

Australian Young Adult Keen
Readers: Choices They Make, and
Creators' Views Regarding the
Young Adult Market

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Abstract

This thesis is a reader-centred investigation of Australian young adult self-defined 'keen readers' of novels for pleasure, and considerations regarding audience/s by writers and publishers. It is predicated on the understanding that adult power operates at every level of young adults' lives, including the publishing, promotion and availability of their literature. The complexity of defining 'young adult' and 'Young Adult literature' and therefore publishing and promoting for this nominal audience is recognised as being dependent on the varying adult constructs of the terms and, therefore, is at the basis of decisions made in this adult-oriented industry. Historical and commercial aspects of Australian publishing (nominally) for this group of readers provide a context for this grounded theory-based qualitative study. Analysis of transcripts from focus group discussions with self-defined young adult 'keen readers of novels for pleasure' demonstrates that these participants had a sophisticated understanding of their leisure reading experiences regarding what they liked reading, how they found out about books, what made them choose one book over another, and where they obtained them. The insights gained from these 34 participants informed the analysis of comments by Australian adult 'creators' – writers and publishing staff – regarding audience, commercial pressures, promotional aspects and other factors influencing what is published and made available to young adult keen readers for pleasure. That these 34 participants were active buyers and promoters as well as borrowers of books indicates the need for the industry to recognise their expertise and value as a distinct and influential audience niche – the 'neo-consumers' of the future. The research provides a starting point into analysis of the influence of the group of adults I have termed 'gatekeepers', whose (largely institutional) roles enable them to either connect young adult readers with books and creators, or to separate them.

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This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Diane Page, who died shortly after I began the research. As a teacher and parent, she was a gate-keeper who loved connecting young people and books. Her confidence in me far exceeded my own. That my parents loved books explains my learning to read at three; that they always allowed me to read anything I wished was a freedom for which I remain deeply grateful. May all young people be so fortunate.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgement	2
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	9
Introduction	9
1.1 Background	14
1.2 Definition of Terms	20
1.3 Model of Key Interrelationships	23
1.4 Scope and Limitations of Study	28
1.5 Thesis Structure	31
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW: YOUNG ADULTS AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE	
Introduction	35
2.1 Young Adults and Young Adult Literature: General Background	36
2.2 Young Adulthood: An Evolved or Constructed State?	40
2.3 Reconstructing the Child	44
2.4 Psychological Standpoints on Young Adulthood	50
2.5 Young Adult Literature: The Development of a Publishing Niche	64
2.6 Young Adult Literature: Splitting the Difference	69
2.7 Reading and Young Adult Literature: Some Issues	83
2.8 YA Literature: The Adult Observers	89
2.9 Young Adults and Reading	93
2.10 Conclusion	100

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW: PUBLISHING, SELLING AND
MARKETING FOR AUSTRALIAN YOUNG ADULTS

Introduction	101
3.1 Australian Children's Publishing History	102
3.1.1 Overview	102
3.1.2 British Traditional Marketing Agreement Overturned	113
3.1.3 The Last 25 Years	115
3.2 The Internationalists	121
3.2.1 Foreign Rights Sales	123
3.2.2 The Global Market Place	126
3.3 Publishing and Profiting	131
3.3.1 Pricing and Profits in Publishing for Young People	140
3.3.2 Sale or Return: Juggling	144
3.4 Determining a Category: YA Literature	149
3.4.1 Reading Patterns	151
3.4.2 Crossing Audiences	154
3.5 Bookselling for Children and Young Adults	156
3.5.1 Bookselling Data	159
3.6 Conclusion	164

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Introduction	166
4.1. Methodology Review	166
4.2 Research Mission or Purpose of the Research	174
4.3 Research Design	176
4.3.1 Focus Groups	178

4.3.2	Development of Question Areas	180
4.3.3	Assumptions Underlying Question Design	182
4.4	Formal Procedures	188
4.5	Data Collection: the Sample	190
4.5.1	Schools	190
4.5.2	Participants	193
4.6	Pilot Studies	199
4.6.1	Pilot Study 1	199
4.6.2	Pilot Study 2	202
4.7	Administration of Data	203
4.8	The Process of Analysis	204
4.9	Conclusion	207

CHAPTER 5: DATA REPORTING: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Introduction	209	
5.1	Topic Responses: Question One	211
5.2	Topic Responses: Question Two	224
5.2.1	Personal Recommendations	225
5.2.2	Computer Searches	230
5.2.3	Browsing	230
5.3	Topic Responses: Question Three	231
5.3.1	Author	234
5.3.2	Blurb	236
5.3.3	Cover	238
5.3.4	Title	245
5.3.5	Series	246
5.3.6	Personal Recommendation	248
5.3.7	Movie or Television Tie-in	249
5.3.8	Subject	256
5.3.9	Genre	258

5.3.10	First Page	259
5.3.11	New Books	262
5.3.12	Author Visits	263
5.3.13	Internet	264
5.3.14	Promotional Material within Books	265
5.3.15	Reviews	265
5.4	Topic Responses: Question Four	266
5.4.1	Keen Readers as Buyers	267
5.4.2	Keen Readers as Buyers and Borrowers	272
5.4.3	Keen Readers as Borrowers from Libraries	273
	5.4.3.1 School Libraries	273
	5.4.3.2 Public Libraries	276
5.4.5	Home and Extended Family as Book Sources	281
5.4.6	Books as Gifts - Cash, Voucher or Kind	284
5.4.7	Borrowing from Friends	285
5.5	Topic Responses: Other Issues	288
5.5.1	Reading Behaviour	288
5.5.2	Sibling Readers	297
5.5.3	Changes in Reading Interests	299
5.6	Conclusion	300

CHAPTER 6: DATA REPORTING: ADULT CREATORS

	Introduction	303
6.1	The 'Young Adult' Publishing Category	305
	6.1.2 The Term 'Young Adult'	306
6.2	Commercial Considerations Behind Categorisation	312
	6.2.1 Development of 'Crossover' Titles	315
6.3	Writers' Ambivalence Regarding Identification as a 'YA Author'	324
	6.3.1 Dealing with the Adult 'Snob' Factor	330
6.4	Creators' Attitudes to Audience(s): Young Adult	335

6.4.1	Creators' Contact with Young Adults / Readers	338
6.5	Promotional Role of Authors	341
6.5.1	Promotion by Publishers	349
6.6	Creators' Attitudes to Gatekeepers	355
6.7	Impact of Notions of Audience(s) on Writing / Publishing Decisions	364
6.8	Bookselling Considerations	372
6.9	Conclusion	376

CHAPTER 7: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS AND CREATORS

Introduction		378
7.1	Topic Responses: Question One	379
7.1.1	Australian Books	380
7.1.1.1	Sales Statistics	383
7.1.1.2	Promotion to Institutional Buyers	385
7.1.1.3	Retail Sales	388
7.2	Topic Responses: Question Two	390
7.2.1	Author 'Branding'	391
7.2.2	Author Visits	394
7.3	Topic Responses: Question Three	402
7.3.1	Blurb	402
7.3.2	Cover	405
7.3.3	Title	415
7.3.4	Series	417
7.3.5	Movie or Television Tie-in	421
7.4	Topic Responses: Question Four	422
7.4.1	Keen Readers as Buyers	424
7.4.2	Keen Readers as Buyers and Borrowers	429
7.4.3	Keen Readers as Borrowers from Libraries	430
7.4.3.1	School Libraries	430
7.4.3.2	Public Libraries	431

7.5	Conclusion	436
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION		
	Introduction	441
8.1	The Exercise of Power	442
8.2	Major Findings and Possible Implications	445
8.3	Suggested Areas for Further Research	448
8.4	Conclusion	451
BIBLIOGRAPHY		453
APPENDICES		493
Appendix A: Letter to Principals		494
Appendix B: Letter to Keen Young Adult Readers and Their Parents		497
Appendix C: Permission Form for Participation in Focus Groups		499
Appendix D: Demographic Information Form		501
Appendix E: Novels, Series and Authors Nominated by Focus Group		503
Participants, in Order of Times Mentioned		