“But That’s Where My Books Are!”: Adults Who Read Young Adult Literature

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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Acknowledgments

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. Colossians 3:17

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Abstract

This narrative instrumental case study seeks to understand why adults (age 30+) read young adult literature (YAL) and how adults engage with the genre. Additionally, this study seeks to interpret how the genre influences adult identities. Though YAL is typically written by adults for adolescents age 12-18 (Cart, 2008; Cole, 2009), the adult readers in this study preferred reading YAL more than other genres of literature. Using both reader response theory and socio-emotional conceptualizations of reading engagement and identity as theoretical and analytical frameworks, the aim of this study is to understand why adult participants preferred this genre, and what, if anything, they gained from reading YAL. Specifically seeking to understand:

- What are the rationales adults (age 30+) provide for reading YAL?
- In what ways do adults (age 30+) engage with YAL?
- How does the genre of YAL influence adult reader identities?

This qualitative study draws on both narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and instrumental case study (Stake, 2006), and employs adult participants' narratives about their experiences reading YAL to elaborate on the greater phenomenon of adults who read YAL for pleasure.

The findings of this study suggest the adults engage with YAL through characters, situations, and worlds, utilizing YAL as a simulation tool to insert themselves into the given worlds or situations presented in YAL texts. Additionally, adults in this study cited YAL texts they read as influential on their behaviors, actions, feelings, and intentions, which is indicative of the dynamic, socially constructed nature of identity, rather than a developmental or essentialized construct of identity as the literature purports.

Keywords: adult literacy, YAL, engagement, narrative inquiry, identity

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Chapter One: Overview of Study

When I was an elementary school teacher, I would often preview the many books I bought before putting them in our classroom library or sharing them with students. Even though I was an adult and considered this practice to be pedagogically sound (McGill-Franzen, Allington, Yokoi, & Brooks, 1999), I secretly relished the reading of those books. Solving the mystery of who took the Vermeer painting with Petra and Calder in Blue Balliet's (2005) *Chasing Vermeer* and returning to Hogwarts year after year with Harry and the gang was a source of professional reading, to be sure, but I kept reading these children's and young adult (YA) books even when it was not for curriculum decision-making purposes (Cremin, 2011; Kolloff, 2002; Merga, 2016).

After several years of teaching in the elementary classroom, I began teaching remedial reading at a local community college. I continued to read children's and YA books and shared them with my new adult students through book talks and in casual conversations. Additionally, part of our curriculum was for students to choose a text from a list which contained a variety of genres for an independent reading text. The students in my class ranged from recent high school graduates or those in dual enrollment courses to adult students looking to advance in their careers. I even taught grandparents returning to school to earn a desperately sought-after degree. It was quite common for me to teach students my age or older. Though the students I taught were of various ages and many different social backgrounds, the commonality between almost all of these students was the frequency with which they chose to read young adult literature (YAL) from the list of selected texts. Admittedly, I anticipated the recent high school graduates would select such texts. However, I did not foresee the older students selecting them as well.

When asked about their rationales for choosing those texts the responses were both numerous and various. Many noted the interest in the action taking place in YAL. Others commented on the ability to reflect on their lives through the character. Others still simply wanted to read YAL because they viewed it as an "easier," more entertaining option. In these discussions, I began to reflect on my personal motivations for reading the YAL genre.

During this time, I also began work on my doctoral degree and enrolled in a YAL course. Being both student and teacher put me in an interesting position of understanding how socially-situated reading influences reading choice (Morgan & Wagner, 2013) and comprehension of reading material (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000). The process of earning a doctorate has been the most introspective experience of my life. I have learned more about myself through this process than any other life experience. In ruminating on the experience itself, I came to question the work I was doing. Often commenting that my study was "me-search," I would explain to those interested how I was curious in the motivations and rationales of adult readers of YAL because I was curious about my own personal motivations and rationales. Why did I privilege this genre over others? Did it matter if I was an "adult"? What did this genre afford me that others did not? Through the YAL course, I continually wrestled with these questions and came to understand, on a miniscule scale, how YAL shapes my identity through the types of books I choose to read.

Stories and Selves

Accepting Herman's (2001) notion of Dialogical Self, wherein the roles that identify a person are both internal, such as I am a wife, teacher, and mother and also external, such as my children, my students, and my book club, I considered how YAL influenced each of these internal and external self- positions and identities. As a woman with body issues, reading Julie

Murphy's (2015) *Dumplin'* aided in the construction of body positivity rather than self-degradation about weight. A constant struggle to understand the complexity of the relationship with my own mother brought an appreciation from both *The First Time She Drowned* (Klettner, 2017) and *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (Sanchez, 2017). In Rita Williams-Garcia's (2013), *P.S. Be Eleven*, I carefully considered how to stop the dysfunctional patterns I experienced from my own mother to become a more present, patient, and mindful mother to my own daughter. Being ever cognizant of narrative as a beneficial means to understand the human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I began to wonder who would tell my story. Like Mary in Jenny Downham's (2016) *Unbecoming*, who will tell of who I am if I cannot? Would it be an accurate depiction? The complexity with which we are comprised, these multiple selves, can be explored, constructed, reconstructed, established, and re-established throughout our lifetime. YAL proved, for me, to be a useful tool to do so.

Sitting in the YAL graduate class discussing strong female protagonists lead me to examine Katniss Everdeen from Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy. Throughout the three books, Katniss works to provide for her family and survive the barbaric Hunger Games; a deadly punishment in which the oppressive Capitol forces the citizens of Panem to participate. In addition, Katniss must fight President Snow in their own personal game of cat and mouse. Though I identified with Katniss greatly, it was not because of her strength. In fact, I felt she was quite weak. She struggled with confidence and low self-esteem, never knowing if her decisions would help or hurt. Yet she desired to right the wrongs of the oppressive system in which she lived. That resonated with me. The fact that a female could be both uncertain about herself, but still want to fight for what was right was the first time I scrutinized YAL explicitly for the connection to my multiple selves. I was 33 years old.

A few years later, I read Julie Murphy's *Dumplin'*. At that point, I was 36, and a divorced-single mother of twins. At first glance, it would seem I would have nothing in common with Willowdean, nicknamed Dumplin' by her pageant-loving mother. However, as we come to know Willowdean, we see as a curvy high school student, she has always felt her mother disapproved of her body shape and therefore she constantly seeks her approval. In an act of rebellion and much to her mother's chagrin, Willowdean signs up to participate in her mother's pageant, which is typically a display of skinny bodies, perfect teeth, and lustrously big hair. As a woman, the pressure to conform to certain body expectations is enormous and imposed upon us from an early age. Even little girls' clothing styles are cut slimmer than boys. Personally, I have struggled with body image my whole life. High school was filled with tears and bullying. One particular incident I can recall with clarity. A boy behind me in line at a turnstile turned to his friend and said, loud enough for me to hear, "Look. She's so fat, she won't fit." While reading *Dumplin'* I thought about that incident. What would I have done if I had read *Dumplin'* in high school? How might I respond now as an adult to the pressures to be a certain size or look a certain way? As Willowdean says, "All my life I've had a body worth commenting on and if living in my skin has taught me anything it's that if it's not your body, it not yours to comment on." Not only did this statement give me confidence to ignore what others said about my body, but it also gave me pause to consider how I comment on my own body and others' bodies, especially my daughter's body.

In the spring of 2016, I spent a weekend at a YAL conference listening to authors discuss their books, crafts, lives, and plans for more stories. Jeff Zenter (2016), the author of *The Serpent King* and *Goodbye Days*, shared part of his process for when he experiences writers' block. He shared how he always returns to Kerry Kletter's *The First Time She Drowned* for its

lyrical prose. Because I was a fan of *The Serpent King* and *Goodbye Days*, I purchased *The First Time She Drowned* and read it cover to cover in just a few short hours. Searching for myself through the pages of *The First Time She Drowned*, I was met with not only beautiful writing, but the evolution of a tumultuous relationship between a mother and daughter. This was a YA book I had been searching for. Plenty of YA books dealt with strained parental/adolescent relationships, to be sure, but there was something different about *The First Time She Drowned* and I could absolutely relate to the dramatic and tenuous relationship between Cassie O'Malley and her mother. Left at a mental institution at the age of 15 by her mother, Cassie is finally of age and has her independence. To be clear, my mother did not put me in a mental institution against my will. I do, however, feel as if I were imprisoned by her for the majority of my childhood. My mother has several mental illnesses and living with her was never easy. What is truly astounding though is I thought much of my childhood was quite normal and even exceedingly great. I thought all mothers and daughters have the relationship we did. A relationship ruled by control and fear. *The First Time She Drowned* was a profound YA book for me. I found myself and my mother reflected in page after page. In every interaction between Cassie and her mother, I saw undertones of myself and my own mother. While reading, often through tears, I would find myself cheering emphatically, "YES!" knowing exactly how Cassie felt. Understanding Cassie, her mother, and their relationship gave me insight to myself, my own mother, and our relationship, which is strained, to be sure. However, the hopeful nature of YA is ever-present. Because of books like *The First Time She Drowned*, I am learning I am not alone in my struggle with complex maternal relationships and like Cassie came to understand, the world is far bigger than my mother.

A similar exchange between mother and daughter in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* provided further insight to this complex relationship and also illustrated the importance of education. Like Julia, for much of my life I too felt pressure to not abandon my family, especially my mother, even though the relationship was toxic. And, like Julia, I saw education is my way to escape. While Julia spends the majority of her sophomore year in high school trying to understand what happened to her sister Olga who died in a tragic accident. As Julia finds more clues about Olga's death, she discovers Olga was not really who she pretended to be. Along the way, Julia is deciding who she wants to be and the path she needs to travel to make that happen. As a Mexican-American daughter, Julia is expected to stay home and not go to college, even though she knows this is her way to the life she wants. As a first generation college student myself, I have battled against many close family members who do not understand what it means to be educated. Like Julia's family, they do not understand why college, especially graduate school is a desire I have. Reading *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* caused a blossom of hope to spring up inside me, even as a 39 year old. Knowing I have made the right decisions to pursue my education to the extent I have, I can rest in the understanding that, like Julia, I am deciding who I want to be and the path I need to travel to make that happen.

Through an author event on our campus, I was introduced to the work of Rita Williams-Garcia. Her most popular books are those about the Gaither Sisters in the middle grade trilogy of *One Crazy Summer, P.S. Be Eleven,* and *Gone Crazy in Alabama*. However, in my opinion the most impactful Williams-Garcia book for me as an adult reader and mother is *P.S. Be Eleven*. This book continues the story of the Gaither sisters, Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern. It picks up just after their *One Crazy Summer* in which they reunite with their estranged mother, a supporter of the Black Panther ideals, in Oakland, California. As I read *P.S. Be Eleven,* I was struck by how

profound the lessons Delphine was learning are to all of us. Seeing the book *Things Come Apart* on her teacher's desk one day, she strikes up a conversation with him about the book. He tells her the title for the novel is taken from Yeats's (1919) poem "Second Coming." A particularly interesting line is the third line of the first stanza which is from where the title of the book comes. In it, Yeats says, "things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;" Nothing could be truer as a parent. Things fall apart almost daily. Plans go awry. Bad decisions lead to worse decisions. The center cannot hold. In my particular situation the center of my family relationship could not hold. Before returning to graduate school, my marriage had fallen apart and everything had changed. I had never planned on being a single mom (who does?), but here I was. I had never planned on going back to earn a doctorate, but here I was. As Rita Williams-Garcia wrote to my daughter as she signed the book, "Everything must change. Even you!" How wonderfully frightening! To know that everything must change—even ourselves. Our centers cannot hold either. True, we keep some existential beliefs at our core, but only those remain after our centers have been chipped away by the only constant in life—change.

I am not Catholic Mexican teenager living in the south side of Chicago. I am not an African-American eleven year old coming of age in 1968 Bed-Stuy. I am not a teen girl rising up against an oppressive post-apocalyptic dictator. I am not a teenager recently released from the mental institution. I am not a curvy beauty queen. So many things I am not.

And yet, because of YAL, I see just how much I am all of these things. Me, a middle-aged White woman living in the south. A woman, a wife, a mom, a daughter, a teacher, a friend. My reading experiences with YAL have influenced each of these identities and allowed me to understand myself better, prompting me to consider my own thoughts, my relationships with others, and my interactions with the world around me. Despite the gene's intended audience of

12-18 year olds (Cart, 2008; Coles, 1989), my own personal experiences reading YAL allow me to better understand and acknowledge my circumstances as an adult.

In my time as a student, I was able to tease out some of the tensions I felt about being an adult reader of YAL, but as a teacher of remedial readers, I also observed how YAL provided a vehicle for my students to remain engaged in the reading (Ivey & Johnston, 2013) and subsequently, build reading stamina (Morgan & Fuchs, 2006). I also noted their myriad rationales for choose YAL. They, too, seemed to be struggling with some of the same tensions I was feeling as an adult reader of YAL, so I set out to research more about adult literacy.

Meeting with my fellow colleagues to share my experience, many were taken aback at my desire (and eventual suggestion) to infuse the community college curriculum with YAL, stating it was, in fact, "not literature" and did not provide enough complexity or challenge for the students. In return, I was taken aback at their book-snobbery. To me, all reading was beneficial, no matter the material.

Complexity and Rigor

I could understand my colleagues' hesitation. A common discourse around YAL is the lack of complexity and rigor within the genre. Though once filled with didactic problems novels (Cart, 2016), the genre has evolved to include rich texts which trouble the assumption that YAL is subordinate to canonical texts in their contribution to complexity and rigor (Alsup, 2013; Soter & Conners, 2013; Glaus, 2014). Additionally, I was keenly aware of the tensions and complexities of identity development I personally experienced while reading YAL.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a large perpetrator of such narratives about the YAL genre. Though they acknowledge the complexity is three-fold, including quantitative, qualitative, and reader to task measures, CCSS lists of exemplar text reveal little to no YAL,

relying instead on archaic, irrelevant canonical texts, which can become a de facto reading list in some secondary education classrooms (Moss, 2013). Many fear the mentor list texts depend on high quantitative measure of complexity, disregarding the other two measures (Alsup, 2013; Moss, 2013). Indeed, many factors contribute to the complexity of a text (Alsup, 2013; Glaus, 2014) and those factors should be considered.

Soter & Conners (2013) state, "YAL is a substantive genre capable of depth, artistry, and yes, even complexity" (p. 69) and serves as "a potentially rich form of reading material that evinces a high degree of craftsmanship, is multilayered, and is aesthetically pleasing" (p. 70). All of these factors contribute to the qualitative and reader/task measures of complexity which are often overlooked in favor of numerical measures of complexity. Instead, Conners (2013) urges educators to resist perceptions made by others and, through the social construction of meaning, challenge not only others' perceptions, but theirs as well. Additionally, Alsup (2013) suggests narrative fiction aids in the creation of a "critical response and empathetic feelings" (p. 182), all of which can be transformative in nature. She further purports, "stories surround us, form us, and change us. Stories make us human" (p. 182). Similarly Bruner (2002) asserts, "self-making is a narrative art" (p. 65). What could possibly be more complex than human development?

Furthermore, in addition to the rationales mentioned above, research suggests YAL is beneficial for adolescents in a number of ways. Firstly, YAL is relevant to adolescents' lives (Cart, 2008) depicting realistic and authentic portrayals of emotions and actions adolescents encounter. Neilsen (1998) posits YAL as a type of identity playground where adolescents can "try-on identities" to engage in reflection simulative work to further their own personal identity development. Finally, YAL provides adolescents with role models (Cart, 2008). Not only do

they see themselves reflected authentically in the pages, but they imagine who they could be. If YAL could offer such benefits to adolescents, could adults experience the same?

Further research showed my students and I were not alone in our love for YAL. A 2012 market research report from Bowker Weekly noted 55% of consumers of YAL are, in fact, not young adults at all. The largest percentage (28%) of specific demographics noted is adults ages 30-44. When questioned about the intention of the reading material, 78% of those adults affirmed the YAL was for their own reading (whether it was pleasure, functional, or other purposeful reading is unknown). Additionally, at the 2016 Assembly on Literature for Adolescents for NCTE (ALAN), Michael Cart and Patty Campbell shared similar statistics, stating 60% of YAL is purchased by adults. Where reading is concerned, adults are clearly intrigued by the genre.

Before the next faculty meeting, I felt it important to impart this wisdom upon my colleagues, so armed with this research, I set out to see what the academic literature said about adults who read YAL. Unfortunately, most of the research on adult literacy I found focused on workplace literacy (Case, Ainsworth, & Emmerson, 2004; Wolf & Jenkins, 2014; Zepe, 2011) and basic education (Fracasso, Bangs, & Binder, 2016; Miller et al., 2017; Scarborough et al., 2013). There was very little with regard to adult pleasure reading. Additionally, much YAL research focused on adolescents in secondary education. My curiosity was piqued and I saw this as a gap in the research literature. While publishers and media outlets continued to purport that adults were purchasing YAL for their own reading, the research literature describing adult readers of YAL was scant.

Background of the Problem

On the whole, this study is one about pleasure reading. Specifically, this study examines closely the relationship between pleasure reading and engagement of adult readers who partake of a particular genre of texts--YAL. Additionally, this study considers the outcomes of such pleasure reading. Defining what pleasure reading is in terms of this study is crucial for fully understanding the conceptualizations of the study. For the purposes of this study, pleasure reading is described as an act of reading in which the reader finds enjoyment, privileges the act or the genre above other activities, and continues metacognitive work post reading event. Although pleasurable reading among children and adolescents is consistently at the forefront of education and literacy research (Kucirkova, Littleton, & Cremin, 2015; Sullivan & Brown, 2015; Wilhelm & Smith, 2013), lesser attention is paid to adult's pleasure reading experiences.

Statement of the Problem

In 1997, in an effort to shift perceptions on YAL, Ted Hipple encouraged classroom teachers to not concern themselves with *what* adolescents were reading. Rather, he suggested *that* they were reading was more important (Hipple, 1997). I certainly subscribed to this belief. In my elementary classrooms, fellow colleagues scoffed when I suggested students read *Captain Underpants* (Pilkey, 2000) and at the community college, my co-workers scoffed again when I offered *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2010) to students. In the past twenty years, conversations regarding the legitimacy for YAL in the secondary classroom have continued to rage, with advocates on both sides of the fence; those who value YAL (Soter & Conners, 2013; Glasgow, 2002; Glaus, 2014; Rakow, 1991) and those who place greater importance on adolescents' reading of traditional, canonical texts (Jago, 2000; Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2002). A 2006

survey of secondary English educators indicated the dichotomy between these two camps is still prevalent and influencing curriculum and instructional decisions (Gibbons, Dail, & Stallworth, 2006). Even when teachers view YAL as beneficial for struggling readers (Gibbons, Dail, & Stallworth, 2006) and as a helpful supplement to the traditional canon (Herz & Gallo, 2005), many teachers sanction YAL solely as independent reading—not worthy of whole-class instruction (Conners, 2009; Henderson & Buskist, 2011; Rakow, 1991). As Bushman (1997) contends, however, "students are not carrying the reading habit into adulthood" (p. 37). Johnson (2011) purports that the lack of a YAL diet could be the reason why: "For teens and tweens YAL plays a major role in encouraging the habit and enjoyment of life long reading" (p. 215). I knew that I was a lifelong reader and I wanted to instill this practice with my students. We were already reading and enjoying YAL, so it seemed natural that the genre had the ability to sustain a positive ongoing correlation between reading and pleasure for many of us. Though YAL is often maligned, my own personal experiences and my observations of my adults students confirmed that YAL promoted voluntary pleasure reading.

Adult Lifelong Reading

Creating lifelong readers is often an educational goal stated by many (Merga, 2016; Swanson & Da Ros-Voseles, 2009; West, 2002). Yet, research literature on adults' pleasurable reading experiences is scant. As pleasure-seeking beings (Bloom, 2010), we return to what we enjoy. If my students were not enjoying their reading, I knew they would not return to the practice. Additionally, their interest in YAL demonstrated a desire to sustain the reading practice until book completion, which many reported they had never done. They were experiencing pleasure from the reading of the YAL genre, just as I did, and I wanted them to harness that feeling to perpetuate a consistent, life-long, pleasurable reading habit.

Pleasure Reading

Reading for pleasure and the rationales for doing so are widely undertheorized and under researched (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Wilhelm & Smith, 2013), and yet, there are multiple pedagogical practices that promote the utilization of pleasurable reading within the classroom to promote lifelong literacy practice among students (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Pruzinsky, 2014). Nevertheless, the pleasurable reading practices of adults is often overlooked. The majority of reading research detailing adult literacy engagement practices focus on workplace literacy practices (Case, Ainsworth, & Emerson, 2004; Wolf & Jenkins, 2014) or basic education programs (Bradbury, 2012; Mackert & Poag, 2011). There is an implicit message that adult reading is not for enjoyment and classroom practices should inform creating lifelong readers, but then what? When the adults do, in fact, become lifelong readers, does that mean the work is done or is there any benefit to continuing the conversation on adult pleasure reading habits and practices? And furthermore, shouldn't there be more research on how this practice benefits the adult population itself?

Pleasure Reading and Engagement

Because of my experiences as a YAL bibliophile, I knew adult pleasurable reading of YAL had the potential to influence identity as it had with me. I was curious to know if other adults have similar engagements and identity influences when reading YAL. The relationship between engagement and pleasure reading seems to be iterative. As pleasure seeking beings (Bloom, 2010) humans typically perpetuate behaviors and actions in which they find pleasure. They are also more attentive to and engaged with such pleasurable tasks (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In my experiences reading YAL, engagement is an outcome of pleasure. Pleasure, however, is not necessarily a prerequisite for or an outcome of engagement. This study assumes

pleasure reading is always engaged reading and adults who read YAL for pleasure are engaged with the YAL texts they choose to read.

The Psychology of Pleasure Reading

Victor Nell's (1988) research, *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure*, proposes a conceptual model which he aptly titles "ludic reading." In this conceptual model, readers are blissfully engaged with their reading material. This ludic reading experience is reminiscent of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of "flow," or a highly focused mental state that requires complete absorption in the activity at hand. Nell (1988) contends that this state can only occur when the proper predecessors (reading ability, attitude of positivity, and suitable books) are in place. He argues ludic reading creates physiological and cognitive changes including automaticity of skills, comprehension that is consciously controlled, and a fluent, easy awareness of the text. Once the ludic reading stage is achieved, reading is not only cognitively beneficial, but also pleasurable (Nell, 1988).

One broad element comprises this study--pleasure reading. Further dissected throughout the study in relationship to adult readers, engagement, and YAL, pleasure reading is at the core of this work. It is the foundation upon which the problem has been identified and its composite nature reveals great nuance to the concepts, theories, findings, and propositions of this work. Therefore, the rationale for this study is to address the gaps in the literature with regard to adult pleasurable reading, proving that pleasure reading does indeed matter. Furthermore, this study aims to show that YAL can promote such voluntary engaged pleasure reading for adults and, as a byproduct, instigate significant identity work just as I had experienced.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Adding to the conversations on both the legitimacy of YAL and pleasure reading the purpose of this study is to illuminate the rationales for adult readers' (age 30+) engagement with YAL and the influences the genre has on their identities. For the purposes of this study, "adults" are bound by the age demarcation of 30 or above. This age was chosen to avoid the New Adult Genre, which focuses on readership between the ages of 19-25 (Cart, 2016) and contains protagonists of relatively the same age (Cart, 2014). Though the YA genre is typically written for adolescents aged 12-18 (Donelson & Nilsen, 2005), many adults read YAL. I seek to interpret the experience of adults who prefer this genre, their perceptions of themselves as life-long readers, and how the YAL genre influences adult readers' identities. This was done through three broad questions: 1). In what ways do adults (age 30+) engage with YAL? 2.) What are the rationales adults (age 30+) provide for reading YAL? and 3.) How does the genre of YAL influence adult identities?

Filtering the data of this study through these three research questions, I found adults who read YAL for pleasure were engaged with a variety of elements of YAL texts and though they initially read simply for pleasure, their purposes expanded to include gaining empathy, seeking hope, and escape to name a few. Furthermore, similar to my experiences with YAL, adult participants in this study also experienced identity influences while reading YAL, which caused them to take actions on multiple levels.

This study utilizes narrative instrumental case study to answer the research questions, linking engagement of pleasure YAL reading to a narrative participants share about their experiences being a reader of YAL. Furthermore, participants in this study share how YAL

influences their identities, causing them to shift previously held beliefs about themselves, about others, and about the world around them.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation work focuses primarily on two theoretical frames; Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader Response Theory and socio-emotional theoretical perspectives of reading (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Johnston, 1993; Lysaker et al., 2011). Rosenblatt's (1938) Transactional Reader Response Theory positions reading as an active, meaning-making, co-participatory reading experience between the reader and the text. As such, reading experiences may be intensely personal and subjective for each individual reader (Hall, 2001). In contrast to New Critical or Formalist ideologies of reading that encourage one "right way" to read a text, reader response theory allows that individual readers will produce a wide variety of responses and reactions to the same text due to their own subjective interpretations of the text, creating a complex reading experience similar to the complexity of the individual (Hall, 2001; Harkin, 2005).

Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theories

In examining adults who read YAL for pleasure, it is essential to consider the transactional interaction between the text and the reader. This is exemplified in Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory (1938/1994), where the focus is largely on the interaction between the reader and the text and the different kinds of reading readers do. Transactional Reader Response Theory acknowledges text meaning as it is implicitly related to the reader (Rosenblatt, 1994). Reader Response Theory posits the reader's distinctive interpretation of the text is determined by his or her prior experiences, knowledge, and emotions and the notion that the meaning is not found solely within the text, but that the reader has a crucial role to play in the meaning making

act (Rosenblatt, 1994). Though multiple reader response theorists provide various nuanced approaches to the conceptualization of the act of reading, Rosenblatt's (1994) transactional model is applied to this work.

Transactional model of reading.

Rosenblatt (1985) provides us with a perfect metaphor to encapsulate her transactional reading model when she suggests the act of reading be considered "a live circuit between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meaning into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings" (p. 24). The transaction Rosenblatt postulates is one of mutualism, with the reader acting as a meaning-making agent and the textual clues and symbols from the text influencing or providing a scaffold with which the reader is tasked with filling in. Rosenblatt (1985) contends that the text is comprised of nothing more than mere "ink spots on a paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols" (p. 24). In other words, the meaning of the text is neither inherently bound within the text or the reader, but rather "comes into being during the transaction between reader and text" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 929).

Efferent Stance

Rosenblatt's (1994) transactional model is demarcated by two distinct stances, or purposes, which readers take as they approach and continue reading. Though these stances differ, they both fall along a continuum and the reader may experience either stance through the course of the reading (Rosenblatt, 1994). However, the predominant stance is what drives the intent of the reading event. The efferent stance, meaning "to carry away," is the approach readers assume when they want to extract information and retain it after the reading event (Rosenblatt, 1994). The focus is driven to what learning must be done during and after the

reading transaction and "meaning results from abstracting out and analytically structuring the ideas, information, directions, or conclusions to be retained, used, or acted on after the reading events" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 932). This is the type of reading transaction that is predominant in classrooms and academic institutions (Smith, 2012).

Aesthetic Stance

On the opposite end of the continuum lies the aesthetic stance to reading. This approach to reading is significant to the research on adults who read YAL for pleasure, as this stance focuses on what is being "lived through during the reading event" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 932). Extending the iceberg metaphor mentioned above, aesthetic reading accounts for the portion of the iceberg that is not visible from the horizon, but instead, lies buried beneath the ocean water. Aesthetic reading considers the readers "sensations, images, feelings, and ideas that are residue of past psychological events" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 932), which are brought about by the textual cues. As a result, "the aesthetic stance pays more attention to the sensuous, affective, emotive, and qualitative" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 934). In essence, Rosenblatt (1985) posits that the aesthetic stance is a "process in which the reader selects out ideas, sensations, feelings, and images drawn from his past linguistic, literary, and life experience, and synthesizes them into a new experience (p. 40).

Socio-emotional Conceptualization of Reading

Examining the complexity of what occurs during the reading transaction requires a socio-cultural and socio-emotional lens of reading engagement. Socio-cultural lens positions reading as both socially and culturally influenced and as both temporally and contextually dynamic (Gee, 2004; Vygotsky, 1980). Adding the socio-emotional layer of reading positions the act as one that involves emotional and relational cognizance through a dialogical process with the text, with

the self, and with others (Bahktin, 1981; Lysaker, 2007). This socio-emotional engagement process is where reader identity work takes place.

Social imagination.

Social imagination, as conceptualized through Lysaker and Tonge's (2013) Relationally Oriented Reading Instruction (RORI) provides a framework for understanding not only the text, but also others through the story. RORI is a instructional practice, largely used with young children to extend their relational capacities, or their positions in relationships to others. In this framework, young readers are encouraged to interpret "the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and intentions of characters" (Lysaker & Tonge, 2011, pg. 538) of mostly picture books. Drawn from Johnston's (1993) work of social imagination, Carpendale and Lewis's (2004) social understanding, and Baron-Cohen's (2001) theory of the mind, social imagination elaborates on the social benefits of understanding the "thoughts, feelings, and intentions of others" (Lysaker & Tonge, 2013, pg. 632) and how this understanding is critical for "forming and sustaining positive relationships" (Lysaker & Tonge, 2013, pg. 633).

Bruner (1986) describes both the inner and outer world of the reader and how stories provide a space for children to think and feel (the inner landscape of consciousness) and subsequently, act and do (the outer world of action). Lysaker and Tonge (2013) extend this conceptualization through their work with elementary children through RORI, finding through dialogism, "reading comprehension engages the whole person as an embodied activity" (p. 528).

During the transaction between reader and text, readers are in dialogue with the text and self. As Lysaker, Tonge, Gauson, and Miller (2011) state, "the person who reads—the self—has a dialogic, fluid, ongoing set of conversations" (p. 523). Furthermore, they contend, "language, as well as the practices of reading and writing, communicate, construct, and constitute who we

are and how we experience the world in physical, psychological, and phenomenological ways" (p. 523). This dialogic component of social imagination provides a self-text dialogue or what Lipari (2014) describes as interlistening.

Interlistening.

Delineating the prefix and root word of interlistening provides a clearer picture of the act itself. In essence, interlistening is the dialogical conversation that occurs with oneself, where *inter* describes the inter-subjectivity inherent in the act and *listening* encapsulates both speaking and listening. As Lipari (2014) states, "listening is itself a form of speaking that resonates with echoes of everything heard, thought, said, and read" (p. 512). Interlistening is polymodal (gestures, movements, breathing, postures), polychronic (timing, syncopations, repetitions, punctuations), and polyphonic (musicality, volume, tonality). In addition to transpiring across multiple modes, times, and sounds, "interlistening, thus, introduces a way of thinking about language and the self…" (p. 518), a non-linear form of identity work, which moves "flexibly between temporalities, is central to sense making" (Lipari, 2014, p. 518) and allows the past, present, and future to come together in the act of comprehension.

Self-mediation and self-authorship.

Through the dialogical, relational process of interlistening, self-mediation and self-authorship take place. This "appropriation of the identity of a fictional character by the reader" is what Ricoeur (1991) describes as "mediation of the self" and Holquist (1990) and Zunshine (2006) characterize as "self-authorship." Both self-mediation and self-authorship act as a dynamic transformation of the reader through the interactions with the text in specific ways to produce new understandings of self, all of which demonstrate "reading is essentially a relational, dialogic activity of the self" (Lysaker, Tonge, Gauson, & Miller, 2011, p. 523). Within texts,

there lies an opportunity for reimaginations of self—as adopting the realities of the characters (Johnston, 1993). Engaging with texts provides a relational environment to explore concepts of creating a new self (self-authorship) and negotiating the attributes of self already possessed in conjunction with the new perspectives gained from texts (self-mediation). The process of socially interacting with the reading through social imagination and interlistening provide rich circumstances for reading engagement. Through the social imagination, self-mediation process, self-text dialogue, and self-authorship of texts, readers become agentive in both their meaning-making and identity construction (Ricoeur, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Wanzek et al., 2006).

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study suggest YAL is not only engaging for some adults, but also provides them with spaces to conduct self-dialogical, self-mediated identity development, rejecting the linear developmental and essentialized views of identity and subsequently positioning identity as an ongoing, continually dynamic process. This contributes to multiple literacy and psychological fields, as it addresses benefits of adult pleasure reading, advantages and the legitimacy of YAL, and expounds on the relationship between reading and identity.

Delimitations

There is potential for much research within either of the three main concepts of this study. For that reason, I am intentionally seeking out a small sample of participants (8-10) to provide in-depth personal narratives about their reading experiences with YAL. It is not my aim to gather data from a larger population for generalizability purposes. Furthermore, this sample size of adults over the age of 30 who read YAL for pleasure specifically speaks to my personal interests. Because of my background in literacy across multiple age ranges and my cognizance of the lack of adult literacy research, I see this as a field of literacy crucial for further research.

This sample population could potentially vary in age, gender, life experiences, socioeconomic status, and other cultural and social indicators. I'm confident that these readers' personal narratives will satisfy the needs of the present study.

Limitations

Qualitative research seeks not to generalize, but rather to deeply understand the experiences and the narratives of people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). This work seeks to do just that. However, there are research limitations to consider. One such limitation is the fact that I will complete all data analysis. This is an integral component of the qualitative research work, as the researcher is a fixture in the process itself. In doing so, the lenses through which I analyze my data are first filtered through my own subjectivities. Additionally, the participant sample examines a very specific type of reader in addition to the small sample size. These participants did provide some diversity in terms lifestyle choices (sexual orientation, coupled or uncoupled, parents), however this same size was not incredibly diverse in terms of race or gender, with 100% of the participants being White and 80% of the participants being female.

Summary

In this chapter I have explained how the topic of adults over the age of thirty who read YAL for pleasure is of interest and relevance to me, therefore elucidating how this study came to be. I have also discussed my experiences as an adult reader of YAL, which lays the foundation for the rationales of this study. Describing how influential YAL was for me with regard to identity coupled with the benefits the research literature purports YAL provides adolescents, adds to the premise undergirding the propositions of this study. Moreover, in this chapter, I have discussed the notion of pleasurable reading itself, specifically addressing the interconnectedness between pleasurable and engaged reading and the gap within the literacy research regarding

pleasurable reading, particularly among adult readers. Furthermore, I introduce the research questions and theoretical frameworks through which this study seeks those answers and rationalized why answering those questions matter. I briefly discuss the findings of this study to designate the outcomes of the work, which explaining the delimitations and limitations of the study. The final section of this introductory chapter provides an overview of the entire study, organized by chapter.

Chapter Overviews

In chapter two, a review the relevant research is presented, focusing on the literacy research on adult readers and how adult literacy is largely discussed in terms of workplace literacy and adult basic education contexts. Literature with respect to engagement during and with reading is discussed, centering on both cognitive and socioemotional engagements and the construction of identity through dialogism. Finally, the relevant research regarding the genre of YAL is described, elaborating on the historical timeline of the genre, critiques of the genre, and arguments in support of the genre.

Chapter three will discuss the methodologies used to conduct this study and the multiple data analysis procedures used on the data. I provide a rationale for such methodologies and research design as well as explain the participants, the data collection method and analyses, including coding cycles, and post coding analysis.

The findings of the study are thoroughly expressed in chapter four through co-constructed individual participant narratives, using the participants' own words to describe their stories of being adult readers of YAL. In addition, this chapter contains findings which occurred across all the participants in this study.

The overall findings from chapter four are further discussed and elaborated in the final chapter of this study in juxtaposition with the literature presented in chapter two. Also included in chapter five are implications and recommendations for both practice and research. I also share limitations of this work and how my personal subjectivities influence this study. The literature, methodologies, participant narratives, and implications of those experiences all work jointly to produce a larger portrait of adults who read YAL for pleasure.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction

This dissertation seeks to interpret the reading experiences of adult readers who read YAL for pleasure. Specifically, the guiding research questions of this study are:

- Why do adults (30+) read YAL?
- In what ways do adults (30+) engage with YAL?
- In what ways does YAL influence the identity of adult readers (30+)?

This chapter delves into the literature on the three major components of this study: adult readers, engaged reading, and YAL. The discussion of adult readers includes literature on adult remedial readers and those who read for pleasure. Engaged reading literature draws largely from the field of education and examines how engaged reading is defined, where in the reading engagement takes place, how engagement is connected to pleasure, and subsequently influences reader identity. Finally, a review of relevant research on the genre of YAL closes this chapter. This section reviews literature that describes what the genre includes, assumptions the genre makes about adolescents/ce, and critiques of the genre itself.

Adult Readers

Despite calls to address adult reading research (Miler, McCardle, & Hernandez, 2010; Smith, 2000), there remains a void to concentrate on the topic. The majority of research on adult readers positions them in deficit models (Barnes & Kim, 2016; Hall et al., 2014; Majeres, 2005; Tighe & Schatschneider, 2016)--disseminating them into binary groups of proficient and less than proficient (Binder & Borecki, 2008; Majid, et al., 2010)--and focuses on how the instruction of adult reading is most successfully implemented (Greenberg et al,. 2006; Ortlieb & Young, 2016). Adult readers are also discussed in terms of the reading and literacy practices in which

they engage for their professions or in their workplace settings (Belfiore et al., 2004; Uvin & Jurno, 1996; Wolf & Jenkins, 2014). While popular media reports that adult pleasure reading is declining (Blakemore, 2015; Ingraham, 2016) the academic community is remaining largely silent on the topic of adult pleasure reading with only a scant amount of publications in the past ten years (Pecoskie, 2012; Stebbins, 2013).

Adult Literacy

Adult literacy and adult reading research literature is, by and large, concerned with addressing the needs of emergent adult readers through adult basic education (ABE) programs. Extolling the benefits of reading leads to the necessitation of reading as a human right (Post, 2016) and subsequently privileges the instruction of adult emergent readers. Benefits of reading mentioned though the literature include the economic benefits on the workforce (Demetrion, 2005; Montiero & Sharma, 2013; Rocha & Ponczek, 2011; Zepke, 2011), health (Black, Balatti, & Faulk, 2013; Blunch, 2013), sustainability (Post, 2016), and civic engagement (Miller, et. al., 2017). Boatright and Faust (2013) provide a humanistic approach to adult literacy by contending that reading literature does not lead to conclusive readings or understandings, but instead to cognizance of self and relationships to others, indicating that, though important, reading and literature through ABE lenses are not the only components to consider in adult literacy instruction.

Adult Basic Education

As the literature is predominantly concerned with adult literacy in ABE contexts, most frequent discussion of instructional practices saturate the research (Lesgold & Welch-Ross, 2012). A myriad of pedagogical practices imply ABE methodologies are as varied as the students themselves. Scarborough et al. (2013) and Alamprese et al. (2011) suggest specific and

systematic instruction in basic decoding and fluency skills as beneficial for adult emergent readers. Other approaches include computer instruction or technologically assisted instruction (Silver-Pacuilla, 2006). Zepke (2011) argues that while embedding literacy in workplace contexts, a popular method of adult literacy instruction (McKim & Wright, 2012), various procedures for enacting such practices exist. Throughout the research literature, reading and literacy in ABE settings are touted as favorable in fostering civic engagement and community interplay (Quan-Baffour & Romm, 2014). Others purport that non-cognitive behaviors are indicative of reading success in ABE contexts, especially persistence (Greenburg et al, 2006) and transforming dispositions to learning (Crowther et al., 2010). Often, student-centered approaches which draw on students' funds of knowledge (Mosley & Zoch, 2012), interpretations of reading (Jacobson, 2011), and students' personal sociocultural contexts (McKim & Wright, 2012; Muth, 2011) are reported as successful with adult emergent readers. Such student-centered approaches allow for personal responses and discourses to reading. One such approach, reading circles, is specifically addressed in the research literature.

Reading Circles as Pedagogy

A particular pedagogical choice positions the value of pleasure reading and informal reading circles as fertile ground, rich with literary merit and literacy opportunities for emergent and developing adult readers (Duncan, 2012). Noting the reading circles ability to bring more "authentic practices into the [adult] classroom" (Duncan, 2012, p. 79), this approach recognizes adults' desire for self-directed learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Houle, 1961, Knowles, 1975; Ryan & Deci, 2000) through book choices and student-led discussions, in addition to celebrating adult students' multitude of prior experiences, which must be acknowledged for adult student success (Knowles, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Duncan (2012) also suggests reading

circles fulfill the desire for social interaction among adult literacy learners, assisting in learning "from and with one another" (p. 96). Finally, Duncan's (2012) work examining reading circles, shows promise for not only the advancement of reading and writing skills themselves, but also the social literacy involved in critical discourses and resisting dominant assumptions. Reading circles and novels coupled with emergent adult readers serve as a sound pedagogical practice which appropriates actions typical of adults' participating in extracurricular or out-of-work pleasure reading activities, such as book clubs, and utilizes those to extend, develop, and enhance an abundance of literacy skills (Duncan, 2012).

Book Clubs as a Context for Pleasurable Reading

Though book clubs or reading circles are often researched in educational contexts for pedagogical purposes (Addington, 2001; Duncan, 2012), they also serve as contexts for collaborative knowledge creation and sharing (Beach & Yussen, 2011), cultural discourses (Alverez-Alverez, 2015; Farr & Kurtzahn-Beach, 2006; Long, 2003), social and political change (Long, 2003), and intimacy through shared personal narratives (Hall, 2003). Civic engagement through book clubs promotes economic and social justice benefits to participants and the communities in which those participants live and work (Alverez-Alverez, 2015). Additionally, adult book club members indicate the practices promote individual agency (Styslinger, Gavin, & Albright, 2017) while simultaneously advocating social interactions, which decrease loneliness (Rane-Szostak, 1995) and serve as possibilities for participants to collaborate in order to become agents of change (Alverez-Alverez, 2016; Long, 2003). Research indicates book clubs provide multiple opportunities for adults to increase their social capital, collaborate and expand their knowledge, and be agentive in social and political contexts. Yet, much of the research on adult book clubs examines the practices to appropriate them for classroom instructional and

pedagogical means (Beach & Yussen, 2011; Smith, 1996; Styslinger, Gavin, & Albright, 2017), once again privileging educational contexts of reading and marginalizing the practice among adults and as a pleasurable experience.

Psychological Simulation

Whether participating in reading circles or book clubs in education contexts or nonacademic contexts, engaged pleasure reading is often a key component of the successfulness of the practice. Pleasurable reading of fiction has gained notable research ground in the field of psychology. Examining various forms of texts, psychologists gain insight on how the act reading of fiction influences adult readers. Oatley (1994) puts forth a taxonomy of emotions of literary response to elucidate the emotions readers experience as they confront texts, positing that fiction works like a computer simulation for the reader where "simulations run on people's minds" (p.53). Adopting the character's goals, the reader experiences the emotions of the protagonist. However, this experience leads to the co-construction of personal emotions in the readers themselves. Furthermore, readers create mental models of the imagined world of the fictional text and integrate disparate elements of the text, which leads to a unified experience for the reader. Oatley (1994) contends readers "feel moved emotionally to understand themselves" and "sometimes undergo cognitive change" (p. 53).

Mar, Oatley, Djikic, and Mullin (2011) explore the emotions connected to narrative fiction through the reading process--before, during, and after reading. The emotional work readers do through fictive texts is often "central to the experience of change in the ways in which they [readers] viewed themselves, that is to say in their personality" (p. 829). The emotions experienced by readers can lead to "deeper engagement with the text and thus a more elaborate simulation of events depicted" (p. 828). Yet, the authors argue "research on how emotion

influences the mind during reading is severely lacking" (p. 828) with the psychological studies beginning to investigate the myriad emotions influenced by fiction.

Further elaboration on the simulation Oatley (1994) puts forth, Kaufman and Libby (2012) describe "experience-taking" readers enact when reading and the influences of those experiences. Self-merging is a central tenet of the "experience-taking process," where "readers simulate the events of a narrative as though they were a particular character in the story world" (p. 2). In doing so, readers "let go of key components of their own identity" (p. 2). Experience taking, according to Kaufman and Libby (2012) "requires that individuals completely transcend self-other boundaries to become the other" (p.2). Furthermore, the researchers posit "the more readers engage in experience-taking, the more likely they would be to ascribe the protagonist's personality traits to themselves, to share the character's attitudes, beliefs, and goals and to enact the same behaviors performed by the character" (p. 3).

Reading and psychology as closely linked. As cognitive actions and responses to texts often bring about various emotional outcomes and even personality and identity changes as readers assume not only the goals of the protagonists, but also the feelings, beliefs, and characteristics of the protagonists. This illustrates the socioemotional engagements readers of fiction encounter when reading for pleasure and how such engagements influence the mind and behaviors of the reader.

Adult Literacy Summary

Adult literacy research positions adult readers as those who are in emergent literacy contexts such as adult basic education (ABE) institutions and environments of learning (Alamprese et al., 2011; Lesgold & Welch-Ross, 2012; Mosley & Zoch, 2012; Scarborough et al., 2013) and those who gain literacy knowledge through workplace embedded literacies

(McKim & Wright, 2012; Wolf & Jenkins, 2014; Zepke, 2011). Though limited in empirical research in general (Miller, McCardle, & Hernandez, 2010; Smith, 2000), adult pleasure reading practices are minimalistic at best and silence surrounding the topic leaves a gap for extending further research to examine and understand adult pleasure reading practices, benefits, and outcomes. Adult literacy research does indicate book clubs as a promising practice for both ABE and pleasure reading contexts (Alvarez-Alvarez, 2016; Duncan, 2012), noting the ability of book clubs for building engagement for readers through texts and discourse and a co-construction of knowledge in a socially situated practice (Alvarez-Alvarez, 2016; Beach & Yussen, 2011; Gee, 2004).

Engagement with Reading

As previously stated in chapter one, this study assumes pleasure reading always as engaged reading, where engagement is an outcome of pleasurable reading, but pleasure is not necessarily a prerequisite or outcome of engaged reading. If pleasure is no longer present in the reading act, disengagement and, subsequently, abandonment of the text occurs (Csikzentmihayli, 1990; Ripp, 2016). Understanding the myriad definitions and manifestations of reading engagement are crucial to this work. This work specifically asks "In what ways do adult engage with YAL?" and uses theoretical frameworks focused on the process? of reading engagement as a means to gain insight for the interaction itself and the evidence of behaviors indicative of such engagements. Rosenblatt (1994) argues that it is within the transaction that engagement takes place, but how can engagement be observed during this transaction if it is unknown of what reading engagement consists? Though scholars vary on the definition of and expression of engagement, most agree that engagement is beneficial for increasing and extending cognitive and socio-emotional reading behaviors (Cremin, et al. 2014; Guthrie, et al., 2004; Guthrie &

Wigfield, 1999; Ivy & Johnston, 2013; Lysaker et al., 2011). Engagement is an elusive term at best, with meanings from "being involved with" to "establish a meaningful connection with" and even "to participate with," according to dictionary definitions. But what does engagement mean in terms of literacy? Ivey and Johnston (2018) define engagement as "more than just liking a book or getting through it. Students [Readers] engaged in reading, entered the social worlds of the narratives, and took up the perspectives of the characters, negotiating the problems they encountered, weighing difficult decisions, and experiencing characters' emotional-relational lives and the consequences of their decisions" (pg. 144). How does engagement manifest and reveal itself throughout the adult reader of YAL's reading process?

The Transaction—Where Engaged Reading Takes Place

Rosenblatt (1938) posits, engagement with the text takes place in the transaction. Within this transaction, if the reader is engaged, Rosenblatt (1994) postulates, he or she will either "take away" knowledge from the text or connect with the text's beauty. Despite the type of stance with which a reader approaches a text, engagement can occur with aesthetic texts and expository texts intended for knowledge gaining purposes (Rosenblatt, 1994).

Because of the paucity of adult literacy and reading research, especially where engagement in concerned, we rely on the research put forth about adolescence and their practices of engagement with reading practices. Though I am cognizant of the disparity such an act might bring forth, due to the divergent experiences adults and adolescents have, until such adult reader and reading research exists, it is necessary to, as Newton would say, "stand on the shoulders of giants" in the field of literacy engagement and apply those conceptual understandings to this work. Understanding that engagement takes place within the various types of transactions

readers have with texts (Rosenblatt, 1994), we can further separate engagements relevant to this study into two larger classifications: cognitive engagements and socioemotional engagements.

A cognitive experience.

Widely accepted notions of engagement within the field of literacy fall to the research of Guthrie, Wigfied, & You (2012) and their work with Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI)[1], which posits when readers are engaged, they are strategic, using such strategies as: activating prior knowledge, posing questions to themselves while reading, integrating the new knowledge with what is already known, and communicating their ideas, understanding, and reacting emotionally to the texts. Engaged readers show their motivation to read through: high self-efficacy, curiosity about texts, reading challenging texts, taking ownership of the text, choosing relevant texts, and socially interacting with and about the texts (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1999). According to Guthrie, Wigfield, & You (2012), engaged reading also requires reader autonomy and relevancy to the reader, both of which are indicative of the identity work which takes place when readers participate in the act of reading.

Guthrie et al. (2004) contend that engagement is substantiated and exhibited through the evidences of skills-based actions and "cognitive strategies are central to engaged reading" (Guthrie, et al., 2004, p. 404). Through his work with Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI), Guthrie et al. (2004) established that readers in an elementary classroom were more engaged in their reading as due to the implementation of the CORI framework and evidenced by increased comprehension, reading motivation, and a greater frequency of reading strategy use (Guthrie, et al., 2004). Though thoroughly described, Guthrie's understandings of reading

[1] According to the CORI website, "Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) is an instructional program that merges reading strategy instruction, conceptual knowledge in science, and support for student motivation. Believing that "engagement in reading is crucial to lifelong reading," CORI is designed to support reading engagement through science inquiry, strategic skills, and student intrinsic motivation.

engagement function in classroom specific contexts and are exhibited in individual readers, largely in isolation.

Motivation to read.

To discuss engagement void of discussion of motivation would be futile. The two concepts seem to be inextricably linked in a cyclical fashion with engaged reading resulting in increased motivation to read and motivation to read encouraging the act of engaged reading itself, concomitant of one another. For motivation to occur, the expectancy-value model (Eccles., 1983) describes the prerequisites necessary. These include the expectation of success and valuing the activity in which one is participating (Bandura, 1977). In addition, relevancy of reading task to readers' lives also serves as a motivating factor for engaged reading (Deci, 1992; Gambrell, 2011; Guthrie et al., 2007; Purcell-Gates, 1995) for when readers "make connections between the material they are reading and their lives, the become more involved and engaged in comprehending the text" (Gambrell, 2011, p. 173). Sciefele et al. (2012) note a positive correlation between motivation to read and competence, especially with regard for reading for pleasure. In other words, competent readers are more motivated to read and experience engagement during the reading, which subsequently bolsters competency through the act of engaged reading (Morgan & Fuchs, 2006). Furthermore, as Pitcher et al. (2007) articulate, motivation is derived intrinsically, from competence as stated above, and extrinsically, from social interactions such as discussions with peers, family, and even instructors. Overall, motivation and engagement are inseparable and form a mutual synergistic relationship through self-expectation, relevancy, and socially situated contexts.

The socioemotional side of reading engagement.

Though reading engagement is expressed by socially interacting with others (Gambrell, 2011; Guthrie, 1999; Pitcher et al., 2007) there is little to expand upon what is involved with social processes indicative of reading engagement. Research suggests engaged reading is noted by more than solely cognitive outcomes, but instead, cognitive outcomes and behaviors in combination with socio-emotional outcomes and behaviors (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Lysaker et al., 2011).

Social imaginations-relational engagement with texts.

As Ivey and Johnston (2013) suggest and others purport "successful reading depends on engagement in a variety of social contexts" (Lysaker, et al., 2011, p. 521), implying social factors are influential on reading engagement and successful reading outcomes. However, social factors, as we have seen in Ivey and Johnston's (2013) work, is a broad category of interaction, including, but not limited to: social instructional groupings (Matthews & Kesner, 2008), discussions, conversations with other readers about texts (Ivey & Johnston, 2015). One specific social factor, the social imaginations (Lysaker, et al., 2011) clarifies the relational aspect of social reading and those effects on, among other things, the identity of the reader. Additionally, observable instances of social imaginations are representative of engaged reading itself.

Through Rosenblatt's (1938) lenses of imagining and connecting with the truths of others, a relational facet of reading is revealed. Lysaker et al.'s (2011) work explicitly defines and expands this aspect as the social imagination, whereby readers have the "ability to recognize and make inferences about the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and intentions of others" (p. 525). In this construct, reading is not only relational, but also a "dialogic activity of the self" (Lysaker, et al., 2011, p. 523), acting as many dynamic, ongoing, conversations with the self which "become

the raw materials for self-construction," (p. 525) or "the development of the individual," which is negotiated by signs and systems and cultivated in social interplays, including those between the reader, the text, and self (Lysaker et al., 2011).

The dialogic nature of social imaginations is apparent in the act of reading. Through the "introduction of new voices--those of the text" (Lysaker, et al., 2011, p. 527) and the conversation between the "voices of the text and the voices of self," (p. 527) the capacity for a metamorphosis of self is possible. Envisaging texts as "environments" for readers to reimagine themselves by adopting the realities of the characters in the texts (Johnston, 1993), allows for readers to explore the notion of self-authorship. As Ricoeur (1991) asserts, "appropriation of the identity of a fictional character by the reader is a form of 'mediation of the self'" (p. 77). In essence, social imaginations affords readers the occasion for identity work by means of appropriation of characters' realities through a dialogic process amongst the text and self (Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015; Lysaker, et al., 2011).

Ivey and Johnston (2013) consider the socioemotional aspect of engaged reading in their qualitative work, asserting that literacy research on engaged reading is related to identity development through agency (Reeves, 2004) and moral development, along with other facets of individuality (Stensko & Arievitch, 2004). Associating engaged reading with Rosenblatt's (1938) reader response theory, Ivey and Johnston (2013) affirm, "the construction of meaning from text and the socially interactive nature of reading are intimately connected" (p. 256) and informs and is informed by social imagination (Fernyhough, 2008) and dialogism (Hermans & Kempen, 1993), respectively. Ivey and Johnston (2013) draw from the work of Kaufman and Libby (2012) to suggest the benefits of engaged reading include broadening the "social imagination of the reader's own life," which could potentially influence the reader's subsequent

social behaviors. Deep engagement with texts as evidenced through dialogic processes can provide readers a framework for possible selves (Lysaker, 2011; Markus, Nurius, & Goodstein, 1986).

Social construction of identity.

Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) conceptualizations of knowledge as a social construction, this work also defines identity through a social constructivist lens. This postmodern philosophy rejects the objective developmental or essentialized conceptualizations of identity and instead recognizes that identity is formed and shaped by the interactions, memories, and social situations in which people undertake. However, identity formation through interactions, memories, and social situations is but one facet of the social construction of identity concerning this study. Additionally, the dialogues in which a reader participate also inform their identities, including conversations with self, or interlistening (Lipari, 2014), conversations with characters of texts, or social imaginations (Lysaker et al, 2011) and conversations with the text as in dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981).

Engagement Summary

Engagement with texts and literacy is a necessary component for sustained reading (Cremin et al., 2014; Guthrie, 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2004), deriving pleasure for reading experiences (Cremin et al., 2014), and gaining knowledge of others, world, and self from reading (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Lysaker et al., 2011). Rosenblatt (1994) describes the engagement readers experience through both aesthetic and efferent reading as taking place in the transaction or exchange between reader and text. Though much research theoretically describes the engagement one experiences while reading, there remains an indeterminate definition of engagement itself. Measuring the reading engagement process as both cognitive (Guthrie &

Wigfield, 2004) and socioemotional (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Lysaker et al, 2011) provides at least some indication of what significance lies in the reading exchange between reader and text, as Rosenblatt (1994) suggests. This research examines the discrete outcomes of cognitive and socioemotional engagement adults experience while reading the YAL genre and how those engagement inform the social construction of identity.

Young Adult Literature

The third component crucial to this dissertation is the genre of YAL. The impetus for this research is my personal preference for the YAL genre. Throughout this introspective experience known as "writing one's dissertation," I began to question why I gravitated toward this genre as an adult and what was it about the genre specifically that kept me engaged throughout the book. In addition, I was cognizant of the vast amount of identity work I was undertaking during the tenure of the reading. The awareness of these concepts fostered the creation of the research questions for this work. Understanding myself as a reader and even as a person, was greater through my engagement with the YAL genre.

Young Adult Literature Define (Or Not?)

YAL remains an inherently difficult term to define in the sense that it is relational to both culture and society which are dynamic and always in flux (Cart, 2008). Despite this ambiguity, many scholars, publishers, and others associated with literature agree that the YAL genre is written for a readership of 12-18 year olds and contains an adolescent protagonist (Bushman & Haas, 2006; Cole, 2009; Nilsen & Donelson, 2005), though many remain unclear on the definition of YAL itself (Crowe, 1998). Cole (2009) provides more insight on the characteristics of YAL when she asserts that the genre usually presents the following traits:

- The protagonist is a teenager.

- Events revolve around the protagonist and his/her struggle to resolve conflict.
- The story is told from the viewpoint and in the voice of a young adult.
- The genre is written by and for young adults.
- The genre is marketed to the young adult audience.
- Stories don't have "storybook" or "happily-ever-after" endings- a characteristic of children's books.
- Parents are noticeably absent or at odds with young adults.
- The genre addresses coming-of age issues (e.g. maturity, sexuality, relationships, drugs).
- Books contain under 300 pages, closer to 200.

Though Cole (2009) is much more elaborate in her definition of the genre, as Cart (2008) stated, this definition is always in flux, relying on cultural and societal cues for evolution. Additionally, these characteristics still make assumptions and neglect crucial traits of the genre, creating a "narrow and misleading" definition, at best (Cole, 2009, p. 49). Taking a postmodernist approach, one of the aims of this research is to deconstruct and reject the meta-narrative that exists around this definition by demonstrating the benefit adults experience while engaged in reading YAL.

Historical overview.

If, by definition, we consider YAL to be literature written about young adults, the first young adult novel could considerably be Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer* in 1942. However, Daly later admitted that she intended the novel to be published and reviewed as an adult novel, not a young adult novel (Berger, 1994). Instead, S.E. Hinton's 1967 class warfare novel, *The Outsiders* was written not only by Hinton herself as an adolescent, but also to portray a realistic ideal of adolescents across the country. Hinton's success incited the first Golden Age

of YAL (Cart, 2016) by writing authentically and realistically about issues and concerns of adolescents through thematically relevant fiction and rejecting the misrepresentations of young people in books to that point (Cart, 2016). Robert Cormier followed by showing readers the darkness which can ensue during adolescence in his 1974 novel, *The Chocolate War*.

Though the origin of the genre has roots in realism, as the genre evolved, the problem novel was born out of this realism and a disillusionment with the genre began (Cart, 2016). By the turn of the millennium, a wizarding boy named Harry Potter cast a spell on the genre of YAL and the second Golden Age of the genre began (Cart, 2016). Rejecting the realism of authors of the past, YAL authors of the early millennium chose to focus on dystopian settings, magic, and fantasy (Cart, 2016). As the genre continues to flourish, YAL authors of today continue to focus on topics of relevance to teens, by returning to the realism realm, but they do so through diverse characterization and by challenging the typical forms, such as verse novels, graphic novels, and multi-narrative formats (Cart, 2016).

Socioemotional engagement with YAL.

Studying reactions from 71 eighth-grade students after a year of self-selected YAL as the primary source for reading curriculum, Ivey and Johnston (2013) found the reading experience garnered "changes in the students' identities, in their sense of agency, and in their relational, moral, and intellectual lives" (p. 255). Specifically focusing on the students' perspectives to their own engagement elucidates the personal and individualized procedure of reading and the engagement which takes place during that procedure—all of which cannot be measured by standardization (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Ivey and Johnston (2013) state that "engaged reading is fundamentally about highly consequential dimensions of readers' socioemotional lives" (p. 257).

Further expanding Guthrie and Wigfield's (2004) notion of social reading as being collaborative and observing students' social interactions during the reading process, Ivey and Johnston's (2013) work understanding students' perceptions of engaged reading yielded more socioemotional outcomes. Students were cognizant of their own engaged reading because they were reading more outside of sanctioned class reading times and prioritizing reading over other activities (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). In addition, students noted they were not only dialogic about the book, but also with the book, spending a great deal of time not only talking about the book to others, as Guthrie and Wigfield (2004) suggest, but also in relational dialogic conversation with the characters of the book (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Finally, students' noted characteristics of engaged reading also included: changes in personal relationships, shifts in personal identity, both as a reader and as a person, the ability to imagine what is happening in the minds of characters, agency and awareness of personal effects on various contexts, cognizance and acceptance of new and other ideas, and overall more personal satisfaction (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). YAL provides readers with the opportunity to not only increase cognitive behaviors (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2004; Ivey & Johnston, 2013), but also expands socioemotional and relational factors which contribute to the comprehensive self, which is indicative of engagement with reading (Ivey, 2014; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Ivey & Johnston, 2015; Wilhelm, 1997).

Assumptions about Young Adult Literature

Assumptions central to the YAL genre become the stories told, shared, and studied about it. These central themes are crucial in an attempt to understand not only the readership of the genre, but also the discourses which drive further scrutiny and propagation of the genre. A large majority of the assumptions about YAL relate to the identity of the reader (Bean & Moni, 2003; Cart, 2008; Campbell, 2010; Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015). Additional assumptions about YAL

position the genre as a space for trying-on various identities that would otherwise be inaccessible to adolescent (and possibly other) readers (Neilsen, 1998). Final assumptions of YAL are the lack of complexity and rigor involved in the texts of the genre (Jago, 2000).

YAL develops identity.

Ambiguous and multi-faceted in meaning and attributes itself, identity is a complex notion. Where YAL is concerned, identity work prompts and propels readers in the identity formation that takes place during adolescence (Cart, 2016). This includes support for the time of "storm and stress" (Hall, 1904). Much of what has been assumed about YAL comes out of psychologically developmental perspectives that also assume an essentialized adult identity is ultimately reached, and adolescence is a stage that gets us to that essentialized identity.

In particular, YAL is assumed to aid adolescent readers to answer such questions as, "Who am I?" and "Who am I going to be?" and navigate the tumultuous time of "storm and stress" (Hall, 1904) postulated as characteristic of adolescence by adolescent developmental psychologists (Bushman, 1997; Bushman & Haas, 2006; Blasingame, 2007; Campbell, 2010). Through a content analysis of 370 award-winning young adult books, Koss and Teale (2009) report a large percentage (85%) of YAL deals with issues of development, including those that feature adolescent protagonists "finding themselves," "searching for answers," and "finding [their] identity" (p. 567). Though an evolution from the problem novel of the early beginnings of the genre, Koss and Teale (2009) found that much of YAL still focuses on the developmental tasks specific to adolescence, especially where identity formation is concerned.

Development of self and identity is one that it inherently ambiguous. The multifaceted nature of such a term as "identity" leads to various understandings and perpetuations by literacy theorists, critics, advocates, and other associated with YAL. As a result, there are many

arguments surrounding the developmental appropriateness and identity formation to which YAL contributes. Such stories have been positioned as relevant to the sometimes tumultuous time period of adolescence (Gallo; 2001; Stallworth, 2006; Stringer, 1997). Another such rationale is for "coming of age" narratives or those that assist adolescents in discovering who they are, who they are going to become, and how they are positioned with other members of society (Beach, Appleman, Hynds & Wilhelm, 2006; Bean, Dunkerly-Bean, & Harper, 2014). In his Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) white paper, Cart (2008) posited:

> Often described as "developmental," these needs recognize that young adults are beings in evolution, in search of self and identity; beings who are constantly growing and changing, morphing from the condition of childhood to that of adulthood. That period of passage called "young adulthood" is a unique part of life, distinguished by unique needs that are – at minimum — physical, intellectual, emotional, and societal in nature.

By addressing these needs, YAL is made valuable not only by its artistry but also by its relevance to the lives of its readers. And by addressing not only their needs but also their interests, the literature becomes a powerful inducement for them to read, another compelling reason to value it. Cart's (2008) position on the value of YAL extols the virtues of developmentally appropriateness.

Another voice that is often associated with this ideological thinking is noted librarian and YAL critic, Patty Campbell. In a seminal essay in the field of YAL, "Middle Muddle," noted young adult (YA) librarian and critic Patty Campbell (2000) explains:

> The central theme of most YA fiction is becoming an adult, finding the answer to the internal and external question, "Who am I and what am I going to do about it?" No matter what events are going on in the book, accomplishing that task is really what the

> book is about, and in the climactic moment the resolution of the external conflict is linked to a realization for the protagonist that moves toward shaping an adult identity. (pp. 485-486)

Later, in her collection of essays entitled *Campbell's Scoop* (2010), she gathers collections of various authors who share their similar, identity-building experiences with YAL, from various perspectives, such as librarians, teachers, and as readers themselves. Campbell (2000; 2010) also positions YAL as developmentally appropriate for adolescents/ce and helpful in navigating the troubled waters of growing up.

Other advocates in the field who situated YAL as being conducive to progression into adulthood include Bushman and Haas (2006), who, in their pedagogically influential text, *Using Young Adult Literature in the Classroom*, align the background discussion of the time period of adolescence/ts with theorists such as Inhelder and Piaget (1958), Havighurst (1972), Erikson (1968), and Kohlberg and Gilligan (1971), succinctly suggesting that:

> Books may offer young adults what our society does not. Reading books helps young adults in their journey--their rites of passage--into adulthood. Books provide experiences that may help young adults through their adolescent years. Providing young people with YAL, not only in bookstores, but also in the classroom, is imperative if we want adolescents to read about more experiences than they could have on their own. In addition, this literature serves young people in their struggle with identity, with their relationships with adults, and with their choices, which often suggest their concern with moral questions of right and wrong. (p. 28)

Cart (2008), Campbell (2000; 2010), and Bushman and Haas (2006) are but a few voices that posit this ideological thinking regarding adolescent development and YAL. Others echo

their sentiments by describing YAL as a "lifeboat" to navigate troublesome waters (Blasingame, 2007) and providing an opportunity to "grow, develop, and rethink self" (Alsup, 2013, p.182). As postmodernist and post-postmodernist paradigms influence critical literacy, the notions of developmentally appropriateness, identity, and even adolescence itself have been critiqued by many (Kasinath, 2013; Lesko, 2001), which complicates these notions as related to YAL (Petrone, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2014). As Beach, Appleman, Hynds, and Wilhelm (2006) suggest, "developmental theories must be viewed in light of the host of social and political circumstances that surround today's young adults" (p. 27).

Try-on identities.

In addition to the assumption that YAL is beneficial for navigating the adolescent's developing identity, Neilsen (1998) asserts YAL is the space adolescents need to "try-on" identities through their readings. Providing "imaginative possibilities" (p. 23) consisting of metaphorical costumes and masks, Neilsen posits YAL offers readers the opportunity to play with imagination and consider the possibilities presented to them through the protagonists, events, and settings in texts. Also present in Neilsen's (1998) work is an awareness of the implicit and explicit messages texts send adolescents. She calls for pedagogical practices to teach adolescents to read YAL critically to understand not just what the text presents to them, but also how the texts constrain them as well. Much has been empirically researched to examine the boundaries some YAL imposes on readers of color, LGBTQIA readers, and other readers considered outside hegemonic norms or engaging in nontraditional, institutionalization conceptions of reading (Kirkland, 2011; Sciurba, 2015; Sutherland, 2005).

Finally, coupling the expectation that YAL provides a space for adolescents to understand what is happening in the developmental, evolutionary stage of their lives and that it

also provides an opportunity to test the theoretical waters through characters and events, Cart (2008) asserts that YAL is the perfect medium for adolescents to make sense of their world. YAL is relevant to adolescents and "by addressing not only their needs, but also their interests," the value of YAL as a sense-making space is all the more clear (Cart, 2008, para 9). Furthermore, YAL serves as a framework for understanding themselves, understanding others, and understanding the world in which they inhabit (Cart, 2008).

Critiques of YAL

As explained above, many of the discourses and discussions surrounding the genre of YAL make assumptions about the readership and of the genre itself. Calls to diversify YAL and pedagogical practices utilizing YAL should consider self-studies to provide readers texts "to fit their socially-situated identities" (Kirkland, 2011, p. 207), rather than confining them to stereo-typed and ascribed identities. Both the explicit and implicit messages in YAL can send adolescent readers messages which influence their identities (Crisp & Knezek, 2010; Engles & Kory, 2013; Kirkland, 2011).

Lack of diversity.

Speaking on the lack of diversity in children's and YAL, Rudine Sims Bishop (1982), in her seminal work *Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction*, metaphorically describes books as mirrors, windows, and doors. YAL that acts as a mirror reflects the readers' own image, while a window acts to show readers what lies beyond themselves in terms of diversity of people, and finally YAL can act as a door that readers can walk through to become a part of the world the author has created (Bishop, 1982). Christopher Myers (2014) extends this metaphor to also include children's literature and YAL as a map to show readers the possibilities of their future. Though these metaphors are speaking to

the lack of diversity in children's and YAL, it also speaks to the possibilities of what YAL can offer any reader. Sciurba (2014) troubles these metaphorical notions of mirrors through her study with Black adolescent boy readers, finding while diversity in YAL has improved, cultural and gender complexities and nuances are often neglected. Furthermore, Sciurba (2014) positions textual relevance on a mirror-window continuum, rather than as two discrete notions; in texts, readers identified with seeing their own reflection or ones that held little resemblance. While Bishop's (1982) metaphor is a starting point for what children's and YAL does for readers in terms of identity, like identity itself, it is much more aggregate.

Furthering the discussion on diversity (or the lack thereof) in children's books and specifically, YAL, We Need Diverse Books, a grassroots organization, seeks to assuage this disparity by aiming to "create a world in which all children see themselves in the pages of a book" (WNDB website). By fostering programs in classrooms, for authors and illustrators, and mentorships, We Need Diverse Books supports their vision of promoting diversity in children's and YAL. Prompted by lack of people of color in children's literature (Meyers, 2013), book publishers Lee and Low determined in 2013, only 10% of children's literature contains multicultural content. To further elaborate on this point, the Cooperative Children's Book Center housed at the University of Wisconsin, completed a content analysis in 2013 to find that of the 1183 human characters portrayed in children's literature, only 124 were people of color, which is approximately 10.57% ("Publishing Statistics on Children's Books about People of Color and First/Native Nations and by People of Color and First/Native Nations Authors and Illustrators," 2018). Finally, authors Ellen Oh and Malinda Lo took to social media to lament about the underrepresentation of diversity in kidlit. In a twitter response to a 2014 BookCon panel of all white, male authors, the two, with author Aisha Saeed, began the

#WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign, prompting the genesis of the grassroots organization. While YAL may lack diversity, it seems as if great efforts are being made to rewrite the narrative about the diverse representations in the genre ("Publishing Statistics on Children's Books about People of Color and First/Native Nations and by People of Color and First/Native Nations Authors and Illustrators,"2018).

The Youth Lens.

Understanding the benefit of YAL for all readers requires reading critically to challenge the traditional hegemonic structures that dominate our society (Latrobe & Drury, 2009; Soter, 1999). This happens when readers apply feminist, racial, Marxists or any other lens that questions the dominant views and assumptions, not only considering what are the heteronormative positions in society, but also considering how to challenge those notions to include more diverse representations and disrupt the "standard way of thinking." The Youth Lens (Petrone, Sarigianides, Lewis, 2014) is one such lens. Drawing largely from the work of Nancy Lesko (2001), who positions adolescence as a sociocultural rather than a biological construction, the Youth Lens questions the ubiquitous portrayal of adolescents throughout our culture, but specifically through YAL. Furthermore, the Youth Lens "scrutinizes the representations of adolescence and adolescents in texts" (Petrone, Sarigianides, Lewis, 2014, p. 508) to question how ideas about youth represented in YAL get created and circulated and to challenge the accuracy of the stereotypes of adolescence/ts represented in YAL.

The central tenets of the Youth Lens provide a starting point for scrutiny and critical reading of YAL. The first central tenet of the Youth Lens positions adolescence as a construct in that the experiences of youth are always influenced and negotiated by social factors such as discourse, politics, and cultural practices. Secondly, the Youth Lens rejects the notion of

adolescence as a universal experience, pushing back on the incomplete stereotype (Adiche, 2009) that is often presented in the biological construction of adolescence. Adolescence, according to the second tenet, is influenced greatly by "individuals' positionalities and circumstances" (Petrone, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2014, p. 509). The third notion represented in the Youth Lens is the consequences of adolescence conceptualizations. In other words, positioning adolescence as "coming of age" or as in a temporary phase of identity construction such as the biological positioning, can have lasting impacts on adolescents, constraining them to a forever state of "becoming" rather than "being" (Petrone, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2014). Identity crisis can ensue, concerning adolescents with who they will become rather than who they are now (Petrone, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2014). Finally, the Youth Lens examines the act of adolescence as a symbolic placeholder of various emotional fears and expectations for a larger population. This notion positions the whole population of adolescence as a way to metaphorically carry out "symbolic meanings beyond those tied to the individual youth" (p. 511).

The biological/psychological/physiological construction of adolescence typically positions them with a deficit model (Petrone et al., 2014). Being an adolescent is implicitly described as negative with little to no positivity ascribed to the time period. Additionally, this construction positions adolescents as "less than" by describing them as coming into being, in a future sense, rather than acknowledging their value in the present (Petrone et al., 2014)

The Youth Lens provides a much-needed critical lens through which to analyze YAL. Adolescence/ts can be stereotyped through YAL and the Youth Lens addresses the reification of these stereotypes and how these came to be accepted as cultural social norms. Additionally, the Youth Lens addresses the danger of such reifications by problematizing what YAL says about adolescents through the texts. The Youth Lens "works in relation to—and develops from—these

prior critiques and brings forward ideas distinct to the stage known as adolescence and the youth expected of—or excepted from—this category" (Petrone, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2014, p. 524). Furthermore, the Youth Lens offers the structure necessary to question the commentaries, ideologies, and stereotypical assumptions the YAL genre makes about its own readership. This analysis contributes in supporting adolescents and their advocates in combating the predominate positions in society and with constructing a counter-narrative to speak back to the stereotypical assumptions made about them. Applying the Youth Lens also precipitates the questioning of larger "cultural understandings of adolescence" (p. 526), including the consequences of adult's and school's conceptions of adolescents/adolescence. These acts of agency position "youth as producers of sociocultural understandings, rather than as passive recipients of circulating images of youth," (p. 526) which is central to the notions of critical reading (Soter, 1999).

Young Adult Literature Summary

As Rosenblatt (1994) contends the transaction is not only where engagement takes place, but also a significant exchange between the reader and the texts, YAL is a salient part of the transaction under study in this research. Much like engagement, the parameters of what is considered YAL is ambiguous (Cart, 2008). However, throughout the evolution of the genre, the discourses and assumptions about the genre remain under scrutiny. YAL is assumed to be developmentally appropriate for adolescents in assisting in their navigation of the "storm and stress" (Hall, 1904) of the time period. Additionally, assumptions posit YAL as beneficial for allowing adolescents to "try-on" identities (Nielsen, 1998), providing readers with the opportunity for sense making in the pages of the books (Cart, 2008). Yet, many also critique YAL for its lack of complexity (Jago, 2000; Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2002) and diversity (Koss & Teale, 2009). Challenging those assumptions are discourses elaborating on the intricacies

(Glaus, 2014; Alsup, 2013; Conners, 2013) and diversity (McNair, 2016) of YAL and of adolescents themselves (Petrone, Lewis, & Sariganiades, 2015), illustrating the relevancy and authenticity of the genre for a gamut of readers.

Chapter Summary

By understanding the three major components of this research, adult literacy, engagement, and YAL, through a review of the literature, gaps within each are revealed. Adult literacy research as a whole is a largely under-researched subsection of the literacy field. Though the overall goal of education is oft cited as "creating lifelong readers" (Atwell, 2007; Kittle & Gallagher, 2018; Miller, Kelley, & Lesesne, 2014; Pruzinsky, 2014; West, 2002), once readers become adults, the sparseness of literature regarding their reading practices is disparaging. For that reason, understanding what is engaging about texts for adult literacy practices seldom occurs. Additionally, a term as ubiquitous, but ambiguous as "engagement" troubles the conceptualizations of reading as various researchers observe and measure engagement in multiple ways, to say nothing of the fact that reading engagement and ways to promote such engagement tend to the be sole domain of children and adolescents primarily in educational institutionalized contexts. Finally, understanding the definitions, history, assumptions, and critiques of the genre of YAL, aid in problematizing the genre as exclusively advantageous for adolescents. This dissertation seeks to challenge the assumptions of the genre of YAL and provide literary merit to the genre by examining adults who read the genre and interpreting the ways in which they engage with the genre, which, in turn, will add to the conversation about the genre itself in addition to adult literacy research.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This study seeks to answer the question of how and why adults engage with young adult literature and how this engagement influences their identities. Paradigmatically, my constructivist beliefs influence both my ontology and epistemology. Believing that knowledge is constructed or created from experiences (Bruner, 1990; Crotty, 2015; Dewey, 1916; Piaget, 1938; Vygotsky, 1980) rather than existing independently, the theoretical and methodological lenses through which this work is conducted relies on individual narratives co-constructed to understand the phenomenon under examination. This chapter explains the research design methodologies and rationales for such design choices and how they were carried out in this study of adults who read young adult literature for pleasure.

This chapter opens with an explanation of the methodology chosen to guide this dissertation study, especially focusing on the relevancy and why it is applied. This is followed by an explanation of my paradigmatic alignment, which informs my epistemology and ontology for the design of this study. Following these rationales, a cursory review of the theoretical frameworks supporting this study appears. While these are more thoroughly outlined in chapter two, a brief review here serves as a reminder for the theoretical lenses through which this study is filtered. Following the theoretical review is a description of narrative inquiry and instrumental case study. These methodologies are largely drawn upon to co-construct the cohesive methodology of this work. This section includes a description of the design model and justification for implementation of this design. After the buttressing of this study has been explained through the methodology, I elaborate on the pilot study I conducted and how the pilot study informed this dissertation process. Finally, I close the chapter with descriptions of participants, data collection methods, and coding schemes used to analyze the data.

Design Definition and Rationale

This study draws on both narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelley, 2000) and instrumental case study design (Stake, 1995), blending the two into one succinct design of narrative instrumental case study. Narrative instrumental case study utilizes narrative inquiry to understand the individual stories which people tell about themselves as readers and how the YAL genre has influenced their identity/ies. Furthermore, this design makes use of those individual narratives to explicate a larger narrative of the phenomenon of adults who read young adult literature (YAL).

At the onset of this chapter, it is necessary to elaborate on the rationale for the design choices of this study. Combining narrative inquiry and instrumental case study design allows for a deeper understanding of both the participants' individual stories and the commonalities and differences of each. Individual stories, while important independently (Riessman, 2008), also contribute to a larger understanding of the motivations of adults who read young adult literature. Though I seek to comprehend adults' engagements with young adult literature and how that engagement influences their dynamic identity, I am cognizant of the nature of qualitative work and the fact that new and germane information can emerge from the data analysis process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

Paradigmatic Alignment

Influencing the design choices and rationales for those choices through this study are the fundamental concepts of the constructivist paradigm (Bruner, 1990; Dewey, 1916; Piaget, 1938; Vygotsky, 1980). Within that paradigm are several applicable nuances, such as social constructivist ideologies (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1980) and the researcher as interpretivist, who makes meaning from interpreting constructed knowledge, as in bricoleur (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2013; Schwandt, 1994). Bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) draws on a range of tools and methods for researchers to interpret and subsequently tell stories about the world. These beliefs about constructivist paradigms, guide the action of this work (Guba, 1990). As a truism, constructivists believe that knowledge is constructed, rather than discovered (Crotty, 2015). As Lincoln and Guba (2013) assert in the *Constructivist's Credo*:

> Encounters within the surround—objects, events, and life forms, including other persons—provide a store of sensory memories which the individual processes into forms that seem to "make sense," that is, forms that organize-reconstruct-sense experiences and make them meaningful. This world is made sensible—that is, made to make sense—by the order that human beings impose on events, situations, and circumstances. (p. 44)

This constructivist notion is touted as individually constructed (Piaget, 1936) or socially constructed (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1980).

This work specifically examines the social construction of knowledge through both the reading process and through the retellings of those processes in narratives. Throughout the reading process, there is a co-construction of knowledge (Spivey, 1997) with the author, text, reader (Rosenblatt, 1938), and other potential readers through conversations (Fish, 1980) about young adult literature. This is followed by a co-construction of knowledge in the retelling of readers' narratives with themselves and with the researcher. This co-construction of knowledge is salient in this study's design and is woven through the theoretical and methodological frames that guide this work with the understanding that knowledge is constructed socially (Vygotsky, 1980), in communities of practice (Fish, 1980) and "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality, as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interactions between human beings and their world" (Crotty, 2015, p. 42). This work examines the socially

constructed and socially relational practice of adults reading young adult literature and the construction of meaning to their identities and, subsequently, worlds.

Restatement of Theoretical Frameworks

As discussed at length in the previous chapter, Louise Rosenblatt's (1994) conceptualization of reader response theories posits the engagement happens at the transaction. The reader brings all of the past experiences and knowledge to the reading interchange and creates meaning, in concert, with the text. Neither the text nor the reader holds inherent meaning on their own, but together meaning is constructed (Rosenblatt, 1994). Examining participant responses to the reading experience will give insight to the engagement occurring within the transaction while their own narratives of their experience with this particular genre of stories provides awareness into the phenomenon as a whole (Rosenblatt, 1994).

While Rosenblatt's (1938/1994) reader response theory indicates the point at which the engagement takes place, she fails to include the social aspects of reading. Socioculturally, literacy is contextually dependent (Heath, 1983; Lareau, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 1995), but specific theoretical frames for this work relate to the identity of the reader, which is addressed through conceptualization of interlistening (Lipari, 2014) and self-authorship (Lysaker, 2011)—a socio-emotional nuance to sociocultural literacy. Interlistening, as Lipari (2014) posits, is a way of relationally thinking about language and self. As readers engage with a text, the inner dialogue intercedes the process of self-mediation and, eventually, self-authorship (Lysaker, 2011). Through these inner dialogues and with the text, readers co-construct a new awareness of self and reconcile the tensions of combining new learned attributes with preexisting notions and belief systems to negotiate new awareness of self (Holquist, 1990; Lipari, 2014; Lysaker, 2011; Zunshine, 2006). Interlistening drives the self-authorship process and allows readers to consider

who they were, are, and will be through the text (Lipari, 2014). Self-authorship, then, allows the reader to be, metaphorically speaking, a book to which the ending is not yet written and the process of interlistening aids in the composition.

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

For the past many years, social scientists have relied on narrative inquiry as a methodology to better understand the human subjective experience by making peoples' stories the central focus (Clandinin, 2006, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Importance of story as a method for awareness of self and others has existed since Aristotle's time (Bruner, 2002). More recently, narrative inquiry has permeated many social science fields, such as anthropology, history, psychology, sociology, communications, and sociolinguistics (Riessman, 2008) which speaks to the universality of narrative inquiry and of stories themselves. As humans, we know what we know, through stories--relying on them to help us "make sense of our existence" (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 576).

What Is Narrative Inquiry

Because of the variance in contextual influences on narratives, there is no determinate definition of exactly what a narrative is (Riessman, 2008). Labov (1982) purports that narratives may be discrete units of discourse. Through Myerhoff (1978) and Ellis and Patti's (2014) work we examine life stories as narratives. Mishler (1999) presents narrative as focusing on a particular influence in people's lives. Though myriad definitions abound, this work best conceptualizes narrative as Riessman (2008) describes: Narratives are "long sections of talk—extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of a single or multiple research interviews" (Riessman, 2008, p. 6). What is salient throughout, however, is the meaningful pattern depicted in the narrative, which connects otherwise arbitrary and possibly unrelated

events or ideas (Salmon & Riessman, 2008). This work weaves researcher interpretations of participant narratives and participant discourses of their reader lives and experiences with YAL to create a larger narrative about adults who read young adult literature-an infinite regression of narratives.

Narratives play a significant part in our lives; they aid in our construction of our realities (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013), and help us understand our existence (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Largely, narratives are "the way in which individuals represent and make sense of past experience, evaluate experiences in the present, and plan and anticipate future experiences" (Garvis, 2015, p. 1). Not only are narratives integral to the sense-making that is required of this so-called experience of life, but they are also culturally determined (Bruner, 1986), taking shape in contextually and socially situated experiences. Bruner (1986) also posits that narratives are oral discourses which communicate lived or imagined events to others. Furthermore, narratives are what people employ to construct and reconstruct who they are (Bruner, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kenyon & Randall, 1997; Mishler, 2004; Watson, 2007).

Historical overview of narrative inquiry.

Quantitative data, on the whole, has largely been regarded as the epitome of academic research due to the generalizability of numeric data and reliance on behaviorism as a method of data collection (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). However, as the rejection of positivist notions were the genesis for the interpretive turn of research in the social sciences, acceptance of narrative analysis prompted the awareness of real tales described by the "subjectivities of investigator and participant alike" (Riessman, 2008, p. 17). As such, the interpretive turn became synonymous with four major shifts in diverse social contexts taking place in the early 1960s (Langellier,

2001). According to Langellier (2001) these major shifts were: 1. A rejection of positivist and realist epistemologies. 2. Literary memoir gaining popularity. 3. Awareness and acceptance of new identity groups, specifically marginalized identities such as women, African Americans, and homosexuals. 4. Exploration of personal life through therapeutic culture. Furthermore, behaviorism as social science research continued to wane in the early 1980s as qualitative researchers become more concerned with the understanding involved in observable human actions and interactions, even if those understandings are based on assumptions and interpretations (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Cognizance of the myriad "ways of knowing" led Geertz (1983) to provide a metaphorical account of knowing, while Bruner (1986) more broadly described ways of knowing as a binary systems of traditional positivistic approaches to social sciences and more narrative ways of knowing. Polkinghorne (1988), through psychological lenses, posited theoretical clarifications for narrative ways of knowing. Additionally, literary critics such as Barthes (1975) and Bakhtin (1981) applied social science strategies for meaning-making in literature, positioning their approaches as useful tools for narrative research. To explicate how engagement with narrative produces learning and growth, Coles (1989) reported about the moral development which transpires through narrative, followed shortly thereafter by Bateson's (1990) revelation into the importance of reflection in narrative over time and throughout the lifespan. In 2000, Clandinin and Connelly's personal, seminal work on narrative inquiry propelled the methodology as the most convincing way to study and report human interactions and experiences. Each of these contributions explained the importance of narrative for understanding human experiences and enriched the evolution of narrative inquiry as both a methodology and a phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Functions of narrative.

Narratives serve specific purposes and functions for the teller and the listener (Riessman, 2008). Among these functions, we tell narratives to recall and make sense of the past, persuade our audience, engage and entertain our audience, even mislead our audience (Riessman, 2008). Individual narratives construct our identities (Riessman, 2008) and are used to inform others and the storyteller about who they are (Yuval-Davis & Silverman, 2002). Furthermore, narratives are tools for sense-making (Freeman, 2002).

Recognizing that narratives are not only told by individuals, but also groups allows for the rich complexity and depth of narrative inquiry to not only alter individual identities, but also mobilize groups and foster a camaraderie within groups (Riessman, 2008). Harnessing narratives provides humanistic perspectives from marginalized groups, which, when told, can subsequently incite individuals and groups to become change agents in their communities and workplaces (Faber, 2002).

Why Use Narrative Inquiry?

Because this study is concerned with adults' rationales for reading YAL and their engagement with the genre in addition to how the literature influences their lives, narrative inquiry allows this specific population to share the narratives of their experiences with YAL. "Telling stories about difficult times in our lives creates order and contains emotions, allowing a search for meaning and a connection with others" (Riessman, 2008, p.10). I would argue the telling of stories about any times, not just the difficult ones, in our lives is beneficial to the sense-making process of identity construction (Freeman, 2002; Yuval-Davis & Silverman, 2002). This study seeks to understand and interpret the narratives adults construct about why they chose to read young adult literature, why they chose to read specific titles, how those titles and passages

influenced their identities, and how those titles, passages, and the genre as a whole has prompted change within their identities.

Importance of autobiography, self-reflection, and narrative inquiry.

Kenyon and Randall (1997) discuss the concept of "restorying our lives," or the notion of personal growth through autobiographical reflection. In thinking about my personal stories of stories, or the stories I told about my personal relationship with the YAL genre and even specific young adult literature texts, there became a clear link between the types of YAL I chose to read and how I viewed myself or how I wished to view myself. As Coles (1989) found, the engagement with those narratives influenced my personal learning and growth. In addition, it served as what Caine, Estafan, and Clandinin (2013) call "sense making of our [my] existence"—self-sense-making.

The relational, social aspect of narrative inquiry cannot be ignored. Solely examining my personal stories about stories, or self-sense-making should not just be a reconstruction of my own personal experiences, but rather, my stories should be shared "in relationship both to the other and to the social milieu" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Realizing how my own storied experience is crucial to my identity (McAdams et al., 2006), and the social nature of narrative inquiry, leads me to question how other adults' self-sense-making has been influenced, shaped, or altered through the reading of young adult literature. My own personal experiences reading YAL allow me to better understand and acknowledge my experiences as an adult and therefore, being ever cognizant of narrative as a beneficial means to understanding the human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I am seeking to gain awareness of the myriad narratives adults who read YAL share about how the genre influences their identity.

Instrumental Case Study Design

Though narrative instrumental case study will be the methodology employed for participants to share their individual stories, instrumental case study design will also be implemented to "go beyond the case" (Stake, 2006, p. 8) and to clarify the idiosyncrasies of each participant's lived experiences of the phenomenon. Instrumental case study design enables identification of commonalities and differences within the boundaries defining a case (Bullough, 2015) and seeks to thoroughly explain an issue. There is no generalizability with instrumental case study design (Stake, 1995). Instead, rich description (Geertz, 1983) focuses on an individual experience with situations encountered by the case (Stake, 1995). Regardless of the individualistic description of the situations, the case is of secondary concern in instrumental design, only serving to facilitate the awareness of the phenomenon itself (Stake, 1995). Instrumental case study design is advantageous for this research as it seeks to illustrate "how the concerns of researchers are manifest in the case" (Stake, 2000, p. 439). In other words, this research will utilize narrative inquiry to determine individual adult reader's stories, which will then be examined to better understand the phenomenon of why these particular adults enjoy the young adult literature genre.

Since instrumental case study design seeks to understand a phenomenon within a bounded context (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2006), this study specifically seeks to interpret the phenomenon of adults age 30 and older who read young adult literature for pleasure. These parameters serve as the boundaries for the case. Each individual participant's narrative will contribute to the case, which is, in this particular study, the narrative of the phenomenon of adults age 30 and older who read young adult literature for pleasure. It is through thick, rich

description (Geertz, 1983) of not only the individual narratives, but also the collaborations of narratives to explain this single instrumental case (Stake, 2006).

Narrative Instrumental Case Study

The methodology in use throughout this work is narrative instrumental case study design. Drawing on characteristics of both narrative inquiry and instrumental case study to construct an amalgamation of the two creates a more robust methodology for understanding the way individual narratives function to tell larger stories about groups. Making use of individual narratives about YAL and adult identity experiences aid in the clarification of the overall narrative that is told about adults who read YAL (Riessman, 2007).

Pilot Study

As a social constructivist who believes knowledge is constructed through human practice and interaction with others and their world (Crotty, 2015), I found it fruitful to design a pilot study to inform my dissertation work. In the fall of 2017, I completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols for social research. At that time, the design was a collective case study (Stake, 1995) and only sought to understand the first two research questions asked in my dissertation work. Those questions were:

1. In what ways do adults (age 30+) engage with young adult literature?

2. What are the rationales adults (age 30+) provide for reading young adult literature?

I used semi-structured interview methods (Denzin, 2001; Mishler 1986) to inquire about three adults' reading of young adult literature. Once the interviews were complete and the data transcribed, I executed three rounds of coding, with the first being in vivo, followed by process coding, and finally, descriptive coding. Simultaneously, I was enrolled in an advanced qualitative research course which allowed me to become intimate with my data corpus. Through

the coding process and through artistic and narrative interpretations and representations of the research (Leavy, 2015; Saldaña, 2016), the theme of identity was threaded throughout the individual case studies. This was a surprising findings, as the pilot was not conducted to consider identity, but simply engagement with YAL texts.

Through this co-construction of knowledge about other adult readers' rationales for reading YAL, along with my own personal motivations for reading YAL, I was cognizant that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engaged with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 2015, p. 43). Each of these participants, as varied as they were, had all constructed their own meanings as they interpreted their world as an adult reader of young adult literature and as engaged readers interpreting the world in the texts they chose to read.

The pilot study I conducted was beneficial for many reasons. Through analytic memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2016) during the pilot process, I was able to constantly reflect on the increasing complexity of this study (Saldaña, 2016). In keeping with constructivist paradigms, this reflection allowed me to integrate this new knowledge I was gaining into the prior knowledge I had previously established through my interpretations of my own world (Crotty, 2015).

Pilot Study-What I Learned

First, conducting the pilot study allowed me the benefit of carrying out the design process from conception to end. This brought about many advantages as I was able to see how methodological designs inform decision making throughout the process, including interview protocols and coding styles. Although the individual reader's narrative story is of importance to me as a researcher and to this work, the greater interest lies in the phenomenon of adults who read young adult literature. By conducting the pilot study, I was able to determine this and select

more appropriate methodologies to more robustly explore the phenomenon rather than the individual participant's narratives. Carrying out the pilot study allowed me to revise the methodology from collective case study, which focuses on the individual cases (Stake, 1995) to instrumental case study which aims to understand and interpret the phenomenon (Stake, 1995/2006)

Secondly, I gained a great deal of knowledge from my co-participants as we worked together to interpret the worlds of adult readers of YAL and the worlds in the texts to gain meaning to apply to our own lives. The realization of the importance of identity led to a third research question for this dissertation study as identity became a much larger piece of the puzzle. The third question became:

- In what ways does young adult literature influence the identity of adult readers (30+)?

Because identity and the intricacies of the concept became an important finding in my pilot study, across all the cases, I was able to focus a specific question on this complex notion in an attempt to gain understanding of adult identities and how young adult literature informs those identities. This also led to further scrutiny of the relationship between reading and psychology. For that reason, it was prudent to adopt the psychological definition of identity, which states identity is:

> 1. an individual's sense of self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles. Identity involves a sense of continuity, or the feeling that one is the same person today that one was yesterday or last year (despite physical or other changes). Such a sense is derived from one's body sensations; one's body image; and the feeling that one's memories, goals, values,

expectations, and beliefs belong to the self. Also called personal identity. (APA Dictionary of Psychology. 2018. "Identity." Retrieved from https://dictionary.apa.org/identity)

Finally, my pilot study allowed me to see the need for a greater sample size. Though I was able to gather a rich amount of data from the three participants in the pilot, this sample size is limited and broadening the number of participants will garner more narratives to build the robustness of the case study. Because the aim of qualitative studies is not to generalize, but rather concentrate on the individual (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013), sample sizes should not be so great as to produce conclusions, but rather sample size should be indicative of saturation (Bowen, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Guest et al. (2006) give two indicators of such saturation: 1) Attainment of no additional new material and, 2) Further coding is no longer feasible.

In terms of this study, it is a seemingly impossible task to fail to attain new information. Each individual adult YAL reader's perspective will vary in some way, which makes attainment of no additional new material an impossibility. Additionally, the vast amount of new information will inevitably lead to subsequent coding, negating Guest et al.'s (2006) propositions of saturation for individual participant narratives. While saturation does not seem feasible, crystallization does. Crystallization (Ellingson, 2009) provides multiple perspectives through numerous forms of inquiry, in essence, allowing for an "infinite variety of shapes, substance, transmutations, multidimensions, [and] angles of approach" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963). This work seeks to attain a text which provides crystallization through thickly described narratives from multiple diverse participants. In addition, knowledge production will be through

traditional constructivist format, such as dialogic interviews, but also interpretive formats with an awareness of how context and researcher reflexivity influence the work.

Throughout my pilot study I responded to and conversed with the data through analytic memos (Charmaz, 2006). These memos served as multi-functional, allowing me both the space to be involved with the data, catch my thoughts, capture comparisons, converse with myself (Charmaz, 2006), and also to be creative with the data, constructing found poems and autobiographical accounts of my own personal experiences with reading YAL (Saldaña, 2016). As the process of analytic memos proved to be very fruitful in construction of multiple ways of knowing, this habit was continued throughout this dissertation work, allowing for both constructivist, creative, and interpretive production of knowledge of and about the data. Ellingson (2009) suggests crystallization utilizes more than one genre of writing. Though I am cognizant of the fact that I am limited to some extent in form, as this is a dissertation, there are multiple opportunities to creatively report the data (Leavy, 2015), even within the memo process, including, but not limited to: poetry (Manning, 2018; Percer, 2002), narrative short stories (Bochner, 2001; Riessman, 1993), pivotal scenes written as dramatic readings (Saldaña, 2016), graphic novel panels (Gallman, 2009), and evocative writing (Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

The importance of researcher reflexivity is not to be dismissed. In fact, Ellingson (2009) suggests researcher reflexivity is so salient it bolsters the crystallization of the data and provides more validity and trustworthiness through its inclusion. Through my reflexivity, creative exploration of my personal narratives, and my interpretations and creative reporting of others' narratives, crystallization occurs and the constructivist nature of this work is reiterated.

Reflexivity

As a researcher, I am keenly aware of the impossibility of being a "disembodied researcher" (Giltrow et al., 2005, p. 209). My design, collection, and analysis choices and method—even my very presence—all influence the outcome of the work I am doing. To imply they do not would be foolhardy and irresponsible for me as a researcher.

I am cognizant of how my gender, race, and personal circumstances influence my work and position me to afford privileges and power that my participants may not have. As a female, I am aware of the socialized assumption of reading as a feminized practice (Tepper, 2000), which frees me from the social fear of being seen in public reading or devoting a large amount of time to the act of reading. Furthermore, as a middle-class citizen, I am conscious of the ability I have to participate in reading, thinking, and reflecting as a leisure activity. As a doctoral student, I am aware of how my position situates me with my participants who may or may not have degrees of any kind, causing them to feel social pressure to answer interview questions in inauthentic ways.

With regard to YAL, as a White, heterosexual woman, I am mindful of the likelihood of my race, sexuality, and gender being represented within the pages of the YAL texts I choose to read while others' races, sexual orientations, and genders are absent from those pages. This is crucial to this work as identity influences of YAL are integral to the study's research questions.

As an avid adult reader of YAL, I see the value in the genre as a whole as well as for adults from a variety of positions and intersections. Furthermore, as I read YAL, I am constantly aware of how my own identity is altered, affected, and influenced through those YAL narratives. All of these ideologies and beliefs I hold and uphold me are perpetually influencing my researcher self, the work I am doing, and the way in which I do that work.

Procedures

This study utilized semi-structure dialogic interviews (Denzin, 2001; Mishler 1986) and verbal protocol interviews (Ericsson & Simon, 1998; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995) of five participants at least 30 years of age or older who read young adult literature for pleasure. The interviews collected were then analyzed using multiple coding cycles to determine codes, categories and themes across the narratives (see Tables A1-A4).

Participant Selection

As an avid reader over the age of thirty who prefers to read the young adult literature genre, I have become aware of a growing group of adults with similar preferences. I am continually surprised by how many of my peers enjoy reading the young adult literature genre. My desire to illustrate the various perspectives of many adults who read YAL led me to seek out a certain type of participant and employ purposeful sampling (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). For example, participants in this study were readers of young adult literature for pleasure. Professionals who read young adult literature for pleasure, but also do so for their occupation were not considered because the lenses through which they read YAL could be attuned to pedagogical practices. Additionally, participants should read YAL for pleasure at an equal or greater rate than other reading materials. Implementing Maximum Variation Sampling (Patton, 2002) yielded "detailed descriptions of each case, which is useful for documenting uniqueness, and important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity" (Patton, 2002, p. 235). Maximum Variation Sampling provided essential and varied features of the phenomenon under study.

Participant Recruitment

Random sampling recruitment of participants took place in affinity spaces and groups specifically surrounding the reading of the YAL genre. Recruitment flyers (Appendix C) were posted in multiple library branches and in local bookstores. Once potential participants generated an interest in participating in the study and gave consent to do so, a short demographic survey was given. This was done through email or text and simply asked the participant if they were 30 years or older and if they read YAL equal to or more than other material. This information was necessary for solidifying the boundaries of the narrative instrumental case study. After the parameters for participation were met, participants were then asked to engage in an individual semi-structured interview (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Roulston, 2010) and provide any artifacts, such as journals or reading lists, which could potentially be useful for revealing more depth to their personal narratives of adult readers of young adult literature, including journal entries, reading lists, responses, or transcripts of conversations about being an adult reader of young adult literature (no such artifacts were provided). After the first interview took place, a second interview was scheduled for two weeks after the date of the first.

Data Collection Methods

Conversation is a basic human interaction and often leads to further understanding, knowledge, and awareness of others' emotions, beliefs, ideas, and overall life (Kvale, 2007). To better understand experiences of others, interviewing allows for an "inner" "view," if you will, of the internal thoughts of others—at least those that they are willing to share. Throughout this interaction between interviewer and interviewee, knowledge is constructed and concepts solidified (Kvale, 2007). As Atkinson and Silverman (1997) posit, our "interview society" utilizes confessional opportunities such as interviews as revelatory for self-production. I found

this to be particularly true through the course of my pilot study. As I interviewed participants and co-constructed their narratives, each was struck by an epiphany as to why they enjoyed and chose to read the texts they did and how those texts influenced their lives. This also occurred during the dissertation. Each pilot participant and dissertation participant commented about the revelatory nature of the dialogic interview (Fontana & Frey, 2000) and how the co-constructed discourse unearthed new discoveries about themselves, not only as adult readers of YAL, but also about themselves as adults living in the world. Although never discussed with the participants, I noticed their experience matched mine when I answered my own interview questions; the dialogue, whether internal or external, uncloaked new ideas about text choices and self.

The Dialogic Interview

Drawing on the importance of dialogism to this study, where dialogism is not only language, but also the acts of reading and writing, which "communicate, construct, and constitute who we are and how we experience the world in physical, psychological, and phenomenological ways," (Lysaker et al., 2011, p. 523) a significant amount of data from this study was derived from an approximately sixty-minute, semi-structured, dialogic interview. Approaching the interview with Bakhtin's (1983) notions of utterances, or a specific response in the chain link of speech communication, which contains inherent tension between the past and present, utterances position dialogism as a give-and-take co-construction between the researcher and interviewer (Harvey, 2015). Using semi-structured interviews will allow me, as the researcher, to develop an outline of questions necessary to carry out this work, but will also allow my participants the freedom to carry out their own personal narratives of their experiences as adult readers of YAL (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Vitanova, 2004).

This method aligns with my social-constructivist epistemological paradigm because together, participant and researcher, are working to co-construct the narratives. Though predetermined, open-ended interview questions were used (Appendix D), participants had the freedom to share their experiences as they wish, which could include answering, avoidance, or responding in other ways to questions posed—all of which revealed important data in the personal narrative of the participant (Clandinin & Connelley. 2000; Roulston, 2010). Interview questions sought to understand the relationship the participant currently has and has had with young adult literature throughout his or her life. The open-endedness of the questions encouraged the participants to explain their perspectives to the research topic (Hatch, 2002). Additionally, because of the semi-structured nature of the interviews, as the researcher, I have the ability to create follow-up questions to further probe deeper on the topics in question, by asking the participant to reflect on or explicate further rationalizations of responses (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Dialogic interviewing, meaning-making through dialogue, and co-construction of knowledge through discourse are powerful data collection methods, requiring careful and compassionate listening on the researcher's behalf and thoughtful consideration of responses for the participant (Ellis & Patti, 2014; Vitanova, 2004). Through this study's dialogic interviewing, emerges a robust portrait of an adult reader of YAL.

Verbal Protocol-Think Aloud Interview

Though dialogic interview methods were used to co-construct narratives for participants, to understand the interlistening process (Lipari, 2014) requires verbal protocol data collection methods (Ericsson & Simon, 1998)—specifically, the think aloud method of interviewing (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Verbal protocols are a specific kind of data which requires participants to verbalize his or her thinking throughout the completion of a task (Ericsson &

Simon, 1998). Very effective for assessing higher order thinking (Olson et al., 1984), verbal protocols reveal the relationship between abstract thought and inner-speech (Vygotsky, 1981); although the true complexity of thought cannot be extrapolated because thoughts must be simplified to speech first (Charters, 2003). Verbal protocols most frequently appear to be utilized when a problem is presented and the participant is required to provide the inner-dialogue for how to solve the problem (Ericsson & Simon. 1998).

As this research does not ask participants to solve a specific problem, but rather verbalize inner thoughts and ideas in response to a linguistic, text-based task (i.e. reading a passage in a preferred book), a specific type of verbal protocol is better suited. The think-aloud method of verbal protocols provides insight which the participant is willing to reveal in response to a text-oriented task rather than a problem-oriented task (Ericsson & Simon, 1998; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Through the think-aloud process, participants shared their inner thoughts in an interview of approximately sixty minutes in which they "narrate[d] their relevant background experiences, complete[d] activities while thinking aloud, and reflect[ed] on their thoughts immediately afterward" (Charters, 2003, p. 80) all while reflecting and sharing meaningful text passages.

To ensure participants understand the process of the think-aloud method of data collection, a pre-orientation session (Gibson, 1997) took place prior to the second interview. Prompting questions are prohibited during the think-aloud process, to allow the participant to speak freely regarding his or her own thoughts in relation to the text (Ericsson & Simon, 1998; Pressley & Afflerback, 1995). In an effort to avoid leading the participant (Sugirin, 1999), a written sign that simply asked the participant to "keep talking" (Sugirin, 1999) was employed.

After the participants completed the think-aloud task and indicated they were finished, retrospective questions were asked (Charters, 2003; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Rankin, 1988).

Retrospective questioning occurs immediately after the think-aloud task and may add depth of information about the participant's thought process (Charters, 2003). Rankin (1988) suggests the use of retrospective analysis for those participants who struggle with the think-aloud process either with metacognitive skills (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995) or validation of the interpretation of utterances (Qi, 1998). All of the processes of post think-aloud data collection reveal insight to the participants' thought procedures during reading as well as the impactful nature of the reading act and the text itself (Charters, 2003; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Retrospective questioning also allows for reflection on the task and the text, which is a crucial facet of the research process as without reflection, transformation does not occur (Mezirow, 1991). The think-aloud method discloses the inner dialogue adult readers of YAL participate in as they read personally significant texts. Through the internal dialogue, contextual meanings and understandings of self can occur (Bakhtin, 1983).

Participants

The first individual to respond to the recruitment flyer was Julissa[2], a 38-year-old single mother. After confirming her demographic information, which established her as an appropriate candidate for the study, we agreed to meet at a local coffee shop for our dialogic interview. A few days after our interview, I received a text from Deanna, whom Julissa had recommended participate in the study. Deanna celebrated her 63rd birthday between her dialogic interview and verbal protocol interview. John was the third participant I interviewed. He is a 49-year old architect and father of two college-aged daughters who share his affinity for YAL. The third and

[2] All names are pseudonyms.

fourth participants in this study, MiKayla and Charlotte, respectively, were both recommended to me as possible candidates by colleagues upon hearing my dissertation topic. After reaching out to both of these participants through email, the final arrangements for interviewing took place. Each participant had two interviews. The first was a semi-structured, dialogic interview (Denzin, 2001; Mishler, 1986). About two weeks after the first interview, the second interview took place. This verbal protocol interview varied in nature from the dialogic interview as it was not a discourse, but rather the participants sharing their inner-dialogue while reading a YAL text of their choice (Ericsson & Simon, 1998; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). All of the interviews took place at local public libraries, with the exception of Julissa's first interview. Because it was a federal holiday, Julissa's first interview was at a local coffee shop. Additionally, all participants had approximately two weeks between interviews with the exception of MiKayla, as she could only agree to participant if her interviews were back to back on the same day.

Data Analysis

This section explains how the two participant data sources--dialogic interviews and verbal protocol interviews--were analyzed. This analyzation is described via the specific codes used and the rationale for such codes. Through multiple iterations of data analyses, the research questions of this study were kept at the forefront. Data were analyzed in an attempt to answer the questions:

- In what ways do adults (age 30+) engaged with young adult literature?
- What are the rationales adults (age 30+) provide for reading young adult literature?
- How does the genre of young adult literature influence adult reader identities?

After reading and rereading transcripts of the participant's dialogic and verbal protocol interviews, I completed three coding cycles, beginning with in vivo coding (Charmaz, 2014;

Corbin & Strauss, 2015), followed by emotion coding (Goleman, 1995; Kahneman, 2011; Prus, 1996). After the first two rounds of coding, a third round was implemented using codes of my own creation. The three cycles of coding contributed to the overall theoretical propositions of this work. Those codified patterns of participants' speech and emotions were indicative of where and what type of engagement took place in YAL and how those engagements influenced participants' identity construction.

First and Second Cycle Coding

After multiple reads of the participants' transcripts, I began the first cycle of coding. The first cycle of coding is an attempt to identify basic ideas present in the data (Saldaña, 2016). To address participants' ontologies and epistemologies as asked in the research questions of this study, two coding schemes, beginning with *in vivo* and followed by *emotion* were applied to assign related codes of data specific, inductively generating descriptive titles, such as "strength and persistence." Once the first two coding cycles revealed categories and ideas present in each participant's story and across the corpus as a whole, a third cycle coding (as discussed later in this section) illustrated the patterns within and among those categories.

In vivo coding.

The first coding cycle utilized in the data analyses was *in vivo* coding (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In vivo coding literally takes the participant's words, verbatim, and organizes those into meaningful groups of like phrases (Saldaña, 2016). In vivo coding also aids in understanding the world view of a particular culture or group (Saldaña, 2016). In vivo codes "honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106) and are "more likely to capture the meanings inherent in people's experience" (Stringer, 2014, p. 140). Using In vivo coding is especially important to this work as it relies on dialogic interviews and verbal protocol

interviews to interpret how adult readers' of YAL identities are influenced by the YAL texts they read and how the words participants use about being a reader of YAL shape their story(ies) and identities.

Using the participants' own words, phrases such as "she just keeps fighting," "her example is teaching me how to overcome," and "I feel stronger and better when I read YAL" were combined because of their similarities. In each of the example codes, participants shared how YAL fosters their personal sense of persistence to overcome obstacles, strength to fight oppression, and tenacity when faced with adversity. All similar in vivo codes were organized in a categorical fashion and assigned short descriptive titles, such as "Grit." These titles were assigned based upon their inherent meaning in the participants' language. Scrutinizing specifically what participants said about their reading choices provided insight to the rationale(s) adults had for reading YAL, which is a research question of this study. In some instances, participants' words were indicative of the ways in which they engaged with YAL, but this research question, as well as the research question regarding influence of YAL on identity, were minimally addressed through this coding cycle. For that reason, a second coding cycle was implemented.

Emotion coding.

To extrapolate further meanings from the data, I deconstructed the previous categories of raw data and generated new, emotion categories as a second cycle of coding, so that the previous categories were reorganized and assigned emotive descriptors in an attempt to address the gaps after the first coding cycle. By labeling the participant's recalled emotions about their reading experiences or what emotions the researcher infers about the participant, a revelation of a person's inner workings or identity can be attained (Saldaña, 2016). Furthermore, emotive

responses are indicative of engagement when reading (Ivey & Johnston, 2013), which provide substantive evidence of instances of engagement with YAL. Emotion coding is crucial to this work as "one can't separate emotion from action; they flow together one leading into the other" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 23). Both action and emotion are salient facets in identity development. Because emotion coding is beneficial for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences (Saldaña, 2016) and this work explores relationally situated reading experiences for participants, especially in terms of how those relationally situated reading experiences influence their identities, it is advantageous to explore the fertile ground of emotion coding.

To extend the example from above, the in vivo codes "she just keeps fighting," "her example is teaching me how to overcome," and "I feel stronger and better when I read YAL," were coded as "bravery," "confidence," and "hope," respectively. Other codes such as "content," "saddened," and "angry" were a small portion of the emotion codes used to describe how the participants were moved to evocation through the reading and discussing of YAL. This second cycle coding process supported understandings of how adult identities were influenced when reading YAL, yet it afforded little to address they ways in which adult readers engaged with YAL and their rationales for doing so, once again, leaving gaps in fully addressing all research questions of this study.

Both in vivo and emotion coding revealed meaningful insights to the ways in which adult readers in this study responded to, connected and engaged with, and subsequently reacted with and to young adult literature. While first and second cycle coding exhibited the beginnings of categorical and thematic understandings, these were still underdeveloped and lacked insight to a larger theoretical and conceptualized notions. For that reason, a third coding cycle was used to reveal a richer, final binding of the salient codes and fully address all three research questions.

Third Cycle Coding

After completing first and second coding cycles, the need for a more focused coding scheme became clear. I assigned the data hundreds of in vivo and emotion codes and then pared those down to more succinct and meaningful descriptions of the broader ideas from the data. I began by applying Lysaker et. al (2011) relational capacities codes because character engagements seemed predominant through the data. After discussing the data through analytic memos (Charmaz, 2014), code summary tables (Harding, 2013), and through coding the codes (Charmaz, 2014), this coding scheme was not applicable and for multiple reasons. In an analytic memo, I discuss my dissatisfaction when applying the relational capacities codes:

> After our meeting last week, my chair suggested I apply Lysaker's topology to code my data because of the depth of character connection in the participant narratives. I tried that, but it didn't seem to work well for two main reasons: 1) Adults are better able to take on the perspective of others—Lysaker's codes assessed a letter-writing exercise for early elementary school students. I feel like these codes are too nuanced for the adult demographic. When I applied her framework to my data, the majority of the codes were on the higher end of her relational capacities codes, indicating significantly more complex social relationships with characters. But more importantly, 2) Adults seem to enter the book and become engaged in more ways than just through characters. It's not just about the character!!! My chair and I discussed the possibility of me having to create new codes, so that seems like a certainty rather than a possibility. The adults in this study didn't pretend to be the character, but they did put themselves in characters' roles and worlds. I first have to determine how they are engaged with the text before I can figure out the types of socio-emotional and socio-relational work they are doing while there.

Writing the above analytic memo afforded me the space to develop small parcels of analysis, holding those up to previously established analytical processes, such as Lysaker et al. (2011), and finally, develop a coding scheme that more accurately reflects the data and answers the research questions of this study.

Engagement-Identity Topology

Taking the in vivo and emotion codes from the first and second cycles of coding and organizing those parcels of thought into closely related categories of meaningful ideas, led to the creation of a pattern coding scheme (Miles, et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2013), called Engagement-Identity Topology. For example, similarly to the first cycle coding, in vivo and emotion codes were compiled and assigned new categorical titles (Figure B1).

All codes which were closely related and salient to the same idea, led to the conceptualization of the new code: character.

Furthermore, utilizing this categorical and pattern grouping of the participants' words and emotions revealed the characters were not the only access point of engagement. Adults in this study also were engaged with the text through the situations presented in the YAL and the worlds of the protagonists. Again, the codes were constructed into patterns and deconstructed once within those patterns to show not only the variety of engagement with YAL, but also how those engagements were influential. This addressed all three research questions of this study, which are:

- In what ways do adults (age 30+) engage with young adult literature?
- What are the rationales adults (age 30+) provide for reading young adult literature?
- How does the genre of young adult literature influence adult reader identities?

This analytic process revealed three major points of engagements for the adult readers of YAL in this study: characters, situations, and worlds (Table A3). It is from this first layer of engagement codes that the first portion of the coding topology title is derived.

Engagements defined.

As participants described their interactions with YAL, I noted where engagements took place. Phrases to indicate engagements included, but were not limited to: "I related," "It resonated," "I care(d) deeply," "made me think," and "gave me pause." Furthermore, I was cognizant of Guthrie's et al. (2004) and Ivey and Johnston's (2013) measures of cognitive and socio-emotional engagements. Once those were identified, further examination led to the broad categories of engagements with characters, situations, and worlds. These broad categories of engagements sought to answer research question one of this study: In what ways do adults (30+) engage with young adult literature?

Character engagements.

Engagements with characters occurred when participants discussed specific characters, their unique qualities, and/or traits. For example, a participant who mentioned connecting with Harry Potter because she tends to "react first and then think afterward" would be coded as a character engagement. One who mentioned the role of "the chosen one," however was not coded as a character, but rather a situation for two primary reasons. First, any character has the potential to fulfill "the chosen one" role and participants did not speak of a specific "chosen one," but rather the role or the patterns of behavior in specific situations for that character. Secondly, literature is saturated with such roles as "the chosen one," "the underdog," and "the rebellious one." While at the onset these appear to be character connections, further probing

revealed the participants in this study were engaged with the actions to be completed as the "chosen one." Such actions and roles were coded as "situations."

Situations.

Engagements with situations, at first, appeared to be engagements with characters. For example, Julissa said she kept reading because the female characters in the books were fighters against oppression. True, she is speaking about a character, but not a specific character; rather a stock character of one that fills a certain "role." The thing that engaged Julissa is not the specific female protagonist, but the situation in which the protagonist finds herself; the situation that requires her to fight. She does admire the behavior of the character, but those behaviors would not occur without the situation or the reason causing the situation, such as oppressive regimes (reason) inciting a rebellion (situation). Reading YAL for these adults acts as a simulation (Oatley, 1994) or a type of role-playing game where readers put themselves in the situations of the protagonists about which they read. While reading, the adults in this study found themselves abstracting the situations in which the protagonists were placed and substituting themselves in that role. Participants noted engagement with "the rebellion," "the journey," and "the love triangle," all of which are indicative, not of the characters in those situations, but the situation itself.

World.

The final way in which participants of this study engaged with YAL was through the world of the book. Though not as frequently discussed as characters and situations, participants did note the importance of the world of the protagonists as a way to engage with YAL. Engagements with the world varied from creative, rich worlds of fantasy in which the author

developed the rules, language, and culture of the world to the notion that the world of the YAL text was varied from the readers' real world, everyday experiences.

Teasing the codes further.

Once the above coding scheme was developed to answer the first research question (How do adults age 30+ engage with YAL?), and it was clear that readers were, in fact, engaged with YAL in a number of ways, I further grouped and examined the data according to those codes. For example, all the character codes were analyzed together. Doing so enabled me to see that while the adult readers in this study may have had a similar engagement, such as character, how that engagement influenced them was quite different. For that reason, I further parsed out the codes and grouped them according to similarities as I had done in the previous cycles of coding. This act led to three major ways in which the engagements influenced the adult readers: clarifying, emotionally reacting, and taking action (Table A4).

Clarifying, emotionally reacting, and taking action.

Once codes were categorized into the larger concepts of engagements with characters, situations, and worlds, these broader codes revealed nuances as to what the readers did once those engagements took place. As research question three asks, "How does YAL influence your identity?," the data answered with three major ways in which the engagements' influence emerged (Table A4). Influence of engagement can be viewed as an interrelated image of concentric circles (Figure B2). As participants shared their narratives of reading YAL, they expressed multiple points of entry as illustrated in the image. Each of the stages is a prerequisite for the next, as readers could not react emotionally without first recognizing and clarifying themselves or others. Furthermore, readers could not be called to action by the book if the text had not sparked an emotional reaction. While this is a linear process, participants discussed how

certain books positioned them in certain sectors of the circles, but not in others. For example, participants might share a narrative about a YAL experience which caused them to clarify, but not react emotionally, or take action. The next narrative they share may cause them to react emotionally and then take action. Though they did not discuss how the text afforded them the space to clarify and recognize, it clearly did as clarification and recognition are precursors to reacting emotionally. One influence does not necessarily lead to another; however, each is a prerequisite for the next. In other words, participants could not have taken action if they did not first clarify how the text was influencing them and subsequently have an emotional reaction, which, in turn, leads to the action. Not all participants discussed all facets of the process through their dialogue. This embedded influences image does, however, illustrate the levels of influence from the inward act of clarifying to the outward act of taking action.

Clarification of self and others.

One influence YAL had on adults in this study caused them to recognize and clarify their own personal beliefs, ideas, and traits and those personal beliefs, ideas, and traits of others. Participants found YAL to be as a mirror in that it reflected beliefs, ideas, and traits they already held or desired to hold. They were able to identify and recognize themselves in the characters they read about and consider how they would think feel and act in similar situations and worlds. This clarification of self sometimes led to emotional reactions and actions, but not always.

Often, as Lysaker et al. (2011) found, reading brings about empathetic reactions through readers' employment of the social imagination. In reading the participant transcriptions, adults discussed how the genre assisted them in clarifying, recognizing, and understanding others' thoughts ideas, emotions, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors. Others, however, is not limited to other beings, but rather "other," in terms of this work, refers to any person, place, thing, or idea

that is not the reader themselves. This could include the text or genre itself. For example, John frequently used YAL as a mentor genre to clarify the writing craft in his journey as both a consumer and producer of the genre. In such instances, the text was considered "other," as the clarification taking place was about the text or writers' craft. As illustrated in Figure B3, clarifications of self and other are inward results of reading YAL. Though clarification could involve others, the change that takes place is within the reader themselves.

Emotional reactions.

Besides clarifying, transcriptions of adult discourses indicated emotional reactions to the texts they were reading. A range of emotions were present in the discourses the readers share about YAL including emotions such as joy and sadness to the more complex emotions of anxiety and hope. When participants emotionally reacted to characters situations and worlds, not only was this coded with the appropriate shortcut code, but it was also labeled with the specific emotion he or she discussed. Having an emotional reaction to the YAL moves the change from identifying, recognizing, clarifying, or understanding something into the evocative change of not only understanding, but also feeling a particular way about it.

Action.

Finally, readers in this study could respond to their engagements with YAL by taking various outward actions. Primarily, actions were labeled as two main categories: internal actions and external actions. Internal actions take place in isolation and appear to solely benefit the reader. These actions could include, but are not limited to: thinking about the text further, questioning the text, continuing to read the text, or writing personal responses to the text. External actions, however, are more visible actions and could be solitary (the reader only) or relational (including others). To clarify the difference between internal and solitary actions,

Charlotte's discourse provides an excellent example. When discussing the YAL book *Dumplin'* by Julie Murphy, Charlotte mentioned that Dumplin' made her think about why people do some of the things they do (such as never leave the house without makeup) and question if she wanted to participate in those actions. Charlotte demonstrated the internal actions of thinking about her own and other people's actions and questioning those behaviors. Charlotte went on to share that when Dumplin' explains the criteria for having a swimsuit body is to simply have a body and put a swimsuit on it, she was inspired to purchase a two-piece swimsuit for the first time in her life. This is an external solitary action. She simply purchased the swimsuit for herself. However, she extended her actions by taking a photo, posting it publicly on Facebook, and sharing the quote from the book Dumplin'. By sharing the photo, she engaged in an external relational action, in which other people could comment and interact with her actions.

Combination of codes.

This study's pattern coding, Engagement-Identity Topology, emerged after using other coding methods that had overlap and indistinct boundaries (Lysaker, 2014). Therefore, Engagement-Identity Topology was developed with clarity as a primary feature. The term topology was chosen because of the characteristics of point-set topology in mathematics. In point-set topology, the points are distinct and defined so that it is clear what belongs in the set and what does not. Furthermore, the main tenets of point-set topology are the terms continuity, compactness, and connectedness (Bing, 1960). This description fits nicely with the organization of engagement and identity codes and their overall continuity and consistency of what comprises a character, situation, or world code. Additionally, these codes are compact in that they reveal a continuum of first clarification, secondly emotionally reacting, and finally taking action. Lastly, the codes show a connected relationship by the various number of permutations and possible

combinations of codes. Instead of a single, complicated code with many options that could be interpreted incorrectly, intertwined with one another, or confused with each other due to indistinctness, multiple, simple, largely objective layers of coding were used (See Figure B3).

The first layer addressed the first research question (How do adult readers engage with YAL?), and simply identified what part of the text engaged readers: was it a specific character, an abstract situation, or the unique story world? The second layer addressed the third research question (How do adults' identities change as a result of reading YAL?): was the change an internal mental realization (clarification), an internal emotional reaction, or an external action? This second coding layer was applied after the first, though it was independent from it, since all three of the codes for the first layer (engagement) also could be linked to all codes in the second layer (identity change), as seen in Figure B3. The second layer had some nuance within it, where the first identity change (clarity) was subdivided to clarity only about one's self (self), or clarity involving anything outside of one's self (other). External actions also were similarly subdivided into "internal" and "external," where internal actions were purely mental activities (such as questions or decisions), and external actions were anything that required the use of the body to perform (including using one's eyes to read more YAL). External actions were further subdivided into "solitary" and "relational," with the same sort of delineation as was used for clarity (one's self only, or was something outside one's self involved). Reading more YAL would be an external solitary action, whereas discussing a YAL book with another person would be a relational action.

Additionally, within second layer of Engagement-Identity Topology, the emotional reaction category was not subdivided at all. There was no apparent benefit for this study to

categorize the emotions beyond the noting of their existence. Although particular emotions were noted as they provided individualistic reading experiences for each specific participant.

Although there are 18 potential codes, Engagement-Identity Topology was developed with simplicity in mind. There is no overlap or confusion about which code to apply at any step. Multiple simple layer decisions made the coding far simpler than if there was a single layer decision to make with 18 options. The Engagement-Identity Topology's coding method is relatively speaking, more objective, which allows this study to be replicated with relative ease.

Post Coding Analysis

Once coding according to the Engagement-Identity Topology was complete, even further examination of influence of YAL on adult readers found more distinctions within the participants' actions. To further determine markers of identity change, the most measurable component to observe for such identity change, according to this coding scheme, are the real-world actions as opposed to clarifications or emotions. In an attempt to create nuance, three levels of action were identified—micro, meso, and macro levels. These three were developed to describe the scope of the participants' behavior influenced by YAL, which is indicative of identity change.

To determine scopes, each participant's action codes were organized on three levels of social interactions (micro, meso, and macro). Because this study found socioemotional engagements throughout the discourses the participants shared, organizing the participants' actions as micro, meso, or macro actions revealed not only the scope of the influence of YAL on the adult participants' identities and lives, but this organization also confirmed the antinomy as discussed in the findings and substantiated the salience of reflection on reading as influential to identity.

Micro actions.

In the social sciences, analysis is often conducted on the micro, meso, and macro levels. Though many interpretations of what constitutes each level under scrutiny exists, for the purposes of this study, the micro level consists of actions that occur within the individual reader. These are not outward expressions and often cannot be seen by others. Thinking, questioning, considering, and becoming more aware are all examples of micro actions in this study. Micro actions consisted of internal thoughts, ideas, and questions and ranged from "thinking about how I parent" (John) to "crying" (Charlotte and MiKayla) to "understanding what's inside me" (Deanna).

Meso actions.

At the medial level, meso actions, for the purposes of this study consisted of actions which involved at a minimum one other person besides the reader. More externally visible, meso actions could be those such as discussions with friends or family members about the YAL, contacting authors of YAL texts, or making significant changes to relationships because of the influence of YAL. As meso actions were often interactions with at least one other person, the scope of the genre's influence on participants now extends to those beyond the reader him or herself.

Macro actions.

The final organizational level of actions was that of macro actions. For the purposes of this study, macro actions were those in which the participants interacted with a larger societal group, formal institution, or those actions regarding perceived dominant societal narratives. Macro actions consisted of writing political figures regarding changing policies, to rejecting and

speaking out against societal assumptions of adults, and even simply sharing YA quotes and ideas on social media platforms such as Facebook and GoodReads.com.

Data Analysis Summary

The data analysis for this study included a thorough analytic coding of three cycles using in vivo, emotion, and pattern coding. From the organization and reorganization of the data, the broad ways in which adults in this study engaged with YAL emerged into three broad categories of: character, situation, and world. Furthermore, these major categories revealed the ways in which those engagements with character, situation, and world influence the identity of the adults in this study. These influences included clarification, emotionally reacting, and taking actions. These subsets contained greater nuance, which further illustrated how influential the YAL genre can be on adult lives. Throughout the data analysis process complex notions of the ways in which adults engage with and are influenced by YAL became apparent. These notions are further discussed in the findings of the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings

This study was conducted in an effort to understand the interactions and outcomes of adults who read young adult literature (YAL) for pleasure. More specifically, the questions this research seeks to answer are:

- In what ways do adults (age 30+) engage with young adult literature?
- What are the rationales adults (age 30+) provide for reading young adult literature?
- How does the genre of young adult literature influence adult reader identities?

As explained in chapter three, two different interviews, a semi-structured dialogic interview and a verbal protocol interview, were administered to five participants. The semi-structured dialogic interview allowed for a natural discourse to take place, as well as a co-constructed narrative about the participants' reading life, while the verbal protocol interview was insightful in understanding the interlistening (Lipari 2014) process adults do when reading YAL. This data was carefully coded, leading to the creation of a new coding scheme, Engagement-Identity Topology, which categorized reader engagements, such as characters, situations, and worlds. Furthermore, subcategories revealed how the participants' engagements were indicative of influences of YAL on adult identities.

This chapter reports the findings of the study in two distinct sections. The first section provides individual narratives for each of the participants in this study. These narratives reveal the differentiated nature of readers' experiences with individual reader events, including notions of tastes, varied rationales for reading, and diverse discourses about personal YAL readings. These narratives are arranged in a similar fashion, introducing the participant, sharing how he or she came to be an adult reader of YAL and how they engaged with the YAL texts. Additionally, each participants' rationale for reading YAL is presented. Finally, individual influences on

identity are described. Each of these components of the individual participant narratives serves to provide an intimate, individual portrait of how YAL manifests in their lives.

The second section of this chapter synthesizes the individual narratives of this study to describe three major findings of how adults who read YAL utilize and are influenced by the genre. The first finding reports how adults in this study employ YAL as a situation simulation. Secondly, most participants in this study experience antinomy when discussing the influence of YAL on their identities, which is examined more closely in the latter section of this chapter through participants' micro, meso, and macro actions, as defined more thoroughly in the methodology chapter. Finally, reflection was found to be an integral component to the influence, or lack thereof, of YAL on adult lives, with those participants who reflected more, illustrating greater YAL impacts on their identities and lives.

Individual Participant Narratives

The first section of this chapter contains the individual participant portraits for the adult readers in this study. These participant narratives tell their stories as readers in general, but more specifically, as adult readers of young adult literature. Through these narratives their motivations to read YAL, engagements with the genre, and influences of the texts on their lives are discussed.

The individual voices in this study are salient as they provide pieces of the larger puzzle of adults who read young adult literature, which has been examined throughout this dissertation. Without individual voices, however, nuances of engagements with the genre are overlooked and, subsequently, the varied purposes and corollaries of adult readers YAL are diminished. It is for this reason the individual portraits are included in this chapter. During the interviews and the data analysis process, a distinct character of each of the participants became clear. Described

below, these traits emerged through the discourses, personal narratives, and the experiences the readers had with the genre itself. Not only is the character sketch indicative of their identity, but also how they approach their reading of YAL, which, as described previously through the iterative process of reading and reflection, greatly influences the identities of the participants involved in this study.

Julissa-the Independent Warrior

Julissa, a 38-year-old single mother to a 12-year-old boy, does not identify herself as a reader. She associates being a reader with reading quickly and consistently—daily, in fact—and although she reads frequently, she still "aspires to be a reader" and admits that young adult literature is the genre which inspired her to become a reader. She recalls having books in her home as a child, but not being read to by adults unless she requested. Classroom experiences were described as "typical" throughout elementary and middle school, with Julissa recalling reading the "popular books of the time," such as the *Hardy Boys* and *Babysitters Club* series.

In high school and college, Julissa was more interested in "partying and boys" than reading or her studies, though she shared she enjoyed Shakespeare—so much so, that she sought extra Shakespeare texts outside of the assigned class readings. She also shared about her spiritual search while in college, which led her first to astrology, where she often read materials to enhance her knowledge of the craft. In college, Julissa majored in geography, which continues to influence her current YAL reading choices, as she is drawn to YAL which has a geographical aspect integral to the plot. Her collegiate studies specialized in natural disasters, so she gravitates towards survival YAL titles, such as *The Hunger Games.* Many of the hardships in her life--a driving under the influence (DUI) conviction, pregnancy, and separation from her son's father—have instilled a sense of independence in Julissa. When selecting YAL texts to

read, she often seeks out independent, female characters, who, she admits, serve as a role model for her own behaviors in situations. She especially draws on YAL when she feels she is facing a difficult situation. She shared, "It's about really making hard choices. It's about really pushing hard. I feel like all that stuff can happen anyway, but you can definitely attribute it [YAL] to your daily life."

Encounters with YAL as an adult.

Julissa traces her experience with reading YAL as an adult back to Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*. A self-described "social butterfly," Julissa recalls her friends asking her to see the film version when it was released in theaters. After enjoying the film, Julissa was eager to read the book and compare the two. She was engaged with multiple aspects of the books and managed to read the entire series in a couple of weeks, which is an accomplished reading task for her. She admits in the past she has had to read "word for word" and then she would just "forget everything she read and have to go back and read it over again." But with YAL, Julissa feels more confident. She states, "But with the dystopian ones, the ones I like? I want to read every single word." Julissa has consistently chosen to read YAL which features a dystopian society, desolate geographical landscapes, strong, female protagonists, and rebellions to oppressive govern regimes. Some of her favorite titles besides *The Hunger Games,* have been Suzanne Young's series about teen suicide, *The Program*; Veronica Roth's faction-filled *Divergent* trilogy, and Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* series, which was so engaging and emotionally charged for Julissa, it prompted her to write the author and share her thoughts and feelings on the series.

In each of these books, Julissa's favorite moments occur when the protagonists recognize and accept "the role they were born to fill." While reading she often thinks, "if they can do it [task in their situation], then so can I." Additionally, she appreciates the ordinariness of the

protagonists and how they are often riddled with self-doubt, which she experiences herself. She often considers the strength the protagonists display in the face of their tenuous situations and admires that ability, desiring to do the same in her situations: "They don't realize that calling--that's who they're supposed to be. When you finally realize your calling and you do it, no matter what anybody else is saying, you can overcome." As a single mother, she feels required to be independent herself and to model that strength for her son.

Julissa epitomizes her independence through supporting her son and herself by owning her own business. Her entrepreneurship is a home-organizing business where she prides herself on meticulous home management and labeling items in people's homes. Though she makes her living through organization and labeling, she does not appreciate labels in all aspects, especially where her reading material is concerned:

> I don't think any of them [books] should be labeled. But they [young adult books] deal with personal, emotional issues. I'm dealing with those issues, too, and I'm 38 years old. Bad relationships, fighting, surviving, or drama with other women, cheating, killing—all of those are adult issues. (Julissa, Interview 1, 2018)

It is Julissa's belief that independence from labels would prompt more adults to read YAL, which, she feels, is a beneficial thing: "I feel like it would really help a lot more people get along. YA helps people have a voice and figure things out on their own," but they also "give people an opportunity to feel they are a part of something."

Immediately after our first interview, I began to think of Julissa as an independent warrior. As her descriptions and discourses above illustrate, her independence is an important aspect to her life. She finds young adult literature relatable as it celebrates independent female protagonists and makes that independence an integral part of the story. She gravitates towards

narratives which feature rebellions and resistance, mostly because she has "always been rebellious" herself, so those books act as a mirror for Julissa, allowing her to extract the protagonist from the situation and place herself in the simulation, imagining how she would act in those scenarios. These books aid Julissa in being more aware of her surroundings in addition to encouraging her to know that "things happen in life and being aware of things that are happening instead of being totally oblivious and floating through life" are the way she chooses to live. The fighting and conquering facet of YAL speak to Julissa as well, especially when the characters have overcome their hardships. "They are just ordinary people and they run this high rebellion and this huge resistance" to fight for what is right.

Julissa's engagements with YAL.

This study found that adults engage with YAL in three primary ways—through characters, situations, and worlds. The primary way Julissa engages with YAL is through situations. She often places herself in the role of the character, continuing to maintain her own beliefs and behaviors. This abstraction allows her to gain clarity on how she currently sees herself, while also providing her with a path to become who she wants to be. When she inserts herself to the narrative and reflectively asks herself, "What would I do in this situation?" she gains insights to her own behaviors, personality, and decisions. This act often serves as a model for Julissa, providing her with the opportunity to "role play" how she might act in any given situation. For example, when she describes Quinland and James's roles in resisting and overcoming *The Program*, she states:

> I could see myself being in those roles and doing whatever it took and fighting. I want to be a fighter. I would say that's definitely a role of mine. I don't want to take any crap. I

> mean I'm always questioning authority and people and their motives and just trying to figure everything out. (Julissa, Interview 2, 2018)

She continues by sharing, "I picture myself like what I would be doing in her place or what she's doing as the character going through this thing or whatever." As she reflects on her choices in these simulations and positions those with the outcomes of the protagonists, she subsequently alters or solidifies her plan for future action in those situations (or similar situations). This reflection on the YAL genre, the actions of herself in the protagonists' situations, and the outcomes of those actions, all work in concert to influence Julissa's identity, especially clarifying how she thinks about herself, her emotions, and her actions.

Rationales for reading.

Julissa, like all the participants in this study, primarily seeks out YAL for pleasurable reading purposes. However, as she continues to privilege the genre over any other, she finds that YAL serves as a "self-help" book, but not in a didactic way, rather because of the way she can place herself in the situations and receive a guide for how to proceed. She finds YAL is often "made to give advice" or "to give a message." As a single mom, with minimal leisure time, she craves realistic texts that are relatable and give her an idea of a larger "plan or purpose" and, in addition, "some moral answers." She finds YAL provides her with all those characteristics.

Identity influences.

When Julissa places herself in the situation simulation of Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* or Lena Tiddle from *Delirium*, she has an opportunity to reflect, which subsequently leads to an action for Julissa. Largely, Julissa engages in micro actions, as a result of YAL (See Figure E1), which is consistent with the majority of clarification of self (CS) codes in her dialogic and verbal protocol interviews. Primarily, Julissa finds herself thinking on and

questioning the text and how she would react in those scenarios while she is reading and, to some extent, after the reading. This often increases her own confidence, especially where decision-making is concerned, but also her confidence simply as a reader. She continually adjusts her reader identity as she maintains her reading of the genre, slowly beginning to see herself as a reader. Predominantly, Julissa's micro actions are congruent with her character sketch of Independent Warrior. She states YAL "makes me more aware of my surroundings," teaches her "how to think for myself," making her "more aware of my emotions," as a result, she feels "empowered and stronger." Her awareness of YAL's influence on her identity appeared when she stated, "It's funny when you see the pattern of things, who you are as a person, so that's my favorite part of a YA story."

YAL influences Julissa's relationships as well. She finds YAL helps her "get along with others" and "relate to many people of different ages," including her own son. As a conversation starter, YAL prompts Julissa to consider how she parents through the examples that are presented in the books, but it also provides a prompt for how to discuss "complex issues," such as equality or suicide, with her son. This was the case when she informed him of the disparity between goods across the districts of Panem while she was reading *The Hunger Games* and of how to process grief as she read *The Program*. Additionally, Julissa says YAL gives her pause to consider her own relationships and how to be transparent and honest in those relationships. Admittedly, she shares that she often does not trust people, but YAL helps her see that reliance on others and working as a team has benefits that she may be missing.

When asked if YAL influenced her life at our first interview, Julissa did not hesitate to say that it did not influence her life. Through our conversations, I heard a different response. Her actions spoke of multiple influences of YAL on her identity, from providing a space for

introspection to prompting her with relevant and important topics of conversation with her son, these influences were apparent to me, but not readily apparent to her. At our second interview, I posed the same question at the end of our discussion. Her response this time was still a hesitant "maybe." Although she did recognize that YAL influenced her "not so much outwardly. I would say it's more internal." When asked if she will continue to read YAL, this answer was much more adamant, "Definitely. This is where MY books are."

Deanna-the Hopeful Survivor

Just as Julissa felt YAL is an accurate and realistic depiction of survival in our current world, Deanna felt much the same way, but she adds, YAL also provides "challenges and always overcoming and there's always hope." Deanna, a 63-year-old retired female, explains she has spent a lot of her life surviving and living through horrible events. A survivor of a childhood sexual assault and multiple medical conditions in adulthood, she now finds herself caring for her mother, who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Deanna finds comfort in YAL as it often provides the hope she needs to strengthen and fortify herself for the fights she must face in life, because "it gives hope, it encourages unity, and it encourages working together—working as a team."

Though she doesn't recall much of her childhood classroom experiences with reading, Deanna does identify herself as a reader because, as she says, "I've been reading my whole life and I don't plan on stopping." She shares her experiences of growing up in a house full of readers. She had four other siblings, who all read frequently, as did both of her parents. She remembers retreating to the bathroom to read to attempt to gain privacy. Deanna has pleasant memories of library visits and reading at home, but seldom does she associate this pleasure reading with school.

After graduating with an advanced degree in economics and teaching at a university, Deanna spent much of her career in arbitration, litigation, and conflict resolution, where she sought to understand people in an effort to aid in solving their problems. In order to mitigate conflicts among disparate groups of people, Deanna believes, above all, you must "get to know someone" and "develop a relationship" with them before you can attempt to resolve the dispute. She feels young adult literature reveals the nature of the human condition and the interpersonal relationships between people more realistically, and in greater depth than other reading material. "In all those things [YAL books] these kids, they gravitate toward one another. They are friends. They help each other. It's always about taking the strengths of people and pulling them together as a team." In her job, Deanna felt as if she were making a difference. This is a characteristic of YAL which appeals to her as well. "That's what I like about young adult stuff. What I notice is not only the hope, but that it gives people a sense that they can make a difference."

Encounters with YAL as an adult.

Not only is making a difference important in Deanna's YAL reading selections, but she also seeks out YAL that features strong, female protagonists who fight against oppressive regimes, much like Julissa. As a survivor of sexual assault from a young age, Deanna finds she relates deeply with the urge to fight against the maltreatment of others, which is prevalent in some of her favorite titles, such as *The Hunger Games* trilogy and *Divergent* trilogy. She shared how she related to the actions that Katniss and Tris took when they were faced with a situation to help those less fortunate than themselves, stating "They didn't want to do it, but they did it anyway because it was the right thing to do." She especially connects with the act of sacrificing, like Katniss did for her sister, Prim, and as Tris sacrifices herself in the *Divergent* series. Deanna recognizes herself in those actions and admits to being capable of sacrificing her time, effort, and

energy for others, but often feels timid when speaking up for herself in similar matters of oppression. It is with this apprehension that Deana finds strength from YAL, stating "it makes you feel stronger. I think, for me, it makes me feel stronger and that there's hope. They [YAL books] deal with overcoming adversity. They let you know that there is always a way and to never give up." YAL shows Deanna that you can be stronger, "you just have to keep working and you just have to keep fighting. Not physically fighting, but fighting yourself and overcoming the hardships in your life."

Deanna also seeks out YAL which helps her make meaning of sociohistorical events and how relationships developed during those times. Learning about the past, in Deanna's opinion, helps shape the future. She favors biographies and historical fiction selections as well and recalls reading *Jefferson's Sons* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley. This book was important for Deanna as it revealed insight from history while understanding how people are affected by such complex issues as racial prejudice, discrimination, family relationships, as well as the personal meanings of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. "I thought it was interesting because it didn't shield them [readers] from the horrors of slavery. The lynching. It didn't shield them from the beatings. It's instructive." Learning about the past and how relationships form and develop through complex struggles is one reason Deanna continues to read YAL.

Deanna's engagements with YAL.

Not surprisingly, the preeminent way Deanna engages with YAL is through situations, which allow her to clarify others (CO). Recalling from the previous data analysis section of chapter three, the descriptor of "other" is simply the reader is gaining clarification on something other than themselves. It could be the text, group ideologies, or any multitude of things barring the self. In Deanna's case, placing herself in the situation simulation of the protagonists of YAL

allowed her the space to gain understanding about other people, especially those of different races.

One of the ways Deanna identifies herself is that of a grandmother. She has no children of her own, but she has close relationships with many young families in her church and community. These families often have children of various ages, and they, too, identify Deanna as a grandmother. Many of these families are Black while Deanna is White. Race is often a topic of discussion among these families and Deanna views YAL as a tool for discussing such relevant issues. Reading *Jefferson's Boys* with the young adult, Black males in her life was a way for each contribute to the current conversations on race relationships in our present time, while reading about historically-based events. A specific current incident she cites is the story of Akil Carter, who was detained and handcuffed because a report of a White female being robbed by a Black male was incorrectly reported. As it turns out, the White female was Carter's grandmother, Paulette Carr[3]:

> I'm sad we have to teach our Black kids what to do when a cop pulls you over. There's no way I can ever understand being Black. I'm primarily concerned with our divisions. I want more unity. The thing I like about young adult literature is if we can get kids to read it, I think it's critical because I do think it can help mold their consciousness to know they can change things. And if adults can read it, that would be great, too. It teaches me a different perspective. It talks about what the person is thinking and I think that helps you get a perspective on other people. (Deanna, Interview 1, 2018)

[3] https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2018/09/07/she-was-giving-her-black-grandson-ride-work-police-mistook-him-robber/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.e9012689497c

Clearly, Deanna views YAL as a vehicle for empathy and change. Through challenging and complex conversations with both young people and adults who read YAL, Deanna believes a difference can be made and we can start to heal our society. Deanna not only has conversations with the characters as she is reading, but she also extends conversations about particularly moving books with others.

Rationales for reading.

Deanna also agreed with the other participants of this study that she preponderantly read YAL for enjoyment and entertainment. However, as she shared her experiences with the texts she read, she realized herself how YAL provided her with much more. One such reason she reads YAL is to make meaning of social relationships, as she feels the genre does a more thorough job of exploring those relationships than other material she reads. An example she shared was the internal dialogue readers experience with Katniss and how this internal struggle mirrored one she felt as well. Deanna comments YAL "helps you understand what's inside." She extends this understanding to relationships with others, explaining that, "if I can understand you then I can deal with the conflict better and I can deal with moving on in having a relationship. I think that's something that comes out more in kids' literature." Understanding of self and others is one rationale Deanna provides for reading YAL.

More than the sense-making of relationships YAL provides for her, Deanna values YAL for the hopefulness it provides. She feels adult literature is "dreadfully depressing" and above all, she wants young people to feel "there is hope in the world." Young adult literature, according to Deanna, is a realistic portrayal of the times in which we currently live and reading and learning from the hopefulness which is present in the books helps her understand how to respond to the current political climate. Additionally, the hopefulness acts as a soothing balm for

troubled times. In fact, she expresses the lack of hope she has had since the most recent presidential election. She expresses concern about the state of the country and suggests, with tears in her eyes, "One thing I can probably do is read some more young adult literature and I would probably be better off." She relies on YAL to provide strength and hope during what she feels are dark and desolate times in our country.

Identity influences.

Deanna's actions (See Appendix E) reveal the scope of how YAL influences her identity. Deanna also experienced antinomy, as she indicated with a negative response when explicitly asked if YAL influenced her life, stating "no, not so much. I'm old and I already know myself." Throughout our first interview, she shared many emotional stories of how reading YAL made her think and want to make a difference in her community. So much so, that she was moved to tears twice throughout the first interview, so her negative response surprised me, as I was certain she would recognize the influence of YAL on her identity. After our second interview, the same question elicited a positive response implying that after given time for reflection, opportunity and reason, Deanna was able to see the evidence of influence of YAL on her life, sharing how it taught her "to not be influenced by the masses" and to not "live in fear."

Deanna primarily experienced micro actions (See Figure E2) as identity transformations. Those internal changes made her realize that she wants to make a difference with her life. She spent many years in her career focusing on arbitration, problem solving, and conflict resolution because she felt she was able to understand people, empathize, see things from their perspective, and make a difference. These are all characteristics she admires about YAL. In her opinion, YAL authors depict protagonists as "having challenges and always overcoming." She relishes the fact that these characters "never give up" and often "provide for others" in addition to

overcoming “really horrible things.” Often, throughout this persistence, they find relationships which are built on overcoming obstacles together and having a tenacity and drive to unite to fight the foes and “do the right thing.” Deanna strongly identifies with this characteristic and often finds herself having the same desires. She is most proud of her own persistence and resolve and as she reads YAL which features protagonists who display similar characteristics in their situations, she finds her own traits fortified and her commitment to do what she feels is morally right is solidified. As she reads YAL, she often finds herself reminded of the fact that, “life sucks, o.k? But it’s going to be o.k. It’s alright and there is good in everything. Sometimes it [life] just requires you to work hard and to live hard, but there is hope. It’s not a fake thing.”

Additionally, Deanna states YAL “doesn’t make me want to be a different person, but a better version of me instead. It makes me want to actually get out there and do something instead of just reading about it.” Deanna mentioned she “wants a movement for unity.” She views the racial divisions in our country as extremely detrimental and serving no purpose but to cause more separations and disconnections between people. Instead, she wants everyone to “work together” and “see others’ perspectives.” She thinks young adult literature can help, especially with race relations and the marginalization of girls’ voices. A macro act Deanna is pursuing is the creation of a girls’ book club at her church, which is predominately Black. In this book club, Deanna would rely on YAL to discuss how Black females are doubly marginalized and how they can find their voices to resist disenfranchisement. Doing so would allow Deanna to share the hopefulness she sees in YAL and provide unity across generations and races, and possibly provide others with agency through the YAL narratives.

John-the Parental Writer

Like Deanna, John considers himself a reader and recalls vivid childhood and adolescent memories of reading books. He shared fond memories of selecting books from the book mobile, as his upbringing was in a rural area and trips to the library were not as frequent. He recollects reading stacks of books both at home and at school, though the books he read at home, which he selected himself, were far more preferred. From an early age, John preferred science fiction texts. As he grew, he found young adult literature was a field ripe with science fiction and therefore, he turned to the genre often, extending into adulthood.

Encounters with YAL as an adult.

John naturally continued to gravitate towards young adult literature even as he aged through high school, college, and beyond. At the age of 24, he was married and his wife expecting their first child. Though in possession of an architect's certificate from the university, John and his wife decided the best place for him would be to stay home with their newborn child. Staying up nights with a baby and suffering with insomnia himself, John found not only reading YAL, but writing the genre helped pass the time during the late nights. As his daughters grew, he continued to read young adult literature with them and individually on his own. He often found himself wondering about "characters on the periphery" and what their particular stories might be. He began writing these stories with his daughters as a way to encourage them to write as well. At that time, his daughters were school age and John was in his thirties. Now, at 49, John continues to reach for young adult literature when he participates in what he calls "binge reads." He often reads a great deal of one specific genre of book—ranging from fantasy, graphic novels, manga, or science fiction either from the young adult or adult section of the library.

Additionally, John rereads familiar YAL texts that he once read as a young adult. He explains, "When it was assigned reading I wasn't all that much interested in it, but later on when it was not considered a required course or reading, I should say, I got more out of it. A lot of nuance was lost when I was younger. I picked up a lot more from that rereading it as an adult than as I did reading it as a kid." Choice and autonomy are important to John. Reexamining familiar titles also provided more nuance, and subsequently, more engagement with the YAL. This led to further reading of YAL titles well into John's adulthood.

John's engagements with YAL.

Much like Deanna and Julissa, John largely is engaged by YAL's situations because they provide him clarity of "other." However, where Deanna sought YAL to understand other people and groups, John's understanding of "other" related to the genre itself, especially the writer's craft of the genre. Through his discourses about reading YAL, John presented himself as a distance reader, meaning, he often spoke generally about stories and was hesitant to "get involved" with characters. He admits he seldom finds himself identifying with any YAL characters, despite mentioning several protagonists, such as Harry Potter, from the *Harry Potter series*, Ender Wiggin, from the *Ender's Game series* and Tiffany Aching, from the *Discworld series.* Instead, John chooses to identify with the characters he creates himself. For example, the Harry Potter series inspired him to write the narrative of another boy in a different Hogwarts house. This boy had some classes with Harry and happened to be present for many of the big events in Harry's narratives; however, John's character revealed more truth to Harry's story, casting Harry as a liar and his own character as the harbinger of truth. John says that he "never bought into" identifying with characters. As a result, he often writes himself in to the narratives through fanfictions.

Furthermore, John engages with YAL as it clarifies the writer's craft for him. John aspires to be a writer and identifies himself as a writer, so he frequently mentions the writing craft of YAL as a characteristic which keeps him engaged. He is familiar with many authors of YAL such as Louis Sachar, Rick Riordan, and Scott Westerfield. In fact, he is the only participant in this study who referred to YAL texts by their authors as opposed to plot lines or even titles. As one who appreciates the craft of writing, John admires the authors of the genre and their abilities to "not sugar coat" information to young readers, basically, "telling it like it is." He seeks out texts that have "good hooks" and plot twists that keep you reading. These are all traits of the genre which he seeks to emulate in his own writing, as he shares, "Yeah, I definitely used Rowling's work as a model. When I was writing I wanted to go for a person who could have been easily insinuated into Rowling's work without changing anything she wrote. So I used it as a model a little bit."

Rationales for reading.

Above all, John feels that YAL provides "better worlds" than other fiction. Because of his attention to detail and writers' craft, he is keenly aware of the various efforts to create complex and interesting worlds in books and he feels YAL has "better developed worlds" than other genres of texts, citing examples such as *The Edge Chronicles* (Stewart & Riddell), *The Leviathan series* (Westerfield), the *Discworld novels* (Pratchett), and the *Ender's Game* series (Card), and explaining these authors "do a better job of world building." In addition, as a storyteller himself, John also seeks out good stories. With all fiction, John wants the author to weave a fascinating story, but in YAL, he finds stories he "hasn't heard before;" those that are innovative and creative. He feels YAL relinquishes him from having to "parse through what the author's underlying message might be" and simply be "entertained, not lectured." Yet he

recognizes YAL, especially current YAL, as often addressing important ideas such as consumerism, racial inequality, and relationship dynamics. Despite his attraction to the imaginative worlds present in YAL, John recognizes the realistic aspect of the genre as well. "It's kind of like we've already got this intangible darkness already going on, so we're just kind of writing to what's current in today's society." It is important to note that John, visualizing himself as a writer of YAL, includes himself in the collective pronoun "we" for this previous statement, indicating that he, too, is writing what he perceives is currently present in society.

Interestingly, John comments on the didactic nature of the YAL he remembers form his own adolescence. He mentions modern YAL as far more sophisticated and authors of the genre frequently "talk to the reader as if they're an adult." He appreciates the complexity of contemporary YAL as it provides an opportunity, in his opinion, to develop vocabulary, and expose young readers to challenging concepts such as "consequences of actions—both positive and negative" and maintaining honesty in difficult situations. These characteristics of the YAL genre are all traits John seeks to incorporate into his own writing, therefore, in an effort to continue to hone his craft, he continues to read YAL.

Identity influences.

Of all the participants involved in this study, John's assertion that YAL had no influence over his life was the strongest. He had time to reflect on his engagements with YAL in addition to the purpose and reason in the form of this study to reflect on how the genre influenced his identity. Yet, at his second interview, he still responded with, "Oh when I was much younger I'd say yes [to YAL's influence], but now? No, my life is kind of set." Furthermore, after our first dialogic interview, John commented about how the study prompted him to seek out more "adult" selections for his next binge read, indicating potential feelings of shame and loss of social capital

(Bourdieu, 1986). At both interviews, John's responses to the question, "Does YAL influence your identity?" were firm "Nos" (See Table A5), despite having the reflection which brought about realization in others, John continued to see no influence of YAL on his identity.

However, when his actions were organized according to micro, meso, and maco actions, to determine the scope of influence YAL did, in fact, have on his identity (See Appendix E), identity influences of YAL are clearly present. John experienced the strongest case of antinomy and it is my belief if John were shown explicitly how much YAL did influence his identity, through his micro, meso, and macro actions, or even through his discourses, he would deny or accredit the influence to another contributing factor other than YAL. This belief is based upon his act of distancing while reading, the way he spoke of YAL readers as "others," not usually including himself, and his immediate rejection of YAL for more "adult reads" after our first interview.

Primarily, YAL influenced John's identity as a writer. Not until reading Harry Potter did John begin to participate in the act of writing fan fiction. As he began the journey to become a writer, he sought out YAL to act as mentor texts, especially from authors whose writing style he wished to emulate, such as Louis Sachar and J.K. Rowling. He specifically speaks of YAL writing styles which reject traditional rules of composition such as Sachar's "inciting incidents and hooks" and Rowling's "use of a lot of adverbs….to convey information and emotion" as well as her ability to "get sidetracked on tangents."

The influence of authors and writing craft of YAL is one of depth for John. As he began writing, he desired a space to share his writing and receive critiques on his skills. He soon joined a writers' group and found many of the participants in the group also write YAL. In fact, he shared with me about the events of a recent meeting where the writing group debated the

attributes of YAL and how to determine if a book, or even their own writings, were YAL or another genre. John critiques others' writing in the group and seeks out feedback for his own stories as well. He continues to hone his craft by reading, rereading, and emulating the YAL genre.

Additionally, John admitted he occasionally felt "parental" when reading YAL, sharing "the only way it would influence me as a parent was when they [his daughters] were younger, but just to make sure I was comfortable with what they were reading." Although he does not usually feel the need to protect the protagonists or other characters in the texts, he does engage in dialogue with the characters to offer them advice or to question their actions. He finds that he often asks characters questions such as, "Why in the world did you do that?" in attempts to understand what he or she is doing or to even warn them of impending danger. He often reprimands characters as well, suggesting if they "would just make a change in your decision here, we would avoid this [a negative consequence]." Just as a parent would warn a child to save him or her from impending hardships, John engages in such internal dialogue and fosters the parasocial relationship (Oatley, 1994) with characters in YAL texts. Yet, this dialogue with the characters is incongruent with his acceptance of how much the YAL genre influenced him as a parent, as evidenced by his quote above.

Furthermore, John shared he often utilizes YAL as a platform for discussing concepts with his own daughters. Now grown, he recalls using Harry Potter and other YAL texts to generate conversations about complex topics such as sexual activity and relationships. When he taught a fencing class, he often used quotes from YAL texts to encourage the students and to remind them of the actions and movements for the sport. Because YAL texts were familiar to him, John was able to recall the concepts and the situations and despite the difficulty of topic, he

used YAL as a tool to influence his own parenting choices and conversations. Although he rejected that idea that YAL had any influence on his identity, John, did, in fact, reveal actions which indicated a great influence of YAL on his identities.

MiKayla-The Thoughtful Caregiver

MiKayla reads widely across a variety of fictional genres, including contemporary literature, classic literature, and historical fiction. However, the genre MiKayla feels is most engaging for her is young adult literature. She mostly enjoys YAL fantasy and, like other participants in this study, she finds YAL provides an escape from the monotony of her mundane daily life. A married, 41-year-old mother of a 12-year-old daughter, MiKayla appreciates change and feels YAL keeps her engaged while giving her "something to look forward to at the end of the day." A reward for another day of living, reading YAL books are what MiKayla turns to in order to escape, find an adventure, and "feel something." MiKayla has always considered herself a reader, frequently reading classical tomes such as *Les Miserables* and *The Phantom of the Opera*. However, it is in young adult literature that she feels she has found the ability to become her "most authentic self."

Encounters with YAL as an adult.

MiKayla's first encounter with YAL as an adult reader was with Harry Potter. Much like John, she resisted reading the series as it was released due to the massive popularity of the series and her own personal attempts to abstain from societal norms of what is and what is not acceptable for adults to read. However, after giving in and reading the series, she realized what a profound connection she had with many of the characters, most notably, Ron Weasley and Luna Lovegood. At this time, she was around 30 years old and her daughter, Kelly, was a newborn. Considering herself in a newly placed parental role also made connecting with the professorial

characters in Harry Potter easy as well. However, she truly found herself in those scenes in which Ron and Luna were present. Similar to Ron, MiKayla admits to feeling "insecure in the presence of others," but also desiring to be a loyal friend in a "friendship that cannot be swayed." Connections to Luna stem from Luna's uniqueness and MiKayla's desire to be both confident and comfortable with her own uniqueness. She appreciates that Luna is "her most authentic self" and strives to do the same in her daily life and relationships.

After not only enjoying Harry Potter, but finding herself gaining much more from the series than she originally thought she would, MiKayla continued to seek out titles from the young adult literature section of libraries and bookstores. Her next selections were *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, but she has since become a fan of many YA books and some middle grade series such as *The Warriors* series, *Anne of Green Gables,* and *Fairy Tale Villains* stories to name a few. Though she continues to read widely and diversely, she finds herself drawn to YAL books and reads the genre more than other reading material. MiKayla explained that when she goes to the library she heads straight to the YA section, stating "this is my spot."

MiKayla's engagements with YAL.

MiKayla's engagements with YAL were the most complex of all the participants in the study. According to the Engagement-Identity Topology coding scheme as thoroughly described in chapter three, MiKayla engaged with YAL equally through both situations and characters. This was unusual for the participant pool, as most participants clearly engaged with YAL most strongly through the situation. MiKayla, on the other hand, often found putting herself in the place of the characters' situations was emotionally beneficial and kept her returning to the genre. However, she also found that well-developed, relatable characters encouraged her not only to

seek out the genre more, but also helped her understand who she was as well as who she wanted to be.

Engagements with situations.

MiKayla, like others, does not take on the habits and beliefs of the characters about which she reads. Instead, she places herself in the situations and considers what she would do to achieve the same goals as the protagonists in YAL. Though she says she loves her life, MiKayla also admitted seeking out YAL to escape the monotony of it, preferring to read adventurous tales where the protagonist is sent on a journey. She also searches for YAL with an overcoming underdog role for the protagonists. She enjoys these scenes and scenarios and finds her best escapes come when she puts herself in those situation simulations. She shares how those situations leave her:

> ...craving adventure and craving something outside the ordinary. I love my life. I love my husband and my daughter. I love my job, but it can all get very routine and very boring. You know adult life can get boring, so YAL fills that craving for adventure. (MiKayla, Interview 1, 2018)

She also admits while she desires the adventure, she does not "want to actually be in the challenge. When I get down to it, I don't want to run in the maze or shoot a bow and arrow in the arena. I would have been one of the first ones dead." However, these simulations allow MiKayla to consider how she would act in those situations.

Through these situations she gets to simulate, and through becoming a "friend" to the protagonists herself, MiKayla experiences a great deal of emotions as she reads YAL. She expresses feelings of heightened anxiety or adrenaline when reading particularly engaging scenes such as those in Harry Potter when the students are fighting Lord Voldemort on the Hogwarts

grounds or when Thomas and Minho are running through the ever-shifting walls of the maze in *The Maze Runner*. She also grieves the ending of extraordinarily engaging YAL texts feeling as if "there will not be another YAL book that will be that good." MiKayla admits to being hesitant to begin a new YAL book, especially a series, because she has become so comfortable and emotionally invested in the series she has just completed and she is certain nothing can rival that. Fortunately, she takes the risk and continues to read the genre, finding new and engaging texts frequently, stating that each time she reads YAL she feels "content" because "it's satisfying and something for me," indicating MiKayla values the act of reading YAL as a type of self-care.

Engagements with characters.

More than any other participant, MiKayla related and connected with the characters within YAL. She found mirrors in the characters such as Ron Weasley and Clay in the Wings of Fire series. These characters reflected who she was and helped her to see her own experiences, feelings, beliefs and emotions. As an adult, MiKayla feels that in terms of "being an adult," she's "not there yet." In fact, she states, "I don't even know where there is and that's o.k., but I want to get there." She shares YAL teaches her "the lessons" she needs to know to understand who she is, accepting that she is not "where I was ten years ago, so my personality has changed, but there are aspects of me that are important to me and they are universal, like friendship, loyalty, and overcoming, so I can find those discussed in YAL and learn from them."

Not only do YAL characters provide MiKayla a mirror to see herself and reflect on her own current identity (Bishop, 1982), but they also provide her with an idealized goal of who she would like to be. For instance, MiKayla mentions Professor McGonagall, Yellowfang, and even Luna, saying she "wants to BE those characters (when she grows up)" because each of them have characteristics she desires to emulate. She desires the confidence and fortitude of Professor

McGonagall, the witty attitude of Yellowfang, and the authenticity of Luna Lovegood. Through her connections, interactions, and engagements with characters, MiKayla was able to clarify more about herself. Not only did she see herself reflected back through the pages, but characters of YAL also provided a pathway for MiKayla to follow to achieve her goal of becoming her most authentic self. Clearly, both situations and characters were important to MiKayla in terms of keeping her engaged and returning to the YAL genre.

Rationales for reading.

Largely, the greatest rationale MiKayla provides for her reading of YAL is the feeling of adventurous escape as she is reading. Eager to experience change, MiKayla feels too much routine leads to a stale existence. Reading YAL is an escape for her and allows her to experience change by placing herself in the situation simulation of the characters. She shares, "Adult fiction is too real for me. It's too much in the real world. I've got the real world. I crave something outside the ordinary. Some big adventure in a far-fetched scenario." In MiKayla's encounters with YAL, she has an imagined narrative, which is one that includes herself and how she would approach the events and "far-fetched scenarios" the author has provided for her and she also reads the given narrative of YAL. These two narratives often follow a similar trajectory, but not always.

Identity influences.

When considering outward measures of identity changes, through MiKayla's discourse, she indicated a majority of micro actions, followed by meso actions. Her conversation had limited mention of macro actions. Despite having considered and thoroughly reflecting on societal heteronormative narratives and how those often marginalize many, MiKayla made no mention of outward actions to support the confirmation or rejection of those narratives. She did,

however, reveal many micro actions, which is indicative of inner personality and identity influences and is consistent with her connections to the characters and situations in YAL.

MiKayla's discourse reflected inner changes to her personality through the reading of YAL. She was able to recognize traits from YAL which she sought after in her own life, such as the desire for someone to watch over her as someone watched over Clay in the *Wings of Fire* series, stating, "those who protect everyone also need someone to protect them." Her acceptance of this influenced how she approached her role as a mother; one of being involved, but also aware of when her own needs were being compromised and she could no longer be a supportive mother, or even person, because of her lack of protection. She felt vulnerable, as Clay was, and reading about him in that role enabled her to see and accept that she was also in a similar position.

Furthermore, MiKayla's micro actions were symptomatic of the agency she felt as she read YAL. She expressed her reactions and emotions about characters and events through writing essays, fanfiction, and her own original stories, sharing her voice and thoughts, which, consequently, forced her to recognize her own insecurities and challenge those assumptions she maintained about herself. Though she acknowledges this is an ongoing process of self-acceptance, she also believes this process as one that will eventually lead to her most authentic self and a rejection of concern for what others think of her. She shares:

> I want people to be accepting and understanding and there are times that I feel like honestly there's not anybody that gets me you know because I'm a weirdo and I like weird things and you know… but I think it's so important to be able to be okay with that. (MiKayla, Interview 1, 2018)

MiKayla's meso actions were also indicative of the influence of YAL on her life and identities. She most frequently engaged in discussions with others about YAL, specifically addressing the merits of the texts she chose to read and the motivations of the characters within the stories. Through such discussions, she became more aware of others' opinions and perspectives on the texts and this subsequently altered how she narrowly defined topics and broadened her own perspective on important issues such as race, class, and gender. Each of these issues were addressed in the Harry Potter series specifically and as MiKayla felt a deep engagement with the series, she found herself moderating a message board about it. Through moderating the discussion on the board, she often realized YAL provided spaces for complex discussions about complex topics in a nonthreatening manner, creating a sense of community:

> It's a sense of community that we created with people talking about things that people would never talk about and I think that's huge. You know we see so much of just people talking but not listening and not understanding and these [YAL books] are things that can give us those openings where we can say okay well let's look at this. How can we know unless we think about the real world? Like, this is what happened here [in YAL]. Plus, there were friendships made that would never have been made without that shared love of something [YAL]. (MiKayla, Interview 1, 2018)

For this reason, MiKayla continues to read YAL and discuss the topics within the genre with adults who also read the genre. She has found that discourses about YAL have encouraged her to "listen more" and to "not be so quick to dismiss others' ideas" in favor of her own.

Additionally, MiKayla has found that YAL provides a prompt for discussing those same complex issues with her 12-year-old daughter, Kelly, who is in middle school. As middle school is often a tumultuous period for relationships, Kelly has struggled to understand the hierarchies

and “rules” of middle school friendships. MiKayla finds herself turning to YAL as a guide to help Kelly navigate those confusing waters. Throughout these discussions, MiKayla finds the information contained within YAL, especially about human nature and relationships, aids her in understanding those complexities as she navigates her own adult friendships.

A meso action that MiKayla is especially proud of is starting a YouTube channel with Kelly to discuss various YAL titles. In their videos, they discuss the merits and motivations of the characters and how they would react if placed in those situations themselves. They also discuss consequences of the characters’ actions and how problematic situations could have been avoided. All of these discussions, MiKayla shares, are influential in how both she and Kelly approach their own courses of action in their lives. In discussing the applicability of YAL’s attributes to both herself and Kelly, MiKayla states, “but some things are universal and that friendship and loyalty and overcoming that's pretty Universal. Yeah to anybody no matter what your age.”

Charlotte-The Reflective Activist

Charlotte, a 33-year-old, self-identified queer female considers herself a lifelong reader. Though she admits to taking a hiatus from pleasure reading during her heavy, course-laden college years, she now privileges reading over any other free time activity; she specifically privileges reading YAL over any other free time activity. Growing up with a teen mom in a small, rural town, Charlotte enjoyed attending school and felt she understood the culture and what was expected of her in school. Therefore, she felt very successful in academia throughout her life. This is reflective in the fact that she is currently pursuing her doctorate degree in social work. Though she does not recall specific reading instruction in her childhood, she states, “It always felt like I could read. It feels like there was never a time I couldn’t read.” Favorites such

as *The Velveteen Rabbit* and R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series were frequently read and reread during elementary school and books were often given as gifts or as rewards for good behavior.

Throughout high school, Charlotte recalls not relating to the majority of the material she was assigned to read, such as Shakespeare or *The Canterbury Tales* because, she "just didn't care about old white guys' writings." Her out-of-school reading experiences were commonly Harlequin romance novels, as she was searching for questions to her answers about sex, which were not present in the abstinence-only curriculum provided by her school. At this time, she continued her love of scary stories by graduating from R.L. Stine to Stephen King.

After her college hiatus, Charlotte found herself working an emotionally and mentally taxing job as an advocate for sexual assault survivors. This meant being involved in the survivors' lives and supporting them in their recovery from abuse. Charlotte sought a respite from such trauma through reading. Also at this time, Charlotte's wife of four years, who is a high school English teacher, began to recommend young adult literature as something Charlotte might be interested in reading.

Adult encounters with YAL.

As Charlotte's wife began to recommend titles of YAL for her to read, Charlotte's initial response was one of judgment. She considered the YAL genre to be too sophomoric and felt that she would find it unrelatable. In fact, she recalls considering the genre at first and thinking of it as if she were "shopping in the juniors' department at the store" and thinking that she did not "fit in here." Still refusing to read the genre, Charlotte recalls shopping at the bookstore with her wife and seeing the novel *Crank* by Ellen Hopkins on the shelf. As she began to skim the pages, Charlotte was overcome with how accurately the author depicted teen mothers addicted to methamphetamines. At this time, she was no longer working as an advocate for sexual assault

victims, but was now a social worker whose case load included several teen moms addicted to meth. At that moment, Charlotte realized the value of YAL and recognized the timeliness and accessibility of the genre for reaching not only an adolescent audience, but also for an adult audience as well. She embraced YAL recommendations from her wife and others from that point on. The more YAL she read, the more she discovered the genre's ability to normalize and advocate for non-binary adolescents, adolescents of color, and adolescents with mental illness, all of which appeal to Charlotte's passion for social work.

Charlotte's engagements with YAL.

Charlotte most frequently engages with YAL through the situations presented in the texts she reads. Often when she reads about the situations in YAL, she reflects on these situations and how they bring meaning to or are reflected in her own life. Carefully considering and reflecting on the situations presented in the YAL she reads routinely moves Charlotte to take action in many ways. Charlotte's shares how reading *Dumplin'* and how Willowdean's situation and speech inspired her to abstain from commenting on other peoples' bodies, to purchase her own two-piece swimsuit, and to promote healthy body image through social media posts. Additionally, Charlotte commonly "communicates via book recommendations" to her clients. She stocks her office shelves with a wide variety of reading material, including YAL and repeatedly finds herself sharing YAL books with adolescents and adults alike. She finds that YAL provides a "space to see that their story is written down or a story like theirs" and if their emotions cannot be verbalized, "it is really powerful to see a story like theirs written down" and normalized. Charlotte appreciates this for herself as well, stating, "It's been really important as a queer person to see queer youth in young adult literature." Seeing this helped her think back on

her own experiences as an adolescent and reflect at the normalcy of what she often felt was abnormal because of her orientations.

Rationales for reading.

In her early twenties, Charlotte shared that she, like most adolescents, tried-on a variety of identities through her reading choices (Neilson, 1998). She has since come to realize that current YAL, in its representation of people of color, LGBTQIA characters, and characters with mental illnesses, to name a few, helps her "get quiet and internally figure out who I am [she is]." When she first began reading YAL, she viewed it a merely a form of escape, even giving herself permission to "let go of some of the expectations of 'good reading.'" However, as she exposed herself to more YAL, Charlotte accepted that the genre is "really difficult conceptually," and also "really timely" in opening up a discourse about often socially-stigmatized topics, such as obesity and anxiety. Furthermore, Charlotte appreciates the representation she finds throughout the pages of YAL. As she discussed representation, especially representation of LGBTQIA characters in young adult literature, she could only recall two adult fiction books which featured LGBTQIA characters, yet she specifically mentions the multiple titles which YAL authors Becky Albertelli and Adam Silvera have written and the "great job" they are doing of "bringing all the gay folks onto the front page." Seeing this representation allows Charlotte the opportunity to reflect on her own experience as an adolescent and consider how those representations are authentic to her own identity.

Feelings are a salient reason for why Charlotte continues to return to the YAL shelves of her local libraries and bookstores. Charlotte considers YA a path to feeling because:

> YA authors do a really good job of just showing us why a character is having an emotion or even acknowledging that a character is having an emotion. I think adults get

> pulled away from that cool part of adolescence where we just feel everything really strongly. They capture that and it gets put on a page. I think adult [fiction] authors have taken that kind of joy out of watching emotional responses and emotional reactions. Teenagers can feel everything and for me, there's something about not getting marred [sic] down in the minutiae. (Charlotte, Interview 1, 2018)

As a social worker, the majority of Charlotte's professional practice centers around teaching adults "how to get back in touch with those feelings that we naturally have as kids and teenagers" and "giving them the permission to feel that joy," which is why she recommends YAL to her clients, suggesting that "YA is good for your mental health." As a healing and restorative practice, Charlotte not only suggests YAL for others, including adults, but also continues to read, what she describes as a "hopeful genre" for herself.

Her final rationale for continuing to read the genre is to see more progressive and representative YAL published for posterity's sake. In essence, speaking with her dollars, Charlotte will continue to purchase, recommend, and read YAL because she has "a lot of faith in young people to lead us toward political freedom." While she feels hopeful when she reads YAL herself, by purchasing more, she is encouraging the craft to continue on the hopeful, fully represented trajectory. Seeking to fight against the stigmas that plague our society, Charlotte is vocal about YAL books that normalize anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, or other often stigmatized social topics, hoping that one day soon there will be "a range of possible normal. It's a spectrum of things, not just one thing" and Charlotte feels, YAL, more than any other genre, is addressing the spectrum.

Identity influences.

Of all the participants in this study, Charlotte was the only participant to not exhibit antinomy about YAL influencing her identity. She unhesitatingly agreed at both interviews that it did. Additionally, Charlotte's broadness of scope regarding those influences extended far beyond those of the other participants in the study. While other participants evinced considerably more micro actions than meso actions and fewer macro actions, if any, Charlotte's map of actions (See Figure E5) displayed the greatest number of micro actions, but her second greatest type of actions were macro actions, or those that influenced Charlotte to take action on a larger global scale.

The influence of YAL on Charlotte's identities begins inwardly with specific micro actions such as questioning, thinking, reflecting, and connecting with her own emotions. Most of the YAL she chooses to read focuses on queer characters, which Charlotte feels is significant for not only adolescents, but also adults of all orientations. As she reads YAL with queer characters, she finds herself reflecting on her own adolescence and how the majority of the feelings she had regarding her orientations were marginalized, which often made her feel abnormal. Current YAL, which Charlotte feels is focused on multiple perspectives and representations for all, actually normalizes the feelings she had as an adolescent and even though she is well into her adulthood, she still considers YAL with those representations of non-binaries as therapeutic in understanding who she is. Above all, Charlotte is continually seeking out ways to be her "most authentic self," which she often finds through the representation in current YAL.

Charlotte is fortunate enough to participate in frequent activities where reading YAL and discourses about YAL are at the forefront. These meso actions start in her own home. Charlotte's wife is a high school English teacher and repeatedly suggests YAL titles for her to

read. Additionally, they engage in discussions about those titles with one another, but also in a monthly YAL book club session. Charlotte often travels with her wife to conferences where YAL authors speak and interact with the attendees, which she considers an educational experience as she usually begins a dialogue with YAL authors about why they feel the need to tell the stories they tell. She finds that a lot of YAL authors want to ensure voices of adolescents are heard and respected, which is why they chose to write in the genre.

Not only does Charlotte participate in YAL-centric activities with her spouse and others, but she also considers YAL a valuable tool for her professional practice. As a social worker pursuing her doctorate, she offers cognitive psychotherapy to both adolescents and adults. As she facilitates therapies where those in need can gain tools to "get over the fear of being with themselves," and be successful when they have had to "grow up too soon" and not deal with emotions appropriately, she regularly relies on YAL texts as a type of tool for that work. Charlotte recommends YAL books for both her adolescent and adult clients who find they need "the space and permission to feel those feelings" and for those who need the empowerment they can derive from "seeing their story or a similar story written down."

Finally, of all the participants in this study, Charlotte participated in the most macro actions, or those actions which influence larger systems in her community and in society. She shares her YAL reading through discourses with others on social media platforms such as Goodreads.com and Facebook, but beyond that, Charlotte feels YAL, through its broader conceptualization of "normalcy," inspires her to take action steps to reject society's expectations of socially-situated constructs such as adulthood, adolescence, race, and gender. She does this mostly through marches and letter writing to politicians, but also through her everyday discourses with those with whom she comes in contact. Charlotte comments that the completion

of YAL often leaves her feeling that she has “accomplished something” and “empowered,” which fuels her for challenging the heteronormative binaries she views as limiting. This is done in an effort to open up “possible range of normal” because YAL is often hopeful and Charlotte has hope that narrow, restricting constructs can be augmented to include a larger scope of people, as she sees successfully portrayed in YAL, rather than excluded and marginalizing those society deems insignificant.

Overall Findings

Through participant discourses during both the dialogic and verbal protocol interviews, consistencies across the responses emerged. As the above section illustrates the individual threads of participant narratives, this section weaves the threads together in a tapestry to create an image of how the adults in this study engage and interact with, discuss, and react to YAL.

Situation Simulation

This study found that adult readers of YAL utilized the YAL as a fictive simulation in that readers in this study did not take on the character’s emotions, in the simulation, but rather felt equipped to handle the unique situation of the protagonists with their own behaviors, emotions, and beliefs. In other words, these readers did not think,” What would Katniss do?,” but rather, “What would I do in Katniss’s situation?” Though they often imagined themselves having the same goal(s) as the teen protagonist and the ability to employ the same tools, adults in this study did not imagine themselves as the specific main characters, especially with regard to the protagonists’ personalities, characteristics, traits, or belief systems. Instead, they imagined themselves in those roles and with those tools, but with their own personalities, characteristics, traits, and belief systems.

Julissa describes the tensions she felt when she frequently placed herself in the situation of the YAL world. “I know my mouth and if I were in that situation I would still be rubbing their face in it [their mistakes], so it’s made me consider the little things and not holding on to them so much.” She also expresses how this makes her put herself in the situations presented in YAL. “It just makes me think what would I do or be able to do in that same situation. Do I need to do things differently?” Deanna shares how she approaches reading YAL and relating to the protagonists. “I’m not sitting there thinking I’m that person o.k.? I don’t put myself in that place like you do with some reading…but it does relate to me as a person.” She goes on to share how it relates to her as a person, explaining that when times are hard, “YAL shows you just have to keep working and you just have to keep fighting.”

John, too, discusses how, not only does he not relate to characters in the books, specifically discussing the Harry Potter books, but how he reacts to that realization:

> Now, see, that’s the funny thing I identified with a character who was not in the book. While reading these I kept getting this whisper of a figure in the background of all these books. He kept saying, “That’s not how it happened.” And so, I just wrote fanfiction with that character. (John, Interview 1, 2018)

John responded to this disassociation by writing a character he could identify with into a Harry Potter fanfiction piece. When asked if he identified with any character in any YAL genre, he responded with, “No. Really I don’t identify myself with any character in books typically.” He provides more detail on the situation simulation when he explains, “I’d see it more along the lines of inventing a character possibly in the similar universe but having a different personality, different character traits. One I could more identify with.” John was anchored to the YAL text

through the situation. When characters with whom he could identify were absent, he essentially wrote himself in the story.

MiKayla shares explicit thoughts on a fictive situation simulation. She specifically mentions tragic situations when discussing how she imagines herself in those situation simulations as she reads. "The Hunger Games, Divergent, Maze Runner— where they're in these horrible situations and it's kind of fun to think about what you'd do differently." Here, MiKayla inserts herself into the role or situation of the YAL and humorously speculates on the outcome, "I'd probably be the first to die, you know?" She goes on to say that participating in this act is one of the things she loves about reading. "I can't stop myself from trying to figure out what's gonna happen, so I love a book that keeps me guessing because then I'm always thinking about what I would do in that situation." She continues, "I might look back on something but I don't know that I've really thought about what Katniss would do in my situation. No I don't think that," even explicitly stating, "so I guess I put myself in their situations but I don't put them in my situation and think what would they do?"

Charlotte did not explicitly discuss situations in terms of placing herself in the character's situation or role. However, she did discuss the situations in the YAL she choose to read as prompting her to reflect back on her own experiences and consider how the situations in YAL alter existing narratives about marginalized people, especially people of color and queer people. Despite not explicitly discussing the situation simulation as she read, Charlotte was still greatly impacted by the situations presented in YAL. Though she did not mention placing herself in those situations, they still caused her to react emotionally and subsequently actions for change.

To answer the first research question of this study (In what ways do adults engaged with YAL?), the data was clear that situations were highly impactful for the adult readers of YAL in

this study. Each specifically reference multiple situations within many YAL texts. Furthermore, most acknowledged their habitual practice of placing themselves within the situations presented in the YAL texts. Though they did not take on the characters' personalities or traits, they did assume their goals and the roles in the specific worlds in which they lived. Julissa, Deanna, and Charlotte discussed how the situations presented in the YAL gave them pause for their own actions, while MiKayla derives pleasure in thinking on how she would perform the situation simulation differently. John, quite literally writes himself into the worlds and situations through fanfiction, simulating how he would act as a character of his own creation.

Antinomy

In this study, the term "antinomy" was used to describe participants' self-contradictory experience of stating that they were not influenced by YAL, but had broad behavior changes in their lives that would never have been present without YAL. The second finding of this study illustrates that the adults in this study abstracted during YAL so frequently and, as a consequence, they assimilated these abstractions into their own lives-- so much so that these acts became a part of them. It appears as if all but one of the participants (Charlotte) were unaware of this distinction, hence the antinomy (Table A5). Prior to this study, I conducted a related pilot study. Throughout the discourses of our interviews in the pilot study, each of those participants admitted to not being aware of the influence of YAL on their adult identities. This was not a question I explicitly asked in the pilot study. However, after seeing the results from the pilot study and experiencing an influence of YAL on my own life, I restructured the questions of this dissertation study to include the explicit questions, "Does YAL have an influence on your life? If so, how?"

In the dialogic interview, which was the first in a series of two interviews, without hesitation, three of the participants (Julissa, Deanna, and John) rejected the idea that YAL would have an influence on their life, rationalizing their age prevented such an influence. Julissa stated that YAL did not motivate her to take any actions, yet she discussed how YAL:

> …makes me more aware of my surroundings and it makes me curious about what's really going on. It helps me educate my son. Really, like having the bug out bags and having the emergency stuff and learning how to shoot a gun. I am a single mom and I am independent and I'm on my own. I go out all the time. I try to be a socially smart person. I've always been more street-smart. I guess it [YAL] just reinforces all of that. (Julissa, Interview 1, 2018)

Clearly, YAL influences Julissa's identity, but she was either unaware or unwilling to admit it. When asked at the second interview about YAL's influence on her identity, Julissa admitted that, "Maybe. It might. I am looking at my life more like a story, but I'm not the author, so I guess I am processing it [YAL] more in my life."

Deanna specifically stated, "I'm not sitting there thinking I'm that person o.k.? I don't put myself in that place like you do with some reading," and when explicitly asked about the influence of YAL on her identity at our first interview, she admitted, "I don't know. I hadn't thought about that," but she also shared how she found YAL hopeful and when she was depressed about current events, especially political events, she was aware of the lack of YAL in her life, stating "I have felt a lack of hope. One thing I can probably do is read some more young adult literature and I could probably be better off. Yeah I really need to." Furthermore, Deanna purports how YAL inspires her to stand up for what she believes in, like Peeta from The Hunger Games. She states, "I don't want to be influenced by the masses and end up living in so much

fear that I have to say a certain thing or be a certain way. I want to fight for what's right." YAL influenced her identity so much so that she shared how YAL inspired her to think "about how can I influence the future. I've got my little tribe and we've got to change." When explicitly asked in the second interview if YAL influenced her life, she expressed that it had, sharing when she reread YAL selections for that interview, "I saw all of me which I didn't see before. It relates to me as a person."

John was the most adamant in his antinomy. He ardently stated that YAL had no influence on his life, stating that he was "pretty set in my choices" yet he admitted to writing fanfiction of Harry Potter, which sparked an interest in writing the genre itself, and subsequently influenced him to join a writers' group to share, critique, and improve his writing of YAL. Furthermore, he participated in dialogues and discussions with his daughters about YAL and even assisted in the creation of a YAL manga cosplay outfit for one of his daughters. While John did not discuss a vast amount of micro, meso, or macro actions, he did discuss some, which is enough to demonstrate his antinomy.

MiKayla was more thoughtful in her response to the explicit question of "Does YAL influence your identity?" at our interview. She paused for a considerable length of time and pondered before answering a tentative, "Maybe?" with a rising intonation as if to turn her response into a question. MiKayla's interview was slightly different than the other participants as she had back-to-back interviews, which eliminated the time for reflection on the influence of YAL. However, in a follow-up email about two weeks after our second interview, I posed the question to MiKayla again. This time, she responded much more confidently:

> I suppose the more I think about it, there likely are some ways YA influences at least some of my roles. For example, most YA lit has a large element of adventure. In

> fact, most of it is based on an adventure of some sort. These are usually perilous and of course cause the hero to go through difficult trials before ultimately overcoming. As a mom, these are great examples to share with my daughter, especially when she's going through a rough time. We can talk about our favorites and think through how they overcame the obstacles before them. And many of them are in the same age range as her. As a wife/woman in general, I would like to think my love of these stories makes me a more pleasant human being because they give me an escape. If I stay immersed in reality for too long without a break I get sad and frustrated with the state of the world. I look at these stories and with so many set in a world worse than ours, I have the opportunity to imagine we can have happy ending too, even though the cynic in me knows that isn't likely. I tend to be cynical and that's why I get grumpy when I have too much reality in my life, so the escape into worlds where the bad is overcome by good helps me not to wallow in that cynicism. (MiKayla, email, 2018)

These contradictions became apparent after each interview with the participants. Only Charlotte readily admitted the influence YAL had on her life and maintained that position from her first, dialogic interview to her second, verbal protocol interview.

After verbal protocol interviews.

At the conclusion of the first dialogic interviews with all five participants, the influence of YAL on life question was posed. This was strategically placed at the end of the interview in an attempt to provide the entire interview as proof or absence of influence of YAL on the adults' (in this study) lives. At a random point in the verbal protocol interview, the second of the series, the question was posed again. There was no strategic placement of the question for the second interview, as the participant controlled the tempo of the verbal protocol interview, so I, as

researcher, simply prompted when appropriate. Three of the participants (Julissa, Deanna, and MiKayla) changed their responses regarding the influence of YAL on their lives from the first dialogic interview to the second verbal protocol interview. Both John and Charlotte remained resolute in their original answers of no influence and definite influence, respectively. (See Table A5)

When participants had time for reflection, an opportunity to reflect on their experiences, and a reason to do so, all of which were present in this study, they showed acceptance to the influence of YAL on their identities. Charlotte, who confirmed that YAL did have an influence on her identities at both of her interviews, participated in a variety of reflective practices about YAL, including, but not limited to, attending YAL conferences, participating in a YAL book club, and discussing YAL books with people in her life. Furthermore, as a social worker, she values the reflective practice as a whole and was keenly aware of how to reflect on her own reading and thinking. For other participants with less time or less knowledge of the reflective practice, the antinomy they experienced seemed harder to overcome.

Chapter Summary

This chapter opens with individual participant narratives of the readers' lives, specifically addressing personal rationales for reading YAL. Participant narratives also illustrate the particular and differentiated experiences adult readers in this study share about their YAL reading and how YAL specifically influence their identities. Furthermore, the individual narratives share how each participant came to be an adult reader of YAL, how and why they engage with the genre, and how the genre influences their identities according to them. These stories they share about being adult readers of YAL address all of the research questions of this study.

The second section of this chapter discussed the primary findings of the study. The first finding explained how adults in this study who read YAL place themselves in the character's situations and often with the character's goals and tools, but with their own personality traits. A second finding revealed most of the readers of this study (4 out of 5) experienced antinomy about the influence of YAL on his or her identities. In other words, they indicated YAL had no influence on their identities while their discourses proved a contradiction. When given time, opportunity, and a reason for reflection, all but one participant accepted the possibility of YAL's influence on their identities.

This findings chapter explores the specific individual narratives of the participants of this study, all of which contribute to the larger, overarching narrative of adults who read YAL for pleasure. These findings provide explicit expressions from the participants to support their own rationales for reading YAL and how they viewed the influence of the genre on their own, multi-faceted identities. In the next chapter, I aim to explain what these results mean in greater detail and in light of relevant research literature.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

This study came about as conversations about who an appropriate reader of young adult literature truly is. In the educational contexts in which I was working, young adult literature was marginalized by my colleagues and yet, the students, adults at the community college, flocked to the genre, reading with enthusiasm and interest, all while improving cognitive skills. As discourses outside the educational context with friends and family also centered on book recommendations and reading young adult literature for pleasure, I began to wonder why adults are drawn to read the young adult literature genre. This initial questioning brought about more questions, such as: do adults engage with the genre in the same ways as adolescents? Does YAL influence adult lives and identities as the literature purports the genre does for adolescents? Do life-long readers exist? Are adults stigmatized or marginalized for reading young adult literature? Is it truly a pleasurable experience or are adults simply reading as an act for some other purpose such as to communicate better with their own children? These questions extend far outside the scope of this study. However, as I have spent more time with participants, their narratives, and the literature, more questions have arisen. In the end, realizing that I am bound by the limitations of a doctoral dissertation, I sought to investigate the following questions:

- In what ways do adults (age 30+) engaged with young adult literature?
- What are the rationales adults (age 30+) provide for reading young adult literature?
- How does the genre of young adult literature influence adult reader identities?

Using Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1994) to examine participants' responses to not only the texts, but also the act of reading itself, I was able to derive new understandings for some adults' purposes for reading young adult literature and their practices during and after the reading event. Understanding these practices and behaviors is salient as the subsequent action

after a reading is often an action brought about by the influential force of the text (Rosenblatt, 1994), indicating that the young adult literature these adults were choosing to read was, indeed influencing their lives and identities. Furthermore, using Lipari's (2014) concept of interlistening, as well as Lysaker's (2011) notion of social imaginations, participants demonstrated how dialogism is imperative during the act of reading in terms of identity development. Utilizing these theoretical frames, I designed a study to interview five adult readers of young adult literature to understand their personal narratives, how reading and, more specifically, young adult literature are positioned within those narratives, and how influential the genre is on their own personal identities.

In this final chapter of my dissertation, I discuss the findings from the previous chapter juxtaposed against the literature from chapter two. In doing so, this study solidifies the academic research narratives present in the literature or provides varied nuance to existing literature. In addition to the discussion of findings and literature in this final chapter, I also provide the limitations of the study, which serve as an impetus for implications for not only future research to expand and build on this study, but also implications for practice in educational contexts.

Discussion

This study illustrates the multiplicity of adult readers' purposes and practices of reading. As outlined in chapter two, the literature on adult literacy and adult readers largely falls into two categories: workplace literacy (Belfiore et al., 2004; Uvin & Jurno, 1996; Wolf & Jenkins, 2014) and adult basic education (Lesgold & Welch-Ross, 2012; Scarborough et al., 2013). This study, however, examined a third, less researched faction of adult literacy—pleasure reading. Though the participants were sharing their experiences with pleasurable reading rather than workplace literacies or adult basic education, the pleasurable reading with which they engaged did, in fact,

have an impact on their workplace and professional lives. Deanna, for example, drew on thoroughly developed relationships from young adult literature to attempt to understand those she interacted with in her personal and professional life. Furthermore, she found the theme of reliance on others, which she feels is prevalent in young adult literature, as imperative to the nature of her work in which she often mediates opposing views through arbitration of unions and businesses. Julissa, who is self-employed as a home organizer, was prompted to consider the labels of the young adult literature genre and how those labels influence the readership. Admittedly, she utilizes labels frequently in her business, yet she feels that the physical labels on the books themselves are prohibitive and should be eliminated, as, in her opinion, the genre seeks to move beyond labels through diverse characters, so should publishers follow suit. Charlotte, more than any other participant, utilized YAL in her professional practice in social work to provide both adult and adolescents the space they need to own their identities. Not only does this study highlight the often neglected pleasurable reading, but it also illustrates the multiplicity of readers themselves and the multiplicity of the purposes they have for not only reading, but more specifically, the act of pleasurable reading, which focuses on the YAL genre.

Pleasure Reading Discussion

Because the participants in this study were sharing their pleasure reading experiences and not participating in adult basic education (ABE) contexts, the majority of the remaining discussion will address the aspect through adult pleasure reading lenses. It is important to note, however, that as the literature reports, ABE contexts which provide opportunities for instruction in reading circles where readers select and discuss literature in an attempt to provide a more authentic reading experience do exhibit realistic attributes of authentic reading according to this

study. Adult readers in this study made mention of choice, discussion, and social interaction about YA as contributing factors to the agentive nature of their own personal reading practices.

Reaping book club benefits in isolation.

Despite the lack of book club settings for the participants of this study, they appear to have gleaned similar benefits as the literature posits affords adult readers in book club settings. Participants discussed their own agency in choosing their material to read and, in fact, none of the participants felt stigmatized in selecting to read young adult literature as an adult. These participants boldly selected and discussed the YAL genre and were not embarrassed nor deterred from continuing to select YAL titles. Additionally, participants noted a "flow state" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) when reading YAL, which was often absent in their attempts to read other material. This was especially noticeable when Julissa described her struggle to become engaged with George Orwell's 1984 as juxtaposed with a YAL dystopian novel, such as The Program. Julissa felt 1984 was too laborious and she was certain she would soon abandon the novel. Yet, when reading The Program series, she became more confident as she finished the books and chose to continue reading the series, not only because she enjoyed the narrative, but also because she found herself able to "get inside the book" and forget everything else around her. John, too, found a "flow state" with YAL much more easily than in adult fiction. As he argues, "YAL tells a better story and YAL author's build a much better world." As John suffers from insomnia, he often found himself reading YAL far longer than he intended late into the night hours because he immediately became engaged in the action, characters, and world of a YAL novel.

Perhaps most surprising was the fact that despite the participants readings of YAL in isolation, they reaped similar social benefits as the literature suggests book club participants

experience. Deanna spoke passionately about YAL as a strong motivator in the desire to become a change agent and augmenting the narratives of racially marginalized people in her life and community. Julissa, too, experienced social benefits despite reading in isolation. She was prompted to initiate conversations with others about the genre and share her personal narratives as they pertained to the YAL books she chose to read. In doing so, she collaborated with others and fought to resist the narrative of YAL as infantile. Both MiKayla and Charlotte also experienced social interactions about their YAL readings. MiKayla often discussed titles with her daughter and co-workers and Charlotte often discussed titles with her wife, other book club members, and even her clients. The participants in this study engaged in social behaviors as similarly described in the adult reading literature as an outcome of book clubs (Alvavez-Alvarez, 2016; Beach & Yussen, 2011; Hall, 2003; Long, 2003) yet, only Charlotte was an active member of a book club and she still read YAL beyond what was discussed at her book club. The remaining participants all read in isolation; yet the benefits the literature purports are present in book club settings for adults, such as extending cultural discourses (Alvarez-Alvarez, 2016), seeking political change (Long, 2003), and promoting agency (Styslinger, Gavin, & Alright, 2017) were all still evident.

Drawing on the field of psychology.

The benefits of pleasure reading are often overlooked in adult literacy research. While the research advocates for educators to make spaces for adolescence to experience pleasure reading (Mathers & Stern, 2012; Wilhelm, 2016), especially in an effort to create lifelong readers (Gardiner, 2005; Witter, 2013), adult pleasure reading is rarely address. Socio-emotionally engaged reading has recently come to the forefront of adolescent literacy research (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; 2018), illustrating the complexity of what "engaged" reading actually is or looks

like. For the participants in this study, social emotional and social relational aspects of engagement were very present. Participants noted relationships were altered, changes in self, and an increase in empathy and social imagination (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Oatley, 2016).

Similar situation.

The primary way YAL influenced the identities of the adults in this study was not through character engagements, but through situational engagements. Research purports that fiction provides adult readers with the space to engage in emotional-relational work (Kaufman & Libby, 2012; Mar, Oatley, Djikic, & Mullin, 2011). This study revealed similar findings, however more nuances on these engagements also became apparent. Kaufman and Libby (2012) suggest experience-taking is what causes behavioral and identity changes. Experience-taking, as described by Kaufman and Libby, requires readers to divorce themselves from their own traits and ideologies and take on those of the protagonists. Oatley (1994; 2016) extends this notion by proposing fiction as a simulation. He also suggests that readers adopt the goals and actions of the protagonists throughout this simulation. This study found that adult readers of YAL did, in fact, utilize the YAL as a fictive simulation. However this finding differs slightly from Oatley's (1994) concept of reading as simulation in that readers in this study did not take on the character's emotions, in the simulation, but rather felt equipped to handle the unique situation of the protagonists with their own behaviors, emotions, and beliefs.

Consider YAL as a role-playing game (RPG) for the adult readers in this study. In an RPG, players bring their embodied cultures and ideologies to the game, resulting in multiple instances of convergence and divergence with both the games' own narrative and culture (Toscano, 2011). Furthermore, gamers traditionally place characteristics and traits of themselves on their avatars or characters in the varied possible simulations in RPGs (Skelton, 2008). The

adults in this study utilized YAL in much the same fashion. They employed their own practices and ideas as they traversed the situations in the world of the adolescent protagonist. Sometimes this resulted in a like-minded course of action; at other times, however, intersections between protagonist and reader caused tension for the adult readers, which often positioned them in a parental or mentor role for the adolescent protagonist. This tension was often discussed as a space for reflective work; to consider how consequences of actions differ between reality and the simulation and what the outcomes indicate for similar situations in the readers' real life.

Engagement Discussion

As engagement is rationalized in chapter two, this study suggests that readers experience engagement in two predominate categories—cognitive engagement and socio-emotional engagement. Though only some participants felt they had what Rosenblatt describes as the "lived through" experience, all participants engaged with YAL in multiple, varied ways. Both cognitive and socioemotional engagement acts were observed, however, most participants felt strongly and spoke at length about their socioemotional engagements.

Observed cognitive engagements.

Through the verbal protocols of this study, participants demonstrated cognitive-based measures of engagement. Most frequently, participants utilized questioning techniques to question the characters and, less frequently, the author. This was noted when Julissa shared her passages from The Program. As she read, she often stopped the text reading and, looking away from the text, questioned the characters. She would occasionally scoff and say, "Why on earth are you doing that?" as if to reprimand or critique the character's behaviors or actions. Similarly, John, when speaking of YAL texts, often questioned the author's craft as writing was of interest to him.

Also relevant to the cognitively based measures of engagement are the participants' understanding and definitions of "challenging texts." Guthrie (2004) posits that as readers are engaged they will seek out challenging texts. Though the participants of this study noted that YAL was not particularly challenging in vocabulary or word choice for them, all the participants indicated YAL's ability to address complexity of concepts and ideas. John did reflect on the complexity of the vocabulary in YAL in the context of writers' craft as he often commented that YAL authors do not "talk down" to their audience. Vocabulary, word choice, and book length notwithstanding, the participants of this study all troubled the notion that YAL is not complex (Jago, 2011), pointing to the complexity of subject matter including racism, classism, feminism, and political upheaval all as complicated topics present in YAL. The adults in this study all have various opinions regarding these perplexing notions and yet, they all commented on the YAL as a catalyst to inspire thought, discussion, and occasionally actions about such.

Predominate exhibitions of cognitively-based engagements center around the continuation to read the genre. Adults in this study found YAL to be relevant to their lives in such a significant manner and therefore they persisted in their reading of the genre. Additionally, Julissa and Charlotte both commented that reading YAL provided them an efficacious benefit in that they felt accomplished as readers once they finished reading YAL, which bolstered their self-confidence as readers in general and for that reason, they continued to read the genre. MiKayla stated she felt content when reading YAL and therefore as contentment is something she seeks, she continues to read the genre. Each participant had myriad reasons as to why they chose to continue reading YAL however, doing so illustrated a marked engagement, as readers seldom return to texts, materials, or genres in which they are not engaged.

Socioemotional engagements.

While cognitively based exhibitions of engagement were present through participant discourse and verbal protocols, most commonly, engagements noted by participants were socioemotional in nature. As previously touched on in the pleasure reading section, socio-emotional engagements present in this study included, but was not limited to: mediation of self (Lipari, 2014), a parasocial relationship with characters (Oatley, 2016), and appropriations of character behaviors in relevant personal situations (Libby & Kauffman, 2012). Julissa frequently commented about "pretending to be in the characters' place," retaining all her own self, taking on the role, and considering what a book character would do when faced with a real-life situation from her own life. Julissa also demonstrated socioemotional engagement as she utilized texts as relational contexts for mediations of self (Lysaker, et al. 2011), appropriating a character's actions and speech for her own in situations in her own life. This was also observed with Charlotte's appropriation of Willowdean's voice, affirming the perfect "swimsuit body."

Both Deanna and John admitted to not putting themselves in the character's positions or considering the characters actions when faced with a similar problem in their own life however, both still displayed other forms of socioemotional behaviors. Deanna was able to recognize herself in character's actions, despite not imagining herself as the main characters. This was an especially prominent connection in characters who illustrated self-sacrificial traits. Continuing to read YAL texts of a similar nature, she states, pushes her to evolve into what she considers a "better version" of herself. Furthermore, Deanna's discourse primarily centers on YAL's ability to create empathy and understanding with others, which Deanna seeks out as she desire to become a change agent for race relations in her community. Deanna's readings of YAL, like others in the study, is one example of mediation of self (Lipari, 2014).

John also demonstrated socioemotional engagements, despite his lack of the "lived through experience" as described by Libby and Kauffman (2012). Most commonly, John identified with marginalized characters in texts and understood how their silencing effected the larger narrative of the text. Therefore, he sought to tell those stories himself. Furthermore, John and MiKayla often took on a parental roles with characters in the books, questioning their actions, admonishing their behaviors, and giving heeds of warning of future anticipated events. This parental relational role is reflective of their own parental role with their daughters. Where Julissa did not share YAL texts with her son, John and his daughters frequently recommended, discussed, and critiqued YAL texts, building an engaging socioemotional community where discourses about YAL texts were plentiful. MiKayla and her daughter extended scope further by creating YouTube videos and inviting other YAL readers to comment and discuss the genre. Charlotte shared YAL texts with adolescent and adult clients and then discussed the relevance of the texts to their own lives, including Charlotte's herself. These socioemotional engagements and subsequent actions served to influence the participants' identities.

Young Adult Literature Discussion

Adult participants in this study exemplified similar characteristics as the literature purports adolescents experience when reading YAL. All demonstrated YAL's ability to develop their own identity, though many appear to not be cognizant of the influence of YAL on their identity (see antinomy section of chapter four). Julissa identified traits in characters in which she desired to emulate. Furthermore, she felt she became more independent and resilient as she read YAL both as a reader and as a woman. She rejected narratives that she was told to blindly accept in favor of her own thoughts and beliefs about her life. Much like Julissa, Deanna mentioned reading YAL made her feel stronger as well. She specifically sought out YAL to provide her

with hope as she feels despairing of personal aspects of her life and also societal and economic ills of the world. John also was influenced by YAL as he became interested in writing the genre after reading Harry Potter. He sought out avenues of development through a writers' guild and fanfiction forums. MiKayla sought to be her most authentic self through the examples set forth by YAL protagonists. Charlotte, as a queer female, reported feeling more represented in YAL than in other genres, therefore, she felt validation on residual feelings lingering from her own adolescence.

Furthermore, John also described trying-on identities of YAL characters whose narratives are absent or minimalized. He related to these characters in such a way that he developed a narrative to more fully understand their identities. And yet, because he was writing these identities himself, characteristics of himself appear in those narratives, which acts as a method of both trying on identities and mediation of self. Julissa also utilized YAL to try on identities of protagonists, appropriating their postures and responding accordingly. She recalled thinking, "if they can do it, so can I. I can be like Katniss (Everdeen)."

Getting in the YAL flow.

Initially, participants stated that YAL was an easier reading task to accomplish. However when probed further, this ease was relegated to word choice and book length. Most participants noted the ease of YAL as advantageous to reaching optimal "flow states" and the ludic reading of texts (Nell, 1988). Julissa commented about the facile nature of YAL for her and how it contributed to her own self-efficacy as a reader. On the whole, participants in this study challenged the terms "complexity" and "rigorous" as they expressed complex thought, discourse, and action all in response to the YAL genre.

Adult participants in this study utilized the YAL genre in much the same way the literature purports adolescents do. Despite being adults and well beyond the biological time period for identity development (Erikson, 1959; Kohlberg, 1984), those in this study experienced identity development, deconstruction, and reconstruction throughout the process and in response to reading the YAL genre. Because of this, such questions as "what is developmentally appropriate?" and "who determines such a highly individualistic idea?" are addressed. The adult participants in this study challenge some of the traditionally held beliefs about text appropriateness and purposes for reading, especially with regard to adult literacy. Where the literature posits most adults read for function and workplace purposes, these adults illustrate other purposes for reading, focusing on what they gain from pleasure reading. Even within their pleasure reading, multi-purpose is revealed. Julissa read to emulate strong, feminist behaviors. Deanna read to find hope in bleak situations and to understand diverse people. John read to discover new worlds and hear better stories. MiKayla read to escape the monotony of her everyday life. Charlotte read to feel represented. Each of the participants, though diverse in a number of ways, found a reason for continued reading of young adult literature.

Implications

This study implies large conceptual notions about pleasure reading, adult readers, and the young adult literature genre. These implications are broad in nature and point to conclusions formed by this study. The adults in this study willingly shared their reader lives and affinities for the YAL genre with me, which allowed me, as the researcher, to deduce how this practice has influenced their identities. This implication section examines the commonalities between all the participants and their assertions.

Positive Social Change

This study illustrates the effect of YAL on five adults and how their engagements with the genre brought about identity changes. It also illustrates the cognitive and socio-emotional benefits of those five participants. Cognitively, readers, in general, have more crystallized intelligence (Schwanenflugel & Flanagan Knapp, 2015), and show a reduced risk of dementia (Kaup et al., 2013). Additionally, readers have cortical thickness, which is indicative of greater intelligence (Schwanenflugel & Flanagan Knapp, 2015). Overall, readers have better health literacy (Black, Balatti, & Falk, 2013), vote more, and contribute to economic growth in communities (Miller et al., 2017).

Furthermore, children of mothers who read often show gains from those interactions. The mothers are more likely to check homework, attend school meetings with teachers, and produce children who are readers themselves (Boggs, Buss, & Yarnell, 1979). My study revealed an added benefit of those in a parental role and their reading of YAL. The parents in this study all described instances of discourses with their children about the YAL they were both reading. These conversations facilitated meaningful understandings of complex issues such as race, class systems, and relationships. The two participants in this study who were not parents still participated in discussions with adolescents in various contexts about the topics covered in the YAL they were reading. This implies that YAL is a space for addressing complex issues with people of various ages through a method that not only influences the reader socio-emotionally, but also psychologically as well (Oatley, 2016). This notion has promise for communities to not only address issues which effect the entire community as a whole, but also include more varied voices in those conversations. As individuals change, the societies in which they participate change. This study explores the type of change that one specific genre has on a

specific sample of people. Further research is needed to explore how various genres influence various populations and how those influences, in turn, alter the spaces in which those readers live, work, love, and play.

Socio-emotionally, reading has been shown to increase empathy (Kaufmann & Libby, 2012; Oatley, 1994), self-esteem, self-efficacy (Burchfield, Hua, Baral, & Rocha, 2002). Additionally, readers, in general, often experience less stress (Jin, 1992; Lewis, 2009). Every emotion the participants in this study discussed was a social emotion. Because they participated in the act of interlistening (Lipari 2014), they had a dialogue and social exchange about the events, characters, and emotions they were feeling about the text with themselves. Furthermore, this exchange extended to include the author of the text and characters within the texts with the readers often questioning motivations and behaviors and becoming incensed or encouraged by these decisions. Even greater, participants often discussed texts and emotions they had while reading with other readers of YAL, or readers in general, which influenced their social emotions even greater. All of these influences prompted a social emotion from the readers in this study. These social emotions optimized and impacted participants' actions. The participants of this study showed a vast swath of social emotions beyond empathy, including, charity, sympathy, bravery, and resilience, all of which governed their decisions to act. Because of this varied list of emotions exhibited by participants, it can be reasonably concluded that reading affects more social emotions than just empathy and the literacy field should take up the conversations that the field of psychology has begun with regard to social emotions and reading.

Problems in the Field

As previously stated, the field of psychology, especially the work of the cognitive psychologists interested in the effects of fiction on the neurology of readers (Mar et al., 2011;

Kaufmann & Libby, 2012) has been attuned to the multiple benefits of fictive reading on adults' brains and subsequently, their social emotions and relationships. The field of literacy, however, remains diligent to focus on adult education largely through the lens of basic education instruction, career literacy transitions, and family literacy. While these are all worthy of research and discussion, when pleasure reading is absent from such academic conversations, the worth of reading for pleasure, and subsequently the multiple benefits derived from it, are all diminished. The definition of reading has become too narrow in adult literacy fields. Focusing only on basic education, workplace, and family literacy the message sent is reading is advancement oriented rather than a full life-transformative experience. Furthermore, this implies that reading takes place in certain contexts, specifically institutionalized contexts, such as school or work, which therefore negates the notion of reading as a pleasurable act outside of those contexts. It is understandable to acknowledge the scaffolding that must take place in adult literacy, yet neglect of proven beneficial means to many societal problems exacerbates and reinforces the inaccurate narrative, only serving to further the problem. Additionally, it serves to only address the deficiency of the adult reader rather than holistically addressing the literacy needs of adults through humanist means.

Adult literacy fields need to address the complexity and broadness of reading, expanding the benefits from psychological fields into literacy fields of practice. Psychology has already illustrated a benefit to reading fiction, yet many questions remain. Do these benefits exists with reading certain types of fiction? How do reading abilities of adults factor in or contribute to the gains of fictive reading? In what ways can social emotions gained from reading be assessed? How do social emotions experienced while reading prompt decision making after the reading event? How do ethnographical studies address cultures of pleasurable reading and how are the

longitudinal benefits exhibited? The benefits extend far beyond the reader, demonstrating gains throughout the readers' family and community, illustrating worth of investigation. The questions posed here are but a few questions the field of adult literacy could address with further probing into the pleasure reading milieu.

Social Construction of Identity

Finally, this study implies the dynamic, ongoing creation of adult identities. No longer fixed as biological or developmental lenses posit, identities, even those of adults, are continually in flux, acted upon, and altered by many external forces, including the media consumed. Adolescence is often considered a time for identity exploration and discovering on what trajectory your identity will begin to develop, as in essentialized identity theories. This study illustrates how adults may exhibit these same exploratory periods throughout their adulthood as well, even if they are unaware of those changes. In this study, the adults examined, probed, and scrutinized their identities and subsequently, their life trajectories through YAL, suggesting that pleasure reading and the subtleties contained therein have the potential to influence individuals on a larger scale than previously believed.

Furthermore, adults in this study frequently returned to YAL as their preferred reading genre, privileging it above other genres, denoting a snowball effect. This iterative process begins with small influences from the texts, increasingly gaining more and more influences as more YAL is consumed until a great impact on identities potentially occurs. Just as the onset of the snowball is significant to the trajectory and speed of the path of the snowball, the same could be said of the participants and their experiences at the onset of YAL. Many of my participants' introductions to the genre were socially motivated. Julissa, for example, watch The Hunger Games movie with friends and to bolster her discourse, read the remaining books. Both MiKayla

and John experienced negative peer pressure and attempted to reject the culture surrounding Harry Potter, but found themselves succumbing to the book and eventually the YAL genre itself. Charlotte's introduction to the genre was also socially motivated. Reading Crank so she could understand her work better, led to conversations and subsequent recommendations to more YAL by her spouse. Social interactions appear to establish the snowball effect, contribute to the iterative nature of the snowball effect, and beget further social discourses and interactions, all of which contributes to the socially constructed identity of the adult readers in this study.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to my study and these, coupled with the implications, indicate areas for recommendations both in practice and research. The participant sample is one such limitation. This study examined the individual nature of a specific type of reader. While this is fruitful for gaining an understanding of particularistic practices of specific people within a boundary, it does not serve to elaborate on the practices of all people, even those who might fall within the distinct boundaries of this study (adults aged 30 or over who read YAL more than other reading material). This study recruited five white participants, ranging in age from 32 to 63. Furthermore, the participant pool was 80% female, with four participants being female and only one being male. Most spoke of heterosexual relationships, with the exception of Charlotte, who identified as queer. Additionally, John, MiKayla, and Julissa all had children, but Deanna and Charlotte did not. While all of these characteristics connote some diversity, it also serves to point to the lack of diversity, especially with regard to race and gender. A larger, more diverse participant pool could provide myriad differences in purposes, practices, and influences of reading YAL.

Additionally, the specific questions I asked of each participant also acts as a limitation to this study. As this was a semi-structured interview (Denzin, 2001; Mishler 1986), discussions surrounding my participants' experiences with reading YAL began with a set of identical questions. However, follow-up questions became extremely individualistic and specific to the individual participant. These questions could not cover the entirety of the scope of my participants' reader lives, nor their complete, exact interactions of reading YAL. The interviews served as snapshots of what my participants were willing to share with me, but not revealing the picture beyond the frame. This is especially evident in the verbal protocol interviews, where participants were asked to share their inner dialogue to make the interlistening (Lipari, 2014) process audible and known to me. It is impossible to ascertain my participants' entire thought process as they may have censored themselves from sharing their inner dialogues for any number of reasons. These observations of limitations, coupled with the findings and the implications are informative and relevant for literacy researchers, educators, students, and other stakeholders in the field of literacy.

Recommendations

This study signified some calls to address certain pedagogical practices in both adolescent and adult education, as well as some spaces where further research could be built from this study's foundation. This section suggests such proposals for educators in both adolescent and adult classrooms and literacy researchers.

For Practice

Considering recommendations for practice based upon this study was no easy task. As adults were the participants in this study, it seemed necessary to address adult literacy education contexts. However, as YAL is the driving force behind this study, it also seemed prudent to

discuss how YAL, when utilized in the high school classroom, could bring about various reading behaviors early in life. Each of the participants in this study discussed the reader life; their course to becoming lifelong readers. All had books in the home as young children and were encouraged to read in a number of ways. School age reading varied with each with some being equally engaged with the in and out of school readings and others far more interested in the out of school reading selections. All seemed to be set on a trajectory for life long reading (Merga, 2016; Swanson & Da Ros-Voseles, 2009; West, 2002). Yet, each, with the exception of MiKayla, described a long hiatus from reading for pleasure of any kind. The genre that brought each back to a fervent reading life was YAL. If YAL had been introduced, encouraged, discussed, and recommended early, would these participants have taken their reading hiatus? Or would each have continued to consume books and reap the benefits of doing so ardently throughout their life?

Adult Basic Education.

On the whole, adult basic education contexts approach literacy with a decoding approach to instruction (Alamprese et al., 2011; Scarborough et al.; 2013). Such pedagogical practices often rely on systemic, repeated exposures to basic sight words and commonly used phrases (Ortlieb & Young, 2016) and computer-based literacy to increase fluency and prosody (Silver-Pacuilla, 2006). While not to belittle the importance of such practices as decoding strategies and fluency are relevant to reading instruction at any age (Ortlieb & Young, 2016), just as there is space in the K-12 literacy curriculum to provide reading choice of relevant, engaging fiction, so too can this take place in the ABE setting. Furthermore, including YAL in ABE classrooms is advantageous for a variety of other reasons, beyond an engaging read. YAL often addresses important social issues, such as the complexity of relationships, racial inequality, and gender

identity (Hall, 2016) to name a few—none of which are the sole domain of the adolescent (Soter & Conners, 2013).

Approachable, relevant texts, such as YAL can often be agentive for adult readers. Just as adolescents find pop-culture texts helpful in rewriting their reading narratives (Hall, 2016), the YAL genre, which influences and is influenced by popular culture can aid adults in reconstructing their reading narratives from deficiency to success.

K-12 Educational contexts.

This study reveals the importance of reflection on reading as integral to the identity change process. To measure the change of adult identities from this study, discourses about actions taken were organized into micro, meso, and macro actions (see Appendix E). The amount, nor the type of action is necessary for the discussion on the importance of reflection at this point. What is crucial to understand is readers experience a wide variety of transformative, and subsequently, agentive actions when exposed to a plethora of reflective practices and tools. For example, John reflected through writing, as did MiKayla. She also reflected through discussions with others about the texts. Deanna and Julissa were both reflective largely in isolation, but through social actions of mediation of self (Lipari, 2014). Charlotte was perhaps the most reflective. She participated in author conferences, book clubs, writings, internal reflections, and social discourses with others to name a few. Regardless of the type of reflection, what is apparent is the opportunity for diverse ways to interact and reflect on the text to produce greater individual and subsequently more global changes. Teachers in educational institutions should be provided with the materials and tools necessary to encourage the journey of transformation through literature reflection through various means including author visits and

interactions, writing about reading, discourses about reading, and other various literacy community practices.

Furthermore, special attention should be paid to the social-emotional engagements adolescents experience with texts. As Ivey and Johnston purport, these engagements have greater effects than simply academic gains. Practices to support the social-emotional engagements in classrooms should be present, including student choice of texts and discussions of empathy and other such social-emotional and socio-relational should be encouraged, fostered, and addressed in educational institutional contexts.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, as illustrated through this study, readers are drawn to numerous texts for a multitude of reasons. The very nature of this study reveals how readers often defy expectations in terms of book choice. To that end, it is advantageous for classroom teachers to promote, recommend, explicitly teach, and read themselves a variety of young adult literature. Readers of all kinds, students included, need to see themselves within the pages of the book (Sims-Bishop, 1982). Charlotte spoke of a void in books addressing the feelings she had during her own adolescence regarding her orientation, but how YAL has since provided her for a space of representation and validated her adolescent (and sometimes adult) abnormal feelings as perfectly normal. Students, in all their identities, just as the multi-faceted adult identities in this study, yearn for representation, acceptance, and validation of feelings through their readings. Providing and teaching innumerable diverse texts for students is one specific way to address and prevent the void that Charlotte felt.

For Research

Much research is still needed with regard to fiction reading and pleasure reading with adults in general. Though the field of psychology has begun some work on the benefits of fictive

reading, which could be a subset of pleasurable reading, there are still many more questions to be answered. With specific respect to this study, further research could extend the discussion on three fronts: feelings of antinomy, scope and depth of engagement and actions, and adolescent and adult purposes, processes, and outcomes of reading.

Antinomy / shame.

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital may be a factor of the participants' antinomy for reading YAL. Popular discourses often discourage the mere notion of adults reading YA indicating that adults should be "better than this" (Graham, 2014) or that YAL lacks depth (Stein, 2012) and though much as been published to push back against these farcical ideas (Medley, 2014; Smith, 2014) the stigmatism of this rhetoric gives pause for adult readers of the genre. By reading, nee, enjoying reading the YAL genre, adults could potentially feel their social capital decreasing. This tension could be a reason for the antinomy the readers in this study illustrated. Additionally, John was the most unwavering in his resistance to admitting that YAL influenced his life, and yet he described many actions throughout his adulthood, which were clearly influenced by the YAL genre, more specifically, the Harry Potter series. It is possible that John recognized this influence, and yet, because of the potential for a loss of social capital, he denied such an influence. John often distanced himself from his reading choices and even shared with me that after our first meeting, he felt the need to read "adult" books until we met again. His antinomy was the most evident, but all of the other participants, with the exception of Charlotte, displayed a similar contradiction. Other participants were, however, less aggressive in their rejection of or resistance to the notion that YAL could influence their life.

For this reason, the other three participants who at first denied the influence of YAL on their lives, Julissa, Deanna, and MiKayla, seemed to be unaware that the genre was as influential

as it was. Each talked passionately about their desire to read the genre and even talked at length about their favorites: books, characters, storylines, on occasion showing great emotion while extolling the merits of the genre. Deanna and MiKayla were both moved to tears when discussing the genre; Deanna when sharing the relationships, unity, and hopefulness of the genre and MiKayla when discussing how much of herself she saw in Ron Weasley. Julissa became impassioned about how the books made her feel emotionally as well. She often privileged reading the genre above other tasks and made efforts to make herself more aware of her surroundings and of authority after reading The Hunger Games. Each participant shared discourses about how the genre has, in a multitude of ways, made them think, question, feel and act. And yet, all the participants, with the exception of Charlotte, were hesitant (in John's case, resistant) to admit the influence it had on their lives. However, because Julissa, Deanna, and MiKayla all changed their negative answers to positive affirmations that, at the very least, YAL possibly had an influence on their lives from our first meeting to the second, it is my belief that these readers were simply unaware of the influence the genre had on their lives. Further research to determine if antinomy is a common occurrence among adult YAL readers could probe the matter further to seek out rationales for such antinomy.

Scope and depth.

This study found that adult participants who read YAL for pleasure were, in fact, influenced by the narratives of those texts; so much so that they felt called to take actions based upon their evocative feelings while reading or in response to the YAL they read. Some deductions can be made from the organization of the types of actions (micro, meso, and macro) in which each participant engaged. It seems there is a strong correlation between the amount of reflection and the scope of action. For example, Charlotte spent a great deal of time interacting

with others in various contexts discussing and reading YAL. She was also the participant with the greatest extension of actions, meaning, she had the greatest number of macro, or global actions. Julissa, however, remarked how she spent the majority of her time reading new texts rather than deeply reflecting on the texts she read. Furthermore, she commented that as a single, working mother, her time was limited, so rather than reflect on those texts extensively, she chose to simply read more. This indicates a connection between the time spent reflecting, not simply reading, and the scope of actions in response.

However, it is beyond the scope of this study to carefully scrutinize the depth of the various types of actions adults experienced after reading YAL. Determining the depth of influence could illuminate particularistic, specific engagements to certain types of texts or even certain types of characteristics and features of those texts. This data has the possibility to drive instructional decisions to accommodate and differentiate to individual learner needs. Where adult readers of YAL are concerned, examining the depth of actions speak to the larger societal benefit of not only simply reading for pleasure, but the agentive nature of YAL as a catalyst for seeking changes in communities, such as Deanna and Charlotte felt when reading YAL.

YAL for adolescents and adults.

Finally, it would serve literacy research well to examine the types of engagement processes and outcomes of reading YAL among both adolescents and adults. Though Ivey and Johnston (2013) have begun this work with adolescents, more work in needed. Utilizing the Engagement-Identity Topology with a larger sample size of adult readers of YAL as indicated in the limitations and with adolescent readers of YAL and comparing those results could reveal new insights into the ways in which each group engages with the genre. Comprehending such

differences divulges nuances on the act of engagement itself, but also on the heterogeneity of readers of YAL.

Additionally, further scrutiny of both adult and adolescent readers of YAL speaks to both the robustness and the steadfastness of the genre itself. Adolescents and adults are both engaged, cognitively and socio-emotionally, to the genre, illustrating the legitimacy of the genre for a variety of diverse readers. YAL can cross generational borders, promote lifelong reading habits, instill positive changes in not only people, but communities, and inspire readers to become better-better readers, better versions of themselves, better friends, neighbors, and partners. This powerful genre is worth further exploration of its sundry readership.

Conclusion

As a researcher, subjectivity is always present. The reality is that any researcher conducting any work in any context must contend with his or her subjectivities. How I interact in the world, my socialization in it, and the experiences I have had in my life make me who I am, but they also influence my research. In part, this study was born out of my own personal subjectivities. The fact that I am an avid YAL reader myself contributed to my interest in the subject matter. Realizing and recognizing the influence YAL has had on my own identity only added fuel to the research fire.

As a first generation college student on either side of my family, I have often felt alone and misunderstood in my desire to obtain new knowledge in higher education institutions. As the first in my family or even in our circle of friends and acquaintances to write a dissertation, I am often asked about the process. Some ask as a nicety and show little interest when I regale them with terms like epistemology or prospectus. Others are genuinely interested. Above all, I tell them how introspective the writing of a dissertation has been for me. My thoughts, my ideas,

my wonderings are all present in this study and I have truly learned about myself through this process. Most importantly, I've come to realize the process, like life, is different for everyone. While we may have to hit the same milestones along the way, each individual author's path is varied.

My path was filled with YAL.

This genre, too has been integral at looking inside and figuring out who I am. I have seen traits in teen protagonists that I would like to have myself at 40 years old. I have witnessed relationships in YAL that served as a scenario "test run" for how an interaction in my own relationships might unfold. Like MiKayla said when discussing being an adult, "I'm not sure I'm there yet. I don't know where there is, but I'm not there. I'm not where I used to be, but I'm not there." I don't think I'm there either, but I know my path to get to the proverbial "there" will be filled with more YAL, because like Julissa, that's where my books are.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table A1

Sample of In Vivo Coding -- Participant: Charlotte

Original Text	In Vivo Codes	Categories
Being able to call attention to the fact that you know girls who don't fit a certain body type are looked over. That whole dynamic with Dumplin' and her mom being the beauty queen like that that's so many pageant moms and that's a real southern experience just seeing that on paper is really amazing. There's a part where her friends are staying over with her and they're practicing or getting ready for the pageant and they're just having this honest conversation about their bodies and themselves and their families and that's really powerful. I think one of the things that Dumplin' kind of spawned me to do is stop complimenting people's bodies or commenting on them and I've started asking them about themselves. I think especially for women, especially adult women in the world, there's a lot of pressure in the world about to be like "you lost weight" or "how's your diet going" or whatever that mess is. Being very conscious of not having a conversation with my sister about her body because her body is her body and being able to talk to her about what's going on with you how school how's this and not right like I don't need to police your body it's not it's not my job right? So being being very conscious about how I talk about my own body because I think that was one of the things in Dumplin'. Her mom was very obsessed about her own body and this image she put into the world was everything. Being conscientious of that I think caused me to…I pause before I give a compliment and I try to make it about a thing about a person rather than their body.	"call attention" "don't fit a certain body type" "looked over" "dynamic" (mother/daughter) "southern experience" "seeing that on paper is really amazing" "honest conversation" "really powerful" "stop complimenting people's bodies or commenting on them" "asking about themselves" "pressure in the world" "Being very conscious" "her body is her body" "talk to her" "don't need to police your body" "very conscious how I talk about my own body" "image she put into the world was everything" "Being conscientious" "I pause before I give a compliment" "a person rather than their body"	Awareness Outliers/Empathy Overlooked Relationships Authenticity Representation Authenticity/Discourse Power Discourse/Genuine Compliments Genuine/Authentic Conversations Pressure/Social Pressure/Appearance Awareness Ownership/Power Genuine/Authentic Conversations Others' Expecations/Pressure Awareness of Self (body) Image/Authenticity Awareness Genuine/Authentic Conversations x2

Note. The above illustrates a sample of in vivo coding strategies applied to Charlotte's transcripts. from the table, the process of distillation from transcript to in vivo codes and then finally to categories appears.

Table A2
Emotion Codes

Example of Code	Emotion
"I really like it because it just talks about that hope, you know?" (Julissa).	Hope
"That's why I like some of the characters they're really hardened women. They're hard but that's what makes them a fighter and then that's when you get the raw emotion like I like" (Julissa)	Hardened Passionate
"I'm like Peeta. I don't want to live in fear and that because of fear I have to do things a certain way and have to say a certain thing and be a certain way" (Deanna).	Fear
"I think Katniss did the right thing and it made me proud" (Deanna).	Morally "right" Pride
"He has such a wonderful dry British wit and he covers topics in real world" (John).	Amusement
"I just I get a little leery when there when the female character's whole purpose is about a partner" (Charlotte)	Cautious
"*The Serpent King* is a beautiful beautiful book so was *Good Bye Days*. Oh the crying!" (Charlotte)	Sadness
"Reading *The Giver,* oh I hated that book! I always have need to have some kind of hope when you get to the end and to me that one didn't" (MiKayla).	Despair
"I'm kind of I'm content when I'm reading it because you know I'm happy to be escaping into another world or just seeing what this character that I love is gonna do. Sometimes I'm apprehensive because I feel like okay especially in a series you know okay we've been with this character a long time... are they gonna die? Don't break my heart!" (MiKayla)	Content/Happy Apprehensive

Table A3
Engagement-Identity Topology: Ways in which Engagement Occurs

Code Name	**Code Definition**	**Code Shortcut**	**Example from Data**
Character	Readers engaged with a specific character and that character's unique traits.	C	"I relate most to Glory in the Darkwings series, but I loved Clay too" (MiKayla)
Situation	Events, conflicts, relationships, or interactions that could be succinctly abstracted apart from the story's characters or world. For example,"a love triangle" or "the rebel resistance." These often involved characters' "roles" (see above), but the participants were more engaged with the situation than the characters who comprised it. A mention of a "role" (such as underdog or chosen one) was coded as situation rather than character.	S	"Something big has to happen right from the beginning. Set me in the middle of drama--YA does that" (Julissa)
World	The specific world setting. For example, Harry Potter's magical world is vastly different from The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe's magical world (for instance, the creation and existence of horcruxes).	W	"Just his way of describing things the way I uses invented words and since he's an illustrator the way he draws you in there" (John)

Note. These codes are the initial pattern codes used to categorize the first cycle in vivo and second cycle emotion codes. Because these codes were broad, further dissemination parses out the engagements and their influence of young adult literature on adult readers' identities (see Table A4).

Table A4
Engagement-Identity Topology: Influence of Engagement on Identity

Code Name	**Code Definition**	**Code Shortcut**	**Example**
Clarification of Self	Understanding, recognizing, observing, identifying, or becoming more aware of one's own self.	CS	"I see myself in some of the female characters that I like to read about who come from poor families or from towns and they do something different with their life" (Charlotte).
Clarification of Other	Understanding, recognizing, observing, identifying, or becoming more aware of anything else (people, groups, text, worlds, behaviors, beliefs, etc.).	CO	"I may not agree with you, but if I can understand you then I can deal with the conflict better and move on in having a relationship. And I think that is something that comes out more in YA" (Deanna).
Emotion	Any emotion which prompts the reader to a feeling. Including, but not limited to: Joy, Excitement, Sadness, Anger, Hope, Strength	E	"...there was a time when some of these original characters from the first arc of Warriors died and I just, I mean I was blubbering tears and I'm like 'I'm crying over fake cats!' " (MiKayla).
Action	The reader is prompted to do something (an action). These actions can be internal (questioning, thinking) or external (an outward action). External actions are further categorized into solitary (participant acting alone) and relational (participant engaged with another). A solitary action can be as simplistic as continued reading. Relational actions involve others and can include conversations, social media posts, or other exchanges and interactions with people about the YAL.	A (I/E)	Internal: "I had to sit there, stop and think--She's right! There's always that one person in the background, but she's always there. And again, that's where he [Scott Westerfield] made you stop and think" (John). External: "Before I read that, I had never bought a two-piece swimsuit. After I read it, I bought one, took a picture, and posted it on Facebook with that quote" (Charlotte).

Note. These codes were dissected from the broader engagement codes (Table A3) as they reveal how readers' identities were influenced because of those engagements. Readers showed three main processes through their engagements: clarifying, emotionally reacting, and taking actions. It is from these codes the second portion of the Engagement-Identity Topology title is derived.

Table A5

Awareness of Identity Influences Responses: Initial Interview and Final Interview

Participant	**Dialogic Interview**	**Verbal Protocol Interview**
Julissa	No	Maybe
Deanna	No	Yes
John	No	No
MiKayla	Maybe	Yes
Charlotte	Yes	Yes

Note. These are the participant responses when asked, "Does YAL influence your identity?" from the first, dialogic interview to the second, verbal protocol interview. These responses, when coupled with the micro, meso, and macro actions in the participants' dialogues indicate antinomy.

Appendix B

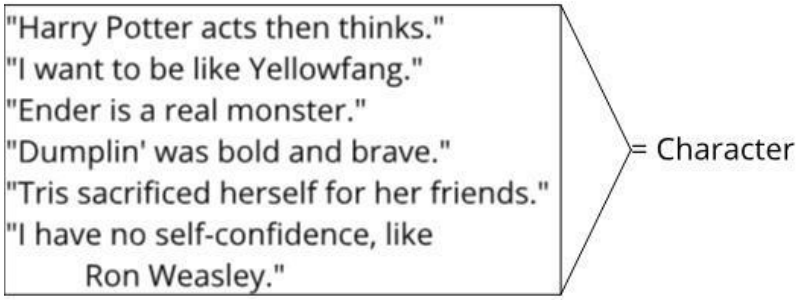


Figure B1. Condensed codes to create a thematic category of engagement.



Figure B2. Diagram of influential codes. This figure is a visual representation of the types of responses adult readers of YAL in this study experienced through the engagements with the characters, situations, and worlds of the genre.

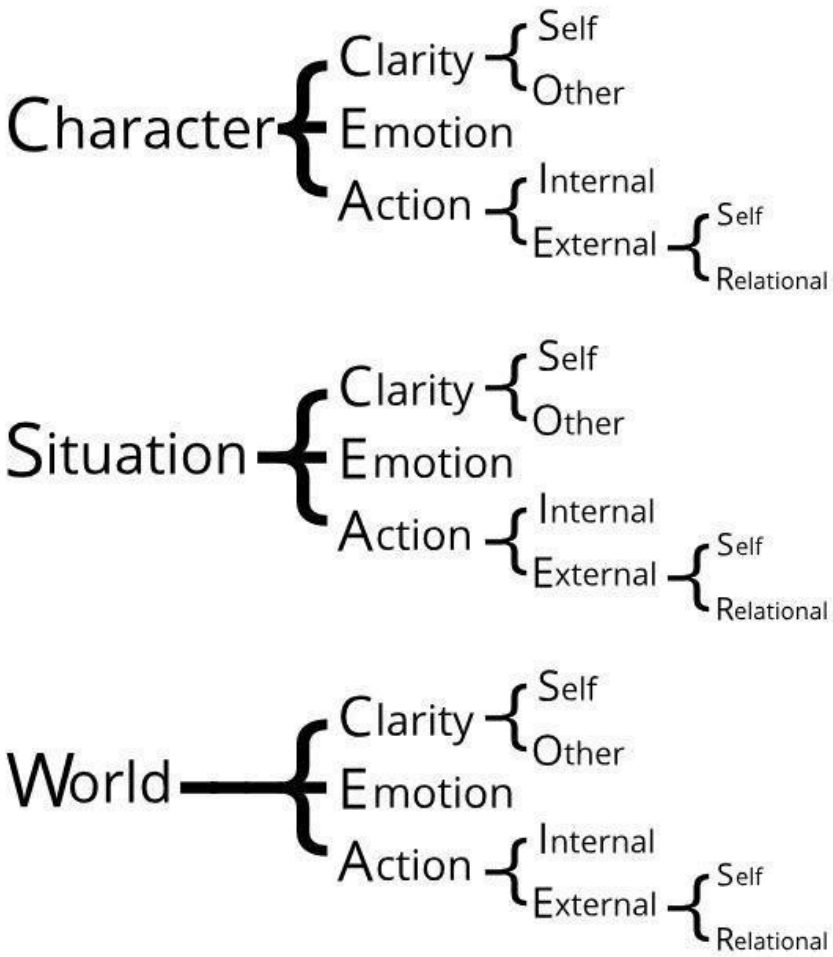


Figure B3. Engagement-Identity Topology: Layered codes. Combined codes of the Engagement-Identity Topology.

Appendix C

Image of Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed



Are you an adult age 30 or older?

Do you enjoy reading Young Adult Literature (YAL)?

Do you read YAL equal to or more than other types of reading material?



If you answered yes to the above questions, I may want to **interview** you on **two separate occasions** for approximately 45-60 minutes (each time) for my dissertation **about adults who read young adult literature**.

This study seeks to understand why adults are engaged in young adult literature and what (if any) influences young adult literature has on adult lives.

Your participation would be **voluntary** and your responses would be kept **confidential**. If you think that you are eligible and you would like to participate, contact Katie at mmccoy16@vols.utk.edu or (865) 745-9232.

Thanks! I look forward to speaking with you!

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of The University of Tennessee. The UTK IRB has reviewed this study to ensure that participants are treated in an ethical manner.

Looking for research participants! mmccoy16@vols.utk.edu (865) 745-9232

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Appendix D

Interview Protocol

First Interview Guidelines:

This is a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions, which lead to the possibility of discovering new themes throughout the interview and qualitative research process. This semi-structured interview seeks to answer the research questions posed in this dissertation. Those questions are:

- In what ways do adults (30+) engage with young adult literature?
- Why do adults (30+) read young adult literature?
- In what ways does young adult literature influence the identity of adult readers (30+)?

Opening Questions: Do you consider yourself a reader? Why or why not?

As you know, this study is about adult readers of young adult literature. How would you define those two terms? In other words, what does it mean to be an adult (to you)? What is young adult literature (to you)?

I. Background of a Reader

1. How did you learn to read?

2. Were you read to as a child?

3. What is the first text or book you can remember reading independently? What did you love about it?

4. What books to you remember reading in school? What were your "reading books"? Did you enjoy them? Why or why not?

5. Tell me about your middle school experience with reading.

6. Tell me about your high school experience with reading.

7. What is the first YA novel you remember reading? Tell about your experience reading that book.

8. What kinds of books did you read outside of school?

9. What was reading like for you in college/after high school?

10. Describe the point when you realized YA texts were what you enjoyed reading most.

III. A portrait of a reader now-The YA Genre

1. Tell me about your process for selecting books? How do you choose what YA material you will read?

2. What features of YA books do you seek out? What is it about those YA books that "speaks" to you?

3. Describe a time when you connected with YA literature. How did you connect? Why?

4. Would you say you read more YA or adult literature?

5. What does it mean to be "engaged" with a book? What aspects of the YA books keep you engaged?

6. When you complete a YA text, do you feel that encourages you to read more YA? Why or why not?

7. What characteristics about YA do you find most interesting?

8. How do you interact socially with YA texts? Media?

9. What feelings do you have when you read YAL? Do those feelings cause you to act? How so? Or why not?

10. How do you feel about yourself when you read YAL?

11. What is the most recent YA book you have read?

12. What does YAL do for you that other reading material doesn't?

IV. A portrait of a reader now-YA Specific Selections

1. What's your favorite YA book that you have read? Why is it your favorite?

2. What do you like about that particular book?

3. What is your favorite scene from that book? Why is it your favorite?

4. If you could have changed anything about that book, what would you change and why?

V. Demographic information:

Gender

Age

Educational Level

Employment

Family Status

Second Interview Guidelines:

Verbal Protocol Interview-Think Aloud Method

For the second interview of this data collection, on a separate date, participants will be asked to bring their favorite young adult literature books. In addition, participants will be asked to share their favorite passages from those selections and comment on the influence of the passages and the books.

Script:

Researcher: Thanks for meeting with me. In this interview, you will be sharing your favorite YAL texts and how those texts were meaningful to you. In addition, I will ask you to share passages with me. During and after the reading of those passages, I will ask you to share what the "inner dialogue" you have during that time and how those passages are impactful to you.

As a reminder, I am recording this interview for data collection purposes and I may take notes during our session. You may stop the interview at any time, at which point I will stop the recording.

Appendix E

The following are graphical representations of types of actions participants discussed as being influenced by YAL. This actions are designated as micro (internal actions), meso (relational and often external actions), and macro (global external actions). These graphical representations illustrate the influence of YAL on each of the adult participants' identities. Each has the participant's response to the question, "Does YAL influence your identity?"

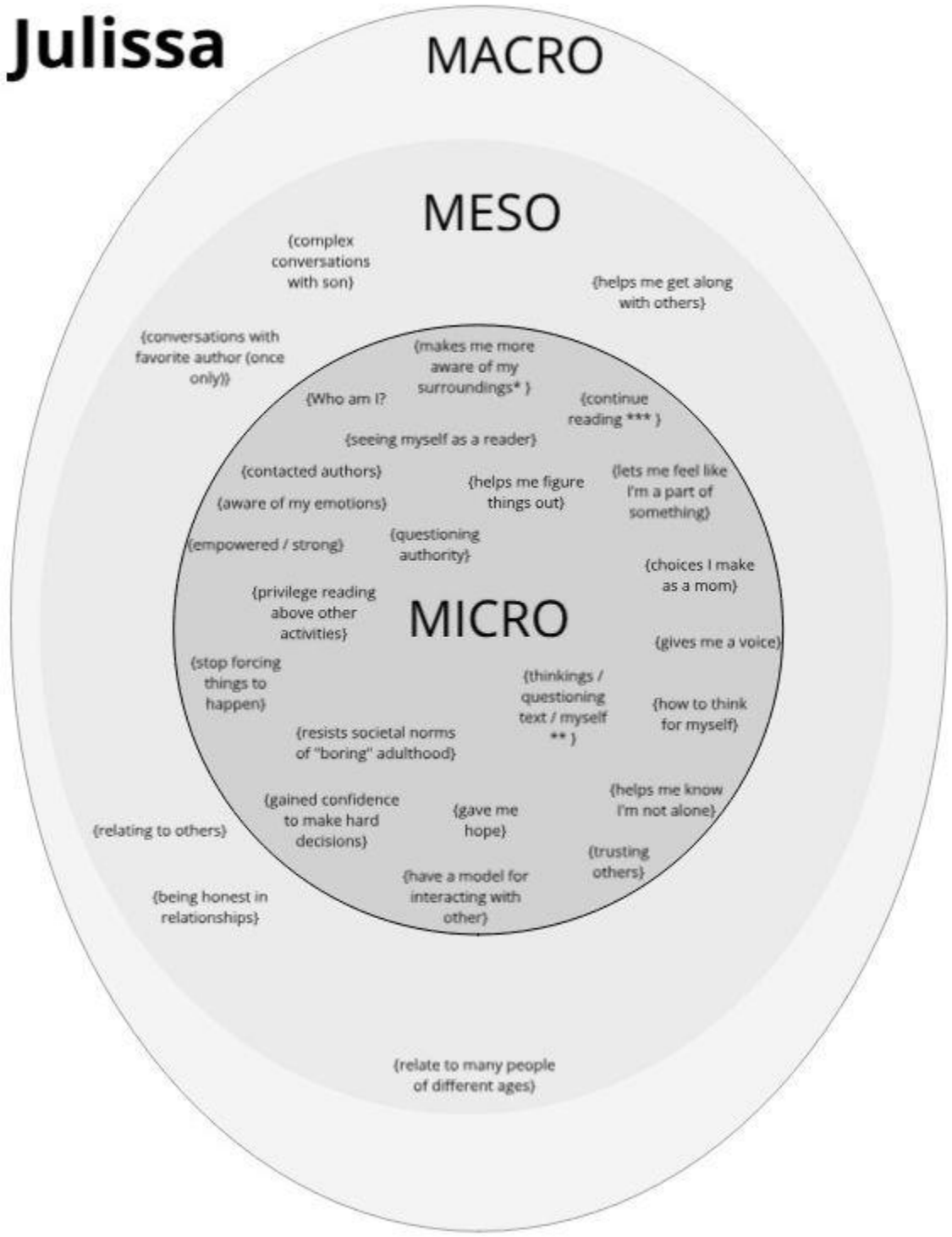


Figure E1. Julissa's Reactions. A visual representation of the inner and outer responses to YAL.

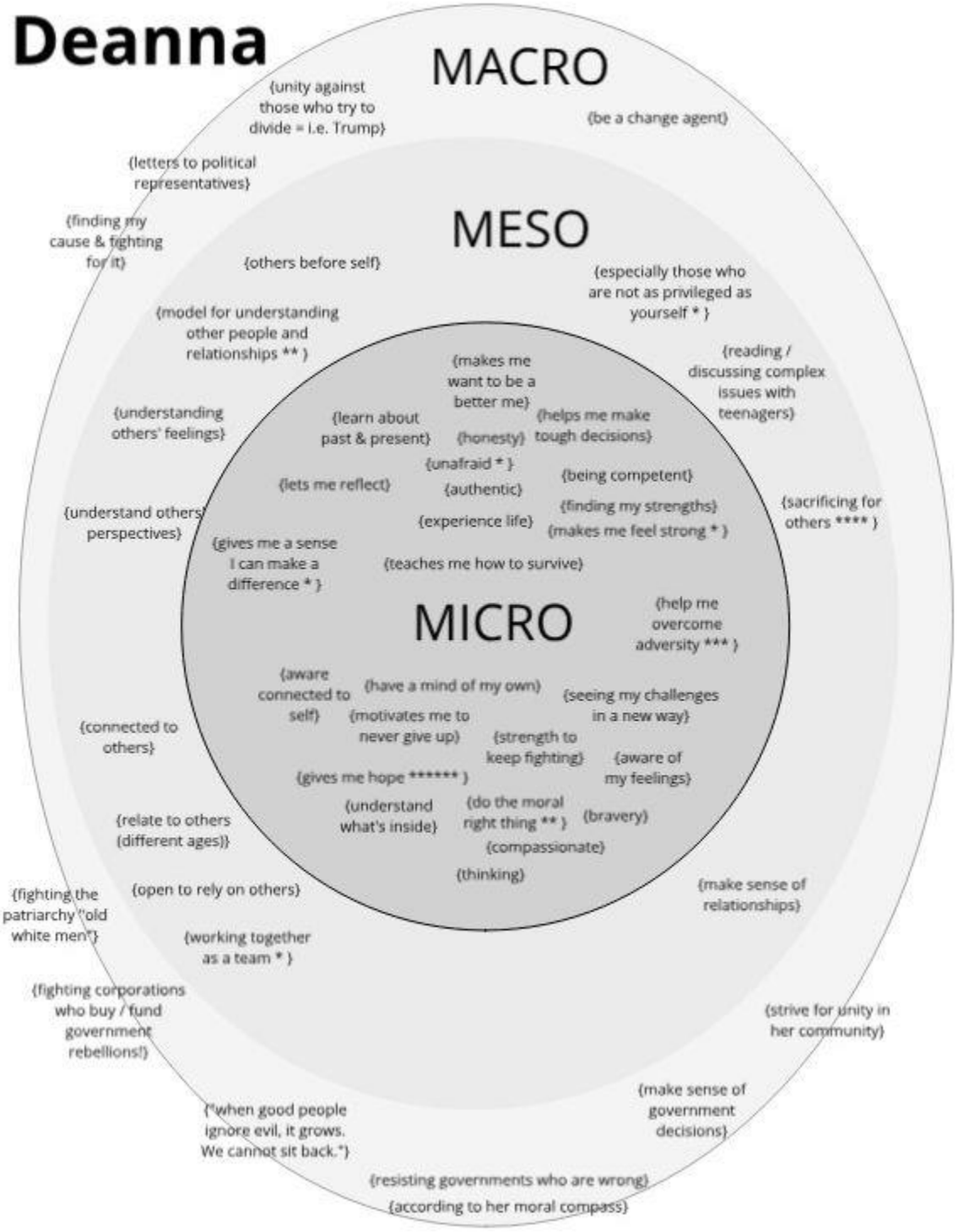


Figure E2. Deanna's Reactions. A visual representation of the inner and outer responses to YAL.

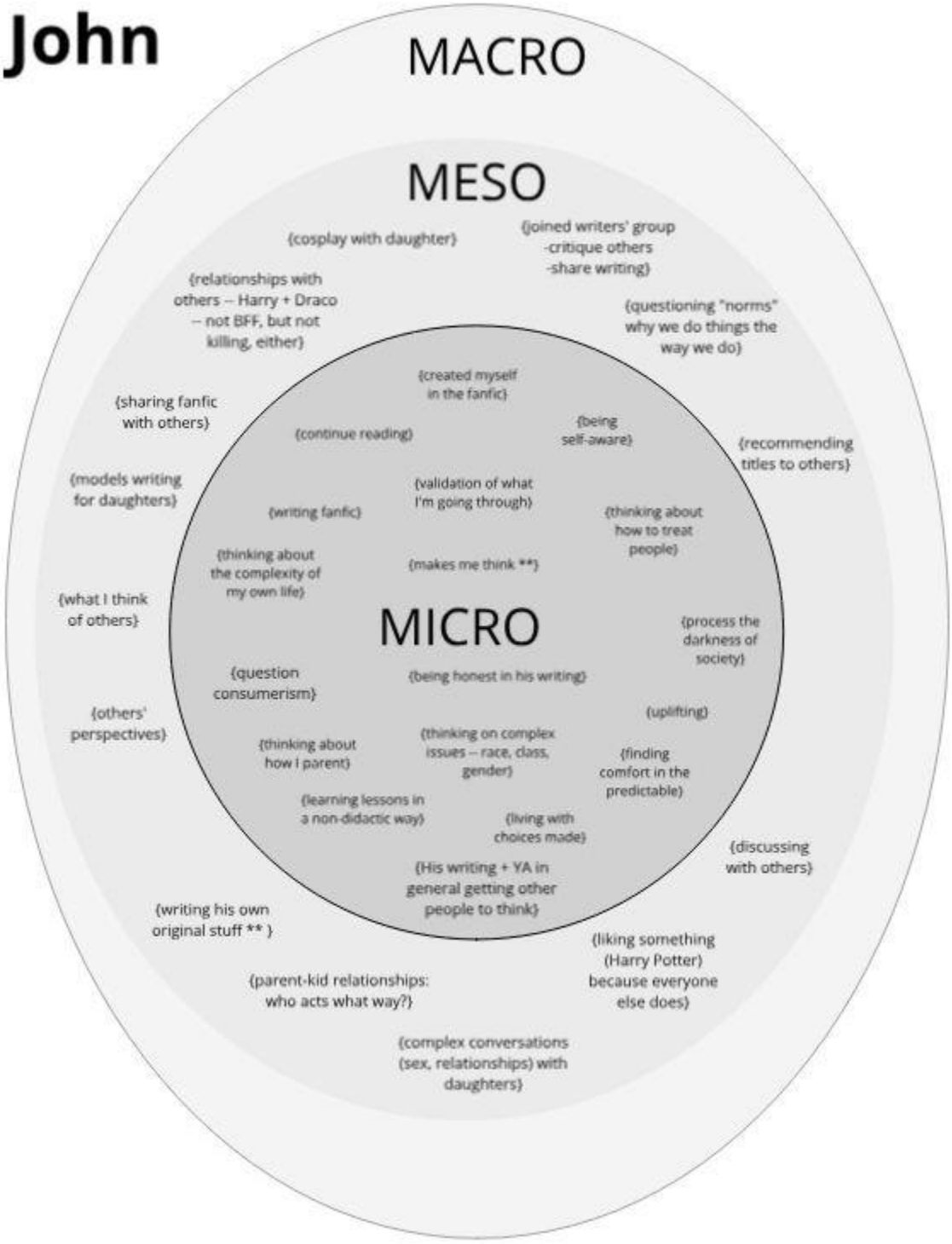


Figure E3. John's Reactions. A visual representation of the inner and outer responses to YAL.

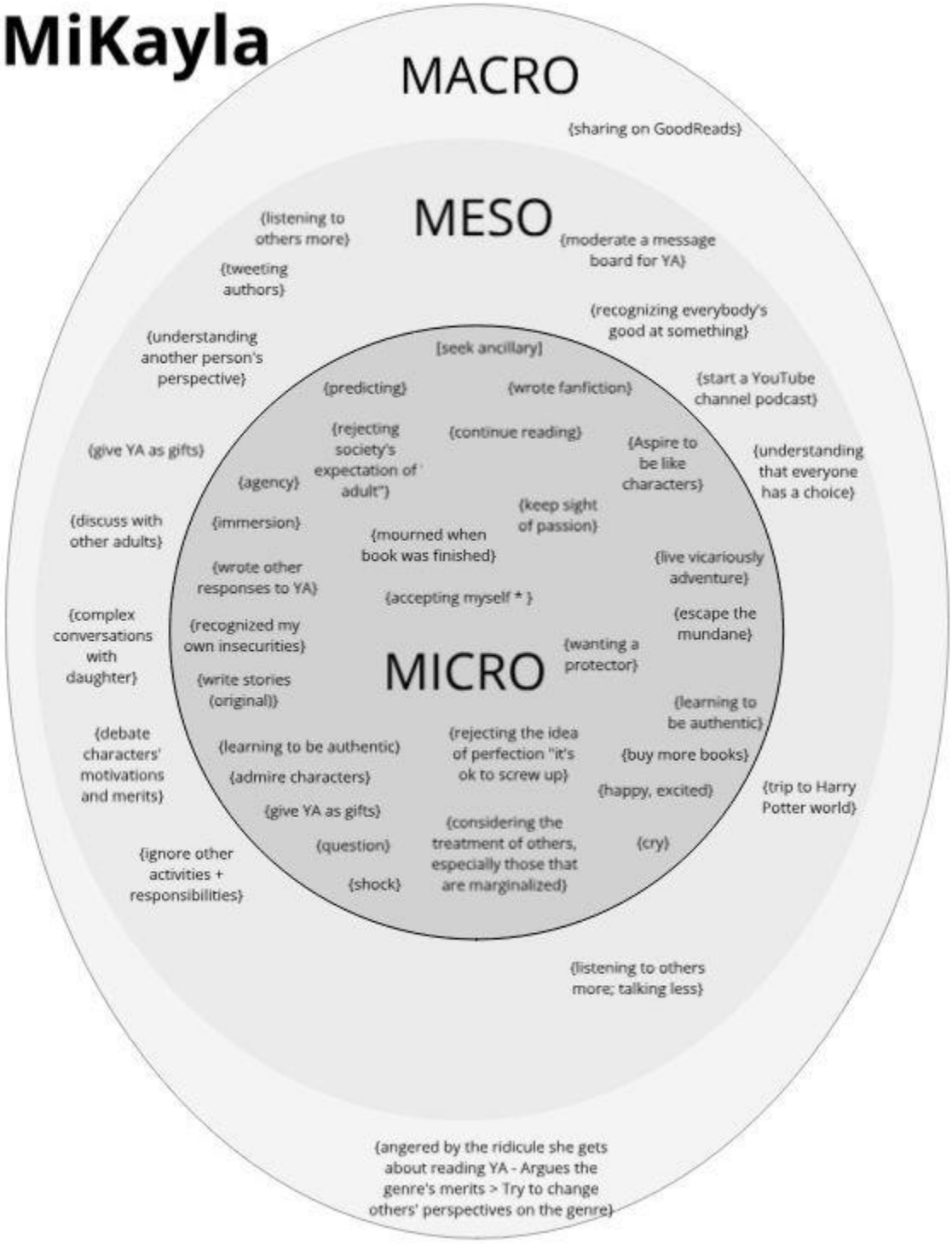


Figure E4. MiKayla's Reactions. A visual representation of the inner & outer responses to YAL.

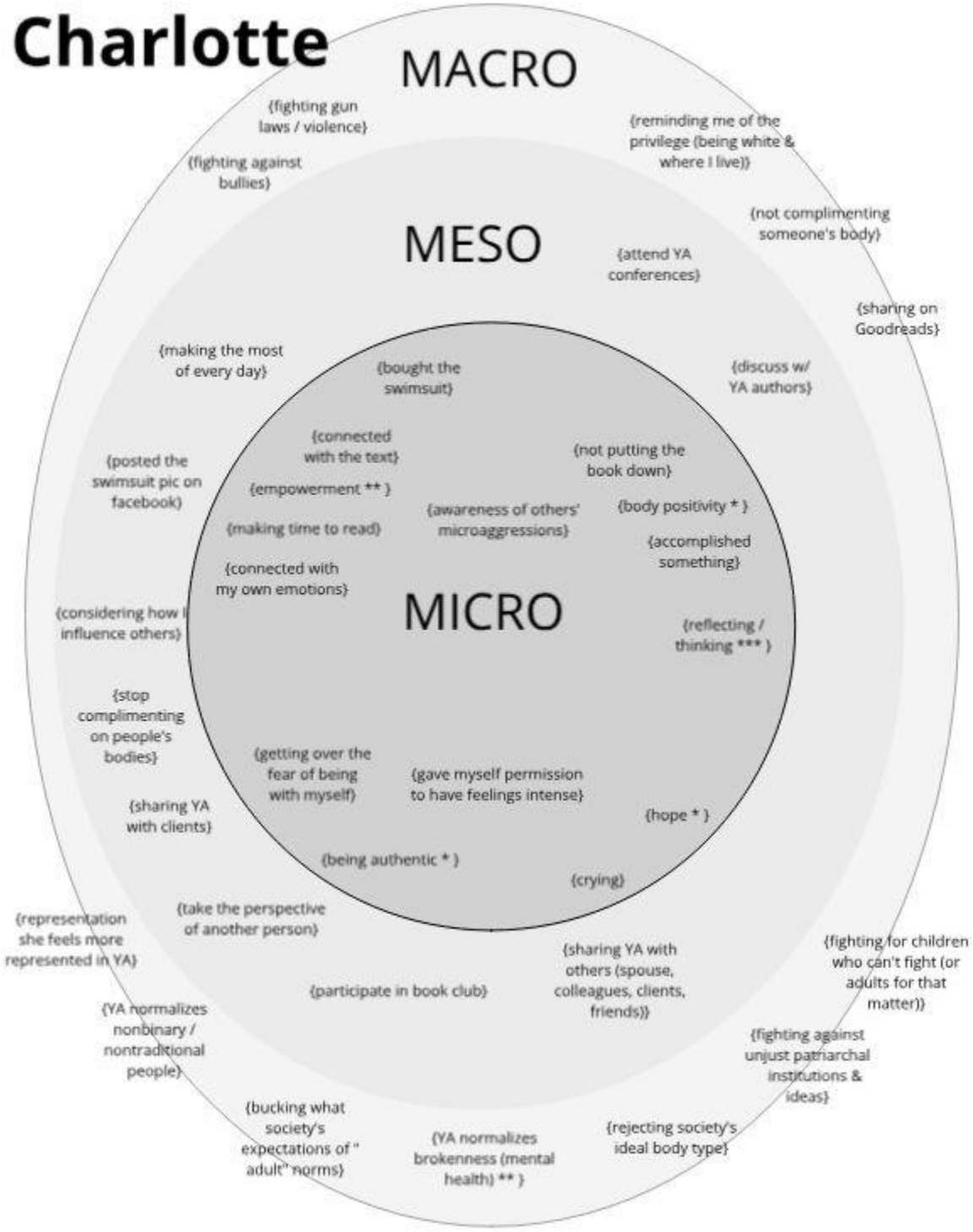


Figure E5. Charlotte's Reactions. A visual representation of the inner and outer responses to YAL.

Vita

Katie Rowe was born and attended public school in Knoxville, Tennessee. After completing high school, Katie earned a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education from Middle Tennessee State University. There, she fell in love with teaching reading while teaching third and fourth graders for eight years. During her tenure as an elementary school teacher, she also earned a Masters' Degree in Literacy from Middle Tennessee State University. In 2015, she returned to school herself full time to earn a Doctorate of Philosophy Degree from the University of Tennessee. While at the University of Tennessee, she worked in a variety of roles including, student director of The Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature, course instructor, research assistant, and intern supervisor for the Teacher Education Department in the College of Education. Katie's research focuses on both children's and young adult literature in a variety of ways, including: picture book biographies, social construction of identity through reading young adult literature, adult literacy, and pleasure reading.