caring family. Mary Rose, the younger daughter, is in Gilly's class and tries to establish a friendship with her. Gilly is embarrassed and ashamed of her secret and fears that it is so visible that Mary Rose will be able to tell.

At home, it is becoming more difficult for Gilly to avoid her father. He forbids her from hanging out with Mary Rose and instead asks her to keep him company while he drinks beer and watches TV.

The incest is not explicitly described, but the reader can infer what is happening. Gillian blames herself, particularly when her father tells her "You're getting so sexy." Gilly also thinks of herself as being bad in contrast to Julianna, who is good, when she recalls how her father makes her sit on his lap while she is keeping him company.

The guilt, shame and stigmatization (Miller-Perrin, 2000) experienced by children who are sexually abused need to be addressed by helping the child change his or her perception about being "different" as well as somehow to blame for the abuse (Finkelhor, 1991; Miller-Perrin, 1997). Other common symptoms are anxiety, fear and posttraumatic stress disorder which can be manifested by disassociation as in the case of Gillian, where she escapes to her fantasy of Princess Julianna.

At school, after several failed attempts to engage Gillian in conversation, Mary Rose gives up. Meanwhile, Gillian imagines that things would be different in Princess Julianna's world, friendships exist there. Gilly and Mary Rose become friends, but as she spends more time with her new friend her father begins to ask Honey to keep him company. It is then that Gilly believes her sister is being abused by her father. The fear that Honey is being molested and the courage that she draws from her friendship with Mary Rose give Gillian the strength to break her secret and talk to her mother.

There is hope in the ending although it seems the resolution of the story is quick, too contrived in places. This notwithstanding, the story is strong in the character development of Gillian, Mary Rose and Honey as the main characters. Although her

mother is a secondary character, she is strong and believable when confronted with Gillian's sexual abuse. The ending of the story is rather hasty, but it does offer hope for Gillian and her family.

Research suggests that there are certain family and societal variables that increase the risk of child sexual abuse. Such factors are a victim's age (i.e. 7 to 12 years old), maternal availability and family conflict (e.g., parents with emotional, alcohol and drug related problems). It is important to remember that sexual abuse occurs in virtually all demographic and socioeconomic circumstances. How the family and social agencies or institutions respond to the disclosure of abuse has been demonstrated to have a significant relationship to the effects of child sexual abuse (Gomes-Schwartz et al., 1990). It has been well established that responses towards the child by parents, relatives, teachers and other adults have considerable effect on the trauma and recovery associated with child sexual abuse (Conte & Schuerman, 1987; Gomes-Schwartz et al., 1990; Miller-Perrin, 2000)

*The Right Touch: A read-aloud story to help prevent child sexual abuse (1997)* is a picture book written for children ages 3 to 6. It is intended to be read aloud to a child. The book begins by prefacing the topic of preventing sexual abuse with a page of suggestions for parents and teachers. The story emphasizes the importance for children to trust their own feelings if they believe something does not feel right. In addition, the book explores way of resisting inappropriate touching, by suggesting some self-protection strategies.

The author, Sandy Kleven is a licensed social worker who wrote this book based on her award-winning docudrama *The Touching Problem*. Besides the self-protection

strategies included in the *Right Touch*, the author also emphasizes the importance of having children understand that if bad touching occurs, it is not the child's fault. This is significant in a book for young children, since generally children are told they need to respect their elders. As a picture book, the illustrations are appealing to a young audience, the images are whimsical without detracting from the seriousness of the topic. It is an informative book about an extremely sensitive and difficult topic.

The focus of most contemporary children's books about sexual abuse is prevention, but mostly to caution them to be mindful and stay away from people they don't know (i.e. *Who is a Stranger, and What Should I do?* and *It's O.K. to Say No! A Parent/Child Manual*). Therefore, some of the literature that is currently available to young children has limited value and in most instances reflects society's unwillingness to discuss unpleasant facts, (McDaniel, 2004) and the desire to keep children sheltered from the realities of life.

CSA is a societal issue that is occurring at alarming rates. In 2002, 10% of the 879,000 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect in the United States were sexual abuse (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). Of the 40,215 reported cases of child abuse and neglect in Massachusetts in 2001, 4,606 were substantiated cases of sexual abuse (Office of Policy, Evaluation and Planning Division of Children and Family Services Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

It is important for educators and parents to be knowledgeable about the topic of CSA in order for them to be successful in their prevention efforts. Knowing who the typical victims and perpetrators are in CSA cases is vital. One study conducted by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found around 4% of the perpetrators of

CSA were strangers and the remaining cases were committed by friends and family. Approximately 150,000 confirmed cases were reported for the year 2003. Because child sexual abuse is usually a concealed offense, there are no statistics on how many cases actually occur each year. Statistics only cover those cases that are reported to child protection agencies or to law enforcement (Finkelhor, 2004).

In her book *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics*, Louise Armonstrong writes, Incest's continuity has both depended on and supported the dominance of men within their private realms and the devaluation of women and children. To actually stop it, to prohibit it, to hold offenders accountable for it, would require breaching a tacit compact the state has always held with respectable men. Their homes, their castles, their families, their turf. Paternal prerogative; paternal privilege (p.253)

Armstrong states that a sense of male entitlement allows for the incest to continue within society, and she views the "sexual assault of children as on the continuum of violence against women" (p.189). Armstrong believes that the problem of child sexual abuse extends beyond the individual victims and offenders, presenting an overarching dilemma within society, for which we all are responsible.

Another issue of serious concern that merits much attention in the literature written for children is that of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy. There exists a lack of children's books that address this subject. Bearing in mind that sexual abuse by Catholic clergy has been in the forefront of public news since 1984 (Doyle, 2003), and has been documented (Doyle, 2003) as being inflicted mostly on boys, books that address this subject are crucial.

A study conducted by Doyle (2003) indicates there have been 1800 civil suits and approximately 200 civil and criminal trials that involve various forms of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy in the United States. Doyle (2003) further points to the unprecedented media exposure of clergy sexual abuse that began in Boston, January 2002 as a catalyst for serious criticism against the Holy See for not speaking on this issue in a strong way, as well as intense protests from the public, that led to significant changes in the Catholic church.

### Summary

In his book *"Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories"* Herbert Kohl (1995) describes the profound influence of books on children:

I believe that what is read in childhood not only leaves an impression behind but also influences the values, and shapes the dreams, of children. It can provide negative images and stereotypes and cut off hopes and limit aspirations. It can erode self-respect through overt and covert racism or sexism. It can also help young people get beyond family troubles, neighborhood violence, stereotyping and prejudice – all particulars of their lives that they have no control over- and set their imaginations free. (pp.61-62)

We can surmise from this statement the importance of presenting children with books that validate their life and their belonging to a culture. Children expect that their worlds will be represented in books they read. When literature does not reflect their worlds, children then begin to question themselves.

The stories I have presented and analyzed in the preceding section offer us a picture of the repercussions of physical and sexual abuse, as well as provide with clear examples of how characters in the stories exercise power. In each of the stories analyzed we can determine how characters collude, offer resistance and attain agency.

A critical multicultural analysis of children's literature is a multilayered lens that examines how power is exercised among the characters of a story (Botelho & Rudman, forthcoming). Botelho (2003), Botelho & Rudman (forthcoming) have identified four positions in the power continuum that characters assume in a story. Oppression, collusion, resistance and agency are subject positions that demonstrate how characters exercise power.

Oppression is power over, and abuse is about power. It follows then that characters such as Mr. Kobalt in *Dorp Dead*, Mrs. Smith in *A December's Tale*, Billy Ray in *Cracker Jackson* and Apa in *A Step from Heaven* all exercise oppression through their abusive behavior and intimidation tactics.

Collusion, refers to the silence that ensues when there exists knowledge of wrongdoing (Botelho & Rudman, forthcoming) thereby conspiring with dominant ideologies whether it is consciously or unconsciously. Key examples of this are *Dorp Dead*, where Gilly Ground does not acknowledge/recognize the abuse he is being inflicted with. We also find the character of Alma, Jackson's babysitter in *Cracker Jackson*, refusing to acknowledge the dangerous situation her and her baby are living. Even when Jackson helps her leave her home and the town the first time, Alma decides she needs to go back, that things at home as not as bad as she had claimed.

As we examine the power continuum that characterizes critical multicultural analysis (Botelho, 2003; Botelho & Rudman, forthcoming), we need consider the importance of progressing in the power continuum from collusion to resistance, with agency being our ultimate goal. Whether we do this as parents, educators, community members, or as a society, it is essential to recognizing oppression and to resist is by overcoming fear, by speaking for those who have no agency, and speaking against those who exercise oppression. It also requires that we actively question what we read, that we refuse to accept lame excuses for abusive behavior, and neglect to become informed.



## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Several findings emerged out of my analysis of the books on child abuse. All the books analyzed had one or more of the following elements that made them applicable to my study:

- They avoided stereotypes and provided real-life situations.
- There was at least one positive role model presented in the books.
- Books that dealt well with sexual abuse were clear about the difference between loving behavior and sexual abuse.
- They provided opportunities for critical thinking and decision-making skills on the part of the reader.
- They provided characters that readers can identify with. This is important, especially to counter the feeling of "I'm the only one."
- They included information to help readers recognize whether or not they are victims of abuse.
- With few exceptions, they did not depict unrealistically simple solutions.
- They reinforce the message that of abuse is not the victim's fault.
- Most of the books suggest alternative ways of getting help.

The books analyzed in Chapter IV, take a serious approach to the prevention of child abuse. An example of a serious topic presented to young children is *Chilly Stomach*. Sexual abuse is undeniably a difficult topic to discuss, especially with young children, but the clarity in which the story is written and the illustrations that

accompany the text, present the topic without potential of causing unreasonable fear in a young child. *The Right Touch* is another book reviewed that is engaging for young children, and provides opportunities for “what if” situations asked by an adult.

In this study, the categories of abuse, physical and sexual, of the books read influenced the analysis (Rudman, 1995; Botelho & Rudman, forthcoming) and consequently the findings. The themes that emerged were consistent across both groupings and provided answers to the research questions guiding this study:

1. How is child abuse depicted in children’s literature?
2. What are the social messages or discourses conveyed by the books that deal with the topic of child abuse?
3. Who is taking part in the abuse and who is interrupting it?

Several themes: resilience, children as social construction and agency were found consistently in the books that satisfied the criteria.

### Resilience

This was a common theme in all the books. The analysis showed that for the most part the characters in the stories were children who possess the ability to recover from or adapt to continued stress (Werner, 1984). In spite of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse, in some cases unfavorable social conditions, and a host of other negative factors, these children showed the will to survive.

For example, in the book *Don’t Hurt Laurie*, we read how despite the continuous and at times severe physical abuse to which she is subjected, Laurie’s character relates to a “caring” other person, her stepbrother Tim. In *Dorp Dead*, we see

how Gilly, seeing himself in danger, begins to take control of his life in small ways, finding a way to escape his abusive and dangerous environment.

These are just a few traits Werner (1984) found in her longitudinal study on resilient children of Hawaii. In a study of 18 academically successful students, who once had been disabled readers, Cecil (1989) found that two significant traits of the respondents were perseverance and a strong will to succeed. Others cited praise and encouragement of caring adults as factors that were influential in helping them overcome their reading difficulties (Cecil & Roberts, 1992).

How does this relate to children's literature? Where are those traits of resilience found in children's literature? I agree with Cecil & Roberts' (1992) view which points to teachers as one the many groups who can determine the kind of resilience models that can be introduced to children by way of books.

Such books need to have at their core literary characters who are themselves resilient and in the process of overcoming hardship. An example of such a character, is Ann Turner, the author of *Learning to Swim: A Memoir*. She is a strong character who learns how to survive and to heal from her childhood sexual abuse by obtaining agency and speaking out. A discussion of this book, guided by a compassionate teacher could help a less resilient, more vulnerable adolescent gradually see the resilient traits exhibited by the author, Ann Turner, and perhaps, over time, grow in her own resiliency.

As I indicated in the review of the literature, the use of books to help children cope with certain a number of real life problems has been well documented by Russell

(1949); Thomas (1967); Zaccaria & Moses (1968); Rudman, Bernstein, Gagne (1993); Pardeck & Pardeck (1980, 1990) as well a number of other scholars.

If as the research on resilience indicates, children can and do develop healthy attitudes and personalities that allow them to succeed personally as well as academically, at times under the most adverse conditions, with the support of caring role model, children's literature is powerful means by which to accomplish such feat. Whether our interactions with children occur in the classroom, our homes, or in the community, this can be attained by modeling resilient behavior and moreover by presenting children with literature that provides dilemmas that allow children to exercise certain skills necessary to cope with challenging real-life situations.

### **Children as social construction**

Children are product of the times. How we view children and understand the concept of childhood, influences how we perceive children. Earlier in this study, I presented an overview of how this notion of childhood has evolved through historical periods. From Phillipe Aries examination of childhood in 17<sup>th</sup> century France to James, Jenks and Prout's (1997) new sociology of childhood, we see childhood as a creation of society that changes with every major social transformation that takes place (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). We have been witnesses to two decades of rapid changes in the ways we think about children, and to a growing research between sociologists and a variety of other social sciences (Holloway & Valentine, 2000).

The way in which this plays out in children's literature and is evidenced in the analysis chapter of this study in particular, is the treatment of child abuse as a social problem. I cite the book *Dorp Dead* as an example. This book was written in 1965,

and if we place it in a historical context, we can understand how it would be possible for an eleven year old child to experience the ordeal he did at the hands of his employer.

The term "battered child" had just recently been formulated by Kempe & Hefler (1963).

There was no official definition of child abuse, and our understandings of the consequences of physical and emotional abuse were limited at best.

Would we allow what happened to the character of Gilly in this 1965 story, occur today? Most of us would say certainly not. This does not mean that we have all the answers to prevent and eliminate child abuse from our cultures. But as we pay more attention to children's agency, we have learned to understand the child as "being" (James & Prout, 1990) or the conception of a child as a person, a set of needs, rights or differences. Thus, the existence of existing social structures would hopefully facilitate identifying instances of child abuse as well establishing support systems for the child and the family.

The analysis of books written in recent years reflects this notion. *Laurie Tells* written in 1994, is a good example of this. After the character discloses the abuse to her mother, and she does not believe her, Laurie realizes that she has options. She does not have to remain under the same house as her father any longer. She finds support in her aunt who takes her in. The author conveys in this book the importance of telling and being validated. A book with a similar theme and where we find the character also finding support to stop the abuse is *Gillyflower*. These two books written in the mid 1990s support the belief that the way in which we regard children is a significant factor in explaining child abuse.

### Children's agency

The degree to which a child's voice expressing agency was present was one more theme emerging in both groups of books. We know that in the power continuum (Botelho & Rudman, forthcoming) agency is defined as initiation and power with. I found agency as it refers to children resisting and speaking out against abuse permeated the stories. The children's characters found their voices either by taking control of their lives as we read in *A December's Tale*, or they exercised agency by being a model against oppression and collusion as was the case in *Cracker Jackson*.

Most literature on child abuse since 1985 not only deals with the topic in a serious manner, but also considers it a priority to provide the characters with the strength and courage to resist and speak against it.

#### Research Question 1 – How is child abuse depicted in children's literature?

The manner in which child abuse was rendered in the literature was both professional and informative without being too didactic. Although all the books portrayed real life situations, some dealt with the abuse by containing fantasy elements such as *A December's Tale*. Others such as *Dorp Dead* added a psychological thriller element to the story. The stories were also careful to avoid unrealistic and happy endings. Some stories such as *The Bears' House* were open-ended allowing place for discussions to take place. In other books, such as *Learning to Swim: A Memoir*, the resolution is far from simple. We see the healing occur, but not without hard work and pain involved. A couple of books presented a contrived ending like *Don't Hurt Me Mama*, where we lack enough information about the process of finding help. A number of books provided models for how people sought and received aid as was the case in

*Laurie Tells* and *Gillyflower*. With a few exceptions the abuse portrayed was not too graphic, although abuse always evokes graphic images.

**Research Question 2 – What are the social messages or discourses conveyed by books that deal with the topic of child abuse?**

The initial themes of the book analysis centered on how characters who have been abused are portrayed in children's literature. As noted in the review of the literature, child abuse is a serious topic that involves all of us – parents, educators, community members and society. If our intention is to prevent it from occurring, the most effective means is to create awareness of the problem. Because books have a significant influence on how children view their world, they provide an excellent medium for empowering children with the tools that will make them less vulnerable. However, not all books written on the topic adhere to all of the criteria. Therefore it would be wise on the part of adult helpers to select carefully and to participate in discussion alongside the critical reading of the selected books.

**Research Question 3 – Who is taking part in the abuse and who is interrupting it?**

Applying the power continuum to the books analyzed, I was able to determine that not only was the perpetrator of the abuse the oppressor or the one taking part in the abuse, but that those who were silent were also colluding. I will refer to *Laurie Tells* as an example. The father was the perpetrator of the abuse. But next to him was Laurie's mother, who refused to believe in her daughter. We see how she does nothing to stop her daughter from being molested by her father, but refuses to validate what her daughter is experiencing. I would in this instance consider her as taking part in the abuse, by colluding with the situation, but taking part in it nonetheless. In contrast to this example, we can see that in *Learning to Swim: A Memoir*, while the author Ann

Turner exercises collusion by remaining silent after her sexual abuse, when she decides to disclose to her mother, the mother takes immediate action and interrupts the abuse.

In books like *The Bears' House* we see the abuse as being part of society's responsibility. Here is a young child who is shouldering adult responsibilities by taking care of the household and an infant baby. We see evidence to the same in *What Jamie Saw*. In this particular story we hear from Jamie how he chooses to stay home with his mother, sometimes because he is afraid his father will find them, and he will be away at school. Other times he remains home because he is paralyzed by fear. We learn about an intuitive teacher who realizes that Jamie's absences are cause for concern. We read how she takes the first step to interrupting the abuse by helping Jamie and his mother.

In *A Step from Heaven* we observe how the Uhma, the mother, by remaining silent is colluding in her own physical abuse and later in her son's and daughter's. At the same time we witness how she interrupts the abuse by standing up for her daughter and taking steps to leave her husband and start a new life.

It has become evident to me during the course of this study that rather than focusing on superficial, meaningless topics, we should provide literature that deals with the significant issues and questions children must face in real life. In "Are the Children the Ultimate Literary Critics?" Isaac Bashevis Singer writes:

No matter how young they are, children are deeply concerned with so-called eternal questions...Children think about and ponder such matters as justice, the purpose of life, the why of suffering...Many grownups have made up their minds that there is no purpose in asking questions and that one should accept the facts as they are. But the child is often a philosopher and a seeker of God.  
(Stories 337-38)



As we consider the use of literature to instill to promote critical thinking in children, it is important to remember that some of the materials we frequently provide contain stereotypical or negative messages. In order to help children understand their world and empower them to take care of themselves, we need to address topics that they encounter in everyday life. Though the phrase might be a cliché, we need to find ways to “break the cycle of abuse.” Changes will occur only if we change our attitudes and approaches to the issues.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

With such an enormous topic it is impossible all the questions and ramifications. Some related studies are suggested for further exploration.

I recommend research into how abuse manifests itself and is dealt with in different cultural and ethnic groups within the U.S. My study focused almost entirely on white, working class people in largely suburban or rural settings.

I recommend that we conduct research on how to use the process more effectively in various settings. This study did not situate itself in a classroom environment. It would be enlightening to actually apply the critical multicultural analytic process to classrooms with varied populations and in diverse settings.

I suggest an investigation of the empirical conducted with children that would include not only victims of abuse, but also their peers with an investigation particularly of the role of empathy.

Cultures vary in their attitudes and practices of discipline. It might be of interest to investigate these differences and how literature might be perceived by different groups.

To date no books for children include sexual abuse by members of the clergy.

I recommend that we continue to work with teachers and counselors on using literature with coping strategies.

I recommend a more in-depth study on "routes to resilience."

## APPENDIX A

### ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED FOR ANALYSIS

Angelou, Maya (1969). *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. New York: Bantam Books. In this autobiography, the author narrates the story of her childhood, including sexual abuse, in a small rural community during the 1930's.

Bass, Ellen (1981). *I Like You to Make Jokes with Me, But I Don't Want You to Touch Me*. Illus. by Marti Betz. North Carolina: Lollipop Power, Inc.

A book empowering young readers to speak up if they feel uncomfortable in the presence of adults who behave inappropriately.

Caines, Jeannette (1986). *Chilly Stomach*. Illus. by Pat Cummings. Harper & Row, Publishers.

Sandy feels uncomfortable when her Uncle Jim visits. She doesn't like way he hugs her and kisses her, it makes her get a chilly stomach.

Cameron, Ann (2003). *Colibri*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.

This book narrates the story of Colibri, Spanish for Hummingbird. At the age of four she was kidnapped from her parents in Guatemala City by an ex-soldier, who forces her to beg and steal. Eventually she gains her freedom.

Coman, Carolyn (1995). *What Jamie Saw*. North Carolina: Front Street.

Fleeing an abusive home, Jamie, his mother, and his baby sister find themselves living an existence full of uncertainty and fear.

Cunningham, Julia (1965). *Dorp Dead*. Illus. by James Spanfeller. New York: Pantheon Books.

Gilly Ground is an orphan who has been sent to work as an apprentice with Mr. Kobalt, a ladder-maker. Soon Gilly realizes that his quiet life in the stone house is about to take a dangerous turn, and he needs to find a way of escaping.

Howard, Ellen. (1986). *Gillyflower*. New York: Atheneum.

Gillian has been sexually abused by her father more than a year. She fears for the safety of her younger sister, Honey. She needs to find the courage and strength to tell someone.

Kleven, Sandy (1997). *The Right Touch: A read aloud story to help prevent child sexual abuse*. Illus. by Jody Bergsma. Washington: Illumination Arts Publishing Company, Inc.

As a way of teaching her little boy about sexual abuse, a mother tells him the story of a child who was lured into the neighbor's house to see some non-existent kittens. The mother explains the difference between touches that are positive and touches that are secret, deceptive or forced.

Na, An (2001). *A Step from Heaven*. North Carolina: Front Street.

In this novel, four year old Young Ju and her family have just emigrated from Korea to the United States. It is a bittersweet, beautifully written account of the family's struggle to adjust to their new world, including the father's physically abusive behavior.

Roberts, Willo Davis (1977). *Don't Hurt Laurie*. Illus. by Ruth Sanderson.

Laurie is eleven years old and has been physically abused by her mother since the age of four. Nobody questions why Laurie frequently appears bruised, has a broken arm, or a burnt hand. Eventually the abuse is acknowledged and dealt with.

Sachs, Marilyn. (1971) *The Bears' House*. New York: Avon Books.

With a difficult life at home and at school, Fran Ellen has the impossible task of taking care of her baby sister and trying to keep the family together. The teacher intervenes but the ending is far from optimistic.

Sachs, Marilyn. (1976). *A December's Tale*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.

Myra Fine has been abandoned by her mother and placed in a foster home along with her younger brother, Henry. Struggling with her abusive home life, Myra feels strengthened by her imaginary conversations with Joan of Arc.

Turner, Ann (2000). *Learning to Swim: A Memoir*. New York: Scholastic Press.

Written in exquisite poetry, this memoir narrates a young girl's experience with sexual abuse at a young age. In this poetic narrative the author uses her experiences learning to swim as a way to frame her attempts at recovering from the trauma.

Stanek, Muriel (1983). *Don't Hurt Me, Mama*. Illus. by Helen Cogancherry. Illinois: Albert Whitman & Company.

This book tells the story of a young girl and her mother dealing with child abuse as a consequence of the mother's alcoholism. It also acknowledges a kind and sensitive nurse who gets involved and finds help for the mother.

Watcher, Oralee (1983). *No More Secrets for Me*. Illus. by Jane Aaron. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

This book contains four realistic stories in which a child makes the decision about how to deal with a potentially damaging encounter with an adult. It is an invaluable resource to help parents talk with their children about the sensitive subject of sexual abuse.

## APPENDIX B

### ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS DEALING WITH CHILD ABUSE

Anderson, Laurie H. (1999). *Speak*. New York: Penguin Putnam Books.

This is the story of Melinda Sordino, a teenager who finds herself an outcast in her high school after reporting her rape to the police.

Clifton, Lucille (2001). *One of the problems of Everett Anderson*. Illus. by Ann Grifalconi. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Everett Anderson thinks his friend Greg is a victim of child abuse, and asks his mother advice on how to help him.

Draper, Sharon (1997) *Forged by Fire*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.

Gerald is a teenager who has spent years protecting his half-sister, Angel, from their abusive father, and their substance-addicted mother. Gerald realizes he must be strong to confront his father and be free of a home filled with anger and abuse.

Flinn, Alex (2001). *Breathing Underwater*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Sixteen year old Nick has been ordered by the court to keep a journal after he has been served with a restraining order for hitting his girlfriend, Caitlin. Through his journal entries we discover what has been happening in this young man's life, that makes him abuse his girlfriend.

Kleven, Sandy (1997). *The Right Touch: A read aloud story to help prevent child sexual abuse*. Illus. by Jody Bergsma. Washington: Illumination Arts Publishing Company, Inc.

As a way of teaching her little boy about sexual abuse, a mother tells him the story of a child who was lured into the neighbor's house to see some non-existent kittens. The mother explains the difference between touches that are positive and touches that are secret, deceptive or forced.

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