

The Mystery of the Vanishing Sleuth: The Representation of Nancy Drew in Cover

Design from 1930 to 2016

by

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loving family who has supported me through the years in all my endeavors.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis uses a semiotic analysis to examine the representation of the character Nancy Drew on the covers of twelve books in nine series published between 1930 and 2016. By studying the covers of books in the Nancy Drew series up to present day, the goal of this thesis is to discover how meaning is constructed through the cover design. In addition, this thesis examines how a longstanding female character was represented in literary media marketed to youth since 1930. Focusing on the construction of Nancy Drew as well as themes present on the book covers, this thesis argues that the representation of Nancy Drew as a strong and independent woman transformed over time to a much weaker and dependent representation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	V
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	1
The Importance of Book Covers.....	3
Nancy Drew: A History.....	6
CHAPTER TWO: Theoretical Framework.....	16
CHAPTER THREE: Literature Review.....	22
Scholarship on Audience and Cover Design.....	23
Scholarship on Nancy Drew’s Character.....	29
Research Questions.....	35
CHAPTER FOUR: Method.....	38
CHAPTER FIVE: Traditional Nancy.....	42
Nancy Drew Mystery Stories: The Secret of the Old Clock (1930).....	42
Nancy Drew Mystery Stories: The Secret of the Old Clock (1950).....	47
Nancy Drew Mystery Stories: The Secret of the Old Clock (1966).....	52
CHAPTER SIX: Transitional Nancy.....	56
A Picture Book: Nancy Drew: Mystery of the Lost Dogs (1977).....	56
Nancy Drew Files: Secrets Can Kill (1986).....	61
Nancy Drew Notebooks: The Slumber Party Secret (1994).....	66
Nancy Drew on Campus: New Lives, New Loves (1995).....	71
CHAPTER SEVEN: Nancy Fragmented.....	78
Nancy Drew girl detective™: Without a Trace (2004).....	78

Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew: Sleepover Sleuths (2006).....	81
Nancy Drew Diaries: Curse of the Arctic Star (2013).....	84
Nancy Drew Mystery Stories: The Secret of the Old Clock (2014).....	87
Nancy Drew Clue Book: Pool Party Puzzler (2015).....	90
CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusion.....	94
Limitations and Implications for Future Research.....	105
REFERENCES.....	108

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
TABLE 1: Nancy Drew Book Series.....	107

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For more than 85 years, Nancy Drew's popularity as a character has had great impact on her readers. Many successful women have referenced the positive influence the fictional teenage detective, Nancy Drew, had on their lives. One fan commented that "she didn't realize how feminist they were because I sort of figured that's the way the world was" in reference to the Nancy Drew books (Rehak, 2006, pg. 279) and during a 1993 Nancy Drew conference, a fan stated that Nancy "gets into a lot of trouble, but always gets out of it. I wish I could do that" while another commented "[W]hen my mother was very little, my grandma used to buy her all the Nancy Drew books, so it like...it runs through the family" (Rehak, 2006, pg. 307). Folk singer Janis Ian stated that "[A]rrogance means to me that you know what you're doing, and you're not polite or humble about it...It's like self-confidence, but self-confidence is like Nancy Drew" (Rehak, 2006, pg. 279).

Since the *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* series was first published in 1930, more than 70 million copies of the original series have been sold (Penguin Random House, 2017). Additionally, spin-offs of the original series as well as television shows, movies, graphic novels and more featuring Nancy Drew as a character have been produced. *Publisher's Weekly* listed five of the books in the *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* in their "All-Time Bestselling Children's Books" list of "hardcovers that have sold 750,000 copies and paperbacks that have topped the one million copy mark over the years" (Hochman Turvey & Roback, 2001). In book publishing, a series refers to "a set of books, documents, etc. that are published with the same design in order to show that they belong to the same group" ("series", 2017). Enclyopedia.com states "[S]eries books are

considered to be any number of similarly plotted novels involving the same characters, settings, or genre expectations. They are marketed according to the familiarity of recurring titles or authors” (“Series Books”, 2017). In the case of Nancy Drew, multiple spin-off series based on the characters of the original series have been created. These series may feature Nancy Drew at different ages, locations, reading levels, etc., but usually refer back to the original world and characters of Nancy Drew. Since Nancy Drew was created at the start of the Great Depression, Nancy has appeared as a main character in at least nine book series. By combining the number of books in each Nancy Drew series, more than 500 books have been published featuring Nancy Drew as a character. With some series ongoing, this number is growing.

Due to the popularity of books featuring Nancy Drew as a character, Nancy has remained a staple of children’s literature since 1930. Her ability to remain in the public eye despite the changes wrought by time has surpassed many the literary character. Instead of abandoning Nancy Drew for a new character representation as has been done in the past with literary characters such as Betty Gordon, Cherry Ames, Judy Bolton, Ruth Fielding, and more, Nancy Drew has persevered. These female characters were detectives and adventurers, yet they did not achieve what Nancy Drew achieved. She remains in print not only for previously published books, but for new works as well. And unlike countless characters frozen in their respective stories, Nancy continues to evolve. The *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* were intentionally created to consist of a series of books focused on a character named Nancy Drew and her adventures solving mysteries. Over time, spin-off series have focused on Nancy Drew and the exploits of both her and her friends. Nancy Drew is a perfect example of a female literary character to study

because the representation of Nancy Drew has been continuously reinvented over the years and her book covers mirror her reinventions.

Despite their differences, one similarity is that Nancy Drew appears on the cover design in all series. By studying the covers of books in the Nancy Drew series up to present day, the goal of this thesis is to better understand the meaning constructed through the cover design as well as how a longstanding female character was represented in literary media marketed to youth since 1930.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BOOK COVERS

A reader's first impression of a book is often linked to the book's cover illustration. Cover art, as it is typically referred to in book publishing, can work as a representation of the book as a whole. "The cover or jacket of a book conveys a message about the contents of the volume, influencing both the retailer who stocks the book and the potential purchaser in the shop" (Matthews & Moody, 2007, pg. 19). By carefully choosing the depiction of characters, setting, clothing, lighting, and more in the cover art, a message may be conveyed to the reader. As Matthews & Moody (2007) argued, "a test of the importance of the jacket to the marketing of books is the way in which the repackaging of books impacts on the kinds of readers they reach and the way in which they are valued" (pg. xx).

Numerous studies have shown that cover design of books may have great impact on audience reaction and perception, especially among children and young adults. "Research for the Orange Prize for Fiction found that, if knowledge of the author or book is excluded, the cover is the most important factor in whether readers would like to start reading a book" (Matthews & Moody, 2007, pg. 23). The importance of cover design in

marketing and book sales cannot be understated. In “Success Drivers of Fiction Books: An Empirical Analysis of Hardcover and Paperback Editions in Germany,” Christina Schmidt-Stölting, Eva Blömeke, and Michel Clement (2011) argued that many factors make up marketing considerations in hardcover and paperback editions of books in Germany including the author’s popularity, genre, and book cover design. Schmidt-Stölting et al. (2011) surmise that while the hardcover edition usually receives increased marketing, in the case of a paperback “the cover assumes that responsibility for the paperback release; the cover then becomes the face of the product in stores and online, as little marketing activity occurs” (pg. 40). In “Judging a Book by Its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature,” Cat Yampbell (2005) argued that “the publishing industry is a product of its culture as a producer as well as a site of cultural creation and meaning. Through its varied marketing strategies, it often perpetuates, albeit sometimes unintentionally, divisive binaries – hegemonic notions of gender definition and division” (pg. 365). This is especially important due to the difference in book selection between males and females. Matthews & Moody (2007) cited research on adults stating that “A book was regarded as a female read based on the author’s gender, the colour and general look of the cover, the title and the blurb about the novel. Whilst women are willing to read titles which they regard as male reads, the converse is not the case” (Matthews & Moody, 2007, pg. 23).

Children are particularly impressionable in regards to cover art. In a study entitled “The Mysterious Case of the Detective as Child Hero: Sherlock Holmes, Encyclopedia Brown and Nancy Drew as Role Models?” Sally Sugarman (1995) found through questionnaires that book covers, along with book blurbs, were indicated as selectors used

by children when deciding which mystery book to read. It is important to remember that book selection and subsequent reading may have great impact on a child. Ivey and Johnston (2013) studied reading and young adults, including topics such as relationships, identities/selves, social imagination, agency, intellectual and moral stance, happiness, and knowledge. They found that “through their engagement with these books and one another, these young adults were recognizing the possibility of, and the cultural tools for, shaping their individual and collective lives” and that “[T]he expanded sense of agency with respect to their own and others’ behavior, attention, relationships, and moral and intellectual stance makes it possible for students to imagine narrative futures for themselves and to form a moral basis for those futures” (Ivey & Johnston, 2013, pg. 270-271). Ivey and Johnston (2015) conducted a further study on student-selected, self-paced reading over a four-year period. The students in this study primarily selected young adult literature and the focus was on reader engagement. The study found that “the students’ engagement transformed the community activity system by increasing the knowledge each student had of others and of themselves, altering the relational properties of the community, and making available a different set of potential goals to pursue” (Ivey & Johnston, 2015, pg. 317).

Since reading has such an impact on so many facets of a young adult reader’s life, book choice is critical. If children and young adults use cover art as a book selection criteria, it may be argued that cover art may have great influence over the reading habits and the subsequent influence of reading on youth.

## NANCY DREW: A HISTORY

Decade after decade since the 1930s, Nancy Drew has returned to impress her readers with her sleuthing skills, leaving no mystery unsolved. Though only sixteen years old in the original series, Nancy was an accomplished woman and sleuth. Crafted by Edward Stratemeyer as an addition to the Stratemeyer Syndicate, Nancy was planned for great things (Rehak, 2006, pg. 109).

Born in 1862, Stratemeyer was a writer who, after freelancing for a publishing house, founded his own successful publishing syndicate. “In his 47-year career, Stratemeyer used 83 pen names. He authored approximately 275 stories and outlined roughly 690 others, hiring writers to complete the latter” (Johnson, 1993, pg. ix). For many years, Stratemeyer hesitated to produce a children’s series targeted at girls because he believed that it was a limited market that soon outgrew children’s literature. “As Stratemeyer sized it up, ‘Almost as many girls write to me as boys and all say they like to read boys’ books (but it’s pretty hard to get a boy to read a girl’s book, I think)’” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 24)<sup>1</sup>.

As time passed, however, Stratemeyer reconsidered his position. Having already produced such well-known and successful children’s series as *The Rover Boys* (1899-1926) (Johnson, 1993, pg. 94), *The Bobbsey Twins* (1904-1992) (Johnson, 1993, pg. 126), and *The Hardy Boys* (1927- ) (Johnson, 1993, pg. 142), Stratemeyer felt there was a market for a new line featuring a female character and wrote his editor at Grosset & Dunlap in 1929 to argue his case, stating “[A]t present our line is weak on girls books with a single heroine. We have ‘Outdoor Girls’ and ‘Blythe Girls’ but not a single line in which a single character dominates the page, like ‘Tom Swift,’ ‘Ted Scott,’ and ‘Don

Sturdy' (Rehak, 2006, pg. 111). Stratemeyer had set his sights on a new series featuring such a character along with "bright, vigorous stories for older girls having to do with the solving of several mysteries" (Rehak, 2006, pg. 114) and the result was the *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*.

Stratemeyer selected ghostwriter Mildred Wirt Benson as the author of the *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* because she was a young writer, fresh out of college, and "she writes particularly well of college girls and their doings, both in college and out, and I feel that she could make a real success of this new line" (Rehak, 2006, pg. 109). However, Edward Stratemeyer himself did not live to see Nancy Drew's success. Leaving behind only outlines for the first five books and his selection of Benson as ghostwriter, Stratemeyer died in 1930. Nancy Drew had been launched only twelve days prior. His daughters, Harriet Stratemeyer Adams and Edna Stratemeyer Squier<sup>2</sup>, soon took over the syndicate and, with it, Nancy Drew.

Using Stratemeyer's initial outlines followed by outlines produced by Adams and Squier, Benson wrote most of the original Nancy Drew series under the pen name Carolyn Keene with the Stratemeyer sisters and additional staff assisting with editing (Johnson, 1993, pg. 10-15). The majority of the remaining Nancy Drew books were written by an assortment of ghostwriters as well as Adams herself until her death in 1982 (Johnson, 1993, pg. 147). It is interesting to note that Adams also used the pen name Carolyn Keene and that it is featured prominently on the cover of each Nancy Drew book. Adams did not reveal that in fact the books were written by ghostwriters and that a living, breathing Carolyn Keene did not exist. Instead, Adams claimed that the author pen names used by the syndicate were pseudonyms. Adams felt that the pens names created

by the syndicate must be real for the fans and created biographical sketches for many of them, including Carolyn Keene, and sent them to publishers. Adams “did nothing short of bestowing personhood on fake pen names” and “[E]ventually, every ‘author’ would acquire stationery with his or her name at the top of it, a bit of biographical background, and a signature, generally forged by Harriet whenever it was called for” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 165). It may be that fans believed Carolyn Keene was a real-life version of Nancy Drew. However, Carolyn Keene represents a female author who does not in fact exist except in relation to Nancy Drew and other works published under her name.

Though Stratemeyer set out to create a heroine, in the end Nancy was developed as a strong and independent character by two equally strong and independent women. Adams and Benson shared some characteristics despite their different backgrounds. Both attended college during a time when few women did (Rehak, 2006, pg. 47-51). Both became career women, with Adams running the syndicate after her father’s death (Johnson, 1993, pg. 12) and Benson working as a journalist (Rehak, 2006, pg. 87). And last, but certainly not least, both greatly influenced the character and representation of Nancy Drew.

A further contribution to Nancy Drew’s success may have been the marketing strategies of the Stratemeyer syndicate. Once the Nancy Drew books were published, ads were placed strategically in both the beginning and end of each book. This was a previously used marketing tactic of Stratemeyers (Johnson, 1993, pg. 7). The beginning usually consisted of Nancy recalling her success on her last case, the previous book, and the end normally featured Nancy relishing her victory and, despite just recently solving a case, yearning for her next mystery. The reader was then informed of the details of

Nancy's next case, thereby establishing a "secret" the reader was privy to that Nancy did not yet know. Arthur Daigon (1964) attributed at least some of the success of the Nancy Drew series to the "obvious promotional material appearing in the first and last chapters of each book. The "advertisement" appearing in the first chapters refers to an adventure in the last volume in the series, and the "advertisement" in the last chapter refers to exciting events to appear in a succeeding volume" (pg. 669). In both instances, the previous and upcoming books were referred to by their titles. The books were also covered with dust jackets featuring the character Nancy Drew and these representations of Nancy Drew were critical.

Adams understood that the depiction of Nancy featured on the cover of the book would have impact to readers. In 1934, for example, Adams complained about the cover art of *The Clue of the Broken Locket*. The cover featured three stylish young women standing among wooden boards on a beach. The woman in the center is holding the wreckage of a boat with one hand while the other grasps a gold locket. It appears that Nancy is the woman in the center and the two women on either side of Nancy are examining the locket with shocked expressions, while Nancy herself appears to be impassively staring ahead. Adams "displayed a shrewd understanding of the brand she was helping to create: 'The picture should have a more mysterious atmosphere, which might have been portrayed by a less bland look on the face of Nancy... Is the picture finished? If so, let us hope that the names Nancy Drew and Carolyn Keene, together with the title, will make sales for the volume rather than the picture itself'" (Rehak, 2006, pg. 173).

These marketing strategies, along with Nancy's character and Stratemeyer's syndicate, firmly established Nancy Drew as a publishing phenomenon. Ten years after publication and in the midst of the Great Depression, over two and a half million copies had been sold and the juvenile audience was growing. According to *Time* magazine, in the 1950s "35% of Random House's sales volume" was estimated to be juvenile books while "fully \$13 million of Simon & Schuster's \$18 million gross" was from "books for kids" (Rehak, 2006, pg. 239).

A Nancy Drew board game appeared in 1957 followed by overseas translations of novels (Rehak, 2006, pg. 239-240). The sales in 1959 for books in the Nancy Drew series "would be close to one and a half million" (Rehak, 2006, pg. 242). And not only was Nancy Drew creating revenue, she was making an impact. Daigon (1964) argued that "[A]ll varieties of young girl readers, the sophisticated, the conventional, and the reluctant, report, not encounters, but *profound involvement* with Nancy" (pg. 666). Nancy Drew was becoming a figure of American pop culture. Her influence on youth, fueled by her representation, was growing.

In an effort to maintain appeal to readers, the cover design of the books was greatly impacted over the years. During revisions to the text of the books, the covers were also redone. The 1960s covers featured "bright yellow spines and up-to-date drawings of Nancy in action printed right on the board covers instead of dust jackets, and all the art was being redone to appeal to the current generation" (Rehak, 2006, pg. 250). Nancy Drew was undergoing transformation.

In the 1960s, American youth had changed and the average age of Nancy Drew readers went down. However, fans of the series remained dedicated to Nancy. Arthur

Prager noted in his 1969 article that Nancy still appealed to a certain age group because “[A]pparently there is a rock-ribbed streak of conservatism in the nine-to-eleven group” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 264). By 1976, the series sales had been on a steady increase for four years, “reversing the gradual drop-off that had been happening since the late 1950s” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 178). In 1977, a short-lived picture book series featuring Nancy Drew and titled *A Picture Book: Nancy Drew* was launched. The series consisted of only two books and ended in the same year. In 1986, Simon & Schuster’s new paperback addition to the Nancy Drew series was launched entitled *The Nancy Drew Files*. The series featured a 1980s version of Nancy Drew as a modern girl. Publisher Simon & Schuster “found it ‘necessary to give her a complete makeover,’ one more time” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 300). In the launch of *The Nancy Drew Files* the next year, Nancy Drew was once again reimagined to fit the ideals of the most current generation. Adams had at this time passed away and without her input, Nancy Drew underwent an even more drastic transformation. The cover of the first book in *The Nancy Drew Files* “showed a distinctly eighties Nancy with feathered hair and tight jeans” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 300). The size of the book was also transformed to “‘rack-size’ – larger than the ‘digest size’ paperbacks it had been publishing since 1979” in order to “appeal to older readers” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 300). It was believed that “[T]he smaller books were geared towards ages eight to eleven, whereas the new Files series would ‘reflect the interest and concerns of today’s teens’” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 300). This may arguably have been the first representation of Nancy Drew in the public eye that was not influenced by Adams and it was dramatically different from what had been seen before.

Although this version of Nancy was unlike previous versions and under a new series names, the 1980s saw the following press release from publisher Simon & Schuster “SKYROCKETING SALES PROMPT ACCELERATED EXPANSION OF NANCY DREW AND HARDY BOYS SERIES” after “one million copies of the new paperback additions to the series had been sold in less than a year” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 298).

This series was followed by *Nancy Drew on Campus* and the *Nancy Drew Notebooks*. In *Nancy Drew on Campus*, Nancy transitioned to college, yet still encounters mysteries. The series lasted only three years, beginning in 1995 and ending in 1998. The *Nancy Drew Notebooks* featured a much younger Nancy and were moderately successful after launching in 1994 and running through 2005. Despite the reworking and relaunch of Nancy Drew, the newer series would not have the longevity of the originals. *The Nancy Drew Files* and the *Nancy Drew Notebooks* series lasted for only eleven years each, compared to over fifty years of the originals. However, they are the longest running spin-offs of the original versions of Nancy Drew thus far.

*Nancy Drew, Girl Detective* launched in 2004 and ended in 2012. This series focused on a version of Nancy Drew more similar to the original. *Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew*, however, targeted a younger audience once again. *Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew* launched in 2006 and ran till 2014. Ongoing series include the *Nancy Drew Diaries* and *Nancy Drew Clue Book*. The *Nancy Drew Diaries* launched in 2013 and consists of fifteen books targeted at children between the ages of eight through twelve while the *Nancy Drew Clue Book* series launched in July 2015 and consists of seven books thus far targeted at ages six through nine. As Johnson so aptly phrased it “[T]he fiction factory Stratemeyer built grinds on” (1993, pg. ix).

In each new series, Nancy Drew is reimagined and reconstructed, undergoing dramatic changes in representation. The staying power of the earlier editions prompted a Massachusetts press by the name of Applewood Books to reissue the original books. An article by *Atlantic Monthly* published in 1991 stated “[A]ntiques though these novels be, they deserve a second look,’ the *Atlantic* writer opined, ‘because they’re richer than the versions of the same books now in print’” (cited in Rehak, 2006, pg. 305). A similar article in *Ms.* published in 1992 claimed that “Nancy is no longer the intrepid, independent detective of the original novels. The teenage detective who was once a symbol of spunky female independence has slowly been replaced by an image of prolonged childhood, currently evolving toward a Barbie doll detective” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 305-306). It was becoming more apparent to the public that Nancy was losing her original identity in order to conform to trends and a resurgence of interest in the original representation of Nancy Drew emerged.

The major differences between the competing versions of Nancy Drew may best be illustrated by their inability to coexist as a character. At a party given in commemoration of Nancy Drew, different actresses were hired to play both the 1930 and 1980 versions of Nancy Drew (Rehak, 2006, pg. 294). Nancy Drew was no longer able to exist in a single form. This is remarkable and leads to the question of why Nancy transformed so drastically over the years that she required two separate individuals to represent her? Multitudes of literary characters remain virtually frozen in time for decades, while the depiction of Nancy Drew is altered several times within a fifty-year span and even more significantly in spin-offs.

These alterations may be significant since reading may influence youth in a variety of facets in their life as detailed by the research above. Given the ardent following Nancy Drew has had over this span of time, representations of Nancy may affect self-image and confidence. As found by numerous studies, including a study conducted by Schmidt-Stölting et al. (2011), consumers frequently base their first impression of a book on its cover and title. Perhaps more importantly, Gillian Rose (2001) argued that “visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies” (pg. 6). Therefore, the shifting representations of Nancy Drew on the covers of books in the *Nancy Drew* series may not have only impacted marketing and sales of the product, but may also have impacted the youth reading the books. By studying covers of books in the *Nancy Drew* series, it may become apparent how a female literary character marketed to youth was constructed on book covers between 1930 and present day as well as any changes that may have occurred in representation during that time frame.

In order to better understand possible meanings attached to images contained in the cover designs of books, I am using a semiotic analysis to study the covers of Nancy Drew books. The number of years Nancy Drew books have been in print presents the character as unique and may reveal shifts in representation as well as cover design over time. In this thesis, I argue that by portraying Nancy Drew in various representations, the Nancy Drew covers were designed to appeal to specific audiences using various signs to communicate meaning specific to that audience during a given time frame. Nancy Drew remains a consistent single female literary character reinvented instead of replaced over a span of 85 years. By using a semiotic analysis to study the Nancy Drew covers, a better

understanding of the shifting representations of a female character on book covers

marketed to youth may be reached.

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<sup>1</sup> *Girl Sleuth: Nancy Drew and the Women Who Created Her* by Melanie Rehak is the primary source for historical factual information pertaining to Nancy Drew. As such, it is the primary reference of this paper for historical factual information.

<sup>2</sup> Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, Edna Stratemeyer Squier, and Mildred Wirt Benson are referred to by their final last names throughout this thesis regardless of marital status in order to reduce confusion.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to conduct this study, I will be using semiotic theory as well as representation to analyze book covers in the *Nancy Drew* series. I will also touch on Erving Goffman's study on gender in advertisements as far as it pertains to analysis of the covers. Representation works well for this study because it explores symbolism present through signs. As Stuart Hall states "[R]epresentation is a practice, a kind of 'work', which uses material objects and effects. But the *meaning* depends not on the material quality of the sign, but on its *symbolic function*" (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, italics in original, pg. 11). An example of representation is language. Hall argued that Language "operates as a *representational system*. In language, we use signs and symbols – whether they are sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, even objects – to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings" (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, italics in original, pg. xvii). We have developed a system by which, as Hall states, "we use signs, organized into languages of different kinds, to communicate meaningfully with others" (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 14). This meaning is constructed and attached to items through language. According to Hall "[R]epresentation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our mind through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to *refer* to either the 'real' world of objects, people, or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events" (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, italics in original, pg. 3). Representation allows us not only to communicate the physical world around us, but the imagined worlds and abstract concepts inside of us all. It lends itself to culture.

Hall argued that culture itself is a transference of meaning, stating that culture “is not so much a set of *things* – novels and paintings or TV programs and comics – as a process, a set of *practices*” and that “culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – the ‘giving and taking of meaning’ – between the members of a society or group” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, italics in original, pg. xviii). Therefore, the items present in a culture can be examined for the meanings present in the item that is both formed from and further contributes to the culture. Stated simply by Hall, “[R]epresentation connects meaning and language to culture” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 1). It is important to note that these attachments to meaning are constructed. Because of this, it may be difficult to ascertain complex levels of meaning attached to an item without pausing to carefully analyze it. But, since these attachments to meaning are constructed, it may be argued that they can also be deconstructed.

One theory developed to help deconstruct meaning in signs is semiotics. Developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, semiotics or semiology is the study of signs. Hall argued that “[I]n language, we use signs and symbols... to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. xvii). Semiotic theory states that human beings attach meaning to signifieds through signifiers. By attaching abstract concepts, or signifieds, to a material form, a signifier, a sign is created. As argued by Hall, “[T]he underlying argument behind the semiotic approach is that, since all cultural objects convey meaning, and all cultural practices depend on meaning, they must make use of signs” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 21). An example of a sign is the peace symbol. The signified in this instance is the idea of peace while the signifier is the “V” symbol made with the pointer and middle finger. When combined, a sign is

created communicating the concept of peace through the form of the “V” symbol. Signs can consist of “anything that stands for, refers to, or represents something else” (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2004, pg. 357).

Saussure also argued that signs may also be defined in relation to each other. The difference between items may be as significant as the meaning originally attached to the item. In semiotic theory, Hall argued “[I]f the relationship between a signifier and its signified is the result of a system of social conventions specific to each society and to specific historical moments, then all meanings are produced within history and culture” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 17). This is an especially important consideration for this study since the analysis will span over 85 years of book covers. Due to the great impact of the communication of meaning on culture as well as the significance of communication as a two-way process, it may be argued that the intended meaning may not be fully communicated and that the various messages conveyed by the signs present on the covers may be significant. As Hall notes, “[T]he *reader* is as important as the *writer* in the production of meaning” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, italics in original, pg. 18).

Theorist Roland Barthes expanded on Saussure’s theory. Hall argued that Barthes “brought a *semiotic* approach to bear on ‘reading’ popular culture, treating these activities and objects as signs, as a language through which meaning is communicated” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 21). According to Hall, Barthes argued that “the first completed meaning functions as the signifier in the second stage of the representation process and, when linked with a wider theme by a reader, yields a second, more elaborate

and ideologically framed message or meaning... Barthes calls this second level of signification the level of *myth*" (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, italics in original, pg. 24).

In addition, Barthes contended that "whatever its mistakes, mythology is certain to participate in the making of the world" (Barthes, 1957/2009, pg. 99). By controlling the message, the establishment is able to construct reality and convince the audience of its importance in their lives. Since reality is a social construct achieved through attachment of meaning "we constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness" (Barthes, 1957/2009, pg. 100).

Finally, Erving Goffman (1979) explored concepts of subjugation and domination in his study on gender advertisements. Goffman (1979) argued that expressions of gender in advertisements "turn out to be illustrations of ritual-like bits of behavior which portray an ideal conception of the two sexes and their structural relationship to each other, accomplishing this in part by indicating, again ideally, the alignment of the actor in the social situation" (pg. 84). He includes examples of the "ritualization of subordination," the "feminine touch," and "licensed withdrawal" in his study, all of which are used as tools of examination in this thesis.

The "ritualization of subordination" describes the various methods in which one individual is placed in a dominant role over another individual, thereby subjugating them (Goffman, 1979, pg. 40). This allows one individual to maintain dominance while the other individual is constructed as submissive. The "feminine touch" examines the various ways in which the hands and touch are used to display femininity and masculinity. As Goffman (1979) states in reference to the "feminine touch," "[T]his ritualistic touching is to be distinguished from the utilitarian kind that grasps, manipulates, or holds" (pg. 29).

“licensed withdrawal” details how individuals may be portrayed as psychologically absent or withdrawn from the scene (Goffman, 1979, pg. 57). Goffman (1979) also argued that advertisers do not continuously reinvent these ritualized expressions, but rather “conventionalize our conventions, stylize what is already a stylization, make frivolous use of what is already something considerably cut off from contextual controls. Their hype is hyper-ritualization” (pg. 84).

As we have seen in previous studies, book covers play a role in book selection. They may also transmit meaning through symbolism. Therefore, we must not look at book covers simply as marketing materials, but as messages communicating meaning through symbolism that is read by every reader of the text. While it is not within the scope of this study to explore the impact of the covers on readers of the text, it is important to note that every reader engaging with a Nancy Drew book is actively reading the meanings and symbolism present on the book covers. For that reason, the way in which book covers are designed and symbolism that may be present are worthy of further study.

The combination of semiotics and representation were chosen in this study because both theories apply to the cover designs that will be investigated. Analyzing how Nancy Drew is represented on the covers over this time period is critical to better understanding the meaning transmitted through the cover design as well as how a longstanding female character was represented in literary media marketed to youth since 1930. Semiotic theory will aid in deconstructing the encoded meaning present in the covers in order to reach how Nancy Drew was represented while Goffman’s theories will help us see patterns of representations present in images. I will be using the theory of

representation to explore symbolism present in the covers and identify signs. I will use semiotic theory to deconstruct the signs into both signifieds and signifiers and, by doing this, better understand the conveyed meaning. I will be using Goffman's theories to aid in my analysis by identifying common messages of dominance and submission as well as masculinity and femininity.

### CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

In conducting this study, previous scholarly literature was examined in order to reach a better understanding of the Nancy Drew series and character as well as the representation of Nancy Drew. A similar study to the one I am undertaking of the representation of Nancy Drew on the covers of books in the series was conducted by Jennifer Stowe (1999) with an emphasis on facial expression. In *The Visual Rewriting of Nancy Drew: An Analysis of the Cover Art of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories from 1930-1999*, Stowe explored how Nancy Drew is represented on selected covers using a qualitative visual analysis. Stowe (1999) used research on non-verbal communication and facial expression along with a semiotic analysis to study Nancy Drew's representation. Stowe (1999) felt that "[W]hile many articles have been written on the evolution of Nancy's character within the text of the stories, few scholars have discussed the changes that Nancy has undergone in the cover art of the series" (pg. 2). Stowe (1999) argued that "[E]xamining the cover art of the Nancy Drew series sheds some light on what the publishers and artist thought would be appealing to 8-12-year-old girls at a given period of time" (pg. 2). Stowe (1999) argued that over time Nancy Drew gradually loses the strength and independence present in the beginning of the series. In Stowe's (1999) opinion, Nancy Drew becomes a weaker character with much less control as the series progresses as portrayed through the cover art. Stowe's (1999) work in analyzing how Nancy Drew was represented on selected covers using a qualitative visual analysis focused on facial expressions. Stowe (1999) contended that "[T]he most interesting changes to the pictorial Nancy are not in the cosmetic changes, such as hair and clothing styles, but in her manner and personality" (pg. 2). Therefore, Stowe (1999) stated that

cosmetic updates to Nancy Drew on the cover art such as fashion changes would not be “examined in much detail” in her study (pg. 2). Instead, Stowe (1999) examined “Nancy’s facial expression and body language in light of scholarship on non-verbal communication” with the purpose of “examining the way that perceptions of Nancy and her role of sleuth are affected by the changes to her visage and body language” (pg. 3). While valuable, the focus of this study was on facial expression and body language along with non-verbal communication. It was also limited to books published before 1999. I believe that the continued publication and revisions to Nancy Drew’s representation warrants additional study to build on Stowe’s important work as well as to focus on the overall representation of Nancy Drew present on the book covers.

In addition, literature pertaining to audience and cover design was also studied in order to ascertain previous research on the impact of cover design on audience as well as possible audience reaction to cover design. Most studies deal with the representation of Nancy Drew in earlier published work and in the text of the work, but this study will examine Nancy Drew through present day and will focus on the representation of Nancy Drew on the covers of books in various Nancy Drew series.

#### SCHOLARSHIP ON AUDIENCE AND COVER DESIGN

Previous work on audience and cover design has examined marketing considerations, visual appeal to children and teens and subsequent book selection, and the communication of meaning. By exploring not only the communication of meaning, but its impact on reading habits and commercial success, the relationship between cover design and audience may be better understood.

As stated previously, Schmidt-Stölting et al. (2011) argued in “Success Drivers of Fiction Books: An Empirical Analysis of Hardcover and Paperback Editions in Germany” that factors including genre, book cover design, and the author’s popularity impacted marketing considerations. Schmidt-Stölting et al. (2011) contended that “a consumer’s first impression of a book is often based on its cover and title” (pg. 35). By measuring sales of 1,206 fiction books along with several additional factors, Schmidt-Stölting et al. (2011) found that a multitude of elements may influence a book’s sales. A book’s cover, for example, “significantly influences potential buyers of paperback editions, but no significant effect is evident for hardcovers” (Stölting et al., 2011, pg. 40). Schmidt-Stölting et al. (2011) contended that “cover configuration is of great importance in the purchasing decision regarding paperback editions” but that further research is needed (pg. 43).

Rachel Noorda (2012) explored how to market a book internationally as well as the potential success of niche titles in international sales in “International Success: Selling Niche Titles Beyond the Prime Home Market.” Noorda (2012) detailed the factors that may influence international success including content matter and design. Noorda (2012) found, in regards to commercial appeal, cover design may be positively influenced by potential sales location. “The same book with covers which convey similar tones and emotions often have quite a different look, specific to cultural tastes. This is even true for markets which seem similar – such as the United Kingdom and the United States” (Noorda, 2012, pg. 362). Noorda (2012) argued that “cover design is as sensitive to markets and cultures as the editing is” (pg. 362).

Yampbell (2005) argued in “Judging a Book by Its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature” that the cover is critical to commercial success in book publishing in the young adult market. As previously discussed, Yampbell’s (2005) study detailed the importance of book cover and its connection to commercial success in the young adult publishing market. Yampbell (2005) explored the change in covers between the 1970’s and 2000’s, stating that “[I]n the 1970s and early 1980s, artists creating teen novel covers used primarily watercolors to depict pensive looking teens in a scene from the book, or during a key moment for the protagonist. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, photographs of brooding, contemplative teens gradually replaced watercolors. Sophisticated graphics in many media forced publishers in the late 1990s to create dramatic and stimulating, ‘fast and furious’ book covers... in 2001 through 2003, the trend was toward less realistic, more representational covers – no people, just images – to achieve cross-gender, multicultural appeal... In 2003 and 2004, characters, rather than symbols, returned to book covers, but in a technologically unprecedented manner” (pg. 356-357). Yampbell (2005) found that an issue that “antagonized readers of all ages is a misleading cover” (pg. 358). Perhaps most importantly, Yampbell (2005) argued that “[A] cover often determines whether the book will be purchased... Covers may not keep a book in print nor in readers’ hands, but in the current market, book industry people agree: The cover is the key—the cover sells the book” (pg. 369).

Bahloul Salmani and Zahra Eghtesadi (2015) argued in “An Intersemiotic Approach towards Translation of Cover Designs in Retranslated Classic Novels” that book covers transmit meaning through intersemiotic translation. Salmani and Eghtesadi (2015) defined intersemiotic translation as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of

sign of nonverbal sign systems” and argue that it “involves translation between two different media” with an example being book illustration “as a type of translation of the text in the illustrated book” (pg. 1185). Salmani and Eghtesadi (2015) contended that the publisher and designers influence the cover design and, therefore, the mythical and ideological meaning translated. The authors further contended that their research reveals the “impact of social, cultural, political and religious ideological implications on the process of translation” and that through further study, translation trainees may “become aware of the role their ideology and that of the society can play in constructing culture, and must also consider translation as a tool to spread or control that certain ideology throughout the society” (Salmani and Eghtesadi, 2015, pg. 1191).

Translated meaning may be a deciding factor in purchase choices of books. Corinne A. Kratz (1994) examined the telling and selling of book covers in publishing in “On Telling/Selling a Book by Its Cover.” Kratz (1994) argued that through cover design “publishers and purchasers alike participate in tellings that distinguish books by genre and by market” (pg. 184). Kratz (1994) also contended that telling is a method in which individuals may assume knowledge of the books content and, with this knowledge, decide if they want to read and/or buy the book. Kratz (1994) stated that “this mode of telling a book is intimately connected with selling it, part of the creation of markets, the production of book categories, and reading audiences” (pg. 185). By using cover design to sell books, the publisher makes “assumptions about readers and buyers” that “inform this view of cover design and book marketing” (Kratz, 1994, pg. 186). By perpetuating assumptions of reads and buyers, stereotyping may occur.

Colin Symes (1992) argued in “You Can’t Judge a Book by Its Cover: The Aesthetics of Titles and Other Epitextual Devices” that the title of a work is central to the generation of meaning in response to the work. In cover design, the wording used may be of as significant importance as the cover image. Symes (1992) argued that the title of a work “perhaps more than any other aspect of an artifact, highlights the deficiencies in treating texts, paintings, symphonies as sufficient unto themselves, as structures within immutable meanings” and that “the relationship between a title and the titled is thus a fluid and dynamic one, in which the title shapes the title, which is in turn shaped by the significance of the title” (pg. 18).

Symes’ (1992) argued that, by looking inward to the artifact and outward to the marketplace, titles serves a dual purpose (pg. 19). It works to direct the reader’s attention to the artifact while expressing the meaning contained in the artifact. Symes (1992) contended that “the title, along with chapter headings and page numbers, assist in calibrating the narrative, in providing it with coordinates on a narrative graph, which enable the text to be oriented in terms of its proximity to its beginning and end” (pg. 21). The title, Symes (1992) argued, is integral in the development of meaning involving the work and bears such a strong association with the work, it is remembered long after the details of the work are forgotten.

Syahranah A. Raqi and A. N. Zainab (2008) studied the borrowing habit of children using two public libraries in “Observing Strategies Used by Children When Selecting Books to Browse, Read or Borrow.” Using both observation and a questionnaire, Raqi and Zainab (2008) contended that browsing was the most popular method of book selection among youth along with factors related to books such as author

or series. Children tended to browse in a non-linear fashion. The authors also found an association with book selection and plot and cover design in addition to visual cues being paramount in book selection.

Children, especially, may use cover design in book selection. Raqi and Zainab (2008) found that “children of all ages tended to choose books by certain series” and to “visually scan purposefully to recognize and physically select books” (pg. 499). Raqi and Zainab (2008) also argued that “organization and display of books” was important and that “children who are browsing books on a particular subject could be enticed to look at other related books which can be visually visible in the neighbouring shelves close to their subject of interest” and that “children use visual cues such as checking the front cover for relevant pictures on a topic” (pg. 500).

Therefore, cover design of the Nancy Drew books may also have great impact on reader preferences and audience reaction. As previously discussed, Sugarman (1995) used questionnaires administered to adults and children in “The Mysterious Case of the Detective as Child Hero: Sherlock Holmes, Encyclopedia Brown and Nancy Drew as Role Models?” to determine what leads to enjoyment when reading mysteries. Sugarman (1995) found that children and adults differed on their responses regarding why they liked to read mysteries, with children reporting suspense as a primary motivator and adults focusing on escapism. In addition, Sugarman (1995) found that different factors influenced selection and enjoyment of mysteries for adults and children on several questions. According to Sugarman (1995), book covers and blurbs were also indicated as selectors used by children when choosing mystery books. Sugarman (1995) noted that “over the years, the book covers of the Nancy Drew books have also reflected changing

styles and attitudes” in order to appeal to children as Encyclopedia Brown did “in recognition that children do judge a book by its cover” (pg. 10).

#### SCHOLARSHIP ON NANCY DREW’S CHARACTER

Nancy Drew is featured prominently on the cover of all the books analyzed in this study and was popular among youth over several decades. Given that Nancy Drew has been a successful character in both the publishing world and other forms of media, the messages transmitted through her representation are worthy of study.

As previously mentioned, Daigon’s (1964) study “The Strange Case of Nancy Drew” explored why books from the Nancy Drew series are popular among junior high school readers. In Daigon’s (1964) study, Nancy Drew mysteries were the most frequently chosen novels seventh graders freely selected for leisure reading. The study went on to detail that “18.2 percent fell into the juvenile-mystery category” and “13.2 percent of all books read were from the Nancy Drew series” (Daigon, 1964, pg. 666).

Barbara Wertheimer and Carol Sands (1975) described the factors that led to the success of the Nancy Drew series both at its original publishing and in subsequent years in their study, “*Nancy Drew Revisited*.” In an interview with Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, Wertheimer and Sands (1975) stated that Mrs. Adams said “[C]hildren ages eight to thirteen don’t care one whit about social problems. They want to be entertained... if children come from a broken home, they don’t want to read about it. They need to exercise their imaginations. Children should play. They will have time to cry and worry later. Let them be children” (pg. 1131). Through interviews with Adams, Wertheimer and Sands (1975) detailed the lengths to which Adams goes in writing the Nancy Drew series as well as the values she feels Nancy possesses. Wertheimer and Sands (1975)

maintained, however, that while entertaining, the Nancy Drew series is not complex enough to challenge readers and does not create “imaginative sympathy” sufficient to which children can experience life, learn, and grow (pg. 1161).

Nancy’s strength as a character may also come into play. Lee Zacharias (1976) argued in “Nancy Drew, Ballbuster” that Nancy Drew is a strong female character who is represented as a solver instead of a solution. Zacharias (1976) contended that the Nancy Drew books contain “several mysteries which eventually come together in one solution; this common solution reassures the reader that there is order in chaos” (pg. 1027). Zacharias (1976) argued that Nancy is a character that the reader wishes to emulate. According to Zacharias (1976), Nancy’s family and friends portray loyalty, kindness, and concern towards Nancy. They are almost perfect, but none can reach Nancy’s perfection. Zacharias (1976) argued that Nancy also commands respect. Not only does her father respect her and take her seriously, so do her friends.

In addition, Zacharias (1976) found that Nancy is always right. On more than one occasion, Nancy is “falsely accused, proved right, and witnesses the accuser’s humiliation, the apology” (Zacharias, 1976, pg. 1030). In regards to her friendship, her friends and series regulars George and Bess remain by her side through many adventures. Many times, Zacharias (1976) contended that they remind Nancy of her obligations and femininity. Nancy, it seems, “exists outside the feminine role; she doesn’t restrict her freedom by accepting a traditional identity” as Bess and George do (Zacharias, 1976, pg. 1033). In romance, Ned Nickerson waits perpetually for Nancy, “but doesn’t get to kiss her through forty-some adventures” (Zacharias, 1976, pg. 1031) which allows Nancy to focus on her life’s work, solving mysteries. Zacharias (1976) argued that Nancy is

dominant in all her relationships and uses her ability to solve mysteries as an “act of power” (pg. 1035) and, in doing so, assumes the dominant role in all relationships.

Nancy’s autonomy is a representation of her strength. Therefore, the importance of Nancy Drew’s depiction on the cover may be related to the importance of her autonomy. Jennifer Woolston’s (2010) study “Nancy Drew’s Body: The Case of the Autonomous Female Sleuth” examined the female body and its use in the Nancy Drew novels as an active vessel through which to solve mysteries. Woolston (2010) argued that Nancy’s representation of a girl sleuth was unusual in her time period due to her ability to drive cars as well as her financial means. She is free to do as she pleases with no responsibilities. Using examples from several Nancy Drew books in which the female characters use their bodies in subversive ways, Woolston (2010) used Laura Mulvey’s (1975) theory of male gaze to argue that the male gaze is “turned on its head” (pg. 179) and that “through this overt physical action... Nancy Drew positions herself in the realm of young adult literature as a feminist heroine. By appearing as an original risk-taker, Nancy Drew serves to inspire young women to *act*, and to use their bodies as a means to explore and investigate the outside world” (italics in original, pg. 182).

Nancy Drew is alternatively sixteen and eighteen in the original series though subsequent series vary her age. Therefore, her sexuality may also be addressed in some of the covers. Kate Harper (2011) examined how female adolescence is constructed in Nancy Drew books as well as any correlation made between adolescent sexuality and delinquency in “‘A Pretty Girl of Sixteen’: capturing the contradictions of female adolescence in the Nancy Drew Series.” Harper (2011) contended that the Nancy Drew series rejects traditional stereotypes regarding adolescence and examines how female

adolescents were sexualized for their audience without retaining any sexual desire of their own. Harper (2011) argued that Nancy Drew was presented as a positive and rational figure with a calm and cool demeanor even in dire situations. This is in direct contrast of the popular viewpoint during the 1930's of the adolescent female as an irrational and, at times, hysterical being. Harper (2011) argued that Nancy Drew is presented as independent, yet she doesn't descend into delinquency. Instead, she remains sure and steadfast. In addition, Harper (2011) contended that Nancy is portrayed as having a very trusting relationship with her father. Harper (2011) argued, however, that despite her strength, Nancy Drew is presented as a pure being without sexual desire. Many references are made to her varied abilities and charm, yet she remains chaste.

Kathleen Chamberlain (1994) argued in "The Secrets of Nancy Drew: Having Their Cake and Eating It Too" that Nancy Drew has done little to evolve over the years and in spite of this, *Nancy Drew* remains a popular book series for adolescents. Chamberlain (1994) contended that "Nancy Drew remains an adolescent superheroine despite contradictions in her character and despite a fundamental conservatism that at first seems surprising given her independent, adventurous reputation" and that Nancy is a "powerful cultural icon because of, not despite, the paradoxical nature of the lessons she teaches" (pg. 2). Besides references to pop culture such as clothes, slang, and cars, Chamberlain (1994) was able to find "only four significant developments over the years" including a slight change in attitude for the positive, a shortening of the books, an editing of racial and ethnic stereotypes, and, in the 1980's, a slant towards more contemporary plot lines focusing on adolescent issues (pg. 2-3). By detailing Nancy Drew's traits,

Chamberlain (1994) argued that Nancy Drew is portrayed as perfect and that the Nancy Drew books focus on plot and action due to this lack of well-developed characterization.

Amy Boesky (2010) argued in “Solving the Crime of Modernity: Nancy Drew in 1930” that the modernity present in the Nancy Drew books is controlled by Nancy Drew through language and the characterization of individuals in either “good” or “bad” groups. Boesky (2010) studied the first three books in the series published in 1930. In these books, Nancy Drew represents a form of modernity to the reader that encourages traditional middle-class values. As Boesky (2010) stated “however lighthearted their plots, these novels displayed morals and manners fit for middle-class emulation” (pg. 187).

During a time of change in our country, the Great Depression, the Nancy Drew novels “offered an escape from the harsh realities of the Depression, a collective fantasy of middle-class empowerment” that allowed Nancy Drew and characters like her “to set a disordered world right again” (Boesky, 2010, pg. 189). As result, the Nancy Drew books “continued to sell briskly during the depression” (Boesky, 2010, pg. 189). Boesky (2010) also argued that the criminals Nancy Drew encounters in the novels do not reform, but are instead revealed. According to Boesky (2010), their identities are fixed and Nancy alone is able to bring justice. It is interesting to note that Nancy often engages in the sort of behavior the criminals engage in, only Nancy is on the side of justice and is therefore allowed to “break the rules” (Boesky, 2010, pg. 190-191). But, as Boesky (2010) argued, there is no reason to fear because in the Nancy Drew novels “people get what they deserve and deserve what they get” (pg. 191).

According to Boesky (2010), modernity comes into play in the relationship between good and evil. Boesky (2010) argued that those on the side of justice and right, including Nancy Drew herself, are often associated with items representing modernity such as telephones and cars, while those associated with evil are often connected with less modern conveniences and poverty. Nancy frequently observes signs of modernity, or the lack thereof, in the world around her. According to Boesky (2010), these observations often help differentiate the criminals from the victims, however, as in *The Hidden Staircase* lack of modern amenities can also be used to reference those of good character who remain “stuck in the past.” Nancy feels “melancholy” when she thinks of them, though she soon returns to her world of modernity (Boesky, 2010, pg. 196).

With the number of people reading Nancy Drew books, Nancy’s impact on readers may be significant in numerous ways. Readers of the Nancy Drew series may have constructed viewpoints in regards to themselves based on the series. Jacqueline Reid-Walsh and Claudia Mitchell (2001) examined how pre-adolescent and adolescent girls view Nancy Drew and the Nancy Drew series in “The Case of the Whistle-Blowing Girls: Nancy Drew and Her Readers.” Nancy continually approaches uncomfortable situations with a clear and level head and is able to “do what is right” in all situations. Through a series of interviews, Reid-Walsh and Mitchell (2001) attempted to ascertain the impact that Nancy Drew has as a literary figure and possible role model on female adolescents. Reid-Walsh and Mitchell (2001) found that young girls were direct and tended to make connections with older female figures in their lives and Nancy Drew while older readers, on the other hand, were more guarded in their opinions and tended to distance themselves from the books.

Catherine Ross (1997) examined the reading habits of adolescents as well as the reasons why adolescents are drawn to series books in “Reading the Covers off Nancy Drew: What Readers Say about Series Books.” Ross (1997) argued that thousands of reading hours are needed to make children and adolescents confident readers. Through interviews, Ross (1997) ascertained that readers are drawn to series books for the formulaic structure as well as their familiar characters. Ross (1997) argued that by engaging in reading with characters, settings, and structures that are familiar to them, adolescents may be able to read with more ease and focus on different aspects of the books. Ross (1997) believed this may be especially useful in cases where children do not have the assistance of an adult. By reading series, Ross (1997) contended that adolescents may experience a familiar yet unfamiliar situation. Eventually, Ross (1997) found, readers may find the series predictable and move on to more challenging reading material. Therefore, Ross (1997) argued that series books may help beginning readers to bridge the gap between being read to and reading independently.

Unlike earlier studies that focused on specific Nancy Drew series published before 2000 as well as Nancy Drew’s character traits in text, I am studying the covers of books in the Nancy Drew series up to present day to attempt to discover how she is represented in order to understand the meaning transmitted through the cover design as well as how a longstanding female character was represented in literary media marketed to youth since 1930.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since Nancy Drew’s appearance in 1930, generations have been born and have grown to adulthood. Not only that, societal norms and customs changed as did dress and

propriety. By studying the cover design of books in the Nancy Drew series from 1930 to present day, an attempt to discover how Nancy Drew is represented may be made in order to better understand the meaning transmitted through the cover design as well as how a longstanding female character was represented in literary media marketed to youth since 1930. What, if anything, has remained consistent regarding Nancy Drew? And what has changed? When did the most drastic transformations take place? What meaning was communicated by each book cover?

Given the popularity of the Nancy Drew series, Nancy Drew's impact both as a literary figure as well as a lasting figure in pop culture is significant. Nancy Drew was a manufactured character, but to what end? Was Nancy Drew manufactured to appeal to pop culture? In addition, if Nancy Drew is manufactured to appeal to pop culture, how has pop culture altered Nancy Drew? Has Nancy Drew remained the strong and independent figure that she was when she first appeared in print?

Concerns about appealing to a specific audience may have shaped the representation of Nancy Drew. It is apparent that the representation of Nancy Drew was altered over time, sometimes drastically. One example is Nancy's hair color. Nancy's hair transforms from blonde to red between different series. A further example is her age. Nancy has been depicted at various stages, including that of a child and a young woman. These choices regarding Nancy Drew's representation may have been a result of marketing efforts. These representation choices are of great importance as literary works may greatly influence audience perceptions.

The covers create a time stamp, if you will, of perceived audience needs and culture at the time of publishing from the viewpoint of publishing houses. Along with

being useful for studying the transformation of a female literary character throughout a given time segment, series books with stable characters are especially useful for exploring marketing strategies and concepts over time as they reveal intended meanings through cover design. How, then, did marketing affect Nancy Drew? Was she able to retain her strength while growing her audience? And finally, how was a female character represented in literary media marketed to youth since 1930? The representation of Nancy Drew in cover design may aid in answering these questions.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD

The sample of book covers studied will consist of the first books in nine book series featuring Nancy Drew. In *The Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*, the book analyzed will be *The Secret of the Old Clock*. In this case, four separate covers of the book will be analyzed. The first cover was the original 1930s version. The second cover was released during the extensive revision process to the originals in the 1950s. The third cover was created during the 1960s and the final cover was created in 2014. The covers vary in appearance with the final cover being the most markedly different design. It is important to note that the *Nancy Drew Notebooks: The Slumber Party Secret* had two different covers. I was unable to locate one of the versions, however, and as a result, this analysis features only one of the two versions of *Nancy Drew Notebooks: The Slumber Party Secret*. Therefore, a total of 12 book covers consisting of the first book in each of the nine series as well as the three revisions to *The Secret of the Old Clock* will be included in this analysis.

The first books in each series were chosen as well as reprints of the covers for *The Secret of the Old Clock* because the covers in the first books in the series may be indicative of not only the tone for the rest of the series, but the choices made regarding Nancy Drew's representation in each series. It may also reveal the initial marketing message formed to represent the character at the time of the creation of the series. I feel that the first book of each series is critical to Nancy's representation because they are the first interaction a reader has with the series.

In this study, I use semiotic theory and the theory of representation as tools to do a close visual analysis and build on work previously done. I also utilize Goffman's

(1979) theories of the “ritualization of subordination,” the “feminine touch,” and “licensed withdrawal” in the analysis. These theories help to deconstruct signs present in the covers as well as better understand meaning contained in the covers. The theories also aid in identifying common practices used in advertising to transmit meaning. I have chosen to focus on studying the cover design of books in the Nancy Drew series because book covers are used as a form of advertisement to appeal to the reader audience. Book covers may feature as a text consisting of a multitude of signs transmitting meaning to a specific audience. By studying covers from the original Nancy Drew series as well as various spin-offs using semiotic analysis, a better understanding of the meaning transmitted through the covers of books in the Nancy Drew series as well as the representation of Nancy Drew as a female literary character marketed to youth since 1930 may be reached.

A semiotic analysis studies meaning present in signs. Within the semiotic analysis, I examined a wide variety of signs in search of signifiers and signifieds present in the cover images. I believe “an approach that thinks about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded; and that means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imaging” is crucial to my study (Rose, 2001, pg. 3). Representations of power were examined by analyzing body language as well as facial expression. The shape of the body, posture, and action were also analyzed. In addition, the setting of the scene featured on the cover was studied. In regards to scene, elements such as light and dark as well as representations of life and death were studied.

I examine reader position in relation to the cover as well as the viewpoint of Nancy Drew and any other individuals featured on the cover. Additional characters present on the covers were also analyzed. Styling choices were analyzed as well. Finally, objects present in the cover were analyzed along with any text that appeared on the cover, such as title and series name. Positioning of these various elements in the cover design relative to Nancy Drew and the reader were also included in the analysis. Examining book covers featuring Nancy Drew clarifies how Nancy is represented. It also aids in analyzing the different tools employed in cover art design by publishers for marketing purposes as well as how a single female literary character was transformed between 1930 and 2016.

It is important to include a book from each series as they all individually contain a representation of the character of Nancy Drew. By including a sample from each series, the various facets of Nancy Drew's character may be explored. Nancy Drew's representation shifts over time throughout the series. The three main categories that encapsulate these shifts in Nancy's representation could be defined as "Traditional Nancy," "Transitional Nancy," and "Nancy Fragmented." In addition to new titles, repeated revisions of *The Secret of the Old Clock* from 1930 through 1966 depict gradually shifting representations of Nancy. Though her representation does transform during this time, it retains a common thread of traditionalism. From 1970 through 1995, Nancy undergoes major transformations in representation. She is often pictured with other characters and in varying ages. In addition, she is sometimes depicted exploring new worlds. She is no longer simply revised, but reinvented. These representations depict a Nancy in transition, or Transitional Nancy. Finally, from 2004 through 2015, Nancy is

once again portrayed at various ages. However, in these covers, Nancy is often greatly transformed in her representation, her age, and her body image. Nancy is also sometimes shown only in fragments. With Nancy becoming increasingly identified by specific aspects of her personality and/or image, Nancy is fragmented. Therefore, the final section features the compilation of Nancy's representations thus far, from traditional through transitional to fragmented.

## CHAPTER FIVE: TRADITIONAL NANCY

From 1930 through the 1960s, Nancy Drew is represented in a traditional form. In popular culture, the 1930s through the 1960s demonstrated a time of social conservatism for women. American culture emphasized the woman's role as a feminine entity and a caretaker while the combination of an economic depression and war allowed women to demonstrate their strength, intelligence, and ability to take on traditionally masculine roles while retaining their femininity. *The Secret of the Old Clock* was Nancy Drew's first mystery. The original series was successful and, perhaps due to that success, revisions to *The Secret of the Old Clock* included changes to the book covers over time. In addition to the 1930s representation of Nancy Drew, *The Secret of the Old Clock* has both a 1950s and a 1960s representation of the girl detective. Each representation featured on the book covers of *The Secret of the Old Clock* relays a unique message and each is linked, in some way, with the traditional representation of the original Nancy Drew.

### NANCY DREW MYSTERY STORIES: THE SECRET OF THE OLD CLOCK (1930)

The book cover of the 1930s version of *The Secret of the Old Clock* features a young woman walking through the woods while grasping a clock. She walks along a path and is dressed in a long-sleeved blue dress with matching blue hat and scarf. The dress is modest and the hem ends just below her knees. Her shoes have low heels and are stylish for the time period. She carries a clock wrapped in a flannel blanket. As she walks, she leans forward, with both her scarf and the flannel blanket rippling in the wind.

The clock itself is large and somewhat ornate. It appears to be made of wood and could possibly be very heavy. Nancy carries it tucked under one arm with both hands

gripping it tightly. Nancy herself appears as a very stylish and slim young woman with perfectly coiffed blonde hair. She is also wearing make-up consisting of red lipstick and blush. Her blue eyes are large and defined. Though she wears visible make-up, her wide eyes and expression portray her as a nice, yet daring, girl. While her face is turned to the reader, her gaze is high and she appears to be looking both above and past the reader. Nancy walks along a path in the woods, though the woods fade into the background, bringing Nancy to the front.

Nancy is erect and appears to be tall and fit. Her manner of movement, leaning forward into the wind while gazing into the distance, conveys a sense of purpose, almost a higher calling. She is intent on her mission and determined as she hurries along the path. As Goffman (1979) argued in his theory of “ritualization of subordination,” “holding the body erect and the head high is stereotypically a mark of unashamedness, superiority, and disdain” (pg. 40). These signs, along with her body language, convey a sense of strength and independence. As Hall stated previously, it is important to remember that “the *meaning* depends not on the material quality of the sign, but on its *symbolic function* (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, italics in original, pg. 11). The signifier of her physique and movement combined with the signified of strength and independence are apparent. By portraying Nancy as tall and fit along with her determined manner of movement, the meaning conveyed here is that Nancy is strong and confident.

Nancy’s facial expression also signifies determination. While attractive, Nancy’s facial features are those of strength. Her mouth is set in a firm line and she appears to be very serious. These signs once again point to a sense of purpose, strength, and independence. It is interesting to note that the reader viewpoint in this example is that of

a bystander. The reader is not engaged by Nancy in the scene. Only the tilt of her body towards the reader allows the reader to view the clock and the clock acts almost as a shield for Nancy. Nancy does not meet the reader's gaze, but instead gazes above and beyond the reader. Looking at this semiotically, this sets Nancy apart from the reader, once again establishing her independence and strength.

Nancy's clothing is that of a well-off and stylish woman in the 1930s. The dress is modest and practical. The scarf, hat, make-up, and low heels allow Nancy to convey that she is feminine. Clothing in itself may signify not only class, but other classifications such as gender. As represented here, Nancy's choice of stylish and neat clothing with accessories places her as middle- to upper-class. It also conveys Nancy's femininity. Nancy is completing her mission while retaining her femininity. The action in the scene is that of Nancy carrying a clock. The blanket falling from the clock makes it appear as if Nancy was covering it. This, along with her furtive manner and hurried stance, conveys the message that the clock is of some importance. The signifier of the clock is combined with the signified of the concept of time to produce a sign. Looking at this from a semiotic perspective, the clock represents the past. It's an old-fashioned clock and is even referred to in the title as "the old clock." These signs along with Nancy's modern dress convey the message that Nancy is "new" or progressive and that the "old" or past will be carried along with her to a bright new future.

Up to this point, the concentration of analysis has been on iconic signs. Hall defined iconic signs as "visual signs" that "bear, in their form, a certain resemblance to the object, person, or event to which they refer" (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 7). However, the text present on the cover also warrants examination. According to Hall,

“[W]ritten or spoken signs, on the other hand, are what is called *indexical*” and “bear no obvious relationship at all to the things in which they refer” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, italics in original, pg. 7). However, the choices made regarding these “written signs” can assist in illuminating the meaning present on the cover. As argued by Barthes (1977), “it is the caption which selects one out of the many possible meanings from the image, and *anchors* it with words” (Barthes, 1977/2013, italics in original, pg. 218). Therefore, it is critical to examine the wording featured on the book covers.

The text of the series name, *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*, is featured at the top of the cover in italicized and underlined yellow font. The slanting script of the font along with the color choice displays elements of femininity and establishes the *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* as a feminine series of books. However, the underlining of the script conveys a quiet strength and seriousness. The title of the book, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, is in blue capital block lettering with white outlines around the letters. This font style dominates the remaining text on the page and conveys a sense of seriousness. The choice of font color and lettering are almost masculine. We see this juxtaposition once more in the text featured at the bottom right corner of the page. The text reads, *By Carolyn Keene*, in the same style of blue center and white outline featured in the title. However, the lettering, *By*, is once again italicized while the author name, *Carolyn Keene*, exactly mirrors the block lettering of the title. By featuring font styles as signifiers and the concepts of femininity and masculinity as signifieds, “Carolyn Keene” becomes a sign of both of strength and femininity. She is represented as feminine, yet resilient and intelligent. Even the name choice of Keene denotes a sense of intelligence and intense curiosity. When comparing the two names, Nancy Drew and Carolyn Keene, only the

name Keene can be directly connected to mysteries through its homonym with the word “keen”. The dictionary defines keen as “showing a quick and ardent responsiveness: enthusiastic, eager” and “intellectually alert: having or characteristic of a quick penetrating mind *also*: shrewdly astute, sharply contested, extremely sensitive in perception” (“Keen,” 2017). The author Carolyn Keene is a dominant personality on the page despite the fact that she doesn’t exist. She is established as such through signs.

The wording of the text is also important to note. The series title, *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*, establishes that the character Nancy Drew is central to the series. It also conveys that, while the series will feature mysteries, they are only stories. The title of the book, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, conveys a message similar to the imagery. The word, *Secret*, adds to the mystery aspect without creating a true sense of danger. It is instead a “safe” mystery suited for the feminine character featured on the cover. The *Old Clock* reiterates the message of time and the past. It is an odd description to choose for an object featured in the title. One could argue that *The Secret of the Clock* conveys a similar message. Yet, the word *Old* was purposefully included to establish a sense of past versus present. Both the series name and title are centered across the top of the cover above Nancy and the wording runs to each edge of the cover, filling the space completely. These signs present on this cover signify that the present is overtaking the past. In addition, the wording of both the series title and the book title signify Nancy’s relative safety and identity through mystery.

Finally, the setting of the woods lends an air of mystery and danger to the cover. Nancy adds to this through her body language. By placing Nancy in a remote location that conveys these themes, Nancy is positioned as a brave character intent on her mission.

Nancy travels alone, but it is daytime and the trees are green and flowers edge the tree trunks. This signifies that, although the woods are remote and mysterious, Nancy is safe. The signs present on this cover convey both the message that the present is carrying the past forward as well as the message that females are strong, capable, and intelligent. Altogether, the cover design of the 1930s version of *The Secret of the Old Clock* consists of signs that relay a message of feminine strength and independence as well as the forward motion of time and modernity.

#### NANCY DREW MYSTERY STORIES: THE SECRET OF THE OLD CLOCK (1950)

In the 1950s versions of *The Secret of the Old Clock* Nancy Drew is positioned off center. She no longer hurries across the screen, but instead, she kneels on the ground in the middle of a field bordered by tall grass, bushes, and a tree. Rolling hills rise behind into a night sky. The center object appears to be a small journal or notebook. It may be surmised that Nancy has just removed a notebook critical to the mystery from the open clock face in front of her. It is not as clear that the item lying on the ground is a clock, however. It is difficult to distinguish as a clock due to its simplicity. A flashlight lays on the ground and its beam focuses mainly on Nancy's knees, but also appears to illuminate parts of the clock and Nancy's upper body and face. Nancy wears a dark blue short-sleeved dress with a high collar and knee-length hem. The dress is tailored to fit Nancy and is plain and modest. One shoe is barely visible through the grass and it appears to be brown and sensible. Nancy wears no jewelry and little make-up. It appears, in fact, that she is wearing only red lipstick. Nancy's hair is blonde and is short, but carefully styled.

In this version, Nancy's body language remains active though she no longer hurries across the book cover, but instead kneels in place. Goffman (1979) calls this

“ritualization of subordination” and describes it as “[A] classic stereotype of deference” by “lowering oneself physically in some form or other of prostration” (pg. 40).

Positioning of the individual is a key aspect of analysis. As Sean Nixon argued “[I]ndividuals are positioned within particular discourses, then, as an effect of power upon them. This might work, for example, through the intensification of the pleasures of the body, its posture and movements, and the solidifying of certain practices. This is a productive relation, with power constituting the fabric of the individual and the individual’s conduct” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 311). By positioning Nancy in this manner, she has relinquished some of her power and independence to another, in this case, the viewer. Once again, however, she appears to be fit. Her upper body is tilted forward, towards both the reader and the notebook in her hands, making her appear to be engaged and interested. She is concentrating totally on the notebook in her hands. The tilt of her body towards the reader along with her engagement with an item connected to the mystery are signs that convey Nancy’s determination and strength. Nancy is focused on the task at hand.

Nancy’s facial expression is one of great interest. Nancy’s facial features are once again quite strong. Her mouth is pursed and her eyebrows raised with eyes wide as she surveys the notebook, here demonstrating interest in and total focus on the notebook in her hands. Her gaze is fixed upon it. Nancy’s engagement with the notebook along with her expression are signifiers. When the signifiers are combined with the signified concepts of cleverness and fortitude, the signs point to a sense of purpose, strength, independence, and intelligence. Once again, Nancy does not engage with the reader.

Instead, the reader is again regulated to that of a bystander and Nancy is portrayed as independent and strong.

Though Nancy still wears blue, her clothing is much different than in the previous version. Her dress in the 1950's version is extremely plain and modest with a high collar and little decoration. Gone are the scarf and hat from the previous version. Though she remains feminine in a tailored skirt and blouse, there is an absence of signifiers in the form of clothing associated with signifieds of wealth and femininity. Therefore, the signs present in Nancy's representation do not convey a strong sense of femininity, but instead a sense of middle-class practicality. Her mission is now at the forefront and Nancy's clothing and styling are no longer of great importance.

The action in this scene concentrates on Nancy's reaction to the notebook in her hands. She studies it with great interest, focusing the attention on both herself and the notebook. However, in direct contrast to the prior cover in which Nancy grasps the clock with both hands, this representation of Nancy holds the notebook delicately. It appears as if most of the weight rests on her fingertips. As Goffman (1979) states in his analysis of the "feminine touch" "[W]omen, more than men, are pictured using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle it or to caress its surface... or to effect a 'just barely touching' of the kind that might be significant between two electrically charged bodies. This ritualistic touching is to be distinguished from the utilitarian kind that grasps, manipulates, or holds" (pg. 29). The signifier of touch combined with the signified of femininity forms a sign in which Nancy's power and strength is compromised.

This concentration on the notebook conveys that the notebook is of great importance and the clock has been relegated to a place of lower importance. Once again, the clock represents time, but in this version, time has little meaning. It is used only as a vessel of the mystery and has little importance to Nancy. The placement of both the notebook and clock are signs which convey that Nancy has left the past behind her and is now a progressive woman. The focus is no longer on Nancy, but the mystery at hand.

The wording of the text in the 1950s version of *The Secret of the Old Clock* is very similar to the 1930s version with only a few marked differences. Once again, the series name, *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*, dominates the top portion of the book cover. However, the text is no longer in italics or underlined. It is also a very bright yellow color. Finally, in this version, the series title *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* is the wording in all caps and centered, placing the emphasis and importance on the series rather than the individual book title. The lack of italics on the page and its replacement with block lettering removes some of the delicate qualities of the text while replacing it with a font of great strength. These signs convey a decrease in femininity and an increase in masculinity.

The book title, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, however, is of lesser importance than in the 1930s version. This places the emphasis not on the mystery, but on the scene. The title is no longer centered, but right aligned. It is also colored in white and is no longer in all capitalization. In fact, it is the only lettering on the book cover that is not written in all capital letters. The author name, Carolyn Keene, matches the font color of the book title, but is in capital letters. While the book series and title names are at the top of the book cover, the name Carolyn Keene remains at the bottom right hand corner and partially

covers Nancy's knee. This sign of attachment conveys that Carolyn Keene is associated with Nancy Drew and is becoming dependent on her. It is interesting to note that the word "By" is no longer present in this version. The fictitious author is no longer claiming Nancy Drew as her own.

The setting in this scene is once again a landscape. However, this landscape differs from the landscape of the 1930s. In the 1950s version, the setting is dark and desolate. It appears to be night and the grass surrounding Nancy is wilted and dead. Nancy kneels on the ground among the weeds and dead grass surrounding her with the bare branches of a tree overhead. But though she is surrounded by dead plants and bare limbs, green bushes are also present. This conveys that life is still present and not all is lost. The meaning relayed by the signifiers of both dead and living foliage along with the signifieds of danger and safety in this setting is that Nancy is in danger, but is unafraid. She still has hope as represented by the green bushes around her. She is strong and sure among the danger as she studies the notebook.

It is interesting to note how elements of light and dark are used in this version. The landscape around Nancy is dark and dangerous, yet Nancy herself, the notebook, and parts of the clock are illuminated in light. Nancy remains in the safety of light while the world around her is dark and troubled. She fears not though she is alone in a dark and desolate field. These signs convey that Nancy and the mystery, here represented by the clock and the notebook, are paramount and separated from the rest of the world. With the increased danger of setting, it may be argued that Nancy sacrifices at least part of her femininity in exchange for a stronger depiction of these previously mentioned qualities. The only area in which she is particularly feminized is that of touch. This is interesting

because the form of touch Nancy displays is typically portrayed as a weakened form of touch by Goffman (1979). It is also the only way in which Nancy physically interacts with an element of the mystery on this cover. The signifier of touch along with the signified concepts of weakness and femininity conveys a sign in which Nancy's femininity is expressed as a detriment to her purpose. However, the overall cover design of the 1950s version of *The Secret of the Old Clock* relays a message of strength, independence, and determination.

#### NANCY DREW MYSTERY STORIES: THE SECRET OF THE OLD CLOCK (1966)

In the 1960s version of *The Secret of the Old Clock* Nancy Drew is positioned in the center of the cover. Once again, Nancy kneels on the ground in the middle of a dark field bordered by tall grass and trees, but this time, the setting is much darker and Nancy has no flashlight to aid her. In one hand, she grasps a clock while in the other she holds a screwdriver. The clock's face has been pried open. Nancy wears a green short-sleeved dress. The hem falls at her knees and the dress is tailored to fit Nancy. On her left wrist, Nancy wears a watch. Nancy's red hair is carefully styled and she appears to be wearing make-up. Her shoes are barely visible through the grass.

Nancy's body language on this cover bears some similarity to the 1950s cover. In the 1960s version, Nancy kneels on the ground, but this time she leans away from the reader. Her posture is almost defensive as she gazes over her left shoulder apprehensively. As mentioned previously, this is another example of Goffman's (1979) "ritualization of subordination." Nancy has taken an even more submissive kneeling position than in the prior cover. Though it is apparent she has pried open the clock's face, she looks away from it. This separates the action from Nancy Drew herself. The signifier

of Nancy's body position combined with the signified of fear and apprehension forms a sign conveying that, while Nancy is completing her mission, it is with some trepidation. She is becoming increasingly submissive and frightened.

Nancy's expression is also fearful. Her mouth is slightly open and her chin is tucked. Her gaze is slightly above her, but it is directed to her left. No longer does Nancy gaze in the direction of the reader. Instead, she appears to be gazing at something or someone off scene. Goffman's (1979) "licensed withdrawal" argued that "[W]omen more than men, it seems, are pictured engaged in involvements which remove them psychologically from the social situation at large, leaving them unoriented in it and to it, and presumably, therefore, dependent on the protectiveness and goodwill of others who are (or might come to be) present" (pg. 57). Nancy appears to be focused outside of the scene. This removes her from the reader, once again establishing Nancy as independent of the reader. However, the signifiers including the direction of her gaze along with her body language convey the signifieds of a sense of anxiety and fear. Though Nancy is facing it, she now realizes the danger she is in and conveys this message to the reader.

Nancy's clothing is once again modest for the era she is in. She appears to be fit and slim and does not hesitate to wear a dress while solving mysteries. Nancy retains her modesty in a dress by kneeling with her knees together. Her manner of dress, along with her watch, signify that Nancy is a stylish young middle-class woman. The message conveyed here is that Nancy is feminine, but not overly ladylike. Instead, she appears to be almost girlish and relatable.

The reader viewpoint is once again that of a bystander. In this scene, however, the reader no longer views an active Nancy, but instead, Nancy is still. She is unaware of the

reader and is totally fixated on something to her left. The setting in this scene is once again a landscape, however, this landscape differs greatly from the landscape of the 1930s and even the 1950s. In the 1960s version, the setting is much darker. It appears to be night and the trees in the background are bare. Nancy kneels on the ground with weeds and dead trees surrounding her. The signifiers are the dead trees and weeds while the signifieds are the concepts of danger, desolation, and death. The meaning relayed through the signs present in this setting is that Nancy is in danger and is right to be afraid.

The text on the cover of the book is similar once again to previous versions. The series name, *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*, is written in yellow block text and in capital letters. The difference here is that the font is much smaller. No longer does it fill the area, but instead is centered, leaving plenty of room on each side for additional imagery. The title, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, is also centered and is once more just below the series name. It is again composed of white lettering, but this time, it is in all capital letters as well. Though the series name and book title are centered on the top of the book above Nancy, they do not fill the space from the spine to the cover's edge as they did before. The signs present in the wording and font choices of the series name and title convey a sense of importance and strength.

The most dramatic difference is the placement and text concerning the author. The text is now featured on the left side of the book and is once more below Nancy and is not attached to her in any way. It is composed of yellow font and the wording consists of "by Carolyn Keene" with the author's name in all capital letters. The signs present in the author's name convey that the author is now more closely associated with the series and less with the character and individual stories in the series. Carolyn Keene is also losing

her power as an “author”. On previous covers, her name was prominently placed to convey a sense of power and authority in regards to Nancy. On this cover, however, her role is diminished through the placement and size of the text featuring her name.

The items in this scene are a clock and a screwdriver. The screwdriver has been used by Nancy to pry open the clock. A glass panel swings wide, revealing the clock face. The clock itself is old-fashioned and made of wood and glass. A carved moon appears to hover at the top of the clock. The signifier is once again the clock with the signified the concept of time. The moon as a signifier may convey several meanings depending on the signified. In this case, I argue that the moon is a signifier and the signified is femininity. These signs along with Nancy “breaking” the clock convey that Nancy is challenging the traditional roles of femininity. It is interesting to note that in this case, Nancy no longer displays Goffman’s (1979) “feminine touch.” She has reverted back to the original representation of the use of her hands and grasps the screwdriver firmly. While this may signify that she is fighting against the loss of her power, it may also signify that she now possesses tools traditionally associated with men. Nancy is trying to break free of the “old” or the past, but is fearful of the repercussions as communicated by her stance and expression.

## CHAPTER SIX: TRANSITIONAL NANCY

Transitional Nancy includes series published between 1977 and 1995. In popular culture, the 1970s through the 1990s represented a time of change for women. American women demanded equality in several facets of their lives, including the workplace and education. In the 1980s, concerns mounted in pop culture that the ideals of the 1950s were making a return. However, the 1990s saw renewed interest in feminism. Starting in the 1970s with the short-lived picture book series, *A Picture Book: Nancy Drew*, the representation of Nancy Drew shifts. No longer is Nancy simply revised to fit a changing time period. Instead, she is introduced to new worlds as in *Nancy Drew on Campus* and new age groups as in *Nancy Drew Notebooks*. Along with these fundamental changes to her character, Nancy undergoes changes to her representation. She is a Nancy in transition, exploring the domains of childhood through adulthood and in between. While these explorations are valuable, it appears through the messages conveyed in these covers that Nancy is gradually losing her original strength and independence.

### A PICTURE BOOK: NANCY DREW: MYSTERY OF THE LOST DOGS (1977)

While only 61 pages in length, *A Picture Book: Nancy Drew: Mystery of the Lost Dogs* is the first book representing Transitional Nancy. The cover of *A Picture Book: Nancy Drew: Mystery of the Lost Dogs* features a young woman, Nancy Drew, and two young boys. The background is beige with a cobblestone pattern leading from Nancy and the children to a group of six dogs in the background. The dogs are of various breeds, including what appears to be a bull terrier, a beagle, a corgi, a cocker spaniel, an Irish setter, and a bloodhound. Nancy Drew stands behind the boys in a white-collared blouse and red top combination. It is unclear if the top is a dress or a shirt. On her wrist is a gold

bracelet. One of the boys has red hair, freckles, and a gap in his front teeth. He holds a string attached to an orange balloon in his left hand and wears a red and pink striped shirt. The other boy has brown hair and wears a brown and yellow plaid shirt.

This cover features several significant changes from previous covers. To begin with, the background is unclear. Besides the dogs, Nancy Drew, and the boys, the background area on the cover is simply beige with no detail. A further important feature thus far not present is the addition of other characters. It is significant to note that other characters are featured on the cover at all. In previous covers, Nancy Drew was alone, signifying independence. However, in this instance, she is joined by others and her independence is lost. It is significant, though, that she retains a position of power and strength by being the “adult” on this cover.

By positioning her with the young boys, Nancy Drew takes on a motherly role. She is without an adult male character and becomes the “caretaker” of both the boys and the dogs. The action present on the cover, however, is not performed by Nancy. Instead, the two boys take on the dominant roles. Both boys wear plain and simple tops and both meet the gaze of the reader, though the boy with brown hair’s gaze is more striking. Only his upper chest and head are in view of the reader, the rest fading into the beige background. Without the benefit of his arms, he gazes in a very solemn and direct fashion at the reader. The boy with red hair also gazes at the reader, but he appears to be in motion. He holds onto his balloon, which crosses in front of Nancy to float in the left hand corner overhead.

Nancy Drew walks behind the boys and, while her body faces the reader, she gazes over her left shoulder at the dogs with an expression of concern. Nancy’s

positioning is an interesting choice. Goffman (1979) argued that “[A] ritualization of participation shielding occurs when one presents oneself as if on the edge of the situation or otherwise shielded from it physically” with a specific example being the positioning “[F]rom behind a person (with the consequent opportunity to overlay distance with a differentiating expression, in the extreme, collusive betrayal of one’s shield)” (pg. 71-72). Nancy is using the children as a shield, not from any danger present in the scene, but from the *reader*. In previous covers, Nancy’s hands were free and active. In this cover, only one hand is visible and it is non-active. Looking at this semiotically, it appears that Nancy is losing some of her independence and power. Nancy’s lips are parted and her lips are turned down, almost to a frown. Her gaze is directed behind her and is intense. The meaning conveyed through her expression is one of concern and danger. Her shoulders are slumped and her body is tilted away from the focus point of her gaze. Though she communicates that there is a sense of danger near them, she places herself physically between the danger and the children. The meaning conveyed through her posture is one of protection and defensiveness. These signs again place Nancy Drew as the caretaker and a motherly figure. As represented here, Nancy’s positioning behind the boys falls under Goffman’s (1979) “licensed withdrawal” as she is removed psychologically from the scene and, when combined with her distant gaze, the signs communicate that Nancy is taking on a submissive, defensive, and increasingly powerless role (pg. 57).

The dogs are also important to this cover. As described above, various breeds are pictured. I identify the breeds present on the cover as a beagle, corgi, bloodhound, Irish setter, cocker spaniel, and a bull terrier. Three of these dogs, the beagle, the corgi, and the

bloodhound, appear to gaze to the right in a similar fashion to Nancy. It could be argued that all four are gazing at the same off-cover item or person. The other three dogs, the Irish setter, the cocker spaniel, and the bull terrier, gaze at the reader. By allotting half of the dogs to gaze at the reader and half to gaze off-cover alongside Nancy, a relationship between both the reader and Nancy is established. None of the dogs appear to be distressed. The Irish setter seems to be wagging its tail while the corgi pants. The bloodhound appears to be the most relaxed as the wrinkles of his face fold into a smile. Of the three remaining dogs, only one, the bull terrier, tilts his head down as if concerned. The other two, the beagle and the cocker spaniel, sit or stand upright with their heads raised. The body language communicated by the dogs collectively is one of strength, independence, and contentment. The meaning conveyed here is that, of all the characters on the book cover, only Nancy is represented as fearful, concerned, and threatened. This is interesting because, at times, Nancy is described as owning a dog named Togo. She is not, therefore, afraid of dogs in general, but rather the mystery surrounding the dogs on the cover.

Nancy Drew is dressed stylishly, yet her body is not overtly feminine. Her body and clothing is almost androgynous. The white collared blouse and top are extremely plain. Gone is the careful tailoring of previous versions. The only feminine article attached to Nancy is the gold bracelet on her right wrist. Nancy appears to be wearing very light make-up, if any, and her red hair is at shoulder length. It is not as carefully styled as in previous versions, though it is neat. The meaning conveyed through these signs is again that of Nancy as a mother figure. Now that she fills that role, she is no longer allowed femininity separate from that role. She is “mother” instead of “woman.”

The wording of the series name and title are interesting. The text of all wording on the book cover is in black and centered at the top of the book cover. The series name, *A Picture Book: Nancy Drew*, is in different fonts with *Nancy Drew* being the largest font as well as underlined. The book title, *Mystery of the Lost Dogs*, is also underlined and is placed just below *Nancy Drew*. Underneath the book title is the author byline, *by Carolyn Keene*. Both the series title and the book title are in all capital letters. The author byline, however, only capitalizes the first letter of each word and is in much smaller font, though still bold. Finally, the wording *illustrated by Tom O'Sullivan* is located under the author byline. Again, the first letter of each word excepting "by" is capitalized, but this is the only wording not written in bold ink. It is important to note that this is the first time in this analysis that an actual human being has been credited by their name on the cover of a book featuring Nancy Drew as a character. The title, *Mystery of the Lost Dogs*, is once again non-threatening. The dogs do not appear to be in danger, merely lost. They are capable of being found and removed from any danger they may be in. The meaning conveyed through the signs present in the text is one of safety despite Nancy's representation of fearfulness and danger. The choice of centering, boldness of text, and font size signifies that Nancy Drew is the most important aspect of the book, followed closely by the book title, or the mystery.

Though in previous versions it has been possible to study concepts of light and dark and life and death, there is not enough imagery here to accurately pinpoint these themes. The absence of such imagery is itself telling. The only focus apparent in the cover is of Nancy, the children, and the dogs. This is signifying that they are the most importance aspects of Nancy's character and her world revolves around them. It is

apparent through the gradually fading into beige nothingness that she does not exist outside of this realm.

#### NANCY DREW FILES: SECRETS CAN KILL (1986)

On the cover of *Secrets Can Kill* Nancy Drew is to the right of center. *Secrets Can Kill* was published in the 1980s and Nancy once again reflects the cultural trends of the decade of publication. She is dressed in blue jeans and a blue jacket. She is wearing make-up and her blonde hair is loose and long. She is slim and attractive. Nancy stands in the foreground and a man stands behind her. He is dressed in blue jeans, a belt, a dress shirt, and has a pink sweater tied around his shoulders. He is blond and well-built. In the background, the front of a red car is visible. It is engulfed in flames and smoke billows across the cover from the fire. Besides the two figures and the car, the cover is blank white space.

Nancy's body language is significant. She stands with her back to the man and her body in profile to the reader. Her hands are shoved into her pockets and she stands as if posing. As stated before, hands are often used as signifiers. In Nancy's case, the signifieds are independence, strength, and work. Her hands are signs of the tools of her trade. The message conveyed by the positioning of her hands in her pocket is that she is defiant, yet powerless. She no longer has control of the hands that were put into action in previous covers. Even in the 1970's *Mystery of the Lost Dogs*, Nancy retained one hand visible to the reader. Instead, on this cover she hides her hands, yet she pushes against the pockets of her jacket, straining against the fabric as if she desires to free her hands. The cover ends mid-thigh for Nancy, but from her posture, it appears as if she is resting most of her weight on the leg nearest the reader. Goffman (1979) describes this pose as the

“bashful knee bend” (pg. 45). He argued that “the knee bend can be read as a foregoing of full effort to be prepared and on the ready in the current social situation, for the position adds a moment to any effort to fight or flee” therefore the position “seems to presuppose the goodwill of anyone in the surround who could offer harm” (Goffman, 1979, pg. 45). It appears that both Nancy and the male featured on the cover have similar poses, however, Nancy’s is the only one in which we can see her knee. This is representative of a lack of urgency and danger in their surroundings. Nancy’s body language here conveys a sense of independence and strength, yet she has lost the power of action her hands previously gave her. They were used to solve mysteries, but in this cover, they are hidden from view.

The action in the scene, however, is not related to Nancy Drew. She stands separate from the action, almost as if she is unaware of it. In the background, a car burns and the smoke rises behind her, yet she pays no attention to it. The man in the cover does not pay any attention to the burning car, either. Instead, he focuses his complete attention on Nancy Drew. He gazes directly at her. This conveys a sense of possession, though he is positioned behind Nancy and appears smaller than her in the cover. Goffman (1979) argued that “[O]ne way in which social weight – power, authority, rank, office, renown – is echoed expressively in social situations is through relative size, especially height” and that “so thoroughly is it assumed that differences in size will correlate with differences in social weight that relative size can be routinely used as a means of ensuring that the picture’s story will be understandable at a glance” (pg. 28). However, Goffman (1979) does point out an exception that seems to be applicable in this case, stating “on the very few occasions when women are pictured taller than men, the men seem almost always to

be not only subordinated in social class status, but also thoroughly costumed as craft-bound servitors” (pg. 28). This is not the case in this situation. Instead of being pictured as a subordinate, the man stands with his arms crossed. This indicates that he is defensive. He is muscled and he faces the reader with his body. He is sure of himself and strong, yet his hands, too, remain hidden. It may be argued that the man encapsulates Nixon’s ‘conservative Englishness’ look (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 307). According to Nixon, in the ‘conservative Englishness look’ hair style is critical and is typically “cropped at the sides and back, but left long enough on top to be pushed back... [T]his combines the romantic associations of long hair with the connotations of the masculine discipline and civilized neatness of the ‘short back and sides’” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 307). Nixon argued that clothing is also indicative with clothing “made of cotton (the shirts) and a wool-mixture (the suits) – materials which signify quality and tradition” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 307). Nixon also argued that posture and expression may be open to the viewer and therefore “openly solicits our look at him” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 309). In this cover, it may be argued that the man is demonstrating this open posture. As argued by Nixon, this representation combines “the assertive masculinity associated with a dominant version of Englishness and entrepreneurial codes of business and, on the other, the romantic connotations of narcissistic young manhood” (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 309).

The clothing in the scene remains modest. Nancy’s jeans are tight, but her jacket is loose and she is fully clothed. While the clothing is fashionable for the 1980s, it is no longer inherently feminine or expensive. Instead, Nancy’s clothing signifies that she is middle-class. The man is dressed in a similar fashion to Nancy. However, his dress shirt

and sweater combined with his styled hair signifies wealth. In addition, Nancy's hair is also loose and disheveled, while the man in the scene has carefully styled his hair. As represented here, the male figure on this cover is of a higher social class than Nancy and therefore has greater power. It is significant to note that the man is in the cover at all. In previous covers, Nancy Drew was alone or accompanied by children, signifying a sense of independence or strength. However, in this instance, she is joined by a man who demonstrates greater strength and power than Nancy and her independence is lost.

The facial expressions of both Nancy and the man are significant. Nancy Drew stares directly at the reader while the man gazes directly at Nancy. It is important to note Nixon's argument that "the way visual pleasures are coded in the representations are connected to wider gender scripts and sexual identities – in other words, who looks at whom and in what way" (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, pg. 310). By gazing at Nancy, the man establishes dominance and control. For the first time, the reader is able to meet Nancy's gaze. This signifies that Nancy is equal to the reader and that she has withdrawn from the man. Goffman (1979) argued that "[T]urning one's gaze away from another's can be seen as having the consequence of withdrawing from the current thrust of communication... Since flight is not exhibited in this gaze – aversive behavior, some sort of submission to and trust in the source of the stimulus seems to be implied" (pg. 62). Once again, Nancy has lost a sense of independence and communicated a submissive message. No longer is she intent on her mission, instead, she is now aware of both the reader and her male companion and has joined them at their level, even going so far as to be submissive to the male companion.

The reader's viewpoint is at Nancy's level. Only Nancy appears to be aware of the reader as if beckoning the reader to join her. The setting appears to be insignificant to the scene. Much of the cover is filled with blank white space. Only the fiery car and the smoke in the background give the scene a sense of setting. The burning car is red and appears to be a sports car. The red color of the car signifies romance while the fact that it is a sports car signifies speed and independence. The car is engulfed in flames and the smoke rising from it fills the cover, signifying that both romance and independence are dangerous and lead to destruction.

The wording present on the cover of the book includes the series title and the book title as well as the author name. The series title, *The Nancy Drew Files Case 1*, is written in a variety of text. The lettering is in all capital letters and the series has been trademarked. In addition, the words *The Nancy Drew* are in a dark purple that closely resembles the coloring of Nancy Drew's clothing as well as the smoke in the picture. Nancy Drew's name is the dominant text on the sheet. Nancy Drew is centered, while the rest of the text on the page is right-aligned. The words *Files Case 1* are written in white text against a red block. This block is additionally used to underline Nancy Drew's name, while also drawing attention to the book's number in the series. The book title, *Secrets Can Kill*, is also written in capital letters with drop shadowing, however, the font is much smaller. While the drop shadowing is the same color as both the author byline and the name *Nancy Drew*, the center color of the lettering is a light gold. The book title, however, is underlined and it places emphasis on the book title. The author byline, *Carolyn Keene*, is positioned directly underneath the book title. The end of the lettering in Keene trails into the fire and smoke. This is the only wording written in both upper-

and lower-case lettering. The meaning conveyed by the series title, book title, and author byline is that the individual book or mystery presented by Nancy Drew as well as the author of Nancy Drew is less important than the character of Nancy Drew herself.

Light and dark are represented in various ways in this cover. The light of the flames on the car and the darkness of the smoke are one example. The other is the light and darkness of clothing. A final representation of light and dark is the white light of the background. This blank white space communicates, once again, a sense of safety. Though danger is present, it is not overwhelming. As far as the flames and smoke, it is interesting to note that the light of the flames appears behind the male on the cover, while the dark smoke is behind Nancy. This is also present in the clothing. The male wears light clothing while Nancy's clothing is dark. These signs convey that the male in the cover is safe, while Nancy herself is in danger. It could even be argued that the male himself represents pureness or safety, while Nancy represents temptation and risk.

Representations of life and death are scarce on this cover. It could be argued, however, that death is represented in the image of the fiery car. The male is posed in front of the car. This may convey that the male is a danger to Nancy's life and represents death. When combined with the concept of light and dark, it may be argued that the signs convey that Nancy is unaware of the danger and potential for death present in the male character and instead sees only goodness and safety in the character.

NANCY DREW NOTEBOOKS: THE SLUMBER PARTY SECRET (1994)

In *The Nancy Drew Notebooks* series, the first book title is *The Slumber Party Secret*. The cover of the book features a white background with a framed scene centered in the middle of the book cover. This scene is framed in purple with black leaves and

vines and a white interior border. The scene features four children of around ten years of age. The child in front is presumably Nancy Drew. She wears a purple dress and white long-sleeved shirt and leggings. The dress appears to have the same pattern of black leaves and vines as the frame. The white shirt appears to have a matching pattern. Nancy has shoulder-length blonde hair and bangs. She carries a flashlight in one hand. A girl with curly brown shoulder-length hair stands behind Nancy. Her left hand is on Nancy's shoulder while she clasps her chest with the other. She appears to be wearing a green sweater dress with white detail and green leggings. In the Nancy Drew books, a popular character is that of George. George is a girl the same age as Nancy typically described as having short, dark, curly hair. For ease of description, I will assume the girl is George and refer to her as such going forward.

The scene is set outside a house with purple shutters and bushes and plants edging a cobblestone walkway with stairs. A white picket fence dominates much of the scene from one edge of the frame to another and splits the scene into two halves. On one side is Nancy, while George is stepping through the open gate behind her. On the other side of the fence is two boys. The boy with dark hair and a heavy green sweater appears to be kneeling with his hands in the air in front of him. The boy with fair hair and a white sweatshirt is caught in the beam of Nancy's flashlight. He appears to be standing and his hands are raised above his shoulders.

The body language of the children varies. Nancy leans forward, towards the reader. She is taller than the rest of the children and is mid-step as she hurries forward. Not even the hand of George on her shoulder can slow Nancy. As Goffman (1979) detailed "when a man and a woman collaborate face-to-face in an undertaking, the man –

it would seem – is likely to perform the executive role, providing only that one can be fashioned” (pg. 32). However, in this situation, Nancy herself has taken on the executive role. Nancy is the “detective” on this cover, and by assuming this role, she is the only individual present in an executive position. These signs convey that Nancy is once again strong and independent. She is sure of herself and intent on her mission. George is shielded by Nancy and leans away from the reader. She tries to hold Nancy back with her left hand while she clasps her chest with her right hand. These signs convey a sense of fear and concern, placing Nancy as the brave protector. Referring back to Goffman’s (1979) description of height and its relation to dominance and subordination, it is important to note that she is second in height (pg. 40). The two boys, on the other hand, are both placed in subordinate positions by their body positioning and relative height. The boy with blond hair is third tallest. He leans toward Nancy and his hands are raised above his shoulders with fingers curled. As Goffman (1979) illustrated in the “ritualization of subordination,” imitating assault in play may reveal that “underneath this show a man may be engaged in a deeper one, the suggestion of what he could do if he got serious about it” (pg. 52). These signs convey a threatening demeanor on the part of the boy, however, he remains frozen in place. The final child pictured on the cover kneels on the ground. His hands are also raised, but are at chest height. His shoulders are hunched and he, too, remains frozen in place. The signs conveyed are that the boys are powerless when compared to Nancy Drew and, though one is almost threatening in manner, neither is a threat to Nancy.

The facial expressions present in the children vary widely as well. Nancy Drew leans forward, mouth open, eyes wide, eyebrows raised, and gaze fixed. The meaning

conveyed is that Nancy is consumed with curiosity and interest. In addition, Nancy is practicing Goffman's (1979) "licensed withdrawal." Though the boys are demonstrating aggression, Nancy looks away from them. While Goffman (1979) argued that this typically demonstrates "aversive behavior" and that "some sort of submission to and trust in the source of stimulus seems to be implied," I would argue that it is the latter (pg. 62). Nancy is not demonstrating submissiveness, but dismissiveness. She trusts the boys and seemingly has little fear of them or what lies ahead. George, however, has an expression of fear and apprehension. Her lips are parted and gaze is directed to her left. The boy with the brown hair has a similar expression. His lips are parted and his expression is one of fear, though he stares fixedly ahead. The boy with fair hair has a slightly different expression. His chin is tucked and his lips curled in a snarl. This, combined with his posture and raised hands, conveys aggression. Nancy, however, remains in power as the boy is without motion. In this scene, only Nancy is in movement. Therefore, this signifies that she commands both the action and the power.

The setting of this scene includes many features worth noting. The fence here creates a divide between the boys and the girls in the scene. Through this, Nancy Drew is placed alongside the reader, while George is caught in between. She is, however, mainly on the side nearest the reader and Nancy. The boys, though, are separated from both Nancy and the reader by the presence of the fence. In addition, life is also present in the green growth surrounding the children. Death is not represented in this scene. The signs convey that Nancy is identifiable with the reader while the other characters are separated from the reader by either Nancy's body or the fence. Nancy, therefore, is once again given a position of power.

The concepts of light and dark are present in this scene. Most significantly, Nancy carries a flashlight reminiscent of the scene in the 1950s book titled *The Secret of the Old Clock*. Nancy uses this light to trap the boy demonstrating aggression. In addition, she also firmly grasps the flashlight instead of demonstrating Goffman's (1979) "feminine touch" and in doing so, she maintains control and power of the situation (pg. 29). She is, therefore, constructed as the wielder of the weapon as well as the carrier of goodness through light. Though night is represented through both the title and the use of a flashlight, the cover is not wholly dark. The meaning conveyed here is that Nancy Drew is safe. She has no fear and no reason to fear, only intense curiosity.

All the children wear heavy clothing. The clothing is modest for all involved with full leggings, sweaters, and dresses. It is significant that Nancy's dress pattern matches that of the frame. It closely aligns Nancy with the encapsulation of the scene. As represented here, the meaning conveyed is that Nancy Drew contains and controls all that is seen.

The wording of the text on the book cover varies. The series title, *The Nancy Drew Notebooks*, is written in all capital letters and is the largest font on the book cover. It is placed at the top of the book cover above the scene. The words are also underlined and the font is centered. This places focus on this series title. Additionally, the series name conveys a sense of youth by the word choice of "notebook." The book title, *The Slumber Party Secret*, is centered below the scene and features a #1 above it. It is written in both upper and lower case letters. The wording of the title also places emphasis on the aspect of youth. "Slumber party" denotes an activity usually reserved for girls and is emphasized by a green oval background. "Secret" again denotes a mystery that is non-

threatening. The author name, *Carolyn Keene*, is placed below the book title and is written in all capital letters. *Illustrated by Anthony Accardo*, is listed below, also in all capital letters. This cover is the first that features additional wording besides the series name, the book title, and the author and illustrator. At the top right hand corner of the scene, the wording “It’s awful! It’s terrible! It’s a disaster! And it’s supposed to be a party!” This wording is the only font written in white with the remaining font in black. The meaning conveyed here is that of danger, yet the last line emphasizes that the danger is to nothing more serious than a party. Again, Nancy’s safety is established.

Finally, this book cover has several viewpoints. While the dark-haired boy gazes straight ahead, the boy with blond hair gazes into the flashlight Nancy yields. George directs her attention to her left at something out of view of the reader. Nancy gazes in the same direction. This signifies that the girls see the danger clearly, while the boys are blinded. In addition, out of the two girls, only Nancy rushes forward to face it alone. Nancy is placed in a leadership role and, once again, a position of power.

#### NANCY DREW ON CAMPUS: NEW LIVES, NEW LOVES (1995)

*Nancy Drew on Campus* presents the first time that Nancy Drew is portrayed by an actual model instead of the usual artwork. On this cover, the character representing Nancy Drew is assumed to be the one in the center of a group of three girls. On her right is a blonde girl who we may assume is Bess, the long-running fictional friend of Nancy’s. On her left is a girl with short brown hair we may assume is George. The background of the book cover is white with a blue border. In each a corner, a bubble appears featuring a different scene. The top left hand area of the cover features a yellow rectangle framing a tall brick building with a winding brown path leading to it. The top right hand area of the

cover features a red bubble containing a laughing Nancy laying on the back of a sofa behind a young man in a flannel shirt and white pants. Nancy wears a white shirt, patterned vest, and beige skirt with pearls. We may assume the young man is another long-running character and Nancy's love interest, Ned Nickerson. The bottom right hand corner displays a red rectangle containing Nancy Drew standing in front of the door to a bus or train wearing a white hat, white shirt, beige jacket, blue jeans, large floral purse, and tennis shoes. The bottom left hand area contains a blue rectangle featuring all four characters. In this representation, it appears that Nancy is cooking. She holds a spoonful of food as if offering it to Bess, who is laughing. Nancy herself is smiling. A soft drink is on the table before her as well as what appears to be a purse. Bess is closest to the reader, followed by Nancy, a smiling George, and a somber Ned. Bess wears a sweatshirt and scrunchie while Nancy wears a white shirt and patterned vest. George appears to also be wearing a white shirt and Ned is clothed in a blue flannel shirt.

The body language present on this cover varies. Nancy herself is pictured as smiling or laughing in every representation in which she is alongside Bess, George, Ned, or all three. In the center of the book cover, Nancy smiles broadly though it does seem a bit forced. She wears a purple shirt and gold chain necklace. Her hair is carefully styled and she wears both make-up and earrings. On her right, Bess smiles into the camera with her head tilted to one side. She does, however, wear a white shirt with a flashy neckline and a visible button. On Nancy's left, George laughs with her head tilted. George wears a sleeveless denim jacket. All three wear identical make-up and their gazes are directed at the reader. Only Nancy smiles with her mouth shut while both George and Bess appear to be laughing or smiling with their teeth parted. The meaning conveyed here is that Nancy

and her friends are virtually identical, though Nancy, as the center of the group and the most serious of the three, is the leader. It may be argued that the other two girls are merely following Nancy's lead.

In the red bubble with Ned, Nancy is stretched out on the couch behind him and is laughing loudly with one hand on Ned's shoulder and the other wrapped around his bicep. Ned himself is sitting as if relaxed with his back to Nancy and his knees in the air. As Goffman (1979) argued that in the "ritualization of subordination," "women are pictured on floors and beds more than are men" because "a recumbent position is one from which physical defense of oneself can least well be initiated and therefore one which renders one very dependent on the benignness of the surround" (pg. 41). Although Nancy is positioned in a high physical spot relative to Ned, which Goffman (1979) indicates is a position of power, she is rendered dependent on Ned by her relaxed position as well as her placement behind Ned (pg. 43). This signifies that Ned functions as a shield between Nancy and the reader or the "world" and that Nancy is dependent on him (Goffman, 1979, pg. 72).

It is significant to note that this is the first cover included in the analysis in which Nancy smiles. Ned does not appear to be amused and instead stares somberly ahead. Nancy is pictured as laughing with her mouth open and her gaze is focused on Ned while he stares blankly ahead. Goffman (1979) argued in "licensed withdrawal" that "[A] corollary is that when a male and female are pictured in a euphoric state, the female is likely to be exhibiting a more expansive expression than is the male, which in turn fits with the argument already made and illustrated that in our society women smile more than men" (pg. 69). Goffman (1979) argued in the "ritualization of subordination" that

smiles “often function as ritualistic mollifiers, signaling that nothing antagonistic is intended or invited, that the meaning of the other’s act has been understood and found acceptable, that, indeed, the other is approved and appreciated” as well as that smiles “seem more the offering of an inferior than a superior” (pg. 48). The meaning conveyed here is that Nancy is submissive to Ned. Though he appears to be totally uninterested, she wraps her hands around him as if holding him to her and pinpoints him with her gaze. Her joviality is not shared and appears to be forced, again reinforcing Ned’s lack of interest in her and Nancy’s desperation to obtain his approval.

In the blue rectangle in the bottom left hand corner of the cover, Nancy is pictured with all three of her friends. Bess alone faces the reader with her body, though her upper body is tilted away from the reader. All four characters focus on the food on the spoon in Nancy’s hand. The meaning conveyed here is that Nancy is the provider and the dominant leader of the group. She contains the power through her possession of food. The other three watch and follow her lead. It is striking that both George and Bess do so happily while Ned is once again somber. In both interactions featuring Nancy and Ned, Nancy appears to be happy and carefree while Ned appears to be subdued. Additionally, all three girls display at least some level of head cant as defined by Goffman (1979) “[T]he level of the head is lowered relative to that of others, including, indirectly, the viewer of the picture. The resulting configurations can be read as an acceptance of subordination, an expression of ingratiation, submissiveness, and appeasement” (pg. 46). Looking at this semiotically, Ned is once again placed in a position of power while Nancy is portrayed as submissive and dependent through the signifiers of her smiles and

head cant and the signifieds of submission and dependency. However, Nancy does retain the dominant role among the females pictured.

The red rectangle in the bottom right hand corner features a much different version of Nancy from other representations on this cover. In this version, Nancy is alone. Her body language in this circumstance is defensive and submissive. She stands with one knee bent instead of straight and sure. This once again references Goffman's (1979) "bashful knee bend" (pg. 45). One hand is in her pocket while the other clasps the strap of her purse. Her head and body is titled and slumped as if unsure. Though her hands have been active in other scenes, here she hides one hand while clasping her purse with the other. Even her smile is altered by an unsure expression. This signifies that Nancy is powerful only in relation to her friends. She is the leader in her group and the most powerful, but on her own, she is unsure and powerless. Her confidence vanishes to be replaced by timidity. Nancy can no longer exist alone.

The final yellow rectangle in the top left corner pictures only the drawing of what appears to be a school building with a path leading to it. It is interesting to note that this is the only drawing on the book cover. This positions the theme of education that is a backdrop to this series as fictional. The signifier of the school combined with the signified of its being conceptual only is apparent. It is only what it appears to be, a fake backdrop with no true meaning for Nancy.

This book cover also concentrates on concepts of light and life. No real representation of darkness or death are made on the cover. In fact, it's difficult to ascertain that this book is a mystery. Only the names Nancy Drew and Carolyn Keene make any connection to a mystery aspect. The book cover itself features little text or

imagery that would denote a mysterious setting as represented in previous covers. The series title is *Nancy Drew on Campus #1*. It is placed in the top left hand corner of the book cover and the meaning conveyed by this title is that Nancy Drew is now attending college. We do understand from the addition of the “#1” that this book is the first in a series, but the series appears to focus on Nancy Drew’s experiences on a college campus rather than on mysteries. The title of the book, *New Lives, New Loves*, reinforces this concept. The wording here conveys that Nancy Drew has a new life, one that may be separate from the mysteries she has been associated with in the past. In addition, the wording *New Loves* may denote that Nancy Drew has found a new romantic interest or that she has found a new purpose in life. This text is also written in a variety of colors, conveying that Nancy is having many new experiences. This is in contrast to the book series title which is simply beige and white lettering on a solid blue and red background. Additional wording is present on the center representation of Nancy Drew. This placement closely associates it with her and in fact appears almost to be connected to her by the gold chain around her neck. The wording reads “Nancy Drew is going to college... and the excitement is just beginning.” This text is the only text on the cover written in all capital letters. The placement of the text along with the emphasis on capitalization conveys that Nancy’s experiences at college are the emphasis of this book series and that these experiences will be much more exciting than solving mysteries. Finally, the author byline reads simply *Carolyn Keene* in red text. This is placed near the bottom of the cover though still layered on top of Nancy Drew. Once again, Carolyn Keene as an author is connected to Nancy Drew.

The styling of Nancy and her friends on this book cover is also significant. The clothing Nancy and her friends wear was stylish during the time period the books were published. The clothing was also representative of a middle- or upper-middle class individual. The signifiers of long sleeves, layered clothes, and conservative styling combined with the concepts of modesty and wholesomeness signify that Nancy is sweet and wholesome. It is significant to note that this cover carefully segments facets of Nancy's life. Nancy's concentration on college is represented by the drawing of the campus building. Nancy's relationship with Ned is also represented as well as her relationship with her friends. A box is even allowed for a representation of Nancy with both her friends and Ned. Taken as a whole, the segmentation of Nancy's life as well as the meaning contained in these segments conveys that Nancy holds different power relations in distinct facets of her life. It is significant that the reader is invited only into one aspect of Nancy's life. The center image of Nancy and her friends is the only one that places the reader as an equal instead of a bystander. Nancy, Bess, and George are here represented as friends and compatriots of the reader, though the reader is not invited into other areas of Nancy's life. The final box representing Nancy alone is perhaps the most revealing. This representation of Nancy reveals her "true" self as an individual who is powerful only in groups and, when alone, loses her confidence, relatability, and strength. She has power only in comparison to other females.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: NANCY FRAGMENTED

The final representations of Nancy Drew focus on books published between 2004 and 2015. In popular culture, women were becoming increasingly independent. However, arguments arose that women were expected to excel in all facets of their lives, from educational goals to motherhood to career and family. It may be argued that women felt increasingly divided over this fragmentation of their lives into specialized areas. During this time, Nancy herself becomes increasingly fragmented. As years pass, Nancy is less often represented as an adult. Instead, several representations of Nancy as a child appear. In addition, the two representations featuring Nancy Drew in adult form are fragmented. Only parts of Nancy are shown as in *Nancy Drew girl detective*<sup>TM</sup> or she is portrayed as simply a silhouette as in the 2014 revision and re-release of *The Secret of the Old Clock*. These fragmented versions of Nancy convey a message of weakness and dependence.

### NANCY DREW GIRL DETECTIVE<sup>TM</sup>: WITHOUT A TRACE (2004)

In *Nancy Drew girl detective*<sup>TM</sup>, the cover is simplified. The top portion of the cover consists of a pair of eyes and the bridge of a nose. The eyes are peering to the left and appear to be alert, watchful, and wary. The top right corner of the book features only the text “#1” in white font on a red background. The eyes and text are underlined by a black bar with red text stating *New York Times Best –Selling Series*. Underneath this proclamation is the series title *Nancy Drew girl detective*<sup>TM</sup> with “Nancy” in large black font and “Drew” in large blue font on a yellow background. Both words are in all capital letters. The text “girl detective<sup>TM</sup>” is in much smaller black font and trails over both the yellow background and the “W” in “Drew.”

The left hand corner of this segment features the bottom of a nose and the lips and mouth of a girl. This is positioned under the “N” in “Nancy.” Finally, the bottom half of the book cover is divided into thirds with one-third featuring a red background with the book title, *Without a Trace*, in white font centered down the middle of the background and the author byline, *Carolyn Keene*, in black font at the bottom of the book cover. The right two-thirds features a sepia photo of a metal base with an old-fashioned key in front of it.

This cover is the first in the series to be absent of Nancy Drew. Instead of a whole, the reader is granted only parts of Nancy Drew and these parts are limited to facial expression. Nancy’s body language is not available for critique, nor her style of clothing, additional characters, or action. The very absence of these forms of representation is telling. Nancy Drew has lost her power and the means in which to express her individuality. By splitting Nancy’s face into two parts, Nancy is regulated to a place of low importance. Only her eyes, which appear to be wary and fearful, are present at the top of the book cover. She is given no voice here, only a method with which to observe. The second piece of Nancy available to the reader is Nancy’s mouth and nose. Her mouth is parted as if she is about to speak or smile. However, Nancy is not allowed any expression. Even her skin is fragmented and unstable. As represented here, the meaning conveyed by showing only fragments of Nancy’s eyes, nose, and mouth is that the only value Nancy has is to watch and stay silent. She cannot speak of what she sees and she cannot see that of which she wishes to speak. She is only a remnant of her former self.

The setting and objects pictured are interesting choices. The old-fashioned key harkens back to the original Nancy Drew mysteries. The metal base has an unclear

representation. It is simply there to be looked at, much like Nancy's eyes and mouth. The sepia coloring applied to the image denotes a quality of age. Therefore, the meaning conveyed by the signs present in this cover is that of the past and its value. Nancy has lost her battle with progression and is regressing into the past.

Though the reader can view Nancy in parts, Nancy does not engage with the reader. Instead, she is once again fearful of something to her left that the reader cannot see. She pays no attention to the objects on the cover and does not interact with any part of the cover. This signifies that Nancy is powerless and fearful.

Nancy Drew is not even allowed to rely on her name as a symbol of her value as she has in the past. Instead, above her name, the wording *New York Times Best-Selling Series* appears in all caps in order to re-establish Nancy's value. Nancy Drew's name is also subject to fragmentation. *Nancy* is written in black font while *Drew* appears in blue. She is not left whole in any area of her representation. Additionally, *girl detective*<sup>TM</sup> is added over *Drew* as if to establish Nancy's place. It is significant that the phrase is written in lowercase letters, further devaluing the title and position of the girl detective. By characterizing Nancy thus so, she is regulated to the position of a "girl" and, therefore, rendered powerless.

The book title, *Without a Trace*, is given noticeable positioning on the cover. It is ironic that this is the book title as barely a trace of Nancy Drew appears on the cover. The author byline, *Carolyn Keene*, is regulated to the lower left hand corner. It is barely noticeable and separates the author from the character. By fragmenting Nancy Drew in both image and text, Nancy is rendered powerless. She no longer lacks just her hands as

her tools, but her whole body. Nancy remains only as a tool through which the reader may engage with the book and has no character representation or autonomy of her own.

#### NANCY DREW AND THE CLUE CREW: SLEEPOVER SLEUTHS (2006)

In the first book of the *Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew* series, Nancy is presented as a child of around 10-12 years of age. On the cover, the series name is presented at the top of the book cover with the series number, #1, inside a magnifying glass. The book title, *Sleepover Sleuths*, is written just below this on a background of blue. Nancy and her friends, Bess and George, appear in the center of the book cover with Bess on Nancy's left and George on Nancy's right. The author and illustrator names appear in a pink striped band along the bottom of the book cover and a sentence blurb is included on the book cover just below George's foot. The three girls stand on yellow flooring with presents stacked to their left and right. All three wear tennis shoes. Nancy wears blue jeans, a white-collared shirt, and a sweater vest. George wears a red pullover and sweatpants and she carries a flashlight. Bess wears jeans covered in hearts with a yellow ribbon belt and a pink shirt. She also wears a necklace and backpack. Both Nancy and Bess have long hair while George's hair is short and curly. Bess is pictured as blonde, George brunette, and Nancy a redhead.

The body language present on this book cover presents Nancy as a strong leader. She stands in front of her friends, meeting the reader's gaze. She is also taller than the other girls which references Goffman's (1979) argument regarding relative size and how it lends social weight to the individual (pg. 28). Both Bess and George seem distracted, but Nancy is calm. She stands still with her hands on her hips and a smile on her face. In addition, both Bess and George demonstrate Goffman's (1979) "bashful knee bend"

while Nancy stands straight and tall (pg. 45). The signifiers of Nancy's height and body language combined with the signifieds of power and control communicate here that Nancy is the leader of the three and, therefore, in a position of power. However, both Bess and George appear to be in action while Nancy remains still. The signs conveyed here are that Nancy is no longer independent. Though she is the leader of the team, she is no longer able to solve the mystery by herself. This is further reinforced by George's use of the flashlight. On prior book covers, Nancy held and manipulated objects such as the flashlight while her friends watched. Now, Nancy is the bystander and her friends perform the action. This places Nancy in an executive role as described by Goffman (1979) (pg. 32). However, while it affords Nancy power in her relationships, it also removes her independence.

The facial expressions of all three are also remarkable. Nancy smiles at the reader while Bess smiles at something to her right and George grins at something to her left. The depiction of smiling is interesting in this example because smiling may position the girls as inferior as argued by Goffman (1979) (pg. 48). In this case, it could be argued that the signifiers communicate that the girls are submissive *to the reader*. The group is fragmented with no set point of mystery established. This communicates that they are not working together despite outward appearances. Instead, all three are in pursuit of their own solution and, it may be argued, identity. This is further reinforced by their dress. Nancy is given a very conservative form of dress with little decoration or personality. Bess and George, however, express themselves through their clothing. Bess displays typical female styling choices through her choice of jeans covered in hearts, a necklace, and a yellow ribbon belt as well as a pink shirt and styled hair. George is styled in a

tomboyish manner with short curly hair, athletic sweatpants, and a pullover. She does not display traditional feminine characteristics. She is also the most active on the book cover and has been yielded the main tool of investigation, the flashlight. The meaning communicated by both their clothing and positioning on the cover is that Nancy falls somewhere in the middle of the two extremes of femininity and masculinity. It is also arguable that George has usurped the actual power of action from Nancy and that this places expressions of femininity as a negative. By associating masculine cues with action, the image of the strong female is relegated to a more submissive role. Nancy believes she is the leader, but she has no true power.

The setting of the cover is intriguing. It appears that the girls are in a stark environment with solid blue walls and solid yellow floors. They are surrounded by wrapped presents of different sizes, yet they appear to ignore them. They are also underneath a light of some sort as revealed by the shadows on the floor. This again places them as the main point of interest on the cover and conveys that the representation of the girls contain more meaning than their surroundings or the mystery itself.

The wording of the book series, *Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew*, reinforces Nancy's loss of individuality. She needs a "crew" in order to complete the work she previously did alone. This title is placed at the top of the book cover in black type against a yellow background. The font is large and disorganized, with some letters capitalized and others lower case. The series number, #1, is placed inside a magnifying glass with a white background. The book title, *Sleepover Sleuths*, references a similar book title in a previous series featuring a character similar in age to the characters present on this book cover. It is featured in plain white font. No reference to the actual mystery present in the

book is made in the title. Both the author byline and the illustrator byline are given equal credence at the bottom of the book cover in a smaller white font in the same as the book series text. Perhaps most telling is the wording present on the cover, *Can you help Nancy solve her first mystery?* This is revealing in several ways. First, this is the first time the reader is asked to participate in the mystery. Second, this is the first time a question appears on the title instead of a statement. Third, this is the first time doubt is cast on Nancy's abilities. And finally, this question places Nancy as a newcomer. The character of Nancy Drew has been solving mysteries for over 76 years at the time of this book's publication, yet the reader is told this is her first mystery. The meaning conveyed in these signs is that Nancy is incapable of completing the task at hand. She has lost her independence and her ability. She is now nothing more than the leader of a "crew" instead of a strong female protagonist. The signs present on this cover communicate that Nancy is once again powerless, but the major difference here is that this time, she doesn't realize it.

#### NANCY DREW DIARIES: CURSE OF THE ARCTIC STAR (2013)

The book cover for *Nancy Drew Diaries* also featured a young Nancy Drew, although this version may range in age from 12-14. A section of the series name, *Nancy Drew*, appears at the top of the book cover in almost cursive purple script while the word *Diaries* is in magenta below. The book title, *Curse of the Arctic Star*, is in the smallest font near the bottom left hand corner. Directly below it, the author byline stretches from edge to edge. It is the only font in white and all capital letters.

The book cover pictures a young girl, Nancy Drew, leaning over the railing of a ship. The ship is white and gray with red and white life preservers hung along the railing.

The reader views Nancy from below. Behind Nancy, storm clouds bathed with light hang heavy overhead. Nancy is dressed in a yellow gown with a black ribbon belt and a long red jacket. She wears a choker around her throat and her long blonde hair is held back by a matching headband. Her hands clasp the railing and she looks up with concern.

Nancy's body language is layered. While she appears to be strong and capable, she also appears to be defensive. She leans forward as if danger is nearby, but her stance is wide and her hands clasp the railing with strength and determination. The meaning conveyed here is that Nancy suspects she is in danger, but she is ready to face it. Nancy is also alone, which is significant. She has regained her previous independence.

Nancy's eyes are wide, her eyebrows raised and her mouth set. The meaning conveyed by her expression is once again that of determination. She is alone, but she is not afraid. Nancy is once again in action. She depends upon her hands once more and appears to be using them to steady herself. Nancy's grasp is firm and she does not display the "feminine touch" described by Goffman (1979) (pg. 29). The signifiers of Nancy being alone, her grasp, and her expression combined with the signifieds of independence, strength, and determination convey that Nancy is not weak and helpless. She has regained her previous power.

This is further supported by the reader viewpoint. The reader views Nancy from below, placing Nancy as a superior. Nancy does not meet the reader's gaze, but she herself looks above. It could be argued that Nancy watches the storm clouds overhead or that she is staring at the script of her own name hovering above her head. Either way, Nancy is concerned with something greater than herself.

Once again, the play of light and dark are apparent. The ship itself is half white and half black. This positions it as a vessel of both fear and safety. The storm clouds communicate the message. Though some roll darkly overhead, the edges are awash with light and the storm clouds farther overhead are pale in color. The meaning conveyed here is that danger is present, but all will be well for Nancy. This is also communicated through the life preservers lining the railing. The signifiers of life preservers combined with the signifieds of rescue communicate that, although danger is present, salvation and safety is also available.

The wording of the text varies on this book cover. The book title, *Curse of the Arctic Star*, is significant. The word *Curse* especially communicates the danger present. The meaning communicated here is that of mystery and danger. The names of the author and the main character are once more paramount. They have the largest font sizes, with *Nancy Drew* being the largest. However, the name *Carolyn Keene* along with the word *Diaries* are the only items to be written in all caps. This garners significant attention. This signifies that the power remains in the capable hands of Nancy Drew and Carolyn Keene and that the mystery poses little danger to both.

The styling of Nancy Drew is especially interesting. Nancy is dressed in an old-fashioned manner, once again resembling her original self. Though her dress, jacket, and ribbon are modest, they also appear to be expensive and stylish. The signifiers of clothing combined with the signifieds of wealth and status position Nancy as upper-class once again. Nancy balances this old-fashioned nature of her clothing with loose hair, a headband, and a choker. The meaning conveyed through the signs present on the cover is that Nancy is at once feminine and a blend of both the present and past. Overall, this

book cover restores Nancy to her previous position of power and independence. She is once again sure and strong, yet feminine, in the face of danger.

#### NANCY DREW MYSTERY STORIES: THE SECRET OF THE OLD CLOCK (2014)

In 2014, *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories: The Secret of the Old Clock* was re-released with an updated cover. This version of the classic featured Nancy Drew in silhouette. She wears a blue cloche hat and blue dress with white trim on the labels and side and white buttons. Her skin is a flat white color and her hair is dirty blonde. She also wears a scarf which becomes a road on which a moving truck is driving. The road/scarf winds over three hills before disappearing from view with the moving truck on the final hill. The hills are varying shades of brown with gears in white, beige, and brown scattered upon them. The farther the hill is from the reader, the more gears cover it. The final hill also features a mound of gears encompassing a clock face against a background of blue sky with white clouds. The book series name is featured in an elaborate brown frame along with the author byline. The title of the book is written in cursive white scripts against the blue sky directly above the mound of gears and clock face.

Nancy Drew's body language is unusual on this book cover. She is nothing more than a silhouette and she leans forward as if on a mission, but the lower half of her body is missing. The book cover stops at just below her forearms and hips. It is impossible to see what Nancy is doing, yet she stands awkwardly as if she was in the middle of some sort of action. Looking at this semiotically, the meaning conveyed here is that Nancy has a purpose, but it's unclear. She is rendered powerless in this representation due to the absence of her limbs.

Nancy's facial expression is also almost entirely absent. Though she has a face, it is blank. Her lips are parted and she appears attractive in profile, but she has very little representation of the five senses. Her hands are absent, as are her eyes and ears. Only her nose and mouth remain. From what little of her facial expression available to the reader, i.e. her profile, it appears that Nancy is alert and curious. She leans in the direction she wishes to go. This signifies that Nancy wishes to fulfill her purpose, but lacks the tools to do it. This once again conveys a message of powerlessness.

The main action present on this book cover is the scarf around Nancy's neck while Nancy herself appears to be frozen in place. One end of the scarf flows in the wind while the other trails behind Nancy and serves as a road. The meaning conveyed here is that Nancy's clothes, and possibly the representation of her femininity, serve a useful purpose. It is used as a path, or a function, for an object and nothing more. This actually places the object, a moving van in this instance, in a place of higher importance than Nancy. In fact, the only items that appear to be more important on this cover are Nancy's clothes. The styling choices signify middle- to upper- class and feminine. The clothes contain more detail than Nancy herself and her body is used only as a rack on which to display them. She is a two-dimensional shell functioning as a showcase for her clothes. Clothing is used as a signifier and the signifieds are concepts of class and femininity. By focusing on Nancy's clothing, the message is reinforced that Nancy's femininity is more important than her actions or purpose.

The setting is also unusual. It is stark and the darkest area is closest to Nancy. As the hills regress away from Nancy to a skyline, they gradually lighten in color. This places Nancy close to the dark, or danger, while the light, or safety, lies in the distance.

Death does appear to be represented in the scarf. It appears as if it may choke her, yet Nancy seems unafraid. The sign here is that Nancy is unaware of the danger she is in. She has lost her intelligence and sharp wit and stumbles blindly through the world.

The reader views Nancy as the closest image on the page. It is therefore easy to identify with her. The bright blue of her dress also sets her apart from the dark colors behind her and makes Nancy appear to be a friendly character in a dark world. Nancy herself seems to be concerned with something to her left. She is fixated on it and remains unaware of the chaos surrounding her. The choice of a moving van, gears, and a clock is interesting. The moving van is far in the distance and represents a transition. It is leaving without Nancy in the opposite direction and is using an extension of Nancy herself as a route. The gears litter the landscape, growing steadily in number the farther they are from Nancy. These gears represent functionality and industry. By associating them with the moving van and leaving very few around Nancy, a message begins to be constructed. This message is finalized in the clock surrounded by gears on the horizon. The light of the sky is brightest behind this clock and the gears appear to construct it. This clock is the first to be presented in modern terms with gears and see-through glass instead of a wooden box. It is also on the horizon, representing newness and birth. As represented here, the signs convey that Nancy has remained old-fashioned and out of date. She is of the past, while both the world around her and the clock are representative of the future. The world, in essence, is leaving her behind as a relic of the past yet Nancy remains unaware.

The wording of the text on this cover is interesting. The series name *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* is written in white font in all capital letters as is the author byline. The

series name is underlined and emphasis is placed on *Nancy Drew* through the use of larger font. It is as if the book needs the reinforcement of Nancy's name to be recognizable. The book title, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, is in white cursive text above the clock. This is striking because the font appears to be old-fashioned and the title references *old* yet the clock pictured is anything but old. It is a new age clock representative of the future. The meaning conveyed here is that the story contained within the book is a relic from the past. It is as if the cover imagery reinforces the future through its desire to align itself with the future and distance itself from the "shameful," "old-fashioned" past. The overall meaning conveyed by the signs present in this cover is that Nancy Drew is no longer the powerful figure she once was. She is, instead, a relic of the past struggling to find a place in the modern world. Though she is alone and independent, she is unaware of the world around her and has not adapted in a significant way.

#### NANCY DREW CLUE BOOK: POOL PARTY PUZZLER (2015)

On the book cover for *Nancy Drew Clue Book: Pool Party Puzzler*, Nancy Drew and her friends, Bess and George, are pictured in a pool. The back cover of this book reveals that the target market is ages 6-9. We may assume that the pictured girls are around the same ages. The series title lines the top of the book cover while the author and illustrator bylines are below. The book cover appears to have lined notebook paper both above and below the main image with a *#1* imposed on a glass of pink liquid with a pink straw. The paper is torn along the edges to reveal the three girls in a white concrete pool. The girl in front, a brunette we can assume is George, wears a purple hat and purple top with black and white striped sleeves. Her hair is short and she rests one finger against her cheek in a thinking pose as she sips from a glass with a yellow straw. On her wrist, she

sports a red flower bracelet. In the background, Bess wears a pink shell barrette in her blonde braids along with starfish bracelets and a pink bathing suit. She holds a starfish wand with a seaweed streamer aloft and she, too, holds one finger to her face as she glances at Nancy. The final character present on the cover is Nancy Drew herself. She stands in the back left side of the cover in a green swimsuit with a tutu and a green headband with a bow in her red hair. She has green bracelets on each wrist and a glass with a green straw.

The body language in this example varies. Nancy and George stand up straight while Bess leans to the side. All three use their hands for some type of activity, though Bess is the only one who is actively splashing. However, this is the first cover analyzed in which Nancy is not positioned in the center nor is she at the forefront. Instead, Nancy is relegated to a background position. The signs here are that Nancy is unable to function independently and she no longer even holds the position of leader of the group. In fact, it could be argued that George has taken that position. The shape of their bodies is also an interesting aspect in this image. Nancy and her friends are portrayed as girls at around 6-9 years of age. Their arms are frail while their heads are unnaturally large. They do not look physically strong. The signs communicated here are that, while the girls are confident, they are not strong nor independent.

The facial expressions and even the features of the girls are virtually interchangeable. Only George appears to be mischievous as she raises one eyebrow and sips through a straw. Though Nancy's face is the slimmest, followed by Bess and then George, the only difference is the size of their faces. All three girls smile. The meaning

communicated here is that the girls are both interchangeable and submissive. None of the three has a strong personality or a sense of self.

It is interesting to note that the girls appear to be swimming in their regular clothes. I refer to them as swimsuits since they are being used for swimming, but the clothing is extremely modest. Once again, however, the clothing is used as a signifier combined with signifieds of class and femininity. Seen here, the meaning communicated by the clothing is upper- to middle- class and feminine. Nancy stands still, glass in hand, while Bess splashes and holds a starfish wand aloft. George sips from her glass. None appear to be solving a mystery. This signifies that the girls are still girls. They care little for mystery or danger and it is not present in their lives. Not a hint of darkness appears in this cover image.

Two of the girls appear to be sipping from glasses. It could be argued that the glasses denote a maturity the girls have not obtained. Additionally, Bess hold a wand aloft and all three appear to be dressed for a party. The meaning conveyed here is that these children are “grown-up” and “mature” despite their appearance. They try to achieve the maturity, wisdom, and power Nancy once had, but through artificial means that cannot reach Nancy’s former heights.

The wording of the text is also interesting. By placing the text on ripped notebook paper, the message of the book is transformed. It is no longer a book, but a notebook, and therefore interactive with its audience. *Nancy Drew* is positioned at the top of the book cover in dark blue font and script styled to mirror juvenile handwriting. *Clue Book* is written directly underneath in a light blue font in all capital letters and framed with stars. This positions the purpose of the book to function as a *Clue Book* as paramount while the

name *Nancy Drew* is positioned to draw attention and to further describe the book. The book title, *Pool Party Puzzler*, appears in purple font above the girls, but below the series name. This choice of title conveys that there is no real danger, or even mystery, in this book. Instead, only something of a puzzling nature, and therefore safe, will appear. The author byline and the illustrator are given equally sized bylines in the dark blue font color in all capital letters at the bottom of the page. Their roles are also illustrated in smaller font. This positions them as equals.

Finally, the reader position as well as Nancy's position are paramount on this book cover. Nancy is regulated to a situation so far in the background and so subordinate that she appears as a side character. Although she appears to be the most mature, with the neatest hair and calmest demeanor, she is easily upstaged by the other girls. She doesn't focus on the reader, but instead, she and Bess appear to be looking at each other. This is the first cover in which Nancy interacts with another character visually. George, however, peers to her left, a pose usually reserved for Nancy. She also dominates the center of the book and has the most expressive countenance. In fact, to someone unfamiliar with the series, it would appear that George is the main character and that Nancy is simply a side character and the most boring, at that. Overall, the meaning communicated by the signs present in this book cover is that Nancy has lost all power and position she once held. She no longer solves mysteries, but instead she puzzles over solutions. She is no longer an independent and strong woman hot on the trail of a mystery, but a young girl enjoying a day at the pool. Nancy is powerless.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

In studying the book covers of the first book in each of the Nancy Drew series, it becomes apparent that the representation of Nancy Drew's character has shifted dramatically over the years. Over time, Nancy Drew's message transformed from one of independence and strength to one of fear and helplessness. Nancy Drew's longevity as a character affords an opportunity as "[S]eries books offer a rich field for study. Like other formula fiction, they combine wish fulfillment and escape with cultural awareness. They contain moral and social teachings, some overt, some subtle. Their use of idealized protagonists clearly delineates prescribed and proscribed behaviors. In their emphasis on success, they show the social and cultural values presented to readers" (Johnson, 1993, pg. xi). Book covers do much of this through cover representation as a marketing tool. As Matthews and Moody (2007) stated "[O]ne challenge in trying to understand the impact of the marketing of books is the difficulty of obtaining even quite recent marketing materials" (pg. xviii). Cover imagery is often used in the marketing of the product with the cover playing "a vital part in positioning a book or author in the market. The retail environment for books has become highly competitive and covers have to be correct for the chosen market" (Matthews & Moody, 2007, pg. 29). Cover images must remain in line with cultural trends in order for the book to remain relevant as a product. Therefore, analysis of covers lends itself to studying both representation and the marketing of products using representation and semiotics.

I would argue that one method in which book covers communicate values to readers is through cover design. As Matthews & Moody (2007) argued "[P]aperback cover art can be seen as a guide to the ways in which literature and various artistic

traditions might be circulated within the currents of pop culture during the sixties – a redirection downwards and outwards of the independent intellectualism....” (pg. 101). Despite this, “[T]he role of the book as visual medium in the marketing, selection and digestion of contemporary popular texts is often little better understood than the meanings of the physical book to previous generations of readers,” (Matthews & Moody, 2007, pg. xviii) and “media, communication and cultural studies have been inclined to neglect books, seeing them not as media forms but as literary texts, and thus the province of other disciplines” (Matthews & Moody, 2007, pg. xviii).

The first book cover in the 1930s version of *The Secret of the Old Clock* featured a Nancy Drew who was independent, determined, and powerful. A vision of progressiveness, the 1930s Nancy Drew set out to solve the mystery at hand without sacrificing her femininity. She was presented as a bold and daring female figure. This overall message continued on the cover of the 1950s version of *The Secret of the Old Clock*, though the reader began to see hints of coming change on the horizon through allusions to weaker representations. This was especially apparent in the positioning of Nancy as well as the darker representations of danger surrounding her. However, Nancy continued to remain determined, focusing only on the task at hand.

The 1960s revision of *The Secret of the Old Clock* featured a Nancy Drew who was noticeably weaker than both the 1930s and the 1950s version. While this Nancy continued to search for a solution to the mystery, she was distracted. Her focus had shifted to one of fear. Nancy completed the task at hand, but her gaze remained elsewhere and she surveyed her surroundings with a watchful eye. While no less feminine, 1960s

Nancy had lost her original strength and bravado. She had retained, however, her independence.

The 1970s version, *Mystery of the Lost Dogs*, features a version of Nancy wholly separate from previous versions. She is no longer girlishly feminine, but now she has assumed a motherly role. She has lost her independence and her focus is disengaged from both the reader and the mystery at hand. She has little power except in the role of a caretaker and, for the first time, appears on a cover only in part. In previous covers, the whole of Nancy was depicted. In this cover, the reader is allotted a view of only that which is deemed important.

The 1980s version, *Secrets Can Kill*, presented a Nancy Drew even further altered from the original 1930s version. This Nancy Drew was no longer independent. Instead, she was joined on the cover by a man who demonstrated control and dominance over Nancy through his attentive gaze. The 1980s version of Nancy Drew no longer actively solved the mystery at hand. Instead, she stood passively by, gazing at the reader. Her hands, once so active in her work, remained trapped in her pockets and hidden from view. Even her femininity was drastically altered, with the 1980s version of Nancy wearing less feminine clothes. The Nancy Drew of the 1980s was no longer an independent woman on a mission, but instead a passive figure to be gazed at by both the man in the scene and the reader.

*The Nancy Drew Notebooks* series published in 1994 allowed Nancy to regain her power and a leadership role, however, it was at the cost of her maturity. Nancy Drew is portrayed as a child of around 10 years of age instead of her usual range of 16-18 years of age. As a result, Nancy is afforded a leadership role and power with limitations. The

limitations here are her relative youth. Therefore, although she has accrued some credit towards re-establishing her position, it is not without cost and places Nancy in the subordinate position of a child.

This was countered by 1995's *Nancy Drew on Campus*. In this series, Nancy is college-aged, but although she has been restored her maturity, she lacks power. It is apparent through analysis of the covers that Nancy is powerful only in a group. She is virtually ignored by her love interest, Ned Nickerson, despite her efforts to please him. She is also uncomfortable and lacks confidence when alone. Therefore, Nancy is no longer independent and retains power only in comparison to others.

The 2004 series, *Nancy Drew girl detective*<sup>TM</sup>, also features a powerless Nancy. She is fragmented on this cover and the reader is only able to view her eyes, nose, and mouth. The use of her hands is a tool used in multiple versions to depict her as strong and independent. In this version, not only are her hands taken from her, but almost her entire being. She is also referenced as a "girl detective," which places her in a subordinate position. In this series, Nancy is portrayed as powerless and fearful.

In 2006's *Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew*, Nancy has lost her independence once again. She is once more a child of around 10-12 years of age. This time, however, she's no longer simply accompanied by other individual, but instead they play an active role in the solving of her mysteries. She has become, in a sense, dependent on them. The wording featured on the cover is also odd. It refers to the book as Nancy's "first mystery." At the time of publication, Nancy Drew had been "solving" mysteries for 76 years. Overall, this series depicts Nancy as the ringleader of a "crew" of girls dedicated to

solving mysteries. Nancy is powerless, dependent on others, and does not appear to realize her weaknesses. Instead, she appears to be happy to be in the position she is in.

It is interesting to note, however, that Nancy did regain some of her strength and independence in one recent series, the *Nancy Drew Diaries*. The *Nancy Drew Diaries* series published in 2013 features the strongest Nancy Drew depiction in several years. This cover offers a representation of an intelligent, dedicated, independent, and strong Nancy Drew. It is important to note, however, that two major issues are apparent on this cover. First and foremost, Nancy Drew is once again a child, though it could be argued that she is between the ages of 12 and 14. Her age allows her greater maturity and independence than previous versions featuring her as a child, but still places limitations on these aspects of her character. Furthermore, Nancy Drew is depicted in an “old-fashioned” setting and dress. This reinforces a viewpoint continuously expressed through the series that modernity removes independence and strength from the female, while “old-fashioned” ideals allow and, in fact, promote independence and strength. Perhaps Nancy Drew is at her strongest and most independent in her original setting.

The 2014 version of *The Secret of the Old Clock*, however, presents Nancy in an ever weaker light. In this version, Nancy is no longer a 3-dimensional figure, but a flat white outline. She does not interact with either aspects of the cover or the reader. She is completely powerless and represented as a relic from the past. She is out-of-date and out-of-touch with the world around her. Published in 2015, the *Nancy Drew Clue Book* series features Nancy Drew in her weakest depiction yet. Nancy is once again a child, but this time she is between the ages of 8-10. She is no longer the center character, has little interaction with the other characters, and is not featured in the center of the book, but in

the background. In fact, to a person unfamiliar with the series and Nancy's continuous depiction as a character with red or strawberry blonde hair, it may seem that the front and center character, George, is the main character. On this book cover, Nancy craves maturity, but is rendered powerless, has lost her independence, and is completely disconnected from the mystery. She is merely an object to be looked at with no true representation.

Similarities present in the covers include the presence of Nancy Drew's name on the cover and a depiction of Nancy Drew. Some book covers for mysteries depict only a scene from the mystery and not the detective. The presence of not only Nancy's full name but a depiction of her on the cover of every book series in the analysis is significant because it establishes that Nancy herself is the focus of each series and not the mysteries involved in the series. They are merely a backdrop for Nancy. Differences present on the covers are the dichotomy of traditional versus modernity, Nancy's age, and the shift of Nancy's depiction from a more realistic representation to an unrealistic representation. A common theme throughout the covers is that Nancy is usually strongest when depicted in a traditional, or old-fashioned, form similar to her original character. Modernity appears to weaken Nancy. It may be argued that the 2014 cover revision for *The Secret of the Old Clock* is an exception to this. Nancy's age also shifts between covers. Initially, later series featuring younger depictions of Nancy helped to retain power and strength for the character while older representations gradually weakened these attributes. More recent covers, however, have struggled with maintaining power through increasingly younger depictions of Nancy. Finally, a major difference between the covers is the transition from representing Nancy Drew in a realistic form to representing Nancy Drew in an

unrealistic, almost cartoonish, form. This further removes Nancy from being a relatable character for readers to instead being simply a disparate character. These changes may have been made in part to appeal to a younger demographic.

It may be argued through analysis of the book covers in the Nancy Drew series that publishers perceived the target audience for Nancy Drew books to be growing increasingly less powerful and independent with time and, as a result, they shifted their depiction of the girl detective to comply with this perception in an attempt to appeal to the audience. This may also be associated with their attempts to market to a younger demographic. The shift in representation of Nancy Drew on book covers sacrificed many of Nancy Drew's original strong female characteristics.

In the past, fans of the book were inspired by Nancy Drew to improve their lives at times. "One woman...said she had joined a police department, after drawing on Nancy Drew for inner strength to overcome her innate shyness, and later was able to investigate the mess left behind after a triple murder" while "[A]nother said that, after a bad marriage, she had withdrawn to her bedroom 'with all my old Nancy Drew mysteries and brought myself back together'" (Rehak, 2006, pg. 307). Nancy Drew was also an inspiration to readers during times of danger. One such reader remarked how she read Nancy Drew books in bomb shelters during resistance to the war in Hungary (Rehak, 2006, pg. 271). In addition, after an eleven-year-old girl was kidnapped and molested, she escaped after removing the taillight of her attacker's truck. "The officer on the case had told reporters, 'She's read something like 45 Nancy Drew books. That seems to have prepared her mind to deal with the situation and to escape'" (Rehak, 2006, pg. 292). Nancy Drew had significant influence on these reader's and their lives through her

depiction as a strong female character who dared to involve herself in mystery, danger, and adventure. The inspiration Nancy provided to readers through her strong and independent representation may decrease as Nancy's loses these qualities. Therefore, the positive influences Nancy had on her readers may not be present for readers of the later series due to Nancy's representation as a weaker and less independent character.

This is important because, as Reid-Walsh and Mitchell (2001) argued, "reading and talking about the girl sleuth may provide a way for girls to construct ideas about themselves at a time when they are said to be most vulnerable" (pg. 16) and that "Nancy's actions also exhibit key attributes of a "whistle-blowing" girl: she is a knower and a doer, who is in search of truth" (pg. 17). Chamberlain (1994) argued that "what young readers see in Nancy is not themselves as they are, but as they *would* be" and that Nancy is "less a source of identification than an object of projection" (italics in original, pg. 5). By allowing readers a comfortable place from which to view the paradoxes of their world, the readers are able to better understand the world and their role in it.

Nancy Drew's original strength was apparent. Woolston (2010) argued that Nancy Drew is a leader in her own household through her assumption as the "woman of the house" and that she therefore creates a strong and independent figure for children to emulate. Nancy is ready, willing, and able for any challenge and, no matter what was thrown at her, Nancy always triumphed. Despite her near perfection, Nancy Drew remained relatable. Indeed, Reid-Walsh and Mitchell (2001) found that young girls who read the series often felt a connection with Nancy Drew, specifically through older women in their lives who had read the *Nancy Drew* books in their youth.

Over time, though, it appears that the character Nancy Drew has become a shell of her former self, existing only to please an evolving audience and subject to the whims of the marketplace. This transformation of Nancy Drew is significant because her evolution may in turn affect her readers through the reading of the signs present on the covers and by absorbing the meaning communicated therein. Perhaps Nancy's transformation was due, in part, to cultural transformations. After all, "The temporal changes within genres can reflect cultural shifts, as with attitudes toward technology" (Johnson, 1993, pg. xi). The representation of female literary characters on book covers may influence how women are viewed as well as how women view themselves. I contend that since 1930, women have experienced cultural change that is reflected in the Nancy Drew covers. From the 1930s through the 1960s, women were positioned as both feminine and conservative, yet strong and self-reliant as well. From the 1970s through the 1990s, women fought for equal rights and began to enter the workforce en masse, at times sacrificing their femininity to do so. From the 2000s through present day, women are experiencing demands on various aspects of their identities. The expectation of maintaining the perfect home, family, and work environment may cause fragmentation as women are forced to choose specific areas of focus in their lives. I argue that these cultural trends are present in the covers of Nancy Drew books. Nancy is first depicted in a traditional, yet strong and independent, manner. She then goes on to sacrifice some of her femininity and independence for exploration into new worlds. Finally, Nancy fragments into various facets of her life and struggles to maintain her identity. Through these changes, Nancy gradually loses her strength and independence. How these weaker

representations of Nancy Drew will influence the audience and, in turn, influence the future evolution of Nancy Drew as a character remains to be seen.

It is interesting to note that Edward Stratemeyer understood the potential significance of the character he was creating as well as her potential appeal. As argued by Johnson (1993), “Stratemeyer’s success came through his willingness to experiment with and adapt material, continually tinkering with popular formulas. He shaped his books to the times, trying series after series in almost every possible area” (pg. ix). Additionally, “he showed ingenious young protagonists triumphing, whatever the odds” (Johnson, 1993, pg. ix). It would be interesting to see how Edward Stratemeyer would react to Nancy Drew today.

The transformation in representation of Nancy Drew over such a lengthy time period is apparent. It may be argued that Nancy Drew was originally crafted as a character with personality attributes and that, over time, Nancy shifted from a rich character to a generic brand. In doing so, her original character was comprised. The 1930s through the 1950s gave Nancy Drew her greatest strength, independence, and autonomy. Modernity, however, has reduced Nancy to a shell of her former self. It has stripped her of her independence and strength and replaced her with a weak representation of a feminine role model. Perhaps one of the most illuminating finds in this analysis was that Nancy did not undergo a drastic shift in representation, but a gradual decline. Questions we must ask ourselves is if this decline in Nancy’s representation built upon itself. Did weak representations lead to weaker representations? Did Nancy suffer with each subsequent depiction from the prior one? If the changes in representation suffered by Nancy Drew is reflective of our current culture and the trends

we have undergone over the last 87 years, we as a society may need to rethink our current cultural ideals and role models. If we do not, we may see further decline in the coming years.

It is important to note that Nancy Drew is still being recreated. She was both a college student and a small child within two years in the late 1990s, but to little success. “No matter what Simon & Schuster did, though, everyone still seemed to prefer the version of the sleuth they had known as children” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 310). Is this, perhaps related to the original power and tenacity of the Nancy Drew of old? In analyzing the covers of books in the Nancy Drew series it may be argued that the audience preferred the earlier versions of Nancy Drew because of her strength and independence in completing her work. The series featuring a strong female representation of Nancy Drew appeared to have the longest amount of time in print. Indeed, as mystery author Carolyn Heilbrun stated in regards to Nancy Drew, “[E]verybody perks up at her name, though few remember the plots or many of the details. The pleasure comes from her autonomy, her taking events into her own hands” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 307). Nancy Drew’s original determination and self-confidence may have been what led to her success as a lasting literary figure.

Regardless, I argue that we must bear in mind the importance of representation in cover art. As Matthews and Moody (2007) argued “No image that appears on the front cover of a book should be ignored or passively accepted, because in every case someone has chosen this particular image in order to sell or market the text that follows. Each individual image, paired with its respective work of fiction, creates an expectation for the potential reader, one that is either mired in stereotypical representations dating back to

the colonial era, or one that is directly relevant to the text at hand” (pg. 170). Though Nancy Drew has been weakened over the years, she is still in production. It remains possible that Nancy Drew may regain her independence and set out once more in determined fashion to solve the mystery at hand. The recent strong and fearless depiction of Nancy Drew in the *Nancy Drew Diaries* may be an example of this. Due to the success of the original series featuring a strong female representation of Nancy Drew as well as the importance of cover design, a shift in marketing of the books to replicate Nancy’s original strength and independence may be effective. This thesis is not designed as a critique of the publishers, but rather an exploration of Nancy Drew’s representation as well as a method in which to explore trends present in the marketing of books since the 1930s. As such, it may reveal additional concepts and ideas to consider when designing book covers featuring the representation of female literary characters.

As Benson once commented, she believed that “Nancy was popular, and remains so, primarily because she personifies the dream image which exists within most teenagers” (Rehak, 2006, pg. 303). It is crucial that we maintain the imagery of a strong female character for generations to come. For the audience who loved the original Nancy Drew, the only mystery that remains is if she will be allowed to become the character she once was or if she will continue to devolve into an increasingly insubstantial character.

#### LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While analyzing the first book in nine separate series as well as three revisions featuring Nancy Drew as a character lays a foundation for building meaning transmitted over time through the book covers of the Nancy Drew series, further study is needed. Some of these series lasted for years and featured much different covers near the end of

the series than at the beginning. It would be worthwhile to complete in depth studies of the book covers in individual series over time. By limiting the selection to the first book in each series, it is difficult to ascertain changes within a series to the representation of Nancy Drew. Examining cultural changes throughout the time period studied would also be relevant to further study on this subject.

Further study of the representation of Nancy Drew in television, games, film, and other products is needed to better understand Nancy's representation in various media. Further study could also be conducted on the evolution of Nancy Drew compared to the Hardy Boys. Both have been hailed as similar series developed by the Stratemeyer syndicate in the same time period to great success. The characters have often been paired as well, both on television and in books. It would be interesting to note if the Hardy Boys experienced the same cultural transformations as Nancy or if they have remained untouched by the influence of culture. A comparative study between Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys would also be interesting as well as a contemporary audience analysis.

**TABLE 1**  
**NANCY DREW BOOK SERIES**

# in Series	Series Title	Book Title	Publisher	Year of Publication	Series Length	Age Range	# of Books in Series
1	<i>The Nancy Drew Mystery Stories</i>	<i>The Secret of the Old Clock</i>	Grosset & Dunlap	1930	~73 years	N/A	175**
1	<i>The Nancy Drew Mystery Stories</i>	<i>The Secret of the Old Clock</i>	Grosset & Dunlap	1950	~73 years	N/A	175**
1	<i>The Nancy Drew Mystery Stories</i>	<i>The Secret of the Old Clock</i>	Grosset & Dunlap	1966	~73 years	N/A	175**
1	<i>A Picture Book: Nancy Drew</i>	<i>Mystery of the Lost Dogs</i>	Grosset & Dunlap	1977	~1 year	N/A	2
1	<i>Nancy Drew Files</i>	<i>Secrets Can Kill</i>	Simon & Schuster (Simon Pulse)	1986	~11 years	12 & up	124
1	<i>Nancy Drew Notebooks</i>	<i>The Slumber Party Secret</i>	Simon & Schuster (Aladdin)	1994	~11 years	5-9****	69
1	<i>Nancy Drew on Campus</i>	<i>New Lives, New Loves</i>	Simon & Schuster (Simon Pulse)****	1995	~3 years	N/A	25
1	<i>Nancy Drew girl detective™</i>	<i>Without a Trace</i>	Simon & Schuster (Aladdin)	2004	~8 years	8-12	47
1	<i>Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew</i>	<i>Sleepover Sleuths</i>	Simon & Schuster (Aladdin)	2006	~8 years	6-9	39
1	<i>Nancy Drew Diaries</i>	<i>Curse of the Arctic Star</i>	Simon & Schuster (Aladdin)	2013	Ongoing	8-12	14+
1	<i>The Nancy Drew Mystery Stories</i>	<i>The Secret of the Old Clock</i>	Grosset & Dunlap	2014	~73 years	8-12	175**
1	<i>Nancy Drew Clue Book</i>	<i>Pool Party Puzzler</i>	Simon & Schuster (Aladdin)	2015	Ongoing	6-9	6+

\* Numbers do not include special editions, boxed editions, etc. \*\*Total number of books in series \*\*\* Simon & Schuster defines age range as 6-9 year olds. Rehak (2006) states the book was marketed to 5-8 year olds when launched (Rehak, pg. 309). \*\*\*\* According to Amazon.com. Out of print on Simon and Schuster's website.

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