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“SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH”: REPRESENTATIONS OF YOUNG WOMEN IN YOUNG  
ADULT LITERATURE AND THE MARGINALIZATION OF YA LITERATURE AS  
A WHOLE

by

Jessica N. Mitchell

A Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the gender stereotypes that may or may not have been present in the portrayal of four female protagonists from the first novels of four different YA series and why young adult literature is such a marginalized literary genre. Bella Swan from Stephenie's Meyer's *Twilight*, Clarissa Fray from Cassandra Claire's *City of Bones*, Katniss Everdeen from Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, and Beatrice Prior from Veronica Roth's *Divergent* were analyzed in order to see which protagonists embodied gender stereotypes and which were gender neutral. Texts and articles were also consulted to discover why, after its monumental growth and popularity, young adult literature is still such a marginalized literary genre. Reasons as to why young adult literature should be taken more seriously as were ways to become more gender equal and why we need young adult heroines who are more gender neutral were covered in the conclusion.

## PREFACE

The researcher's purpose was to examine four literary heroines from four, popular YA series in order to determine if these protagonists still embodied the same sort of gender stereotypes. The researcher also wondered why young adult literature was not regarded as a serious focus of study for literary critics and educational institutions. With the balance of power always tipped out of the woman's favor, the researcher feels it is important to create, examine, and incorporate new literary heroines that are more gender neutral. The researcher also enjoyed young adult literature and wanted to study it more closely but felt as though she was not being taken seriously enough when she shared this with others who enjoyed and studied English literature. The researcher then proposed ways to establish more gender equality, incorporate young adult literature into the curriculum more, and discussed the need for literary heroines that are more gender neutral.

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Introduction  
The Evolution of Gender Stereotypes in Young Adult Literature

In their book entitled *Discovering Their Voices: Engaging Adolescent Girls with Young Adult Literature*, authors Marsha Sprague and Kara Keeling elaborate on how fairy tales are some of the earliest literary experiences that adolescents girls have and how they are negatively affected by the portrayal of the heroines from these tales:

In most fairy tales that have become popular with U.S. children, young girls exhibit a clear pattern of behavior. The young women in the stories are uniformly beautiful and helpless. To succeed, they must receive some kind of aid, often through magic performed by others, and the only definition of success in the stories is marriage to a handsome prince. Generally, the other women in the stories are hateful to them and try to prevent them from reaching their goal of living happily ever after: Snow White’s stepmother poisons her; Cinderella’s stepmother and stepsisters force her to work as their servant. (115)

Sprague and Keeling then point out a study done by Kay Stone in 2002, in which she interviewed 44 girls and women about the depiction of femininity and masculinity in fairy tales and how it affected their thinking. She found that the majority of them were able to distinguish the gender stereotypes found within the tales. She also discovered that her subjects disapproved of these stereotypes, particularly the idea that women had to be rescued by men, or in this case, a prince. Sprague and Keeling then add, “Stone is quick to note that fairy tales are only one source of messages about beauty, marriage and living ‘happily ever after’ since all types of media—including advertising—have borrowed and expanded on these themes,” and conclude that in their original forms, fairy tales carry negative messages for girls (116). This is not surprising considering the time periods in which they were written. Martin Hallett and Barbara Karasek acknowledge this, claiming, “Women had little hope of subsisting without the protection and financial support of a man because they could not own property. Thus, women had to compete for available

males, particularly prosperous ones, creating jealousy and treachery within the female community” (qtd. in Sprague and Keeling 115). Cathy Fagan elaborates on this by saying, “The world of women was defined by and limited to the married state and motherhood, characterized by self-sacrifice, nurturance, passivity, dependence...women often attached themselves to men from whom they hoped to receive a share in power and status as a prerequisite of their relationships” (228). This practice of women relying on men only intensified the beliefs already present due to the established patriarchal society; the beliefs that men are superior to women and masculine traits are the ones to be desired and admired, not feminine ones. In their anthology, Suzanne Kelly, Gowri Parameswaran, and Nancy Schniediwind call attention to this, saying, “Women have traditionally been defined in relation to male standards and needs. Man is seen as strong, woman weak, and the resulting dichotomy perpetuates the superiority of males. A woman has historically been viewed as a man’s subordinate, someone different from and inferior to him. “Masculine” traits are socially desirable and valued while “feminine” ones are not” (47). This schism prevented women from taking on any kind of roles or traits that made them appear more masculine and if they attempted to transition this gap, they were likely to be mocked or treated facetiously. According to David Russell, “For a woman to be taken seriously, she must perform like a man, and such behavior is just as likely to win her ridicule from both sexes. Only in the second half of the twentieth century have significant strides been taken to eliminate this male bias in Western culture” (43). Steps have been made to try to put women on a more equal footing with men supposedly because “the women’s liberation movement has tried to balance the scale and is making



progress” (Loeb 2). However, if progress has apparently been made, then why do we continue to see the same gender stereotypes flourish in our society today?

According to Susan Golombok and Robyn Fivush, part of the reason is that “gender stereotypes reflect culturally prescribed beliefs about gender, [so] one might also assume that as society’s view of female and males change, the content of the stereotypes will change as well” (34-35). They also call attention to the fact that “one of the problems with interpreting results on changing stereotypes is the difficulty of determining whether changes are due to developmental differences or to cohort differences” (35).

Developmental differences would simply be the indication of a shift in the way an individual perceives society and their environment while cohort differences occur when certain time periods affect people’s lives and beliefs due to critical, historical events happening during said time periods. Because of these snags in the so-called “progress”, Golombok and Fivush claim, “It is apparent that gender stereotypes have remained relatively stable over the past 30 to 40 years. Although there have been many changes in the roles that females and males play in our society, beliefs about gender-related traits and characteristics have not undergone much change” (36). If gender stereotypes are relatively the same as they were a few decades prior, the question then becomes what exactly are these stereotypes and how is gender viewed in contemporary society? Also, does gender merely come down to sexual differences influencing these beliefs or does society play a bigger role?

According to Richard Ashmore, Frances DelBoca, and A.J. Wohlens in their study, *The Social Psychology of Female-Male Relations: A Critical Analysis of Central Concepts*, “A *gender stereotype* is defined as a set of beliefs about what it means to be female or male. Gender stereotypes include information about physical appearance, attitudes, and interests, psychological traits, social relations, and occupations” (qtd. in Golombok and Fivush 17). They cause society to regard traits like independence, strength, and ambition with men and weakness, dependence, and docility with women. This can be especially frustrating for women because patriarchal societies have always cast them in the subordinate role. “Stereotypes about girls and women make it easier for individuals to think they can predict behavior, allowing a quick evaluation and categorization of behavior. Stereotypes are tightly woven into the social fabric of this culture and reinforce dichotomous notions of “femininity” and masculinity” ( Kelly, Parameswaran, and Schniedewind 48). These stereotypes are clearly the result of gender inequality. With our so-called “progress”, how have gender stereotypes managed to linger in our present understanding of gender itself?

Critic Judith Lorber proposed the idea of social construction feminism to present a contemporary view on gender. According to Lorber, “Social construction feminism sees gender as a society-wide institution because it is built into all the major social organizations. As a social institution, gender determines the distribution of power, privileges, and economic resources” (*Gender Inequality*, 244). The key idea is that gender is essentially *constructed by society* and it is embedded in people from a young age. Children begin learning about gender very early in development. In their article “Doing Gender” sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman say:

In early childhood, humans develop gendered personality structures and sexual orientations through their interactions with parents of the same and opposite gender. As adolescents, they conduct their sexual behavior according to gendered scripts. Schools, parents, peers, and the mass media guide young people into gendered work and family roles. As adults, they take on a gendered social status in their society's stratification system. Gender is thus both ascribed and achieved. (qtd, in *Paradoxes of Gender*, 22)

Since people place gender labels on themselves and others in their youth and maintain them to adulthood, it comes as no surprise that gender is such a huge part of our existence. Lorber claims, "Gender is such a familiar part of daily life that it usually takes a deliberate disruption of our expectations of how women and men are supposed to act to pay attention to how it is produced" (*Paradoxes of Gender* 14). With our patriarchal beginnings and the fact that there has been little change to the stereotypes that formed as a result, it is also no surprise that our Western society promotes gendering based on the physical differences between males and females, particularly their genitalia. "Western society's values legitimate gendering by claiming that it all comes from physiology—female and male procreative differences. But gender and sex are not equivalent, and gender as social construction does not flow automatically from genitalia and reproductive organs, the main physiological differences of females and males" (Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* 17). Lorber counters this by claiming,

Social construction feminism demonstrates that gender is a constant part of who and what we are, how others treat us, and our general standing in society. Our bodies, personalities, and ways of thinking, acting, and feeling are gendered. Early and constant gendering gives the illusion of inborn sex differences, but social construction feminism argues that gender differences are not sex differences. (*Gender Inequality*, 244)

Sex differences come strictly from an individual's anatomy while gender differences form the various facts of their behavior, relationships and how they organize their lives. These differences are created and perpetuated by society; society splits them into either men or women and the differences keep them separated. It seems that if these differences disappeared or were removed, the whole gender order that people have come to rely on would collapse. "Look not only at the way individuals experience gender but at gender as a social institution. As a social institution, gender is one of the major ways that human beings organize their lives" (Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* 15). Unfortunately, while social construction feminism clarifies the distinction between sex differences and gender differences, it also continues to generate the unequal status between men and women.

According to Lorber:

The social construction of gender not only produces the differences between men's and women's characteristics and behavior, it also produces gender inequality. Although societies can insure that differences are not used to legitimate unequal legal rights or discriminatory practices, there is always debate over how equal women and men can be, given what seems to be a substantially wide and unbridgeable gap between female and male "natures." (*Gender Inequality* 245)

If gender inequality is a result of the social construction of gender, then how does this affect women and girls in Western societies? One effect is clear: society constructs the concept of the good female and the bad female, otherwise known as the Madonna/whore dichotomy. Girls learn from a young age what is acceptable for a "good" girl and why deviating from these restrictions will make them a "bad" girl. Perceptions like these cause women and girls to have distorted ideas about themselves, not only at work or out in the world but particularly in classrooms. Kelly, Parameswaran, and Schniedewind elaborate on this by claiming, "The dynamics of the classroom often reinforce existing power

relationships between males and females. These patterns are so pervasive that we don't usually notice them. However, studies of classrooms reveal that teachers call on female students less frequently than on male students and discourage females' classroom participation, thus eroding their self-confidence" (48). If young girls are struggling with their self-perceptions, then how can young adult literature help them? In order to answer this, we must first understand what exactly young adult literature is and how it came to be.

The real issue of defining what young adult literature is is determining the age range of the readers of this particular literature. The Young Adult Library Services Association, or YALSA, "denotes ages twelve to eighteen as comprising "young adult" readers" (228). Lois Stover considers the age range of readers of young adult literature to be from around "the age of eleven, when most students enter sixth grade (the grade that frequently marks the first year of middle school), through the age of eighteen, when the majority of students graduate from high school" (5). Kenneth Donelson and Alleen Nilsen define young adult literature as "anything that readers between the approximate ages of twelve and twenty choose to read (as opposed to what they may be coerced to read for class assignments)" (*Literature for Today's Young Adults* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 13). Author Michael Cart presents perhaps the most contemporary view of young adult literature and its readership. Cart claims:

Surely the term no longer embraces only twelve-to-eighteen-year-olds—it must now also include nineteen-to-twenty-five-year-olds (or even older, as the twelve-to-thirty-four MTV demographic has become an increasingly desirable market in publishing). Indeed over the course of the past five or so years, coming of age itself has become a significantly more attenuated process, and as a result a new category of human development has begun to appear that is being called, variously kidult, adolescents, twixters, and boomerangers. (*From Romance to Realism*, 119)

All these critics and authors put age limits on readers of young adult literature, which makes sense in theory because everyone has assumptions about the age span of the readers. However, trying to limit what people can read due to their age range and what texts are appropriate for that particular age range is not fair to those individuals who enjoy reading outside of their age range. Critic Isabelle Holland expands on this belief:

One of the reasons why I resist the increasing tendency to categorize according to age is that it is a form of pressure from the outside, telling a young person what he or she is supposed to be, or what stage he or she is supposed to be at. And the more this is done, the more, I believe, it is difficult for people—and people of any age, but particularly young people who are on this particular stage of the road of self-discovery—to know from within themselves who they are, where they are, and what they really like and want for themselves. (37)

Technically, Holland defines “adolescent literature” as whatever any adolescent happens to be reading at any time” (33). I would modify this slightly and say that young adult literature is whatever any young adult happens to be reading at any time, regardless of whether you are an adolescent or almost an adult. But whether the reader is an adolescent or almost an adult, the fact is that young adult literature was not born as a genre of literature, like the other genres. Cart claims:

Young adult literature evolved in concert with and in response to the very concept of the adolescent, the teenager, the young adult, the embodied idea that there was a separate and distinct period of personal development between childhood and adulthood. This new landscape of life, this terrain of transition, did not begin to emerge until the turn of the twentieth century, however. Before then one moved directly from childhood into adulthood and that transition took place the day you first went to work,” (“Young Adult Literature Comes of Age” 201-202).

Before the twentieth century, there was no real transition from childhood to adulthood.

Depending on the time period, once children reached a certain age, they were not children

anymore. They had to step into the adult role and take responsibility. The literature was either instructional or not aimed at their particular age group. It was not until around the time of the Great Depression that the state of adolescence even began to be acknowledged. According to Cart:

It was not until the Great Depression caused the job market to dry up—along with most of the state of Oklahoma—that children stopped going to work and, instead, started going to high school. And yet, by 1930, the first year of the Depression, almost half of America’s adolescents—fourteen-to-eighteen-year-olds—were enrolled in high school. By 1936, the number had grown to 65 percent, and by 1939, arguably the last year of the Depression, a robust 75 percent were in high school. (“Young Adult Literature Comes of Age” 202)

Though they now had the opportunity to go to school, these adolescents did not spend their time studying. They used school to their advantage and began to form social lives. Publications began to be aimed at them. “It was in September 1936 that *Scholastic Magazine*—even then a fixture of the classroom—began running a brand new column; it was called “Boy Dates Girl” (Cart, “Young Adult Literature Comes of Age” 202). By 1944, adolescents began to be known as teenagers and became consumers. Book publishers began taking advantage of this though they approached it with caution. They could not offer literary diversions to simply pass the time to these new consumers. “Though in marketing terms these books were targeted at teens, in literary terms, they remained—with a few anomalous exceptions—children’s books. It would take a sexual and social revolution—otherwise called the 1960s—before a true young adult literature would begin to emerge” (Cart, “Young Adult Literature Comes of Age” 204). J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* introduced the themes of adolescent angst and alienation that helped to characterize the literature of the sixties. The seventies helped to

break down more of the boundaries that were limiting this literature and began to challenge the idea of the “good” girl and boy. “The explosion of new talent that characterizes the seventies justifies its being called young adult literature’s first golden age” (Cart, “Young Adult Literature Comes of Age” 205). The eighties brought about a surge in romance. Cart claims, “The content of the new romance differed scarcely at all from the old. The difference was in its presentation. Another difference: readers no longer looked for their latest reading fix in libraries but, instead, in chain bookstores strategically located in the new home away from home for America’s teens: the neighborhood shopping mall” (“Young Adult Literature Comes of Age” 205). Some experts believed that young adult literature had reached its peak and was dead by the end of the eighties. However, the nineties became known as the renaissance of the genre. Teri Lesesne explicates on this idea, “Another step forward in the 1990s was the expansion of the YA audience, which widened from a narrow middle school focus to include good YA for high school and even college-age readers. Hitherto, these older readers had been written off by the YA market. Most high school and college readers long ago moved on to adult books” (“Young Adult Literature Charts Its Own Course” 218). The inclusion of these older readers slowed authors to address more than they could before. The young age of their audience prevented them from exploring darker or edgier subjects. According to Cart:

This has been wonderfully liberating for writers who now have greater freedom than ever before to address “edgy” material in novels for the older end of this new demographic and to introduce ambiguity artfully into their increasingly complex treatments of the real lives of today’s teenagers. Young adult literature has become more sophisticated than ever before in subject, style, and tone, and the product is, increasingly, being cross-marketed to both teen and adult audiences. (“Young Adult Literature Comes of Age” 207)



Since the renaissance of the nineties and the expansion of the YA audience has allowed for more readers, it is no surprise that YA literature continued to thrive. It grew until special considerations were made for the literary genre such as the creation of the ALEX Awards. “The American Library Association, in recognition of the fact that many teens read adult books, instituted the ALEX Awards for the most exemplary books written for adults but suitable for YA readers” (Lesesne, “Young Adult Literature Charts Its Own Course” 218). Perhaps the biggest recognition for this genre was the creation of the Printz Award, which honors an author for distinguished contributions to literature for young adults. According to Lesesne, “this honor elevates the entire literary designation and offers renewed hope for its continued well-being” (“Young Adult Literature Charts Its Own Course” 218). Today, young adult literature has become one of the most popular genres out there yet it is still not taken seriously in school classrooms or by literary critics. So what does young adult literature have to do with the social construction of gender and gender stereotypes?

Despite the so called “progress” towards equality, gender inequality still exists, which not only affects adolescents but the literature they choose to read as well. Author Robert Carlsen notes in his work, *Books and the Teenage Reader*, why this is important: “According to Carlsen, it has been well documented that reading interest peaks between the ages of twelve and fourteen. During this time young adults are interested in finding out about themselves and the world” (7). In their quests to learn more about the society they live in, adolescents would no doubt experience the issues with gender. Gender, and the inequality that comes as a result of social construction feminism, could affect not only the readers but also how the overall plot and characters are presented in the texts. In

*Transcending Boundaries: Multi-Disciplinary Approaches to the Study of Gender*, Susan McKinstry comments on how fiction and gender intertwine. She says, “In fiction, plot often tells us what the culture believes gender should be; gender and genre are related means of constructing assumptions about maleness and femaleness through plot” (31). She continues on with, “And fiction, in the conventional form of the romance plot, defines, and refines our understanding of gender through judgments about these choices on the level of the surface text and its subversive voice. A genre can be examined for its restrictions, its gender system that makes certain stories “plausible” and others “implausible” for women” (32). These gender restrictions, not to mention the prevalent gender stereotypes of our society, cause a shortage in literary heroines that can be presented as positive role models for readers of young adult literature, especially girls. Fairy tales heroines present stereotypes early in life when young peoples’ perception of gender is still being formed but the fact that the stereotypes still persist in literature intended for a younger audience is disturbing. During the nineties, strong female characters became popular and they provided good role models for young adults. If this was indeed the case then why are contemporary authors presenting young adult readers with heroines that continue to embody gender stereotypes? Golombok and Fivush elaborate on this:

Females in the leading character role were depicted as active and adventurous, just as males who were leading characters. However, few books had females as leading characters. When females were secondary characters, or when males and females shared the leading roles, females were depicted in fairly traditional terms, as passive and dependent. Although there has been some change toward more equal representation of females and males in children’s storybooks, gender is still portrayed in relatively stereotyped ways. (31)

Patricia Kelly is the one who puts the whole idea into perspective: She says, “young adult novels provide excellent opportunities to look at the way gender roles are played out...The content of many adolescent novels, however, makes it equally difficult to find good gender roles” (154-155). With this in mind, why is there not more of an effort to create new literary heroines who are more gender neutral or defy the stereotypical gender roles still in place in our society? Also, there are portrayals of strong heroines who are more gender neutral and good role models in young adult literature so why are schools and critics not taking the opportunity not only to examine them and the young adult genre more closely but to include them in the curriculum and criticism?

My thesis examines Bella Swan from Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight*, Clarissa Fray from Cassandra Clare’s *City of Bones*, Katniss Everdeen from Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* and Beatrice Prior from Veronica Roth’s *Divergent*, four female protagonists from the first novels of four popular YA series, in an examination of whether or not they embody the gender stereotypes created by the gender inequality still prevalent in our society today or whether they are more gender neutral. The thesis probes the larger question of young adult literature and why it is such a marginalized literary genre. It will also explore whether or not these literary heroines are good role models for young adult readers and how young adult literature can be incorporated more and be beneficial to those who employ it.

It's All About Him  
Embodying Gender Stereotypes in *Twilight* and *City of Bones*

Critic Judith Lorber explains why people cling to the gender roles and stereotypes associated with patriarchal societies: "People go along with the imposition of gender norms because the weight of morality as well as immediate social pressure enforces them" (*Paradoxes of Gender* 23). While this may be true in contemporary society, this is certainly not the case presented in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*. Bella Swan is not burdened by the weight of morality or social pressures; she embodies the gender stereotypes most women have come to disdain as a result of the genre through which her tale is told: romance. Not to mention, Bella voluntarily chooses a lot of the behaviors that label her stereotypical. However, it is highly unlikely she could have escaped these prescribed gender roles because Bella's story falls in the romance category and romances are highly-discriminatory by nature. In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Nancy Armstrong claims:

The romance plot creates and articulates the rules of gender: "narratives which seemed to be concerned solely with matters of courtship and marriage in fact seized the authority to say what was female. Successfully differentiating male and female behavior, "narratives in which a woman's virtue alone overcomes sexual aggression and transforms male desire into middle-class love" reinforces gender expectations: "to coax and nudge sexual desire in conformity with the norms of heterosexual monogamy affords a fine way of closing a novel and provides a satisfactory goal for a text to achieve. (qtd. in McKinstry 32)

Susan McKinstry expounds upon this idea further: "In fact, the romantic plot is often seen as dangerous to women, either corrupting them into sexual fantasy (in the nineteenth century) or tranquilizing them into domestic acceptance (in the twentieth century)" (33). Anyone who has read or is familiar with romance novels can definitely recognize the

pattern. It comes as no surprise then that this occurs regularly in standard adult romances, but do young adult texts follow the same set up? Author Janice Radway provides the answer:

Young adult romances have many of the same characteristics as adult romance novels. The heroine is in some way vulnerable—a condition brought on by a move to a new environment, an illness, or some secret flaw; she meets a handsome hero, who is initially drawn to her; some type of conflict occurs that separates them or causes a misunderstanding; in the final resolution they are happily together. (159)

This is exactly the set up presented in Meyer's text. Bella is characterized as vulnerable from the very beginning, and this causes her to meet Edward. Her vulnerability initially sparks his interest and as he observes her, he becomes more drawn to her and eventually begins a relationship with her. They are separated because of a conflict caused by another vampire hunting her but they are still together in the end. The text makes it clear that Bella's happiness is dependent on Edward. "Like the adult versions, the adolescent heroine's happiness depends on her having the love of a man. Her identity is tied to "coupleness" (Kelly 159). The best example of this is near the end of the text when Edward briefly considers ending things between them in order to protect Bella. It is clear to the readers that this suggestion is devastating to her. She is consumed by him to the point where nothing else in her life matters. Amanda Firestone claims, "Bella is consumed by drama surrounding her romantic life...her narrative arc is reliant on her relationship with Edward Cullen. The love story is the central driving force of her world" (213). Her obsession with Edward and the genre in which she finds herself causes Bella to embody specific gender stereotypes. Her "motherly" nature combined with her irrationality, passivity, and extreme weakness prevent her from becoming a positive role-model.

From the very beginning of the novel, Bella is portrayed as weak, a common gender stereotype of women. She describes herself as, “I was ivory-skinned, without even the excuse of blue eyes or red hair, despite the constant sunshine. I had always been slender, but soft somehow, obviously not an athlete; I didn’t have the necessary hand-eye coordination to play sports without humiliating myself – and harming both myself and anyone else who stood too close” (Meyer 10). Bella easily places herself in the stereotypical female role from the very beginning. She is basically the “mother” in the household, first taking care of her erratic mother, Renee, then looking after her father, Charlie, after she moves to Forks. “Bella is constructed as a caretaker in her text. In relation to her mom and dad, she exhibits traditional domestic behaviors such as cooking dinners, cleaning up, and generally organizing their lives” (Firestone 213). Meyer shows how Bella assigns herself the domestic role with her mother at the beginning of the novel. Bella says, “I felt a spasm of panic as I stared at her wide, childlike eyes. How could I leave my loving, erratic, harebrained mother to fend for herself?” (Meyer 4). Meyer then furthers the stereotype by adding how willing her father was to let Bella fulfill this role. Bella says, “Last night I’d discovered that Charlie couldn’t cook much besides fried eggs and bacon. So I requested that I be assigned kitchen detail for the duration of my stay. He was willing enough to hand over the keys to the banquet hall” (Meyer 31). Bella remains in this role throughout the saga, even after she turns, but this is mainly because she has become an *actual* mother. Not even her transformation breaks her from this domestic role.

After Bella meets Edward, she displays even more gender stereotypes by being passive to Edward and his wishes for her. Even before they get together, they decide to be friends although it is an awkward struggle to be so at first. Bella is so in awe of Edward and curious about him that she does not listen to his clear attempts to get her to stay away from him. When they are discussing potentially being friends, Edward says, "...If you're smart, you'll avoid me," to which Bella responds, "I think you've made your opinion on the subject of my intellect clear too...So, as long as I'm being...not smart, we'll try to be friends?" (Meyer 89). Edward agrees that they will be friends. The whole exchange showcases Bella's passivity; Edward states what he wants and she simply acquiesces without any reservations or hesitations. He tells her that she should stay away from him but confesses right before this exchange that he was done trying to stay away from her. Clearly, he does not really mean for her to stay away from him and his "charms" manage to sway her into a passive role. She knows at this point in the novel that there is something extraordinary about Edward but right after he saves her from Tyler's van, he brushes her off. After this moment between them, Bella is willing to overlook Edward's blatant ignoring of her and passively agrees to be his friend, despite the warnings that she should not.

Another instance of Bella's passivity is when she almost faints from blood typing in Biology and Edward tells the nurse he will drive her home. She fully intends to drive herself but Edward is not having it. Bella says, "I am perfectly capable of driving myself home!" (Meyer 104). Edward simply replies by telling her to get in his Volvo and when it looks like she might try her luck and bolt to her truck, he threatens to drag her back. This instance once again highlights Bella's passivity.

More of the encounter displays Edward's power and assertiveness which is almost to the point of bullying. Bella shows once again that she is the personification of these gender stereotypes by passively giving into Edward and letting him drive her home that day.

Irrationality is another gender stereotype that Bella exhibits. Even though Bella knows it is a bad idea, she spends time with Edward anyways and eventually, falls in love with him. Instead of going to Seattle, she heads into the woods with him and to the famous meadow of the series. This is where they find out how they feel about each other officially. Edward says, "And so the lion fell in love with the lamb" (Meyer 274). Bella admits right before this that she would rather die than stay away from Edward. She knows that Edward is a dangerous predator and yet, she continues to see him and hang around him. "Bella seems to make choices that deliberately put her in harm's way..." (Firestone 213). She is also putting her father at risk but he is clearly not at the top of her priority list. Bella does not truly understand the danger she is in simply being around Edward. She lets love "blind" her. Not to mention, the whole love between Bella and Edward is irrational to begin with. Marsha Sprague and Kara Keeling expound upon the trend in young adult literature that is contributing to Bella's irrationality:

One of the current trends in fantasy for young adults, particularly girls, revolves around the legends of vampires and werewolves, which have in common the idea of a monster that preys on helpless victims, often female. Despite the horror and danger of these monsters, they often are attractive to their female victims. The vampire offers immortality through feeding off human hosts; the werewolf combines both the danger of the predator and the lure of sexual gratification. This attraction-repulsion causes young people to question whether they want to break taboos and explore the unusual, the strange, the grotesque, and the forbidden. Several popular YA authors make use of supernatural creatures, offering girls an opportunity to explore the lure of the dark side. (135)



Bella is clearly drawn in by the lure of Edward's dark side and though she could become his victim, she is irrational enough to pursue and remain in this relationship. She is a *human* choosing a *vampire*, someone perfectly designed to kill her, as her mate.

The gender stereotype that most critics and non-fans have problems with is Bella's weakness. Quick mention of this stereotype is made originally because Bella's appearance is characterized as weak from the very beginning with her physical description. However, it is not just her physical characteristics that make Bella weak. Her constant need to be saved promotes the feminine gender stereotype of weakness in Bella. "Edward is frequently controlling and domineering, saving the hapless Bella time and again from danger" (Silver 122). In chapter three, Edward saves Bella from Tyler's van crushing her. It is where she first discovers that there is something different about him. This causes her to be in awe of Edward and her curiosity keeps her focus mainly on him. However, it also displays her weakness. He interests her before the incident but after he saves her, she concentrates mostly on him. In chapter 8, Edward saves Bella from a group of men planning to either rape or kill her or both. In neither incident does Bella *really* try to save herself; she simply allows herself to be saved by Edward, thus showing her weakness. She even admits she was trying to remember self-defense but ended up being saved anyways. The gender stereotype only continues as the novel moves forward. In chapter 18, Bella finally meets vampires that hunt humans and becomes the target for one of them, James. He is initially suspicious because of how Edward is guarding her but her humanness is confirmed in a split second and so is her frailty. Bella says:

Three things seemed to happen simultaneously while Carlisle was speaking. My hair ruffled with the light breeze, Edward stiffened, and the second male, James, suddenly whipped his head around, scrutinizing me, his nostrils flaring. A swift rigidity fell on all of them as James lurched one step forward into a crouch. Edward bared his teeth, crouching in defense, a feral snarl ripping from his throat. (Meyer 378)

Not only is Bella not physically strong enough to fend off James on her own, her weakness with Edward previously is what put her in this particular situation in the first place. She allows herself to succumb to him, knowing full well that she was in danger and putting others in danger. This weakness keeps her with Edward and it is what makes her a target for these new vampires, particularly James. The gender stereotype of weakness reaches its climax just as the novel reaches its climax and aftermath. Alice and Jasper take Bella back to Phoenix to try to protect her but James is smarter and eventually corners her at her old ballet studio. He attacks her but Edward eventually intervenes and saves her. In the hospital, instead of thinking rationally and making the choice to stay away from Edward or move to Jacksonville with her mother, Bella wonders why Edward did not simply let her become a vampire and is content to simply give up everything to be like him. This is the ultimate moment of her passivity and frailty. Bella is in the hospital, after a *vampire attacks* her and yet she wants to become one. Edward's influence causes Bella to disregard everything and everyone she has in her life and ignore the pain of the transformation simply to be with him. She is helpless to fight off or consider the presence Edward has had in her life and is content to give up essentially what makes her human in order to keep him and be on an equal footing with him. On the *Feminist Mormon Housewives Blog*, Chelsea comments on how Bella's decisions negatively affect readers of Meyer's text, particularly young girls: "I find the message to young girls disturbing. That love is an irresistible force that precludes making any rational decisions. That it's

OK (even noble) to sacrifice your personal safety if you ‘really’ love someone” (qtd. in Silver 122). Clearly, Bella is not the sort of role model that readers of young adult literature need. Her focus is always on Edward and this prevents her from experiencing anything else that she might have wanted to do, like pursuing a career or college.

However, Bella Swan is not the only literary character that could be considered to be embodying gender stereotypes. Clarissa Fray, or Clary for short, from Cassandra Claire’s *City of Bones* could be said to be embodying gender stereotypes as well, though her embodiment could not be said to be the result of the genre of her story. Her passivity and irrational behavior shows how she can embody gender stereotypes as a literary character. Like Bella, Clary’s focus on a guy and his influence over her cause her to be perceived as a bad role model for readers of young adult literature, especially girls.

One gender stereotype that Clary could be interpreted as embodying from the very beginning is passivity, especially when it comes to Jace. In the novel, once Jace’s mentor, Hodge, discovers that Clary can see the Shadowhunters, he tells Jace to bring Clary to the Institute so he can talk to her. She does not really know Jace or Hodge this early in novel so she is wary of accompanying Jace back to the Institute and voices her suspicions. Of course, Jace does not give her the option of going or not. He clearly says she’s going whether she wants to or not. “Of course not,” Jace said. “Look, Hodge will explain all this to you when you see him.” “What if I don’t want to see him?” [asked] Clary. “That’s your problem. You can come willingly or unwillingly.” [stated] Jace. “Are you threatening to *kidnap* me?” [asked] Clary. “If you want to look at it that way, yes.” [replied] Jace, (Clare 44). Much like Bella and Edward in the scene where Edward forcibly gives Bella a ride home after biology, Jace does not give Clary the option of not

returning with him to the Institute. If she does not want to come, he simply hints at the fact that he might force her to go there via kidnapping. Clary goes to Institute anyways after she is injured a little later in the novel, but obviously Clary is passive towards Jace because she does not even do anything about Jace and his subtle threats. She could have returned to the coffee shop she was in right before the exchange and tried to get help or attempted to use some other means to get away from Jace but she did nothing. She was perfectly willing to go along with him whether he had to force her or not. Since there is no real desire in Clary to avoid Jace despite the fact that she saw him murder a demon right in front of her and he is giving ultimatums, she is passive to Jace and what he wants.

Another instance that showcases Clary's passivity is near the end of the text when Valentine escapes through a Portal with the Mortal Cup, Valentine tempted Jace with the offer to accompany him but Jace refused so Valentine took the Cup. The Cup is obviously key to the plot and as the protagonist, Clary should want to go after it. After all, Valentine stole her mother from her and caused her to fall into a coma, not to mention sent demons out to do his bidding, which endangers her (Clary is attacked by demons more than once because of him), attacked and kidnapped Jace, and threatened/attacked her friend/surrogate father, Luke Garroway, among other things. Clary should either want to repay him for all he had done to her by going after him and the Cup, or she should simply want to recover the Cup because Valentine is evil and will use it for evil. The opposite happens in this scene. "I thought maybe I could see what he was doing with the Mortal Cup," [said] Jace. "Where it was." "Jace, that's not our responsibility anymore. Not our problem. Now that the Clave finally knows what happened, the Lightwoods are rushing back. Let them deal with it" [replied] Clary (Claire 481). Clary discourages Jace

from pursuing the Cup and is simply content to let the Clave go after Valentine and retrieve it. As the supposed heroine, Clary should want to do something about this situation but she does nothing and steps aside to let other people handle it. She was adamant about saving her mother but when it comes to something that could tip the balance in the scale of evil and bring all sorts of horror and devastation to her newly discovered world, she does not seem concerned about that. She is actually more concerned with stopping Jace from following Valentine through the portal than she is with the greater good. In the pursuit of the safety of others, Clary is extremely passive. She is more concerned with Jace than she is about the potential consequences of stopping Valentine or at least attempting to stop him. Her stereotypical passivity is a threat to all those innocent people who could be hurt or killed because of her decision to do nothing.

Just like Bella, being irrational is another gender stereotype that Clary embodies. Right after Jace has given Clary the ultimatum of accompanying him back to the Institute or being taken there against her will, Clary receives a call from her mother, Jocelyn, instructing her not to come home because she is in danger and Clary can obviously hear over the phone that something is happening to her mother. Rather than ask anyone for help, she resolves to go home at once. Jace tries to intervene to prevent her from heading straight into danger and even offers to help himself but he simply angers Clary.

Rage flooded through Clary, a hot tide through her veins. Without even thinking about it, she struck out at his face, her nails raking his cheek. He jerked back in surprise. Tearing herself free, Clary ran toward the lights of Seventh Avenue. When she reached the street, she spun around, half-expecting to see Jace at her heels. But the alley was empty. For a moment she stared uncertainly into the shadows. Nothing moved inside them. She spun on her heel and ran for home. (Claire 46)

It is clear that when someone you love is in danger, your first instinct is to help them. However, Clary does not think clearly or rationally about the situation. She *knew* there was something or someone in her apartment that was dangerous yet she chose to go there anyway, despite her mother's warning. Her best friend, Simon, was right inside the coffee shop. She did not bother to ask for his help or to tell him what was happening. Even Jace, who barely knew her at this point, offered to help her, yet she simply fled and headed straight into danger. She certainly found it because once she reaches her apartment, she finds it completely wrecked and is attacked by a Ravener demon. It is only through Jace's intervention that she survives the ordeal. When they are behaving in a way that is not natural for them, more often than not it seems illogical; men often accuse women of being irrational, and Clary is no exception. Rather than keeping calm and thinking logically, she reacts irrationally and walks straight into harm's way. Much like a human trying to have a relationship with a vampire, Clary's behavior is not smart and reinforces the idea that women are complex, emotional creatures who often get upset or act irrationally for no reason. In this instance, there was a reason but her folly could have been avoided had she simply stopped to think. As stated previously, once Clary is in her apartment she is attacked by a Ravener demon and poisoned. Though she managed to kill it with Jace's Sensor, which she stole from him thinking it was a cell phone, it still managed to get a shot in on her and the poison began to act quickly on her.

She was busy trying not to fall over. The ground was heaving up and down under her feet. "Jace," she said, and she crumpled into him. He caught her as if he were used to catching fainting girls, as if he did it every day. Maybe he did. He swung her up into his arms, saying something in her ear that sounded like *Covenant*. Clary tipped her head back to look at him but saw only the stars cartwheeling across the dark sky overhead. Then the bottom dropped out everything, and even Jace's arms around her were not enough to keep her from falling. (Claire 55)

Jace, having followed her, arrives in time to take her back to the Institute so she can be healed properly. Though her timely action of using the Sensor to kill the demon, keeps her from falling into the typical, fairytalesque idea of being a damsel-in-distress.

However, her poisoning afterward and the fact that Jace has to save her from dying of poison pretty much cancels this out. Her irrational choice of heading straight into danger turns her semi-heroic moment against her when a man has to come in behind her and save her. If she had thought or acted rationally before, she might have been able to do something that would have given her the upper hand in this situation. Jace saving her is similar to Edward's constant saving of Bella. The irrationality of their choices puts them in situations where they have to be saved by men. This guarantees that they will be perceived as the embodiment of gender stereotypes.

The most prominent example of Clary's irrational behavior comes late in the text when everyone is about to go after Valentine and attempt to rescue Jocelyn from Valentine. However, Simon's concern is more focused in the Mortal Cup. Since it is one of three Mortal Instruments given to the first Shadowhunter by the angel Raziel, Valentine could use its power to create a whole army of demons, and he brings up the issue of whether or not it is worth it to rescue Jocelyn. After all, she is only one woman and his concern is focused on how many more people could be affected if the Cup falls into Valentine's hands. Simon is thinking of the greater good but Clary is only concerned with getting her mother back and does not care about the consequences of giving Valentine the Cup in exchange for her mother. Clary says, "This isn't D&D, Simon!" "It's not a funny game where the worst thing that happens is you get a bad dice roll. This is my *mom* we're talking about, and Valentine could be torturing her. He could *kill* her. I

have to do anything I can to get her back—just like I did for you” (Claire 333). A common question often brought up in tales like this is whether or not the life of one person is more important than the lives of many and the answer is typically that the lives of the many matter more. Clary apparently does not agree with this belief because she is more concerned with what is happening to Jocelyn than she is about the fact that saving her mother could end up plunging the Shadowhunters into war and bringing about a lot of suffering and death. It is irrational to save the life of one person if you know that your choice is most likely going to result in the deaths of a lot of others. Clary is personifying the gender stereotype of being irrational by being more concerned about what is going on in her own life rather than the people she might potentially end up hurting or killing as a result of her choice. As her daughter, Clary should not simply disregard Jocelyn’s life, but she has to ask herself whether it is really worth it save her mother at the cost of losing others.

Another gender stereotype that Clary shows is dependence, in this case dependence on Jace. It is true she was thrust into the world of the Shadowhunters quickly and the situation for her is intense but even while they are taking the time to plot out what the plan of attack will be and Clary learns about some of the Shadowhunters’ lives and quirks, she makes no effort to learn how to potentially protect herself now that she is a part of the Shadowhunter world. Her ignorance and lack of concern over learning these skills make her dependent of Jace’s expertise in all of the situations they find themselves in. Jace sums it up quite nicely when he says, “You’re far too inexperienced to protect yourself in a hostile situation without me” (Claire 111). With Clary being searched for and in potential danger on her own, the fact that she makes no effort to learn to defend



herself shows just how dependent she is on Jace to protect her. Clary is not even making the effort to defy this stereotype by educating herself more about Shadowhunters and their ways of fighting. Her dependence on Jace is much like Bella's is on Edward; the girls need their men to protect them from whatever danger they get themselves into. This makes adolescent girls who are reading the texts doubt that they can handle themselves in the real world.

The gender stereotype that is most often associated with women and girls is that they are too emotional and unfortunately, Clary can be characterized as having this stereotype within the text as well. Once Clary realizes where the Mortal Cup is, she and her friends return to her apartment building to retrieve it. While there a Greater Demon attacks them and incapacitates everyone except Clary. Though she could have tried her luck with some of the weapons, Clary's fear freezes her and she is unable to help in this situation at all. It's only through Simon's intervention that she and the others are not killed by the demon. Alec is seriously injured though and when they all return to the Institute, Clary guiltily muses on the situation: "*I knew it was there, Clary thought. I should have acted on it. Even if I didn't have a bow and arrow like Simon, I could have thrown something at it or told Jace about it.* She felt stupid and useless and thick, as though her head were full of cotton. The truth was that she'd been frightened. Too frightened to think straight. She felt a bright surge of shame that burst behind her eyelids like a small sun" (Claire 360). Though there are ways she could have helped, her emotions kept her from acting. It is not nearly the same as having an irrational fit of hysterics but Clary still embodies the stereotype because she let her emotions get the best of her. In situations where your life is in mortal peril, you want to be able to keep your

wits about you and unfortunately, Clary was not able to do that in the fight with the demon. Her failure to act contributed in part to Alec's injury and her hesitation could have caused everyone their lives. By being too emotional in this instance, Clary also portrays herself as weak. Young adult readers, especially developing adolescent girls, do not need heroines who are going to continue to embody old-fashioned ideas about what they can and cannot do.

Bella Swan and Clarissa Fray are two of the most prominent examples of feminine gender stereotyping. Their passivity, irrationality, and weakness all show how contemporary female heroines can still embody these stereotypes, despite the fact that they were both created in a time in which there is supposedly more equality between men and women. Both of them rely too heavily on the main men in their lives: Edward and Jace. It is no surprise then that the stereotypes flourish because neither of the girls do much of anything to counter the fact that through their embodiment of the stereotypes, their tales become more about their male counterparts even though the narratives are centered around them. Because social construction feminism still produces gender inequality, the stereotypes associated with men and women continue to exist. The embodiment of these stereotypes is still part of "the cultural version of what it means to be feminine," (Golombok and Fivush 19) so adolescents will continue to be exposed to literary heroines who do not progress to a new gender status. Readers of young adult literature, especially young, developing adolescents do not need these outdated ideas of what it means to be feminine or to be a woman which is why the need for young adult literary heroines that have achieved a new gender status is so crucial. Adolescents need new or strong female characters that can be positive role models for them.

Breaking the Mold  
Katniss Everdeen, Beatrice Prior and Becoming Gender Neutral Heroines

Critic Judith Lorber explains why valued characteristics of women are not regarded nearly as highly as men's characteristics in Western societies, even when their activities are similar or essentially the same. She says:

In the evaluation of gender differences, women are ranked lower than men. Even valued characteristics of women, such as the capacity for empathy, nurturance, and care for others, are ranked lower in Western societies than men's characteristics for assertion, competitiveness, and individual achievement. Because men and boys are held in higher social regard than women and girls and are granted advantages and rights, gender differences produce gender inequality. Although, gender is intertwined with other unequal statuses, remedying the gendered part of these structures of inequality may be the most difficult, because gendering is so pervasive. (*Gender Inequality* 245)

However, Marjorie Garber gives a small ray of hope for not just women and girls, but young adult literary heroines as well in the potential breaching of these gender boundaries. In her work, *Vested interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, she claims, "Gender boundaries are breachable, and individual and socially organized shifts from one gender to another call attention to "cultural, social, or aesthetic dissonances" (qtd. in *Gender Inequality* 18). So what could this potentially mean for contemporary young adult literary heroines? It could give them the opportunity to really break away from traditional gender roles and become more gender neutral. Regarding the literary heroine's break away from traditional gender roles, Roberta Seelinger Trites notes that "In the process of maintaining her personal strength, she often subverts traditional gender roles, playing on stereotypes and stretching their limits by incorporating characteristics that are typically associated with both genders into her actions" (*Waking Sleeping Beauty*,

11). She continues on “If she does not already know how to speak for herself, she learns in the course of the novel. If she does not already know how strong she is, she learns. If she does not already know how to combine the strengths traditionally associated with femininity with the strengths that have not been, she learns” (11). This is exactly the course that Katniss Everdeen and Beatrice Prior are on in Collins’s *The Hunger Games* and Roth’s *Divergent*. They both perform a series of actions and are cast in multiple roles that incorporate characteristics from both genders making the two protagonists essentially gender neutral. Neither girl is strictly feminine or masculine, allowing them to navigate both worlds in order to achieve their goals and providing a literary alternative to the heroines that strictly embody gender stereotypes such as Bella or Clary.

With her archery skill and talent at survival, Katniss Everdeen defies stereotypical feminine gender roles while at the same time maintaining characteristics more associated with femininity such as domesticity or “motherly-instincts” and the ability to be “nurturing” or feel empathy. Ellyn Lem and Holly Hassel sum it up quite nicely: “We contend that Katniss Everdeen is a female character who balances traditionally masculine qualities such as athleticism, independence, self-sufficiency, and a penchant for violence with traditionally feminine qualities such as idealized physical female beauty and vulnerability” (118). Katniss possesses aspects of both masculinity and femininity while fully embodying neither, making her gender neutral. Because of her gender neutral status, Katniss can provide an alternative form of fulfillment to developing adolescent girls and boys who might be searching for more in a young adult literary heroine than simply sticking to the gender norms.

Katniss appears to epitomize some of the gender stereotypes as well but she takes them on in a much different way. Firestone elaborates on this saying, “Katniss is associated with empowerment usually destined for men in the form of activity and perceived agency” (213). Unlike other heroines who might still have both parents in their lives, Katniss’ parents are not both alive. Katniss’ father dies in a mining accident and it causes her mother so much grief and sadness that she completely checks out and leaves her daughters to fend for themselves. Recalling the incident, Katniss says:

I was terrified. I suppose now that my mother was locked in some dark world of sadness, but at the time, all I knew was that I had lost not only a father, but a mother as well. At eleven years old, with Prim just seven, I took over as head of the family. There was no choice. I bought our food at the market and cooked it as best I could and tried to keep Prim and myself looking presentable. Because if it had become known that my mother could no longer care for us, the district would have taken us away from her and placed us in the community home. (Collins 27)

Katniss also lives in a place where life is hard and there is constant concern over where the next meal will come from. Living in a harsh, future reality and having a dead father and an emotionally vacant mother, Katniss has to step up and become the breadwinner in her household. She has to take care of her mother and her little sister, Prim. She gets food for them, prepares it as best as she can and trades to make sure that her family has everything it needs to get by. According to Tom Henthorne:

Rather than accept the situation she finds herself in after her father’s death and slowly starve to death along with her mother and sister, Katniss, who is only eleven at the time, adapts, transforming herself from a dependent into a provider. She becomes “the man of the family,” so to speak, not only having to hunt for food in her father’s stead but engaging in illegal commerce in order to gain other necessities. (45).

This seems to make Katniss embody the “domestic” gender stereotype but with very few options available to her, she *has* to take on this role in order to ensure that she and her family survive to see another day. This also obviously comes into play when Prim’s name is drawn and she is selected to participate in the Hunger Games. Because of her sister’s youth and frailty, Katniss knows there is no way she would survive in the games. She deeply loves her little sister. Katniss says early on in the novel that Prim is the only one she knows that she loves for sure. “Prim is the single most powerful motivating force in Katniss’s life” (Mitchell 131). Collins shows how Katniss’ love for Prim and her desire to protect her reflect the “domestic” or nurturing” trait in her when she unflinchingly steps up and takes her sister’s place in the games. Katniss says:

“I volunteer!” I gasp. “I volunteer as tribute!” There’s some confusion on the stage. District 12 hasn’t had a volunteer in decades and the protocol has become rusty. The rule is that once a tribute’s name has been pulled from the ball, another eligible boy, if a boy’s name is read, or girl, if a girl’s name has been read, can step forward to take his or her place. In some districts, in which winning the reaping is such a great honor, people are eager to risk their lives, the volunteering is complicated. But in District 12, where the word *tribute* is pretty much synonymous with the word *corpse*, volunteers are all but extinct. (Collins 22)

Even though being chosen as a tribute is essentially the equivalent of a death sentence, Katniss’ love and “domestic” impulse to protect her little sister cause her to step up and volunteer in Prim’s place. Jennifer Mitchell expresses similar sentiments: “Her gesture of taking Prim’s place in the Games can be ascribed to her undying notion of maternal protection” (128). The stereotypical nature of her actions is canceled out when the audience realizes that Katniss is taking on the “domestic” role in order to survive, and her act of sacrifice is done purely out of love for Prim, not out of obedience to a husband or general female weakness in a patriarchal society.

Another gender stereotype commonly associated with women is emotion (or perhaps, being overly emotional) and Katniss shows emotion in her empathy for her fellow tributes, even though she is supposed to be killing them, thus ensuring her survival and victory. The Hunger Games dictate that the tributes are supposed to fight to the death but Katniss never outright kills anyone. Tom Henthorne expounds upon this claiming:

Since the girls from the other districts other than 1,2, and 4 generally have not been trained to fight like men, so to speak, they have to rely upon alternative strategies if they are to have any hope of surviving, including those that involve using their supposed feminine wiles. Some feign weakness only to prove themselves ruthless when they have the opportunity, and others, like Rue and Foxface and even Katniss, use stealth and cunning to survive, avoiding direct conflict as long as they can. Whatever their strategy, however, it seems that female tributes often play “social games,” to borrow a term that is frequently used in contemporary reality television, in order to put themselves in a position to win. (51)

When Katniss kills, it is in defense of herself or those close to her. She is reluctant to really ally herself with anyone, though she can, but eventually, she teams up with fellow tribute, Rue. Katniss admires Rue’s skills but mainly, allies herself with Rue because she reminds Katniss of her sister Prim. Rue’s likeness to Prim causes Katniss to once again feel that “nurturing” feeling towards Rue, almost like a mother would, and she feels empathy towards the young girl, preventing Katniss from outright killing her, though they are supposed to be pitted against each other. When Rue is later killed by the boy tribute from District One, Katniss feels a true sense of loss. Her nurturing feelings and emotional empathy cause Katniss to place flowers around Rue’s body, an act of rebellion against the Gamemakers and the Capitol. Katniss says, “A few steps into the woods grows a bank of wildflowers. Perhaps they are really weeds of some sort, but they have blossoms in beautiful shades of violet and yellow and white. I gather up an armful and come back to

Rue's side. Slowly, one stem at a time, I decorate her body in the flowers. Covering the ugly wound. Wreathing her face. Weaving her hair with bright colors" (Collins 237). Katniss treats Rue very much like a mother would treat their own child if they died, kissing her head and decorating her body. Katniss also displays emotional empathy towards Peeta. Even though he is from her district, he is *still* a competitor to her so she should not feel empathy towards him. However, Katniss is reluctant to kill Peeta, especially after he saves her from Cato after the tracker jacker incident. When a rule change declares that both tributes from the same district will win the games if they are the last two alive, Katniss realizes that she was never in any danger from him and that Peeta has kept the audience believing the star-crossed lovers ruse to ensure this rule change. She immediately sets out to find him. When she does, Katniss helps clean him up and treats his wounds as best she can. It is during this situation that the audience witnesses her emotional empathy once again. As she is helping him, Peeta says, "Katniss... Thanks for finding me." To which Katniss replies, "You would have found me if you could" (Collins 268). She becomes scared that Peeta might die. Katniss' concern for Peeta, though he is still a fellow competitor, shows the more emotional side of her. Though being emotional is a feminine gender stereotype, Katniss' emotions in this situation are far from stereotypical. The situation Katniss is in, fighting for her life in an arena, ensures that her emotional empathy is fitting. Her empathy for Rue and Peeta is not a sign that Katniss is succumbing to the gender stereotypes; it is a sign of her humanity in a dire situation.



Though Katniss appears to epitomize some gender stereotypes, she also embodies skills normally associated with men. It is established from the beginning of the novel that Katniss is a competent woodswoman and huntress. Stereotypes ensure that hunting is typically thought of as a male activity, and it is hard for some individuals to see women as hunters. Katniss is clearly an exception. Not only does she participate in perceived feminine pursuits like cooking and looking after a family, Katniss also proves that hunting is clearly something that men *and* women can do. Though the audience gets a glimpse of her hunting skills from the beginning, they *really* get to experience her skill doing a typical “male” pastime in the arena. Right after Katniss witnesses Peeta’s alliance with the Careers, her routine nature with hunting causes her to check the traps she set earlier in the day. She says:

I’m about to take off when I think of my snares. Maybe it’s imprudent to check them with the others so close. But I have to. Too many years of hunting, I guess. And the lure of possible meat. I’m rewarded with one fine rabbit. In no time, I’ve cleaned and gutted the animal, leaving the head, feet, tail, skin, and innards, under a pile of leaves. I’m wishing for a fire – eating raw rabbit can give you rabbit fever, a lesson I learned the hard way – when I think of the dead tribute. I hurry back to her camp. Sure enough, the coals of her dying fire are still hot. I cut up the rabbit, fashion a spit out of branches, and set it over the coals. (Collins 164)

Hunting might fall under the stereotypical list of things people automatically associate with men but Katniss breaks through the stereotype by being a female that can hunt and hunt *well* at that. She is almost contradictory when it comes to these stereotypes because Katniss is a *female* that can *hunt*. Not only that but she uses *hunting*, a typical *male* activity, in order to fulfill a *feminine* role: providing food for her family, thus ensuring their survival. Hunting is not the only way that Katniss embodies skills associated with males. She is also talented at surviving. When someone thinks of typical survivalists,

normally they think of men, living in harsh conditions in the wilderness. However, Katniss uses both her feminine and masculine traits in order to survive. Firestone adds to this, claiming, “Conventions for dystopian fiction dictate that Katniss’s main goal must be to survive at any cost” (214). She hunts, a typical male activity, and what she gains from hunting, she uses either for cooking or ensuring that her family is taken care of, activities normally associated with women or mothers. In the arena, the key objective is to survive in order to be the victor. Katniss, due to her empathy, does not survive in the way people would expect the typical survivalist to survive. Her experiences in the woods and while hunting have made her clever and her empathy keeps her from outright killing people in order to ensure that she survives. She develops a more humane mentality in order to survive during the games. According to Katniss:

Along with other statistics they report to help people place their bets, every tribute has a list of kills. I guess technically I’d get credited for Glimmer and the girl from District 4, too, for dumping that nest on them. But the boy from District 1 was the first person I knew would die because of my actions. Numerous animals have lost their lives at my hands, but only one human. I hear Gale saying, “How different can it be, really?” (Collins 243).

Katniss has to strive to survive the moment she becomes head of her family. She takes up an activity stereotypically associated with men and a position stereotypically assigned to men, but in the arena, the stereotypical feminine sense of empathy causes her to evolve into something new. Katniss becomes a female who is not simply subject to the gender stereotypes commonly assigned to women; she comes to be strictly gender neutral, a perfect mixture of femininity and masculinity.

Katniss Everdeen is a clear example of a female breaking free of traditional gender stereotyping and maturing into something new: a gender neutral heroine. Her domesticity, empathy, development into a skilled huntress, and knowledge which helps her become clever at survival, shows how literary characters are breaking free of the gender stereotypes typically associated with certain sexes. “Katniss...makes conscious and circumstantial choices to adopt various gender roles that suit her situational needs” (Mitchell 128). Meghan Lewit praises Katniss referring to her as “a character who defies gender segregation in her story and among her readers” (qtd. in Lem & Hassel 121). She is clearly a literary heroine who has achieved gender neutrality, making her a good role model for adolescent readers, especially girls. However, Katniss is not the only protagonist to do this. In Veronica Roth’s novel, *Divergent*, Beatrice Prior primarily takes up masculine qualities in order to help her survive in her new faction and in the growing turmoil between the rest, but she still manages to retain and exhibit feminine qualities making her a gender neutral literary heroine just like Katniss.

Beatrice, or Tris as she later becomes known, develops skills normally associated with men, just like Katniss. At the Choosing Ceremony, Beatrice chooses to leave her old faction, Abnegation, in order to join the ranks of the Dauntless. Abnegation values selflessness, which Beatrice never exhibited or felt in any real way, and Dauntless values courage. She had always been fascinated with them from afar but did struggle choosing them at the ceremony because she had to leave her family behind. Beatrice takes to her new faction well but of course, she misses her family. One night, she begins to cry as she is lying in her bed one night, missing her home. Beatrice seems to embody the gender stereotype of being emotional but she keeps herself calm and does not get overly

hysterical. Meanwhile Al, a fellow initiate, is the biggest and most-masculine looking of all of them but he cries loudly where everyone can hear as he misses his home.

“Al sobs again. I almost feel the sound grate in my own throat. He is just inches away from me—I should touch him. No. I put my hand down and roll onto my side, facing the wall. No one has to know that I don’t want to help him. I can keep that secret buried. My eyes shut and I feel the pull of sleep, but every time I come close, I hear Al again” (Roth 74-75). It is interesting to note that while Beatrice is a girl, she manages to keep her emotions in check and not get too emotional in the face of being separated from everything she has ever known while Al, an extremely masculine boy, lets his emotions get the best of him and gets carried away by the separation he experienced. Beatrice manages to almost defy the gender stereotype associated with this particular moment: she *is* emotional because she misses her home but she’s not *overly*-emotional and actually manages to keep herself in check as a result. The gender stereotype constructed by society does not directly apply to Beatrice here as she, a female, manages to be emotional but on a manageable level while Al, a male, gets overly-emotional and disrupts the peace of the other initiates.

After he wins his first hand-to-hand combat fight against Will, Al decides he is simply going to lose the rest as he does not like physically fighting with anyone. He is an extremely gentle boy but it is precisely this tame personality that gets him into trouble later. While they are learning to throw knives later in the text, Al is terrible at it and Eric, one of the instructors who is cruel, makes him stand in front of a target and order Four (Tobias), another, lower-ranked instructor, to throw knives at him. Beatrice intervenes before anything happens but ends up being forced to take his place in front of the target.

The last thing I want to do is stand in front of that target, but I can't back down now. I didn't leave myself the option. I weave through the crowd of initiates, and someone shoves my shoulder. I recover my balance and walk toward Al. He nods at me. I try to smile encouragingly, but I can't manage it. I stand in front of the board, and my head doesn't even reach the center of the target, but it doesn't matter. I look at Four's knives: one in his right hand, two in his left hand. My throat is dry. I try to swallow, and then look at Four. He is never sloppy. He won't hit me. I'll be fine. I tip my chin up. I will not flinch. If I flinch, I prove to Eric that this is not as easy as I said it was; I prove that I'm a coward. (Roth 162-163)

In this instance, Beatrice embodies aspects commonly associated with men like courage, stubbornness, and determination. She bravely stands in front of the target and allows the knives to be thrown at her. Even though she is a female, Beatrice does not embody any of the stereotypical behaviors that might have been exhibited in this situation like weakness or fear. She manages to stand on equal footing with men in this particular instance and achieves a more gender neutral status by showing them that anything a man can do she can do as well.

Beatrice manages not only to embody traits commonly associated with men like courage and determination, but also to embody skills that have long been associated with men. Like Katniss, Beatrice is talented at survival. While going through Dauntless initiation, another thing Beatrice has to do is learn to fight. She gets beaten quite badly in her first fight with Peter but in her second fight, her survival instincts come out in full force. She ends up fighting Molly, a lackey of Peter's who is sarcastic and vindictive towards Beatrice. Molly is no lightweight as she manages to beat Beatrice's best friend, Christina, quite badly in her first fight but Beatrice manages to hold her own quite well. When she finally get the opportunity to really strike, she seizes it.

I aim an uppercut low, below her bellybutton. My fist sinks into her flesh, forcing a heavy breath from her mouth that I feel against my ear. As she gasps, I sweep-kick her legs out from under her, and she falls hard on the ground, sending dust into the air. I pull my foot back and kick as hard as I can at her ribs. My mother and father would not approve of my kicking someone when she's down. I don't care. She curls into a ball to protect her side, and I kick again, this time hitting her in the stomach. *Like a child.* I kick again, this time hitting her in the face. Blood springs from her nose and spreads over her face. *Look at her.* Another kick hits her in the chest. I pull my foot back again, but Four's hands clamp around my arms, and he pulls me away from her with irresistible force. I breathe through gritted teeth, staring at Molly's blood-covered face, the color deep and rich and beautiful, in a way. (Roth 173-174)

Savagery is not a trait commonly associated with females but in this instance, Beatrice becomes a savage, viciously beating Molly even when she is already down. Part of her reason for beating Molly so badly is to get revenge for an incident that had happened earlier in the text but the main reason she fights Molly so hard is to survive through initiation and make herself a full member of the Dauntless. The initiation is extremely competitive because those who do not rank a certain way are cast out into the world of the factionless and Beatrice is adamant that she must survive in order to be accepted. When one thinks of survival, they typically think of being out in the wild, competing against the elements and other animals. While this is not the type of survival Beatrice is experiencing, it is just as important and just as harrowing. Beatrice proves herself to be an un-stereotypical female as she fights like a man in order to survive.

Early in the text, Beatrice is identified as being Divergent, which means she exhibits traits of more than one faction, in this case, Abnegation, Erudite, and Dauntless. Near the end of the text, the Erudite have found a way to take control of the Dauntless and during the night after the Initiation Ceremony, they make the Dauntless go out and start killing off their government leaders who are all from Abnegation. They are killing

them off with guns. Because both Beatrice and Tobias are Divergent, they are able to resist the control. Eric turns out to be in league with the Erudite and because of his personal hatred of Four (Tobias), he decides to kill him while the controlled Dauntless are simply standing in formation. However, Beatrice intervenes.

My index finger hovers over the trigger. “Get your gun away from his head,” [said] Beatrice “You won’t shoot me,” Eric replies. “Interesting theory,” I say. But I can’t murder him; I can’t. I grit my teeth and shift my arm down, firing at Eric’s foot. He screams and grabs his foot with both hands. The moment his gun is no longer pointed at Tobias’s head, Tobias draws his gun and fires at Eric’s friends leg. I don’t wait to see if the bullet hits her. I grab Tobias’s arm and sprint. (Roth 424-425)

Once again, Beatrice embodies the more male skill of survival. Since women are often portrayed as weak, it seems out of character for Beatrice to shoot someone but she does it without hesitation and continues on with her mission. Even though Eric and the Dauntless leaders had been monitoring her and she was essentially surrounded by enemies, she manages to elude them all and survive. As a female, she could have backed down and became submissive, embodying those old-fashioned idea about women, but instead she chose to take charge to fight back and ensure her survival, making her anything but stereotypical.

Beatrice also knows how to exhibit her feminine characteristics to her advantage. After some of her fellow initiates attempt to kill her in order to knock her out of the running, Tobias advises her to act weak in order to lull them into a false sense of security. He says, “The others won’t be as jealous if you show some vulnerability. Even if it isn’t real.” “You think I have to *pretend* to be vulnerable?” [asks] Beatrice. “Yes I do.” He takes the ice pack from me, his fingers brushing mine, and holds it against my head himself”(Roth 285). She has to act vulnerable in order to fool her attackers into thinking

they actually got to her with that attack so they will leave her alone and she can focus on the initiation. Beatrice has to play up her injuries in front of her attackers so her supposed “weakness” can help protect her from being attacked again. She says, “I pull away from the wall and walk into the dining hall without another thought. A few steps in, I remember I’m supposed to look like I’m cowering so I slow my pace and hug the wall, keeping my head down. Uriah, at the table next to Will and Christina’s, lifts his hand to wave at me. And then puts it down” (Roth 291). It is clear that Beatrice is not embodying the weakness stereotypically associated with females simply because she cannot handle what is going on and needs a man to protect her. No, she is using that exact stereotype in order to trick her attackers into thinking they got the best of her. She knows how to use the very beliefs used to describe females to her advantage, which keeps her from falling into the gender stereotype trap.

Even though she is able to embody masculine traits and employ masculine skills when she needs to, Beatrice is still very much a female and exhibits femininity during certain moments during the text. In a rare moment of lightheartedness, Christina and Beatrice have a silly, girlish conversation about kissing and boys during their free time one day. Christina starts off with “Can you be a girl for a few seconds?” to which Beatrice replies, “I’m always a girl.” I frown. It continues on as a back and forth exchange between the girls. “You know what I mean. Like a silly, annoying girl.” [said] Christina. I twirl my hair around my finger. “Kay.” [replies] Beatrice. She [Christina] grins so wide I can see her back row of teeth. “Will kissed me.”[said] Christina. “What?” I [Beatrice] demand. “When? How? What happened?” [asks] Beatrice “You *can* be a girl!” She straightens, taking her hands from my shoulders (Roth 369). This exchange



continues on until Beatrice says, “I laugh. Suddenly I want to tell her about Tobias and everything that has happened between us” (Roth 369). Though Beatrice constantly has to keep her femininity contained in order to level the playing field between her and the male initiates, Beatrice does still possess her femininity and does exhibit it even though there is no real time and place to exhibit feminine traits while the initiation is going on. It is common for regular girls to have gossipy conversations like this on a regular basis so it is stereotypical of their characters, particularly adolescent girls who are beginning to experiment with their sexuality. The fact that Beatrice is exhibiting this behavior after she has spent the majority of her time embodying male characteristics and employing masculine skills proves that she is a more gender neutral literary heroine.

More instances where Beatrice exhibits her femininity is when she is with Tobias. When she goes through her fear landscape as part of her initiation test, Tobias is a part of her landscape and she cannot understand why until she has an epiphany. “My fear is being with him. I have been wary of affection all my life, but I didn’t know how deep that wariness went” (Roth 393). After her initiation test, she accompanies Tobias back to his room in the compound. They are just beginning to get close to each other when she confronts him over what his intentions are with her and confesses that he was a part of her fear landscape. He is shocked, to say the least. “What?” He releases my wrists, and the hurt look is back. “You’re *afraid* of me?” “Not you,” I say. I bite my lip to keep it still. “Being with you...with anyone. I’ve never been involved with someone before, and...you’re older, and I don’t know what your expectations are...” (Roth 409). Tobias assures her that what they are doing is new to him as well but it is not surprising that this situation went on between them. As a girl, it is not surprising that Beatrice would display

some hesitation upon entering into her first real relationship but she handles it in a mature way and does not fall into the stereotypical split of either coming off as a virgin or a whore. Beatrice manages to exhibit her femininity in a way that shows her mature and in a way that displays her as a good role model for young, adolescent girls.

Critic Roberta Seelinger Trites says, “Feminism’s most obvious contribution to children’s literature lies in the ways that female protagonists have been liberated from inevitably growing into passivity” (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* 11). In a time where more complex heroines who embody the best traits of both genders are needed, Katniss Everdeen and Beatrice Prior measure up in spades. Their balance of embodying feminine traits while employing masculinity and masculine skills whenever they need it make them more gender neutral characters and allow them the opportunity to become the kind of YA literary heroines that young adolescents need in a contemporary society where gender inequality thrives.

## The Missing Link The Marginalization of Young Adult Literature

In the Foreward to Monseau's work, *Responding to Young Adult Literature*, writer and child abuse therapist, Chris Crutcher, makes a comment that seems to be at the heart of why young adult literature is treated as if it were a species of foreign literature that should never be touched. He says, "I have often been forced to consider my work a bastard child of *real* literature...this culture does not give proper respect to stories about teenagers because it does not respect teenagers themselves" (ix). Due to the issues teenagers experience while going through puberty and the sad truth that these changes often result in them doing stupid things or acting irrationally, it makes sense that they do not have the best reputation within Western culture. However, Crutcher's claim does illuminate one obvious truth: literature should not be judged on the reputations of the "perceived" readers of it. Young adult literature is not strictly limited to teenagers or adolescents but it is understandable how the genre appears to be aimed mainly at them. That being said, Crutcher brings up the key issue immediately: Why is young adult literature not taken seriously, thus resulting in its marginalization? The lack of its inclusion in school curriculums and the failure of literary critics to see its worth prevents this genre from growing and flourishing. Isabelle Holland asks the question that many who want the genre to thrive want to know: "Where does that leave the genre of books called young adult?" (36). To determine the answer to this, one must understand why exactly young adult literature is marginalized to begin with. In higher learning institutions, it seems as though young adult literature is a field of study that is not focused on nearly as much as other fields of literature and perhaps because of this, literary critics do not take it seriously or ignore it completely. Cindy Lou Daniels discusses the problem

of the critics: “Some still believe that YA literature is merely a secondary category of childlike storytelling—didactic in nature—and unworthy of serious literary evaluation, when, in fact, it is really an overlooked and underappreciated literary genre that has only recently begun to attract the critical attention that it deserves” (78). The common issue with these critics appears to be that they do not take the time to really consider young adult texts and therefore are under the assumption that young adult literature is no different from children’s literature. They are closed off to any possible analysis before any can even be made which keeps other individuals from discovering or evaluating YA literature, keeping it marginalized. Daniels continues by expounding on why exactly the critics do not view YA literature as worthy of their time. She says:

Unfortunately, many people working in literary theory and criticism are foregoing the opportunity to explore this phenomenon because they mistakenly believe that works labeled as YA should only be analyzed in terms of the connection—whether that be historical or psychological—to the supposed “intended” reader. They see the phrase YA, and they tend to dismiss the work as disconnected to the literary community. The problem, of course, is exacerbated by the actual labeling of the genres: it should be readily apparent that YA literature is not the same thing as children’s literature—in the same way that short fiction is not the same genre as the novel. Yet contemporary critics often speak of the two as if they were one and the same. What would help in this regard would be not only for critics to recognize the difference between the genres, but to simply acknowledge that *regardless of genre*, both children’s and YA works *are* literature. (78).

If these critics began recognizing young adult literature as a separate entity from children’s literature and critiquing it as they would any other genre, it would not be so marginalized. Since they are closed off to young adult literature, they are missing key opportunities to not only experience the new genre but also any chance to see how this type of literature connects students not only with the school curriculum but also with the students themselves. Most contemporary critics, who have taken the time to give the

genre some respect, believe that those who did not give young adult literature the proper time on day either were basing their actions on older texts or they simply had not read enough YA literature, preventing them from making a proper assessment. In the third edition of their text, Donelson and Nilsen deliberate on why young adult literature is worth giving a chance. They claim:

Although we have grounds for rejecting negative criticism, we need to be aware that it exists. Such a pessimistic view of teenage books is an unfortunate literary heritage that may well influence the attitudes of school boards, library directors, parents, teachers, and anyone else who has had no particular reason to read and examine the best of the new young adult literature. Besides, so many new books for young readers appear each year (approximately 2,000 with about one-fourth of these aimed at teenagers) that people who have already made up their minds about adolescent literature can probably find titles to support their beliefs no matter what they are. In an area as new as young adult literature, we can look at much of the disagreement and the conflicting views as inevitable. They are signs of a lively and interesting field. (*Literature for Today's Young Adults* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.16)

Even with plenty of titles to choose from and material to work with, adults are still not taking advantage of all the new titles and educating themselves on the genre. Their biased ideas about young adult literature make it tough to argue its case in classrooms and so forth. Unfortunately the “perceived” audience of this genre is exactly what is causing the problem, making people assume that because young adult literature is “supposedly” intended for teenagers and adolescents, it must be an easier genre than the rest and therefore, not worth the effort.

According to Virginia Monseau, “Because of the erroneous perception that young adult literature is too simple to be taken seriously for advanced classroom study, many teachers shy away from including it in the curriculum. Since they are not themselves sure of the value of YA literature, they find it difficult to support its use in their classrooms” (21). Of course, the problem does not lie simply with literary critics and teachers. Parents are an issue as well because if teachers think young adult literature is too simplistic a genre, then it is almost certain there are parents somewhere that share that train of thought. There are also other adults who have some knowledge of the books that fall within this category and as soon as they learn of the classification, they simply ignore it. Monseau says,

Adults who aren’t teachers or parents miss a great deal by walking past the shelves labeled young adult literature in libraries and bookstores...until adult readers can convince the reading public that these are everybody’s books, we’ll continue to be secret sharers of literature that not only encourages us to remember, but also reminds us how important it is not to forget. (88)

Monseau’s observation clearly indicates that there is some merit to young adult literature in a classroom setting. However, she may be strictly referring to a regular school setting. What about specialized classrooms or schools? The issue with these is that teachers here seem to be under the false impression that any YA text is simply beneath what they are covering in their classrooms, such as the classics. Monseau comments on this, saying, “Reading young adult literature in the advanced placement classroom is certainly not widespread. Indeed, some teachers see it as a waste of time, labeling it “subliterature.” Student responses are mixed” (40). It seems mind boggling that a genre of literature focusing on characters, themes and issues that are typically important to young adults and adolescents would be thought of as less than children’s literature. Are they not very

similar in their own ways? But of course, some just assume that YA literature should be a facet of children's literature and nothing more. It simply does not make sense as it possesses pretty much all the characteristics and aspects of children's literature; it is simply intended for a different audience. The label of "subliterature" is plainly unfair for a genre of literature that can give the same things that the other genres can. Monseau laments on this saying, "It is most frustrating that this labeling, instituted by publishers for marketing purposes, has so profoundly influenced the lack of acceptance of young adult literature into the curriculum . But publishing is a business—and marketing strategies are not likely to change any time soon" (40). She makes an excellent point; if the books are selling, then to the publishers, their way is working. Unfortunately, the effect of the marketing success is sending the message to schools that YA literature is too risky to focus on in regular curriculums. According to John Bushman and Kay Haas:

It seems that schools have accomplished just the opposite of what they intended to do: They have turned students off from reading rather than made them lifelong readers. How has this happened? Teachers have failed to choose literature that enables students to become emotionally and cognitively involved in what they read. If students are asked to read literature that is not consistent with their developmental tasks, they will not be able to interact fully with that literature. As a result, students who do not interact with the literature are left with learning only *about* literature. (3)

The curriculum often includes works that students are not particularly thrilled about reading or interested in at all so it would be beneficial to include young adult texts to ensure that the students are truly involved in what it is they are reading. Their ages and stages of development ensure that they will begin pondering the bigger questions and issues in the world. Most teachers and other adults would not understand the idea that young adult literature could provide them with the answers to these questions.

However, many texts aimed at teenage or adolescent readers can provide them with some sort of understanding about how the universe works. Critic Sylvia Engdahl believes in the knowledge that these texts can provide to students. She says,

Increasingly, the adolescents of our time are interested in questions: questions about life and its meaning, about the future of civilization, about man's place in the universe. No author can give them answers. But I feel that books directed toward the young can encourage them to go on looking for answers—which, surely, is one of the major goals of education. And if they can, teenage novels do fill a need. (48)

Obviously, the knowledge that these texts provide will help the students not only in the classroom but in their overall development as well. This is a period of constant flux for the students and they will need some kind of anchor or relief from the constant change. Lee Talley provides a similar idea about the power young adult literature can have on an adolescent's progress through puberty and the changes. She claims, "Given the considerable changes in mind and body that mark adolescence, and our belief in the significance of this liminal state between childhood and adulthood, it is no wonder that YA literature is viewed—positively or negatively—as potent and transformative" (232). If adults, not just teachers, are able to stress the benefits that young adult literature can have on adolescents and their perception of the world then perhaps the genre would not be marginalized anymore within educational institutions and with critics. Of course, adolescents must first recognize what good can come from engaging with these novels and before that happens, they must at least have a love or at the very least an appreciation for reading. In *Young Adult Literature: The Heart of the Middle School Curriculum*, Lois Stover states,



Teachers seeking to motivate their students to perceive reading as valuable should probably be familiar with research on the developmental stages of reading appreciation. Initially, young children have to learn to associate “pleasure and profit” with the printed word, according to Donelson and Nilsen (1993, 48-57). Once this connection has been made, children have the motivation to want to learn to decode the texts for themselves, and they begin to learn to read, finding their own rewards for engaging in this difficult process. (7)

Arthea Reed continues on with this idea, claiming, “A knowledge of young adult books is the starting place for helping adolescents become lifelong readers. If you can pair the right young adult book with the right reader, it is very likely, no matter how reluctant or poor the reader, that this adolescent will read the book all the way through and will seek another book just like it” (44). Fortunately, adolescents are at a time in their lives where they actually have the time to sit down and read through a good number of texts, if they wish. Of course, reading in excessive amounts is also required as students move through school and their workloads become more intense. Holland elaborates on this by stating, “Adolescence is probably the only time of life when a large proportion of its membership inhales books—all kinds of books—in huge, indiscriminate drafts at all hours of the day and night and at the full peak of the reader’s energy. The adolescent is not only encouraged to do this, he is pretty much forced to do it, if he wants to keep up with his required reading” (35). The more students read, the more they can potentially comprehend about society and the world around them but they must also learn their own limits. Sure, every teacher wants to instill in all their students a love of reading. However, not every student is cut out for it. Therefore, teachers must be flexible and be able to anticipate any issues that might arise when they are educating a student on the importance of reading. They must be ready to accept their unique needs. *In Reaching Adolescents: The Young Adult Book and the School*, Reed states, “The task of the teacher of young

adults is to help students build bridges from childhood to emerging adulthood. To do this, teachers must understand that every student is different. No two people progress through the adolescent years at the same physiological pace, with the same needs, with identical interests, with equal intellectual maturity” (25). If they can learn to accept and work well with their students’ differences, teachers can then achieve a much closer connection with their students. Many teachers wish that they understood all of their students without the strenuous effort it takes to do so. However it is just not possible. Teachers cannot read minds or force their students to tell them every little intimate detail about themselves, but surprisingly, they can use literature to help clear up at least some of the mystery that is their students. According to Crutcher, “The teaching of literature offers us as educators a chance to make a connection with these kids. By sharing our responses to stories about lives like theirs, and by relating our own lives to those stories, we can bring their education home, make it an intimate thing” (xi). Once a good connection is established with the students, teachers should be more willing to incorporate young adult literature into the curriculum. The connections will help the teacher to better decide which YA texts to use in order to maximize their students’ learning. Monseau continues on with this idea, stating, “Young adult literature isn’t the answer to all curricular problems in the basic English class, but its effectiveness has been proven time and again. As important as the literature itself are the ways in which it is presented and the teacher who presents it. Using young adult literature with reluctant readers is nothing new, but creating intellectual challenges for students through the literature and rewarding their insights does not happen nearly as often as it ought to” (12). A general assumption as to why teachers do not incorporate YA literature into the curriculum more is because they

basically have to teach what the students need to know in order to pass certain examinations and meet certain state requirements and YA literature seems as though it would take up valuable time to teach, thus taking away from what the student is expected to know. However, young adult literature is actually a great way to connect lessons about the classics, which every student is expected to know, to literature the students can enjoy inside the classroom and out. Monseau claims, “If we want young adults to read and enjoy the classics of literature, we must first ensure that they *understand* these works (without the aid of *Cliff’s* Notes); in order for this understanding to occur, students must be able to connect the literature to something they already know” (21). Not only can these texts be a good way to connect the classics, they can also help to provide students with certain objectives they need to know and meet during their school career. Monseau continues on, stating, “In addition to their value as partners with the classics, young adult books can increase students’ knowledge about the elements of literature, an objective commonly listed on courses of study for the ninth grade” (23).

Probably the most argued point about why young adult literature should be incorporated more into the school curriculum is because through these texts, students can connect with characters who are going through similar issues or dealing with certain problems of which the students are familiar. The students feel as if they can relate to that character and it ensures that they enjoy not only reading but the genre itself more. Bushman and Haas expound upon this, claiming “One of the most significant qualities that draws young adults to reading is the existence of characters with whom they can relate in situations with which they are familiar” (46). It seems as if students particularly enjoy fiction , which, of course, allows the student to experience just about anything,

allowing them to make better connections because of the endless possibilities. However, they can also find themselves enthralled with nonfiction which gives them a more realistic experience, which they may require from time to time. Either way it appears as if literary characters can engage and connect with students in a way no one else can.

“Young adults also find themselves interested in unique people and situations— characters, settings, and story lines that are different from them and their lives but with which they can still make some connections” ( Bushman and Haas 46). Of course, it is simply not enough to find engaging characters and texts. Students cannot include these texts in their learning without their teacher also taking the journey with them. Teachers who plan to incorporate YA literature into their curriculum should have at least a basic knowledge of the genre. In *Developmental Tasks and Education*, Robert Havighurst stresses this fact:

Teachers who seek to find books that their students will *want* to read, should have some familiarity with the genre of young adult literature because in young adult literature readers will find protagonists wrestling with the same developmental tasks they face themselves. The characters in young adult literary texts are concerned with developing relationships with their peers, practicing more sophisticated social skills, trying to determine an appropriate social role, adapting to their changing bodies, struggling to achieve an independent identity with their own set of values, and trying to determine how they fit into the larger societal context. (qtd. in Stover 6)

Students can use the characters in young adult texts to help them work through all the changes they are struggling with as they move through puberty towards adulthood. This is especially true of adolescent girls. As discussed in the previous sections, there are female protagonists that are more gender neutral and can potentially be positive role models for them and there are those who embody gender stereotypes and could be bad role models for them. Bella and Clary are not the best examples of their genre but luckily

there are others that adolescent girls can choose to emulate such as Hermione Granger from the Harry Potter series. Sprague and Keeling point out that there is still hope for the fantasy genre and their heroines. They say “Many heroes of fantasy are ordinary; some are even insignificant. Yet they are able to overcome huge obstacles and in combat defeat adversaries who are far more powerful. This sense of empowerment is a key feature in books with female heroes. Fantasy novels can reveal to girls the possibilities of speaking out, leading, and overcoming obstacles—even those that seem insurmountable” (114). Obviously though, girls are not the only ones who benefit from developing a connection with YA characters. Donelson and Nilsen point out, “Writers treat a wide variety of subject matter and themes, including many controversial ideas. And they choose protagonists from minority groups as well as from the white middle-class majority” (*Literature for Today’s Young Adults 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.* 32). Literature allows individuals to connect with characters from all kinds of backgrounds, ethnicities, and social classes. For young adults struggling to find a place in the world, this can be a good way to demonstrate to them that they do not have to change themselves in order to fit into someone’s preconceived idea of who they should be.

Characters are not the only things that can educate and interest an adolescent reader. Readers of young adult literature can also appreciate the more direct plot that often comes with these texts or the fact that in fiction, the language often flows just like the oral speech of adolescents. It is a good thing that young adult literature is able to connect so well with adolescents because they are in a society and world that is constantly changing, much like the developmental stages they go through physically and mentally. Monseau highlights this simple fact by saying, “Today’s young adults are

immersed in a fast-paced world in which changing social norms and technological advances sweep them along in a sometimes frightening current. They seldom have the chance to discuss their fears and concerns with anyone other than friends. Young adult literature, which reflects students' lives so well, provides an opportunity for such discussion" (24). The opportunity for discussion about all the issues surrounding young adults is precisely why teachers, and often librarians, get involved. Author Michael Cart supports this by stating, "One reason adult gatekeepers—librarians and teachers—are involved with young adult literature is to bring their maturity of judgment and their greater experience of reading to the process of putting teens and excellent books together. Sometimes this means fast talking and strenuous selling, but surely a successful sale is worth the labor, no matter how herculean" (*From Romance to Realism* 81). The influence of this literature on young adults is clearly a positive one and it is shown in the fact that as the importance of these texts grow, the more the genre gains attention and the better talent it attracts. That being said, it is still mind boggling as to why the genre is not being utilized more within the school curriculum. Literature is crucial in providing support to instructional content in classrooms and it can also provide a more authentic voice to adolescents and characters in whom they can see themselves reflected. This can help them connect with the world outside of the classroom not to mention, their fellow peers. The question now becomes if young adult literature is this beneficial to adolescents, why is it not included more in school curriculums? Why is it not taken more seriously by literary critics? Though there has been a move to change this in our contemporary society due to the fact that young adult literature has become a global phenomenon, it has not been an effective enough movement to stop the genre from remaining marginalized.

## Conclusion

Even in a society in which young adult literature has become a global phenomenon, the genre itself is still very much marginalized, left out of school curriculums and not taken seriously by literary critics or the world of higher academia. If young adult literature is so beneficial to students' education and development, then why does its marginalization still persist? Some believe that young adult literature is simply childlike storytelling and unworthy of serious literary evaluation. Others are unsure of its value or believe it is simply a waste of time. However, young adult literature is influential in a way that it can help students by supporting the instructional content in their classrooms or providing them with characters that are experiencing problems or issues that are familiar to them. According to Stover:

Young adult literature provides a mirror in which middle school students can look at themselves and their world and can learn about themselves, about others, and about the nature of literature with a degree of comfort and security that other kinds of texts often fail to provide...Because young adult literature provides the middle school student with easy access into the story, teachers can employ young adult titles as the basis for helping students appreciate literature as art and understand how it is crafted...Finally, because young adult literature does invite adolescent readers in, rather than keeping them at an emotional distance, they can begin to understand the transactional nature of the reading act. (11-13)

Clearly, young adult literature allows students the opportunity to understand and interpret literature as well as themselves and the world around them. However, some would argue that the inclusion of young adult literature in classrooms would simply take away from the literature already presented. Donelson and Nilsen counter this, claiming, "Young adult literature was never intended to replace other forms of literature. It provides enjoyment, satisfaction, and literary quality while it brings life and hope and reality to

young people” (*Literature for Today’s Young Adults 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.* 32). Not only does young adult literature reach out to the students to help them in their personal lives, it helps them academically as well. It provides support to the instructional content received in classrooms and can provide a platform for transdisciplinary study. Stover points out the usefulness of this:

Transdisciplinary units focused on literature about adolescents experiencing anxiety and tension can help students realize they are not alone in their struggles to cope with the tumultuous state of their bodies and their fluctuating reasoning capabilities. Having a literary text at the heart of their transdisciplinary work also provides students still not all that adept at abstract thought with a concrete context for exploring abstract concepts. And working with peers to solve real-life puzzles growing out of their reading can help them perceive themselves as part of a group, which is consistent with a fundamental mission of schools. (18)

With all these benefits, there should be no question of teachers incorporating young adult literature into their curriculums. The question then becomes how to they should incorporate young adult literature and how much they should utilize to support their instructional content. Bushman and Haas elaborate on the concern for the teachers:

The role, then, of the classroom teacher is to walk that fine line between having students read for the pleasurable act that it is and read to increase their powers of literary analysis and, thus, become members of an educated, literate society. To this end, teachers will want to make decisions carefully concerning the literature curriculum: its design and how it is delivered to students. In addition, teachers will want to structure lessons and how it is delivered to students. In addition, teachers will want to structure lessons that will enable students to independently evaluate the quality of the literature they are reading. (29)



If teachers follow this model in their curriculums then it should be no problem to incorporate young adult literature more into the lessons and teach the students to make connections between these texts and the literature that is studied more often in the classroom such as the classics. This should lead to more attention from literary critics and higher academia which should result in the marginalization of young adult literature coming to an end.

Greater attention focused on young adult literature might also affect the way that writers portray their literary heroines in the future. Unfortunately, social construction feminism produces differences between men and women's characteristics which, in turn, produces gender inequality. This gender inequality causes gender stereotypes to persist in contemporary society, even with the so-called "progress" gained by things like the Women's Liberation Movement, etc. The progress causes people to assume that men and women are now on a more equal footing but if that is indeed the case then why do gender stereotypes still exist? Also, why are contemporary young adult literary heroines still being portrayed as embodying these stereotypes if there is indeed equality between men and women? Is it possible for society to evolve to a point where the sexes truly are equal and these stereotypes disappear? According to Janet Momsen:

Gender equality does not necessarily mean equal numbers of men and women or girls and boys in all activities, nor does it mean treating them in the same way. It means equality of opportunity and a society in which women and men are able to lead equally fulfilling lives. The aim of gender equality recognizes that men and women often have different needs and priorities, face different constraints and have different aspirations. Above all, the absence of gender equality means a huge loss of human potential and has costs for both men and women and also for development. (8)

Since Lorber speculated that without our gender differences our society would fail to function normally, it seems highly unlikely that the goal of gender equality will ever actually be achieved. Alison Jaggar proposed a radical idea that could attempt to balance out the inequality. She says, “A truly radical goal for feminism would not be just gender equality but “a society in which maleness and femaleness are socially irrelevant, in which men and women, as we know them, will no longer exist” (qtd. in Lorber 293). Jaggar’s idea would essentially create a more equal footing but it would most likely throw society into chaos. Lorber proposes a counter-idea in which society would evolve to the point where gender was no longer needed. She goes on to add, “A more pragmatic goal (but ultimately equally radical) would be a society without economic inequalities, racial distinctions, or sexual inequality” (*Gender Inequality* 293). All of these ideas while good for feminism in theory would not be actually possible in a society where gender is essential for it to function normally as it is established now. In her article, “Gender as a Social Structure,” Barbara Risman proposes an idea that might actually be possible one day. The idea that she proposes is what she calls “degendering.” She says,

Degendering is a recognition of the myriad ways that we do gender—and deliberately not continuing these practices. Degendering means not assigning tasks in the home and workplace by gender. It means not grouping children by gender in schools. Degendering means confronting gender expectations in face-to-face interaction and underplaying gender categories in language (not saying “ladies and gentlemen” but “colleagues and friends”). Where language itself is built on gender categories, developing gender-neutral ways of addressing and referring to people will be a major and revolutionary enterprise, but its accomplishment would go a long way towards degendering. (257)

Degendering would prevent people from being placed into specific categories the way they are now. She then goes on to talk about how degendering could actually be possible if our society ever evolves to the point where it could function without gender being an issue. She says,

The feminist task of gaining citizenship rights and economic equality for most of the world's women is undeniably of first priority, but a second task can be done in Western societies where women are not so terribly unequal—challenging the binary structures just a little bit more by asking why they are necessary at all. Degendering means freedom from gender restrictions, but it does not mean anarchy. Gradual degendering would be preferable, until all taken-for-granted gender practices are replaced with degendered practices in bureaucracies and work organizations and in informal interaction in everyday life. Gendering is taken for granted now, done without reflection. Without awareness of how much we do gender, we cannot degender. Degendering is disruptive, but that is the point of it—to call attention to what is done without thinking, think about it, and not do it. (257)

In our society right now, this idea would probably not be plausible. Gender inequality is too much a part of how our society functions and because of this, gender stereotypes continue to flourish, especially in the media such as young adult literature. In young adult literature, there are heroines that embody these gender stereotypes thus ensuring that they are bad role models not only for not only adolescent girls but all readers of the texts in which they are found. Bella Swan and Clarissa Fray are prime examples due to their weakness, passivity, and irrationality. We also have heroines who are more gender neutral, embodying aspects of both femininity and masculinity while not fully accepting either. Katniss Everdeen and Beatrice Prior are perfect examples of gender neutrality due to their ability to possess and excel at masculine skills in hunting and survival while still preserving and exhibiting femininity. Because of this, they are good role models for adolescent girls as well as all readers of young adult literature. It is clear that we need

more heroines like Katniss and Beatrice in order to provide young adult readers with good role models as well as shut down these stereotypes. Roberta Trites comments on heroines like the two of them by claiming “These female characters gain their strength by rejecting stereotypical expectations that girls must be submissive and by exploring their own choices” (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* 24). Katniss and Beatrice simply cannot afford to be submissive in their respective worlds and they make extraordinary decisions with the choices they are given. Trites then goes on to add, “Successful feminist characters are those who adopt the best traits of both genders to strengthen themselves personally and within their communities” (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* 25). A surge in these types of protagonists is extremely overdue. Perhaps when society finally evolves to a state of equality between men and women or allows degendering to take hold, more gender neutral literary heroines will begin to emerge.

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