R.L. STINE AND CONTRADICTORY GENDER EPISTEMOLOGIES IN THE POSTMODERN CHILDREN'S SERIAL

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ABSTRACT

My thesis argues that R.L. Stine presents purposefully contradictory notions of what it is like to be feminine and masculine through portrayals of gender from book to book in his original *Goosebumps* book series. The original *Goosebumps* series is a children's horror series comprised of sixty-two books, each with a different narrator, premise, and set of gender coding. The differing expressions of gender between books within the series allow Stine's readers an understanding of gender that is not essentialist, but that rather has a place for multiple expressions of masculinity and femininity and recognizes all of these expressions as equally valid. Stine is, in this view, a children's fiction writer whose books refuse to present one singular interpretation of either masculinity or femininity as normative but rather normalize multiple interpretations of gender throughout the series. Though the formulaic content of Stine's books may appear to separate him from postmodernity, his move *toward* multiplicity and contradiction in gendered expressions rather than away from it is a move characteristic of the postmodern writer. I intend to argue within the context of writers like Karen Coats, Perry Nodelman, and Heidi Anne Mesmer who have seen the *Goosebumps* series as employing postmodern gender epistemologies, and against those writers who have seen the series as an instrument of patriarchy. In doing so, I will provide, through a detailed content analysis of the types that appear in Stine's series and their distribution across gender lines, evidence that *Goosebumps* taken as a cohesive work presents to its readers a compelling argument in favor of the deconstruction of gender essentialism.

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my parents, John and Lisa, whose support and love have been the foundation of any good I have ever or will ever accomplish; to my grandmother Sue Nealy, who, knowingly or not, has taught me enough about life to make writing about books easy; and to Christen Gandy, *ma benediction*, who makes everything, this project included, seem like something to be profoundly grateful for.

INTRODUCTION

When R.L. Stine retired his original *Goosebumps* series in 1998 after sixty-two books, he had sold more books than any writer in the history of young adult or children's literature (Jones xxi). In a book about Stine published that same year, Patrick Jones names him the "King of All Media" in response to his successful branding of the *Goosebumps* name across media as diverse as clothing, television, food, clothing, amusement park rides, and cinema[1] and declared him to be the most of famous of all young adult writers. Remarking on the popularity of the series in the mid-2000s, J.S. Ryan notes that *Goosebumps* still held the Guinness World Record for best-selling children's book series. Though the series is now down to the number two spot (placing it behind only J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series), its three hundred million copy figure is still impressive, and is indicative, in Jones' words, of the impact and importance of R.L. Stine (Jones xx). The series' popularity had just passed its peak when Jones' book came out, but he notes importantly that in a list of all-time best-selling children's paperbacks, every *Goosebumps* title shows up almost all of them with sales near one million copies (Jones 147). With such a wide readership, it is worthwhile to examine the way these books affected the children who read (and who still read) them. I will focus here on how the books in Stine's series portray gender; I will conduct a detailed content analysis of *Goosebumps* as a series, specifically examining content categories and their distribution across gender lines, arguing that the series purposely shows males and females occupying the same character types in equal amounts to undermine essentialist notions of gender.

[1] Jones refers to the eventually dropped *Goosebumps*-Tim Burton film, the rights to which were signed in December 1997 (Jones xxi).

Upon its inception, Stine's *Goosebumps* series occupied a unique place in the children's literature market. Stine's literary heritage was not restricted to children's literature. One of Stine's major sources for both inspiration and guidance is the American horror film, particularly the Universal films of the early 1900s and the B-horror movies of the 1950s and 60s. Indeed, James Parker calls the series a "glorious, B-movie bonanza," referring not just to the books' titles (many of which, like *It Came from Beneath the Sink!* are obvious homages to horror film titles) but to the general atmosphere of *Goosebumps* (Parker 35). Like the Universal Horror films, the monsters in *Goosebumps* are often established members of the horror stock: werewolves, mummies, vampires, ghosts, aliens, mad scientists. And, as in those Universal films, the focus is more on the characters' fears of the monsters than on acts of violence by those monsters themselves (in contrast to the *giallo* films of the 1970s and the violence-as-formula slasher films of the 1980s); there are rarely any deaths or serious injuries in the series and there is a strong emphasis on the characters' perceptions of the horrors they face (backlit by generic descriptions of generically creepy locations) rather than the horrors themselves. The series' debt to the B-horror movies of the 50s and 60s may be found in its incorporation of humor alongside its scares. This is not the self-referential, wink-nudge humor of 1990s horror (epitomized by Wes Craven's *Scream*), but a more straightforward type of humor that, while perhaps conscious of the tropes that it is playing with, never strays far enough from the established horror formulas to constitute anything like satire. The humor in *Goosebumps* is more likely to be pun-based or to come from cat's shadow mistaken for a ghost than from a clever exposure of the more ridiculous conceits of the horror genre (something Craven is known for) and the funniest books in the series owe much more to films like *Them!* and *Creature with the Atom Brain* than they do to films in Craven's line.

Patrick Jones identifies Stine's most obvious literary predecessor as Christopher Pike, author of young adult horror books such as *The Slumber Party* and *Bury Me Deep*, whose first book was published in the mid-1980s (Jones 69). Stine's Pikean influence is obvious in his *Fear Street* series, a collection of young adult thriller books, but *Goosebumps* represents a divergence from the Pikean model in that its target audience is, according to J.S. Ryan, "in the age bracket from eight to twelve years old."[2] Though Jones disagrees to a degree, claiming that, while the "while age range of the books is middle school, it is obvious from the products and the real audience of the books that *Goosebumps* mania was highest among six to ten-year olds," his remark about the novelty of Stine's tapping into this specific age-related market remains apt regardless of where the parameters of the series' true audience actually lie; "there was nothing even remotely like *Goosebumps* on the market; it was a brand new field" (Jones 149). Perry Nodelman, in his article "Ordinary Monstrosity: The World of *Goosebumps*" adds, "Before *Goosebumps* appeared, there was little that might be identified as horror fiction for young readers" (Nodelman 118).

This does not mean that there had never been. The editors of *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders* argue that "Children's literature emerged as a genre largely in reaction to the popularity of the adult gothic romance" and that "children were expected to covet books with the tame delights that came from light whimsy rather than the more piquant pleasures of a good shiver" (Jackson et. al 1-2) and Charmette Kendrick adds that "although many writers in the nineteenth century attempted to shield children from the perceived noxious influence of gothic literature, a few brave souls pushed past Victorian constraints" (Kendrick 21). Despite

[2]Ryan notes that this is the age bracket is defined both by the publishers and by the content of the books themselves (Ryan 101).

these barriers, horror fiction for children did exist prior to R.L. Stine, although there are almost no examples of serial horror fiction for children before *Goosebumps*.

Stine's innovation in marketing was not merely the application of the horror serial model to the children's literature market, though *Goosebumps* did represent the first concentrated effort to brand and market the horror serial to this specific demographic. Instead, Stine's most significant demographic achievement was his ability to get young males to read and read voraciously; as Jones asserts, one of the greatest successes of *Goosebumps* is its large male readership (Jones 155). In attracting this group, Stine joined a group of authors who reversed the notion that reading was something that only girls did. Jones again is relevant: "instead of hiding books for fear of teasing, [boys] showed them off at school and traded titles like baseball cards. Books, thanks to R.L. Stine became 'cool' for ten-year-old boys" (Jones 156).

This notion about the gender codification of reading as feminine for children has a complex and far-reaching history. In his landmark work on the subject of children's literature, *The Hidden Adult*, Perry Nodelman presents one potential and persuasive explanation for the feminization of reading for children: "the complaint of parents and teachers, heard across decades, that boys don't read might have something to do with an inherent disavowal of conventional masculinity in characteristic texts for children" (Nodelman 175). Nodelman is referring both to the privileging of traditionally feminine ideas in children's texts (the importance and safety of the home and the move from animalistic irrationality to learning and rule-following, for example) and to the idea that the very act of reading falls more easily within the accepted sphere of the female child, who is instructed by those very books she reads to stay inside and read more, than the sphere of the male child, who is told that his proper place is the

outdoors.[3] Stine himself was clearly conscious of this trend to some extent when he remarked during an AOL Web chat in 1995:

> I searched for 25 years for something that boys would read. Everyone in publishing accepted the fact that girls read books and boys do not. And *Goosebumps* is the first series in the history of publishing that has been read equally by boys and girls.
>
> (Stine 1)

Though Stine has never claimed that he began his *Goosebumps* series in an attempt to rectify the low readership among young males, it is clear that he was aware of the problem while writing his books.

This leads naturally to a second note, which concerns the degree to which this gendered codification of reading relates to the characterization of children in books within the children's literature genre. If reading has often been construed as a feminine activity meant primarily for girls (and if children's book authors are, like Stine to some extent aware of this gendering of the activity of reading), then it is likely that the gender constructions within children's literature among those authors would exist *to be read* by girls; that is, authors aware that mostly girls will be reading their books would have a hard time avoiding the tendency to construct gender within their works with a specific knowledge of how young female readers would react to (or, in many cases, internalize) these constructions. This is problematic on many fronts, most notably in that further alienates male readers from an activity that they have already been instructed to avoid.[4] Stine seeks to avoid this dilemma not by writing specifically for boys (as some have argued), but by attempting to work with material that he feels is, to use his own term, "equally accessible to both genders." Certainly Stine is right in his claim that his readership is not primarily male;

[3]Iris Marion Young's work in her book on body politics *On Female Body Experience* provides an detailed documentation of how and why these spheres exist in the lives of individual children within a patriarchal system.
[4]It is worth noting here that this alienation does not *necessarily* have to occur. However, it often does and, for the purposes of this project, a discussion of how it can be avoided will not take place.

though no official scholarly research was ever conducted on the subject, all documented evidence points to *Goosebumps* as a phenomenon that has had an equal effect on both males and females.[5] This may be partially attributable to the wide reach of the horror genre itself, a fact that Stine utilizes to form his large male readership; Makowski argues that horror

> affects all readers alike, male and female. What they all have in common is terror before the unknown, the unthinkable, or the unspeakable. The way that horror fiction has swept all other fiction genres...proves what a powerful thing literature can be when the subject matter appeals to males and females alike.
> (Makowski 27)

The original *Goosebumps* series consists of sixty-two paperback books, all of which were published by Parachute Press (which Stine co-founded) under copyright with Scholastic Inc. and within the Apple Paperbacks series. The first book in the series, *Welcome to Dead House*, was published in 1992, and the last book, *Monster Blood IV*, was published in 1997. Though they are not the focus of this project, the original *Goosebumps* series was succeeded (or at times overlapped) by six distinct spin-offs: *Give Yourself Goosebumps*, a series of fifty books which were published from in the choose-your-own-adventure format and which were published from 1995 to 2000; *Tales to Give Yourself Goosebumps*, a series of six short story collections published from 1994 to 1997; *Goosebumps 2000*, a series of twenty-five books published from 1998 to 2000 which Stine intended to be much scarier than the books in the original series and to be more appropriate for a young adult audience; *Goosebumps Graphix*, a series of graphic comic adaptations of books from the original series which began in 2006 and is still running[6];

[5] I am here referring specifically to works like Jones' book, which conduct informal surveys of professed *Goosebumps* readers. Though such data is by no means authoritative, it remains the only type of research conducted so far.

[6] As a spin-off series which consists entirely of direct adaptations of books from the original *Goosebumps* series, *Goosebumps Graphix* is of specific interest for this project. The notion of translating the *Goosebumps* into a visual medium is one that is of some relevance to this study, particularly the degree to which such adaptations modify or

Goosebumps Horrorland a currently running series that began in 2008 and which adapts books from the original series to make them compatible with the *Goosebumps Horrorland* video game[7]; and *Goosebumps Horrorland: Hall of Horrors*, a currently running series that began in 2011 and which provides additional adventures for readers who are immersed in the video game universe that are not related to characters story-lines from the original series. Additionally, a *Goosebumps* television series ran from 1995 to 1998 on FoxKids and produced its own series of books, *Goosebumps Presents*, which attempted to align the original stories with their televised adaptations.

The original series itself, as mentioned, consists of sixty-two separate paperback novels, all of which are less than one hundred and thirty pages long. In addition to each novel's story, there are recurring paratextual features present in all of the volumes: a truncated list of the previous books in the series on the back of the title page (with directions to the full list at the back of the book, conveniently contrived in the form of an order sheet), three chapters from the next book in the series, and a biography of Stine himself. Books in the second half of the series also contain advertisements for the other *Goosebumps* spin-off series, the television adaptation, the *Goosebumps* fan club, and various other promotions (such as the *Gives You Goosebumps* contest in which readers are asked to compose a twenty-five word description of what gives them goosebumps in hopes of being rewarded with a monsterized version of their mailed-in photo). Each book has the same border, covering the edges of the book's cover and the majority of the book's back cover, featuring Stine's name in blocky black script and the name of the series in

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change entirely the gender representations (and in some cases, the actual gender!) of the characters from their first iterations. However, this project is not permitted here due to length restrictions.

[7] *Goosebumps Horrorland* is a Wii console game released in 2008 that takes gamers on an adventure through the titular theme park.

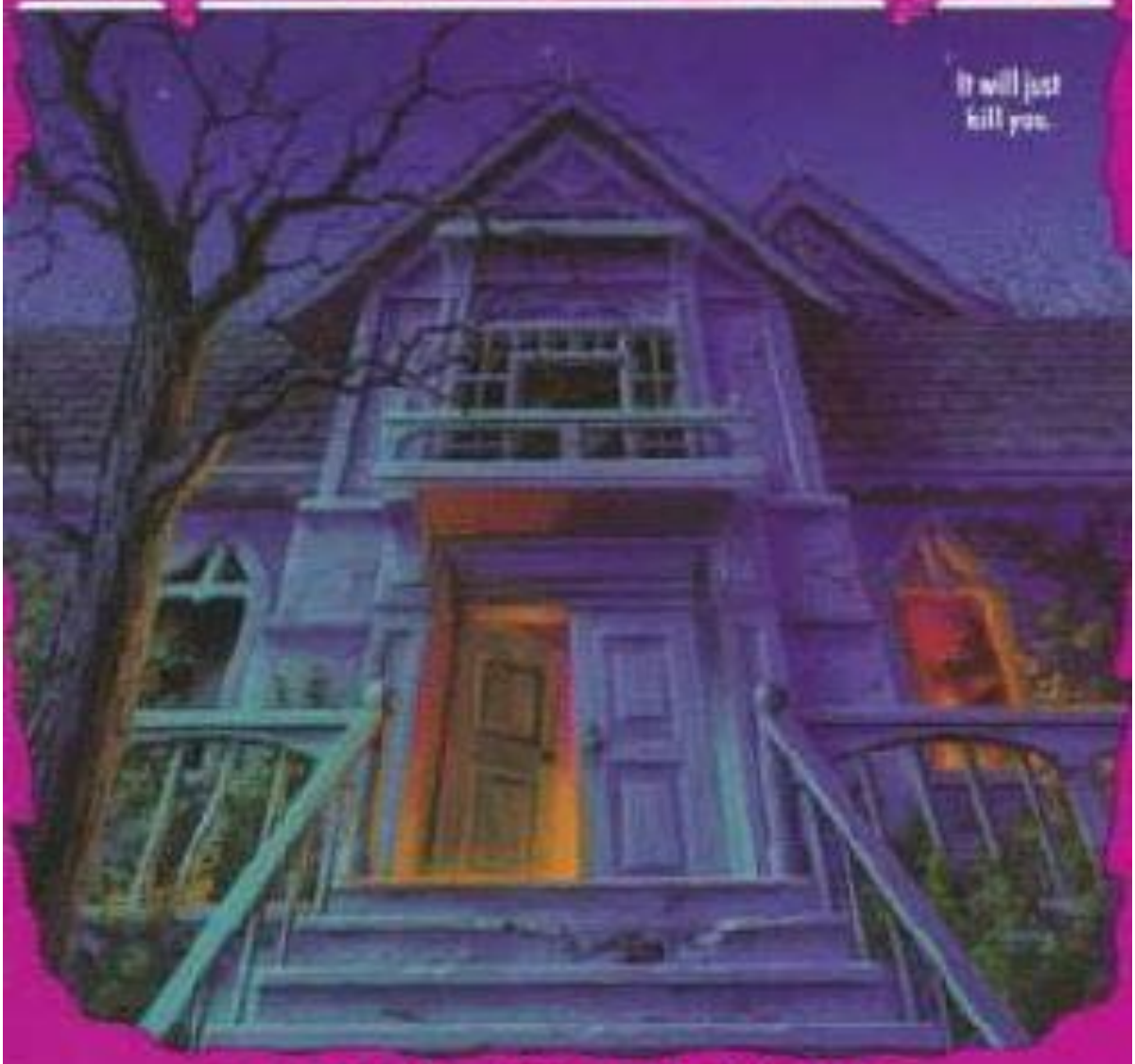
three-dimensional, blood-splattered type at the top and the name of the individual book at the bottom in smaller white text. Every book has its own unique, two-toned color scheme, that colors the border, and a colored picture depicting some event characteristic of the individual story.[8] The cover of the first book in the series, *Welcome to Dead House* provides the prototype

[8]This border, two-toned color scheme, and title logo were all designed by Scholastic Inc. graphic artist Sharon Lisman. (Jones 150)

for the rest of the series:

R. L. STINE

Goosebumps®



WELCOME TO DEAD HOUSE

SCHOLASTIC

These cover drawings, all of which were done by artist Tim Jacobus[9], represent an important aspect of the series' attractiveness to young readers. As such, a case may be made that these drawings, which are themselves adaptations of the stories themselves, are the most crucial marketing tool for each book. Jones calls this look "the total package," a reference to its supreme marketability, and while the uniform look of the series allows for the "brand loyalty" (Jones 150) that is integral to the success of series, the individual covers are responsible for selling the individual titles, as the article "Judging a Book by Its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Fiction" indicates. These para-texts are "often more important than the text itself" because they are the first thing that children see in regards to each individual *Goosebumps* title (Yampbell 14). Indeed, *Goosebumps* does well in all five of the levels of the BrandDynamics pyramid identified by Martin Lindstrom in his book on brands and children, *BRANDchild: Remarkable Insights into the Minds of Today's Global Kids and Their Relationships with Brands*. Lindstrom argues that brands must satisfy the following five criterion to be successful: presence, relevance, performance, advantage, and bonding, all of which are achieved by Stine's series. But it is not necessarily the brand of *Goosebumps* that is of great importance here; it is the fanbase of *Goosebumps* readers where my focus more accurately lies. These readers are important not because they are merely readers but because they are *fans*, a term which Henry Jenkins identifies as having a more participatory definition: "Fandom is not about Bourdieu's notion of holding art

[9]Tim Jacobus also did the artwork for the *Goosebumps 2000* series, as well as for the never-published *Goosebumps Gold* series which was intended to provide sequels to some of the more popular books from the original series. Several of these proposed sequels (such as those to *The Haunted Mask* and *Night of the Living Dummy)* ended up occurring later in the series proper.

at a distance, it's not that high art discourse at all; it's about having control and mastery over art by pulling it close and integrating it into your sense of self" (Jenkins 23). Under Jenkins' definition, *Goosebumps* fans not only control the art form they are taking part in (numerous *Goosebumps* promotionals gave readers the chance to "Create a Monster"), but they construct their own *selves* through their relationship with the series. In his article on the series, Nodelman notes, with perhaps a larger focus on consumerism, that the series is about "ownership" (Nodelman 118).

Critical Background

Early critical discussion of Stine's series was limited to one central question, captured nicely in the title of Leslie A. Perry and Rebecca Butler's 1997 article in *Language Arts*: "Are *Goosebumps* Books Real Literature?" This question revolved around two competing claims. The first was that the *Goosebumps* books did not count as literature but were, as Vicki Coppell puts it, "the literary equivalent of junk food" (Coppell 15). Those in this group felt that the books provided little substantive intellectual material for young readers were essentially making children less likely to read by lowering their appreciation for quality literature and causing them to associate reading with mindless entertainment. A (non-scholarly) sub-section of this group was those who believed that Stine's books were morally damaging to children readers. This smaller group, composed mostly of librarians and parents, were wont to make comments such as this one, from Patty Campbell, "I think [Stine] is wicked...I think he's extremely destructive. He preys on the absolute worst instincts of the human soul" (Campbell 4). To a large degree, those

in this second camp were arguing not just about the merits of *Goosebumps* as literature but about the appropriateness of the horror genre for child readers.

In the opposing camp were those who argued that the *Goosebumps* books were "very useful in making children become 'hooked on books so that they will move on to better literature'" (Jones 75). This view, which uses the language of addiction ("hooked on") to describe children's attraction to the series, saw *Goosebumps* as a site of transition from picture books to longer, all-text books with chapters (the *Goosebumps* books themselves being too short and too specialized in focus to count themselves as part of the category of literary chapter books). Often those in this camp, such as Perry and Butler, argued that the answer to the question of whether Stine's books count as literature is beside the point; it seemed obvious that they did not, but they could still be valuable as tools for leading pre-teen children into a world of words that was often either uninteresting or un-navigable. Jones in particular dedicated the titular chapter of his book to refuting some of the arguments against Stine's work, arguing that the books mirror the YA experience: "lots of confusion about what is happening, an intensity of emotion, and a thin layer of everyday fear of humiliation" (Jones 56), allowing them to meet the emotional needs of YA readers, which he identifies as "achieving independence, gaining acceptance, forming an identity, and managing excitement" (Jones 7). This reflects Doris Fong's defense of series fiction for YA readers, which she neatly summarizes by saying, "YAs are not adults. They process what they read through a filter of young adult, not adult, experiences" (Fong 7). Jones further argues that series book offer a psychological reassurance to YA readers because they provide a "stable, known, and dependable experience to those readers see their lives and bodies in a state of flux" (Jones 61).

Jones' support of series reading is backed up by the research project of Catherine Sheldrick Ross, who found that series reading, far from being harmful, might be for some readers an essential stage in their development as powerful readers (Ross 3). Ross' description of the results of her research concludes, “rhetoric to the contrary, series books do NOT enfeeble the reader or render them unfit for reading anything else” (Ross 29). Similar research conducted by Rusikoff came to similar results; he found that

> the hypothesis that light reading leads to more serious reading...is supported [by my research]. Frequent light readers do become good readers who go on to advanced, complex reading tasks, an ironic finding given educational and parental concerns.
>
> (Rusikoff 123)

Jones' advocation of horror as a genre appropriate (and even beneficial) for young readers is also a well-supported view. Psychologist Dorothy Singer contends that horror allows young readers “a healthy way to explore their feelings and let off steam at a time when they are learning to control their emotions and behave appropriately” (Singer 214) and YA critic Cosette Kies adds, “horror scares us, and the relief following the realization that the horror is not real brings pleasure. Horror is fun just because it is scary and shocking” (Kies 34). Klause remarks that interactions with horror give young readers the chance to “project their everyday fears into a monster and confront them in an environment they can control. This power gives them strength, especially when characters in books for younger readers defeat evil all by themselves” (Klause 12). Barbara Smiley's remarks, though initially in the context of the appropriateness of horror films for young viewers, are also applicable here:

> [As young people] struggle for independence, their feeling toward their parents might swing between love and anger, at times even murderous (guilt ridden) fantasies...Young people feel that

> they can relate with monsters...They fear they have shameful, monstrous impulses, and [interaction with the horror genre] helps them sort out their ambivalence.
> (Smiley 21)

Jones' statement on the subject sums up this view that horror is helpful for young readers: "horror is exciting, and given the rapid physical and emotional changes occurring in a teenager's life, the seeking out of thrills, chills, and spills as an escape valve is quite common" (Jones 213). A final voice on the subject is provided by some of the readers themselves, whom Campbell interviewed in preparation for her article on Stine; when asked why they read books like those in the *Goosebumps* series, they replied in many different ways, ranging from "I read for pleasure I just want to read something trashy. Adults have their trashy reading, why can't kids too? I'm offended that adults would try to limit or change my reading habits" to "I know these aren't real, that's why I read them" (Campbell 15). These responses demonstrate both an appreciation of the importance of reading as an activity and a knowledge of the place of *Goosebumps* in that process. Though other, less encouraging reasons are presented ("I don't know any other reading for my age"), it is important to recognize that these young readers seem to be mostly aware of the criticisms of Stine's work and to have reconciled it with their own opinions about what material is appropriate for them and why.

Literary criticism about Stine took a different direction in the late 1990s when the questions being asked changed. Whereas prior criticism had revolved around the moral implications of children reading *Goosebumps* and the series' status as real literature or junk food, scholars in this time period began asking questions that were less practical and more theoretical. The three most important articles to come out of this new phase of Stine criticism were Perry Nodelman's previously referenced 1997 article, Heidi Anne Mesmer's 1998 article "*Goosebumps*: The Appeal of Predictability and Violence," and Vicki Coppell's previously mentioned 1998

article, “The 'Goosebumps' in *Goosebumps*: Impositions and R. L. Stine.” These articles approached Goosebumps from a theoretical perspective, attempting to avoid blanket statements about the series' virtue or value and to analyze instead what actually went on within the books themselves and what the series' content communicated to its large and fiercely loyal fanbase.

Coppell's article makes a case that Stine's books present an understanding of the world that is potentially harmful to the impressionable readers who consume them so readily. If the *Goosebumps* books are popular (and their popularity was never in dispute), she reasons, then it is likely that the effect that they have on their readers is profound. Thus, the main issue should be what messages are presented in the books themselves; that is, which views or perspectives are declared to be normative and which are excluded. By performing a close reading of the some of the books, Coppell attempts to provide a sampling of the kinds of unspoken claims Stine makes to his children about what it means to be "normal."

Coppell's conclusions are not encouraging. She sees the major attributes of Stine's book (specifically their use of humor as the "jokey, shorthand speech of the child [rather] than that of the adult") as "all part of the marketing drive to attract the child consumer" (Coppell 17). She argues that the books "have the potential to invade the child in all aspects of social experience from private to public," a fact which is problematic given that the "values [which are] incorporated in the *Goosebumps* narratives" are ones that she sees as "including violence and promotion and support of patriarchy" (Coppell 18). To categorize Coppell as anti-juvenile fiction or even anti-violence-within-juvenile fiction would be a gross mis-characterization; rather, it is the use of violence in the *Goosebumps* series that she is against. Coppell sees Stine's books as using "the values incorporated in the world of commerce" (Coppell 2) to lure children into the series (echoing Jones' claim that the real issue most have with Stine is that the

Goosebumps cash machine reminds too many people that “while books can be literature, they are always commerce”) (Jones 192). This ubiquity of the *Goosebumps* texts are, for her, troubling given patriarchal messages she is convinced pervade those same texts. The last four pages of her article seek to provide, through a close reading of approximately ten of Stine's books, a cohesive notion of what sort of world the *Goosebumps* series implies. Put another way, Coppell attempts to decipher what messages about identity (specifically gender identity) the books are sending to their young readers. The messages she identifies are ones which are consistent with the patriarchal agenda, messages which promote the idea of gender essentialism and confine masculinity and femininity to their traditional meanings. Read alongside her argument that the series inundates its readers with these messages, Coppell's readings of a selection of books from the series present a formidable obstacle to any critic attempting to argue that the *Goosebumps* series presents an outlook on the world which refuses to accept as true the notion of gender essentialism.

But where Coppell contends that the series espouses a single, cohesive message based on her close readings, both Mesmer and Nodelman disagree, seeing the series as producing no coherent message for its readers. Nodelman sees Stine's series as presenting a view of the world which offers "no cohesive system of knowledge or faith or ethics” (Nodelman 11) and Mesmer continues the same line of thought, writing, “Stine's reader experiences chaos...there is no causal relationship between events, no linkage of character's actions to the conclusions,” though she ends with a conclusion that is much stronger than Nodelman's ambivalence, saying that “*Goosebumps* creates a world which contains ultimately no hope for its child protagonists” (Mesmer 57). Despite their different conclusions, both Nodelman and Mesmer agree that the

series is full of contradictions, a position which is in contrast to Coppell's argument that the series has a clear, knowable patriarchal agenda.

The work of Nodelman and Mesmer lead to later articles in the early 2000s by J.S. Ryan and Karen Coats which took their arguments about the chaotic nature of the *Goosebumps* world and connected them more explicitly to postmodern critical theory. Ryan responds to Mesmer's conclusion in the passage reproduced below, in which he argues that books read together as a series ultimately create a coherent message of hope (rather than hopelessness) for Stine's young audience:

> While no single text by Stine takes us--or his youthful readers--a very long way towards a successful attainment of the needed confidence and maturity, it may be argued that the reading of a series of them can afford some measure of self-identification with the courage and resourcefulness of the central figures. Slowly such a reader can learn to accept responsibility for him- or her-self, for social obligations, for contributing to a part of one's created friendships. Indeed, there are, arguably present throughout, the ingredients for a phenomenology of attainable hope--one concerned with an achieved sense of identity, security of place, freedom from environmental violence, with a measure of good parenting, and of confidence in dealing with one's peers and with the opposite sex.
> (Ryan 202)

Ryan, as is clear from the above passage, comes away with a very different result than Coppell Nodelman or Mesmer. On the one hand, he seems to be opposed to Coppell's statement that "the *Goosebumps* books offer the repetitious familiarity of the hamburger" (Coppell 22) and Mesmer's conclusion about the series' presenting a lack of hope, arguing instead that Stine's books contains positive messages for its readers. On the other, he is also unwilling to consent to Nodelamn's reading, which sees *Goosebumps* as too inconsistent and self-contradictory to provide any sort of coherent message. Ryan argues that the series is postmodern, but his use of the term is unorthodox:

> These so numerous and peculiarly vulnerable Stine-created children are in the main 'post-modern'--coming from fractured families, with little meaningful identification with the places

> where they may be, and with their moral codes very little defined or developed. They are, in short, genuine contemporary 'urban kids.'
> (Ryan 217)

Ryan's post-modernism is not an accurate representation of the theoretical tenets of postmodern critical theory, though it does have some things in common with it.

In contrast, Coats employs the conventional meaning of postmodern in her 2001 article, “The Mysteries of Postmodern Epistemology: Stratemeyer, Stine and Contemporary Mystery for Children," which is in part a direct response to Nodelman's work on Stine. Whereas Coppell and Ryan's proposed views of the *Goosebumps* series focus on the meanings the books *create*, Coats' focuses on the books' tendency to blur or undermine meaning. Coats argues that the series does not, as Ryan and Coppell would have it, espouse any one perceptible understanding of the world; rather, it is through the multiple contradictory voices and experiences of the books' narrators that categories like gender are shown to be constructions. Coats writes:

> Certain contemporary mysteries for children, such as those by R.L. Stine adopt a different stance toward knowledge [than those adopted by Stratemeyer and the Nancy Drew series]. They do not move from not knowing to knowing, chaos to order, tension to homeostasis. Although they do not have predictable plot structures, they do have a particular flavour in common, which consists in the fact that when the book's adventure is over, neither characters nor readers know anything more conclusive about the mystery or about themselves than they did before the book began.
> (Coats 332)

This is "a world that wavers rather than one that follows rational rules" (Coats 311) and Coats sees this lack of cohesion as progressive. Reading Stine in the line of Stratemeyer's Nancy Drew series (in which truth is knowable and good things mostly happen to good people), Coats argues that *Goosebumps* represents a postmodern progression in that it recognizes the flimsy foundations on which supposedly solid concepts such as truth and gender are built and allows for a larger variety of expressions of truth rather than confining it to narrow parameters. This is in

keeping with the de-centering and deconstructing tactics of postmodern theory, particularly post-structuralism.

This new interpretation of Stine leads to a re-evaluation of Coppell's argument specifically. Coppell's close readings of a selection of *Goosebumps* texts are (for the most part) insightful and persuasive as individual readings. But her attempt to find a common thread among them which can form an overall statement or message by the series about the world is misguided. Moreover, her readings do not take into account those other books in the series where gender is presented in ways which directly oppose the ways it is presented in the books she examined. This realization has directed me to perform my own careful examination of the series as a whole in hopes of determining the degree to which Coppell's arguments are reflected by those books in the series which she did not use for her reading. That this project was first founded as a reaction to her reading of the series as patriarchal does not mean that it has remained merely reactionary; however, it may be helpful to review Coppell's major arguments both to help further clarify my opposing position and to give voice to its counterpoint.

Coppell's argument may be broken into three major segments: first, she sets up a methodology for what does and does not constitute critically significant content within Stine's series; second, she identifies specific examples of characters within the series which exist along patriarchal lines; third, she addresses other issues of importance within the series beyond gender, such as representations of race and class.

Coppell's methodology is flawed in a couple of ways. First, her sample size is too small. Her close reading takes into account less than one-sixth of the original *Goosebumps* series, and while that is a sufficient amount of content to perform a surface analysis, it is not enough to make definitive statements about the messages and ideological content of the entire series. As

will be shown later, Coppell's conclusions are often undermined by books in the series with which she is clearly not familiar, a danger which is always present when making generalized comments about a book series while only having knowledge of a fraction of its contents. Secondly, Coppell sets a curious precedent when she takes the unpleasant ending of *The Girl Who Cried Monster* (in which the narrator, Lucy, discovers that her family is actually made up of "cannibalistic monsters" (Coppell 24) who eat the librarian who was the presumed monster of the story) as a nullification or a re-writing of the rest of the book's message:

> A world in which girls are normatively brave, resourceful, and successful is a world that is aberrant: a normatively female world is one in which (male) life is prey to the horror of cannibalism of the vagina dentata.
> (Coppell 14)

Coppell contends that the surprise ending of *The Girl Who Cried Monster* constitutes a revoking of the positive aspects of the book. She reasons that, if the book turns out to be set in a world in which monsters are not only loose but undiscoverable (since Lucy does not know until the end of the book that her parents are monsters of a more fierce type than the librarian monster who had terrified her for the body of the novel), then the fact that there is a "protagonist [who] is a female who bravely and resourcefully challenges social taboos" is thus shown to children to be a dangerous, indeed monstrous, deviation. In other words, Lucy is allowed to exist as an intelligent and unconfined girl precisely because she lives in a sort of alternate universe (a universe which, Coppell argues, is one "both sexes would find...a place to dread"). Extrapolating from this reading, one logically concludes that those *Goosebumps* books which end on a world which is a place to dread must constitute similar revokings of those books' messages about what sorts of gender expressions are and are not acceptable, effectively reversing those messages by virtue of the menace of the world in which those messages are seen as normal (Coppell 14).

Such a broad statement is problematic to make for an entire series, however, and is even difficult for Coppell to sustain in her other readings of Stine's work. Her critique of *Welcome to Dead House*, for example, claims that the book supports the patriarchal agenda by positing an older sister who knowingly does wrong by breaking her parent's rules and is subsequently punished, only to be saved by her younger brother (for whose safety her sin of rule-breaking was committed). As Coppell says

> To further promote the dominance of the male [in] *Welcome to Dead House* it is Josh who rescues Amanda by holding the "the bright beam of light" on Ray causing this parody of a child to disintegrate. Again the implication is that the male is the one with the phallic "light" of true knowledge, and the female cannot hope to compete.
>
> (Coppell 14)

Welcome to Dead House does not end with this event, which actually happens in chapter fourteen of the eighteen-chapter book, but Coppell's reading goes no further. In the succeeding chapters, Josh and Amanda leave the graveyard only to be confronted by the former residents of their house, now in ghost form. These ghosts tell them that they need "new blood" to carry on and close in on the siblings, but they are rescued by Mr. Dawes, the family's real estate agent, at the last moment. This is another false ending however, as Mr. Dawes turns out to be a ghost as well. In a moment that drastically undermines Coppell's claim of Josh's phallic power, the flashlight with which he defeated Ray fails him--"'It's broken,' Josh said, 'I guess when it hit the gravestone...'" (Stine 109-110)--and the children escape to look for their parents, who they find trapped by the ghosts in the town's amphitheater. It is Amanda, not Josh, who discovers the means to rescue their parents:

> "What are we going to do?" Josh repeated urgently, still holding desperately to arm. "We can't just stand here and--"
>
> I suddenly knew what we were going to do.

> It just came to me. I didn't even have to think hard.
>
> "Maybe we can save them," I whispered, backing away from the tree. "Maybe *can* do something."
>
> Josh let go of my arm. He stared at me eagerly.
>
> "We're going to push this tree over," I whispered with so much confidence that I surprised myself. "We're going to push the tree over so the sunlight will fill the amphitheater."
>
> (Stine 116)

The two siblings succeed in pushing the tree over together and save their parents. Though Coppell's initial reading clearly does not take the chapters after chapter fourteen into account, it may still be argued that Amanda's surprise at her own ability ("I whispered with so much confidence that I surprised myself") continues to perpetuate the myth that women are not normatively resourceful. This defense only saves Coppell for a moment, however, as the book ends with Mr. Dawes, who was not in the amphitheater at the time when the tree was pushed over, still haunting Dark Falls. The world Coppell sees as representing patriarchy is, just like the world she sees as representing female empowerment, a world in which monsters are allowed to roam free. This undermines Coppell's own logic on several levels, both undoing her argument about *Welcome to Dead House*'s patriarchal leanings and her more general arguments about the use of endings to determine the message of any of the individual books.

In the second segment of her argument, Coppell identifies specific examples of character types which she sees as being dictated by Stine's gender essentialism. In this section of her close readings, Coppell makes several contentions about recurring character types in the *Goosebumps* series which are in direct contradiction to the evidence which I will later provide in my content analysis. Coppell defines the stereotype of the Stinean male as "an independent individual who may define his own rules," a contrast to the Stinean female, who is "organised...not only

externally controlled by her position in the patriarchal family but internally controlled by the repression of her own natuiral drives...invariably the 'goody two shoes' type" (Coppell 11). These types, as will soon be shown, not only fail to be sustained throughout the series, but, in some cases, fail to be sustained even throughout the books in which Coppell identifies their presence.

Coppell's final contribution in her article is her most salient. Coppell does not limit her discussion to issues of gender solely, but also addresses issues of class and race in regards to Stine's presumed inappropriate handling of these identity categories. In this respect, Coppell's readings of Stine do in fact hold true for the entirety of the series. Stine's characters are, with very few exceptions, white, middle to upper class, and heterosexual. While I will be arguing for the importance of the non-essentialist portrayal of gender in *Goosebumps*, it is important to remember that there are many other areas of identity in which the series fails to depict a true variety of perspectives.

Methodology and Terminology

Another issue which must be addressed before turning to the content analysis section of this project concerns the methodology which I will be employing to draw conclusions both about the series as a whole and about individual books within the series. Having criticized Coppell's methodology for drawing series-wide conclusions from a small sample size, I have read and annotated all sixty-two books in the original *Goosebumps* series in preparation for a content analysis of the series. As I have previously stated, my focus in doing so is on the series'

representation of gender expressions from book to book, so I have traced certain attributes, actions, and character types through the entire series to see if they are represented disparately, equally, or close-to-equally between males and females. This has required the creation of project-specific shorthand in order to more easily identify and track some of these items, and I believe it to be worthwhile to explain some of the more complicated jargon (all of which is of my own creation specifically for this project) here rather than attempt to introduce them at the same time I am attempting to use them to prove crucial points in my larger argument.

The first of these terms which are representative of a specific action which manifests itself multiple times throughout the series is the term "scare prank." This term is meant to capture a certain activity which characters throughout the series engage in frequently. The scare prank is, simply, any attempt by one of the characters to frighten or unnerve one of the other characters by means of tricking them into believing that they are in some sort of physical danger. This tactic, as the name implies, is meant to result in the victim becoming scared, thus allowing the pranker to be in a position of power and control over them, as well as to relish their gullibility and cowardice for becoming afraid at what is ultimately a perfectly safe situation.

In contrast to the scare prank, a separate term is needed for a different sort of trick, also common among *Goosebumps* characters: the death prank. The components of the death prank are similar to that of the scare prank, with one crucial difference. While the goal is still the same, that being to allow the pranker a measure of power over his victims as well as a chance to taunt them about their fear, the death prank does not involve tricking the prankee into thinking that he or she is in danger. Instead, it involves tricking the prankee into thinking that the pranker is in danger.

Both of these terms (scare prank and death prank) are meant to denote certain actions which I have concluded warrant highlighting for the sake of my analysis of the series. This final

term is not meant to describe an action but rather a frame of mind or emotional state which results in a series of predictable actions. The term I have chosen is "bravado," whose etymology renders it exceptionally apt for this new meaning[10] is meant to describe a character that is feeling and acting in the way Zack does after he returns from a frighteningly long stint in the world of invisibility in this excerpt from *Let's Get Invisible*:

> "How do you feel?" I asked, grabbing his shoulders. I think I wanted to know for sure that he was really back."
> "I'm back!" Zack proclaimed, smiling. "That's all I care about."
> "That was really scary," April said quietly, hands shoved into the pockets of her white tennis shorts.
> I mean, really."
> "I wasn't scared," Zack said, suddenly changing his tune. "I knew there was no problem."
> Do you *believe* this guy?
> One second, his whining and wailing, begging me to do something.
> The next second, he's pretending he had the time of his life. Mister Confident.
> (Stine 58)

As evidenced by this example, an expression of bravado begins necessarily with vulnerability. Here, that vulnerability, which is on the part of all the present characters but which its presence in the person of Zack is what is of the most relevance to this analysis, is made clear by the use of words/phrases such as "very frightened," "wailed," "pleaded," and "long, breathless sigh of relief." As the excerpt ends, Zack, is in a position of both emotional and physical vulnerability as he collapses to his knees in gratefulness for having returned from the invisible world, his heart pounding. This experience is necessary for the character in question because without this intense

[10]The Oxford English Dictionary defines bravado as "Boastful or threatening behaviour; ostentatious display of courage or boldness; bold or daring action intended to intimidate or to express defiance; **often, an assumption of courage or hardihood to conceal felt timidity, or to carry one out of a doubtful or difficult position**." I have highlighted the portion of the definition that is, as will be seen shortly, particularly applicable to my use of the term.

vulnerability, we would not see the parallel intensity of defensiveness which was presented in the previous example.[11]

Bravado, then, is shown to have been expressed when this sort of vulnerability is followed immediately with the response shown in the previous excerpt. Zack's response is particularly instructive because it includes many of the trademarks of the bravado-laden re-writing of a given situation: Zack immediately changes his emotional state from terrified to happy-go-lucky, he denies the extent (or entire existence) of his previous fright and he retells the narrative of the event as one in which he was enjoying himself and was separate from the obvious fear of his peers. The goal of bravado is made obvious through these three attributes of its expression; simply put, bravado exists in Stine's series to attempt to retell the story of what actually happened in a way which saves the previously-vulnerable character from being in a position of lesser power. In other words, Zack attempts to re-write his own fear both in order to prevent himself from being accused of vulnerability and to put himself in a position of power over his friends, who, not expressing bravado themselves, are still tied to their previous fright. In this way the expression of bravado is both narrative and ontological; Zack at once both changes his past via story-telling; the new story, "Zack was never afraid and was having fun the whole time," being substituted for the old, "Zack was frightened," and categorizes himself-as-frightened as an entirely separate being with whom he has no connection. This brings to mind writers like Rorty and Foucault[12] in that it establishes both the legitimacy (at least in Zack's

[11]Of course, a less intense degree of vulnerability would naturally result in a less exaggerated expression of bravado. For an example of this, see expressions of bravado by specimens of the Scaredy-Cat type, such as Cooper from *The Barking Ghost*.

[12]Rorty is, of course, most well-known for his claim that each break in one's consciousness (sleep, anesthesia, etc.) represents the termination of one self/identity and the genesis of a new, separate one. Foucault's work in his essay "The Death of the Author" is relevant here for establishing the irrelevance of authorial intention, and thus a break from the notion of author as anything greater than a function.

mind) of considering one's past as a previous, non-concomitant self and the idea that those previous identities can be viewed as entirely separate from (and, in this case, not relevant to) the current self. By making a distinction between the Zack-who-was-frightened and the-Zack-of-moment, and by denying the existence of the former and replacing him with the-Zack-who-had-the-time-of-his-life, this character does more than deny his own vulnerability: he places the self who experienced that vulnerability on an entirely separate narrative and ontological plane.

In summary, these three terms, death prank, scare prank, and bravado, will be extremely helpful in more succinctly identifying various recurring actions and emotional states in the following analysis of different types of characters along gender lines in Stine's *Goosebumps* series. As a final note, I must now clarify my use of the word "type" in said analysis; I intend the word to be taken not in its semiotic usage, but in its more general. That is, as in the following definition from the Oxford English Dictionary: "The general form, structure, or character distinguishing a particular kind, group, or class of beings or objects; hence *transf.* a pattern or model after which something is made." Thus, each type here discussed will be discussed with the understanding that these types are not semiotic categories but merely groupings of like content, of which the individual iterations will constitute specimens.[13]

, It is also important to clarify the role of protagonists versus secondary characters in the interpretation of this typal data. Not all of the specimens of the types identified are the primary characters of their respective books; indeed, some of them, like Tyler, a Scaredy-Cat specimen from *Vampire Breath*, only appear for a few pages. It would then be misleading to give Tyler's

13 The Oxford English Dictionary defines a specimen as: "An example, instance, or illustration *of* something, from which the character of the whole may be inferred."

embodiment of the Scaredy-Cat type the same weight as that of a character like Carly Beth from *The Haunted Mask*, another specimen of that same type who is her book's protagonist and through whom all of the book's developments are seen. To help account for these differences, I have given more consideration to those typal specimens who represent the protagonists of their books, a fact which is shown in the Appendix and which is of particular importance to the Scaredy-Cat type, as without this measure the data for that type would be quite difficult to read in line with my thesis.

Before diving into the content analysis section of my paper, it will be helpful to clarify my position on a few of the issues which have been brought up by my discussion of the critical history of Stine's series. This will both serve to make it clear what direction I intend for my analysis to lead the reader and to pre-emptively resolve questions which might distract from the focus of my more data-oriented research.

The first of these issues is one which has been recently discussed, the question of the significance of the ending of individual books in the series for the statements the bodies of those books make about gender. As I have shown, Coppell's conclusions about the broad importance of endings are problematic. This is not to suggest that all of the *Goosebumps* books end in the same way or even that her original reading of the ending of *The Girl Who Cried Monster* is unsound. I do not wish to assert that the ending of each individual book *does* or *does not* universally indicate an erasure of that book's gender constructions; what I wish to make clear instead is that there is no evidence whatsoever that these monstrous endings are used *only* in those cases where females are empowered and that happier endings are used *only* in those cases where females are restricted. For example, both *The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb* and *A Night in*

Terror Tower contain examples of females who "transgress" according to Coppell's definition. In the former, the main female character, Sari, transgresses in the same way Coppell identifies in Lucy from *The Girl Who Cried Monster*. Coppell writes that Lucy "loves to transgress by terrifying her younger brother with scary stories but, although she exasperates her parents with this particular piece of mischief, she goes unpunished by them" (Coppell 12). Sari, who is also older than her cousin Gabe, tricks him by hiding in a mummy case and then jumping out at him. She relates the story to "Uncle Ben," who is in charge of the two children and who acts as their parental figure throughout, with results that clearly mirror those of Lucy's parents:

> Now [Sari] was walking ahead of me, arm in arm with her dad, telling him something, her face close to his ear. Suddenly they both burst out laughing and he turned back to look at me.
>
> I could feel my face getting hot.
>
> I knew what she'd told him.
>
> She'd told him about hiding in the mummy case and making me scream like a scared baby. And now they were both chuckling about what a jerk I was.[14]
>
> (Stine 46)

Sari is clearly not punished by Uncle Ben for this act, as he also derives pleasure from her trick. Similarly, Sue, the female protagonist in *A Night in Terror Tower*, relishes frightening her younger brother Eddie with the same amount of gusto. In a scene in which both siblings are taking a tour of the torture room of a medieval English castle, Sue notices Eddie's voice trembling and acknowledges that "she knows that he really [doesn't] like scary things especially when they [are] real" (Stine 51). Yet it is only moments later when Sue pretends that the spiked handcuffs she has been playing with have locked around her wrists and are cutting into her.

[14]It is worth noting that Sari and Gabe's separation from Uncle Ben is the result of her coercing him to explore the pyramids with her, another transgression using Coppell's logic, as she identifies rule-following as a traditionally feminine trait and rule-breaking (when it occurs with impunity) as a traditionally masculine trait.

Eddie's reaction and Sue's glee in seeing it, are another example of the occurrence which Coppell highlights in *The Girl Who Cried Monster*:

Yet these transgressing girls go unpunished. *A Night in Terror Tower* ends with Sue and Eddie happily ordering fast food with their new-found sorcerer friend and *The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb* ends with Sari and Gabe resting safely in a hotel room and the monsters of the pyramids vanquished. In both cases, the worlds in which these females break out of the restrictions which Coppell argues Stine places on Lucy via the ending of her book are worlds in which those same restrictions do not exist.

On the other hand, not all books which embody the patriarchal agenda Coppell sees in Stine's work end happily. Coppell presents Amanda, the already-discussed older sister in *Welcome to Dead House*, as an embodiment of the controlled female who must deal with her unruly and unrestricted younger brother. As I have shown, *Welcome to Dead House* does not end happily, but it is not the only instance of this character type occurring in a book which ends unpleasantly. Ginger Wald, the female protagonist of *The Beast from the East*, is like Amanda in many ways: she takes care of her two twin brothers Pat and Nat, who are described as reacting to being told not to do something by "only [wanting] to do it more" (Stine 25), and she is considered "the sensible one of the family," highlighting her adherence to parental rules (Stine 11). Embodying Coppell's designations in similar fashion, Todd, the male protagonist of *Go Eat Worms!*, ignores authority at will with no repercussions. In a particularly telling scene, Todd skips class because of his worm-related science project, despite the protestations of his friend, to which he replies coolly, "I don't care" (Stine 18). Both Ginger and Todd are examples of the stereotypes Coppell identifies in her article, but both *The Beast from the East* and *Go Eat Worms!* end unhappily; in the former, the Wald siblings escape from their monstrous captors by

pretending to be Level Three players in the fatal game in which they were forced to participate, only to run into a Level Three monster on the book's final page; in the latter, Todd gives up his study of worms after a series of frightening events and takes up lepidopterology, thinking it a safer avenue for his scientific pursuits, only to be confronted at the book's close by a giant butterfly carrying an enormous silver pin (Stine 119). In both instances, those very stereotypes which Coppell argues support patriarchy are, to use her logic, undermined by the frightening endings of the books which contain them.

What is clear from these examples is that the assignation of "happy" and "unhappy" ends is not predicated on the extent to which the books reinforce patriarchy and is, it seems, instead not particularly related to *any* one trait or characteristic. Indeed, as may seem appropriate for a series within the horror genre, the majority of books in the *Goosebumps* series end in one of the following ways: with the protagonist in some sort of immediate danger or peril (as in the previously mentioned examples, as well as books like *The Curse of Camp Cold Lake*, in which the protagonist is at the mercy of a ghost who wishes to force her to spend the rest of her life in the spirit world, or *How to Kill a Monster*, in which the protagonist learns that she and her brother are surrounded by angry, hungry versions of the monster they have just painstakingly dispatched of), or transformed into some sub-human creature (as in *Bad Hare Day*, in which the protagonist is turned into a magician's pet rabbit, or *The Barking Ghost*, in which the protagonist and his female companion are turned into squirrels), or informed that some foundational beliefs of his/her world are not true (as in *My Hairiest Adventure*, in which the protagonist learns that he and his friends were all formerly dogs and were transformed into children as part of a science experiment, or as in *The Shocker on Shock Street*, in which the protagonist and her best friend turn out to be robots programmed to test a theme park ride). In fact, only thirteen of the sixty-

two books in the original *Goosebumps* series end in ways which are not variations of those mentioned above. Of those thirteen, seven of them end with the protagonist's life returning back to normal and the monsters of the novel conquered, usually substituting a pun for the more common twist ending.[15] The remaining six books end in ways which are more ambiguous: *You Can't Scare Me!* ends with the book's villain, the "smug" Courtney, bragging that she was right about the existence of monsters (obscuring the fact that the mud monsters which attacked her and the book's protagonists are still alive) (Stine 27); *One Day in Horrorland* ends with the Morris family safely back in their house, but confronted by one of the workers in the horror theme park they have escaped, who enthusiastically offers them free passes to come back which they will doubtlessly never use; *The Cuckoo Clock of Doom* ends with Michael having happily returned back to the present being involuntarily sent back in time, only to find out that his sister and constant antagonist Tara has disappeared, which leads him to pledge "to go back through time to rescue her one of these days. Maybe" (Stine 118); *How I Got My Shrunken Head* ends with Mark back at his house, miles away from the jungle of terrors he has just fled, only to have the supposedly formerly magical shrunken head he kept for a keepsake begin speaking to him; *Night of the Living Dummy III* ends with Trina mischievously giving her cousin Zane the evil, sentient dummy Slappy she has just rid herself of; and *Calling All Creeps* ends with the socially alienated Ricky tricking everyone in the school into become his alien, lizard slaves. These endings aside,

[15] A characteristic example of this is the end of *Piano Lessons Can Be Murder*, the story of a young boy named Jerry who is sent to a school for piano instruction only to find out that the school's owner has been removing his student's hands and using them for his own gain. The story closes with Jerry trading piano playing for baseball as his hobby of choice: "I'm not a great hitter, but I'm good in the field. Everyone says I have great hands" (Stine 124). This replacement with a punchline of the scare which more commonly ends a *Goosebumps* book is curious and may indicate an assumed connection between humor and fear on Stine's part, something which would not be difficult to believe given his background as "Jovial Bob Stine," writer of joke magazines, as detailed in his auto-biography *It Came From Ohio!*.

books in the series usually end unhappily, thus making it unwise to attach specific importance to any one unhappy ending. Though a case by case analysis of each book's ending may still prove fruitful, it is misleading to make any broad statements about endings throughout the series.

The second issue which must be addressed before turning to the content analysis section of this project concerns the methodology which I will be employing to draw conclusions both about the series as a whole and about individual books within the series. Having criticized Coppell's methodology for drawing series-wide conclusions from a small sample size, I have read and annotated all sixty-two books in the original *Goosebumps* series in preparation for a content analysis of the series. As I have previously stated, my focus in doing so is on the series' representation of gender expressions from book to book, so I have traced certain attributes, actions, and character types through the entire series to see if they are represented disparately, equally, or close-to-equally between males and females.

A final note must be made before this discussion of types is undertaken. By distinguishing between male and female exclusively thus far, I have set up a traditional gender binary here, which could be, in itself, a statement about the legitimacy of non-traditional gender distinctions. *Goosebumps* deals in gender categories beyond those two mentioned very sparingly, and it is the lack of statistical presence of these categories which compels my non-inclusion of them in my discussion. That this speaks to the series' own de-legitamizing of these categories is not a notion which I will dismiss. I do, however, think it wise to point those instances in the series which seem to point to gender categorization outside of the male-female binary, if only to indicate that the series is not entirely homogenous when it comes to gender categorization. There are a handful of instances of characters engaging in seemingly

transgendered thoughts or actions, the most prominent example of transgendered thought occurring in the book *Why I'm Afraid of Bees*:

> Cautiously, I walked back over to the glass booth. She opened a little slot at the bottom of her window and pushed out a book. I picked it up and saw that it was a photo album, like the ones my parents have from their wedding.
> I opened it and started looking through it. "It's kids!" I exclaimed. I'll about my age."
> "Correct," said Ms. Karmen. "They're all interested in switching lives with someone else for a week."
> "Wow." I studied the album.
> A lot of the kids in the pictures looked big and strong. And cool. Kids like that wouldn't be afraid of anything, I told myself. I wondered what it would be like to be one of them.
> "You can pick a boy or even a girl, for that matter, to trade places with for a week," Ms. Karmen was saying.
> (Stine 28)

In this excerpt, the book's protagonist, Gary, visits the offices of a supernatural service by the name of Person-to-Person Vacations. The company's claim to allow their customers to switch bodies with another person for a week is interesting by itself, linking Stine's book to the philosophical queries of Descartes, Berkeley, and later thinkers like Rorty and Dennett, but the gender implications are what is most relevant here. That the company's representative makes a point of informing Gary that he can switch bodies with a customer of a different gender is quite noteworthy; the implication is that this service allows those with transgendered proclivities to live out their desires to switch genders, and, perhaps even more importantly, that this action is supported by the company, encouraged to such a large degree that Ms. Karmen offers it to Gary with no evidence that he might have a need for it. Though Gary does not take advantage of the transgendered possibilities of the service, *Why I'm Afraid of Bees* remains a book which, at best, encourages its readers to consider the possibility of changing genders (or the possibility that gender itself is violable, and is thus a construct and not an inscrutable certainty), and, at the very worst, at least tacitly allows for the possibility of transgendered transformation (though perhaps

without commentary on the value of such a transformation). Ultimately, despite these examples of trans-possiblities, *Goosebumps* as a series tacitly reinforces gendered distinctions by presenting the traditional gender binary as normative.

Types of Siblings

In beginning to discuss types in Stine's *Goosebumps* series, one may find it difficult to find a foothold. I have chosen to begin my content analysis with types of siblings both because it presents a lesser challenge than analyzing the various types of protagonists and thus will make a smoother and less daunting initial task, thus allowing an easier acclimation. I have identified four types of siblings which recur with notable frequency in the *Goosebumps*, which will be discussed presently. The purpose of the identification of these types, to reiterate, is to establish that they exist equally across gender lines and thus that Stine's books do not attempt to argue that any one type is essentially male or female. This is important given Nodelman's argument that children's literature "constructs child characters for readers to identify with, in order to satisfy adult wants and needs in regard to children" (Nodelman 161). Nodelman draws from Rose's notion of these constructed child characters "securing" the construction of the child reader which is in process as the actual act of reading occurs (Rose 2). If, then, these characters are created to secure child readers, it then stands to reason that the fact that Stine presents all of the types here identified as being equally male and female would "secure" his readers in the knowledge that both genders can occupy those roles as well as validating the experience of any one individual reader already feels a connection to any one role. Stine, then, secures permeable gender barriers for his readers in relation to potential thoughts, actions, and personality traits by presenting a

large variety of such being applied equally to both genders. This fluidity of roles across gender lines is supported by no less a theorist than Nodelman himself, who notes in his article on Stine that “gender doesn’t seem to be much of an issue because [*Goosebumps*] characters tend to share personality traits whatever their sex,” a fact which of much weight considering that he proposes in the same article that all of the material in Stine’s series “is presented without question or comment, as normal—as what children usually are, and as what readers are invited to identify with and imagine themselves to be” (Nodelman 119). One can easily see how the permeability of gender barriers in terms of potential roles to occupy would then be normalized in Stine, creating an argument for his readers for the dismissal of rigid conceptions of masculinity and femininity.

Type 1: The Pesky Younger Sibling

This first type is one which was identified by Coppell in her article and one which recurs frequently throughout the series. Coppell emphasizes the stereotype of the younger brother as "an independent individual who may define his own rules" and notes that he has "allowances made for him due to his status as the younger male in the family” (Coppell 14). Coppell sees this type as an example of patriarchy in the series, an example of males being allowed to escape from restrictions which are inescapable for females, but this will soon be shown to not be the case.

Coppell's type is more specific than is beneficial for this stage in the project, so a bit of expansion is necessary. The younger sibling who is able to define his/her own rules is one example of a larger type in the series, that of the pesky younger sibling. This type consists of younger siblings who are primarily viewed by their older siblings as nuisances and who make

efforts to annoy or vex their older siblings. This type may be identified textually through the use of words like "pest," "annoyance," "brat," and "immature." The last two adjectives help highlight the essential dynamic at the root of the older sibling's relationship to this type; for the older sibling, the Pesky Younger Sibling[16] is an unwanted burden, having interrupted their enviable life as the only child, whose major reason for existing seems to be to cause them trouble. The older sibling often sees the Pesky Younger Sibling as underdeveloped and attributes their more bothersome personality traits as much to their age as to pre-conceived malice.[17]

The Pesky Younger Sibling type may be further categorized both by the degree of aggression displayed in their conflicts with their older siblings and by the amount of restriction placed on them by adult authorities. One thus ends up with four distinct sub-types of the Pesky Younger Sibling: one who is aggressively combative, one who is passively annoying, one who is largely restricted by adult authorities, and one who is left unrestricted by adult authorities.[18] Of course, it is possible for one character represent more than one of these sub-types, especially considering that they represent two continuums.

The Pesky Younger Sibling who is aggressively combative is perhaps the easiest of the four sub-types to identify, not only due to its extremity of recurrence throughout the series but also because it has a long history in Western children's literature, reaching from Dickens to Beverly Cleary. This sub-type is prone to violence, particularly against their older sibling, and instigates conflict without fear of repercussion. A characteristic example of this sub-type is

[16]For ease of identification within the larger body of my paper , I have chosen to capitalize all of the types which I identify.

[17]This again calls into question the role of free will in Stine's series. If the Pesky Younger Sibling is vexing because he or she is truly immature, then it would seem unfair to hold him or her responsible for those vexing behaviors.

[18]Coppell's description of the younger brother type in her article represents the final of these four sub-types.

found in *Bad Hare Day*, in which Ginny's treatment of her older brother is borderline abusive. Tim, the older brother in question, expresses his fear of her here:

> She flicked my nose. "Boi-oi-oing."
>
> "Stop it!" I swatted her away. "You're definitely going to get it. I'm telling Mom about the fridge for sure."
>
> "Go ahead," she taunted. "But if you do, I'll give you the freezer chop." She waved her arms through the air, making those weird karate noises. "*Wah wah wee -- ah*! Right to the neck. You'll never walk again!"
>
> She trotted away. "See you at home, Swanz-O!"
>
> This is what I have to deal with every day of my life. A little sister who could kill me if she wanted to. What can I do? I'm helpless against her.
>
> (Stine 5)

Ginny continues to intimidate and threaten her brother as the book progresses, all without any repercussions. Showing that this combativeness is a fundamental aspect of her character also beats up kids at her school with impunity, as shown in the following exchange: "'Michael Franklin teased me, so I had to karate chop him in the leg!' Mom's forehead wrinkled--her concerned look. 'You didn't hurt yourself, did you, Ginny?'" (Stine 16). Tim's friend Foz seems to be afraid of his own little sister for related reasons: "'Just catch the rabbit!' Foz ordered. He was in a total panic. Maybe his little sister really *would* chop him into rabbit food'" (Stine 26). It appears that the world of *Bad Hare Day* is a world where females use violence and aggression to manipulate and torture their older male siblings.[19]

Regardless, Ginny is a strong example of this particular sub-type. Another character who mirrors both Ginny's physical aggression and her abuse of her older brother is Krissy from *Why I'm Afraid of Bees*. In this book, a less physical but equally physically-intimidating younger

[19]Interestingly, the book ends with Ginny on her way to full recovery from the result of an unexpected bout of magic and Tim living out his life as a rabbit as part of Amaz-O's magic act.

sister uses her physical dominance to torment her older brother without consequences. Though she does not strike her brother as Ginny does Tim, Krissy uses her superior strength to allow herself to scare prank her older brother with impunity. Again, the Pesky Younger Sibling is chiefly motivated by a desire to cause her older sibling pain and this sub-type does so primarily through physical aggression.

It would, however, be unfair to portray all of the Pesky Younger Siblings of this sub-type as female bullies. Not all of them use their aggression in such a contentious context and, more relevantly to my thesis, not all of them are female. Indeed, the specimen of this sub-type which Coppell herself identifies is male: Joe from *Revenge of the Lawn Gnomes*, who Coppell herself describes as an "example of aggression and violence" (Coppell 10). Like Ginny and Krissy, Joe uses his physicality to cause his older sibling unhappiness; unlike the two girls before him, however, he does so without actually physically threatening his sister Mindy. Joe's physicality is playful rather than threatening; though he annoys Mindy purposely, he does so without actually harming her. This sort of aggression, stripped of its bullying component, turns this sub-type from one which is physically imposing to one which is simply physically forceful. Joe's physicality cannot be restrained by Mindy, but it is does not put her in danger either. This same dynamic can also be seen in *One Day at Horrorland* in the form of a male, Luke, who "cannot sit still for a second" and who is constantly wrestling with his best friend (Stine 2).

The opposite sub-type, it must be admitted, is one which is defined more by negation than anything else: it is, simply, those Pesky Younger Siblings who do not exhibit aggression and violent tendencies. As a larger category, this sub-type naturally contains a larger amount of specimens than its antonym. An example will make clear the difference between this sub-type

and the previous one and will also provide a sort of control for the other two sub-types yet to be discussed:

> Now all we had to do was follow the stream back to the clearing where we had set up camp.
>
> I began to hum again. The boys tossed their sticks into the stream. We began to jog along the grassy shore.
>
> "Whoa!" I cried out when my left boot started to sink. I nearly fell into a deep mud patch. I pulled my hiking boot up. Soaked in wet, brown mud up over the ankle.
>
> Pat and Nat thought that was a riot. They laughed and slapped each other high fives.
>
> I growled at them, but I didn't waste any words. They're both hopeless. So totally immature.
>
> (*The Beast from the East* 9)

In this examples, the Pesky Younger Sibling specimens presented annoy their older siblings without using violence or aggression, thus fulfilling the basic qualifications of this sub-type.

The third sub-type of the Pesky Younger Sibling is defined by the degree to which he or she is restrained by adult authorities. Those specimens who are depicted as being largely controlled by adult authorities comprise this third sub-type. A telling example of this is found in *Night of the Living Dummy II*:

> Family Sharing Night isn't so bad for Jed, either. My ten-year-old brother is such a total goof. He doesn't care what he shares. One Thursday night, he burped really loud and explained that he was sharing his dinner.
>
> Jed laughed like a lunatic.
>
> But Mom and Dad didn't think it was funny. They gave Jed a stern lecture about taking Family Night more seriously.
>
> (Stine 2)

Here Jed's obnoxious behavior is punished by his parents, who respond to his antics by reinforcing the idea that he must be serious when presenting himself to his family. (Stine 5) Jed is later blamed for destructive actions for which he is not responsible, further showing that his goofy behavior does not go unrestrained by adult authorities. In the above example, the Pesky

Younger Sibling specimen is restrained by adult authorities, demonstrating to him that his vexing behaviors, both those directed at their older siblings and those directed at the authorities themselves, will not go unpunished.

In contrast, the fourth and final sub-type of the Pesky Younger Sibling is one who is unrestrained by adult authorities. This sub-type annoys his or her older sibling with impunity and is often even favored by adult authorities, despite his/her bad behavior. Though one will recall that Coppell identifies Josh from *Welcome to Dead House* as a specimen of this sub-type, perhaps the most characteristic specimen can be seen in the person of Tara the Terrible in *The Cuckoo Clock of Doom*:

> I glanced down at my shoe. It wasn't untied, of course. But I'd just stepped on a huge wad of gum. If I had looked down to check my shoelaces, I would have seen it.
>
> But Tara knew I *wouldn't* look down. Not if she told me to.
>
> Tricked by Tara the Terror again.
>
> "You're going to get it, Tara," I grumbled. I tried to grab her, but she dodged out of reach and ran into the house.
>
> I chased her into the kitchen. She screamed and hid behind my mother.
>
> "Mom! Hide me! Michael's going to get me!" she shrieked.
>
> As if she were afraid of me. Fat chance.
>
> "Michael Webster!" Mom scolded. "Stop chasing your little sister."
>
> She glanced at my feet and added, "Is that gum on your shoe? Oh, Michael, you're tracking it all over the floor!"
>
> "Tara *made* me step on it!" I whined.
>
> Mom frowned. "Do you expect me to believe that? Michael, you're fibbing again."
>
> "I am not!" I cried.
>
> Mom shook her head in disgust. "If you're going to tell a lie, Michael, at least make it a good one."
>
> Tara peeked out from behind Mom and taunted me. "Yeah, *Michael*."
>
> The she laughed. She loved this.

> She's always getting me into trouble. My parents always blame me for stuff that's *her* fault. But does Tara ever do anything wrong? Oh, *no*, never. She's a perfect angel. Not a bad bone in her body.
>
> (Stine 3)

As this selection makes clear, Tara is allowed to do almost anything. Throughout the course of the book she makes Michael fall face-first into his birthday cake, scratches up his bike in front of their parents, pokes him in the eye, pulls his hair, and, in a particularly agonizing scene, leads Michael's crush Mona into his bedroom while he is undressing, causing her to see him in his underwear. Though Michael is routinely scolded when he accuses Tara (always rightly) of mischief, Tara, who also physically torments the family cat, is only reprimanded when she plays around with the antique cuckoo clock which functions as a time machine, and even then we only learn of her chastisement secondhand (a fact which seems to lessen the significance of her punishment given how frequently the reader actually sees Michael punished).

Tara's unrestrained misbehavior is mirrored by that of Ginny and Krissy, mentioned earlier, and, on the male side of the spectrum, Cole from *Chicken, Chicken:*

> Even though Mom and Dad are computer programmers not farmers we have a backyard full of chickens.
>
> *Cluck. Cluck.* That's *their* dream.
>
> *My* dream is that Cole gets punished for mouthing off the way he does. And his punishment is that *he* has to feed the chickens for the rest of his life.
>
> Everyone has to have a dream, right?
>
> (Stine 2)

In defining as her life's dream that her younger brother actually get punished for his misdeeds, Crystal makes clear that his mouthing off typically goes unpunished, and, further, that she is the one who chiefly suffers from it. All of these specimens have in common the lack of restriction by adult authorities regarding the Pesky Younger Sibling which Coppell identifies as belonging

solely to younger brothers in her analysis of *Welcome to Dead House*. In defining these types, it is important to keep in mind the purposes of the identification and categorization of these types: to prove, by showing that each of these types is equally distributed along the male/female binary, that *Goosebumps* as a series presents purposely contradictory messages about femininity and masculinity with the end result being a deconstruction of the essentialist nature of those very concepts. By showing that both males and females can equally embody the Pesky Younger Sibling type (and all of the types which will be here identified), Stine refutes the notion that being male or female necessitates a certain way of acting or being and encourages readers to accept the idea that males and females alike can encompass a wide range of personality traits, ways of thinking, and actions. Stine is not unique in portraying this specific type as male and female equally; however, the fact that this equality is mirrored in all of the types which I will be discussing *is* noteworthy.

Type 2: Responsible Younger Siblings

In a move which highlights Stine's penchant for placing exact opposites within his series, the Pesky Younger Sibling type is countered by the existence of the Responsible Younger Sibling type, which, as one might suspect, represents those younger siblings who are the more mature figures in their relationships with their older siblings. The Responsible Younger Sibling takes the place of substitute adult authority, keeping their older sibling within the parameters of grown-up rules and monitoring situations from position of authority. Just as the Pesky Younger Sibling type was identified by the presence of certain words, so too is this type; words like “mature,” “sensible,” “calm,” and “serious” all signify the presence of the Responsible Younger Sibling

type. However, the significantly smaller number of occurrences of this type in relation to the last type accounts for one important difference: where the Pesky Younger Sibling type was split into four sub-types, the Responsible Younger Sibling type is not, mostly owing to a dearth of examples. This itself may be taken as a comment (intentional or not) on the likelihood of the occurrence of the types in real life and, as such, a statement on the tendency of siblings to be normally pesky and irresponsible.

The Responsible Younger Sibling type is exemplified by Simon from *My Best Friend Is Invisible*:

> Simon never gets yelled at. He's good.
>
> …
>
> I told you Simon is the good one. He never waits until the last minute to do his homework. He never has to be reminded to throw his clothes in the hamper. Or take out the garbage. Or wipe his feet when he comes in the house.
>
> What kind of kid is that?
>
> A *mutant* if you ask me.
>
> (Stine 3-4)

Simon's humorlessness is identified as an adult trait throughout the book, though it is not the only indicator of his status as a specimen of the Responsible Younger Sibling type. Simon's major concern in the book is the success of his science project, a reinforcement of the academic-focus which Sammy identified in the above excerpt and an example of his internalization of the values of the book's adult authorities. Simon's seriousness results both in his separation from what Sammy sees as normal childhood activities (such as entertainment and sports) and in his finding unwavering approval and support from the book's adult authorities. That *Goosebumps* strongly links responsibility to adulthood and irresponsibility to childhood (a move which, though not uncommon in the world of children's literature, has its own potentially dangerous

consequences) is proof in itself that Simon's seriousness is a sign of his adult-ness, as well as that he is an example of the Responsible Younger Sibling type.

Simon is, of course, not the only example of this type in the series, though the type is, as previously stated, not nearly as prevalent as the Pesky Younger Sibling type. Viewing one other specimen of this type will be helpful in solidifying what the type looks like in the context of the actual books:

> My whole body tingled. I uttered an angry cry. "How *could* you?" I shrieked at Briana and Meg. "What is your *problem*?"
>
> Aaron came hurrying over to be the grown-up again.
>
> Just what I needed. Mr. Mature Kid Brother.
>
> "Sarah, did it bite you he asked softly.
>
> I shook my head. I can still feel it! I wailed. Did you see it? It was three feet long!"
>
> "Calm down, Aaron whispered. Everyone is staring at you."
>
> "Think I don't know it? I snapped.
>
> "Well, it was just a tiny snake," Aaron said. Totally harmless. Try to get yourself together."
>
> (*The Curse of Camp Cold Lake*, 25-26)

In the above excerpt, a younger siblings occupies the position of a substitute adult authorities. Indeed, Aaron's conversation with Sarah is close to infantilization. After Sarah embarrasses herself both by falling for a scare prank and by reacting with almost hysterical accusations, Aaron tries to calm her down in the same manner as a father attempting to calm an out of control adolescent. In reminding Sarah of the inappropriateness of her reaction (and in emphasizing the importance of her being in public, bringing into play the notion that Sarah's petulance is also embarrassing Aaron), Aaron treats Sarah as a child who can only be calmed by soothing tones and negative appeals to public humiliation. In this way, Aaron represents the substitute-adult position of the Responsible Younger Sibling type. This is important for a few

reasons; first, it links Aaron with other specimens of this type, all of whom are adult substitutes in various ways. More importantly, as the specimen who most clearly occupies the role of adult figure in relation to his older sibling, Aaron shows how this type may function as a book's primary positive adult figure. In a series in which adult figures are mostly either negative or indifferent, the presence of positive adult figures, whether they be substitutes or not, is worth mentioning, especially in light of Rose and Nodelman's ideas about how the constructed child characters help to construct the child readers. These adult substitutes encourage the acceptance or avoidance of similar substitution by the way they are portrayed in the series, although, as a whole, *Goosebumps* does not present as consistent a stance on these substitutions as it does in refuting gender essentialism.

Type 3: Responsible Older Sibling

While a younger sibling posing as an adult substitute is possible within *Goosebumps*, as just demonstrated, it is much more common for the position to be taken by an older sibling. Thus the Responsible Older Sibling type is one which recurs often within the series. Identified with the same keywords which were linked to the Responsible Younger Sibling type, this type represents those characters who use their status as older siblings, a post which usually comes with it increased freedom and some degree of power over their younger siblings anyway, to turn themselves into adult-surrogates, enforcing adult rules and tracking the misbehavior of their younger siblings as well as using their higher position to force them to do their bidding. That the Responsible Older Sibling type uses this power primarily to keep their younger sibling within the boundaries set by the relevant book's true adult authorities is an indication of the chief

motivation which drives this type: to maintain (adult-mandated) order in a world where chaos appears to be seeping in at every turn.

Coppell herself identifies the Responsible Older Sibling type, although she mistakenly claims it to be a female-specific phenomenon; Coppell fails to take note of internally-controlled older siblings who are male (as well as not accounting for specimens of the previously discussed Pesky Younger Sibling type). Despite Coppell's scholarly failures, she is correct that Amanda, the protagonist of the series' first installment, represents an example of this particular type. She, Lizzy from *One Day in Horrorland*, and Ginger from *The Beast from the East* have all been discussed earlier in this regard, but they are not the only examples of female specimens of the Responsible Older Sibling type:

> "Stanley—stop!" I called. Stanley come back! Don't leave us down here!"
>
> But he was gone. Vanished into the woods.
>
> "I'm going after him," I told Mark. "And then I'm going to tell Grandpa Kurt about this. Can you carry back the fishing poles by yourself?"
>
> "Do I have to?" Mark whined. My brother is so lazy!
>
> I told him he had to.
>
> (*The Scarecrow Walks at Midnight*, 47)

> "You were scared?" I asked. "Why didn't you at least answer me when I called you?"
>
> "I thought maybe the Grool was chasing you," he confessed, his face turning red.
>
> "Daniel, don't worry," I said. The poor guy was really frightened. And embarrassed that he had hid.
>
> I put both hands on his shoulders. "The Grool is gone. It's buried deep in the ground."
>
> (*It Came from Beneath the Sink!*, 55)

These two excerpts show additional examples of the Responsible Older Sibling type in action. In the first, Jodie responds to her brother Mark's perpetual laziness by ordering him to take action as their summer vacation starts to take a macabre turn; even though Mark initially

objects, he resigns himself to the task after being informed that he has to do it. This is a common exchange; in response to the Responsible Older Sibling's orders, the younger sibling often initially refuses to obey them, being fully aware of their status as children and not adults. However, a reiteration of the orders is usually enough to remind the younger sibling that, though the Responsible Older Sibling is not an adult, they possess a modicum of an adult's power via their position as an adult substitute. Furthermore, the Responsible Older Sibling's status as a liaison between the actions of the younger sibling and the knowledge of those actions by adult authorities is also convincing; even though Mark doesn't have to obey Jodie, he will likely be punished for disobeying her adult-approved orders when the two siblings are re-united with their parents.

Kat from *It Came from Beneath the Sink!* occupies a different adult/parental role. Instead of taking the place of parent-as-rule-enforcer, she takes the place of parent-as-comforter when her younger brother, Daniel, fails to stand up for her in the presence of (erroneously) perceived danger. Recognizing Daniel's fear and embarrassment (the latter likely stemming from his failure to fulfill his expected role of protector as a male, albeit a younger male)[20], Kat physically consoles her younger brother and assures him that the monster which has tormented them throughout the book has been disposed of. Kat offers Daniel a sort of substitute for maternal protection here, a reassurance bolstered by physical comfort and by her (supposedly) irrefutable knowledge that everything will be okay. That Kat is wrong about the death of the Grool may indicate her own failure to be a convincing maternal substitute, but it does not nullify the fact that she is clearly acting in this capacity.

[20]Note that this vulnerability in the face of admitted failure constitutes an almost complete reversal of my bravado. This is a rare occurrence in the series, which only leads to further highlight Daniel's failure.

But it isn't only females who represent the Responsible Older Sibling type. Males who act in this role appear in books like *Ghost Beach, Ghost Camp,* and *The Legend of the Lost Legend*:

> "Let's climb up and explore it," Terri cried eagerly.
>
> "No, wait!" I remembered what Mom and Dad had said to me that morning as we boarded the train: Keep an eye on Terri and don't let her get too carried away with things. "It might be dangerous," I said. I *am* the older brother, after all. And I'm the sensible one.
>
> (*Ghost Beach,* 10)

In this example, the Responsible Older Sibling type is exemplified in the personage of Jerry. In the excerpt, Jerry proves himself to be a specimen of this same type both by the adjective he uses to describe himself (sensible) and by his parents' reliance on him to carry out their orders and protect his oft-unrestrainable younger sister. Here it may be seen that males in Stine's series are just as capable of occupying the role of the Responsible Older Sibling type as females.

Type 4: Pesky Older Sibling

Much like the Responsible Younger Sibling type, the Pesky Older Sibling type is one which seems to go against the grain in Stine's series; as such, just like the Responsible Younger Sibling type, this type finds itself under-represented in comparison to the previously discussed type. The Pesky Older Sibling type may be identified in the same way as its Younger Sibling predecessor; that is, by looking for the same keywords and finding characters who same to take extraordinary pleasure in vexing their siblings.

The prototypical specimen of the Pesky Older Sibling type in the *Goosebumps* series is Mickey from *The Barking Ghost*. This scene, in which Mickey is introduced to readers by scare pranking the book's narrator, Cooper, provides a decent introduction to Mickey's relationship with his younger sibling:

> Carefully, I lifted the blanket from the bottom of the bed. Then carefully, carefully, I lowered my head and peeked under the bed.
>
> That's when the two hands darted out and grabbed me. Two strong, cold hands. Slowly tightening their grip around my throat.
>
> I screamed.
>
> So loudly I surprised myself.
>
> My attacker must have been surprised, too. He quickly let go of my throat. I clutched my throat and sputtered for air.
>
> "Cooper, will you keep it down," a voice whispered. "You'll wake Mom and Dad!"
>
> Huh?
>
> Oh, man.
>
> It was Mickey. My totally obnoxious older brother.
>
> "Mickey! You jerk!!" I cried. You scared me to death!"
>
> Mickey slid out from under the bed and wiped some dust off his pajamas. "No big challenge," he muttered.
>
> (Stine 10-11)

Cooper later describes his relationship with Mickey this way: "For as long as I can remember, Mickey has played tricks on me, trying to terrify me," a description which is evidenced by Mickey's constant taunts and pranking (both of the death and scare prank variety) throughout the book (Stine 12-13). That Mickey's sole desire in *The Barking Ghost* appears to be tormenting his younger brother (in this case via a classic scare prank) is indicative of his status as a specimen of the Pesky Older Sibling type. The Pesky Older Sibling is a character who uses his position in the power hierarchy (older siblings being typically afforded more power in Stine's books) to torture his younger sibling with impunity.

Other examples of this type occur in *The Girl Who Cried Monster* (the aforementioned Lucy), *You Can't Scare Me!* (in the form of Eddie's older brother Kevin, whose penchant for annoying Eddie and his friends with his mud monster project actually turns out to be helpful in their goal to scare their school enemy, Courtney), and *Don't Go To Sleep!*. The latter is in an interesting (and unprecedented) example of a younger sibling being accosted by two older siblings who "gang up on [him] all the time" (Stine 12).

It is important here to reiterate the purpose of the compilation of different types represented within Stine's *Goosebumps* series, if for nothing else than to serve as a reminder before the rest of the literary analysis is embarked upon so that the project does not become (or seem to become) a mechanical cataloging of arbitrarily identified recurrences within Stine's books. The purpose of this compiling is to prove that, in the case of all of these chosen types (which are meant to encompass the majority of the major personalities and characters within the series), both the male and female gender are shown to occupy all of these types in equal[21] number. By showing this to be true, Stine's *Goosebumps* is shown to be a series of books in which masculinity and femininity are not made essentialist; that is, the books do not assign one set of traits specifically to males or females but rather allow characters of both genders to equally occupy all of the different typal variations and thus argue against the notion that gender is a determinant for the potential range of typal expressions.

This connects my project both to the work of Judith Butler. Butler's arguments about gender being foundationally performative in *Gender Troubles* and *Bodies that Matter* are of specific relevance to my project, as it is clear these roles which the children in *Goosebumps*

[21]Of course, this equality must necessarily be approximate.

occupy are enacted rather than determined; that is, understanding performativity "not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names" (Butler 59), one may see the children in *Goosebumps* performing their (gendered) identities in ways which clash with the discourse of gender essentialism. It is crucial here to understand that Butler does not see performativity as inherently misleading or deceptive and that she recognizes its capacity to undermine problematic or restrictive ideologies, as do the performances of the characters in Stine's series.

In order for Stine's refutation of gender essentialism to be proved conclusively, a thorough (though by no means exhaustive) catalog of the different types in Stine's series, as well as their necessarily cross-gendered specimens, must be created. It is this catalog which, having sufficiently previewed the inner workings of the process by discussing types of siblings previously, I will now present.

Type 5: The Know-It-All

While my previous discussions of types have focused on sibling relationships, the following discussions focus on relationships of all types: sibling, parental, platonic, romantic, adversarial, and educational. This is a necessary component of these discussions, as these discussions are meant to cover as much of the substance of the *Goosebumps* series as can reasonably be accomplished in a single project. Such variation in relational relevance is demonstrated by types such as the Know-It-All type, which occurs in nearly all of the previously mentioned iterations.

The Know-It-All type is defined as a character who exhibits a marked desire to possess not just knowledge, but Foucaultian knowledge-power[22], using his/her knowledge to make himself/herself superior to others and/or to reverse relational power dynamics which would otherwise not be in his/her favor. The Know-It-All is identified by a notable pride in his/her possession of knowledge, by an unwillingness to share that knowledge but rather a desire to hoard it, and by the appearance of the descriptive phrases "Know-It-All," and "brainiac." Like the Pesky Younger Sibling and Responsible Older Sibling types, the Know-It-All type may be further split into two sub-types: characters whose desire to possess knowledge-power appears as a singular characteristic and an end in itself and those whose desire to possess knowledge-power is one iteration of a larger characteristic of perfectionism (identified, naturally, by the occurrence of the adjective perfect and acts as a function of their larger desire to control their environment.

The first of these two sub-types applies to characters whose desire to possess knowledge-power is a singular characteristic; that is, that it does not coincide with (and thus complement) other traits but is presented as its own stand-alone descriptor. Examples of this sub-type of the Know-It-All are given below:

> Daniel is okay--most of the time. But he insists on being right. Dad calls him Mr. Know-It-All. (*It Came From Beneath the Sink!*, 3)

> You almost pushed me into *quicksand*! That's not funny!"
> She laughed at me, then let me go. "It isn't quicksand, dork," she muttered, It's a bog."
> Huh? I turned to stare into the gloppy green water.
> It's a bog. A peat bog, she repeated impatiently. Don't you know anything?"

[22] In his chapter on torture in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that "knowledge and power directly imply one another" (Foucault 27). Though Foucault is not the first or only theorist to make a case for the connection (or even conflation) of knowledge and power, his concept of knowledge-power, created, importantly, through discourse, and the way that it is and has been used throughout human history fits well with the way *Goosebumps* characters use *their* knowledge to gain power over their peers.

> What's a peat bog? I asked, ignoring her insults. Emily the Know-It-All. She's always bragging about how she knows everything and I'm a stupid clod. But she gets B's in school, and I get A's. So who's the smart one?
>
> (*The Werewolf of Fever Swamp*, 10)

In the above examples, one finds several examples of the Know-It-All type seeking out knowledge-power as a contained characteristic, not inextricably tied to any other traits. Though the specimens of this sub-type given above are all younger than the protagonists of the books they come from, they are different genders, have different relationships with their protagonists (from the more typical Pesky Younger Sibling-Responsible Older Sibling relationship exemplified by Grady and Emily from *The Werewolf of Fever Swamp* to the competitive, non-sibling relationship between Billy and Sheena from *Deep Trouble I & II*), and use their knowledge-power for different purposes. It is this last point which is perhaps most crucial; that these characters use their knowledge-power for different gains is important in establishing that their desire to possess it is not the same as the sub-type which uses it as a function of their perfectionism. This distinguishing factor is shown in the variety of uses for knowledge-power depicted in the above examples, as well as in other examples of the type in the *Goosebumps* series. These differing motivations serve to differentiate these specimens of the Know-It-All type from their sub-type kin, which I will refer to as the Mr/Miss Perfect sub-type.

The Mr./Miss Perfect sub-type differs from the above sub-type of the Know-It-All type chiefly in that the specimens of this sub-type desire knowledge-power as a function of their desire to control the world around them in a perfectionistic manner rather than acting as a singular trait and that they use that same knowledge-power to enforce their control on their world. This sub-type is distinguished from the previous sub-type by the motivations of the specimens for the possession of knowledge-power, their usage of it, and by the presence of

identifiers such as the phrase 'Miss Perfect" or "Perfectionist." The following are two of the primary examples of this sub-type in Stine's series:

> Mindy is weird. She's probably the weirdest fourteen-year-old in town.
>
> Why? I'll tell you why.
>
> Take her room. Mindy arranges all her books in alphabetical order by author. Do you believe it?
>
> And she fills out a card for each one. She files them in the top drawer of her desk. Her own private card catalog.
>
> If she could, she'd probably cut the tops off the books so they'd be all the same size.
>
> She is *so* organized. Her closet is organized by color. All the reds come first. Then the oranges. Then the yellows. Then come the greens, blues, and purples. She hangs her clothes in the same order as the rainbow.
>
> And at dinner, she eats around her plate clockwise. Really! I've watched her. First her mashed potatoes. Then all her peas. And then her meat loaf. And if she finds one peas in her mashed potatoes, she totally loses it!
>
> *(Revenge of the Lawn Gnomes* 2-3)

> "Larry is a perfectionist," Kristina said. "Did you forget that, Manny?"
>
> "How could I forget?" Manny groaned. "He never lets us finish one song!"
>
> I could feel myself blushing again. "I just want to get it right," I told them.
>
> Okay. Okay. Maybe I *am* a perfectionist. Is that a bad thing?
>
> (*My Hairiest Adventure*, 9)

As can be seen here, the Miss/Mr. Perfect sub-type includes a variety of different characters who, despite their necessary similarities, still manifest important differences. All of the specimens listed above share in common a desire to possess knowledge-power (seen most prominently in Sara from *Night of the Living Dummy II*, who also exemplifies the type), the need to keep the world around them controlled (seen most prominently in Mindy from *Revenge of the Lawn Gnomes*), the tendency to use their possession of knowledge-power to put them in a position above their peers (seen most prominently in Tabby from *Attack of the Jack O'Lanterns*, who also exemplifies the type), and a fear of losing their control over their world (seen most prominently in Larry from *My Hairiest Adventure*). Despite these similarities, which are shared in different

gradations in the different specimens of the sub-type, the characters are all quite different. Mindy's focus is on controlling her physical surroundings and habits; her actions, which a reminiscent of a common misapplication of the obsessive-compulsive diagnosis, depict a character whose primary drive is the regulation of the physical world which she occupies and her interactions with it and whose primary fear is the loss of that regulation. In contrast, Larry's focus is also on his appearance and how it relates to what others think of him, but, rather than hoping for the maintenance of a satisfactory social status, he hopes to advance his status and, more centrally, to *not lose* what he already has; his actions and thoughts depict a character whose primary drive is the avoidance of sliding down the social ladder and whose fear of that slide motivates the majority of his decisions.[23] Both of these specimens of the Miss/Mr. Perfect sub-type share the same basic characteristics, but their differences show them to be, rather than carbon copies of one another, multifaceted expressions of one type.

Type 6: The Scaredy-Cat

The Scaredy-Cat type is one which occurs as frequently as any type in Stine's series, being present in nearly one-fifth of the *Goosebumps* books. As mentioned earlier, reading the data for this type depends, more than for any other type, on an understanding of the importance of protagonists versus secondary characters. While the ratio of male to female specimens of this type is not at all equal (ten males to three females), the ratio of male to female protagonist specimens is in line with the rest of the data for the series (at three males to two females). The

[23]This explains Larry's near-crippling fear of embarrassment, which becomes one of the book's main themes. Larry talks about embarrassment (and his fears of it) obsessively throughout the book and his anxiety about how others perceive him is one of his most well-defined character traits.

type itself is defined by the presence of the descriptors such as “wimp,” “chicken,” timid,” and phrases such as “scaredy-cat” and “easy to scare.” The Scaredy-Cat type is an individual who is, in the context of the chaotic world of *Goosebumps*, is constantly under attack from monsters (real, imagined, and fabricated) and who spends a sizable amount of their time and energy worrying about their safety and the safety of those they care most about. The Scaredy-Cat type's bad nerves often cause them to be the subject of repeated prankings by others and usually place them in positions of inferiority in nearly all of their relationships, even ones in which they would normally be in a position of power (such as an older-younger sibling relationship). As a result, the specimen of the Scaredy-Cat type is often resentful of his/her timidity and may seek become braver (usually without success) or to get revenge on those who have tormented him/her by taking advantage of his/her anxiousness.

That this type is occupied with relative equality by males and females is noteworthy; Tabor and Woloshyn argue in their article, “Dumb Dorky Girls and Wimpy Boys: Gendered Themes in Diary Cartoon Novels “ that books which contain “frequently frightened…timid” male protagonists often “promote heteronormative gender roles for boys and girls by endorsing traditional femininities and hegemonic masculinities” by having those male protagonists be the subject of ridicule and scare-pranking, thus reinforcing the notion that fear is not a masculine trait (Tabor and Woloshyn, 212, 214). If Tabor and Woloshyn are correct, it is then important that Stine’s series also provides examples of female protagonists who go through the same ordeals and who share the same personality traits because this shows that being fearful may be harmful regardless of one’s gender and that cowardice (however inappropriately vilified

throughout a series in which the focus is always on who can scare—and not be scared—by whom) is not a gender-specific trait.

In light of the important distinction in this particular type between secondary and primary characters, it seems wise to discuss those two groups separately. While this sub-categorization does not indicate anything about the characters who occupy these sub-types themselves, it is a useful distinction both due to the added importance of protagonist specimens of this type discussed above and because the characters who are the protagonists of the books in which they appear are significantly more developed than secondary characters, meaning that those who are in the former sub-type are likely to have a wealth of material to analyze relating to their status as specimens of the Scaredy-Cat type, whereas those in the latter sub-type may be identified as such by as little evidence as a single descriptor.

The following are examples of the sub-type for secondary characters occupying the Scaredy-Cat type:

> I love baby-sitting for Tyler. He scares so easily.
>
> "The werewolf's breath freezes you so you can't move," I said in a whisper. "You can't run away. You can't run away. You can't kick your legs or move your arms. That makes it easy for the werewolf to rip your skin off."
>
> I sent another hot blast of werewolf breath onto Tyler's neck. I could see him shiver. He made a soft whimpering noise.
>
> "Stop it, Freddy. You're really scaring him!" My friend Cara Simonetti scolded me. She flashed me a stern scowl from the chair across the room."
>
> Tyler and I were on the couch. I sat real close to him so I could whisper and scare him good.
>
> "Freddy he's only six," Cara reminded me. "Look at him. He's shaking all over."
>
> "He loves it," I told her.
>
> (*Vampire Breath*, 1-2)

> On Tuesday morning, I walked to school with my little brother, Jeremy. As we walked, I talked about the play.

> I told Jeremy the whole story. But I left out the part about the trapdoor. Ms. Walker said it would be better if we kept it a secret until the performance.
>
> "Is it really scary? Jeremy asked me. Jeremy is seven, and he gets scared if you say boo to him. Once, I made him watch the movie *Poltergeist* with me, and he woke up screaming every night for three weeks.
>
> Yeah, it's pretty scary, I told him. But not scary like *Friday the 13th* scary."
>
> (*The Phantom of the Auditorium*, 38)

In the above examples, one finds a variety of specimens of this sub-type of the Scaredy-Cat type. All of these specimens have in common that they are secondary characters in the books in which they appear, but, aside from that, they need not have any other similarities, aside from those which are necessary components of the type which they represent. The older character's delight in seeing how scared their younger brother gets (usually via application of some sort of scare prank) is both the primary motivation for the scary stories being told or shown and one of the reasons for the Scaredy-Cat specimen's perpetual timidity; by saturating the Scaredy-Cat's world with horror stories, ones whose status as terrifying is attested to, and thus validated, by the older character.

Though not all of the examples of this sub-type of the Scaredy-Cat type are along the same relational lines, in both of the above examples, the specimens of the Scaredy-Cat type are secondary characters. However, there are also cases in which the Scaredy-Cat specimen is the book's protagonist; it is these instances which comprise this second sub-type. Though less common than the above sub-type, this sub-type allows readers a more thorough examination of the Scaredy-Cat type because the character occupying that type is protagonist and is thus the book's major focus. This will be apparent in the following examples of this sub-type:

> They chatted for a while. Then Carly Beth confided, I was so mad, Sabrina. At lunch today. Why do Chuck and Steve think it's so funny to do things like that to me?"
>
> Sabrina was silent for a moment. I guess it's because you're so *scare-able*, Carly Beth."

> Scare-able?"
>
> "You scream so easily," Sabrina said. other people get scared. But they're more quiet about it. You know Chuck and Steve. They don't really mean to be mean. They just think it's funny."
>
> Well, I *don't* think it's funny at all, Carly Beth replied unhappily. And I'm not going to be *scare-able* anymore. I mean it. I'm *not* ever going to scream or get frightened again."
>
> (*The Haunted Mask*, 9, 17-18)

> A bunny rabbit, I mumbled as I stared at myself in the mirror. Scared by a bunny rabbit.
>
> I'd made it through the entire day without being scared once. That's pretty good for me.
>
> Back where I used to live in Boston, Massachusetts my best friends, Gary and Todd, always made fun of me.
>
> "Cooper," they'd say, "you probably scare *yourself* on Halloween!"
>
> They were right. I get scared a lot. Some people just scare easier than others. I'm an easy scarer.
>
> (*The Barking Ghost*, 3-4)

The excerpts just presented show numerous example of the Scaredy-Cat type being occupied by the protagonist of the book in which it occurs. In the case of Carly Beth from *The Haunted Mask*, whose torment at the hands of Steve was discussed previously in my discussion of the revenge scare prank, her identity as a specimen of the Scaredy-Cat type is something she actively seeks to reverse.[24] In attempting to scare prank those very people who have been scare pranking her, Carly Beth attempts to invert the relational dynamic she finds herself on the wrong end; to use a type which I have not yet introduced but will be discussing shortly, she attempts to switch places with those characters who occupy the Brave One type and to force them to take her place as a specimen of the Scaredy-Cat type. Cooper from *The Barking Ghost* is missing one aspect of the direct reversion of relational dynamics which Carly Beth attempts; he is not seeking to bring anyone down to his level. Instead, he seeks the opposite end of the formula; in other words, Cooper seeks to become more brave without having to prove his bravery by scaring

[24]To a degree, Gary seeks to reverse his status similarly; however, as I will argue later, his desire to occupy the body of another being is more a function of his status as a specimen of the Outcast than of the Scaredy-Cat type.

someone else in the process. In all cases, the specimens of this sub-type of the Scaredy-Cat type find themselves in untenable positions within the frightening *Goosebumps* universe. Though they seek different methods to overcome their fear, all of them recognize that they cannot continue to be specimens of this type and try to do something to overcome their (many) anxieties.

Type 7: The Brave One

On the opposite end of the spectrum of courage from the Scaredy-Cat type is the Brave One type. As a foil to the Scaredy-Cat type, the Brave One is a character who is very difficult to frighten (one sees the contrast here to the Scaredy-Cat's refrain that he/she is an easy scarer) and whose bravery buffers them (to a degree) from the chaos and terror of the *Goosebumps* universe. Specimens of the Brave One type often see the hectic world before them as full of opportunities to prove their bravery, instead as full of threats to their safety, as their Scaredy-Cat antonyms do. As with all of the previous types, the Brave One type is chiefly distinguished by the presence of a series of adjectival identifiers: “brave,” “fearless,” “unafraid,” “calm,” “rough,” and “courageous,” and with phrases “like not afraid of anything” and “impossible to scare.” Oftentimes, specimens of the Brave One type are placed in narratives alongside their Scaredy-Cat counterparts to act as foils for plot purposes. This interplay between the easy to scare and impossible to scare (or between two of the latter category when two Brave One specimens are placed alongside one another, which also occurs frequently) echoes Nodelman’s observation that *Goosebumps* characters “compete to see whether they can scare each other” and that “these

books focus almost obsessively on the effort of children to frighten other children and the importance of not being frightened" (Nodelman 120).

Though there are fewer examples of the Brave One type than of the Scaredy-Cat type in the *Goosebumps* series[25], the examples which do exist fall into the same two sub-categories which the Scaredy-Cat types do: those Brave One specimens which are the protagonists of the books in which they appear and those which are secondary characters. For the same reasons as with the Scaredy-Cat type, I have thought it wise to discuss these two sub-types separately, beginning with the latter:

> "She acts as if she isn't afraid of anything," Charlene said. "Like she's Superwoman or something."
>
> ...
>
> I turned to my friends. "We've got to find a way to scare Courtney," I said heatedly. "We've *got* to!"
>
> "Eddie's right," Hat quickly agreed. "We've got to find a way to scare Courtney and embarrass her in front of a whole bunch of kids. Otherwise, she'll never let us forget today."
>
> "But she's so brave, so totally fearless," Charlene said, shaking her head.
>
> (*You Can't Scare Me!*, 16-17, 24)

Though this sub-type occurs infrequently, it is important to discuss regardless. Specimens of the Brave One type tend exist in books which share similar plots, based around the specimens themselves as secondary characters who are the subject of attempted scare-pranking by the Scaredy-Cat protagonists. Courtney's torturing of Eddie and his friends is, in this quintessential example, the thing which motivates him and his friends to spend the entirety of the book trying to scare her.

[25]This owes perhaps to the fact that, as Smiley argues, "it is the journey down into a valley of fear and up out of it again which provides horror's primary catharsis" (Smiley 36). This reasoning is, however, admittedly speculative, and there may be plenty of other logical reasons for the prevalence of any one type versus any other.

The other sub-type of the Brave One type, that in which the specimens of that type are the protagonists of the books in which they appear, is much more common. All of these specimens share a few common characteristics, some of which are necessary components of their status as examples of this type and some of which seem to occur merely by coincidence. Because these traits and mindsets repeat so clearly between different books, it may be useful to address these characters by their individual characteristics, if for nothing else than to provide an example of how closely specimens of these types can be related and how important it is, due to the obvious connections between these characters, to look at the series through the lens of character types.

The first characteristic that many of these specimens share is a component of their status as specimens of the Brave One type. Most of the specimens of this sub-type remark, at some point in their narrative, upon their own bravery.

> I've always been pretty brave.
>
> The time a bat flew into our house, *I* was the one who yelled and screamed at it and chased it out with a butterfly net.
>
> I'm not afraid of bats. Or snakes. Or bugs.
>
> "Or monsters," I said out loud.
>
> (*The Girl Who Cried Monster*, 33)

These remarks are important, though no necessary, in the establishing of these characters as specimens of this type. It is noteworthy that the two specimens of this type who do not make remarks like these fit into what could be, if not for the increased convolutedness, a sub-sub-type; both Erin from *A Shocker on Shock Street* and Duane from *Headless Ghost* display the remaining characteristics of the Brave One type but do not consider themselves to be brave due to their close relationship with a braver peer. This relationship leads Erin and Duane to conclude, despite

all outward evidence, that they are not brave because they are consistently comparing their bravery to the superior bravery of their companion:

> Even though I was frightened, a smile crossed my face. I *liked* seeing Marty scared.
>
> I really enjoyed it.
>
> I know, I know. That's terrible. I admit it. Erin Wright is a bad person. What kind of friend am I?
>
> But Marty always brags that he is braver than me. And he is usually right. He usually *is* the brave one, and I'm the wimp.
>
> But not today.
>
> (*A Shocker on Shock Street*, 1-2)

Here Erin is seen declaring themselves the wimpier half of her twosomes, despite the fact that she is engaged in an act of courage In constantly comparing themselves to their braver friends (comparisons which are encouraged by their competitive friends, who frequently taunt them for being afraid), both Duane and Erin ignore the fact that they are higher in the bravery hierarchy than anyone else in their respective stories aside from those friends; Duane is one half of a gang whose purpose is to bring terror to all of the kids in his city and Erin is selected (along with Marty, of course) to be one of the test subjects for a new theme park based on the *Shock Street* horror franchise. In focusing on their bravery as relative to the bravery of their friends, both Duane and Erin underrate their own bravery.

Another characteristic which most of these specimens share is the desire to scare others. Because their bravery typically places them in a rare position in a *Goosebumps* universe filled with shrieks and shivers, specimens of the Brave One type frequently use their unique status to wreak terror-inducing havoc on their peers, as well as on each other.

> Stephanie Alpert and I haunt our neighborhood.
>
> We got the idea last Halloween.

> There are a lot of kids in our neighborhood, and we like to haunt them and give them a little scare.
>
> …
>
> In the mornings, we catch them peeking out their doors, seeing if it's safe to come out. And at night, most of them are afraid to leave their houses alone.
>
> Stephanie and I are really proud of that.
>
> During the day, we are just Stephanie Alpert and Duane Comack, two normal twelve-year-olds. But at nights, we become the Twin Terrors of Wheeler Falls.
>
> (*The Headless Ghost*, 1-2)

But it is not their acquaintances or siblings whose fear these specimens of the Brave One type are typically most concerned with, it is that of their closest friends. Most of the specimens of this sub-type are engaged throughout their respective books in a constant battle with their closest friend to prove which one of them is the bravest. This creates a competition which has a few notable results: the specimens usually refuse to admit when they are afraid, exercising bravado lest they lose the competition, they pretend to be brave when they aren't (as has already been seen in a few instances), and they take pleasure in the fear of their companions (as has also been seen)[26]. It is the first of these results which yields the most characteristic interplay between the Brave One specimens and their partners.

> "But you don't believe the story about the missing head--do you? I protested. It's just a ghost story. We can search and search. But there *is* no head. It's all a story they made up for the tourists."
>
> Stephanie narrowed her eyes at me. I think you're scared, Duane."
>
> "Huh? Me?" My voice got pretty shrill.
>
> A cloud rolled over the moon, making my front yard even darker. A chill ran down my back. I pulled my jacket around me tighter.
>
> "I'm not afraid to sneak off from the tour and search Hill House on our own," I told Stephanie. "I just think it's a big waste of time."

[26]Erin's reaction to Marty's fear in *A Shocker on Shock Street* is of particular note because, in place of the glee displayed by other specimens of this type when they see their companions afraid, she expresses relief at finally being able to commiserate with him regarding her own fear: "I felt so glad that Marty finally agreed with me. And he wasn't pretending to be brave anymore. He wasn't pretending that it was all robots and special effects." (Stine 99)

> "Duane, you're shivering," she teased. Shivering with fright."
>
> "I am not!" I screamed. Come on. Let's go to Hill House. Right now. I'll show you."
>
> A grin spread over Stephanie's face. She tossed back her head and let out a long howl. A victory howl. "This is going to be the coolest thing the Twin Terrors have ever done!" she cried, slapping me a high five that made my hand sting.
>
> She dragged me up Hill Street. The whole way there, I didn't say one word. Was I afraid?
>
> Maybe a little.
>
> (*The Headless Ghost*, 18-19)

Here, and in examples like it, one can see those specimens of the Brave One type who have equally brave or braver companions refusing to admit that they are scared due to the potential loss of respect which would occur between them and their companions. It is interesting that, these characters can admit to themselves that they are scared, just not to their friends. This breeds frustration in their relationships with their brave friends, often leading them to opine, as does Erin from *A Shocker on Shock Street*, "why can't [Marty] ever admit when he's scared?" (Stine 26).

In sharing all of these traits, these sub-types of the Brave One type show themselves to be a type expressed across multiple books and, more importantly, across both genders. Here again one sees that the *Goosebumps* series uses its expressions of gender in character equally in regard to males and females, allowing the series to deconstruct notions of masculinity and femininity as essentialist and the encourage its readers to think of the traits which are associated with these types (here, bravery, bravado, and competitiveness) which either gender may embody.

Type 8: The Scientist

The Scientist type is one which is fairly straight-forward and comparatively infrequent in relation to some of the other types represented in the series, but it is important to consider

because of the that the equal gender representation defies cultural norms. The Scientist is a type which is defined by a high interest in the sciences (often to the point of social awkwardness) and a logical/analytical approach to the events which affect them (often to the point of being manipulative or incautious in pursuit of their scientific curiosities), and is identified by phrases like "science freak," "nerd," and "genius." This type is most often occupied by males; indeed, all of the examples of the scientist type described by Anne Stiles in her genealogy of the mad scientist, "Literature in Mind: H.G. Wells and the Evolution of the Mad Scientist," are male. Whether tortured by their genius, as Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll was, or merely inconvenienced by it, as the four scientists who comprise the major cast of the Emmy-winning TV sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* are, the scientist as depicted in Western culture is almost always male. Stine's scientists, however, are split relatively equally between male and female, another point in favor of *Goosebumps* as a series presenting a counter-culturally non-essentialist portrayal of gender, epistemologically speaking.

> [Kermit] didn't want to play video games. He didn't want to watch TV. He refused to go outside and play ball or toss a Frisbee around. He didn't even want to sneak down to the little grocery on the corner and load up on candy bars and potato chips.
>
> All he wanted to do was stay downstairs in his dark, damp basement and mix beakers of chemicals together. "My experiments," he called them. "I have to do my experiments."
>
> Maybe he *is* a genius, Evan thought bitterly. But that doesn't make him any fun. He's just *impossible*.
>
> (*Monster Blood III*, 7)

> "Dana, don't look so serious." That's what Mom is always telling me.
>
> "Dana has an old soul," Grandma Evelyn always says.
>
> I don't really know what that means. I guess she means I'm more serious than most twelve-year-olds.
>
> Maybe that's true. I'm not really serious all the time. I'm just curious about a lot of things. I'm very interested in science. I like studying bugs and plants and animals. I have an ant farm in my room. And two tarantulas.

> And I have my own microscope. Last night I studied a toenail under the microscope. It was a lot more interesting than you might think.
>
> I want to be a research scientist when I'm older. I'll have my own lab, and I'll study anything I want to.
>
> (*Egg Monsters from Mars*, 1-2, 71)

> There are so many ghost stories from all around the world, how can ghosts *not* be real?
>
> Maybe that's why I sometimes get scared when I am in strange places. I think I *do* believe in ghosts. Of course, I would never admit this to Terri. She is always so scientific. She'd laugh at me forever!
>
> …
>
> "I don't think this is a story," Terri said. "I know I'm supposed to be the scientific one in the family. But I think something strange is going on here, Jerry."
>
> (*Ghost Beach*, 18, 37)

The characteristics of the Scientist type are represented in all of the above specimens. That these characters are placed in a variety of situations (from the comic book supernaturalness of the world in *Egg Monsters from Mars* to the relative realism of *Stay out of the Basement*), reflect a variety of attitudes (from the adult-like seriousness of Dana from *Egg Monsters from Mars* to the immaturity of Kermit from *Monster Blood III*), and span both the male and female gender is indicative of the series' attempt to place its character types evenly across many narrative and ideological lines. It is, with this type as with all of the others, not important that these specimens all act in exactly the same ways or share the same thoughts (indeed, Terri seemingly renounces her scientific-ness towards the end of *Ghost Beach*), it is simply important that they share a series of quantifiable characteristics which can then place them within a specific category. Again, it is the placement of these specimens *across* gender lines (the Scientist being yet another example of a type that is shared relatively equally between males and females) which is the foundation for my argument that the *Goosebumps* series as a whole argues against essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity; in this case, the fact that females are not traditionally

represented as scientists in American media and the subsequent implication that females are not normally scientific is undermined by the presence of female specimens of the Scientist type in this series.

Type 9: The Outcast

Feelings of alienation are common in the *Goosebumps* series, in part because the characters who feel alienated are often the only ones who have experienced some sort of supernatural force which no one else believes exists and in part due to the existence of the Outcast type within the series. The Outcast is a type which is defined as applying to characters who are disliked and/or mistreated by their peer group and who experience social anxiety as a result of this, who engage in self-loathing rhetoric and thoughts, and who are described with words like "loser" and "lonely." These characters represent an embodiment of the Kristevian abject within their respective communities; referred to by nicknames which dehumanize and quarantine (ex. Ricky Rat, Sicky Ricky) and repeatedly forced into contact with substances like their own blood, these abjections are treated with the very horror, rejection, and cruelty by those inside the social structure from which they are removed that Julia Kristeva identifies in her ground-breaking work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* Kristeva situates her notion of abjection in terms of psychoanalysis, contrasting it with the Lacanian "object of desire," and positing the abject as "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 3-4). Because the abject reminds us of the reality of death, the "fragility of the law," and other breakdowns in our order of the worlds, those abject things must be rejected. By being at various points either instruments of (always accidental) catastrophe or

entities of complete social un-redemption, the specimens of the Outcast type force their social groups to push them away in horror at the recognition of the breakdown both of a supposedly meritorious social system (in which those who truly want companionship can find it) and of an ordered world in which motivation determines results. The Outcast characters show their social groups the "Real" in these systems: that some people are excluded from relationships for no reason other than that their peers have decided that they should be, that accidents can lead to total social isolation. Faced with the terrifying prospect that *anyone* can become an Outcast, the characters in these books further cement those specimens' status as such by avoiding them at all costs (unless it's to torment them), hoping not to see the awful potential for isolation and rejection they all face. The following specimens of the Outcast type reflect their statuses as abject in this specific way:

> I'd like our school too if the kids would give me a break. If they'd get out of my face and stop calling me Ricky Rat and Sicky Ricky, I'd be a real happy guy.
>
> Maybe you think I sound a little bitter.
>
> Maybe you're right!
>
> But all the kids think I'm a nerd. And they make fun of me every chance they get.
>
> (*Calling All Creeps!*, 3, 45)

> I'd been reading a stack of comic books under the big maple tree in my back yard. Other kids might have better things to do on a hot, sticky summer afternoon, like maybe going to the pool with their friends.
>
> But not me. My name is Gary Lutz, and I have to be honest. I don't have many close friends. Even my nine-year-old sister, Krissy, doesn't like me very much. My life is the pits.
>
> (*Why I'm Afraid of Bees*, 1-2)

> Okay, I admit it, I don't make friends easily.
>
> …
>
> Everyone hates me, I thought, shaking my head sadly. And there is nothing I can do about it.
>
> *(The Curse of Camp Cold Lake,* 3, 43,)

In addition to the characteristics already discussed (their social isolation and anxiety and their self-loathing/pessimism), there is one further aspect which is shared by specimens of the Outcast type; all of the specimens attempt to solve the problem of their respective lonelinesses in extreme (sometimes to the edge of absurdity) manners. Gary from *Why I'm Afraid of Bees* (as documented previously) uses a supernatural body-switching agency to change bodies with a kid he deems "cool." Ricky from *Calling All Creeps!* eventually uses a case of mistaken identity to turn himself and his entire school into alien lizards, knowing that he (having been mistaken for the leader of this alien race's Earth division) will be their leader and that he can enslave those who have mistreated him. Of all of the characters who are specimens of the Outcast type, it is Sarah whose behavior is the most troubling[27]. Resentful towards her fellow campers for their mistreatment of her and their refusal to allow her to befriend them, Sarah comes up with "a really desperate plan...a really *dangerous* plan" to fake her own suicide (Stine 35):

> Have you guessed my desperate plan?
> It was really quite simple.
> I planned to drown myself.
> Well...not really.
> I planned to dive down to the lake bottom. Stay under. A long, long time.
> And make everyone think I had drowned.
> I can hold my breath for a very long time.
> …
> I can probably stay underwater for two or three minutes.
> Long enough to scare everyone to death.
> (Stine 49-50)

[27]This is, of course, my opinion, as forcing an entire student body to become alien lizards and then enslaving them is fairly troubling by itself. Though Ricky does this out of revenge, and thus exhibits a shocking level of callousness and bitterness, the absurdity of the conclusion of *Calling All Creeps!* somewhat mitigates its capacity to be troubling for me.

This death prank may be viewed as more extreme than previous death pranks in the series' history (and more extreme than the solutions to social isolation devised by Sarah's Outcast compatriots) in a few ways: it is planned well in advance, it comes out of Sarah's bitter desire to punish those around her, and it has as its focus not the momentary fear of her victims as much as the guilt and remorse they will experience for not treating her properly. In other words, instead of merely trying to scare the other campers, Sarah is trying to force them to re-evaluate her position in the social hierarchy by transferring her own self-loathing to them in the form of guilt over their complicity in her suicide. That Sarah's goal in this suicidal death prank is to create these feelings in the other campers (as well as her family, both her brother Aaron and her parents included) is explicitly stated by Sarah herself:

> [Aaron] laughed and splashed away to join his buddy.
>
> He won't be laughing in a few minutes either, I told myself. He'll treat me differently after today.
>
> Everyone will.
>
> (Stine 49)

> Everyone will panic. Even Briana, Meg, and Jan.
>
> Everyone will feel sorry for how mean they were to me.
>
> I'll get a new start. After my close call in the lake, everyone in the camp will want to be nice to me.
>
> Everyone will want to be my buddy.
>
> (Stine 50)

> I thought about Mom and Dad, thought how sad they'd be if I really did drown.
>
> *We never should have sent Sarah to that water sports camp*, they would they.
>
> …
>
> I pictured the horror on Liz's face when she saw my body floating so still, floating under the water, my hair bobbing on the surface.
>
> I almost laughed when I thought of Liz leaping into the lake to rescue me, having to get her crisp white tennis shorts wet.
>
> …

I shut my eyes even tighter. I thought about Briana, Meg, and Jan.
They'll feel so guilty. They'll never forgive themselves for the way they treated me.
After my close call, they'll see how mean they were. And they'll want to be best friends with me.
We'll all be best friends.
And we'll have a great summer together.
(Stine 52)

Imagining that her faked suicide will act as a panacea to her social problems, Sarah envisions a post-attempt world in which everyone appreciates her, regrets all of the things they have done to her that she didn't like[28], and becomes her close friend, creating a bond which will last for the duration of her stay at Camp Cold Lake. By assuming that her suicide attempt will not only solve the problems of her being mistreated but will always completely reverse the social situation that she finds herself is, Sarah allows herself to get caught in her fantasies of being liked, appreciated, and popular, ignoring the (self-identified) danger inherent in her faked drowning. Though her attempt is not successful (Sarah's faked drowning causes her to momentarily cross over into the spiritual world, which results in even more problems for her)[29], Sarah's suicidal fantasies as well as her decision to act on them form the most extreme example of an Outcast specimen trying to solve their social problems.

In addition to the types already discussed, there are other recurring actions or events in the *Goosebumps* series which are worth considering from a gender standpoint which cannot be

[28] It's important to note here that the regrets which Sarah sees occurring as a result of her suicide attempt are not limited to her peers but also include her parents' choice to send her to camp in the first place. This changes the category of post-attempt regrets from instances in which Sarah has been clearly mistreated to the more general (and more troubling) instances in which someone has done something to Sarah that she doesn't like.

[29] Interestingly, Della, the ghost girl who Sarah meets as a result of this crossing over, is her only friend at the camp in the course of the book, although Sarah eventually learns that Della only likes her because she hopes to use her to re-animate herself.

categorized typally.[30] These recurrences are nonetheless important to any discussion of the way that gender epistemologies are set-up in *Goosebumps* and, despite the fact that the recurrences cannot be seen as instances of character types, they are still worth comparing and contrasting from an analytic standpoint. The recurrences which are the most worthy of this sort of analysis is those instances in which characters participate in acts of bullying or show interest in sexuality. As with the types already discussed, it will be shown that equal weight is given to male and female perspectives regarding this recurrence, by which the series may be said to deconstruct notions of either sexuality (or a specific sort of sexuality) or cruelty being naturally masculine or feminine.

BULLYING IN *GOOSEBUMPS*

I struggled mightily in trying to decide whether the presence of characters who act as bullies within Stine's series constituted their own type. Such characters are prevalent and influential throughout the series. With the recent birth of the Anti-Bullying movement (sparked by the advent of Anti-Bullying Week in 2004 in the United Kingdom and Anti-Bullying Day in Canada in 2007), a discussion of how bullying is portrayed in *Goosebumps* is of particular interest. However, given that all of the characters who fit the criteria for what I identified as the "Bully type" were secondary characters, it seemed misleading to present a discussion of their presence in the series across gender lines in the same way previous discussions of protagonist-

[30] It may be argued that this recurrences could be categorized typally as The Sexually-Interested One and the Cruel One. However, as these recurrences are less traits of the characters themselves and more simply instances of similar actions and thoughts occurring in a variety of different characters (and as there are less linkages between the relevant characters than with the types previously discussed), I have chosen to categorize these recurrences outside of the realm of character types.

heavy types had been presented. Therefore, I have elected to discuss bullying's presence in the series not via identification with a specific character type, although I will be identifying bullying through its embodiment in those secondary characters who commit bullying acts.

Sabaha Dracic defines bullying as "attack[s] aimed at causing harm or suffering and inconvenience of [sic] other persons…whether it is physical or emotional suffering" and splits acts of bullying into two categories, direct bullying, which consists of things like "kicking, pushing, calling names," and indirect bullying, which consists of things like "ignoring or gossip" and "which often involves third parties" (Dracic 216-217). Dracic is quick to point out that "direct bullying is more represented in males, while indirect bullying more represented by n women" (Dracic 218), an idea which is further supported by Duncan and Owens' article "Bullying, Social Power and Heteronormativity: Girls' Constructions of Popularity." This insight is particularly interesting given that bullying occurs in equal amounts (both directly and indirectly) among males and females in Stine's series. Bullies in *Goosebumps* are characterized by a callous disregard for the safety of others, as well as a desire to see them in pain, either physical or emotional, which borders on sadism.[31] Because these bullies are always secondary characters, their drive to hurt others (as well as the joy which they experience when they see the pain of others) is often their only defining character trait, a common enough occurrence in children's media (see bullies in texts from Dickens' *Oliver Twist* to the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series), though perhaps a troubling one. On a textual level, these bullies are identified by the

[31]I have chosen, for this discussion, to only include characters who are children because it seems that, within the *Goosebumps* series, that there is a strong distinction between the type of pain inflicted by these characters and adults/monsters who have the same desires. The children who fit the description of the Bully type inflict physical pain and emotional pain which has no supernatural component and which does not (typically) threaten the life of their victim. The adult/monsters who fit the description, however, frequently threaten the lives of their victims and often engage in supernatural behavior. Because the child version of the Bully is always a peer of their victim (even if they are slightly older or younger), they occupy a different space within the series than their adult/monster counterparts.

presence of adjectives like “rough-looking,” “mean,” and “cruel” and by dehumanizing descriptors like “animal” or “monster.” They are, of course, also identified by acts of bullying, though there is a difference between singular acts of bullying by characters in the series and the presence of bullies, who seem to exist solely to bully. The former is much less prevalent, though it is of note that acts of bullying in non-bully characters occur in an equal ratio between males and females (ten to nine, specifically).

In addition to the examples below, many of the specimens of the Pesky Younger/Older Siblings discussed earlier fit the criteria for being bullies:

> Judith and Anna are just cruel, that's all.
>
> I know they both call me “Stork” behind my back. Cory told me they do.
>
> And Judith is always making fun of my name, which is Byrd. Samantha Byrd. “*Why don't you fly away, Byrd!*“ That's what she's always saying to me. Then she and Anna laugh as if that's the funniest joke they've ever heard.
>
> (*Be Careful What You Wish For*, 2)

> As I turned around, I heard mean laughter. The Miller twins jumped out from behind the tree.
>
> I should've known. The Miller twins, Kyle and Kara. The twin pug noses, the beady little eyes, the matching short-cropped red hair. Yuck. They carried twin Super Soakers, red ones.
>
> The Miller twins love practical jokes. They're worse than I am. And much meaner.
>
> Everyone in the neighborhood is afraid of them. They pounce on little kids waiting at the bus stop and rob them of their lunch money. Once they blew up the Saxes' mailbox with a stink bomb. Last year, Kyle sucker-punched me during a basketball game. He thought it was funny to watch me turn purple.
>
> The Miller twins like to pick on me more than anyone, for some reason.
>
> Kara is just as scary as her brother Kyle. I hate to admit it, but Kara can take me out with one punch. I know that for a fact. She gave me a black eye last summer.
>
> (*The Abominable Snowman of Pasadena*, 14-15)

> Greg looked up from the developing snapshot in surprise. Two tough-looking boys stepped out of the shadows, their expressions hard, their eyes on the camera.
>
> He recognized them immediately—Joey Ferris and Mickey Ward—two ninth-graders who hung out together, always swaggering around, acting tough, picking on kids younger than them.

> Their specialty was taking kids' bikes, riding off on them, and dumping them somewhere. There was a rumor around school that Mickey had once beaten up a kid so badly that the kid was crippled for life. But Greg believed Mickey made up that rumor and spread it himself.
>
> Both boys were big for their age. Neither of them did very well in school. And even though they were always stealing bikes and skateboards, and terrorizing little kids, and getting into fights, neither of them ever seemed to get into serious trouble.
>
> (*Say Cheese and Die!*, 94-95)

> I lowered my shoulder. And burst through the double doors.
>
> And barreled at full speed into a girl standing in the hall.
>
> "Hey--!" She let out a startled cry as we both toppled to the floor.
>
> I landed on top of her with a groan.
>
> Her head made a loud *CRACK* as it hit the concrete floor.
>
> Stunned, we both lay there for a second. Then I rolled off her and scrambled to my feet.
>
> "Sorry," I managed to choke out. I reached out to help her up.
>
> But she angrily shoved my hand away and climbed up without my help.
>
> As she stood, I saw that she was at least a foot taller than me. Tall and broad-shouldered and powerful- looking, she reminded me of those women wrestlers on TV.
>
> She had white-blond hair, which had fallen over her face. She was dressed in all black. And she stared at me furiously with steel-grey eyes.
>
> Frightening eyes.
>
> (*The Haunted School*, 6-7)

. One immediately notices a few similarities in the characters described in these excerpts: many of the bullies in *Goosebumps* are twosomes (frequently twins), many of them are described as being abnormally large for their age and thus physically imposing, many of them have imposing-sounding nicknames (the only recurring bully in the series, appearing in all but one of the four *Monster Blood* books, calls himself "Conan the Barbarian"), and (importantly, for plot purposes) many of them hold a special grudge against their book's protagonist. These similarities are not necessary components of their status as bullies, but they are worth noting because they display a commonality of representation that links them, though not typally, and that remains unchanged regardless of gender. Indeed, the twins from the original *Say Cheese*

and Die and its sequel are two different sets of characters, but they are effectively interchangeable and it is unlikely that most of the *Goosebumps* readership noticed the replacement.[32]

Most of the bullies in Stine's series engage in what Dracic would call "direct bullying," the inflicting of immediate, physical pain. This pain tends to be temporary and relatively minor (compared to that inflicted by some of the adult/monster characters in the series), though there are cases in which Bully specimens go to great (sometimes even absurd) lengths to cause pain to their enemies, such as when Conan the Barbarian beats up the protagonist so badly that he causes his nose to change position on his face. Indirect bullying does occur in the series as well, typically in conjunction with the victimization of an Outcast type, but it is only inflicted by characters who may be termed bullies on a few occasions. Both direct and indirect bullying are performed with relative equality by male and female bullies.

Because bullies in *Goosebumps* are always secondary characters, they never develop beyond the cruelty which characterizes the,. All of them torture their victims throughout their existence in their book (and any of it sequels) with no remorse and, as Greg from *Say Cheese and Die!* points out in the above example, no repercussions. It is worth reiterating that these bullies are both male and female throughout the series, despite the fact that bullying is primarily conducted in the "traditionally" male manner: direct bullying, rather than indirect. Though the (in all cases, male) protagonists who face these female bullies do attempt to marginalize them to some degree (Jordan from *The Abominable Snowman of Pasadena* being reluctant to admit that

[32]The major plot element which could alert readers to the new set of twins is the fact that the first *Say Cheese and Die* ends with the twins finding the evil camera which has haunted Greg and his friends for the book's duration. The twins do not appear in the sequel and the camera is found by Greg were he originally left it, leading one to suspect that the camera did something potentially fatal to remove the original set of twins from the narrative.

he was beaten up by Kara and Tommy from *The Haunted School* outsourcing his categorization of Greta to that of a female wrestler who, given the time frame in which the book was written and the description, is almost certainly former WWF Women's Champion Chyna), they are generally afforded the same respect (or, at least, fear) as their male counterparts, further confirming my hypothesis that the series presents these types in relatively equal balance across gender lines. It is, however, quite troubling that these bullies never receive serious consequences for their actions and are allowed to continue their bullying tactics to the conclusion of their respective books unimpeded (and, in the case of Conan the Barbarian, across several books). Given the strong voice of contemporary anti-bullying activists, *Goosebumps* may be seen as normalizing (and thus implicitly supporting) bullying as "just something children must endure" (Dracic 216), a stance on bullying which many anti-bullying writers see as part of the problem. Here we then find another area in which Stine's series, despite its important non-essentialist take on gender, fails to provide positive examples for its young readers.

SEXUALITY IN *GOOSEBUMPS*

Sexuality plays an important role in children's literature, with *Goosebumps* being no exception. Given the context of traditional understandings of how children's literature tends to address child sexuality (that is, by hiding it), it is not surprising that most of the instances of sexuality which bubble to the surface of characters' thoughts and actions in *Goosebumps* are dealt with euphemistically, either by the narrator or the characters themselves. In his *The Hidden Adult*, Nodelman importantly connects the "open secret" that children are sexual beings with Eve Sedgwick's work in her "Epistemology of the Closet." In doing this, Nodelman postulates a

"theoretically repressed sexuality" in children's literature, a sexuality which is, like homosexuality in Sedgwick's argument, ignored even when it is at its most obvious; that is, even when the author is discussing what are clearly desire-laden relationships between younger characters (Nodelman 42). In Stine's work, terms like "crush," "cute," and "like you" re-code the erotic desires of the sexually-interested characters into generic, platonic language, possible to interpret either sexually or simply as friendly commentary. These terms act as coded erotic language, sublimating the un-acceptable sexuality of these twelve-year-olds character into, at worst, harmless, non-erotic attraction. At no point do any of the characters in *Goosebumps* move beyond this sort of language, and, in keeping with this coding of their individual sexualities, all of their potentially flirtatious physical actions are also sublimated into competition, voyeurism, intense friendship, or feigned aloofness. These sublimations are fairly transparent for the reader with an eye toward repressive sexuality typical for adolescents, but it is still important to catalog these instances with an eye toward their variations, frequency, and, most importantly, distribution across gender lines.

Naturally, not all of the sublimations of sexuality in the *Goosebumps* series occur in the same manner. I have identified two distinct categories of sexual interest being displayed in the series: Explicit/Voiced and Non-Explicit/Non-Voiced. The first of these is fairly obvious; Explicit/Voiced displays of sexual interest are ones in which a character is demonstrably interested in another character in a sexual nature and says so, either to the character or to him or herself or to a secondary character. Non-Explicit/Non-Voiced displays of sexual interest occur when a character is arguably interested in another character in a sexual manner (how this argument may be made will be later discussed), but does not say so outright. Both of these types

of sexual sublimation are important to consider in building a more complete understanding of the nature of sexuality as it is depicted in the *Goosebumps* series.

Explicit/Voiced Expressions of Sexuality

It may seem somewhat counter-intuitive top describe an expression of sexuality which is both explicit and voiced as a sublimation. After all, what more could one ask for in a non-sublimated expression of sexuality than for it to be explicit and voiced? However, the displays of sexuality in *Goosebumps* which fall into the Explicit/Voiced category are, in fact, sublimations, though there is a gradation among them. The most explicit of these displays involve the characters describing their objects of sexual interest in euphemistic terms (such as "cute," "pretty," and the hopeless "awesome looking") and being overly conscious of their gaze[33], while the less explicit have the characters generalizing their sexual interest to the entire opposite gender rather than focusing it on one individual. Regardless, these actions represent sublimations of deeper (and more explicitly erotic) sexual desires which these characters feel uncomfortable exploring and giving voice to.

Perhaps the most sensible way to discuss these displays of sexuality is to do so following this gradation, specifically from least explicit to most explicit. A nice contrast between the former and the latter end of that continuum can be found in the following discussions of the uses of the power of invisibility from *Let's Get Invisible!*:

> "I wonder if we could leave the house like this."

[33]I use gaze here in its full, Mulveyian sense.

> “And go and spy on people?” Lefty suggested.
>
> “Yeah,” I said. I yawned. I was starting to feel a little strange. “We could go spy on girls and stuff.”
>
> 'Cool,” Lefty replied.
>
> …
>
> “I want to get invisible again before school on Monday so I can go spy in the girls' locker room!”
>
> “Zack, you're a pig!” Erin declared disgustedly.
>
> “What's the point of being invisible if you can't spy on girls?” Zack asked.
>
> (Stine 36, 60)

On one end of the spectrum is Max's (the book's protagonist and narrator) off-handed suggestion that he and his younger brother Lefty could use their invisibility to “spy on girls and stuff.” This non-committal assertion about a potential use of the invisibility powers represents a generalized interest in the female gender which is neither directly sexual (though it seems hard to imagine what other motives could exist for such spying, aside from perhaps a curious sort of cross-gendered reconnaissance) nor specific enough in its aim that it would cause Lefty, whom Max almost certainly does not view as a sexual being, to be put off by it. This ambiguous motioning toward voyeuristic sexuality is contrasted by Zack's explicit and unapologetically sexual voyeurism. Rather than keep his motives vague, as Max does, Zack makes his intentions for spying clear by announcing that he wishes to use his invisibility to place himself in the girls' locker room, implying that he will watch his female classmates (among whom may be counted April and Erin, both of whom are present) undress as they change into their gym clothes. This un-ambiguous voyeurism elicits this disapproval of Erin, who is understandably repulsed at the proposed violation of her and her classmates modesty and privacy. Though Erin is right to object to Zack's plan, she does not dissuade him from his stance that it is the only real use for gaining the power of invisibility; this shows Zack to be a character chiefly motivated by his sexual

appetite, and, though this appetite is still sublimated to a degree (Zack's deviance takes its most extreme form in voyeurism; one could easily imagine a similarly-minded adult using such powers to molest or rape), it is much more clearly articulated than Max's desires.

Further up the continuum towards explicit sexuality is one of the series' other camp narratives, *Camp Nightmare*. Billy's fascination with campmate Dawn is similar to Harry's with Lucy, only without the social anxiety component:

> Dawn smiled at me as I came closer. Then she glanced quickly away. She's really pretty, I thought. Her blonde hair gleamed in the bright sunlight.
>
> (Stine 10)

Billy and Dawn continue to flirt with one another as the book progress, despite the fact that there are actually two camps, one for boys and one for girls, and that they are separated by a lake. Dawn, who waves to Billy as she leaves for the girls' camp, comes up in Billy's thoughts--"I thought about Dawn and Dori. I wondered if the two camps ever got together, if I'd ever see them again" (Stine 35)--and finally reappears in a scene which is laden with images of female sexuality and arousal:

> "Dawn!" I cried.
>
> Ssshhhhh! She leapt forward and clamped a hand over my mouth again. "Duck down," she whispered urgently. "They'll see you."
>
> I obediently ducked down behind the low bush. She let go of me again and moved back. She was wearing a blue, one-piece bathing suit. It was wet. Her blonde hair was also wet, dripping down onto her bare shoulders.
>
> (Stine 83)

A whirlwind series of twists at the book's conclusion reveal first that Dawn (and her companion, Dori) are to be shot by the boys' camp for intruding, then that the camp is a front for a survival training program that Billy's parents have enrolled him in, and finally that all of the characters in

the book are aliens and that Billy's parents are trying to increase his survival skills in preparation for a visit to Earth. Though this does raise interesting questions (specifically about the nature of extraterrestrial sexuality), it does not undermine the explicit sexuality with which Billy notes Dawn's attractiveness and physical features.

Billy and Dawn echo a previous, camp-themed narrative in the series, *The Ghost Next Door*. Set in the quiet, camp-evacuated summer suburbs, this book tells the story of Hannah, who has been left alone after all of her friends have gone away to camp and who meets Danny, a neighborhood newcomer, all alone as a result. Hannah's speaks about Danny in terms similar to those Billy uses to refer to Dawn, though she does so from a different position, being forced to communicate to her peers via letters to her best friend Janey which go unreplied to:

> My only other news is that a new boy moved into the Dodsons' old house next door. His name is Danny and he's our age, and he has red hair and freckles, and he's kind of cute, I think.
>
> I've only seen him once. Maybe I'll have more to report about him later.
>
> Bu now it's YOUR TURN to write. Come on, Janey. You promised. Have you met any cute guys at camp? Is THAT why you're too busy to write to me?
>
> (Stine 12)

> Things are definitely WEIRD around here. Do you remember I told you about that boy who moved in next door? His name is Danny Anderson, and he's kind of cute. He has red hair and freckles and SERIOUS brown eyes.
>
> (Stine 47)

Like Billy, Hannah attempts to advance her relationship with Danny into more romantic/sexual territory, and, like Billy, she sublimates her desires for him into more acceptable thought categories.

Beyond this playful, shared attraction seems to be the unrequited affection of Michael Webster, the protagonist of *The Cuckoo Clock of Doom,* for his crush, Mona. Like Kris, Michael's feelings for Mona find their origin in her physical attractiveness:

> I wasn't so crazy about Ceecee and Rosie, but I really liked Mona. She had long, shiny brown hair and a turned-up nose that's kind of cute. She's tall, and good at basketball.[34] There's something sort of cool about her.
>
> …
>
> She looked great. I didn't really care what the other girls were wearing.
>
> (Stine 19-20)

Like Kris, Michael's desire for Mona expresses itself mostly in admiration and a voyeuristic desire to be around her and to see her without a concerted attempt to voice his feelings to her. And, like Kris, Michael's crush is known to his sibling, most likely via her shrewd observation of his gaze. Unlike Kris, Michael is placed in an embarrassing position far beyond Lindy's playful teasing; his feelings are revealed to Mona by his younger sister, Tara, in an act of sibling cruelty:

> "Hey, Mona," Tara chirped. "You know, Michael really likes you."
>
> Mona's eyes widened. "He does?"
>
> My face got red-hot. I glared at Tara. I wanted to strangle her right then and there. But I couldn't. Too many witnesses.
>
> Mona started laughing. Ceecee and Rosie laughed, too. Luckily, the guys didn't hear this. They were around the CD player, skipping from cut to cut.
>
> What could I say. I *did* like Mona. I couldn't deny it?t would hurt her feelings. But I couldn't admit it either.
>
> I wanted to die. I wanted to sink through the floor and die.
>
> "Michael, your face is all red!" Mona cried.
>
> Lars heard this and called out, What did Webster do now?"
>
> Some of the guys call me by my last name.
>
> I grabbed Tara and dragged her into the kitchen, Mona's laughter ringing in my ears.
>
> (Stine 21)

[34] In light of the similarities between Michael and Kris, it is worth pointing out that Kris' adoption of the interests of Robby may be mirrored by the fact that Michael plays basketball later in the book.

Though this seems like it must be the most painful episode in the book, it is far from it. Indeed, *The Cuckoo Clock of Doom* is a series of sexual humiliations for Michael, most at the hands of his younger sister, from being outed at his birthday before falling face-first into his birthday cake in front of all of his friends (unsurprisingly, it is Mona's reaction to this which Michael is most concerned with) to being emasculated by an elementary-age Mona on the playground to an agonizing scene regarding Michael/Mona practicing for the school's production of *The Frog Prince*[35] in which Tara tricks Michael into being see in his underwear in front of Mona and her friends. Because of the unique chronology of this book (whose plot revolves around Michael being forced backward in time with each new day), this scene actually occurs twice. Michael's recurring exposure in a state of undress may be interpreted several ways, but the most productive relies on the assumption that Tara's desire to show Mona Michael in his underwear, struggling to zip up his frog costume, is motivated chiefly by her drive to see Michael in a state of helpless sexual humiliation. By producing for Mona an exposed and vulnerable Michael in a situation which has obvious sexual implications but which cannot produce any positive sexual rewards for Michael (who does receive a reciprocal semi-nude Mona to gaze on), Tara reduces her brother to a state of intense, emasculated sexual shame, heightened by the fact that Mona's involvement makes it less likely that he will be able to form a productive sexual relationship with her in the future.

That Tara is the major agent preventing Michael from forming this relationship with Mona (who, at the very least, doesn't appear unwilling to use her sexuality in relation to him) is shown conclusively when, by way of an error in the time-traveling device around which the plot

[35]Michael is cast as the frog in the play, a part which he relishes "because Mona, the princess, kisses the *frog*, not the prince" (Stine 25).

revolves, Tara ceases to exist. This alternative, Tara-less version of the universe is one in which Michael *is,* in fact, capable of forming a relationship with Mona, who takes on his role as the shy, longing one once his sister is no longer around to constantly emasculate him. In this new version of Michael's birthday party, it is Mona who is hoping that Michael will return her affections:

> My friends arrived for the party. We played CDs and ate tortilla chips. Ceecee pulled me into a corner and whispered that Mona had a crush on me.
>
> Wow. I glanced at Mona. She turned a little pink and glanced away, shyly.
>
> (Stine 116)

Without Tara's emasculative presence, which had presumably lowered Mona's respect for Michael and made her unwilling to reciprocate his feelings, Mona takes the role Michael had previously occupied, blushing at the revelation of her affections. Though Michael considers going back in time to save his little sister, the book ends with him deciding to put off that venture for a while, allowing him to enjoy (sublimated) sexual fulfillment with the girl of his dreams.

Similarly, *Calling All Creeps!* ends with a character who had spent the majority of the book in a position of vulnerability becoming a dominant figure and being rewarded with sexual fulfillment. Ricky, who has previously been discussed as a manifestation of the Outcast type, spends a large portion of the book talking about Iris, the school's new girl with whom he is infatuated. In the book's second chapter, Ricky is chosen to help show Iris around the new school. This chapter marks the beginning or Ricky's sexual interest in Iris, and, if Ricky's narration is faithful, her reciprocal interest in him:

> A few days ago, a new girl started at our school. Her name is Iris Chandler.
>
> …
>
> Kind of cute, I thought. She had a round face with big blue eyes and short blond hair parted in the middle. She wore long, red plastic earrings that jangled when she moved her head.

> Ms. Williamson gave Iris a seat near the back. Then she asked me to show Iris around the school during the day. You know. Point out where the lunchroom is and all the bathrooms and everything.
>
> I nearly cried out in surprise. Why did Ms. Williamson pick me? I guess it was because Iris just happened to be sitting next to me.
>
> I heard a couple of kids laugh. And I heard someone mutter, "Sicky Ricky."
>
> Kids in my class are always on my case. I hoped that Iris didn't hear them.
>
> I admit it. I wanted to impress her. I liked having someone new to talk to, someone who didn't know that everyone thought I was a loser.
>
> (Stine 21, 23)

As the chapter opens, Ricky's interest in Iris seems to be primarily an extension of his status as a specimen of the Outcast type; that is, he seems to be concerned about what she thinks of him mainly because he sees her as a rare opportunity to form a positive social relationship. As the chapter progresses, however, his intentions become more developed:

> At lunchtime I walked Iris downstairs to the lunchroom. I told her about how new the school was. And how when we moved in for the first time, hot water came out of all the cold water faucets and cold water came out of the hot.
>
> She thought that was pretty funny. I liked the way her earrings jangled when she laughed.
>
> …
>
> "Be sure to stay away from the macaroni" ,I warned. "No one ever eats the macaroni. We think they serve the same macaroni all year. See that crust on top? Whoever heard of macaroni with a crust?"
>
> Iris laughed. I brushed back my hair. I wondered if she liked me.
>
> (Stine 10-11)

Unfortunately for Ricky, as his feelings about Iris become more defined (leading quickly to him speculating about her feelings for him), his status as an Outcast is re-enforced. Caught up in his new role as school tour guide, Ricky is tripped by one of his many tormentors, causing him and his tray of Jell-O to fall to the cafeteria floor. As Iris looks on laughing, Ricky experiences a familiar surge of humiliation and vows to finally take action to change his Outcast status. It is important to note that this vow is spurred partially by his feelings for Iris, as it is her laughter

which Ricky focuses on and the threat of losing a potential relationship with her which seems to motivate him to finally take action against his assailants.

As he attempts to enact this change, Ricky operates under Iris' gaze. A typical instance of de-humanizing (which Ricky reacts to by regressing, becoming himself infantilized) at the hands of Tasha, the executive editor of the school's newspaper who is furious at Ricky for accidentally deleting the layout of the paper, ends in a surprising rush of hope as Ricky realizes that Iris has not adopted his other classmates' position of dominance over him. Breaking from the mold of all of the other kids at Ricky's high school, Iris does not react to his mistake and subsequent berating by joining Tasha in degrading Ricky but rather sympathizes with him, agreeing with his assessment of the injustice of Tasha's decision and siding with him in his struggle against the rest of the school's loathing.

Though this instance of public humiliation does not negatively affect Ricky's relationship with Iris (rather unexpectedly it strengthens it), further instances occur and they do begin to take their toll on her perception of him. In one episode, Ricky correctly guesses that he is about to be tortured by some of his common enemies, leaving Iris a bit put off both by his inability to defend himself and his paranoia: Wart and his friends assail Ricky, knocking him into a puddle of mud and forcing him to (poorly) sing the national anthem; their cruelty is immense, wishing not just to prove their superiority over Ricky (which has been long-established), but specifically to ruin any chance he might have of forming a positive relationship with Iris. The focus on Iris by both parties marks her as a significant figure; Brenda, the group's female voice, orders Ricky to sing a song for his “new friend,” both to remind Ricky of the group's principal purpose with this direction (which is to degrade Ricky so that Iris will not wish to be associated with him) and to

highlight the unlikeliness of their friendship continuing after this new, crushing humiliation. That Brenda and her friends are threatened by Ricky having a friend is not explicit, but is implied; they are used to seeing him friendless and must restore order by lowering Ricky's status in Iris' eyes. On Ricky's end, this is an event of powerful degradation. Brought down so far that he wishes to be a worm, Ricky experiences a deeper shame than he has ever experienced, quite a statement for someone who is humiliated on a daily basis as Ricky is. It is Iris' presence which creates this new shame; seeing himself losing what may be his only chance at a sexual (and even platonic) relationship in his middle school career, Ricky is powerless to stop his enemies from showing Iris the Ricky that they know: helpless, begging, obedient, and ridiculous. Assuming, understandably, that Iris will no longer respect him (much less be attracted to him) after this revelation, Ricky flees the scene, unwilling to witness firsthand the fruits of his enemies' heartless labor.

Spurred by this and future humiliations, Ricky decides to play a practical joke on Tasha, giving out her number in the school paper along with the message "Calling All Creeps. If you're a real Creep, call Tasha." In this moment of joy, he calls Iris, reflecting to himself the "She would appreciate it. [She] would understand." That Iris' reaction to his call is surprise is not itself surprising, as this is the first time they have talked since the singing incident and he is manic with imagined triumph. Iris doesn't laugh at the joke, seeming more concerned than anything, which Ricky dismisses by arguing, "it's just a joke. What could go wrong?" (Stine 41-42). But things do go wrong. It is Iris who first tries to alert Ricky to the fact that his name and phone number are the ones to actually appear in the paper. As a mysterious group of voices, identifying themselves as Creeps, begin harassing Ricky via a barrage of phone calls.

Despite this newfound stress, Ricky's relationship with Iris almost immediately takes on a more defined romantic feel. Indeed, the very first day after Ricky receives phone calls from the Creeps, Iris asks him on what appears to be a date. This is a moment of supreme triumph, not just for Ricky but for all of the Outcast specimens who he represents, and he thinks about it in those terms:

> Iris stopped at her locker and turned to me. Her cheeks suddenly had pink circles on them. "Would you do me a favor?"
>
> "Sure," I told her.
>
> Was she blushing? What was she going to ask?
>
> "It's so hard being the new girl in school," she said. "I thought I'd try to make something really special for the school bake sale on Saturday. You know. Try to impress everyone with my school spirit. Rah rah!" She shot up both hands like a cheerleader.
>
> I laughed and waited for her to continue.
>
> "Well..." she hesitated. "Would you come with me after school tomorrow to help me buy supplies? Flour and sugar and stuff? We could go--"
>
> "Of course!" I interrupted.
>
> I felt so excited, I almost blurted out, "No girl ever asked me to go *anywhere* before!"
>
> But somehow I managed to stay cool enough not to tell her that.
>
> "I'll meet you behind the playground after school tomorrow," I said. "We can shop for whatever you need, and I'll help you carry it all home."
>
> Big man, huh?
>
> She thanked me, and I jogged down the hall to my locker. I actually felt like skipping. Or flying! Iris likes me, I decided. A girl in my school *likes* me.
>
> You probably think this is no big deal. But it was a very big deal to me.
>
> (Stine 58-60)

Though the request is, as always, sublimated within an innocuous request to come help her hunt for school supplies, both Iris and Ricky recognize the romantic implications of the occasion. Iris' self-consciousness and Ricky's post-request celebration are both indicative of the respective characters' understanding that the event is a sign of Iris' attraction to Ricky (and, via his acceptance, his reciprocal attraction to her). That Ricky ties the whole affair to his

masculinity ("Big man, huh?") and relates his feelings about it to his lonely past ("It was a very big deal to me.") are indicative of his fantasies of popularity-as-a-sign-of-masculinity. Iris' decision to ask Ricky out in the immediate wake of his failed practical joke may seem a bit odd, but, given what his joke ends up meaning for his status as the book's most dominant figure, it becomes easier to understand. Ricky's joke ends up convincing a group of alien lizards who refer to themselves as Creeps that he is their leader. As the book closes, Ricky decides to accept his role as such, purposely enslaving the entire student body by giving them cookies which will mutate them into lizards themselves...lizards who will have to report to their commander, Ricky. Ricky goes from typal Outcast to alien lord as the book progresses, but it is his relationship with Iris (and the rarely seen relational and sexual triumph therein)[36] which is the book's main contribution to the series.

The *Goosebumps* book which is the most explicitly sexually driven is *How I Learned to Fly*. The book centers around the competition between Jack, the work's protagonist, and Wilson for the affections of their mutual friend and crush, Mia. Jack's first description of Mia, on only the book's second page, makes the book's plot (as well as its sexual edge) apparent:

> Mia is the cutest girl at Malibu Middle School. Ask anybody. Everything about Mia is cute.
>
> She has big green eyes and a perfect, little nose. I think Mia's nose is the first thing I noticed about her. I really admired that nose. I guess that's because my nose is kind of big.
>
> And Mia has the prettiest hair. Short, straight black hair. Really shiny. My hair is dark. Like Mia's—but it's curly. Way too curly.
>
> …
>
> Anyway, when Mia is around, that's when Wilson is at his worst! He has to show off in front of her. And he has to prove that he's better than me.
>
> Wilson likes to compete. Wilson likes to win.

[36] Ricky does not prevent Iris from eating the transformative cookies, meaning she will become his slave and lending a (in many ways disturbing) patriarchal bent to his relationship with her.

> So what choice do I have? I have to show Wilson that he's wrong. I have to prove that I'm good as he is. I don't want Mia to think I'm a loser.
>
> (Stine 2)

This page highlights all of the book's major themes: Wilson's competitiveness and its ability to force the normally non-competitive Jack into a game, their shared affection for Mia, her status as the school's most attractive girl (and hence its biggest prize), and the text's undercurrent of homosociality in regards to the competition between its male characters. Jack's comparisons between himself and Mia sound more like a jealous female than a potential suitor, and, while his motivations for competing seem Mia-centric, they always come back to how trying to form a relationship with Mia relates to Wilson.[37] Even a (now familiar to us close readers of the series) scene in which Mia sees Jack in his underwear ends up being centered around Wilson's triumph at Jack's humiliation.[38]

For her part, which ultimately seems almost inconsequential in face of the competition between the two boys, Mia seems to be at least somewhat interested in both of them, but not unwilling to encourage them to compete for her affections, repeatedly egging them on by lauding the others' accomplishments and making sure to remain equally flirtatious with both. In scenes such as the one where the two boys are asked to save a kitten which has gotten itself caught in a tree, Mia does not fail to take opportunities to get the boys to compete for her when the present themselves; in that particular scene, she cries to the boys, with a helplessness that may remind

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[37] Interestingly, one of Wilson's most prominent tactics in his quest to gain Mia's favor over Jack is to feminize the latter, mockingly calling him "Jackie."

[38] In that scene, Jack accidentally rips his pants while playing *Twister* at Mia's birthday party. The scene proceeds as previously-discussed underwear-baring scenes have: Jack blushes and remarks upon his own total humiliation and Mia laughs along with the rest of the party's guest. This scene is unique for two reasons: first, Mia stops Jack from leaving the party in embarrassment, blocking his exit through the front door and softly asking him to remain. Second, the scene's final focus is not on Mia or Jack, but on Wilson's "big, horrible grin" and how his gloating is driving Jack "CRAZY." Eventually, Wilson's continual victories over Jack do cause him to leave the party (Stine 20-21).

readers of Olive Oil or the assailed women in comic books, “She's going to fall! Someone has to save her!”

As the book progresses, Jack finds a book titled *Flying Lessons* and learns how to fly. Of course, the first thing Jack considers when he decides to reveal his newfound ability to his friends is “the sick look on [Wilson's] face when he [realizes] that our competition [is] over for all time” (Stine 65). Note that Jack's remarks do not include any mention of Mia, furthering the idea that the triangle between her, he, and Wilson is, at least on his end, a sublimation of repressed homosexual desires for Wilson. As the book takes a turn for the absurd, Wilson also learns to fly, and the boys become national celebrities, as well as scientific curiosities. They are finally pitted against each other in much-hyped flying race, which Jack nervously notes will take place “in front of two billion people” (Stine 112). Jack loses the race on purpose so that he won't have to deal with the fame of being the nation's most successful flying youth, and the book ends on his assumption that Wilson's fame will prevent him from being able to form a relationship with Mia, meaning that Jack can finally pursue her unimpeded. This is particularly interesting because it seems to imply that Jack has either given up his desire to be in a sexual relationship with Wilson or that he has found himself more attracted to Mia than he was previously, since his former focus (which was always the game with Wilson, no Mia as the prize) has shifted. Either way, *How I Learned to Fly* is a book which is (almost unapologetically) sexually driven, more so than any of the other books in the series.

These books, all of which involve the explicit expression of (sublimated) sexual desires, are important to consider both when attempting to make statements about the series' approach to sexuality as a whole, and, more importantly, when attempting to compare the treatment of

sexuality between the two genders throughout the series. Both females and males occupy all of the potential sexual roles in the series, from the sexual aggression of Hannah from *Werewolf Skin* and Ricky at the end of *Calling All Creeps!* to the submissive acceptance of the advances of the opposite sex of Mia from *How I Learned to Fly* and Danny from *The Ghost Next Door*. That both genders occupy all roles is crucial to the argument that the series uses sexuality (in addition to other aspects of human personality and psychology) to expose readers to purposefully contradictory, post-modern notions of gender-as-construction and masculinity/femininity as fraudulent terms.

Non-Explicit/Non-Voiced Expressions of Sexuality

It is easier to see how Non-Explicit/Non-Voiced expressions of sexuality might constitute sublimations; a more pressing problem is how to determine if these expressions are occurring at all, given their necessary subtlety. All of the following examples may be argued to not constitute expressions of sexuality at; such is the nature of their type of expression. However, for reasons I will provide respective to each, there is evidence that these are expressions of sublimated sexuality, and, moreover, there is significant evidence that these Non-Explicit/Non-Voiced expressions occur equally between male and female characters within the series.

The most ambiguous (and thus difficult to defend) examples of this type of sublimated sexual expression come from relationships which skirt the border between purely platonic and secretly sexual. Relationships like those between Shari and Greg from the *Say Cheese and Die!* books, Evan and Andy from the *Monster Blood* books, Brooke and Zeke from *The Phantom of*

the Auditorium, Freddy and Cara from *Vampire Breath*, and Zack and Alex from *The Blob That Ate Everyone* may simply be platonic relationships, but exhibit evidence of suppressed erotic desires which cannot be ignored. Characteristic of these relationships are traits such as thinking about one's actions in terms of the gaze of the other person, above-average competitiveness (potentially a sublimation of a playful fight for sexual dominance), and the purposeful separation of the pair from the rest of the their social groups, allowing the relationship to progress in relative isolation. As is shown in the following examples, all of these traits can be indicative of Non-Explicit, Non-Voiced sexuality between the two characters.

> Evan returned to Kathryn's, walking slowly, thinking about the Beymer twins, daydreaming about fighting them, imagining himself beating them to a pulp in a fight as Andy watched, cheering him on.
>
> (*Monster Blood* 38)

> Shutting his eyes and settling back on the pillow, Evan thought about Andy. He was glad she had come to stay in Atlanta for a while. She could be a real pain. But she was also a lot of fun.
>
> (*Monster Blood II* 37)

> I want to be a writer when I grow up. I write scary stories all the time. Then I read them to Alex and Adam.
>
> They always react in the same way. Alex always likes my stories. She thinks they're really scary. She says my stories are so good, they give her nightmares.
>
> (*The Blob That Ate Everyone* 7)

> I turned the corner and saw Shari down the hall.
>
> "Greg!" she called, surprised to see me. "What's going on?"
>
> She was wearing a short black skirt over blue tights. She started to run down the hall toward me.
>
> She took about four steps. And then cried out as her skirt fell down!
>
> "I don't believe this!" Shari wailed.
>
> We both stared down at her skirt, which had fallen around her ankles.
>
> She dropped her books and bent to pull it up.
>
> Normally, I would have burst out laughing, but she seemed so upset, I just stood there.
>
> …

> "Let's go," she urged. "Quick, help me pick up my books."
> I bent to pick up the books---and the back of my jeans burst open with a loud *rrrrrrip*.
> (*Say Cheese and Die--Again!* 80-81)

Throughout the above examples, the relationships between the relevant characters come close to the border between platonic and romantic/sexual relationships. Though they do not all do so the same degree (Greg and Shari seeing each other in their underwear can hardly compare to Alex's support of Zack's writing), they are all arguably examples of the Non-Voiced/Non-Explicit sexual expressions which I have categorized, and, the fact that these expressions (whether the arguments that they are sublimated sexual expressions is convincing or not) are shared equally between both males and females indicates that *Goosebumps* does not code this specific type of sexual expression as masculine or feminine but instead rejects essentialist categorizations and allows it to occur among all of its characters.

Whether Explicit/Voiced or Non-Explicit/Non-Voiced, all of the expressions of sexuality in Stine's *Goosebumps* series have in common that they are sublimated, forced to only hint at the erotic desires which the characters who express them secretly harbor by societally-mandated impulses which restrict them before they can form wholly in those characters' consciousnesses. Both types of these expressions are shared relatively equally among the sexes, indicating that, with sexuality as with every other aspect of the personalities and psychological make-up of Stine's characters, there is no essentialist gender coding restraining how frequently or in what way those aspects may be demonstrated throughout the series. This re-enforces the notion that Stine's series ascribes to a post-modern understanding of gender, one which presents characters

of both sexes who act in ways which are varied so as to be purposefully contradictory, thereby undermining essentialist understandings of how males and females should act.

CONCLUSION

R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series is a children's horror serial which addresses the issue of gender in a surprisingly post-modern way. As outlined by Nodelman and Coats, the series' take on gender stems from its constant contradictions. Where one story shows, perhaps, a female specimen of the Responsible Older Sibling type interacting with a male specimen of the Pesky Younger Sibling type, another will have the scenarios reversed exactly. Where one book has a male specimen of the Outcast type expressing sublimated sexual feelings for a female, another will do the opposite along gender lines. By heaping contradictory gender representations on top of one another, by employing the same types equally across gender lines, by using a medium as formulaic as the children's serial to depict extremely similar characters of different genders (thereby creating both a contrast and an inherent familiarity), *Goosebumps* undermines an understanding of gender which teaches, as gender essentialism does, that being male or female necessarily includes certain actions, personality traits, and habits. Though the series does not deconstruct gender essentialism perfectly, it leaves any reader who reads it as one comprehensive text no chance of conclude that the world of *Goosebumps* is one in which males and females can only act one way, respectively, or are disallowed from occupying the same roles.

The question must then be posed as to what importance these findings about Stine's work have for children's literature as a field and, more broadly, humanity at large. As one of the most

popular series in the history of children's literature, the impact of *Goosebumps* is difficult to ignore; Coppell was right to argue that, if the series is that popular, it must be imparting *something*, whether good or bad, to its sizeable and loyal fanbase. Though the series is no longer as popular as it was at its peak (the *Goosebumps Horrorland* game has moved around forty-three million copies in the four years it has been on the market), the impact it had on the generation of children who counted themselves as *Goosebumps* fans in the 90s (and the generations which follow, to lesser extent) is worth considering. Because the series presents a view of gender which is post-modern in its non-essentialism, it is not unreasonable to suggest that its readers, presented with this view as normative, were made more accepting of this post-modern approach to gender. Moreover, the popularity of *Goosebumps* during its heyday indicates that this approach to gender did not discourage children from reading the books (or parents from buying them) , perhaps an indicator of an increasingly non-essentialist view of gender nationwide.

It is worth reiterating here that *Goosebumps* as a series is only post-modern in this specific way. Though Stine's series refuses to normalize gender essentialism, there are many other areas in which it reinforces ideas which are potentially problematic for its impressionable readers. On the issue of race, all of the characters in the *Goosebumps* series are white, with three exceptions (to be found in *The Curse of Camp Cold Lake*, *The Blob That Ate Everything*, *Attack of the Jack O'Lanterns*, and *Piano Lessons Can Be Murder*, respectively). The non-Caucasian characters are either barely mentioned or handled poorly: "Lee is African-American, and he sort of struts when he walks and acts real cool, like the rappers on MTV videos." (*Attack of the Jack O'Lanterns* 4). On the subject of class, all of the characters in the series are assumed to be upper middle-class, unless specifically identified as either rich (like Patrick from *Go Eat Worms*) or

lower middle-class (like Trina and Dan's family from *Night of the Living Dummy III*). There are no poor families or characters, even secondary ones, and no one every struggles financially or has difficulty obtaining anything they want on a consumer level. As Nodelman observes, "the families of these children aren't rich, but they enjoy enough material comfort not to need to comment on it" (Nodelman 119). On the subject of family structure, nearly every family is nuclear. Those exceptions (such as Marco's family from *I Live in Your Basement*) are only referenced in their books' beginning chapters; because parents have such a limited role in the series, non-traditional parenting models do not have much effect on the characters who live under them. On the subject of sexuality, all of the (sublimated) sexuality in *Goosebumps* is heterosexual; there is no mention of the category of homosexuality in the series. Even on the subject of gender, *Goosebumps* affirms the gender binary which Butler's previously-referenced *Bodies that Matter* seeks to deconstruct, placing each of its characters clearly along the male-female dichotomy.

Ultimately, *Goosebumps* contribution to children's literature (and, further, to humanity) relies chiefly on its popularity. As a text that was read *en masse*, it is a text worth reading critically. That the series convinced young males to read in higher than average amounts and that it presents when read as a whole presents a non-essentialist view of gender are encouraging results of this reading, but, on a practical level, the reason for re-visiting the *Goosebumps* books critically in the first place is that they were a bona fide cultural phenomenon with a real impact on a large number of child (and adult) readers from 1992 to the early 2000s.

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APPENDIX

Representations of Types throughout the *Goosebumps* Series across Gender Lines

As equal weight is not given narratively to protagonists and secondary characters, it is worth noting which characters among the following are the focus of their respective texts and which are merely supplemental. In addition to showing which types are more likely to occupy major roles in their respective texts, this is particularly helpful in explaining some of the gaps in equality (see my argument regarding Type 6: The Scaredy-Cat in the body of my paper). Protagonists are indicated in this index by the presence of an asterisk. Despite the obvious objection that they are not types proper, I have chosen to include my data regarding expressions of sexuality throughout the series in this appendix as well, though, without consulting the analysis of such in my paper, the data will almost surely be misleading.

Type 1: The Pesky Younger Sibling

Ginny, female, *Bad Hare Day*
Krissy, female, *Why I'm Afraid of Bees*
Tara (the Terrible), female, *Cuckoo Clock of Doom*
Terri, female, *Ghost Beach*
Sheena, female, *Deep Trouble* and *Deep Trouble II*
Luke, male, *One Day in Horrorland*
Pat and Nat, males, *The Beast from the East*
Joe, male, *Revenge of the Lawn Gnomes**
Jed, male, *Night of the Living Dummy II*
Dan, male, *Night of the Living Dummy III*
Josh, male, *Welcome to Dead House*
Cole, male, *Chicken, Chicken*

Final Results: Five female, seven male.

Type 2: Responsible Younger Sibling

Emily, female, *The Werewolf of Fever Swamp*
Simon, male, *My Best Friend Is Invisible*

Aaron, male, *Curse of Camp Cold Lake*

Final Results: one female, two male.

Type 3: Responsible Older Sibling

Amanda, female, *Welcome to Dead House**
Lizzy, female, *One Day in Horrorland**
Ginger, female, *The Beast from the East**
Jodie, female, *The Scarecrow Walks at Midnight**
Katrina, female, *It Came from Beneath the Sink!**
Max, male, *Let's Get Invisible!**
Jerry, male, *Ghost Beach**
Harry, male, *Ghost Camp**
Justin, male, *Legend of the Lost Legend**

Final Results: Five females, four males.

Type 4: Pesky Older Sibling

Lucy, female, *The Girl Who Cried Monster**
Pam, female, *Don't Go to Sleep!*
Mickey, male, *The Barking Ghost*
Greg, male, *Don't Go to Sleep!*
Kevin, male, *You Can't Scare Me!*

Final Results: Two females, three males.

Type 5: The Know-It-All

Emily, female, *The Werewolf of Fever Swamp*
Sheena, female, *Deep Trouble* and *Deep Trouble II*
Mindy, female, *Revenge of the Lawn Gnomes*

Sara, female, *Night of the Living Dummy II*
Tabby, female, *Attack of the Jack O'Lanterns*
Nicole, female, *The Abominable Snowman of Pasadena*
Larry, male, *My Hairiest Adventure**
Kermit, male, *Monster Blood III* and *Monster Blood IV*
Daniel, male, *It Came from Beneath the Sink!*

Final Results: Five females, three males.

Type 6: The Scaredy-Cat

Carly Beth, female, *The Haunted Mask**
Drew, female, *Attack of the Jack O'Lanterns**
April, female, *Let's Get Invisible!*
Clay, male, *One Day in Horrorland*
Eddie, male, *A Night in Terror Tower*
Clark, male, *How to Kill a Monster*
Gary, male, *Why I'm Afraid of Bees**
Eddie, male, *You Can't Scare Me!**
Cooper, male, *The Barking Ghost**
Jeremy, male, *Phantom of the Auditorium*
Tyler, male, *Vampire Breath*
Zane, male, *Night of the Living Dummy III*
Randy, male, *The Girl Who Cried Monster*

Final Results: Three female, ten male.

Type 7: The Brave One

Courtney, female, *You Can't Scare Me!*
Erin, female, *A Shocker on Shock Street**
Cara, female, *Vampire Breath*
Brooke, female, *Phantom of the Auditorium**

Stephanie, female, *The Headless Ghost**
Lucy, female, *The Girl Who Cried Monster*
Tabby, female, *Attack of the Jack O'Lanterns*
Lee, male, *Attack of the Jack O'Lanterns*
Freddy, male, *Vampire Breath**
Marty, male, *A Shocker on Shock Street*
Zeke, male, *Phantom of the Auditorium*
Duane, male, *The Headless Ghost*

Final Results: Seven female, five male.

Type 8: The Bully

Judith, female, *Be Careful What You Wish For...*
Ginny, female, *Bad Hare Day*
Kara, female, *The Abominable Snowman of Pasadena*
Gretchen, female, *The Haunted School*
Kyle, male, *The Abominable Snowman of Pasadena*
Joey/Mickey, males, *Say Cheese and Die!*
Brian/Donny, males, *Say Cheese and Die—Again!*
Conan (the Barbarian), male, *Monster Blood II*, *Monster Blood III*, and *Monster Blood IV*

Final Results: Four females, four males.

Type 9: The Scientist

Diane, female, *Stay out of the Basement*
Terri, female, *Ghost Beach*
Todd, male, *Go Eat Worms!**
Kermit, male, *Monster Blood III* and *Monster Blood IV*
Dana, male, *Egg Monsters from Mars**

Final Results: Two females, three males.

Type 10: The Outcast

Samantha, female, *Be Careful What You Wish For...**
Sarah, female, *The Curse of Camp Cold Lake**
Gary, male, *Why I'm Afraid of Bees**
Ricky, male, *Calling All Creeps!**

Final Results: Two females, two males.

Explicit/Voiced Expressions of Sexuality:

Dawn, female, *Camp Nightmare*
Hannah, female, *The Ghost Next Door**
Iris, female, *Calling All Creeps!*
Lucy, female, *Ghost Camp*
Mia, female, *How I Learned to Fly*
Kris, female, *Night of the Living Dummy*
Mona, female, *Cuckoo Clock of Doom*
Billy, male, *Camp Nightmare**
Zack, male, *Let's Get Invisible!*
Tommy, male, *The Haunted School**
Michael, male, *Cuckoo Clock of Doom*
Jack, male, *How I Learned to Fly*
Harry, male, *Ghost Camp**
Ricky, male, *Calling All Creeps!*

Final Results: Seven females, seven males.