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A FEMINIST EXAMINATION OF HOW GIRLS AND WOMEN ENGAGE
WITH A FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN DYSTOPIAN
YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

by

Robin A. Parent

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Education

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2015

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ABSTRACT

A Feminist Examination of How Girls and Women Engage With a Female
Protagonist in Dystopian Young Adult Literature

by

Robin A. Parent, Doctor of Philosophy

Utah State University, 2015

Major Professors: Amy Alexandra Wilson, Ph.D., and Sylvia Read, Ph.D.
Department: Teacher Education and Leadership

This qualitative research study used a theoretical framework of third-wave feminism and reader response theory to examine two research questions: *How do girls and women relate to the female protagonist in dystopian young adult literature (YAL)?* and *How are the responses to dystopian YAL similar and different for the targeted teen audience and the adult audience?* A group of four teenaged girls and another group of three adult women read and discussed the YAL dystopian text *Uglies*. For this project, I collected participant journals and transcripts from individual interviews and book club discussions. I selected quotations from each data source that highlighted the participant's reactions to the protagonist.

Data were analyzed in two phases. In phase one, I used discourse analysis, and in phase two I used constant comparative analysis. The analyses revealed that participants from both groups identified with the protagonist's attempts to improve society, which

aligns both groups' responses with inclusive aspects of third-wave feminism. However, other aspects of feminism were incorporated into their answers as well. The women participants demonstrated a broader societal concern, such as those shared by second wave feminists. The girls, in contrast, were firmly situated within individualist aspects of third-wave feminism. Whereas, the women related to the protagonist on both a personal and broader societal level, the girls related only on a personal level. Findings from this research extend reader response theory by showing that responses to literature are strongly shaped by generational position.

(174 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

A Feminist Examination of How Girls and Women Engage With a Female
Protagonist in Dystopian Young Adult Literature

Robin A. Parent

This study examines how girls and women related to a strong female protagonist in Scott Westerfeld's book *Uglies*, a dystopian young adult novel. I chose the text, *Uglies*, as a common experience shared between both participant groups. Two main research questions framed this study: *How do girls and women relate to the female protagonist in dystopian YAL?* and, *How are the responses to dystopian YAL similar and different for the targeted teen audience and the adult audience?* This study utilized third-wave feminism and reader response theory for its critical framework. Third-wave feminism calls for researchers to foreground personal narratives as a way for people to make meaning from their experiences. Reader response theory posits that meanings are created when the reader engages with a text.

The analysis revealed that women related to the protagonist as an agent for societal change, and the girls related to the protagonist as an individual who desired societal acceptance. The findings from this study affirm and extend reader response theory's view that generational positions factor strongly in responses to literature.

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Robin A. Parent

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“It’s closing time at the library. Do you know where your teen collection is?” (Benedetti, 2011). Benedetti opened her article “Not Just for Teens” with this question directed at librarians everywhere in the U.S. Even just 10 years ago the answer was, “In the lockers, bedrooms, and backpacks of the teens who use the library” (p. 40). This is no longer the case. Currently, a growing number of adults read young adult literature (YA or YAL) where the targeted audience has traditionally been 12- to 20-year-olds (Alsup, 2010). The population of adults, who were reading YAL 20 years ago, were those who had a vested interest in the content, such as parents, teachers, and librarians. Directed at librarians at a recent state conference, Benedetti’s article asked, “why YA?” the answers arise from a wide range of experience, from the personal to professional (p. 40).

The phenomenon of adults reading YAL has been noted in popular media. In March of 2010, Susan Carpenter published “Young Adult Lit Comes of Age” in the *Los Angeles Times*. Carpenter hypothesized some of the reasons more adults gravitate to YAL: the books are “well-written, fast-paced and engaging stories” (p. 1). Carpenter compiled her reasons for adult interest in YAL using sources from the publishing and commercial industry. She reported that YAL gains popularity through word of mouth, movie adaptation, and publishing companies specifically targeting the “mom” reader.

Five months after Carpenter’s *LA Times* article, Pamela Paul (2010) published “The Kids’ Books Are All Right” in *The New York Times*. Paul’s piece was focused on the anticipated release of Suzanne Collins’ (2010) *Mockingjay*, the third installment in

her *Hunger Games* trilogy. Paul unabashedly defined herself as a mother of three who read *The Hunger Games* while in the hospital for the birth of her third child. Paul supported her engagement with YAL by citing David Levithan, editorial director at Scholastic, who reported that “roughly half of the *Hunger Games* fans on Facebook are full-fledged adults” (p. 1).

Both articles discussed the generational appeal of YAL. YAL included J.K. Rowling’s (1997-2007) *Harry Potter* series, Stephenie Meyer’s (2005-2008) *Twilight* series, Suzanne Collins’ (2008a, 2008b) *Hunger Games* trilogy, and Scott Westerfeld’s (2005-2007) *Uglies* series, which appeal to teen and adult readers. In her article, Paul highlighted a book club called Kidlit, which was comprised of several top publishing agents and editors, book critics, Ph.D.s, and a former clerk for Justice Sandra Day O’Connor. This group argued “often passionately, about the books” where the “themes are serious and the discussions intense.” Only YA titles were allowed (Paul, 2010, pp. 2-3). One of the most contentious arguments was over *The Hunger Games*. The group discussed and dissected such questions as: “Is Katniss a feminist hero? Is she a tool of the state?” (Paul, 2010, p. 2). Lev Grossman, a member of the Kidlit book club and book editor for *Time* magazine, summed up the group’s experience by saying, “I think young adult fiction is one of the few areas of literature right now where storytelling really thrives” (Paul, 2010, p. 3).

In March 2012, the discussion continued in *The New York Times* online section *Room for Debate* with a discussion titled “The Power of Young Adult Fiction.” Seven debaters—three authors, a columnist, blogger, book reviewer, and a librarian—debated

YAL. Included in their debate was an area for reader comments. When I printed the debate and comments for initial review in the first week of April 2012, there were 609 comments in response to the seven debaters about the power of YAL. What I found in the readers' responses was an overwhelming sense that YAL indeed impacted the lives of adults and teens. The adults were reading material targeted to a different audience for a reason.

The scholarly work on the "crossover" phenomenon of YAL is slim because it is a burgeoning area of study. However, the information found in the popular sphere supported that YAL is a growing category and heavily influenced by the consumer market. The recent explosion of adult YAL readers has suggested a change in either the literature itself and/or the consumers of the literature. It is an area of "convergence [that] represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). For example, YA novels, particularly dystopias, are made into movies (*Hunger Games*, *Host*, *Warm Bodies*). When audiences enjoy the movies, they seek to read more from the particular genre. Movies are not the only areas of convergence; television series, computer games (both interactive and static), fan fiction sites on the Internet, and commercial goods also operate as sites for convergence. Convergence also occurs between those who engage with the content such as in the case of this study, adults and adolescents.

The surge in YAL popularity is not caused by increased adult readership alone. The recent box-office successes of both the *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games* series has introduced the books through other media outlets to more people. When *Harry Potter and*

the Deathly Hallows, the final installment in the seven-book series, was released in the summer of 2007, I remember observing kids and adults everywhere ensconced in the massive hard-backed book.

Series such as these have captured the interest of mass media and has created a following that has pushed reading into the forefront. It suddenly became “cool” to have read the books before seeing the movie, like a badge of honor. Jenkins (2006) stated that “convergence thinking is reshaping American popular culture and...it is impacting the relationship between media, audiences, producers, and content” (p. 12). An example of this convergence occurred while I waited in line for a movie (for hours) with my kids listening to them talk to other kids about the characters and sharing quotes from the books they carried to the movies with them. I also found myself carrying on conversations in a similar manner with adults. I did not remember anything like this during my teenage years that tied a community together in such a way as through reading. With teenagers as the target audience, they were experiencing these stories in a way that promoted critical reflection through multimodal atmospheres such as books, movies, games, and social gatherings (Jenkins, 2006). Alsup (2010) similarly asserted that YA literature supports critical examination when she asked, “Might not adolescence be the perfect time to read and explore literary narratives that encourage critical reflection?” (p. 4).

The types of books and stories that were making the leap between teen and adult readership represented a re-envisioned genre that can “illustrate different viewpoints and portray characters involved in realistic problem solving” (Stallworth, 2006, p. 60). The

multiple perspectives of the new young adult novel highlighted a trend, which has “emerged in the way YA novels rely on adolescent protagonists who strive to understand their own power by struggling with the various institutions in their lives” (Trites, 2000, p. 8).

Adolescence is a liminal time, a time “betwixt and between,” that characterizes a space and time that bridges the gap between childhood and adulthood (Turner, 1968). It is often a space where those in the midst of this phase experience power of their own while simultaneously understanding how disempowered they really are (Alsup, 2010; Trites, 2000; Zdilla, 2010). Meyer and Land (2006) proposed that the “condition of liminality may be transformative” (p. 22). This space of liminality is not solely reserved for teens. As adults, and more specifically as adult women, we are often in liminal power situations where we are exposed to the tensions of gender, institutional power, and societal power. Dystopias often highlight the societal tensions between behaving and acting in the “normal” or “accepted” manner as dictated by a group in power, and rejecting those behaviors in favor of choice and difference, which leave its characters in states between one position and another. Dystopias can offer the audience examples of how the characters in the story negotiate their positions between the choices offered. The negotiation of the character often represents an internal transformation or understanding that leads to personal growth.

Statement of Purpose

With the growing number of women reading literature generally targeted for

teens, I wanted to examine how both teens and women read YAL. The purpose of this study was to analyze the reading experiences of girls and women as they read a popular dystopian YAL text. I chose a text that included a strong female protagonist to allow for a focus on gender. My epistemology is rooted in feminist theories, which complemented the focus on the gender of the protagonist along with female participants. I also explored how the participants connected with feminist themes or interpretations within the novel, as indicated through book club discussions, interviews, and journals. The information I found on adults reading YAL was very broad with little attention paid to subgenre, gender, or critical reflection on personal experience with individual texts (Benedetti, 2011; Carpenter, 2010; Hertz & Gallo, 2005; Paul, 2010). This study contributes to the literature on how readers engage with the growing number of female protagonists in YAL dystopias.

Through this study, I attempted to narrow and deepen the explanations of how teen girls and adult women read YAL using a qualitative research design. A qualitative study as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) is “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). Qualitative research, especially within a feminist framework, encourages researchers to situate themselves within the study as an observer and a participant in a give and take where “researchers recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practice” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 17).

Research Questions and Assumptions

When I was a teen, I was often absorbed in a book. My favorite genres were fantasy and science fiction. It was not uncommon at my house to hear: “Robin are you reading again?” “Robin, go outside!” “No, you cannot bring your book to the dinner table.” “Robin, turn off that flashlight, put the book away, and go to sleep!” I heard most of these admonishments from my dad. I was pretty sure my mom would have been happy to be reading with me, or in my place.

As I now watch my teenage daughter read in much the same manner that I did, I am struck with the enjoyment she and I get from reading the same books. Over the years, I left the genres of fantasy and Sci/Fi to dabble in the classics, biographies, historical fiction, mysteries, and thrillers. However, my passion for young adult literature developed a few years ago when I began to preview texts for my preteen daughter, who was an advanced and voracious reader. As I searched for young adult books, I sought suggestions from friends with daughters who were near the same age. Through this interaction, I found a population of women who also enjoyed reading this genre.

Consequently, I no longer need to preview the books my daughter reads; however, I have continued to read young adult literature, especially dystopian and utopian genres with strong female protagonists. The friends I sought suggestions from a few years ago had become book sharers. We exchanged titles as we came across books that we thought others in the group would enjoy. Often times, the first reference to a new “good” read comes from our daughters. As this informal book circle progressed, and I continued to study what was available in the scholarly and popular realm concerning “crossover” YAL

texts, I began to question what each of us takes away from our reading experiences. This desire to understand the purpose and meaning that we derive from reading young adult dystopian/utopian texts has manifested itself into two research questions that were explored through an analysis of book club discussions, journals of the participants, and interviews with the participants.

1. How do girls and women relate to the female protagonist in dystopian YAL?
2. How are the responses to dystopian YAL similar and different for the targeted teen audience and the adult audience?

These questions differ from previous work on the subject. My research focused not only on the target YA audience, but also on the adult audience. Previous research (Benedetti, 2011; McCormick et al., 2012; Paul, 2010) has given a broad overview of some general reasons adults read YAL, without focusing on a more critical perspective of how the reader engages with the text through personal and social engagement with the characters and content. I worked to collect participant standpoints, or ways of knowing and understanding *Uglies* (Westerfeld, 2005a, 2005b) by focusing on how they engaged with the text. Standpoints, as used by feminist theorists, are perspectives shaped by experiences that contribute to how a person views and makes sense of the world (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2007).

In contrast to the lack of research on adults' reading of YA texts, there is extensive research on why and how teens read YAL (Alsup, 2010; Coats, 2011; Cole, 2008; Ma'ayan, 2012; Trites, 2000). The focus on children and adolescent readers has been explored in many different directions. Many of these research areas have examined

the intricacies of reader and text. My purpose with this study was not to replicate the previous research in this area but rather to add new insights into teen girls' experiences and compare and contrast them with experiences of adult women readers.

Teens are often portrayed in a liminal position between child and adult, where they are marginalized by not completely fitting into one group or the other. Feminist theories of the past also marginalized girls and young women. It was not until the late 1990s that the focus on girls in research became connected to feminist scholarship (Kearney, 2009). In fact, during the suffrage movement, which is associated with the first wave of feminism, women were often told to distance themselves from girls and to actively make distinctions between being a child and a woman. This distancing created an even wider gap between the perceived actions of women and girls, further marginalizing the girls (Hunter, 2002; Kearney, 2009; Mills, 1994). According to Dickerson (2004), women

experience tremendous pressure to accomplish many things, including how to find a partner, determine their careers, achieve financial independence, and create their living situations, social lives, and life direction, not to mention needing to look good and be thin. (p. 2)

Many women believe that as women they should have a firm grasp on their identity and where they fit in within their world. By working with these two groups, I had the unique opportunity to compare and contrast their experiences.

In this endeavor, I am influenced by a feminist epistemology, which is reflected in some of the assumptions I had in this project. My first assumption was that there were similarities in the way and reasons both groups read dystopias. I also assumed that these texts helped adult women as well as the girls negotiate their identity. The third

assumption was that the YAL texts would serve to support the participants' interest in the social issues that are often portrayed through YA dystopias. All of these assumptions are tied to feminism through third-wave theories that speak to generational connections, identity negotiation, and social issues, which will be explored more in Chapter II.

Significance of the Study

YAL is a hot topic, extending beyond the boundaries of age (socially constructed) that contain the target audience to include adults as avid participants in its readership. Very little scholarly work has been conducted in this area to describe the phenomenon of crossover audiences, and what little there is does not venture deeply into the specific genres read within YAL or the responses that audiences have to the content. With the explosion of strong female characters, specifically in dystopian style narratives such as *Uglies*, the time was ripe for examining the responses of women and girls to the characters and content of these texts.

This study allowed for a deep, rich, and unique examination of the intersections of feminism and reader response theory that highlight aspects of age, gender, genre, and text not currently found in the literature. This study examined how girls and women viewed the societal rules that govern the characters' lives in *Uglies* and how these two audiences used the book as a way to reflect on their own identities and standpoints. This study added to the body of literature on how girls and women read strong female protagonists in dystopian YAL. Dystopian literature, with its tendency to "form a strong impulse for social change" (Zipes, 2003, p. ix), created a space to critically examine the participants'

individual and group responses to reading *Uglies*.

I examined how girls and women related to a strong female protagonist in a current YA dystopia through a feminist lens in order to reveal how different ages critically engage with ideas. Dystopias lend themselves to a futuristic world where oppression is a stark reality. The ways that the girls and women reacted to the protagonist, and the ways she engages with the social constructions of power, can provide a glimpse into how the girls and women connected the themes from the book into their own lives. I hoped to identify directions for future research through examining the similarities and differences between the two age groups.

This study is also significant because it can impact professional practice. Teachers and librarians who are aware of how girls and women relate to a strong female protagonist can help guide readers toward books and supporting media that fill a similar need. Along with suggesting materials, teachers and librarians can act as facilitators for discussions that critically examine social issues portrayed in the texts and how they parallel issues in current times. Dystopias, especially those with female protagonists, help to disrupt the status quo and provide new lenses to view our present worlds (Hill, 2012).

Finally, this study contributes to the existing research literature on book clubs due to its focus on a novel with a strong female protagonist. Previous studies (Hubler, 2000; Radway, 1991) have addressed how women and girls interpret romance and sexism in literature, which often portrays women as weak, submissive, passive, and as sexual objects. This study illuminates how girls and women react to strong female protagonists in a dystopian society. Dystopias with strong protagonists provide the space to engage in

“conversations about the present and how it may lead to a desirable or undesirable future” (Hill, 2012).

Summary

Chapter I introduced the topic through my positionality and interest in YAL as an adult and through observing teens in their reading processes. *The New York Times* and *LA Times* articles cited earlier, suggested an increase in adult readership in YAL without digging deeper into what the adult finds compelling about the genre. Accordingly, my research will examine this area in a different and deeper manner.

The next four chapters guide the reader through the process of the study. In Chapter II there is a theoretical framework and a literature and methods review, which provide the lens through which I viewed this project. Chapter III outlines the methodology used in collection and analysis of the data. Chapter IV provides examples of the research process and an analysis of the findings. Chapter V summarizes Chapters I through IV and highlights the implications of the research and suggested areas for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A qualitative study is a chance to examine phenomena through a rich contextualized engagement with those who lived the experience. I am drawn to the ways qualitative research can create a voice to tell the story within the data. The following theoretical framework and literature review represent how I positioned myself within this study and how previous bodies of literature have influenced this research project. This chapter is broken up into three main sections including the theories that influenced my framework, research studies that I used to help construct the format of this study, and the research supporting the methods used in data collection and analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in feminism. I am influenced by feminism, particularly third-wave, which “offers a central belief system that helps interpret how power imbalances affect our lives” (Labaton & Martin, 2004, p. xxvi). The third wave also attempts to be more inclusive by creating spaces that center personal narratives and highlight the intersections of differing perspectives of feminism. Third-wave feminists push to communicate to a generation of women/girls/men/people “the power and possibility of feminism” in a way that simultaneously encourages engagement of all people who are interested (Walker, 2004, p. xxv).

In this endeavor for inclusivity, the third wave simultaneously critiques the first and second waves’ lack of encouragement of young women/girls involved in their

movements (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Labaton & Martin, 2004; Walker, 1995).

Through inclusivity, the third wave includes a more diverse and eclectic group of participants, and it welcomes young women/girls, men, women, crones, and anyone who wishes to engage in discussions, work, and narratives that explore power within our lives (Byers & Crocker, 2012; Snyder, 2008; Walker, 1995).

Feminism

Feminist epistemologies are similar to other epistemologies in that they are concerned with ways of knowing and how knowledge is constructed and employed; however, they situate gender, specifically women, at the heart of research (Haraway, 1988). Feminisms also actively work to open spaces “for all women to articulate their relations to one another and the wider society-spaces where personal transforms into the political” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 3). As such, it is important to remember that feminist theories are “interdisciplinary, intersectional, and interlocking” in the way they are thought about by researchers and acted on by people (Tong, 2009, p. 1).

Feminism has a history of academic study, and I cannot help but to be influenced by the rich history. Scholars have often described feminism as “waves” that were connected with the movement’s initiatives of the time (Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006). The first wave of feminism in the U.S. was associated with the 19th and early 20th centuries. Women in the movement at this time were primarily concerned with women’s suffrage and the right to vote. As such, the women distanced themselves from other inequality issues of the time including rights of Blacks and children that might detract from their

core vision.

In the U.S., the second wave began in the 1960s and started to wane in the early 1980s. The second wave broadened the initiatives of the first wave to combat inequities surrounding sexuality, family, the workplace, and reproductive rights (Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006; Witt, 2011). Feminism in the second wave was attached to the activism surrounding the Civil Rights movement. Activism at this time generated the catch phrases most associated with the feminist movement such as “sisterhood is powerful” (drawn from a book of the same title), “consciousness raising,” “the political is personal,” and the “politics of housework” (Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006; Morgan, 1984). My mothers, aunts, and grandmothers grew up during this wave. What they had achieved was a sense of status quo for them, as well as a sense of individual acceptance as women. What failed to be transferred was a sense of continued activism for all women and people.

Toward the end of the second wave, the sense of activism began to change. The 1980s and 1990s brought a sense of complacency for many middle/upper class white women that translated to their daughters (Bobel, 2010; Henry, 2004; Walker, 1995). I am a product of this time period. My parents and teachers told me that I could be whatever I wanted and that I was equal in every way. They were wrong. I grew up with Title IX, the right to vote, and what appeared to be equal access. I also grew up with an uncertainty about how to read, react, relate, and engage in activism or relationships with conflict.

These very things to which I had not been exposed were at the crux of a growing “crisis” in girlhood that heralded the beginning of the third wave (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990; Pipher, 1994; Ward & Benjamin, 2004). As the

“crisis” became a national campaign to counteract the devaluation of girls, grassroots movements such as Riot Grrrls and Girl Power developed to combat the hegemonic narrative that often suppressed and marginalized girls and women through traditional cultural and societal norms.

The counterculture tactic of the Riot Grrrl and Girl Power campaigns served to present an “alternate discourse of girlhood, in which girls were not constructed as helpless victims; rather they knew they were mistreated by society and were angry about it” (Hains, 2012). These narratives highlighted the strength of the individual and an “I-can-do-it” attitude. As a high school graduate and new college student, I was situated as a peripheral member of this movement. My college courses where critical discussion occurred were designed using second-wave theories. In these courses, theorists discussed the new generation as feminists “without ambition, conviction, or purpose, save for dismissing earlier generations as sellouts and dupes” (Shugart, 2001, p. 135). I heard its message but did not know how to engage.

What took place next was a marketing frenzy, as a previously untapped market of middle class girls gained access to media in which girls, just like them, were being promoted as individuals with desires and credit cards. The commercialization caused a shattering of a social movement into a mainstream pop culture brand that reinforced the materialistic and individualistic nature of being a “girl” with such fads as the Spice Girls, Powerpuff Girls, and the ever evolving Disney Princess dream (Hains, 2012; Kearney, 2009; Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008). Third-wave feminists tended to focus more on their individual wants and needs and attainment of those desires. The third wave was also open

and inclusive to more women and girls than the previous “waves,” especially those who had been marginalized by mainstream feminism. The inclusion of marginalized individuals and groups often highlighted the social inequity and promoted activism and social justice. The self-centered focus along with the inclusive environment creates a paradox within the third wave.

Girls and young women were currently focused on self-expression, individuality, and strength, in line with third-wave ideals. However, second-wave feminists continued to push those negotiating their feminist identity in the “third wave” by asking for a more “politicized, activist feminism that is grounded in the material realities and the cultural productions of life” and less focused on the self (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003 p. 5). One area that began to grow during this time was a market for literature targeting young women with strong female protagonists (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007; Trites, 2000; Younger, 2003).

Women and Girls in YAL

As waves of feminism changed, YAL continued to change as well—working to provide texture and character that engaged its readership. In the 1990s, the female protagonist of YAL began to undergo a shift (Pratt, 1981; Rubinstein-Avila, 2007; Younger, 2003). Storylines that had followed a traditional male tale type motif, where a female character was inserted in a tried and true story line, began to evolve. For example, *Blue Sword* (McKinley, 1982) and *Hero and the Crown* (McKinley, 1984) depict a traditional hero’s quest motif with Aerin as the protagonist and heroine. She takes on the roles of the hero by leaving home, coming into contact with those who help and also

hinder her quest, accomplishing her task, and returning home to be accepted back into society (Campbell, 1973; Propp, 1968). In this case, Aerin is the daughter of a king, but she cannot be the heir due to her gender. She finds her strength in other ways, one of which is to defeat a dragon that is ravaging the land of the kingdom. In the process, she follows the steps of a hero's quest outlined by Propp and Campbell.

Aerin defeats the dragon and the evil sorcerer, discovers who she is, and returns home victorious. However, instead of being given the kingdom and allowed to marry her first love, she has to give up parts of the hero in sacrifice. In the traditional motif the male hero would return home, be heralded as the hero, be rewarded with the "princess," and rule the kingdom until the next quest. Aerin is not given this level of "heroism." She has to give up her first love, agree to marry the heir Tor, and rule by his side. In the end, Aerin's gender still excludes her from being equal in the motif. As suggested by this example, even though popular stories showed an evolution to the traditional hero's journey by featuring females as the hero, they still did not portray girls/women as equals to boys/men. Nonetheless, Aerin appears in these books as a character with a feminist agenda. Much like second-wave feminists, she showed readers that girls can be heroes, formerly a male role, by working within the constructed system, thereby highlighting "positive" images of girls that opposed the dominant male motif (Arrow, 2007; Tong, 2014).

Pratt (1981) explained that when examining a female in a traditional hero archetype, "The hero does not *choose* a life to one side of society after conscious deliberation on the subject; rather, she is radically alienated by gender-role norms *from*

the very outset” (p. 36 italics in original). She explained that the authors of these stories attempted to accommodate the growth and development of the heroine by highlighting that “the woman’s initiation [is] less a self-determined progression *towards* maturity than a regression *from* full participation in adult life” (p. 36, italics in original). Coats (2011) summed up the past and present of female protagonists in YAL by saying:

While books about girls have always located their characters in relationship-intensive plotlines, gone are the days where getting the guy ends the story with a happily or tragically ever after. Girls today are generally encouraged to be more savvy in negotiating objectifying discourses, even standing against mainstream feminism in their quest to chart their own destinies. (p. 318)

This shift in tale type highlighted complex societal issues related to the female characters and encouraged negotiation and transformation of identity through relationships, conflict, gender, and justice. Early YA literature with female protagonists tended to focus on the transformation of identity on a personal level, whereas more contemporary YA literature with female protagonists tended to focus on the transformation of societies.

Feminism and Positionality

These changes in young adult literature paralleled some of the movements of feminism during the same time. In the 1990s, early in the third-wave, feminist research saw a rise in postmodern, poststructural, and postcolonial theories of feminism. These theories drew from the previous feminist literature by situating women’s gender issues in the forefront but went further to include relationships between individual and social constructions of race, class, gender, and age (Davies, 2003; Gannon & Davies, 2007; Tong, 2009). Postmodern, post-structural, and postcolonial feminist researchers such as Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault worked to deconstruct

the binaries of power and oppression through multiple interpretations, which helped to bring to the “posts” of feminism the concept of positionality—the act of situating one’s self within the context of the research/problem/conversation.

Positionality influences our construction of knowledge and how we identify with or against the dominant culture and other social groups. These influences always affect our view of the world and shape our multiple frameworks for interpreting and knowing the world. As feminists became aware of positionality within their research in the mid-1990s, the third-wave of feminism began to take hold with younger women (Tong, 2009; Walker, 1995).

Women and girls who are drawn to third wave’s openness in addressing difference, conflict, and contradiction work to understand how oppression through gender, age, race, and other forms is interrelated and how these forms of oppressions reinforce their experiences. These ideas are constructed from aspects of the other forms of feminism but at times come together. Though they “sometimes directly contradict each other, they are all part of our third-wave lives, our thinking, and our praxes: we are products of all the contradictory definitions of and differences within feminism” (Heywood & Drake, 1997, p. 3). This description by Heywood and Drake encapsulated my engagement with feminism; it resonated with my lived experiences. Walker (1995), a noted third-wave feminist, provided reasoning for contemporary girls and women who gravitate to the third-wave because third-wave feminists seek to establish identities that “accommodate ambiguity” and are influenced by “multiple positionalities” where the borders between “Us and Them are often blurred” (p. xxxiii-xxxiv).

When readers of YAL are familiar with difference and are ready to negotiate, reflect, and detangle the complex ideas of relationships, YAL then “very self-consciously problematizes the relationship of the individual to the institutions that construct her or his subjectivity” (Trites, 2000, p. 20). In what seemed like a response to this readiness of the contemporary female reader, YA novels exploded as a phenomenon, promoting female protagonists who “interrogate social constructions, foregrounding the relationship between society and the individual rather than focusing on Self and self-discovery” as previous literature did (Trites, 2000, p. 20).

As Trites (2000) pointed out in *Disturbing the Universe*, the “explosion” of the type of YAL that disrupts and examines the relationships of power through gender, age, and society is fairly recent and connects with the empowerment of the individual reader. In 1996 Caroline Hunt defined the “coming of age” for YAL as occurring in the early 1990s when there was a “widespread acceptance of the grown-up name ‘young adult’” (p. 4). Prior to the recognition of a new genre of literature, young adult titles were lumped into the massive category of children’s literature with little attention paid to the differences in audience and content (Coats, 2011; Hunt, 1996). Women who are now in their late 30s and 40s were the teens of the 1990s. This group was considered one of the largest consumers of contemporary YAL (Paul, 2010). While much of the scholarship on YAL is focused on the teaching of literature in secondary classrooms, Hunt (1996) asked for increased awareness and theorizing of YAL from perspectives other than use in the classroom by secondary teachers.

Following Hunt’s article, Laminack and Bell (2004) claimed that YAL exists

within a liminal space that continues to blur the lines between children and adolescents, even as the genre has continued to grow. Plots have become less predictable and include complex ideas of social justice, crime, racism, and injustice, while the number of female protagonists has increased (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007; Younger, 2003). However, Rubinstein-Avila conceded that although researchers explore the role of female protagonists, it tends to be on a surface level. Research is often centered on counting the numbers of female protagonists in very young children's literature, with far less attention given to a critical examination of older adolescent female protagonists who appear in "crossover" literature. There is also little attention paid to how audiences engage with the reading to make meaning of what they encounter. By focusing on the positionalities of the readers, researchers can begin to examine how these positionalities influence the meaning they make when reading texts.

Reader Response Theory

In 1938, Louise Rosenblatt published her work *Literature as Exploration* in which she explained reader response theory as an engagement between reader and text. Her innovative thoughts and ideas about readers' engagement with text were significantly different than the prominent theory of the time, which was known as New Criticism. In contrast, New Criticism promoted the idea that meaning is located within the text and is to be identified by the reader (Church, 1997).

Rosenblatt "has shown that readers project their world into what they read; that readers tend to ask critical questions directed in part by the text and in part by their

culture; that readers gain diverse insights and satisfactions from their reading; and that readers change as they grow” (Purves, 1976, p. iv.). Reader response theory is built upon the foundation that “the experience of literature, far from being for the reader a passive process of absorption, is a form of intense personal activity” (Rosenblatt, 1938 p. v).

Readers examine what they read as possibilities influenced by their past experiences and look toward their future experiences through a variety of avenues such as talking about their reading experiences, writing about them, or just reflecting on the reading experience. These engaging acts with past, present, and future highlight the exploratory nature of reading in a way that encourages people to think about the different perspectives they are encountering as they read (Langer, 1994; Probst, 1994; Rosenblatt, 1938).

Rosenblatt’s (1938) insights into how adults and children engage with the experience of reading supports the previously outlined feminist/positionality theories of this study because her work on reader response is intrinsically tied to the experiences/positionality that the reader brings to the experience. This experience is not just between the individual reader and the text; it also moves past the reader into dynamic group settings where “students, in the spirit of friendly challenge, can lead one another to work out the implications of the positions they have taken” (Rosenblatt, 1938 p. 120).

Rosenblatt’s (1938) seminal work, *Literature as Exploration*, used reader response theory to suggest that, “literature makes comprehensible the myriad of ways in which human beings meet the infinite possibilities that life offers” (p. 6). Twomey (2007) argued that Rosenblatt “mapped a way for feminists to challenge the dominant masculine

discourse of reading practices by thinking about the literary experience as an artfully constructed transaction between reader and text” (p. 400). The transaction that occurs between the reader and the text is unique to each reader and is based upon the “aesthetic” experience that incorporates not only the content of the text but also the feelings, emotions, and positionalities of the reader that formulate the total experience (Probst, 1994; Rosenblatt, 1938; Twomey, 2007). Transaction represents convergence of the reader with the text to create new experiences and understanding.

Rosenblatt’s (1978) groundbreaking work on how the reader engages with the text can also be used to explore the relationship between gender and reading through feminist work by identifying its political nature and the influence of power that gender exerts over literature, or that the literature exerts over gender (Davies, 1993; Gilbert, 1992; Mills, 1994; Radway, 1991, 1997). Gender issues in young adult and children’s literature have also been central to many studies examining developmental awareness and the relationships between genders (Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; Tsao, 2008). The reader’s awareness of gender in the text promotes transactions that allow readers to identify with and relate to characters and events and continue, “constructing ideas from information around them and assimilating new knowledge with previous knowledge” (Tsao, 2008, p. 108).

Women and girls coming together in community to engage with a common text can “create opportunities to interpret personal and collective experience” (Sumara, 2002, p. 19). The community can also be a space to try on different forms of self-identity that are shared between the text, group, and reader. The feminist theory that influences the

intersections in my theoretical framework revolve around the lived experience of the individual and the story that she tells in two different situations: individual interviews and group discussions. These stories, and the quotations I drew from them for analysis, act to describe how the reader connected to the text based upon her past. When the participants come together into a group setting, they bring their positionalities and standpoints about the text that they read (Harding, 1991; Herkman, 2010). Participant-led discussion can highlight the voices of the participants that encourage open group dynamics. In open spaces, the participant narratives have the potential to be heard, interpreted, added to, and renegotiated as new perspectives are developed.

Reader response promotes the engagement of the reader with the text. It encourages participants to reflect upon their lived experiences while connecting with the context of the story in producing a new experience. As the individual moves from a personal reading and engages in a group dynamic with others who have also had their own experience with the book, a new dynamic is introduced where shared experiences influence the personal interpretation of the text.

Reader Identity

Identity is a concept that intersects feminism, positionality, reader response, and was ultimately one of the similarities and differences between the girls and women. Alsop (2006, 2010) explored the discourses that are used to describe experiences with texts first with adults—new teachers—and then with teen audiences. She found that “discourse as an identity spark; narratives or storytelling as central to identity growth and self-perception of identity” were themes that affected not only the readers, but also others

where information and experiences were shared (Alsup, 2010, p. 2). Reader identity is a dynamic experience as pointed out by Bogdan and Straw (1990) where self-actualization has become a way for readers of any age to improve and reflect upon their lives.

Gee (2000) discussed identity as an analytic tool for research in education where he highlighted that people act in certain ways depending on the context of the situation. When the context of the situation is the engagement of a reader and a text as Rosenblatt suggested, followed by the possibility of discussion and engagement in critical analysis, often seen in educational settings, as discussed by Alsup (2010) readers use the “multiplicities of ‘self’” to convey their position about the material read. The positioning of the self alongside a story line or character requires the reader to “imaginatively position oneself” within a category (p. 6). In the case of this study, participants used teen identities to connect and convey their responses to the text. The women, included more complex “multiplicities of ‘self’” by also discussing their reading reactions through other identities.

Readers and Individual and Social Transformation

Young adult literature often portrays coming of age storylines that highlight the transformation of a character from child to adult (Latham, 2007; Nilsen & Donelson, 2001; Trites, 2000). Identifying with a character requires the reader to grapple with what the character is doing in the story such as being a teen or remembering that time in life. A reader must negotiate the emotional and mental consequences of the character’s decisions as Rosenblatt explained through transactional theory. Trites argued that the

transformation of the protagonist from acting in one way to another in YAL is particularly well suited to “interrogate social constructions, foregrounding the relationship between society and the individual” (p. 20). Teens are entering into this awareness of their position within society and adults, especially women, often continue to negotiate their positions in society.

Young adult novels are depicting relationships and decision making scenarios that “illustrate different viewpoints and portray characters involved in realistic problem solving” that appeals to broader audiences. Reader response and the transaction between reader and text surrounding issues of individual and social transformation could help teens and adults understand how their “individual experiences fit into a larger socio-cultural context” (Alsup, 2010, p. 13).

Book Clubs

Book clubs, sometimes called literature circles or reading groups, are generally small peer-led discussion groups where the participants have all chosen to read the same text and then come together to engage in a dialogue, thereby sharing their reading interpretations and experiences (Daniels, 2002). Reading groups have been documented as existing as far back as the 12th century (Long, 2003; Twomey, 2007). Book clubs are popular because they provide opportunities for individuals to come together to share personal ideas, responses, reactions, and experiences. Group discussions move beyond an individual reader response as theorized by Rosenblatt (1995) and Probst (1994) by entering into a more critical analysis supported through a social reading (Flood & Lapp,

1994).

When readers engage in a close reading of a book, they must pay careful attention to language and the context of the story. Readers grapple with conflicts that are presented at an individual or societal level, which allows them to make connections between self, the ideas in the text, and global issues. As people move from individual engagement of reader response (reader, text, experience) into a community of readers with a shared experience of reading the same text, they are provided with multiple perspectives and ideas, which can then lead to a more complex understanding of the material.

I decided to use the spaces of book clubs for this study to make it possible for the participants, particularly the teens, to share their experiences in a natural setting that was different from their formal school settings. Park (2012) stated, “In reading together, individuals’ literacy interpretations as well as their worldviews and interpretive lenses become public, and, therefore, open to reexamination” (p. 194). I also used the book club spaces to encourage discussion and sharing of experience and to collect data for this study. I discuss the method of book clubs for the purpose of collecting data later in the Literature Review of Methods.

Together, these theories and ideas combined to create a theoretical framework suited for a study in which women and girls read the same text, reflected individually, and then expanded their personal engagements through group discussion. Through this study, I sought to understand how girls and women related to the female protagonists, how they engaged with young adult dystopian literature, and what were the multiple perspectives that the participants brought to the study.

Research Studies

Each of the following studies utilized theories and methods that I found useful in structuring my own study. They are all qualitative, use interviewing and discussion, and highlight the perspectives of the participants. I have created a matrix (see Appendix A) that provides an overview of the specifics of each of these studies.

Long (2003) explored historical documents representing 121 reading groups that were in existence throughout Texas shortly after the U.S. Civil War. These groups were comprised of affluent white women whom Long discovered were engaging in “the meaning of reading, the culture and constitution of subjectivity, and woman’s relationship to the public sphere” (p. xviii). Long’s study was not only a historical account of the literacy of women in early U.S. but also an exploration of how these groups offered spaces for women to engage in textual analysis and encourage identities of solidarity. They also provided places for women to seek a reprieve from the isolation of domestic roles. These spaces and places helped foster early momentum in the feminist movement by encouraging dialogue about the war, society, and the woman’s place in social reform.

In her work on how women engage with romance novels, Radway (1997) expressed that “by picturing the heroine in relative positions of weakness, romances are not necessarily endorsing her situation, but examining an all-too-common state of affairs in order to display possible strategies for coping with it” (p. 75). Radway noticed that in the end women used the reading of romance as a strategy to affirm their current lives, or to trouble them. In another study that also highlighted reader-response, Radway (1997)

looked at the Book-of-the-Month Club, which was popular with women though the United States in the 50s and 60s, and explored the power of “acquiring, owning, reading, and talking” (p. 8) about texts. In this way, the Book-of-the-Month Club provided a space and place for women to explore identity and authority within group conversations that highlighted multiple interpretations and negotiations (Twomey, 2007).

Finders (1997) worked with five girls as they progressed through sixth and into seventh grade. She used reading and writing as ways to examine the relationship between the girls and the content that they read. Similar to Radway (1991), Finders found that it was difficult to identify how reading influenced girls’ identities, but she asserted that “[g]irls use literacy to control, moderate, and measure their growth into adulthood. I would argue that a new independence is afforded to adolescent females through literacy” (p. 19).

Carico (2001) studied four girls over a 5-month period as they discussed two novels with strong female protagonists. In her theoretical framework, Carico drew from Rosenblatt’s (1978) concepts about the transaction between reader and text in groups, which had progressed from her early reader response theory writings (Rosenblatt, 1938). Carico surmised that students benefit cognitively and emotionally when they learn how and are allowed to draw on their own personal connections to the text, when they are given opportunities to discuss their responses with others, and when they are asked to probe deeply into those responses.

The following year, Broughton (2002) studied four sixth-grade girls as they participated in book club discussions. In her study, she used similar research tools and

data as those I used, which included interviews, journals, and discussions. Broughton's focus was on the girls' conversations about themselves that transpired through the reading and discussions. She concluded that through engaging in book club discussions, girls were influenced in an ongoing pattern of identity negotiation.

Frye (2009) stated in her essay, "A 'Book Club Girl' Becomes a 'Leader,'" that "book clubs, along with other social literacy experiences, can provide a place for adolescents to contemplate and 'try on' their future selves" (p. 1). Frye also noted that, as of 2009, "researchers and practitioners are just beginning the conversation about using book clubs to promote identity exploration in adolescents" (p. 6). She called for further research in the area of how girls' positionality can be changed through book clubs and literature groups.

Maine and Waller (2011) conducted a study with five children and five adults to examine their responses and reactions to reading and re-reading. The children read *Swallows and Amazons Forever* (Ransome, 1930) for the first time, and the adults reread it after having first read the story as children. This study focused on analyzing the response of the readers through answering the following three research questions: "What do these different readers enjoy in the text and what do they find difficult?" "What do they bring to the text which alters their engagement with it?" and "Do the re-readers experience similar responses to their child counterparts or their previous childhood selves?" (p. 355). The researchers were interested in how the two groups related to the reading material provided. They looked for individual reactions to the text as well as how they incorporated the experience into their lives. In the case of the adults who read the

text twice, there was an element of remembering past reactions as well as adding a new experience.

All of these studies included aspects connected with my research; they examined the relationships of readers with text and how their relationships affected their lived realities in some way, the collaboration of the participants through book clubs, and they worked with girls and women. However, my study adds to this knowledge base by asking specifically how the two different age groups related to the same characters within a text and what were the similarities and differences between the two age groups. I hoped to extend theories of feminism and reader response theory by showing how different generations of women can interpret the same female protagonist with a different set of concerns.

Literature Review of Methods

Because qualitative research is connected so closely with the ontology and epistemology of the researcher, it was important that my research methods were grounded in my theoretical framework. The following five sections describe my methods of data collection and analysis, and explain how each data source aligns with theories of feminism and reader response theory. Specifically, I collected data from semistructured interviews, journals, and group discussions. I analyzed the data using constant comparative analysis and discourse analysis.

Semistructured Interviews

Qualitative researchers use many different styles of interviewing and analysis to

interpret and discern the nuance of what is said by the participant. This nuanced, focused account of a lived experience is what Geertz (1973) called a “thick description.” Feminist methodologies of interviewing were historically used to give voice to experiences and make those experiences more visible to others through the medium of research.

Interviews in this case are used to encourage participants to reflect and share their beliefs and experiences with the researcher (Hammersley, 2003; Schostak, 2006; Sprague, 2005).

Interview techniques within qualitative data collection fall upon a continuum from formal to informal. Formal interviews, also called structured interviews, use a set question guide that does not allow for deviation from the guide, and questions are often organized in a sequential manner in order to elicit specific information. Informal interviews, or unstructured interviews, are often considered conversations, where no specific guidelines govern the conversation. A mid-point between these two styles is the semistructured interview for which a set of guiding questions may be determined prior to the interview, but there is space for the conversation to progress in different directions based upon the experiences the participant wishes to share as she engages in dialogue with the researcher (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

I chose semistructured interviews to provide some guidance for participants with a set of questions; however, this data source also left open spaces for our conversations to develop in directions the participants felt were important and related to the topic. I worked within the feminist framework to “develop ways of conceptualizing the interview as an encounter between women [even of differing ages] with common interests, who would share knowledge” (DeVult & Gross, 2007, p. 178).

To help encourage open spaces for dialogue, I worked to follow a set of guidelines designed to keep me focused on feminist theories and interactions within the interview process. The guidelines included: being a conscious researcher, being an active listener, sharing knowledge, and being reflexive in all aspects of the study. I strived to be conscious of my position of power within the context of the interviews with participants and reflexive throughout the entire process. I wanted my position as “researcher” to be felt on a more even playing field. My goal was to provide a shared space to highlight participant experiences through listening actively and being conscious of my position (Lorde, 1984).

Journals

A journal is a tool of reflection and memory holding. It provides the writer with an opportunity to engage with ideas outside of context as well as provides a marker for remembering events (Kolencik & Hillwig, 2011). As a metacognitive tool to promote thinking about the experience, “writing can record a train of thought and relate it in past, present, and future” (Kolencik & Hillwig, 2011 p. 43). The reflexive nature of journaling is consistent with a feminist framework because it encourages a cognizant process of “recognizing the social location” of the author within the context of thinking about the subject and writing about it reflectively (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 418). The act of journaling in the context of this study provided participants with an opportunity to engage with their thoughts about *Uglies*, our interview conversations, and their past experiences that led them to think the way that they do about the topic. This style of journaling follows reader-response theory in that readers engage with the text and their background.

(Morawoski, 2010; Rosenblatt, 1978; Shihab, 2011).

Shihab (2011) highlighted the transaction between reader and text where the “process of reading involves constructing meaning among the parts of the text and between the text and readers’ personal experience” (p. 209). Through journaling, these ideas, insights, feelings, experiences, and responses are recorded for further reflection by the reader or in discussion with others (Harris, Silverstein, & Andrews, 1989). Rosenblatt (1938) found that students from middle school to college became more invested and engaged in topic discussions after journaling about their reading.

Teachers use low stakes writing assignments, such as journaling, with literature circles and book clubs in schools to promote deeper thought and analysis, as well as to generate discussion topics and prompts for future group discussions. Day, Spiegel, McLellan, and Brown (2002) discussed the benefits of students writing in conjunction with literature circles as a “tool to help them remember what they want to say and to make the conversation flow” (p. 86). Students who write after they read and before a discussion become more aware of how they are thinking about the topic and include more details as they document their engagement between themselves and the text. Writing in a journal also promotes reflection upon the convergence of lived experience in relation to the text in a manner that can promote analysis and discussion (Daniels, 2002; Day et al., 2002; Langer, 1987).

Group Discussion

Reader response theory posits an engagement between individual, text, and past experiences, which means that readers can be encouraged to move easily into discussing

past experiences with other readers to develop a deeper and wider range of analysis (Daniels, 2002; Day et al., 2002; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). Keene and Zimmerman theorized that at some point adults develop the ability to make personal connections and create sensory images with texts as they read. Daniels took this theory one step further in saying that “a skillful reader’s ‘response’ includes several kinds of active, ongoing thinking” (p. 38). Through opening up spaces for conversations about individual interpretations of texts, I encouraged the practice of thinking more deeply about ideas and sharing those within a group.

In productive group discussions, participants explore their individual reading experiences, supported by their journals, to expand their knowledge through engaging with the multiple perspectives of the other participants (Beach & Yussen, 2011; Farr & Kurtzahn-Beach, 2006; Long, 2003). Beach and Yussen discovered that participants “valued acquiring shared knowledge about books that they would not acquire on their own” (p. 130).

Feminist researchers have a long history of utilizing groups to create shared knowledge and understanding about issues. Frazer (1988) used discussions with several groups of teenage girls to collect perceptions on gender. The teens generated conversations about gender that Frazer had not initially considered. The informal and organic discussions led Frazer to incorporate class as an important construct when discussing gender with the girls. Similarly, Wilkinson’s (1998) work on focus groups in feminist research suggested that “group interviews of various kinds (generically designated focus groups) offer an important opportunity to explore issues relevant to the

person-in-context—so providing a valuable methodological tool for feminist psychology, and for feminist research more generally” (p. 112).

I used book club discussions in this study under the assumption that participants’ understandings of the novels would be enhanced as they shared their lived experiences with others. To make the most of the group discussions, and in keeping with feminist thought, I tried to promote open and encouraging discussion spaces. In order to foster greater understanding, participants need to be open, aware, and actively promoting their perspectives and positionality within the group (Beach & Yussen, 2011; Kooy, 2006; Souto-Manning, 2010).

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is focused on knowledge, values, and positions expressed through language used to describe or explain an experience. The analysis examines the patterns within language while also considering the connections between what is said and the social and cultural context in which it was situated (Gee, 2010; Johnston, 2002; Paltridge, 2012). Zellig Harris first introduced discourse analysis as a method in 1952 as a way to examine language beyond the sentence level and language’s connection to behavior. In the 1960s and 1970s discourse analysis was used to study patterns of conversation. Discourse analysis continued to develop in the 1980s and 1990s to include a focus on culture’s influence on discourse, which has evolved by adding foci of identity, power relations, and virtual spaces (Dressman & McCarthey, 2004; Florio-Ruane & Morrell, 2011; Paltridge, 2012). I used discourse analysis as a method to analyze interview and group discussion transcripts to provide “a deeper understanding and

appreciation of texts and how they become meaningful to their users” (Paltridge, 2012, p. 3).

Discourse analysis situated within a feminist framework works at a critical level (Gee, 2010). Through adding the critical aspect, the goal becomes to “speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, social or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world” (Gee, 2010, p. 9). It is not a coincidence that there is a relationship between feminism and discourse analysis (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995). Indeed, the emancipatory process of bringing forth a voice through text provides a way of knowing and understanding a situation and is a tool to examine gender, age, and other power-related nuances in the language used by the authors. Rogers (2004) defined researchers using critical discourse analysis as people “concerned with the critical theory of the social world, the relationship of language and discourse in the construction and representation of the social world, and the methodology that allows them to describe, interpret and explain such relationships” (p. 3).

Paltridge (2012) explained that critical discourse analysis examines language to draw out issues that reside in “gender, ethnicity, cultural difference, ideology and identity” (p. 197). An example of a critical discourse analysis is seen in the work of O’Donnell-Allen and Smagorinsky (1999) in which they analyzed a group discussion surrounding the character Ophelia from *Hamlet*. The group was comprised of four girls in a senior high school English class. O’Donnell-Allen and Smagorinsky set out to examine how groups of students use artistic interpretations of literature to make meaning through non-traditional assessments. They found that the girls’ conversations were “tentative,

nurturing, connected, and indirect as they worked” (p. 36). Instead of stereotypical descriptions of the way girls act, which are often used to disempower, this “inclusive nature of their speech fostered a collaborative working relationship that paved the way for their joint interpretations,” which in turn empowered them both as individuals and as a group (p. 37).

Baxter (2003) also incorporated discourse analysis as a feminist research methodology into her study examining the significance of gender for assessing students’ speech in class settings. She was looking for a discourse method that took into account the complexities and competing messages that arose from classroom talk surrounding assessment. Through the use of discourse analysis, Baxter saw that students were constantly negotiating positions of gender that influenced the outcome of assessments.

When incorporating a feminist approach in a research study, researchers using discourse analysis as a method highlight the ways speakers negotiate identities, situate themselves within the world, and bring forth what they find significant through the language they use. Research projects that consider the position of gender, such as O’Donnell-Allen and Smagorinsky (1999) and Baxter (2003) used discourse analysis to analyze the voices of the participants who aligned with feminist beliefs to show that language is powerful.

Constant Comparative Analysis

Constant comparative analysis is connected with the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss used constant comparative analysis as an important method for developing theory that was “grounded” within the data with the

overall goal to “discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories, and to discover patterns” (Tesch, 1990, p. 96).

Fram (2013) added to the already strong base of constant comparative analysis within grounded theory and showed how the method was useful to other methodologies. She showed its power to “maintain the emic perspective (participant’s view as insider)” (p. 1). Like Fram, Bryant and Charmaz (2007) asserted that the standpoint of the researcher and design of the study must work in concert to develop theories about participant meanings. For example, Alvermann, O’Brien, and Dillon (1990) conducted a study with 24 middle school teachers over the course of two semesters while the teachers conducted content specific discussions of assigned readings in their classrooms. The purpose of the study was to define a “descriptive-interpretive” discussion (p. 296). Constant comparative analysis was used on both a macro and micro level to provide a holistic as well as specific view of the experiences. In this case, the researchers audio and video recorded participants and then reviewed and compared events to distill experiences into coded categories.

Throughout the process they met often to discuss what they observed, refine their assertions, and triangulate “with the secondary data—the teachers’ definitions of discussion and what the teachers said during interviews about their videotaped discussions—with our own interpretations” where they worked to co-construct meaning from the data (Alvermann et al., 1990, p. 304). As indicated by this study, constant comparative analysis complements feminist frameworks, which are concerned with the standpoint of the participants, by negotiating meaning between the participants and

researcher to answer the main questions of the study.

The intersection of discourse analysis and constant comparative analysis helps “show the link between texts (micro) and dominant power relationship (macro) within a social structure” (Fram, 2013, p. 8). Together these two analytic methods are focused through feminist and reader response lenses. These lenses allowed me to highlight how the participants related to the protagonist individually and provided a way to compare and contrast the girls’ and women’s responses.

Summary

This chapter described the theoretical framework that influenced my positionality as a researcher as well as the theories that were used to organize the project, collect, and analyze the data. This study is qualitative and eclectic; I drew from select theories to formulate a framework that I felt best fit this study. Through this process of formulating my framework, I kept the research questions in mind (*How do girls and women relate to the female protagonist in dystopian YAL?* and *How are the responses to dystopian YAL similar and different for the targeted teen audience and the adult audience?*) as I worked to determine the ways in which to best answer them, including which theories informed me, and which methods would work to provide meaningful data for analysis.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

I used qualitative methods to collect information on how girls and women relate to a female protagonist in dystopian young adult literature and the similarities and differences between audience experiences. I collected three types of data: 14 semistructured interviews (two with each participant), audio recordings of the girls' and women's book club discussions, and participant journals. Data collection began at the end of October 2012 with the initial individual interviews, followed by a 3-week period for the participants to read the text, *Uglies*. Group discussions, final interviews, and journal collections were concluded early in December 2012. I coded and analyzed the data following discourse and constant comparative analysis methodologies (Boeije, 2002; Fram, 2013; Gee, 2010, 2011). The rest of this chapter is organized to provide my positionality within the study and outline the process of text and participant selection, data collection, limitations, and analytic methods.

Positionality

When I frame myself as a feminist researcher, I draw from many influences to explain my positionality. The method(s) a feminist researcher chooses to use depend upon these influences. As such, I kept in mind my goal as a feminist researcher when I situated myself, and my methods, within this study. I know that I influenced the study by choosing the topic, the epistemology, the participants and the methods used to gather data. Through this awareness, I worked to “keep people and politics at the center” of my

research (Benmayor, 1991, p. 173). This commitment to understanding differences, change, and activism was meant to “decenter ourselves from the ‘ivory tower’ and construct more participatory, democratic practices” (Benmayor, 1991, p. 172). Denzin (1997) explained that “this framework presumes a researcher who builds collaborative, reciprocal, trusting, and friendly relations with those studied” (p. 275). I kept these ideas in mind as I worked to build collaborative, open, and friendly spaces with the participants by reminding them in the interviews and in discussion that we were building the content of this study together. In doing this, I valued what they had to say and acknowledged that they were the experts that I was learning from. I emphasized in discussion that everyone experiences reading differently, that our discussions were spaces where there was no right or wrong way to read *Uglies*, and that it was the differences that helped to make a global picture.

As a child, I was a feminist and did not know it. As far back as I can remember, I tried to stand up for my girlfriends and myself. In second grade, my group of girls was called the horses and the boys were the jets. I refused to let my group get kissed. I preferred the wild untamed mustang that would just as soon kick you instead of let herself be caught and kissed (yuck). In fifth grade, I punched Paul in the nose because he wouldn't let girls on the merry-go-round. Middle school didn't result in any strong feminist-like outbursts that I can remember; instead, I was riddled by anxiety about identity. I had no idea how to negotiate the social structure of middle school and wondered how suddenly all this stuff had changed and there was no equal footing. High school was different. I reveled in being different; I fought to be the first girl in dynamic

fitness because I was not coordinated enough to do dance, and I felt that girls should be able to weight lift too. I wore combat boots, black clothes, liked punk music, and had never heard of the Riot Grrls. Never once did anyone explain to me that these acts of resistance and activism could be aligned with something as big as feminism.

I was a voracious reader. I read fantasy and science fiction and hated princesses that needed rescuing. I do not consciously remember wondering why all the protagonists in my books were male. I do remember the long-lasting impact of those few books that had female protagonists. Anne McCaffery's (1967-2011) *Dragon Riders of Pern* series captivated me, but my favorites were the books in which Menoly, Lessa, and Moreta were the lead characters. In *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1953-1955) I was angry when Theodin refused to let Eowyn ride with the Rohan to fight for Middle Earth. Still, I had no idea what feminism was.

In college, I took an ethnic women's literature class. When discussing a book, the lecturer called the character a mulata. I did not know what that was, but a Black man in class did. I remember him standing up and angrily explaining to the teacher about language, racism, and privilege. I had no idea what he was talking about, but it scared me. Who talks to a teacher like that? Were we not just reading a story? Slowly, I began to realize there was a lot more going on in the world than I was aware of. I was not (still am not) the critical thinker that I thought I was.

When I became a mother, it was as if a switch was flipped in my brain. I began to notice pink and blue. Gender was in my face every day. Girls need this, boys need that, girls do this, boys do that. The constant gender barrage was overwhelming. I tried to

purchase gender-neutral toys and books, as well as provide items that highlighted everything. My daughter still, to my horror, loved all that was pink and would only wear dresses and carried her doll Kate everywhere she went. As she got older, we would discuss gender and power on a level that she would understand. We would look at the marketing in the aisles at Walmart, one pink and one blue.

By the time she reached middle school, she was reading everything she could get her hands on and was quickly moving into a territory that I was unprepared for—teen romance (puke). Her friends were reading the *Babysitter* and *Sweet Valley High* books, which I felt were filled with stereotypical female roles that did nothing to push boundaries to induce critical thinking. I began to preread books and recommend those I thought would interest her or books suggested by other parents, and some we picked out together. Her love of fantasy and my love of sci/fi led us into discovering dystopias. It helped that this genre began to explode around 2005 and gave us a number to choose from.

The more I read, the more I found I was reading for me and not for my daughter. I would finish a book, pass it along, and pick up the next. In between, we would talk about characters, ideas, directions of series, and how it made us feel. I was conflicted about the way it made me feel. I felt younger, more positive, more sure of myself. I also felt silly as an adult woman who enjoyed reading about messed up futuristic worlds where teenage girls had to save the world. And then I found other women who felt the same way and began to wonder, how do girls and women experience these stories? Are they similar or different? If so, in what ways?

Text Selection

Because the genre of YAL is so broad and encompasses so many subgenres, it would not be effective to sample them all. In this study, because of my focus on feminist and social issues, I chose a text with a strong female protagonist set in a dystopian future: Scott Westerfeld's (2005a, 2005b) *Uglies*. I found Lyman Tower Sargent's definition of critical dystopia useful to describe the dystopic setting of *Uglies*. Sargent's "critical dystopia" is defined as:

A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one Eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia. (Baccolini & Moylan, 2003, p. 7)

Critical dystopias allow for the protagonist and other characters to hope for the future even as the narrative portrays a society at its bleakest hour. The storyline is left open and encourages reflection and engagement with the context of the futuristic story so that readers can make changes, or visualize alternate futures, before the fated timeframe of the narrative. In many cases, it represents the future as history that encourages change (Baccolini & Moylan, 2003; Donawerth, 2003; Jameson, 1982). Critical dystopia "opens a space of contestation and opposition for those collective 'ex-centric' subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by hegemonic rule" (Baccolini & Moylan, 2003, p. 7). Many scholars have written about utopias and dystopias related to adult fiction (Booker, 1994; Snodgrass, 1995), which is where these definitions and explanations originate.

Scholarship on utopias and dystopias for adolescent readers, however, is another

story. The scholarship about how and why adolescents read dystopias is not abundant. This is not to say that there are few books of this genre for children and young adults. On the contrary, Hintz and Ostry (2003) began their description of the genre in 1749 with Sara Fielding's *The Governess or, Little Female Academy* (p. 1) and included hundreds of titles in the annotated bibliography at the end of the book. The annotated bibliography and descriptions provided a way to frame the timeline of dystopias for adolescence. However, it did not provide a guide for scholarship in how to analyze the ways the genre was read. I was able to use the source to support my decision for using utopia/dystopia when examining the ways women and girls interact with the genre because it provided a good historical context for situating dystopias in both generations of participants.

Utopian and dystopian YAL literature “encourages young people to view their society with a critical eye, sensitizing or predisposing them to political action” (Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 7). Because feminism is also connected with critical discourses that disrupt the status quo, a dystopia can be another resource that can encourage deeper reflection on the societal connections between participants and text. These definitions of utopia and dystopia fit with the novel I chose for this study, which promotes the examination of gender.

Tally, the female protagonist in Westerfeld's (2005a, 2005b) *Uglies*, is a 15-year-old living in Ugly Town, which is described as a futuristic boarding school for kids under the age of sixteen. On their 16th birthday, kids from Ugly Town are transported to Pretty Town with a brief stopover at the hospital for plastic surgery that will make them physically acceptable for life in the perpetually fun and glitzy Pretty Town. This plastic

surgery is a rite of passage for 16-year-olds, much like we view getting your driver's license. Tally eagerly awaits her birthday so she can join her best friend (and future possible love interest) Peris.

It is during this time between when Peris leaves and her own transition that she meets another student, Shay, in Ugly Town. Shay provides an alternative narrative that challenges the hegemonic one of body modification, parties, and over-the-top hedonism of Pretty Town. Shay did not believe that surgery and vapid parties of Pretty Town were the only way to live. She believed that there must be an alternative. For her, the alternative lay in the stories of the Smoke, which she shares with Tally. This introduction to a different alternative than the status quo initiates Tally's journey. As Shay shares information, Tally begins thinking critically about the society she is a part of, how it reflects the apocalyptic history of her time, and what it might mean for the future.

Uglies exemplifies dystopian tropes through its negotiation of the protagonist's identity within the spaces she inhabits. The story highlights the hegemonic institutionalized power structure that works to marginalize people who do not fit the socially constructed ideal, as well as showcases how a police state/government can restrict choices by making it seem better not to have to choose. I chose the text because I felt it worked well as a basis for the participants' discussion, journaling, and interviewing. The dystopian future of *Uglies* connects its present day to our present day overtly through the history taught in schools, ancient ruins, and the library full of popular magazines that the Smokies kept.

Tally begins as someone who has succumbed to the pressures of her society; she

is a believer in the way things are and does not question authority. I assumed that her transformation from non-activist to activist would lend itself to feminist interpretations as the participants compared and contrasted their own lives with her motives and choices. Her story is the central narrative. Tally's negotiation of her life is connected very closely with the third-wave's ideas of intersection. Intersections, or intersectionality, is a concept in feminist studies that represents the complexity of women's lives. Intersectionality is an important way of understanding personal identity. Dill (2009) describes the understanding of intersectionality when people begin to see that their "sense of self is multifaceted, that they have been shaped by a number of different (and sometimes conflicting) social factors and that their behaviors cannot be understood in a one-dimensional manner" (p. 27).

The intersections in this text occur as Tally's character experiences moving between a child and adult. This transition is represented through dichotomies such as having no choice and choice, no power and power, and that having choice and power also creates scenarios where there are consequences for herself and also for others. These areas of intersection illustrate Tally's changing identity as she experiences life (Snyder, 2008). I assumed the participants would also reflect on what their choices might be in those situations and how that might influence the way they feel about the character.

Participant Selection

I purposefully selected research participants based upon several criteria. Palys (2008) defined criterion-based sampling as a process that "involves searching for cases or

individuals who meet a certain criterion, for example...particular life experience” (p. 687). For the purpose of my study, basic selection criteria were gender, age, location, and familiarity with young adult literature and dystopias. Because of the nature of the study, I looked for adult women between the ages of 30 and 40 and teen-aged girls who were located centrally to each other to facilitate in-person interviews and group discussions.

I used my previous connection with women who were interested in YAL as a starting point for recruiting the adult participants for this study. It was important that the women had time to commit to the project as well as the desire to engage in a discovery process about their reading. Through these connections, I identified three adult women whose ages ranged from 35-38 and who were interested in participating. My teenage daughter and my connection with teens on a local swim team granted me access to a number of teenaged candidates. I found four teens, aged 15-17, who were also interested in participating in the study.

Purposeful selection, as defined by Maxwell (2005), “is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 88). Even though my sample was based on criteria from the study as well as convenience, I looked for participants who represented different backgrounds to provide diverse perspectives and who were open about their enjoyment of discussing books and listening to each other. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) described this technique of purposeful sampling as an “iterative process...that seeks to maximize the depth and richness of the data to address the research question” (p. 317). I hoped to find individuals who would share their

reading experiences through one-on-one interviews, but who could also come together in groups to share, build, and discuss perspectives.

Participant Descriptions

It is important in a feminist research study to pay attention to those contributing to the construction of knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Sprague, 2005). I selected participants with a main goal of gaining an understanding of how they read and respond to a text based upon their narratives; therefore, it is important for readers to gain perspective of who the participants are through biographies. This section provides a detailed account of recruiting participants as well as biographical information for the individuals. I divided the participant description section into two groups: teens and adults.

Teens

As a volunteer with the local high school girls' swim team, I overheard discussions surrounding the girls' schoolwork and, more specifically, their reading. They all knew that I taught English to college students and were interested in what I read and what my students did in class. When I began looking for participants for this study, I asked around to see what types of books they all liked to read, if they liked to read, and what kind of characters they liked in books. Based upon my inquiries, I approached four girls about participating in my study. Because the girls were minors, I explained the project in detail, gave them copies of the IRB (Institutional Review Board) approved participant agreement letter, and invited their parents to contact me to answer any questions they had about the project. To provide confidentiality for the participants, I

asked them to come up with names they wanted to be referred to during the course of the study.

Almira identified herself as an African American who was born and had lived in Utah her whole life. She was 15 years old at the time of data collection and a sophomore in high school. In the first interview, she said she liked school but not homework and really liked to read; however, she had not read *Uglies* before. Almira loved to draw and hoped to pursue art in college. She described her favorite book in recent memory as *Unwind* by Neal Shusterman (2007), which is an example of a dystopian YAL book. When asked what she enjoyed about dystopias, she said “There is a possibility that what happens in the books could actually happen. It’s more realistic than a fantasy book. I find that concept more fascinating.”

Marilyn was born in Idaho but had spent the majority of her life in Utah. She was a white middle-class, 16-year-old-girl, and was a junior in high school at the time of the study. In the initial interview, she explained how she loved people, and especially loved to talk and debate issues, not because she liked to argue, but rather because she liked to learn about how others think about the same topics. Marilyn was a voracious reader and dabbled in many different genres; she had read *Uglies* before, but when asked how she felt about reading it again she said she was “excited because when I read it I think I was in sixth- or seventh-grade and as I get older I feel like my opinions are changing about *everything*, so I’m excited to read it again.”

Isobel was 17 years old and a senior in high school. She was a first generation Mexican American and will be the first in her family to attend college. She was born in

Los Angeles, California, and had lived in Utah for 5 years. Isobel loved reading, was a good student, and was driven to achieve her goals. She stated that her family members were not big readers, primarily because they worked rotating 12-hour factory shifts, which did not leave much time for leisure activities. Because of her parents' work, Isobel helped to care for her two younger siblings; she tried to make sure they read and hoped that they would one day enjoy it as much as she did. Isobel mentioned that she had two older siblings who also worked in the same factory as her parents and were not big readers. Isobel said she liked to read books where the "main character has to be overcoming a big problem. Something huge." She liked to read about the growth and success of the characters and how they overcome obstacles in their lives.

Crystal was a 16-year-old junior in high school. She came from a white lower-middle class family who expected Crystal to hold a job during high school to help pay for her extracurricular activities. She was a hard worker, aspired to be a doctor or physician's assistant, and loved to read paranormal-romance, especially stories with vampires, angels, and werewolves. Crystal had not read *Uglies* but had read other dystopias such as *The Hunger Games*. She said that dystopias make "you realize what's out there. Like people all think of the ideal world but like it makes you realize what is happening out there, and people do have it worse than you."

Adults

The three women who participated in the study were all white middle-class married women. All three held advanced degrees and worked outside of the home. Of the three, two read extensively for pleasure. We had often shared book titles with each other,

including many YAL books. The third enjoyed reading but found it difficult to connect with series books. However, she liked YAL specifically because they were generally quick reads that allowed her to have something to talk about with her daughters if they read the same books. As with the teens, I asked the adults to choose aliases for themselves for the duration of this project.

Jane was born and raised in Utah. She married her high school sweetheart and they had two teenage daughters. At the time of the study, Jane was 37 years old and loved the outdoors; she had participated in such sports as skiing, biking, hiking, and running, and did all of these activities to the extreme. She was raised as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon), but she did not find that it fit with who she was and quit participating after high school. Jane enjoyed reading many different genres. In high school, she was interested in the Beat era and such authors as Jack Kerouac and Ken Kesey and admitted she still liked books that question the status quo. When asked what she liked about dystopias specifically, she said she found the “whole big brother idea fascinating. It takes our society to a new level. Like, I can foresee the possibility.” She had not read *Uglies*, but her daughters had, and she remembered them talking about it so had an idea of the premise.

Amber was 35 years old and grew up in the San Francisco Bay area, where she was raised in a liberal Catholic family. Like Jane, she also married her high school sweetheart. Amber came from an upper-middle class family with liberal values. She was virtually an only child because her half-brother was 9 years older. Her mother owned and taught in a preschool where Amber remembered reading to children during the summers

as her first job. Reading in her family was a way of life. She related a memory about negotiating for more reading time.

We always had dinner together and we were supposed to talk about our days, and I would beg for reading dinners. They both wanted to read so they said yes. So totally breaking the rules about talking at dinner, we would get second knives, one to eat with and one to hold the book open with. We would all sit around the kitchen table silently reading. It was awesome.

Amber reads, and re-reads books, including *Uglies*. She referred to the characters of her favorite books as her “book friends.” She admitted to having read *Uglies* twice before but was looking forward to a third read this time.

Ivette, like Jane, was also raised Mormon in Utah, but left the church. Her mother died when she was a teen and this pushed her into a mothering role for her younger siblings. She found reading, specifically fantasy and YAL, an escape from her daily life. Ivette married a Colombian man who was raising his daughter from a previous relationship. Her stepdaughter considered Ivette her mother, called her mom, and they seemed to enjoy a strong mother-daughter relationship. In the 5 years prior to the study, Ivette and her husband had two other children together. She mentioned the challenges to raising an ethnically diverse family, especially in a conservative location such as Utah, where they were not the norm.

For Ivette, reading was an integral part of her life, and she tried to instill that love into her children. She had a Master’s degree in family child and human development and saw the importance of reading through her work in her preschool and with people with disabilities. She had not read *Uglies* but had just finished *The Hunger Games* and was looking forward to another dystopia. When asked what she liked most about reading she

said, “I don’t have to think. You work hard all day. You’re interacting with the kids. I think about my kids. I think about my life. I think about my family. When I open a book, everything just calms down. It’s a stress relief. It’s fun. It’s entertaining. And, I find a lot of enjoyment from it.”

Data Sources

Qualitative research, by definition, is multidimensional, drawing from many methods to provide a thorough view of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Flick, 2004). This project relied on three separate sources to triangulate the data and strengthen the study: interviews, group discussions, and journals. Denzin and Lincoln described triangulation as “not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation” (p. 5). The process is not to provide an objective view but rather to show the depth and complexity of study through the multiple perspectives represented through the different data.

I began the study by interviewing each participant individually prior to asking them to read the book. I also asked the participants to keep journals to record their thoughts about the project, including their thoughts about the interviews, the reading, the discussions, and anything else that made them think about this experience. Throughout this process, I also kept a reflexive journal as a way for me to reflect on my engagement with the participants, data, and where my thinking went along the journey.

Participants also engaged in a book club discussion after reading the *Uglies*. After the book club discussion, I conducted additional individual interviews. I used the three

data sources—the interviews, journals, and the discussions—to examine individual engagement as well as group dynamics while exploring the study’s research questions.

Interviews

Semistructured interviews “unfold in a conversational manner offering participants the chance to explore issues they feel are important” (Longhurst, 2010, p. 103). I chose to use a semistructured interview protocol in order to facilitate a conversational and relaxed atmosphere. Interviews with all participants bookended the study and were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed in a timely manner. I conducted the interviews in my home office, and they lasted 15-30 minutes. The initial interview was used to introduce the study and help each participant engage in critical reflection concerning YAL. Closed and open-ended questions (see Appendix B for questions) provided the opportunity for participants to think deeply about connections to previous reading experiences and about the framework that informed this study.

In the initial interviews, I gathered biographical data about the participants. I also asked about their reading habits and preferences with regard to genre and characters. We discussed their knowledge about feminism and activism and how those were related, as well as their previous experiences, if any, with book club style discussions and journaling. I also asked about the participants’ knowledge of dystopias and asked them to describe the stories and characters from dystopian book they had previously read. I used information from these first interviews to initiate discussion during the group book club session.

Because this research was informed by a feminist epistemology, it was important

to keep “people and politics at the center” of the research, so I kept in mind that my participation in this project had some effect upon the data collected (Benmayor, 1991, p. 173). As a feminist researcher, I tried to encourage and facilitate “participatory, democratic practices” throughout the interview process by encouraging an open dialogue that extended past the organized questions. Participants in turn questioned me about the study, terms used in the questions, and dystopias I had read.

The exit interview helped to “bound” the study by providing an opportunity for the participants to debrief after the group book club sessions. I conducted the exit interviews in my home office all on one day. These 20-30 minute interviews were more relaxed and deeper than the initial interviews. While conducting the exit interviews, I asked about individual experiences with the text, group discussion experiences, and also for information on how the participant chose to journal about their experiences.

The adult interviews were harder to schedule and required a little more flexibility with the locations. I met with Amber in her kitchen; I arranged to meet Ivette and Jane at a local coffee shop. The exit interviews with the women were longer, similar to the teens, lasting 30-45 minutes. I used the same semistructured format, and I asked about their individual experiences, group experiences, and then also about their journals. After completing all of the exit interviews, I began the transcription process.

Journals

Because “[w]riting bridges the inner and outer world and connects the paths of action and reflection” (Baldwin, 1991, p. 9), participants were asked to use journals to chronicle their engagement with the novel. I did not prescribe a preferred format for

journaling. I encouraged the participants to write, compose, jot, brainstorm, list, draw, or use any other means of connecting thoughts and ideas between self, environment, and text. It was my hope that the journals would provide a vehicle for the convergence of prior knowledge and new content and experiences and to act as a conduit for “inner dialogue that connects thoughts, feelings, and actions” (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 62). The journaling process was also to allow the women and girls to express their thoughts, responses, evaluations, and feelings individually without the constraints of a group setting. The journal materials were designed to examine the personal journeys of the individual girls and women. They also acted as conversation starters and memory prompts during discussions.

I introduced journals at the onset of the initial interview and described them as open-ended, without specific prompts other than the context of the study itself. I specifically asked participants to journal after they read or discussed the book. However there were no constraints and if the participant felt like journaling at any time she was encouraged to do so. I hoped that the open nature of the journal would encourage the participants to think critically and disrupt preconceived notions. I had also hoped to use the journals to augment the group discussions and to support themes and ideas as they came about. However I found that most entries were vague, brief, and disorganized.

I asked participants during the exit interviews to describe their journaling style, what prompted them to write, and when they journaled. The girls appeared much more engaged with the journaling process. I provided composition notebooks for all participants to use as a journal during this process. Marilyn, Isobel, and Crystal chose to

write text to engage with the experience. Almira used her artistic skills to illustrate her written text throughout her journal. The girls' journals were thin on content and sporadic in their entries. For this reason, I reference the journals in passing but did not use specific quotes or content for analysis.

Of the three women, only Amber kept a detailed journal. She chose an electronic format that fit her lifestyle. Her journal included links to fan-fiction about the text, other fan-inspired art, her own textual analysis of her reading and those of the sources she found. Ivette and Jane jotted a few notes, but mentioned that time was an issue that got in the way of the journaling. At the end of the exit interviews, I collected all of the journals. Because Amber's journal was focused so heavily on the online fan fiction aspects of *Uglies*, and the other women did not journal, I chose not to use specifics from Amber's journal in the study. I plan on revisiting Amber's journal after this study to possibly examine it from a different perspective.

Throughout this process, I also kept a reflexive researcher journal as a method to self-check, record notes, and examine thoughts. This journal was a space for me to reflect on my positionality, influence, and engagement with participants and the study itself. It stands to reason that I too, as a feminist reader, was affected by this experience and I also affected others, and through the reflexive journal I documented and discussed those tensions I found within the study as a whole (Casper, 1997; Stacey, 1998).

Book Club Discussions

This study was designed around one 400-page YAL novel, *Uglies*. After the initial interviews, we discussed a reasonable time to complete the first book—about 3

weeks. Towards the end of the 3-week period, I spoke with participants to set up a day and time that worked best for all those involved. The teens chose a weekend, and we blocked out 2 hours to meet at Almira's house. The teen group discussion lasted almost an hour and a half. The women chose to meet on a Sunday evening at Amber's house. I blocked out 2 hours for discussion and we used the entire time. Prior to the first book club meeting, I reviewed the initial interview transcripts and the text as well as prepared questions and prompts for discussion.

Early in the study, I emphasized that I valued the participants' input and that we were working through these ideas together. I expressed my desire to learn from their experiences and reiterated that they were the experts of their own story. I spoke with all the participants about my own position within third-wave feminism as a researcher who was collecting personal narratives. When we met for group discussions, I explained at the beginning that each perspective was different and that there was no "right" way to interpret, relate, or engage with the book. I felt that this point was especially important for the teens to understand. They were concerned about "what I was looking for" and would they be "smart" enough to say what I wanted them to say. By talking about these ideas of co-constructed spaces and ideas and ensuring that there was not an expected answer, I tried to build encouraging and open spaces for sharing information.

Teens. Before beginning our book club discussion, the four participants and I sat on couches around a table where I placed the digital recording device. To get us started, I handed out a piece of paper with some ideas drawn from their initial interviews. I asked them to spend a few minutes journaling about the prompts on the paper before we got

started. I did not want to “lead” the discussion as I would in a classroom; however the four teens fell into a pattern of waiting for a prompt before engaging in discussion. I encouraged them to look at their journals and ask questions that they had of each other, not from me. It took some time but they were able to move past me as the facilitator and enter into an engaging discussion that only occasionally required prompting and steering to stay on topic.

Adults. We spent nearly two hours in informal, friendly conversation before we began to discuss the book. Once we began discussing the book, we spent another two hours talking in a way that was very different from the discussion of the teens. I did not feel like a facilitator. The women discussed the book and offered themes freely. They explored deeply their feelings and how they related the book and characters to personal, professional, and familial roles as they shared their interpretations. The discussion was almost completely centered on Tally and what it meant to be pretty or not in her society and in ours.

Data Analysis

Analysis occurred in stages. The first step was to listen to and transcribe the recordings and then read through the transcripts of the interviews. Each interview had the potential to provide “progressively more abstract conceptual categories to synthesize” (Charmaz, 1995, p. 28). I used information from the interviews to formulate prompts during the discussions when needed. For example, I asked each participant in the initial interviews about what character traits they liked to see in the books they read. I used

some of their descriptions to help begin discussions about Tally and the other characters in *Uglies*. I transcribed the recordings for the group discussions in much the same way as the initial individual interviews. At the conclusion of the final interviews, the transcription process began again and was followed by a review of the participants' journals.

After transcribing the data, I began to conduct a discourse analysis (Gee, 2011) by looking for quotes and passages that worked to explain how girls and women related to the protagonist. I then conducted a constant comparative analysis of the findings from the discourse analysis. In this phase, I looked for similarities and differences between the ways girls and women engaged and reacted to the protagonist in *Uglies*.

In the following sections, I have detailed the processes I went through in transcribing, revisiting, culling, and analyzing the data. Examples of the coding and analysis process are provided in Appendix C for reference. At the end of this chapter, I provide two sections describing limitations to the study and ways in which I worked toward rigor in my analysis.

Data Reduction

During the data reduction process, I took a whole data set that included individual interview and group discussion transcripts and selected several quotes and narratives to analyze in more depth. This first phase of analysis enabled me to answer the initial research question: *How do girls and women relate to a female protagonist in dystopian YAL?* Through examining the rich data collected through the individual interviews, I was able to see how the participants related to Tally. After the initial interviews were

collected and transcribed, I revisited the data, separated into the teen and adult categories, and began looking for themes to use in the group discussions as well as a preliminary organizer for future coding. In doing so, I chose to examine the data based upon my two research questions. I chose a color to represent each question and began coding the data according to the way it could answer aspects of the original research questions. If the data could answer how women and girls relate to characters, it was coded a bright and bold fuchsia pink. When the data revealed how participants engaged with dystopian YAL, the information was coded turquoise. Themes were drawn from the initial interviews to help organize and provide prompts in the group discussions when needed.

I initially thought I would begin coding the book club discussions in the same manner as the interviews. However, early on it became apparent that the conversation in the group discussions was deeper, more complex, and much more dynamic than that of the interviews, which made coding based upon the research questions problematic and too broad. After rethinking the approach after discussing the conundrum with colleagues, I began looking for quotes within the transcripts that worked to answer the initial research question. In this way, I focused on the narratives that highlighted how the women and teens participated to

communicate meaning through a range of linguistic practices, how their stories are embedded in the interaction between researcher and narrator, how they make sense of personal experience in relation to culturally and historically specific discourses, and how they draw on, resist, and/or transform those discourses as they narrate their selves, experiences, and realities. (Chase, 2005, p. 659)

After making this shift in analytic strategy, I began looking for quotes throughout the transcriptions and in the participants' journals that worked to described how the

participant felt or reacted to the characters and any personal experience narratives that were connected with the character's actions. Through this process, I was looking for the richest examples that provided insight into the experiences of the participants from both their individual interviews and the group discussions.

Discourse Analysis

In this study, I used James Gee's (2010, 2011) architecture for discourse analysis. Discourse analysis can be used to examine how language reveals social and cultural perspectives and identities of the speakers. Within the method, Gee (2011) outlined 27 different "tools" to use when analyzing language. Of those 27, I chose two to use during the analysis: the significance tool and the identity tool. The significance tool is used to examine how participants construct some words or concepts as important or relevant, and others as unimportant or irrelevant. The identity tool examines how the speaker used language to represent an identity or position as well as how the language treats others' identities (Gee, 2011). Both of these tools highlight important feminist attributes. The significance tool represents a standpoint of the speaker, or what she is choosing to emphasize in relationship to her position. Identity, or how the speaker represents herself and others, can also show how the participant relates to power and positions within the text as well as within the group discussions.

When examining a quote, I looked for significance to the participant and to the topics represented in the research questions. In following the discursive analysis process outlined by Gee (2010), I began asking the question "How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?" (p. 17). While using the

significance tool, I began to see a reoccurring aspect that I initially interpreted as significance, but later felt fit within Gee's (2011) identity tool. In this case, I would examine the identity or perspective the participant was using to describe or make sense of what she was sharing. As Gee stated, as discourse analysts, we "care about how people express their sense of who they are and their multiple other identities" through the language they use (pp. 106-107). This tool allowed me to identify the perspective that the participant was using to relate to and convey information about their experiences reading *Uglies* and relating to Tally.

I created a table with three columns: one for the participant's name, one for personal experience narrative, and one that reflected direct reference to Tally. In following Gee's analytic method, I then broke up the quote into smaller clauses, which began to look like lines of poetry. I tried to highlight a word within each clause that appeared to be the most significant for the speaker. I did not consider prepositions and articles significant, but I highlighted words within each clause that contained more information or were emphasized through intonation or repetition. I also paid attention to the perspective that the participant used to talk about the experience. As they related to Tally, I noted how they were identifying with the section.

Here is an example from Isobel, one of the teen participants. In this quote, she is responding to the idea that Tally often has to make choices that contradict her moral compass and in doing so chooses to make a sacrifice for some reason or another.

Original quote: I feel like I have more important values than trying to be beautiful. I think that if you have to make sacrifices it should be for something more important than beauty.

Broken into clauses:

- 1 I feel like
- 2 I have more important values
- 3 than trying to be beautiful
- 4 I think
- 5 if you have to make sacrifices
- 6 it should be for something
- 7 more important than beauty

Significant words underlined:

- 1 I feel like
- 2 I have more important values
- 3 than trying to be beautiful
- 4 I think
- 5 if you have to make sacrifices
- 6 it should be for something
- 7 more important than beauty

I started by asking what is significant and important to the speaker. In this passage, she used the phrase “more important” twice to explain her position about beauty. In this case, Isobel did not identify with Tally’s value of beauty and felt that if she were to sacrifice her values it would have to be something more important than beauty. Isobel’s intonation in the recording stressed “I think” and “I feel” in a way that sounded as though she was defending her position.

Upon completing the discussion group analysis, I went back through the initial and final individual interviews as well as the journals and looked for more quotations that showed how the girls and women engaged with the protagonist. I found that the journals were not complete enough to extract good quotations. I then repeated the first layer of discourse analysis with these quotations from the interviews. I wanted to choose excerpts that were long enough and deep enough to show a rich engagement with the personal

response. It was easier to select detailed quotations in the adult data than the teen data. I ended up collecting four segments from each of the adults and two from each of the teens.

Second Layer of Analysis

The second phase of analysis enabled me to answer the second research question: *How are the responses to the protagonist in dystopian YAL similar and different for women and girls?* Constant comparative analysis allowed me to compare and contrast the personal narratives and character connections of the girls and women. Constant comparative analysis works to generate theoretical properties based upon the cross comparison of texts (Boeije, 2002; Fram, 2013; Glaser, 1965). By comparing and contrasting the ways the girls and women related to Tally, I worked to situate their narratives as central and use the comparisons to celebrate the differences of perspective shown by all participants. I worked to situate their perspectives as central to the analysis to promote in positive ways how the similarities and differences continued to work toward inclusive spaces as well as honor the narrative of the girl/woman (Byers & Crocker, 2012; Snyder, 2008; Walker, 2004).

I continued to identify what was significant to each participant in the first layer of analysis. I placed the first layer analyses of participant quotes into another table with the teen personal data analysis on the left and the adult personal data analysis on the right. As I did in the first layer of analysis, I began the discourse analysis process again. This time, I broke the analyses into clauses and identified significant markers throughout. I would complete a teen analysis and then an adult analysis. Throughout this process, I kept in

mind Charmaz' (2000) approach where "focus is on a mutual construction of knowledge by the researcher and participant and the ability to develop subjective understandings of participants' meaning" (p. 510). At this point, I was comparing and contrasting concept to concept that further integrates coding (Elliot & Jordan, 2010). This process provided the opportunity for important themes to become exposed while also comparing the similarities and differences between the significance for the individual, between individuals within their group, and between members from all groups (Boeije, 2002). For an example of the second layer of analysis, see Appendix C.

Limitations

Like all forms of research, there were limitations in the construction of this study. The participants that I chose through purposeful selection and the methods of discourse analysis and constant comparative analysis, which rely on my interpretation and co-construction of data, make it nearly impossible to replicate for verification in subsequent studies. The feminist framework centered in the qualitative methods relies upon the personal interaction between researcher and participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2007).

By limiting the number of participants in the study and selecting those I knew were somewhat interested in the material, I may have excluded other perspectives such as those from different ages, geographic regions, backgrounds, and genders. However, it was not the purpose of this study to be generalizable, which is often associated with quantitative research, but rather to provide an opportunity of transference (Schwandt, 2007). Much like reader response theory and the transactional theory of reading and

writing, transference occurs when the reader can connect their situation to what they read in the study. They can then relate the findings to their own experiences (Shenton, 2004).

Rigor in Qualitative Research

Saumure and Given (2008) defined rigor in qualitative research using such terms as “transparency” and “reflexivity” (p. 795). In this process, rigor is seen as the quality of the research process, and if the process is rigorous it will result in increased trustworthiness. I used transparency and reflexivity along with triangulation of multiple data sources to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Transparency meant that I worked to make the process of the study open and visible to the participants, thereby working to ensure that the girls and women knew what was happening and could ask questions as well as have a hand in the process of discovery (Denzin, 2009; Ortlipp, 2008; Rose, 1997). Reflexivity is a research practice tied to critical pedagogy and feminism that calls for awareness of the current research processes employed by the researcher. Through being reflexive, I was able to examine my decisions as a researcher as well as the process as it developed and make adjustments along the way (Finlay, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Macbeth, 2001).

I realized that my involvement as a researcher in this project influenced the participants. As a researcher, I had power because I designed this study and was the one seeking the information, and as an adult with the teen participants I had additional power because of our age difference. In the interviews and description of the project, I talked with participants about the group discussions as places where “everyone’s voice can be heard, their presence recognized and valued” (hooks, 1994, p. 185). This place of sharing

also included my own position as researcher and participant. By being reflexive, I too was aware of my influence within the process of this research. Reflexivity as a researcher pushed me to understand my thoughts and feelings of an experience while in the middle of that experience.

Reflexivity affected how my thoughts and actions led me to consider what happened next. I kept notes during the discussions about body language and engagement of the participants. There were times when a note I jotted down about a pause or movement of a participant would make me think of a follow-up question. In this way, I was trying to be critically aware of the “what” and “why” of the research study process (Cunliffe, 2004). Throughout this study, I worked to put forward my positionality by describing how I defined myself as a feminist, why I was interested in the participants’ perspectives and valued those perspectives, how reading and talking about books had affected who I am, how I was trying to be open and transparent with my biases and research methods, and how those might affect and influence the participants.

The following example from my reflexive journal illustrates how my own experiences and biases affected this study. I used my reflexive journal, in which I took notes throughout the project, to help organize my thoughts and ideas. When I was reading the section of the book where Tally first arrives at the Smoke and is looking at the “Rusties” magazines, I thought about the tabloids I see at the grocery and wrote, “When I look at the faces on the tabloids I find myself analyzing the symmetry that I see there. Is it true that as humans we are drawn to features in particular symmetrical patterns? Is there power in genetics?” This entry helped me to examine how beauty, power, and

agency are related and should be discussed when analyzing.

I also used the journal during the group discussions to jot down notes about how participants were engaged at various points during the discussion, for example, the body language and climate in the room. I jotted down a note during the teen group discussion about the wait time between one of Marilyn's comments and when the rest of the group replied: "There was a long pause, almost uncomfortable, after Marilyn asked the others if they would give up the ability to have choice if it meant world peace. No one answered her directly. Come back to this."

The journal also helped me check my involvement in the data collection process. While engaged in the teen discussion, I tallied the number of times I prompted the discussion. When I looked back at the journal along with reading the transcript, I felt that there were places where I was "guiding" the direction of the discussion too much. I used this tally as an indicator when selecting quotations to ensure I was choosing quotes that reflected the participant's voice and not what I hoped to see in the data.

Another way to insure rigor is through data audits and communicating about the process and direction of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used peer debriefing in formal and informal sessions with my mentors as I began to make assertions about the data in preparation for constructing the analysis and findings section. I met formally with my co-chairs at one point, mid-way through, where we sat down and discussed the themes I was finding. Through this discussion, I gained valuable insight about keeping the themes manageable and making sure that the categories I was building worked to answer the research questions of the project. I also shared random selections of the data

analysis via email with my dissertation chairs. Toward the end of the process, I met in person several times with another professor who was familiar with discourse analysis and qualitative work to help me keep on track and think through the different parts of the whole experience.

I also approached participants of the study for member checking and verification of themes and representations of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These avenues of member checking were informal and occurred early on in the process. All of my participants were interested in the process from beginning to end, not just the content of the text, but the construction of the study as well. For instance, Jane, Amber, and I discussed some of the themes I was finding in the data, how they related to one another, or whether they could be combined.

Member checking and verification also occurred during conversations with the teens involved in the study. Often, the teens were interested in where I was in the process. I was also able to meet with them individually to discuss the transcripts and ask if they had specific opinions about what was said. These discussions tended to indicate a stronger relationship of the themes to the reality of their lives, rather than just engagement with the text itself. In fact, one discussion about beauty as an overarching theme resulted in an impromptu individual and group list of beautiful and attractive physical attributes. What had started out as a conversation about a participant's quote regarding the traits of physical beauty morphed into a conversation with about ten swimmers, including Almira, Marilyn, Crystal, and Isobel. They created individual lists of physically attractive attributes and then compared them, creating a master list, which

led to a debate about physical, mental, and natural aspects of beauty. Based upon this discussion, I broadened the theme of beauty to include beauty naturally occurring in nature, like sunsets, along with the physical traits of beauty such as skin tone, and symmetry.

Summary

I collected three types of data: transcripts from personal interviews and group discussions, and participant journals. I reduced the data set by selecting important quotations from both the individual and group transcripts. I found the journals to be too thin and disjointed to use as stand-alone data and set them aside. I used discourse analysis to analyze the data looking for significance and identity. After the discourse analysis, I used constant comparative analysis to look for similarities and differences between the data from two age groups. I ensured rigor by keeping the process transparent as possible for the participants, being open to ideas and changes through member checking, and by utilizing my reflexive journal as a way to reflect, converse, and keep myself in check within the study. These types of data collection and analysis methods fit within the frameworks of feminism and reader response by situating the participant centrally within the study and allowing for co-construction of knowledge and meaning.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I describe how I analyzed the participants' individual interviews and group discussions to answer this study's two main research questions: *How do girls and women relate to the female protagonist in a dystopian YAL? How are their responses to the protagonist in dystopian YAL similar and different?* I divided the chapter into two sections, each of which answers one research question.

In the first section of this chapter, I used each participant's individual story to answer the first research question "*How do girls and women relate to the female protagonist in dystopian YAL?*" I showed how each participant related to Tally, the protagonist in *Uglies*, by analyzing quotations drawn from their individual interviews and the transcripts from the group discussions. As outlined in Chapter III, I conducted the analysis using discourse analysis methods where I focused on how each participant expressed identities or values that were significant to her (Gee, 2010, 2011). This process helped me to narrow what was significant within each of the groups and led to a more focused response to the first research question. I found that the participants discussed Tally in two distinct ways: through their personal narratives where the idea of transformation triggered a narrative from their own lives and through comments directly about Tally's character.

The second half of the chapter is dedicated to answering the second research question "*How are the responses to the protagonist in dystopian YAL similar and different for women and girls?*" I divided this section into similarities and differences that

encompassed five themes:

- Both the girls and women connected to Tally through their teen identities.
- Both groups connected with Tally's transformation or change throughout the book.
- The women used identities rooted in the past, present, and future when connecting to Tally, whereas the girls connected only through the present.
- The girls defined the catalyst for Tally's transformation as her desire to belong, whereas for the women the catalyst was Tally's coercion and lack of agency.
- The girls were more focused on individual growth and development, whereas the women identified with societal activism.

After the sections answering the research questions, I provide a summary of Chapter IV that examines how these themes and ideas fit within the framework of the study.

How Do Girls and Women Relate to the Female

Protagonist in a Dystopian YAL?

All of the participants related to Tally's transformation in the way they each viewed their position in their world. The participants discussed Tally's transformation through their individual interviews and in the group discussions in which they shared personal narratives connecting themselves to Tally and made comments about Tally's character.

I broke the quotations into stanzas/clauses as outlined by Gee (2010). Stanzas are

“‘clumps’ of tone units that deal with a unitary topic or perspective” as represented in the original transcription (p. 118). I underlined words in each stanza that appeared significant to the participant. I analyzed the stanzas using this method, as I outlined in more detail in Chapter III, to answer the first research question. As I read and re-read transcripts, I kept Gee’s (2011) significance and identity tools in mind as I examined quotations for words and phrases that explored the significance to the speaker and the speaker’s connection to identity. I continually asked the data:

- How is this piece of language used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?
- What identities is this piece of language used to enact and get others to recognize as operative)?
- What identity or identities is this piece of language attributing to others, and how does this help the speaker or writer enact his or her own identity?

In the excerpts below, I underlined a significant word in each sentence; however, I did not comment on how every word was used in the analysis. Based upon the passage, I looked for the words that the participant stressed or repeated the most. I identified the most common words from each section, noted how they were used, and built my analysis from there.

Women

The women connected with the theme of change, or transformation. Within this theme they discussed Tally’s negotiation with being pretty, the system within which she had to participate, and the struggle she had to engage in to shift from a self-centered

individual to someone working within a system. All three women were similar in age and education and lived in the same geographic region. They used their experiences as a lens to describe how and why they related, or did not relate to Tally. The following sections highlight how the women related to Tally.

Amber. In several quotations where Amber described Tally's transformation, the words she mentioned most often were “pretty,” “system,” and “choice.” Amber used these words to show her understanding of Tally's agency and the way it changed within the story. For example, in this quotation from a group discussion, Amber talked about Tally being forced into searching for Shay and the Smoke:

- 1 Tally is coerced into becoming pretty.
- 2 There is no option not to become pretty.
- 3 There's no system in place
- 4 for people who aren't pretty.
- 5 I understood Tally's wanting to be pretty,
- 6 when she finally agrees
- 7 to go hunt down Shay
- 8 and betray the Smoke,
- 9 in a whole different way.
- 10 When I first read that, I really thought
- 11 she's doing it to be selfish.
- 12 She can't go back to her parents.
- 13 She can't stay a teenager,
- 14 but she can grow up.
- 15 I mean they've really presented her
- 16 with a choice that's not a choice.

Amber saw the extent of Tally's limited situation as she examined Tally's lack of choices. When discussing Tally's choice/nonchoice, she led into the idea of prettiness with words that situated and provided significance for “pretty.” For example, in the first three sentences Amber paired “pretty” with “coerced,” “no option,” and “no system” in place for those who were not pretty. These three phrases situated what “prettiness” meant

to Amber. Amber thought that Tally was “doing it [betraying her friend] to be selfish” because she saw the desire to be beautiful as a self-centered desire. As the story line progressed, Amber’s views of Tally’s behavior shifted from believing that Tally was motivated by her selfish desire to be pretty to an understanding that Tally was coerced and left no choice but to be pretty, and, finally, that this coercion forced Tally down the road to changing who she was. Amber realized that “she [Tally] can’t go back to her parents, she can’t stay a teenager, but she can grow up” and this was her path to changing who she was as a character.

The repetition in the words stressing what Tally cannot do, “can’t stay,” “can’t go back,” “no choice,” all highlight the lack of choice and the coercive environment within which Tally operated. Amber believed that to survive in Tally’s society you must be pretty because there was no other option. Amber associated this lack of choice with the system as a whole when she said “there’s no system in place for people who aren’t pretty.” She empathized with Tally’s position within a system by relating her own feelings of having lived in a society where there was a lack of choice for women who were not considered pretty.

When Amber discussed her personal experiences while reading the book, I found that she emphasized the words “pretty,” “system,” and “political.” She used these words to provide a connection with her own growth and maturity, thus connected with Tally as she remembered being a teen and also as an adult. Amber said in an interview that she:

- 1 understood Tally's wanting to be pretty
- 2 because the reality is that they [girls] do
- 3 I didn't particularly want to be pretty
- 4 but I bought into the system

- 5 who didn't question a lot.
- 6 I believed teachers knew what they were doing
- 7 cops were always right
- 8 and the president had our best interests at heart.
- 9 Systematic change was not in me
- 10 and that's normal

In her childhood, Amber trusted the system and those who governed it. She did not consciously want to be pretty but was aware that society expected her to be pretty. By remembering how she behaved within the construction of society as a teen, Amber connected with Tally's desire to become beautiful and live within the system she grew up believing in. Amber also acknowledged that this trust and belief in adults and the world was completely normal. The fact that Tally was, at first, compliant within the system allowed Amber to relate to her as a character.

However, Amber still questioned her connection with Tally, particularly when Tally left to bring her friend back to society. By acquiescing to the demands of societal leaders, Tally accepted the status quo in which she will get to be pretty and life will be easy. Amber saw this decision as a "selfish" moment, in that her concern was for being pretty and not for her friend. When Amber pointed out her feelings about Tally being selfish, she was doing so from her current perspective and identity as an adult. Even though as a teen Amber was compliant within the greater structure of society, Amber used her current perspective as a tacit critique of not only her teen beliefs but also Tally's character.

Amber was also concerned about how other readers, particularly the targeted teen audience, would read and interpret the messages of the book. In her journal, Amber spent a large amount of time externally researching "fan art" and blogs about how others read

the story. In the group discussion, she shared some of her concerns about what she found and how this created a conflicted message for Amber.

1 I feel like
 2 when I looked at
 3 a lot of the fan art
 4 that people, mainly kids,
 5 did of her [Tally],
 6 they were really obsessed
 7 with the fact
 8 that Tally gets to
 9 be pretty anyway.
 10 She has had her moral victory,
 11 she knows she
 12 should not want
 13 to be pretty,
 14 she knows that prettiness
 15 is not something to value
 16 and yet
 17 she gets it anyway
 18 and that [gets to be pretty too] is something
 19 that I have a really hard time
 20 overlooking as a message
 21 of this book,
 22 She gets to be pretty
 23 and I thought that is
 24 a very confusing message
 25 that's being sent
 26 to younger readers.

Amber shared her feelings about how others, specifically adolescents, engaged with *Uglies*. Amber's words carried a tone of annoyance as she thought about future teen readers engaging with Tally's journey. She believed that Tally's struggle was an admirable one that provided a path towards a more morally-grounded identity, which readers could relate to and benefit from. However, Amber was distressed that Tally became pretty in the end, perhaps suggesting that she did not have to reject society's values after all. Amber felt that it was an unfortunate outcome that Tally gained wisdom

but also got to be physically pretty. Through this exchange, Amber reflected perspectives that connected her past teen identity, present adult identity, and an identity concerned with the future. Throughout this quotation, Amber showed concern with society as a whole and not with herself. She continually placed others in the focus rather than herself. She was concerned with how fans and “younger readers” might interpret the “confusing messages” of the book when Tally becomes “pretty” in the end.

Amber’s interviews and group discussion transcripts highlighted how she shifted between identities of a teenager, who worked within the provided system and largely believed in the process because the system has her “best interests at heart” and as an adult with a much deeper set of experiences and critical understandings of society’s expectations and needs. As an adult, she also exhibited more concern for society’s wellbeing rather than focusing on the individual.

Jane. Jane was very forceful in her language when describing Tally. She used words like “fight,” “battle,” “system,” and “win,” in trying to show how she considered Tally’s initial apathy as a deterrent to her ability to connect with her. As the story progressed and Tally changed, Jane began to develop a connection with her character.

The following quotation begins to show how Jane connected with Tally:

- 1 Tally bugged me.
- 2 I was like ‘Where’s your fire?’
- 3 As an adult I can see a little bit more
- 4 about where Tally’s coming from.
- 5 I was a little bit fight the system
- 6 when I was younger
- 7 now I’m like fight the system
- 8 when it’s fightable
- 9 when you can win.
- 10 Tally was part of the system at first

- 11 and then realized
 12 that there were a lot of things that were bogus
 13 decided to do something
 14 instead of just kind of biting her tongue
 15 and tossing things under the rug
 16 that was one of the biggest things.
 17 I actually liked the way
 18 that she interacts with people.

Jane identified herself as a strong woman who found it hard to connect with the teenage Tally at first. She found that Tally’s acceptance of the system was a trait that made her character too complicit. Jane began connecting with Tally once she started “doing” something. When Tally became active, she contradicted the self-centered unquestioning characteristics that had bothered Jane in the beginning and opened the possibility for her to build a connection. When she began to interact with others, seek information, and to “fight,” Jane was able to see characteristics that she admired, similar to her own personality. Jane talked about Tally being “part of the system at first” and then “realized that a lot of things were bogus” and then “decided to do something” about what bothered her. These phrases suggested that Jane valued action, confidence, and assertiveness in Tally’s character.

Jane struggled to talk about connecting to Tally directly, but found her voice when discussing how she was as a teenager in comparison to Tally. Much like Amber had, Jane identified with aspects of Tally’s character from the identity of a teen as well as from the identity of an adult, and more specifically a mother. In the following quotation, Jane shifted between remembering when she was a teenager and how she felt at that time and how as an adult she felt, and then she shifted one more time to how she viewed her own daughters negotiating their own agency:

1 I was like fight the system.
 2 But you're going to
 3 always lose as a teenager.
 4 But it didn't matter.
 5 Now I'm like,
 6 'fight it when there's a win-able battle.'
 7 I just think
 8 everybody hits adolescence
 9 at different points in their life
 10 and it [adolescence]
 11 is the most painful thing.
 12 I call adolescence the vortex.
 13 It's a vortex.
 14 Both of my girls
 15 have gone into the vortex.
 16 I actually feel like Tally
 17 is in a vortex
 18 for the majority of the book
 19 she just doesn't know.
 20 All these choices
 21 she never intentionally made
 22 are forced upon her.
 23 Sometimes she is higher in the vortex
 24 and can see things more clearly.
 25 When she's at the very, very bottom
 26 everything in her life
 27 is the center of the vortex.

Jane connected with Tally most through her identity as a mother. Through this position, she recalled fighting for something as a teen and losing and watched with the anxiety of a parent as Tally marched down similar paths. As an adult, she was aware of what it meant to fight battles you can win by choosing those battles carefully, based upon what your strengths are, and having the power to make choices that affect the battle. However, she felt a great amount of empathy for Tally's position in what Jane called the "vortex."

Tally's adolescence made her vulnerable.

Jane's metaphor of the vortex is particularly useful. As Tally moved from the eye

of the vortex, she was in a higher position which gave her a broader perspective, and Jane saw a similar pattern in her own children. Based upon her own and her girls' experiences, Jane connected with the Tally's future possibilities. Whereas Amber read *Uglies* with concern for all girls in society most likely due to the fact that she does not have children, Jane read through a lens of concern for her daughters. She saw Tally as similar to her girls and her own background.

Like Amber, Jane used multiple identities to connect with Tally. She drew upon her past, connected with her present, and projected ideas of the future onto Tally's character. Jane valued that Tally found her "fire" and engaged in "fighting" for something, which showed her resilience and strength. Jane also valued the ability to discern that the fight was "win-able." The desire to "fight" was part of Jane's adult identity, including her identity as a mother who understood from observation and lived experience that adolescence is a tumultuous time when focus often shifts between a narrow view at the "bottom of the vortex" and a broader more "clear" view, which Jane described as being "higher in the vortex." The vortex metaphor allowed Jane to explain how at times Tally (and teens in general) are the at the eye of the storm where everything revolves around them and they are unable to see past their own experiences to sometimes being higher up in the storm where they have a more global and broader view of life.

Jane's personal experiences were important to her engaging with Tally's character as well. She shifted fluidly in her talk between remembering her past, engaging with her present, and forecasting as a mother, looking toward the future for her children. Similar to Amber, this quality of noticing individual focus and society focus was a distinct theme.

Jane's remembered teen experiences and how she observes her daughters in the "vortex" exemplifies her view of the narrow individual focus exhibited by adolescents. As an adult, Jane was less concerned about herself and much more concerned for society.

Ivette. When Ivette discussed Tally, she spoke most about remembering her life as a teen. Ivette's connection with Tally was not related to Tally's character specifically but more generally towards what a strong protagonist in this genre represented. Ivette connected to the strength of the protagonist from the identity of being strong as a teen and also as a strong woman, which is represented in some of the words she uses in her quotations. As Ivette talked through her past and present, she used "teenager," "strong willed," and "different."

In the excerpts below, I focused on two quotations where Ivette talked about herself in relation to Tally specifically and protagonists in general. The first quotation came from the final individual interview and the second from the group discussion:

1 The life that you lead
 2 as a teenager,
 3 at least the one that I led
 4 as a teenager
 5 was one where I was very trusting
 6 of the things that were told to me
 7 by people of authority.
 8 I enjoyed reading this story
 9 because it pulled me out
 10 of that piece of my childhood
 11 and gave me new things to look at
 12 and new perspectives
 13 and things that I'm wanting to explore
 14 but never really got the opportunity to.

Ivette remembered having limited choices as a teen. Her teenage identity was a crucial part of a shared experience with Tally. She connected with the way Tally trusted in

society to know what was best for her because she remembered that she was “very trusting” of “authority.” Ivette saw Tally’s transformation as moving from an unquestioning acceptance of authority to becoming critical, while also examining her own experiences as a teen and as an adult. Ivette’s tone during the interview was somewhat wistful. I felt that she remembered her adolescence and connected with Tally’s acceptance of the way things were. However, she examined that part of her life through the lens of Tally, which allowed for her to reflect critically upon the past and Tally’s present.

In the following quotation from the group discussion, Ivette talked about important traits of characters such as Tally and connected them with the way she perceived herself both in the past and in the present.

1 I identify with characters
 2 that are very strong willed.
 3 I always felt strong willed.
 4 I always felt I had to fight for myself
 5 and for who I was individually, belief-wise,
 6 and that thought process isn’t always given to you.
 7 I can identify with Tally
 8 because she becomes a very strong woman.
 9 She takes a stand,
 10 which takes being strong willed.
 11 I always felt like I wanted that
 12 when I was young.
 13 I think that the biggest thing for me now
 14 is that I enjoy seeing
 15 the different ways that people live,
 16 the different avenues,
 17 the different settings ...
 18 that’s very actualizing.
 19 At this age looking back
 20 I say ‘Oh, I get where they’re coming from,
 21 I get this is ...’
 22 It’s very fun for me

23 to look back that way.

Ivette repeated the phrase “strong willed” and “different” several times in this passage in relation to traits she valued in the characters. Ivette’s use of “different” in this passage also connected with the “new perspectives” from the previous quotation. She valued the ability to come into contact with multiple ways of thinking about issues. When Ivette was looking back and thinking from the perspective of a teenager, she identified the different ways of thinking and solving problems as “new perspectives.” When she positioned herself as an adult, she identified “different” in a more current framework. Ivette used stories with strong female protagonists to support her own perceptions of her youth and to help define characteristics she tried to embody as an adult. In this quotation, she talked about Tally specifically, as well as other protagonists, which provided a connection with strong female protagonists in general and not just those in *Uglies*.

Ivette’s connection with Tally occurred on two different levels, representing two different identities: her past and present. She remembered feeling as though she should not question society or those in power when she was a teen. Yet, Ivette also felt she had to fight for herself, both “individually” and also for her “beliefs” to be heard. At this point in her life, reading and connecting with Tally, Ivette appreciated Tally’s character traits that highlighted being “strong willed” and “taking a stand.” She said the different perspectives were “actualizing.” They provided her with ways to connect through both her past and present to affirm her adult identity on a personal and social level. Much like Jane and Amber, Ivette’s adult identity prompted her to show concern for others. She identified with the individualistic feelings of Tally from a teen’s perspective, but she also

switched fluidly to connect that with concern for the larger community and others.

In the following passage, Ivette shared an experience of how she related to the aspects of beauty in the book. This experience highlights her thinking about the future, which represented an identity concerned with how future generations deal with concepts of beauty. Ivette talked about her daughter in this passage who was often perceived as an “idealistic beauty” by others. Ivette explained that people react in very strange ways towards her daughter’s beauty, which gave her insight into how people relate to those who are thought to be beautiful by society’s standards.

1 I’m not that idealistic beauty described in the book
 2 where I have a child
 3 who is more viewed that way.
 4 I go out with her
 5 and I watch
 6 the way people respond
 7 and the way people look at her
 8 and the way people react to her
 9 She can be standing next to me
 10 and people don’t even see me
 11 They just reach out
 12 to talk and even to touch her
 13 It is the most surreal and weirded-out feeling.
 14 I feel in many instances
 15 it’s just like Tally’s desire to be pretty
 16 and it is very strange to me
 17 and it bothers me like crazy,
 18 but it is a part of society.
 19 That book hit home for me that way.
 20 It is weird to have to grow up like that
 21 to live like that.

Ivette used her identity as a mother, and someone concerned about the future, to describe how she connected with the way Tally must feel about being pretty. She saw how kids and adults reacted to beauty that meets a societal standard of excellence. Ivette was

concerned over what that might do to objectify the person of beauty as well what it means to not be considered “pretty” based upon the ideals of the society. Through her transcripts, Ivette’s tone reflected concern and sadness about how beauty was defined by society. By not viewing herself as an “idealistic beauty,” she judged herself and the way she looked through another’s standard. She did not go into detail about how that made her feel, but she did acknowledge the awkward, strange, and sometimes painful feelings of watching how people reacted to her and her children based upon those same standards of beauty.

Overall, Ivette connected with the book from three different levels of identity. She connected with Tally based upon her past identity of being a teen and examining her experiences in comparison to Tally’s. From her adult perspective, Ivette connected with Tally based upon her current beliefs and ideals, where she also used the reading experience to “actualize” or lend credibility to her current position in life. When considering her connections to the story and to Tally, she reflected fondly about her past and saw the power in her present. However, when discussing how she thought about the future and her children, she was “bothered” by the way society treats and reacts to beauty and how those reactions impacted individuals, specifically her daughter. In each case, Ivette valued the perspective she gained through reading the book, which included a different understanding of how beauty was seen socially, which was reflected in the way she described how others react to her daughter. Similar to Amber and Jane, Ivette also read the text with concern for the future. Amber connected through future readers, Jane through her own teenaged daughters, and Ivette through the way society reacted to the

beauty of her child.

In all, Ivette connected with the transformative qualities of Tally. Tally's strength, ability to grow and gain a broader, more socially conscious, perspective, were all positive aspects that Ivette gravitated toward in the book. These characteristics were important to how Ivette remembered her own adolescence as well as how she felt personally as an adult. However, the underlying social construction of beauty that is woven throughout the text triggered warnings in Ivette from her perspective as a mother. As a participant in society's construction of gender and beauty, Ivette could see the ramifications in how her children, particularly her daughter, would be affected by socially constructed standards of beauty. She witnessed her children being judged and examined as something beautiful even though they were different from the typical standard of beauty. They were seen as "idealistic beauties." For Ivette, this experience created a great amount of concern. She was worried that society's focus on beauty and looks would provide a strange and difficult environment in which to grow up.

In sum, all three women connected with Tally's transformation during the story. They valued her development into a "strong woman" who exhibited the ability to make decisions that were for the improvement of the society and not just herself. The women were able to connect with Tally through three distinct identities: past, present, and future. They related to Tally's situation by remembering their own teen years, through their present positions, and also through the eyes of someone concerned with how future readers, or generations, will deal with the ideas and issues portrayed in the story. Specifically, they read the text with a concern for how societal standards of beauty, or

how the messages in the novel, might affect younger generations, such as their daughters or other girls. In this sense, the women’s interpretations were societally oriented, rather than strictly self-oriented.

Girls

Much like the women, the girls engaged with Tally’s journey through ideas central to her transforming as a person. When I examined quotations that represented the girls’ personal narratives and connections to Tally’s character, I found that they focused most on Tally’s transformation. The girls emphasized Tally’s wants and desires as the catalyst for change, whereas the women connected more to the effect that the change had on others.

As I read through the transcripts, words began to jump out at me from all four girls’ quotations. The most repeated words from their transcripts were “change,” “want,” and “pretty.” Each girl interacted with Tally in unique ways, but all used these terms in their descriptions of her. The following sections examine how each individual girl related to Tally.

Marilyn. Tally’s transformation was very significant to Marilyn. Marilyn was in a pretty good spot in her life—she was happy, doing well in school, and had a lot of friends—and was able to connect with Tally early on in the story through this sense of comfort and lack of motivation for change. She related Tally’s journey to her own life in the follow ways that highlighted “change”:

- 1 I relate to Tally because, at first,
- 2 she doesn’t really want to make a change,
- 3 and she just wants to stay here,

4 you know, it's nice here.
 5 Nothing's wrong.
 6 And I feel
 7 kind of like that too.
 8 I'm kind of afraid
 9 to make changes.
 10 She worries about what other people are thinking,
 11 and she makes mistakes, you know,
 12 and I make mistakes.
 13 I hurt people's feelings sometimes.
 14 I just really like that about her, you know,
 15 and how she's trying to fix things
 16 and pick up the pieces.
 17 She is willing
 18 to do whatever it takes.
 19 I just like that about her
 20 that she's not perfect,
 21 and I'm not perfect.

Marilyn's fears about making changes in her life influenced how she perceived both herself and Tally. Marilyn was a junior in high school, involved in Advanced Placement and honors courses, a captain on the swim team, and involved in a serious romantic relationship. She was able to see her life as both a "nice" place but also one filled with stress and fear of the future. Marilyn repeats the words "change," "mistakes," and "perfect" to show how both she and Tally were similar in many ways.

Through Tally's story, Marilyn examined her own comfort with the status quo, recognized that she occasionally hurt people she cared about, and believed that, like Tally, she could "try to fix things." Tally's imperfections, mistakes, and determination were traits that Marilyn admired. Marilyn reflected upon herself and Tally in ways that were focused on the individual. Even when talking about fixing things with those that she had hurt, it came from an individualistic perspective, and personal motivation, rather than a desire to affect change for others.

When looking at the other aspects of Tally's character that she related to, Marilyn was drawn to Tally's strength. In the following quotation, Marilyn discussed Tally's change in relation to how she was the future of her society:

- 1 It [Tally changing and taking charge] involves power
- 2 and being able to have a say...a voice.
- 3 Tally, really, is pretty much the whole future of the Smoke
- 4 and everybody that lives there.
- 5 They are placed into her hands.
- 6 So, she really is in a position of power,
- 7 and then she is faced with what she's going to do with it.
- 8 I think she is an activist because
- 9 she wants to make a change
- 10 and she's willing
- 11 to stick up for those
- 12 who don't have a voice
- 13 or power.

Although my initial interpretation of this quotation caused me to believe that Marilyn was concerned for the greater society, a further analysis of this quotation indicated that she was still focused at the individual level. She was focused on herself and Tally as individuals and what they did to make themselves feel better. Marilyn emphasized Tally's power several times in this passage in making individual change without emphasizing how that power was being used to directly impact others. The power she exerted was designed to make her position better and inadvertently impacted the larger society. Following this excerpt, Marilyn switched immediately from discussing these important aspects of Tally's character and launched into a connection to her own life:

- 1 As far as right now goes,
- 2 I don't feel like
- 3 I have very much control
- 4 or power
- 5 over society
- 6 and the government and stuff.

Marilyn saw Tally's agency and ability to create positive change as something powerful. Tally represented a strong, powerful person whom Marilyn admired. Tally's transition into strength highlighted the threshold of a teenager on the cusp of needing and wanting to be more responsible and Marilyn, who is also near this cusp gravitated to these characteristics. As evident in the first excerpt, Marilyn's response contained fear represented as well as anticipation and admiration of the qualities that Tally possessed, which Marilyn highlighted in the second excerpt.

Marilyn's quotations showed how she was able to draw upon her own experiences as a teen to make connections with Tally's story. Tally provided similar feelings of comfort in her current life, but also discomfort. As Tally transformed, Marilyn began to describe her differently. In the second quotation, Marilyn emphasizes Tally's power through phrases such as: "involves power," "position of power," and even "placed into her hands," which is an image of power. She saw these traits of power, along with the ability to have a "voice," as the end goal of Tally's transformation. As she transitioned into the third excerpt, Marilyn began to connect this part of Tally's transformation with her own position. She repeated the word "now" when referring to herself as a teen, suggesting she felt she did not have that kind of power.

Marilyn was more focused on herself and her present situation than the women. As she read *Uglies*, she connected with Tally when she made mistakes similar to the way she made mistakes with those she cares about. She connected to Tally again when Tally exerted power, but this time it was through knowing that she did not have power of her own. Even though Marilyn recognized that Tally impacted her own society, she did not

talk about creating change in her own society. Marilyn was able to read and connect with Tally’s transformation from self-centered to engaged with changing society, yet she was not able to see herself in that character as one who had power, affected change, and was concerned for the future.

Isobel. While examining Isobel’s transcripts, I highlighted “pretty” and “change” as the most used words when discussing Tally. I found that while Isobel focused on change in many of the ways that Marilyn did, there were also some differences that stemmed from her current perspective and identity. Isobel was the oldest of the four teens in the study and a senior in high school. She had been sending out college applications and was anxiously waiting for responses. Because of the intense pressure and focus of working toward her college dreams, I felt she engaged in the book circle in a much more academic sense than the other girls. Based upon what she was learning in her Advanced Placement English course, she focused on the symbolism that Scott Westerfeld wove in throughout the story. In the following quotation, Isobel highlighted the symbolism of “pretty/beauty” that Westerfeld incorporated into the story and connected it with Tally’s “transformation/change”:

- 1 I found lots of symbolism
- 2 in this story.
- 3 It might not mean anything,
- 4 but I really connected
- 5 with it.
- 6 In the first sentence
- 7 of the book Tally says
- 8 ‘The early summer sky
- 9 was the color of cat vomit.’
- 10 Aren’t sunsets
- 11 supposed to be pretty?
- 12 Tally says this

13 while she is in Uglyville
 14 while she's wishing
 15 to be in Pretty Town.
 16 When she was out
 17 on her adventure
 18 to find the Smoke and Shay
 19 she sees another sunrise
 20 and relates it
 21 to being really pretty,
 22 not cat vomit.
 23 I think it symbolizes
 24 her finding herself
 25 and changing.
 26 She's finding that inside
 27 she truly is beautiful.
 28 She notices
 29 and describes nature
 30 and sunsets
 31 as breathtaking.
 32 I think this is when
 33 she starts to realize
 34 that maybe being pretty
 35 isn't so pretty after all.

Isobel connected to Tally through the use of symbolism in the story. The way she used symbolism reflected her identity as a high school student immersed in her classes. Isobel used the word “symbolism” twice in connection with how the descriptions of sunsets were portrayed in the book to explain how Tally viewed beauty at different times during the story. The first time Isobel pointed out the symbolism was at the beginning of the book by connecting the sky to the color of “cat vomit” and then later the description of the sunset as “breathtaking.” Isobel observed how Tally’s views of natural beauty changed during the story and connected this realization to a personal shift within Tally.

When I asked specifically about connecting to Tally, Isobel described her in a less than positive light:

1 I didn't feel
 2 like she was her own person.
 3 It felt like
 4 she was too focused
 5 on being like everybody else.
 6 She just wanted
 7 to be pretty
 8 and I felt
 9 that in a way
 10 that's all she thought about.
 11 I was annoyed with her
 12 because being pretty
 13 was such a priority.
 14 She was also
 15 kind of selfish
 16 about just wanting
 17 to be pretty
 18 and fit in too.
 19 It wasn't until the end
 20 where she started
 21 being more responsible
 22 and an individual.
 23 I think
 24 it made her think
 25 about more
 26 than just herself
 27 and that things
 28 have consequences
 29 and even though
 30 she was only 16
 31 she did have power.
 32 34 She had to realize that
 33 she had to help
 34 free her society
 35 and work
 36 for a bigger cause
 37 than just getting
 38 to be beautiful.

Isobel did not connect in a positive way with Tally at first. Tally's behavior such as her focus on being "pretty," "selfish," and wanting to "fit in" "annoyed" Isobel. In this passage Isobel emphasized the length of time that it took for Tally to engage in change

through phrases such as “it wasn’t until the end.” It was at this point that Isobel began using words that showed Tally in more of a positive light. There was another passage in Isobel’s transcript where she described Tally’s actions in relation to the way she herself might act or behave.

1 I feel like
 2 just the way Tally
 3 is so self-centered
 4 it just makes it hard
 5 for me to relate to that
 6 because I don’t see
 7 how a person could
 8 push like those lies
 9 to the point
 10 where they don’t care
 11 about anything else
 12 especially when it comes
 13 to the fact that
 14 she’s doing that
 15 for something for me
 16 so superficial
 17 as just to be beautiful.
 18 I feel like I have
 19 I guess
 20 more important values
 21 than trying to beautiful
 22 I think that
 23 if you have to
 24 sacrifice something
 25 you’d better sacrifice
 26 them [values] for something
 27 more important
 28 than beauty
 29 It just made it
 30 harder to relate to
 31 Tally because
 32 I don’t feel like
 33 I personally could
 34 put myself
 35 in her place

Isobel's reading of *Uglies* and the way she spoke about Tally were different from the other girls in that she did not find similarities between herself and Tally. In this passage, Isobel talked about how she found it "hard" to relate to Tally because of the way that Tally behaved. She understood that Tally chose to sacrifice her values for the chance to be beautiful, and Isobel could not justify that with herself. She believed that if you were going to sacrifice "something [values]" it should be for something more important than physical beauty. Even though Isobel read and related to *Uglies* and Tally differently than Marilyn, Almira, and Crystal, she still spoke about her experiences from her current position and identity as a teen.

It seemed as though Isobel displayed perspectives of a student through her use of symbolism as a way to describe what she saw as significant in the story. She also displayed the perspective of a person in flux, where she was shifting from one identity to another. This made sense as Isobel was 17 years old, the oldest of the girls, and in transition between identifying as a teen and as an adult. For Isobel to connect with Tally's character, it was crucial that Tally begin acting in a way that Isobel respected. Isobel grew to respect Tally when she learned that being pretty was something generated from inside of a person and not on the outside. The individual growth and realization of identity aligned with the ways the girls viewed Tally's transformation. The individual journey and understanding of self was their central focus.

Almira. Like Marilyn and Isobel, Almira also talked a lot about being "pretty," but she connected it to the word "want" in her interviews and group discussion. Almira resonated with Tally trying to fit in and be a part of a community. What stood out for

Almira was Tally’s desire to be accepted, which reminded her of her own struggles to fit in.

1 Tally wanted so badly
 2 to fit in.
 3 Even though she was doing
 4 what everyone else did,
 5 she also wanted
 6 to be her own person.
 7 But at the same time
 8 she still wanted
 9 to fit in
 10 and have people stunned
 11 by her beauty.
 12 It reminded me
 13 of a teenager trying
 14 to be cool.
 15 I think everyone
 16 goes through that,
 17 so there was a lot of me
 18 that connected with it.
 19 I want to fit in
 20 and be liked;
 21 yet I also want
 22 to be a little different.
 23 Cooler and daring,
 24 like when Tally
 25 sneaked into Pretty Town
 26 to see Peris.

Almira saw Tally’s desire to be accepted and be a part of the society as something that she could relate to. A few years ago Almira moved from a larger more urban area to where she lived now. She still remembered the fear and discomfort of being different and not fitting in with everyone else. As a Black Muslim girl in a predominantly white town with an LDS (Mormon) religious majority, Almira felt distanced from the greater population. She wanted to “fit in” and “be liked” but she also wanted to be “different,” “cool,” and “daring,” which she equated with Tally’s character traits.

Throughout the previous passage and the next, Almira was focused on herself, her own experiences, and how she had to work to try and fit in and be accepted. She underwent a very personal struggle and saw a similar struggle for Tally:

1 I really related
 2 to how Tally struggled
 3 through the changes
 4 going from her city
 5 to the Smoke.
 6 I felt like I even
 7 went through it.
 8 I hated changing
 9 from my old hometown to here.
 10 And I remember wanting things
 11 and the struggles
 12 that came with it.
 13 And I remembered in the book
 14 how just shocked she is
 15 at how they do things in the Smoke,
 16 how new and different it is to her,
 17 and I just felt
 18 I could relate
 19 to how hard it is
 20 to take in new surroundings
 21 and how bad
 22 you just want
 23 to be liked
 24 and fit in.

Almira represented herself through the transcripts primarily from the identity of a teenager but also from the identity of an outsider. Her reading was focused on herself and her own experiences. She used similar experiences of being a teen in a new place and not “fitting-in” and “wanting” to be “liked” by others as a bridge to relate to Tally’s experiences. Almira did not speak about future generations or societal influences of beauty or even how others might play a part in making an individual feel welcome in a new place. Her focus was situated primarily in the present and directed at toward an

individual, either herself or Tally.

Crystal. Crystal was focused on the concept of “beauty/pretty” and thus it was the most repeated word Crystal used in her transcripts. She also used “wanted” to describe both Tally and her own desires to change some aspect of their lives. Both Almira and Crystal gravitated toward the term “want” as a form of needing or requiring something to fulfill a desire:

- 1 I liked how even though
- 2 Tally wanted
- 3 to be pretty
- 4 like every other person wanted to;
- 5 she still had
- 6 her own individualism.
- 7 She was still
- 8 her own person
- 9 even though she did
- 10 more what everybody else wanted
- 11 at the same time.
- 12 Like she would just
- 13 go sneak out
- 14 to Pretty Town
- 15 when she wanted to.
- 16 I liked that.

Throughout the interview Crystal came back to focus on “want” again and again concerning Tally and also herself. Crystal understood that Tally “wanted” to be like everyone else as a way of being accepted, but she also admired Tally for her unconformity through her “sneaking out” when she “wanted” to.

In the following two quotations, Crystal discussed Tally’s decision to seek out the Smoke. During these passages, Crystal again repeats the word “want” and refers to how Tally’s “wants” change therefore focusing on Tally’s transformation.

- 1 Tally wanted

2 to be pretty
3 for Peris.
4 I think that's why she decided
5 to go to the Smoke.
6 She wanted
7 to be with him
8 in Pretty Town.
9 It wasn't until
10 the Smoke was destroyed
11 that Tally really wanted
12 to change.
13 This is when
14 I thought
15 she actually wanted
16 to help
17 spread knowledge,
18 and wanted
19 to change society.
20 You know,
21 I want
22 to stand out
23 and be myself.
24 But at the same time,
25 you don't want society
26 to be completely
27 against you.
28 Everyone wants
29 to be accepted
30 by everybody,
31 I'm like that.
32 I have my own personality,
33 but I'm always afraid
34 that I might not
35 be good enough.
36 Tally is like that.
37 She's herself
38 and at the same time
39 she wants
40 to be accepted.
41 She wants friends
42 and she wants
43 to be pretty too.

Crystal's connection with Tally through the "want/wanting" was generated from

Tally's individual and self-centered desires. Tally "wanted" to go to Pretty Town. Tally "wanted" to be pretty. Tally "wanted" to "be accepted." Crystal saw these wants as significant because she had many of the same desires for herself. She recognized that Tally was changing throughout the story through the way her desires transformed, even if they were centered on her individual desires and not the needs of the greater society. Throughout this passage, Crystal intermixed Tally's storyline with her own as she continued to explore how to negotiate conforming to certain ways of thinking and non-conforming.

Crystal's connection with Tally's transformation was different from the other girls, but she was still centered on the individual and immediate gratification and not the societal influences that benefit many and take longer to realize. Through repeating phrases related to immediate desires, Crystal's identity was rooted in her present. Crystal was concerned with what she "wants" and needs right now, similar to Almira and Marilyn. Crystal said she wanted to "stand out" like Tally stood out, to be her own person but also to be accepted.

Summary

Using Gee's (2010) discourse analysis, I found patterns represented through all participants. Both the girls and the women connected with Tally's transformation/change from the beginning of the book to the end. I will explore the common theme of Tally's transformation in greater detail in the second part of this chapter. The concept of personal transformation within the story was a powerful indicator of a "good" person for the participants. When answering the question, *How do girls and women relate to the female*

protagonist in a dystopian YAL?, it was evident to me that the readers related to Tally's struggles and desires.

The women empathized with the difficulty of adolescence, the lack of choice, and especially how choice is often curtailed by coercion and conformity. They also remembered the process of adolescence in ways that affirmed their current beliefs and life choices. The women's adult identities resonated with Tally's development as a strong, independent thinker, who made choices that took others into consideration rather than just individual desires. The women also exhibited identities that reflected aspects of concern for the future. In the case of Ivette and Jane, both were concerned about the impact of beauty on adolescence and choice because they had children who experienced many of these same issues. They thought about how the ideas within the book would affect their children and how this age group as a whole might interpret the messages. Amber looked for information about how targeted teen audiences reacted to Tally and the book; what she found led her to be concerned about how conflicting messages that might be internalized by other teens. As these examples suggest, the women all responded to the text with a concern for younger generations as well as a concern for society's wellbeing over the individual's wellbeing.

I was surprised that issues of power did not explicitly surface during the individual interviews and group discussions more often than it did. Dystopias inherently center issues of power in their storylines that affect the protagonist individually and often societies as a whole. (Hintz & Ostry, 2003; Nilsen & Donelson, 2001; Trites, 2000). Amber discussed how she felt that Tally was "coerced" into making some of the decision

she did, which could be related to an exertion of power over her by others. However, Amber did not articulate the situation in a way that furthered discussion a discussion about power, but rather Tally's move onto another part of the story. Jane also spoke about "fight the system" and "win-able battles" that seem to be associated with power structures within the story between Tally and others. Like Amber, Jane did not focus on the power structures or imbalance; instead she shifted her focus to her own children and how they negotiate making decisions.

Marilyn, on the other hand, explicitly spoke about power when referring to Tally and her change throughout the story. She believed that at the end of the story Tally had gained "power" but that "power" was an individual thing that Tally would have to decide what to do with it where her choices could benefit herself or others. Marilyn did not move the discussion out of power in the individual sense to the power structure that was in place to create the dystopia and it did not seem to spark an interest in further discussion. I felt that the participants were aware that there were problems both with individual power of the protagonist and within the society; however, they were more interested in discussing the transformation of Tally and the impact on her identity rather than deconstructing the system that made the transformation necessary.

All four girls were very rooted in their present identities. Almira, Marilyn, and Crystal connected with Tally's desire to fit in, and they related that desire to important parts of their own lives. Isobel had a hard time connecting with Tally as a character but still read *Uglies* through her perspective as a teen. When discussing Tally's characteristics, the girls drew from their own immediate experiences and identities to

make comparisons and provide evidence for their explanations. As Tally transformed throughout the book, the girls continued to connect to the individual aspects of Tally. They were much more concerned for Tally as an individual and her personal change rather than the effect Tally had on others.

In all, Tally's change was a positive development throughout the story and by the end had captured all of the readers' interest and garnered a connection, even for participants who had not connected strongly with Tally's character in the beginning. All of the participants engaged with the text and Tally in ways that examined Tally's adventure and journey to their own beliefs and identities, which helped them to explain what they liked/disliked about Tally.

How are the Responses to the Protagonist in a Dystopian YAL Similar and Different for Women and Girls?

As seen in the first half of this chapter, the participants connected with Tally in many different and similar ways. Some connected with Tally's desire to be a part of a group, whereas others were more drawn to Tally's transformation into a strong and independent character; some liked how she grew into a person who cared about others. Overall the protagonist's change, or growth, captured the attention of both audiences as was reflected in answering the first research question. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to exploring the ways in which both groups were similar and different in their connections with Tally.

I examined the similarities and differences between groups using a constant

comparative method of analysis as described in Chapter III and highlighted in Appendix C. As Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 9) discussed, “The interplay between data and researcher when gathering and analyzing data” is a creative process. As such, I thought about what would work best when comparing and contrasting the ways the individuals, and the groups, related to Tally. To make sense of this information, I collected individual interview excerpts from the first layer of analysis and organized them in two columns and compared and contrasted the reactions and responses between groups. The first section below examines the ways that both groups were similar; then I discuss how the groups were different in their connections, followed by a brief summary tying the chapter together.

Similarities

In the following section on similarities, I discuss how participants had similar engagements and responses in the way that they connected with Tally. There were two specific similarities between the groups. The first was through the participants’ identities as teens and the other was through Tally’s transformation.

Both women and girls connected to Tally through their teen identities. I used Gee’s (2010) identities tool to examine how the participants used “language to get recognized as taking on a certain identity or role” (p. 18). The tool helped me to see when both groups connected with Tally because of their shared teenage experience. Because this story was written with a teenage audience in mind, it is not surprising that both groups connected using a teenage identity.

The girls, immersed in the lived reality of being teens during this study, reflected

a very “in the now” sense of identity when discussing and connecting to Tally. Almira and Crystal talked about Tally wanting to “fit in” with a particular group and how they too, at that moment in their lives, wanted to be accepted and fit in. Marilyn also used the present tense to connect with Tally as a teen when discussing some of the characteristics she most liked about her. She said that she liked that “she’s [Tally’s] not perfect and I’m not perfect.” Even though Isobel did not agree with Tally’s behavior, she talked about herself in the present tense when discussing the story and how her values were different from Tally’s.

This desire to belong was echoed when Amber empathized with Tally by remembering what it felt like to be a teen and how that meant wanting to be pretty because “in reality, they [teens] do.” Jane was also drawn to remembering her past teenage identity when she talked about her initial lack of connection with Tally. Jane wanted to “fight the system” as a teen and wondered where Tally’s “fire” was in the beginning. When Ivette was discussing why she liked Tally, she talked about being “strong willed” as a teen and how she connected with that in book.

It made sense that the participants connected with Tally from a teen perspective because the book is, in essence, a coming of age story. The teens were engaged with living their own “coming of age story” and used Tally’s experiences as a gauge or indicator to assess their own feelings. They constantly moved back and forth between what Tally did in the story in comparison with what they did, or would do, or not do, in the case of Isobel, in their lives.

The girls compared their lives with Tally’s as a way for them to explore their

feelings about fitting in and belonging to a group, about what it meant to be accepted because of the way you look or how you act. The act of comparing their experiences to those of Tally and then sharing those experiences provided ways to examine different methods of handling and dealing with problems. All of the girls were in a stage where they were negotiating belonging while also pushing boundaries of what conforming might mean.

The women, by contrast, had already lived this stage, but found the remembering to be a useful reminder of the struggles they went through and, as Ivette found, “actualizing.” The women’s ability to read and identify as a teen allowed a recursive reliving of a transformational period. The women were aware of relating through the memory of a teen identity but also simultaneously aware of their present lives.

Many of the struggles that Tally endured, such as the desire to fit in and find acceptance, the power exerted to conform to society, and the desire to be pretty were all problems that the women faced when they were teens. They remembered their time as teenagers as one in which they felt uncomfortable about their identities, yet they valued being “strong women,” “strong willed,” and they valued characters who have “fire” and “fight.” These characteristics provided an affirmation of who they were as adults.

Both women and girls found Tally’s transformation significant. *Uglies*, as a dystopia and as a coming of age story, draws on many of the tropes that are common in these types of books. The dystopic setting necessitates a struggle between those who have power and agency and those who do not. That, along with a focus on a character who makes a significant personal shift typical of a coming of age story, provides the

framework for personal growth through overcoming barriers. All of the participants touched on aspects of Tally's transformation. They repeated words that highlighted the significance of Tally's personal journey such as: "change," "transformation," "understanding," "awareness," and "selfless."

Through their reading of Tally's character, the participants engaged with the growth and maturation of the protagonist. Tally's character was at a point where she was on a path that had reached a crossroads. She could either continue on the path that she had always known was there for her, provided by her family, friends, teachers, and society. Or, she could diverge and travel down a new path. All of the participants had been or were faced with similar choices, regardless of their age.

Without Tally's growth as a person, Jane (adult) and Isobel (teen) would not have been able to resonate with her character at all. Both of these participants were initially turned off by Tally's behavior. Jane found her uninteresting and lacking "fire," and Isobel felt that her lying and desire to just be "pretty" was in fact ugly. The other participants did not react as strongly to Tally's character. However, her transformation was still the key that allowed all of them to engage and relate to her on personal levels.

Differences

Within the global idea of Tally's character change and transformation, there were three main differences between the groups. First, women connected and related to Tally on three identity levels: their pasts, presents, and futures. The girls connected only through their present identities as teens. The second difference was how each group interpreted the catalyst for Tally to embark upon her journey to the Smoke. The third

difference was how each group internalized the transformation. The girls were more focused on individual growth and development, whereas the women identified with the societal activism.

Identities. It is not surprising that both groups used identities rooted in their teenage years since the book is a young adult text about a teenage protagonist. For the girls, Tally represented a character that was near the same age as they were, was going through a transition from child to adult, much like they were, and as such was struggling with issues of friendship, acceptance, decision making, and agency, which paralleled many of the girls' personal experiences. Even though the girls had experiences prior to being teens, such as earlier childhood experiences, the present was the only identity that the girls actively drew upon when discussing how they related to Tally. When Crystal and Almira mentioned "growing up" and "being raised," it was in reference to their present situations and identities (and not a reflection back on a specific experience) that led them to engage with Tally in a particular way.

In contrast to the girls, the women shifted between past, present, and future when discussing Tally. All of the women were in their mid-thirties, which was roughly 15 years older than what would be considered the upper end of the target YAL audience. They used their remembered teen identities often when discussing how Tally's actions would have been similar to or different from when they were teens. The women were able to remember what it felt like as a teen and what they were like compared to Tally's decisions and characteristics, which helped them create a sense of connection.

The women also drew upon their current experiences of the present, but what

differed for the women was their additional experience of having gone through the transition between teenager to adult. Jane was a great example of how moving between the past and present was useful for connecting with and interpreting Tally's character. She mentioned in her interview that she was a "little bit fight the system" when she was a teen, which caused her difficulty in connecting with Tally because she wanted to see more "fire" in her character. However, she could also sympathize with Tally's reluctance to engage in the fight because now that she was older she believed that one must only "fight it when there's a win-able battle." The ability to draw on a more extensive set of life experiences provided the women with different lenses with which to view Tally's actions.

In their responses to *Uglies*, all three women expressed concern for future generations. Ivette's position as a mother affected the way she connected with the overarching theme of socially constructed beauty. She connected the way her daughter was perceived by others as beautiful with the way that Tally saw the people in Pretty Town. She also worried about the future of her children and how they would be affected by the way society constructs beauty in relation to the way they look. Amber also thought about how people would engage with the ideas in *Uglies*, and Tally specifically, in the future. Her journal reflected a concern for the way young readers connected with Tally's eventual transformation into being pretty and smart. She saw this as a mixed message that condoned a socially constructed image of beauty and sameness where there was not a sacrifice or lesson or some kind of negative.

Catalyst for change. Both groups connected with Tally leaving on her journey as

the beginning of her transformation, but they connected with her leaving in different ways. All four girls discussed Tally's desire to fit in with a group as an important aspect of her journey. They also related Tally's need for acceptance to their own desire to fit into a group, recognizing that there is safety and support in acceptance. Marilyn worried "about what other people are thinking." Isobel also spoke about Tally wanting to be pretty "and fit in too." The very first sentence of Almira's initial quotation highlighted how "Tally wanted so badly to fit in." In Crystal's personal narrative about how she connected with Tally, she said, "Everyone wants to be accepted by everybody." The girls saw Tally's decisions rooted in the need for acceptance, both when she left to find the Smoke for those in Pretty Town, and again when she decided to help keep the Smoke's secret. The girls saw both of these actions, even though they were in contradiction to one another, as part of Tally's pursuit to be accepted into a group and as the catalyst for Tally's journey.

The women gravitated to another catalyst for Tally's journey. All three women connected with Tally's coercion as an impetus for her journey. They felt that Tally's lack of agency, the institutional system in which she was made to operate, and the coercive tactics used by authorities to get her to comply as what motivated Tally to leave Pretty Town. When Tally left on her journey to find the Smoke, the women were not connecting with her character from their current perspectives. Jane felt she had no "fire," and Amber originally thought she was being "selfish." Ivette connected Tally's coercion to her own teenage experiences by saying, "I was very trusting of the things that were told to me by people of authority...I enjoyed reading this story because it pulled out of me that piece of

my childhood.”

Although the girls saw Tally’s leaving as an internal desire for her to find acceptance within a group, the women saw Tally embarking on her journey as something imposed from outside, a coercion that was imposed upon her by those in power. This difference between the groups’ interpretation of the impetus for Tally’s journey is significant. Because the girls believed that what motivated Tally’s growth was her desire to fit, this supports my interpretation that their response to *Uglies* was self-focused. In contrast, the women saw Tally’s journey as beginning with coercive elements, not personal desire, and ending with a transformation that highlighted her concern for others over her individual growth, which is discussed further in the following section.

Individual growth versus social activism. The women could relate to Tally by remembering that as teens they were complicit in going along with what the authority thought was best, but as adults they desired more agency from the protagonist. The unyielding power exerted over Tally became too restrictive for the women, much like it did for Tally. The women felt that this authoritative power became the tipping point that pushed Tally into her transformation. Unlike the girls, the women saw Tally’s journey toward transformation as originating with her decision to fight back.

A crucial moment for the women occurred when Tally shifted from being coerced and selfish about her desires to taking a stand and fighting for something larger than herself. It was at this point that the women began to see the characteristics that they, through their current identities as adults, could connect with. Tally began to exhibit “fire and fight,” “selflessness,” and the makings of a “strong woman,” all of which were

characteristics described as important by the women. When Tally began showing concern for others, she transformed for the women. It was at this point that they shifted from identifying with Tally from their teen perspectives and began relating to her through their adult identities and experiences.

In their current positions, the women used Tally's maturing characteristics as a mirror to reflect their own valued personal qualities. They valued the ability to question authority and the agency to make a difference. Instead of only finding safety and acceptance within a group, the women wanted to protect, provide, and contribute to the group. These values fit with how the women also expressed what they deemed important for future readers, in the case of Amber, and for their children, in the cases of Ivette and Jane.

In contrast, the girls were drawn to Tally's individual growth. Marilyn felt that Tally grew into being "able to have a say...a voice." Isobel traced Tally's growth through her description of nature. At first, Tally described a sunset as the color of "cat puke" and later while on her journey another colorful sunrise as "pretty." Isobel felt that this awareness and change in perceptions of beauty was Tally "finding herself" as she grew into somebody who was more "individual" and "more responsible."

Almira valued Tally's self-focused "desire" and what she "wants" with regard to fitting in. She described Tally as someone who "wants to fit in" but also "wanted to be her own person." It reminded Almira of a "teenager trying to be cool," and she said, "a lot of me connected with it." Crystal identified with Tally's transformation from a very self-centered position. She described Tally as someone who was focused on finding a

place to fit in, who worked to find that spot, which meant acting like and following others. While describing how she related to Tally, Crystal said she wanted “to stand out and be myself. But at the same time you don’t want society to be completely against you.” Crystal saw Tally struggling with fear of rejection from a group and she related to that fear. Crystal’s whole focus was centered on Tally as an individual who changes and reacts and not on Tally’s influence on others.

Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth examination of how each participant related to Tally’s character. From this examination, I found that the individuals related in similar ways within their age groups. As I expanded my analysis outside of the specific groups and began comparing and contrasting responses, it became clear that there were also similarities between the ways the two groups related to Tally. Along with the similarities, there were also differences between how the groups connected and related to Tally.

In answering *How do girls and women relate to the female protagonist in a dystopian YAL?* And, *How are the responses to the protagonist in dystopian YAL similar and different between girls and women?* I found that the girls connected to Tally using their present teen perspectives and identities as they compared Tally’s behavior and experiences with their own. When they discussed Tally, the girls highlighted their own individual experiences and connected them with Tally’s individual growth. They also gravitated to the idea that Tally desired to belong to a group where she would “fit in” and related it to their own feelings and desires to belong. These connections highlighted the

girls' focus on individual growth and transformation of the self rather than a concern for growth and change within a society.

The women also found Tally's transformation to be a critical component that allowed them to connect and relate to her character, yet the connection was different from the girls. The women connected with Tally's growth and concern for others. They too used their teenaged perspectives to connect with Tally's decisions. However, the women also used their present identities as adults, as well as aspects of concern for the future and future readers, to make sense of what they engaged with in the book. It was through their current adult identities that the women connected with Tally's coercion. They felt deeply that Tally's lack of choice and the inability to exert power over her situation were the catalysts for embarking upon her journey, whereas the girls resonated with Tally's desire to fit in as the catalyst for the journey. In contrast to the girls, the women's focus on transformation was directed toward a concern for others and the well-being of the society.

The ways in which the participants related to Tally, along with the similarities and differences between the girls and the women, provide a rich set of data to begin thinking about the implications of how and why girls and women read YAL, specifically dystopias with strong female protagonists. In the following chapter, I will conclude by examining the implications of this study for both girls and women through the lenses of feminism and reader response theory as well as explore possible future research avenues that might further the insights of this study.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS

The previous four chapters created the framework for answering this project's two main research questions: *How do girls and women relate to female protagonists in dystopian YAL?* And, *How are the responses to the protagonist in dystopian YAL similar and different for girls and women?*

In Chapter I, I introduced the idea that there was new research in the popular sector showing an increase in the number of adults reading young adult literature (Benedetti, 2011; Carpenter, 2010; Mitchard, 2013; Paul, 2010; "Power of Young Adult Fiction," 2012). This research had not yet crossed over into academia and thus leaves a gap in the literature surrounding why adults choose to read YAL. The demographics and reasons behind the increase portrayed in the news led me to wonder what audiences enjoy from their YAL reading experiences. Because of the large scope of the YAL topic, I needed to narrow and focus on several aspects of this initial question. I used gender and age, as well as narrowing to one subgenre of YAL, dystopias, to create boundaries for this study.

In Chapter II, I examined my positionality through the theoretical framework of feminism and reader-response theory. Chapter II also included a review of literature on book club discussions, as well as discourse analysis and constant comparative analysis as methodologies for analysis in this project, which led into the methods chapter.

In Chapter III, I described the study's research methods, which aligned with the theoretical framework. I gathered transcripts from interviews and group discussions to

provide texture and context in answering the research questions. I chose specific quotations from the participants that I felt were rich representations of how they engaged with the story. I then used discourse analysis, in accordance with Gee's (2010, 2011) methodology, as a tool to look for significance and identities within participant quotations. The second layer of analysis was an extension of discourse analysis, constant comparative analysis, which allowed me to compare the significant findings from the teens with those of the women, looking for similarities and differences between the two groups.

In Chapter IV, I organized the information to answer the two research questions. In response to the first research question, I examined how the girls and women related to Tally. The women valued Tally's development into a "strong woman" who was able to make decisions that were more focused on the good of the society rather than personal desires. The girls connected with Tally's transformation from the perspective that as Tally changed she was able to find acceptance within a group, a place of belonging. When the women were describing their connections with Tally, they used three distinct identities representing their past as a teen, their present as an adult, and their future as a person concerned for the future. The girls, by contrast, connected to Tally through their current teen identities.

In response to the second research question, I found that there were two specific similarities between the women and the girls. Both groups used identities grounded in the experiences of being teenagers to describe some of the ways they related to Tally. The women and the girls also connected to Tally through her character's transformation

during the story.

There were three main differences between the two groups: the identities the participants used to relate to Tally, the interpretation of the catalyst for Tally's journey/change, and the way participants connected with Tally's transformation. The women utilized three distinct identities when making sense of their connections with Tally, whereas the girls only used their present identity. The second difference was how each group interpreted the catalyst for Tally's journey. The women saw Tally's journey as being orchestrated through coercion, whereas the girls felt that Tally was internally motivated to seek a place where she could belong. The final difference was how each group resonated with Tally's transformation. The women felt that Tally transformed when she began to pursue courses of action that impacted the well-being of the community, whereas the girls felt that Tally's transformation was based upon her internal growth and development.

Chapter V reconnects with the theoretical framework and explores areas where the project extends and adds new information. The remainder of the chapter is organized in a manner that addresses the following two questions:

1. How does the study extend or add to theories of feminism and reader response?
2. What are the implications for future research?

Feminism and Reader Response

This study was framed around theories of third-wave feminism and reader

response. Third-wave feminists believe that being female does not always constitute a shared experience (Snyder, 2008; Walker, 1995). Third-wave feminism is criticized for being unable to move beyond the personal experience narrative. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, feminist studies do not include gender as a shared experience since gender can be different for every person. Therefore, for this study, *Uglies* became the common connection between the participants. Third-wave feminist theory and reader response theory, informed my analysis of the individual engagement with the text because it incorporated the perspectives of the readers (women and girls) and their transactional reading of the story to add new knowledge and experiences (Rosenblatt, 1938). Using this combination of theories, I examined how girls and women related to the female protagonist in dystopian YAL and whether there were similarities and differences between the age groups.

One of the functions or purposes of dystopian stories is to present societies in dire predicaments that require people to change for the redemption of society (Hintz & Ostry, 2003; Sambell, 2003; Rabkin, 2004). Both groups related to Tally's transformation as she grew to understand the limiting social constructions of the society she lived within. The girls identified with Tally's understanding of herself as an individual within a group, thereby focusing on the individual endeavors of the character. By contrast, the women identified with Tally's efforts on behalf of the community when she focused on the collective best interests and not her individual interests.

Consistent with third-wave feminist approaches, the girls interpreted the story of *Uglies* as being about a teenaged girl who wanted to fit in and be accepted by a

community (Walker, 1995). The girls identified Tally's transformation as beginning when she left on her journey to find the Smoke. Crystal, Almira, and Marilyn specifically were drawn to Tally's need to feel part of a community. Although, in fact, they did not articulate which community, Pretties or the Smoke, was more compelling, they also felt that, like Tally, they wanted to belong and to fit in. The desire to be accepted into a group fits with Newman and Newman (2001) who postulated that "young people seek connections, supportive relationships, and an understanding of groups and communities, all of which help them take the risks that eventually give rise to an articulated sense of personal meaning" (p. 516). Third-wave feminism promotes seeking spaces of acceptance in an inclusive environment where differences and similarities are accepted (Tong, 2009; Walker, 1995). Walker discussed that one of the things she was looking for through third-wave feminism was a "deep desire to be accepted, claimed, and loved" by a community (p. xxx).

The girls showed less connection to Tally's engagement in the greater social issues in the book. They recognized the problem of not having a voice to choose to be "pretty" or not, and they respected Tally's transformation into a person who was fighting for something. However, their connections with Tally were on the level of the individual. They were invested with Tally being accepted within a group and fitting in; for them the larger societal issues were not as important as finding acceptance. And if they felt that the societal issues were important, the focus was still upon Tally as the individual hero and not the collective community. This focus on Tally's individual growth was consistent with third-wave feminism's focus on the personal narrative and the individual experience,

the framework from which the third wave arises (Siegel, 1997). The girls used the framework of their individual narratives situated in the present to make sense of what they read and to relate it with how they, as individuals, fit into their worlds.

By contrast, the women connected to Tally in ways that aligned with a different strand within third-wave feminism. Rather than connecting with Tally's need to belong, they connected with her social activism. The phrase "the personal is political" grew out of the feminist movement in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. In the context of third-wave feminism, the phrase "the personal is political" is connected to the belief that sharing personal narratives can raise awareness and foster opportunities for social change (Shaw & Lee, 2009). The women connected with Tally when she was more concerned about others. As Tally was more conscious of the impact her decisions would have on the greater society and not just on herself, the women began relating experiences from their present lives such as when Ivette said, "I can identify with Tally because she becomes a very strong woman."

In the forward to Walker's (1995) edited third-wave anthology, Gloria Steinem said, when discussing the gifts of feminism, "*The greatest gift we can give one another is the power to make a choice. The power to choose is even more important than the choices we make*" (p. xxvi, italics in original). The ability to have choice was important for the women. Amber saw *Pretty Town* as a system that did not allow for choice. There was no place for someone who was not beautiful. Jane also connected with Tally fighting to not be assimilated. Both of these connections represented moments where choices had to be available to Tally. As Tally transformed she began fighting for things that would in

turn provide others with the ability to choose not to become pretty.

Besides connecting through teen identities, the women also used their current identities and positions to relate to Tally. In order to relate to Tally, they used identities that represented future thinking as a mother for their children and as a teacher to students. The identities that the girls and women used to relate to Tally fit with Rosenblatt's theory that "any values to be derived from literature must emerge from a personal, esthetic experience of the works themselves" (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. 35). Because of the women's longer lives, they had more background than the girls to draw upon when making connections to Tally.

The findings led me to believe that both the women and girls used their connections with Tally as support for aspects of their identities. For example, Marilyn resonated with Tally's acknowledgement of making mistakes. She felt that reading about a character who made mistakes made it more real for her because she makes mistakes too. Ivette also discussed how reading about strong female protagonists was actualizing and affirming to her own identity. I did not feel that the findings reflected negotiation of identity per se, but they did indicate that there was a connection between the relationship of the readers' identity(ies) and the character. In line with third-wave feminist practices, Dickerson (2004) discussed that young women, and I believe women of all ages, "are facing an intense internal struggle to find their identity, and that this struggle is an effect of what they experience" (p. 337). Much like Rosenblatt (1995) outlined in reader response, the girls and women used their life experiences and different identities as "stances" to make sense of what they read, which provided unique individual experiences

that they then shared within their groups (p. 137). Third wave's inclusive environment then privileged their narratives and provided a space within which to share (Snyder, 2008).

The women, as indicated in the findings, identified Tally's transformation as the point when she began to think about others more than herself. As Jane said, this was when she began to "fight." All three women were drawing from their adult identities when they made claims that identified this point of connection. Third-wave feminism makes allowances for "different identities within a single person...and identities that previously may have been seen to clash with feminism" (Heywood, 2006, p. xx). This appeared to be evident when Ivette and Amber connected with Tally's early desire to conform and adhere to the status quo from their teen perspectives. Both women did not connect to these aspects of Tally's character through their adult identities. But third-wave feminism allows for the negotiation of identity from different perspectives, therefore providing room for change and choice. As Walker (2004) stated about the third wave, "We find that the nexuses of power and identity are constantly shifting, and so are we" (p. xiv). By drawing upon their experiences and different identities as they engaged with Tally, the women engaged in a feminism that "offers a central belief system that helps interpret how power imbalances affect" their lives and Tally's life (Labaton & Martin, 2004, p. xxvi). The women's ability to draw upon multiple identities demonstrated that they were able to take their personal experiences outside of only a focus on the self and show concern for others. Although they situated their personal experiences as central to constructing meaning, they also extended beyond the self to making sense of themselves

and Tally within society.

Conclusion

In all, this study has provided an opportunity to examine the ways girls and women engaged with the protagonist of a dystopian young adult novel. It has prompted a deeper and richer understanding of reader response as a first step in a process of making meaning from a text. By choosing the text for the study, I was able to provide the participants with a common experience. Finding a common experience for participants to engage with fit within the third-wave feminist framework. The next step was using discussions for each group as a space where both groups shared their perspectives to co-construct meaning.

There were similarities between how adults and teens engaged in the content and reacted to characters in *Uglies*. The girls and women both connected to Tally's transformation. Both groups also connected through identifying as teens. These similarities showed that, even though there was a difference in the age of the readers, there was common ground between their individual personalities and Tally's character.

There were also differences between the groups. Differences were most notably connected with the greater lived experiences of the women and their broader worldview. The longer lives of the women allowed them to draw upon more identities that helped them to connect with Tally in more multidimensional ways. Because the women were able to connect with Tally from different points in time and experiences from their lives, they were able to see the bigger picture of Tally's actions. The women were not solely

focused on Tally's personal success. They were concerned for the good of the society. Feminist theories of care and ecofeminism are situated within women's ability to care, nurture, protect, and empathize (Tong, 2014). Feminism and feminist theories do not occur in a vacuum. The women in this study were in situations that prompted them to draw upon ethics of care, nurturing, and protection as they showed concern for future readers, their own children in the cases of Jane and Ivette, and the messages supported by the text, that are often identified as their own "brands" of feminism (Gilligan, 1988; Noddings, 1984; Tong, 2014). The women's ability to connect to Tally through many identities provided a blending of feminist theories into an eclectic third-wave conglomeration that represented the multifaceted way the women lived their lives.

In contrast to the women, the girls' lived experiences were situated within a shorter time frame than those of the women and more firmly embedded into the timeframe associated with third-wave feminism. Therefore, their experiences represented the most significant and readily accessible identity, that which was grounded in the present. The girls recognized that there were social issues at stake in the story; however, they did not identify with the larger issues. Rather, they were most connected to the individual and immediate negotiation of Tally's transformation.

Given time and additional experiences, I believe the girls' connections with Tally would also show additional identities. It is also possible that, if the girls were guided through examining Tally from alternate identities, they might be able to make connections to the larger social issues. I explore this idea more thoroughly in the implications section.

Implications for Future Research

Implications for this research extend beyond an examination of individual and shared reading experiences. They touch the paradigm of inclusivity in the classroom that honors multiple interpretations based upon the unique backgrounds of students. A study that included a discussion with combined aged groups has the potential to offer a space where participants could discuss and engage across age barriers. And finally, including other genders in a similar study might expand our understanding of how readers of different genders engage with a strong female protagonist in dystopian fiction.

Inclusivity

Rosenblatt began her research on the need for readers to expand their perceptions in the 1930s, and throughout her career she advocated for the inclusion of works that evoke a connection with past experiences and present situations (Rosenblatt, 2005). Without books and opportunities for multidimensional discussion and engagement, literature remains inert; however, “when books arouse an intimate personal response, the developmental process can be fostered” (Rosenblatt, 1956, p. 71). Reader response in connection with feminism, specifically third-wave feminism, creates an inclusive framework. It becomes a framework that centers on the personal experience of the participant. For third-wave feminism, it is paramount that personal experience narratives are valued and that spaces are ensured that allow individuals to voice their perspectives (Bobel, 2010; Mack-Canty, 2004; Snyder, 2008)

Studies that focus on the lived experiences of participants, and connect those

experiences with others, can highlight the importance of educational practices that foster inclusion of diverse perspectives and ideas. Rosenblatt stated in an interview that if she had “been involved with development of the ability to read critically across the whole intellectual spectrum, it is because such abilities are particularly important for citizens in a democracy” (Karolides, 1999, p. 169). Third-wave feminism paired with reader response can create a framework that, if used together, can open inclusive spaces in the classroom. Rosenblatt’s reader response theory provides the framework for an individual to engage in a transactional experience with a text. This experience is unique to the individual based upon the personal knowledge, experiences, and “stance” that the reader brings to the text. Reader response becomes the first step in the process. The next step is to incorporate third-wave feminism to privilege the personal narratives created through the reading experience. These two steps are followed by a group sharing experience fostered through an appreciation of multiple perspectives on a shared experience (the same text). By creating inclusive spaces, students can negotiate an individual connection and experience with a book that elicits the similarities and differences of multiple perspectives to co-construct new knowledge in a respectful and open environment.

Combined Age Groups

A natural progression from this study would be to combine discussion groups. By having individual reading time, a similar group discussion, and then a mixed group discussion, the women and girls could share both their individual understandings as well as their shared understanding through their group. Sharing across groups could be a powerful way for the women to model extended and broadened viewpoints and for the

girls to provide a teen connection that reflects the current era. It could also provide a different viewpoint for the women to see how girls are negotiating ideas of power and identity in the current world, which would allow the women to better understand the next generation's engagement, or lack of engagement, in issues that often affect the present day.

Both the teens and the women knew about the other group during the study and were curious as to how they each experienced the study. I would hypothesize that a reading group that included a diverse age range would provide an opportunity for increased awareness, connection, and development for both groups.

Expanded Gender Focus Groups

Another study could examine how men, boys, and those who identify outside the gender binary, react and engage with dystopias, even *Uglies*. The book *Uglies* is a fairly gender-neutral story despite having a strong female protagonist. It has been read voraciously by both male and female readers and was written by a man, Scott Westerfeld. There are also many other young adult dystopias that are read by males and female audiences that incorporate protagonists of both genders and would provide rich opportunities for discussion and perspective sharing.

A research study that expands the gender focus to be more inclusive would provide interesting insight into the traits of the characters and how they affect different audiences. The opportunity to examine the responses, reactions, and connections of people of different gender identities could provide insight into how gender within the role of a protagonist like Tally is viewed between girls, women, men, and boys, and others.

Courses in higher education, especially in areas such as women's and gender studies, are venues where dystopias with female protagonists could be used as a focus for a course centered on a specific theme. For instance, I would like to develop a feminist theories course centered on ecofeminism that uses dystopian feminist texts to explore specific ecofeminist questions about environmental change, sustainability, and community. Reader response in connection with group discussions infused with feminist themes would offer students from diverse backgrounds spaces to engage, interpret, and share experiences with a goal of furthering understanding about the specific topic.

Another example of how this framework centers the personal experience of the participants and their responses to a text in a space that values multiple perspectives might include a three-part unit beginning with reader response activities to engage the individual in connecting personally with the common/shared text, followed by an activity that privileges the personal narratives created through the reading experience, and then completed with a group discussion that extends the individual response that allows for co-constructed knowledge. For example, I would like to design a course using dystopias. The framework used in this study, along with the information I now know about the ways some readers relate to protagonists, would help me to develop opportunities for female, male, and gender nonconforming students to engage with texts, have opportunities to share their responses, and generate further knowledge about how readers engage with protagonists and social issues in dystopias.

This current study connected the theories of reader response and feminism into a unique framework that was useful in examining some of the ways girls and women relate

to protagonists in dystopian young adult literature. I was able to analyze similarities and differences between responses that provided a richer examination as to how different ages relate to the protagonist. This research has also set the stage for future work that would continue to push the edges of examining personal positions and engagements with texts and create spaces to share and learn from the different interpretations through group discussions that promote understanding, multiple perspectives across gender and age, as well as inclusivity.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A

Study Matrix

| Author, Year | Participants | Research Type | Description |
|----------------------|---|--|--|
| Broughton, 2002 | 4 girls 6 th grade | Interviews Journals Discussions | Explored conversations about themselves through the engagement to the text |
| Carico, 2001 | 4 girls over a 5month period | Reader engagement with text Reader response in groups | Readers benefit mentally and emotionally when allowed to discuss responses with others |
| Finders, 1997 | 5 girls 6-7 grade | Focus on reading and writing | Relationship between girls and content Interpretation of content by girls |
| Long, 2003 | 121 reading groups | Textual analysis Spaces Identities | Historical examination of how women used reading groups as spaces for growth and reprieve from the social structure outside of the group |
| Maine & Waller, 2011 | 5 kids, 5 adults | Responses Reactions Reading 1 st time Re-reading | Examines the reactions and interpretations of a 1 st time reader to those that re-read |
| Radway, 1991 | How women situate themselves to resist the dominant in the context of reading when negotiating text | | |
| Radway, 1997 | Book of the month club participants | Acquiring Owning Reading Talking | Providing spaces to negotiate power and identity within group conversations |

Appendix B
Interview Guides

Initial Interview

Biographical Information

- 1- Where were you born?
- 2- How long have you lived in Utah?
- 3- How old are you?
- 4- Please tell me a little about yourself.
- 5- What, in your mind, are the most important things for me to know about you?
- 6- What can you tell me about your family and their reading habits?

Reading Experiences

- 7- What are your most memorable reading experiences?
- 8- What type of books did you like as an adolescent? (Adult Specific)
- 9- What type of books do you like to read?
- 10- What about these books do you find engaging?
- 11- Have you ever participated in a book club? If so, what were/are your thoughts?
- 12- Do you ever discuss books with friends or family members? If yes, why?
- 13- What kinds of writing do you like to do? Will you please describe something you've written that was especially meaningful to you?

Gender/Genre/Feminism

- 14- Have you read any dystopian books before? If so, what do you think of the genre?
- 15- Have you read *Uglies*?
- 16- If you have read this book, how do you feel about reading it again through a different context?
- 17- In the books you read are the main characters usually male or female?
- 18- Do you prefer a specific gender protagonist? Why?
- 19- How would you define feminism, or someone who is a feminist?
- 20- Would you categorize any of the characters from books you've read as feminists? If yes, who and why?
- 21- What do you think about social activism?
- 22- Would you self identify as a feminist? If so, what characteristics describe your feminism?
- 23- Have you ever experienced gender inequality? If so, would you mind describing that experience?
- 24- Anything else you have to say that relates to feminism, your reading experiences, or anything else that might be relevant to this interview?

Follow-up Interview

Book Club

- 1- What did you think of the book club discussions?
- 2- How do you feel the combining of different ages worked out?
- 3- Were there any conversations that really got to you and made you think? Can you tell me about them?
- 4- What did you enjoy most about the book club discussions?
- 5- Was there anything you didn't like or would like to have done differently
- 6- I noticed that you said XXX during the book club. Would you mind telling me more about that?

Genre/Gender/Feminism

- 7- What are your thoughts about dystopias as a genre?
- 8- If you had read these texts before did you find anything new or different this time?
- 9- How would you describe Tally?
- 10- Do you think about social activism differently than you did before the discussion?
- 11- How would you define feminism now?
- 12- Were you able to use the journal to help you with your thoughts?
- 13- Do you have any thoughts you'd like to add about this experience?

Appendix C
Analysis Methods

Discourse Analysis

| Participant name | Personal quote | Character quote |
|------------------|--|---|
| Isobel | <p>I feel like I have more important values than trying to be beautiful. I think that if you have to make sacrifices it should be for something more important than beauty.</p> <p>Repeated words: - I feel/think - Beauty(iful)</p> <p>Significance: - Values things that are deeper than physical beauty - Sacrificing values and beliefs is ok as long as it is for something greater than superficial appearance</p> <p>Identity: - Present tense, teen perspective</p> | <p>The way Tally is so self-centered throughout the book makes it hard for me to relate to her.</p> <p>I don't see how a person could tell all those lies to the point where they don't care about anything else especially when it comes to the fact that she's doing that for something that I think is so superficial, just to be beautiful.</p> <p>It just made it harder to relate to Tally because I don't feel like I personally could put myself in her place.</p> <p>Repeated words: - makes it hard and made it harder - relate - I don't see/feel</p> <p>What is the significance to this person?</p> <p>The "lies" that are told repeatedly created an ability to relate to the character. Her trustworthiness was put into question due to the ultimate goal of becoming beautiful</p> <p>What connections does this person make?</p> <p>She connects her inability to relate to the character with the character's faults of lying and superficial desire to become beautiful.</p> <p>What identities does she reflect?</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | She speaks about her lack of connection to Tally from her current position. Isobel draws on her feelings as they come to her right now as a teen. |
| <p>In the right column Isobel uses the word “relate” twice when discussing her inability to empathize with Tally due to Tally’s repeated lying. Isobel uses the word “lies” in connection with multiple accounts of lying for what Isobel believes is a “superficial” desire to be “beautiful”. The lying and general untrustworthiness of Tally is represented through Isobel’s use of the phrases “makes it hard” and “made it harder” for her to connect. Through the use of these phrases it appears that Isobel tried to connect with Tally throughout the book but that was unable to because of Tally’s inability to come across as an upstanding character who reflected Isobel’s values.</p> <p>Isobel’s narrative about herself on the left reflected her thoughts by the repetitive use of the phrase “I think” and “I feel” when describing her reaction when Tally was not displaying values that Isobel felt strongly about, especially through pursuit for “beauty”, which she mentions twice in this short section. Isobel felt that the “sacrifices” that Tally makes, which I connect to the numerous lies she tells friends, should only be done for something that is more deeply important than physical attractiveness.</p> | | |
| Amber | <p>I think more than the book changing my perspective, maybe our group’s discussion changed my perspective a little bit, just in thinking about activism and youth. I always knew kids growing up whose parents were very much social activists and who took them to stuff or gave them political ideas. I remember, in elementary school, kids having opinions on the Presidential election. I couldn’t even have told you who was running. Maybe I could have told you the current President’s name in elementary school. I’m sure I could have, but I couldn’t have told you anything about platforms or policies or anything like that. I was just an apolitical kid. It was interesting to think of Tally as having an opinion on her society’s governance, and then to think of people that I knew or know as having opinions on things like that—like Jane describing herself as sort of fighting the man and things. I don’t know.</p> | <p>I will admit that it reads a little bit unrealistic a strange word for this genre a little bit emotionally unrealistic Tally would standout to authority figures, to people of an external group like David, as like truly astounding I think she is obviously capable. She’s obviously thoughtful I think she goes through a good transformation of self-centeredness to selflessness It’s not even ability or intelligence or whatever. It’s charisma. She is not a charismatic character to me in the books. However, the one thing that she does pushed that was kind of an accident sneaks into New Pretty sees Peris and all of that stuff. not doing that really so much as a trick. sort of ended up stamping her as this person who pulled this great trick obviously daring enough to sneak out to go outside of the city prepares her being able to pursue Shay not that she is the most boring of all I know that’s one of the things that I</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | <p>I don't know if it even changed my perspective more, but I just found myself thinking about it.</p> <p>I sort of, without much critical thought, off the top of my head, would say that parents</p> <p>I don't think should involve their kids in a bunch of real political protests. Then, that sort of makes me think like, well, maybe their kids will then be the ones who change stuff later on.</p> <p>Repeated words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - activism - social/societies - Youth/kid - Political, governance, apolitical - I remember/I always knew - Parents shouldn't involve kids - Maybe they will be the ones to change stuff later on <p>Significance: Relation to past, present, future in self reflection, how Tally sees her world, and how parent's interact with kids about politic issues.</p> <p>Identity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Past tense, remembering being a child or teen - Present tense, relating to the here and now as an adult woman - Future, questioning how future adolescent readers might engage or think about <i>Uglies</i> | <p>thought I could relate to. I'm glad she was the main character and not Shay, because I think it's a little bit more relatable to be typical.</p> <p>Repeated words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unrealistic - Obviously capable/thoughtful/daring - charisma/matic - sneak(s) - relate/relatable <p>Significance to this person? Based upon the repeated words used in this excerpt Tally's capabilities (capable, thoughtful, daring) and her ordinariness made her most relatable.</p> <p>Connections this person makes? Amber connected Tally's typical teenage personality as something that would draw in audiences.</p> <p>What identities does she reflect?</p> <p>In this narrative, Amber reflects her present position and identity as an adult woman.</p> |
| <p>It appears significant to Amber that Tally was capable, thoughtful, and daring. She mentions these three qualities prefaced by obviously each time. Amber did feel that even though Tally exhibited these qualities she also seemed less charismatic than others. For Amber Tally showed her outgoingness through her sneaking. Overall, what made Tally's character relatable to Amber was her averageness. If she had been more outgoing, more dangerous, and more atypical she would not have been a relatable character for Amber.</p> <p>Amber's narrative reflects a significant tie to the past, present and future when concerning ideas of activism, government awareness, and political savvy. She reflects upon her own past experiences when making connections with Tally's present. From reflecting, Amber moves into a present tense situation concerning her thoughts on whether or not parents should engage their children into political awareness. She follows this thought pattern with a glimpse of the future when musing that maybe it would be the kids of parents who pushed for awareness that would change things in the future.</p> | | |

Constant Comparative Analysis

| Character-Teen | Character-Adult |
|---|--|
| <p>Changing from “going along with others” to making her own decisions based on a moral compass. Values independence and morality.</p> <p>The “lies” that are told repeatedly created an inability to relate to the character. Her trustworthiness was put into question due to the ultimate goal of becoming beautiful</p> <p>The ability of the character to change over time is significant</p> <p>Being able to find a place to fit in and be accepted while still being independent and an individual</p> <p>Crystal references aspects of change, either through using the word change or time movement identifiers, five times in this passage. It appears as though Tally’s progression/change from being influenced by those around her, or being a follower, into becoming someone who is influential and more powerful is important to Crystal. She mentions that she “thought it was cool” to see Tally’s personality evolve and change over the course of the story.</p> | <p>Based upon the repeated words used in this excerpt Tally’s capabilities (capable, thoughtful, daring) and her ordinariness made her most relatable.</p> <p>Significance appears through the use of words describing appearance and their relationship with confidence and how being a role model in broadening perspectives created a feeling of affinity or ability to relate as a child, teen, and adult to various characters. The more confident the character became the “prettier” or more “attractive” they became within the story.</p> <p>Tally’s growth from self-centered to a person who is a free thinker provided credibility and belief in her character toward the end of the book. Jane didn’t necessarily like Tally’s character at the beginning because she felt that she was un-relatable in her lack of conviction and fire. Jane values someone who thinks for themselves and is independent. Someone who is a critical thinker, someone who is passionate about their beliefs.</p> <p>Jane listed several positive values about Tally. She said she was nice and caring, attributes that made Jane respect her. However, Jane felt that her character was not strong and she kind of “blew with the wind”. Jane values strong female characters with direction and drive.</p> <p>Ivette connects with Tally’s transformation as a character. She is drawn to the ideas of growth and exploration that Tally exhibits when she ventures outside of her comfort zone. David becomes the secondary character that Ivette was drawn to mainly due to his steadfastness. He represented an honesty and vulnerability that provided a strong character to relate to.</p> <p>Ivette appreciated the relationship between natural beauty and nature after Tally left Pretty Town. Her realization and understanding of beauty through different perspectives resonated with Ivette.</p> |
| <p>Change</p> <p>The girls related to the characters in <i>Uglies</i> through connecting to the ideas about change. All four teens</p> | |

mentioned aspects of Tally being one way in the beginning and then going through a transformation, internally, by the end. Through the concept of change, finding a place to belong was also important. It was significant to the girls that Tally was an individual and independent, but also had a place within a community.

The adults also connected with the characters' ability to change or transform from an uncritical thinker to a critical thinker, who is operating under more of a global awareness instead of a self-centered one. All three women were attracted to strong characters in the story, those strengths were connected to transforming, thinking more critically and developing a critical awareness, and understanding inner beauty versus physical beauty.

There were **similarities** between the teens and adults when it came to relating to the characters about change and transformation and becoming more independent and critical thinkers. These were qualities that bridged the age gap between the two groups. Both groups drew from teen perspectives and identities.

Differences became apparent where the teens were drawn to the notion that the characters' internal transformation led to a better chance to "fit in" with another community. When considering transformation and change from the adult perspective it resulted in the adults being drawn to the independent strength and how that strength was reflected in ways of thinking and knowing the world around her. The women drew from identities that were connected to different aspects of their lives such as teen, adult, mother, teacher, whereas the girls drew only from their present identities as teens.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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- **Utah State University**
 Logan, Utah
 Masters of Science, May 1999
 American Studies—Folklore
 Plan B Thesis—paper titles:
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 “Dancing With Tradition: Asking and Answering to Dances”
- **Utah State University**
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 Bachelor of Science, June 1997
 Anthropology—Cultural Emphasis
- **University of Georgia**
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WORK EXPERIENCE:

1. Center for Teaching, Learning & Technology, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California
 Inclusive Excellence Instruction Specialist September 2013-present
 - Faculty and staff development and support for inclusivity and diversity in the classroom

- Workshops in the following areas
 - Course design
 - Co-curricular
 - Groups in the classroom
 - Assessment
 - First Generation Campus Committee
 - Inclusive Excellence Council
 - Professional Learning Communities
 - Teach courses for Women and Gender Studies (1 per academic year)
2. English Department, Utah State University, Logan, Utah
Lecturer/Adjunct 1999-2012
 3. Lecturer for Kaplan Online Education 2009-2013
 4. Program Coordinator for Utah State University English Department's international classes 2002-2004
 5. The 3GB Group, Utah State University Research Foundation, Logan, Utah Project Specialist and Service Coordinator 2000-2004

EDUCATIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE:

1. Utah State University College of Education Teacher Education and Leadership (TEAL) Assistantship
 - Teaching and Research Assistantship August 2011-2013
 - Assisting with elementary and secondary education student teacher electronic portfolios
 - Workshops and lectures on LiveText, the online portfolio system employed by TEAL
 - Maintaining and managing a professional accomplishment news blog for the TEAL website
 - TA for TEAL 6410 (Social Foundations of Education)
 - TA for TEAL 6710 (Diversity in Education)
 - TA for EDUC 6770 (Qualitative Research I)
 - Graduate Assistant for Mexican Educational exchange program in Cuernavaca, MX. Summer 2011
 - Co-creator of curriculum for summer 2012 Mexican exchange program
 - Instructor of record and course developer for TEAL 4710 (Language, Culture, and Diversity in Education) spring 2012
 - Secondary Education student teacher field supervisor
2. Research Assistant for Social Studies Education content analysis, summer 2012
3. Fife Folklore Conference, Utah State University, Logan, Utah
 - Assistant June 7-11 1999

4. Fife Folklore Archives, Utah State University, Logan, Utah
 - Internist 1998-1999 school year
 - Instructing patrons
 - Archival filing
5. University of Georgia Archeology Lab
 - Internist 1995-1996 school year (post archeological dig experience)
 - Sort and categorize artifacts
 - Answer patron questions about the lab and their personal collections of artifacts

COURSES TAUGHT:

- Women and Gender Studies – Introduction (WGS 201)
- Feminist Theories online graduate course (WGS 4910/6910)
- Secondary Education (SECED 5500) – Student Teacher Field Experience Seminar
- Teacher Education and Leadership (TEAL 4710) – Language, Culture, and Diversity in Education
- English 1010 – Introduction to College Composition
- English 2010 – Intermediate College Composition

PUBLICATIONS:

Peer Reviewed

- Parent, R. (2012). “Student teaching in a virtual world: An online field experience for future teachers.” *Ubiquitous Learning: An International Journal*. Vol. 4, p. 43-54

Invited

- “Utah State University, College of Education: Virtual Field Experience - Case Study.” *iNACOL. Volume? Issue? Page numbers?*

Book Review

- Book Review – Education Review. Souto-Manning, Mariana. (2010). *Freire, Teaching, and Learning: Culture Circles Across Contexts*. New York. Peter Lang. Pp. x+218. ISBN 978-1-4331-0406-0
- Book Review - Western Folklore, Vol. 62, Number 4, Fall 2003: Clarke Secrest, ed., *Hell’s Belles: Prostitution, Vice and Crime in early Denver, with a Biography of Sam Howe, Frontier Lawman*. Jeffery Nichols, *Prostitution, Polygamy and Power: Salt Lake City 1847-1918* 306
- Book Review - Western Folklore, Vol. 64, Numbers 3&4, Summer and Fall 2005: *Myth and History in the Creation of Yellowstone National Park*. By

Paul Schullery and LeeWhittlesey. (*Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. Pp. xi + 125,acknowledgments, introduction, illustrations, photographs, appendix, notes, index. \$22.00 cloth*)

GRANTS:

- 2014-15 CSU sponsored Threshold Concepts Learning Community (\$5000)
- 2014 CSU sponsored Metacognition Grant (\$5000)
- 2011 – USU Diversity Grant (\$3000)

RESEARCH:

- Learn by Doing: From Day One 2014
- Perceptions of feminism 2014
- Mindset: Mixed methods examining freshmen perceptions of mindset on academic success – approved for longitudinal study 2013-on going
- Girls and Women Reading Dystopian YAL: Qualitative research using book clubs, journals, and interviews, 2012
- Professional Development School Apprenticeship Study: Qualitative research assistant using interviews and observations, 2012
- Social Studies Education Content Analysis: Content analysis assistant, 2012
- Study Abroad Program Development: Curriculum development, evaluation, and promotion, 2011
- Study Abroad Personal Experience Narratives: Qualitative research collection using interviews, Cuernavaca, Mexico, 2011 (IRB)
- Virtual Student Teaching Pilot Program: Project creation, mixed methods collection, and evaluation, 2011 (IRB)
- Online Technical Training Faculty Satisfaction Survey: Qualitative, 2010
- Personal Experience Narratives: Qualitative collection of local high school dance traditions, 1998
- Folklore Literacy Lesson Plan: Instruction in a seventh grade English class, implementing a week-long lesson, 1998
- Narratives Collection Project: Qualitative collection of fifth grade family folklore and traditions, 1997

INVITED PRESENTATIONS:

- “*Killing Us Softly 4*” University Film Discussant, February 2013
- “*Cover Girl Culture*” University Film Discussant, October 2012
- “*Feminism in Fairytale Film*” Fife Folklore Workshop, Summer 2012
- “*Zines are for Everyone!*” Girls’ Studies, FCHD 5500, Summer 2012
- “*Miss Representation*” University Film Discussant, October 2011

CONFERENCES:

- Parent, R., Lehr, J., Lisberger, J., “The University as Nation-State: Dismantling boundaries through border-crossings and agency” panel presentation at the National Women’s Studies Association, San Juan, Puerto Rico, November 2014
- Parent, R. “Mindset Matters” paper presentation at the CSU Teaching Symposium, San Marcos, CA, March 2014
- Parent, R., Huber, J., Keller, M. “Zines for Activism” workshop presentation at the Women’s Psychological Association annual meeting, Salt Lake City, UT, March 2013
- Parent, R. “Your utopia is my dystopia: Activism in young adult literature” Journal of Language and Literacy Education conference, Athens, GA February 2013
- Parent, R. “From martyr to hero: Exploring young adult agency in dystopian stories through the intersection of fairy tale and feminism” American Folklore Society (AFS), New Orleans, LA, October 2012
- Parent, R. “Making virtual student teaching a reality” Virtual Schools Symposium, New Orleans, LA, October 2012
- Saavedra, C., Parent, R. Whitaker, M., “Crossing boundaries: Testimonios and personal narratives of language, space and nation” American Educational Research Association (AERA), Vancouver, BC, Canada, April 2012.
- Parent, R. “Student teaching in a virtual world: An online field experience for future teachers” Ubiquitous Learning Conference, Berkley, CA, November 2011.
- Parent, R. “Online education: What is the virtual curtain hiding?” American Association for University Professors, Washington DC, June 2011.
- Parent, R. Panel chair at the Folklore Society of Utah meeting, November, 2009
- Parent, R. “Professional panel: works in progress” Folklore Society of Utah, November, 2008
- Parent, R. “Legend tripping through serendipitous ostension” International Society for Contemporary Legend Research, Logan, Utah, May 2007
- Parent, R. “Bear River area heritage folklore collection project” California Folklore Society, Logan, Utah, April 2002
- Parent, R. “Online learning and the future of folklore: One small step for technology, one giant leap for folklore” American Folklore Society, Anchorage, Alaska, October 2001
- Parent, R. “Online learning and the future of folklore: One small step for technology, one giant leap for folklore” California Folklore Society, Los Angeles, California, April 2001
- Parent, R. “Teaching with the teacher: folklore in a middle school” California folklore Society, Fullerton, California, April 1999

- Parent, R. “Dancing with tradition: Asking and answering to dances”
Folklore Society of Utah, March 1999

AWARDS:

- 2012-2013 – Graduate Student Travel Award, \$500
- 2012 WGS – Women in Gender Studies travel grant, \$500
- 2011 Ubi – Ubiquitous Learning Conference Graduate Student Award, \$300
- 2011 AAUP – American Association for University Professors, John Hopper award \$750
- 2011 WIGRI – Women in Gender Research Institute travel grant, \$500
- 2010 Outstanding Service to the English Department at USU
- 2007 David Buchan best student paper award at the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research conference, \$300
- 2002 Monarch Award for Advisor Contributions from Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority, National Convention.
- 2001-2002 Faculty of the Year from Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority, USU’s Epsilon Chapter
- 2000-2001 Faculty of the Year from Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority, USU’s Epsilon Chapter
- 1999 Fife Folklore Conference Assistantship
\$250.00/ week
- 1998-99, Fife Folklore Archives Internship
\$1000.00/ semester

SERVICE:

University:

- Inclusive Excellence Council 2013-present
- Diversity Coalition Council 2013-present
- First Generation College Student Success 2013-2014
- Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority Faculty Advisor 2009-present
- Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority Academic Advisor 2000-2003

Department:

- Member, 5 Course Committee 2009-2010
- Member, Conversation Social Committee 2008
- Member, Technology and Pedagogy Committee, 2005-2009
- Member, Lynn Meeks Memorial Committee, 2006-2007
- Member, University Studies/Breadth and Depth Humanities Committee, 2006-2007
- Member, 2010 Textbook Committee, 2003-2004
- Member, 1010 Textbook Committee, 1999-2000

Community:

- CAPSA Chocolate Festival, 2000-2005
- Marlins Fundraiser Triathlon, 2005, 2007
- Ryan's Place memorial playground, 2007

Additional Service and/or Consulting:

- Manuscript review, Pearson Publishing, 2006

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

- NWSA– National Women's Studies Association
- ASC – Association for Borderlands Studies
- AERA – American Education Research Association
- AAUP – American Association for University Professors
- AFS – American Folklore Society
- International Society for Contemporary Legend
- Western Folklore
- Folklore Society of Utah, Board Member 2009-2011 (2-year term)
- Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority Member 2002-present

EXTRACURRICULAR:

- Established professional Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority chapters around the US
- Professional member of the Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority 2001
- Lettered in Swimming at the University of Northern Colorado in 1992-93
- Logan High School swim team captain 3 years, 1989-1992
- Photography both professional and hobby