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Mystery readers : an exploratory study of gender similarities and differences

Joyce Assar
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and differences**

Assar, Joyce, M.S.

San Jose State University, 1992

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**MYSTERY READERS:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF GENDER SIMILARITIES
AND DIFFERENCES**

**A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Journalism
and Mass Communications
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science**

**by
Joyce Assar
December, 1992**

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND
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ABSTRACT
MYSTERY READERS:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF GENDER SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES
by Joyce Assar

This thesis focuses on the demographics, reading habits, and opinions of mystery readers. The study, guided by reader-response theory, was based on a survey of 485 members of Mystery Readers International and relied heavily on open-ended essay-type questions.

The study finds that although mystery readers evince many similarities, there are also substantial differences that emerge along gender lines. These differences are best explained by developmental feminist theory. Women demonstrated a pattern of deeper involvement in mystery reading. While the majority of both men and women readers said the gender of the author was not important in their selection of mysteries, their actual choices of favorite mysteries revealed a same-gender preference. Women chose mysteries because they are relaxing, soothing and comforting, while men chose mysteries because of their sense of suspense, urgency, and excitement.

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

The Mystery

The 1988 Gallup Report on Book Buying revealed that, of the 2.1 billion books sold in the United States in 1987, the most popular category with nearly 17 percent of all books sold were mysteries; 4.1 billion mystery books are sold weekly ("Page-turning Detectives," 1989). And, as Radway (1984, p. 284) pointed out in her analysis of the book publishing industry: "If the number of titles issued per year is used as a standard, mysteries have dominated paperback publishing since the twentieth century revolution began." The main goal of this study was to learn why the genre attracts the number of readers that it does by providing an understanding of the underlying meaning of mysteries to their readers.

In this study, the umbrella term, "mystery" will be used to describe the genre; other terms used by critics include detective fiction, thrillers, and crime fiction. Although the origins of the mystery have been traced to the Oedipal myth (Van Meter, 1976), most critics consider Edgar Allen Poe's "Murder in the Rue Morgue" to be the first true mystery story, mainly because, as Holquist (1983) and Knight (1980) noted, you can't have detective fiction before you have detectives.

Mysteries are usually divided into two schools: the classical school which features the intellectual, ratiocinative detective, such as Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Christie's Hercule Poirot and the American hard-boiled school, best represented by the writing of Chandler and Hammett. The genre also includes

(among others) such sub-genres as the cozy, the political thriller, police procedurals, and true crime.

Recent trends in mysteries include mainstream writers crossing over into mysteries, for example, Oates, Mailer, and Llosa; the influx of women writers into the field (Foster, 1988; Herbert, 1988a); the emergence of the hard-boiled woman detective; and ethnic detectives.

Gender Similarities and Differences

As this study will show, there are differences in the ways women and men perceive mysteries. To lump all mystery readers into one category would, therefore, obscure fundamental demographic, situational and structural differences in mystery reading.

In addition, a survey of critical approaches to literary theory, specifically those having to do with role of the reader and the mystery genre itself, revealed vast differences in perspectives based on gender. Traditionally, the canons of literature have been masculine. Women's writing, for the most part, has either been excluded or devalued in the discussion of great works of literature. As a result, masculine norms are traditionally used to evaluate all literature. Thus, the canon of great mystery writers have been traditionally masculine. As one feminist critic noted:

Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Ngaio Marsh are the equivalents here of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot: those women almost always admitted to the ranks of "important writers," with a sort of guest chair sometimes available for the addition of a fourth woman, usually P.D. James or Ruth Rendell (a la Virginia Woolf or Emily Bronte). Sexist bias masquerading as objective aesthetic judgment is rampant in literary criticism, as so many feminist critics have shown, and the field of crime fiction is not exempt (Reddy, 1988, p. 4).

To apply theoretical or critical discussions to all mystery readers without taking gender differences into account would provide an inaccurate and incomplete description of how all readers actually experience mysteries. Since the majority of mystery critics have traditionally been male, their discussions of mysteries have assumed the perspective of the male reader. But, as Bleich (1989), Flynn (1989), and Radway (1984) demonstrated, women read differently than men. These differences must in turn have a structuring affect on the way readers respond to mystery reading. Therefore, this study includes the voices of women and the theories behind the forces that shape those voices. As Rakow (1986) noted:

The academic "popular culture debates," as they continue to be fought over theories of society and the role of popular culture, should pause to hear what feminists are saying. Feminists are saying that popular culture plays a role in patriarchal society and that theoretical analysis of this role warrants a major position in ongoing discussions (p. 38).

As a result, in addition to reviewing traditional (and mainly male) approaches to the study of mysteries, this study provides a discussion of feminist theory to expand the discussion to encompass an understanding of all mystery readers.

Purpose and Limitations of the Study

Cultural studies scholars have repeatedly called for more audience studies, but little work has been done on actual readers of literary texts. And, with the exception of Janice Radway's Reading the Romance (1984), there has been a virtual dearth of audience studies linking specific genres to differing reading patterns based on gender. One such neglected area of audience

studies is the mystery genre, which has historically been the most popular category of mass-produced fiction.

The purpose of this study is to discover what mystery reading actually means to those who engage in it, with an emphasis on gender differences and similarities. The study will first provide a survey of theoretical and critical approaches to the mystery genre to see how closely these perspectives echo actual reader responses. Next, the study will answer four research questions:

1. Who reads mysteries?
2. How and where is mystery reading done?
3. What specific features of mysteries are important to readers?
4. Why do people read mysteries?

However, three concerns need to be addressed. First, as numerous authors have noted (Carey, 1977), (Guba, 1985), (Ewen, 1983), and (Doyle & Paludi, 1991), there is no such thing as value free, objective research. As Bellah (cited in Doyle & Paludi, 1991, p. 7) stated:

Social science as a public philosophy cannot be "value free." It accepts the canons of critical, disciplined research, but it does not imagine that such research exists in a moral vacuum The analysts are part of the whole they are analyzing. In framing their problems and interpreting their results, they draw from their own experience and their membership in a community of research that is in turn located within specific traditions and institutions.

Therefore, as an avid mystery reader, as well as a white, middle-class, heterosexual, female researcher who is influenced by feminist theory, the author bring to this study her own experiences and predispositions. However, the results of the study came directly from the responses made by the readers and not from a previous commitment to a specific theory or hypothesis.

Second, the study focuses on similarities as well as differences between women and men who read mysteries. By highlighting only differences, there is both a tendency to polarize women and men and to substantiate the masculine claim of women as "Other," thereby affirming the masculine as the norm and the feminine as the deviation from the norm. In addition, by discussing only gender differences, the variations within each gender tend to be dismissed or obscured. Therefore, where relevant, similarities were also noted.

By way of explanation, throughout the study, the terms "women" or "feminine" and "man" or "masculine" are used, whenever possible, instead of the terms "male" and "female." As pointed out in Doyle and Paludi (1991), sex does not consist of two dichotomous categories, but is rather a description of "certain reproductive structures, hormones, and physical characteristics that exist along a continuum ranging from extreme femaleness to extreme maleness" (p. 24). And gender refers to those social, cultural and psychological components that also exist along a continuum of femininity and masculinity and are associated with the status of being either male or female.

Third, this study can only make claims about the sample of readers drawn from a particular mystery publication at a particular point in time. Although respondents may be demographically similar to other studies done on mystery readers (for example, see Stander, 1990, p. 35), the study cannot claim to represent the diversity of all mystery readers.

This study of mystery readers was predicated on three premises and assumptions: First, the importance of gender differences in reading and in criticism has traditionally been overlooked when discussing mystery novels. And, as a corollary, a great deal of mainstream criticism related to mystery

readers is androcentric. Second, the act of mystery reading is a complex transaction between the reader and the text. To truly understand what the genre means to its readers, it is therefore necessary to explore how actual readers read: when, where, and how mystery reading is done, as well as the attitudes and emotions associated with mystery reading. And third, the goals of knowledge and understanding in themselves warrant equal, if not greater, importance than that of prediction in mass communications studies.

This study begins by grounding the genre with an overview of cultural and audience studies approaches to mass communications which philosophically guided this study from its inception. Next, the study surveys the main approaches used by critics to analyze literature in general and mysteries in particular. The method and the results of the survey are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 6 analyzes the results of the survey, particularly the similarities and differences in mystery reading between women and men and how closely actual mystery reading conforms to critical analyses of the genre. In this section, quotations from the readers themselves were used extensively to allow them to speak for themselves using their own voices. In the past, both literary critics and the academic establishment have sometimes made universal claims about readers based on their own privileged positions rather than the actual lived experiences of those groups they purported to represent. This study tried to avoid such a position by allowing the respondents to speak directly about their reading.

CHAPTER II

GROUNDING THE GENRE

Cultural Studies

Cultural studies, best represented by James Carey, Michael Real, Horace Newcomb, and Paul Hirsch in the United States and by Klaus Bruhn Jensen, Stuart Hall, David Morley, and Robert White in Europe, have had a profound and invigorating impact on American mass communications research in recent years. Real (1989) defined a cultural studies approach to mass communication as follows:

[It is] the examination of media through social and aesthetic theories, with an emphasis on understanding the creation, content, and implications of media as human expression and experience. It is "culture-centered" in an expansive sense, looking at institutions, historical contexts, aesthetic levels, and collective outcomes. It criticizes for the purpose of appreciation and improvement, seeking understanding rather than prediction (pp. 44-45).

And Carey (1989) offered the following description:

A cultural science of communication, then, views human behavior—or more accurately, human action—as a text. Our task is to construct a "reading" of the text. The text itself is a sequence of symbols—speech, writing, gesture—that contain interpretations. Our task, like that of a literary critic, is to interpret the interpretations (p. 60).

Audience Studies

An important component of cultural studies is the location of the audience as the site of interpretation of mass communicated signs and symbols. Rather than visualizing the audience as a passive receiver of bits of information, cultural studies view the audience as actively constructing meaning within the

communication process. Research within this tradition is turning to studies of how audiences are involved in the process of making meaning. Schroder (1987, p. 17) commented: "Critical scholars are realizing that it has become necessary to examine how the audience actually selects, decodes, and makes sense of media texts."

Numerous scholars (Lindlof, 1988), (Newcomb 1984), (Altheide & Snow, 1988), (Morley 1981), (Radway, 1984, 1985), and (Cawelti, 1976) have advocated examining genre usage as a way of studying how actual audiences negotiate texts. Genre audiences are viewed as "interpretative communities" (see Fish, 1980; Lindlof, 1988) that tend to formulate and decode meanings according to genre conventions that have been established over time by both their producers and audiences. While many genre studies have concentrated on television audiences within a cultural studies context (Hobson, 1982; Jensen, 1986; Liebes & Katz, 1987, 1988; Lull, 1980; Morley, 1981), few studies have been conducted on actual readers of literary texts.

The studies that follow represent those that have been done on readers. Leenhardt (1980) studied 500 readers from Hungary and France. The readers were given two fictional texts to read, one from each country which were "intimately related to the history of the publics we wanted to investigate" (p. 212).

Leenhardt found that the readers from each country approached the novels from the other country in very different ways; the readers of both countries "filtered the text through highly schematic patterns" (p. 216). The French reader of the Hungarian novel (composed of fragmented narratives) reconstructed the text around a "central hero, thus building a narrative structure more familiar to him" (p. 216). The Hungarian reader, on the other hand,

approached the French novel by "creating an agglomeration of stereotyped 'kernels' unrelated to each other" (p. 216). For the French reader, the need for coherency and causal relationships predominated. For the Hungarian reader, the imposition of a judgmental code with a hierarchy of values predominated. The author found that within each country, readers differed according to sociological categories, but particularly important was their educational background. Leenhardt concluded:

The reading process actively involves the reader himself, and is not the area of terrorist operation in which the text and its meaning are forced upon the reader. Even though it does communicate meaning, the written text, when read, undergoes a very deep and complex process of appropriation. Reading is not only an act of docile consumption, and the meanings a text conveys do not repress the reader's activity to as large an extent as some have claimed. The appropriation of the text causes its original "truth" to break apart (p. 210).

Bleich (1986) studied the responses of two groups of readers to see if there were gender differences in the way college students read literature. In the first group, a graduate seminar at Indiana University, Bleich compared the "literary response patterns" of four men and four women. He found there were no differences in the response of the students based on the gender of the author, but he did find that there were obvious differences in gender responses to the reading of fiction:

Men perceive a strong narrative voice, but women experienced the narrative as a "world," without a particularly strong sense that this world was narrated into existence. Perhaps another way of articulating the difference would be that women *enter* the world of the novel, take it as something "there" for that purpose; men see the novel as a result of someone's action and construe its meaning or logic in those terms (p. 239).

Bleich's second study was based on the retellings of Faulkner's "Barn Burning" by 100 students (50 women and 50 men) chosen at random from 120 responses of a freshman class at Indiana University. He asserted that men were more careful about accurately restating what actually went on in the story; they seldom made inferences that couldn't be literally documented. Women, on the other hand, "saw" feelings in the story more readily than did men (1986, pp. 258-259). Bleich concluded that men were more "instinctively distant from the reading," and, as a result, they retell stories using more abstractions. Women seemed to enter into human relations in the story more readily, and, as a result, "they retell the story more in terms of interpersonal motives, allegiances, and conflicts, and less in terms of the perspective of a single character or the author" (p. 261). Men identified with only one or two characters in the story, while women "were less likely to offer a judgment of individual figures and more likely to describe differential allegiances to various figures and situations" (p. 265).

Bleich attributed these differences to men's need to distance themselves by trying to literally understand the events that unfolded in the narrative. Women, in contrast, regarded literal comprehension as less important than their emotional responses to the story.

Bleich ascribed these differences in responses to fiction to the gender acquisition of language. Women view the narrator as less of an other than do men and more easily become the tellers of the stories because of their tendency to sense language as that of the mother who essentially speaks the same language as they do. Men, however, view the narrator as an other because, as children, they sense that mother's language is different from that of their own—

"both the content of the narrative and the source of the narrative are other"

(p. 264). Bleich concluded:

Both men and women are born of women. Women, therefore, probably perceive men as "less other" than men perceive women. For a man to come into his own involves a more radical separation than it does for a woman to come into her own, even though both genders do require a decisive separation at the infantile stage of language acquisition. What makes it less decisive for women is that the acquisition of gender identity takes them "back" in a sense to the mother from whom they just separated. What makes the separation more decisive for men is that the acquisition of the sense of gender identity moves them further away from the "other" who gave birth to them (p. 265).

Flynn (1989) studied 26 women and 26 men enrolled in a freshman composition course at Michigan Technological University. Flynn's study was grounded on the idea that reading involves a confrontation between the self and other (the text). She predicted three outcomes: (a) the reader can dominate the text by resisting it and thus remain essentially unchanged by the reading; (b) the text can dominate the reader to such an extent that the self is totally replaced by the other of the text, indicating too much involvement and resulting in a lack of consistent meaning; and (c) the reader can interact with the text by counterbalancing critical detachment with emotional involvement resulting in a learning experience which combines both self and the text.

Flynn found that most of the responses indicated that the text tended to dominate the reader. She attributed this to the students' lack of familiarity with the stories and the authors. However, in overall responses, Flynn found that more men tended to dominate or reject the text while women were "better able to resolve the tensions in the stories and form a consistent pattern of meaning" (p. 272). In addition, more women than men related setting and theme. In the

case of the short story "Araby," for example, male readers either tended to reject the ending of the story or to identify strongly with the male protagonist, while women were better able to achieve a balance critical detachment and involvement in the story.

Janice A. Radway's Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (1984) is an innovative study combining both gender and genre to explore the ways romance reading is both a symptom of, as well as a protest against, patriarchy. Radway's study was predicated on reader-response literary theory which views reading as a "complex transaction" between an inert text and an "actively productive reader" who constructs meaning based on previously learned cultural interpretative strategies (Radway, 1985, p. 340). Although the reader tries to decode a text based on the codes and strategies the reader believes the author intended, nothing in the text forces her to do so.

Radway's book was based on 42 written surveys of romance readers and extensive taped interviews with 16 of those who answered the survey. She also conducted an ethnographic study of these same 16 women who frequented a bookstore in Smithton, a pseudonym for a community in the Midwest. Radway defined these readers as an interpretive community whose literary competencies were based on learned conventions of the romance genre. Radway located her interpretive community by using a standard of the book publishing industry—book categories. Publishers have surveyed the market and have found that certain readers will choose books only from a single category because "essential features of their social life create needs and demands that are somehow addressed and fulfilled by these books" (Radway, 1985, p. 342).

Radway began her study by describing the historical background of the paperback publishing industry in the United States. She demonstrated how romance readers became a prime target of the publishing industry because of three factors. First, market research found that women made up more than half of the book-reading public. Second, the rise of chain book stores in suburban shopping malls (such as B. Dalton and Waldenbooks) contributed to the accessibility of paperback books. And third, the majority of romance readers are suburban, middle-class mothers who have blocks of reading time available to them while children are in school and who have the money necessary to be able to repeatedly purchase romance novels.

Radway used the information from her questionnaires and from her first series of taped interviews to compare how closely her group of readers fit the demographic characteristics released by the romance publishing houses. For the most part, they were statistically identical. Radway next described the reading patterns of her informants: for example, 88% read romances daily and 55% read from one to four romances weekly. She also studied the working definitions readers gave of the genre and their preferences for particular kinds of romances, heroes and heroines. Radway noted: "After hearing a plot summary, the investigator might read the text, noting both what the reader has designated as significant in her account and what she has ignored" (1985, p. 344).

Working from the questionnaires, Radway focused her second set of in-depth interviews on the two reasons most cited for reading romances—escape and relaxation. She found that reading took these women away from what "they believe is the psychologically demanding and emotionally draining task of attending to the physical and affective needs of their families, a task that is

solely and peculiarly theirs" (1984, p. 92). At the same time, by choosing to read romances that made them feel happy, they were able to figuratively escape into a fantasy world where the heroine's similar needs were always adequately met.

Based on the questionnaires which asked for three favorite authors and three favorite titles, Radway selected 20 novels as representative of novels considered good by their readers. Next, she undertook a semiotic analysis of these books. She constructed a sequence of 13 narrative functions (based on Propp's analysis of the folktale—a syntagmatic analysis). She also constructed a set of eight binary oppositions (a paradigmatic analysis) of the characters (heroine, female foil, hero, male foil) as portrayed at the beginning of the novels. Based on these textual analyses and on the interviews, Radway found that, for romance readers, the cruelty and indifference that the hero expresses at the beginning of these novels is not important because these emotions really originated in love and affection that manifest themselves in other ways. She said that romances, then, help perpetuate the notion that indifference is really a form of devotion, thus sending the message that there is no need for changes in behavior. Using Chodorow's (1978) theory of mothering, she also showed how repetitive romance reading "simultaneously recapitulates a woman's psychosexual development and vicariously satisfies some of the reader's needs created by such a development and seldom met fully by traditional, patriarchal marriage" (1984, p. 16).

It was at this point that Radway went beyond the mere descriptions of the romance readers' statements to interpret "other acknowledged significances and functions that make romance reading into a highly desirable and useful

action in the context of these women's lives" (1984, p. 9). She justified this movement from explicit to implicit meaning by adopting an anthropological perspective that assumes "cultural rituals also carry covert or tacit meanings in addition to those that are explicitly recognized" (1984, p. 9). Radway did acknowledge that the accuracy of any ethnographic account depends on the culture being described and on the individual who translates and interprets that culture, in her case, an interpretation guided by a feminist perspective.

However, Radway noted:

But in making the interpretation, in formulating what might be called my informants covert agenda, I have always worked from their conscious statements and beliefs about their behavior, accepted them as given, and then posited additional desires, fears, or concerns that complement rather than contradict those beliefs (1984, p. 10).

By examining those novels that readers said were examples of bad romances, Radway found that readers reject stories that provoke intense feelings about rape, violence, female sexuality, or anger. Radway concluded that these stories often inspire questions about whether men and marriage really benefit women and that these stories often fail to replenish the reader emotionally so she can return to her daily duties of nurturance. She also showed how both the narrative and the language found in these novels serve to reinforce the idea that the novel is a still uncompleted story about a unique individual. However, in reality, each romance novel has the same basic plot elements and the same ending. This perpetuates and reinforces the idea that, like the heroine, the reader's adoption of the conventional role was the result of chance and choice and not of social coercion. Thus, while the act of reading

itself may be a kind of protest of the role prescribed for them by the patriarchal culture, nevertheless, the text itself is encoded with the opposite message.

Radway concluded that romance reading is used to reconcile women to a patriarchal society by "deflecting and recontaining real protest and by supplying vicariously certain needs that, if presented as demands in the real world, might otherwise lead to the reordering of heterosexual relationships" (1984, p. 217). She further stated that feminists need to recognize that romance reading should be viewed as a protest originating in a real and deep dissatisfaction with the status quo. Working from this premise, feminists should develop real strategies for making this dissatisfaction overt and channeling it into social action.

CHAPTER III

SURVEY OF APPROACHES TO THE MYSTERY GENRE

Some literary critics and mass communications researchers have usurped the power of audiences by claiming to speak for them. The following approaches are presented as a touchstone to assess how accurately they reflected how actual readers perceived mysteries. These approaches will later be compared with readers' responses to see if what critics said about the genre actually mirrored what readers had to say.

Traditionally, critics have approached the mystery genre from a literary perspective. The importance of this literary approach to cultural studies is twofold. First, it offers an analytic tradition of interpretation that searches beyond the surface meaning of the text to uncover latent messages:

The literary and linguistic traditions already possess a refined interpretative apparatus which rests on the conviction that exclusion of non-manifest meanings from cultural analysis is absurd. Any text under scrutiny must be read "symptomatically": We have to search for what is behind the explicitly articulated, for the presuppositions, and the accepted attitudes concealed within them (Schroder, 1987, p. 28).

Second, audience studies have demonstrated that the meaning inscribed in a text by the author is not necessarily the meaning gleaned by the reader. Reading is therefore viewed as a complex transaction that occurs between the reader and the text. Meaning is a production process, not an imposition of the text on the reader.

The following four critical approaches to the study of the mystery genre are discussed: reader-response, feminist, mythological, and Marxist-socialist .

In addition, a brief section detailing critical comments on specific topics germane to this study follows the discussion of the four approaches.

Reader-Response Approach

Reader-response criticism concentrates exclusively on "what readers do and how they do it" (Davis, 1986, p. 345). Reader-response critics contend that works of literature can only be comprehended by its effects since meaning exists only in the reader's mind (Davis, 1986; Tompkins, 1980). This type of criticism represents a wide variety of theoretical approaches that draw from formalism, structuralism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction. The authors that follow represent the progression in reader-response criticism from a belief in the objectivity of the text to its ultimate destruction.

Prince (1980) divided readers into three categories: (a) the real reader (who is actually holding the book); (b) the virtual reader (who is the type of reader the author believes he is addressing); and (c) the ideal reader (who understands the text perfectly. But, for Prince, the function of any reader was to discover the meaning inherent in the text.

Poulet (1986) believed that to read means to think the thoughts of another person. The reader actually begins to experience the way the author sees the world. Although the reading process is centered on the reader, and the reader remains in control of the text, she or he becomes a part of an alien consciousness.

Iser (1980, 1986) viewed the reader as actively involved in the production of textual meaning. Iser allowed the reader a great deal of free variation of meaning which is seen as proof of the text's inexhaustibility. Iser believed the reader must fill in the gaps the author implies in the text.

The next step in reader-response criticism is the denial of any inherent meaning in the text. The reader's act of reading becomes identical with the text, and, therefore, the reader's activity becomes the source of all literary value (Tompkins, 1980, p. xvi).

Fish (1980) argued that readers actively participate in textual meaning. Fish concentrated on the sequences of "decisions, revisions, anticipations, reversals, and recoveries" that the reader performs as he reads through the text sentence by sentence (Tompkins, 1980, p. xvi). Instead of merely extracting meaning from the text, the reader's response to the text becomes the meaning of the text.

Fish (1980) explained: "The entities that were once seen as competing for the right to constrain interpretation (text, reader, author) are now all seen to be products of interpretation" (p. 16). Fish said, however, that there are some constraints on meaning. Much like Hall (1982), Fish (1980, pp. 171-173) believed that since all sign systems are social constructs that individuals unconsciously assimilate, each individual's literary perceptions and judgments are a part of the interpretative community to which she or he belongs. Different interpretations of the same literary work will depend upon the way in which a particular interpretative community interacts with the work.

Fish did acknowledge the difficulties inherent in his theory of interpretative strategies. It is impossible to know which interpretative community one belongs to because "any evidence brought forward to support the claim would itself be an interpretation" (p. 173).

Holland (1980a, 1980b), using a form of subjectivist psychoanalytic criticism, said that readers recreate texts according to their own personalities.

He believed that all adults have a cultural identity theme through which they filter a text. Holland (1980b) explained: "All of us as we read use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves . . . identity re-creates itself" (p. 124).

Holland (1980a) used this subjective transactive criticism in a kind of free-association analysis of Poe's "The Purloined Letter." Instead of reducing meaning, Holland believed that this type of approach multiplies possibilities by opening reading to a kind of personal transaction.

However, as Suleiman (1980) and Culler (1980a) pointed out, if, as Holland (1980b) claimed, identity replicates itself in textual interpretation, and if identity itself can only be discovered by interpretation, then any attempt to validate the first statement is hopelessly circular.

While Holland worked at an individual level of interpretation, Culler (1980a, 1980b) approached reader-response criticism from an institutional level. Culler defined one's literary competence as a "set of conventions for reading literary texts" (1980a, p. 112). Instead of concentrating on interpretations of individual works, Culler used a structural framework to try to isolate those conventions that direct readers to pick out certain features of a work that the reading public considers correct, acceptable, or appropriate interpretation.

Much like Eagleton (1983), Culler (1980b) said that literary interpretation is not a function of the reader, but rather of educational institutions. Culler (1980b) explained: "Reading and interpretation may be carried out in solitude, but they are highly social activities, which cannot be separated from the interpersonal and institutional conventions that are explicitly manifested in literary journals, critical discussion, and literary education" (p. 53).

Feminist Reader-Response Criticism

Fetterly (1991) stated that American literature is male. Therefore, the female reader must be coopted into an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a self that defines itself in opposition to her; she must identify against herself.

Fetterly said women experience two forms of powerlessness in reading. First, she is excluded from seeing her experience articulated, clarified and legitimized in literature. Second, she is forced to identify herself as a male while constantly being reminded that to be male—to be universal, American—is to be not female. Fetterly noted: "As readers, teachers, and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate, a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny" (p. 497). Fetterly's solution is to become a resisting reader rather than an assenting reader "to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us" (p. 498).

Schweikart (1991) also said that women readers are taught to think and identify with a male point of view. Furthermore, an androcentric canon of literature (the literature designated as important and good, and one that is based on the model of the melodrama of beset manhood) encourages interpretative strategies that, in turn, favor the canonization of masculine texts and the marginalization of gynocentric ones.

Using Adrienne Rich's reading of Emily Dickinson as an example of a feminist reading of a gynocentric text, Schweikart cited two characteristics of

such a reading: the use of the personal voice and the subjectivity of her approach toward the text. Schweikart said a feminist model of reader-response criticism should be based on a dialectic approach, one in which validity of interpretation gives way to the idea of a connectiveness with the author of the original work, and with a community of readers. Thus validity of interpretation becomes "contingent on the agreement of others" (p. 545).

Feminist Approach

Feminist Theory

Feminist theories begin with the assumption that women have been systematically "oppressed, repressed, and suppressed" (Tong, 1989, p. 1), and that the patriarchal system in which this is accomplished must be eliminated. Although there are numerous positions within feminist thought, four of the main approaches are liberal, radical, Marxist and socialist, and psychoanalytic.

Liberal feminism is characterized by the attitude that rational argument is capable of changing irrational prejudices by creating and altering laws to promote equal opportunities. Liberal feminists believe that rational argument and legal changes will ultimately result in both increased opportunities for women and in providing role models for women and girls (Steeves, 1987, pp. 100-101). Liberal feminist theory also maintains that socialization and sex-role conditioning victimizes men as well as women (Tong, 1989, p. 4).

Steeves said that radical feminists believe that there are biological innate differences between the sexes. Radical feminists focus on the ways gender, sexuality, and reproductive capacity are used by men to promote and perpetuate patriarchy. Since the patriarchal society is so deeply ingrained, radical feminists believe women must resort to a biological revolution that can take many forms:

lesbianism, the existence of a women's language separate from that of men, the rejection of social science methods as male-biased, and the promotion of gynocritics (feminist literary criticism based exclusively on female writing).

Marxist and socialist feminist theory states that capitalism promotes class oppression which, in turn, is a major factor in women's oppression. However, unlike orthodox Marxist-feminism, most socialist feminists take the view that, in addition to class oppression, such factors as patriarchy, race, sexual preference, and cultural background must also become major focuses, particularly in regard to ideological expressions in mass culture (Steeves, 1987, p. 106).

Feminist psychoanalytic and developmental theories are based on variations of Freud and Freudian concepts of the pre-Oedipal stage and the Oedipus concept. Chodorow (1978) focused on the pre-Oedipal stage of the infant-mother relationship as the determining experience in the formation of gender identity. Gilligan (1982) focused on the male biases traditionally used to assess morality and the ways in which qualities regarded as women's moral weaknesses are, in reality, human strengths.

According to Chodorow in The Reproduction of Mothering (1978), the desire to mother is neither biological nor conditioned by sex roles. Rather, it is an unconscious choice that cyclically reproduces itself. A boy defines himself negatively, as an other than that of his mother. A boy must separate from his mother in order to avoid the anger and punishment of his father but, at the same time, he identifies with his father because "he can gain the benefits of being the one who gives punishment, of being masculine and superior" and, as a result, he develops the normal male contempt for women (p. 113). Thereafter, a boy perceives himself as active, independent, individual, efficient, and competitive--

traits valued in the public sphere. But this separateness also results in an inability to relate deeply to others.

In contrast, a girl's pre-Oedipal relationship is characterized by prolonged symbiosis and narcissistic over-identification since her sense of self and gender is continuous with that of her mother. Although a girl eventually separates from her mother because she is drawn to the penis as a symbol of both power and sexual satisfaction, she never fully breaks the symbiosis between herself and her mother. As a result, a woman finds her strongest emotional connections with other women, and she develops a capacity for nurturance, dependence, and empathy—traits necessary for her role as a mother in the private sphere.

Women have a more difficult time attaining independence and autonomy than do men since the self is defined through relationships. Because women have "more permeable ego boundaries" (p. 93), they are therefore concerned with issues of intimacy and of merging of the self with others (p. 79). Chodorow's solution to the problem of over-relatedness for women and under-relatedness for men is dual parenting.

Gilligan's In A Different Voice (1982) challenged the masculine norms used to assess women's moral development, norms which find women deficient and underdeveloped morally in comparison to men. Instead, Gilligan argued that men and women have different conceptions of morality, each equally developed and valid. Men view themselves as separate beings; their construction of morality is based on the "the primacy and universality of individual rights"—how to exercise one's rights without interfering with the rights of others (p. 21). Women, on the other hand, view themselves as interdependent beings whose identity depends on others; their construction of

morality is based on "limiting responsibilities without abandoning moral concern" (p. 21).

These differences are clearly highlighted in a study of college students described in In A Different Voice. A greater incidence of violence was found in stories written by men. Moreover, men see danger more often arising from close personal relationships and intimacy, while women see danger arising from "impersonal achievement situations" and competitive success (p. 42).

Defining aggression as a response to danger, Gilligan says that women perceive danger in different ways and in different social situations than men:

If aggression is tied, as women perceive, to the fracture of human connection, then the activities of care, as their fantasies suggest, are the activities that make the social world safe, by avoiding isolation and preventing aggression rather than by seeking rules to limit its extent. In this light aggression appears no longer as an unruly impulse that must be contained but rather as a signal of a fracture of connection, the sign of failure in a relationship. From this perspective, the prevalence in men's fantasies, denoting a world where danger is everywhere seen, signifies a problem in making connection, causing relationships to erupt and turning separation into a dangerous isolation. Reversing the usual mode of interpretation, in which the absence of aggression in women is tied to a problem with separation, makes it possible to see the prevalence of violence in men's stories, its odd location in the context of intimate relationships, and its association with betrayal and deceit as indicative of a problem with connection that leads relationships to become dangerous and safety to appear in separation. Then rule-bound competitive achievement situations, which for women threaten the web of connection, for men provide a mode of connection that establishes clear boundaries and limits aggression, and thus appears comparatively safe (pp. 43-44).

Thus, women's conception of morality is tied to care and responsibility in relationships, while men's conception is tied to one of rights and rules involving the logic of fairness and equality.

Gilligan also found that women tend to take into account the context of a moral problem, weighing the consequences of an action on all the people involved, while men tend to take a more nonconsequential point of view: principles must be upheld even if some people get hurt in the process. And women tend to reconstruct hypothetical moral dilemmas in terms of the real, requesting or supplying missing information about people and places, while men tend to reconstruct real moral dilemmas in terms of an abstract problem that represents a universal type of moral choice.

Feminist Literary Theory

Humm (1986) said that all feminist criticism shares three basic assumptions. The first is that all literature and criticism is ideological since "writing manipulates gender for symbolic purposes" (p. 6). The second is that there are sex-related writing strategies. Women use language in different ways, have different vocabularies, and formulate different kinds of sentences. Some of the specifically female forms in literature would include patterns of disjunction, animal and plant imagery, uses of the supernatural or otherworldliness, dress iconography, and anxiety motifs. However, Humm stated that this is to celebrate the "multiplicity of women's" writing rather than simply its difference, since the former will prove the "extent and normality of women's experience" (p. 8).

The third assumption in feminist criticism is that the continuing tradition of literary culture, like the economic and social conditions of which it is a part, uses masculine norms to exclude or undervalue feminine writing and scholarship.

Gardiner (1982) used identity theory to distinguish between male and female literary strategies. Drawing on psychological theory and Chodorow's work (1978), Gardiner traced the process of identity formation to the differing

literary paradigms used by male and females to describe the life experience. Because the female identity is more fluid and flexible, women writers tend to dissolve generic boundaries and create characters that "tend to dissolve and merge into each other" (p. 185). The female reader is characterized by her shift in "empathetic identifications and her sense of immersion in and separation from the text as she reads" (p. 187).

Finally, Gardiner said that female writers are more able to create androgynous characters:

Women writers often draw characters in whom traditionally male and female attributes of personality form a real and tangible union. Such deliberate literary androgyny does not reflect authorial confusion about gender identity. As we have seen, boys have more difficulty than girls in acquiring gender identity, and men exhibit more disturbances in gender identity than do women. The problems of female identity presently in women's poetry and prose are rarely difficulties in knowing one's gender; more frequently, they are difficulties in learning how to respond to social rules for what being female means in our culture (p. 189).

According to Showalter (1991), the dominant critical feminist methodologies and movements have included the following: androgynous poetics, a feminist critique of masculine culture and a Female Aesthetic, gynocritics, gynesic, and gender theory.

Before the women's liberation movement, criticism took the form of androgynous poetics which ignored any feminine literary consciousness and set a universal standard of criticism that female writers had to meet. It celebrated the notion of the genderless imagination.

From the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, criticism took the form of a feminist critique of male culture. With the realization that the creative imagination cannot be separated from the "socially, sexually, and historically positioned self"

(p. 178), and with the influence of psycholinguistics, feminist critics began to examine the ways in which patriarchal ideology repressed women. The androcentric canon of literature, the stereotypes of women as angels or monsters, and the exclusion of women from literary history began to be examined by feminist critics. At the same time, the Female Aesthetic was celebrated. This movement developed the idea of the distinct female consciousness in women's writing, proposed the empowerment of the common woman reader, and explored the idea of a powerful but neglected women's culture. In France, *écriture féminine*, or writing the body, explored ways to construct a feminine language that was based on women's biological differences from men.

Gynocritics, which also appeared in the 1970s, identified women's writing as central to feminist criticism, but rejected the concept of an "essential female identity and style" since "there can be no writing or criticism outside of the dominant culture" (p. 180). Instead, theories of feminine creativity were developed within the female literary tradition itself. From feminist studies in philosophy, religion, psychology, and social history came the concept of "'matriarchal values' of nurturance, caring, nonviolence, and connectedness" which were viewed as positive values for society as a whole (p. 181). Other critics concentrated on gender and genre, how gender has shaped genre conventions in forms as diverse as the hymn and nineteenth-century English women's texts.

In the late 1970s gynestics emerged, which drew on the works of linguistics, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and deconstruction to explain sexual differences in language, reading, and writing. Central to this movement was the

theory of "female subjectivity" which located woman as the "silenced and repressed Other of Western discourse" (p. 183).

The latest movement, gender theory, which began in the late 1980s is the comparative study of gender differences. Gender theory says that all writing, not just writing by women, is gendered. The three goals of gender theory are the following:

To substitute the analysis of social constructs for biological determinism in the discussion of sexual difference; to introduce comparative studies of women and men into the specific discipline field; and to transform disciplinary paradigms by adding gender as an analytic category (p. 184).

Feminist Criticism of Mysteries

Cranny-Francis (1988) examined three contemporary detective novels written by women and featuring female protagonists. She began her discussion by surveying traditional detective fiction and concluded that the genre is based on macho values—a lone male who is strong, brave, and independent—which are coded into the narrative. In each of the three novels studied, some attempt was made to explore feminist issues; however, Cranny-Francis found that ultimately, the conservative, ideological function of the novel was upheld. In two of the books, social injustice and the murder was blamed on an aberrant individual rather than seen as a consequence of the system itself. In the third novel, the institutional practice of sexism in the university was explored and implicated, but, in the process, the novel was transformed from detective fiction into political fiction.

In The Woman Detective, Klein (1988) traced the evolution of the paid, professional woman detective in novels written from 1864 to 1987. She then used a textual and sociological analysis to conclude the following:

Because detective fiction follows rather than parallels social reality, the genre's inherent conservatism upholds power and privilege in the name of law and justice as it validates readers' visions of a safe and ordered world. In such a world view, criminals and women are put in their proper, secondary places. In consequence, despite enormous differences in the detectives themselves and in the societies for which they were produced, the underlying plot in almost three hundred novels denies these characters either as detectives or as women (p. 1).

Klein believed that a truly feminist detective would not support social institutions such as the police or the judicial system since both have historically oppressed or excluded women. She was particularly critical of Grafton's series character, Kinsey Milhone, because of her acceptance of such institutions and because of way in which she views solutions to problems on a personal rather than societal level. However, Klein cited Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski as virtually the only example of a feminist detective because of Warshawski's recognition of oppression, paternalism, and patriarchy in others around her and in society as a whole. Klein commented favorably on Paretsky's portrayal of close relationships with other women and her "minimization of the mystery formula" (pp. 214-215).

Because feminism rejects the very elements that are basic to the detective fiction formula, such as "violence, the objectification of sex, and the patronization of the oppressed" (p. 201), Klein concluded that the genre must undergo a radical and complete reformulation. However, she conceded that since the genre is such an economic success, thus maintaining the status quo, such changes are unlikely.

Kaplan (1986) reviewed the works of women canonized as great crime writers: Christie, Marsh, Tey, Sayers, Wentworth, James, and Rendell. She concluded that they have all been "at worst explicitly anti-feminist and at best

highly ambivalent about any disruptions of traditional gender relations" (p. 18). In addition they often defended a social order that no longer existed in the real world.

Kaplan conceded that Christie's Miss Marple does "reinstate the unmarried, childless woman as an independent force," but Kaplan also claimed that Miss Marple, by standing "outside the sexual, familial and economic entanglements that make up the lives of most of the members of the community," highlights the "disruptive power of sexuality in the populace at large" (p. 18). Kaplan also stated that Christie, Tey, Marsh, and Wentworth all employ variations of the cold, independent women who use sex to better their social positions as murderers or catalysts.

In addition, books such as Sayers' Gaudy Night, Tey's Miss Pym Disposes, and James' Shroud for A Nightingale, which are set in all-women institutions, depict "envy, jealousy, competition and--worst of all--unnatural attachments" between women (p. 18). The implication made by these authors was that occupations for women that require periods of single-sex education encourage homosexuality and dangerous emotions.

Kaplan also discussed the way in which many authors (Allingham's Albert Campion, Christie's Poirot, James' Adam Dagleish, Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey, and Rendell's Wexford) use a masculine persona to appeal to the audience of both genders who read mysteries and to distance the authority of the investigator from the gendered identity of the feminine writer. Kaplan briefly surveyed the ways in which contemporary women authors use aspects of feminism in their mysteries. Some (such as Amanda Cross) explicitly question whether the male villain "represents society or acts as its agent" (p. 19); others

(Caudwell and Fraser) "use their defiantly promiscuous female protagonists to reject the notion that it is women's transgressive sexuality that is the 'problem'—the trigger of social disturbance and violence" (p. 19). However, Kaplan said that the major flaw found in these novels is that they are usually set in a safe bourgeois world of urban professionals, thus limiting their applicability to all women.

Klein and Keller (1986) said that the mystery genre contains two major self-contradictions that are causing it to self-destruct. The first is that the traditional deductive detective story is not primarily deductive. Instead, the authors argued that "between the always incomplete investigation and the subsequent discovery of an explanation occurs a logical gap bridged by what, in the poverty of current psychological knowledge, we may call intuition" (p. 160). The second self-contradiction is that educated readers can no longer believe in an absolutely morally degenerate villain that deserves the inevitable and sometimes disproportionate punishment she or he received.

The authors questioned why the genre has continued to survive with these inherent contradictions. They concluded that the Golden Age writers of the 1920s (such as Christie and Sayers) adopted the masculine-logocentric and patriarchal fascination with objective science, and believed themselves to be linearly rational and analytical. Thus, the mystery reflects a male dominant cultural myth which readers of the time expected since they were "either males or honorary males by virtue of an educational system which validates linear, scientific, and objective approaches to knowledge" (p. 165).

The authors believed the fallacy of this thinking is that, as Gilligan demonstrated in In Another Voice, women have different value systems than do

men. Thus, the mystery could only succeed in a patriarchal and logocentric world in which alternate ways of thinking were tightly kept in check. Klein and Keller believe that readers will come to the conclusion that no matter how fairly the author revealed the clues to the reader, they cannot solve the crime by pure deduction; thus the deficiency is in the genre, not in the reader.

The authors also commented on another basic tenant of the formula, the identification of the reader with the protagonist. They imply that the "trans-ethnic, Western, middle-class WASP" myth of logocentrism forces women and "culturally different men," (such as Hillerman's Navajo detective, Joe Leaphorn) to view this objective, scientific, logically-thinking world as outsiders (p. 168). This necessitates a dual vision in which they must read the world as if they were members of its power structure, but, at the same time, viewing it as alien.

The final point raised by the authors was that another basic component of the mystery formula is being eroded: the punishment of the villain to achieve justice and closure. They said a primary function of the mystery is to arouse fears about death, and/or threats to oneself, family, and personal possessions which are then appeased by the detective exposing an evil villain who is ultimately punished. However, the social sciences have taught (a) "that as much as criminals are like ourselves . . . we are like them" (p. 169), and (b) often societal factors are the cause of a criminal's behavior. Thus, fears aroused in a novel which acknowledges these types of criminals can never be appeased by simply exposing and punishing an aberrant individual.

In "Investigating Women: The Female Sleuth after Feminism," Pykett (1990) looked at whether feminist authors have changed the politics of the

mystery genre in any way. Pykett found that novels by Fraser, Mann and James have not challenged the conservative social values and politics of the genre. Each author uses a "cool, detached female sleuth to unravel the consequences of the disruptions of order and familial stability that result from the transgressive behavior of socially ambitious and sexually predatory women" (p. 54).

While Cross's Kate Fansler does incorporate feminist issues, she, nevertheless, "remains cocooned in a world of middle-aged, middle-class privilege" (p. 45). Pykett commented that several of the post-feminism novels offer a designer-feminism, whereby a wise-cracking, independent, female protagonist is simply placed in a self-consciously radical environment without questioning the conservative ideology or conventions of the genre.

However, in novels by Slovo, Wilson, and O'Rourke, the protagonists engage in issues of race, class, and gender. This is accomplished by the use of such devices as lesbian, politically radical, and/or working-class protagonists. In all of these novels, the authors question the use of the authoritative voice of the hard-boiled male narrator. Narratives are first-person, the voice of a "closely observing female recorder" whose authority is simply that of the individual (p. 65). However, as Pykett points out, these novels are published by small feminist presses and have limited distribution.

Koelsch (1986) asserted Nancy Drew served as a role model for four decades of teenage girls. Although she epitomized the stereotype of the upper-middle class WASP (she was pretty, popular, had a handsome boyfriend, her own car, and a housekeeper), she nonetheless also subverted stereotypical ideas about feminine behavior. Nancy Drew demonstrated that a girl could be liked for her courage, competence, and intelligence, as well as for her looks.

More importantly, "she suggested a psychologically integrated alternative to the totally male-identified character of teenage romances" (p. 2).

Koelsch suggested that the adolescent readers of Nancy Drew have grown up to be fans of contemporary feminist mystery novelists. She stated that many of the protagonists of these novels are women, much like their readers, who have careers, children, husbands or lovers and are concerned with contemporary social issues and involved in politics. Koelsch also said that the popularity of series characters in mysteries provides a way to implicitly and explicitly explore social issues as well as a way to incorporate women's concerns and friendships into these novels.

Levy (1989) remarked on the binary opposition and dichotomy between "female sexuality and female subjectivity" found in the hard-boiled mystery novel, where women are victims, seductresses, the objects, not the subjects of inquiry, and in the classical school, where the female protagonist is often an asexual outsider, such as Christie's Miss Marple. She said that precisely because of its traditional emphasis on bourgeois individualism, innovations within the genre could provide an important vehicle for questioning of social issues and challenging conservative ideology.

Levy asserted that mysteries should not be viewed as a historically masculine form since women have long been readers of the genre and since recent feminist work is discovering a number of submerged women mystery writers. She stated that genres should be understood as constantly in formation and under revision.

Fritz and Hevener (1979) studied 52 female detectives in mystery novels from the 1920s through the 1970s. They concluded that shifts in the portrayal of

female detectives parallel actual social changes in women's status. They stated that detective novels reflect and reinforce women's roles rather than changing or influencing them.

The authors found the following: (a) the increase of fictional women detectives who have careers reflects the rise in the number of working women; (b) the fictional image of career women has changed from one of "unattractive losers in the marriage sweepstakes" (p. 123) to one of an "attractive independent woman who combines 'feminine' virtues of sensitivity and concern for others with 'masculine' qualities of courage, determination, and intelligence" (p. 12); and (c) the one demographic trend not represented in mystery novels in the increase of married women in the labor market; mysteries continue to represent women detectives as single.

The authors say this last trend can be explained in two ways: (a) Either detective novels, as a form of popular culture, distort social reality to reflect typical attitudes, beliefs, and ideas imbedded in the culture, thus upholding traditional roles. Or (b), the new role model is a happily single career woman, who is confident in her choice of career over marriage.

Reddy (1988) surveyed mysteries written by women in the last century and concluded that the increasing diversity of women detectives reflects social changes, the most important of which is feminism. She stated that, contrary to the generally accepted notion of the beginning of crime fiction being Poe's "Murder in the Rue Morgue," the mystery actually has its roots in the Gothic novels dominated by women authors.

Reddy said that the genre is problematic for the women writer for several reasons. Traditionally, it has been defined according to a masculine model

which makes objective, distanced, rational thought its most prized element. Mysteries tend to glorify masculine values and to uphold and reinforce conservative social attitudes.

The formula begins in disorder or the violation of social order and proceeds linearly to order. The ultimate message of the genre is that it is desirable and possible to destroy disruptive social elements and that the continuation of (bourgeois, patriarchal) society depends on accepting control of a masculine authority figure capable of explaining the world satisfactorily. In addition, the mystery has traditionally been a monologue. Although readers think they are hearing a multiplicity of voices and viewpoints, one voice finally drowns out all the others and established a single version of truth.

Reddy cited Gilligan (1982) and Chodorow (1978) who suggested that men define themselves through individuation and separation, valuing autonomy over bonds with others and viewing relationships in terms of rules and procedures for adjudicating issues of individual rights. Women, on the other hand, tend to define themselves in terms of relationships, valuing bonds with others over autonomy and viewing relationships in terms of balancing needs and negotiating responsibilities to maintain the relationship (Reddy, 1988, pp. 10-11). Thus, women detectives might read clues differently than do men. Reddy said that some women writers, especially feminist women writers, "might be expected to play around with the issue of narrative authority and to be at least somewhat distrustful of authority generally" (p. 10).

Like most male mystery writers, women authors tend to use a main figure who represents moral authority, a controlling intelligence who explains what at first seems inexplicable. This person is more often a man rather than a woman

(Sayers' Wimsey, James' Dagleish, Allingham's Campion, etc.). According to Reddy, there are three reasons for this: (a) employment discrimination banned women from jobs as detectives or private investigators until recently, leaving women authors who wanted to use a feminine protagonist the option of gifted amateur, such as Christie's Miss Marple; (b) to reach the largest possible audience, women authors chose to use a male protagonist since women will read novels by and about men, but not the opposite; and (c) the idea of a woman in charge, especially one dedicated to law and order, works against traditional expectations.

Unlike Kaplan (1986), Reddy viewed Gaudy Night as "the first feminist detective novel and the book most feminist readers of crime novels I know cite as the one that first attracted them to the genre" (p. 12). Reddy said that the text can be read from a female vantage point instead of through the usually masculine voice of authority representing the masculinist legal system. Instead of viewing Wimsey as the central authority figure who is called in to solve the problem, the reader "reading consciously as a woman" will find the following:

The mystery at the center of Gaudy Night is not the mystery of who is responsible for the nocturnal acts of mischief, but of female character and female development in a male-ordered world. The dons of Shrewsbury College represent a violation of the social order—they are celibate women, living in a female community, pursuing work of their own—while their tormentor is a male-identified woman, spurred to hatred by love of a man (her dead husband) and by fear and hatred of the female dons, who seem to her to be unnatural women. The poltergeist, then, embodies conventional definitions of womanhood, with her intrusion of the hostile world into the cloister. Gaudy Night asks: What are the possible ways for women to live? Can women both love and work? Is work enough? The novel answers few of the questions it raises, despite Peter's conviction that the puzzle is solved (p. 13).

Similarly, Reddy found feminist strains in Christie's Miss Marple novels-- the celebration of those feminine qualities ridiculed in the stereotype of the irrational, intuitive, gossipy spinster. Miss Marple's lifelong study of human nature involves acuity, insight, intelligence, and imagination in contrast to her conventionally feminine exterior. Concluded Reddy: "Miss Marple's habit of disguising her sharp mind is a conventionally feminine strategy akin to Christie's portrayal of her character as no threat to established social order" (p. 20).

Rather than adhering to a definition of the mystery formula as one in which a crime or murder occurs, the solution to which is found in the reading of physical clues, Reddy preferred to define mysteries as the examination of events, often but not always criminal, that are partly hidden at the beginning of the story. Reddy noted: "Frequently, in the most interesting mysteries, and particularly in those written by women, the answer lies in character, with its revelation depending upon the investigation of personality and on the conjunction of the personal and social" (p. 5).

Reddy also showed how the woman hard-boiled protagonist created by Paretsky, Grafton, Muller, Cody, and James, in the Cordelia Grey series character, differs from the masculine hard-boiled detectives created by Hammett, Chandler, and Spillane. The most important difference is the woman-centered world view which displaces the central male consciousness. Instead of the isolated masculine loner, with his lack of ordinary human relationships, feminine hard-boiled protagonists (most of whom, Reddy noted, are also parentless, spouseless and childless) relish their independence and form close personal relationships that function as chosen families.

Instead of the glorification of violence found in many of the masculine hard-boiled novels, these feminist detectives avoid violence, except when threatened with violence, and never initiate it. They also refuse to play the role of victim; they fight back and can hold their own in physical fights. Finally, unlike the masculine hard-boiled detectives who possess rigid personal moral codes, feminist detectives—while they, like their masculine counterparts, hold themselves apart from the legal system—never see themselves as either above the law or as a law unto themselves.

Masculine Criticism of Gender Issues in Mysteries

Porter (1981) analyzed detective heroes of the classical school, such as Dupin, and Sherlock Holmes, and said that, since they were associated with "cultural and intellectual pursuits," they therefore appear "unmasculine" (p. 183). However, the hard-boiled, tough-talking detective is unequivocally anti-feminist. Porter cited the "linguistic double-standard" in the genre whereby "tough-talking women" were either "bumpkins or fallen women" (p. 184). Although there is a great deal of sex in this type of fiction, as a general rule, it goes un consummated. Porter viewed the hero as an extension of the American hunter myth in which the hero must remain celibate. The detective as loner usually finds himself betrayed by women and "ends up demonstrating his mastery over sexual temptation by rejecting, arresting, or, in some cases, killing her" (p. 185). Porter felt this anti-feminist strain in detective fiction is a function of the formula: the discovery that love is perverted is an expression of the corruption and the pessimism of the society in general.

Palmer (1979) commented on the dualism of male and female manifestations in detective fiction. The female body is viewed as a threat or

temptation, while the male body is presented as a symbol of the hero's presence and personality. Females in the genre are one of two types: the asexual and dull good girl and the mysterious bad girl. Thrillers, such as James Bond novels, maintain the male myth that if a man is virile enough, he can cure women of "frigidity and lesbianism" (p. 33).

Mythological and Archetypal Approaches

Myth criticism asserts that there are universal themes, symbols, motifs, or primordial images in different mythologies that perform the same cultural or psychological functions worldwide (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, & Willingham, 1979). This type of criticism draws heavily from both Jungian psychology and anthropology.

Carl Jung coined the word *archetypes* for these universal themes (Jung, von Franz, Henderson, Jacobi, & Jaffe, 1976, p. 57). Jung believed that archetypes are stored in the collective unconscious of all human beings; they act as possibilities, predispositions, potentialities or templates to organize and shape an individual's interactions with the outside world and with the internal world of the unconscious. Jung said that myths are one way in which these archetypes reveal themselves to the conscious mind:

The further we delve into the origins of a "collective image," . . . the more we uncover a seemingly unending web of archetypal patterns that before modern times were never the object of conscious reflection. Thus, paradoxically enough, we know more about mythological symbolism than did any generation before our own. The fact is that in former times men did not reflect upon their symbols; they lived them and were unconsciously animated by their meaning. (Jung et al., 1976, p. 69)

Jung identified and classified archetypes that appeared frequently in mythological stories: the Hero, the Child-God, the Mother, the Trickster, the

Shadow, Animus and Anima, and the Persona, for example (Monte, 1987, pp. 250-253).

From anthropological studies comes such work as Joseph Campbell's The Hero with A Thousand Faces (1973) in which the archetype of the hero is described in terms of the "monomyth": separation—initiation—return (p. 30). Note the similarity to the detective hero in Campbell's description of the mythical hero: "The composite hero of the monomyth is a personage of exceptional gifts. Frequently he is honored by his society, frequently unrecognized or disdained. He and/or the world in which he finds himself suffers from a symbolic deficiency" (p. 37).

The hero archetype may go through several transformations according to the needs of the culture, for example, the hero can be seen as Lover, as World Redeemer, as Saint, as Warrior, as Emperor and Tyrant, etc. (Campbell, 1973, pp. 315-364). The hero is a universal archetype found in all cultures. However, the particular manifestations and embellishments of the hero archetype in an individual culture tells us something about the values, aesthetics, and ideology of that culture.

Breen and Corcoran (1986) discussed the paradigm shift in communications research toward "meaning creation within a context of dominant social images and values" (p. 197). Breen and Corcoran explained: "All of this research movement—the rapprochement with anthropology, the interest in culture as meaning system, the exploration of public fantasies, the influence of European thinkers, and the analysis of symbolic convergence—represents a profound change in orientation which is becoming increasingly important in the U.S." (p. 197). They mentioned the incorporation of ideology into

myth studies: "Ideology as promoted by a state apparatus, tribal myths as represented in song and dance, as well as products of the established scholarly community all have the shared attribute of a 'mythical quality'" (p. 199).

Breen and Corcoran said that myth performs specific functions. These are defined as a perceptual system, exemplary models for a whole society, conflict mediation, and the reification of culture (examples include the French resistance and the myths of the American and Russian revolutions).

Breen and Corcoran also discussed the wide range of myth and fantasy themes in the mass communications field. Numerous studies have focused on the idea that the media tend to use a dramatic framework in terms of archetypal images, such as heroes, villains, supporting players and rituals (pp. 205-206).

Examples of Myth Criticism

One of the most influential works in myth criticism is The American Adam by Lewis (1955). According to Lewis, the predominant myth that appeared in U.S. literature was that of the first archetypal man, Adam before the Fall:

An individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him, with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources (p. 5).

This uniquely American archetype can be traced through popular fiction, particularly in its manifestations as the cowboy and the hard-boiled detective hero. Svoboda (1983) viewed the American detective hero as a direct descendant of the gunfighter, "the cowboy adapted to life on the city streets" whose task is to ritually cleanse the city through a physical trial involving violence and moral risk (pp. 560-561).

Nelson and Avery (1983) showed how detective fiction, particularly the police procedural sub-genre, is a "mythic and religious ritual" which serves to translate the "experiences of people into a metaphor that expresses those experiences in reference to what they believe about the nature of life" (p. 465). Nelson and Avery viewed the detective hero as a Redeemer archetype, one who assumes the guilt of the culture to ritually atone for its sins through a catharsis of violence.

Cawelti (1976) also took a mythological approach to popular literary genres. He defined each genre in terms of a formula which he described as:

A means of generalizing the characteristics of large groups of individual works from certain combinations of cultural materials and archetypical story patterns. It is useful primarily as a means of making historical and cultural inferences about the collective fantasies shared by large groups of people and of identifying differences in these fantasies from one culture or period to another (p. 7).

Cawelti reviewed three approaches traditionally used to explain the cultural functions of literature: (a) impact or effects theories of mass communications; (b) deterministic theories (such as Marxism and psychoanalytic approaches); and (c) symbolic or reflective theories. Cawelti concluded that the third approach combines the best elements of the other approaches to formulate workable hypotheses. These hypotheses include the following (Cawelti, 1976, p. 35):

1. Formula stories affirm existing interests and attitudes by presenting an imaginary world that is aligned with these interests and attitudes.

2. Formulas resolve tensions and ambiguities resulting from the conflicting interests of different groups within the culture or from ambiguous attitudes toward particular values.

3. Formulas enable the audience to explore in fantasy the boundary between the permitted and the forbidden and to experience in a carefully controlled way the possibility of stepping across this boundary.

4. Literary formulas assist in the process of assimilating changes in values to traditional imaginative constructs.

Cawelti gave examples of the uses of these hypotheses in the mystery formula of the classic detective story. He said that the existing values of the social order were affirmed by reducing crime to individual motivations through the use of scientific methods. Crime was turned into a type of puzzle, by which something dangerous in the society was transformed into something entertaining, completely under control. Finally, the repressiveness of the family circle in the society produced stories of domestic murder, whereby feelings of guilt could be symbolically expiated.

Feminist Myth Criticism

Humm (1986) asserted that most myths in Western culture are derived from the Graeco-Roman tradition and are masculine constructs. Humm said myth criticism popular in the 1950s and early 1960s is based on the concept of value-free scientism and that it is both racist and patriarchal since it ignores gender and the actual rituals of real ethnic groups. Furthermore, men use cultural myths "as the translation of their own unconscious fears of women into mythical monsters or, particularly in the Western tradition, into myths of rape and violence to women" (p. 93).

Marxist-Socialist Approach

Marxist criticism can be broken down into (at least) three schools: classic Marxism, the Frankfurt School, and the socio-cultural approach (McQuail, 1987; Selden, 1985). Classic Marxist criticism is founded on Marx's assertion that the superstructure (ideology and politics) rests upon the base (socio-economic relations) of a society. Selden noted: "The relationship between dominance and subordination (exploitation) which govern the social and economic order of a particular phase of human history will in some sense 'determine' the whole cultural life of the society" (1985, p. 24). Thus, literature is seen as a reflection of the dominant social and economic class of the historical period for which it was written.

The Frankfurt school, of which Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse were the main spokesmen, used Marxism and Freud to analyze the ways in which capitalism used ideology to contain or stem the contradictions inherent in the system (Bennett, 1982).

The legacy of the Frankfurt school contributed much to recent Marxist criticism, particularly in their analyses of the relationship between class, ideology, and the media (Bennett, 1982; McQuail 1987). Drawing on the works of Volosinov, Althusser, and Gramsci, as well as structuralism and deconstruction, the socio-cultural school is best represented by the work of Stuart Hall and others at the Centre for the Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham during the 1970s.

Traditionally, Marxist popular/mass culture studies have been approached in four ways: as the product of a culture industry; as coterminous with working

class culture; as myth; and as an ideological apparatus of the state (The English Studies Group, 1980, p. 257).

Jameson (1977) argued that in the post-industrial media society, popular fiction can be used to illustrate historic changes in the function of ideology. Because Jameson took the view that "ideology as a quasi-narrative has a vital mapping function to play in all societies" (p. 544), he believed that changes in the infrastructure of the novel reflect changes in the superstructure of the society.

Eagleton (1983) argued that present literary criticism "dislocates 'literature' from other social and cultural practices" (p. 213) and offers a particular perspective from which to view history. Eagleton felt that literary theory should be replaced by other methods of cultural analysis which focus on the study of effects that forms and devices produce in particular readers in actual situations:

"Pure" literary theory is an academic myth: some of the theories we have reviewed in this book are nowhere more clearly ideological than in their attempts to ignore history and politics altogether. Literary theories are not to be upbraided for being political, but for being on the whole covertly or unconsciously so—for the blindness with which they offer as supposedly "technical," "self-evident," "scientific" or "universal" truth doctrines which with a little reflection can be seen to relate to and reinforce the particular interests of particular groups of people at particular times (p. 195).

Hall in "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies" (1982) argued that structuralism has demonstrated that meaning is arbitrary:

Things and events in the real world do not contain or propose their own, integral, single and intrinsic meaning, which is then merely transferred

through language. Meaning is a social production, a practice. The world has to be *made to mean* (p. 67).

In order to for one meaning to be regularly produced in society, it had to win "a kind of credibility, legitimacy, or taken-for-grantedness for itself" (p. 67). Drawing from structuralism and the work of Volosinov and Gramsci, Hall showed how different social interests conduct ideological struggles to "disarticulate a signifier from one preferred or dominant meaning system, and rearticulate it within another, different chain of connotations" (p. 80).

This view is different from that of traditional Marxist theory; instead of ideology being a reflection of, or determined, by, class position or economics, ideology becomes autonomous, a focus of study in and of itself. Dominance is seen as accomplished at the level of the unconscious as well as the conscious. "Hegemony is understood as accomplished, not without the due measure of legal and legitimate compulsion, but principally by means of winning the active consent of those classes and groups who were subordinated within it" (Hall, 1982, p. 85). Thus, one of the functions of popular fiction as an ideology is to "naturalize" such historical contradictions as "men are superior to women" and "we are all different but equal" (The English Studies Group, 1980, p. 258).

Marxist-Socialist Criticism of Mysteries

Marxist-socialist criticism of detective criticism reflects the broad range of Marxist and socialist theory itself. Kaemmel (1983), representing the classic Marxist approach, viewed detective fiction as a product of capitalism since it is not found in the socialist state, and he believed that when capitalism collapses, the genre will disappear. Kaemmel argued that murder in detective fiction is always an act based on economic motives, an act against private property. It is

also based on the premise that one isolated, self-reliant individual can correct ruptures in both the moral and social order. Kaemmel pointed to the enormous popularity and influence of the genre to demonstrate "how strongly the defects of capitalism's social order are felt" (p. 58).

Mandel's Delightful Murder (1982) also espoused a traditional Marxist view of ideology. Mandel prefaced the book by acknowledging that he enjoys reading detective fiction, but, he hastened to add: "To those who consider it frivolous for a Marxist to spend time analysing [sic] crime stories, I can only offer this final apology: historical materialism can—and should—be applied to all social phenomena" (p. viii). Like Kaemmel (1983), Mandel viewed detective fiction as an ideology of support for private property. Mandel stated, "The reduction of crime, if not human problems themselves to 'mysteries' that can be solved is symbolic of a behavioural [sic] and ideological trend typical of capitalism" (p. 16). Mandel viewed the genre as the "opium of the 'new' middle classes" (p. 70) because it distracts them from more immediate problems, such as "a civilization imposed by market laws, factory discipline, despotism of the nuclear family, authoritarian schools, and repressive sexual education" (p. 69).

The author noted the change in the hero from the classical detective story to that of the thriller/spy story: where he once triumphed over his enemies because of his superior intellect, he now triumphs because of greater technical resources, physical fitness, and superior organization. Mandel saw this change as a reflection of the decline of rationalism in bourgeois ideology. Similarly, the trend in recent detective fiction of the hero as murderer signals, in Mandel's view, both a questioning of the relationship between law and order and the state, as well as a symptom of the "decay of bourgeois values" (p. 132).

The following authors (Knight, 1980; Palmer, 1979) demonstrated the type of Marxist socio-cultural analysis Hall (1982) outlined. Knight's analysis hinged on the struggle for meaning between social groups in the society, while Palmer's analysis concentrated on the historical discourse that naturalized the underlying ideology of the genre.

Knight said that ideology is produced as much by the form of detective fiction as by its content. Like Hall (1982), Knight viewed the genre as a form of discourse that presents ideological struggles that represent a conflict of world-views. However, these struggles are artificially resolved by the plot and structure of the novel to create and justify hegemony.

Knight said these struggles represent "strains or fissures" that "reveal areas of central anxiety, the space where ideology works at its hardest to assert that all is normal, change need not be feared" (p. 5). One example of such a fissure is found in Agatha Christie's work where a conflict is presented between "basic individualism" on the one hand, and "conformity and a collective value system" on the other (p. 128). "Beneath the surface of the fiction the reader can exorcise fears that he or she could show 'weakness' and act self-indulgently against the interest of the class, be personally a model of the deviance that is feared" (p. 129).

Palmer's Thrillers (1979) combined Marxism and structuralism to examine the wide range of literature in the genre and then reduce the genre to two basic components: (a) a hero who is intrinsically competitive and (b) a conspiracy which is intrinsically mysterious.

Palmer (1979) explained: "Because literature is part of society both in its process of production and its consumption, the common denominators that tie

texts into each other form part of the stock of commonplaces of that society" (p. 4). Palmer then used a literary/historical and historical/sociological analysis of these two components—competitive individualism and conspiracy—to demonstrate how the thriller is logically related to an "ideological field" that was situated in the mid-nineteenth century and that was "promulgated by a laissez-faire political economy and a fear of 'dangerous classes'" (p. 202).

Palmer also said that an essential feature of the thriller is that the story is told through the eyes of the hero which results in an "absolutely unequivocal moral perspective, accepted not only by the reader but also by all the characters" (p. 61). Palmer said that this identification functions both morally as well as physically:

Morally, insofar as we identify the source of the hero (as long as we are reading the story, at least) as the source of good in the world; and physically insofar as, even when the narration allows us to see some things from the villain's angle; dramatic and significant events are always shown from the hero's side of the fence (p. 59).

Palmer asserted that the thriller genre is dead. He examined two modern offshoots of the thriller: the enforcer novels and anti-thrillers. Palmer said that in the enforcer novels, the conspiracy element is missing, and in the anti-thriller, the element of competitive individualism is removed. Underlying this analysis, of course, is the premise that the basic ideology of the society that produced this genre is also undergoing change.

Critical comments on Specific Mystery Topics

Reasons for Reading Mysteries

Reddy (1988) said there are a variety of pleasures readers find in mystery reading: the intellectual puzzle of assembling clues and trying to solve the

mystery before the detective, escape, enlightenment, the author's style and characterization, and the fascination with murder, "the one transgression against moral law that no society can ignore" (pp. 4-5). However, Reddy cautions against compartmentalizing, judging, and codifying each type of pleasure since this often contributes to the canonization of masculine novels and the marginalization of female authors.

Cawelti (1976) said the appeal of formula literature are the goals of escape and entertainment. He wrote that literary escapism fulfills two different psychological needs:

First of all, we seek moments of intense excitement and interest to get away from the boredom and ennui that are particularly prevalent in the relatively secure, routine, and organized lives of the great majority of the contemporary American and western European public. At the same time, we seek escape from our consciousness of the ultimate insecurities and ambiguities that afflict even the most secure sort of life: death, the failure of love, our inability to accomplish all that we had hoped for, the threat of atomic holocaust (pp. 15-16).

Cawelti believed that formula fiction satisfies both needs at the same time; they are "highly ordered and conventional," but permeated with symbols of "danger, uncertainty, violence, and sex" (p. 16). Mysteries present an ideal world devoid of uncertainty and ambiguity (the mystery is solved; the villain is unmasked) while at the same time giving readers a sense of fear and suspense about the fate of characters they care about.

Porter (1981) characterized mystery readers as pleasure-seekers. Porter said that pleasure comes from the exposure to an acceptable dosage of fear which is quickly followed by the return from fear (p. 102). He suggested that readers return again and again to favorite authors because they know these

authors exhibit acceptable dosages of fear and anxiety. Porter asserted that the pleasure derived from a mystery is not simply the end, in the restoration of order, but rather in the "halting and suspenseful approach" to the end, the excitement produced by the waiting (p. 236).

Porter maintained that most denouements are disappointing, which is why mystery readers seldom skip pages or are tempted to read the ending before finishing the book. Therefore, most mysteries are "throwaway literature," instantly discarded when finished and seldom reread.

Interestingly, both Cawelti (1976) and Porter (1981) used masculine metaphors concerned with rape, power, and the domination of women to explain the appeal of mysteries. Cawelti compared reading detective fiction to pornography; he said the experience of both consists of "pleasurable excitation interspersed with long stretches of boredom and frustration" (p. 14). In pornography, like mystery, Cawelti said that there is an escape from the limitations of reality into a fantasy world: "totally submissive females readily willing or forced to submit to sexual activity with lustful enthusiasm" (p. 14).

Similarly, Porter (1981) asserted that mysteries and sex are linked:

The Bible itself authorizes us to consider that the curiosity to know is a sexual curiosity, and knowing, a carnal activity. And the Bible's authority in the matter is confirmed by the myth of Oedipus insofar as it is one of the earliest known stories to propose a connection between sex and detection, between the activities of the riddle solver and those of the incestuous son. Yet the trouble with the proposition that violent crime is not violent crime but censured sex is that it is reversible. Love making is also a killing, with its weapons, offensives, counteroffensives, penetrations, bleedings, and, sooner or later, its victors and vanquished. Making love is the closest most of us ever come to committing murder" (p. 240).

In addition, Porter said that mystery readers are voyeurs since it legitimizes activities considered taboo in their lives—watching others without being seen and without the accompanying guilt. Porter wrote: "Through the mechanism of the morally upright detective hero, the detective novel allows its readers to pry and peep, to enter locked houses, and to open drawers and cupboards in other people's homes" (p. 241).

Appleyard (1990) characterized escapist literature as an escape from the boredom and frustrations of the everyday adult world, as well as an escape from problems and the problematic treatment of problems. He went on to speculate that readers who choose escapist literature also want to escape from books themselves that are challenging or demanding:

So it may not be only their own problems that adult readers want to turn away from, but also the kind of fiction that, with its complicated narrative methodology, ironic perspective, and lack of clear resolution, makes the problems it deals with as intractable as those of readers' own real lives (p. 165).

Appleyard saw a paradox in the fact that readers don't expect formulaic or escape literature to deal with complex issues of actual life in ways that are perplexing or disturbing, yet these readers want to find their own problems in these books. He identified two types of readers of escapist fiction: (a) those who read to dull their consciousness, to keep busy so as not to be reminded of their own problems and anxieties; and (b) those who read to heighten their consciousness through involvement with characters and situations. The latter group use reading as a vehicle for self-exploration and as an enlargement of experience. Appleyard also said that the habit of reading in bed is a

continuation of a childhood habit and speculates that it comes close to reproducing, as an adult, the experience of being held in someone's lap (p. 170).

Conservative and Radical Elements

Most feminist critics of the mystery (Cranny-Francis, 1988; Kaplan, 1986; Klein, 1988; Levy, 1989; Pykett, 1990) acknowledged the inherent conservatism found in mysteries: the lone detective who can redress the problems of society by simply discovering the aberrant individual guilty of committing a crime, thereby restoring the established order.

Porter also said that the classical detective story is ideologically conservative since these novels take the view that "the causation of crime is individual, not social; it is the result of moral choice or physic disorder, not of institutional malfunctions in a complex society" (p. 161). Similarly, although the American hard-boiled mystery seems to question corruption and brutality in institutions such as business, the law, and the police, nevertheless, the ideology behind the hard-boiled mystery is basically that of the American mythic hero who is self-reliant and relies on the egalitarianism of the gun:

The radicalism of the hard-boiled tradition is therefore a radicalism for a mythical past. If any political program is implied at all, it is one that looks forward to the restoration of a traditional order of things, associated retrospectively with the innocent young Republic and its frontier, a tradition that was destroyed with the advent of large-scale industrialization (p. 181).

On the other hand, historian Robin Winks (1982) concluded that, despite the mystery's conservative conclusions, it is a literature "arising from protest, from closely observing society and its ills, and unless a tradition of commenting

on the ills of society is encouraged, detective fiction is not likely to be encouraged" (p. 41).

Knight (1990) acknowledged conservative elements in the mystery formula but said that radicalism is also inherent in the genre:

In order to fully realise [sic] a threat that will engage the audience and so create a pattern that can produce some genuine historical fear and possibility . . . it must speak with a partly radical voice and realise [sic] some aspect of the social relations from a period" (p. 175).

Knight maintained that most powerful and successful mysteries do return to conservative status. Nonetheless, he said that aspects of the radical do still exist, although these aspects are often strongly foreclosed.

Knight cited Agatha Christie's mysteries as examples of low social profile radicalism. Although the novels are politically conservative (showing rigid class distinctions, for example), Knight found the values expressed in some of her mysteries as examples of "a kind of female (if not feminist) populism" (p. 177). Poirot and Miss Marple solve mysteries because of the close attention they pay to material details: "listening to what people say, remembering family relationships, scrutinizing personal appearances with care, thinking about such things as pot-plants, and the position of furniture" (p. 177). In short, mysteries are solved because of "stereotypical feminine knowledge" (p. 177).

Similarly, Taylor (1990) said that Christie's solutions depend on understanding the enigmatic significance of everyday banal objects, the practical and the small scale. In the Miss Marple novels, the practical and observant woman constitutes a better detective than the intellectual or extravagant man, such as Holmes, Poirot, or Wimsey. Observed Taylor, "The authorization of the domestic, and the positive value placed on female talk, are at once progressive

and conservative—progressive, in that they give worth to the circumstances of female domestic life, but conservative in that the texts limit women's influence to the domestic " (p. 144).

Elements of the Mystery Formula

Cawelti (1976) said the six phases or patterns of the action of both the classical and hard-boiled detective story formula are as follows: (a) introduction of the detective; (b) crime and clues; (c) investigation; (d) announcement of the solution; (e) explanation of the solution; and (f) denouement. Cawelti stated that these phases do not always occur in sequence and sometimes collapse into one another.

The character roles found in both the classical and hard-boiled are as follows: (a) the victim or victims; (b) the criminal; (c) the detective; (d) those involved in the crime but are incapable of resolving it ; and (e) role of women (found mainly in the hard-boiled mystery).

Porter (1981) defined the mystery as "a work of prose founded on the effort to close a logico-temporal gap" (p. 30). He said that the mystery contains an equal number of verbal units that combine to close this gap as there are to impede progress toward a solution.

The sequences of the formula, according to Porter (pp. 88-89), are the following: (a) the initial situation that is about to or has just been interrupted; (b) the discovery of the crime that disrupts; (c) the appeal to and arrival of the detective; (d) the pursuit of the criminal via a series of investigations, searches, and interrogations that usually include interruptions to divert or interrupt the

detective in his pursuit; (e) the progressive elimination of suspects; and (f) the final unmasking and arrest of the criminal.

These sequences of action are distributed among a conventionally limited number of roles: the criminal or villain and the detective or hero (the most fundamental), the victim and the suspect or suspects. Porter says these roles repeat inside the novel the relationship that exists between author and reader as "problem maker and problem solver": "The former gathers clues, the latter gathers them into viable hypothesis and finds himself [sic] aided or thwarted in his [sic] search by victims and witnesses, helpers and blockers, decoys and prizes" (p. 88).

Theoretical Perspectives and Summary of Approaches

The theory which guided this research throughout was reader-response theory which assumes that a text alone has no meaning; it is only when a reader engages with a text that meaning occurs. Like Radway's research, this study assumed the existence of an interpretive community of mystery readers whose competency in generic conventions defines them as a group who, in the words of one mystery reader, "understand the rules of the game." The audience studies described in Chapter II also shared these assumptions about the primacy of the role of the reader.

The other theories presented in this chapter have been used to explain (a) why people read mysteries and (b) how people read mysteries. But, again drawing on reader-response theory, if reading is the process of making meaning of texts, then only readers themselves can describe what that meaning is for them. Critics working within a particular theory may make claims about readers, but the important test is whether readers substantiate these claims.

Feminist theory claims that women exhibit different writing and reading strategies than do men. It also says that women's texts have been systematically undervalued by a masculine literary canon. Mythological theory claims that women and men make sense of the world through archetypal images that reflect cultural assumptions, ideologies, and fantasies. Traditional Marxist theory claims that capitalism promotes the amassing of private property by the exploitation of the working classes and that all literature is a reflection of the economic base of that society. And socio-cultural Marxists say that all popular literature is ideologic since it reflects and naturalizes the beliefs of the dominant classes.

One purpose of this study was to see how closely these theoretical claims reflect the opinions and attitudes of actual mystery readers. The discussion in Chapter VI links these theories to the responses of mystery readers.

CHAPTER IV

METHOD

Subjects

This survey of mystery readers was sent to individuals on the mailing list of Mystery Readers International, an organization based in Berkeley, California. This group publishes Mystery Reader's International, a quarterly journal that reviews and analyzes mystery novels and announces upcoming mystery events, such as seminars, book signings, and conventions. Surveys were mailed to all 485 individual members of the organization on November 9, 1990. Questionnaires were not sent to five of the bookstores and magazines on the list because they did not include the names of individuals.

Members of the organization were located throughout the United States and seven foreign countries (Canada, England, Australia, Japan, Austria, Italy, and Belgium). Since Mystery Readers International is located in Berkeley, it was not surprising that 128 members or approximately one-fourth of the total number of members lived in the Bay Area. Twenty-four members lived in foreign countries, with the greatest number residing in Canada ($N=11$).

The Instrument

The survey instrument was a six-page questionnaire containing 49 questions, many of which had multiple parts (see Appendices). The questionnaire was loosely based on Radway's 53-question survey of romance readers (1984, p. 231). However, many of Radway's questions were modified to specifically apply to mysteries (for example, "At what age did you begin to read mysteries regularly?"). In addition, more open-ended questions were added to

allow respondents to more fully explain their opinions and attitudes about mysteries in their own words.

Like Radway's study of romance readers, this study was guided throughout by reader-response theory which posits that meaning is constructed from the text by readers who use strategies and assumptions adopted by virtue of membership in an interpretive community of mystery readers. So, to understand why readers read mysteries, reader-response theory required an investigation of what readers actually do when they read and what they say about the genre.

Drawing on this theory, the first section of the questionnaire probed the reading habits and leisure-time activities of mystery readers to assess the length of time respondents had been reading mysteries; when, where, and how mysteries were read; whether reading mysteries facilitated social contact; other types of media attended to by mystery readers; and how mystery reading fits into the spectrum of other leisure activities.

The second section of the questionnaire asked for the readers' personal opinions about mysteries. The majority of questions in this section were open-ended, which gave respondents freedom to formulate their own answers without forcing them to choose from preset categories. This section probed the reasons for mystery reading, and asked readers to list the integral features of the genre, their favorite novels, characters and books, and their feelings while reading mysteries.

The third section of the questionnaire was designed to provide a descriptive profile of mystery readers. In addition to demographic questions,

respondents were also asked about membership in social organizations to uncover mystery-related subgroups to which they belonged.

Analysis

Because the purpose of the study was to explore, interpret, and understand mystery readers rather than to predict behavior, the data were not analyzed using statistical tests. However, descriptive statistics in the form of percentages were used. All percentages were rounded to the nearest decimal point. The response rate of useable questionnaires was 49% (N=237), and the response rate for questionnaires sent to foreign countries was 67% (N=16).

Chapter V presents a descriptive statistical analysis of all the survey questions. In this chapter, the percentages for all respondents will be noted, followed by a parenthesis in which the percentage for women will be given, followed by the percentage for men. For example, 65% of all respondents were married (W=64%, M=67%).

Chapter VI presents a qualitative analysis of the data in which the theoretical approaches discussed in Chapter III were used to assess how closely they fit the actual responses of mystery readers. Numerous scholars (Carey 1989; Fejes, 1984; Jensen, 1987; Real, 1989; Schroder, 1987) working within a cultural studies perspective have advocated this synthesis of quantitative and qualitative analyses. This study followed Real's (1989) recommendation that quantitative data be used as a first step in qualitative studies, rather than the opposite which is the usual pattern in mass communications research.

The data were coded by the researcher. Because of the difficulty in coding many of the open-ended questions, broad categories of responses were developed to encompass more detailed answers. For example, specific

responses concerning character development, sympathetic characters, and believable characters were all placed under the larger heading: Aspects of Character.

Although the directions on the survey specifically requested that only one answer be given unless the question specified otherwise, many respondents had difficulty in providing only one answer to some of the questions. For example, when asked to choose from six answers describing the best reason for deciding to read a mystery, 38% of respondents gave multiple answers. Since so many readers gave more than one answer, these responses were not considered as missing data. Instead, they were used to calculate total percentages. However, when this occurred, the number of multiple responses was always given.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study can be applied only to the members of Mystery Readers International in 1990; they can not be generalized to describe all mystery readers. In addition, demographic descriptions of such things as members' incomes and education levels may have been influenced by the fact that more than a quarter of the group's members were living in the Bay Area of Northern California. However, as indicated in Chapter V, this group of mystery readers did demographically match mystery readers profiled in other studies.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Demographics

The respondents ranged in age from 21 to 81. The mean age for all respondents was 49, (W=49, M=49). The majority of those who answered, 74% of the respondents, were women (N=176), and 26% were men (N=61). Household incomes varied widely, ranging from \$10,000 to \$500,000, with a mean of \$68,649, a median of \$56,000, and a mode of \$100,000. The mean household income for women was \$68,913, and the mean for men was \$67,800. Fifty-one respondents, 22%, refused to state their household incomes.

Most mystery readers, 65%, were married (W=64%, M= 67%); 23% said they were single (W=23%, M=23%); 10% said they were divorced or separated (W=10%, M=10%); and 2% said they were widowed (W=2%, M=0%). The total number who answered the marital status question was 235 (W=175, M=60). As shown in Table 1, levels of education for all respondents were fairly high: 43% of all respondents graduated from college, and 41% received either a graduate or doctorate degree.

Table 1

Highest Level of Education

Highest level of education	All (N=236)	Women (N=176)	Men (N=60)
Graduated high school	3%	2%	5%
Some college	14%	17%	7%
College degree	43%	40%	50%
Graduate degree	30%	33%	20%
Doctorate degree	11%	8%	18%

Occupations ran the gamut from unemployed to braille transcriber to auctioneer. Table 2 shows the top four most frequently mentioned occupations for all respondents, for women, and for men.

When asked, "Do you have a religious preference?" the top three answers were as follows: no preference 38% (W=36%, M= 43%); Protestant 27% (W=30%, M=18%); and Catholic 11% (W=12%, M=10%). The total number of respondents who answered the question was 231 (W=171, M= 60).

Table 3 shows that as a group, more respondents chose the designation "Liberal" or "Very liberal" (47%), than chose the designation "Conservative" or "Very Conservative" (15%). Also a greater proportion of men consider themselves conservative or very conservative.

Table 2

Occupations

Occupation	All (N=236)	Women (N=176)	Men (N=60)
Librarian	11%	13%	5%
Retired	12%	10%	18%
Writer	8%	7%	10%
Professor	6%	2%	15%
Other	63%	71%	48%

Table 3

Political Description

	All (N=234)	Women (N=174)	Men (N=60)
Very liberal	12%	13%	10%
Liberal	35%	34%	35%
Moderate	35%	37%	28%
Conservative	13%	13%	15%
Very Conservative	2%	0%	7%
Other	4%	5%	3%

When asked to describe any social organizations to which they belonged, the most frequently given answers were business and professional 26% (W=25%, M=27%); mystery group 26% (W=25%, M=27%); writer's group 23%

(W=21%, M=27%); women's group, such as NOW or AAUW, 12% (W=16%, M=0%); Historical group 11% (W=8%, M=20%); Environmental group 10% (W=9%, M=13%); and religious group 10% (W=9%, M=13%). A total of 137 respondents answered the question (W=107, M=30).

Reading habits

When asked "At what age did you first begin reading for pleasure?" the answers ranged from 2 years old to 31 years old. As shown in Table 4, women began reading for pleasure at a younger age than did men. The mean for all respondents was 7.6 years old (W=6.9, M=9.4).

Table 4

Age Began Reading for Pleasure

Range in ages	All (N=123)	Women (N=164)	Men (N=59)
0-4	11%	13%	5%
5-9	66%	73%	49%
10-15	20%	13%	39%
Over 15	2%	1%	7%

Respondents found it difficult to choose only one category of book when asked, "As a teenager, what was your favorite type of book?" Twenty-eight percent (N=65) of all respondents gave multiple answers. The most frequently mentioned answers for all respondents, as well as those for women and men, are shown in Table 5. The greatest differences in readership between women and men were found in science fiction, romances, and westerns. Interestingly,

13% of women ($N=22$) wrote in the space provided for "Other" that they had read Nancy Drew mysteries as a teen.

Table 5

Favorite Type of Book Read as Teen

Type of Book	All ($N=236$)	Women ($N=176$)	Men ($N=60$)
Mysteries	54%	57%	47%
Biographies	19%	19%	17%
Science fiction	13%	8%	27%
Romances	10%	14%	0%
Classics	8%	9%	6%
Historical	7%	7%	7%
Westerns	5%	4%	10%

When asked, "At what age did you begin reading mysteries regularly?" once again, the answers varied widely, from 5 years old to 59 years old. The mean for all respondents was 18, which was the same for women as well as for men.

Those who responded to the questionnaire were voracious readers of both books and magazines. When asked how many mystery books were read weekly, the mean for all respondents was 2.3 books ($W=2.4$, $M=1.9$). When asked how many books other than mysteries were read weekly, the mean for all respondents was 1.2 books ($W=1.0$, $M=1.3$).

All respondents read a mean of 7.8 magazines per month (W=7.6, M=8.3). When asked to list the titles of the magazines they read, all respondents read a mean of .8 mystery publications per month (W=.7, M=1.2). Mystery Readers Journal which is published by Mystery Readers International (from whom the sample was drawn) was not counted toward the total number of mystery publications read since it is issued quarterly.

When respondents were asked if they read mysteries daily, 60% answered "Yes" (N=140); however, 68% of these were women and 36% were men.

The top three responses to when mysteries were most often read were the following: evening 50% (W=51%, M=48%); hard to say because I read every chance I get 46% (W=46%, M=44%); and to and from work 5% (W=5%, M=5%). All 237 respondents answered. Table 6 presents the places mysteries were most often read.

Table 6

Places Where Mysteries Are Read

Place read	All (N=236)	Women (N=175)	Men (N=61)
AT HOME (364 mentions: W=276, M=85)			
Bed or bedroom	54%	63%	30%
Living room or family room	27%	26%	30%
At home (no description)	24%	22%	33%
Favorite chair, sofa, recliner	22%	24%	16%
Library, den, office or study	11%	9%	20%
Kitchen or dining room	9%	10%	7%
AT WORK (79 mentions: W=42, M=17)			
At work (no description)	14%	14%	15%
Breaks	11%	10%	13%
WHILE TRAVELLING (77 mentions: W=64, M=13)			
Train or subway	8%	10%	5%
Plane	7%	9%	2%
Bus	7%	7%	7%
WAITING (29 mentions: W=25, M=2)			
Waiting (no description)	6%	7%	2%
Waiting rooms	4%	6%	0%
Lines	3%	3%	0%
OUTDOORS (15 mentions: W=14, M=1)			
Deck, garden, patio, hot tub	5%	6%	0%
Beach	1%	1%	2%

Once again, respondents had difficulty choosing just one answer to "Which of the following best describes what usually makes you decide to read a mystery or not?" Thirty-eight percent of respondents gave multiple answers. Mystery readers choose their books primarily because of their knowledge of the author. The other three most cited reasons are found in Table 7.

Table 7

Reasons for Deciding to Read A Mystery

Reason	All (N=237)	Women (N=176)	Men (N=61)
Familiar with author	80%	80%	78%
Read review	37%	40%	30%
Recommended	21%	23%	15%
Publisher's blurb	19%	22%	11%

Mystery readers describe their usual patterns of reading as follows: "I read as much as I can until I'm interrupted or have something else to do," 78% (W=80%, M=72%); "I read just a few pages each day until I'm finished," 12% (W=13%, M=11%); and "I only continue reading when I'm in the mood," 7% (W=5%, M=13%). A total of 236 readers answered the question (W=175, M=61).

For the next ten questions, readers were asked to provide an indication of how frequently (never, rarely, sometimes or often) they engaged in activities associated with reading mysteries. To the question, "How often do you reread

mysteries you have read before?" 13% (W=12%, M=16%) chose never; 36% (W=34%, M=41%) chose rarely; 37% (W=38%, M=34%) chose sometimes; and 16% (W=19%, M=8%) chose often. More women (57%) said they reread mysteries sometimes or often while more men (51%) said they reread mysteries never or rarely. A total of 233 people answered the question (W=172, M=61).

When asked if they read the end of the book before finishing the book, 71% (W=69%, M=77%) said never; 17% (W=18%, M=15%) said rarely; 8% (W=10%, M=5%) said sometimes; and 4% (W=5%, M=2%) said often. A total of 236 readers answered the question (W=175, M=61).

Asked to describe how frequently they figured out the murderer/villain before she or he is identified, respondents answered as follows: 3% (W=3%, M=2%) chose never; 23% (W=18%, M=23%) chose rarely; 58% (W=58%, M=57%) chose sometimes; and 16% (W=16%, M=15%) chose often. A total of 236 readers answered the question (W=175, M=61).

Readers answered as follows when asked how often they fantasize about committing the perfect murder: 75% (W=72%, M=82%) said never; 14% (W=15%, M=11%) said rarely; 10% (W=11%, M=5%) said sometimes; and 1% (W=1%, M=2%) said often. A total of 236 answered the question (W=175, M=61).

Readers were also questioned about the extent to which they used other types of media. A majority of both women and men readers said they rarely or never watched television or listened to music while they read mysteries. And a majority of readers never listen to mysteries on audio tape. However, a majority of both women and men said they often read the newspaper. When respondents were asked if they read mysteries while watching television, 58%

(W=55%, M=64%) said never; 18% (W=19%, M=13%) said rarely; 17% (W=18%, M=13%) said sometimes; and 8% (W=7%, M=8%) said often. A total of 236 respondents answered (W=175, M=61).

In answer to "How often do you listen to music while reading mysteries?" 40% (W=42%, M=35%) chose never; 22% (W=24%, M=17%) chose rarely; 24% (W=21%, M=33%) chose sometimes; and 15% (W=14%, M=17%) chose often. A total of 234 readers answered (W=174, M=60).

The majority of mystery readers do not listen to mysteries on audio type: 55% (W=53%, M=61%) chose never; 22% (W=23%, M=20%) chose rarely; 16% (W=17%, M=15%) chose sometimes; and 7% (W=8%, M=5%) chose often. A total of 233 people answered (W=174, M=59).

Asked to describe how frequently they read a newspaper, readers answered as follows: never 3% (W=3%, M=3%); rarely 5% (W=6%, M=2%); sometimes 12% (W=12%, M=13%), and often 81% (W=80%, M=83%). The total number of readers who answered was 234 (W=174, M=60).

When mystery readers spent time watching television, the most frequently mentioned program watched is Mystery! 33% (W=38%, M=30%). Other programs frequently mentioned are the following: news and or commentary 22% (W=21%, M=25%); movies, either made-for-television or cable 19% (W=15%, M=30%); and Murder She Wrote 13% (W=13%, M=12%). Twenty-six readers gave multiple responses. A total of 173 readers answered (W=173, M=57).

Although reading is perceived as a solitary activity, it can also be used as a means of communication facilitation. As shown in Table 8, when readers were asked how often they discussed mysteries with others, the majority of all

respondents (87%) reported they did so sometimes or often. More women (88%) discussed mysteries sometimes or often with others than did men (79%).

Table 8

How Often Mysteries Are Discussed with Others?

Frequency	All (N=236)	Men (N=61)	Women (N=175)
Never	1%	2%	1%
Rarely	14%	20%	12%
Sometimes	47%	43%	48%
Often	40%	36%	40%

Asked with whom they discussed mysteries most often, readers chose the top four responses: friends 46% (W=51%, M=30%); a family member 36% (W=26%, M=38%); co-workers 14% (W=9%, M=13%); and other mystery readers 12% (W=12%, M=15%). A total of 233 answered (W=173, M=60).

When readers were asked to state their preference for reading alone or in the presence of others, 73% (W=71%, M=79%) chose alone; 5% (W=5%, M=3%) chose with others; and 24% (W=26%, M=18%) answered that they had no preference. Three women gave a multiple response: "Alone or with quiet others." The total number who answered was 234 (W=173, M=61).

The majority of readers, 62% (W=62%, M=61%) chose "Yes" when asked if their enjoyment of mystery reading carried over into other aspects of their lives. When asked to explain this answer more fully, the most frequently given responses are found in Table 9.

Table 9

How Mysteries Carry over into Other Parts of Lives

Explanation	All (N=156)	Women (N=119)	Men (N=37)
Conferences or conventions	51%	52%	46%
Discussion group or class	24%	27%	16%
Job related	21%	17%	35%
Mystery parties or weekends	18%	20%	11%
Book signing or talk by author	12%	13%	8%

To assess how mystery reading compares to other leisure-time activities, readers were asked to estimate the number of hours per week spent in such activities. As shown in Table 10, mystery reading placed second only behind spending time with family and friends. Mystery reading comprised 19% of leisure-time activities for all respondents.

Table 10

Mean Hours Per Week Spent in Leisure-Time Activities

Activity	All	Women	Men
Time with family and friends	15.5	14.8	17.6
Reading mysteries	11.0	11.1	10.7
Watching television	9.0	8.8	10.0
Listening to radio	6.3	5.9	7.3
Hobby	5.2	4.8	6.2
Sports and exercise	3.4	3.5	3.1
Relaxing, doing nothing	2.5	1.9	3.9
Concert, plays or museums	1.5	1.7	1.0
Movies	.9	.9	.9
Total hours per week	55.3	53.4	60.7
Proportion of mystery reading to listed leisure-time activities	19%	21%	18%

Readers' Opinions about Mysteries

Except where noted, most questions in this section were open-ended, allowing readers to develop their own explanations without prestructuring categories. In the first question, which was closed-ended, readers were asked to choose their favorite type of mystery. As shown in Table 11, the most popular category was the classical mystery, followed by the hard-boiled mystery. More women than men preferred the classical, while more men than women preferred the hard-boiled. In the space provided for "Other," 7% of all respondents wrote

in "cozy," a subcategory of the classical detective story that began with the British vicarage story and features strong plots and romantic entanglements. Seventy-three respondents gave multiple answers to this question.

Table 11

Favorite Type of Mystery

Type of mystery	All (N=235)	Women (N=174)	Men (N=61)
Classical mysteries	71%	76%	56%
Hard-boiled	23%	16%	41%
Police procedural	16%	16%	16%
Other: cozy	7%	8%	3%
Political thrillers	6%	6%	8%
True crime	5%	5%	5%

Table 12 shows what readers considered to be the most important ingredients in a mystery. The most frequently mentioned ingredients were plot, characters, setting, writing, personal referents, and dislikes.

When respondents were questioned about what qualities they liked in a fictional detective, respondents mentioned humor, mental capability, a specific personal trait, relationships with others, appearance or background, and personal referents. The breakdown of each these categories is shown in Table 13. Readers were also questioned about what qualities they most disliked in a

fictional detective. The most frequently mentioned dislikes are detailed in Table 14.

When asked in a closed-ended question which reason most often allows the detective or spy to triumph over his or her enemies, the four answers chosen most often were the following: superior intellect, chosen by 71% of all respondents (W=75% , M=62%); teamwork, chosen by 14% of all respondents (W=15%, M=11%); persistence, tenacity, or determination which was written in by 13% of all respondents (W=12%, M=16%); more strength and/or bravery, chosen by 8% of all respondents (W=8%, M=7%). Fifty-one respondents gave multiple answers, and 224 readers answered (W=169, M= 55).

Table 12

Most Important Ingredients in A Mystery

Ingredient	All (N=228)	Women (N=169)	Men (N=59)
ASPECTS OF THE PLOT (225 mentions: W=174, M=51)			
Plot (no description)	21%	21%	20%
Logical clues/author plays fair	18%	19%	14%
Explanation/loose ends tied up	11%	12%	7%
Unmasking of villain/killer caught	8%	8%	8%
Fast paced/exciting	7%	6%	10%
Surprise twists	7%	7%	8%
Good puzzle	7%	8%	3%
ASPECTS OF CHARACTER (185 mentions: W=149, M=36)			
Character (no description)	30%	30%	32%
Development/complexity	13%	15%	7%
Decent/sympathetic/good	12%	14%	7%
Believable	12%	14%	5%
SETTING/ATMOSPHERE/PLACE (77 mentions: W=60, M=17)			
Setting (no description)	31%	31%	29%
ASPECTS OF WRITING (64 mentions: W=33, M=31)			
Well written	15%	12%	25%
Contains humor or wit	8%	9%	5%
Style or voice	5%	4%	10%
PERSONAL REFERENTS (25 mentions: W=23, M=2)			
I must identify with character	8%	9%	3%
Must teach me something	3%	4%	0%
DISLIKES (24 mentions: W=24, M=0)			
Violence	8%	11%	0%

Table 13

Qualities Liked in A Fictional Detective

Quality liked	All (N=225)	Women (N=170)	Men (N=55)
HUMOR (162 mentions: W=143, M=19)			
Sense of humor	62%	74%	25%
Wit	7%	6%	9%
MENTAL CAPABILITY (153 mentions: W=118, M=35)			
Intelligent/smart/clever/brains	50%	55%	36%
Analytical/reasoning/logical	7%	5%	13%
Common sense	6%	6%	5%
PERSONAL TRAIT (106 mentions: W=80, M=26)			
Honesty/integrity/ethical	15%	14%	16%
Vulnerable/fallible/faults	8%	9%	7%
Persistent/tenacious	7%	5%	13%
RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS (90 mentions: W=78, M=12)			
Caring/compassionate/kind	27%	33%	9%
Has relationships with others	4%	6%	0%
APPEARANCE OR BACKGROUND (28 mentions: W=21, M=7)			
Cultured/elegant/polished	4%	4%	5%
Well-educated/well read	4%	5%	4%
PERSONAL REFERENTS (13 mentions: W=11, M=2)			
I like or I would like to know	4%	5%	2%

Table 14

Qualities Disliked in A Fictional Detective

Quality disliked	All (N=214)	Women (N=161)	Men (N=53)
RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS (159 mentions: W=131, M=28)			
Gratuitous violence	27%	33%	8%
Ruthless/insensitive/cruel/hard	18%	20%	11%
Superman/perfect/infallible	8%	6%	13%
Sarcastic/snide/smart mouthed	7%	9%	4%
Aloof/cold/isolated	7%	9%	2%
PERSONAL TRAIT (156 mentions: W=120, M=36)			
Pompous/egotistical/conceited	18%	19%	17%
Stupidity/incompetent/bumblng	18%	19%	13%
Self-pity/complainer	6%	7%	4%
Unethical/dishonest/deceitful	6%	6%	6%
GENDER-RELATED (82 mentions: W=69, M=13))			
Macho/sexist/misognist	24%	29%	9%
Womanizing/sex-driven	9%	9%	9%
DISTASTEFUL PERSONAL HABIT (55 mentions: W=46, M=9)			
Swearing/foul language/vulgar	13%	14%	9%
Alcoholism	6%	7%	2%

When asked to name their favorite fictional detective, 30 respondents failed to answer. Of those who did not answer, eleven people wrote in an explanation: seven said they couldn't choose only one; two said that their favorite detective changes often; one said that this was an impossible question; and one said they couldn't remember the character's name. The favorite detective for all readers and for women was Peter Wimsey. For men, the favorite was Sherlock Holmes. Table 15 shows the top five favorite detectives for all respondents, and for women and for men. The only detective that was named as a favorite by both women and men was Sherlock Holmes.

Readers were also questioned about their favorite fictional character in mysteries. As shown in Table 16, the favorite fictional character for all respondents and for men was Sherlock Holmes. For women, it was a draw between Sherlock Holmes and Peter Wimsey. Again, the only character that was named as a favorite by both men and women was Sherlock Holmes.

When asked to describe the reasons for choosing their favorite fictional character in mysteries, the most frequent answers were the following: specific personal traits, mental capability, personal referents, and other. Table 17 details the most frequently mentioned answers under each category.

When respondents were asked to describe the qualities most liked in a villain or murderer, they described a specific personal trait most often, followed by mental capability, motivation, personal referent, and other. Table 18 provides a breakdown of the each of these answers.

Table 15

Favorite Fictional Detective

Favorite detective for all readers (N=207)			
Peter Wimsey		11%	
Sherlock Holmes		9%	
Miss Jane Marple		7%	
Nero Wolfe		5%	
Kinsey Milhone		5%	
Favorite detective for women (N=153)		Favorite detective for men (N=54)	
Peter Wimsey	13%	Sherlock Holmes	17%
Miss Jane Marple	9%	Philip Marlowe	11%
Kinsey Milhone	7%	Spenser	7%
Sherlock Holmes	7%	Nero Wolfe	7%

Table 16

Favorite Fictional Character

Favorite character for all readers (N=178)			
Sherlock Holmes		8%	
Peter Wimsey		5%	
Miss Jane Marple		4%	
Nero Wolfe		4%	
Kinsey Milhone		4%	
Favorite character for women (N=131)		Favorite character for men (N=47)	
Peter Wimsey	9%	Sherlock Holmes	13%
Sherlock Holmes	9%	Philip Marlowe	9%
Miss Jane Marple	5%	Nero Wolfe	7%
Kinsey Milhone	5%	Sam Spade	4%
Brother Cadfael	5%	Matt Scudder	4%

Table 17

Qualities Liked in Favorite Fictional Character

Quality liked	All (N=172)	Women (N=126)	Men (N=46)
PERSONAL TRAIT (166 mentions: W=124, M=42)			
Vulnerable/fallible/faults	17%	15%	22%
Funny/humorous/witty	16%	20%	7%
Kindness/compassion/warmth	15%	15%	15%
Resourceful/spunky/survivor	11%	11%	11%
Honesty/integrity/ethical	10%	9%	13%
Has relationships with others	8%	9%	4%
Perseverance/determination	6%	5%	9%
Aristocratic/classy/urbane	6%	7%	2%
MENTAL CAPABILITY (68 mentions: W=51, M=17)			
Intelligent/smart/clever/brains	27%	30%	20%
Analytical/reasoning/logical	11%	10%	15%
PERSONAL REFERENTS (27 mentions: W=22, M=5)			
I can identify with him/her	8%	7%	9%
OTHER			
Realistic/believable	8%	5%	15%
Specific setting	8%	10%	4%
Women characters	5%	6%	0%

Table 18

Qualities Liked in A Murderer or Villain

Quality liked	All (N=205)	Women (N=153)	Men (N=52)
PERSONAL TRAIT (114 mentions: W=87, M=27)			
Ordinary/normal/no monsters	19%	17%	25%
Evil/ruthless/cruel/amoral	18%	18%	17%
Egotism/vanity/pride	5%	6%	2%
MENTAL CAPABILITY (112 mentions: W=84, M=28)			
Intelligent/smart/clever/brains	27%	28%	23%
Clever/devious/sneaky/cunning	16%	14%	19%
Worthy adversary for detective	8%	9%	6%
Planner/finesse in method	4%	3%	6%
MOTIVATION (48 mentions: W=38, M=10)			
Strong/logical motive	7%	7%	8%
Motivation (no description)	6%	7%	4%
PERSONAL REFERENTS (21 mentions: W=21, M=0)			
Someone I don't like	9%	12%	0%
OTHER			
Believable	9%	7%	15%
Don't care about the villain	6%	5%	10%

Asked, "Why do you think the detective/hero/heroine is usually a loner?"

Table 19 shows readers mentioned that it related to the writing structure or to relationships, disagreed with the statement altogether, mentioned a personal trait, related the statement to the detective's work, mentioned traditions within the genre, and gave a philosophic answer.

In a closed-ended question, mystery readers were asked to describe their preference regarding the sex of the author. They answered as follows: 1% of readers preferred mysteries written by men (W=0%, M=3%); 16% preferred mysteries written by women (W=20%, M=2%); and 83% said their sex didn't matter as long as the author could write a good mystery (W=80%, M=93%). A total of 232 readers (W=171, M=61) answered the question.

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: "Some critics say that mysteries are anti-female, violent, and put women in a secondary role (victim, villainess, or girlfriend/wife)." The majority of all readers, 75%, disagreed with the statement (W=72%, M=81%); 14% of all readers agreed with the statement (W=15% , M=10%); and 12% of all readers both agreed and disagreed (W=13%, M=8%). The number of readers who answered the question was 221 (W=162, M=59).

Readers were then asked to explain their answer. The most frequently mentioned answer was that there are more strong women detectives and heroines now. Other responses are found in Table 20.

Table 19

Why Detective is A Loner

Reason	All (N=213)	Women (N=158)	Men (N=55)
WRITING STRUCTURE (72 mentions: W=57, M=15)			
Easier to write/tighter plot	15%	15%	13%
Easier for reader to relate to	8%	7%	13%
RELATIONSHIPS (67 mentions: W=51, M=16)			
No obligations or distractions	14%	15%	9%
Independent/free	8%	8%	7%
Can't trust others	6%	6%	5%
DISAGREE (46 mentions: W=37, M=9)			
Not always true	22%	23%	16%
PERSONAL TRAIT (38 mentions: W=30, M=8)			
Observer/detached/objective	6%	8%	4%
WORK RELATED (37 mentions: W=31, M=6)			
Lousy hours	6%	8%	4%
Needs time to concentrate	6%	6%	4%
OTHER			
Related to genre	8%	8%	9%
Philosophical answer	6%	4%	11%

Table 20

Are Mysteries Anti-Female?

Opinion	All (N=217)	Women (N=159)	Men (N=58)
More strong women detectives now	23%	26%	15%
I don't read that kind of mystery	22%	26%	10%
Some mysteries do, some don't	21%	22%	17%
Found mainly in hard-boiled	15%	19%	3%
Once true, but this is changing	14%	17%	7%
Reflection of society	13%	13%	16%
More women writers now	13%	13%	12%

Asked to name their three favorite authors, 19% of all readers chose Dorothy Sayers. Women also chose Dorothy Sayers as their favorite author, and men chose Tony Hillerman as their favorite. Table 21 shows favorite authors for all respondents, for women, and for men.

When asked what most appeals to them about the way their favorite author writes, readers gave the following responses: characters, aspects of the plot, setting, writing, humor, and referential statements. Table 22 details the responses under each of these categories.

Table 21

Favorite Author

FAVORITE AUTHOR FOR ALL	
RESPONDENTS	(N=224)
Dorothy Sayers	19%
Agatha Christie	18%
Tony Hillerman	17%
Sue Grafton	13%
P. D. James	13%
FAVORITE AUTHOR	
FOR WOMEN	(N=167)
Dorothy Sayers	23%
Agatha Christie	22%
Tony Hillerman	16%
P.D. James	16%
Sue Grafton	14%
FAVORITE AUTHOR	
FOR MEN	(N=57)
Tony Hillerman	19%
Raymond Chandler	18%
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle	18%
Dashiell Hammet	16%
Sue Grafton	11%

Table 22

Way Favorite Author Writes

Aspect mentioned	All (N=219)	Women (N=165)	Men (N=54)
CHARACTERS (163 mentions: W=135, M=28)			
Characters (no description)	32%	34%	30%
Complex characters	11%	13%	2%
Character development	8%	10%	2%
Believable characters	6%	7%	6%
Series characters	5%	7%	0%
PLOT (116 mentions: W=83, M=33)			
Plotting (no description)	20%	21%	19%
Twists/inventive/ingenuity	11%	12%	9%
Realistic/plausible	8%	4%	20%
Can tell a good story	8%	5%	15%
Action/suspense-filled/	5%	4%	11%
SETTING (110 mentions: W=87, M=23)			
Setting/atmosphere/place	37%	39%	30%
British setting	5%	5%	4%
WRITING (74 mentions: W=54, M=20)			
Quality of the writing	19%	17%	24%
Style/tone/voice	9%	10%	7%
HUMOR (45 mentions: W=37, M=8)			
Humor (no description)	21%	22%	15%
REFERENTIAL STATEMENTS (30 mentions: W=21, M=9)			
I can identify with/like to know	8%	8%	9%

Readers were asked to name their three all-time favorite novels. The favorite of all respondents and for women was Gaudy Night. The favorite for men was Hound of the Baskervilles. But this was a difficult question for many readers to answer; 43 respondents (W=37, M=6) listed at least one author instead of a book; 13 respondents (W=10, M=3) said that they had too many favorites to list only three; 8 respondents (W=5, M=3) said that this was an impossible question; and 8 respondents (W=7, M=1) said that their favorite novel changes often. Table 23 shows the favorite novels for all respondents, for women, and for men.

Raymond Chandler described four types of mystery readers. In a closed-ended question, respondents were asked to choose what type they best fit. They answered as follows: "I become involved with the characters; I worry about what happens to them," was chosen by 48% of all readers (W=52%, M=38%). "I don't fit any of the types" was chosen by 21% of all readers (W=20%, M=25%). "I get caught up in the feelings of suspense and the excitement of the chase" was chosen by 15% of all respondents (W=11%, M=25%). "I am a puzzle addict" was chosen by 11% of all readers (W=12%, M=8%). And "It's the only kind of fiction that satisfies me intellectually; it doesn't get too big for its boots" was chosen by 10% of all readers (W=11%, M=8% of men). There were 10 multiple responses, and a total of 234 readers (W=174, M=60 men) answered the question.

Table 23

Favorite Novel

FAVORITE NOVEL FOR ALL RESPONDENTS (N=188)	
Gaudy Night	16%
Daughter of Time	11%
Hound of the Baskervilles	9%
Maltese Falcon	7%
Murder of Roger Ackroyd	7%
And Then There Were None	5%
Nine Tailors	5%
FAVORITE NOVEL FOR WOMEN (N=140)	
Gaudy Night	21%
Daughter of Time	12%
Murder of Roger Ackroyd	9%
Hound of the Baskervilles	6%
Thief of Time	6%
And Then There Were None	4%
Unsuitable Job for A Woman	4%
FAVORITE NOVEL FOR MEN (N=48)	
Maltese Falcon	21%
Hound of the Baskervilles	17%
Daughter of Time	8%
Moonstone	8%
And Then There Were None	8%
Big Sleep	6%
Long Goodbye	6%

In a closed-ended question, readers were asked about their point-of-view preferences. As shown in Table 24, most readers preferred the first-person point-of-view (through the eyes of the detective). The second preference for women was the omniscient narrator, and the second preference for men was the outsider. Five people gave multiple responses.

Table 24

Point-of-View Preference

Preference	All (N=228)	Women (N=171)	Men (N=57)
Through eyes of the detective	50%	49%	53%
Omniscient	21%	23%	18%
No preference	14%	15%	14%
Outsider	11%	9%	16%
Dr. Watson figure	9%	8%	12%

Readers were asked to agree or disagree with critics who say that mysteries are formula fiction and are always the same. The majority of all readers, 83%, disagreed (W=83%, M=83%); 15% (W=15%, M=14%) agreed; and 3% of all readers said they weren't sure (W=2%, M= 3%). Readers were then asked to explain their answers. The most frequent response for all readers was there was too much variety within the genre for there to be a formula. Other frequently mentioned responses are found in Table 25.

Table 25

Why Mysteries Are/Aren't Formula

Reason	All (N=197)	Women (N=146)	Men (N=51)
Too much variety in the genre	22%	23%	22%
Follow a framework but everything else is different	20%	20%	20%
Characters different	9%	10%	6%
Plots different	8%	8%	8%
Writing styles different	4%	3%	4%
Settings different	4%	5%	0%
Good ones transcend the genre	19%	20%	18%
All literature is formula	13%	12%	16%
Who cares what critics say	6%	5%	10%
Formula makes them dependable	5%	5%	6%

When asked to describe the emotions they most often felt when they read mysteries, readers gave the following top three answers: 56% of all respondents said curiosity (W=56%, M=56%); 34% of all respondents said contentment (W=38%, M=24%); and 20% of all respondents chose excitement and suspense (W=13%, M=29%). The question was closed-ended, and there were 30 multiple responses. The total number of people who answered was 234 (W=175, M=59).

Readers were asked in both a closed-ended and in an open-ended question about their reasons for reading mysteries. In the closed-ended

question, readers were asked to rank their three most important reasons. As shown in Table 26, all readers, chose simple relaxation for their first, second, and third most important reason. The order of ranking for women was (a) simple relaxation, (b) simple relaxation, and (c) unmasking of the villain in the end. The order of ranking for men was (a) simple relaxation, (b) escape into a fantasy world, and (c) the murderer is caught and justice is done.

In the open-ended question, readers were asked to describe why they choose mysteries/thrillers over other types of books. Respondents mentioned feelings they associated with mysteries, as well as aspects of the plot, and characters; readers said they read other types of books, also, cited practical reasons, compared mysteries with other genres, and said they read to escape. Table 27 shows the most frequently mentioned answers under each category.

Finally, readers were asked about the changes they perceived in mysteries since they first began reading them. Respondents mentioned the following changes: gender-related, characterizations, characteristics of the novels, the quality of writing, and themes or subjects. Other changes mentioned were more diverse settings, more of a variety to choose from, and more realistic. Table 28 details the answers most often mentioned under each category.

Table 26

Three Most Important Reasons for Reading A Mystery

REASON #1			
Reason	All (N=232)	Women (N=173)	Men (N=59)
Simple relaxation	47%	47%	49%
Enjoy solving puzzles	13%	16%	5%
Escape into fantasy world	9%	11%	3%
Challenge of solving before detective	7%	8%	5%
REASON #2			
Reason	All (N=215)	Women (N=165)	Men (N=50)
Simple relaxation	20%	21%	16%
Enjoy solving puzzles	18%	20%	12%
Escape into fantasy world	13%	8%	22%
Challenge of solving before detective	13%	13%	10%
Murderer caught/justice done	13%	13%	10%
Feelings of fear and suspense	6%	4%	12%
REASON #3			
Reason	All (N=205)	Women (N=157)	Men (N=48)
Simple relaxation	16%	17%	15%
Escape into fantasy world	16%	17%	13%
Murderer caught/justice done	15%	11%	27%
Unmasking of villain in end	15%	18%	4%
Enjoy solving puzzles	11%	7%	15%
Challenge of solving before detective	9%	9%	9%
Feelings of fear and suspense	5%	4%	8%

Table 27

Why Mysteries Are Chosen

Aspect mentioned	All (N=218)	Women (N=164)	Men (N=54)
FEELINGS (131 mentions: W=100, M=31)			
Suspense/urgency/excitement	14%	13%	19%
Relaxing/soothing/comforting	13%	15%	7%
Intellectually challenging	10%	10%	9%
Entertaining/fun/enjoyable	7%	6%	9%
Holds my interest/attention	6%	5%	7%
Predictable/safe/dependable	5%	6%	2%
PLOT (116 mentions: W=100, M=16)			
Puzzle aspect	13%	16%	4%
Definite ending/resolution	11%	13%	4%
Plotting (no description)	9%	10%	6%
Can tell a good story	7%	6%	9%
Definite beginning/middle/end	5%	7%	0%
CHARACTERS (46 mentions: W=40, M=6)			
Characters (no description)	7%	9%	2%
Series characters	6%	7%	6%
READ OTHER KINDS OF BOOKS TOO (42 mentions: W=32, M=10)			
I read other kinds of books, too	19%	20%	19%
PRACTICAL REASONS (44 mentions: W=37, M=7)			
Shorter/quick read	5%	7%	0%
Job related	4%	3%	7%
Not demanding	4%	4%	2%
Can learn something	4%	4%	2%
BETTER THAN OTHER GENRES (32 mentions: W=24, M=8)			
Better than mainstream fiction	10%	9%	11%
Better than romances	4%	4%	4%
ESCAPE (30 mentions: W=24, M=6)			
Escape (no description)	6%	7%	4%
Into another world/life	3%	3%	4%

Table 28

Changes in Mysteries

Change	All (N=212)	Women (N=159)	Men (N=53)
GENDER-RELATED (116 mentions: W=102, M=14)			
More women protagonists	16%	16%	13%
Stronger women characters	15%	19%	0%
More women authors	14%	14%	13%
CHARACTERIZATIONS (90 mentions: W=61, M=29)			
Characters more developed	13%	12%	17%
More variety in kinds of detectives	10%	11%	6%
Emphasis has shifted from puzzle to characters	8%	4%	17%
More psychological exploration	6%	5%	8%
CHARACTERISTICS (64 mentions: W=44, M=20)			
More violence	16%	15%	17%
More sex and/or obscenity	7%	4%	17%
WRITING (55 mentions: W=35, M=20)			
Better written	13%	11%	19%
More poorly written	4%	4%	4%
THEMES or TOPICS (44 mentions: W=33, M=11)			
More social or moral issues	7%	7%	8%
Current topics or themes	6%	5%	9%
OTHER			
More diverse settings	15%	16%	11%
More to choose from/variety of types available	14%	11%	19%
More realistic	13%	11%	19%

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Who Reads Mysteries?

Although the study is based on individual members of Mystery Readers International, the profile of mystery readers that emerged is demographically similar to other published statistics of mystery readers (Gibson, 1989; Herbert, 1992; Mysterious Book Club Review, 1991). These articles all described a similar audience for mysteries, as summed up in the following: "predominantly female, over 30, well-educated, and well-heeled" (Stander, 1990). This study echoes these descriptions: 74% of respondents were women; the average age of all respondents was 49; 88% of all respondents received either a college, graduate, or doctorate degree; and the average household income was \$68,91.

As feminists and socio-cultural Marxist scholars have pointed out, there is an underlying conservative strain in mystery genre. However, when asked to describe themselves politically, 47% of all respondents described themselves as "Liberal" or "Very Liberal." In addition, only 13% of women and 22% of men described themselves as "Conservative" or "Very Conservative."

While political description by itself cannot be used to assess the extent to which mystery readers read against the conservative strain of the mystery, these results do tend to bolster Knight's (1990) and Winks' (1980) assertion that underlying the genre is a partly radical voice that questions some aspect of the existing society. This observation is further supported by the increase of women and minorities as both protagonists in and writers of mysteries, as well as by the

number of respondents who mentioned the increase of social and moral issues in the genre.

Where, When, and How Is Mystery Reading Done?

As a group, mystery readers were remarkably similar in their reading habits. A majority of both women and men chose books based on their familiarity with the author, read until they were interrupted or had something else to do, never read the ending ahead of time, sometimes figured out the murderer before the end of the book, never fantasized about committing the perfect murder, never or rarely watched television or listened to music while reading mysteries, never listened to mysteries on audio tape, often read the newspaper, preferred to read alone, sometimes or often discussed mysteries with others, and carried their enjoyment of mystery reading into other aspects of their lives.

However, there were also some marked gender differences in reading habits. Women began reading for pleasure at the average age of 6.9 years old, while men did not begin reading for pleasure until the average age of 9.4 years old. As teens, more women (57%) cited mysteries as their favorite type of book than did men (47%), indicating a loyalty to the genre which carried over into their adult lives. One woman reader commented on this longtime fascination with mysteries, "When I read these at a young age, that was all it took to be a life-long addict."

In addition, women read two more mystery novels per month than did men, while men read about one more book other than mysteries per month than did women. More women reread mysteries than men, and, most significantly, 68% of women read mysteries daily, while only 36% of men reported they did so.

While all respondents mentioned home as the place where they most often read mysteries, 63% of women but only 30% of men said they read in bed or in the bedroom. This response is consistent with theories of both Appleyard (1990) and Chodorow (1978). Appleyard asserted that reading in bed is a continuation of a childhood habit, evoking feelings associated with being held in an adult's lap. And Chodorow stated that behind the desire to mother is a women's own wish to be mothered. For women, then, more than for men, reading in bed may indicate that they wish to reproduce the feeling of being nurtured as children. Like Radway's romance readers, women may turn to mystery reading to compensate for the "lack of emotional nurturance" they receive, as well as a way to keep from being overwhelmed by the "expectations and limitations" of their role as women (Radway, 1984, p. 94).

Also, women more often went into detailed descriptions of where they most often read mysteries and more often described a favorite chair or sofa in their responses. For example, one women wrote: "Sitting in my den with a cup of hot tea on the table beside my overstuffed chair and footstool." Another replied: "In bed, the den in late afternoon, waiting rooms, on vacation, curled up in a chair on a lazy winter weekend." In contrast, men more often provided simple listings of rooms or places, as typified in the following response: "1. Living Room 2. Bed."

Men reported spending an average of 7.3 more hours a week in leisure-time activities than did women. Yet, women spent a greater proportion of what leisure time they did have on mystery reading, 21% for women versus 18% for men. This reflects both the lack of leisure time afforded women because of the

double-duty they perform as workers and as primary caretakers, as well as the importance these women attributed to their mystery reading.

In response after response, women described how they squeezed mystery reading into their busy lives. One woman wrote: "I don't have much time for reading for sheer pleasure anymore Mysteries are my guilty pleasure." Another said: "I have a very busy life. I love to read. My reading time is limited and often disjointed. Therefore, I need to read books that draw me in quickly, interest me deeply, and make me forget the rest of my life while reading." And another woman respondent said she "stayed up into the wee hours on a work night for a book that truly held my interest."

Taken together, these differences reveal a pattern of deeper involvement in mystery reading on the part of women. For women, mystery reading seems to take on almost ritualistic overtones, as evidenced by an early devotion to the genre, the time devoted to mystery reading, and the detailed descriptions of places associated with mystery reading. These findings are similar to Radway's (1984) description of romance readers as chronic readers who find their genre "so enjoyable and beneficial" that they "deliberately work it into busy schedules as often and as consistently as they can" (p. 62). Like Radway's romance readers, women who answered the survey also drew both psychological and affective support from mysteries. As Radway explained, "They vicariously attend to their own requirements as independent individuals who require emotional sustenance and solitude" (p. 93).

What Specific Features Are Important to Readers?

As shown in Table 11, the majority of both women and men preferred the classical mystery featuring the thinking detective (W=76%, M=56%). However,

27% more men preferred the hard-boiled mystery than did women (W=16%, M=41%).

Interestingly, 83% of both men and women disagreed with the idea that mysteries were formula fiction and always followed a similar pattern, saying most often that there was too much variety within the genre for it to be formulaic or that mysteries followed a basic framework but everything else was different (see Table 25). This contrasts with critics such as Cawelti (1976) and Porter (1981) who view the repetition of a immutable formula as the essential feature of the genre. One woman reader explained:

Just because it isn't "mainstream" doesn't mean it is "formula." There may be basic elements common to all mysteries, but the way those elements combine, the style of the individual writer—these combine to make it ever new and exciting. Mystery writing is as much formula as fashion design—give three designers a piece of material and you come up with three pieces of clothing. Give three writers a motive or something to hang a plot on—you get three different stories.

This attitude was also that of Radway's (1984) romance readers who claimed that there was too much diversity in romances for them to be formula, but who, at the same time, "exhibit fairly rigid expectations of what is permissible in a romantic tale" (p. 63). Mystery readers acknowledged this seeming contradiction by making the distinction between great mysteries and run-of-the-mill mysteries according to how rigidly authors follow the formula. One man explained: "Most mysteries begin with a formula. Their success is generally a measure of their ability to transcend it." Similarly, a women commented: "While there are some common elements among murder mysteries, the better the writer, the more they innovate and stretch the limits of those elements." Another said:

Predictability is welcome at certain times. But great mysteries depart from the formula in some significant way."

When readers were questioned about those qualities that allow the detective/spy to triumph over his enemies, the majority of both men and women chose "superior intellect" as their answer. This directly contradicts Marxist critic Mandel (1982) who said that there was a shift in the hero from that of thinking hero to spy/thriller/hard-boiled hero with his/her dependency on technical gadgets, physical prowess, and the backing of an organization, thus signaling "the decline of rationalism in bourgeois ideology" (p. 69).

All readers indicated that the most important ingredients of a mystery were plot, characters, a sense of place, and aspects of the writing (see Table 12). But patterns of gender differences within each of these categories emerged in this study.

Plot

Women more often than men emphasized their enjoyment of the puzzle aspects found in the mystery. One woman said: "I am a puzzle addict; reading them is second nature." Another said: "I think the reason I reach for mysteries more often is that at this stage I understand the rules of the 'game.' and I enjoy relaxing and trying to work out the puzzle. Another respondent commented: "They provide . . . a chance to work out the puzzle to see if you are correct. It's fun early on to try to spot the clues."

Women also more often mentioned the idea of a definite closure or resolution found in mysteries. Women liked the fact that mysteries had an explanation at the conclusion of the story that tied up the loose ends. One woman said, "I guess maybe I'm just searching for some order out of chaos, and

I truly love to see evil vanquished by good." Another wrote, "Some major event always occurs and is resolved in some way." And a third respondent replied: "Good mysteries are neat in tying up loose ends and satisfying in a way that real life never is."

In conjunction with the idea of closure is the importance, particularly to women, of the structure of the mystery. They emphasized this point repeatedly: "I absolutely cannot stand present-day novels; many seem to have no beginning or end and no successful resolution of conflicts. They are like unfinished chords"; "Too many other books are slice-of-life crap. No beginning, no middle, no end"; "Mysteries have a beginning, middle, and end—a plot, unlike some modern fiction"; "They have a beginning, a middle, and an end. A problem is presented and resolved"; "I know they'll have a beginning, a middle, a climax, and an end. Much modern fiction is so confused it's hard to pinpoint these basic things."

A greater percentage of men, however, more often mentioned the necessity for realistic and plausible plots. They also proportionally more often made reference to the importance of the author's ability to tell a good story, as illustrated in the following comment regarding favorite authors: "They know how to tell a story. There are many writers but too few good storytellers." And men emphasized the element of action and suspense found in mystery plots: "I enjoy the anticipation and the suspense of the 'chase,' and I like to lose myself for a little while in another world"; "I enjoy action and adventure in movies and in what I read. I'm not into war novels, so P. I. novels fill the groove for me"; "They're fast-moving and entertaining."

These answers are consistent with observations made by Porter (1981) and Cawelti (1976) who said that the main appeal of the mystery is found in its ability to intersperse periods of tension, excitement, and fear with a release from these emotions. However, it is interesting to note that although these critics, who are men, correctly identify the aspect of the plot that most appeals to men, they failed to take into account that not all readers are men. Women more often mentioned the puzzle element, the resolution, and the structure of the plot.

Characters

Although this study did not ask specifically about series characters, both men and women commented on their importance, often referring to them as friends. Women wrote: "Series characters become friends"; "The thing is once I get to know a character like Grafton's or Paretsky's, I want to keep living with them"; "Many favorite authors produce a book each year, and I like meeting old friends. You can absolutely count on four to five hours of fun if you find a new Dick Francis"; "Sometimes the characters are familiar, like family"; "Whenever I find one [series character] I like, I have to buy every book in the series—I scrounge for old ones and wait patiently for new ones."

Men made the following comments about series characters: "Being single and a bit of a loner, I tend to rely on friends I meet in books for company"; and "[Mysteries have] familiar series characters one feels comfortable visiting."

Women more often commented on the significance of character development and character complexity than did men. One woman remarked: "I can put up with a poor ending or one I guess early on if I like the characters." And another wrote: "The characters must be strong enough to make me care about the story."

When questioned about what specific characteristics readers liked or disliked in a detective, and liked in a villain or favorite fictional character, very different answers emerged along gender lines. Women were more interested in relationships between characters. They more often referred to qualities of kindness, decency, compassion and caring. Women more frequently mentioned they liked detectives who were intelligent and disliked bumbling, incompetent sleuths. Women much more frequently mentioned their preference for humor in stories and particularly in their characters. Overwhelmingly, women, much more than men, mentioned their dislike of a character's use of gratuitous violence, cruelty, and misogyny.

Proportionally, men more often said they valued qualities of persistence, perseverance, and honesty. Men disliked perfect or superhuman characters; they preferred characters who were fallible. A greater percentage of men mentioned their preference for detectives who were analytical, reasoning, and logical. And they said they liked their villains to be clever, cunning, and sneaky.

These findings form a pattern of responses that support those elaborated by Gilligan (1982) in In A Different Voice. Women value relationships and fear violence as a sign of the ultimate breakdown in human connections. And the traits more admired by men are those found within the individual, not those associated with relationships: tenaciousness, honesty, and fallibility.

Settings

Women consistently mentioned the importance of setting or a sense of place more often than did men. And women wrote more detailed descriptions of the importance of settings to their enjoyment of mysteries. Some examples of these descriptions written by women respondents include the following: "Even if

these are not reflective of people I know in real life, James, Hillerman, and Sayers construct such complete, authentic worlds that I believe the people they create to live in them"; "They write about a way of life and a place in time that already seems remote and where murder can be solved and things go back to cozy normal (as they can't seem to nowadays)"; and "I enjoy entering the worlds created by the author . . . If I were to wake up in a manor house in pre-World War II Britain, I would know just what to have for breakfast and how to proceed if I found a body on the library floor; similarly, if I were to need a P.I.'s assistance in Stout's New York City."

The emphasis placed on setting and atmosphere, as well as the willingness on the part of women to enter into the world created by the author is similar to the findings of both Bleich (1986) and Flynn (1989) who noted these same gender differences in reading patterns of college students.

Writing

A greater percentage of men were more concerned with the quality of the author's writing than were women. This is interesting in that it tends to echo Bleich's (1978) study of gender differences in reading among college students which found that men tend to distance themselves more from the narrative. This tendency on the part of men to comment more often on the technical aspects of the writing follows this distancing pattern.

Favorite, Characters, Books, and Authors

When respondents were asked about their preferences regarding the sex of the author, the majority of both men and women said their sex didn't matter as long as they could write a good mystery (W=80%, M=93%). However, when questioned about specific favorite characters, books, and authors, a very

different pattern emerged. As illustrated in Table 15, three of the top four favorite fictional detectives of women were created by women authors; two were men and two were women. In contrast, four out of the top four favorite fictional detectives chosen by men were created by men authors; all four were men.

Table 16 shows that four of the top five favorite fictional characters chosen by women were created by women authors; three were men and two were women. Four of the top five favorite fictional characters chosen by men were created by men; all five characters were men.

As Table 21 shows, four of the top five favorite authors listed by women were women. And four of the top five favorite authors named by men were men. Table 23 follows a similar pattern. Four of the top five favorite novels chosen by women were also written by women; three of the top five favorite novels chosen by men were written by men.

So, while respondents said the sex of the author didn't matter, their actual reading patterns revealed a preference based on gender. This differs from Bleich (1986) who found that the gender of the author did not affect the response of the student.

However, it is interesting to note that both women and men were more apt to choose a male character as a favorite. This may be explained, as both Kaplan (1986) and Reddy (1988) stated, by the lack of female detectives in the genre because of gender discrimination during the time the books were written; the need to appeal to the largest readership possible (since men are reluctant to read books featuring women); and the traditional taboo against having a woman in charge.

Significantly, all the characters named as a favorite by men were created by male authors. This emphasis on male characters reinforces the pattern, observed by Bleich (1986), namely, the need for men to identify with only one or two characters in a novel, and the tendency of women to involve themselves in the entire pattern of relationships. It is also consistent with Palmer (1979) who said that an essential feature of the genre is that the narration told through the eyes of the hero, thus establishing a "unequivocal moral perspective," but, once again, this observation appears to hold true for men, much more so than for women. This pattern also bolsters Gardiner's (1982) argument that because women have a more fluid and flexible identities, women authors are better able to create androgynous characters.

Questions that Generated the Most Responses

Three survey questions produced the greatest number as well as the most varied responses. The first question was influenced by Klein's (1988) assertion that mysteries are basically anti-feminist. The question asked: "Some critics say mysteries are anti-female, violent, and that they put women in a secondary role (victim, villainess, or girlfriend/wife). Do you agree or disagree? Why?"

Some respondents were disconcerted by the question. Men seemed to be the most disturbed: "I suppose you can find something to bitch about on any subject"; "What a bullshit question"; and "The accusations are feminist propaganda." But some women were also upset: "A mystery is a type of story. It doesn't have to reflect my personal system before I will read it."

The majority of both men and women disagreed with the statement. The only answer given by proportionally more men than women was that mysteries

reflect society. The most frequent answers given by women (see Table 20) were that there are more strong women protagonists now and that women avoid reading that type of mystery. The following comments by women readers reflect these views: "Today there are as many female fictional detectives as there are male, and they are every bit as intelligent, tough, and funny as the males"; "They used to be anti-female, but now are usually equal to the men—even more unsavory at times"; and "I mostly read mysteries by women, though, partly because of this [gratuitous violence]. But I am never short of reading material."

Other respondents were concerned with issues of violence and the secondary roles played by women. Comments from women: "If one has read as many books and/or stories as I have, you would realize that both men and women are capable of violence. Since the preponderance of writers are men, they tend to put the blame on women. But that's changing. Many more women are writing mysteries now"; "Just read a few—violence of all kinds from physical to intellectual—is increasing in reality and in fiction"; "Neither men nor women have a monopoly on murder and neither sex can say it does not commit murder or is not murdered"; "Women were never inferior to men in anything attendant to crime. Therefore, I put their secondary role in mysteries to ignorance of male and female authors"; and "Most of the female writers treat women as people Crime is usually violent."

And comments from men: "Why is the Della Street role inferior but not the Archie Goodwin/Dr. Watson role?"; "As far back as Sherlock Holmes, there was Irene Adler. There are now just as many male victims, villains, witnesses, partners, or whatever. Good mysteries mirror life and that's full of violence"; and "I don't agree that the role of victim and villainess are secondary, nor is

girlfriend/wife or husband/boyfriend come to that. Much violence is directed toward women, according to my newspaper."

Many women respondents remarked that the characterization of mysteries as anti-female was misleading since it applied mainly to the hard-boiled sub-genre: "Some sub-genres (like the hard-boiled private eye) may be more violent, but mysteries also include amateur sleuth, cozy or malice domestic"; "Agree when critics are referring to the American hard-boiled type. Disagree with reference to the English mysteries where women are treated equally for the most part"; "The qualities named are still part of the 'hard-boiled mystery,' but better writers of both sexes are creating women who are as three-dimensional as men. Thank God"; "I don't read those authors. The hard-boiled school is certainly anti-female and the worst of the genre"; "The number of mean streets and spy mysteries on sale far exceeds other types. Females tend to be hard, dumb, or submissive. There is a lack of sensible, smart and good women characters"; "Lip-smacking, graphic descriptions of violence obviously stems from deep misogyny. This is true especially of hard-boiled mysteries"; and "I agree as to the old-style hard-boiled or 'had I but known' types, but not to 'good' classical detective, golden age and cozies. I think it's like any genre—some books are anti-female because they use stereotypes."

Other frequently mentioned answers to the question were that mysteries reflect society and/or the role of women is undergoing change. One male reader wrote: "In general, mysteries reflect the 'real world' and until recently, women were not able to work in positions in society which would allow them to participate as detective/hero." One woman remarked:

This reflects how women are regarded in modern America. This not only occurs in American literature, but throughout the world. Women are still struggling to change the image of victim. Perhaps when women believe that they don't have to be victims or when they are not secondary to men, hopefully this image will also change in mystery fiction as well.

Some other comments from women regarding societal changes and the changing role of women: "On the whole, mystery novels are changing to show women as more intelligent and resourceful. Women are beginning to reflect society (i.e. showing up as characters in positions of power), probably because of the greater number of women writers"; "The worst anti-female mysteries I've ever read are still better than real life!"; and "Mystery fiction, like any other type of fiction, reflects society. Of course, women had a lesser role in many of the earlier 'classics,' but that has changed in the current crop of books. The best always respected women, even if they couldn't be chief-superintendent."

Another woman wrote:

Mysteries reflect society. When women were second-class citizens, they were second-class citizens in mystery fiction. As society's perceptions about women began to match the reality, the way women were portrayed in mystery fiction also begins to approach the reality. As more and more women raised in the '60s and '70s begin to write mysteries, the portrayals of women have also begun to improve. They are central characters, including detectives, in more and more books. I think that hard-boiled and police procedurals will slowly reflect these changes, while cozies have been quicker to respond.

Finally, women who agreed that mysteries were anti-female explained their answers: "Women detectives were usually male-identified, and even plucky, engaging heroines were always punished for their freedom or emphatically returned to the norm at the story's end by marriage, motherhood or

some other capitulation to male dominance"; and "The 'gatekeepers' in book publishing and distribution have traditionally been male or male-oriented."

The second question on the survey that elicited a number of differing responses was "Why do you think the detective/hero/heroine is usually a loner?" As illustrated in Table 19, the greatest percentage of respondents (W=23%, M=16%) thought the statement was not always true. Women made the following observations: "I disagree that they are usually loners. Most detectives I read are excellent judges and manipulators of people and therefore are often interacting with others"; "The great majority of detectives (and I own a collection of over 5,000 mysteries) have either a love interest or at least one close friend--sometimes several"; and "I like them as a loner, being single. But I truly find that most of them have a 'buddy' on the police force or a lawyer, etc."

Other readers related the answer to the writing structure, not surprising since the third most frequently listed profession of respondents was writer. It is intriguing that 6% more men than women said that having a loner protagonist made it easier for the reader to relate to him/her. This reinforces Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982), and Bleich (1986) who assert that while women define themselves in terms of relationships, men define themselves in terms of separation. And, as discussed previously, Bleich (1986) found that men tend to identify with only one or two characters in a story, in this case, the loner figure in the mystery.

Here is what women said on the subject of writing structure and reader identification: "The technical demands of developing a plot tend to make writers avoid devoting time, effort, and space to developing non-essential, minor characters"; "It allows the reader to become the sleuth's 'sidekick' and participate

in the mystery without competing with other fictional 'sidekicks'; and "Having the detective unattached gives the author greater freedom in writing. He/she can involve the main character in a greater variety of situations, especially a series character."

Men mentioned the following: "It's a hard enough job to write a good detective story without having to mix in romance. So writers concentrate on plot and ignore involvement with others or keep it to a minimum. Consequently, the result is a loner"; "I think the loner appeals to a wider range of reader. Who ever heard of a private dick with a wife and six kids?"; and "Pragmatically, it is the most efficient way to tell the story in most cases."

Some readers commented on the practical aspects of the detective as loner, what it does to relationships and to family life. One woman wrote:

Not all of them are. Of those that are, the men's obsession with their work makes them impossible to live with. The women's independence and attention to their work make them poor candidates for a traditional male-female relationship, although some do exist. In these, the women seem to do their detecting behind or around their husband or relationship.

Other women wrote the following: "He/she doesn't have the time to cultivate friendships—his/her life is too unpredictable"; "Maybe because to be a good detective they have to concentrate on the case they're on to the exclusion of other people in their life. Also, their hours stink"; "So they can be open to romantic entanglements. Also it gives them time for contemplation and they are free of family obligations"; "Too much family, too many social disruptions interrupt the logic process. Who can think in a crowd?"; and "Easier for the detective to leave the house at all hours and be dedicated to work if he doesn't have spouse, children, home responsibilities."

Men wrote: "No one else would live with them, even in fiction!" and "No competing commitments."

Still other respondents emphasized that the detective must be an outside observer, often with his/her own code of ethics. Women wrote the following (note the frequent assumption of the male protagonist): "The detective gives us an unbiased outsider's view of society which would be impossible if the character weren't basically an outcast"; "The exigencies of the genre place him [sic] outside the situation as an observer rather than a participant in the main action. Psychologically, it is also often appropriate . . . not having personal ties enables him [sic] to engage believably in many repeated adventures without encumbrances"; "So he [sic] will not become emotionally involved, thereby tainting his [sic] ability to be objective"; "In order to solve the crime or puzzle, detectives must distance themselves from the pack of other characters to become objective enough to see the problem from their unique perspective" And from a man: "The detective must sometimes work outside the law, but within his/her own code of ethics."

Some readers also commented on the parallel between reading and detecting. Women respondents made the following observations: "Some reader identification comes about--after all, reading is a solitary pursuit and the detective operates much of the time by him/herself"; and "The reader can identify with them going through their paces. Reading is also a solo activity."

Still other readers traced the lone detective archetype to genre conventions and to masculine patterns of behavior in our culture. A woman commented:

He/she is no longer likely to be a loner except in the most traditional (old-fashioned) private-eye novels. That convention was common to the American private-eye novel, but not in the classical who dunnits. The loner private eye was the successor to the knight-errant and the cowboy. He [sic] was the outsider who could see faults in society and try to right some individual wrongs. He [sic] had to be detached and unattached.

Other women said: "Because most (but not all) mysteries rework a teen male myth, and teen males are supposed to leave family and make their own way. The first phase of women's rights claimed equal opportunity for adventure"; "Because too many writers get caught up in the adolescent 'I am a rock/I am an island' fantasy that to be strong is to need nobody"; and "He's [sic] a trait of the American character, has been ever since Fenimore Cooper and Natty Bumpo. The detective is a cipher and mirror of culture, and, of course, someone we can pretend to be: the person who has it figured out—finally!"

Men commented: "He [sic] is an everyman figure—a paradigm of justice in an unjust world"; and "The primitive instincts of the hunter."

This was the one area of the survey that most reflected archetypal and myth criticism. But it's significant that most answers reflecting this approach assumed a masculine point of view. This would appear to support Humm's (1986) contention that most myth criticism is androcentric.

Finally, many readers gave philosophical answers to the question of why the detective is usually a loner. Some of the more interesting statements from women included the following: "Dealing with the darker side of life tends to weary the soul—recuperation is necessary to allow for healing. This can't be done in a crowd!"; "Given what he/she does—cleans up after some of us—society prefers not to look closely at the detective's work. Hence, he/she works in obscurity"; "Thinking is lonely. So few people do it"; "They are usually loners

because they've seen the darkness of a human soul. That's why they are involved in crimes"; and "Because he/she/it (I read fantasy mysteries too) is a one-eyed person in a world of mostly blind people."

Men wrote: "Each of us has to understand the world alone, so why not a detective?"; "He's a seeker of truth and people don't like seekers of truth"; and "Deep thought and analysis is usually solitary. Research/investigation is usually most efficient that way. You spy alone. Eccentricity produces aloneness."

The third question that generated a great deal of response from readers had to do with the changes they perceived in mysteries. It asked, "What changes do you see in mystery novels since you first began reading them?"

Although both men and women commented on the increase of women as authors and protagonists, only women commented on the evolution of strong women characters. Women remarked: "A change in motives. A change in detectives—more women, more women, more women. And women with brains . . . Women as real people, not stereotypical grandmothers or scatterbrained authors or bimbos or caricatures"; "The position of women has gone from that of genteel observer (Miss Marple) to strong professional, either member of police, private detective, or other type—college professor, bookstore owner, etc."

Other women commented: "Female sleuths have become less macho and more human"; "Female protagonists have become professionals. There are more older protagonists—not old, just older"; "More intelligent and strong female characters; less 'had I but known' type of heroines in need of protection"; "Women are less likely to be prizes or pawns to be captured so the hero may rescue someone"; "More women writers and women detectives. Better, well-

evolved beyond secondary 'cardboard' roles"; and "More women writers being published/acknowledged. Their success has been paralleled by the success of male writers who portray human, vulnerable heroes."

A few respondents noted that changes in women characters were sometimes superficial. For example, one woman wrote, "The increase in independent women detectives is the most prevalent trend, but I haven't found these heroines very satisfying--Paretsky et al. seem to be more macho than men rather than creating a new, truly female model."

And not all readers felt the changes in mysteries were positive. Many noted changes in moral values, and the increase of violence. Women remarked: "More violence--on-stage graphic violence as opposed to off-stage, alluded-to violence. This used to be the domain strictly of the hard-boiled detectives who got beaten up with startling regularity. Now it is everywhere--a reflection of society"; "There has been a shift in moral values, so that qualities once prized are now despised and vice versa (cf. smoking, drinking, sex, as well as moral issues)"; "New emphasis on strong female characters, feminism, and regionalism (all good); more graphic violence (bad); more sexually frank (can be good or bad)"; and "More explicit sex in mysteries; more explicit violence--more blood and gore."

Other readers contrasted the elements found in the classical mysteries with more contemporary mysteries. A woman commented:

Authors in the first half of this century were often schooled in the classics, mythology, the Bible. They added a depth of background to the characters and setting which is usually missing today. Also, the oldies wrote to amuse--the Ludlams want to write blockbusters.

In contrast, another woman wrote, "Better writing and plots. Some of the earlier books seem rather corny now."

Men wrote the following: "They have become more violent and sexy. They have lost ingenuity and the capacity to satisfy intellectually. They promote 'character' and 'psychology' at the expense of complex, satisfying, and absorbing action"; and "Decreasing importance of the puzzle. Increase in the number of women detectives. Slopier plotting, more derivative work."

Other respondents mentioned a strain of trendiness in the genre. Women wrote: "A mania for trendiness further cripples many of the stories with Midwestern academics attempting to write about hookers, pimps, etc."; and "There is more concern with trendy, topical issues now—not a good idea, I think, since these issues are subject to change."

A man wrote:

There's always some new gimmick, but these authors don't last long. How do you carry a series with an Eskimo who speaks no English, but is a professor at Miami State, and is married to an African princess, and is good at cracking drug-related murder cases in the Cuban exile community? Hypothetical, I hope.

But most readers seemed to approve of the changes they found. They often commented on the greater variety of settings and characters, greater character complexity, and on the greater number of books available in the genre. A sampling from women: "Mysteries are now set in a wide variety of settings, i.e. wide range of occupations, geographic variety. It reflects changes in society vis a vis women and minorities. And many of today's mysteries have an ethical or sociological theme/concern"; "1) The emergence of women detectives; 2) Greater variety in locales (no longer just New York, Boston, and L.A. in

American novels, for instance); 3) Great stretching of what constitutes a mystery. Sometimes 'why done it' is more important than 'who done it.'"; "Fewer prissy detectives (like Hercule Poirot). More diverse locations and settings. More 'human' criminals—all the murderers are not monsters. The detective is a fully drawn character—not just a character stuck in to solve the crime."

"So many mysteries and so little time to read them. There has been a virtual population explosion in the number of authors writing books worth reading"; and "There are a lot more of them to chose from since they have 'taken off' as a genre. This allows me to be pretty selective in my choice of plots, characters, and authors, which adds up to a satisfying read. It isn't that they have gotten better, it's that they are better for me."

And, finally, from a woman:

More women writers and sleuths. Sleuths who are more "connected" with society, family, lovers, friends, etc. Quality is improving all the time, at least in some. Emphasis is less on puzzle, more on character. Many male authors are showing more sensitivity, less sexism. More diversity in type, setting, background, characters, etc.

Why Do People Read Mysteries?

Readers were questioned about their reasons for reading mysteries in both closed-ended and open-ended questions. In the closed-ended question, all respondents chose simple relaxations as their primary reason (see Table 26). Respondents were asked to rank their three most important reasons. Women chose simple relaxation (47%) and enjoy solving puzzles (16%) as their first reason; they chose simple relaxation (21%) and enjoy solving puzzles (20%) as their second most important reason; and they chose unmasking of villain in the

end (18%), simple relaxation (17%), and escape into fantasy world (17%) as their third most important reason.

Men chose simple relaxation (49%), enjoy solving puzzles (5%), and challenge of solving before the detective (5%) as their first most important reason; they chose escape into fantasy world (22%) and simple relaxation (16%) as their second most important reason; and they chose murderer caught/justice done (27%), simple relaxation (15%), and enjoy solving puzzles (15%) as their third most important reason.

It's interesting to note the differences between the answers chosen as the third most important reasons given by men and women: for men, unmasking of the villain and for women, murder caught/justice done. The former implies a resolution, an answer to the puzzle of who did the crime, while the latter implies a punishment. This supports Gilligan's (1982) contention that men focus more on issues of justice, rules, and rights and reinforces the pattern, noted earlier, of women's preference for closure.

And men's choice of escape into a fantasy world would seem to corroborate both Cawelti (1976) and Appleyard (1990) who said that mystery readers are seeking an escape from the boredom and frustrations of the everyday world. However, this issue of fantasy in mysteries is a complex concept. The majority of both women and men (W=72%, M=82%) say they never fantasize about committing the perfect murder. Yet, fantasy does seem to play some type of role in mystery reading for both women and men.

Men's fantasies seem to evolve around thrilling or exciting stories or situations, and women's fantasies appear to evolve around characters. For example, note the differences between men and women in the following

examples. A man commented: "I like action, mysteries, thrills, escapism, so different from the life I lead. Fundamentally, they make my humdrum life easier to accept." And women wrote the following when asked to name their favorite fictional character in mysteries: "Travis McGee—Lots of fantasy potential"; "I like Archie Goodwin. I'd like to date him, although with Lily in the picture, I haven't a chance, even if I wasn't too old, too fat, and otherwise not eligible as far as he is concerned He's sexy without being sexual—the fantasy without the reality"; and one woman drew hearts next to her two favorite fictional characters, Melrose Plant and Joe Leaphorn.

Open-ended responses to the reason for reading mysteries repeated many of the choices made in other areas of the survey (see Table 27). Men most often mentioned feelings of excitement, urgency, and suspense, while women most often mentioned that they found mysteries relaxing, soothing, and comforting. Women also mentioned, once again, that they enjoyed the puzzle aspect and the definite ending or resolution.

Similar answers were given when readers were asked to choose the emotions they most often felt while reading mysteries. The majority of both men and women (56%) chose curiosity as the main emotion. However, as their second choice, women chose contentment (38%) and men chose excitement and suspense (29%). Once again, women emphasized the ritual enjoyment found in mysteries, while men emphasized the action, thrills and escapism found in the genre.

Both women and men often mentioned how finding a solution or resolution in mysteries serves as an antidote to the problems they face in their own lives. Women said: "It's nice to have someone else struggle with the

problems of life. I am just an observer, not a participant in the story/mystery"; "A good mystery is soothing in a stressful world"; "My profession is one of the helping kind—I deal with violence, abuse, drugs, sorrow and poverty every day. I like to read stories where there is a conclusion. Good is rewarded and evil is punished"; "I've reached the age when I know that life isn't always sweet and pretty; the world isn't always lovely, and the good guys don't always win. So I look for a kind of cynical realism in the books I read. If the hero (detective) can find some good in a contradictory world, I am satisfied with that."

"When I feel I'm not in control of my life, I know a mystery will entertain me, educate me, and give me a good puzzle that is tied up and resolved in the end. There is control in them. They are also very relaxing"; "I can lose myself in a good mystery. I like the challenge of trying to solve it before the end of the book. To me, it is just very relaxing; it's my way of escaping from the real world"; "Things can turn out fine in fiction as opposed to real life"; and "My favorite hobby is genealogy which consists of many mysteries—some of which I will probably never solve. So it is therapeutic for me to read a mystery that is solved."

A man wrote: "They, as a genre, have a self-contained momentum which provides a canon for social analysis—the power of the intellect over the chaos of modern existence." Another man commented:

I read several years ago that the upsurge in mystery reading may be due to readers needing a sense that things can work out O.K. Life seems so confusing and so full of crises and a rising crime rate and a failing justice system, etc. I started concentrating on mysteries after I was suddenly dumped by my wife. I suppose I was unconsciously seeking redemption and assurance that people can treat each other better than I was treated.

Respondents also mentioned the need for relaxation and for reading purely for pleasure. Others said that mysteries were a quick-read and didn't require high levels of concentration. Women wrote the following: "I find that mysteries relax me more than any other type of book. If I read non-fiction, I'm always on the lookout—how can it benefit me or my business? It seems more like work than relaxation"; "Non-fiction isn't relaxing enough after a long, stressful day. Mysteries are satisfying about real people in real situations where justice usually triumphs"; "I simply like the genre. I read books to relax. I listen to the radio and read magazines for information and to stay current"; "They are quick and easy to read, entertaining, and most are not too demanding. They take you quickly into another world"; "Can be read in one night in one sitting and appeals to my interest in puzzle solving."

"They don't require heavy concentration. [They] combine the best of good literature (character and plot) with entertainment that is easily accessible"; "They tend to be shorter—I rarely have the patience to plow through 60 pages"; "I find that reading mysteries is enjoyable, relaxing, mentally stimulating. Most are not so long that it takes too long to finish"; "I like the challenge of solving mysteries, and also it is simple relaxation, unlike the business books I normally have to read for work"; and "I like books that can interest me so much, I lose myself in them, but don't require a high level of concentration. So I'm interested but can relax."

And men commented: "They're easy to read and don't spend as much time in close examination of humanity's dirty pores"; and "I do a lot of reading--some for work, some for pleasure. When I read mysteries I can read purely (well almost) for pleasure."

Some respondents commented on the superiority of mysteries to other genres. One woman said:

Most contemporary mainstream novels are not satisfying because they don't tell a story. Genre fiction does usually have a beginning, middle, and an end, and does tell a story . . . Mystery fiction is generally better written and more intellectually satisfying. Many wonderful authors are writing mysteries. I always say that if Jane Austen were alive today, she would be writing mysteries!

Other women made the following observations: "Better plotted; characters are three-dimensional. Unlike Trish Murdoch and Doris Lessing, they aren't angst-ridden and depressing—one can watch the news for that"; "I enjoy having a 'good guy' (hero) who may have faults but is basically honorable. The protagonist of other modern fiction has no redeeming qualities"; "Sometimes [it is] easier for me to escape into than other 'heavier' fiction"; "I find other genres boring."

"When I choose fiction, I avoid most non-mystery novels because they are psychological and depressing"; "Nothing happens in mainstream fiction—people just agonize or worry over something instead of doing something"; "Contemporary non-mystery fiction is too whiney"; "Ordinary fiction is too dull or too involving. I like mysteries to engage my interest, but where I don't get diver's bends when I come up for air"; and "Well-plotted. Most novels are dragged out to the point of boredom. Mysteries—never."

And a comment from a man regarding other genres: "Sure as heck beats romances!"

Others commented on the superiority of the writing found in mysteries, particularly the plots and characterizations. Women wrote: "For the most part,

they are better written, better plotted and are not padded (i.e. tighter)"; "Mystery authors consistently provide well-written, unpretentious stories that are strong in character, plot, and entertainment"; "They tend to be more focused and structured, less likely to diffuse into an endless, self-indulgent waste of words They are dependable and wonderfully comforting and familiar"; "I demand good plots and characterization found more often in mysteries"; "They have a plot. People do things that affect others who then do things. People don't just sit around talking. Besides, death is the ultimate--after that, everything else is just soda pop"; "Words--I like words, and I like the way many authors in the field use them."

And men commented on the superiority of mystery writing: "They promise more. There's a guarantee (or should be) that the artifact on offer has been artfully contrived to give pleasure, to amuse, and tease, and satisfy"; and "I, as a reader, enjoy the challenge of playing an intellectual game with a first-rate mind, the author's."

Contributions to the Literature

This study was predicated on reader-response theory which states that readers create meaning through their interactions with a text. The meaning is not found in the text, but rather meaning occurs only when readers interact with the text. Rather than focusing on mystery texts, this study focused on readers and assumed they possessed the ultimate authority in making sense of mysteries. By allowing readers to describe in their own language what they felt were the central features of mysteries, what emotions they felt while reading them, and their attitudes about them, this study was able to pinpoint those elements of mysteries that readers think are integral to the genre.

This study found that the idea of an interpretive community of readers with similar reading strategies based on genre conventions may need to be revised. Instead of an integrated group of mysteries readers, the interpretive community of Mystery Readers International consisted of two groups, women and men, with many differing reading strategies based on gender. Although the group did exhibit many similarities, particularly in the area of situational reading habits, there were also fundamental differences that could not be accounted for using the concept of a unified interpretive community.

This directly relates to feminist theory. As demonstrated in this study, women and men often read differently, using differing strategies. Feminist developmental theories, particularly those of Chodorow (1978) and Gilligan (1982) offer the best explanation for these differing patterns of responses along gender lines. Although many feminist critics viewed mysteries as a traditionally masculine form, women readers disagreed. And, while both women and men mentioned the increase in women authors and protagonists, only women mentioned the increase of stronger women characters, indicating an awareness of changes in the roles of women in these books and in the society at large.

This study also showed how androcentric many of the mainstream critical analyses of mystery are. While critics such as Porter (1981) and Cawelti (1976) were correct in their assessment of why men read mysteries, they failed to take into account or even consider that women may have different reasons for reading the genre.

Similarly, as demonstrated in this study, a mythological approach to mysteries also assumed the existence of a masculine protagonist. As described by both women and men, the mythological character of the loner in detective

fiction is most often a man. Therefore, while the mythological approach did have an influence on readers' perceptions of mysteries, it did so by reinforcing masculine myths.

The most difficult theory to assess was the Marxist and Socio-culturalist approach. Both men and women mystery readers refuted Mandel's contention that capitalism was in a state of decline as evidenced by the dependence of the hero on guns, gadgets, and organizations rather than on his superior intellect. And, as mentioned previously, most readers described themselves as moderate to very liberal, rather than moderate to very conservative when describing themselves politically; were aware of and approved of the influx of women and minorities into the genre as writers and protagonists; and mentioned the increasing importance of social and moral issues in mysteries. These factors would seem to indicate that readers read against the conservative ideological strain in mysteries.

However, readers also said that they read mysteries because the books offered a solution to problems, unlike the unsolvable problems in their own lives, and because of their need to escape into a fictional world. This would seem to indicate one of the fissures Knight (1980) mentioned where the ideology contained in mysteries fights hard to maintain the status quo. Much like Radway's (1984) romance readers, many mystery readers may have chosen to read mysteries to escape from a society that has failed to meet their needs. By reading plots in which the mystery is always artificially solved, mystery readers may be compensating for dissatisfaction in other areas of their lives.

Once again, extreme caution must be used in extending these findings to all mystery readers. While they describe the members of Mystery Readers

International, more research must be done on a larger cross-section of mystery readers from varying locations before claims about its generalizability can be made.

Suggestions for Further Research

The results of this study suggest several intriguing questions that warrant further study. One area that needs to be further addressed is the importance of seriality in the mystery. More than any other literary genre, mysteries feature serial characters that evolve and change from book to book. As Katz and Liebes (1987, 1988) discovered in their study of the international Dallas audience, seriality plays a major role in audience enjoyment and interpretation. The number of answers in this study which mentioned the importance of series characters, combined with the fact that most respondents chose a mystery based on their familiarity with the author, speak to the need for further research into this area.

More feminist research also needs to be pursued in specific areas of mystery reading. For example, women repeatedly mentioned the importance of humor in stories and in characterizations. Appleyard (1990) called comedy "a view of a community transformed and redeemed from its limitations" (p. 189). If this is so, do women sense these limitations more and use humor to dull the inequalities found in society? Or is humor simply more appreciated by women readers to counterbalance the seriousness of the elements found in mysteries (murder, violence, etc.) .

Another topic that might be explored is the diametrically opposed reasons men and women give for reading mysteries—suspense and excitement for men

and contentment, comfort, and dependability for women. Equally fascinating is that the genre provides satisfaction for both genders at the same time.

The issue of reader response based on gender to both the author and to characters in mystery novels could also be studied further. Do men, as this study indicates, identify more with a masculine protagonist? Are women more able to identify equally with feminine or masculine characters? And does the gender of the author play an important role in one's enjoyment of a mystery novel?

Finally, in addition to gender differences, differences in mystery reading based on age, class, and race should also be examined. Do these factors affect the types of mysteries chosen in terms of their perceived conservative or radical underlying messages?

One recommendation is that the results of this study be applied in a national sample of mystery readers taken from mystery organizations located throughout the United States. And another study could cross-culturally compare these results with the opinions and habits of foreign mystery readers.

Conclusion

The examination of genre usage of written texts is a promising and exciting field of inquiry. As demonstrated in this study, looking at genres, such as the mystery, can tell us much about the shared (and differing) assumptions that underlie them, what part they play in the daily lives of those who regularly participate in them, and what kinds of satisfactions readers derive from their usage. And, because popular genres play an important role in both reflecting and formulating attitudes and ideas, the study of mystery reading and its

meaning to its audience can provide us with important insights into a particular culture at a particular point in time.

As this study shows, although both women and men are ardent readers of mysteries, they often read differently and experience mysteries differently in ways that reflect gender differences in our society. In addition, this study highlighted both the androcentric nature of our culture as well as some women's dissatisfaction with the cultural status quo. For example, women reported having relatively less leisure time compared to men, and women often commented on the misogyny and violence in mysteries as well as in the society in which they were written. This study also makes clear how masculine critics presume to write about all mystery readers while, in actuality, writing only about mystery readers who are men. One hoped for result of this study, therefore, is the revelation and recognition of the pervasiveness of patriarchal ideas and practices in our culture.

Finally, this study added to the understanding of the mystery genre by allowing actual readers to describe and define what is important to them about mysteries. But the study goes beyond what readers say and also looks at their actual practices and patterns of responses to discover the larger implications of mystery reading in their lives.

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APPENDICES

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As a member of Mystery Readers International and an avid mystery fan you can help me by participating in a study of mystery readers. Your opinions and attitudes about mysteries are important for an understanding of why mysteries continue to outsell all other types of fiction available today. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Although the results of the study will be published, any information that can be identified with you is confidential and can be disclosed only with your permission. Also, your participation is completely voluntary; your decision not to participate in this study will in no way affect your membership in Mystery Readers International.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at (408) 683-2715 or my graduate advisor, Dr. Shay Sayre, at (408) 924-1327. For questions about research subject's rights, you can contact Serena Stanford, Ph.D. (Associate Academic Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research) at (408) 924-2480. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Joyce Assar
Graduate Student
San Jose State University

FOR EACH QUESTION PLEASE SELECT ONLY ONE ANSWER UNLESS THE QUESTION 145
SPECIFIES OTHERWISE. PLEASE PRINT YOUR ANSWER.

This section asks questions about your reading habits
and leisure-time activities.

1. At what age did you first begin reading for pleasure?

6. Do you read mystery books every day?
(Please Circle)

A. Yes

B. No

2. As a teenager, what was your favorite type of book?

A. Biographies.....()

B. Westerns.....()

C. Romances.....()

D. Mysteries.....()

E. Science fiction.....()

F. Fantasy.....()

G. Comic Books.....()

H. None, I didn't read for pleasure.....()

I. Other (Please specify) _____

7. Which of the following best describes your reading pattern?

A. I read mostly in the morning.....()

B. I read mostly during the day.....()

C. I read mostly during lunchtime.....()

D. I read mostly in the afternoon.....()

E. I read mostly when traveling to and
from work.....()

F. I read mostly in the evening.....()

G. It's hard to say when I do most of
my reading since I read every
chance I get.....()

3. At what age did you begin reading mysteries regularly? _____

4. About how many mystery books do you read each week?

5. About how many books other than mysteries do you read each week?

8. Which of the following best describes what usually makes you decide to read a mystery or not?

A. The cover.....()

B. Familiar with author.....()

C. The title.....()

D. The publisher's blurb on the front and
back cover()

E. Recommended to me.....()

F. Read a review of the book.....()

G. Other (please explain) _____

9. Which of the following best describes what you usually do once you start reading a mystery?

- A. I only continue reading when I'm in the mood.....()
B. I read a few pages each day until I'm finished.....()
C. I read as much as I can until I'm interrupted or have something else to do.....()
D. I won't put it down until I've finished unless it's absolutely necessary.....()

10. Beside each of the statements below please tell how often you do the following:
(N) Never, (R) Rarely, (S) Sometimes, (O) Often.

N R S O

- A. Discuss mysteries with others? () () () ()
B. Reread mysteries you have read before?.....() () () ()
C. Read the end of a mystery before you finish the whole book?.....() () () ()
D. Listen to music while reading mysteries?.....() () () ()
E. Read mysteries while watching television?.....() () () ()
F. Fantasize about committing the perfect murder?.....() () () ()
G. Figure out who dunnit before the murder/villain is identified?.....() () () ()
H. Watch mysteries on TV?.....() () () ()
J. Read the newspaper?.....() () () ()
K. Listen to mysteries on audio tapes.....() () () ()

11. With whom do you discuss mysteries most often?

12. About how many hours a week do you spend on the following leisure-time activities?

- A. Reading mysteries _____ Hours
B. Watching television _____ Hours
C. Spending time with family/friends _____ Hours
D. Spending time on a hobby _____ Hours

- E. Participating in sports or exercise _____ Hours
F. Going to movies _____ Hours
G. Going to concerts/plays/museums _____ Hours
H. Relaxing--doing nothing _____ Hours
I. Listening to the radio _____ Hours
J. Other (please specify) _____ Hours

13. When you do watch television, which ONE do you watch most often?

- A. *Mystery!* (PBS).....()
B. *Murder She Wrote*.....()
C. Movies (regular films, cable or made-for TV).....()
D. Situation comedies (like the *Cosby Show*).....()
E. Hour-long dramas.....()
F. Game shows.....()
G. Soap operas (either day-time or night-time).....()
H. Documentaries.....()
I. News and /or commentary (e.g., *60 Minutes*).....()
J. Other (please specify) _____

14. How many magazines do you read each month?

15. Which magazines do you read?

16. Please describe the places where you most often read mysteries.

17. Do you prefer to read alone or in the presence of others?

This section concerns the types and characteristics of the mysteries you most enjoy, as well as your personal opinions about mysteries.

18. What type of mysteries do you most enjoy reading?

- A. Classical mysteries featuring the thinking, intellectual detective.....()
- B. Hard-boiled mysteries featuring the wise-cracking detective.....()
- C. Political thrillers.....()
- D. Police procedurals.....()
- E. True crime stories.....()
- F. Other (please specify).....()

19. Please describe what you consider to be the most important ingredients in a mystery (such as the murder occurring at the beginning of the book, the eventual unmasking of the murderer/villain, etc.).

20. What are your three all-time favorite mystery novels?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

21. What qualities or characteristics do you most like to see in a detective (for example, good looks, a sense of humor, etc.)?

22. Who is your favorite fictional detective?

23. What qualities or characteristics do you most **dislike** in a fictional detective?

24. Why do you think the detective/hero/heroine is usually a loner?

25. What reasons most often allow the detective or spy to triumph over his enemies?

- A. Superior intellect.....()
B. Greater technical resources (guns or gadgets).....()
C. More strength and/or bravery.....()
D. Teamwork (e.g., CIA or police back-up).....()
E. Other (please specify)_____

26. Please describe the qualities or characteristics you most like to see in the murderer or villain.

27. Who is your favorite fictional character in mysteries or thrillers? And why do you like him/her?

28. Some critics say that mysteries are anti-female, violent, and that they put women in a secondary role (victim, villainess, witness or girlfriend/wife). Do you agree or disagree?

- A. Agree.....()
B. Disagree.....()

Why?_____

29. There has been an increase in women mystery writers in the last 20 years. What best describes your feelings about mystery authors?

- A. I prefer mysteries written by men.....()
B. I prefer mysteries written by women.....()
C. Their sex doesn't matter to me as long as they can write a good mystery.....()

30. Who are your three favorite mystery authors?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

31. What is it about the way your favorite authors write that most appeals to you (for example, unique setting, type of characters, etc.)?

32. Which of the following reasons best describe why you read mysteries? **Please pick the three reasons which are closest to your reasons and rank them from the most important (number 1) to the third most important one.**

- A. To escape into a fantasy world.....()
B. For simple relaxation.....()
C. Because I enjoy solving puzzles.....()
D. Because I like the challenge of solving the mystery before the detective does.....()
E. Because I like to see the murderer/villain get caught; I like to feel that justice has been done.....()
F. Because I like the feelings of fear and suspense that I get while reading.....()
G. Because I know that there will always be an unmasking of the villain in the end.....()
H. Other (please specify).....()

33. Do you agree or disagree with critics who say that all mysteries are "formula fiction" and are always the same?

A. Agree.....()

B. Disagree.....()

Please explain your answer.

37. What changes do you see in mystery novels since you first began reading them?

34. Raymond Chandler described four types of mystery readers. Which type would you best fit?

A. I am a puzzle addict.....()

B. I get caught up in the feelings of suspense and the excitement of the chase.....()

C. I become involved with the characters, I worry about what happens to them.....()

D. It's the only kind of fiction that satisfies me intellectually; it doesn't get "too big for its boots".....()

E. I don't fit any of the types.....()

35. Which of the following best describes your attitude to the way mysteries are told?

A. I like stories to be told through the eyes of the detective/hero/heroine.....()

B. I like stories to be told by someone close to the detective/hero/heroine (the Dr. Watson figure).....()

C. I like the narrator to omniscient, to be able to read the minds of all the characters.....()

D. I like the narrator to be an outsider.....()

36. What type of emotion do you most often feel when you read mysteries?

A. Excitement and suspense.....()

B. Curiosity.....()

C. Contentment.....()

D. Fear and anxiety()

E. Other (please specify).....()

38. Please describe why you choose mysteries/thrillers over other types of books that are available today.

39. Does your enjoyment of mysteries ever carry over into other aspects of your life (for example, attending mystery parties, conventions, discussion groups, etc.)?

A. Yes.....()

B. No.....()

If you answered Yes, please explain.

Questions in this final section explore the unique characteristics of people, like yourself, who are interested in mysteries.

40. What is your sex? (Circle one)

A. Male B. Female

41. What is your age?

42. What is your current marital status?

43. What is your occupation or job title?

44. What is your TOTAL family household income?

45. What is your educational background (for example, graduated from high school, some college, college graduate, etc.)?

46. Do you have a religious preference?

47. How would you describe yourself politically?

A. Very liberal.....()
B. Liberal.....()
C. Moderate.....()
D. Conservative.....()
E. Very conservative.....()
F. Other (please specify).....()

48. If you belong to any social organizations or groups, could you please list them?

49. If you live in the San Francisco Bay Area and want to participate further by responding to more in-depth questions about mysteries, please write in your name and telephone number below.

Name _____

Area Code _____

Phone Number _____

Your confidentiality and voluntary participation is still acknowledged here; you may withdraw your consent to be interviewed at any time without prejudice to your relations with SJSU and Mystery Readers International.

Thank you! Your help in maximizing this study about mystery readers is greatly appreciated.