THE IMPORTANCE OF AGENCY:

FEMALE ROLE MODELS IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

by

Mary Lindsey

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for Departmental Honors in

the Department of English

Texas Christian University

Fort Worth, Texas

May 4, 2015

THE IMPORTANCE OF AGENCY: FEMALE ROLE MODELS IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Project Approved:

Supervising Professor: Sarah Robbins, Ph.D.

Department of English

Ariane Balizet, Ph.D.

Department of English

Jan Lacina, Ph.D.

Department of Education

ABSTRACT

Because of a history of gender inequality, women and girls are routinely misrepresented in mainstream media. For girls, especially adolescents, this negative representation can have a profoundly detrimental effect as they plan for their futures. Young adult literature has an opportunity to give young women strong female role models, and educators have a responsibility to guide our female students to books with positive representations. This thesis presents a framework which helps educators analyze the quality of a young adult novel's female protagonist in terms of the ability to be a positive role model. The framework's main concern is with the issue of agency (i.e. the female protagonist's power over her own life). This project gives examples of high-scoring and low-scoring books along with an example of how the framework can be used in the classroom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface: The Beginning of an Idea

The summer before my sophomore year of high school, *Breaking Dawn*, the fourth book in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series, was published to the joy and excitement of much of the female teen population. Along with many girls at the time, I read the whole series. As I read, I enjoyed the story, but I thought it was a little silly and not particularly well-written. Despite its drawbacks, I happily read the series, especially because it was an easy summer read. However, when I returned to school, I heard many girls fawning over the books, obsessing about the ins and outs of the plot and characters. A few weeks after reading Meyer's series, I had forgotten much of the novels but people around me were still talking about Bella, Edward, and Jacob. I became very frustrated with the girls at my school who seemed unable to stop talking about the series, especially because their conversations ignored the protagonist, Bella, and focused almost entirely on the possible love interests, Edward and Jacob. And no wonder; Bella is clumsy and unremarkable. Even in high school, I was confused and frustrated by the obsession with the praise for books with such an unlikeable female protagonist.

In college, I continued to pursue my interest in young adult literature in both my coursework and my spare time. Through my coursework I began to explore young adult literature as a pedagogical tool and women and gender studies, specifically about how gender roles affect girls in their formative years. About four years after I read the *Twilight* series, I learned of Allison Bechdel's test about female representation in films.[1] I began to wonder if it would be possible to make a similar test to analyze, not just female representation in books, but the quality of the female protagonists in novels. Based on

[1] http://www.feministfrequency.com/2009/12/the-bechdel-test-for-women-in-movies/

this interest, I began researching the topic of female role models in young adult literature more intently.

When I began this project, my goal was to bring together my three areas of study: English, education, and women's studies. Ultimately, I came up with the idea of creating a framework with which educators could analyze the quality of female protagonists in young adult literature, in terms of being role models for adolescent girls. Teenagers are affected by representations in the media,[2] and educators have the opportunity and responsibility to guide students to more accurate and complex representations of adolescents. The framework I have created will help teachers and librarians decide which young adult books to recommend and will support building strong and interesting book collections from which students can choose books.

[2] See Chapter 1 discussion of Friedan, Pipher, and Orenstein.

Chapter One: Introduction

This project focuses on the intersection between women and gender studies, teenage development and education, and young adult literature. In researching to build my framework to analyze female role models in young adult literature, I examined work done by scholars in each of these fields. While I read many books and articles (see Works Cited and Referenced for a full list), the scholars who were most important in influencing my thinking about this project were Betty Freidan, Mary Pipher, Peggy Orenstein, Roberta Trites, Pam Cole, and Deborah O'Keefe. The authors whose work I will review are prominent in their field and have greatly influenced my own work.

The first group of researchers that were influential to this project focus on gender roles and how gender-based restrictions are placed on women from a young age. Strict gender roles repress women's ability to be who they want to be. Gender researchers since the 1950s have discovered how detrimental these restraints can be, especially because they are pushed on girls at such a young age. In my research, Betty Friedan, Peggy Orenstein, and Mary Pipher have been most helpful in shaping my understanding of the detriments of negative gender roles.

Gender inequality is a major problem in American culture, but it is by no means a new problem. One of the most influential women's studies texts for modern gender studies is Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. The book's argument was that women were suffering from "a problem that has no name" which centered on the idea that '50s/'60s era housewives were plagued with unhappiness that seemingly had no cause. Friedan examined this discontent and found several societal expectations for women

which caused dissatisfaction with their lives, most of which revolved around women not feeling free to do things for themselves. From expectations about their level of education to how they were represented in the media, women were presented with a very limited idea of what they should be, which didn't always match their desires and ambitions. One of the cultural expectations for women that Friedan found was the idea that women should "devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children" (Friedan 58). Even 50 years later, many books targeted to young women still present this expectation rather than promoting the idea that young women should focus on finding their identity and interdependent relationships. Furthermore, Friedan spoke to one magazine executive who claimed that women "are only interested in the family and the home" and not interested in general issues (Friedan 84). However, by not marketing any other types of magazines to women and by promoting the idea that general interest magazines were only for men, magazine executives had created a self-fulfilling prophecy. Today, this idea is echoed by toy and media executives who push princesses, dolls, shopping, and anything pink on young girls.

Many of the issues Friedan outlined in her book have been echoed by contemporary authors along with many new problems brought about by changes in modern society. Peggy Orenstein and Mary Pipher are two very influential gender studies scholars from the past 20 years. Orenstein, a scholar who writes for more general audiences, focuses on how gender roles and stereotypes have been pushed on young girls and how this pattern affects their development in her book *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*. Pipher, a psychologist writing for other scholars and professionals, focuses on recounting

the ways in which her teenage patients were affected by gender expectations. Both authors focus on how gender roles are limiting.

Mary Pipher argues that teenage girls today face the problem that has no name that Betty Friedan talked about in her influential book. She says that adolescents "know that something is very wrong, but they tend to look for the source within themselves…rather than in broader cultural problems" (Pipher 12). When girls begin to understand that men hold the power in our society, they struggle to understand their place in society. While they don't understand why their contribution is ignored, they feel they need to find a way to fit in the society as it is. As girls learn more about the world, they see men in power and women marginalized (Pipher 41). With this realization, girls suffer from cognitive dissonance because their own sense of power and independence conflicts with their identification as a woman.

Physical appearance is highly important to adolescents. Part of the focus on their own looks is the understanding that being too pretty is just as damaging to one's reputation as being too plain or ugly because while being plain is looked down upon, being too pretty turns girls into sex objects. "Girls struggle with mixed messages" because they are expected to be sexy but not sexual and smart but not threatening (Pipher 35). Girls struggle to understand how they should look, feel, and act and bounce between extremes as they decide who they will be. Many women struggle with issues caused in their adolescence that were never resolved. These issues resurface in adulthood as women attempt to become more pleasing to others without thinking about their own happiness. In other words, women struggle as they learn to become subjects of their own stories rather than objects of someone else's story.

Though these issues follow women into adulthood, they actually begin much earlier. Orenstein's research focuses on how gender roles affect young girls. Just as teenagers and young women are presented with conflicting messages about who they should be, so are young girls. For Orenstein, though, it's not so much that girls are told to choose between conflicting images or walk the fine line between them. Rather from a young age, girls are encouraged to be both extremes. With the message that women could have it all followed the message that women needed to be it all. If they only manage to be smart but not funny or beautiful it seems they have fallen short of what they were supposed to be (Orenstein 17). As society has changed and more opportunities have become available to women, there has been a new perspective on empowerment that women are not free from traditional gender roles but free to choose them (Orenstein 7). The problem, however, is that the choice to buck tradition is too hard to make. Societal pressure to follow traditional roles is still too strong, and young women especially may not be ready to make such a tough decision. In exchange for high achievement, women must obsess about our physical appearance as a way to defuse the threat it poses to male dominance (Orenstein 16).

Orenstein determines that one of the ways that societal expectations are being pushed on women starting in girlhood is through toys that limit gender expression. Newer toy designs "define individuality entirely through appearance and consumption," but appearance and consumption are not actually character traits and do not actually define who a person is (Orenstein 50). Another problem with toys marketed to young girls is that the toys are sexualized putting pressure on young girls to be sexy before they are ready to be. Children need developmentally appropriate experiences; "girls pushed to be

sexy too soon can't really understand what they're doing" and do not learn to connect sexual performances with feelings of intimacy (Orenstein 85). Young women are faced with the struggle of being expected to look sexy but not feel sexual or have sex. In other words, they are expected to "provoke desire in others without experiencing it themselves" once again putting women in the position of object in their own life (Orenstein 123). Another problem presented with sexualized toys at a young age is self-objectification. Self-objectification, judging your body by how it looks to others rather than how it feels, is one of the leading causes of "depression, eating disorders, distorted body image and risky sexual behavior" and the play sexiness encouraged for girls can lead to self-objectification in preteens and teens (Orenstein 6). Correlations have been found between the amount of mainstream media girls consume and the importance they place on being physically attractive, and girls who place more emphasis on physical beauty are more likely to be depressed and are less ambitious (Orenstein 16). If mainstream media presented better role models and placed less emphasis on external looks, then girls might have a better chance at healthy self-esteem. Even a single gender related comment from people can be all a little girl needs to give up what she likes and be steered to stereotypical behaviors (Orenstein 3). If this trend works with non-stereotypical comments and representations as well, then every positive representation has a positive effect on young girls. The princesses separated from their stories are just shells, the exterior beauty without the story that makes her interesting; at least the movies give them a chance to be the star and have their story told (Orenstein 20). This idea of giving girls a chance to tell their own story is very important. Gender roles that are pushed upon

children are very influential. If young girls were presented with better representations of women they would suffer less from societal expectations not matching their desires.

Another group of researchers that influenced my project focuses on the consumption of cultural products, including books, that reinforce gender roles. Within the field of gender representation in American literature, Fetterley and Baym set the standard. While some of their ideas are a bit out of date, without their contributions, the field would not be the same. Baym defined woman's fiction as books written by women, addressed to women, and telling one particular story about women (Baym 22). Baym describes what she calls unspectacular feminism in which a female character begins with no ego and after looking to the world to protect her and being let down, she realizes her own potential and her inner possibilities (Baym 19). Baym's findings of characters with unspectacular feminism made a major contribution by highlighting some of the tentative signs of female agency in 19th-century fiction. Promoting these readings, in turn, helped encourage 20th-century women writers to extend their positive feminine role models for female readers. Fetterley's ideas about women in literature also largely impacted the landscape of research. Fetterley presents the argument that when a woman reads only books with male protagonists, she begins to think like a man and is estranged from her own perspective (Fetterley xxi). I think, however, that it doesn't so much make her think like a man as it limits her perspective and limits what she believes she should think about. All children should be given the opportunity to see the world from a variety of perspectives as that helps them grow and learn to think critically and learn empathy. More than telling her how to think, books with male protagonists give girls an idea of what is acceptable to think about, which may lead to her ignoring her own perspectives

because it does not fit with what she has learned is acceptable. Along with seeing multiple perspectives, including women's, it's important to see women characterized in many ways. In fact, having some stories in which women take on the role of the villain is better than women in every book being characterized exactly the same way. The problem is when being a women is portrayed as inherently evil, which implies that all women are evil. When women are boiled down to a single character trait, such as happy, kind, evil, etc., it dehumanizes them because humans are inherently comprised of many characteristics.

Another, more recent, influential researcher who focuses on cultural products that reinforce gender roles is Deborah O'Keefe. O'Keefe rightly stated that women in boys' books published in the 20th century or earlier either nurture a male protagonist or need to be saved by him (O'Keefe 50). In this sense, women are mostly plot elements needed to keep the male hero's story moving forward rather than characters in their own right. Female readers are expected to read about male characters and try to identify with them as a way to broaden their perspectives, but male readers are not expected to do the same with female characters (O'Keefe 31). Women's experiences have been downgraded and determined unworthy of understanding if readers haven't experienced them first-hand. There is a perspective that stories with male protagonists can be interpreted as stories of selfhood that can be beneficial for boys and girls to read and learn from (O'Keefe 31). For young girls who are just learning to tell their own stories, this can be a devastating belief. While a single book's negative images or exclusion of women is not necessarily devastating to girls, there is a cumulative effect when every book a young girl reads systematically excludes or defames female characters. Girls who read these books

do not get the opportunity to see anyone like them in books and understand that their perspectives are not worth being heard by boys or girls. While this has certainly been a problem in older books, the newer genre of young adult literature has the opportunity to present the perspective of positive female protagonists.

In that context, the last group of researchers that influenced my project focuses on young adult literature and its importance for adolescent girls. Young adult literature is powerful because it is relatable to teenagers and they can see themselves in the characters and situations presented in those books. There are many proposed qualities that define young adult literature. Pam Cole presents a comprehensive, nine-part definition of young adult literature in her book *Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century* (Cole 49). While Cole's characteristics are a solid place to start, most YA critics acknowledge that not all young adult books perfectly fit all of these categories. Most critics agree that YAL centers on a teenage character, but the reigning mantra for defining young adult books is "I know it when I see it". With this in mind, all of the books I will examine are widely accepted in the YA genre.

Young adult literature is popular because it "offers a window through which teens can examine their lives and the world in which they live" (Cole 61). While classic texts present similar social issues or emotional conflicts as are found in YAL, the classics lack the modern issues and pop culture references that hook teen readers. While adults often want teens to read books because of their literary merits, teens want and need to connect with something in the book, and if they don't they will not want to read it. Young adult literature can bridge this divide because it is very relatable for adolescents and can have as much literary merit as books in the adult literary canon. This idea of being

relatable, though, can be difficult for female readers reading many young adult books. Many young adult books portray female characters as very one-dimensional, making them hard to relate to for female readers, which can not only deter them from reading more, but can also give them a false idea of what they should be like. Just like Baym's woman's fiction was once downgraded and said to be unimportant with terms such as "sentimental fiction" or "domestic fiction" (Baym 24), today's young adult literature for girls is often seen as being of lower literary quality. Though young adult romances are often looked down upon for their idealism and lack of literary quality, there is a reasonable idea that girls want books that portray women with power, rather than the more typical book that portrays women as inferior to men and dealing with hardships they cannot escape from.

Roberta Trites, author of *Waking Sleeping Beauty* and *Disturbing the Universe*, discusses the importance of YAL in teenage identity formation. Trites claims that "power is even more fundamental to adolescent literature than growth" and an essential part of adolescence is learning one's place in the power structure and how to use their power (*Disturbing the Universe* x). This issue is even more important for female teenagers as women have systematically been oppressed and disempowered. Trites' findings about the importance of having power reflect Pipher's argument that adolescent girls want to see themselves having power in society. While power is often the main point of discussion within feminism, other traits are more important when talking about feminist young adult novels. Accordingly, in this thesis, I will focus on the concept of agency. While power connotes having control over others, agency is about having control over oneself (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* 8). Agency for female characters means being able and having

opportunities to making choices for herself. “voice often serves as a metaphor for female agency” because a character cannot enact agency if she cannot or will not speak up for herself (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* 6). The ability to use one’s voice is an important part of agency, and giving a female protagonist the chance to let her voice be heard through first person narration is an important presentation of agency.

While many adults will cite Jo March or Nancy Drew as positive female role models for girls, Trites argues that these characters “think much more about solving other people’s problems and making other people happy” than working out their own sense of identity (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* ix). While these characters are resourceful, they do not use their abilities to build agency for themselves. Furthermore, in the case of a character like Jo, when she gets married, she gives up her resourcefulness to fulfill a traditional role. While there is nothing inherently wrong with such a choice, some of her agency is lost with this life change. These female protagonists focus more on relationships than selfhood or identity. Relationships are certainly important in every person’s life, but these characters become dependent on these relationships because they derive their own happiness form the happiness of others. Emotional autonomy is an important quality for a YA character to have, meaning that a female character is not dependent on a romantic partner or family members for emotional health. While friendships or familial relationships are sometimes present in these novels, they are “often depicted as being less important that heterosexual relationships” (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* 91). These relationships often feature the female character learning “to validate themselves though the male’s opinion…or they sacrifice their strength to a male…or they are objectified” (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* 88). These are clearly not ideal models; there have to be

alternative narratives for young women to read. While there is nothing wrong with female characters or real women getting married or being in a romantic relationship, in books "the marriage plot often signals an ending of the heroine's independent ways" (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* 14). Female characters, especially those in young adult literature, typically lose their agency when they get married or begin a romantic relationship. While these female characters had power compared to other women of their time period and might have been role models for young adults at the time of original publication, those characters might not be appropriate role models for contemporary girls. Young girls who don't understand the historical context of the novel may mistakenly think that these outdated characters would be positive role models for their own lives.

One of the most effective ways to combat the objectification of women in young adult novels is to put women in the subject position. Throughout history, women have been silenced and oppressed by others and often learn to silence themselves over time. In order to change this trend, though, young women need to see role models that are able to use their voice to enact their agency.

Young adult books allow adults to present children with a model of how they should behave. Because of the instructional function of young adult literature, any discussion or framework around them is going to be inherently value-laden. As I was creating my framework, I considered this and decided that my framework should focus on valuing agency, making choices for oneself, and equality because these qualities encourage and accept many choices and ideologies.

My original inspiration for the structure of this type of framework came from Allison Bechdel's test. In her cartoon series, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, Bechdel presented her test with three simple requirements: 1) There are at least two women who, 2) talk to each other, 3) about something other than a man. Originally intended to just be a joke in her comic strip, this informal test is frequently used by film critics to gauge the female presence in popular movies (though it does not necessarily measure whether or not a movie would be considered feminist or have feminist characters). While this is a very simple test, it effectively measures female presence in films, but even today many popular movies fail the test. More recently, the creator of the documentaries *Miss Representation* and *The Mask You Live In* created what she calls the Representation Test. Again, this test is geared toward film, but it focuses on multiple types of representation including gender, race, and disability. While both of these tests were influential in my thinking, I knew that I wanted to include the gender focus that the Bechdel test uses and the intersectionality presented in the Representation Test through the examination of female protagonists in young adult literature. In my reading of YAL, both as a teenager and an adult, the protagonist is the most relatable character usually because he or she are the most well-developed. I knew I wanted to center my research on main characters rather than secondary characters. However, examining the quality of female protagonists is challenging because there are many areas where bias can get in the way. Because of this, I focused especially on the issues researchers have studied in regards to healthy development of adolescent girls. Under each major category are guiding questions which determine the scoring. The major categories are female agency, relationships, men, intersectionality/diversity, and a bonus for books with female authors.

Female Agency • Is the female protagonist represented as more than an object for the male gaze? • Are female characters depicted as having and using agency? • Is being a woman not the defining characteristic of the character?
Relationships • Are relationships with family and friends (i.e. non-romantic relationships) emphasized? • Are romantic relationships presented without characters becoming completely dependent on each other?
Men • Does the book avoid glorifying violent men? • Does the book avoid extreme and unhealthy body ideals for men? • Are men presented in non-stereotypical roles?
Intersectionality/Diversity • Does the book depict diverse body types? • Does the book depict people of color (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict LGBT characters (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict people with disabilities (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?
Bonus • Author is female

Each of these categories was informed by my research, especially Roberta Seelinger Trites's *Disturbing the Universe*. Agency, or power to control oneself, is essential for adolescent girls who routinely feel powerless in a patriarchal society. Trites focuses on how teenage protagonists are empowered and disempowered in YAL. "Teenagers are repressed…in these books" and these representations can affect the way readers understand their own power (*Disturbing the Universe*, 7). Seeing representation of characters with agency gives teen readers the message that they also have agency, which is important to help them develop into adults who feel they can make a positive impact in the world. Therefore, in my framework agency is the most important section. The three questions in this section focus on a female protagonist and any other female characters in a book and the agency they have and enact in their own lives. The next section focuses on the emphasis on romantic relationships versus other relationships like

those with family or friends. Because traditional gender roles have focused so heavily on a woman's role as a wife, it is important that books for adolescents present a balanced view in which non-romantic relationships are valued and characters who are engaged in romance do not lose their own identity in order to fulfill their partner's needs. Next, with the knowledge that gender roles are just as damaging to men as they are to women, the third section focuses on how men are portrayed. If men are present in the book, it is important that they are not pushed into traditional hyper-masculine gender roles. The next section focuses on intersectionality and diversity. While gender issues are an important concern for adolescents, there are many other marginalized groups that should be represented well within young adult literature. Authentic, non-stereotypical representations of gender help create a more realistic narrative world. Similarly, other privileged groups cannot be the only ones represented while oppressed groups are entirely left out. Furthermore, the importance of intersectionality cannot be overestimated. No reader is affected only by issues of gender. All people are affected by various issues of marginalization so it is important that books reflect issues of intersectionality. This category focuses on body type, race, sexual orientation and transgender, and disability as important categories for representation. I included these categories of representation because they are closely related to gender issues and most prominent in contemporary discussion. Body type is not directly a gender issue but is commonly studied by feminist and gender scholars. The bonus section is intended to add points to female authors who write female characters, because their character portrayals are more likely to come from personal experience. While men are just as capable of writing convincing and authentic female characters, female authors are able to pull

directly from lived experience. Experiences like first menses or first sexual experience could be speculated by male authors, but female authors' first hand experiences give them something more authentic to draw from.

In terms of scoring, the system is very simple. A book can be given a score from 0-15, or a 0-16 including the bonus point. Each question earns a score of 0 or 1, except for the questions in the agency category which are worth 2 points each. Half points may be given in circumstances where, for example, some of the female characters have and use agency, but other characters are not in control of their own lives. Books that earn 11 or more points may have problematic elements but likely have a realistic female protagonist with some agency; these books should be added to book collections with little hesitation. Books that earn a score of 5-10 points may have problematic elements. The protagonist may or may not have agency, but it may still be appropriate in a collection, especially if other issues are well-done and other books in a collection score well. Books with a score of 0-4 are likely seriously problematic and should be reconsidered in adding to a collection.

In the following chapters, I will apply my framework to analyses of particular texts and outline related points about the ways the framework can guide classroom teaching and library development.

Chapter Two: Agency in Action

In the following paragraphs, I will demonstrate how this rubric can be used by analyzing Rainbow Rowell's *Eleanor & Park* and Jerry Spinelli's *Stargirl*. These books represent a higher-scoring book and a lower-scoring book. Both of these books are award-winning novels that are very popular with adolescent readers.[3] However, the former focuses on a female character who enacts agency in very difficult situations, while the latter reduces the main female character to an object for the male gaze.

Eleanor & Park by Rainbow Rowell is a novel about two 10th graders who form an unlikely bond and eventually fall in love. A chubby loner who always wears mismatched clothes, Eleanor is the new girl at the school. Even though her step dad had kicked her out of their home, she is back living with her mom and step dad, sharing a room with her four younger siblings. Obsessed with comic books and his cassette player, Park is the only Asian boy in their town. While Park has some tension with his parents and younger brother, his family life is more traditional than Eleanor's.

Is the female protagonist represented as more than an object for the male gaze?

In the novel, Eleanor is often described as having unruly curly red hair, being overweight, and wearing clothes that never match and are often men's clothes. On her first day at a new school she wears "a plaid shirt, a man's shirt, with half a dozen weird

---

[3] Both of these novels are award-winning and popular in the YA genre as seen in the following articles:
http://www.ew.com/article/2014/04/02/eleanor-park-dreamworks-picks-up-film-rights-to-rainbow-rowell-novel-exclusive
http://www.readersread.com/cgi-bin/review.pl?reviewid=90207

necklaces hanging around her neck and scarves wrapped around her wrists" (Rowell 8). Because of her family's low socioeconomic status and needing to provide for five children, Eleanor cannot afford luxuries like hair products, nutritious food, or fancy clothes. Her choices about her appearance are based on her difficult situation at home, but they cause unwanted attention. People at her school, including Park, think Eleanor is looking for attention because "girls who don't want to be looked at don't tie curtain tassels in their hair" (Rowell 151). But though her odd appearance does bring Eleanor negative attention, she is not objectified. Even in her relationship with Park, though, she is not downgraded to an object. Though she and Park have a physical relationship and Park is attracted to Eleanor, he says "she looked like art, and art wasn't supposed to look nice; it was supposed to make you feel something" (Rowell 165). Park is always less focused on the way Eleanor looks and more focused on how she makes him feel.

Are female characters depicted as having and using agency?

Eleanor's relationship with her step father, Richie, is very complicated. Richie is an abusive and controlling alcoholic. The reader learns that before the start of the novel, Richie had thrown Eleanor out and forced her to live with her grandmother. When he finally allows Eleanor to come live with her mother and siblings again, he treats her as if she is not really a part of the family. He is emotionally and mentally abusive to all of the children, but Eleanor especially. Not to mention the sexual and physical abuse he inflicts on Eleanor's mother, which all of the children can hear, inflicting another kind of abuse on them. Throughout the novel, Eleanor's agency blossoms. She first identifies the importance of agency when she realizes the importance of agency for women when she notices that all of the female X-Men characters are "stereotypically girly and passive"

(Rowell 64). This understanding of agency helps her realize that she has and can use agency herself. For example, when Eleanor hears gunshots in her house, she calls 911 in an effort to protect her siblings, even though the incident gets her in even more trouble with her step-father. Later in the novel, it becomes clear that Richie might physically or sexually abuse Eleanor. Eleanor tries to talk to her mom about her concerns about Richie, but her mother is afraid of doing anything that might make Richie angrier; she has married him and has four children with him and therefore feels like there is no way out for her. However helpless the situation might feel, Eleanor is able to move to a new city and live with her uncle. Despite how worried she is about leaving her mom and younger siblings behind, Eleanor knows that in order to protect herself she needs to get out of her home and away from the life she had built. She takes control of her life and begins somewhere new with the help of a caring family member.

Is being a woman not the defining characteristic of the character?

While some of Eleanor's defining issues come from being a woman in a patriarchal society (namely, sexual harassment at school and at home), Eleanor herself is defined by her personality. She is a person who wants love but is scared of being too close to people. She is a caring older sister. Eleanor works hard to be a peacemaker within her family, but is strong enough to make tough decisions for the safety of her family members even if it might be detrimental to harmony in the home. Along with being brave at home, she is brave at school. When some cruel girls stick pads to her gym locker, Eleanor walks past the girls "with her chin as high as she could manage" and cleans off her locker (Rowell 55). In the face of an embarrassing and sad situation, Eleanor holds herself together and refuses to be brought down to anyone else's level.

With every turn of the page Eleanor's personal characteristics like generosity, bravery, intelligence, caring, and humor are more important than her gender.

Are relationships with family and friends (i.e. non-romantic relationships) emphasized?

While Eleanor's relationships with her mother, father, and step-father are all strained, she works hard to maintain her relationships with her younger siblings. She loves them deeply, wants the best for them, and looks out for their well-being. All of the children sleep in the same bedroom, and on the nights they hear their mother screaming or crying Eleanor slides off of her top bunk and huddles with them until they all can fall asleep together in one bed (Rowell 49). Though her troubled relationship with Richie puts a strain on her relationships with the younger kids, she does her best to rebuild her relationships with her family and once again become a role model they can look up to.

Eleanor's relationships with friends are also emphasized in the story. She has two female friends who are also somewhat outsiders in the school. They are an odd group because Beebi and DeNice have been friends since they were little and Eleanor "felt like it was an honor to be in their club" (Rowell 141). While neither of these girls would be described as Eleanor's best friend, both friendships are important to her and help her avoid loneliness and isolation as they bond over the trials of gym and the joys of gossiping at lunch. Eleanor also develops unlikely friendships with some of the kids who bullied her when she first came to the school. They bond over having step-parents who don't treat them well, and Eleanor's once bullies help her escape from her home when she begins to feel unsafe.

Similarly, Park's non-romantic relationships are emphasized in this book. While Park doesn't have many friends in the book, his familial relationships are very important. Some emphasis is placed on Park's relationship with his grandparents, who live next door, and his brother. However, the main relationships that are emphasized are those with his parents. Park struggles to relate to his Korean mother, but he loves her and continues to put forth effort to improve their relationship. Park also struggles to connect with his father. Park's father was in the military and his often harsh demeanor frustrates Park. Park's father continually tells Park that he is not allowed to get his driver's license until he can drive a stick shift; the conflict occurs frequently between the two. When Park tells his father that he needs to help Eleanor leave to Minnesota, the only condition is that Park drives the truck and for the first time Park had no trouble driving a stick shift (Rowell 296). When Park needs him the most, his father is supportive and caring and clearly only pushes his son in order to help him grow.

Are romantic relationships presented without characters becoming completely dependent on each other?

Eleanor and Park's relationship is a perfect example of characters not becoming overly dependent on each other when they fall in love. Both characters at some point find themselves depending on the other for support or help, but neither depends on the other for validation. While the two spend a lot of time together, they do not place their identity or sense of self on the other person. In fact, in a difficult situation, Eleanor decides to move out of state for her own safety even though it means leaving Park behind. When they are about to part, Eleanor "felt the gaping loss of him" but still went to her uncle to ask for help and still let Park leave not knowing when or if they would see each other

again (Rowell 311). She is more concerned about her safety and maintaining her own sense of identity than she is about making Park happy or fulfilling his needs or desires. This starkly contrasts with her mother, who puts the needs of the men in her life above the needs of herself or her children.

Does the book avoid glorifying violent men?

Without question, the most violent character in the book is Eleanor's step-father Richie. His actions are never condoned, let alone glorified. He is abusive to his wife and children and fires guns near his house while his children sleep. His violence is constantly discouraged in the novel. In fact, at the end of the novel Eleanor moves out of her home to escape Richie's violent ways. However, there is an incidence in the book where Park uses his taekwondo skills to kick another student at school. His actions are not necessarily condoned neither is he strictly condemned. The school punishes Park, and his father gets angry at him for using his marital arts to harm someone else. Because the boy he kicked had been bullying Eleanor for weeks, Park's actions might seem somewhat justified except for Eleanor's reaction. She makes it clear that she doesn't want Park to fight because of her and that Park is only doing so because he feels embarrassed and wants to do it for his own sake (Rowell 130). Because Park is one of the two protagonists of the novel, his actions and the reactions of people around him to those actions are weighty. Since neither Richie's nor Park's violent actions are glorified or even portrayed as acceptable, it is clear that this book does not glorify violent men.

Does the book avoid extreme and unhealthy body ideals for men?

Many books that address female body issues and ideals ignore the concerns men have about their bodies. This novel, however, addresses both equally. Park doesn't like

his tall, lanky body because he doesn't have really a really muscular body. While Park is concerned with being unattractive because his body doesn't match a narrow ideal, Eleanor finds him attractive even describing him as so beautiful he's like the "person in a Greek myth who makes one of the gods stop caring about being a god" (Rowell 137). His body does not fit the ideal body type that society pushes on men but is still presented as attractive.

Are men presented in non-stereotypical roles?

While most areas of this novel score well within this framework, this area falls short because many of the roles for men in this book are rather stereotypical. Park's father was in the military and pushes both of his sons to be more interested in sports, Richie is an alcoholic with a bad temper, and Park is obsessed with superhero comic books. Each of these roles are accepted stereotypical roles for men. While Park's father does avoid some stereotypes by being a loving and devoted caretaker for his children, some of the other stereotypes outweigh this departure for typical roles.

Does the book depict diverse body types?

One of the main topics of this book is Eleanor coming to terms with her body. She is overweight and struggles to come to terms with her body for which people make fun of her. Throughout the book she learns that she is not defined by her body type. She also learns that just because she won't see her body type mirrored in magazines or advertisements doesn't mean that she can't be attractive to someone else or that she has to hate the way she looks. While she grew up with her father "dropping hints about her weight," Eleanor doesn't seem to have internalized many negative feelings about her body (Rowell 94). When she compares herself to other girls at school she wonders

"where they put their organs" and while she knows she is overweight she doesn't "feel *that* fat" (Rowell 126). Her insecurities about her body and her worries about being unattractive are very similar to what many teenage girls feel. But unlike other girls, Eleanor accepts the body that she has rather than wishing for another one.

Does the book depict people of color (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?

This book does an amazing job of portraying a racially diverse cast of characters. Park's mother is Korean and he is half Korean. He and his family are very realistic and his struggles with being biracial in a largely monocultural community are handled well. For example, Park's mother has a heavy accent that makes her seem very different than others in the community even though she "tried so hard to fit in in every other way," and Park struggles to decide to what extent he wants to identify as Korean and to what extent he wants to distance himself from that part of himself (Rowell 25). Furthermore, Eleanor's two friends at school are both black. While the color of their skin does make them outsiders at their school, the novel does not focus on their race. Rather, the emphasis is on the friendship and support they give and receive.

Does the book depict LGBT characters (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?

None of the characters in this book openly identify as LGBT.

Does the book depict people with disabilities (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?

None of the characters in this book have visible disabilities or disabilities that they talk about.

Eleanor & Park does present a positive female protagonist and scores highly on this framework, but it does not receive a perfect score. Again, novels do not need to score

perfectly to present positive female role models. *Eleanor & Park* scores highly because of its positive focus on female agency, its treatment of relationships, its presentation of non-stereotypical male figures, and its areas of diversity. In other words, *Eleanor & Park* scores highly in every category of the framework.

Though the romantic relationship in *Stargirl* parallels that between Eleanor and Park in a surface way, based on the shared pattern of a "normal" boy falling for an outsider girl, the two novels ultimately differ greatly in their representations of the female protagonist and therefore differ in their ability to provide positive role models.

Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli is the story of two 11th graders, Leo and Stargirl. The story is told entirely from Leo's point of view as Stargirl, who had always been homeschooled, starts attending Leo's school. She wears odd clothes and does things no one else in school understands. While most of the students at school all conform to each other, Stargirl stands out. Leo is intrigued by her, but when he spends time with her is often embarrassed by her. For example, every time Stargirl sings happy birthday to someone in the cafeteria, Leo cringes and hides his face wishing to get distance from Stargirl's well-meaning outlandish tactics. At one point Stargirl tries to conform with the rest of the students in school in order to make Leo happy, but she loses her identity and feels lost. She eventually returns to her eccentric ways and leaves the school for good.

Is the female protagonist represented as more than an object for the male gaze?

The entire novel is narrated from the perspective of Leo, so the reader only sees Stargirl as filtered through Leo. She is often treated more like an object than a person. At

one point Leo claims that it was easy "to believe she was a plant, a joke, anything but real" (Spinelli 8). This trend of ignoring Stargirl's personhood is especially poignant when Leo decides he doesn't like her as she is and forces her to change traits of her personality in order to better serve his obsession with pleasing others and being popular. Rather than accepting Stargirl the way she is, Leo tells her that nobody likes her and everybody wants her to be more normal (Spinelli 138). When she does change, she changes so completely it's like "Stargirl was gone, replaced by Susan" a dull version of what Stargirl had been (Spinelli 139). Her happiness is completely diminished to increase Leo's comfortability. Throughout the book, Stargirl's perspective and opinions are often ignored in place of Leo's. In fact, her voice is rarely heard by the reader as she has very little dialogue and her words and ideas are usually paraphrased by Leo. For example, when Stargirl competes in a speech competition, Leo as the narrator talks about the speech and how powerful and moving it was, but neither time she presents the speech do we get any quotes from the speech itself. The reader never gets to hear Stargirl's inspiring words, only the echo of them as filtered through Leo.

Are female characters depicted as having and using agency?

The only female character whose story line is really presented in the book is Stargirl's. Because her story is told by Leo, and he is much more focused on how being friends with Stargirl will affect his image than he is with how she feels, she has no voice in the novel. Because voice is a large part of agency, it seems that Stargirl has very little agency in the novel. She gives Leo's opinions and feelings preference over her own. When he feels embarrassed by the way she presents herself at school, she changes so that he will feel secure and be happier. Stargirl is infamous for doing whatever it takes to

make other people happy and when she changes herself, Leo is incredibly happy that she became, as he calls it, "one of us" (Spinelli 142). When she realizes that she can't be who he wants her to be for more than a couple of weeks, she leaves the school so her presentation of identity will not embarrass Leo or continue to make him unhappy.

Is being a woman not the defining characteristic of the character?

While being a woman is not the defining characteristic of Stargirl, her breaching of traditional roles and behaviors for women is a key identifier. Stargirl is loud and confident; she takes up space and is happy to be in the spotlight. While most of her actions are focused on making other people happy, she does not support and nurture people in the quiet, subdued way that is often expected for women. When Leo tries to make Stargirl more popular, he does so by quieting her voice and asking her to pull away from the spotlight and dull her shine. Therefore, while Stargirl is not defined by being a woman, some of her defining characteristics can be summed up by bucking traditional and expected behaviors of women. Even this, though, does put unnecessary emphasis on womanhood. While Stargirl wants to be different and choose her own path, she is forced down and eventually pushed out of the narrative and Leo's life when she cannot fit into traditional womanhood. Her lack of traditional female characteristics is always seen as wrong; being herself leaves her shunned. Though Stargirl's quirky personality gives hope for her being a positive female role model, the ending leaves readers disappointed at the punishment of a young girl trying to enact agency.

Are relationships with family and friends (i.e. non-romantic relationships) emphasized?

For the most part, Leo and Stargirl are the only characters of importance in this book, and their relationship is the only one examined. While Leo has a best friend, Kevin, who he sometimes talks to, their conversations are shallow. The biggest thing they have in common is their interest in careers in television, but even that is not a large part of conversation as the boys spend much more of their time talking about the popular kids and Stargirl. While Leo has some interaction with the popular, "normal" kids at school, for the most part, he idolizes these students rather than treating them like real people who he might actually be friends with. In a book like this, relationships with siblings, parents, teachers, or friends would be expected; maybe not all of those relationships, but at least one or two. Without these relationships, the lack of emphasis on romantic relationships is clearly felt.

Are romantic relationships presented without characters becoming completely dependent on each other?

The only romantic relationship in this book presents the girl becoming so dependent on the boy that she changes in order to make him happy and loses her sense of self. Before meeting Leo, Stargirl was incredibly independent and confident. She had no qualms with being the center of attention; she would walk through the cafeteria "marching among the tables, strumming and singing and strutting and twirling" and when the marching band wasn't getting enough attention, Stargirl ran onto the field with them "[prancing] around the grass in her bare feet" (Spinelli 5, 22). She fears the opinion of no one. After spending time with Leo, though, Stargirl becomes much more conscious of the opinions of others, especially Leo's. She does many of her favorite activities with him and when he doesn't approve of them, she stops. She becomes dependent on Leo for

approval and her sense of self. Stargirl makes it very clear that she does care what Leo thinks about her, though she cares very little for what other people think (Spinelli 134). What is important to Leo, however, is what everybody else thinks, and therefore Stargirl begins to care too. She tries incredibly hard to make other people like her and when they don't, she becomes more depressed than she had ever been before because she had given up on herself in favor of other people's opinions (Spinelli 143). Luckily, she is able to see that she has become unhappy by being with him and does end up reverting to her old ways.

Does the book avoid glorifying violent men?

There are no incidences of glorification of violence in this book.

Does the book avoid extreme and unhealthy body ideals for men?

Body image for men is not really addressed in this book. Leo's body type is not a point of focus in the novel, and if he has any concerns about his body type, whether or not it conforms to assumed body ideals, it is not discussed in the novel.

Are men presented in non-stereotypical roles?

For the most part, men play fairly stereotypical roles in the novel. If nothing else, Leo's power to control Stargirl is stereotypical and representative of the dynamic between men and women in the novel. However, there is one instance in which Leo cries after listening to Stargirl's speech (Spinelli 156). This act breaks the stereotype that men don't and shouldn't cry. But Leo's tears are only given one sentence in the novel. Therefore, this very short scene does not do enough to counteract the far more typical nature featured in the rest of the novel.

Does the book depict diverse body types?

There is no obvious diversity of body type in the novel.

Does the book depict people of color (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?

None of the characters in this book are described as people of color.

Does the book depict LGBT characters (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?

None of the characters in this book openly identify as LGBT.

Does the book depict people with disabilities (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?

None of the characters in this book have visible disabilities or disabilities that they talk about.

While *Stargirl* proves to be lacking in all of the categories of this framework, the area that is most severely lacking is the category of agency. Stargirl is presented as having very little control over her life and makes decisions based on what men, specifically Leo, want from her. She is repeatedly punished for being authentic and even when she does try to conform she is treated less human than others. For easily influenced young girls, Stargirl is not a great role model. Young girls do not need another role model who shapes herself to be what boys want and gives up on passions to be what other people want. Young girls need role models like the pre-Leo Stargirl: passionate, excited, caring, thoughtful, positive, sincere, and straightforward. The Stargirl that they get, however, is merely an echo of who she was repeated from the voice of the man who tried to change her, and that is certainly not someone young girls should want to be.

These books are related in their similar content. The plot line of the normal boy falling for the quirky, outsider girl is common in media geared toward adolescents. In

fact, the manic pixie dream girl trope is based on it. Even though the two books are similar in description, *Eleanor & Park* and *Stargirl* differ in their treatment of the female protagonist. Eleanor is given a chance to tell her own story while Stargirl's story is told entirely from a male perspective. This difference is even seen in the pairing of the titles and narration of the two books; *Eleanor & Park* gives equal attention to the male and female protagonists in both title and narration, while *Stargirl*'s title is completely focused on the female character but narrated from the male perspective, which means Stargirl's own story is warped by being taken out of her control. The more equal attention given to the protagonists of *Eleanor & Park* make it more relatable to all teen readers and give a more authentic representation.

In the next chapter, I will give examples of books from many subgenres that score well on this framework.

Chapter Three: Multigenre Agency Successes

The books I will examine in this chapter are all high-scoring within the framework that I have developed for evaluating gendered identity as represented in young adult texts. They all earn either a 10 or 11, mostly because of the female protagonists' agency. In analyzing each book, I will describe some of the situations in which characters use agency and then explain some of the other aspects that made the text high-scoring.

In chapter 2, both the books I presented for examination were modern-day problem novels focused on realistic adolescent situations. However, the books I examine in this chapter present a more diverse spectrum of the subgenres within young adult literature. The following represent historical fiction, dystopian, graphic novels, and more diverse problem novels.

Here is my assessment of *Fever 1793* using the framework:

2 2 2	Female Agency • Is the female protagonist represented as more than an object for the male gaze? • Are female characters depicted as having and using agency? • Is being a woman not the defining characteristic of the character?
1 0	Relationships • Are relationships with family and friends (i.e. non-romantic relationships) emphasized? • Are romantic relationships presented without characters becoming completely dependent on each other?
1 0 0	Men • Does the book avoid glorifying violent men? • Does the book avoid extreme and unhealthy body ideals for men? • Are men presented in non-stereotypical roles?
0 1 0 0	Intersectionality/Diversity • Does the book depict diverse body types? • Does the book depict people of color (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict LGBT characters (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?

	• Does the book depict people with disabilities (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?
1	Bonus • Author is female
10	Total

Fever 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson is set in Philadelphia during the yellow fever outbreak in 1793. The protagonist, Mattie, lives with her mother and grandfather. After the death of her grandfather and being separated from her mother, Mattie learns to be independent and take care of herself even during difficult times. This book scores as a 10 because of the protagonist's agency, emphasis on non-romantic relationships, avoidance of glorifying violent men, non-stereotypical representation or people of color, and having a female author.

While there is a subplot featuring Mattie's love interest Nathaniel, she is never treated like an object of the male gaze. The love interest does not end in the protagonist's marriage, and Mattie remains the subject of her own story throughout the book.

Especially at the beginning Mattie feels as though she has very little control over her own life because her mother is so protective of her and both women need to work hard to support themselves. However, as the novel continues, Mattie learns to take charge of her own life. Even though she is too young to really take care of herself, being forced to do so allows her to make choices for herself and use the agency she has.

While being a young woman changes some of the options that are open to Mattie because of her context of being in early American society, she is not defined only in terms of her gendered roles. First and foremost, she is defined by the work she does and her personal characteristics, like generosity and perseverance.

Mattie's non-romantic relationships are thoroughly emphasized in this novel. Mattie is romantically interested in one young man but their relationship does not end in a confession of love or a marriage proposal. Even though in the historical context of the novel couples married earlier, Mattie does not make the choice to get married. Her romantic prospects are given some attention, but her non-romantic relationships are always at the forefront of her mind. For example, when Mattie is separated from her mother, she sees Nathaniel and exchanges pleasantries with him, but thinks "no matter how kind he was, it couldn't erase the question that had haunted [her]" that her mother wouldn't come home at all (Anderson 218). Mattie's non-romantic relationships are carefully examined and are presented as being more valuable than romantic relationships. The most important relationships Mattie has are with her mother, her grandfather, and Eliza. Like the relationship many adolescent girls have with their parents, Mattie's with her mother is complicated. Her mom wants the best for her, but needs her to work hard and be mature so she asks a lot of her daughter. At first, Mattie resents her mother for this, but as she gets time away from her mother she begins to appreciate her more. The next important relationship is the one Mattie has with her grandfather. He treats her more like an adult than her mother does and jokes with her. Because she loved her grandfather so much, his death is particularly difficult for her. After his death, Mattie "held her breath and waited for the earth to stop spinning" and thought the sun would not rise again and the birds would stop singing (Anderson 147). Her grandfather was so important to her that it felt as though the world would end when he was gone. The last important relationship is her relationship with Eliza, the African-American woman who helps cook in the family's coffeehouse. Eliza acts like an older sister to Mattie. She advises Mattie

and helps her when she is left to fend for herself. Her maternal instinct and passion for serving the people who have yellow fever rubs off on Mattie and gives her a sense of purpose in a difficult time. Mattie uses her experiences of being ill herself and logic to advise Eliza not to bleed the patients because the French doctors "treat yellow fever every year" and they don't bleed people as a form of treatment (Anderson 205). Eliza's trust and her own ability in a time of crisis helped save the lives of many of the people she treated. These relationships help Mattie grow and become stronger without being romantic or pulling away her agency.

In terms of representations of male characters in the novel, Mattie's grandfather is treated rather non-stereotypically. While Mattie's grandfather is a veteran of the Revolutionary War, he is very caring and loving and protective of his young granddaughter. He affirms Mattie's characteristics without objectifying or simplifying her by calling her "strong…beautiful… clever… my sweet Mattie" and he uses his last words to tell Mattie he loves her (Anderson 147). These traits of love and empathy avoid stereotypes for men and are a positive part of Mattie's life.

Within the category of diversity, *Fever 1793* positively represents African-Americans, despite the historically accurate setting, primarily through the character Eliza. Eliza is a strong and independent black woman with a job. Even though the story is set in the north, Eliza's agency is unique for the time. This book also depicts the Free African Society, a group which has a positive impact in the community and focused on positively representing people of color.

Throughout the novel Mattie gains agency through her experiences and with the help of other characters. Though at the beginning of the novel she was portrayed as a

young girl trying to find herself, by the end of the novel she had reopened her family's coffeehouse and was reunited with her mother. She had found power and control over herself, and the ending of the novel does give hope that Mattie's learned agency will continue for the rest of her life.

A second novel that effectively demonstrates the use of this project's gender framework is *Divergent*:

2 2 2	Female Agency • Is the female protagonist represented as more than an object for the male gaze? • Are female characters depicted as having and using agency? • Is being a woman not the defining characteristic of the character?
1 0	Relationships • Are relationships with family and friends (i.e. non-romantic relationships) emphasized? • Are romantic relationships presented without characters becoming completely dependent on each other?
0 0 0	Men • Does the book avoid glorifying violent men? • Does the book avoid extreme and unhealthy body ideals for men? • Are men presented in non-stereotypical roles?
0 1 1 0	Intersectionality/Diversity • Does the book depict diverse body types? • Does the book depict people of color (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict LGBT characters (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict people with disabilities (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?
1	Bonus • Author is female
10	Total

Veronica Roth's *Divergent* is part of a dystopian series about Tris. In this society, every 16-year-old has to choose one of the five factions, or groups, that comprise the

society. Each faction has a role to play in maintaining order: Abnegation works in public service, Erudite are the scholars, Dauntless are soldiers that guard the fence to the outside world, Amity grows food for the society, and Candor uphold the law. Right before each person has to choose a faction, he or she is given a personality test that will help make the choice. Tris's world is changed at this monumental time when she has to take her test before the Choosing Ceremony. Her tests tell her that she is divergent, meaning she equally fits into multiple factions. When she defects from the faction she grew up in, Abnegation, and switches to the Dauntless faction, she has to adjust to her new life and keep her secret about being Divergent.

While Tris is often examined by the men who run her training, she is watched as a subject and examined based on her skill and understanding of her training rather than being objectified for her body. In other words, she is constantly under the gaze of many authority figures, many of them men, but she is never treated as an object. Tris is constantly using her agency as she tries to overthrow the system that is trying to kill all the divergents. While being divergent is dangerous, it gives her a set of strengths that are unique. She uses her bravery, intelligence, and training to control her own destiny. Her agency is encouraged and respected by the men in her life, and she effectively uses her agency to control her life and not become a pawn of a broken system. Throughout the series she has moments where she could go along with the system and hide her divergence out of fear of her government leaders, but instead she takes a stand and uses her divergence as an asset in making the changes she wants to see. For example, when the government uses brain control on the Dauntless population, Tris could just go along with everyone else and be a part of the government's plot, but instead when she is pulled in

with the government leaders she takes her gun and "[presses] the barrel to Eric's [the government leader's] forehead" in order to take control of the situation (Roth 424). By using her agency she is able to make an impact on her society while saving her own life and that of her boyfriend, Tobias. Tris is certainly defined by more than her identity as a woman. Tris is strong and clever, and those character traits are valued more than her position as a woman.

Tris has strong but complicated relationships with her parents and twin brother. She loves them, but struggles with all of them based on their different choices within the faction system. When Tris goes to visit her brother, Caleb, at the Erudite headquarters, there is significant tension between them because Caleb sees Dauntless as the cruelest of the five factions and doesn't understand why she would have chosen that faction (Roth 242). Both Caleb and Tris wonder if the other made the right choice in leaving the faction they were born into. Tris also has strong relationships with friends who she meets during her Dauntless training. Her friendships are often given precedence over romance. Both positive and negative interactions with friends are emphasized as being as important as what is happening in her love life. For example, during their Dauntless training, the harsh trainer, Eric, forces Tris's friend Christina to hold herself on a railing over a waterfall for five minutes. Tris, along with another friend named Al, begin cheering on Christina, giving her words of support and encouragement until they are allowed to help her over the railing and back to safety (Roth 103). This experience bonds the characters in their friendship, and these types of experiences are seen again and again throughout the series.

This series presents many people of color without making their race an emphasized part of the story. Characters are described as being people of color, but are

represented as part of society with many of the same skills as other characters. For example, Tori, the woman who explains Divergence to Tris, is Asian, and Tris's best friend, Christina, is black. Their race is barely mentioned, but their characteristics of bravery and compassion are given precedence. Furthermore, some of the characters are represented as LGBT. This representation is not a focus of the plot or any subplots; LGBT characters are merely a part of the cast and are treated like any of the other characters. For example, Amar, Tobias's Dauntless instructor, is gay but is still presented as a strong and competent leader, and Lynn, a Dauntless-born initiate, is lesbian but is ranked second and is one of the best initiates in their initiate class. These characters not only sidestep stereotypes but are presented with their personal characteristics as more important than their sexual orientations. These representations of diversity reinforce the ranking based on gender because they put personal characteristics and personhood above exterior stereotypes. These areas of representations are important when looking at gendered representations because intersectionality plays a large role in how people perceive themselves and if only one minority group is being represented while others are still being represented with stereotypes or not being represented at all, there is not much progress being made.

A third novel that presents a female protagonist with agency is E. Lockhart's *The Boyfriend List*.

2 2 2	Female Agency • Is the female protagonist represented as more than an object for the male gaze? • Are female characters depicted as having and using agency? • Is being a woman not the defining characteristic of the character?

1 1	Relationships • Are relationships with family and friends (i.e. non-romantic relationships) emphasized? • Are romantic relationships presented without characters becoming completely dependent on each other?
1 0 0	Men • Does the book avoid glorifying violent men? • Does the book avoid extreme and unhealthy body ideals for men? • Are men presented in non-stereotypical roles?
0 1 0 0	Intersectionality/Diversity • Does the book depict diverse body types? • Does the book depict people of color (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict LGBT characters (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict people with disabilities (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?
1	Bonus • Author is female
11	Total

E. Lockhart's *The Boyfriend List* follows Ruby Oliver as she recounts her romantic relationships as an assignment from her therapist. After fighting with her best friend over boys, Ruby begins to have panic attacks. In order to reflect on her experiences with romantic relationships and work through her emotions, she creates a list of all the boys she had romantic feelings for and talks about her experiences with her therapist.

The protagonist of *The Boyfriend List* by E. Lockhart, Ruby, is never treated as an object for the male gaze. Part of this is because the story is told entirely from her perspective, but at the same time the men in her life genuinely treat her as a subject rather than an object. For example, Ruby's mother is a performer who does one-woman shows; when she began using personal stories from Ruby's life in her monologues (one called Ruby's First Period) Ruby's father helped convince her mother to stop using Ruby's life as humorous stories. Ruby uses her agency to get help for her anxiety. She also has

agency to make decisions about her life in order to try to make her life the way she wants it to be. For instance, with boy #11, Shiv, she didn't understand what happened between them to make them stop talking to each other, so she took her life into her own hands. Rather than letting herself wonder, she had a conversation with him and realizes that though there was a miscommunication between them, she had made mistakes. By using her agency and her voice, she was able to get what she wanted and learn about herself to make positive personal changes. Ruby's emotions and experiences are emphasized much more than her identity as a woman.

While her romantic feelings are the premise of this novel, Ruby's non-romantic relationships are a huge focus of this book. Ruby's friendship and loss of the relationship with her best friend, Kim, is one of the biggest reasons for the start of her anxiety attacks. Along with the loss of her best friend, all of Ruby's other friends have stopped talking to her. These relationships were just as important to Ruby as her romantic interests. Furthermore, Ruby's relationships with her parents and her therapist, Doctor Z, are emphasized as they serve as role models and advisors as they help her get through tough times. For instance, the book is written on the premise of a homework assignment from Dr. Z in her therapy. This process of thinking through her romantic relationships does help Ruby analyze herself and work through the issues that were plaguing her. Because of her trust in Dr. Z's expert advice, Ruby found relief. In each of the relationships she describes, Ruby remains independent.

While there are several men in this novel, most importantly her father and the boys on her list, none of them are presented as being particularly violent and no violence or anger is glorified.

As in the novels discussed above, the positive agency assigned to the central female figure, Ruby, is reinforced by way of a focus on intersectionality showing a positive role model character of color. One of the most important representations of people of color in this book, is the characterization of Doctor Z, who is African-American. Because of her profession she is well-respected and an authority figure for the protagonist.

The following novel, combining romance with an exploration of disability, also presents a female character with agency:

2 2 2	Female Agency • Is the female protagonist represented as more than an object for the male gaze? • Are female characters depicted as having and using agency? • Is being a woman not the defining characteristic of the character?
1 0	Relationships • Are relationships with family and friends (i.e. non-romantic relationships) emphasized? • Are romantic relationships presented without characters becoming completely dependent on each other?
1 1 0	Men • Does the book avoid glorifying violent men? • Does the book avoid extreme and unhealthy body ideals for men? • Are men presented in non-stereotypical roles?
0 0 0 1	Intersectionality/Diversity • Does the book depict diverse body types? • Does the book depict people of color (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict LGBT characters (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict people with disabilities (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?
0	Bonus • Author is female
10	Total

John Green's hit novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, centers on Hazel, a teenager with lung cancer. After going to a support group for kids with cancer, Hazel meets Augustus and almost immediately falls in love. She shares her struggle to battle her disease alongside trusted peers who are going through the same thing.

Hazel is always treated as the subject of her life. Because of her visible disease, she is often not looked upon at all, let alone treated as an object for the male gaze. Even in her romantic relationship she is loved for her personality and subjectivity; she is never reduced to being objectified based solely on physical attractiveness as a trait to be "consumed" or gazed upon by a male figure. Even though Hazel is struggling with a disease she cannot control, she does take control of how she wants her life to be even if it is short. While at the beginning of the novel she wants to isolate herself to protect her loved ones, she decides that having an open heart will lead to a more fulfilling life. Hazel's determination and openness are just two of the personal characteristics that are much more important than her position as a woman.

While no single non-romantic relationship is given as much emphasis as Hazel's romantic relationship, Hazel's non-romantic relationships are still emphasized. Hazel's concern with protecting her parents in case she dies from her cancer is an interesting twist on a typical parent-child relationship. At the same time, her parents often give Hazel advice that she doesn't want to follow, which does reflect a typical parent-child relationship. This type of relationship helps guide Hazel to good decisions but give her the freedom to choose for herself. For example, her mother encourages her to go to a teen cancer support group but doesn't force her to and allows her to make the decision on her own. Furthermore, Hazel's relationship with her friend Isaac is very authentic and

powerful, especially when they only have each other left. After Augustus's death, Isaac and Hazel rely on each other for support as they deal with the grief associated with their loss. In one instance, they play videogames together and discuss whether he was in pain when he died and they share how much they "dislike living in a world without Augustus Waters" (Green 281). Having a friendship that she can rely on helps her cope with the pain she feels in losing her boyfriend.

Especially with the emotional trauma the characters in this book withstand, it would fit with stereotypes to have the male characters react with violent outbursts. However, none of the men in this novel are violent. There is one incidence of vandalism that is glorified, when Augustus and Isaac, along with Hazel, threw eggs at Isaac's ex-girlfriend's car (Green 228). Though it is an act of vandalism, it is not a particularly violent incident. Because of their diseases, the men in these books are not expected to have unrealistic, idealized bodies. This novel shows men having insecurities about their bodies, but coming to terms with non-idealized bodies and learning to feel confident in their own skin.

In terms of the framework's focus on diversity, there is very little diversity in terms of body type, race, or sexual orientation. The three main teenage characters in this novel, however, all have visible disabilities. Hazel uses a cannula, Augustus has a prosthetic leg, and Isaac is blind. These disabilities are not romanticized or stereotyped, but are portrayed in very authentic ways.

Still another narrative illustrating the framework is *Story of a Girl*:

2	Female Agency

2 2	• Is the female protagonist represented as more than an object for the male gaze? • Are female characters depicted as having and using agency? • Is being a woman not the defining characteristic of the character?
1 1	Relationships • Are relationships with family and friends (i.e. non-romantic relationships) emphasized? • Are romantic relationships presented without characters becoming completely dependent on each other?
0 0 1	Men • Does the book avoid glorifying violent men? • Does the book avoid extreme and unhealthy body ideals for men? • Are men presented in non-stereotypical roles?
0 0 0 0	Intersectionality/Diversity • Does the book depict diverse body types? • Does the book depict people of color (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict LGBT characters (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict people with disabilities (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?
1	Bonus • Author is female
10	Total

In Sara Zarr's *Story of a Girl* the protagonist, Deanna, is a sixteen-year-old struggling with decisions she made three years earlier. At thirteen, Deanna had sex with her brother's seventeen-year-old best friend. At the time the story is told, she still struggles with the repercussions of her actions. She has been branded the school slut, her father can't look her in the eye, and every day she wishes she hadn't gotten involved with Tommy at all. In order to make some money over the summer, Deanna finds a job at a pizzeria. Little does she know that Tommy, the boy she had sex with three years earlier, also works at the pizzeria. Because she can't find another job, she is forced to see Tommy every day and face the decisions that she's made.

When Deanna became sexually active at a young age, it was because her naïveté let her be led astray by an older boy she thought she could trust. As she gets older, she has the opportunity to sleep with Tommy again, but has grown and acquired agency. She also uses agency in a big showdown with Tommy. She refuses to be taken advantage of again and confronts him about how he has negatively affected her life. Three years after she made the mistake that changed her life, she was able to make a better choice. When she found herself in a car with Tommy again, she confronted him about the damage he had done to her life rather than having sex with him again (Zarr 126). While being naïve enough to think that by getting a summer job she could move out of her family house, she uses her agency to work on her own. Deanna is much more defined by her goal-oriented thinking and thoughtfulness than she is by being a woman. For instance, Deanna works to earn money to pay for her and her brother to move out of her parents' house, but when she realizes how much her brother needs to have a stable life with his girlfriend and daughter she gives him all the money she earned over the summer (Zarr 184). Deanna's generosity and compassion are much more important to her identity than her gender. However, this book does focus directly on gender as it tackles some of the double standards for men and women, primarily because the same act made Deanna the school slut but had no negative repercussions for Tommy.

In many ways, Deanna's non-romantic relationships are more important than her romantic relationships. Deanna's struggle to repair her broken relationship with her father is one of her biggest concerns throughout the novel. He can barely look at her, but what she wants most is his understanding and acceptance. Her relationship with her brother is also highly emphasized. While her brother, Darren, deals with the consequences of

having a baby at a young age, Deanna tries to help and learn from his experiences. Deanna's narrative also focuses on her friendships with her two best friends, Jason and Lee. These relationships are complicated by Deanna's growing feelings for Jason and betrayal of Lee, but the emphasis on her concerns about these friendships is interesting. Furthermore, Deanna's romantic relationships are presented without characters being dependent on each other. When Deanna came onto Jason and he rejected her, she did not become depressed because of an unhealthy dependence on him. In fact, she only felt sad because of the guilt of doing something that hurt their friendship. And by the end of the book their friendship is mended as they begin their junior year of high school together along with Lee. Even though Deanna's relationships are not particularly romantic, she separates from partners and retains a sense of independence.

Most of the men in this novel are presented non-stereotypically, including Deanna's brother Darren whose role as the primary caregiver of his infant son places him in a non-stereotypical position.

Yet another YA text demonstrating portrayals of strong female agency is *Persepolis*:

2 2 2	Female Agency • Is the female protagonist represented as more than an object for the male gaze? • Are female characters depicted as having and using agency? • Is being a woman not the defining characteristic of the character?
1 0	Relationships • Are relationships with family and friends (i.e. non-romantic relationships) emphasized? • Are romantic relationships presented without characters becoming completely dependent on each other?
1	Men • Does the book avoid glorifying violent men?

0 0	• Does the book avoid extreme and unhealthy body ideals for men? • Are men presented in non-stereotypical roles?
0 1 0 0	Intersectionality/Diversity • Does the book depict diverse body types? • Does the book depict people of color (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict LGBT characters (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict people with disabilities (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?
1	Bonus • Author is female
10	Total

Marjane Satrapti's *Persepolis* is an autobiographical graphic novel about growing up in Iran in the 1980s. While the protagonist, Marjane, likes Western culture, she is forced to wear the veil prescribed by the Islamic regime and follow the prescribed behavior of her government. Marjane struggles with the loss of her freedom under an oppressive regime and tries to find her identity in a society that wants to make decisions for her.

Marjane's subject position is never compromised to render her an object for men to control. One of the contributing factors to her lack of objectification is the fact that she was forced to wear the veil. This makes it difficult for her to be looked upon as a sexualized object. More than that, however, Marjane dictates how she will be seen by others and holds on to her subjectivity. When Marjane's country becomes too oppressive and dangerous for her, she moves to Europe to get an education. While there, she uses her agency to make choices about her life that she wouldn't have been able to make in Iran including watching TV, talking openly about sex, expressing herself personally, having a boyfriend, picking and choosing cultural aspects to hold onto (Satrapi 176, 184, 190, 193,

208). She also uses her agency to eventually move back to Iran, where she can return to her parents, who are her biggest support system. While Marjane is faced with some issues because she is a woman, including having to become veiled, she is nonetheless defined more by her search for freedom and social activism than her position as a woman.

Marjane's relationships with her family are particularly emphasized in this book. Her relationships with her mom, dad, and grandmother are each emphasized. Each of these people impact Marjane's personality and sense of self, especially her activist parents who show her the value of freedom.

Much of the first half of this graphic novel focuses on the violence and destruction caused by revolutionary men. The violence is never glorified, however, the book firmly denounces acts of violence and presents the negative outcomes of violence. None of the men Marjane comes in close contact with are presented as being violent.

In terms of the framework's focus on diversity, all of the main characters of this book are people of color who are not reduced to stereotypes. Every character is treated as an individual rather than a caricature.

Finally, *Luna* presents two female characters with agency, including a character using agency to embrace a transgender female identity:

222	Female Agency • Is the female protagonist represented as more than an object for the male gaze? • Are female characters depicted as having and using agency? • Is being a woman not the defining characteristic of the character?
1	Relationships

0	• Are relationships with family and friends (i.e. non-romantic relationships) emphasized? • Are romantic relationships presented without characters becoming completely dependent on each other?
1 1 0	Men • Does the book avoid glorifying violent men? • Does the book avoid extreme and unhealthy body ideals for men? • Are men presented in non-stereotypical roles?
0 0 1 0	Intersectionality/Diversity • Does the book depict diverse body types? • Does the book depict people of color (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict LGBT characters (who are not reduced to stereotypes)? • Does the book depict people with disabilities (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?
1	Bonus • Author is female
11	Total

Luna by Julie Anne Peters is the story of Regan and her brother Liam, who is a transgender girl who renames himself Luna and dresses in Regan's clothes at night. While Regan is more of a tomboy, she still identifies as a girl, but she has a hard time relating to her hyper feminine sister Luna. Her difficulty to relate, though, does not hinder her ability to be supportive of Luna at any cost. Whether Regan's sibling is presenting as Liam or as Luna, the relationship between her and Regan is loving and supportive. While Regan narrates the book, much of the story focuses on the relationship between Liam and Regan during Liam's transition to presenting as Luna full time.

Regan is never presented as an object for the male gaze. Even within relationships she is treated as a subject. For example, when Regan is feeling overwhelmed by Luna's secret, Chris, Regan's boyfriend, tries to comfort her and be understanding (Peters 232). In this novel both Regan and Liam use their agency to control their own lives. Liam uses agency every time he becomes Luna, especially at the end of the novel when he

transforms into Luna and leaves home to live on her own in order to present herself the way she wants to. While Regan often feels pressured to help Liam transform into Luna, she is never forced to help but always does so in order to assist Liam in finding a true transgender identity as Luna. Regan is Luna's greatest confidante as Regan supports her as she tests the waters of presenting herself as a female and begins wanting to transition. Regan is never defined by being a woman; her main characteristics come from her generosity and love for Liam. Luna, however, is in many ways defined by her desire to present as a woman, but this is more an internal self-definition as a woman rather than the outside world placing her in a female gendered stereotype.

While Regan does have a romantic relationship, her relationship with Liam and her parents is emphasized much more. Regan and Liam's relationship is easily the most important in the book. While they may not always understand each other's perspectives, they are unconditionally supportive and loving toward each other. One scene where readers see the siblings' effort to understand each other is when Liam teaches Regan about sexual reassignment surgery, something that Liam longs to have to complete his transformation to Luna (Peters 70). This idea is also seen when Regan expresses to Liam how important her babysitting job was to her and Liam tries to understand her need for a space to herself (Peters 171). Regan's relationship with her parents is also emphasized because of the concern that both siblings have that their parents' expectations of who they will be are different from who they are.

Regan and Liam's father is a stereotypically masculine man, who vehemently disapproves of Liam's more feminine personality. Regan says that her dad is not sexist, "just boring and conventional," but either way, their dad really struggles with the fact that

his wife and his children all challenge traditional gender roles in various ways (Peters 17). Though he is frustrated by his wife earning more money than he does and Regan not wanting to cook or clean, it is Liam's disinterest in sports and all other traditionally masculine things that angers their father. He does not, however, ever resort to violence against either of his children. In the one instance when his anger seems like it could lead to violence, their father's anger is not glorified or justified. In the climax of the book, Liam reveals himself as Luna to their parents. Regan describes her father as "more angry than [she] ever remembered him being" and he made a fist as though he were going to hit Luna, but before his anger got the better of him he released his fist and though still furious lets Luna leave physically unharmed (Peters 223). Also, the body ideals for men are neither idealistic nor unhealthy. Men in this novel are expected to have healthy bodies and present them in ways that they feel comfortable. This is exemplified by Liam who sheds his male body to present as a woman, choosing feminine curves over the typical hardness of the ideal male body.

This book powerfully and authentically presents the struggles of coming out as transgendered without reducing the idea to stereotypes or caricatures.

The books presented throughout this chapter are not perfect; they do not fulfill every category of perfect representation as they are laid out in this framework. These books do, however, all score perfectly in the category of agency. Those six points are the most important for determining whether or not a character will be a positive role model for teenage girls because seeing a female character who is able control her own life makes teenage girls believe that they can take control of their lives as well. While the

agency category is the most important, the books presented in this chapter also score especially well because they follow a positive representation of agency with positive representations in at least one of the other categories. Positive representation of young women paired with positive representation of another group adds to the positive gender representation and makes it more impactful. Furthermore, this grouping of books serves as proof that female characters with agency can be found in any subset of young adult literature. Positive female role models can be found in dystopian, LGBT, and graphic novels, which are all incredibly popular subgenres for teenage readers. Therefore, readers of varying interest areas can find books to read that present positive female role models who are shown having and using agency to make positive changes in their lives. In the next chapter I will discuss practical applications of this framework in building a school, classroom, or home library that incorporates young adult literature featuring female characters using agency.

Chapter Four: An Educator's Use for the Framework

Analyzing books in terms of their female protagonists is not a venture limited to academic rumination. Because of the real-world effects of positive representation outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, this framework has several possible practical applications. While it is most applicable to teachers and librarians building a collection of young adult novels, it can also be used by parents and adolescents who are developing an at home book collection. As an educator, this framework will help me present books with well-developed female characters to teens and parents who are looking for new reading material. Using this framework, I can guide students to new novels that present stronger characters. For example, if a student tells me she loved reading *Twilight* because of the romance, I can recommend *Eleanor & Park*, or if she loved it for the adventure I can recommend *Divergent*. Therefore, the framework can be used as a tool to keep students reading but encourage them to read books with better role models.

The framework can also help the individuals previously mentioned to analyze individual books for the quality of a female protagonist. This framework would be a great tool for introducing feminist criticism to high schoolers to help them begin to see how gendered issues that are present in society are visible in and even perpetuated by literature.

While the framework can be used to analyze young adult books individually, the framework is strongest when applied to the creation of a collection because the strength of individual novels is less important than the power of a collection as a whole. If most of the novels in a collection rate higher than a 5 on this framework, it is likely that students will be exposed to a couple of exemplar female protagonists. In fact, some books that are

considered classics (e.g. *Jane Eyre*, *Little Women*, etc.) and which in their time portrayed women with unprecedented agency, might not score well on this framework because it is geared toward modern-day expectations. For example, while Jo March of *Little Women* is often considered a strong female role model because of her strong will and decision to work, she is eventually married and loses her voice and agency. This is not ideal and would therefore not score well on this framework, but *Little Women* is still a classic and in a collection of books that score well, there is no reason this book shouldn't be included.

There is also some value in keeping more modern books that score in the bottom tier, specifically books like *Twilight* or *Stargirl* which are extremely popular. I never want to discourage students from reading, and lower scoring books may be the jumping off point which will encourage student interest and motivation which will lead them to reading higher scoring books.

In terms of future research I would like to do around this topic, I would like to come up with a conclusive number of the percentage of books that should rate highly in this framework. Right now, I'm hoping to create a classroom library in which 85% of the books with female protagonists score in the top two tiers of the framework. However, this number is merely a guess rather than an evidence-based number. I would also like to create a website or database where people can search books they want to read and see the scores of those books and why they earned the score. There is also room for another framework examining what constitutes a strong male protagonist in young adult literature or a framework analyzing female role models in classic literature.

While I've given some ideas above as to how this framework can be used, I would like to explain in more detail one possibility which other English teachers can use in their classrooms. One way to use this framework is to incorporate it into literature circles. Literature circles are a commonly used tool in the classroom for students of all ages and ability levels. The generic version of this strategy is to have students, usually in groups of three to five, read a book and each person is given a role within the in-class discussion group. The most common roles are Discussion Director, Connector, Summarizer, and Illustrator, with additional roles depending on the needs of the group. To use the framework with literature circles, though, I've created four roles based on the four main categories of the framework.

First, each group should read a different young adult novel with a female protagonist (see Appendix A for a list of possible books). Each of the books on the list are award-winning young adult novels with female protagonists. Once students are in their groups and have picked a book, they need to decide how much to read before each discussion day. Then, they must assign each member of the group one of the four roles: Agency Assessor, Relationship Relator, Male Monitor, and Intersectionality Investigator. If there are fewer than four people in a group one person can take on more than one role, and if there are more than four people, the teacher can add other roles like Connector or Summarizer. Each student will be required to analyze the section of reading based on the guiding questions of the framework (role sheets for each of the roles can be found in Appendix B). Once students have finished the book they will score the novel based on the framework and present their findings to the class. This activity can easily be differentiated for different groups of students based on size of the group, length of the

novel, roles given to each student, teacher intervention, preteaching vocabulary and feminist thought, and duration of the project. This project allows students to deeply interact with both the text of the young adult novel and with the framework.

According to statistics prepared by The Representation Project, women make up the majority of undergraduate students in the United States, but are still a minority in graduate and doctoral programs and in positions of economic or political power. Therefore, educators have an important role in helping young women understand their worth and realize their potential. This framework gives educators a tool to decide which books to recommend to young women which will mirror this ideal and help them recognize their own agency and ability to change the world.

Appendix A

1. *Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson
2. *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson
3. *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* by Judy Blume
4. *Forever* by Judy Blume
5. *Anya's Ghost* by Vera Brosgol
6. *Stolen: A Letter to My Captor* by Lucy Christopher
7. *City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare
8. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins
9. *Matched* by Ally Condie
10. *Someone Like You* by Sarah Dessen
11. *This Lullaby* by Sarah Dessen
12. *The Truth About Forever* by Sarah Dessen
13. *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green
14. *Page by Paige* by Laura Lee Gulledge
15. *Annie on My Mind* by Nancy Garden
16. *Dead Reckoning* by Mercedes Lacky and Rosemary Edghill
17. *The Boyfriend List* by E. Lockhart
18. *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry
19. *Sold* by Patricia McCormick
20. *Cinder* by Marissa Meyer
21. *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer
22. *Kissing Kate* by Lauren Myracle
23. *Shine* by Lauren Myracle
24. *Luna* by Julie Anne Peters
25. *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult
26. *Divergent* by Veronica Roth
27. *Eleanor & Park* by Rainbow Rowell
28. *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi
29. *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli
30. *Daughter of Smoke & Bone* by Laini Taylor
31. *Code Name Verity* by Elizabeth Wein
32. *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld
33. *Story of A Girl* by Sara Zarr
34. *Elsewhere* by Gabrielle Zevin
35. *The Book Thief* by Markus Zuzak

Appendix B: Literature Circle Role Sheets

Agency Assessor

Name: _____ Meeting Date: _____

Book: _____ Reading Assignment: _____

Agency Assessor: Your job is to analyze the agency of the female protagonist. Remember that agency refers to a person's ability to control their own life rather than being controlled by others. Answer the guiding questions below based on the assigned reading. Provide specific details from the text to support your answer. Discuss your thoughts with your group. At the bottom write your own questions about agency in the book based on the assigned reading.

Is the female protagonist represented as more than an object for the male gaze?

Are female characters depicted as having and using agency?

Is being a woman not the defining characteristic of the character?

Questions for your group:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Relationship Relator

Name: _____ Meeting Date: _____

Book: _____ Reading Assignment: _____

Relationship Relator: Your job is to analyze the relationships in the novel. Remember to pay attention to which relationships seem most important and are emphasized the most. Answer the guiding questions below based on the assigned reading. Provide specific details from the text to support your answer. Discuss your thoughts with your group. At the bottom write your own questions about the relationships in the book based on the assigned reading.

Are relationships with family and friends (i.e. non-romantic relationships) emphasized?

Are romantic relationships presented without characters becoming completely dependent on each other?

Questions for your group:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Male Monitor

Name: _____ Meeting Date: _____

Book: _____ Reading Assignment: _____

Male Monitor: Your job is to analyze how males are represented in the novel. Remember that gender roles affect both men and women. Answer the guiding questions below based on the assigned reading. Provide specific details from the text to support your answer. Discuss your thoughts with your group. At the bottom write your own questions about male representation in the book based on the assigned reading.

Does the book avoid glorifying violent men?

Does the book avoid extreme and unhealthy body ideals for men?

Are men presented in non-stereotypical roles?

Questions for your group:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Intersectionality Investigator

Name: _____ Meeting Date: _____

Book: _____ Reading Assignment: _____

Intersectionality Investigator: Your job is to analyze areas of intersectionality in the novel. Remember that intersectionality refers to the ways people's various identities intersect. Answer the guiding questions below based on the assigned reading. Provide specific details from the text to support your answer. Discuss your thoughts with your group. At the bottom write your own questions about intersectionality in the book based on the assigned reading.

Does the book depict diverse body types?

Does the book depict people of color (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?

Does the book depict LGBT characters (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?

Does the book depict people with disabilities (who are not reduced to stereotypes)?

Questions for your group:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

WORKS CITED AND REFERENCED

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Fever 1793.* New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks, 2002. Print.

Baym, Nina. "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors." *American Quarterly* 33. 2 (1981) 124-139. Web.

Baym, Nina. *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America 1820-70.* Chicago, IL: University of Illinois, 1993. Print.

Bean, Thomas B. and Helen J. Harper. "Exploring Notions of Freedom in and through Young Adult Literature." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 50.2 (2006) 96-104. Web.

Bushman, J. H. (2005). *Young adult literature and the classics.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education. pp 167-186.

Coats, Karen. "Is It Really Mommie Dearest?: Daughter-Mother Narratives in Young Adult Fiction (review)." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 26.2 (2001) 107-109. Web.

Cole, Pam. *Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2009. Print.

Crowe, Chris. "Young Adult Literature: An Antidote for Testosterone Poisoning: YA Books Girls—And Boys—Should Read." *The English Journal* 91.3 (2002) 135-138. Web.

DeBlase, Gina. "Acknowledging Agency While Accommodating Romance: Girls Negotiating Meaning in Literacy Transactions." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 46.8 (2003) 624-635. Web.

Fetterley, Judith. *The Resisting Reader*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978. Print.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York, NY: Norton, 2001. Print.

Green, John. *The Fault in Our Stars*. New York, NY: Penguin, 2012. Print.

Greenwell, Amanda M. "Reading Like a Girl: Narrative Intimacy in Contemporary American Young Adult Literature by Sara K. Day (review)." *Children's Literature* 42 (2014): 335-340. Web.

Harper, Helen. "Studying Masculinity(ies) in Books about Girls." *Canadian Journal of Education* 30.2 (2007): 508-530. Web.

Hately, Erica. "Sink or Swim?: Revising Ophelia in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 38.4 (2013) 435-448. Web.

Kapurch, Katie. "Unconditionally and Irrevocably: Theorizing the Melodramatic Impulse in Young Adult Literature through the Twilight Saga and Jane Eyre." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 37.2 (2012) 164-187. Web.

Kokkola, Lydia. "Sparkling Vampires: Valorizing Self-harming Behavior in Stephanie Meyer's Twilight Series." *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 49.3 (2011): 33-46. Web.

Lockhart, E. *The Boyfriend List*. New York, NY: Random House, 2005. Print.

Meyer, Stephanie. *Twilight.* New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005. Print.

Mirtz, Ruth. "New Voices in Children's Literature Criticism (review)." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 29.3 (2005) 445-449. Web.

O'Keefe, Deborah. *Good Girl Messages: How Young Women Were Misled by their Favorite Books.*

O'Quinn, Elaine J. "Good Girl Messages: How Young Women Were Misled by Their Favorite Books, and: Declarations of Independence: Empowered Girls in Young Adult Literature, 1990-2001 (review)." *NWSA Journal* 15.1 (2003): 169-172. Web.

Orenstein, Peggy. *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*.

Ostenson, J., & Wadham, R. (2012). Young Adult Literature and the Common Core: A Surprisingly Good Fit. *American Secondary Education. 41*(1), 4-12.

Peters, Julie Anne. *Luna.* New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2004. Print.

Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*.

Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2011. Print.

Rowell, Rainbow. *Eleanor & Park*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 2013. Print.

Santoli, S. P., & Wagner, M. E. (2004). Promoting young adult literature: the other "real" literature. *American Secondary Education. 33*(1), 65-74.

Satrapi, Marjane. *The Complete Persepolis*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2004. Print.

Siebel Newsom, Jennifer. *The Representation Project*. The Representation Project, 2015. Web. 12 April 2015. http://therepresentationproject.org/

Silver, Anna. "Twilight is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephanie Meyer's Twilight Series." *Studies in the Novel* 42.1 (2010) 121-138. Web.

Spinelli, Jerry. *Stargirl*. New York, NY: Random House, 2000. Print.

Stallworth, B. J. (2006). The relevance of young adult literature. *Educational Leadership. 63*(7), 59-63.

Trites, Roberta. *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*.

Trites, Roberta S. "Theories and Possibilities of Adolescent Literature." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 21.1 (1996) 2-3. Web.

Trites, Roberta. *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels*.

Younger, Beth. "Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature." *NWSA Journal* 15.2 (2003): 45-56. Web.

Zarr, Sara. *Story of a Girl.* New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2007. Print.