WINTER 2018

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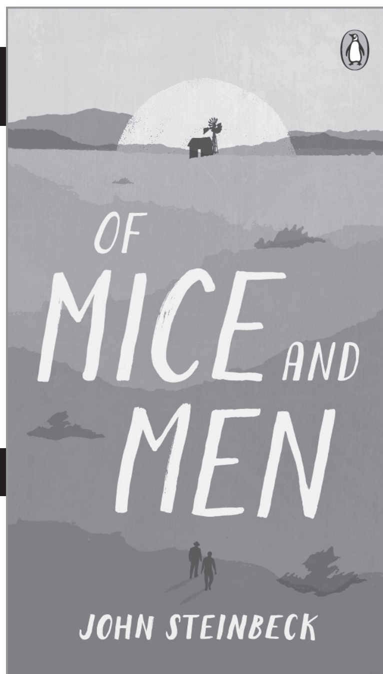

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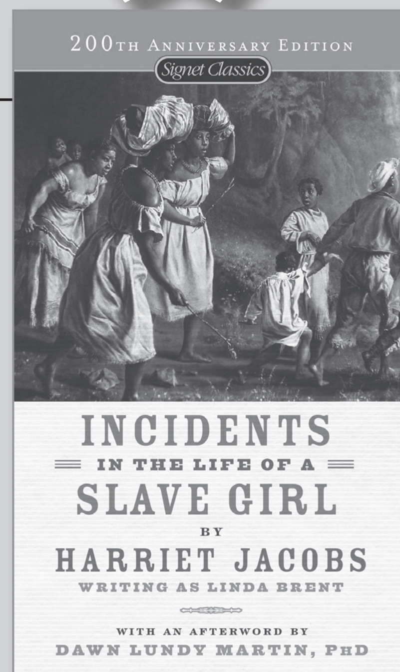

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AUDIENCE. Many of the individual members of ALAN are classroom teachers of English in middle, junior, and senior high schools. Other readers include university faculty members in English and/or Education programs, researchers in the field of young adult literature, librarians, YA authors, publishers, reading teachers, and teachers in related content areas. ALAN has members in all 50 United States and a number of foreign countries.

PREFERRED STYLE. Manuscripts should usually be no longer than twenty double-spaced, typed pages, not including references. A manuscript submitted for consideration should deal specifically with literature for young adults and/or the teaching of that literature. It should have a clearly defined topic and be scholarly in content, as well as practical and useful to people working with and/or studying young adults and their literature. Research studies and papers should be treated as articles rather than formal reports. Stereotyping on the basis of sex, race, age, etc., should be avoided, as should gender-specific terms such as "chairman."

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Manuscripts that are accepted may be edited for clarity, accuracy, readability, and publication style. Upon publication, the author will receive two copies of *The ALAN Review* in which the article appears. Publication usually occurs within 18 months of acceptance.

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FALL (October) Issue Deadline:	**MARCH 1**
WINTER (March) Issue Deadline:	**JULY 1**
SUMMER (June) Issue Deadline:	**NOVEMBER 1**

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Wendy **Glenn,** Ricki **Ginsberg,** and Danielle **King-Watkins**

From the Editors

"All" in the Family: Conceptions of Kinship in Young Adult Literature

The idea of family is complicated by the reality of life. While some may envision family as consisting of those to whom we are related by blood, others might hold a more inclusive definition. Family might be associated with home and safety and tradition and love or connected to feelings of betrayal and loss and loneliness and anger. Although our unique experiences with family might conjure differing definitions and perceptions along the continuum, we all likely have some type of emotional response to the concept.

In this issue, we invite consideration of how YA literature might influence how young people make sense of their own and others' families. Contributors help us contemplate how family is perceived and depicted in YA literature and the roles parents and guardians, extended family members, siblings, neighbors, teachers, caregivers, friends, etc. play in defining family. They encourage us to explore whether it is true that "Everyone plays a purpose, even fathers who lie to you or leave you behind" (Silvera, 2015, p. 84). They offer suggestions as to how YA titles might help adolescent readers consider the moral obligation to stand by family, exploring the question, Is the family bond immutable, or can/should we cut ties and under what circumstances?

As adult readers of the articles in this issue, we are challenged to evaluate the claim that "[N]o matter what, we're still family, even if we don't want to be" (Quintero, 2014, p. 168). And as educators, we appreciate the opportunity to learn how our colleagues have reached out to families to foster young people's reading and engagement with stories and to learn more about how and why they have valued and celebrated the funds of knowledge and lived experiences of those in our students' families.

We begin this issue with the voices of several acclaimed authors for young adults, David Arnold, Jenny Torres Sanchez, Teresa Toten, Jeff Zentner, and Ibi Zoboi. In "Unconventional Families and Making Our Own: A Collaborative Conversation," these writers explore the concept of family. They bring to light the reality of how characters in books and people in life form families in ways that differ from more traditional definitions. Their words demonstrate how unconventional families might be just what characters—and people—need.

The next three articles in this issue turn to considerations of mothers, fathers, and daughters and how their portrayals in young adult literature might be understood and have important implications for readers and their teachers. In "'Sorry I'm not your little angel anymore': Reading Good/Bad Girlhood through Mother–Daughter Relationships in Latina YA Fiction," Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino and Christine N. Stamper examine three award-winning works of Latina young adult literature: Guadalupe Garcia McCall's *Under the Mesquite* (2011), Meg Medina's *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (2013), and Isabel Quintero's *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* (2014) to explore how the characters' identities as young women, specifically young Latina women, are navigated through mother-daughter relationships. They argue that these books, in telling the simultaneous stories of mothers and daughters, allow

for a nuanced understanding of Good and Bad girlhood and a complex portrayal of intersectionality.

In her article, "Good Mother/Bad Mother: The Representation of Mothers in Prinz-Award-Winning Literature," Heidi Lyn Hadley explores the ways in which highly genderized roles like motherhood matter for all young adult readers. Drawing from Printz Award and Honor Books from 2016 and 2017, Hadley analyzes the discourse around mothering in YA literature. She focuses particularly on the ways in which the performance of mothers is written using literary markers of "good" and "bad" and the implications of these portrayals for teachers and adolescents.

Linda T. Parsons's "Maligning Mothers and Forgiving Fathers: Maintaining the Motherhood Mandate in Response to Parents in Two Young Adult Novels" analyzes preservice teachers' engagement with and responses to *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* (Mackler, 2003) and *Luna* (Peters, 2004). Findings reveal that students expected parents to embody traditional, gendered parenting consistent with the breadwinner/caregiver model and faulted mothers for not following the motherhood mandate. Parsons describes how young adult texts can be used as sites for deconstructing and disrupting perceptions of these parenting models and mandates.

The last two research articles featured in this issue explore chosen and adopted families and their implications for research and practice. Summer Melody Pennell, in "Chosen Families: Using and Creating Queer Cultural Capital in a Queer YAL Course," explores how university students used queer familial cultural capital to analyze both queer texts and their own experiences. Analysis of student work, end-of-semester surveys, and tweets revealed how queer familial cultural capital provided support for queer identities, enhanced student learning experiences, and offered opportunities for adventure.

In "No Longer an Orphan: Narratives of Adoption in Young Adult Fantasy and Science Fiction," Tara Moore analyzes examples of positive adoption language and adoption microaggressions to initiate a spectrum of adoption sensitivity in young adult novels. She explains how educators can use these adoption narratives as a means through which to sensitize readers to adoption issues and advocate for children in adoptive families.

In his Book in Review: A Teaching Guide column, "Looking beyond the Classroom: Accessing Our Students' Funds of Knowledge through Young Adult Literature," Bryan Gillis speaks to the essentialness of developing strategies that enable educators to learn more about their students so they can better support these adolescents in their learning and their living. Using two YA texts written by A. S. King, *Still Life with Tornado* (2016) and *I Crawl through It* (2015), Gillis provides strategies for teachers to do just that.

Victor Malo-Juvera partners with David Macinnis Gill for this issue's Right to Read column, "Writing across Identity Elements: An Interview with Cynthia Leitich Smith, William Alexander, and Kekla Magoon." The column features the voices of authors who write the types of texts that educators want, particularly those that feature diverse characters and cultures. Guest columnist David Macinnis Gill interviews these authors to get a glimpse into how they view matters of identity and how their views may or may not influence their work.

The Layered Literacies column, "Finding Our People: Kinship Connections and Young Adult Literature," explores kinship networks—both traditional and nontraditional. Shelbie Witte and Pamela Unruh Brown highlight three kinship themes focused on adolescence and describe useful and compelling YA texts and multimodal resources for readers to extend conversations about these themes in complex, interesting ways.

We conclude this issue with "Family Influence across the Ages: A Collaborative Conversation." Four accomplished YA authors, Kristin Elizabeth Clark, Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock, Rahul Kanakia, and Sara Zarr, discuss considerations of family history in the lives of individuals and the influence of family relationships on both adolescent identities and across the life span. They help us think carefully about the connection between our family history and individual present. The authors also consider the lingering effects of our past, whether there exists a moral obligation to stand by family, and how cultural and/or societal expectations and norms shape the family lives we lead.

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Call for Manuscripts

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Manuscript submission guidelines are available on p. 2 of this issue and on our website at http://www.alan-ya.org/page/alan-review-author-guidelines. All submissions may be sent to thealanreview@gmail.com.

Winter 2019: How We Play the Game: YA Literature and Sport
Submissions due on or before July 1, 2018

Sport, culture, identity, and power are intimately related. Sport can both reaffirm and challenge societal beliefs, strengthening and calling into question existing ideologies related to gender, race, and class. While it might be true that "it's a long race and you can always outwork talent in the end" (Matthew Quick, *Boy 21*, p. 8), the relationship between sport and socioeconomics, for example, is real: sport is an industry driven by profit, and young people pay to play. Working hard sometimes isn't enough to gain access, leading us to wonder who gets to participate and if and how such issues are addressed in YA literature.

Sport can also unite and divide people—with real consequences. It's true that the team element of sport can connect people in memorable ways, as "it's amazing how two thin pieces of clothing can hold such deep memories. Laughter, pain, victory, defeat, friendship, fatigue, elation . . . they're all there, but only to the person who's worn the uniform" (Wendelin Van Draanen, *The Running Dream*, p. 187). But it's also true that sport can perpetuate inequities across people and across time, as evidenced by this scene from Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven:* "Last night I missed two free throws which would have won the game against the best team in the state. The farm town high school I play for is nicknamed the 'Indians,' and I'm probably the only actual Indian ever to play for a team with such a mascot. This morning I pick up the sports page and read the headline: INDIANS LOSE AGAIN. Go ahead and tell me none of this is supposed to hurt me very much" (p. 179). For this issue, we invite you to consider the presentation of sport in YA titles and how YA sports literature might be used to foster a more nuanced understanding of the game and its players, its history and institutional norms, and its impact on life on and off the court.

continued on next page

Summer 2019: What's Now? What's New? What's Next?
Submissions due on or before November 1, 2018

The field of young adult literature has exploded over the past few decades. As a result, we have enjoyed increasing numbers of memorable stories written by authors willing to trust their readers with complexity and challenge. We have learned from colleagues who have implemented innovative approaches to teaching and thinking about this literature and its implications for the young people who read it. And we have begun to think carefully and critically about whose voices are present and not present and how literature both reflects and has the potential to shape the sociocultural realities in which we live and work.

In our final issue as editors of *The ALAN Review*, we aim to create space for reflection, contemplation, and anticipation around young adult literature. We invite you to consider where we are, what we've accomplished, and what we all might tackle in our collective pursuit of scholarship and teaching. As we engage in this work, we find inspiration in the words of Nicola Yoon: "I was trying so hard to find the single pivotal moment that set my life on its path. The moment that answered the question, 'How did I get here?' But it's never just one moment. It's a series of them. And your life can branch out from each one in a thousand different ways" (*Everything, Everything*, p. 305). And we are reminded that we can (and must) do better in this work, knowing that "Sometimes you can do everything right and things will still go wrong. The key is to never stop doing right" (Angie Thomas, *The Hate U Give*, p. 155). Given our shared commitment to books, young people, and a better tomorrow, we are hopeful that our forward momentum will impel us to move the field ahead in ways that foster equity and social justice for all. As Renee Ahdieh intones, "When I was a boy, my mother would tell me that one of the best things in life is the knowledge that our story isn't over yet. Our story may have come to a close, but your story is still yet to be told. Make it a story worthy of you" (*The Wrath and the Dawn*, p. 387).

As always, we also welcome submissions focused on any aspect of young adult literature not directly connected to these themes. Please see the ALAN website (http://www.alan-ya.org/page/alan-review-author-guidelines) for submission guidelines.

David **Arnold**, Jenny Torres **Sanchez**, Teresa **Toten**, Jeff **Zentner**, and Ibi **Zoboi**

Unconventional Families and Making Our Own:

A Collaborative Conversation

From the Editors: In this piece, we are honored to feature a written conversation among David Arnold, Jenny Torres Sanchez, Teresa Toten, Jeff Zentner, and Ibi Zoboi, inspiring and honest authors who explore unconventional definitions of family. We appreciate the generous response of the authors (and their publishers) and their willingness to engage with challenging questions that focus on exploring constructions of family, particularly how we form our own families in ways that might differ from more traditional definitions of family.

As to process, we generated and sent a series of questions to all five authors. We compiled their initial responses into a single document and then sent the compiled version back and forth to solicit questions, elaborations, and revisions until all were satisfied with the end result. We hope our readers enjoy the important insights offered in the thoughtful responses of these authors for adolescents.

How do you envision the concept of family?

Jenny: Family is interesting because it can mean so many contradicting things. It's blood ties and not blood ties. People you love, people you hate, people you don't know well sometimes, and people you can't imagine going through life without. Overall, though, I guess family is whomever you feel tied to in some strong way, whether by blood or not.

Jeff: In my mind, a family is any grouping of mutually loving people that agrees to consider itself a family. I'm not very concerned with the presence or absence of legal or blood ties.

Ibi: I envision the concept of family as being one that consists of some biological ties, where members share common lineages with one another, however close or distant. Such members can also adopt others into their respective families, and those relationships expand to include family members bound by love. Ultimately, love is the unifying force within any given family—an energy that nurtures, supports, and protects each member.

David: I think family is a person or a group of people who accept you for exactly who you are no matter what. They may not always like it, and they may not always show it, but at the end of the day, you can come home to these people because these people are home.

Teresa: I believe that families defy definition, and that's as it should be. Many of us have agonized over the word *family,* especially when ours have fallen short of what our culture still holds up as "normal"—that is, a family that's intact and nuclear. Family is messier and looser. It's also the most powerful force in a young person's life. And its reach is long.

What roles do parents and guardians, extended family members, friends, siblings, neighbors, teachers, caregivers, etc. play in defining family for adolescents?

David: I'll speak for myself here, but when I was an adolescent, I was fairly convinced that adults had pretty much lost their grip on reality. Now that I am an adult, my opinion hasn't changed all that much. I spend a good amount of time in schools and bookstores and festivals with teens, and I always walk away thinking the future is brighter than the present. This isn't to say adults have nothing to offer. I'm a dad of a four-year-old, and there are times when I feel I just have so much to teach him, and while that may be true, I think back to when I was a kid and try to remember: there's a lot he can teach me, too.

Jenny: I think many different people can play a role in an adolescent's definition of family, but it's obviously very particular to a person's experience. Some of us are born to individuals we never meet, or ones who don't know how to care for us, or ones who love and support us, and there are all shades in between. I think when you don't feel that love and support, you seek it, and whomever you find it in becomes family. Those who will love and look out for you just as much as, or more, or in place of, your parents (whom we trace ourselves back to time and time again).

Teresa: Aside from immediate and extended family members, a *consistent,* caring adult can play a critical role in supporting and shaping a young person. Absent that, peer groups or even gangs will stand in for the semblance of family. The thirst to belong is primal and paramount.

Jeff: I think the most important thing that these people can do to define family for adolescents is to model the sort of unconditional love and acceptance that's the hallmark of a family and to teach adolescents that *this* is what defines a family, whether or not that family meets stereotypical narrow criteria. I think it's important, too, that these people honor and teach young people to take pride in unconventional families, hopefully inoculating them against those who attack unconventional families.

Jenny: Adolescence can be such a confusing, lonely time when we feel misunderstood; in a way, it becomes a time of looking for family, a time of looking for those who understand and get us. Maybe that's why friends are especially important to us when we're teens; they are the people we spend so much of that time with and who, ultimately, become family to us—sometimes for a lifetime and sometimes only during that point in our lives.

Ibi: Our culture instills this idea that both parents are supposed to play vital roles in defining family for adolescents. In truth, far too many children are raised in single-parent homes, oftentimes isolated from extended family. There's a stark difference between what society says ought to take place within families and the reality within many households. Parents should be the primary teachers who impart values, faith, culture, and tradition to their growing children. Extended family members serve to reinforce those values. But when friends, neighbors, and teachers don't share many of these values, they can still function as support systems that connect adolescents to their larger community. If the core values at home are those of empathy, building strong character, and making right choices, every single person an adolescent comes into contact with should echo those same core values, both in their personal lives and in how they interact with others. This will ultimately cultivate overall well-being in teens, their families, and the community at large.

What role might an unconventional family experience play in the lives of young people? How are your characters influenced by their families?

Teresa: Unlike Tolstoy, I believe that no two families are alike, whether they're happy, unhappy, or near unrecognizable. Who raised you? Did it matter that it wasn't a family like all the other families on your block? Hopefully someone met your emotional and basic needs, gave you boundaries, encouraged your dreams, and a whole lot more. If those needs were met, awkward moments aside, I'll bet you

reached adulthood as a decent human. If your family was traditional, perhaps you had a friend whose household was not—the variations of *different* are endless. Witnessing that love is love, no matter the architecture, alters you. Experiencing a family construct other than the one you know goes a long way toward obliterating the fear of "the other." I believe that fear can also diminish if it's experienced through the pages of a YA novel.

Jeff: An unconventional family experience could be a saving grace to a young person. There's nothing more frightening than feeling alone and unloved when you're a young person, because it feels like that'll last forever. My characters' families often leave them wanting for some sort of emotional satisfaction, so they form families of choice that deliver that emotional satisfaction. This is true even when my characters come from exceptionally supportive and loving families.

Ibi: My personal understanding of unconventional families would be that of single-parent households in urban communities where women often work full-time jobs while raising one or more children without much help from extended family or neighbors. Historically, this has played a major role in how urban teens interact with their peers, their school community, and their neighborhood. Without much adult supervision or guidance, teens face a tremendous amount of peer pressure, financial insecurity, and apprehension in striving for personal goals. This is the case for all my teen characters in *American Street* (2017). They are being cared for by single mothers who must find ways to earn a living while in a country and city crippled by large unemployment rates. In these situations, there often isn't enough time or wherewithal within the household to impart values or traditions. The modus operandi becomes that of daily survival, and within this context, teens can view other teens as threats, while adults and teachers are viewed as untrustworthy.

Teresa: Family is the most critical factor in the development of every character I've ever written. Adam, in *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13b* (2013), is the product of divorce; both households suffer from various degrees of mental health issues, yet both homes are loving and supportive. It helps. On the other hand, both Olivia and Kate, in *Beware That Girl* (2016), come from a near nonexistent family structure. They're damaged and drawn to each other for many reasons, but the most important is their need to *make family*.

David: In *The Kids of Appetite* (2016), our group consists of one kid whose father recently passed and whose mother is contemplating remarriage, one kid whose parents are dead and whose abusive uncle is now the primary caretaker, one kid whose mother left when she was born and whose depressed father eventually resorts to foster care for his primary income, and two brothers who lost their parents and sister while fleeing their war-torn country. These kids are nothing if not found family. And while theirs may not be the ideal situation, I like to think they raise each other up.

Jenny: I think it helps to broaden our definition of family and extend it outside the bubble of the "norm." I think it creates understanding, empathy, and insight. Several of my characters find ways to survive *despite* their biological family. And they seek family elsewhere.

In what ways have your own family experiences influenced the portrayals of family in your work?

Ibi: As an immigrant, my own family experiences have always been, at least to a certain extent, in direct contrast to what friends and neighbors in my immediate community were experiencing. I was raised by a single mother, and she relied on her Haitian community of friends for support. For years, I thought these friends of my mother were actual aunts, uncles, and cousins. But they were merely other Haitians who lived in the neighborhood. Family, in this case, was made up of the people who shared a nationality within communities where they were the minority. In *American Street*, I removed this element from the story to examine what would happen to an immigrant family if no one around shared the same nationality. How would the family interact with the surrounding community? How do teens navigate being the only member of a certain group? Do they hold on to their values, which will ultimately keep them connected to their distant cultural community? Or do

they try to assimilate in order to make new friends and create their own unconventional families?

David: Family can be complicated, certainly, and every family has its own set of histories, quirks, and flaws. But family can also be a life raft; my family saves me every day. I've often wondered if the reason I'm so drawn to writing found families is the unique ability it affords me to offer a life raft to someone who might be in desperate need of one.

Jenny: My family was far from perfect. There was love and strife and tension in my household. My parents were imperfect and had their own difficult pasts that they brought to our family along with the stress, uncertainty, and loneliness of being immigrants in the United States. Those experiences definitely influence the books I write. I think about family a lot—all the ways love and family dysfunction do and can play out, the different ways they manifest in families, the different reasons why. It's hard when you're trying to figure yourself out as a teen to also be trying to figure out the adults around you who shape and influence your life. It's unfair on some level because as a child, you're taught adults know better. But then you realize that's not always true. So that plays out in a lot of my stories—very flawed adults and authority figures and teen characters who don't understand the origin of their dysfunction but have to figure out how to deal with it.

Teresa: I'm working on my twelfth novel and just realized that none of my protagonists have ever enjoyed an intact nuclear family! I was raised by a remarkable single mother who never quite got the hang of English. She worked six days and two nights a week. I also had a half-brother who was 18 years older and who was charming, handsome, alcoholic, and violent. He came in and out of our lives like an itinerant hurricane. Although I had no other "family" and we seemed to move every year, I was blessed by a steady stream of caring teachers, librarians, and—most important—friends. The friends I made as a child are my *family* to this day, 50 years later. Friendship and the desire to *belong* are central to my novels, as are the stray but caring adults who arrive and then refuse to leave the page. Write what you know . . . .

Jeff: I grew up with a very loving and supportive family, and even then, I turned to families of choice to feel fully understood. That experience made me realize that even characters with families that should fill every material and emotional need still need families of choice.

How might literature allow readers to find family in fictional spaces and places? Who might serve as your literary family?

Jeff: Literature can provide readers with vibrant, living characters with whom they can surround themselves to create a surrogate family. Any character whose struggles you can identify with and relate to might serve as a member of your literary family.

Jenny: I think literature allows for strong, emotional ties to characters, their stories, and their struggles. So any reader might find support and understanding in the pages of a book, might, in a sense, find family in a book. And that's a good thing. As for who might serve as my literary family, I guess any character(s) who identifies as some kind of outsider and flawed individual. Those characters are my family.

Teresa: *Little Women* (Alcott, 1869) was my aspirational family, while *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1908) prepared me for what I was convinced was imminent orphanhood. My adolescent reading was devoted to science fiction where families were fluid or nonexistent. *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers (1999) left me breathless, perhaps because a teacher plays so key a role in Steve's life; Chip's relationship to his single, muddled mom in John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (Green, 2005) moved me. Most recently, Elena Ferrante's (2012–2015) Neapolitan series explored family and friendship with her portrayal of the casual brutality of both.

I believe young adults need to compare, search for themselves, be startled by, aspire to, and be soothed by the endless possibilities of *family*. I used to read with a desperate hunger, searching for a family that looked like mine. I also admit to reading bleak stories in an effort to comfort myself that at least we weren't *that* bad. In reading about other families, worlds opened. I wasn't alone.

Ibi: Literature will help young readers better understand the dynamics of family and how it affects their peers in different ways. I hope my readers will gain greater empathy for other teens dealing with trauma by seeing how violence and pain are sometimes generational. And I also hope readers who are dealing with their own traumas can see the larger truths in their experiences and make connections between themselves, their families, and their communities. By providing social and historical context for such trauma, young readers can begin to peel away the layers that make up how societal norms or dysfunctions can affect communities, which in turn affect family dynamics and ultimately the young people who are navigating these circumstances while coming to terms with their maturing selves. In order to do this, a good story has to humanize every single character that lives on the page. The story of a teen is also the story of a family and the story of a community.

David: One of the things I love about my job is that no matter where I go—whether it be a book festival or conference, trade show or bookstore, library or school—I know I'll be among family. Book people have a connection not unlike a bloodline. There's a current of familiarity, an understanding that even if you hate the books I love, and I love the books you hate, we're all in this together. We've chosen to reside in this little corner of the world where fictional characters are (at least) as important as real people, where whole universes exist on a single page. There are factions, flaws, histories, quirks, and differing opinions, and yet we choose to be together. Sound familiar?

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Rachel L. **Rickard Rebellino** and Christine N. **Stamper**

"Sorry I'm not your little angel anymore":

Reading Good/Bad Girlhood through Mother–Daughter Relationships in Latina YA Fiction

At the end of Guadalupe Garcia McCall's (2011) Pura Belpré-winning verse novel, *Under the Mesquite*, the main character, Lupita, leaves her recently widowed father and her siblings to pursue her education. In a poem chronicling her feelings, she narrates that she feels "like Malinche when she walked / away from her own city, Tenochtitlán" (p. 203). This mention of La Malinche may be unfamiliar to some readers; however, those who know La Malinche's story will recognize the deeply ingrained ideas of femininity suggested by this reference. While the story of La Malinche is more legend than history, leading to layers of contradictory meaning, La Malinche is the traitorous mistress of the conquistador Hernán Cortés, who assisted the Spanish in the overthrow of her people (Petty, 2000). La Malinche has become synonymous with treasonous women, especially those women who use their sexuality for their own gain and, presumably, others' demise. She is contrasted with the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe, a divine appearance of the Virgin Mary who asked for a church to be built in Guadalupe, Mexico. Just as Malinche has come to represent sexually deviant femininity, La Virgen is understood to represent feminine purity and domesticity.

According to Petty (2000), these stories "sharply define female roles in Mexican culture based on physical sexuality; however, as historical and mythical figures, these two archetypes take on both political and social significance that also influence perceptions of femininity in the Latin American world" (p. 120). As evidenced by the reference to La Malinche in McCall's work, young adult novels featuring Latina girls and women must navigate these archetypes as they explore notions of femininity.

Other scholars have considered the distinct ways that representations of Latina mothers in YA literature are rooted in the division between La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche (Baxley & Boston, 2014); we see this dichotomy as equally at play in the lives of the young Latina protagonists themselves. Moreover, the duality between the two figures is enforced within the relationships between mothers and daughters in Latinx YA fiction. Through their implicit and explicit words and actions about how girls ought to behave, the mothers in the novels we discuss within this article perpetuate polarity between La Malinche (Bad Girlhood) and La Virgen (Good Girlhood). For the purposes of our study, we've chosen to concentrate on award-winning contemporary realistic YA fiction published between 2010–2015 written by Latina authors about Latina protagonists. Based on these parameters, our study focuses on three novels: McCall's *Under the Mesquite* (2011), Meg Medina's *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (2013), and Isabel Quintero's *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (2014). In each work, the protagonists navigate the label of Good or Bad within their relationships with their mothers.

In order to better understand the ways these navigations of femininity through mother–daughter relationships work, we draw upon the framework of LatCrit and, specifically, the idea of counter-storytelling (Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). LatCrit becomes particularly useful for exam-

ining these young adult books due to its attention to intersections of race, gender, and class—all of which significantly influence understandings of girlhood—and because of its attendance to understandings of race beyond a black/white binary (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), "The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform" (p. 32). Panlay (2016) further defines counter-storytelling as "a culturally powerful tool that has long been utilised by various minority groups to de/reconstruct their own reality and shape their own identity" (p. 161). The three young adult books that we examine function as counter-stories that challenge conceptions of race and gender in YA fiction through the ways the teenage characters push back against white supremacy by carving out their own understandings of femininity with respect to their other identities.

Within McCall's, Medina's, and Quintero's novels, mother–daughter relationships become vehicles for conceptualizing the cultural expectations surrounding girlhood, beliefs that are summed up in the idea of marianismo. Marianismo is a generalized cultural expectation for how Latina girls and women ought to act and is constructed across multiple dimensions, including sexuality, religion, body image, and familial obligation (Castillo, Perez, Castillo, & Ghosheh, 2010; Espinoza, 2010). Depending upon how a girl performs marianismo, she may be cast as either a Bad Girl, embodying La Malinche, or a Good Girl, following in the footsteps of La Virgen de Guadalupe.

More generally, many representations of femininity and girlhood, especially those in young adult media, explicitly or implicitly employ oppositional tropes: virgin/whore, cheerleader/tomboy, prom queen/nerd, etc.—a construction that mirrors the angel/monster dichotomy explored by Gilbert and Gubar (2000). This dichotomy is misogynistic and problematic, and within the novels we examine, the protagonists themselves are ambivalent toward what constitutes Good Girlhood and whether or not being a Good Girl is desirable.

We utilize Good and Bad as shorthand that weaves together the multiple forms of sometimes-conflicting constructs of femininity with which both the young adult characters and their mothers struggle. In analyzing the ways that mother-daughter relationships are used to navigate understandings of girlhood within the three novels, we examine the work that the authors are doing to deconstruct gender expectations. Following our analysis, we show how understanding these books as counter-stories might allow them to be used within classrooms as launching points for practicing critical theory.

"I'm tired of playing *mama*": Familial Obligations in *Under the Mesquite*

Guadalupe Garcia McCall's verse novel, *Under the Mesquite*, is structured as poems written by the protagonist Lupita, a Mexican immigrant who struggles to maintain normalcy in light of her mother's recent cancer diagnosis. As her mother's health worsens, Lupita takes on the role of caretaker for her eight siblings, an undertaking that becomes explicitly connected to her and her mother's ideas of what a Good Girl is. From the initial poem in McCall's novel, entitled "The Story of Us," Lupita and her mother's relationship is foregrounded, as the titular "us" is Lupita and her mother. Their closeness, though, serves as a base for conflict around how to fulfill the marianismo ideal of familial obligation (Espinoza, 2010). Lupita's mother is explicit about Lupita's role in the household; as the oldest girl, she must care for her younger siblings. When she is not allowed to go play with her friends because she must watch her siblings, Lupita responds angrily, but her mother is not swayed:

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> "I'm tired of playing *mama*," I complained.
> "You do it. They're *your* kids!"

I sassed her, and for that I had to mop
The entire house, which included
Four bedrooms, two bathrooms,
And the kitchen. (p. 43)

Not only is Lupita expected to care for her siblings, but the punishment for questioning the fairness of this expectation is more domestic tasks. In her attempted rejection of "playing" the role of parent, Lupita is given tasks that require even more work.

Without the regulating influence of her mother on how Lupita enacts girlhood, Lupita begins to reconcile the more traditional, marianismo-based understanding of femininity with her own desire for what she views as potentially traitorous independence.

Although initially frustrated with this expectation, Lupita internalizes and accepts these marianismo-based guidelines, as evidenced later in McCall's novel when she volunteers to become the full-time caretaker for her siblings when her mother has the opportunity to go to a cancer clinic several hours from home. For three months, Lupita is the often-frustrated head of her household, with the poems chronicling this period emphasizing how difficult the work is. Although she is not completely happy, Lupita perseveres until her parents return, fulfilling the ideals of marianismo. Her internalization of family obligation is central to her identity, not only as a Mexican but also as a Good Girl, which is directly addressed in the book. After she works to minimize her accent in her drama class at school, several classmates mock her: "[Y]ou talk like / you wanna be white" (p. 80). In response, Lupita defines what makes her Mexican: "Being Mexican / means more than that / It means being there for each other. / It's togetherness, like a *familia*" (p. 83). Lupita equates being Mexican with familial obligation, defined here as "being there for each other." This definition stems directly from her mother's repeated statements that taking on a caregiving role is necessary for Lupita to be a member of the family.

However, when Lupita's mother dies, Lupita's conception of what it means to be a Good Girl, and eventually a woman, fundamentally changes. Without the regulating influence of her mother on how Lupita enacts girlhood, Lupita begins to reconcile the more traditional, marianismo-based understanding of femininity with her own desire for what she views as potentially traitorous independence. In order to navigate her grief, Lupita's father suggests that she visit Mexico to stay with her grandmother. While in her parents' birthplace where her mother's ideas of womanhood emerged, Lupita considers what she wants from her life, independent of her family's expectations. She affirms her desire for education and travel, despite the wishes of her father for her to remain at home. After working through these feelings and the loss of her mother, Lupita tears out all of her older, sad poems about her mother and starts fresh:

I open my journal
to a blank page and begin
writing a whole new batch of poems,
poems filled with memories
and hope, because that's
what Mami would've wanted. (p. 196)

The absence of her mother allows Lupita to reconstruct what she believes her mother wished for her through her poetry. In writing as a way to contextualize her memories and work toward hope, Lupita takes ownership of her story. She moves from defining her girlhood and her Mexicanness within the context of her mother's desires to creating her own set of ideals through her creative power. In this way, McCall uses the space of Lupita's notebook to allow for counter-storytelling that defies the ideals of marianismo that she learned from her mother. Panlay (2016) notes that counter-storytelling is connected explicitly to the act of re-envisioning oppressive beliefs: in "[u]sing their own voice, which is often suppressed, untold, and thus unheard of, counter-storytelling gives the marginalised a means to (re)construct their own stories" (pp. 161–162). Through engaging in counter-storytelling in her poetry, Lupita is ready to move on both figuratively and literally, and she goes behind her father's back to buy a bus ticket to a northern town where she plans to attend college.

In leaving her family, Lupita confronts the archetype of La Malinche in the moment referenced in the opening of this article. Although she compares herself directly to Malinche, her poetry as a whole reveals that she understands herself to be forging her

own path that aligns neither with Malinche nor with La Virgen de Guadalupe. Lupita's mother's death has freed her to explore a more nuanced conception of womanhood. The final lines of the book evoke this newly assembled understanding of familial obligation in conjunction with Lupita's own desires:

> This feels right to me—
> starting to walk towards the doors,
> holding Mami's old, blue suitcase,
> and remembering
> the love I carry with me. (p. 207)

As Lupita moves toward independence, she carries her mother with her, both figuratively and literally. According to Trites (2000), although teenagers of both genders rebel against their parents in young adult fiction, books about teen girls traditionally feature a relatively short time of conflict followed by the protagonist complying with the parents' wishes. In *Under the Mesquite*, though, part of the counter-storytelling that McCall engages with is rewriting how girls' relationships with their parents are navigated. Lupita's growth stems from her ability to negotiate identity formation rooted both in her own desires and in those of her mother.

While for Lupita, familial obligation is focalized, in the novels we turn to next, mother–daughter relationships are a vehicle through which the protagonists come to understand their identity in terms of both familial obligation and sexuality.

"Put a bra on already, Piddy": Sexual Expectations in *Yaqui Delgado*

Expectations of marianismo within Meg Medina's *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* are largely defined through the ways the mother of Piddy, the protagonist, polices Piddy's sexuality, both through how she embodies femininity and through expectations regarding romantic attachments. The title of Medina's book references Yaqui, a classmate who bullies and physically attacks Piddy because she believes Piddy is trying to steal her boyfriend; however, Piddy's relationship with her mother, whom she calls Ma, is more central to the book than Yaqui's bullying. For Ma, part of her daughter's success in life comes from Piddy controlling and containing her developing body. Ma snaps, "Put a bra on already, Piddy. . . . You can't go around with two loose onions in your shirt for all the boys to stare at" (p. 3). Unlike Lupita's mother, who was most concerned with the ways that Lupita cared for her siblings, Ma focuses her attention on Piddy's embodied sexuality. In Ma's mind, having an exposed or uncontrolled body sets one up to be a sexual(ized) Bad Girl who is loose, skanky, slutty, or trampy, as opposed to a Good Girl whose body remains covered, contained, and controlled.

Ma has engrained in Piddy just how undesirable the Bad Girl label is, and Yaqui provides a prime example of what Ma envisions as a Bad Girl. Piddy recounts:

> They're her worst nightmare of what a Latin girl can become in the United States. Their big hoop earrings and plucked eyebrows, their dark lips painted like those stars in the old black-and-white movies, their tight T-shirts that show too much curve and invite boys' touches. The funny thing is, if I could be anything right now, I'd be just like one of them. (pp. 55–56)

Expectations of marianismo within Meg Medina's *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* are largely defined through the ways the mother of Piddy, the protagonist, polices Piddy's sexuality, both through how she embodies femininity and through expectations regarding romantic attachments.

Ma chooses, at least in Piddy's mind, to focus on what is outwardly read as Bad—a girl's choice of makeup, clothes, and accessories. Yaqui not only embraces each of these markers, but she also exposes how Piddy's body refuses to conform to Ma's expectations. At the start of the book, readers learn from a friend of Piddy why Yaqui is bullying her: "[S]he wants to know who the hell you think you are, shaking your ass the way you do. . . . She even called you a *skank*" (p. 2). Yaqui, whose disdain for Piddy stems from the way Piddy walks, reinforces the idea that having an uncontrolled, sexualized body gathers undesired attention. However, even when Piddy attempts to follow Ma's controlling guidelines, her body still betrays her. She is sexualized by others against her will, leading Piddy to question her mother's seemingly useless standards.

After Yaqui's torment of Piddy has worsened, Piddy experiments with physically embodying a Bad Girl. Staring in the mirror, she pulls her hair back in a manner similar to Yaqui, paints her lips a "dark burgundy that Ma would never let [her] wear," and takes tweezers to her eyebrows: "My eyebrows grow thinner and thinner until I'm teary and my skin is red and swollen, until there is only the barest line remaining. . . . If Ma walked by, she might not recognize me" (p. 152). Piddy's reinvention as a Yaqui-esque Bad Girl is explicitly connected to a separation not only from her mother's rules, but also, through changing her appearance in order to become unrecognizable, from Ma herself. While in *Under the Mesquite*, Lupita is able to rewrite her mother's understandings of femininity after her mother's death, because Ma is still alive, Piddy must find a different way to assert her power over Ma and Ma's expectations (Trites, 2000). By physically embracing the kind of Latina femininity that Ma fears, she does just that. Whereas Ma sees Yaqui and other Bad Girls as dangerous, Piddy views Bad Girls as tough and able to fit in at school. At the same time, though, Piddy admits that her new appearance frightens her, showing that despite the physical attributes that she conflates with Badness, an alteration to her appearance alone is not enough to change who she is.

Piddy's reinvention as a Yaqui-esque Bad Girl is explicitly connected to a separation not only from her mother's rules, but also, through changing her appearance in order to become unrecognizable, from Ma herself.

Piddy's navigation of what it means to be Good or Bad extends beyond these alterations to her appearance. While Ma repeatedly reinforces the idea that being Good is synonymous with protecting oneself from boys, Piddy struggles with this notion in light of her romantic relationship with Joey, a former neighbor. When Piddy and Joey have a romantic encounter, the new Bad Girl persona Piddy tries to cultivate competes alongside the Good Girl Ma has taught her to be. Piddy wonders what having sex with Joey would be like at the same time that she questions her desire: "There will be no way back, but would I want one? I'm nearly a woman, right? . . . I will make it No Big Deal. *Tears are stupid, a thing of little girls*, I tell myself" (p. 184).

Just as Lupita feels like La Malinche upon leaving home but sees that identification as both Good and Bad, Piddy's experimentation into sexuality here sees her trying to reconcile Goodness and Badness. The capitalization of "No Big Deal" highlights how big of a deal she actually understands sex to be, and although Piddy is frightened by the idea of having sex with Joey, she also feels desire for him. She works through this tension in the context of her femininity, attempting to connect herself to her nascent womanhood through deciding to have sex as she distances herself from the tears she associates with young girls. Piddy continues to try to put on a womanly, Bad Girl persona that is sexual and confident rather than scared or ashamed. In doing so, she represses her Good Girl modesty and discomfort in favor of embracing her sexual desires. Ultimately, Piddy is relieved from making this decision herself, as Joey stops their sexual encounter when he sees that she has been beaten up by Yaqui.

The tension Piddy experiences in attempting to negotiate understandings of Good and Bad Girlhood is only further complicated when she learns that her mother is not the perfect vision of La Virgen de Guadalupe that she has seemingly cast herself as. Ma's friend Lila reveals that Piddy's absent father was married to another woman when Piddy was conceived. Piddy and her mother's relationship becomes even more tense as Piddy accuses her mother of hypocrisy; however, her anger abates as she gains more information about the situation: Ma was engaged to Piddy's father and only learned afterward that he was already married. Embedded in this story is the breakdown of Good/Bad Girlhood, a breakdown that allows Piddy and Ma to reconcile. Knowing Ma's story lets readers understand her protection and regulation of Piddy's behavior as stemming from the lack of control she had on her own Good/Bad Girl status, and Ma ends her restorative conversation with Piddy with the question, "[W]ho are *you* going to be?" (p. 203). In raising this question, Ma allows Piddy to move freely between the dichotomous understandings of femininity that had previously dominated her life, asking Piddy to make her own decisions about how she chooses to identify

and relinquishing some of her attempts to regulate Piddy's behavior.

While not explicitly stated, Ma and Piddy's conversation shows Piddy that her understanding of her identity is complex, and as Medina (2016) herself has stated, *Yaqui* is "full of a whole tribe of women that defied the stereotypes. . . . [women who] are almost all Latina, in every variation: austere women and overtly sexual ones; the academically driven and school dropouts; successful business owners and hourly wage workers" (p. 58). This mixture of women leads to a richer, nuanced depiction of femininity, mirroring the complex understanding of womanhood that Lupita attains. However, while Lupita's understanding is realized because of her ability to rewrite her mother's expectations, Piddy actively negotiates these ideas in conversation with her mother and the other women in her life. It is important to note, though, that Piddy's forging of her own path is not entirely revolutionary; rather, it fits with Trites's (2000) understanding of rebellion in YA literature more generally: "[R]ebellion is only portrayed as effective in literature as long as it ultimately serves to sustain the status quo at some level" (p. 36). Though Piddy rebels against her mother's understandings of femininity and the duality of La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe, her rebellion also leaves her with a relatively similar version of femininity and marianismo as her mother—she is neither a traitorous, overly sexual woman, nor a virginal homemaker.

"Why is every mom's concern about sex?": *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* and Balancing Acts

While *Under the Mesquite* focuses on familial obligation and *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* emphasizes sexuality, Isabel Quintero's *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* weaves these threads of marianismo together. Quintero's book, which is constructed as a diary, is also the most explicit of the three in its discussion of what defines Good and Bad Girlhood, with Mexican American protagonist Gabi directly addressing the narratives she has heard from her mother and from other sources. Within her diary, Gabi speaks candidly about the oppressive forces in her life, which include not only the narratives that stem from her mother, but also those from society at large. Panlay (2016) states that "[o]ne of the main reasons that victims of internalized racism are perpetually trapped within the vicious cycle of self-condemnation is because they hold majoritarian stories or master narratives as true representations of themselves" (p. 165). Gabi's written entries are a means for both Gabi, the protagonist, and *Gabi*, the diary's author, to openly push back against the narratives of white supremacy and patriarchy that lead to the oppression of Latina girls and women. This form of counter-storytelling often leaves Gabi at odds with what her mother expects of her.

For Gabi's mom, Good Girls embody the marianismo qualities of staying close to home and being chaste, while Bad Girls leave home and are sexually promiscuous. Gabi's mindset about both sexuality and pursuing a future that would require leaving home becomes clear early in the novel when she states: "Why is every mom's concern about sex? There are more important things in life like school, careers, poetry, books, ice cream or learning how to make the perfect chocolate cake" (pp. 51–52). Although Gabi as writer may be performing a stance of nonchalance toward sex in this narrative, linking it to more lighthearted concerns, her diary continually reaffirms that she views sex and sexuality as only a part of her identity. Throughout her entries, she discloses a belief that being a Good/Bad Girl should not be decided solely based on her choices about sex. In this way, Gabi, like Piddy, refuses to let the narrative of La Malinche, licentious and eager to denounce her family, define her. Rather, she strives for a form of femininity where sexual pleasure is not damning and does not distance her from her family.

Gabi, like Piddy, refuses to let the narrative of La Malinche, licentious and eager to denounce her family, define her. Rather, she strives for a form of femininity where sexual pleasure is not damning and does not distance her from her family.

Early in the novel, Gabi sets goals for herself that include self-discovery—both sexual and intellectual in nature—that rebel against her mother's ideas that "all of [women's] worth is between [their] legs. Once a

man has access to that, then there is no future for [the woman]" (p. 146). As she accomplishes these goals, Gabi becomes simultaneously conflicted and excited about becoming more sexually active. When discussing a make-out session with her boyfriend, Martin, Gabi states that he asked before touching her breast for the first time. She reflects that she's glad he asked because even though she wanted more, she "didn't say anything because [she] thought that [she] would have seemed way too slutty . . . because girls are not supposed to think that way" (p. 240). Here, Gabi's desires intersect with her internalized societal and maternal expectations about what Good Girls are "supposed" to do.

Gabi does not conform solely to her mother's wishes, nor does she rebel entirely. Instead, she reconciles her mother's ideals with her own desires in order to find the space for expressing and existing as an independent woman.

Despite this, Gabi recognizes her own wants and desires, ultimately deciding to have safe sex with her boyfriend, even as she is unsure of how to reconcile the duality between her opinions and those of her mother. As Younger (2009) notes, "In YA literature, females are punished in myriad ways for being sexual. Frequently the punishment takes the form of an unplanned, unwanted pregnancy, although a few novels provide more complex depictions of young adult sexuality" (p. 23). Quintero's novel fits into the latter description, as Gabi is able to come to terms with what sexuality means for her organically, without receiving punishment for having sex with Martin.

As Gabi grapples with her sexuality, she also works through an understanding of the marianismo tenet of familial obligation. For Gabi's mother, the possibility of Gabi going away to college means abandoning the ideals of marianismo for multiple reasons: leaving her family, becoming sexually promiscuous, and— implicit in both of these—trying to become less Mexican:

> My mom is always going on about how good Mexican girls stay home and help their families when they are in need and how that differentiates us from other people. Kind of wishing I was other people right now if that is what is going to determine my Mexicanness at the moment. (p. 83)

However, soon after expressing her frustration with this obligation, Gabi shows that she has internalized this belief. When Gabi's addict father returns home, Gabi considers not letting him into the house. Ultimately, though, she does let him in, explaining that "Good Mexican girls never turn away their parents, no matter how awful they've been. My mother taught me that" (p. 88). Thus, Gabi echoes Lupita's belief that familial togetherness is entwined with being Mexican, yet Gabi, unlike Lupita, explicitly expresses her resistance to this concept as pivotal to her "Mexicanness." Gabi finds her mother's reasoning outdated and ridiculous; she is determined to live her life the way she wants: "If that means moving away to college to do whatever it is that I want to do . . . then that is what I have to do" (p. 185). The diary format of the book emphasizes Gabi's agency in choosing how and in what direction she grows. She comes to the realization that moving away from home and following her dreams will allow her to become comfortable with being simultaneously Mexican, sexual, and independent.

Gabi's rebellion is similar to Piddy's in that she looks for ways to reconcile her independence and her relationship with her mother, as evidenced in a poem she writes titled, "Questions I Would Like to Ask My Mother But Am Afraid to Because She Will Probably Think I Am: A) Bad, B) Whitewashed, and/or C) All of the Above" (p. 147). Gabi's questions focus on many facets of identity: sexuality, gendered expectations, and ethnicity, such as, "Do I have to get married to be happy?" "Why do you tell me that sex is bad, but you tell my brother to use a condom?" "If I don't like beans, does that mean I am not Mexican enough?" and, lastly, "How will I know when I'm a woman?" (pp. 147–149). Although the title of the poem and some of the questions themselves are positioned as facetious, they represent very real fears Gabi has about her life, concerns that she wishes she could discuss with her mother. According to Cardell (2014), "the diary is considered by feminist critics as a particularly important site for the expression of female subjectivity . . . [and] has been considered a location where processes of resistance or compliance to cultural proscriptions of feminine identity can be seen" (p. 21). Thus, the choice to structure *Gabi* as a diary

can be read as a feminist act, reinforcing the content of the book and forming quasi-answers to the questions Gabi poses. While she may not have responses from her mother, she is able to write her own counter-story about how the world works.

By the end of the novel, Gabi has come to the conclusion that she and her mother will not agree on what makes a girl Good or Bad, but that their disagreement is okay. Gabi discovers that the questions she raised do not necessarily have one right answer:

> I know my mom and I have our differences . . . but I love her with all my heart. . . . She's a walking contradiction—she wants me to be a strong woman and not let any man tell me what to do, but she also wants me to be obedient and behave like a nice young lady (whatever the hell that is): a virgin, I am sure, but what else? . . . Being a virgin can't be the only thing that makes you a "nice young lady" because I know plenty of girls who are virgins, but could never be called nice-young-anythings because they are straight-out spawn of Satan. (pp. 274–275)

Gabi does not fully understand or agree with her mother's rules and values, but she does respect her mother and wants to find a balance of respect and independence; while she is not a virgin and will not stay home for college, she also does not use drugs and clearly has her family's best interests at heart. Like both Lupita and Piddy, Gabi does not conform solely to her mother's wishes, nor does she rebel entirely. Instead, she reconciles her mother's ideals with her own desires in order to find the space for expressing and existing as an independent woman.

La Malinche in the Attic: Bad Girls in the Shadows of Latinx YA Literature

Within *Under the Mesquite*, *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*, and *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*, mother–daughter relationships become vehicles through which the books stress the impossibility of one singular definition of Good and/or Bad Girlhood. This message is made possible by the ways in which the teen protagonists' stories are told in connection with the stories of their mothers. As we've explored in our analyses of the three books, the protagonists actively grapple with reconciling their own understandings of femininity with the messages their mothers have imparted to them. Beyond this, though, the inclusion of both the girls' mothers' visions of what ideal girlhood looks like for their daughters and pieces of the stories of the girls' mothers themselves illustrates the ways in which the mothers' expectations are paradoxical and inconsistent.

In Quintero's book, Gabi's father's addiction and eventual death force Gabi's mother to take on increased independence, a behavior that does not fit directly with the more demure ideas about femininity she tries to impart to Gabi. Piddy's mother in *Yaqui Delgado* clearly attempted to be a Good Girl; however, her plans were foiled when it turned out that the man she was in love with was already married. Instead, she is placed into the Bad Girl category as an unwed mother having an affair with a married man. Lupita's mother in *Under the Mesquite* fits most closely with the expectation of Good Girlhood as embodied in the characteristics of La Virgen de Guadalupe. She is family oriented, docile, and religious. However, the book's central narrative is about Lupita's mother's illness and eventual death, a death that allows protagonist Lupita to rewrite her ideas about womanhood onto her mother's legacy. Thus, the text positions her mother's "abandonment" of her family as a loss of idealized motherhood similar to that of the other mothers we discuss. The gap between the mothers' ideas about femininity and the realities of their situations reveals that the behaviors and attitudes associated with Good Girls would not benefit the protagonists if they were placed in the same scenarios as their mothers. A traditional marianismo trajectory does not serve the three daughters well as they progress toward womanhood. Ultimately, each of the three books suggests that in order to successfully be a girl, and eventually a woman, a girl must embrace a more nuanced understanding of femininity that draws together notions of Good and Bad Girls,

Ultimately, each of the three books suggests that in order to successfully be a girl, and eventually a woman, a girl must embrace a more nuanced understanding of femininity that draws together notions of Good and Bad Girls, subverting the false duality of La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche.

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At the same time, one of the most important takeaways from these books is the way each emphasizes the reconciliation of the protagonist with her mother—or the idea of her mother in Lupita's case. Each work allows for a more complex, intricate understanding of the place that the mothers are coming from in their concern for their daughters, and indeed, the mothers' ideas are not fully rejected. Instead, they are problematized and negotiated, and each book ends with the girls' relationships with their mothers intact, even as Lupita, Piddy, and Gabi are able to achieve independence. The relationships presented between the girls and their mothers in these books provide nuance to the widely accepted idea that parents in YA fiction are either absent or sources of conflict (Nilsen, Blasingame, Donelson, & Nilsen, 2013; Trites, 2000). In these works, there is conflict in the mother–daughter relationships, but the overarching narratives of the books construct the girls' mothers as both sources of conflict and sources of support, something that seems to be explicitly connected to the books as works of Latinx literature.

The three books examined in this study illustrate tension between Good and Bad Girls using girls who fall decidedly on the Good end of the spectrum. However, Bad Girls haunt these books, presenting unredeemable counterpoints to the protagonists.

Thinking about these three books as Latinx literature also allows for interesting implications regarding the ways that femininity is constructed in them with respect to ethnicity. As a group, they set up an intersectional understanding of femininity that considers both notions of traditional American girlhood and more culturally specific understandings of femininity. In thinking about the competing ideas of La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe, Petty (2000) states that Chicana authors, such as Sandra Cisneros, face a dilemma wherein they are "creating a role model for [themselves] and other Chicanas that is neither limited by this good/bad duality ingrained in Mexican culture, nor too 'Anglicized' [Rodríguez-Aranda, 1990, p. 65] to adequately represent their experience" (pp. 122–123). Each book actively takes up this question of Anglicization: Lupita is criticized by her friends at school for actively working to lose her accent (McCall, 2011, p. 8); Piddy is not considered "Latina" enough because of her light skin, lack of an accent, and academic performance (Medina, 2013, p. 6); and Gabi is repeatedly questioned by her mother for trying to "act white" because she wants to leave home for college. At various points in the books, women in the lives of all three protagonists claim that the girls are sacrificing their Good (Latina) Girlhood for Bad (Americanized and white) Girlhood. In drawing this underlying issue to the forefront of the narratives, each book emphasizes the intersectionality of the texts and the ways in which multiple narratives about femininity and race operate in constructions of identity.

That being said, a review of these three books and their depictions of Good and Bad girlhood reveals one noticeable gap in representation. Although the books problematize what it means to be Good and Bad, they offer relatively similar depictions of successful girls: all three protagonists are academically successful, college bound, have good relationships and/or closure with their mothers, and have an ultimately healthy view of their sexuality. These books do work to deconstruct the assumptions of docile, abstinent, innocence that comes with La Virgen; however, they do not place the same care into fully reclaiming the negativity associated with La Malinche. Across these books, the perspective of characters like Yaqui from Medina's book is sorely missing—girls who come from so-called "broken homes," flounder academically, consistently have discipline issues, and potentially have unhealthy romantic relationships.

The three books examined in this study illustrate tension between Good and Bad Girls using girls who fall decidedly on the Good end of the spectrum. However, Bad Girls haunt these books, presenting unredeemable counterpoints to the protagonists. Medina's Yaqui comes from an unsupportive family, misses a great deal of school, and is considered a thoroughly Bad delinquent by the adults in the text. Despite the fact that her name and not Piddy's appears in the title of the book, Yaqui does not receive any kind of resolution within the text. Similarly, Quintero's novel offers a Bad Girl counterpoint to Gabi—a girl named

Georgina who has an abortion and is positioned as an annoying gossip who is not liked by any of the main characters.

The Bad Girls within these texts loom as warnings of what not to be and are not given space or voice to tell their counter-stories, making these books not altogether different from the monster/angel complex that Gilbert and Gubar (2000) explored in their foundational writing on Victorian literature. While Lupita, Gabi, and Piddy are not perfectly Good, they are given the narrative space to explain their lives and justify their Bad Girl turns; perhaps this is a reason why these books have been the recipients of so many awards. They show a particular kind of girlhood that is potentially more palatable to adult gatekeepers of young adult literature.

According to Jiménez Garcia (2017), "The lens of Latinx literature is one that magnifies issues of transnationalism, language, race, ethnicity, gender, and class for how they shape ideals about U.S. literary, historical, and scholarly canons" (p. 120). Indeed, a close analysis of what stories are represented within these books draws attention to the perpetuating dominance of certain kinds of narratives about race, gender, and class in youth literature. While this analysis has focused on girlhood and identity through the lens of mother–daughter relationships, the looming presence of Bad Girls in these texts offers an even greater tension and potential for more in-depth analysis of how girlhood in YA literature is portrayed through the lens of other female relationships.

Conclusions and Implications

As award-winning texts, these novels are likely housed in most libraries and bookstores, which gives them great potential for librarians, educators, and others to interact with their ideological disruptions. Considering that American political rhetoric builds literal and figurative walls around Latinx and other black and brown bodies, these texts can provide a human face to help majority readers understand the multiple, intersecting oppressions that minoritized groups face, while also providing much-needed mirrors for Latinx readers (Sims Bishop, 1990). The teenage girls in the texts we examined show intersectional lives; not only are the elements of rebellion and self-exploration familiar to white, middle-class, suburban teenagers, but they also incorporate elements that do not mask the characters' ethnicities. By foregrounding ethnic and cultural differences, the books allow educators to introduce narratives like La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe to their students. While this dichotomy is culturally specific, it can be easily linked to other dualities placed upon women, opening up the ability to create broad dialogue about the treatment of women and girls.

Saldaña (2012) advocates for viewing multicultural literature as "capital L" literature, stating that, "We don't deny [Latinx] works' cultural value—we will even bring it up in class—but we don't treat it as a lesser literature (lowercase "l") by assigning it *because* of its cultural significance" (p. 70). The books we have discussed are important for their culturally specific representations; however, they also provide fertile space for teachers to guide students in using critical frameworks, such as LatCrit, to work toward "literary study as social change" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Through acknowledging the books as capital L literature, rich with opportunities for critical readings and ideological deconstructions, teachers can work toward an antiracist pedagogy that empowers students to tell their own counter-stories.

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Heidi Lyn **Hadley**

Good Mother/Bad Mother:

The Representation of Mothers in Printz-Award-Winning Literature

Motherhood and its surrounding choices are cultural battlegrounds in popular media and literature. The "Mommy Wars" (O'Connor, 2013) seem to break out every few months over some new aspect of motherhood: co-sleeping versus crying-it-out; time-outs versus corporal discipline; working versus full-time mom. The list goes on and on and on. In each instance, the amount of energy spent in trying to convince the world that "good mothers" do *this* instead of *that* can seem to border on absurd. These pop culture references are the reflection of the societal expectations that are set for the performance of motherhood. Sociological research also reflects a preoccupation with the attributes of motherhood (Edin & Kefalas, 2007; Hewlett, 2002) and the ways that children are shaped or misshaped at the hands of their mothers (Dadds, Mullins, McAllister, & Atkinson, 2003; Johnston & Mash, 1989).

Young adult (YA) literature tells its own stories about mothers. These stories are important because, as Coats and Fraustino (2015) point out, they "encode powerful schemas that tell us how mothering should and should not be performed in the larger world" (p. 107). They tell us who gets to be considered a mother and the qualities that mothers are supposed to possess. They frame our beliefs about what a "good" or "bad" mother is (and who is considered a "good" or a "bad" mother). Varying possibilities, particularly around highly contested, highly genderized roles like motherhood, matter for all young adult readers as they continue to explore their own gender identities and possibilities through a critical lens. A careful analysis of what adolescents are learning through YA literature about what it means to be a mother and who gets to be portrayed as a "good" mother can lead to a discussion about productive disruptions of these narratives, both in literature and in life.

The purpose of this article is to explore the representation of motherhood constructs in YA literature that has been awarded the Printz Award or the Printz Honor Award for the years 2016 and 2017. The following research questions guided this analysis:

1. How are mothers marked as good or bad in the selected YA literature?
2. What disruptions of motherhood narratives are found in the selected YA literature?

Theoretical Framework

An initial literature review of mothers in YA literature reveals that some work has been done on the relationship between mothers and daughters or mothers and sons. Nadeau (1995) examines the relationship between mothers and daughters in six YA novels to look at how mothers and daughters navigate the tensions and joys of their relationships. Bray (2015) examines middle-grade fantasy literature for boy characters who resist gendering structures and take on roles of nurturing and caretaking. Bray identifies these literary characters as mother figures. Additionally, there are several studies that explore the portrayal of motherhood in literature, although not specifically in YA literature (Deszcz-Tryhubczak & Marecki, 2015; Hicks, 2015). While these studies explore the constructions

of motherhood in rich and critical ways, many of them look at only one kind of motherhood experience (for example, Miller's 1994 study that surveys the ways that working mothers in particular are portrayed in children's literature).

One of the common plot devices in YA literature has been absent parents, a situation that allows youthful protagonists to engage with independent problem solving. Rawson (2011) found in a survey of Printz Award winners, Printz honor books, and YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) Top Ten Books for Young Adults from 2000 to 2009 that 20% of the protagonists in these books were orphans or had no guardian. This is a vast overrepresentation, as the actual national percentage of young adults in the same situation is 0.4%. Authors may choose to minimize or remove mothers to allow teenagers more independence to solve their own problems. However, as Nadeau (1995) points out, "This device does not describe the situation of most young adult women. All women are daughters and must resolve the conflicts inherent in the mother/daughter relationship if they are to understand themselves and ultimately to establish their own identity" (p. 17).

If YA literature is meant to reflect, challenge, and enrich the understandings of the young adults who read it, then YA literature should engage with the complex relationship of youth with mothers, even in absentia.

One can easily extend this observation to all young adults—the relationship between adolescents and mothers is both important and complex. Because parental absence in YA literature is so often used to simplify protagonists' independence, it does not reflect the experience of the young people who read it: mothers, even in absentia, impact identity formation. The problem with absent mothers (and fathers) in YA novels isn't just that most teenagers simply do not have that experience; it is also dismissive of how mothers in absentia shape and change the experience of the youth who *do* experience it. If YA literature is meant to reflect, challenge, and enrich the understandings of the young adults who read it, then YA literature should engage with the complex relationship of youth with mothers, even in absentia.

I frame this analysis by using Jung's (1934/1971) work on archetypes to shape my understanding of how a good mother (or alternately, a bad mother) might be portrayed in YA literature, particularly as such representations relate to Jung's work on "psychic systems" being taken up by literary critics (Young, 1992). Jung argued that archetypes (in dreams and literature) are markers of a collective unconsciousness—that is, a body of knowledge and a way of knowing that do not come from personal experience but are instead inherited parts of the human psyche. Archetypes, according to Jung, are universal ideas that transcend culture and tradition.

In literary analysis, Jung's archetypes are understood to be already laden with meaning when they are encountered in a text. For example, a serpent can be understood to represent temptation or evil, even when the direct parallel is not drawn in the story. In this way, good mothers (who are identified by Jung as a universal archetype, and also as the single most important archetype) are already meaning*ful* in literature: they are already imbued with nurturing characteristics, patience, empathy, and selflessness. The negative archetype of a bad mother is also fully formed: bad mothers are easily recognized by their destructive, selfish, and detached parenting. Because archetypal motherhood in literature is fraught with heavy but implicit meaning, it is important to consider the constructs that surround these fictitious yet still socially constructed mothers. Jungian archetypal theory further allows me to use an already established language (nurturing versus destructive) to describe the patterns and themes that emerged throughout my analysis.

However, I also wish to critique the very notion of the archetypes of "good mothers" and "bad mothers" from a post-structural feminist perspective by examining the ways that mothers in YA literature may conform with or alternately trouble the societal expectations of motherhood. Although Gibson (1988) argued that archetypes are very different from stereotypes in that they "provide foundations to build on and allow endless variety" (p. 177), feminists critique Jung for the androcentric push of his archetypes. In particular, feminist scholars critique the mother archetype as essentializing, and they criticize Jung's concept of the

Feminine as stereotypical and limiting (Wehr, 1988).

Cixous (1976) encouraged women to write themselves, arguing that writing is a more influential creative force in the construction of gender than biology. If this is so, an examination of the ways that motherhood (or the absence of motherhood) are constructed in YA literature would hopefully offer a range of possibilities that young adults may choose to construct themselves within (and without). I find myself in sympathy with "deconstructive currents in interactionism and feminism that encourage provocative and productive unpacking of the taken-for-granted ideas about women in specific material, historical, and cultural contexts" (Oleson, 2000). In other words, troubling the binary of motherhood as good/bad allows an examination of not only the social construction of motherhood, but opens also the possibility of new constructions of motherhood. It is further useful to question how these taken-for-granted ideas about the experience and act of motherhood are reproduced or refigured in YA literature.

Judith Butler (1990) argues that there is a "proliferation" of gender roles that "already exist," but which our culturally informed ways of performing gender do not equip us to cope with in a productive way (p. 203). Many feminists would argue that literature (often written by and about men) has traditionally propped up essentialist ideas about womanhood, including the notion that women are "naturally" selfless and nurturing and thus more suited to mothering and childcare. These archetypal ideas, broadcast in literature and media, undergird social practices that shape the way motherhood is constructed. Simone de Beauvoir (1949/2011) described this discourse around motherhood as "maternal splendor" (p. 491), a discourse that still pervades much of the modern construction of motherhood. Scarth (2004) argues more recently that even if "the dominant ideology is no longer blissful fusion [between mother and child] and reproductive destiny, it often still fails to recognize the mother as subject" (p. 155). YA literature, which has increasingly portrayed teenaged girls (particularly in speculative fiction) in a proliferation of gender roles (Bray, 2015), may stop short of offering the same proliferation of gender roles to women who also happen to be mothers and may even fail to recognize mothers as subjects.

Methodology/Method

For my analysis, I selected the Printz Award winners and honor books because these reflect a well-recognized, well-respected selection of books that appeal to young adult readers. The prize is awarded annually for the best book written for teens, based entirely on its literary merit. Rawson's (2011) survey of YA literature has shown that lists of award-winning books have often more closely mirrored the actual demographics of the United States in terms of diversity and representation than, for example, a list of best-selling young adult books or a list of teen-selected, Internet-crowd-sourced best books. (A major exception is the underrepresentation of Hispanic and Latinx populations across all lists.) If award-winning book lists are more likely to have protagonists who are diverse in terms of gender, race, and sexuality, I expected that this trend might follow for the mothers portrayed in award-winning books.

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I examined the Printz winners and honor books for the two most recent years (2016 and 2017) in an attempt to make my analysis as timely and current as possible. Additionally, I worked from a smaller sampling of books to allow for deeper iterative and comparative reading processes, where themes of analysis could be fleshed out more fully. The selected books included: *March: Book 3* by John Lewis and Andrew Aydin (2016), *The Sun Is Also a Star* by Nicola Yoon (2016), *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Pérez (2015), *Bone Gap* by Laura Ruby (2015), *The Ghosts of Heaven* by Marcus Sedgwick (2014), *The Passion of Dolssa* by Julie Berry (2016), *Asking for It* by Louise O'Neill (2016), and *Scythe* by Neal Shusterman (2016).

A natural choice of methodology for this study is textual analysis, which considers texts as "social facts [that] are produced, shared, and used in socially organized ways" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 632).

Textual analysis becomes a useful tool for considering the social construction of gender in these social artifacts, particularly as a way to analyze how they serve to illuminate gendered roles in society at large. Additionally, psychoanalytical theory clarifies that many of these constructions are not *conscious* choices, but instead reflect *unconscious* structures that mirror near-universal societal constructions. Textual analysis allows space to consider both explicit and implicit constructions of motherhood.

My choice to use award- and honor-winning books allows me to survey a sampling of current YA literature and also to consider how motherhood is constructed in novels that have been judged as high quality by people who are generally considered qualified to do so.

One of the benefits of analyzing books from an award list is that the list itself adds another level of societal construction. If a panel made up of YA literature educators and librarians has deemed these books to be some of the finest examples of new YA literature, the themes around motherhood and gender construction take on even more weight as a social critique. Because these books are selected as some of the best new YA literature, the representation of mothers indicates not only a social construction of motherhood at the author and reader level, but also at the educator and list-curator level. My choice to use award- and honor-winning books allows me to survey a sampling of current YA literature and also to consider how motherhood is constructed in novels that have been judged as high quality by people who are generally considered qualified to do so.

As to process, during the first read of the eight texts, I noted places where mothers were being discussed or playing a role in the action of the novel. I noted my initial reaction to what was happening and how the mother was being portrayed. During this stage of analysis, my purpose in reading was to form initial ideas of emerging themes around the construction of mothers in the texts and also to note moments of import in the relationships between the protagonists and their mothers. In my second stage of analysis, I reviewed the novels to determine whether mothers were being portrayed as nurturing and self-sacrificing (Jung's good mother archetype) or whether mothers were behaving in destructive and selfish ways (Jung's bad mother archetype). Most important, I looked not only for instances of "good" mothers or "bad" mothers, but *how* those characteristics were communicated to readers. In short, I looked for the discourse of motherhood as communicated in this award-winning YA literature.

It would be a mistake to assume that the tables that accompany this article encapsulate all of the data collected and analyzed, as these are meant only to communicate to the reader the patterns that were identified in both the first and second stages of analysis. In both of these phases of analysis, and even extending throughout the writing of the manuscript, the process of analysis might best be described as "poring over the data, annotating, describing, linking, bringing theory to bear, recalling what others have written, and seeing things from different angles" (MacLure, 2008, p.174) in an iterative process that allowed me to identify patterns and their exceptions.

Findings

YA literature marks "good" and "bad" mothers in very specific ways. Many of the markers of good/bad motherhood follow Jungian constructions around nurture/destruction or sacrifice/selfishness. However, there were additional constructions of good/bad mothering, including death (most of the "good" mothers are dead) and sexuality (only "bad" mothers are sexual beings), that emerged in the analysis. For the purpose of this article, I will focus on several markers of good/bad mothering that were particularly interesting, namely: presence/absence, traditional gender performance/nontraditional gender performance, asexuality/sexuality, and nurturing/destructive. (I organize these binaries here to mirror how the markers align with designations of good/bad mothering.)

Good Mothers

I explored several markers of "good" mothering throughout the selected YA literature (see Table 1 for an overview of discussed codes for each novel). If there is a lesson within these titles about how to be a good mother, the overwhelming message is this: it

is much easier to be a good mother if you are dead. Shakespeare (1599/1974) wrote in his play *Julius Caesar* that "the evil that men do lives after them / The good is oft interred with their bones" (III, ii, 75–76), and while this may be true for men, the YA literature examined here seems to tell a different story about mothers. Dead mothers were almost never portrayed as selfish, and were most often portrayed as nurturing, wise, and selfless. The three novels that typified this sanctified dead mother (although to varying degrees) were *Out of Darkness*, *The Ghosts of Heaven*, and *The Passion of Dolssa*.

In all of these novels, the deceased mother is remembered with fondness, even reverence, and may even be imagined to still be involved in the protagonists' lives as some kind of guardian spirit. In Berry's *The Passion of Dolssa*, the main character Botille feels deeply connected to her deceased mother, especially during her most difficult times. At one point when she has been chased out of her home, has lost her sisters and everything that is most important to her, and is terrified for her life, she falls asleep in the woods while envisioning her mother comforting her: "I rocked to sleep in my mama's arms. 'Who's my girl?' whispered she, 'Who's my pretty girl?' I nestled down in her comforting lap and let her put me to sleep" (p. 402). Botille's mother appears as a protector even in death, comforting Botille from beyond the grave.

Table 1. Good mother markers

Good Mother Markers							
Book Title	**Mother**	**Child(ren)**	**Cooking/Domestic Chores (and page of first occurrence)**	**Presence/ Absence**		**Nurturing/ Destructive**	
				Present	**Absent**	**Nurturing**	**Destructive**
Asking for It	Nora O'Donnell	Emma O'Donnell	Cooks muffins (p. 8)	X			X
Asking for It	Karen Hennessey	Ali Hennessey	None	X			X
Bone Gap	Didi O'Sullivan	Sean & Finn O'Sullivan	None		X (Abandoned)		X
Bone Gap	Mel Willis	Petey Willis	Makes tea and honey clusters (p. 139—Mel is introduced on p. 134)	X		X	
Ghosts of Heaven	Grace Dolen	Deceased infant	None/works as a wet nurse	X			X
March 3	Fannie Lou Hamer	Unnamed	Not enough information to complete the chart	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Out of Darkness	Estella Smith	Naomi Vargas, Beto and Cari Smith	None		Dead	X (in life)	X (after death, actions hurt her chidren)
The Passion of Dolssa	Mamà (unnamed)	Botille, Plazensa, and Sazia			Dead	X	
The Passion of Dolssa	*Maire* (unnamed)	Dolssa de Stigata			Killed	X	
Scythe	Jenny Terranova	Citra Terranova	Bakes ziti (p. 8)		Separated by Scythes	X	
The Sun Is Also a Star	Min Soo	Daniel Jae Ho Bae	Prepares breakfast (p. 28)	X		X	
The Sun Is Also a Star	Patricia Kingsley	Natasha Kingsley	None	X		X	

Throughout the novel, Botille's mother is spoken of with great fondness. Her loss, according to Botille, "left each of us her love, her reputation, two sisters, and [our father]" (p. 6), and Botille and her sisters attribute all of their best qualities (good-naturedness, beauty, intelligence, and resilience) to their mother's influence.

As is often the case with literature around mothering, "good" mothers sacrifice even their own lives so that their children can live. It is no different in the selected literature. In *Out of Darkness*, Estella is told that she will die if she gets pregnant again. Despite this, she gives birth to twins, Cari and Beto. As predicted, she dies a few days after giving birth, but even as she dies, "the babies lay curled on [her] chest, their small bottoms rising and falling with her breath. Then there was no more rise and fall" (p. 69). Estella's death is directly tied to giving life to her children, a self-sacrifice that is a common construction of "good" mothering. And Estella is not the only mother in the selected texts who sacrifices her own life so that her children can live. In *The Passion of Dolssa*, Dolssa's *maire* (*maire* is the Old Provençal word for mother) is burned at the stake, a fate from which Dolssa herself is spared. During the confusion after her mother's execution, a friend loosens Dolssa's bindings, and she is able to disappear largely because of the smoke of her mother's execution. The ultimate marker of "good" mothering, then, is not just dying, but *sacrificing*: offering a mother's death upon the altar of a child's life. Mothers' lives, the literature seems to say, are most valuable when they are given up to their children, both figuratively and literally.

As is often the case with literature around mothering, "good" mothers sacrifice even their own lives so that their children can live.

Another important marker of "good" mothering in YA literature is a willingness to follow traditional gender roles. "Good" mothers are the ones who prepare meals, whether they have careers or not, and this act of food preparation by "good" mothers was almost bizarrely universal. Perhaps most surprisingly, even Shusterman's *Scythe*, which is set in a utopic future where technology has solved all of the world's most pressing problems, features a mother who comes home from work to cook from scratch, despite her profession as a food synthesis engineer—a job that apparently eliminates the need to cook from scratch at all. Her children wait for her to serve the dinner, and her husband comes home just in time to sit down for dinner. "Good" mothers in Shusterman's future, then, look fairly similar to "good" mothers of the 1950s.

Other novels also have mothers who are marked as "good" by engaging in cooking for their children. In Yoon's *The Sun Is Also a Star*, Min Soo is constructed as a "good" mother in the first few scenes of the novel when she cooks breakfast for her family, even though she is often critical of her sons. When Min Soo's son Daniel is asked about his relationship with his mom, he says, "Pretty good. . . . She's kind of like me. She paints. She's artistic" (p. 151). Min Soo is marked as a modern, intelligent, and artistic woman by her painting, but she is marked early on in the novel as a "good" mother by cooking for her children.

O'Neill's *Asking for It* features the only mother who is coded as destructive *and* who is featured in the first pages of the novel as cooking for her children. Early on in the novel, Emma takes her mother's muffins for her friends to eat as they drive to school. "They're still warm. God, your mom is amazing" (p. 8), her friend Maggie says. Emma's mother is such a good baker that she earns extra money by selling her baked goods on market day to tourists and locals. If, in fact, the act of baking and feeding one's children is an important marker of good mothering, then two scenes in the middle of the novel take on greater symbolic and archetypal meaning: the first (p. 178) takes place directly after Emma's rape, where Nora burns a batch of her muffins; the second, also after the rape, occurs when Emma accompanies Nora to the market to sell her baking, only to have very little of it sell. On the way home, Emma describes her mother stopping at various supermarkets and dumping the unsold portion in the garbage bins, a little at each place so that people won't notice and spread gossip. Emma reflects, "Maybe my mother's baking isn't that great after all. Maybe it has nothing to do with me" (p. 193). Nora, who up until this point, displayed both nurturing (baking for her children) and destructive markers (sensuality, selfishness), symbolically burns up and throws away the product of her nurturing. From this

point on, Nora becomes a much less complex character and is marked as wholly destructive.

Bad Mothers

If "good" mothers are recognizable because of their adherence to traditional gender roles, then "bad" mothers are just as easily recognizable in YA literature. (See Table 2 for an overview of discussed codes for each novel.) Most important, their identity as a "bad" mother is most easily communicated by their unwillingness to give up their identity as sexual beings when they become mothers. Every single mother represented in the selected YA literature who is portrayed as both a mother and a sexual being was also coded as destructive or a "bad" mother. In *Asking for It*, the main character, Emma, notes that her mother has a "special voice that she used with [Emma's father], with all men. (And I would wonder why she never used that voice with me.)" (p. 5). Emma recalls, too, that when she was a small child, her parents would be so engaged in one another before they went out for the evening that there would be no space for her. Her father would watch her mother's "hips move under the silk as she walked down[stairs]," and Emma was ignored "even when I started to cry as they left, arms flailing as the babysitter restrained me" (p. 5). Emma's mother's sexuality comes at the cost of Emma's connection with her mother.

Naomi's mother in *Out of Darkness*, Estella, is one of the more complex mothers in the selected literature. Like other dead mothers, she is remembered with fondness by her children. Naomi wears her dress to

Table 2. Bad mother markers

Book Title	Mother	Portrayed as Sexual	Nurturing/ Destructive	
			Nurturing	Destructive
Asking for It	Nora O'Donnell	" . . . she would reply, 'I'm coming, dear,' using that special voice she used with him, with all men." (p. 5)		X
Asking for It	Karen Hennessey	"Karen, never breaking eye contact with the camera, emerges from the water, her chestnut hair slicked back off her angular, fine-boned face. She is completely naked." (p. 38)		X
Bone Gap	Didi O'Sullivan	"Your mother has always been able to wrap men around her little finger!" (p. 32)		X
Bone Gap	Mel Willis	Recounts sexual history *before* she became a mother, but not after	X	
Ghosts of Heaven	Grace Dolen	"He stood up straight, his eyes wide, and then, as his stepmother's wet nurse came in, shut the door behind her, with the top half of her dress way down from her shoulders, his eyes grew wider still . . . . She said, 'Hello, Master Robert,' and smiled what she supposed was an invitation." (p. 111)		X
March 3	Fannie Lou Hamer	Not enough information to complete the chart	N/A	N/A
Out of Darkness	Estella Smith	" . . . flecks of light caught on the shimmering red of her dress. Her hand was hot in his. He felt her breasts against his chest when he pulled her close, missed them when she moved away. . . . she did not pull away from him." (p. 190)	X (in life)	X (after death, actions hurt her chidren)
The Passion of Dolssa	Mamà (unnamed)	No portrayal of sexuality or sexual desire after becoming a mother (particularly interesting since she was a *courtesan* by trade)	X	
The Passion of Dolssa	*Maire*	No portrayal of sexuality or sexual desire after becoming a mother	X	
Scythe	Jenny Terranova	No portrayal of sexuality or sexual desire after becoming a mother	X	
The Sun Is Also a Star	Min Soo	No portrayal of sexuality or sexual desire after becoming a mother	X	
The Sun Is Also a Star	Patricia Kingsley	No portrayal of sexuality or sexual desire after becoming a mother (flashbacks to youth)	X	

remember her mother, she tells her younger twin siblings stories about their mother, and she remembers Estella as caring and nurturing. However, Naomi's mother is also portrayed as a sexual being—wearing a red dress, out dancing with men even though she has a small child at home. This sexuality, passion, and desire set off a chain of events: marriage to Henry—the kind of marriage that you can tell won't go well, since, even in wedding photos, "her mother's expression was already tinged with regret" (p. 154); unwelcome pregnancies that make her sicker and sicker until the doctor tells her she will die if she gets pregnant again; and then Henry molesting Naomi because, in her words, "my mom was sick and she couldn't, wasn't supposed to, you know, and so he started coming to find me" (p. 257). Naomi's mother, then, is remembered by her children as a nurturing "good" mother, but her identity as a sexual being *and* a mother leads to disastrous consequences for Naomi. A mother's sexuality, it seems, is always punished. In the selected literature, it is often the young adults, like Naomi, who pay the price for their mother's transgression of cultural discourses around motherhood and sexuality. For Naomi, Estella's sensuality while occupying the role of motherhood has disastrous results, culminating in the death of both Naomi and her lover at the hands of her stepfather.

Sexuality, selfishness, and cruelty seem to be tied closely together for the "bad" mothers in the selected YA literature.

"Bad" mothers are also constructed as selfish or unfeeling; mothers who were coded as destructive consistently made choices based on their own interests and desires. For example, in Ruby's *Bone Gap*, Didi O'Sullivan, the mother of Sean and Finn, "took up with an orthodontist she'd met over the Internet and announced she was moving to Oregon" (p. 21). Sean, at 21, was planning to attend medical school, but when Didi announces that her new husband doesn't like kids and so the boys would not be moving with her, he gives up his dreams of becoming a doctor to support and take care of 15-year-old Finn. Didi's selfishness is highlighted in her insistence that "they were old enough to look after themselves. Hadn't she given up so much already? Didn't she deserve to be happy, too?" (p. 21). Throughout the selected YA literature, a mother who expresses a desire to have her own identity supersede her identity as a mother was coded as destructive or "bad."

Sexuality, selfishness, and cruelty seem to be tied closely together for the "bad" mothers in the selected YA literature. In *Asking for It*, Nora O'Donnell (Emma's mother) has difficulty dealing with her daughter's rape. "Oh, wouldn't I have loved the luxury of a nervous breakdown" (p. 248), she says when she hears that a friend had a nervous breakdown when her child died. Her insistence that she is just as much a victim of the rape as her daughter causes her to turn against Emma, who is caught up in a media firestorm about the rape and has tried to commit suicide. As the town they live in increasingly takes sides in the rape case and the pressure intensifies around their family, Nora drunkenly lashes out at Emma:

> Maybe I'm sick of having to keep my medicine cupboard locked, did you ever think of that? Maybe I would like to be able to relax in my own fucking house without worrying about what you're up to in your bedroom. Whether I'm going to go upstairs and find you lying in a pool of your own blood. The *mess* of it. . . . Selfish, that's what you are. (p. 268)

This incident with Nora is key to Emma deciding that she would like to drop the rape charges, that she will refuse to testify against her rapists. Without her mother's support, she finds it unbearable to face the media scrutiny and judgment. Nora's cruelty here is particularly troublesome coming from a mother, mostly because of the societal expectations for motherhood. Mothers are always supposed to put themselves second, and Nora transgresses this expectation. Nora's deep humanity, the ways in which she has been hurt and ostracized through the community's response to the rape of her daughter are unimportant; as a mother, she should be able to ignore any personal needs and focus all of her energy on her daughter.

Early Markers

One of the most interesting findings was how early these markers of "good" and "bad" mothering were communicated to readers. In nearly all of the novels, mothers were portrayed as either cooking for their children ("good") or as selfish or sexual beings ("bad") within the first 20 pages. In *Scythe*, Jenny Terranova cooks for her family in the novel's opening

scene; in *Asking for It,* Nora's sensuality is discussed on page 7 and is presented as one of the early memories that Emma has of her mother. This early marking of mothers as "good" or "bad" seems to support Jungian literary analysis of these mothers as already meaning*ful*—marked early on as an archetype of a specific kind of mothering. It is also interesting to note that in the selected YA literature, nurturing behavior is directly linked with food preparation in line with traditional gender roles. This early marking, however, also seems to indicate a lack of fluidity in the ways that mothers are constructed in YA literature. None of the mothers who were marked early on as destructive redeemed themselves, and only one mother (Estella from *Out of Darkness*) who was marked as nurturing in early coding was determined to later be destructive.

Family Dynamics

Family dynamics did not seem to be a direct marker for whether a mother was "good" or "bad." Across the selected novels, there were three mothers who, during the time period of the novel, were unmarried or widowed. Of these three, one was coded as destructive (Grace Dolan from *Ghosts of Heaven*) and two were coded as nurturing (*maire* from *The Passion of Dolssa* and Mel Willis from *Bone Gap*). The remaining nine mothers were either married or partnered during the time period of the novel; four were coded as destructive, four were coded as nurturing, and one was coded as neutral (Fannie Lou Hamer from *March 3*, whose coding was neutral because her identity as a mother was mentioned only once and did not appear as an important part of her representation in the text; the neutral coding does not reflect any judgment on her substantive and positive contributions to the Civil Rights Movement). The most notable aspect of family dynamics from a mothering standpoint was the lack of diversity; there were no queer mothers and only three mothers of color (two in the same book), and overwhelmingly the mothers were married (even if it wasn't to the father of their children, as is the case with Didi O'Sullivan in *Bone Gap,* who ran away to marry an orthodontist). This lack of diversity in motherhood and family experience in award-winning YA books highlights the need for more diversity in representations around what family might look like, how mothers might construct themselves, and how the act of mothering might be performed.

Binary-Troubling Mothers

In framing this study as an exploration of the binary construction of mothers, my analysis of these mothers is in many ways a re-inscription of the very binary I wish to trouble. It is worth noting that many of these mothers are complex characters, while still conforming to binaries around femininity, motherhood, and family makeup. I fully expected (and hoped) to find mothers who pushed against strictures of "good" performances of motherhood without being portrayed as destructive forces in their children's lives. The mother who comes closest to this would perhaps be Mel Willis in *Bone Gap,* who demonstrates both a deep care for her daughter Priscilla *and* a deep sense of self. She is a beekeeper, a single mother, runs her own business, and speaks frankly with her daughter about sex, often reminiscing about her own experiences. As Priscilla says, "She likes to think she's hip about all that stuff. Which she is, I guess, but it's sort of weird to listen to a thirty-six-year-old woman reminiscing about all the boys she made out with under the bleachers when she was in high school" (p. 141). Mel is characterized as a free-spirited, carefree, and even self-absorbed woman, but she is also characterized as a nurturing, interested, and caring mother.

This lack of diversity in motherhood and family experience in award-winning YA books highlights the need for more diversity in representations around what family might look like, how mothers might construct themselves, and how the act of mothering might be performed.

Other mothers, such as Estella in *Out of Darkness* and Nora O'Donnell in *Asking for It,* seem to fit more closely to binary-driven expectations of motherhood (staying at home with the children, engaging in traditionally gendered activities like baking and cooking), and yet they constitute some of the most highly developed and complex mother characters of the group. Nora, for example, not only cooks for her children, but she also seems to be deeply interested in their lives. She brings Emma vitamins every morning,

tells her she's beautiful, calls her "pet," and demonstrates a deep interest in her school life—actions that certainly could be construed as markers of nurturing motherhood. At the same time, her obvious pride in Emma's beauty and her achievements in school could also be read as a preoccupation with the ways that her children add to her own prestige, which might be interpreted as selfishness. These kinds of complexities do not explicitly push against binary constructions of motherhood, but they do offer spaces for more complicated readings and open up possibilities for interpretations that are both thoughtful and nuanced.

Pedagogical Implications and Discussion

The discourse around motherhood in young adult literature as a whole could provide rich opportunities for both thematic and critical explorations in classroom settings. Although the selected literature is award winning, any classroom study of family and family units could provide a more diverse outlook on what a family looks like, who is represented in families, and the roles that people can take on in families other than what has been explored here. For this reason, this research may be most helpful to teachers as they work to build their classroom libraries, offering a perspective on another kind of diversity they might consider as they choose novels for individual and classroom reading.

The discourse around motherhood in young adult literature as a whole could provide rich opportunities for both thematic and critical explorations in classroom settings.

Certainly, Jungian archetypes and the ways they have been picked up in literary analysis lend themselves well to classroom discussion and study. Teachers could use examples from a variety of media and genres that represent mothers to examine the ways that motherhood is performed in popular culture and in young adult literature: movie clips (Disney princess movies tend to be rife with archetypal motherhood, for example), songs (like LunchMoney Lewis's (2015) "Mama" and Reba McIntyre's (1990) "Fancy"), poems, art, and excerpts from novels (certainly including the novels examined here). Adding a critical element to students' explorations would be important to challenge current binaries around good/bad mothering. To this end, students could complete a chart mapping the mothers they encounter in literature and pop culture, then talk about how the discourse of *maternal splendor* has been created, how it continues to be inscribed, and where they see representations of mothers who are pushing back against these mothering norms.

Returning to the research questions that guided my study, the findings indicate that mothers are strongly marked very early on in the selected YA literature as either "good" or "bad," and these markers are fairly cemented throughout the story. There is very little complexity in this marking: nurturing behaviors include following traditional gender performances of mothers—handling household chores or preparing food for their children and dying (especially as a way to save or give life to their children). Destructive behaviors include attending to self as a sexual being and putting one's desires and wants before those of one's children. In this article, I use the Jungian analysis and binary framings of archetypal motherhood in YA literature to establish current social constructions around motherhood, but I also wish to trouble the good/bad mother binary using poststructural feminism as a means of opening up new readings of YA texts around motherhood. Perhaps, most important, poststructural feminism invites an interrogation of the Jungian and cultural discourses of "good" and "bad" mothers as the only options for analyses of motherhood experiences. Poststructural feminist thinking encourages a reading of maternal splendor and nurturing versus destructive motherhood binaries as only *some* of the discursive possibilities around mothers and mothering, possibilities that have been reified and solidified through iterations and reiterations of those discourses in policy, pop culture, literature (including children's literature and YA literature), and cultural mores. Further examination of the discourse of motherhood might question why acts of mothering are so value-laden (e.g., nurturing or destructive), or who gets to be counted as a mother or a mother figure.

Using a Jungian frame of analysis, the findings indicated that for the selected YA literature, there were very few instances where mothers disrupted normative motherhood narratives without careening into "destructive" ways of being. Part of this, of

course, is that these norms are so interwoven into the ways that motherhood is defined and judged that any disruption of these norms is, in itself, viewed as destructive. It does seem odd, however, that in a time when, as a general trend, female YA protagonists are consistently pushing gendered boundaries, including being portrayed as deadly assassins (Maas, 2012), clever business owners (Berry, 2016), driven Internet personalities (Zentner, 2016), and enlightened mystics (Berry, 2016), the mothers in these award-winning novels are performing more traditionally: selling their baking (O'Neill, 2016), working in the family store (Yoon, 2016), and sacrificing themselves in the ways that mothers have always been required to sacrifice themselves to prove they are really, truly good mothers, even with their very lives (Berry, 2016; Pérez, 2015). The message appears to be a little mixed: young women can be whatever they want while they are young, single, and free, but once they become mothers, the traditional and essentialist framings of what it means to be a woman are still in full force. In other words: rebel against traditional gender roles now, but settle down later, or your children pay the price for your selfishness.

Poststructural critique of the same novels leads to other possible interpretations and critiques of the performance of motherhood. If binary thinking and analysis are challenged, the discourse of motherhood could, in fact, offer the proliferation of gender roles that Butler (1990) talks about. Motherhood, then, might include all the ways of being that women who care for children embody. When the assumption of mothering as either good or bad or as nurturing or destructive is troubled, then complicated mothers like Nora O'Donnell in *Asking for It* can be recognized as subjects in their own right, instead of as objects or as symbols of oppression. If Nora's acts of mothering are not viewed through destructive framing, she herself can be constructed more generously and read as a subject who is exercising her own agency within the same patriarchal discourse that her daughter experiences so negatively.

Although moving away from a binary representation or analysis of motherhood allows for multiple readings of the performance of mothering in the selected literature, there remained a lack of diversity in the family structures within these texts. This is particularly problematic in award-winning YA literature. These committees do, I generally believe, attempt to select diverse, representational YA literature that tells rich and nuanced stories from a variety of experiences and viewpoints. Future research may focus on the diversity of the makeup of these committees' members in order to determine whether these committees are themselves representational of diverse and nuanced experiences—not only in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, but also in terms of family structure. I suspect that a large part of why motherhood can be constructed in such binaries in award-winning YA literature is not only related to archetypal literary portrayals of women, but also because a certain kind of motherhood (white, middle class, stay-at-home) is normative and therefore invisible in its ubiquity.

YA literature is uniquely positioned to challenge gendered roles. If women truly can be written or write themselves, then YA literature . . . is a particularly powerful place to challenge binary thinking around gender.

YA literature is uniquely positioned to challenge gendered roles. If women truly can be written or write themselves, then YA literature (and children's literature, too) is a particularly powerful place to challenge binary thinking around gender. Literature that shapes and guides young adults as they are forming their ideas about themselves, the world around them, and their role in that world could offer a proliferation of gender roles that invites young adults to consider additional possibilities in the discourse and performance of both womanhood *and* motherhood. Judging from the selected literature, YA literature is not currently presenting a proliferation of gender roles beyond young adulthood to young women (and one might argue in a different article, this proliferation of gender roles is not being written for young men, either), but I believe that YA literature *can* and *should* allow young women and men to question the narrative of "good" motherhood, recognize mothers as subjects who exercise agency and power, and open up additional possibilities in the performance of gender.

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Linda T. **Parsons**

Maligning Mothers and Forgiving Fathers:

Maintaining the Motherhood Mandate in Response to Parents in Two Young Adult Novels

"What is it about our gendered parenting roles that we cling to so tightly?"
—(Hauser, 2015, p. 329).

From an early age, children are presented with media messages, parenting models, and direct instruction that shape their conceptions of and expectations about the employment options and parenting roles that will be available to them. Since the Industrial Revolution, middle-class, heterosexual parents have been assigned and confined to the breadwinner-caregiver model, wherein the father's primary responsibility is to work outside the home to provide for the family's financial needs, and the mother's primary responsibility is to care for and nurture their children (Fulcher, Dinella, & Weisgram, 2015). This model of gender-linked parenting is still transmitted from parents to their children, who learn that the expectations for involvement in and commitment to childrearing are different for mothers and fathers (Borelli, Nelson, River, Birken, & Moss-Racusin, 2016). The preservice teachers whose responses I share in this article articulate and perpetuate these gender-linked expectations for mothering and fathering. This mindset will influence their feelings about their own work lives and their parenting roles as well as how they view their future students' parents.

Although contemporary women have more employment and parenting options than those of past generations, most little girls still dream of becoming mothers. The mothers of young children in Hauser's (2015) study indicated that becoming a mother "signified some sort of dream fulfillment" (p. 336) and reported developing an ideology of motherhood long before they actually became mothers; they idealized maternal identity. This is not merely a personal or biological yearning, but a socially constructed and shared expectation. In 1976, Russo wrote that childlessness was viewed as "a deficient condition" (p. 149), and that perspective largely holds true today. Bays (2017) studied others' perceptions of women based on their parental status and found that mothers were admired, women who were involuntarily childless were pitied, and women who were childless by choice evoked both envy and disgust. Being a mother is still part of a woman's "prescribed performance of gender" (Henderson, Harmon, & Newman, 2016, p. 514).

Good mothering is perceived to be biologically naturalistic, but is actually a patriarchal construction inextricably tied to social, cultural, and political concerns. Russo (1976) articulated the "motherhood mandate" (p. 148) by which women are judged: women should first and foremost be mothers, a good mother has at least two children, and the quality of a woman's mothering is measured by the amount of time she spends with her children. Furthermore, nurturance is fundamental to motherhood, and women are expected to put their children's needs (and their husband's needs) before their own. The motherhood mandate is evident in contemporary "intensive mothering ideologies and perfectionistic parenting practices" (Henderson, Harmon, & Newman, 2016, p. 514), and the pressure to meet these impossibly high expectations contributes to women's feelings of guilt, anger, and stress. These cultural narratives that idealize and standardize good mothering result in mother-

blame for children's behavioral, moral, or intellectual shortcomings—with little to no corresponding father-blame (Henderson, Harmon, & Newman, 2016).

Current statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016) regarding married parents' employment statuses problematize the perpetuation of the breadwinner-caregiver model and the accompanying motherhood mandate. In married couples with families, 76.3% of mothers and 95.6% of fathers are employed full time. Mothers of young children are less likely to work outside the home than those with older children: employment rates are 58.6% for mothers with children under 1 year of age, 64.7% for mothers with children under 6 years of age, and 75% for mothers of children between the ages of 6 and 17. While mothers of young children are less likely to work full time than are mothers with older children, the employment status of fathers is not tied to the age of their children. These statistics indicate that mothers are still the primary caregivers for the married couple's children.

It is evident that the number of families with dual wage earners has not resulted in significant expectations for egalitarian childrearing practices; the breadwinner-caregiver model of parenting and the motherhood mandate persist.

The breadwinner-caregiver model creates a double standard regarding employed mothers and employed fathers. It is egregious for mothers to engage in employment that interferes with their role as a mother, yet it is demeaning for fathers to move from full-time to part-time employment to care for their children. Thus, the motherhood mandate creates role conflict as women try to balance work and family life, and it explains why women have traditionally limited their employment choices to occupations such as teaching, nursing, or secretarial work to minimize this conflict. As contemporary women enter a broader range of professions, however, the expectation for mothers to spend significant time with their children "is at its apex" (Borelli, et al., 2016, p. 357), and mothers who transgress this expectation are criticized for not being committed to their roles as mothers. There are two narratives to which women resort to resolve their work/family conflict: the full-time domestic mother and the employed supermom (Riggs, 2005). It is evident that the number of families with dual wage earners has not resulted in significant expectations for egalitarian childrearing practices; the breadwinner-caregiver model of parenting and the motherhood mandate persist.

Feminist scholars call for a dismantling of the breadwinner-caregiver model (Hauser, 2015). Yet parents who aspire to degender parenting often conform to traditional roles through "acts of subjection" (Assarsson & Aarsand, 2011, p. 80), because those who deviate from traditional parenting roles risk the disapproval of family, friends, and society at large. The presumption remains that mothers should be nurturing, attached to, and invested in their children, regardless of their employment status, while fathers may play a secondary role in childrearing. These assumptions are evident in the responses of the preservice teachers in this study as they hold mothers and fathers to different standards of parenting. Faulting the mothers for their transgressions and excusing the fathers for theirs, they maintain the motherhood mandate.

Study Methods

This analysis combines data from two studies conducted in undergraduate young adult literature courses I taught within an Education department. The first study involved students who read *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* (Mackler, 2003) and their reactions to a fat, female protagonist. The second study included students who read *Luna* (Peters, 2004) and their reactions to a transgender character (Parsons, 2012; Parsons, 2015). The students in both studies were traditional and nontraditional students from the surrounding local, mainly rural, community in one of the most economically depressed counties in the state. All students were working toward a degree leading to teacher licensure in either early or middle childhood and typically enrolled in the course during their junior or senior year. The course wherein students read *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* was comprised of 20 females and 2 males. Twenty-four females and 4 males were enrolled in the course iteration during which students read *Luna*.

Students read a young adult novel each week; *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* was

assigned about halfway through the course, and *Luna* was the final reading. Throughout both iterations of the course, students submitted a written, three-part response to each assigned novel. The first two sections encouraged students to adopt an aesthetic stance followed by an analytic, efferent stance (Rosenblatt, 2005). The prompts for the first section were: "How did you feel as you were reading this book? What struck you forcibly? What did you find especially interesting, annoying, puzzling, frightening, familiar, or unfamiliar?" Prompts from which students could choose in the second section included: "What does this text assume about your beliefs, values, and/or experiences? Are there aspects of the text you feel compelled to resist? Which parts of the story seem 'obvious' or 'natural' to you? Did the book challenge any of your beliefs or prompt you to think about something in a different way? What issues does this text explore?" (adapted from Apol, 1998, & Rosenblatt, 2005). These two sections transitioned students from "being in and moving through" to "stepping out and rethinking what one knows" (Langer, 1995, p. 17). Students wrote these responses prior to class.

During class, students first discussed the novels in small groups of approximately five students. After these open-ended discussions, students moved to whole-class discussion and critique of the novel and of life-questions it raised. Students wrote their responses to the third section of the three-part response at the end of the class: "What effect did discussing the book with others have on your personal understanding?" As Langer explains, readers' responses are "subject to change with additional thought, reading, discussion, writing, and living" (1995, p. 15), so students were encouraged to consider these changes in this final section of their written responses. I purposefully structured this movement from aesthetic to efferent response and combined that with guidance and discussion so students would arrive at a "critical reading of the text as a social and political construct" (Cai, 2008, p. 216). These three-part written responses comprised the data for analysis in each study.

I analyzed the students' written responses by moving between inductive and discourse analysis. In the inductive phase, I repeatedly read through the responses to identify preliminary categories and arranged responses accordingly (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Data reduction during this phase involved identifying "response statements [reflecting] a focused thought" (Hancock, 1993, p. 341). Any paragraph, indeed any sentence, within a response often included thoughts pertaining to more than one catgegory. As a result, I organized the response statements into meaningful and ever more precise categories. Once data were reduced in this manner, I moved to a discourse phase of analysis, identifying recurrent words or phrases within each statement and facilitating more accurate placement of statements and coherence within categories. I made iterative passes through the data and refined categories until I arrived at "a relatively small, manageable, and maximally relevant" set (Kamberelis & de la Luna, 2009, p. 251) and reached saturation when no new categories emerged.

Parenting was not the articulated focus of either of these two studies, but a category regarding parenting emerged in both; readers had different expectations for and reactions to mothers and fathers.

Parenting was not the articulated focus of either of these two studies, but a category regarding parenting emerged in both; readers had different expectations for and reactions to mothers and fathers. A significant number of students in each study expected parents to embody gender-linked parenting consistent with the breadwinner-caregiver model. It is this unanticipated category that I explore and develop here. In the discussion that follows, I begin with a summary of each novel and my analysis of each parent's role, followed by a discussion of readers' inclination to malign the mothers and forgive the fathers. I use participants' real first names with their permission, and I have maintained the language of the participants' written responses.

The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things

Story Synopsis

The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things (Mackler, 2003) is the story of Virginia Shreves—overweight and out of place in her perfect family as

well as at school, where the popular girls call her "that chubby girl" (p. 28). Her family's idealized façade cracks when Virginia's older brother is accused of date rape and expelled from Columbia. As Virginia begins to see chinks in her family's perfection, she comes to believe that she herself may be closer to perfection than she imagined. Virginia's journey to self-acceptance begins when she defies her mother and spends Thanksgiving in Seattle with her best friend, and it continues with the support of an understanding physician and a sympathetic teacher. Yet it is when Virginia starts kickboxing, gets an eyebrow piercing, dyes her hair purple, and rejects her mother's fashion dictates that she truly comes into her own.

Good mothers are expected to be nurturing and supportive, and readers censured Phyllis for lacking these qualities.

Virginia's mother, Phyllis Shreves, is a successful adolescent psychologist. Formerly heavy, she is obsessed with not gaining weight. She constantly monitors Virginia's food choices and suggests clothing styles she believes complement a fat body. Virginia wants to shop at a trendy store that displays all sizes together, but her mother insists she shop at plus-size Salon Z where "the dresses look like gunnysacks and the mannequins resemble embalmed grandmothers" (p. 187). Virginia eventually rebels, opting for "More colors. More curves. Maybe even a little flesh exposure" (p. 188).

Dubbed "The Queen of Denial" (p. 158), Phyllis Shreves wields euphemisms like a shield. She never refers to Virginia as fat but as "heavy" and "like I used to be" (p. 35). Virginia believes her mother's intentions are good, as evidenced when Phyllis takes Virginia to Dr. Love to discuss her weight and tells him, "It's so hard being overweight. I want to do everything I can to make life easier for Virginia" (p. 65). By the end of the novel, Phyllis finally seems to accept that Virginia can be happy and healthy just as she is, and she even admires Virginia's transformation, telling her, "I do admire your chutzpah" (p. 214).

Virginia's father, Mike Shreves, is a high-powered software executive who frequently travels for his job and openly admires thin women. After Virginia's appointment with Dr. Love, Mike tells her, "You've got a great face, Ginny. Think how much prettier you could be if you lost twenty or thirty pounds" (p. 67). When Virginia subsequently goes on a diet, Mike gives her "a tell-all, show-all, full-length mirror" (p. 75), thinking it will inspire her to reach her weight goal. This mirror, however, is the catalyst for Virginia's self-inflicted abuse.

Like Phyllis, Mike wants what is best for Virginia and works to improve his relationship with her. Although Phyllis initially forbids Virginia's trip to Seattle, her father takes her to the airport and gives her spending money. He and Virginia agree to talk about rather than ignore the family's problems. Toward the end of the novel, Virginia and her father go to a Knicks game, and her father comments that she looks like she's slimming down. Virginia tells him, "I have to tell you that I'd rather you don't talk about my body. It's just not yours to discuss" (p. 237). Mike apologizes and indicates that he will respect her and her wishes in the future.

Maligning Phyllis and Forgiving Mike

Fifteen of the 20 female students in this class wrote response statements finding fault with Phyllis Shreves, and none approved of her. Good mothers are expected to be nurturing and supportive, and readers censured Phyllis for lacking these qualities. In light of Phyllis's former weight issues, Jean criticized her for having "little or no empathy for her own daughter's situation," while Sarah thought she should have been "more supportive and more concerned about Virginia's feelings." Rather than showing empathy, Charity thought Phyllis "ostracized" Virginia for not having, and not striving to have, the ideal body. These students might have interpreted Phyllis's actions as motherly concern for her overweight daughter's future health and welfare, but instead accused her of not being empathetic and supportive. Phyllis violated the motherhood mandate by not being nurturing in the right way.

Phyllis breaks the breadwinner-caregiver model by being a successful adolescent psychologist to the detriment of her role as mother, and readers harshly criticized her for this transgression. Some found her to be "only concerned with her public image" or "too busy with her own life to take the time to get to know her own children." Readers saw Phyllis as "a family

therapist who did not understand her own family," and they criticized her for not integrating her professional knowledge with her mothering: "An adolescent psychologist should understand more than anyone her daughter's needs. Instead, she ignores her own advice and basically robs Virginia of a true mother–daughter relationship." These readers resisted the possibility that Phyllis might be both a successful psychologist *and* a good mother or that she might conscientiously separate her professional identity from her motherhood. They accused her of work/family conflict because she created and maintained a professional, public image inconsistent with the image of a good mother; they felt she neither put Virginia's welfare before her own nor employed her professional expertise in her familial relationships.

Readers continued to criticize Phyllis for not integrating her professional identity and her mothering, and they faulted her for being the "Queen of Denial" (p. 158). Sarah wrote:

> It amazes me that a renowned adolescent psychologist could miss everything that is going on in her home, and if she does realize it, how she could just push it under the rug like it doesn't exist. If anyone should know the ramifications of not talking things out and a lack of communication it should be her.

She also expected Phyllis to have her finger on the pulse of the family, wondering how she could be "so clueless and in such denial." Several readers believed her denial "caused a lot of problems in the family." Marcia criticized her for calling the rape allegation "'the Incident' rather than talking about [it] and resolving the problem." These criticisms mother-blame Phyllis for her children's actions. They did not hold Brian responsible for committing date rape; they blamed Phyllis, whose denial compounded her family's problems and who was expected to resolve everyone's problems. If Phyllis had just brought her professional expertise to bear, had she not been in denial, she would have been a better mother.

Readers also criticized Phyllis for exerting excessive control over her daughter, and several thought Virginia "needed to stand up to her mother and let her know how she was feeling." One student celebrated Virginia defying her mother and going to Seattle as the act that "gave her the courage to continue to stand up to her mother's abuse," and Rachel praised Virginia for confronting her mother over her "inability to use the word *fat*." Linda labeled discussing Virginia's weight with Dr. Love as "misguided love" and mediating Virginia's clothing choices as "unfair." None of these readers entertained the possibility that Phyllis was a good mother who wanted what was best for her daughter and who actively provided support and guidance. What they saw was "abuse" and "misguided love." They felt so strongly about this that they celebrated Virginia's acts of disrespect and defiance. They criticized Phyllis because her professional life interfered with her role as mother even as they criticized her for being too controlling and involved in her daughter's life.

It was impossible for Phyllis to redeem herself in [the students'] eyes.

Readers were skeptical when Phyllis expressed her admiration of Virginia at the end of the novel. Rather than commending Phyllis's change of heart, those who noted it factually recounted the event. For instance, Sarah appreciated the "importance of the scene where Phyllis tells Virginia she 'admired her chutzpah' (p. 214)." Others remarked that Phyllis finally recognized that "Virginia has courage and strength" and that Virginia finally "received a positive response from her mother." Yet Rachel wrote:

> I wonder if Virginia's mother will ever completely accept her daughter, and her past self, for being fat. She seems to start to accept Virginia for who she is by saying that she wished she had had her daughter's nerve when she was younger, but she was also drunk at the time. She gave Virginia an eyebrow ring, but does that mean she accepts Virginia's whole appearance, or just the fact that she has an eyebrow ring?

These readers would not accept Phyllis's admiration and affirmation as genuine nor as an example of good mothering. The fact that she had been drinking nullified her compliment while it could just as easily have been seen as enabling her to be more unabashedly honest with Virginia. It was impossible for Phyllis to redeem herself in their eyes.

Mike conforms to the traditional, gendered father role, and I believe this is why students made very few comments about his relationship with Virginia or about his competence as a father. Only four female students wrote statements about him, and the lack of statements seems to indicate tacit approval. No one

criticized that his job as a software executive involved frequent travel that took him away from the family. No one criticized him for attempting to control Virginia by constantly commenting on her weight or for giving her the full-length mirror. Charity was reminded of her own struggle with weight when she wrote, "I too, have felt the way Virginia did after her father's comment [that she had a pretty face but would look better if she lost weight], like 'I've been punched in the stomach' (p. 65)." She stopped short, though, of condemning Mike for his insensitivity or for his superficial connection with Virginia. One reader observed that Mike always made comments about Virginia's body and left her out of sports outings, making her feel unloved, but she did not criticize him for not being nurturing and supportive. In stark contrast to the harsh criticism leveled at Phyllis for denying family problems, one student wrote without judgment that Mike was someone who "didn't want to rock the boat." In other words, readers maintained the motherhood mandate by not censuring Mike for the same behaviors that earned Phyllis their contempt.

Readers maintained the motherhood mandate by not censuring Mike for the same behaviors that earned Phyllis their contempt.

Luna

Story Synopsis

In *Luna* (Peters, 2004), 15-year-old Regan negotiates high school and a new crush while keeping her brother's transgender identity a secret from their parents and peers. Regan reveals, through flashbacks, that Liam identified as a girl from an early age, that their mother feigned ignorance of his transgender identity, and that their father both denied and railed against it. Regan is the only witness to Liam's despair as he contemplates life as a male and attempts increasingly public transitions to Luna. On his eighteenth birthday, Liam comes to breakfast as Luna for the first time, and her father demands that she assume her male identity or never return home. Liam's income as a beta game tester enables him to move to Seattle, as Luna, to pursue a new life under the mentorship of transgender Teri Lynn.

Regan and Liam's mother, Patrice O'Neill, is an enterprising wedding planner. Although Regan and her father resent Weddings by Patrice, Liam recognizes that their mother is smart and would have pursued a professional career sooner if she had postponed marriage and children until she finished college. Regan, however, thinks mothering is "the most important job in the world" (p. 60) and does not understand her mother's dissatisfaction. She recounts overhearing an argument during which her mother yelled at her father that full-time motherhood was "mindless" and "stifling" (p. 136) and that she was "dying inside" (p. 137). So, Patrice saves herself by immersing herself in her work.

On the morning Luna reveals herself to her family, Patrice looks directly at Luna and then turns away to continue her phone conversation with her assistant. After confronting Patrice for not defending Luna, Regan realizes that her mother always knew about Liam's transgender identity. She also suspects that her mother made her medications, particularly her hormones, available to Liam. Regan resents her mother, believing she could have made Luna's life easier by acknowledging the situation, helping Jack come to terms with it, and raising Luna as a girl. As they sit together at the airport awaiting Luna's flight to Seattle, Luna confirms Regan's suspicions and encourages her to recognize that Patrice supported Liam to the best of her ability. Regan wonders if she has been wrong to criticize her mother so harshly: "Was she a monster, or a martyr? Or just a mother?" (p. 241).

Regan and Liam's father, Jack O'Neill, "had been downsized by Sears and had to take a flunky job at the Home Depot" (p. 7). That, along with the fact that Patrice's successful business elevated her "from Wife and Mother to More Significant Other" (p. 7), compromises his patriarchal position as breadwinner. He is adamant that Regan and Liam perform gender traditionally. Jack expects Liam to rebuild cars with him and play sports; he even goes so far as to meet Liam after class and sit in the bleachers while Liam tries out for the baseball team. Jack confides to Regan that all he ever wanted was for Liam "to be like every other kid" (p. 103), and Regan feels a "sudden surge of sympathy for [him]" (p. 122) when Jack asks Regan if Liam is gay. Even though Jack tells Luna she is "sick" (p. 222) on the morning she comes out to her family,

Regan sympathizes with him because he feels "inadequate as a father" (p. 228).

Maligning Patrice and Forgiving Jack

Twelve of the 24 females and 1 of the 4 males in this study wrote response statements criticizing Patrice O'Neill, and no one approved of her as a mother. Readers sharply criticized her for transgressing the motherhood mandate by prioritizing her business over her children. One reader thought she was "selfish," one "just wanted to punch her awake," while another believed she was "disengaged" from her family because of her business. Rebecca censured Patrice for work/family conflict, writing that she was "furious" when Patrice continued talking with her assistant after Luna appeared at breakfast. Even though Liam talks with Regan about their mother's intelligence and need for meaningful work beyond childrearing, these readers agreed with Regan that motherhood fulfills *good* mothers—but not Patrice. These responses support the notion that mothers are supposed to engage in work that allows them to be emotionally and physically available to their children; good mothers spend significant time interacting and connecting with their children. These readers faulted Patrice for escaping into her work (and her medications) rather than being present for her children.

The motherhood mandate also dictates that a mother must be nurturing and put her family's needs before her own. Readers believed Patrice failed in this area, as well. Several readers were angry with Patrice because "she should have been more supportive" and should "love her child unconditionally." Chelsie expressed anger toward Patrice because "she immerses herself in work and takes antidepressants, stimulants, and everything in between so she can pretend not to notice the struggles within the family. Mothers are supposed to be more nurturing and supporting." Gina's extended response addresses several aspects of the motherhood mandate, but particularly encapsulates the expectation that a mother must be self-sacrificing to the extent that she willingly gives up *her* identity:

> I was angry at the mother, Patrice. . . . Her attitude was such that she felt it was beneath her to fulfill the traditional role of mother. . . . Instead of helping Liam, she turned away from the problem and allowed him to steal her estrogen and wear her clothing in secret. So not only does she scorn the role of mother, which is horrible to me, she also emasculates her husband, emotionally abandons her children, and is self-absorbed. Isn't family above self, especially when it is your very own child? Wouldn't you do anything for your child? By undertaking the sacred vow of marriage, don't you agree to lose a part of yourself to be part of something greater?

Some readers were furious that Patrice knew about but did not deal directly and openly with Luna's identity, despite the fact that Luna reveals that she and Patrice maintained an "unspoken truth" (p. 241) for the good of everyone in the family. Kalla felt this denied Luna the support she deserved: "That pissed me off so much because [Patrice] didn't handle it at all. She didn't try to help Luna through this struggle in her life, and she didn't try to inform her husband and keep her family together. What was she thinking?" Readers ignored that Patrice "handled it" by covertly making her medications available to Luna and secretly giving her feminine birthday presents.

The motherhood mandate also dictates that a mother must be nurturing and put her family's needs before her own.

Regarding the medication, another student alleged, "I really do believe that Luna's mom tried to kill her indirectly [by] leaving the pills out where she could get to them easily." Accusing Patrice of attempted filicide goes far beyond faulting her for transgressing the motherhood mandate. It would undeniably have been better if Patrice had taken Luna to a physician for the appropriate hormones, but Luna repeatedly states that Patrice did the best she could. Readers did not see this as good enough, though. They believed it was up to Patrice to educate Jack about transgender identity, to mediate the conflict between her husband and Luna, and to support Luna openly and unconditionally.

Seven of the 24 females and 2 of the 4 males wrote statements excusing Jack O'Neill's behavior, and no student criticized him without justifying his actions. This is more than double the statements written about Mike Shreves, and the statements were forgiving rather than factual. It is possible that more students responded to Jack and did so in this merciful way because Regan repeatedly expressed empathy for her father. Students may have echoed Regan's

sentiments without critiquing or interrogating them. Whatever the reason, readers expressed a level of understanding of Jack's actions that were absent in the comments about Mike and certainly absent in the comments about both mothers.

Many students identified Jack as sexist, but seemed to accept it as a naturalistic rather than as an offensive, cultural construct. Jocelyn stated, "The dad came off as a typical father figure, pressuring their boys into sports and following their footsteps." Chelsie simply stated, "Their dad was overbearingly masculine and traditional. He felt that there were specific jobs for women, like laundry and cooking, and specific jobs for men, like playing sports and yard work." Even though she used the phrase "overbearingly masculine and traditional," she did not fault Jack for his views. As readers recognized Jack as a "typical father figure," they accepted and upheld the breadwinner-caregiver model of gender-linked parenting; they forgave him for his sexist attitude because it fits the traditional stereotype.

I was surprised by the vehemence with which these students upheld the breadwinner-caregiver model and the motherhood mandate as they maligned mothers and forgave fathers.

Readers also justified Jack's enforcement of gender-linked behavior. They sympathized that he simply "wanted the perfect son," and they believed he insisted that Liam perform traditionally male activities because he actually knew about Liam's transgender identity and "had hopes of changing him," but "was frustrated with his lack of progress." None of these readers faulted Jack for not accepting Liam as Luna. Evidencing a flagrant double standard, they didn't expect him to display unconditional love and acceptance toward his child but noted his wish for the "perfect son," a "regular boy," or a "masculine male." No readers expected Jack to nurture or support Luna; they just noted his frustrated hope that Liam would change to meet *his* expectation.

Students also drew on cultural narratives that value sons over daughters to forgive Jack. Chelsie believed Jack thought that by allowing Liam to break with the male stereotype, "he would be forced to accept that he was 'losing' a son and could not bear the emotional disappointment he would have." Lyndsey also "found some sympathy for [Jack] because he just wanted a son." Ethan "felt pain and a sense of loss" for Jack who was "searching for his son, trying to find out who he is, wanting to understand." This statement is particularly glaring, since there is no evidence in the novel that Jack made any attempt to understand Luna. Ethan further believed Jack wanted "only the best for his child." This implies that Jack knows what is best and ignores that Jack threw Luna out of the house. Thus, Jack was forgiven time and time again for his unrelenting, gendered expectations. He was seen as "losing a son," yet no one censured him for not celebrating the fact that he was gaining a daughter. And, unlike Patrice, he was forgiven for putting his own emotional needs before Luna's.

Implications

I find myself returning to Hauser's (2015) question, "What is it about our gendered parenting roles that we cling to so tightly?" (p. 329). I was surprised by the vehemence with which these students upheld the breadwinner-caregiver model and the motherhood mandate as they maligned mothers and forgave fathers. Turning to existing literature, I found only one study involving ninth and tenth graders' views of parents in realistic and historical fiction (Harmon & Gonzalez, 2003). These students expected parents to serve as role models, to be supportive and caring, and to balance mandates with opportunities for independent decision making. This dearth of research indicates the need for studies involving preservice teachers' cultural models of parenting. Those of us who teach know what a demanding profession it is, and my students' responses set them up for mother-blame and the very real problems associated with work/family conflict. I am also concerned about the implications of upholding traditional parenting roles on teachers' perceptions of their students' parents. Too often, I hear mother-blame expressed when children's homework is not done or when they come to school without necessary supplies or appropriate clothing, and I now recognize this criticism as an expression of the motherhood mandate. Hopefully, this study will lay the ground-

work for further research regarding parenting models and cultural expectations.

Admittedly, this study looks only at white, middle-class, heterosexual, two-parent households, which are only a subsection of the array of family structures and parenting styles. Future research looking at readers' responses to a range of family and parenting models is needed. YA novels featuring nontraditional families abound and would be valuable venues for studying preservice teachers' responses to diverse families and parenting. *Dumplin'* (Murphy, 2015) features an overweight female protagonist in a household headed by a single mother, while *Husky* (Sayre, 2015) features an overweight male protagonist in a multigenerational household comprising his mother and grandmother. *I'll Give You the Sun* (Nelson, 2015) is a novel featuring a single father and a gay adolescent, and *If I Was Your Girl* (Russo, 2016) features a trans protagonist living with her father. LGBTQ parents are represented in novels from the classic *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* (Woodson, 1997) to the two moms in *Saving Montgomery Sole* (Tamika, 2016). Additionally, in *Piecing Me Together* (Watson, 2017), Jade lives with her single mother and uncle, and Katie lives with her single mother, special-needs brother, and aging grandmother in *Unbecoming* (Downham, 2016).

Finally, these preservice teachers' responses led me to reconsider my teaching pedagogy. My students did not arrive at a "critical reading of the text as a social and political construct" (Cai, 2008, p. 216) as I had intended. I am still committed to the movement from aesthetic to efferent response, but realize I must be more purposeful in guiding my students to critical reflection. Critical reading extends from aesthetic response when readers become aware of their "misconceptions, biases, and prejudices" (Cai, 2008, p. 217) and scrutinize them for their sociocultural influences. This occurs when students identify how texts position them and how the cultural contexts and ideologies they bring with them to their reading shape their responses (Connors & Rish, 2015; Lewis, 2000; Schwartz, 2014). I believe that achieving this deep, critical reflection requires purposefully and strategically guiding students to recognize their "otherwise unchallenged cultural assumptions" (Hancock, 2008, p. 95) by front-loading instruction about cultural ideologies and posing more teacher-initiated questions during discussions so cultural storylines *are* deconstructed and disrupted.

To begin to encourage student critique of the cultural assumptions they bring to their reading, I have revised the second-section writing prompts as follows (adapted from Apol, 1998; Connors & Rish, 2015; & Rosenblatt, 2005):

- Which of your beliefs or values did you become aware of while reading? How did you develop these beliefs and values; where did they come from?
- Which aspects of the story seem "obvious" or "natural" to you? What cultural narratives did you bring to your reading that made these parts of the story seem familiar?
- Did the book challenge any of your beliefs or prompt you to think about something in a different way? What does this indicate about the author's ideology and your own?
- Describe who the text seems to be addressing. How are you like and unlike this implied reader?

Conclusion

The students in my young adult literature courses were preparing to become licensed teachers of early or middle childhood students, and many will likely become parents. It is also likely that they and their partners will not conform to the breadwinner-caregiver model, though they clung tightly to the motherhood mandate, faulting Phyllis and Patrice for being dedicated to their professions, for not being self-sacrificing enough, for not being nurturing and supportive enough, and for exerting both too much and too little control over their children. While they commented on the fathers' negligence in relating to and supporting their children and for their traditional, sexist behavior, their observations were devoid of blame, and those who commented about Jack O'Neill actually forgave him for his transgressions. Focused interrogation of the breadwinner-caregiver model of parenting and the motherhood mandate, as well as what they mean for both mothers and fathers (and teachers) today, may enable readers to identify their personal beliefs, explore why they hold those beliefs, and determine if such beliefs serve them well now and if they are likely to serve them well in the future. Through critical reflection, we might discover why we cling so tightly

to gendered parenting roles and ask a new question, "What model of parenting makes the most sense for me and for my family?"

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Summer Melody **Pennell**

Chosen Families:

Using and Creating Queer Cultural Capital in a Queer YAL Course

There has been much discussion among young adult literature (YAL) scholars about the need for queer[1] youth in K–12 settings to read diverse and authentic representations of queer youth. While all readers can benefit from queer texts, queer youth (like members of all minority groups) benefit especially from seeing their experiences reflected. Diverse queer texts allow these young readers the chance to see themselves represented, to feel affirmed, and to see possibilities for their own queer futures (Banks, 2009; Bittner, 2010; Mason, Brannon, & Yarborough, 2012). But what about college students? How do they react to queer YAL texts, and what do they gain from reading them?

I taught a queer YAL undergraduate course in 2016, which I described in the syllabus as more than a course about coming out and bullying; it was also a chance to read a variety of genres, talk about the strengths inherent in queer youth experiences, and review relevant work in queer theory. I found my class populated by a queer majority that often expressed the desire to see its identities mirrored in texts. However, as their ages ranged from 18–22 and they were living away from their families of origin, they had more life experiences than many of the high-school-aged protagonists in our novels. They were also looking at their early teen years as their recent past, rather than as a form of fond nostalgia with which older readers (including myself) might approach a YAL text.

As a result, some students had self-proclaimed wisdom gained from being in their early twenties and often expressed frustration with the younger queer main characters' choices in the novels we read. It seemed that these readers were looking at the characters more from the perspective of an exasperated older sibling or friend, and so had a difficult time maintaining distance between themselves and the characters. When they expressed frustration about a character's romantic choices, for example, I had to remind them that these characters were younger teens and that teens make mistakes, at which they would laugh and roll their eyes while continuing to grumble. My students were continuously searching for a queer storyline that was both entertaining and showcased healthy relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. They were, in fact, more judgmental of these relationships than perhaps younger readers would be.

As students examined our queer texts, we engaged in both face-to-face class discussions and virtual conversations on Twitter, using a course hashtag. From this, a strong community dynamic emerged. Being in a class dominated by other queer people and focused on queer issues allowed the students, and myself, to relax. The nature of YAL also allowed students to be more comfortable talking about texts; these were the kinds of books they might read for fun, and many were already comfortable discussing this type of literature. Additionally, our classroom environment was not only supportive but celebratory of queer identities. I aimed to instill this celebration in my curriculum by representing a variety of identities through the novels we read and the queer theories we used to

1. I am using queer as an umbrella term that encompasses diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, genderqueer, gender fluid, and non-binary identities.

analyze the texts. For example, when I introduced the concept of queer cultural capital (Pennell, 2016a) to students, many expressed excitement about a theory that allowed them to analyze the positive aspects of queer communities.

There are six aspects of queer cultural capital that will be defined below, and this article focuses on one: familial. When analyzing a short writing assignment in which students chose one aspect of queer cultural capital to identify within a text, the most popular form chosen was queer familial cultural capital. My initial thoughts about this selection centered on the fact that these college students, many of whom were freshmen, were living away from their kin families for the first time and forming strong relationships with new friends. Thus it seemed logical, in hindsight, that so many would be drawn to the idea of queer familial cultural capital as they explored new relationships. I also felt this familial capital forming in our classroom.

In order to learn what these particular college students gained from reading queer YAL texts, I examine here the ways students utilized queer familial cultural capital to both analyze novels with queer main characters and to imagine and explore queer experiences through creative writing.

In order to learn what these particular college students gained from reading queer YAL texts, I examine here the ways students utilized queer familial cultural capital to both analyze novels with queer main characters and to imagine and explore queer experiences through creative writing. I gave students a working definition of queer familial cultural capital (described below), but students expanded on this and identified new elements. I will discuss how queer familial cultural capital can describe the classroom environment and contribute to student learning. In our classroom, for instance, there was a close sense of community among the students and myself. Through these examples, I hope to demonstrate the value of teaching queer YAL at the college level, both for the intellectual growth it can inspire in students and for the possibilities of community it can create for queer students who may need—whether or not this need is conscious—a space on campus to be themselves without having to justify their experiences or right to exist. I also aim to contribute to scholarship on teaching YAL in college settings outside of teacher preparation programs, as currently there is a paucity of literature on this topic.

Queer Young Adult Literature

As Garden (2014) outlined, in the 1970s, queer characters in young adult literature were punished by being ostracized from their communities or even killed. The 1980s saw improvement on this trope, and there was evidence of influence by queer activist movements like Stonewall and AIDS rights activism (which continued in the 1990s publications), though there were also many books with a straight main character dealing with the queerness of a friend or relative (Garden, 2014). In the 1990s, there were books published that went beyond mainstream lesbian and gay identities and focused more on the queer characters than their relatives and friends (Garden, 2014). However, Banks (2009) noted that consistently from 1980–1995, "LGBTQ characters in YA fiction were secondary, often dead or killed . . . and separated from community and/or family" (p. 35). Scholars and educators, myself included, worry about the impact of such negative storylines on young queer readers.

While queer representations have improved in more contemporary YAL novels, there are still many stereotypical characters and mainstream situations. Crisp (2009) noted that although more recent queer YAL novels do not kill or punish their queer main characters, they still reinscribe heteronormativity (the idea that our society expects everyone to be heterosexual and cisgender) by emphasizing monogamous relationships and using homophobic characters as a way to portray realism. Wickens (2011) explained this same idea by highlighting that in older queer novels, queer sexuality was the problem, while in contemporary novels, homophobia (and I would add transphobia to the assertion) is the problem. This emphasis on homophobia may be due to the publishing industry's own reliance on heteronormative ideas and believing that queer lives must include homophobic experiences by default (Banks, 2009). While most queer people experience homophobia or transphobia, it is not necessarily a central part of queer lives, and queer YAL

should illustrate a wider range of experiences.

Queer YAL suffers from another problem endemic to YAL in general: most characters are white and middle class (Hayn & Hazlett, 2011). There has been improvement in the racial diversity of queer YAL, though like the YAL publishing industry in general, main characters are still predominantly white. Some recent novels that focus on queer characters of color include *More Happy than Not* (Silvera, 2015), *Juliet Takes a Breath* (Rivera, 2016), and *When the Moon Was Ours* (McLemore, 2016); given their popularity, it seems readers desire more racially diverse queer texts. As the call for racial, gender, and sexual diversity grows (such as the #WeNeedDiverseBooks and #OwnVoices Twitter campaigns), it is the hope of authors and readers that publishers will celebrate diverse, intersectional texts.

As queer YAL has gained popularity from readers and notice from publishers, so too has the scholarship on queer YAL grown. The volume *Teaching, Affirming, and Recognizing Trans and Gender Creative Youth* (edited by Miller, 2016) contains chapters on teaching queer YAL. In this collection, Greathouse (2016) discusses using Malinda Lo's *Ash* (2009), a queer retelling of Cinderella, to examine gender roles. Hayn, Clemmons, and Olvey (2016) suggest teaching YAL with transgender characters to open students' minds to transgender identities and recommend investigating author purpose and motivation. While these approaches are written specifically for use in K–12 classrooms, they could be translated to college courses as well.

Another recent publication called *Beyond Borders: Queer Eros and Ethos (Ethics) in LGBTQ Young Adult Literature* (Linville & Carlson, 2015) offers critical examinations of queer YAL using queer theory, as well as strategies and frameworks for teaching queer YAL in K–12 classrooms. I used excerpts from this volume in my college course, and students were especially taken with Thein and Kedley's (2015) chapter that queered the constructs of coming out narratives and coming of age stories. The authors posit that in many queer YAL novels, characters have to come out—and have a definite label to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity—to be considered an adult. This leaves no room for youth who are questioning or for youth's identities to change over time, which (as the authors argue and my students agree) does not represent the reality for queer individuals. This lack of nuance could be why some people, such as a gay student in Thomas, Crisp, and Knezek's (2010) children's literature course, do not see themselves represented in queer YAL.

At the time of this writing, there is a lack of research on teaching queer YAL outside of K–12 education and teacher preparation programs. While both Miller's (2016) and Linville and Carlson's (2015) texts offer vital insight into teaching queer YAL, both are focused on K–12 education and teacher education. In the university setting, Bach (2016) examined 270 syllabi from YAL college courses to find out if preservice teachers were taught about queer YAL in these courses; she found that 67 contained queer texts. However, some of the syllabi listed queer texts as options, so even in the 67 courses, not all students were actually discussing queer YAL. In addition, Pruitt (2016) surveyed professors of college courses on queer literature broadly, but these courses were not focused on queer YAL. As queer YAL courses are beginning to find homes on college campuses, I hope that the scholarship on this topic grows, and we begin to learn how teaching this at the college level (to both English and non-English majors) may differ from teaching it in courses focused on teacher preparation.

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Scholars are also developing ways to analyze queer texts, such as Helmer's (2016) queer literacies framework, which draws from critical literacy and queer theory, and Miller's (2015) queer literacy framework, which provides guidelines for educators of queer inclusion. Blackburn, Clark, and Nemeth (2015), in an expansion of Cart and Jenkins's (2006) work on categorizing LGBTQ YAL, note the difference between LGBTQ-inclusive texts, which sometimes reinforce heteronormativity and gender binaries, and

queer texts, which instead “interrogate heteronormativity by acknowledging a variety of genders, sexes, and desires, as well as foregrounding the sexual, thereby challenging the notion of what counts as normal among them (Blackburn & Clark, 2011)” (p. 12).

[I]t was important to me that the novels we read reflect a wide range of both genre (realistic fiction, fantasy, science fiction, and genre-bending texts) and identity (diverse sexual orientations and gender identities as well as racial and socioeconomic diversity).

Boyd and Bereiter (2017) have created criteria particularly for selecting trans-focused YAL. I have posited that queer cultural capital can be used to analyze memoirs of transgender teens (Pennell, 2016b) and that this framework could also be used to select queer YAL texts that incorporate positive aspects of queer identity. Using these analytical frameworks and critical guidelines, instructors of queer YAL at both the secondary and college levels can critically choose novels that celebrate intersectional queer identities without teaching that queer people have to choose a definitive gender or sexual orientation, acknowledging instead that these identities are flexible across time and space.

Theoretical Framework

Queer cultural capital (Pennell, 2016a) is an asset-based theory intended to highlight the strengths queer people have *because* of, not in spite of, their varied queer identities and the challenges of living in a heteronormative world. There are six forms of queer cultural capital, five of which were adopted from Yosso’s (2005) forms of cultural capital for people of color (aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, and resistant), and I added an additional form: transgressive. These forms of cultural capital highlight the strengths inherent in marginalized communities due to their very marginalization. Rather than seeing the differences of marginalized identities as a deterrent to happiness and success, cultural capital recognizes that these differences create positive qualities. For example, rather than focusing on how difficult it is for people of color to navigate institutions created for white people, Yosso (2005) saw the strengths this builds within people of color as navigational capital and recognized as a skill this ability to work within institutional structures not created with their needs in mind. Yosso (2005) defined familial capital as encompassing the history and social resources that come from family bonds, which can be defined broadly beyond biological kinship.

It is the aspect of familial capital beyond biology that applies most readily to queer familial cultural capital. Queer familial cultural capital was defined in course materials for students as “family history and community memories, social networks and resources. Family can mean families united by kinship or chosen families (common in LGBTQ communities)” (adapted from Yosso, 2005, & Pennell, 2016a). In class, we discussed how queer people often form chosen families, either because their kin families reject them or simply because they find closer bonds with friends. This is a strength of queer communities, one that provides a well-connected social network that can help queer people get through hardships or important milestones in life. For some students, the queer concept of chosen family was new, and they readily engaged in applying this concept to the characters’ relationships in our novels.

Context of the Course

This study took place at a public liberal arts university in the Midwest. The queer YAL course was a lower-division undergraduate class, and the students had a range of majors and experiences with literary analysis at the college level. I wanted the course to expose students to new literature and diverse ideas about queer literature, identities, and theory, agreeing with Hayn and Hazlett (2011) that “the best works portray LGBTQs in various situations and genres, interacting with an array of people, their sexuality simply one part of them” (p. 70). Further, I agree that “by integrating texts with queer community into our curricula, we can show students what the world can and should look like in terms of how we demonstrate respect and appreciation for all facets of our own and others’ identities” (Mason, Brannon, & Yarborough 2012, p. 19).

Thus, it was important to me that the novels we read reflect a wide range of both genre (realistic fiction, fantasy, science fiction, and genre-bending texts) and identity (diverse sexual orientations and gender identities as well as racial and socioeconomic diversity).

Given these priorities, I chose texts using these guidelines: a) the main character had to be queer; b) the plot had to be about more than coming out; c) across the texts, a variety of queer identities had to be represented, and d) across the texts, a variety of genres beyond realistic fiction had to be represented. I also focused on contemporary publications that I hoped would be new to my students, rather than taking a survey or historical approach to text selection. To locate potential texts, I searched for and evaluated recent queer YA publications, looking to create a set of titles that fit my criteria and contained intersectional characters. I found many of these texts at the ALAN Workshop and other English education conferences.

I chose six YA novels: *Afterworlds* (Westerfeld, 2014), *Carry On* (Rowell, 2015), *Huntress* (Lo, 2011), *Openly Straight* (Konigsberg, 2013), *The Art of Being Normal* (Williamson, 2016), and *We Are the Ants* (Hutchinson, 2016). *Huntress* is the only text I had previously taught, though in a middle school setting. A brief description of these texts can be found in Table 1. The course goals were for students to: a) examine the intersections and complexities of LGBTQ identities; b) question and critique the social construction of adolescence and LGBTQ+ youth; c) improve their skills as critical readers and writers; d) learn to communicate effectively with classmates and a global Twitter audience; and e) analyze texts using theory (primarily queer theory, but also intersectionality and feminist theories). For theory, I drew primarily from an edited collection on queer theory analyses of queer YAL (Linville & Carlson, 2015).

Students completed a variety of writing assignments throughout the course. For the first novel we read, *The Art of Being Normal*, students completed a more traditional writing assignment, analyzing the main characters' relationships to their family members. For *Carry On*, students had a more creative assignment—to write queer fanfiction involving characters of their choosing. As the semester progressed, I gave students choices between writing a traditional analytic response, generating a PowerPoint presentation, or creating an artistic representation and providing an artistic statement (though they had to choose each option once) in responding to the novels. For the artistic representations, students drew illustrations of character personalities and curated playlists that demonstrated their analyses of the novel.

Additionally, all students completed two assignments on queer cultural capital. In the first, they identified examples of each form of queer cultural capital (described in detail below) in *Openly Straight*. Then, they chose one form of capital and in a 2–3-page paper, used this form to analyze any book read during our course to that point (all books except *We*

Table 1. Descriptions of course texts

Book Title	Author	Genre	Queer Identities (either named or inferred)	Other Identities/ Issues
Afterworlds	Scott Westerfeld	Realistic/ paranormal	Lesbian, demisexual	Indian American (Gujarati), Hindu
Carry On	Rainbow Rowell	Fantasy/ fanfiction	Gay (male)	Orphan, mixed-ethnicity (secondary character is Indian and English)
Huntress	Malinda Lo	Fantasy	Lesbian	Asian, spirituality
Openly Straight	Bill Konigsberg	Realistic/ sports lit	Gay (male)	Racial minority status as tied to mental health (secondary character is African American)
The Art of Being Normal	Lisa Williamson	Realistic	Transgender (female and male)	Low socioeconomic status
We Are the Ants	Shaun Hutchinson	Realistic/ sci-fi	Gay (male) Queer (male)	Mental health

Are the Ants). Their final writing assignment was to write a 5–7-page paper that either analyzed a theme (in one or multiple novels) using a theory from class or to use a theory as inspiration for a creative writing piece, including a short artistic statement. Students were fairly evenly split between the two options, even though only a few were creative writing majors.

Another major component of class was Twitter. Students were required to have a public Twitter account (though they did not have to use their real names or photos) to communicate with their classmates, myself, and the novels' authors. We used a course hashtag, which allowed me to easily look through and evaluate my students' tweets for grading purposes. I required students to tweet a minimum of twice per week (many exceeded this) and to tweet our authors at least three times. Students understood that the authors may not communicate with them, but to our delight, many were responsive. Using Twitter allowed students to talk easily with each other both during and outside of class. It also allowed me to communicate with my students more casually than my typical professorial demeanor, which in turn served to help bond us as a community. I could also use the Twitter feed to see what students were interested in or confused about, which helped inform my instruction and aided student learning.

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Research Methods

In order to examine student learning surrounding queer YAL texts, as well as how the classroom community contributed to this learning, my research questions were: 1) How were students identifying and defining queer familial cultural capital within queer YAL? 2) How did queer familial cultural capital apply to our classroom dynamic? To answer these questions, I approached the data using a case study method (Stake, 2000). The phenomenon of investigation was student work surrounding queer familial cultural capital (Pennell, 2016a). The data set came from a broader study of the course at large and included student response papers and creative projects, the final paper, students' tweets using our course hashtag, end-of-semester surveys and demographic forms, and my own reflective and analytical memos of the course.

Participants

Twenty-three students enrolled in the course, and 18 participated in the study. The majority of students were white, reflecting the demographics of the university. Student majors included English, creative writing, biology, business, chemistry, and psychology. Students were diverse in gender identity (genderqueer, nonbinary, cisgender men and women, and transgender men and women) and sexual orientation (identities included lesbian, bisexual, gay, pansexual, asexual, biromantic, and panromantic, with only three participants identifying as heterosexual).

Out of the 18 participants, seven wrote about queer familial cultural capital in their short essay assignment, making it the most popular choice out of six possibilities. (The next most popular was navigational, with five.)

This article focuses on the work of three students (all names are pseudonyms): Birch, a white, gay, cisgender male junior; Lily, a white, lesbian, cisgender female freshman; and Mahogany, a white, queer aromantic, genderqueer junior. These students used queer familial cultural capital for both their short queer cultural capital essay and their final project, allowing for an in-depth case study examination of their use of the theory. Birch's final project was a memoir, Lily's was contemporary fiction, and Mahogany's was fantasy. Consequently, the primary data sources for this study were the queer cultural capital short essay, final project, end-of-semester surveys (which asked their opinion on queer cultural capital theory), and tweets from the three focal students.

Data Analysis

As I was the course instructor, all participants' responses remained anonymous until the final course grades were submitted. Students delivered IRB-

approved consent forms and end-of-semester surveys to a colleague who kept them until the semester was complete. Data were coded, using both open and in-vivo codes, using MAXQDA analytical software to discover prominent themes. I began by coding the queer cultural capital essay and final projects of the focal students. Initial codes were organized into categories and then translated to themes. For example, codes such as "acceptance of identity" and "encouragement" were organized into a category of "support," which was further refined to the theme of "support for personal queer identity." Surveys and tweets from the focal students were coded to confirm these categories and themes, and tweets from other participants are also reported as they relate to the themes described here, particularly regarding my second research question about our classroom environment. Additionally, I consulted my reflections and notes on the course as part of the data analysis.

Findings: Exploring Queer Familial Cultural Capital

In their written assignments and through their tweets, each focal student demonstrated how queer familial cultural capital was, or can be, formed; they were creating the kind of queer narratives they wanted to read. These students identified several aspects of queer familial cultural capital that went beyond the definition provided. After analyzing the data, three of the most common themes were support for personal queer identity, learning experiences, and adventure.

Support for Queer Identities

Support for personal queer identities is crucial to any queer person's well-being, but perhaps more important to queer youth and young adults. Unsurprisingly, students wrote extensively about this when referring to queer familial cultural capital. As Mahogany wrote in his short essay, "Family . . . play[s] a huge role in affirming a queer person's identity." Mahogany wrote about the enthusiastic and at times overbearing support Rafe has from his parents in *Openly Straight,* which allowed him "to grow and help others that do not have that same support," as when he spoke at other high schools on queer issues. Mahogany also addressed this need for support in his final project when he wrote a fantasy story about a transgender character, Cas, who found a chosen family that accepted his identity as a prince rather than the princess he was expected to be by his royal family members. When Cas told his new friends about his identity, the leader of the traveling performers said, "Kid, you're not the only one with a story like that. When you need a family, someone has to take up the reins, and we protect our own." Mahogany was perhaps projecting his own desires for unconditional familial support onto his character.

Birch and Lily also wrote about supportive chosen families in their short stories. Birch wrote about his own experience at a Pride festival, where his friends encouraged him to talk to a cute boy. The cute boy turned out to be dating the girl he was with, which he revealed to Birch the next day after he and Birch had flirted. Yet despite the initial deception, Birch felt a kinship with the pair and remained friends. He felt "they'd given [him] an amazing couple of days [and] an incredible way to remember [his] first Pride," which supported his own gay identity. Lily wrote about a fictional group of "queer musketeers" who supported other queer people who were abandoned by their families of origin. This group of chosen family members lived together, helped each other find clothing to outwardly express their gender identities, and provided both emotional and material support.

Support for personal queer identities is crucial to any queer person's well-being, but perhaps more important to queer youth and young adults.

Support was also a class value that was evident in both face-to-face and Twitter conversations. In a class conversation on high school experiences, Birch shared that someone asked him if he sat under the painting of the school mascot in the cafeteria. Unbeknownst to him, that was a coded question for "Are you gay?" After class, students in the course referred to themselves as "the mascot," began tweeting[2] their own stories from high school, and shared affirming comments, such as when Oak tweeted, "Seeing fellow

2. To maintain anonymity, dates and twitter usernames are omitted, and tweets may be paraphrased. Original spelling and conventions are maintained as much as possible.

[mascots] 2day rly does help relieve stress. [We] gotta stick together." Lily also sought support from the class when she tweeted, "I always feel weird not living up to the stereotypical gay appearance. I feel like I need to cut my hair and buy a cat," to which she received reassuring replies from classmates.

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These learning experiences about queer culture helped solidify our familial bond as students learned that even members of the queer community have more to learn about queer identities outside of their own.

Current events that occurred during the course of the semester also increased the students' desire for emotional support of queerness. The largest event was the 2016 presidential election, which left my students (and me) scared and uncertain about the landscape for queer rights. Our class community, which already felt a bit like a queer book club among friends, became more important to students. The night of the election, students tweeted using our course hashtag to vent their fears. Some students expressed their appreciation for their classmates, such as Iris who tweeted, "So thankful for my support systems today. My mom, my sister [Oak], and the rest of [our class]." The next day, I used Twitter to gather students on the quad. So while queer familial cultural capital was a helpful tool for highlighting and analyzing the strengths in queer YAL characters, I found it described the community we built in our classroom as well. Students frequently commented that the class environment was a positive experience for them, and undoubtedly the support we demonstrated for one another was a large part of that.

Learning Experiences

Lily, Mahogany, and Birch's work also indicated that support from queer familial cultural capital sometimes included learning experiences. Often this learning was about the queer community, but it also included learning for other interests. For example, Lily wrote that in *Afterworlds*, "Imogen is Darcy's main connection to both the world of writing and the queer community, and Darcy learns a great deal about each of them from her girlfriend [Imogen]." Mahogany wrote that in *Openly Straight*, Rafe's mom taught him the history of the American gay rights movement, which was important to his development. Mahogany noted that:

> [I]t is excellent that he is learning this because he has yet to face challenges that he would later come across when he was out publicly. By helping him to learn this history, she is also preparing him for the world that he lives in, one in which he will still face prejudice.

According to Mahogany's argument, queer youth benefit from learning queer history, as they can draw from this history if they experience homophobia in their own lives. Birch talked about learning in more subtle ways, such as his depiction of Pride as a space for him and his new friends to explore their queer identities and learn more about who they were attracted to and how to act on those attractions.

The concept of learning about the queer community extended to our classroom. When discussing *The Art of Being Normal,* which many students found to be a problematic portrayal of transgender identities, Lily tweeted that even if it "may not have been the best representation . . . it and [our class] showed me fascinating new LGBTQ perspectives." As the instructor, my desire for student learning stretched beyond our texts and queer theory to knowledge about queer communities and queer pop culture as well. For instance, when I pondered if Westerfeld named Imogen after Imogene Threadgoode, the queer tomboy in *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* (Flagg, 1987), I was shocked that my students were unfamiliar with this book and movie. In response, I tweeted images of Imogene and her partner Ruth from the film. Similarly, while students were in small groups to discuss *Huntress,* I talked with students about how Lo was likely making a lesbian joke by naming a city Cathair. One student tweeted our comments, and then other students explained the joke to classmates who did not understand: a stereotype about lesbians is that they love cats. This novel includes a central lesbian relationship, and the city Cathair is cat-hair. These learning experiences about queer culture helped solidify our familial bond as students learned that even members of the queer community have more to learn about queer identities outside of their own.

Adventure

Adventure often accompanied queer familial cultural capital as characters in our novels (and those in the three focal students' short stories) explored their worlds. Birch argued that "narratives focused on adventure and friendship more accurately depict the LGBTQ YA experience" than stereotypical coming out stories. These moments of adventure depict queer characters as in-depth and well-rounded people whose sexuality is only a part of their identity. In his essay on queer familial cultural capital in *The Art of Being Normal,* Birch wrote about Kate and Leo's (the main characters) journey to find Leo's father, which involves a train ride where Kate presents as a woman in public for the first time, a drunken night of karaoke, and a swim in a freezing ocean. Birch's description illustrates the overlap between adventure and support in queer identities, as he wrote, "[A]lthough Leo is not incredibly supportive of Kate at the beginning of the trip to see his dad, over the course of their journey, he starts to reach back to Kate, primarily by talking about their shared queer experiences."

Birch also explored his own adventure of crashing a wedding and finding his way to the roof of a hotel with new friends he met at Pride. He described it as "God giving [me my] 'teen rebel' moment on a beautiful queer platter." In Lily's short story, "Queer Musketeers," the main character narrated how "the pride flag draped over her shoulders made her look like a vengeful goddess of the queers. Which, technically, she was." Lily's characters went on adventures in support of their queer friends, such as rescuing someone from conversion therapy. Mahogany's fantasy story was also an adventure, as the main character (Cas) was running away from home. To add an additional aspect of adventure, the performers Cas traveled with were story dancers, which Mahogany characterized as capable of "weaving great tales of adventure, magic, and fantasy together with only the music and their dancing."

Even though a classroom is usually a contained space, we managed to have a class adventure when we went on a field trip to attend a lecture on magic and medicine at another university. The lecture was advertised as discussing the science behind the magic in the Harry Potter series (Rowling, 1997–2007), and since we were reading *Carry On* (Rowell, 2015), which is inspired by the series, it seemed a natural fit for our class. However, the lecture was different than expected, and the speaker discussed medicine in a way that made us all doubt our doctors' training. We communicated via Twitter during the lecture to vent our feelings, especially on the euphemisms the lecturer was unintentionally (we think) using: asking volunteers for magic tricks to "excite the wood" and to "gently touch the tip" of a pointy metal object. Amusingly, *Carry On* contains several similar euphemisms—mostly about the main male characters "pushing" magic energy into each other and their frequent discussions about their wands—which we had discussed extensively in class. So this lecture fit better with our class than we initially thought. I tweeted "gamefaces" to the class when I myself was struggling not to laugh at the speaker's word choices. When we debriefed about this experience in the following class, many students expressed that they were glad we all could experience it together. Like other class experiences, this little adventure brought us together and strengthened our queer familial cultural capital.

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Implications for College YAL Courses

In queer communities, chosen families are vital. For this semester, our class became a chosen family where students sought support. As young adults learning to live on their own, my students were exploring their identities and creating strong friendships outside of their families and home towns. In writing about transgender YAL, Bittner (2010) stated that such novels "can be seen as a form of therapy that will aid young people in developing healthy self-acceptance" (p. 31). This was certainly true of my queer students, both transgender and cisgender, as they related the characters' experiences to their own. I think this is why many students were drawn to queer familial cultural capital as an analytical tool.

This was especially true for freshmen, like Lily, who were developing these new chosen family rela-

tionships for the first time while living apart from their families of origin. Lily's tweets echoed the queer familial cultural capital present in class: "love you guys and I hope you're having a wonderful day!" and "[our class] makes my day so much better." Creating a welcoming classroom environment for queer students is just as important at the college level as it is in K–12 environments. It may also be more easily done, as including queer YAL texts in a college setting rarely involves parental backlash. This freedom was likely felt by students who were discovering their identities, whether their own family was supportive or not, because they could thrive in the supportive space of our classroom as well as in the relative freedom of new living spaces in college.

I do not want to suggest that only queer faculty should teach queer YAL texts or courses. Students need faculty allies to create inclusive curricular experiences, and by reading queer YAL, college students can reflect on their own adolescent experiences and see new possibilities for forming chosen families through literature.

Students often referred to queer familial capital elements of "chosen families" and "shared queer experiences" when discussing our queer novels. They discussed secondary characters who supported their queer friends unconditionally—Rafe's best friend, Claire Olivia, in *Openly Straight* and Penelope, Simon Snow's formidable best friend, in *Carry On*—and noted how important that was to a queer character's journey. Birch's end-of-semester survey stated that he "benefitted from [a queer cultural capital] understanding" because the theory "helped [him] on a personal level to reframe [his] experience." This illustrates that using an asset-based queer theory can benefit both students' analysis of a text and their feelings about their own identity—at least in the case of my students, who eagerly used queer familial cultural capital and expanded it, which is what I hope for as a queer scholar. In future iterations of this course, I would like to incorporate more asset-based theories to demonstrate the multiple ways queer identities are positive and to continue affirming students' own identities.

The next time I teach this course, I will strive harder to represent more identities outside of the typical white, middle-class, cisgender identity and will look for more queer books, as defined by Blackburn et al. (2015) as literature that "offers multiple and conflicting ideologies related to sexuality and gender [that] manifest themselves in queer elements, such as disruptions of norms as they pertain to sexuality, gender, families, homes, and time" (p. 24). As more students (in my limited experience) are identifying as asexual (someone who experiences little or no sexual attraction, though they may experience romantic attraction), genderqueer or non-binary (someone whose gender is neither male nor female, but in the middle), or agender (someone who does not identify with any gender), teachers of YAL at all levels should work to include these identities in the works they teach.

Conclusion: Finding a Queer Home in College

Banks (2009) wrote that most queer YA novels in the 1980s–1990s were about characters' struggles with sexuality, which "continues to reinforce the notion that one's sexuality is inherently controversial and conflicted, and I'm not sure that is true for all LGBT adolescents today" (p. 35). My students seemed to largely agree with this latter sentiment. They relished narratives that did not center on sexuality and instead focused on adventures, friendships, and other elements of adolescents' experiences. They liked reading about how Rafe's family, however overbearing, was supportive of his sexual orientation (Konigsberg, 2013). They enjoyed characters who used magic (Lo, 2011; Rowell, 2015); dealt with aliens, family issues, and mental health (Hutchinson, 2016); learned to live on their own (Westerfeld, 2014); and traveled to unknown places together (Lo, 2011; Williamson, 2015). For my students, these shared experiences bonded the characters together and demonstrated queer familial capital.

Research has shown (though these findings are likely obvious to those in marginalized communities) that queer students feel less stigmatized when queer identities are represented in the curriculum and when they have an "out" faculty member (Linley & Nguyen,

2015). In this class, my students were able to experience both, and several expressed to me that these factors were meaningful to them. I, too, was forming new chosen families as a professor, and that extended network now included my students. The straight students were also fundamental to the community, and hopefully gained some insight into authentic queer experiences, as did the straight students in Pruitt's (2015) study.

However, I do not want to suggest that only queer faculty should teach queer YAL texts or courses. Students need faculty allies to create inclusive curricular experiences, and by reading queer YAL, college students can reflect on their own adolescent experiences and see new possibilities for forming chosen families through literature. Any faculty with background in literature could teach a course as I outlined here and create a space celebratory of diverse queer identities. I also recommend professors try Twitter or other forms of informal communication that will allow them to get to know their students better in a low-pressure environment. Studying queer YAL in an inclusive, familial environment is important both for students' learning experiences and personal development. As Birch wrote in his essay on *The Art of Being Normal,* "[I]n a world that pressures queer people to be 'normal,' community is our greatest refuge." This idea was echoed in Lily's short story: "She had never felt more loved and accepted in her entire life. She wasn't gross, or weird, or broken. She was normal and whole and good and even though things would never be easy, she knew that she was going to be okay. She was with her family. She was home."

This queer YAL course was a refuge and a home to the students and to me, a refuge I did not know I wanted until I experienced it. Later, some students told me they had similar reactions to the course; they had not realized how much they craved an inclusive and celebratory queer space until they were in one. The queer familial cultural capital I experienced with my students was invaluable as we became chosen family, and this concept enabled them to analyze queer YAL in new and sophisticated ways. Focusing on the strengths within queer communities allowed for both scholarly investigations and personal affirmation.

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No Longer an Orphan:

Narratives of Adoption in Young Adult Fantasy and Science Fiction

Young adult literature is rife with adoption narratives. Although they are often categorized as orphan stories, these tales nearly always include an element of adoption. The adoption in the story may be official or it may be an informal arrangement, but it has long been a trope in books for and about children. Consider the importance of adoption in the popular, sentimental "orphan" tales of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, tales that have been shown to exhibit the indispensable orphan girl who uses "affective discipline" to lead her adoptive family to redemption and wellness (Sanders 2011). Here and elsewhere authors appropriate the orphan story because the orphan represents a universal pain of isolation, a pain with which readers can readily empathize (Kimball, 1999).

Young adult literature has seen another boom in adoption tales since the mid-twentieth century, largely due to the orphan quest narrative. These orphan/adoption narratives rarely cast the adopted child in a healthy family setting. In fact, in fantasy novels, adopted children imbued with special powers must use their abilities to free themselves from some unpleasant situation, and this plot arrangement can mean that the adoptive family is vilified as part of the problem rather than the solution for the child.

While contemporary texts continue to sensationalize the orphan, some recent fantasy novels offer a more cultivated appreciation for adoptive families. By re-centering these orphan narratives as adoption narratives, educators can take the opportunity to sensitize readers to adoption issues and advocate for children in adoptive families. This article looks at examples of respectful adoption language and adoption microaggressions to initiate a spectrum of adoption sensitivity across young adult novels.

Providing Context and Defining Terms to Ground the Analysis

Contemplating the adoption narrative solicits questions around how the long-term vilification of adoptive families affects readers who themselves identify as part of an adoptive family. Adoption actively influences a large number of households. In 2002, 64% of Americans reported that they had a connection—either a friend or family member—who had been adopted (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2002). According to the 2010 census, 1.5 million American children and young adults, or 2.4% of those under the age of 18, are adopted (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). Numbers not represented here are the siblings, parents, and birth parents of adopted young people—readers who might also see themselves caricatured in an adoption narrative. Adults who were adopted do not figure into that census data.

Controversy exists over the language that should be used to discuss people involved in adoption. The term "biological parents" has been used and more recently cast aside as unworthy of the very real tie that exists between the family of origin and the child. Since the 1970s, a large segment of the adoption community has lobbied for the acceptance of respectful or positive adoption language, such as "birth mother" and "birth father." More recently, the term "first parents" has been championed "to more fully recognize

the primacy of the relationship that these parents have in the lives of their children"; however, this term has not been fully embraced by the adoption community (Baden, 2016, p. 2). The adopting parents are termed simply "parents." If called upon to do so, parents might explain that they have one "biological daughter" and one who "was adopted." Social workers use the term "adoption triad" to recognize that the child, the adoptive parents, and the birth parents are all always present in the equation of adoption.

While the adoptive community may not be regarded as a maligned group, it is a minority community that can suffer emotionally from mainstream culture's uninformed assumptions about adoptive identity and priorities.

While some advocates believe recent language choices belittle the role of the birth parents, this is generally the language used by social workers and those involved with adoption. For the purposes of this paper, biological parents will be called "birth parents," parents will be called "adoptive parents," and the child might be referred to as the "adopted child" to clarify this element of identity. However, this stressing of the adoptive relationship is discouraged in conversations about adoption in general.

Without respectful language training, there is little clear semantic recourse available to young people faced with the devaluing question, "Who are your real parents?" That question in general raises the issue of "adoptism," a term now being used in some limited adoption circles to describe prejudice against families formed by adoption because they are not seen as inherently authentic families. Baden (2016) has repurposed the term "microaggressions," taken from conversations about racism, for the world of adoption. Adoption microaggressions can be subtle and possibly unconscious, but they are inherently detrimental to the adoption kinship network. Microaggressions can include the microinsults of positing young people as commodities, expecting young people to be grateful for their adoption, and emphasizing an external expectation that young people need to find their birth parents to be complete (Baden, 2016).

Studies have shown that young adult literature is effective in increasing empathy around a host of social issues and communities, including teen pregnancy, people with disabilities, the LGBT community, and undocumented migrants (Cummins, 2013; Hayn, Clemmons, & Olvey, 2016; Hill, 2009; Malo-Juvera, 2015). While the adoptive community may not be regarded as a maligned group, it is a minority community that can suffer emotionally from mainstream culture's uninformed assumptions about adoptive identity and priorities.

Problematic Representations of Adoption in Literature

There is a subset of adoption-related books marketed to help very young adopted children process this element of their identity. Picturebooks about adoption tend to remove power from the birth parents in favor of honoring the adoptive parents. Jerome and Sweeney (2013) reviewed 104 picturebooks about adoption and found that "birth parents are often represented as failing to be 'good' parents" (p. 698). So even within children's literature created for the adoptive community, the portrayal of actors differs from the way those actors are discussed in the contemporary professional language.

From a review of the middle grade and young adult literature, it seems that novelists are typically even less intentional about portraying adoptive families in respectful, realistic ways. Authors of young adult fantasy novels that include adoption interact with a vulnerable community at odds with mainstream perceptions. For example, Michelle Lovric's *The Undrowned Child* (2009) is set in 1899 and tells the story of how young Teodora Stampara teams up with the mermaids of Venice to stop an evil threatening the city. While the story is set in the past, the narrative has a modern feel and modern sensibilities. Teodora was born in Venice, but lived most of her life in Naples with a nurturing adoptive family. When the family travels to Venice, Teodora becomes involved with saving the city from an evil influence. In the process, she discovers the identity of her birth family. At times, the novel emphasizes her birth identity in

a less thoughtful way: "[I]t felt strangely beautiful to say the words 'my family' to describe her real parents, Marta and Daniele Gasperin" (p. 292). Teodora longs to stay in Venice "[w]here my real family is buried" (p. 420). While connecting with her birth heritage is certainly a powerful benefit to Teodora, the language used to describe her birth family applies less thoughtful, mainstream terms to her situation and, in a sense, disrespects her very real relationship with her adoptive parents.

Narratives can mishandle either the language of adoption or the depiction of it, or both. Haddix's *Children of Exile* (2016), the first book in a new series, can be faulted on both scores. The actual plot point of adoption ends up being vilified; it is associated with child-trafficking, and it undercuts the adoptive family relationship. In the story, a town full of children ages 12 and younger have been raised with nonviolent principles by the Freds, the term given to their caregivers. These pacifist "Fred-mamas" and "Fred-daddies" have maintained a clear distinction as the not-parents: "'Fred-mama,' she corrected me [. . .] 'I'm only your Fred-mama. Your real mama is waiting for you at home'" (p. 17). Haddix's language here subverts positive adoption language by forcing the children to stay focused on their inaccessible birth families as the "real" family and using a linguistic marker to reinforce the Fred-parents' lesser status.

The children are suddenly returned to their birth parents in a traumatic process, only to find that their birth parents, maimed survivors of a race war, lack the virtues the children have been raised to embody. Twelve-year-old Rosi grapples with the transition from utopia to ghetto, but she also questions the situation. In the end, she learns that an alien consortium has been removing all human newborns to raise them to appreciate nonviolence in an attempt to reboot the human species. While the human parents are eager to have their children back after 12 years of alien oppression, these adult survivors are physically and emotionally damaged. Rosi's birth parents cannot give her the emotional nurturing she received from her Fred-parents, but the human parents do recognize that their children have been raised to be pure and good. The adults realize that keeping the children in the ghetto will destroy the children's humanity, as it has done to the adults. The closing scene shows Rosi and two younger children making their way out of the war-ravaged ghetto in a tableau reminiscent of *The Giver*'s (Lowry, 2003) uncertain conclusion.

Since the alien plot only becomes apparent in the last 1% of the novel, it does not overshadow the identity conflict that Rosi faces as a child reunited with birth parents she has never known. In this new setting, she faces the uncertainty of being in a new place and being treated with derision and physical threats. While she finds her identity in her adopted family's teaching, she slowly comes to empathize with her birth parents' struggles. Once again, language conveys the subtleties of a child's feelings about her family. Rosi talks about her emotionally distant, abusive birth parents as "the mother" and "the father." In the final pages, when she recognizes their attempt to protect her, Rosi slips naturally into calling them "my mother" and "my father" (p. 255).

Some orphan/adoption narratives revel in fantasies of poverty, a set up for the later payoff of wealth and security.

Rosi, like many adopted young people, chooses to reconnect with her birth parents, but the narrative arranges it so that she must also entirely separate from her adoptive/Fred parents. This is problematic, as is the underlying premise of kidnapping or child-trafficking required to broker the peace between the humans and the aliens. As it explores the fantasy about why a child no longer resides with her birth parents, this text highlights a sense of fictive peace conferred through the knowledge. Rosi's eventual understanding of the larger politics allows her to finally bond with her birth parents, bringing a sense of peace to that relationship and within herself. Ironically, it also plays through an extreme fantasy of rights and responsibility: aliens stole her away.

Some orphan/adoption narratives revel in fantasies of poverty, a set up for the later payoff of wealth and security. There is also a cultural respect for individualism present in the orphan fantasy; however, the orphan must work toward finding a home to avoid being a "perpetual orphan" outcast (Mattson, 1997). Peters (2001) has identified these as "orphan adventure narratives" and has found that they tend to emphasize the heroism of the orphan who, though

detached from a basic family structure, seeks to secure the safety of the larger "family," namely the empire or society (p. 62).

Just such a messianic orphan plays the lead role in *Sabriel* (1995), the opening novel of Garth Nix's Old Kingdom trilogy. In the novel's opening backstory, Sabriel's mother dies giving birth, and her caring father guides her in the ways of his Abhorsen magic, a necromancy that lays to rest spirits that break out of Death and threaten the living in his magical kingdom. The main plot begins when Sabriel's father dies just as she graduates from high school. As a result, she gives up her plan to continue on to a mundane university. Instead, she claims her father's magical tools and crosses the border back into the Old Kingdom, finding her father's home and his servant and taking up both his quest and his role as the one and only powerful Abhorsen. Sabriel's mentor, a cat spirit named Mogget, continues her training in the ways of Old Kingdom magic as she fights to reach her goal. The novel's conflict is only resolved when Sabriel and her companions work together to allow her to vanquish Kerrigor, the dead spirit that seeks to destroy both the Old Kingdom and the mundane neighboring country of Ancelstierre. Her victory restores order and begins the restoration of magic in the Old Kingdom. As the only Abhorsen and the only one who could stop this danger, Sabriel serves as the messianic orphan who saves two kingdoms while growing in her own independent power. Questing orphans like Sabriel may meet mentors who challenge, inform, and direct them, but these mentors do not serve officially as parents. They may be paternal or maternal, but they are not fathers and mothers. They do not attach with the child; instead, they tutor the child in his or her role as independent magical entity, apart from a family.

[L]iving outside the bounds of parental authority and protection, orphans must find their way through fantasy worlds with only their wits, their abilities, and the occasional benefit of a mentor's counsel.

Adult mentors frequently fail Harry Potter in Rowling's novels (1997–2007). All seven Harry Potter novels depict a fraught family relationship in which adoptive parents are emotionally abusive, yet which is tolerated, if not fully endorsed, by Harry's magical world. In keeping with the less sensitive approach, the adopted young person is burdened by his or her adoption. The plot hinges on how the young person can escape that situation and reconnect with the birth family, either by adapting to the wizarding world or literally speaking with the spelled vestiges of his birth parents. Meanwhile, the Dursleys insult Harry's birth parents and underfeed him.

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets,* the Dursleys physically threaten him: "[Aunt Petunia] aimed a heavy blow at his head with the soapy frying pan" (p. 10). According to Dumbledore in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, the adoptive parents emotionally abuse Harry: "You have never treated Harry as a son. He has known nothing but neglect and often cruelty at your hands" (p. 55). The wizarding adults force the infant Harry Potter upon unsuitable adoptive parents for the sake of the remnant of protection his birth mother transferred magically to his aunt's blood. This text then allows for a voyeuristic thrill in observing the evil adoptive family. Rowling's scenes of a neglected teen harken back to the abusive adults who take guardianship roles in novels intended for younger readers: evil Miss Minchin in *A Little Princess* (Burdett, 1905), the abusive Calormene father whom Shasta flees in C. S. Lewis's *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), and the aunts in *James and the Giant Peach* (Dahl, 1961).

Orphan-hood has served as a trope in the typical fantasy equation. Homans (2006) has called adoption a "fiction-generating machine" because it highlights how unknowable one's origins really are (p. 5). Literature also emphasizes the freeing nature of orphan-hood. The orphan may mourn the birth parents, but the young person is also free to complete dangerous quests and run risks that living parents would not allow. Thus, living outside the bounds of parental authority and protection, orphans must find their way through fantasy worlds with only their wits, their abilities, and the occasional benefit of a mentor's counsel. Additional texts that fall into this category include Lloyd Alexander's *The Book of Three* (1964) and

the Chronicles of Prydain series, Tamora Pierce's *Wild Magic* (1992), Christopher Paolini's *Eragon* (2003), Ann Aguirre's *Enclave* (2011), and Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Drowned Cities* (2012).

(More) Positive Adoption Language and Portrayals in Young Adult Literature

Instead of reading these orphan plots as the isolated orphan on a quest for acceptance and belonging, it behooves the world of young adult fiction to read how these narratives accumulate in the genre and how they can be re-centered and read in the light of the adoption narrative. While there is nothing inherently hurtful in the questing orphan narrative, it does belie the fact that maturing within a stable family structure is usually a required element of an emotionally healthy childhood.

Some socially responsible portrayals of the adoptive family do exist in children's literature. Prolific children's author Margaret Peterson Haddix repeatedly develops plots based on her protagonists' adopted status. Unlike her novel *Children of Exile* (2016), two of her earlier tales include a tentative thoughtfulness in their treatment of adoption; however, these novels also capitalize on titillating adoption vulnerabilities in the interest of spectacular plot twists. Haddix's *Escape from Memory* (2003) brings in the adoption plot very early. Fifteen-year-old Kira begins to have strange memories after being hypnotized. Shortly after that, her quiet, steely mother disappears, and a stranger convinces Kira that the woman who raised her is not her birth mother. The not-mother is being held captive, and Kira needs to free her. This leads Kira to a Soviet enclave in California that prizes the memory above all things, and she must thread her way through the politics and lies while uncovering the truth about her identity.

Kira's awareness of her adopted status explains a niggling feeling that has existed below her consciousness. When a strange woman appears in Kira's house and tells her that "Sophia . . . is not your mother," Kira realizes that she has known this truth for a long time but never acknowledged it: "I loved her, I guess. But there had always been something at the back of my mind, I thought now, some inkling" (pp. 45–46). For readers, the threat of that "inkling" paints adoption with a "wrongness," as if children feel a greater belonging when they reside with birth parents. Kira learns that the woman she thought of as her mother was, in fact, her biological aunt, Aunt Sophia, who became her guardian when Kira's birth parents were killed in a political struggle. Adoption literature recommends full disclosure of adoption facts. Since Aunt Sophia chooses to deceive Kira, she has removed the child's ability to have agency over her own narrative; the adult has taken license with the truth of Kira's life.

As narrator, Kira carries the reader through both the plot and her struggle to come to terms with her adopted status. Shortly after learning a skewed version of the facts, Kira thinks, "I was willing to believe that [Sophia] wasn't my real mother" (p. 55). In ensuing scenes, Kira forces herself to talk about her adoptive mother as "Sophia." For instance, when she wants to know about her adoptive mother's safety, she asks, "'And my—I mean, Sophia?' I whispered" (p. 73). With such language, it is as if the term "mom" no longer applies. Here Haddix appropriates mainstream language that presents adoption as a less "real" relationship, but this is partly due to the fact that the young narrator has absolutely no reliable adult to mentor her through this process. The novel's antagonist, Rona, shows her inhumanity by emphasizing the perceived wrongness of the relationship at every turn. She refers to Sophia as "your so-called mother" (p. 134). Rona has evil designs to obtain the memory-downloading machine that Kira's birth parents were working on before they were killed.

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Within just a day of learning about her adoption, Kira struggles to redefine her relationship with her dead birth parents and her adoptive mother: "They were the ones I belonged to. Not Mom. But my mind was a traitor: Suddenly all I could think about was

how Mom had taken care of me for the last thirteen years. She'd cleaned up my vomit when I'd gotten sick. She'd cut up my meat for me when I was too little to handle knives" (p. 88). By the time she reunites with Sophia, Kira easily calls her "Mom" again. In a sci-fi plot twist, Kira learns that the woman who has raised her has the memories and implanted identity of her aunt but the physical body of her birth mother. At the story's conclusion, Kira herself has the power to rebuild the machine that will give her aunt/mother the chance to choose which identity she would like for herself. Kira concludes the novel as an empowered character, taking control of her future but also able to relinquish her aunt/mother's identity choice to the person most directly affected by it. The novel's complicated sci-fi/political conflict has served as a background for Kira's fully informed acceptance of her adoptive mother.

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Haddix employs positive adoption language in *Found* (2008), the first book of her *New York Times* best-selling series, The Missing. Protagonist Jonah's parents supplied him with "all the kid-approved 'isn't-adoption-wonderful!' books," and Jonah has also read adult books about the subject: "*Raising the Well-Adjusted Adopted Child, What to Tell Your Adopted and Foster Children, Adoption without Secrets*" (p. 32). These books, like the real ones they are meant to represent, set forth carefully worded positive adoption language that has not yet been accepted by mainstream American society.

Jonah also models positive adoption language choices. He corrects his friend Chip, who has just discovered that he, too, was adopted, when Chip wonders about his unknown "real parents":

> "'Birth parents . . . They're called birth parents . . . Those are the correct terms. Birth parents are the people who gave birth to you. Real parents are the ones who change your diapers and get up in the middle of the night when you're a baby and show you how to ride a bike without training wheels and, and, ...' He stopped because he thought maybe he was quoting directly from *What to Tell Your Adopted and Foster Children*" (p. 33).

Jonah self-censors because, while he believes in the message of the adoption-support books, he also perceives a level of calculated concept control in their teaching. Scenes like this at times undercut the relevance of modern, politically correct adoption terminology. In this scene, Jonah uses terminology self-consciously; he cannot help but analyze his use and assess its sincerity. Is he parroting a book, or is he using language he feels is the real expression of his situation?

Using adoption terminology is counter-cultural. More people would understand "real parents" to mean birth parents, when in fact the adoption terminology stresses that "real parents" are the adoptive parents. Jonah may indeed be quoting the book, or he may simply *feel* that he is quoting the book; either way, he feels that his response to his friend is scripted rather than sincere. The failure of the terminology in this scene damages the novel's overall attempt to train its readers in positive adoption language. At the same time, it succeeds in showing the uphill battle adoptive families have in using vocabulary that respects their family structure.

The novel uses Jonah's well-read adoptive education as a foil against Chip's untutored, politically incorrect use of mainstream language about the topic. The contrast is made even more significant because Chip learns from a source other than his parents that he was adopted; he realizes they have been hiding the fact of his adoption from him—a parental choice that is not recommended in modern adoption literature. In fact, when Chip uses the old fashioned, potentially hurtful language about adopted families, he is applying the only language he knows to his own situation: "Why did my real parents give me up?" (p. 34). In this scene, Jonah mentally edits Chip's untutored language: "*You mean, your birth mother set up an adoption plan* . . ." (p. 34). This textbook phrasing is intended to offer respect to the birth parents by avoiding language that is inherently derogatory about their choice or their feelings for their biological child. Even though she offers both types of language, the mainstream and the politically correct, Haddix reinforces the more appropriate terminology by letting Jonah have the final word.

In the climax of the novel, the children learn that they are part of an inter-time adoption/child-trafficking ring, a plot point that actually detracts from the

text's adoption sensitivity. A company from the future has been traveling to the past to "rescue" famous missing children—those whose destinies and/or lives were cut short by the whims of history—and then morphing them back into infants and transporting their historically relevant DNA in baby form to rich parents in a future century. The company sponsoring the historic rescues has become the purveyor of "prestigious names from history for wealthy idiots who want to brag at their cocktail parties, 'Oh yes, my little Henry comes from a line of British kings'" (p. 283). One shipment of children accidently crash-lands in the twenty-first century, only to be adopted by regular parents, thus thwarting the wealthy would-be parents waiting several centuries in the future.

With this knowledge comes a destabilized identity for the adopted children. They learn that they have been victims of child-trafficking. The children move from identifying as legally adopted children to seeing themselves as adoptable commodities. Ironically, the trafficking has saved their lives and redeemed them from a fifteenth-century death. This plot point strikes a jarring chord. The idea of the child as commodity is a fraught one in the world of adoption. Young people must come to terms with their transition through the adoption triad and the fees that necessarily change hands during this process. Of course, tragic tales of child-trafficking do exist in modern adoption, so it is a fair point to consider. Certainly, some anti-adoption advocates emphasize this aspect of adoption. Nonetheless, such texts may raise haunting questions for readers who are becoming aware of the many facets that contribute to their identity.

In subsequent books in the series, Jonah and his tiny band reject the option to be commodified and reclaim their agency by traveling through time and engaging in time-convoluting quests. Knowing that their existence in an earlier century means both a premature death and a danger of interfering with the existing historical timeline, the young people work to reunite with their twenty-first-century adoptive families and their own chosen twenty-first-century identities. *Found* brings twenty-first-century adoption language to the common orphan plot, but, of course, Jonah is not an orphan. He has been adopted and loved by his family. Moreover, his parents model sensitive parenting by being supportive of his desire to learn more about his birth family. *Found* offers recurring lessons on how to talk about adoption, even though the conversations can be difficult. This perspective sets it apart.

These Haddix novels wrestle with the adopted child's security in his or her identity with varying levels of sympathy. *Found* is the most intentionally supportive of adoptive family priorities, but even it has some threads of darkness. Such is not the case with an even more masterful handling of this trope: Kate Milford's award-winning *Greenglass House* (2014). The novel sits on the border of science fiction; it has a ghostly element and seems to take place in the present time but in a slightly different dimension. Twelve-year-old Milo and his friend Meddy create a role-playing game in which they set out to solve the mysteries surrounding them while they are snowed in with the curious customers staying in the inn run by Milo's parents. Like *Found's* Jonah, Milo feels empowered by his knowledge of positive adoption language and corrects people, even adults, when they misrepresent the adopted family bond. One guest tells a story in which an adopted girl "had never been able to learn anything about her family"; Milo quickly interrupts: "'Her birth parents,' Milo corrected her instinctively. 'The people who adopted her would still have been her family'" (p. 205).

Milo's self-exploration coincides with the mystery story, and this narrative recognizes the adopted child's need to daydream about the birth family.

While Milo's adopted status is central to his character, it never becomes the crux of the mystery. He empathizes with other adopted characters, and he explores his own feelings about his identity, but Milo reaches the conclusion of the novel without discovering his birth parents. This is perhaps the power of the adoption narrative in this novel: the character was adopted, and he is now a part of a loving family. Milo toys with the fantasy of "orphan magic," an idea that arises from a fantasy story he reads, but he knows that he is an orphan no longer. He later comes to the conclusion that, while he had no control over his origins, "he got to choose who and what he was going to be from now on" (p. 344).

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tery story, and this narrative recognizes the adopted child's need to daydream about the birth family. As the only person of Chinese descent in an otherwise non-Asian family, Milo feels conspicuous when he meets new people, and his role-playing character allows him to fantasize about fitting in and connecting with a birth family that looks like him: "[Milo] gave in and pretended to remember looking in the mirror with his famous [. . .] father to see the same nose, same mouth and eyes, same straight black hair as his own" (p. 85). Milo often feels guilty when he daydreams about his birth father, and this is the novel's most sensitive exploration of the adoption narrative. The text encourages readers who were adopted to freely consider their biological family, and at the end of the story, Milo's mother cannily realizes that the resolution of some mysteries may have resonated with Milo's own exploration of his personal mystery. She tells him, "[W]e would never want you to feel guilty about loving your birth parents too, and wanting to think about them" (p. 371). His friend Meddy reminds him, "You're not an orphan, Milo" (p. 329). Milo agrees. This is not an orphan narrative.

This choice is made more poignant because of her adopted status and the way it marks a change in her character.

Set in a much more fantastical environment, Anne Aguirre's post-apocalyptic *Outpost* (2012) depicts a sweet love story between a warrior and her foster family. Once she has escaped from her underground enclave, Deuce and her companions attempt to adapt to the post-Amish society in the topside town called Salvation. The society assigns the new arrivals to foster families with varying degrees of success. Her former hunting partner, Fade, must endure an abusive foster father. The injured Tegan settles in smoothly with the doctor's family. Deuce, who has never before enjoyed a parental relationship, chafes at the responsibilities of family life, but finds herself in a loving, supportive family.

Deuce's former society separated the assigned tasks of birthing and child-rearing, and Breeders, as they were called, rarely lived long enough to know their offspring. As she learns about family relationships, Deuce also thinks about her birth mother, the girl she calls her "dam," in accordance with her old society's vernacular: "I wondered if my dam had been a kind girl" (p. 186). Like Milo, the narrative permits Deuce to ponder her birth parents. Deuce has to trade away her birth mother's one legacy, a metal compact, to survive her escape from the subterranean world. This loss resurfaces at times, suggesting that Deuce feels a broader loss in never knowing her birth mother or the relationship they might have had.

Over the course of the novel, Deuce comes to appreciate the support and love the Oaks, her foster family, can offer her. Adoption language plays a vital role in Deuce's understanding of her new family. Because of her upbringing, she has never heard of the term "adoption." Learning about how a family structure works exhausts Deuce, but she puts in the effort: "Since I'd never had a mother at all, I didn't know what to do with [Momma Oak's] attention" (p. 26). While Deuce resents how dependent she is on these adults, she brings healing to the family through her presence and actions. For example, she reaches out to her foster brother and reconciles him with their parents. Overall, this family exhibits a particularly reciprocal relationship that presents the young person with the power to accept or reject that which is offered.

While Deuce retains a level of independence, her growing love for her family motivates her to protect them from the zombie-like mutants that threaten the walled town of Salvation. Here, then, is another messianic young person who must rescue her society. In this narrative, however, the young person becomes invested in the plan for survival only after she becomes a part of a family. She is messianic, but not a messianic orphan. As an independent, wandering orphan she could have left Salvation to its fate; instead, as a member of the Oaks family, she chooses to preserve her society. This choice is made more poignant because of her adopted status and the way it marks a change in her character. It is, however, the choice of a child of Salvation.

The past decade has produced a host of other adoption narratives available to middle grade and young adult readers. The narrating voice of Death would place Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005) on the list of science fiction novels that addresses foster families and adoption with subtlety and feeling. The protagonist's brusque foster mother, Rosa Huber-

mann, does ask Liesel, "What did you call your real mother?" (p. 35). However, it would be anachronistic for a housewife to use the term "birth mother" in 1939 Munich, especially in this gritty work of historical fiction that seeks to capture the trauma of Liesel's experience. The ensuing narrative develops the trust between Liesel and her foster parents while blending in a deep regard for her birth family. The overall picture is respectful and nuanced.

Similarly, Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* (2008) thoughtfully portrays an uncanny adoptive family: the living boy Nobody "Bod" Owens and his ghost parents, who adopt him after an evil order kills Bod's birth family. Bod discusses his murdered family with his parents and his guardian, a vampire named Silas. He is curious about them, like any adopted child, and he also feels a sense of belonging to his adoptive family. In the climax, when he must claim his name, he chooses the name his adoptive ghost family has given him: "And in that moment, Bod understood. Everything slowed. Everything came into focus. 'I know my name,' he said. 'I'm Nobody Owens. That's who I am'" (p. 282). Like Milo, he accepts who he has become.

Implications for Reading and Teaching Adoption in Young Adult Literature

Understanding how the adoption narrative fits into novels like Gaiman's can greatly increase readers' appreciation of the protagonists' developing identities. Teachers and librarians can preface discussion of these novels in such a way that they educate students about respectful adoption language and increase reader engagement with the texts. They should also recognize and address with students that those affected by adoption can experience intense and difficult feelings about their identity during their teen years. When discussing adoption narratives, they can model appropriate adoption language from the outset to socialize students to this vocabulary. It should be noted that families involved in kinship or informal adoptions rarely participate in adoption training. As a result, even young people directly affected by adoption may not have the language to express significant relational distinctions. When any student uses the problematic term "real mother," for example, an educator might subtly rephrase his or her insight using positive adoption language.

If a class text involves adoption, teachers might consider asking students to reflect in writing on what has informed their thoughts about adoption. This allows students to talk about movies, works of fiction, stories from their faith traditions, or personal experiences, depending on what resonates most deeply with them. These reflective responses could be developed into a discussion that invites students to evaluate their experiences and to reflect on how certain popular opinions can inadvertently disrespect adoptive family values. This would be another wonderful opportunity to discuss the benefits of positive adoption language. If an educator is comfortable doing so, he or she might share personal experiences with adoption with the goal of presenting adoption as a familiar, established element of family life.

Representations of adoption in literature are complex, and even respectful depictions can be tinged with conflicting portrayals and microaggressions.

Adopted young people may prefer not to reveal details from their past or even the fact that they were adopted, and they should never be asked to represent "the adopted viewpoint." Nonetheless, many students have a connection to some sort of adoption, either through step-parent adoption, kinship adoption in their extended family, or agency-facilitated adoption. If they are comfortable volunteering details, connecting their lived experience with the text can add richness to class discussions.

Educators and librarians would do well to be aware that mainstream culture rarely acknowledges or embraces the language and priorities of adoptive families. Being able to recognize adoption microaggressions in literature helps sensitize both teachers and students to the way that language can devalue the family relationship (Baden, 2016). Representations of adoption in literature are complex, and even respectful depictions can be tinged with conflicting portrayals and microaggressions.

Traditionally, books for young people posit the orphan as an icon of potential and agency. The twentieth-century trend in fantasy and science fiction texts exchanges the subtleties of a healthy adoptive

family for the conquering orphan's narrative; the young person must be without parental authority to engage in the quests that so often characterize fantasy novels. Nonetheless, conversations about young adult literature will be enhanced by an awareness of where these texts fall on the spectrum of adoption sensitivity. While fantasy typically downplays the semblance of a healthy adoptive relationship, recent texts by Haddix, Milford, Aguirre, Zusak, and Gaiman discussed here do show an awareness of the subtleties of adoption language while experimenting with affirming portrayals of adoption.

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Book in Review: A Teaching Guide

Bryan **Gillis**

Looking beyond the Classroom:

Accessing Our Students' Funds of Knowledge through Young Adult Literature

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

"There is only one way to look at things until someone shows us how to look at them with different eyes." (Pablo Picasso)

This issue of *The ALAN Review* poses the question: *How can educators use young adult literature to value and celebrate the funds of knowledge of students?* As I considered this, I thought, *How can we value and celebrate something if we are not familiar with what we are valuing and celebrating?* Students do not arrive in our classrooms wearing their funds of knowledge on their sleeves, and most do not willingly share them. As an essential first step in utilizing young adult literature to value and celebrate funds of knowledge, we must develop strategies that enable us to learn more about our students so that we are best equipped to analyze and act upon how their perceptions, self-esteem, values, classroom behavior, and learning are affected. Teaching strategies that encourage students to share their funds of knowledge will make them feel more welcomed, affirmed, respected, and valued. These strategies also have the potential to create social contexts within the academic setting. As a result, academic content becomes more significant for students, allowing an easier transference and utilization of new academic information (Genzuk, 1999). Stated simply, teachers will be able to build background, which motivates students and engages them with the academic content.

Funds of Knowledge

Funds of knowledge are the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). They are created in various settings throughout an individual's life, primarily in activities outside of the classroom, and are utilized to transmit information that will enhance survival (Genzuk, 1999). These are not static traits of individuals, nor are they cultural artifacts, e.g., lists of clothing, foods, and holidays. Funds of knowledge are fluid characteristics that are manifested through participation in specific activities (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Each individual uses these "social, physical, spiritual, and economic resources to make one's way in the world" in order to establish a social context for the transfer or utilization of knowledge, because "the content of the interactions is significant or necessary" (Genzuk, 1999).

A deficit funds of knowledge model exists when a school views a student, family, or community as missing specific qualities or abilities. As a result of a focus on what is not possible, students are viewed as possessing gaps that need to be filled (Felton-Koestler, Simic-Muller, & Menendez, 2017, p. 124). For example, *Maria can't read above a second-grade level,* or *Eddie struggles with proper English grammar,* or *I wish more families would participate in school events*. Historically, non-mainstream and marginalized students

have been viewed through this deficit lens, and are often seen as being in need of saving.

Conversely, an assets model focuses on the knowledge and strengths that students, families, and communities possess (Felton-Koestler, et al., 2017, p. 124). Adopting an assets-based approach enables teachers to facilitate students' learning by asking, *How can I use this knowledge and these strengths to help students succeed?* An assets-based approach has the potential to encourage active engagement by utilizing students' funds of knowledge. In this way, teachers learn how to value broader forms of knowledge and expertise.

The Importance of Empathy

"If a doctor had 40 patients in the office at one time, all of whom had different needs, and some of whom didn't want to be there and were causing trouble, and they all had to be treated with professional excellence, without assistance, for nine months, then that doctor might have some conception of the classroom teacher's job." (Poster in an 8th-grade classroom)

The current public education culture in the United States poses a tremendous challenge to teachers who want to learn more about their students and incorporate this knowledge into the classroom. Standards-based curricula paint a limited picture of what it means for students with varying backgrounds and cultures to be intelligent and for families and communities to be supportive. Furthermore, the quixotic scope and sequence designs used to manage curricula across the country offer limited opportunities for teachers to learn more about their students' funds of knowledge, much less opportunities to value and celebrate them.

In order for teachers to connect in meaningful ways with their students, parents, and communities, they must possess a tremendous amount of empathy. An empathetic person possesses and, more important, *demonstrates* the capacity for understanding, awareness, and sensitivity for the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of others without having those feelings, thoughts, and experiences explicitly communicated. In the classroom and in the school community, understanding, awareness, and sensitivity are critical if teachers are to effectively contribute to their students' academic and socio-emotional growth. These have become such important points of emphasis that many university teacher education programs now teach and assess professional teacher communication skills in courses and field experiences. One communication disposition rubric item used in the Secondary and Middle Grades Department of Education at Kennesaw State University states: "The teacher candidate consistently uses optimal communication techniques in a given situation to listen and respond to others in ways that enhance student learning through cultural awareness, empathy, and understanding." This is a lofty goal. The presence of 30 or more students, coupled with 30 to 60 or more parents or guardians per classroom, can make demonstrating cultural awareness, empathy, and understanding seem like an impossible task.

However, with careful listening, schools can make meaningful connections with students and the community by accessing their funds of knowledge. As a classroom teacher and academic coach at a school in a predominately Latinx community in Phoenix, I was asked to brainstorm ways that our school might increase parent/guardian and community involvement. Assuming that the lack of parent/guardian participation was due to a language barrier, my school began sending home flyers, composed in both English and Spanish, promoting important school events. Attendance at these events did not increase, so we invited parents from the community to the school and asked what we might do to increase involvement. The overwhelming response was that the flyers felt impersonal and insincere. It was suggested that someone from the school call, or that each child's teacher send a personalized invitation home whenever an event was upcoming. Once we gained this understanding of the community's funds of knowledge and acted on it, parent and student involvement at school-sponsored activities increased substantially.

Accessing Our Students' Funds of Knowledge through Young Adult Literature

The frenetic pace and structured content of standards-based curricula can create the perception that there is little class time for activities that encourage student expression in a way that increases student–teacher and student–student connectivity. Beginning as early

as first grade, students are conditioned to exercise extreme control in their class work. For example, writing standards encourage teaching strategies that require students to write for a singular audience (the teacher) and a singular, predetermined purpose (e.g., expository essay). Young adult literature offers tremendous opportunities for the creation of activities that encourage expression and connectivity—not just with the teacher, but with peers—and that serve to establish social contexts within the academic setting. These social contexts allow for easier transference and utilization of new academic information. By way of example, A. S. King's novels *Still Life with Tornado* (2016) and *I Crawl through It* (2015) provide teachers with countless opportunities to promote student expression and connection through activities and discussion.

A. S. King (www.as-king.com/about) is the author of several highly acclaimed novels; in addition to the two mentioned above, she has written *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* (2014), *Reality Boy* (2013), *Ask the Passengers* (2012), *Everybody Sees the Ants* (2011), *Please Ignore Vera Dietz* (2010), *Me and Marvin Gardens* (2017) and *The Dust of 100 Dogs* (2017/2009). After returning from Ireland, where she spent over a decade living off the land, teaching adult literacy, and writing novels, she now lives in the Pennsylvania woods with her husband and children. Although she says that she never intended to write for teenagers, King's stories have touched both teens and adults. "What I was always doing was trying to help teenagers better understand the adults in their lives, and vice versa" (Corbett, 2013).

Still Life with Tornado (2016)

Sarah is a 16-year-old girl who abruptly gives up on high school and her dreams of going to art school after finding it impossible to complete an assignment in art class—sketching a pear. Two weeks prior, someone sabotaged Sarah's art show project. Her art club friends bullied her when she tried to find out who was behind the destruction, and her art teacher showed no interest in trying to help her. Sarah also misses her older brother, Bruce. He left years earlier, and Sarah's parents refuse to speak of him. Sarah doesn't understand why.

Each morning, Sarah's parents ask her to go to school. But Sarah has had an existential crisis, a break from reality. Instead of going to her school, she wanders the streets of Philadelphia alone, the words of her art teacher, "There is no such thing as an original idea," echoing in her mind. Sarah rides buses around the city, stalks a homeless man who creates art, and breaks into an abandoned school, where she imagines she is a student. She also meets and has conversations with her 10-year-old self as well as her future selves, ages 23 and 40. Conversations with these three alter egos help the 16-year-old Sarah begin to make sense of her life as she desperately searches to find anything that is original.

Young adult literature offers tremendous opportunities for the creation of activities that encourage expression and connectivity—not just with the teacher, but with peers—and that serve to establish social contexts within the academic setting.

Discussions with Sarah's 10-year-old self help 16-year-old Sarah recall sublimated memories of a vacation to Mexico six years prior. She remembers that her brother disappeared after the trip. Sarah's mother Helen, an emergency room nurse, also narrates several of the chapters, and through her, we learn that Sarah's parents have remained together solely for Sarah's sake. Their marriage is a sham, and readers may suspect that emotional and physical abuse occurred.

The tornado as a metaphor recurs frequently and is a fitting image for Sarah's life. When Sarah's friend Carmen sketches a tornado in art class, Sarah doesn't believe it is original. All she can see is dust. Carmen explains that her picture does not represent a tornado; it represents everything that the tornado contains, such as a car, a family pet, a quart of milk. Sarah is on a quest to see past the dust.

I Crawl through It (2015)

Gustav, Stanzi, China, and Lansdale are four teenagers pushed to the edge of reason as a result of their inability to cope with their own personal demons—grief, guilt, past trauma, senseless high-stakes testing, and daily bomb threats called into the school. Help is not forthcoming, and no one seems to be listening. All of these characters decide to escape the worlds they presently inhabit.

Gustav is building an invisible helicopter so that he can fly away. Each day, he refers to his blueprints and is able to explain every detail of the construction process to anyone who asks. Stanzi splits in two. One Stanzi is a biology student who wants to become a doctor. She hides her secrets behind a lab coat that she never removes. The other Stanzi plans to escape with Gustav, whom she secretly loves. Stanzi can see the invisible helicopter that Gustav is building, but only on Tuesdays. China turns herself inside out. She has swallowed herself, her digestive tract on display for everyone to see. Lansdale lies, and each time she does, her hair grows. Readers are told that all of these things are true because each character believes them to be so.

Verisimilitude in young adult literature is critical, as it engages readers and increases students' comprehension skills by facilitating text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections.

Gustav, Stanzi, China, and Lansdale are all trying to run away from their perceived realities by creating new ones. These new realities serve as coping mechanisms, for a time at least, but the realness of the world continues to crawl through.

Surrealism and Verisimilitude: Scars, Maps, and Mirrors

Surrealism (https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/surrealism) is an artistic, intellectual, and literary movement that was guided by poet André Breton (MoMA.org). Surrealists present unrelated images and events in strange and dreamlike ways, ways that stress the subconscious, given the lack of rational significance of imagery. Surrealism is rooted in the belief that revelations found in dreams, on the street, and in everyday life can be substituted for traditional solutions of life's principal problems (theartstory.org). In his Surrealist Manifesto, (http://www.ubu.com/papers/breton_surrealism_manifesto.html), Breton describes surrealism as the expression of thought "in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern" (1924). As examples, ask students to view several of the world's most iconic surrealist paintings (http://all-that-is-interesting.com/most-iconic-surrealist-paintings).

In contrast, verisimilitude is defined as the semblance of truth. In fiction, verisimilitude refers to the plausibility of events to the extent that readers are able to relate those events to their real-life experiences. Verisimilitude in young adult literature is critical, as it engages readers and increases students' comprehension skills by facilitating text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections.

The concepts of surrealism and verisimilitude may seem oxymoronic. They are not. Our students, like King's characters, are attempting to connect to some semblance of truth as they simultaneously wrestle with issues of self-esteem and self-awareness. This is simply the definition of adolescence. They are processing real-life experiences through the lenses of home, school, neighborhood, and work environments, creating and supplementing their funds of knowledge.

All of this chaos can make students feel as though they are teetering between reality and fantasy. In both *Still Life with Tornado* and *I Crawl through It*, King's characters try to tap into the "superior reality" of the subconscious mind (Breton, 1924) as a way to cope with their *real* lives. Sarah's coping mechanism, her art, is squashed when her teacher tells her that there are no new ideas. Gustav, Stanzi, China, and Lansdale all retreat from a world they perceive as unwilling and unable to listen or pay attention. Viewed in this way, surrealism and verisimilitude simply define our students' typical middle and high school lives.

The following activities connect to King's two novels and are modifications and extensions of journaling strategies taught to me by one of my beloved mentors, G. Lynn Nelson. Lynn's mission throughout his teaching career was to help others learn to use writing "as a tool for intellectual, psychological, and spiritual growth" (2004, p. xi). I had the privilege of co-teaching with Lynn in his last semester at Arizona State University. Whenever I asked him if I could use one of his strategies in my own classroom, his reply was always, "Once you use it, it's yours."

Activity 1: Scar Story

Every character that readers meet in *Still Life with Tornado* and *I Crawl through It* possesses physical and emotional scars. Sarah wanders the streets of Philadel-

phia, slowly uncovering the physical and emotional abuse that has been taking place in her family for years. Gustav, Stanzi, China, and Lansdale all carry scars with them as well. Each tries to hide, deny, or run away from their scars. The scar story enables students to share events in their lives sans the typical writing assignment restrictions placed on them. Students are asked to recall their personal scars by drawing simple self-portraits and then connecting images and words to the drawings. The scar story activity can be completed over several days.

1. Students sketch a self-portrait and place an X on 3–5 spots on the head and body where they recall being hurt. *Note:* The hurt can be physical or emotional; an actual scar doesn't need to be present. Teachers should create and model their own self-portrait. I typically sketch a stick figure to deemphasize the importance of the drawing in comparison with the connection of the body parts to the scars. Teacher modeling is an effective tool for this activity because the model represents personal experiences and thus cannot be copied by students.
2. Students annotate their self-portraits by connecting each X to a brief phrase, image, diagram, etc. that represents an event or emotions associated with that event. The goal is for the connection to make sense for the creator, not necessarily for anyone else. For example, an X placed on a knee, a representation of falling off of a bicycle, might be paired with a drawing of a bicycle that has band aids for handlebars, or a few words expressing an applicable emotion or thought, like "it felt like my heart was rushing out through my knee."
3. Students partner and orally recall one or more of their scar stories. Oral descriptions create opportunities for students to recall specific details. They also increase motivation and engagement with the activity. Students then discuss with their partners which scars they wish to expand into narrative writing pieces.
4. Once the stories are completed, the class forms a large circle and students read their stories aloud. Teachers must write and share a story as well. It is critical that we share events in our own lives that helped create our funds of knowledge if we expect our students to share.

Activity 2: Map Story

Maps and travel play important roles in both *Still Life with Tornado* and *I Crawl through It*. Sarah explores the streets of Philadelphia. Stanzi, Gustav, and China embark on journeys that take them to places few have seen. In their travels, each character encounters people and situations that may or may not be real but nevertheless represent real emotions and perceptions. The map story gives students the opportunity to recall salient places in their lives and represent those places through words and images.

1. Ask students to close their eyes and picture their neighborhoods (past or present), envisioning the places where they live(d) and play(ed). The teacher should stress the importance of recalling and recording everything that comes to mind.
2. Students create a map of their envisioned neighborhood. Teachers should create and model their own maps. Again, this modeling is effective because the model is personal and cannot be replicated by students. Maps do not need to be accurate or to scale. Each map should represent the world as the student remembers it. For example, if a specific tree, apartment, house, or swimming pool was a center of activity, that object might be drawn larger or appear in a more prominent place on the map, regardless of its true location.
3. Students annotate their maps by writing short sentences or phrases that describe each place and/or why it is included on the map. For example, *I built a treehouse in this tree*, or *This is where the meanest lady in the neighborhood lived.*
4. Students partner and orally recall their maps, emphasizing the importance of each location.
5. Students create more detailed maps on poster board, using words, images, etc. to illustrate the significance of each place on their map. *Variation:* Create a detailed map of one location on the map.
6. Posters are displayed around the room and an art walk is held.

Activity 3: Self-Portrait

Windows and mirrors are two common metaphors used to represent an important goal of young adult literature. When we read a story, we are looking through a window into a specific world. When we connect with a setting, a situation, or a character in

the story, we are looking into a mirror, experiencing verisimilitude, recognizing a bit of ourselves or others in the story. The characters in both of King's novels are simultaneously trying to understand the world (window) and how they fit in (mirror). This activity gives students the opportunity to create a work of art that represents how students see themselves in juxtaposition to the world around them. Although it is called a self-portrait, a drawing or photographic representation of the creator's face and/or body is not a requirement. On a poster board or similar display format, students discover, create, compose, and arrange words, images, drawings, symbols, etc. using colors, sizes, and positioning to create a piece of art that represents who they are, what is important to them, and how they fit in the world.

Each classroom is unique, and all of the individuals in those classrooms possess unique sets of characteristics that affect how they approach learning.

1. Ask students to create an inventory of their identities. For each identity, they will list and describe what that identity means to them or what comes to mind when that identity is considered. Examples: *General*—physical, emotional, intellectual, gender; *Relationship*—son, sister, friend; *Doing*—student, athlete, writer, reader; *Ethnic*—Native American, Mexican, German; *Possession*s—house, car, computer (Nelson, 2004, p. 80–81).
2. Discuss the funds of knowledge concept with students. Place students in groups of four and ask them to identify skills they have learned at home or in their community that help them survive on a daily basis. If they have completed either the scar story or map story, ask them to review their work for inspiration.
3. Give students the opportunity to view images of surrealistic self-portraits. Many of these will contain some type of head and body representation of the artist, but the idea is not to provide student models, rather student inspiration. Ask students to note objects and images that each artist includes in the self-portraits. What might those objects and images reflect? A good place to begin is on the Frida Kahlo Foundation website (http://www.frida-kahlo-foundation.org/the-complete-works.html). The site contains her complete works; many of her paintings are considered examples of surreal self-portraits.
4. Self-portraits are displayed around the room and an art walk is held.

Conclusion

After 35 years in education as an elementary, middle, junior high, high school, community college, and university teacher, the most important lesson that I have learned is that possessing the skills to connect with my students is just as important as knowing and teaching the subject matter. Each classroom is unique, and all of the individuals in those classrooms possess unique sets of characteristics that affect how they approach learning. Many of those characteristics cannot and should not be changed. We must be able to teach in ways that acknowledge and incorporate our students' funds of knowledge. Integrating young adult literature is a powerful way to make these connections because quality young adult fiction creates empathy. Novels like A. S. King's *I Crawl through It* and *Still Life with Tornado* allow students to travel to places where they are able to see the world through the eyes of another person, to live another life. What a powerful tool this can be—the opportunity to be immersed in a world that resembles truth, and to connect with characters who seek solutions to their problems through revelations found in dreams, on the street, and in everyday life.

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RIGHT TO READ

Victor **Malo-Juvera**
and
David Macinnis **Gill**

Writing Across Identity Elements:

An Interview with Cynthia Leitich Smith, William Alexander, and Kekla Magoon

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

Although recent national conversations have been dominated by multicultural issues, such as immigration bans, young black men's violent encounters with the police, or the ongoing struggle of LGBTQ peoples to gain equal rights, diversity has been largely absent from the majority of books written and published for young adult readers (CCBC, 2017). Despite this dearth, English teachers have often been at the forefront in bringing these types of texts to the attention of young readers. NCTE has also addressed this void in the literature by passing a resolution that calls on publishers and booksellers to increase publication and marketing of texts that represent the rich diversity of cultures in the United States, as well as reaffirming support for those authors, publishers, and booksellers who provide such texts to readers (NCTE, 2014). *English Journal* also published a special issue in September 2017, edited by Jaqueline Bach and Kelly Byrne Bull, titled "Multicultural and Multivoiced Stories for Adolescents." Although we often hear the views of teachers and teacher educators on these issues, this column will turn to the authors who write the types of texts that educators feel are in demand. Reflecting this issue's themes and the widespread interest in multicultural literature and issues, guest columnist David Macinnis Gill interviews three well-known YA authors to get a glimpse into how they view matters of identity and how their views may or may not influence their work.

Writing across Identity Elements:

An Interview with Cynthia Leitich Smith, William Alexander, and Kekla Magoon

David Macinnis Gill
The need for full inclusion of diverse voices in children's and young adult books is nothing new. Almost as long as there has been a field of study for books for young readers, there have been critics who have been frustrated with the lack of ethnic, cultural, ability, and identity diversity in the field. Like most conversations, it has waxed and waned over the decades, but in April 2014, thanks to social media, the conversation moved from informal discussions to the establishment of We Need Diverse Books, a campaign to raise awareness among readers, librarians, teachers, publishers, and writers of the need for all children to see themselves in the stories they read.

As an author of YA books, a past-president of ALAN, and a member of the faculty of the Writing for Children and Young Adults program at the Vermont College of Fine Arts, I have been part of the conversation on multiple levels, with a special focus on the role of the author in the creation of texts that acknowledge and include multiple identity markers. So that the conversation would be more permanent, I sat down with Cynthia Leitich Smith, William Alexander, and Kekla Magoon—three award-winning authors of

books for teens and children—to discuss those topics. Our friendly, random, and sometimes rollicking conversation took place over time and space, from a snowy day in College Hall at the Vermont College of Fine Arts to a sushi bar in Washington, DC, with multiple texts and emails in between. Our goal wasn't to find answers, but rather to continue the conversation.

The Authors

First, an introduction of our authors, all three of whom teach at the Writing for Children and Young Adults program at the Vermont College of Fine Arts.

Cynthia Leitich Smith is the *New York Times* best-selling author of the award-winning Feral series (2013, 2014, 2015) and Tantalize series (2007, 2009, 2011, 2012) and of several award-winning children's books, including *Jingle Dancer* (2000), *Rain Is Not My Indian Name* (2001), and *Indian Shoes* (2002). Cynthia is a graduate of the White School of Journalism at the University of Kansas and the University of Michigan Law School. She was named a Writer of the Year by Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers. She is also an enrolled tribal member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and serves on the advisory board of We Need Diverse Books.

Will Alexander is a National Book Award-winning, *New York Times* best-selling author of fantasy and science fiction for kids. His honors include an Eleanor Cameron Award, an Earphones Award, and two CBC Best Children's Book of the Year Awards. His work has also earned Junior Library Guild Selection status, and he was named a finalist for the International Latino Book Award and Minnesota Book Award. He studied theater and folklore at Oberlin College, English at the University of Vermont, and creative writing at Clarion. Will is a second-generation Cuban American.

Kekla Magoon is the author of eight young adult novels, including *The Rock and the River* (2009), *How It Went Down* (2014), *X: A Novel* (2015), and the Robyn Hoodlum Adventures series (2015, 2016, 2017). She has received an NAACP Image Award, the John Steptoe New Talent Award, two Coretta Scott King Honors, the Walter Award Honor, and has been long-listed for the National Book Award. Kekla holds a BA degree from Northwestern University and an MFA in Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Kekla is biracial; her mom is white, and her dad is black. Her mom grew up in the US, but her ancestors came from Holland, Scotland, and maybe elsewhere in Europe. Her dad grew up in Cameroon, a country in western Africa.

The Interviews

What is identity? How do you define your identity as a person? As a writer?

Cyn: Identity is brushstrokes, side roads, highways: Destination you and your communities. Some identity elements came with you into this world; others are born of choices you made along the way.

Will: Identity is a story that we tell ourselves about ourselves, and it is also the combined, cacophonous narrative that everyone else will ever spin around us. It's as imaginary a construct as national boundaries and as solidly real as the ammunition nestled in the sidearm of every single border guard.

Kekla: Identity elements are everything that make up who you are. Identity is the sum of a lot of things we often point to—like gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability/disability, and age—as well as things we sometimes forget or that fall to the background—like socioeconomic status and upbringing, religion, geographical location, relationship status, family dynamic, or employment. Identity includes even subtle things like our name, our appearance, how we present ourselves (intentionally or inevitably) to others, and how we negotiate the world from within the physical body and body of experiences we've been given.

What is an identity element?

Cyn: A defining aspect of self. Possibly inherent, possibly chosen and/or earned, not necessarily permanent, but probably. Educational achievement, for example, can be steadily heightened but not retracted. Socioeconomic status is more fluid, either way.

I see myself as a middle class, cis-gendered, mixed-blood Native woman, a Mid-to-Southwesterner, an only child, a Protestant, self-employed

and traditionally employed, among many other qualities. I'm a writer of realistic and fantastical worlds wherein the heroes reflect identities that are underrepresented in books for young readers.

Will: My identity is that of a disabled, cis-gendered, white-passing and mostly assimilated second-generation Cuban American immigrant to the United States. I have preexisting conditions, but my existence intends to go right on persisting. I am also a novelist of several unrealisms for middle grade audiences. In moments of grand and outrageous ambition, I imagine that my words will make walls come tumbling down. In other, quieter moments, I hang mirrors on that wall and strive to chisel out a few small windows so that my readers will see both familiar reflections and neighboring, unfamiliar selves.

Kekla: It's hard to define my identity as a person, because there are so many facets of identity. If I try to list them all, will I exclude some? Will I appear to give more weight to some and less weight to others? Will I fail to define something that would be very important to someone else? I often define myself as a biracial woman, raised in the Midwest, now living on the east coast, who is a writer and teacher. As a writer, I'm known for writing books that deal with black American teenagers and their struggles in a historical and contemporary context. In many ways, my identity as a writer is more narrow than my identity as a person, because it's as much about how people perceive me as it is about who I actually am and what I actually write. Engaging with how I am perceived affects my identity on personal and professional levels.

What obligation does a writer have to a reader? To her identity and the people who share it?

Cyn: The writer owes the reader respect and a best-possible effort. As for everyone else, including those who share identity elements, the writer has not so much obligation as opportunity. For example, I am well positioned to offer Native/POC writers help and insights and serve as an ambassador in the related conversation of books. Sometimes I choose to use that opportunity; other times, I signal-boost the insights of someone more qualified in a specific case.

Will: Identities are myths. Some we get to choose, like clothing and bottles of hair dye. Others are chosen for us. But the combination cuts through the noise of every stereotype to become something genuinely mythic, a tale of self-creation that will either kill us or save us. Or both. Our obligations to readers and to our own identities are, in practice, exactly the same: to tell the story as well and respectfully as we possibly can.

Kekla: A writer doesn't have any particular obligation to a reader, in general, although this claim becomes extremely murky when you talk about writing outside your culture. I'd like to hope we all strive for accuracy, in both facts and emotions, when we portray people different from us. The problem is that we can easily create "diverse" characters that are believable to many readers, but that do not actually reflect reality. This is not an inherent problem with fiction, but rather with our seeming tendency to equate the experience of any single fiction text to reality. We want to believe the deeper truth of the books we read, so when that truth fails to reflect reality, we are teaching and learning false lessons. I feel a sense of responsibility to capture a truth about the subject matter I'm dealing with and to represent my characters in realistic (not only believable) ways.

The responsibility of writers who write about characters of color, for example, is heightened because there are fewer books that represent these characters. Each of these books is received as true and broadly universal in a way that books about white characters are not. And because there are many more books in the world about white characters, no single one is tasked with carrying so much weight. Space has been created to allow for many experiences of whiteness to exist in fiction, but each book about a black child is expected to adhere to some universally accurate and mythical truth about blackness. So when authors get it "wrong," it creates a different kind of damage. Placing such heightened expectations on books about children of

color has the potential to urge better books entering the marketplace, but it also potentially limits what is acceptable in "diverse" literature and creates parameters that are too narrow for what the lives of characters of color look like in reality.

When you were a teen, what did you feel was missing from the books that were available for you to read?

Kekla: Intersectional stories, meaning books in which characters displayed multiple layers of identity, and their identity was not the core issue or problem of the narrative. There were not a lot of books about biracial children that didn't involve trying to find your place between black and white. I didn't want to read that; I lived it. I also don't recall reading any black lesbian teen characters or discovering books in which a character had a disability that wasn't the core storyline and "problem." It would have been nice to see more diversity in the characters and their experiences because I loved "issue" books as a teenager; I gravitated toward them as a way to learn about different kinds of struggles, so I believe there's value in that type of reading for teens. But it would have been nice if those books could have avoided reinforcing the message that a non-white, non-straight, differently-abled identity was inherently problematic.

Will: As a kid, I never found a work of realism that actively spoke to my third-culture, borderland understanding of the world. Only books set in other worlds felt familiar to me. Only speculative fiction offered a paradoxical combination of escape and homecoming. No regrets. I'm still devoted to unrealisms and the ability to imagine that the world could be otherwise. But it might have been comforting to recognize myself in a book set on *this* planet.

Cyn: Me. I was missing. American Indian teen girls are still almost entirely missing in the body of YA literature. I'm trying to correct that now through my own writing and mentoring of other Native writers. What else was missing? Stories of people of faith, stories of the Mid-to-Southwest, stories that didn't water down my everyday reality—that is, stories that fairly reflected the free-flowing profanity, the degree of sexual activity and related pressures, the fact that I had LGB friends, and that not everybody's family was financially secure, despite desperate posturing to the contrary. And the weaknesses of grown-ups—the ego and intrigue and, among certain parents, vicarious competitiveness. Books when I was a teen didn't reflect the depth of our emotions or how confusing they were to navigate or the fact that life and death stakes were absolutely part of daily life.

How can teachers include more diverse voices in the books their students read? How can librarians expand their collections in the same way?

Kekla: This question is easy to answer in theory, but proves challenging to execute in reality. The deceptively simple answer is: buy more diverse books for the classroom and incorporate more diverse books into the curriculum. The challenge comes because we operate in an inherently biased system. It's structurally difficult for teachers and librarians to become aware of new diverse books because those books get less attention, and it's structurally complicated for readers to view these books as having merit beyond their diversity. I would like to challenge teachers and librarians to think about diversity in the second place, as well as in the first place. When you think, "I need some more diverse books for my library," and you go out and order several titles by authors of color, that is thinking about diversity in the first place. When you think, "I need some new, lyrical picturebooks," and you go looking for lyrical picturebooks *written by authors of color or with characters of color*, that is thinking about diversity in the second place. Can we all learn to think of books by and about diverse people as an integral part of the fabric of literature? Can we begin to recognize the broader merits of these texts, beyond their contribution to the diversity of our shelves?

Will: Remember that reading itself is an absurd, telepathic, practically impossible and joyful act of vicarious experience. Diverse books are not veg-

etables. They are not tasteless, nutritious, difficult-to-swallow, multicultural multivitamins. They are not here to build character. Mirrors and windows are vitally important, but that importance isn't why we read them. Foster the joy. It will be contagious.

Cyn: Make diverse books available in classroom libraries, the school library. Set aside time for free reading. Create engaging thematic displays (not necessarily framed around diversity-driven topics). Be subversive. Question systematic roadblocks and those in your own mindset. Read diverse books to students as often as possible. Open lessons with picturebooks, including diverse picturebooks, no matter if the kids are in middle or high school. They're visual thinkers, so integrate texts and illustrations into your lesson plan. Realize you're probably underestimating the diversity in your students' real lives. Would you have recognized this mixed-blood girl as Native?

By way of example, I was visiting a school in Houston, and a girl came up to me after her presentation. She was Oklahoma Cherokee, her family from Tahlequah. Come to find out, her grandparents owned the ranch next door to my great auntie's. She sailed out the door afterward, proudly proclaiming her tribal citizenship to her friends, because that day I had somehow made it okay for her to share that. The teacher said, "It never occurred to me she was Native American. I assumed Latino." I replied, "Maybe both."

Bring in diverse authors to role model, to reinforce that we all belong in the world of books, to spotlight that any kid can be a hero everyone cheers. Choose authors who can supplement the visit with Saturday writing workshops for the kids who choose to be there. Empower those young voices. If budget is an issue, begin your search with local talent.

Gah! I know not all of this will work in certain schools and classrooms and that you face demands I can't imagine. Teachers and librarians know their jobs infinitely better than I do. So if anything I said resonates, great. Do it. And if not, figure out a way. Don't give up. I was a child, then teen, saved by books. By teachers, librarians, school, stories. All the kids need you, look up to you, whether they admit it or not.

All: We are happy to help brainstorm, but we are not here to tell you how to do your job. We will just say it's important, critical, maybe now more than ever. Please know that we all support and believe in you.

Thanks to Cyn, Kekla, and Will for joining me in conversation. Our dialogue here represents one small piece of a broader discussion to which we all hope more and more voices will be added in the coming days, months, and years. As conversations about diversity and inclusion intensify, we seek to invite and celebrate a broad range of perspectives. Our community will be richer for it. Making room at the table does not mean giving up anyone's place; together we can build a table big enough to fit us all.

Victor Malo-Juvera *is a former middle school English language arts teacher who is now an associate professor of English Education at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, where he teaches courses in young adult and multicultural young adult literature. He has appeared on NPR's* All Things Considered *to discuss his research on young adult literature and rape myths. His work has been published in journals such as* Research in the Teaching of English, Teachers College Record, Study and Scrutiny: Research in Young Adult Literature, Journal of Language and Literacy Education, *and* SIGNAL.

David Macinnis Gill *is the author of the YA novels* Uncanny, Soul Enchilada, *and The Black Hole Sun series from Greenwillow/HarperCollins. His stories have appeared in several magazines, and his critical biography,* Graham Salisbury: Island Boy, *was published by Scarecrow Press. He holds a bachelor's degree in English/creative writing and a doctorate in education, both from the University of Tennessee, as well as an MEd from Tennessee-Chattanooga. David is the Past-President of ALAN and an associate professor at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. He is represented by Rosemary Stimola of the Stimola Literary Studio.*

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Layered Literacies

Shelbie **Witte**
with
Pamela Unruh **Brown**

Finding Our People:

Kinship Connections and Young Adult Literature

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

While the commonly accepted notion of *kinship* is a synonym for family ties, our analysis of YA literature supports the idea that kinship is more complex, going far beyond one's family tree. As Brown, Castle, Rogers, Feuerhelm, & Chimblo (2007) describe this theme in their study of an elementary teacher's lifeworld, "Kinship refers to the network of caring relationships with children, families, and colleagues" (p. 11) that may cross over from typical teacher–student relationships. Young adults in the midst of searching for their own identity seek a place within kinship networks, both traditional and nontraditional. These networks may be as small as two people or much larger, including groups of trusted friends who support and push one another; groups with whom they share a passion for a particular activity, such as music or archaeology; or even their own families, sometimes writ large across generations. Kinship is formed of "meaningful, long-lasting relationships" (Brown et al., 2007, p. 11), often requiring time to discover, build, and nurture. Just as with adults, adolescent and preadolescent kinship ties can transcend time, distance, and culture. Kinship going beyond expected family ties is difficult to define, but its assonance resonates for those who hear its tone, even though others outside the circle may be deaf to its sound, its meaningful presence.

As we explore the layered literacies of YA literature with multimodal resources, we highlight below three kinship themes focused on adolescents and preadolescents. Through each lens, we highlight YA titles we feel bring dimension and perspective to the conversation. We also share some of our favorite film and digital resources to illustrate, extend, or offer additional information to conversations surrounding kinship communities.

Marching to the Beat of Your Own Drummer

There are many interesting and complex young adult novels that celebrate the unique attributes of adolescents. While the individuality of the characters is highlighted in the books below, we would like to draw attention to how those who march to the beat of a different drummer find kinship within the communities and places they live.

Story Synopses

***Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs (2011)**

In this delightfully bizarre tale, Jacob and his grandfather share a close and special bond forged through the grandfather's sharing of stories and photographs of characters from his Welsh roots. When his grandfather is murdered, Jacob journeys to Wales in search of answers to his mysterious death. The cast of characters Jacob knew only through his grandfather's eyes is brought to life through plot twists and turns, with his-

torical references, coming of age angst, and the perfect amount of peculiar. Jacob and these characters work together to fight the evils of the world and bring Jacob closer to understanding his grandfather and himself.

Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli (2000)

In an ode to the nonconforming teenager, Jerry Spinelli tells the tale of Mica High School's Leo Borlock, who does his best to blend in with everyone else in his class. His universe is quickly turned upside down, however, with the arrival of Stargirl Caraway, a formerly homeschooled, quirky, and artistic teen who challenges the status quo and quickly rides the wave of popularity. Stargirl's love of people and optimistic attitude soon begin to irk the moody teens of Mica High, proving that even when you have the best of intentions, one day you can be "in" and the next day, you can be "out." Leo's friendship and love of Stargirl are tested when she tries to conform to them as "Susan," but eventually, individuality wins.

Whale Talk by Chris Crutcher (2001)

TJ Jones is fed up with the bullying of his classmates at the hands of the jocks and athletic elite at Cutter High School. A gifted athlete in a school dominated by winning teams and their coaches, TJ rejects organized school sports in general, but decides to recruit the bullied to form the school's first swim team. Traveling to meets, all of which are in distant towns, the swim team members bond on the bus rides, finding kinship in the group. At school, however, the team of misfits continues to be mistreated, as the letter-jacket elite of the school feel the swimmers are neither worthy to participate in a sport nor worthy of a jacket for their effort. Tensions build and violence ensues with a real test of who will provide support when life becomes difficult. TJ discovers more about his own family and the family he gains through swimming.

Film: *Inside Out* (Docter & del Carmen, 2015)

In the animated film *Inside Out*, 11-year-old Riley is coming of age and learning to handle all of the emotions that live within her. A family relocation to San Francisco sends Riley into a tailspin. Riley's personified emotions—Joy, Fear, Anger, Disgust, and Sadness—govern the Riley Control Center at Headquarters where her happy core memories are put at risk. The film is an entertaining and dynamic reminder for preadolescents that despite all of the complex emotions we have within us, we are all okay. Riley's kinship communities exist not only within her old school and hockey team in Minnesota and her new school and friends in San Francisco, but also within herself.

Teaching "Marching to the Beat of Your Own Drummer"

Each of these texts represents kinship beyond family. These adolescents, who feel like misfits in their school settings but come to embrace their uniqueness or "different drummer" roles—as seen in *Whale Talk* and *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*—may, in fact, encourage other misfits to find strength in an unexpected commonality. *Stargirl* and *Inside Out* represent a different take on the misfit role, given Stargirl's and Riley's (personified by her emotions) quirky ways and insightful perspectives. These texts have the potential to push those who have previously succumbed to the traditional female and student power structures out of their comfort zones, allowing students to question what they value and honor. All of the books include the protagonists' family members, but they also go far beyond the nuclear family in their identification of kinship bonds. Jacob's story (*Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*) is most closely blended between family and more complex kinship, as he discovers other misfits through his relationship with his grandfather.

These texts have the potential to push those who have previously succumbed to the traditional female and student power structures out of their comfort zones, allowing students to question what they value and honor.

Educators might use a documentary lens to approach the instruction of these texts. Each of the texts in this section can be viewed through such a lens, much like a case study of the uniqueness of individuals. A class reading or viewing of some of these texts would encourage students to document, using vodcasts through school computers or personal smart phones, the ways in which they are interacting with the world around them. Posing the question, "What makes you unique?" would allow students

opportunities to discuss how they march to the beat of their own drummers through engagements such as in-school and out-of-school activities, volunteer work, or family and community interactions. Tools like FlipGrid (https://info.flipgrid.com/) allow students to document their own life experiences as well as compare and contrast their experiences with the characters they have read and viewed.

In consideration of a kinship lens, each of these novels demonstrates that finding like-minded people, often through shared struggles, can strengthen an adolescent's perceptions of familial experiences—both positive and negative. During trying times, friends can feel like closer allies than family. Those who march to the beat of a different drummer may find commonalities in a shared Otherness, flourishing through the challenge of finding community with those who are very unlike themselves.

Those who march to the beat of a different drummer may find commonalities in a shared Otherness, flourishing through the challenge of finding community with those who are very unlike themselves.

How a Sense of Community Guides Us

Whether connected by relationship, location, or shared interests or values, we often find that adolescents seek examples of the ways in which communities can guide and support who they are. We can draw on these adolescent tendencies by considering how communities can influence us. This includes the negative impact of a community. In each selection below, we see examples of how the communities with which we identify can impact us in both positive and harmful ways.

Story Synopses

***All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely (2015)**

Rashad and Quinn are typical teenagers, going about their usual routines, when their lives are changed instantaneously by the police brutality experienced by innocent Rashad and witnessed by Quinn. Rashad is merely shopping for chips at a convenience store when he is wrongly accused of a crime and suffers a brutal attack at the hands of Quinn's mentor. The juxtaposition of the boys' two viewpoints, along with the real world overtones of police brutality and racial tensions, highlight and mirror the fact that racism still exists in America. Anger, sadness, fear, and confusion all fuel the community's response to the attack, where consequences to actions are oftentimes as complicated as the actions themselves.

***Orphan Island* by Laurel Snyder (2017)**

The small island has rules. Exactly nine children live there, and when a small green boat brings a new little boy or girl, alternating gender, it is time for the eldest child to board the boat, which immediately disappears into the mist. The boat, without captain or tiller, arrives and leaves once a year. The nine "orphans" enculturate the youngest with traditions and tasks passed down over the years, and the children learn to swim, read, and cook a meal during their first year. Other more nuanced roles develop following the first year, with each child working to his or her strengths on behalf of all of the children. The nine children create a functioning family. They look out for one another even in the midst of disagreements. When one child breaks an island rule, the island is no longer inherently safe. Jinny, the eldest, must take action on behalf of the group.

***The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2007)**

Arnold, called Junior by family and friends on the Spokane Reservation, is a gifted student with serious health problems. He enjoys creating satirical cartoons depicting his life events. Encouraged by a teacher's recommendation that he change schools in order to keep his hope alive, Arnold walks 22 miles to and from school nearly every day. He leaves his school on the Rez in favor of attending the public high school in the nearby white community. This transfers his basketball skills to a new team. Author Sherman Alexie tells Arnold's story in first person in this somewhat autobiographical tale. The family into which Arnold is born paradoxically becomes even more important to him, as his distance gives him better perspective on what family truly means.

Film: *Okja* (Bong, 2017)
In the Netflix original movie *Okja,* Mija and her giant mutant pig Okja have lived together in South Korea for ten years. A multinational conglomerate, Mirando, has populated the world with these engineered animals only to repossess them after a decade. The company takes Okja from Mija in an attempt to exploit Okja as the face of their new meat products. Mija sets out to rescue Okja, who is much more to her than just a pet. A kinship community of supporters, united by a shared disdain of the practices of Mirando, come together to aid Mija in her rescue of Okja.

Teaching "How a Sense of Community Guides Us"
In each of these texts, the protagonists face challenges outside of their control. While Jinny has come to know the challenges she and the other orphans face on Orphan Island, she understands inherently the importance of the kinship community on the island, which is organized using an apprentice or mentoring approach. Junior, in his efforts to join a new community, learns the importance of the kinship community he is leaving behind on the Rez, where tribal kinship is everything but which is paradoxically both nurturing and harsh. Mija journeys to rescue Okja, who is taken from her without her consent. And most abruptly and violently, as Rashad and Quinn face the aftermath of police brutality, they encounter a combination of community support and opposition. As they experience a racial divide, Rashad and Quinn, along with Jinny and Junior, try to navigate the opposing forces of doing what they know is right and doing what their kinship communities perceive to be right. While the racial and violent divisions present in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and *All-American Boys* are significantly more complicated on the surface than the tensions in *Okja* or *Orphan Island,* we believe each establishes a scaffold for complex discussions that can emerge from engaging with these texts.

This set of texts reminds us about ways we can use social media to discuss how different conceptions of community may be merged through the use of technology. Adolescents use technology to share, situate, and negotiate their identities. They also use it to make connections across peer groups and in relation to the world. But social media can also be used to bring adolescents and kinship communities together—often for positive reasons, but all too frequently for negative reasons, as well.

Through the work of the Why We Post initiative (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post), a series of ethnographic studies focused on social media, Costa and Nicolescu (2016) found that not only do social media reinforce traditional social networks, such as families divided by place and distance, but it has also allowed for a new type of social relationship, kin ties, in what they term *scalable sociality* (Costa & Nicolescu, 2016). Particularly intriguing in the context of adolescence is the value of relationships built by choice (versus relationships formed by birth). Through our work with adolescents, we know that social media apps constitute contemporary trends for staying connected. Adolescents are intricately connected through social media tools such as Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, as well as others being invented as we write.

We need to remind ourselves and the adolescents in our classrooms about the importance of critical media literacy, and we must teach social media interaction behaviors to counteract negative influences.

As we drafted this column, we were struck by the news of negative online kinship communities, such as an online suicide game called Blue Whale. Adolescents are instructed to complete 50 tasks and commit suicide on the final day (Timm-Garcia & Hartung, 2017). We are torn about whether or not, as teachers, we would address the game of Blue Whale directly with students, as drawing attention to the game could have deadly consequences. Negative and destructive communities are not new to our work with adolescents—a long history of gangs as kinship communities exists. However, social media avenues that can be used for good can also be used for evil. For every positive relationship adolescents build with like-minded individuals around the world, a negative relationship is cultivated. We need to remind ourselves and the adolescents in our classrooms about the importance of critical media literacy, and we must teach social media interaction behaviors to counteract negative influences.

Sources from the National Association of Media Literacy Education (https://namle.net) and websites such as Media Literacy Now (https://medialiteracynow.org) offer easily accessible resources that can be used in conjunction with the texts above. One particularly powerful activity promoted within critical media literacy is offering adolescents opportunities to become media creators, rather than media consumers. Asking adolescents to create a public service announcement, for example, can open their eyes to the ways others cultivate their support, encourage them to buy a particular brand of shoes, or even draw them into more nefarious relationships. Encouraging media literacy and awareness allows adolescents to critique what they are seeing, so they can celebrate the positive connections they find while critiquing the threatening ones.

One particularly powerful activity promoted within critical media literacy is offering adolescents opportunities to become media creators, rather than media consumers.

Finding Your People When Life Gets Hard

In addition to celebrating the unique attributes of adolescents, it is important to provide examples of the ways in which we find "our people" during difficult times. Taking the perspectives of others is often a matter of becoming aware, with consciousness-raising being a natural part of becoming an adult. The following set of YA novels explores how characters form kinship bonds with others during challenging times. These others see them as individuals, rather than as stereotypes.

Story Synopses

Ask Me No Questions by Marina Budhos (2006)

Fourteen-year-old Nadira and her older sister find themselves alone when their Bangladesh-born father is placed in a Canadian detention center for illegal immigrants after leaving the United States following 9/11 in the wake of anti-Muslim sentiment. Their mother leaves the sisters to finish the school year in New York so she can be near her husband. The sisters—with a relationship usually fraught with sibling rivalry—find their true family in one another as they keep their illegal status hidden from friends and teachers. They had always been sisters, but their dangerous shared status allows them to acknowledge the true importance of family.

Everything, Everything by Nicola Yoon (2015)

Madeline (Maddy) suffers from an immunodeficiency that requires her to remain in her home at all times. A modern-day Bubble Girl, she has no exposure to the outside world. In a carefully controlled and sterilized environment, Maddy interacts only with her mother and her nurse and passes the time living through the books she reads and observing her new next-door neighbor, Olly, and his family. Olly and Maddy soon find ways to communicate with one another, and Maddy risks her containment in order to save Olly from a dangerous situation. It isn't long before their connection grows stronger, putting Maddy in a place where she is willing to risk it all to have a few moments of wonderful versus a lifetime of seclusion. Once she takes the risk, Maddy learns she is stronger than she thinks.

We Are Okay by Nina LaCour (2017)

After her grandfather's death, Marin leaves San Francisco for New York, where she completes her first semester of college. In this introspective text, grief and betrayal drive many of Marin's actions as she shuts out her past life and friends. Mabel, Marin's best friend, visits the dorms for the winter break in hopes of convincing Marin to come home with her for the Christmas holiday, where she is always welcome. Marin works through her grief in flashbacks and musings, illustrating for the reader that the journey to understanding why a loss has occurred can be as challenging and important as the loss itself.

Film: _Wonderstruck_ (Haynes, 2017)

We are excited about the YA adaptation of Brian Selznick's (2011) *Wonderstruck*, which follows the story of two deaf children, Rose and Ben, through their journeys through New York City—Rose in 1927 and Ben in 1977. The juxtaposition of the muted sound in 1927 coupled with the contemporary scenes with deaf characters in 1977 elicits the idea of kinship spanning

five decades through shared experiences of deafness and deaf culture, in addition to solving the puzzle of how the two characters are connected.

Teaching "Finding Your People"

While traumatic and difficult experiences seem to be the common denominator among these four texts, we believe it is the resiliency of the protagonists that deserves the most attention. Nadira, Maddy, Marin, Rose, and Ben each demonstrate their resolve in different ways and on their own timelines, but not without the need to find their people, their kinship communities, to help them navigate through the trauma itself. Nadira and her sister, while hiding their status from their friends, depend on one another, while Marin actively retreats and tries to depend on herself. Between the two are Maddy, Rose, and Ben, who are alone in distinctive ways and would give anything not to be. Each of the texts is a stark reminder of the havoc adults make in the world. In each case, the healing begins when each protagonist persists, refusing to be victimized by the lives the adults hand them.

Our approach to teaching this set of texts and helping students understand the importance of "Finding Your People" would be an investigation of the resources available. Many websites provide information on kinship, including resources that provide support for families and kinship groups. The US Department of Health and Human Services provides resources about kinship care through their website at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/kinship/, which includes information about family preservation and counseling services.

Michigan State University offers the Kinship Care Resource Center (http://kinship.msu.edu/). The Center defines kinship as "the full time care, nurturing, and protection of children by relatives, members of their tribes or clans, godparents, stepparents, or any adult who has a kinship bond with a child." The site offers information on training and publications for caregivers and others interested in kinship services.

Additionally, there are a growing number of resources to support LGBTQ+ families and individuals seeking support or kinship experiences. PBS LearningMedia (https://oeta.pbslearningmedia.org/), in conjunction with experts and the NYC Department of Education Guidance Office, created a toolkit for educators, The LGBTQ+ Identity, which supports educators and students in navigating information and discussions that consider or involve LGBTQ+ students and topics. The First Person video series also highlights narrative experiences and provides teaching tips and conversation guides.

Why Kinship Matters

The notion of kinship as extending beyond family can be powerful for adolescents and preadolescents as they search for their identities and seek their niches and their people. In a consideration of the nuances of kinship, we recall an account shared by an elementary teacher who was the focus of a study a decade ago (Brown et al., 2007). She described the annual campout her previous year's students and their families held in her large, flat yard. Parents brought tents and bedrolls, and they read aloud to groups of children, including some older and younger siblings of her students, effectively extending and blending families for that evening, night, and the following morning. She saw this event as a culmination and validation of the open door, open communication policies she had quietly put into place over the academic year, with books at the center. The need for meaningful relationships is real, and YA literature, including books, films, and websites, can help adolescents navigate their way. Providing them a kinship lens to focus their attention may offer a light for their paths.

The notion of kinship as extending beyond family can be powerful for adolescents and preadolescents as they search for their identities and seek their niches and their people.

The YA books, films, and websites we include here are examples only, and we considered a wealth of other texts. In scanning our own experiences with YA texts through the kinship themes, we surfaced many possibilities. We hope you will consider the three themes we have shared here as a starting point in your own quest to help students find their kinship communities through literature.

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Kristin Elizabeth **Clark,** Bonnie-Sue **Hitchcock,** Rahul **Kanakia,** and Sara **Zarr**

Family Influence across the Ages:

A Collaborative Conversation

From the Editors: In this article, we are honored to feature a written conversation between several YA authors who have addressed explicitly discussion of family history in their writings and presentations. We appreciate the generous response of these authors (and their publishers) and their willingness to engage so thoughtfully and candidly in this public collaboration around considerations of family history in the lives of individuals and the influence of family relationships on adolescent identities and across the life span.

As to process, we generated and sent a set of initial questions to each author. We compiled the responses into a single document and then sent the compiled version back and forth to authors to solicit questions, elaborations, and revisions until all were satisfied with the resulting piece. We hope that in reading this article, you gain a deeper appreciation for this theme and these insightful authors.

How tightly connected are our family history and our individual present? Can we escape the effects of our past?

Bonnie-Sue: I think this is a question that dates back to Greek mythology (or even further) and has been a favorite theme of philosophers, religious clerics, and writers alike. Personally, I like the idea that family history somehow travels through time in our DNA. I like to read about these themes in literature as well, because they lend a bit of mysticism to the world, but family history can also be stifling and limiting, not to mention downright depressing if it makes a person feel trapped.

Rahul: I really don't know the answer to either of these questions. Sociologically, I think the importance of outside forces is underappreciated. Where you end up in life in terms of career, family, wealth, etc., is largely a product of your parents' circumstances, and your parents' circumstances are largely a product of broader societal forces. But when we're talking about psychology, I think family trauma is emphasized *too* much. Human beings are very resilient, and the present has much more of an effect on our psyche than does the past. Yeah, perhaps your parents were neglectful or abusive, and perhaps you live in a system of terrible, overarching oppression, but if the sun is shining and your apartment is clean, and your bills are paid, and you've just eaten a great pulled pork sandwich from the corner deli, well then, you're probably pretty happy.

Bonnie-Sue: I have often wondered if everything we do or think has been set down already and if it's perspective that we are lacking. I don't mean this in a religious sense, but rather in a physics sense, that time and experience are really just matters of perception and that our inability to conceptualize our place in the world has led us to believe that we have more of a say over our future or are less tied to our past.

Kristin: Whoa! Bonnie-Sue just threw me into an existential crisis! (It's all right—I'm prone to them. Just let me breathe into this paper bag for a minute.) Okay, physics, perception, and fate aside

(I'll think about them tomorrow), I'm inclined to believe our family history has a tremendous impact on us. How can it not? We are the product of our experience, and family is a pretty big influencer of experience. I don't think it's possible for the past *not* to affect us, but we can make choices regarding how we allow it to influence our present outlook and behavior. This kind of ties in with Rahul's point about finding happiness in a clean apartment and a tasty sandwich. Wretchedness and turmoil leave a mark. The question is, how do we respond? With self-destruction or pulled pork and gleaming cabinets?

Sara: I don't know if "escape" is possible, because it seems like that would involve denial of a certain part of the self that is as real as any other part. I do think we can transcend family history. We aren't doomed, as long as we can see the problems. I think it's not seeing the problems that gets us stuck in family patterns—thinking of our family patterns as normal or inevitable. That's especially a problem for kids, because when you're a kid, whatever is going on in your family is "normal," and you adapt to it and learn how to survive it until you get older and start seeing other models, other possibilities.

What is our moral obligation to stand by family? Is the family bond immutable, or can/should we cut ties and under what circumstances? How are these ideas explored in your novels?

Sara: That's a tough one, because the belief that one is morally obligated to stand by family is one of the things that can keep people in abusive or neglectful situations. At the same time, I have sympathy for people who feel a special obligation to family that might have fewer limits.

Rahul: I can't dictate other peoples' moral obligations. Personally, I feel a strong moral obligation to support my family. Of course, my family is both small and relatively well-off. However, I recently got engaged, and to my mind, that obligation immediately enlarged to include my fiancé's somewhat larger family. If someone were to say to me, well my family is awful—they're not supportive, and they suck the life from me—I don't know what I'd advise.

Kristin: I'm with Sara on this one. I say there is no moral obligation to stand by an abusive, neglectful, or unsupportive family, but I do think the decision to walk away should be examined deeply and acted upon (or not) according to circumstances. The idea of cutting ties with family is explored in both *Freakboy* (2013) and *Jess, Chunk, and the Road Trip to Infinity* (2016). Each book comes to a different conclusion. In *Freakboy,* the character Angel is mistreated, abused, and cast out of her family for being trans. For her own safety, it makes sense for her to sever ties with most of the members of her family. In *Jess, Chunk, and the Road Trip to Infinity,* the character Jess is set to cut ties with her father because she feels he isn't supportive of her transition. In the end, she doesn't detach herself from him, and I'm glad, because in that particular case, through communicating, she is able to perceive (a little) that his fears for her are what made him originally say no to signing the waiver for her hormone treatment. By choosing to talk to him, she is able to help him grasp that her need to live her life as her authentic self is no passing fad. I like to think this conversation sets the two on a path of greater understanding, the kind that might make full reconciliation possible. In each case, although my characters make different decisions, both are right in that they lead to peace for the individual making the choice.

Sara: In my experience, there are a lot of ways to "stand by" that don't have to include enabling or risking your own mental or physical health and safety. For example, when I was dealing with my dad as an adult, I didn't cut the ties, but I did tell him there were certain things I wouldn't do, like fetch him from the hospital or detox center or otherwise rescue him from situations he got himself into by drinking. I was available for a relationship with the sober version of him. For someone else, the line might be elsewhere. In *Gem & Dixie* (2017), Gem doesn't cut ties, but ultimately you're seeing her communicate by removing herself; she's not going to let herself be put in the parenting or caretaking role anymore. She changes the bond by rejecting the roles she knows she can't take on anymore, but she doesn't sever it.

Bonnie-Sue: Each of my characters in *The Smell of Other People's Houses* (2016) addresses this to some extent. Obviously, I think the family bond is incredibly strong, but everyone should be able to cut ties when that bond is akin to a sinking ship, and the only way out of drowning is to abandon it. However, that's a really hard position to be in. My character Dora is in that position and chooses to confront her father head on, but she never totally abandons her mother, thus altering the roles in that relationship significantly. I chose to write her character this way because where I'm from, this is a common outcome. I think this is something we see a lot when there is abuse in a family or when parents aren't in a position to take care of their children. Kids are really resilient and can rise up and take responsibility, but it doesn't mean they should have to do that from a young age. Of course, it does happen. The same is true for my character, Hank. Once his father is gone and his mother basically checks out, he steps in to make decisions for himself and his brothers. He cuts ties with his mother once it is obvious that it's the only way he can keep his brothers safe. That example is more about choosing his moral obligation to his brothers when he senses that his mother has broken her moral obligation to her children, so in that sense, his bond is more immutable than his mother's. I think these are universal questions and themes, and that's why we see them explored so often in YA literature.

Rahul: Sometimes we talk about "found" families, but oftentimes these families are ephemeral, and they disappear exactly when you most need them. What I've observed time and again is people thinking they can rely on their friends and then having their friends disappear when things get difficult. The problem with any relationship based on good feelings is that it'll be severely strained once those feelings are gone. People look to friendships for joy, which is why they're surprised and appalled when those friendships bring pain. Family, on the other hand, is just stronger. I don't know why. There's something mystical about it. Family bonds aren't like friendships. You often don't *like* or even love your family. Frequently these are people who, if you met them at a party, you'd be appalled by. But when they need help, you help them. It's the same with other sorts of community. I've often observed that the Indian American community is *much* stronger than any friendship network I might have. My very best friends in the world might help me move. They might let me crash on their couch for a few weeks if I was having trouble. They might loan me some money. But I could probably walk up to some random Indian person at a gas station, tell him I was in trouble, and he'd most likely let me stay at his house. And I'd do the same! Again, I have no idea where this comes from, but it's a real thing.

What about the family relationship might be unique during adolescence? How do your characters navigate family during this time of life?

Rahul: In adolescence, family as a concept doesn't really matter as much because you have something stronger: you're actually dependent on another person for all your material needs. Later on, when those financial ties are cut, I think it's a shock to realize that, err, I actually *don't* need to talk to these people anymore. This is why family ties are much weaker in the industrialized world. In India, that financial independence never happens; until your parents die, you will most likely be financially entangled with them in some way.

Bonnie-Sue: The main thing that occurs during adolescence, in my opinion, is that sort of gray period when a character isn't a child anymore but isn't an adult yet either. It's like having a foot in both worlds, and it's rather an exciting but also scary time. For many people at this age, so much of life experience is seen and experienced through the lens of that first family. I think this is critical because this reality shapes those most formative years; the absence of a parent, the death of a parent, the activities of a parent, the vices of a parent—all of these things will play into who we are and who we become while growing up in a particular household. All of my characters struggle with defining who they are and who they want to be in light of what they've known most of their lives. Even my character Alyce, who has wonderful parents, has a certain amount of guilt when she realizes that she might want something different than what she was raised to want. She had this

wonderful life fishing with her dad that obviously shaped her, but it's always a challenge to walk away, because the unspoken expectation that parents have with their children, at least in the world that I came from, can be really demanding. Choosing what you want for yourself rather that what you've been given, that's huge.

Sara: Adolescence is this transition period, from childhood to adulthood, and it's a long and complex transition period. You are beginning the process of detaching from parents and differentiating yourself from them in behaviors and beliefs. At the same time, an adolescent still needs parenting and still needs guidance. Even in a healthy family system, it's not an easy time. There's a lot of negotiation and pushing away and then wanting to pull in close again. Gem and Dixie are not in a healthy family system, to say the least, so this transition kind of brings to the fore one dominant question for the daughter, who can see it's not working: *How am I going to get myself out of here and on to something better?* That's not how she articulates it, but it's what's going on in her gut when a window of escape is unexpectedly opened. I think a lot of teens and young adults can relate to that feeling of looking at your family and thinking, "I don't know exactly what I want, but I know it's not this . . . ."

Kristin: During adolescence we explore and discover who we are outside the confines of our family unit. It's a great time for individuation, and while the family may remain important in terms of support and stability (if we're lucky), the teen years are when we gravitate toward our peers. Our peers are mirrors, reflecting back at us the outward trappings of our newly explored identities. If we like what we see when we're with them, we align ourselves with these friends. Our interactions with them become a more important part of our lives. In my books, while the families of my protagonists are present and important, in most cases, it's the kids' relationships with their friends that have the most impact.

Rahul: It's interesting that you all stress adolescence as a transition period. I think what I've been struck by, in talking to teens, is how adult they seem. In terms of reasoning ability and social polish, they seem more or less adult. But at the same time, I know from my friends who are parents of teens that there is a tremendous amount of labor involved in making them presentable, feeding them, getting them from place to place. I don't know. I think what's hardest for teens who have a sense of fairness and duty is this idea that they haven't yet earned freedom. I know that was the case for me. I felt so much respect for my parents and gratitude for all they'd done for me. And yet, in America at least, you need to take these steps toward freedom before you're really ready—before you really feel like you deserve it. In fact, without doing that, without rebelling, without learning to follow your own heart, you never really become an adult, no matter how long you live.

How are cultural and/or societal expectations and norms transmitted down the family line? When these change or shift across the generations, what gets lost and found?

Bonnie-Sue: I suppose I touched on this a little bit in that last question. I think this is sometimes such a subtle thing that we don't even recognize it until it starts to change. In my family (and in Alaskan native culture), one of the biggest societal expectations was that you never talked about yourself, and you definitely did not talk about anything that might happen within your family. Even answering this question has taken me quite awhile because I'm hesitant to write specific examples, knowing that it is still frowned upon to talk openly about certain things in our society, or perhaps I can't shake what I was raised to believe. But I have also been really impressed by young people who have stood up and said they want to heal some of the rifts in our society that were exacerbated by not talking, while at the same time holding on to the integrity of that sentiment, "Do not gossip; do not brag." What is lost by speaking out is some of the pain and harm that have been covered up over the years, but what is gained is a chance for elders and younger generations to come together and learn from each other again.

Rahul: What I think is complex about adolescent family relationships is that your parents have to meet a

lot of your emotional needs. They need to socialize you, teach you morals, give you skills to survive, but at the same time, they need to make you feel valued and loved. These are two goals that are sort of mutually incompatible, because how can you simultaneously say, "You are enough" and "You are failing in this, that, and the next way"? The heart of my book, *Enter Title Here* (2016), is, I think, about this tension. Reshma's parents do their best to walk that line: they want their daughter to be successful, but they also want her to love herself. And I think they do a really good job! But the message nonetheless gets garbled. Or maybe Reshma susses out the inherent incompatibility between the two messages. And now, even though parent and child know something has gone wrong, they can't set it right, which I believe is a major part of adolescence. You can't tell your child what to think anymore. Adolescents are starting to form their own opinions about the world, and they're starting to think, well, you know, maybe my parents are wrong. . . .

Sara: I became aware of a few things when I did my family tree as a sort of therapy exercise. One norm was that men/fathers sort of came and went; they were unreliable, and it was largely the women who stuck around, took care of things, and sacrificed to ensure the best for their children—at least as much as it was in their power. A related cultural norm in my tree, on my mother's side anyway, was religion—that the women, having been frequently abandoned by husbands and fathers, turned to faith and to church communities for emotional and sometimes practical support in the work of raising their families. For Gem and Dixie, with addiction in their tree, one of the norms is a kind of resignation or denial that "this is how things are" and there aren't other options.

Kristin: When we think of culture, we often think of a broader swath of individuals making up a society, with its own rules, mores, traditions, and biases, but families have cultures as well. These get passed down and absorbed in ways both conscious and unconscious. Even when we become aware of these things and recognize that not everyone thinks or behaves as our family does, particularly in areas of bias or prejudice, a lot of our actions remain reactions. You can reject your family culture, but your very rejection shapes you—how you are in the world, how you see yourself. I believe it takes a tremendous conscious effort to recognize your family culture without acting or reacting in response to it in some way.

Sara: When I think about changes and shifts in my own family, I think about how neither my sister nor I have kids, and we're the only children of our parents. What's lost there is our continuing history, both genetically and directly—no more branches of that particular tree. On the other hand, we've found lives for ourselves that aren't all about surviving abandonment and struggling under the responsibility of holding a family together. Similarly, in my book, Gem is radically breaking off from the norms and expectations in her system. She's losing the comfort (if that's the right word) of the familiar patterns and the approval that can come from being the good child, the responsible one, but she will go on to gain so much more as she makes new paths for herself and maybe, down the line, other members of her family.

Rahul: I think you're very astute, Kristin, writing about family cultures. It's only since becoming engaged and becoming intimately involved with another family that I've started to see the ways that my family is idiosyncratic. For instance, my fiancé is always chiding me for being too abrupt, for hurrying too much, for not lingering in my goodbyes. And yet whenever we're around my family, she's the one who confuses them by not hurrying along. There's a sort of expediency and practicality and lack of sentimentality that I've gotten from my parents, and it's not a particularly Indian thing—it's just the culture that these two people formed together. But I didn't know it. And when you're a teen, you're so enveloped by that mini-culture that it's hard to see beyond it. This is something I haven't much thought about, actually—how it's possible for two outwardly similar families to differ so totally in their rituals and their aims and their mores.

What piece of your family history has influenced you as a writer?

Sara: Oh, so many things. My parents were readers and musicians, and we grew up with books and classical music and culture generally being valued. My maternal grandfather was a writer, and all of my aunts have done some kind of writing in their lives, and I do think in some ways that kind of thing either gets into your blood or is passed down by example and what is valued. On the less happy side, kids who spring from generations of alcoholics and their codependent spouses can develop acute sensitivity as far as reading people and detecting the emotions of others. Mind-reading almost becomes a survival skill (though also a huge burden for a kid), and I think that opens up a channel of empathy that might not otherwise be there. Also, as a reaction to chaos, you get into the habit of running "What if?" contingencies and trying to predict what will happen next, and that feeds directly into the part of storytelling that involves imagining what *could* happen.

Kristin: I come from a pretty academic family. My dad was a linguistics professor; my mom was an anthropologist who got her Master's degree when I was a kid. Books were super important in our house. In spite of the love of reading I absorbed from the environment, I was a very, very poor student and had the sense that I was turning out to be a disappointment to my parents. That changed when I wrote a short story to earn a Girl Scout badge. My parents' reaction to the story was overwhelmingly positive, and it held (to my mind) a strong whiff of relief. (She's *not* a total failure!) I was given a sense that there was something I could do and do well. Proud (and relieved), I continued to write. As I type this, I wonder now for the first time if their praise (and my relief) were merited. The story was a day in the life of a baby, told from the perspective of the baby, which seems awfully trite and cutesy now. No matter. It was the right reaction at the right time, and it set me on course.

Rahul: Out of my parents, I'm closest to my mom. She fell into a career as a sociology professor (after not particularly enjoying her undergraduate education, she only applied to graduate school so she could join my dad in America), and she's always emphasized to me the saving power of work. How you should find meaningful work, and then do it. If you've read my book, this is a major theme. Reshma keeps hearing "be successful," when really her mom is trying to give her a subtler message. Like Reshma, I haven't wholeheartedly accepted my mom's values. At least half the time, I think they're BS. I'm much more of a slacker than my mom is, and most days I wonder if it wouldn't be much more satisfying to simply lounge around all day like a Jane Austen hero. But obviously I do work, and I do find meaning in it. I don't know; I think the sorting-through of clashing values is the kind of thing that powers both a writing career and a meaningful life.

Bonnie-Sue: I did not really feel that I had a voice when I was growing up. Writing was a way for me to express myself, even if for many years, it was done only in the privacy of my own journal. I could disappear into books and read about other cultures, other societies, and other teens my own age who might have had different struggles. I could see how writers solved problems in these worlds, and that opened my eyes to other ways of seeing and being. Because I didn't feel confident speaking and wasn't encouraged to speak, I learned to create a world where my voice might matter or I had some control over the outcome. Even after all these years, I still struggle with that thought that maybe I shouldn't be speaking quite so much or being so honest about what it was like growing up in this place. That certainly shows how deeply ingrained our family history can be.

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Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock *was born and raised in Alaska. She worked as a journalist for Alaska Public Radio for many years and fished commercially with her family on their salmon troller when her kids were young. She now writes from her yurt in Fairbanks.*

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Sara Zarr *is the author of six novels plus a collaborative novel for young adults. Her first book,* Story of a Girl, *was a 2007 National Book Award Finalist. Her works have been variously named to annual best books lists of the American Library Association,* Kirkus Reviews, Publishers Weekly, School Library Journal, *the* Guardian, *the International Reading Association, the New York Public Library, and the Los Angeles Public Library, and they have been translated into many languages. She lives in Salt Lake City, Utah.*

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