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AN ANALYSIS OF HOW BIRTH CONTROL IS PRESENTED IN YOUNG ADULT  
NOVELS

by  
Corey L. Mason

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
May 12, 2008

Approved by  
Professor

Date Approved May 15, 2008

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## ABSTRACT

Corey L. Mason

### AN ANALYSIS OF HOW BIRTH CONTROL IS PRESENTED IN YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

2007-2008

Dr. Marilyn Shontz

Master of Arts in School and Public Librarianship

Young adult literature can be a safe method of receiving correct and vital information about birth control in novels that contain sexual activity. It is important that birth control in young adult novels is dealt with accurately, honestly, thoroughly, and in an unbiased way. There has been little research done on how birth control is presented in YA novels and how it may have changed over time. To study this topic, ten YA novels were read and analyzed. Five of the novels were written prior to 1990 and the other five were written after 1990. Each novel was analyzed for mentions of specific types of birth control, if those methods were actually used, and if the mentions were presented accurately and positively. It was found that although some positive changes in how birth control was presented in YA novels have occurred over time, the change was not been significant enough.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Shontz for all her help and suggestions. Without her, I would have been lost.

Also, thanks to my mother, who inspired this topic.

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## CHAPTER I

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

#### Significance of the Problem

Nearly half of all 15-19 year-olds in the United States are sexually active and these teens' ideas about sex and birth control can be strongly influenced by the media. "Sexuality is a part of teens' lives, and to ignore it in their fiction—especially realistic, contemporary fiction—is inauthentic" (Perez, 2006, p. 20). Young adult (YA) novels about sexual activity and birth control can speak to teens who "want to read about things that are interesting and true" (Donelson and Nilsen, 2005, p.87). YAs may have difficulty in locating correct and complete information on birth control. Alternatively, they may be unwilling to or unable to seek out factual sources. Young adult literature can be a safe method of receiving information and connecting with the experience presented in the novel. For this reason, it is important that birth control in young adult novels is dealt with accurately, honestly, thoroughly, and in an unbiased way.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this content analysis is to compare young adult novels featuring sexual activity written before 1990 with YA novels written after 1990 to see how birth control methods were discussed and described and how it may have changed. Five young adult novels written prior to 1990 and five novels written after 1990 were read and analyzed for comparison regarding these issues.

## Research Questions

This content analysis of YA novels containing sexual activity and birth control attempted to answer the following questions:

What methods of birth control were mentioned, referenced, or described in YA novels written prior to 1990? Compared to ones written after 1990?

How negatively or positively were those birth control methods presented?

How accurately were those birth control methods presented?

In YA books that mention birth control, was a method of birth control actually used by the characters?

How were the changes from those written prior to 1990 and the ones written after 1990 best characterized?

## Definition of Terms

Abstinence: Choosing not to have any kind of sexual intercourse.

Birth control: Birth control is the use of any practices, methods, or devices to prevent pregnancy from occurring in a sexually active woman (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 226).

Cervical cap with spermicide: A soft rubber cup with a round rim, which fits snugly around the cervix (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 231).

Condom (male): A sheath placed over the erect penis blocking the passage of sperm (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 226).

Condom (female): A lubricated polyurethane sheath shaped similarly to the male condom. The closed end has a flexible ring that is inserted into the vagina (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 188).

Content analysis: Close analysis of a work or body of communicated information to determine its meaning and account for the effect it has on its audience (Reitz, 2004).

Diaphragm: A dome-shaped rubber disk with a flexible rim that covers the cervix so that sperm cannot reach the uterus. A spermicide is applied to the diaphragm before insertion (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 227).

Emergency contraception (EC): Prevents pregnancy *after* unprotected vaginal intercourse. It is also called "morning-after" contraception, emergency birth control, or backup birth control. EC contains hormones found in birth control pills and prevents pregnancy by stopping ovulation or fertilization, within 72 hours of unprotected sex (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 227).

Implant (Norplant): Six matchstick-sized rubber rods that are surgically implanted under the skin of the upper arm, where they steadily release the contraceptive steroid levonorgestrel (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 226).

Injection (Depo-Provera): An injectable progestin that inhibits ovulation, prevents sperm from reaching the egg, and prevents the fertilized egg from implanting in the uterus. Must be injected every three months (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 226).

IUD (Intrauterine device): A T-shaped pregnancy-preventing device inserted into the uterus by a health professional (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 237).

Media: Channels of communication that serve many diverse functions, such as offering a variety of entertainment with either mass or specialized appeal, communicating news and information, or displaying advertising messages (Answers.com, 2007).

Oral contraceptive: A pill that suppresses ovulation by the combined actions of the hormones estrogen and progestin (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 232).

Patch (Ortho Evra): Skin patch worn on the lower abdomen, buttocks, or upper body that releases the hormones progestin and estrogen into the bloodstream to prevent ovulation (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 238).

Realistic fiction: Composed of characters, settings, or occurrences that might possibly exist in the actual world (Answers.com, 2007).

Rhythm method: Also known as fertility awareness, natural family planning, and periodic abstinence, this approach to contraception entails not having sexual intercourse on the days of a woman's menstrual cycle when she could become pregnant or using a barrier method (such as a condom, the diaphragm or a cervical cap) for birth control on those days (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 226).

Sexual decision making: Selection of choices concerned with intimate and sexual behavior (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 26).

Sexual activity: The act of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman; activities associated with sexual intercourse (Adapted from Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 26).

Spermicide: A foam, cream, jelly, film, suppository, or tablet that contains nonoxynol-9, a sperm-killing chemical (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 226).

Sponge with spermicide: A disk-shaped polyurethane device containing the spermicide

nonoxynol-9 (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 226).

Vaginal contraceptive ring (NuvaRing): A flexible ring about 2 inches in diameter that is inserted into the vagina and releases the hormones progestin and estrogen to prevent ovulation (Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 229).

Withdrawal: Pulling the penis out of the vagina before ejaculation. Very ineffective method of birth control (Adapted from Lowdermilk & Perry, 2004, p. 230).

Young adult (YA): An adolescent aged 12-18, usually in the eighth to twelfth grade (Reitz, 2006).

Young adult novels/literature- A book intended to be read and enjoyed by adolescents 12 to 18 years of age (Reitz, 2006).

#### Assumptions and Limitations

The assumption was made that the selected YA novels were a sufficient representation of those published before 1990, and of those published after 1990. The content analysis was limited to realistic fictional novels labeled for young adults that contained at least one major event of sexual activity.

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## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

There has been very little research done on sexuality in YA literature, and surprisingly, almost none done on birth control presented in YA literature. Of the three articles exploring sex in YA literature, two of the articles discuss sexuality in YA literature and only one frankly discusses birth control. In the article that does discuss birth control, birth control is only briefly mentioned and the focus is actually the outcomes of pregnant teenagers in YA literature. This study takes this research a step further and analyzes a selection of young adult novels to see how birth control is presented in young adult novels, if it is accurate and positive, and how it has changed over time.

A study by Peresie and Alexander (2005) with a similar methodology (content analysis) was also looked at to gain a model for this study

#### Birth Control in YA Literature

In *I'm Pregnant! Fear and Conception in Four Decades of Young Adult Literature*, Emge (2006) explored the outcomes of pregnant teenagers in young adult literature and touched on birth control methods in young adult novels. She found that in YA novels, birth control information was often ineffective, inaccurate, or hard to obtain.

According to Emge (2005), young adults in the 1960s had a hard time getting birth control pills. In *Mr. and Bo Jo Jones*, published by Signet in 1968, July bought a

fake wedding ring and took a bus fifty miles to try to get birth control pills, but the doctor ended up sending her home empty-handed and told her to talk to her parents (Emge, 2006, p. 22). Emge (2006) also noted that condoms were rarely mentioned in YA novels from the 1960s and 1970s. Condoms were hard to get until the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, and then they became more available and sold in drug stores and grocery stores for anyone to buy (Emge, 2006, p. 23).

Emge (2006) also found that the teens in YA novels often had an unsubstantiated fear of birth control or were suffering from misinformation. In *Our Sacred Honor*, published by Rosen in 1987, the female sex partner says she is “afraid of the pill”. In the same book, the teenagers use the rhythm method instead but get pregnant anyway, due to misinformation about how the rhythm method works and statistics about its effectiveness (Emge, 2006, p. 23). In Paul Krop’s *Baby Baby*, published in 1984, the male protagonist believed that “...when two people love each other, anything they do works out”, and used this for the basis for not using any birth control methods, or perhaps that *is* his birth control method (Emge, 2006, p. 22).

#### Sex in YA Literature

Stone’s (2006) *Now and Forever: The Power of Sex in Young Adult Literature* and Pattee’s (2006) *The Secret Source: Sexually Explicit Young Adult Literature as an Information Source* explored sex in young adult novels. Both articles explored the emotional side of teenage sex and the need for honesty and accuracy.

Stone (2006), an editor with a Masters in Education, discussed how Judy Blume’s *Forever* was a stepping in stone in changing how teenage sex is portrayed in YA novels.



In *Forever*, published in 1975, the main character “had a positive sexual relationship that was described in detail” (Stone, 2006, p. 463). Today, many YA novels feature the reality of teen sexuality, “not just the physical part, but also the complex web of emotions that accompanies it” (Stone, 2006, p. 463). She mentions several YA novels and stories that do present teenage sex in an honest and intensely emotional way, such as *Watcher* by Angela Johnson (2001), Chris Lynch’s *Inexcusable* (2005), and Rita Williams-Garcia’s *Every Time a Rainbow Dies*, published in 2001 (Stone, 2006, p. 463-464).

Stone (2006) argued against any gratuitous sex scenes in YA literature, such as any “scene that does not advance a story line or deepen character development” (Stone, 2006, p. 464). Instead, she wanted to see “books for teens reflect male and female main characters who are allowed to be healthy sexual beings, able to experience sex and intimacy without feeling ashamed or being punished” (Stone, 2006, p. 465).

Pattee (2006), a former Youth Services Librarian and current professor at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina, agreed that Blume’s *Forever* “paved the way for greater explication in young adult fiction, including uncensored scenes of sexuality” (Pattee, 2006, p. 34). Before *Forever*, YA novels were primarily concerned with the consequences of sex, not the act itself (Pattee, 2006, p. 34). She stressed that it is necessary for YA novels to not only provide details of the act of sex, but also of the emotional aspect and use affective, not clinical language (Pattee, 2006, 34). Pattee cited Norma Klein’s *Beginner’s Love*, published in 1983, as an example of a YA novel that “is effective as a text not only because it includes detailed descriptions of the sex act, contextualized and reframed in terms of adolescent

experience, but also because it tempers and surrounds these admittedly steamy scenes with thoughtful and personal critique” (Pattee, 2006, p. 35).

Pattee (2006) felt that sexuality education in schools is incomplete. It generally focuses on abstinence rather than safe sex practices, but research shows that teens want and need to know more (Pattee, 2006, p. 35). Pattee also stated that “young adult literature has the potential to fill in the gaps left by sexuality education curricula” (Pattee, 2006, p. 32). To fill in these gaps, it is important to keep scenes of intimacy and actions as close to the truth as possible (Pattee, 2006, p. 32).

#### Similar Methodology

A content analysis of young adult novels done by Peresie and Alexander (2005) explored *Librarian Stereotypes in Young Adult Literature*. Although Peresie and Alexander’s study features a different topic, the methodology they used is similar to the one that will be followed in this study.

The purpose of the study was to examine the portrayal of librarians in young adult literature, and how that perception may have changed over time (Peresie and Alexander, 2005, p. 26). The research involved a content analysis of a sample of young adult fiction aimed at grades six through twelve (Peresie and Alexander, 2005, p. 27). The researchers considered a content analysis to be “a systematic analysis of the occurrence of words, phrases, and concepts” and then “organizing the information that is found and breaking it into clusters or categories, synthesizing it, and looking for important patterns or themes that the researcher can relate to others” (Peresie and Alexander, 2005, p. 27). They evaluated the content by using a checklist that included certain pre-selected descriptors.

## Summary

Generally, the authors of the articles agreed that sexuality in YA literature is lacking. Two of the authors, Pattee (2006) and Stone (2006), explored the need for openness, accuracy, and honesty in YA novels when dealing with the emotional aspect of sex. Emge (2006) discussed the difficulty YA characters faced in obtaining birth control in YA literature, especially those that take place in the 1960s.

## References

- Emge, D. (2006). I'm pregnant! Fear and conception in four decades of young adult literature. *Young Adult Library Services*, 4(2), 22-27. Retrieved October 29, 2007 from WilsonWeb database.
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- Peresie, M., & Alexander, L. B. (2005). Librarian stereotypes in young adult literature. *Young Adult Library Services*, 4(1), 24-31. Retrieved October 29, 2007 from WilsonWeb database.
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### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

##### Research Methodology

This study used a descriptive content analysis to analyze a total of ten YA titles that contained at least one mention of sexual activity and at least one mention of a birth control method. For the purpose of this study, content analysis was considered to be "a systematic occurrence of words, phrases, concepts, etc. in books, films, and other kinds of materials" (Powell, 1997, p. 50). The identified words, phrases, and concepts were then organized into clusters or categories, synthesizing it, and looking for important patterns or themes that the researcher can relate to others (Peresie and Alexander, 2005, p. 27). Then, the content was evaluated by using a researcher created checklist that included the pre-selected categories.

Content analysis provides a way to examine YA novels for mentions of birth control methods, to measure if the birth control mention is accurate, and if it is mentioned with a positive or a negative connotation. Also, content analysis provides a way to tell if the birth control method mentioned was actually used. Content analysis enabled the researcher to include large amounts of textual information and systematically identify its properties. "When this textual information is categorized according to a certain framework, content analysis provides a meaningful reading of content under scrutiny" (Peresie and Alexander, 2005, p. 27).

## Purpose

The purpose of this content analysis was to compare young adult novels featuring sexual activity written before the 1990s with YA novels from the 1990s and 2000s to see how birth control methods were discussed and described and how that may have changed. Five young adult novels written before 1990 and five novels from the 1990s and 2000s were read and analyzed for comparison regarding these issues.

## Research Questions

This content analysis of YA novels containing sexual activity and birth control attempted to answer the following questions:

What methods of birth control were mentioned, referenced, or described in YA novels written prior to 1990? Compared to ones written after 1990?

How negatively or positively were those birth control methods presented?

How accurately were those birth control methods presented?

In YA books that mention birth control, was a method of birth control actually used by the characters?

How were the changes from those written prior to 1990 and the ones written after 1990 best characterized?

## Sample

The sample was ten YA novels, five will be written prior to 1990, and the other five written after 1990. These novels all contained at least one mention of sexual activity and one mention of a birth control method.

## Variables

For this study the following variables were be measured:

Time periods in which the books were written

Methods of birth control included

Accurate descriptions

Positive descriptions

If the method was actually used

## Procedures for Data Collection

For this study, five YA novels written before 1990 and five YA novels written in the 1990s and 2000s were selected. Each book contained at least one mention of sexual activity and one mention of a birth control method. These novels were pre-selected based on publication year to fit into the two time eras, and on the assurance that a birth control method was mentioned. The assurance that a birth control method was present in each novel was found in either a review of the novel or in one of three articles: Stone's *Now and Forever: The Power of Sex in Young Adult Literature* (2006), Pattee's *The Secret Source: Sexually Explicit Young Adult Literature as an Information Source* (2006), and Emge's *I'm Pregnant! Fear and Conception in Four Decades of Young Adult Literature*.

A checklist was created by the researcher to collect and analyze information presented in the novels. This checklist consisted of a chart that requires a checkmark to be used as a yes response to piece of information about each mention of a birth control method. The checklist collected information on what type of birth control was mentioned, if it was accurately described, if it was described positively, and if the method was

actually used by a character in the novel. Each novel was read twice, and then a checklist was used for each instance of birth control mentioned.

The checklist was pretested by having two readers read Morton Kurland's *Our Sacred Honor*, both filled out the checklist, and compared results. The results agreed on all points except that it was found that abortion and adoption could also be considered to be forms of birth control. To clarify this issue, the researcher decided to only consider methods of birth control that were preventative, so abortion and adoption were eliminated as possible forms of birth control in this analysis.

#### Validity and Reliability

Reliability was established by having one other reader read one of the novels and complete the checklist. After changes made to the checklist, the checklist was considered a reliable and valid tool for this study. This checklist was able to be used with other YA novels as well.



## References

- Peresie, M., & Alexander, L.B. (2005). Librarian stereotypes in young adult literature. *Young Adult Library Services*, 4(1), 24-31. Retrieved October 29, 2007 from WilsonWeb database.
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## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### Procedures/Methods Used

The researcher read ten YA novels that were pre-selected on the criteria that they contained at least one mention of sexual activity and one mention of a birth control method. Five of the novels were written prior to 1990 and the other five were written after 1990. Each novel was analyzed for mentions of specific types of birth control, if those methods were actually used, and if the mentions were presented accurately and positively. A checklist was created by the researcher using Microsoft Word to collect this information. The checklist was pretested by having two readers read Morton Kurland's *Our Sacred Honor*, fill out the checklist, and compare results. The results agreed on all points except that it was found that abortion and adoption could also be considered to be forms of birth control. To clarify this issue, the researcher decided to only consider methods of birth control that were preventative, so abortion and adoption were eliminated as possible forms of birth control in this analysis. After the checklist was updated with this change, and all novels were coded, all results were formatted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and the results were arranged into bar graphs.

#### Presentation of Results

The results of this content analysis of YA novels containing sexual activity and birth control attempted to answer the following research questions:

What methods of birth control were mentioned, referenced, or described in YA novels written prior to 1990? Compared to ones written after 1990?

How negatively or positively were those birth control methods presented?

How accurately were those birth control methods presented?

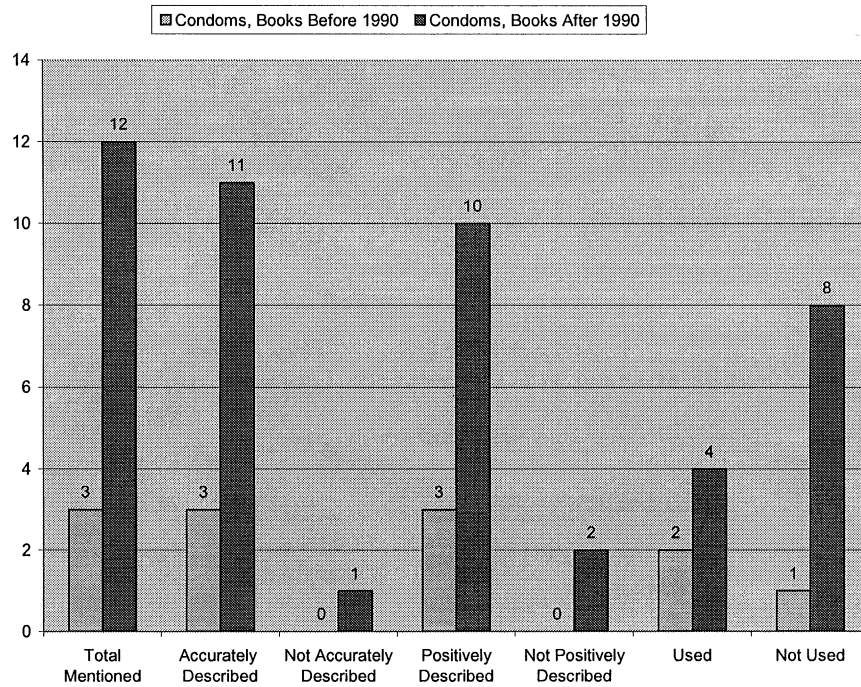
In YA books that mention birth control, was a method of birth control actually used by the characters?

How were the changes from those written prior to 1990 and the ones written after 1990 best characterized?

### Condom Results

In books written before 1990, condoms were mentioned three times, and mentioned twelve times in books after 1990. Condoms were described positively as a birth control method in all three occasions in books written prior to 1990, but were only positively described ten out of twelve times in the books written after 1990. Both *Teen Angel* and *Forever in Blue: The Fourth Summer of the Sisterhood* described condoms in a negative manner. All three times condoms were mentioned in books written before 1990, they were accurately described. In books written after 1990, condoms were accurately described as a birth control method all but one time, in *Teen Angel*. Out of the three times condoms were mentioned in books written before 1990, they were used as birth control methods twice, both times in *Forever*. These results are found in Figure 1.

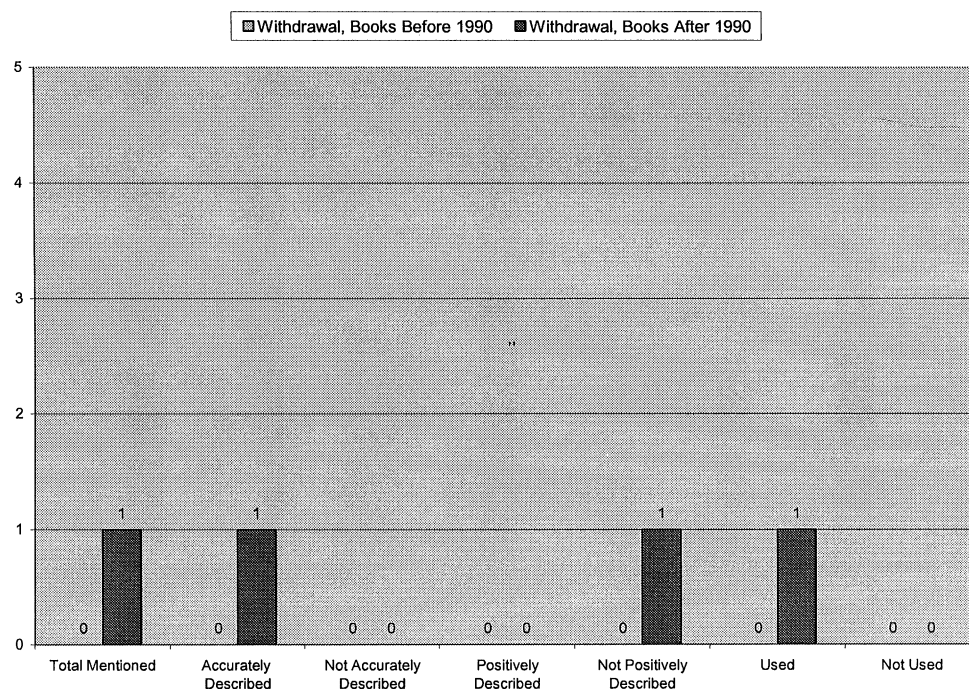
Figure 1: Condoms



### Withdrawal Results

Withdrawal was not mentioned as a birth control method in any of the books written before 1990, and was only mentioned once in the books written after 1990. The one time it was mentioned (*Slam*), it was accurately and negatively described as a very ineffective form of birth control, yet was still used as a birth control method. These results are presented in Figure 2.

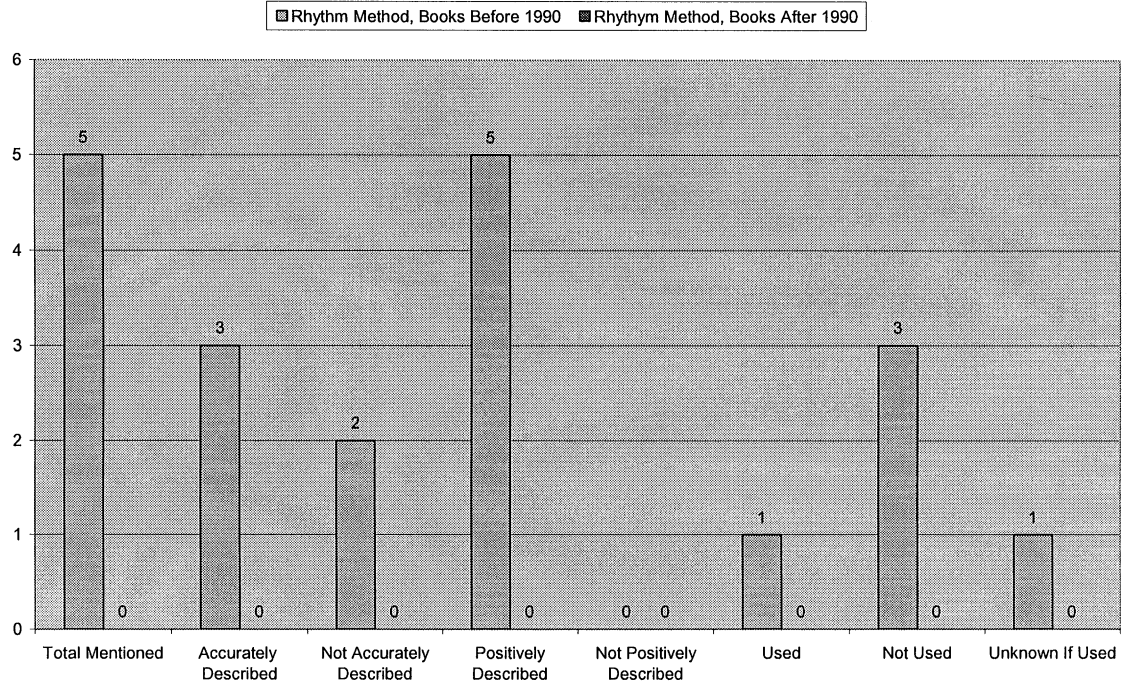
Figure 2: Withdrawal



### Rhythm Method Results

The Rhythm Method was mentioned five times in books written before 1990, and not mentioned at all in any of the books written after 1990. The five times the Rhythm Method was mentioned, it was accurately described three times, and inaccurately described twice in *Our Scared Honor* and *Growing Up in a Hurry*. In those two instances, the Rhythm Method was inaccurately described as being completely infallible as a birth control method, when in reality only abstinence can be considered infallible. All five times, it was positively described as a form of birth control. It was used as a birth control method once, not used three times, and once it was not stated whether it was used or not. These results are found in Figure 3.

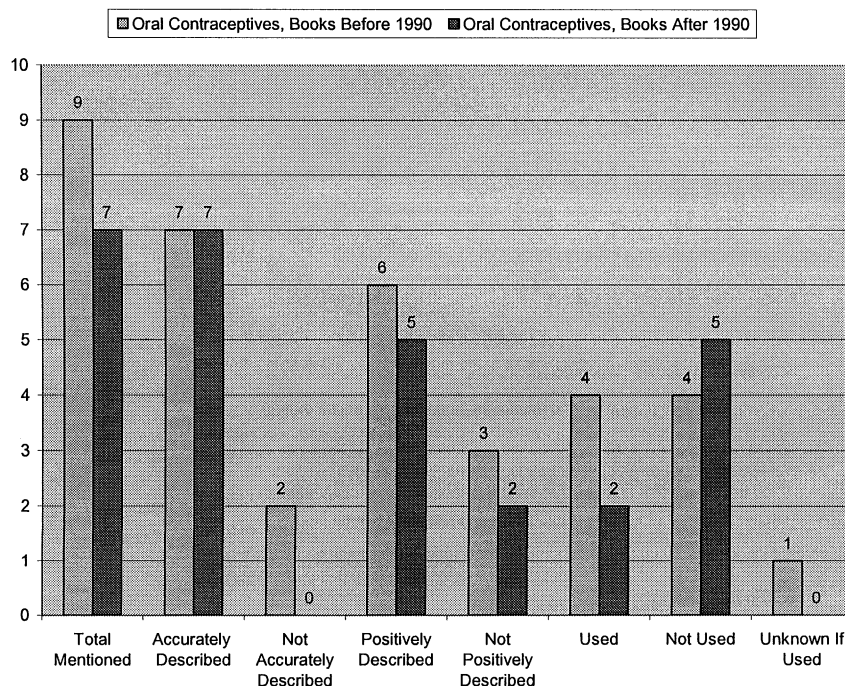
Figure 3: Rhythm Method



### Oral Contraceptives Results

In books written before 1990, oral contraceptives were mentioned eight times. In books written after 1990, it was mentioned seven times. Oral contraceptives were described accurately all seven times in books written after 1990, but only six out of eight times in the books written prior to 1990. In five out of eight times, oral contraceptives were described in a positive manner in books written before 1990, and were positively described in five out of seven times in books written after 1990. In books before 1990, oral contraceptives were used three times, not used four times, and one time it is unknown if they were used (*Our Sacred Honor*). All these results are found in Figure 4.

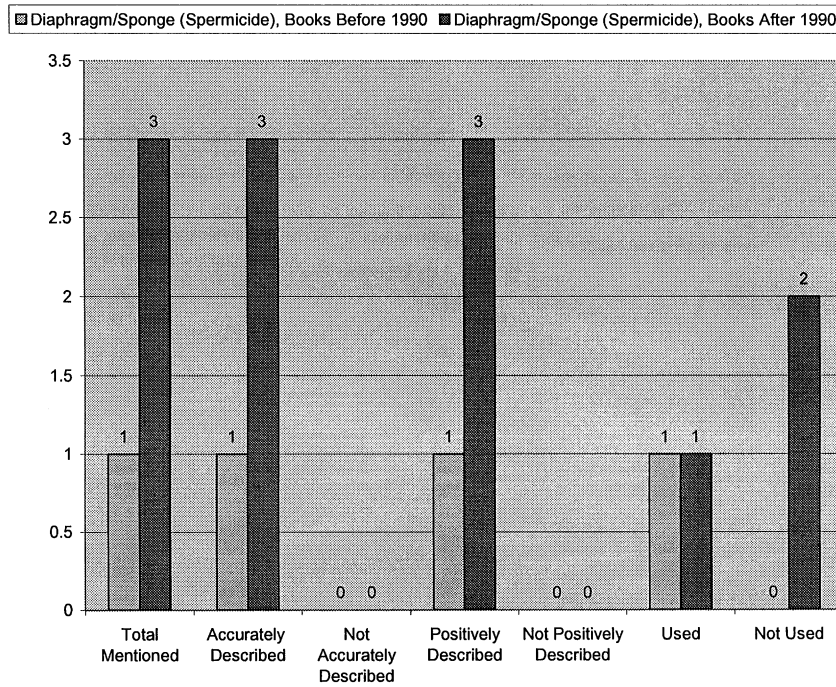
Figure 4: Oral Contraceptives



#### Diaphragm/Sponge (spermicide) Results

A Diaphragm is only mentioned once in the books written before 1990, in *Forever*. It was accurately and positively described as a method of birth control and it was actually used by a character in the book. In books written after 1990, a spermicidal sponge was mentioned three times in *Ready or Not*. In all three instances, it was accurately and positively described, but only used once as a form of birth control. The first two times it was mentioned, it was discussed as a method to be used in the future. These results are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Diaphragm/Sponge (spermicide)

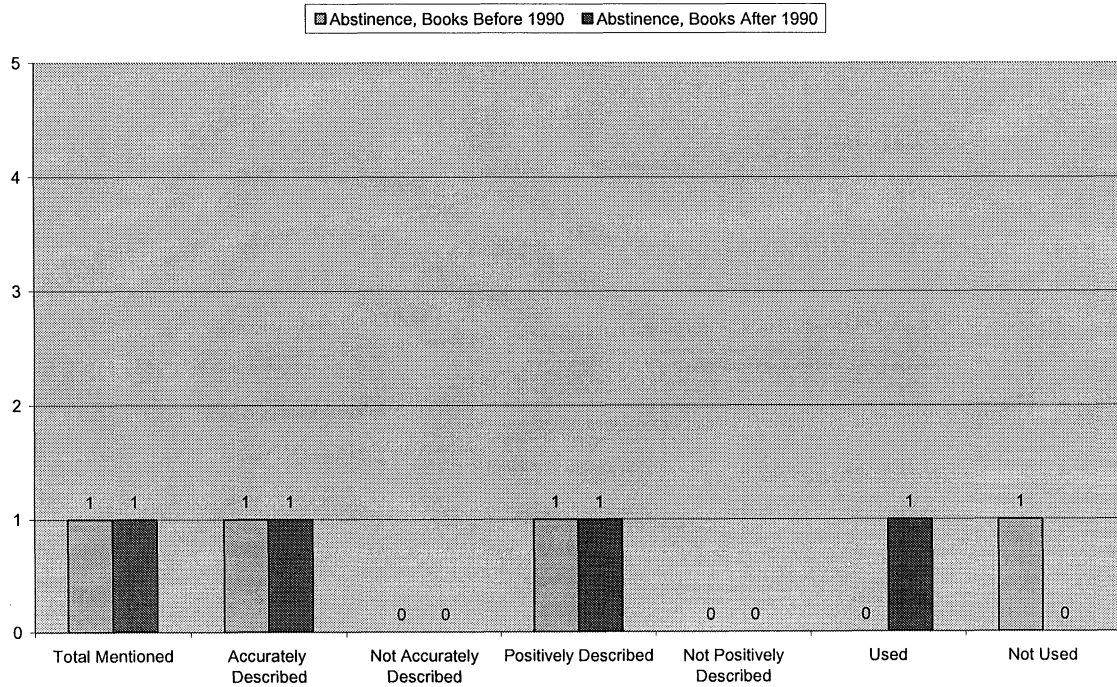


### Abstinence Results

Abstinence was mentioned as a form of birth control once in the books written before 1990, and once in the books written after 1990. In both instances (*Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* and *Teen Angel*), abstinence was described both accurately and positively as a form of birth control. However, it was actually used as a birth control method in *Teen Angel*, but not in *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones*. These results are found in Figure 6.



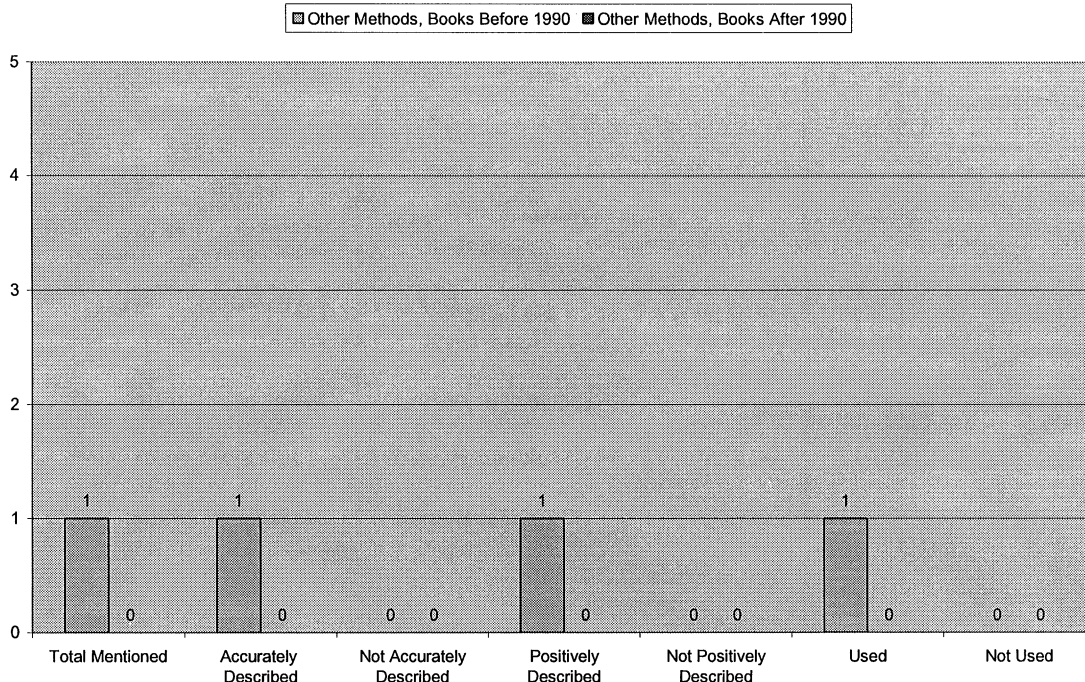
Figure 6: Abstinence



### Other Methods Results

In all ten books, another type of birth control was only mentioned one time, an IUD in *Forever*, written in 1975. It was positively and accurately described by the character as a form of birth control she planned to use in the future, and had been fitted for. These results are presented in Figure 7.

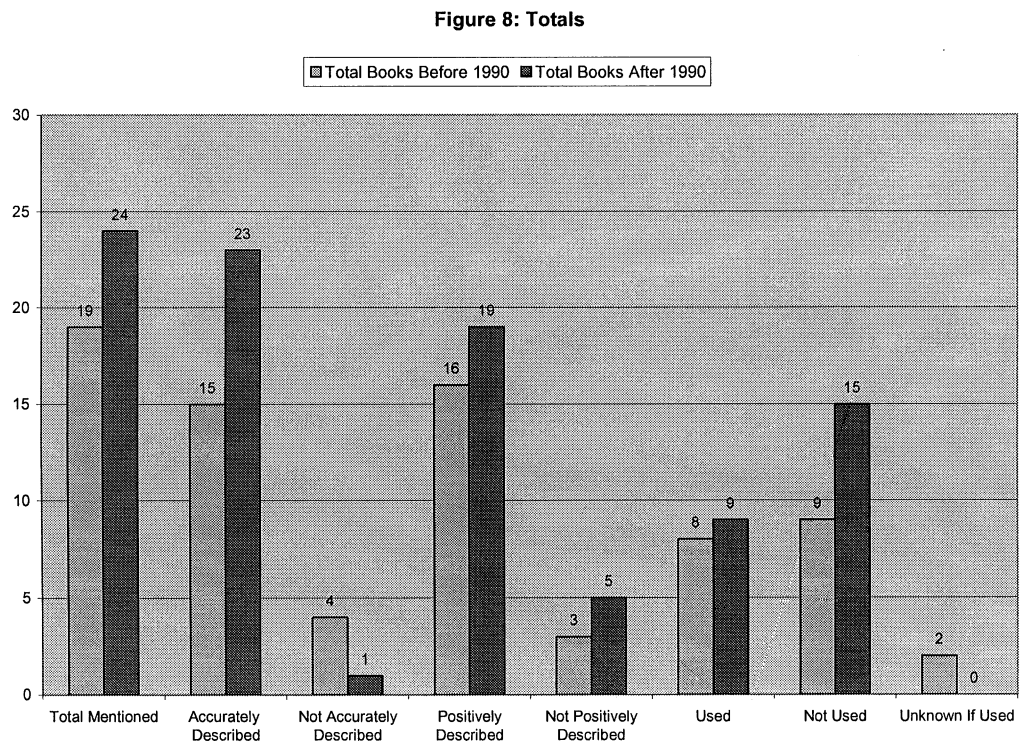
Figure 7: Other Methods



#### Changes: Books Before 1990 Versus Books After 1990

Another research question this analysis aimed to answer is “How were the changes from those written prior to 1990 and the ones written after 1990 best characterized?” Overall, birth control was mentioned more often in books written after 1990, a total of twenty-four times, compared to the nineteen times it was mentioned in books before 1990. Birth control was also described accurately more often in books written after 1990. Birth control methods were accurately described in books written after 1990 twenty-three out of twenty-four times, and only fifteen out of nineteen times in books written before 1990. Similar results occurred in instances where birth control methods were described positively, with positive descriptions occurring sixteen of

nineteen times in books written before 1990, and occurring nineteen of twenty-four times in books after 1990. Instances where characters actually used a birth control method was a little higher in books written before 1990, about half the time. In books written after 1990, a birth control method was only used nine out of twenty-four times. These results can be found in Figure 8.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

There has been almost no research done on birth control presented in YA literature. From the research that has been done, it was found that oral contraceptives were usually hard to obtain for teens in the 1960s and this was reflected in YA literature (Emge, 2006, p. 22). Also, Emge (2006) found that condoms were rarely mentioned in YA novels from the 1960s and 1970s. In many YA novels, characters were afraid to use certain birth control methods or were misinformed about how they worked (Emge, 2006, p. 23). Young Adult novels often portrayed birth control as ineffective, inaccurate, or hard to obtain.

This study analyzed a selection of young adult novels to see how birth control was presented in young adult novels, if it was positively and accurately described, and how it had changed. A total of ten YA novels (five written prior to 1990, and five written after 1990) were read and analyzed for this study using a researcher created checklist.

#### Conclusions

##### *Condoms*

Condoms were rarely mentioned in the YA novels written before 1990. Actually, they were only mentioned three times, compared to twelve times in books written after 1990. In fact, all three times condoms were mentioned in books written prior to 1990, they were actually only mentioned in one book, Judy Blume's *Forever*. *Forever* is often

considered to be a groundbreaking work when it comes to birth control (Stone, 2006, p. 463). Perhaps that is why this was the only book in this study written before 1990 that featured condom usage as a birth control method. Not only are condoms used in *Forever*, but Blume even had her characters refer to condoms accurately and in a positive light. This seems to be the exception in books written before 1990, not the rule.

Books written after 1990 mentioned condoms twelve times, more than any other type of birth control. This may be because of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, after which they became more available and sold in drug stores and grocery stores for anyone to buy (Emge, 2006, p. 23). This new availability seems to be reflected in YA novels. However, condom usage is very low in the books written after 1990. In fact, condoms were only used four out of twelve times. However, three of the five novels featured teen pregnancy as a plot point, so that may have contributed to the low condoms usage.

### *Withdrawal*

The researcher expected to find withdrawal used as a birth control method more often in books written before 1990 than books written after 1990. According to Emge (2006), teens often had trouble accessing types of birth control like oral contraceptives, condoms, diaphragms, etc., so the researcher expected to find higher instances of “natural” methods of birth control, like withdrawal. However, this was not the case.

Withdrawal was only mentioned once in all the novels and it was mentioned in a book written in 2007, *Slam*. Nevertheless, the main character refers to this method negatively and accurately as an ineffective form of birth control. The main female character actually became pregnant when this method failed. According to the

TeensHealth website, “withdrawal is *not an effective way* to prevent pregnancy” because sperms can leak out even before ejaculation, and it does not protect against STDs (TeensHealth, 2008). *Slam* portrays withdrawal in a clear and honest way and reaffirms the idea that other methods are more effective.

### *Rhythm Method*

Since the Rhythm Method is a “natural” method, the researcher also expected to find it mentioned more often in books written before 1990. In this case, that assumption proved to be true. The Rhythm Method was mentioned five times, all in books written before 1990. It was mentioned positively all five times, but only accurately three times. The Rhythm Method was positively identified as an effective form of birth control; however, it is only a moderately effective form of birth control, even when used properly (TeensHealth, 2008). The inaccurate descriptions were due to the characters either not using it properly or acting on misinformation. For example, in *Our Sacred Honor*, the main character Jamie, mentions that she relied on knowing when her period was coming and picking a time in the middle of her cycle. She did not mention *how* to know when it was the middle of her cycle. Also, the Rhythm Method is less effective for teenage users because teens’ bodies take many years to settle into a regular cycle (TeensHealth, 2008).

### *Oral Contraceptives*

Although oral contraceptives have been available in the US through organizations like Planned Parenthood since 1960, it was not legal for unmarried women to receive prescriptions until 1972 and it was not until 1977 that minors were given that privilege

(Planned Parenthood, 2006). Planned Parenthood was only mentioned in one book written before 1990, the groundbreaking *Fovever*. Often, the characters in the books written before 1990, were afraid to go to their family doctors for prescriptions and did not have anywhere else they could go. Since it was often difficult for unmarried girls to obtain oral contraceptives, the researcher expected to find more mentions of oral contraceptives after 1990 than in books before 1990. However, it was found that oral contraceptives were mentioned nine times in books before 1990, and seven in books after 1990. Oral contraceptives were even used more in the books written before 1990 (four times, compared to two times in books after 1990).

#### *Diaphragm/Sponge (spermicide)*

Diaphragms, Sponges (spermicidal) are not mentioned in any of the research previously done on birth control methods, so the researcher in this study expected to find little or no mentions of it. A Diaphragm was mentioned once in *Forever* (1975) and it was positively and accurately described, but the main characters decide to use oral contraceptives instead. In books written after 1990, a Sponge with spermicide was mentioned three times in one book, Meg Cabot's *Ready or Not*. This also marked the only mention of using two methods of birth control (sponge and condoms) at once, which greatly increases their effectiveness. In *Ready or Not*, this method was described accurately and positively. It was only used once by the character, but that was the only instance where the character actually had sexual intercourse. The other two times it was mentioned, it was mentioned as a discussion of what to use *before* becoming sexually active. This was a positive change from the other novels.

### *Abstinence*

Abstinence, the only 100% effective form of birth control (TeensHealth, 2008), was mentioned once in the books written before 1990, and once in the books after 1990. Both times, it was both accurately and positively described as a foolproof way to not become pregnant. When abstinence was mentioned in *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* (1968), it was not actually used. The female main character was already pregnant and abstinence was mentioned as something the two main characters should have practiced, but did not. In *Teen Angel* (2003), abstinence was mentioned and used by a character that did not want to get pregnant, and accurately and positively described it as a good way to accomplish this.

### *Other Methods*

Only one other type of birth control is mentioned in all the books. In *Forever* (written before 1990), a teenager who had just given birth discussed how she will be fit for an IUD. She mentioned this in a positive way because she believed it will keep her from becoming pregnant again and accurately describes it as such.

### *Significance of the Results*

The researcher expected that with the progression of time, more teens would have the education about and access to birth control and would use it, and that would be reflected in YA novels. There has been some progression in the awareness and usage of birth control methods in YA novels, but not as much as the researcher expected.

Overall, birth control methods were mentioned with greater frequency in books written after 1990, but were not actually used any more often. In all the mentions of birth



control methods in books written prior to 1990, a method was actually used forty-two percent of the time, compared to thirty-seven percent of the time in novels after 1990.

However, it does seem that teens in YA novels are becoming more aware of birth control methods and are describing them accurately ninety-six percent of the time and positively eighty-two percent of the time. This is an improvement over the books written before 1990, with birth control methods being described accurately seventy-nine percent of the time. It seems that in books written prior to 1990, characters expressed fear in using or obtaining birth control methods compared to the characters in books after 1990.

More teens should be informed about and actually be using more forms of birth control than are reflected in the study. The progression in birth control awareness and usage from books written prior to 1990 to those written after 1990 has occurred but is not significant enough.

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## APPENDIX A: List of Novels

## List of Novels

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## APPENDIX B: Checklist

## Checklist

### Checklist for Each Instance of Birth Control Mentioned

(Bibliographical Information)

Book 1, Instance A	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Accurate Description	Positive Description	Actually Used	Not Used
Condoms						
Withdrawal						
Rhythm Method						
Oral Contraceptives						
Diaphragm/ Sponge						
Sponge						
Abstinence						
Others						



