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Literature for girls and the preadolescent novel: a historical analysis and recommendations for challenging the status quo

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LITERATURE FOR GIRLS AND THE PREADOLESCENT NOVEL: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Children's literature has long been an influential historical, social and cultural discursive site of gender identity and gender appropriate behavior. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century children's literature abounds with strong, active and adventuresome boys, and more submissive, introspective and accommodating girls. These artificial yet abundant characters communicate to readers how boys should behave and how girls should conduct themselves appropriately in society if they want to be accepted and be successful. As time has progressed and historical, cultural and social presentations and etiquettes have evolved, so has the development of the gendered main character within children's literature. No longer limited to the restrictive guides of early literature where the fictional worlds of boys and girls were clearly demarcated, children's books are now giving way to more fluid storylines and character augmentation that make them accessible to both young male and female readers. In doing so, however, authors are not necessarily challenging the dominant heteronormative gender structures, but are instead reinforcing it in new and less apparent ways that adhere to modern cultural, historical and social expectations. The deliberate gender disruptions strengthen the existent binary or allow children to satisfy an urge to experiment with new gender representations and transgressions from the safety and privacy of their literary imaginations without destabilizing their own identities.

Currently, there is great deal of research and analysis of children's literature and young adult fiction, examining literature's role in children's and young adults' process of identity formation, as well as their conceptualizations about gender identity and gender appropriate behavior. There is little research and interrogation, however, of the presence of traditional binary gender roles and representations of gender appropriate behavior in girls' preadolescent novels, aimed at 8- through 12-year-olds. For much of the existing research, preadolescent novels are lumped into children's literature or forced into the arena of young adult fiction where its themes

are not as effectual. This gap is further augmented by little research that addresses representations of the preadolescent feminine body within preadolescent girls' literature or ideas about developing sexual identities. The preadolescent novel is an important historical, social and cultural discursive site of gender identity, gender appropriate behavior, conceptions about the female body and sexuality at a time that is critical in the identity formation and development for preadolescent girls. Therefore, in this study, I will examine how the female protagonists, as well as some supporting characters, in select preadolescent novels for girls adhere to or subvert the traditional binaric gender roles, gender appropriate behavior, and notions of body and space. In addition, I will interrogate how each female protagonist conforms to dominant discursive constructs surrounding heteronormativity.

Politics of Reading Girlhood

The history of children's literature is inseparable from the history of childhood. As Seth Lerer (2008) notes in *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter,* the child and the experience of childhood as it is recognized today was produced through the texts and stories he or she read, heard, and recounted (p. 1). Preadolescence, in particular, is a unique time for girls when they have historically been permitted to challenge the bounds of their sex before settling into womanhood. Mary Piper (1994), clinical psychologist and author of *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, notes that preadolescence is a beautiful time in a girl's life when she is not held to gender role constraints. She writes,

> Most preadolescent girls are marvelous company because they are interested in everything – sports, nature, people, music and books. Almost all the heroines of girls' literature come from this age group – Anne of Green Gables, Heidi, Pippi Longstocking and Caddie Woodlawn. Girls this age bake pies, solve mysteries and go on quests. They can take care of themselves and are not yet burdened with caring for others. They have a brief respite from the female role and can be

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tomboys, a word that conveys courage, competency and irreverence. (Piper, 1994, p. 18)

At the end of this time, when the girl enters early adolescent around age 13, something happens to these young, resilient, female adventurers and their optimism, raising the questions: What are the cultural and social influences that incite this social phenomena? What can be done in preadolescence to prevent or curtail this dramatic downturn in self-esteem and self-worth experienced by girls in adolescence? Can preadolescent literature serve as a useful tool to combat these dismal social incidents?

By exposing young girls to more positive, strong, smart and capable images of girls, women, and gender non-conforming characters, the more likely readers will be able to identify with a character that speaks particularly to them and their lived experience. Ruth O. Saxton (1998), in her introduction to *The Girl: Construction of the Girl in Contemporary Literature by Women*, writes, "Contemporary writers tend to begin with the assumption toward which [Jane] Austen gestures: that there is no such thing as an 'unremarkable' or 'normal' girl, as it is in the telling of her tale, the excavating of the easily dismissed, that heroism is made" (p. xvii). According to this trope, girls are told they can do anything and be anything or anyone they want to be. This in and of itself is not a dangerous and potentially problematic message to convey to young women, because girls' self-esteem should be cultivated, encouraged and emboldened in order for them to believe in themselves and their futures. The issue, however, is that while girls are being told that their futures are boundless, they are simultaneously infantilized and expected to maintain their second-class status in a "patriarchal world of glass ceilings and second shifts" (Saxton, 1998, p. xxi). Ultimately, the author finds that little has changed for female protagonists. Of this, she notes:

> "…the twentieth century girl is not more free than her nineteenth-century predecessor...contemporary girls, no less than and perhaps even more than girls of previous generations, are bombarded with fierce expectations that they should control and contrive their appearance if they are to be loved and valued. (Saxton, 1998, p. xxiii)

Beyond body comportment, however, Saxton aptly critiques the narrow images presented to preadolescent girls that reinforce rather than challenge the status quo, leaving readers with stock images of girlhood that develops into heteronormative womanhood. Representations of girlhood within preadolescent literature must develop and expand to offer readers more complex and multifarious female characters who can speak to readers lived experiences and provide a broader range of role models in ways that engage readers in thinking about and constructing their gendered, sexed, raced, class identities in more complex ways.

Particularly in terms of the reading of the girl and girlhood less as a natural category and more as the product of evolving, culturally located, and contradictory discourses, a poststructural feminist lens can provide new and more fluid ways of presenting and interpreting the concept of preadolescent girlhood. Susan Archer Mann (2012), author of *Doing Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity,* acknowledging the dominance and entrenchment of academic Western feminist perspectives notes that poststructuralism's acknowledgment and attention to socially lived knowledge and alternative ways of knowing "…not only provides an important critique of expert knowledge and dominant discourses, but it also empowers and gives voice to the subjugated knowledges of many who otherwise might remain silent" (p. 218). Concerned with notions of difference and how women's experiences vary based on their global or local social locations and historical contexts, poststructuralism disrupts the idea of an essential girlhood. In terms of literature, Elizabeth Marshall (2004), author of "Stripping for the Wolf: Rethinking Representations of Gender in Children's Literature," notes that many early modern

feminist frameworks privileged the variable of gender over the equally complex identity markers of culture, class, sexuality, and race (p. 260). She goes on to note, "In addition, the strong girl, who often serves as a model 'feminist,' relies primarily on white, Western, middle class, heterosexual notions of femininity" (Marshall, 2004, p. 260). Denaturalizing girlhood through a focus on the discourses of femininity mobilized within preadolescent literature allows for a critique and deconstruction of how girlhood is produced within particular cultural practices.

Defining Feminist Poststructural Theory

Read through the lens of poststructural feminist theory, however, the gender and sexual limitations and restrictions in preadolescent literature can be recognized with the explicit aim of subverting and challenging these socially constructed categories. Concerned with the collapse and break down of systems, frameworks, definitions and certainties, this theory asserts that frameworks and systems are merely fictitious constructs and that they cannot be trusted to develop meaning or to give order. As reflected by this definition, for poststructural feminists, culture and what we perceive as reality is constructed through language. Fluid communication systems reveal that there is not a fixed, underlying structure to language and meaning is neither arbitrary nor absolute. Furthermore, poststructuralists censure absolute truths, aspiring instead to question and identify how power operates in order to produce locations for new subjects and institutions. To believe otherwise, according to Jodi Kaufmann (2011), author of "Poststructural Analysis: Analyzing Empirical Matter for New Meanings", has the capacity to limit the scope of experience and knowledge by erasing what is available to exist as a possible meaning (149). Most notably, there is an emphasis on how language constructs experience and the presence of power within that construction. Moreover, poststructuralism is concerned with hegemonies and power and how these elements contribute to or maintain structures to enforce hierarchy.

Friedrich Nietzsche (2005), in his essay, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," states, "The various languages, juxtaposed, show that words are never concerned with truth, never with adequate expression..." (p. 15). Expanding upon this notion, Mann (2012), notes that poststructural feminist theorists seek to reveal and interrogate the unconscious acceptance and internalization of language that is already deeply entrenched within systems and dictates individuals' perceptions of reality. Of this, she writes "For a person to function adequately within any society, they must submit to certain linguistic rules that they learn as children in their acquisition of language" (Mann, 2012, p. 216). Beyond this, however, Mann notes that poststructuralist feminist theory allows for the dissection of the unconscious acceptance and internalization of the system of language that govern an individual's sense of what is real, normal, and natural in order to challenge established assumptions and create new spaces for difference (2012, p. 216).

In a similar manner, Marshall (2004), judiciously seeks to broaden theoretical paradigms commonly used to analyze representations of gender in children's literature. Adding to liberal feminist thought, which as Mann (2012) notes tends to theorize gender through the lens of sex-role theory, Marshall seeks to highlight and address sex-role stereotypes in children's literature that have remained virtually unchanged, proposing that a poststructural feminist interrogation of literature about girlhood can provide a guide and a method for disrupting both the creation of literature for young readers and a young reader's experience engaging with literature (Mann, p. 69). She writes,

> A poststructural lens allows literacy researchers to theorize gender as a contested and socially produced identity marker rather than as a universal category with one single meaning. In this way, the 'girl' can be theorized as a complex character whose representation intersects with larger cultural discourses about childhood,

gender, and sexuality. (Marshall, 2004, p. 268)

Although a useful, revolutionary and influential tool for analyzing gender, liberal feminism's contribution to feminist literary criticism has also been limiting as it largely regards identity categories as stable rather than fluid. By engaging instead with poststructural feminist theory, authors, educators and researchers can disrupt simplistic identity markers and destabilize the subject within preadolescent literature. Through this analysis, it is possible to see the limitations of previous feminist frameworks and the benefits to enlisting the theoretical approaches of poststructural theory to better examine the discursive production of gender within literature for young readers.

Employing post-structural feminist theory allows for a deeper examination of the relationship among language, power and resistance, while recognizing the importance of the subjective in constituting the meaning of lived realities, thereby accounting for the continued need for female protagonists to occupy diverging and different subject positions. As Judith Butler (1992), in "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," writes, "To deconstruct is not to negate or dismiss, but to call into question and, perhaps, most importantly, to open up a term, like the subject, to reusage or redeployment that previously has not been authorized" (p. 15). Explicating on the specificities of language deconstruction, Jacques Derrida (1988) in "Signature Event Context," notes that post-structural theory's emphasis on deconstruction does not mean a total demolition or annihilation of language. Instead, he notes,

> Deconstruction cannot limit or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it
> must…practice an overturning of the classical opposition and a general
> displacement of the system. It is only on this condition that deconstruction will
> provide itself the means with which to intervene in the field of oppositions that it
> criticizes, which is also a field of nondiscursive forces. (1988, Derrida, p. 328)

Derrida reminds readers that, through deconstruction, we can identify the marginalized to begin to build knowledges where there are gaps. By utilizing a poststructural critique of language, and deconstructing discourse, it is possible to identify how language operates to produce authentic, material, and harmful realities. Through deconstruction, it is possible to take apart the current rhetorical structures in order to see how they have been constructed, how they are reproduced, and how they can be reinscribed. This process also works to erode the power within these dominant stories and expose alternative meanings.

Derrida's definition of deconstruction, however, marks where poststructuralism diverges most acutely with the many modern feminist frameworks that preceded it. For example, feminist standpoint theory is an influential, although contentious, modern theoretical framework, demanding space where the knowledge and experience of the oppressed, dominated, and marginalized are given epistemic authority. As bell hooks (2004) powerfully notes in her piece "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," feminist standpoint theory offers a space for "radical openness" where the necessity and motivation for resistance"...is sustained by remembrance of the past, which include recollections of broken tongues giving us ways to speak that decolonize our minds, our very beings" (p. 157). Focusing specifically on the relations between political power, social power, and knowledge with the purpose of describing and analyzing the causal effects of power structures on knowledge, feminist standpoint theory also advocates an explicit and distinct route for enquiry that begins from a standpoint's emergence from shared political struggle within marginalized lives. Poststructural feminists, however, position themselves politically on the margins as an act of resistance to the systems of power they are seeking to deconstruct (Mann, 2012, p. 217). Of this, Butler (1992) writes, "The point is not to stay marginal, but to participate in whatever network of marginal zones is spawned from

other disciplinary centers and which, together, constitute a multiple displacement of those authorities" (p. 15). It is this perspective that is invaluable to the reading and reformation of girlhood in preadolescent novels in order to identify gaps in representations of girlhood, illustrate a need for broader and more complex ways of being a girl, and create more space for these novels about girlhood to exist.

One of the major issues with utilizing a poststructural feminist framework to analyze and critique preadolescent literature for girls is rooted in poststructuralism's contentious relationship with identity politics and the existence of the subject. In contrast to liberal feminist thought, as previously discussed, as well as other modern feminist theoretical frameworks, poststructural feminist theories of subjectivity postulate identity as fluid rather than fixed and innate. While not overtly troublesome, this becomes particularly convoluted and problematic when trying to address and challenge dominant images and discourses surrounding healthy identity formation presented in preadolescent novels for girls, with the explicit objective of determining obstacles or dilemmas and proposing alternatives. In other words, it is challenging to critique ideas about identity formation within preadolescent literature for girls while simultaneously recommending and introducing new forms of healthy identity formation when poststructuralism largely views identity as "a construct of language, discourse, and cultural practices" (Mann, 2012, p. 215). As Mann crucially notes, however, not all poststructural feminist theorists completely reject identity politics. While this is the case with some, others want to illustrate that identities are vast and open, their divergent political roles and meanings are contentious, and they can reproduce and maintain hegemonic discourses and power structures (Mann, 2012, p. 217). Here, deconstruction becomes vitally important to identifying and resisting the binary categories used to define and differentiate all elements of society. Of deconstruction, Mann (2012) writes, "The method of

deconstruction is a critical tool that dismantles this binary thinking by expanding its arbitrary, socially constructed nature. These socially constructed category schemes also limit the possibilities for being; they preclude us from recognizing alternatives…" (p. 216). In line with other post-perspective frameworks, including but not limited to postmodern theory, queer theory, and transgender theory, poststructural feminist theory aptly critiques identity politics, arguing for a more intersectional and expansive focus surrounding identity. For example, Judith Lorber (2012), author of "Postmodern Feminism and Queer Theory," writes about identity from a queer feminist framework, noting,

> Queer politics turns what we think is normal and natural inside out by showing how genders, bodies, and sexualities are socially constructed for conformity – and how they could be different…Genders, sexes, and sexualities can be as numerous and varied as the imagination can dream up. (p. 298)

According to this thought, identities are not fixed but are fluid and multifaceted. Following this logic, identities cannot be categorized and labeled definitively because identity is a vast array of multiple and unstable positions. Engaging with identity politics and ideas about subjecthood in this way can be a much more productive method of challenging established identity categories and subverting them to assert difference. By engaging in a discourse that repositions girls as subjects and refrains from claiming a universal experience for all preadolescent girls, a new language and discourse can begin to form.

Methods

In this study, I examine how the female protagonists in preadolescent novels for girls adhere to or subvert the traditional binary gender roles, gender appropriate behavior, and notions of body and space. In addition, I interrogate how each female protagonist conforms to or challenges dominant discursive constructs surrounding heteronormativity. To do this, I examine

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a select group of texts, limiting my sample to American girls' preadolescent novels from the start of the Victorian era in 1837 to the present. All of the books I selected are written by American authors written within the aforementioned timeframe, have a female main character that is approaching adolescence and are intended for a preadolescent audience. All authors but one are female. A large amount of research has been dedicated to children's books and young adult or teen novels, but there is a very limited research that focuses on middle grade or preadolescent novels aimed more specifically at 8- through 12-year-olds. This type of novel is an important historical, social and cultural discursive site of gender identity, gender appropriate behavior, conceptions about the female body and sexuality. In addition, preadolescent novels do not fit comfortably within the realm of children's literature, but also do not cover the themes available through or are of interest to readers of young adult fiction. Therefore, it serves as a new and unique area of study.

Although I limit my sample to the girls' preadolescent novels within the aforementioned parameters and my sampling is not representative of all middle grade literature, it provides illustrative case studies for analysis regarding issues related to messages about gender appropriate behavior, gender roles, body image, sexuality and related concerns. I have selected texts within three eras: Victorian era girl's literature from 1837 to 1901, Modernist era girls' literature from 1902 through 1950, and Contemporary girls' literature from 1950 to the present. The rationale for beginning my analysis in the Victorian era is that children's and adolescent literature developed in response to larger social changes taking place during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kimberley Reynolds (1990), author of *Girls Only?: Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain, 1880-1910*, suggests that books specifically aimed at a strictly juvenile or adolescent audience did not become a subdivision of literature until the 1880s

with the growth of commercial publishing for youth as well as a growth in literacy (p. 47). It should also be noted that the rise of the middle-class, the development of compulsory elementary education, and labor restrictions also greatly influenced the development of literature for youth to engage the changing notions of childhood and adolescence. I investigate the historical, social, and cultural changes that characterized and defined each period and shaped and informed the definition of girlhood and the character of the preadolescent novel.

I discuss the range of books available to preadolescent girls in each time period by reading and reviewing a sampling of each. To more fully examine and critically analyze each period, however, I selected a sample set of three to five books from each period. In order to select an appropriate sample set, I chose books listed on the bestseller lists from Publishers Weekly. By constructing my sample set in accordance with books that are best sellers, my sample set is comprised of books that are widely read and accessible to more preadolescent girls, thereby providing a better analysis of books that, according to the sales, are in the hands of more girls. Using this method, the books selected for analysis include Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World;* Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women;* Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did;* Frank L. Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz;* Ruth Sawyer's *Roller Skates;* Lois Lenki's *Strawberry Girl;* Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*; Judy Blume's *Are You There, God? It's me, Margaret;* Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry;* Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons;* Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie;* and Clare Vanderpool's *Moon over Manifest,*

My data analysis is qualitative and based predominantly on content analysis, literary criticism, and narrative analysis. Beginning with literary criticism, I utilize a content analysis methodology. Content analysis is beneficial when qualitative information is converted or reduced to numerical terms. Because I analyzed a larger amount of material, content analysis is effective

in identifying patterns in overarching themes and motifs as well as to reveal trends in the depiction of girls and girlhood in literature and areas of discontinuity. For example, as the tomboy character is still an important and widely used archetype in adolescent girls' literature, it was appropriate and beneficial to track the number of novels in which the tomboy character was present within the literature analyzed, the number of times the tomboy character was reformed or began the process of reformation to less masculine and more feminine characteristics and comportment, and the number of times the tomboy character was allowed to remain a tomboy or retain characteristically male-defined qualities and attributes. In addition to the aforementioned theme of the tomboy, I identified themes regarding feminine comportment, body and space, and issues of identity including race, class, and queerness. Beginning with this type of analysis, helped me identify key issues within the novels I analyzed and helped me to later unpack and deconstruct the themes, images, and discursive constructs within these novels.

In addition, I employ critical techniques to analyze how each text functions by looking at the following: female protagonists and their representation, plot, setting, genre, language, as well as the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the time period in which each text was written. I draw upon feminist literary criticism, post-structural feminist frameworks in particular, because post-structural feminism emphasizes the social construction of gendered subjectivities with express attention to the intersectionality of race, sex, culture, class, sexuality, ability, as well as other multiple and converging identities. Utilizing post-structural feminist theoretical frameworks is useful toward identifying and questioning the methods employed within literature to build knowledge, and deconstructing the language and themes used to define girlhood.

Finally, I use narrative analysis to more deeply understand and research the way authors construct meanings about girlhood through language within their texts written within a particular

sociocultural and historical period. Because narrative is a powerful tool in the transfer, or

sharing, of knowledge, a narrative analysis offers great insight into the dominant views and

values communicated through preadolescent literature. Jerome Bruner (1990) discusses this issue

in *Acts of Meaning*, where he considers the narrative form as a non-neutral rhetorical account

that aims at "illocutionary intentions," or the desire to communicate meaning (p. 8). Bruner's

approach places the narrative in time, to "assume an experience of time" rather than just

referencing the historical time (1990, p. 9). This narrative approach attempts to captures the

emotion of the moment described, thereby making the event active rather than passive and

infused with latent meaning (Bruner, 1990, p. 10).

This project is in no way definitive or inclusive of all preadolescent literature for girls,

but is does offer a deep engagement with the preadolescent female literary figure, which is

absent from much literary criticism and analysis about the past and present state of girlhood in

the United States. Chapter 2 offers a brief history of the preadolescent novel, tracing the

development and progression of preadolescent literature for girls. Chapter 3 presents a historical

analysis of the literary tomboy figure, how it operates within preadolescent literature for girls,

and the messages it communicates to readers. Chapter 4 addresses ideas about feminine

comportment and femininity imparted through dominant heteronormative discourse as well as

through the literature preadolescent girls are reading. In Chapter 5, issues of identity within

preadolescent literature for girls, specifically issues of race, class, and queerness, are grappled

with and interrogated. Finally, Chapter 6 offers recommendations toward a more empowering

and positive future for preadolescent literature for girls.

I hope this work helps to shape the ongoing conversation about the portrayal of girls in

preadolescent novels for girls, identifying key issues, problematic themes, and ideas regarding

more empowering images of girlhood. Through an examination of the multiple ways in the figure of the girl has become a site of competing ideologies, future authors can expand their critical and theoretical lens, learn to ask increasingly more provocative and raise questions about what it means to be a girl, and identify the images and stories of girlhood girls are hungry to read.

Chapter 2: Tracing the Development and Progression of Preadolescent Literature for Girls

Children's literature, although less overt than television shows, toy promotion or music, is still a socially, culturally and historically constructed artifact which conveys to readers life lessons, humor, adventure, identity and gender appropriate behavior. Karen E. Wohlwend (2012) in "'Are You Guys Girls?': Boys, Identity Texts, and Disney Princess Play" analyzes identity construction through the social practices of play, literacy and gender. Through this work, she finds that children tend to develop a fastidious adherence to gender roles and gender appropriate behavior. Of this, the author notes, "In their play, most children committed socially and emotionally to a dualistic model of male and female roles as they constructed gender in their fantasy play as well as in everyday classroom interactions" (Wohlwend, 2012, p. 9). Because children have such rigid conceptions of gender roles, it is an important area of study in order to determine what influences their opinions. Within a gender binary system, as is dominant throughout many Western cultures, the gender dichotomy is limited to male or female. Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987), authors of "Doing Gender," note the importance of gender identity and gender roles in accordance with gender attribution or assessment and write, "If an individual identified as a member of one sex category engages in behavior usually associated with the other category, this routinization is challenged" (p. 139). As children grow and learn to read, they are exposed to these cultural symbols of boyhood and girlhood contained and imparted in books, making children's literature an important source of gender roles and gender appropriate behavior that children use as a guide to organize their own behavior. As George Herbert Mead (1934), author of *Mind, Self, and Society*, notes, it is through language and interaction that children acquire a social self (p. 5). In this way, children's literature must be analyzed in accordance with what it communicates about children's identities in connection to their gender, gender roles and gender appropriate behavior. Concerned with the identity

formation of youth, children's literature has taken on an oppositional view of social interactions that are reminiscent of the Western preference for establishing binary hierarchies and categories. Kerry Mallan (2009), author of *Gender Dilemmas in Children's Fiction*, discusses the narrative structure of identity formation, stating, "In this the typical coming-of-age narrative, there is often an underlying promise of an essential self that will emerge or be discovered" (p. 7). In other words, Mallan suggests that children's literature commonly adopts a narrative structure that communicates to readers that gender identity is innate and they too will go on a quest of self-identity to discover their own unique, but heteronormative, individuality.

Continuing with this idea of a quest, it is possible to see how children's literature leads readers on a journey of discovery to become a man or to become a woman. In this way, children's literature serves as a pedagogical tool of becoming more mature, more self-sufficient, more empathetic or more sensitive and embracing and, thereby, becoming more grown-up. This process of becoming directs children, using both discursive and thematic guides, through certain ways of being that are appropriate versus inappropriate. Calling on Judith Butler (2010), in her work entitled "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," she posits, "… what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo. In its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status" (p. 420). It is Butler's claim that these acts do not represent the internal and personal, but instead exemplify the social construction of how gender should be. Not exempt from this, children's literature, like many other social, cultural and historical artifacts, suggests that gender identity and the accepted behaviors that accompany an individual's gender identity are innate. Deborah Blum (1998), author of "The Gender Blur," addresses several aspects of cultural influences on gender development and writes, "If there is

indeed a biology to sex differences, we amplify it. At some point – when it is still up for debate –

we gain a sense of our gender, and with it a sense of 'gender appropriate' behavior" (p. 4). In this

way, it is possible to see how children's literature serves as a script to discovering true

subjectivity and identity within the framework of heteronormativity. Of this, Mallan (2009)

writes that children's literature

> …provides a point where the individual has arrived; a moment of self-realization
> of self-actualization, whereby the struggles of finding one's "true" identity have
> been overcome…Such a narrative resolution provides readers with a reassurance
> that things will work out for the best in the end, which is an enduring feature of
> the genre and part of liberal-humanism's project of harmonious individuality. (p. 7)

This not to suggest children's literature should not encourage and foster readers' desires to find

their true selves and the potential wonders and comfort that accompany such a realization. What

it does propose is that children's literature should be more embracing of departures from

hegemony in order to allow readers who divert from this standard an outlet and a better

understanding of their own identities that are largely underrepresented in literature. Because this

is so seldom done, it is evident that children's literature is a product of social, historical and

cultural ideology, dispensing heteronormative directives through a quest for identity. The same

holds true for preadolescent literature.

The Historical Roots of Preadolescent Literature for Girls in Victorian America

Preadolescent girls' literature, deeply rooted in social, historical and cultural ideologies

about girlhood, provides an important insight into what it means to be a good and proper girl

within a given time period. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, children's literature was not

created for entertainment, but rather was written for the moral, behavioral, social and religious

instruction of children. While these didactic tales were still relevant and being produced during

the Victorian era, they were more popular in earlier periods, used to teach moral earnestness and salvation through the everyday application of religious and ethical principles. Shirley Foster and Judy Simons (1995), authors of *What Katy Read: Feminist Re-Readings of "Classic" Stories for Girls*, recounted some of these early didactic themes where particular emphasis was on the suffering of the wrongdoer, writing, "In one story, quarrelling siblings are taken by their father to see a rotting corpse on a gibbet, the visible manifestation of brotherly hatred which culminated in murder; deeply shocked, the children vow never to fight with each other again" (p. 5). Literature for children, however, developed in new and very fundamental ways in the Victorian era, taking a less severe didactic approach and giving way to the Victorian girls' novel. As Sabrina Vellucci (2005), author of "'What Katy (& Co.) Did': Reforming Girlhood in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," notes, "…the nineteenth century seems to have especially been the age of the girl, as there developed an almost obsessive concern with issues of gender, propriety, and social status related to the education and activities of middle-class female children under the age of twenty" (p. 72). In this period, characterized by critical changes in societal attitudes toward women and the opportunities available to them for self-expression, girls' literature became a new and productive site for identifying attitudes about girlhood and revealing the continuing and dominant anxieties about gender.

To understand the development of the girls' preadolescent novel, the social and structural changes in the Victorian era must also be understood, because the girls' novel developed in conjunction these shifts. Girls' literature, in accordance with the Victorian Ruskinian assumptions of separate spheres, differed greatly from standard boys' literature of the time. Contrary to boys' literature, which centered on travel and adventure stories and advocated less self-reflective virtues such as courage, endurance, loyalty and patriotism, literature for girls was

typically set in the home. This genre became known as "domestic realism" or "sentimental fiction," because it exemplified idealized feminine characteristics such as domesticity, charity, kindness, patience, and self-discipline. Of the utility and benefits of girls' literature, Edward J. Salmon (1886) in an article entitled "What Girls Read," stated, "Girls' literature performs one very useful function. It enables girls to read something above mere baby tales, and yet keeps them from the influence of novels of a sort which should be read only by persons capable of forming a discreet judgment" (p. 522). Salmon's position is indicative of the dominant sentiments surrounding girls' literature and the education of girls during the Victorian era. In accordance with this statement, Victorian girls' fiction was meant to prioritize feminine experience and explore the possibilities of female self-expression and fulfillment within a patriarchal society, which confined women to the role of wife and mother and relegated them to the domestic sphere. Eliza Lynn Linton (1868) in "The Girl of the Period," defines the Victorian girl as a girl "…whose sole idea of life is fun; whose sole aim is unbounded luxury…[she has] done away with such moral muffishness as consideration for others and purity of taste" (para. 3). For Linton, the Victorian girl can either make concerted efforts to embody the traditional, virtuous womanly ideal of the past or, if she is inclined to follow contemporary developments, be at risk of sexual deviance. As an antifeminist author and journalist, Linton's critique of the "Girl of the Period" was intended to provoke a response and draw attention to a growing anxiety about the control that girls were assuming over their own lives. These modern girls, while still adhering to ideals of purity, virtue, and morality, were taking the few small liberties available to them to exert their own power in articulating a new and more complex reality of girlhood that challenged existing ideas of domesticity and subordination to patriarchal structures. Social anxiety developed about the shifting economic, political, social and cultural landscape in Britain and the

United States, and placed an importance on defining girls and the experience of middle-class girlhood.

Class divisions became more poignant as the middle-class grew and began to operate as a cohesive body during the Victorian era. Having benefitted and amassed more economic means during the Industrial Revolution, the middle-class began converting economic success into political power to challenge upper class and aristocratic corruption. In doing so, they strove to establish a society based on merit rather than pedigree and lineage. According to Sally Mitchell (1995), author of *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England, 1880-1915*, it was through the effort, influence and power of the middle-class that girls' education changed dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century in both the United States and Britain. Prior to education reforms, lower and working class girls received little to no education, lower middle-class girls were taught at home until the age of 10 when they might be sent to a day school for four to five years, prosperous and professional middle-class girls were taught at home until they reached the age of 10 when they were sent to a private school near home or a boarding school, and upper-class girls were taught at home by a governess or sent to a boarding school (Mitchell, 1995). Only 15 to 20 percent of girls, however, were receiving any education in their adolescent years or beyond (Mitchell, 1995, p. 78). By the first decade of the 20th century, all girls were required to attend school and receive virtually the same quality of education through age 14 if their families could postpone their earnings until that time (Mitchell, 1995, p. 79). According to Vellucci (2005), with the rise of the middle-class came the ascendency of the middle-class girl literary figure. Excluded from the productive sphere as a result of increasing urbanization and industrialization, middle-class girls were instead expected to learn their proper role as emblems and preservers of their families' social standing (p. 72). The girls' novel became instrumental in socializing girls

with the dominant values of appropriate young ladyhood and the developing female body. As the popularity of the Victorian girls' novel increased, so did the importance of addressing the period of transition between childhood and adulthood known as adolescence.

The concept of adolescence was in its rudimentary stages during the Victorian era. Largely, dominant medical discourse limited this stage of life, defining it as essentially inherent to the male sex. According to Sarah Elbert (1988), author *of A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott's Place in American Culture*, "…no one thought 'little women' went through such a stage. Protected from worldly experience, their innocence preserved, little women presumably experienced nothing of the turmoil and stress that we now associate with female adolescence (pp. 80-81). Because girls were only destined for marriage and motherhood, it was assumed their physical development did not require an additional stage of growth and change in the way that males did. It was not until 1904, with the influential work of American psychologist G. Stanley Hall, that it was accepted that both sexes experienced this transitional period between childhood and adulthood (Vellucci, 2005, p. 82). In addition, education reforms challenged dominant medical discourse's widely held belief that the female body could not process and absorb complex knowledge while developing a healthy reproductive system. According to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg (1993), authors of "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views on Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America," Victorian physicians believed that the body existed as a closed system and possessed only a limited amount of vital force. Therefore, any energy expended in one area of the body was consequently removed from another (p. 48). A young woman who devoted herself to education and employed too much brain energy during puberty was at risk of infertility, having not devoted all of her energies toward the optimum development of her reproductive capacities. To prevent this,

Thomas A Emmett (1879), in *The Principles and Practice of Gynecology*, believed that upper-class girls and girls from more prosperous middle-class families should spend the year preceding and the two years following puberty expending as little energy as possible. In addition, he prescribed, "Each menstrual period should be passed in the recumbent position until her system becomes accustomed to the new order of life" (p. 21). As it became more widely accepted that women also experienced an adolescent period of development, however, this new life stage became a fundamental interval in the process of maturing toward proper womanhood.

The Tomboy Archetype

Characters who abide by traditional gender roles, thereby helping to enforce them, are common within children's and preadolescents' literature. Interestingly, however, authors have a predilection for allowing these characters to exist in tandem with other characters who seek to undermine these very same proprieties. One of the most prominent examples of this archetype is the tomboy. According to Jack Halberstam (1998), author of *Female Masculinity*, masculinity is produced by both male and female bodies. For women, however, the most appropriate form of gender deviance and masculinity can be found in the tomboy identification. In girls, tomboyism is associated with the desire for greater freedom and mobility and is therefore a sign of independence and self-motivation (Halberstam, 1998, p. 10). This identification is punished, however, when it extends beyond adolescence or when it presents as extreme masculine identification. According to Judy Simmons (2009), author of "Gender Roles in Children's Fiction," the Victorian era saw a rise of the literary tomboy in response to larger social changes taking place during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Vellucci (2005) the Victorian tomboy character, who still influences contemporary girl characters, is usually a girl on the verge of adolescence who, after taking the reader on adventures that are generally a

safe distance from home, is eventually compelled to accept an adult, feminine role, thereby renouncing the freedom and creativity of her girlhood (p. 72). Within this framework of Victorian heteronormative behavior, with the influence of adolescence, education reform and dominant medical discourse surrounding healthy female development, the tomboy character was created and remains a prevailing archetype of girlhood. As Simmons (2009) postulates, it is the tomboy's steadfast desire to prove herself and to discover her own true identity that makes her such a strong and alluring character. At the same time, however, she represents an untenable connection to the reader's own desire to divert from hegemonic gender roles (Simmons, 2009, p. 147). She allows readers to join her and experience the life, from a safe vantage, of someone deviating from the norm.

The Modern Era and Preadolescent Literature for Girls

By the turn of the twentieth century, however, girls' literature was shifting as the series book became popular, although not to the extent that it would following the Modern era. Emily Hamilton-Honey (2012), author of "Guardians of Morality: Librarians and American Girls' Series Fiction, 1890-1950," notes that American society was developing around ideas about consumption as a marker of and in connection to individual achievement and contentedness in the Modern era. As Hamilton-Honey (2012) writes, "Since girls in particular were encouraged to read for self-development, series books were a sensible place in which to promote the idea that consumerism was the new, modern-road to self-fulfillment and happiness" (p. 768). With the rise in consumerism also came the expansion of the space women could occupy and the productive sphere became a place where, even if they were not working within it, women and girls could exist as paying customers. According to Hamilton-Honey (2012), beyond consumerism, these books for girls also promoted education, cosmopolitanism, sports and travel, thereby challenging

traditional assumptions about a girl's place in the family and the community (p. 769). Series fiction encouraged readers to make decisions and demonstrate some of the intelligence, capability and freedom generally reserved for adults. Within these tales, children became the moral arbiters, competing on an equal footing with adults, giving young readers a greater sense of agency than was previously available in more traditional literature. Of this, Hamilton-Honey (2012) writes, "Series books gave young men and women a chance to make choices about who they wanted to be, what they wanted to do with their lives, outside the confines of adult authority" (p. 770). Like the Victorian tomboy, ideas about agency and decision-making have been enduring and are influential in contemporary literature for youth today.

Contemporary Literature for Preadolescent Girls and Sexuality

Although the tomboy character was created in response to major systemic and social changes as a model of girlhood that would prepare girls and help them become healthy adults, dominant discourse maintained that girls and women possessed an inherent asexuality. Truly good women and girls were passionless, when it came to sexual activities. Physician William Acton contributed to this increasingly accepted myth that normal women lacked sexual impulses, stating, "The majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind…The best mothers…know little or nothing of sexual indulgences. Love of the home, children, and domestic duties, are the only passions they feel (Reynolds & Humble, 1993, p. 13). As is evident through this statement, however, this asexuality was framed within a heteronormative lens where women were expected to strive to be wives and mothers.

Apart from changing historical, cultural and social influences, this practice has been maintained within literature for girls and sexuality and issues of sexual identity have been largely unaddressed in preadolescent girls' fiction, with the exception of a few rare pieces and several

contemporary young adult novels that seek to address sexual identity. As a result and because heterosexuality is an important component of Western heteronomativity, it is subtlety written into the identity scripts presented in children's and preadolescent's literature. David Gutterman (1994), author of "Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity," writes, "The critical step in the process of acknowledging and celebrating difference is a recognition of contingency – of the instability of our 'selves' and the world" (p. 222). Because masculinity or femininity in accordance with heterosexuality has served as a central marker of individual identity, the author finds that it has been produced and sustained by networks of discourse surrounding sexuality and gender. Calling upon Judith Butler's concept of the "heterosexual matrix," however, Gutterman recognizes that the hegemonic standard for heterosexuality creates a clear designation of accepted behaviors in relation to an individual's gender so that society adheres to heterosexuality (1994, p. 225). As a result, gender and sexuality have become so entangled that the author believes the relationship between the two must be reimagined to embrace constantly shifting identities.

Vanessa Wayne Lee (1998) writes about the change within contemporary young adult literature that made space for writing about sexuality or, more specifically, homosexuality. In her piece "'Unshelter Me': The Emerging Fictional Adolescent Lesbian," Lee tackles the adolescent novel of lesbianism. In doing so, she aptly notes,

> Of critical importance is how adolescent lesbian sexuality is articulated by adults for adolescents in popular literature and culture, because whether the adolescent reads for truth, experience, identification, or pleasure, she reads what the dominant culture deems publishable. (Lee, 1998, p. 152)

In her analysis, the author finds three provisional counterplots meant to influence the way readers interpret lesbian sexuality. The first includes texts that position lesbianism as a threat or a

problem. Through their presentation of sexuality to a readership largely unfamiliar with lesbianism, these authors ignore ideas of lesbian identity formation, instead castigating what they deem to be morally wrong and deviant sexuality (Lee, 1998, p. 152). The second type tries to address what the former group ignores by focusing on the formation of lesbian identities and giving these identities depth, endurance and scope (Lee, 1998, p. 152). Finally, the third category interrogates current ideologies about lesbianism and lesbian identity. Where the other two categories center their plots on the issue of lesbianism, the final category does not, instead presenting lesbianism and the formation of a lesbian identity as part of a larger cultural landscape (Lee, 1998, p.152). Despite these representations of alternative sexualities and identities, however, Lee's study focuses on a small subset of fiction that specifically seeks to target a certain demographic. This leaves issues of homosexuality and sexual identity formation essentially absent from mainstream preadolescent literature for girls. In addition, the books in Lee's study focus on young adult literature. According to Michelle Ann Abate and Kenneth Kid (2011), editors of *Over the Rainbow: Queer Children's and Young Adult Literature*, children's literature, if addressing alternative sexualities, usually focuses on lesbian or gay parents or other adult family members such as uncles (p. 6). Sexuality beyond an anticipated adherence to heteronormativity is rarely addressed in children's literature or preadolescent literature.

Conclusion

These examples of gender discourses surrounding gender roles and gender appropriate behavior in children's and preadolescent's literature illustrate that Western heteronormativity is still the dominant perspective communicated through children's literature. Despite the divergences from hegemonic gender identity, such as the tomboy, traditional gender relations and hegemonies continue to exist and continue to be represented in children's and

preadolescent's literature. If these conventions and power relations are not remedied, however, this binary will continue to be reproduced, limiting youth and restricting them to the confines of hegemonic femininity and masculinity with strict adherence to heterosexuality, thereby stifling their own unique identities at an early age. Literature can serve as a place of change by rethinking gender in ways that challenge the existing gender order rather than reinforcing it. As Mallan (2009) writes, "Children's literature will not change the world but it does make significant and often undervalued contributions to how its child readers see the world and their place in it" (p. 3). By exploring new complex relationships and identities, authors can open new worlds for their young readers that embrace and support nonnormative sexualities and ways of being. Preadolescent literature shows this potential.

Chapter 3: Tomboyism in Preadolescent Literature for Girls

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the concept of tomboyism and the tomboy literary archetype has its origins in the Victorian era. Victorian girls' literature flourished, instilling new images of girlhood that continue to permeate contemporary girls' literature. In navigating the changing social and economic contexts in the United States, girls could turn to literature to help them learn about social expectations as they grew and developed into women. American novels for girls were particularly popular, both nationally and abroad, because they allowed their heroines a substantial amount of both social and physical freedom through the promotion of tomboy romping in a way that popular British texts of the time did not. Affirming dominant ideologies of Victorian femininity, the Victorian girl literary figure became a model of appropriate and exemplary girlhood and adolescence. It is important to note, however, that this model of girlhood was and still is largely white, middle-class American preadolescence. Of this, Michelle Ann Abate (2008), author of *Tomboys: A Literary And Cultural History,* writes, "Especially in works created by white female authors or intended for a largely white female audience, the ambiguity of the tomboy's gender mirrors the ambiguity of her purported Caucasian identity" (p. xxiv). In addition, rather than challenging traditional ideas and representations of femininity, feminine bodies and feminine space, Victorian girls' literature, reinforced established ideologies of girlhood and womanhood within the new and changing social systems. As Foster and Simmons (1995) note, "The centrality of the heroine and her disturbed sense of gendered identity highlights [Victorian] novels' concern with femininity, both as a cultural construct and as a socio-psychological state towards which every female adolescent must inevitably progress" (p. 108). In doing so, although Victorian girls' literature created a new space for femininity and feminine expression, it continued to deny women's and girls' sexuality and agency within the public sphere.

Within this framework of Victorian heteronormative behavior with attention to adolescence, education reform and dominant medical discourse regarding healthy female development, the tomboy character was created and has been a prevailing archetype of girlhood since the Victorian era. In an attempt to comply with the contradictory demands of teaching about the virtues of domesticity, while also providing girls with enjoyable reading, the tomboy character became an important and enduring model of healthy girlhood.

Responding to changes in education reform, Victorian physicians began to worry about the reproductive capacities of girls who were now going to school through adolescence and into adulthood. As late as 1901, gynecologist William Edgar Darnall, in an article entitled "The Pubescent Schoolgirl," worried that the competition and pressures of education, particularly university education, would be so devastating to women that it could damage their entire nervous system. Of this, he wrote,

> …bright eyes have been dulled by the brain-fag and sweet temper transformed into irritability, crossness and hysteria, while the womanhood of the land is deteriorating physically. She may be highly cultured and accomplished and shine in society, but her future husband will discover too late that he has married a large outfit of headaches, backaches and spine aches, instead of a woman fitted to take up the duties of life. (Darnall, 1901, p. 490)

According to Susan R. Gannon (1998), author of "Learning to Be a Girl: 1830-1915," in order to preserve the faculties of healthy reproduction in the face of new access to education, physicians and psychologists began to prescribe "tomboy romping" as part of girls' natural and healthy development (p. 215). Charlotte Yonge (1869), one of the most prolific female Victorian authors, aptly described this tomboy romping in *Womankind,* saying, "What I mean by 'tomboysim' is a wholesome delight in rushing about at full speed, playing at active games, climbing trees, rowing boats, making dirt pies, and the like" (p. 231). These ideas promoting physical activity inspired

new and changing ideas of girlhood, while also modifying contemporary standards of beauty in connection to class. With these changes, middle and upper-class girls were no longer expected to stay indoors in keeping with standards of femininity which valued pale skin, delicate constitutions and elevated morality. Now, developing girls were encouraged to play, imagine and explore in order to build up strength and vitality. This strength and freedom presented a dilemma, however, because it was assumed that this vitality prepared girls for marriage and family and made them better wives and mothers, further relegating them to the domestic sphere rather than preparing them for new opportunities outside of the home.

The American tomboy, however, developed around unique economic and class divisions, which were particular to nineteenth century America and significantly affected authors' depictions of girls' in a way that British authors, who were also popular during the Victorian era, were not impacted. Lynne Vallone (1995), author of *Disciplines of Virtue: Girls' Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, discusses the illusion of the American Myth and its influence on Victorian American literature for girls, noting that the particular belief that merit rather than entitlement leads to success, appealed to its vast and growing middle-class audience. As the development of literature for girls came to fruition, the Victorian American economy was unstable and fluid. Therefore, as is reflected in early American literature for girls, such as Susan Warner's (1850) *The Wide, Wide World,* often acclaimed as America's first bestselling novel, fortunes were built and lost with alarming frequency. Warner (1850), taking her readers on a didactic journey through the devastating, emotional, but ultimately fulfilling, existence of young Ellen Montgomery, writes,

> The seed so early sown in little Ellen's mind, and so carefully tended by sundry
> hands, grew in course of time to all the fair structure and comely perfection it had
> bid fair to reach–storms and winds that had visited it did but cause the root to take

deeper hold; and at the point of its young maturity it happily fell again into those hands that had of all been most successful in its culture. In other words, to speak intelligibly, Ellen did in no wise disappoint her brother's wishes, nor he hers. Three or four more years of Scottish discipline wrought her no ill; they did but serve to temper and beautify her Christian character; and then, to her unspeakable joy, she went back to spend her life with the friends and guardians she best loved, and to be to them, still more than she had been to her Scottish relations, "the light of the eyes." (p.569)

Ellen, as Warner suggests to her young female readers through her use of sentimentalism and domestic realism, portrays the social limitations imposed upon nineteenth-century women to endorse Christian morality. As a work of sentimentalist literature, the conflict created by the story is dealt with almost entirely through the emotional response that Ellen has to the conditions in which she is put in the novel, in manifesting strength and perseverance. In addition to its roots in sentimentalist literature, *A Wide, Wide World* also has deep roots as a domestic novel. Adhering to the basic plot of most women's fiction novels of the time, which, as Nina Baym (1978) describes in *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820 - 1870*, largely involves "the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world" (p. 19).

This lesson was very common within preadolescent literature for girls in a variety of ways in Victorian literature. For example, grounded within the religious didactic teachings of these early novels, girls who wanted to be strong, active and competent members of society, although not as likely to be directly linked to the economy through paid labor, were encouraged to participate in the market through their domestic duties. Of this, Vallone (1995) notes that an American girl's knowledge of the domestic sphere and expense "…could be critical to the success of her family members; her influence upon her brothers and sons might determine the

degree of their honor in whatever society the fluid American 'class system made available to

them" (p. 118). Contrary to the British ideal of womanhood, where girl literary characters were

depicted as passive, sentimental, romantic, delicate, aristocratic, and intelligent though

intellectually restrained, American girl figures were represented as modest, pious, chaste, strong

and productive, with domestic capabilities as well as both physical and intellectual capacities that

may have made them tough playground foes, but would eventually be invaluable in their future

roles as wives and mothers in an ever-changing political and economic landscape. Of this,

Vallone writes,

> It was believed that the youngest members of the new political system must be
> taught that upholding this system was morally sanctioned. The growing American
> nation, however, was fraught with economic, social, and demographic movement:
> fortunes were made and lost seemingly overnight, the issue of slavery was
> threatening national unity, and the rapid growth of urban areas and cultivation of
> the wilderness all combined to create if not an actually unstable atmosphere, at
> least the emotional equivalent. Children's literature of this period was formulated
> in response to the fears of change and the unknown, and reflected the desire for
> stability and stasis. (1995, p. 113)

Because the middle-class made up nearly three-fourths of the overall population, much of

the literature by women or for girls was addressed to a white middle-class audience and

featured white middle-class characters of which the tomboy was an important type

(Abate, 2008, p. x). The active, intelligent, playful, but always loving tomboy character

served as an embodiment of appropriate and ideal womanhood because, even as she

struggled against its boundaries, she would eventually become, with time and proper

socialization, a capable, yet feminine, American woman.

The Victorian tomboy character, which is still manifested in contemporary girl

characters, is usually a girl on the verge of adolescence who, after taking the reader on

adventures that are generally a safe distance from home, is eventually compelled to accept an adult, feminine role, thereby renouncing the freedom and creativity of her girlhood. Lively, intelligent, and charming in her puerility, she prefers boyish games and pursuits to the duties of the domestic girl. She, as Vallone (1995) aptly notes, "…is always measured against a male standard; her charm is that she is a proto-boy. The possessor of some of his qualities but few of his prerogatives, a tomboy merely plays at being a boy" (p. 120).

According to Simmons (2009), the most tenacious and continually celebrated tomboy from the Victorian era is the character Jo March in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (p. 147). Readers like and continue to identify with Jo because she is an emblem of independent and autonomous girlhood. Yet, she also challenges hegemonic femininity because, at 15 years old, she expresses an aversion towards her own body and femininity, chopping off her hair, taking over as the wage earner of the home and expressing impatience with her own sex. Bemoaning her terrible misfortune of having been born a girl, Jo complains of her fate, stating, "I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March…It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, where I like boys' games and work and manners! I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy…" (Alcott, 1947, pp. 5-6). Throughout the novel, Jo tries in many ways to distance herself from the behaviors as well as the assumed natural and proper body comportment of her sex by taking on masculine roles at home, wearing a scorched dress to a party because she is unable to keep her feminine possessions tidy, accidentally burning Meg's hair while curling it, playing all the male roles in her plays, and befriending the shy neighbor boy. It is her steadfast desire to prove herself and to discover her own true identity, while struggling to overcome her faults, that makes her such a strong and alluring character.

While Jo may provide an escape into a gender nonconforming role and the freedom of

adolescence, *Little Women* was one of the first fictional texts to explore the difficulties and

anxieties of girlhood (Foster & Simons, 1995, p. 87). Inevitably, Jo, as well as other tomboy

characters in literature for girls written in the Victorian era, eventually grows out of her tomboy

phase, which largely suggests that becoming a "little woman" is a learned and often distressing

process rather than an instinctual or natural condition of normal female development. In

Victorian girls' literature, this transition represents a recurrent taming process of girls as they

transition into adulthood.

Like Jo, Katy Carr, in *What Katy Did,* which was originally published in 1872, is a wild

and energetic tomboy who is constantly getting into trouble because of her lively imagination

and her impatient temperament. In addition, as Foster and Simons (1995) note,

> In common with those other tomboy figures…Katy experiences a constant battle
> between intention and deed, as her disruptive qualities – carelessness, untidiness,
> impetuousness – threaten the womanly ideals set before her, and as her
> imagination overturns the established stability of daily existence. (p. 121)

As an aforementioned commonality among female protagonists within American literature,

Katy's girlhood is largely unrestricted, enjoying and benefitting from a philosophy in which

girls' freedom to exercise and have adventures is not viewed as abhorrent or disparaged by

proprieties. Though she is allowed to experience this temporary freedom, however, Katy is

continually chiding herself and being reminded of her failings at achieving or working toward

idealized femininity. When her imagination gets the best of her or she is reprimanded for her

carelessness, "…she console[s] herself with planning how, by and by, she would be beautiful and

beloved, and amiable as an angel" (Coolidge, 1999, p. 17). Like Jo, Katy functions to

deconstruct the idea of a romantic heroine, entertaining more heroic goals as well as more

sexually aware goals than usual girl characters (Foster & Simons, 1995, p. 121). On the one hand, she "means to *do* something grand," citing women who challenge conventional femininity, such as female artists, Florence Nightingale and Grace Darling as her examples. At the same time, however, she has a very realistic attitude toward virtuous idealism, noting that, despite her dreams of doing something grand and being remembered, she will be "…beautiful, of course, and good if I can…because it would be nice to go and ride with the young gentlemen *sometimes*" (Coolidge, 1999, p. 25, emphasis in the original).

Unlike Jo, however, Katy never expresses the wish to be a boy nor does she share Jo's sexual ambiguity, refraining from referring to herself in masculine terms. Coolidge, the author, abstains from describing her protagonist with traditionally male-gendered language. Instead, for Coolidge and her readers, Katy becomes an emblem of unconventional girlhood blossoming into ideal femininity, noting that Katy "…planned to do a great many wonderful things, and in the end did none of them, but something quite different – something she didn't like at all at first, but which, on the whole, was a great deal better than any of the doing she had dreamed about" (1999, p. 10). Giving up her dreams and her vivid imagination, Katy abandons her desire to row boats, save peoples' lives, become a nurse in a hospital, head a crusade, or become an artist, singer, or sculptor, and happily embraces her role as wife and mother, successfully becoming "the heart of the home" (Coolidge, 1999, p. 26).

By the end of the First World War, women were voting and asserting their right to participate in the wage sector, which was largely considered a male dominated space until this time. As Abate (2008) notes, "Compared with young women only a generation before them, the entire sex had been 'tomboy-ified'" (p. x). As the number of tomboys increased and began

appearing more in public, so did their representation within media and literature. Of this, Abate (2008) notes,

> …in the years since the term "tomboy" made its debut in U.S. literature and culture, a number of common or defining characteristics have emerged…The traits most Americans are likely to name as constitutive of this code of conduct include a proclivity for outdoor play especially athletics, a feisty independent spirit, and a tendency to don masculine clothing and adopt a boyish nickname. (p. xvi).

According to Shawn Megan Burn, A. Kathleen O'Neil, and Shirley Nederend (1996) in their article entitled "Childhood Tomboyism and Adult Androgyny," there are twelve behaviors that are unmistakable indicators of a tomboy identity within literature for youth. These behaviors include, but are not limited to the following: preferring more masculine clothing such as shorts and jeans to more feminine clothing such as skirts and dresses; preferring traditional boys' toys over girls toys; wishing to be a boy; resembling a boy in appearance; participating in traditionally male sports with boys; preferring traditionally boys' activities over traditionally girls' activities; having girl friends that are also tomboys; engaging in loud or boisterous play with others; preferring to play with boys over girls; using traditionally girls' toys in stereotypically boys' activities; engaging in rough play; and playing with many different peer groups (Burn et al., 1996, p. 422). Although these characteristics may encapsulate the general nature of many tomboys, the list is by no means exhaustive. This list is also important because it identifies the problematic and essentializing way a tomboy experience is depicted within preadolescent literature for girls, excluding other equally important aspects of the female character's identity such as race, class, ability, sexual orientation, and much more. In addition, it points to the normalization of tomboyism, which has had harmful effects in reinforcing

heteronormative gender roles as well as increasing stigmatization of other preadult forms of female masculinity.

Harkening to back to Halberstam's (1998) exploration of the idea that masculinity is produced by both male and female bodies, in accordance with the Western ideas of masculinity, cultural discourse about gender revolves around decidedly clear and expected perceptions of what it means to be male. Currently, according to Mallan, there is a new rhetoric emerging in contemporary literature for youth which is reframing characters through the lens of "lost boys and empowered girls" (2009, p. 2). Of this new discourse, the author writes, "Many of the dilemmas, and underlying contradictions, problematizations, and subjective anxieties remain located in the often polarizing and popularizing discourses that inform theoretical, institutional and wider societal understandings about changing gender relations" (Mallan, 2009, p. 2). While there is not one simple form of masculinity presented in preadolescent literature, there is a limit on the amount of femininity permitted for male characters to express. Expanding upon this idea in "Oh Bondage Up Yours! Female Masculinity and the Tomboy," Halberstam (2004) notes, "Because masculinity is a sign of privilege in our society, it is much more heavily guarded than femininity. Young boys who exhibit feminine behavior are punished, not to protect femininity from male incursions but to encourage masculinity in male bodies…" (p.201). They may be allowed some degree of sensitivity, emotion, compassion and curiosity, but they are bound by a stricter adherence to hegemonic masculinity than female characters are to hegemonic femininity.

For women, however, the most acceptable form of gender non-conformity and masculinity can be found in the tomboy identification. As Halberstam (1999) observes in *Sissies and Tomboys: Gender Nonconformity and Homosexual Childhood,* "It has become almost

commonplace nowadays for at least middle-class parents to point to their frisky girl children and remark proudly upon their tomboy natures" (p. xxiii). In girls, tomboyism is associated with the desire for greater freedom and mobility and is therefore a sign of independence and self-motivation (Halberstam, 1998, p. 10). This identification is punished or disciplined, however, when it extends beyond adolescence or when it presents as extreme masculine identification. For example, after losing her temper and abandoning her sister Amy on the ice, which nearly results in her drowning, Jo is bemoaning her terrible temper and seeks her mother's advice. Confiding to her daughter about her own struggle with anger, Marmee recalls, "I had a hard time, Jo…for, in spite of my efforts, I never seemed to get on. Then your father came, and I was so happy that I found it easy to be good" (Alcott, 1947 p. 91). Here, Jo's mother's words suggest that, there is a cultural allowance of anger for men that is not extended to women. Thus, anger is not a characteristic that Jo, as a burgeoning woman, should possess if she wants to pursue a path toward ideal femininity and eventually find comfort and joy in her own heterosexual marriage. In addition, her mother's words seem to imply that, with time and diligence, she also may be able to overcome her faults, but the deeper meaning implies that Jo must also give up her tomboyish ways in order to settle into a proper, heteronormative marriage and family structure.

When defining "empowered girlhood" within fiction for girls and analyzing the state of the tomboy, Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair (2002), authors of *Declarations of Independence: Empowered Girls in Young Adult Literature 1990-2001,* note that empowered female characters must distinguish themselves from their male counterparts in key ways. For example, within literature for youth, male characters in novels aimed at a male audience often depict characters achieving absolute and unmitigated independence. Female protagonists and

literature for girls, however, depict the main character's reliance on close relationships with others to recognize and harness their full potential (Brown & St. Clair, 2002, p. 27). Herein lies one of the issues with the tomboy character and her enduring nature. While social norms endorse competitive, assertive, and powerful qualities in boys, the tomboy is only allowed a finite amount of time to embody these characteristics with the understanding that she will eventually strive toward and embrace her innate, feminine characteristics.

Challenging this status-quo within preadolescent and young adult literature for girls, Brown and St. Clair (2002) write, "The definition, therefore, should include girls whose empowerment has more to do with gaining confidence in themselves than gaining power over others…meaningful empowerment should result from purposeful action rather than innate talent or coincidental circumstances" (p. 27). Upon gaining power through self-confidence and recognition of their ability to enact productive and positive change, empowered female protagonists can illustrate how to share power, thereby serving as an example of how to empower others. In addition, empowering fiction for preadolescent girls must subvert the didactic tradition of preparing readers primarily for heterosexual relationships, marriage and motherhood. Equally critical and, as aforementioned, absent from Burn, O'Neil and Nederend's (1996) definition of a tomboy identity is the need to make space and allowances for the differences in how girls become empowered. For example, many preadolescent books for girls featuring a tomboy protagonist follow the heroine as she challenges injustice, instinctively performs brave feats, and/or helps reform youth and adults around her to be better members of the community. Empowerment for readers, however, may not align with these daring stunts, selfless acts, or male norms for defining standard heroism, but rather encourage them to identify themselves as valuable and powerful in their own way.

Tomboys and their Male Counterparts

Interestingly, as Abate notes, the tomboy's closest friend in preadolescent literature is often a "sissy boy rather than either another tomboy or a feminine girl" (2008, p. xvii). The author notes that, although such an intimate relationship between members of the opposite sex would generally arouse suspicion or invoke feelings of concern or apprehension, the connection between a tomboy and a sissy poses no threat. Of this, she writes, "Since these figures exist outside of conventional gender roles, their relationship also exists outside of conventional sexual ones…the tomboy/sissy dyad also disrupts heteronormative ones" (2008, p. xvii). Yet, as the pair defies the boundaries between homosexuality and heterosexuality, they often reinforce the bounds between masculinity and femininity by policing each other's gender transgressions. For example, instead of serving as company within which to safely display their overt femininity, the tomboy character often helps masculinize the effeminate male friend. By the close of the novel, the tomboy character has helped transform her once "sissy" and feminine male counterpart into a strong, capable and even powerful man by teaching him to be adventurous and to assert himself. For example, Jo March is instrumental in reforming the effete Laurie Laurence into a strong man and honorable husband for her sister, Amy. Laurie, an emotionally repressed adolescent who is starved for expressions of love and tenderness, covets the March family and home life, confiding in Jo,

> Why, you see, I often hear you calling to one another, and when I'm alone up here, I can't help looking over at your house, you always seem to be having such good time. I beg your pardon for being so rude, but sometimes you forget to put down the curtain at the window where the flowers are; and when the lamps are lighted, it's like looking at a picture to see the fire, and you all round the table with your mother; her face is right opposite, and it looks so sweet behind the flowers, I can't help watching it. I haven't got any mother, you know. (Alcott, 1947, p.57)

It is through Laurie's friendship and later unrequited love with Jo that helps transform and mold Laurie into an emotionally strong and capable husband for Amy. Musing over the difference between the sisters, Laurie notes, "[Jo] ought to have made an effort, and tried to love him; it couldn't be very hard, many people would be proud and glad to have such a dear boy care for them; but Jo never would be like other girls, so there was nothing to do but be very kind, and treat him like a brother" (Alcott, 1947, p. 473). In fact, Alcott, in working on a sequel to the first section of *Little Women* and infuriated by the public's demand for a traditional romantic ending, declared, "Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman's life. I won't marry Jo to Laurie to please anyone" (1889, p. 201). Instead of uniting Jo with Laurie, the author pairs her with a deliberately unromantic lover who is also twice her age. In her refusal to submit to this customary literary practice of taming the tomboy in response to romantic interest, Alcott still relegates her dynamic heroine to a life of domesticity where her dreams of being a famous author and playwright have no place.

Similarly, Berthenia Lou (Birdie) Boyer, in Lois Lenski's (1945) bestseller *Strawberry Girl*, spends much of the novel working to redeem and remedy her young neighbor's, Jefferson (Shoestring) Davis Slater's, lazy and cowardly ways. When she is not plowing, tending the strawberry plants, painting the house, or going to school, Birdie navigates the complicated terrain of her interactions with the neighbor family and their young son who is closest to her age. Of this, she muses, "Seems like them Slaters air [sic] hard folks to neighbor with…Likely I had orter been nice to Shoestring; likely they won't come see us no more" (Lenski, 1945, p. 20). Lenski does not depict Birdie as an archetypal tomboy, however. While she is smart, independent, strong-willed, with an affinity for both outside work and play, she also has an appreciation for beautiful gardens, flowers, clothing, a passion for music, and strong maternal

instincts. For example, while helping Azuloy, a fifteen-year-old orphan and the hat shopkeeper's assistant, make tissue paper and wax roses while her mother is shopping in town, the shopkeeper's young attendant tells Birdie, "They're for ornament…Keep them in a vase on your parlor table. I can see you like pretty things as much as I do'" (Lenski, 1945, p. 57). Part of this deviation from the standard tomboy character lies in the author's intentional depiction of early 1900's Florida frontier county. Of this, Lenski notes in the novel's Foreword,

> In this series of regional books for American children, I am trying to present vivid, sympathetic pictures of the real life of different kinds of Americans, against authentic backgrounds of diverse localities. We need to know our country better; to know and understand people different from ourselves; so that we can say: "This then is the way these people lived. Because I understand it, I admire and love them." Is not this a rich heritage for our American children? (1945, p. x)

Therefore, Birdie, growing up a "Cracker" within a frontier community replete with all its cruelties, brutalities, and crudities, she is all at once determined, quick-tempered, self-reliant, and brave, while also maternal, altruistic, and feminine. The harsh environment in which she is coming of age, coupled with her willfulness and her empathy, make her just as likely to care affectionately for the Slaters' infant and bravely rescue her young sister and Shoestring's younger siblings from a brush fire, help her family with exhausting manual labor without complaint, long for a beautiful new hat, and express irredeemable frustration toward Shoestring while also wanting to reform him.

Despite this deviation from the archetype, however, Birdie spends the majority of the novel in perpetual struggle and discord with Shoestring, grappling with Shoestring's own lazy and unsociable behaviors, but also those of his family. After several attempts on behalf of the Slater family to continue using the Boyer land for grazing, Birdie's patience with Shoestring and his family has worn thin. Boasting that he can catch a live snake at a

church social, an overly arrogant Shoestring loses control of the reptile and accidently throws it into Birdie's church hat. Of this, she fumes, "She was so angry she wanted to kill him. She hated him with a cold hard hate. She hated his overalls and his black felt hat. She hated his thin face, tight mouth and half-shut eyes. Her anger was black enough to kill him…" (Lenski, 1945, p.47). Her compassion eventually softens this hatred, however, as she comes to see that Shoestring is not a lazy, uneducated brute like his father and older brothers. Instead, Shoestring wants to attend school, although his father will not let him, and wants both families to get along. Realizing her own underestimation of his character, Birdie notes, "It looked as if Shoestring didn't want trouble any more than she did. He was trying to fix things up. All at once her black hate melted away and she liked him again" (Lenski, 1945, pp. 51-52). Recognizing that Shoestring's behavior was a reflection of his own personal struggles with his family and his own desires, she begins to usher him into social and community activities from which he had previously been excluded. Accompanying him to school one day, Lenski writes, "It was a proud moment for Birdie when she presented Miss Bunnaway with a bunch of red roses, and introduced Shoestring Slater" (1945, p. 189). The novel concludes with the ending of the feud between the Slaters and the Boyers, as well as the strong and budding friendship between Shoestring and Birdie.

Tomboys and their Absent Mothers

In addition to the tomboy's important relationship with her effeminate or "weak" male friend, she is also characterized by her separation from her mother. For example, Katy Carr's mother is deceased, leaving her rambunctious daughter in the care of her liberal and forgiving father and her more severe and conservative aunt. Similarly, Alcott's Mrs. March is the arbiter

of morality and proper upbringing, but is largely absent from the text. As Louise Westling (1996), in her article, "Tomboys and Revolting Femininity," argues, "Without mothers, these female protagonists define themselves most comfortably in masculine terms" (p. 155). Orphaned by their mothers and raised under the male guidance of the fathers, these tomboys can easily and justifiably align themselves more with masculinity in their early years. As Mary Elliot (1999), author of "The Closet of the Heart: Legacies of Domesticity in Tomboy Narratives and Lesbian Pulp Fiction, 1850-1965," writes, "The presence of the orphaned tomboy in the narratives creates an orphaned space in the ideological fabric of the narrative as well, freeing it temporarily from its overarching didactic purpose" (p. 10). The missing mother is not the narrating agent in most of the books and, as a result, the reader never learns directly her thoughts and feelings.

Without mothers to indoctrinate these tomboy characters about ideas related to traditional women's roles, the characters are able to define these things themselves. For example, in Kate DiCamillo's (2000) bestselling *Because of Winn Dixie*, ten-year-old India Opal Buloni is a friendly, brave, and independent young girl who, long abandoned by her mother is raised by her distant and hard-working father. Of her father, she muses, "My daddy is a good preacher and a nice man, but sometimes it's hard for me to think about him as my daddy, because he spends so much time preaching or thinking about preaching or getting ready to preach. And so, in my mind, I think of him as 'the preacher'" (DiCamillo, 2000, p. 11). Although she loves her father, she still feels the strong absence of her mother, largely because she has no memory of her. In an effort to familiarize herself with her runaway mother, Opal asks her father to tell her ten things about her mother: one thing for each year she's been alive. When he finishes, Opal records each fact, noting, "I wanted to know those ten things inside and

out. That way, if my mama ever came back, I could recognize her, and I would be able to grab her and hold on to her tight and not let her get away from me again" (DiCamillo, 2000, p. 30). On her quest to find her mother, however, Opal learns more about herself: what it takes to maintain a relationship of care and the complexity, as well as the value, of interpersonal relationships. Opal's and many preadolescent female protagonists' own bildungsromans are initiated by the mother's abandonment of the family, giving the perceptive adolescent voice the authority that speaks convincingly to the reader.

Abilene Taylor, in Clare Vanderpool's (2010) *Moon over Manifest*, is another quintessential contemporary example of the self-motivated, independent and autonomous tomboy. On her first day of school in her new home of Manifest, Kansas, she narrates, "I put on my one change of clothes…Then I splashed some water on my face and ran my fingers through my hair. It felt like straw but was the color of a rusty nail. Wearing it short, I never fussed with it much…" (Vanderpool, 2010, p. 24). A spirited and courageous minimalist, Abilene has been living on the road and traveling the country with her father since she was born. Now, at the age of 12, however, her father decides that the road is "a poor place for raising a young lady," and sends her to the one place he stayed that started to feel like home (Vanderpool, 2010, p. 326). There, the young tomboy spends the summer of 1936 uncovering the secrets of Manifest and the secrets of her own father's life as she tries, desperately, to reconnect with him. In doing so, she discovers her own strengths and connects with her personal identity while developing an understanding that her father is imperfect and more deserving of her care and devotion because of this.

Told in first-person, from Abilene's perspective, Vanderpool also incorporates third-person narratives through excerpts from Hattie Mae Harper's newspaper column, as well as

Miss Sadie's stories about the town, which help her solve the mystery of her father's past, but also a town murder committed in 1916. Abilene first meets Miss Sadie after her pocket watch, given to her by her father, is stolen and hung on Miss Sadie's porch. Upon trying to retrieve it, she knocks over a flower pot and, as a result, she spends the summer tending to Miss Sadie's garden as compensation for the property damage. In addition, Abilene learning about her father's past and unraveling the mystery behind her father's past in Manifest, Kansas and his present secrecy. Perhaps unwittingly, Miss Sadie reveals Abilene's similarities to her father, and she grows to understand her father's aversion to discussing or remembering the past.

Like DiCamillo's Opal, Vanderpool presents a strong-willed, quick-witted, and brave character designed specifically to appeal to preadolescent female readers. Both Opal and Abilene must navigate the issues of remembering the past for future growth; love, loss, and the human condition; and the grief and pain that surrounds secrets. Unlike DiCamillo, however, Vanderpool's protagonist does not endeavor to learn more about her absent mother, but rather strives to discover the secrets of her father's hidden past in an effort to grow closer to him. By solving the mystery of his past, Abilene feels a greater compassion for her father who has been plagued by secrets for most of his life. While the absence of her mother offers her the space and freedom to define for herself what femininity is and adopt a tomboy identity which is fitting for her adventures with her father on the road, it is the abandonment of her father that leads Abilene to discover her ability for tenderness, compassion, and her desire to care for someone. Through Abilene's summer of growth and discovery, Vanderpool creates a world that celebrates the values rooted in feminine discourse, such as being caring and nurturing while also constructing a liberating world that Abilene is forced into through her abandonment.

Tomboyism and Race

As discussed earlier, tomboy characters are infrequently written as non-white. Abate (2008) explores the gender and sexual dynamics of tomboyism, and offers intriguing discussions of race and ethnicity's role in the construction of the enduring cultural archetype. My own analysis affirms the persistent and essentializing racial identity of the tomboy character as, in novels written by white authors for a predominantly white audience, the tomboy character's gender ambiguity tends to mirror the ambiguity of her assumed white or Caucasian identity (Abate, 2008). This is done with the consequence of making invisible and further silencing voices of color within preadolescent literature for girls. Echoing this, Abate's stated goal of showing how tomboys are "unstable and dynamic…changing with the political, social and economic events of [their] historical era" reveals a history of gendered rebellion bought at a price that she eventually concludes has been too high (2008, p. xii). This monograph creates a useful history and critical analysis of the shifting racial identities of tomboyism on which to hang further analyses of girls' culture as it is represented within preadolescent literature for girls. For example, as was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, concerns over girls' health historically contributed to the support and promotion of tomboy romping. Along with a changing economy, the rise of the middle-class, and more (white) girls having access to education, discourse surrounding healthy girlhood changed from a languid lifestyle, which promoted corseting and valued pale skin, to producing strong girls who would become strong women and thereby become strong wives who could help produce strong white sons. Coupled with the abolition of slavery within the Victorian era, Abate (2008) notes, "Declining birth rates among upper and middle class white women, coupled with the declining vitality of the children they did produce, elicited fears about the potential 'race suicide' of Anglo-Americans" (p. 6).

As this example suggests, Abate's most striking argument is that the history of tomboyism is entangled with a history of race and racism in the United States. Of this, she writes,

> As a mode of behavior that was conceived by white women for white women to protect and preserve white racial supremacy, [tomboyism] verifies [the tomboy's] claim to whiteness and, thus, her ability to become a "true" (i.e., white) American. Possessing the same racial prerequisite, the two entities are interrelated; participation in one facilitates inclusion in the other. (Abate, 2008, p. 106)

With a hope for "…a form of white female gender rebellion that is not predicated on the appropriation of nonwhite peoples and cultures," Abate reveals the often hidden or unrecognized marginalization within literary tomboyism, exposing it not as a pure expression of gender resistance, but also as a device used to historically bolster another form of oppression (2008, p. 239).

In 1965, Nancy Larrick's critical essay "The All-White World of Children's Books" appeared in the *Saturday Review*, calling attention to "…the almost complete omission of Negroes from books for children" (p. 63). When black characters did appear, the books were frequently by white authors and, as a result, stereotypes, established in earlier decades, continued to linger. The 1970s, however, when Mildred Taylor's award-winning *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* was first published, brought major changes to the preadolescent literary world. First, the Coretta Scott King Award for excellence in African American children's authorship and illustration was first established. In addition, black authors were awarded the Caldecott, created in 1937, and Newberry, started in 1921, for the first time since the respective awards' inceptions. Despite the gains of the last few decades, however, Black authors still face barriers in publication. The Cooperative Children's Book Center, which tracks minority publishing statistics, began tracking children's books written and/or illustrated by African

Americans in 1985 and calculated that only 0.7% of books published that year were by Black authors. By 2013, 1.8% of books were by Black authors or featured a black protagonist while the latest census figures put the African American population at 13%.

Taylor (1997), author of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry,* first introduced readers to her strong, brave, intelligent, and brazen tomboy protagonist, Cassie Logan, in 1976. At 10 years old, Cassie is navigating her preadolescent years as a black girl in rural Mississippi during the Great Depression. As Taylor (1977) notes, the novel "…mirror[s] a Black child's hopes and fears from childhood innocence to awareness to bitterness and disillusionment" (p.407). The author details Cassie's gradual awakening and comprehension of the brutal realities of racism and its many incarnations throughout her fourth grade year. For example, as they walk an hour each way to school, Cassie and her brothers are deliberately splashed with mud by the bus for white children as the passengers, cheering and laughing, goad the white bus driver on each day. Arriving at school on the first day, their Sunday clothes dirtied from their daily encounter, they are pleased to learn that each student will receive his or her own new textbook for the first time. This excitement is quickly quelled, however, with the discovery that they are old and worn discards from the white school. Finding a chart in the inside cover of her book which denotes the date of issuance, the condition of the book, and the race of the student, Cassie observes, "…I opened my book to its center and began browsing through the spotted pages. Girls with blond braids and boys with blue eyes stared up at me…The blank lines [of the chart] continued down to line 20 and I knew that they had all been reserved for black students" (Taylor, 1997, p.26). In the climax of the novel, Cassie learns that her father set fire to his own cotton crop in an effort to disband a lynch mob. Assembled to lynch T.J. who was framed by two white boys for killing a local white store owner, Cassie's white neighbors temporarily abandon their informal and

unlawful reparations in order to prevent the fire from reaching their own fields. The novel ends

with Cassie's bitter awareness of the racially divided America in which she is living. Of this,

she sorrows,

> I had never liked T.J., but he had always been there, a part of me, a part of my
> life, just like the mud and the rain, and I had thought that he always would be. Yet
> the mud and the rain and the dust would all pass. I knew and understood that.
> What had happened to T.J. in the night I did not understand, but I knew that it
> would not pass. And I cried for those things which had happened in the night and
> would not pass. (Taylor, 1997, p. 276)

While he is saved that night from the lynch mob, readers are left with the foreshadowing of

T.J.'s inevitable death at the hands of the white judicial system.

While Taylor does depict Cassie in several ways that are reminiscent of other tomboy

characters analyzed within this chapter, Taylor uses Cassie's tomboyism as a way to provide an

analysis of the mutually constitutive and interdependent systems of racism and sexism that

impinge upon the lives of Black people. For example, Cassie, like Jo, Katy, and Abilene, finds

feminine clothing to be restricting and bothersome. Regretting her promise to her mother that

she would arrive to class on the first day of school "looking clean and ladylike," Taylor's

heroine complains,

> I tugged again at my collar and dragged my feet in the dust, allowing it to shift
> back onto my socks and shoes like gritty red snow. I hated the dress. And the
> shoes. There was little I could do in a dress, and as for shoes, they imprisoned
> freedom-loving feet accustomed to the feel of the warm earth. (Taylor, 1997, p. 5)

Establishing quickly Cassie's affinity with other tomboy characters and traditional tomboy

characteristics, readers then follow the protagonist on a painful path of discovery about the

United States' history of slavery and the marginalization she faces due to both her race and

gender. On her first trip to town, Cassie recalls, "No Day in all my life had ever been as cruel as

this one," and readers accompany her as she is first confronted with the harsh realities of being a black female in the Depression era. In one day, Cassie is made aware of her second-class position in society as she and her grandmother, Big Ma, must park far away from other vendors at the market; she, her brother, and T.J. must wait to be assisted in a shop until all of the white customers have been helped; and she must apologize to a white girl after the girl's father twists her arm and knocks her off the sidewalk because she did not initially step aside for his daughter to pass. After all of these injustices, Cassie is forced to apologize once more to the young girl as her strong and tall grandmother looks on fearfully. Ultimately, she is faced with the reality that her grandmother's actions, emanating from both her gender and racial identity, were the safest. Later, discussing the incident, her mother chides Cassie for her anger toward Big Ma, saying, "I don't want to hear what Papa wouldn't have done…You were with Big Ma and she did what she had to do and believe me, young lady, she didn't like it one bit more than you did" (Taylor, 1997, p.125). Confronted with the material structure of racism, including the additional vulnerability of black women, this experience is later added to a deeper analysis of the legal system and the legal support of racism when T.J. is brutally attacked and unlawfully arrested.

Through Cassie's painful endeavors and experiences, readers are able to see that the struggle of the tomboy has the potential to provide commentary and critical analysis of social institutions which perpetuate racism, sexism, and heteronormativity. Using the term "children's literature" to define preadolescent and early adolescent literature, Angela E. Hubler (2000), author of "Beyond the Image: Adolescent Girls, Reading, and Social Reality," notes, "The idealist focus on individuals rather than a materialist focus on social institutions that characterizes these novels also emerges in much feminist scholarship on children's literature" (p.87). Taylor, not following the formula of the tamed and rehabilitated tomboy, such as Jo

March or Katy Carr, or the tomboy who is able to enact change simply by being strong-willed, empathetic, and vocal, such as Abilene Taylor, Birdie Boyer, or Opal Buloni, she is instead candidly portrays her readers Cassie's marginalized social location. She is straightforward in illustrating that the strength and independence of Cassie, Big Ma, and her mother is powerful, but she shows that one cannot eradicate the systems of inequality by simply being polite and dignified (Hubler, 2000, p. 95). Elaborating on this, Hubler writes,

> A more accurate understanding of the vexed relationship between agency and structure is crucial to any criticism, such as feminist criticism, originating in, and ultimately concerned with, social change. Girls are better served by novels that offer them not only positive role models but also a structural "map" of social reality, one which reveals the historical development, and interrelationship, of the institutions of gender, race, and class. Such knowledge is crucial if girls are to begin to understand and to transform oppressive social institutions. (2000, p. 85)

Through Cassie and her tomboyish nature, Taylor shows that the process of social change is an arduous one and deeply entrenched within the interrelationships of different systems of social oppression. Readers from diverse backgrounds can connect their own social and lived realities to those of Cassie, thereby recognizing that their experiences of sexism and racism are rooted in a larger system, which can be altered through social action, resistance, and a call for new ways of being.

Conclusion

Overall, the pattern I have observed demonstrates that the tomboy character within preadolescent literature for girls has remained largely static since its introduction in the Victorian era. While the tomboy character does make space for preadolescent female characters and their readers to create a new ideas about femininity and feminine expression, the depiction of the tomboy experience remains problematic and essentializing, relegating this divergences of

femininity to heteronormativity and excluding other equally important aspects of the female character's identity such as race, class, ability, sexual orientation, and much more. In addition, the normalization of tomboyism has had harmful effects in reinforcing heteronormative gender roles as well as increasing stigmatization of other preadult forms of female masculinity because the tomboy is only allowed a finite amount of time to embody traditionally masculine characteristics with the understanding that she will eventually strive toward and embrace her innate, feminine characteristics. In addition, fiction for preadolescent girls must subvert the didactic tradition of preparing readers primarily for heterosexual relationships, marriage and motherhood.

Descriptors such as "strong," "feisty," "clever," "independent," "resourceful," "confident," "brave," and "creative" are used widely across fiction to describe preadolescent female protagonists, particularly tomboy characters. These labels, however, are seldom defined or articulated. Rather than generally defining preadolescent tomboy characters with these generic descriptors, authors should depict their female protagonists as achieving empowerment through purposeful action that does not necessarily stem from innate ability or coincidence, as is common within past and present preadolescent literature for girls. Further, upon gaining power through self-confidence and recognition of their ability to enact productive and positive change, empowered female protagonists can illustrate how to share power, thereby serving as an example of how to empower others. Equally critical and, as aforementioned, absent from Burn, O'Neil and Nederend's (1996) definition of a tomboy identity is the need to make space and allowances for the differences in how girls become empowered.

The enduring archetype of the tomboy within children's literature suggests that there is a continued need for illustrative examples of girls being free to express themselves without being

forced into the restricting limitations of gender propriety. The perpetuation of stereotypes, such as the tomboy, are limiting and essentializing, damaging readers' self-confidence and offering them an unrealistic and discouraging forecast of opportunities available to them. As authors, publishers, critics, and readers continue to recognize that preadolescent fiction for girls can and should provide strong role models for young female readers, preadolescent literature for girls can improve and expand representations. Of this, Foster and Simons (1995) aptly note, "As stories for girls, these novels then are not just entertaining narratives but are also explorations of gendered social and spiritual development, inviting reader identification with the main characters and the dilemmas and trials they experience" (p.108). The authors and stories they tell play a meaningful and significant role in disseminating cultural values. Therefore, fiction for preadolescent girls can provide a variety of frameworks for the many different ways girls can imagine their lives may be lived, their own self-worth, and the opportunities available to them.

Chapter 4: The Body

Theoretical Foundation: Preadolescent Girls' Literature and the Body

Equally important to the poststructural critique of the social and discursive construction of the tomboy archetype and its role in preadolescent literature for girls is how a poststructural feminist framework uniquely perceives the complex interplay of language which constructs the feminine body and issues of embodiment. Embodiment has become a discursive site of sociopolitical significance within Western consciousness and knowledge production. From the moment of its birth, the body of a child is malleable, subjected to both visible and invisible modes of regulation, coercion, surveillance and routinization, with the objective of instilling socially prescribed ideologies about how various bodies should interact with others and society. As Christine Wilkie-Stibbs (2008), author of *The Outside Child: In and Out of the Book*, notes, debates regarding children's bodies often limit the young body to restricting binary definitions and that the relation of the body to the world, as well as the body within the world, serves as an arbiter of meanings and experience (p. 49). About this, she elaborates, "…the body as a semiotic system is 'successful' and is determined in the degree to which it negotiates the complex sets of encodings and decodings prescribed by, in, and for the corporeal training" (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2008, p. 49). In continuous dialectical production, the child as an embodied figure is, using Butler's terminology, "performative" not only in relation to gender and sexuality, but also in relation to its performance in social spaces that determine how the individual body should perform in accordance with hierarchies of power.

Therefore, because embodiment is so entrenched within discourse about femininity, it is imprudent to talk about female protagonists within preadolescent literature without addressing ideas about representations of female bodies, feminine comportment and space. Ann J. Cahill (2000), author of "Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body," writes, "Given

the admittedly complex, but always central, role of the body in the political oppression of women, the feminine body is a particularly crucial text" (p. 50). The female body is a site of struggle, and continues to be marked by dominant, patriarchal discourse as weak, unstable and inadequate. Elizabeth Grosz (1994), author of *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism,* writes that the connection between subjectivity and corporeality is problematic for women who "have been objectified and alienated as social subjects partly through the denigration and containment of the female body" (p. xiv). Focusing specifically on preadolescent and adolescent girls, Brenda Boudreau (1998), author of "The Battleground of the Adolescent Girl's Body," notes that body image is particularly tenuous for girls who are anticipating or currently experiencing radical physical changes within their bodies, as well as the cultural responses to their bodies (p. 44). Even before they understand or become aware, girls' bodies are written upon and marked by both society's idealized notions about femininity, such as characteristics considered to be maternal, passive, empathetic and gentle, as well as potentially dangerous notions of femininity, such as overt sexuality, masculine tendencies, and aggressive behaviors.

Boudreau writes, however, that "The focus within many of these novels is not exclusively on the adolescent girl's body but on female bodies, including mothers, friends, and siblings, linking the girl to a community of women in (potentially) empowering ways" (1998, p. 45). In other words, these negative or limiting representations of embodied women are not fixed, making it possible to create more positive images of the female body and thereby making preadolescent literature for girls an important site of change and revisioning for young female readers. Within preadolescent literature for girls, the female body can and should be presented in ways that illustrate the protagonist's, and conceivably the reader's, ability to claim control over her own body and self-representation, allowing her to resist cultural objectification and

containment. In addition, the female bodies of protagonists and supporting characters can and should illustrate and draw attention to some of the limiting notions about femininity that are ever present throughout many classic books for girls, but should also expose the many ways in which gender can be challenged and performed.

Similarly, girls' corporeal experiences are intrinsically connected to race and class. Developing a positive sense of self in connection with comportment can be particularly difficult for girls experiencing racial and class marginalization. At any given time, preadolescent girls inhabit simultaneous and multiple subject positions which can be both complementary and conflicting as well as dominant and marginal. For example, masculinity is given more power and status in Western societies whereas femininity is marginalized. With this in mind, the tomboy figure, although embodying several characteristics that may mark her as more masculine, is still written within preadolescent literature as female and, therefore, she cannot access the same amount of power available to her male counterparts. This is further compounded if she occupies another marginalized subject position in terms of race, class, sexual identity, ability, or much more. Navigating the complexity of identities, which are intricate and manifold, becomes more convoluted because identities are never static and always in motion. In her article "Growing Sideways, or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal," Kathryn Bond Stockton (2004) discusses the implicit marriage between the innocence of a preadolescent female character within literature and film and the character's whiteness, noting,

> They all share estrangement from what they approach: the adulthood against
> which they must be defined…They are seen as normative but also not like us, at
> the same time. The contours of this normative strangeness may explain why
> children, as an idea, are likely to be both white and middle-class. It is a privilege
> to need to be protected – and, indeed, to be sheltered – and thus to have a

childhood. Not in spite of privilege, then, but because of it, the all-important feature of weakness sticks to these markers (white and middle-class) and helps to signal innocence. (Bond Stockton, 2004, p. 297)

This is an important reality that must be considered and addressed when discussing female comportment within preadolescent literature for girls because bodies of color continue to be underrepresented within the literature. According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center's (CCBC) annual statistics on multicultural literature trends entitled, "Children's Books By and About People of Color Published in 2002 to Present," of the 5,000 books published in 2013 for children, preadolescents and teens, only 223 of those books were by authors of color and only 253 featured a protagonist of color (CCBC, 2014). While publishing trends show an increase in the number of books published by authors of color, the vast majority still depict childhood, preadolescence, and adolescence from a white, middle-class perspective (see Appendix for details).

As discussed earlier and focusing on a poststructural analysis of the subject, it is possible to see that the individual is constructed and identity is formed by interactions and responses to social norms. Commenting on the complexity of this process, Butler (1993), in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* notes that the subject is seemingly always constituted through dominant power discourses that place the individual somewhere within the power hierarchy between powerful and powerless (p. 9). She goes on, however, to note, "…the body *is* a historical situation, as de Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation" (2010, p. 421). Identity is an incomplete process, according to poststructuralism, where subjects are constantly situating their identities within discursive formations and cultural practices; yet through this activity, the subject participates in this production. Therefore, in order to analyze preadolescent literature for girls within this

perspective, it is critical to first examine how a poststructuralist feminist framework defines the

feminine body and affects the potential subjectivity of girls' identities in relation to their bodies.

According to Butler (2010), there is a tenuous relationship between the body and the

expression of one's gender. In this way, the feminine body is only feminine because the

performance of gender coincides with the stylized actions, movements and enactments that

adhere to norms within the larger social and cultural discourse. Of this, she writes,

> Considering that 'the' body is invariably transformed into his body or her body,
> the body is only known through its gendered appearance. It would seem
> imperative to consider the way in which this gendering of the body occurs. My
> suggestion is that the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are
> renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. From a feminist point of view,
> one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts
> rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether
> natural, cultural, or linguistic. (Butler, 2010, p. 422)

For Butler, gender is not innate in one's body, but rather is reified through repetitive,

performative acts that conform to the historical idea and perception of a particular gender.

Therefore, the body is a set of possibilities because it does not express a predetermined,

interior essence, but rather it expresses a historical rendering of its preferred gender

(Butler, 2010, p. 420).

More specifically relating to representations of the female body within preadolescent

literature for girls, in an earlier work entitled *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of

Identity*, Butler (1990) references Foucault's view of the body as a blank page, but criticizes him

because his analysis implies that the body exists simply as a blank surface prior to an inscription

of power (p. 101). In other words, Butler is challenging Foucault's claim that systems of power

must have a surface to write on and, because the body is an object or surface malleable in its

construction, the body becomes a surface merely awaiting power's inscription. As a surface, the

body is a discursive medium because norms are written on it; yet the performative body aspires to intervene in this discourse. The author writes, "Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (Butler, 2010, pp. 421-422). In this way, she notes the danger of excising the body from representation, because bodies produced through discourse are not merely waiting to be inscribed as masculine or feminine.

To elaborate further on Butler's claims, it is important to note that the connection between subjectivity and the material body is not necessarily one of direct correspondence. Of this, Grosz (1994) suggests that it is instead more productive to focus on body image which is the subjective representation to the self of the corporeal body (p. 79). Arguing that body image is relational, she writes, "The body image is as much a function of the subject's psychology and sociohistorical context as of anatomy" (Grosz, 1994, p. 79). In accordance with this perspective, and because body image is particularly delicate for the developing girl, body image becomes instead "the result of shared sociocultural conceptions of bodies in general and shared familial and interpersonal fantasy about particular bodies" (Grosz, 1994, p. 79).

Sandra L. Bartky (2010), author of "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," critiques the idea of femininity through a poststructural lens with consideration to the amount of space that women and girls utilize through their movements, postures and expressions. In addition, girls are given the message that women are expected to be graceful and erotic, yet restrained by modesty. Claiming that "femininity is an artifice, an achievement," Bartky enlists Jeremy Bentham's design, and later Foucault's philosophical application, of the Panopticon. Bentham's Panopticon was a model prison built as a circular

structure. The periphery of the structure was divided into cells, each with two windows. One window faced a large tower with wide windows at the center of the ring. The other window faced the outside to ensure that any figure within the cell was visible. Alone, but constantly detectable, the inmate falls into a perpetual state of self-surveillance and self-policing becoming, in Foucauldian terms, a "docile body." In a similar way, Bartky endeavors to show how women and girls adopt a similar form a self-policing and self-discipline in accordance with the messages they receive through advertisements, popular culture, and social relations with others. Commenting generally on this social construction of body image, Bartky (2010) notes, "Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other…the female gaze is trained to abandon its claim to the sovereign status of seer" (p. 408). An awareness of the way femininity is socially, culturally, and historically situated offers a useful way to read alternative narrative possibilities regarding comportment, body image and subjectivity in preadolescent novels for girls.

Similar to Butler, Bartky agrees that the feminine body is situated within the production and social construction of a gender binary which frames notions about femininity and masculinity. Elaborating on this idea, she references Butler and writes, "We are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine. Femininity is an artifice, an achievement, 'a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh'" (Bartky, 2010, p. 405). Thus, femininity feels real because it is entrenched in practice. In her piece, Bartky draws upon a Foucauldian analysis of the body, although she finds his lack of attention to the implications of sexual difference problematic. In an effort to address this omission, however, she closely examines the disciplinary practice that works to produce the feminine body, including strict social practices of dieting, exercise, fashion and make-up, and

shows how the feminine body has been inscribed by dominant norms of femininity regarding beauty standards. She goes on to discuss the interiorizing effects of disciplinary institutions, such as the cosmetic industry, on women and their bodies. She writes, "Woman's space is not a field in which her bodily intentionality can be freely realized but an enclosure in which she feels herself positioned and by which she is confined" (Bartky, 2010, p. 407). For her, then, these disciplines of control and self-monitoring lead girls and young women to constantly struggle while seeking to self-define.

Historical Foundation and Textual Analysis: Preadolescent Girls' Literature and the Body

Class divisions became more poignant as the middle-class grew and began to create a particular culture during the Victorian era. Having benefitted and amassed fortune during the Industrial Revolution, the middle-class began converting economic success into political power to challenge upper-class and aristocratic hegemony – socially, culturally, and politically. In doing so, they strove to establish a society based on merit rather than pedigree and lineage. According to Mitchell (1995), it was through the effort, influence and power of the middle-class that girls' education changed dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century in both the United States and Britain. Prior to education reforms, lower and working class girls received little to no education, lower middle-class girls were taught at home until the age of 10 when they might be sent to a day school for four to five years, prosperous and professional middle-class girls were taught at home until they reached the age of 10 when they were sent to a private school near home or a boarding school, and upper-class girls were taught at home by a governess or sent to a boarding school (Mitchell, 1995). During this time, only 15 to 20 percent of girls, however, were receiving any formal, institutional education in their adolescent years or beyond (Mitchell, 1995, p. 78). By the first decade of the 20th century, all girls were required to attend

school and receive virtually the same quality of education as their other female peers through age 14 if their families could afford to postpone their earnings until that time (Mitchell, 1995, p. 79).

With the rise of the middle-class came the ascendency of the middle-class girl literary figure. Excluded from the wage labor sphere as a result of increasing urbanization and industrialization, middle-class girls were instead expected to learn about and embrace their proper role as emblems and preservers of their families' social standing (Vellucci, 2005, p. 72). The girls' novel became instrumental in socializing girls with the dominant values of appropriate young ladyhood and the developing feminine body. Of this, Saxton writes,

> The messages in [Victorian] novels require girls to learn the social codes of obedience, reverence, appearance, modesty, thoughtfulness of others, while simultaneously subverting the most dastardly of those codes through developing an inner knowledge. These girls were to participate in securing their own futures by marrying – not necessarily, and never ultimately, through paid labor" (pp. xv -xvi).

As the popularity of the Victorian girls' novel increased, so did the importance of addressing the period of transition between childhood and adulthood known as adolescence.

The concept of adolescence emerged during the Victorian era. Largely, dominant medical discourse determined this stage as ages between 12 and 17 and defined it essentially as a male experience. According to Sarah Elbert (1988), author of *A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott's Place in American Culture,* "…no one thought 'little women' went through such a stage. Protected from worldly experience, their innocence preserved, little women presumably experienced nothing of the turmoil and stress that we now associate with female adolescence (pp. 80-81). Because girls were only destined for marriage and motherhood, it was assumed that their physical development did not require an additional stage of growth and change in the way that males did. It was not until 1904, with the influential work of American psychologist G. Stanley

Hall, that it was accepted that both sexes experienced this period between childhood and adulthood (Vellucci, 2005, p. 82).

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Although it is a British text, and therefore outside the works discussed in this project, Lewis Carroll's (1992) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is an important and influential text to understand and consider, because it prompted and shaped later fantasy and dream-like novels for girls, such as L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.* Carroll's novel was one of the first books to successfully incorporate fantasy and absurdity into a larger narrative space where the characters' playful activities served an important role in character development., This book also alluded to to the fact that puberty for girls in the Victorian era was an especially painful time, because the social expectations and norms for middle- and upper-class girls demanded that female sexual development also required the renouncing the freedom, exhilaration, and imagination of play, as well as other childhood activities (Vellucci, 2005, p. 81). In guiding the readers through Wonderland, Carroll forces Alice to constantly change size as she gallivants through her dream. For scholars, this symbolizes Alice's own unease at the onset of puberty. Of this, the author writes, "Luckily for Alice, the little magic bottle had now had its full effect, and she grew no larger: still it was very uncomfortable…'It was much pleasanter at home,' thought poor Alice, 'when one wasn't always growing larger and smaller…'" (Carroll, 1992, p. 43). These bodily changes for Alice are disconcerting and unsettling as she tries to navigate the complex and fantastical world of Wonderland. She is first unable to fit through the door that admits entrance into Wonderland. After drinking an elixir on a table before her, however, Alice shrinks enough to fit through the door and resume her adventure. After several more growth spurts and shrinkages, Alice ponders, "Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning?

I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I? Now *that's* the great puzzle" (1992, p. 24). Symbolic of her approaching entrance into puberty, Alice's dream-like adventure leaves her questioning her true bodily comportment and body image as she struggles to grasp her sense of self.

Carroll's novel was one of the first books to successfully incorporate fantasy and absurdity into a narrative space where the characters' playful activities served an important role in character development. These things also contributed to the secularization of children's literature and the relatability of characters who were flawed. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, children's literature was not created for entertainment, but rather was written for the moral, behavioral, social and religious instruction of children. While these didactic tales were still relevant and being produced during the Victorian era, they were more popular in earlier periods to teach moral earnestness and salvation through the everyday application of religious and ethical principles. Foster and Simons (1995) recounted some of these early didactic themes where particular emphasis was on the suffering of the wrongdoer, writing, "In one story, quarrelling siblings are taken by their father to see a rotting corpse on a gibbet, the visible manifestation of brotherly hatred which culminated in murder; deeply shocked, the children vow never to fight with each other again" (p. 5). As an imperfect character who gets into scrapes, says the wrong things and purposefully disobeys adults, Alice helped inspire the presentation of more realistic characters for girls such as Jo March, in *Little Women,* and Katy Carr, in *What Katy Did.*

These physical changes that Alice experiences are complicated by feelings of loss and pain as Alice symbolically transitions from a child to an adult and enters puberty. This sense of loss is felt and expressed most acutely, however, by Alice's older sister to whom, upon waking, she relays the fun and fantasy of her dream. As Alice runs inside for tea, her sister sits musing

over what she has been told and tries to imagine the wonders and fancy that her younger sister recounted, only to find that she is unable to do so. Saddened by this, she ruminates, thinking,

> …how this same little sister of hers would, in the after time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood; and how she would gather about her other little children, and make *their* eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago: and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days. (Carroll, 1992, p. 150).

Her sister witnesses Alice's imagination and excitement but, because she has already gone through puberty, she can no longer access the ability of wonder and fancy, and can only recall through memory the feelings and freedoms of childhood that are now lost to her.

Preadolescent Girlhood and the Body in American Literary Texts

As is exemplified through Carroll's fantasy and nonsensical adventures of Alice as compared to the practical musings of her older sister, it is possible to see how preadolescent literature leads readers on a journey of discovery to become a man or to become a woman. In this way, preadolescent literature serves as a pedagogical tool of becoming more mature, more self-sufficient, more empathetic or more sensitive and, thereby, becoming more grown-up. This process of becoming directs preadolescents, using both discursive and thematic guides, through certain ways of being that are appropriate versus inappropriate in terms of social expectations and norms. As Butler (2010) posits, "… what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo. In its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status" (p. 420). Butler claims that these acts do not represent the internal and personal, but instead exemplify the social construction of how gender should be. Not exempt from this, preadolescent literature, like many other social, cultural

and historical artifacts, suggests that gender identity and the accepted behaviors that accompany an individual's gender identity are innate. In this way, it is possible to see how preadolescent literature serves as a script to discovering gendered subjectivity and identity within the framework of heteronormativity.

Similarly, in a brief introductory note to *The Marvelous Land of Oz,* the sequel to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,* Baum addresses his readers as "another Dorothy" (1992, p. 2). Stuart Culver (1992), author of "Growing Up in Oz," notes,

> As an American girl seven years old in 1904, Baum's hypothetical reader will grow up to become a member of the nation's first generation of women voters. Yet her generation, situated between those of the suffragist and the flapper, will be one torn between conventional notions of propriety and new possibilities of pleasure and action. (p. 608)

Within the confines of this fairy tale world, Baum offers his female readers a compromise: a way of developing in a proper, idealized version of young womanhood while also providing her the opportunity to view her gender as something other than an unavoidable physical and biological limitation. In other words, the reader is asked to imagine her mature body as something she must discover and acquire, much like Dorothy does throughout her journey through to Oz. Dorothy's own struggle with comportment and her changing body is most palpable as she enters "china country," whose residents are all animate dolls made of porcelain and china, on her way to the Land of the South. Orphaned and raised by her poor aunt and uncle, Dorothy is captivated by the princess who rules this beautiful and fragile kingdom. Wanting to take her home to Kansas, the young girl says, "But you are so beautiful that I am sure I could love you dearly. Won't you let me carry you back to Kansas, and stand you on Aunt Em's mantel-shelf?" (Baum, 1992, p. 187). Dorothy is enamored by the beauty and daintiness of the figurine, wanting

to capture those qualities for her own amusement and pleasure. The princess quickly

helps change Dorothy's mind, however, convincing her that life is better and more

pleasant for her in her own country. She states,

> You see, here in our country we live contentedly, and can talk and move around
> as we please. But whenever any of us are taken away our joints at once stiffen,
> and we can only stand straight and look pretty. Of course that is all that is
> expected of us when we are on mantel-shelves and cabinets and drawing-room
> tables, but our lives are much pleasanter here in our own country. (Baum, 1992,
> p. 188)

Through this exchange, Baum is illustrating clear demarcations about women's bodies to

his young, developing readers. Women's bodies exist within clear and controlled

boundaries reflected by society's idealized versions of femininity. As Bartky (2010)

writes, "Women's space is not a field in which her bodily intentionality can be freely

realized but an enclosure in which she feels positioned and by which she is confined" (p.

407). Recognizing the princess's desire to remain animate coupled with her own longing

to be home, the young girl leaves the princess behind in her fragile, but exquisite world,

continuing on her own quest home to Kansas.

To accentuate and affirm Dorothy's struggle with embodiment and coming of age, her

companions throughout Oz are incomplete and transitioning into their own comportment. The

Scarecrow, new to the world after being built by the Munchkin farmer two days earlier, was

created without a brain and knows little about the world beyond his perch in his cornfield. He

confides to Dorothy, "I don't mind my legs and arms and body being stuffed, because I cannot

get hurt…But I do not want people to call me a fool, and if my head stays stuffed with straw

instead of brains, as yours is, how am I ever to know anything?" (Baum, 1992, p. 26). The Tin

Woodman, discovered by Dorothy and the Scarecrow, cemented in place after a surprise rain

storm rusted him in place a year prior, bemoans the loss of his heart, his ability to love, and his capacity for compassion. Recalling his first notion of this misfortune and deficiency, the Tin Woodman recounts, "It was a terrible thing to undergo, but during the year I stood there I had time to think that the greatest loss I had known was the loss of my heart. While I was in love I was the happiest man on earth; but no one can love who has not a heart…" (Baum, 1992, p. 43). Finally, the traveling pilgrims are startled to encounter a lion "as big as a small horse," but who is easily intimidated and cowardly. The Lion, embarrassed and saddened by his timidity, tells the clan, "All the other animals in the forest naturally expect me to be brave, for the Lion is everywhere thought to be the King of Beasts…If the elephants and the tigers and the bears had ever tried to fight me, I should have run myself – I'm such a coward" (Baum, 1992, p. 49). Within Baum's magical world of Oz, these characters operate metaphorically as reminders of the difficult reality of the coming of age process with changing and developing bodies, dominant discourses about bodies, and bodies viewed to be discordant with cultural and societal ideals. As Culver (1992), observes, Dorothy's companions "…are taken as reminders that humanity is really transcendent and never reified, always present but never located in a specific body part" (p. 620). In other words, these characters are read as whole because they lack those characteristics considered to be valuable within dominant discourse and within which they believe their humanity lies.

This is accentuated by the ease and creativity with which Oz the Great and Terrible bestows these missing traits upon the three friends. Readers are left with the notion that they possessed these innate qualities. Giving the Scarecrow a "brain" filled with bran, needles and pins to make him sharp, the Wizard also explains, "You are learning something every day. A baby has brains, but it doesn't know much. Experience is the only thing that bring knowledge,

and the longer you are on earth the more experience you are sure to get" (Baum, 1992, p. 153).

Similarly, the Wizard symbolically has the Lion swallow his courage in the form of a green

elixir, reminding him that courage resides inside the body, but requires personal confidence to

invoke it. He notes, "There is no living this that is not afraid when it faces danger. True courage

is in facing danger when you are afraid, and that kind of courage you have in plenty" (Baum,

1992, p. 154). Finally, questioning the Tin Woodman's desire for a heart, the Wizard asserts, "I

think you are wrong to want a heart. It makes most people unhappy. If you only knew it, you are

in luck not to have a heart" (Baum, 1992, p. 154). Here, readers are reminded that, while

suspecting he did not have the capacity for compassion and love without a heart, the Tin

Woodman made a concerted effort to treat all creatures who were innocent and deserving with

care and empathy while also forming strong bonds of friendship with Dorothy, the Lion, and the

Scarecrow. Still too, while without a brain or courage, the Scarecrow and the Lion both

demonstrate these characteristics throughout their journey to the Emerald City, protecting

Dorothy and helping get out of difficult predicaments. Baum's message, through the pilgrimage

of the weary and adventuresome travelers, is that coming of age is also arduous and often painful

journey, but one that can successfully navigated.

Notions about Female Biology and Human Development

In the Victorian era, prior to but still very new when Baum's novel was published in 1900

in Chicago, education reforms challenged dominant medical discourse's widely held belief that

the female body could not process and absorb complex knowledge while developing a healthy

reproductive system. According to Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg (1993), Victorian physicians

believed that the body existed as a closed system and possessed only a limited amount of vital

force. Therefore, any energy expended in one area of the body was consequently removed from

another (p. 48). Accordingly, it was thought that a young woman who devoted herself to education and employed too much brain energy during puberty was at risk of infertility, having not devoted all of her energies toward the optimum development of her reproductive capacities. To prevent this, Emmett (1879), in *The Principles and Practice of Gynecology*, believed that upper-class girls and girls from more prosperous middle-class families should spend the year preceding and the two years following puberty, expelling as little physical energy as possible. In addition, he prescribed, "Each menstrual period should be passed in the recumbent position until her system becomes accustomed to the new order of life" (p. 21). Later, in the 1850s, it became more widely accepted that girls, like boys, also experienced an adolescent period of development (Smith-Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 1993, p. 48). This new life stage became a fundamental interval in the process of maturing toward proper womanhood.

What these changes in perceptions of human development reflect is a social discomfort and lack of understanding about the developing female body. The tomboy character, as was addressed in chapter 3, was created in response to major systemic and social changes and was presented as a model of girlhood which would prepare girls and help them to become healthy adults. Tomboyism became and remains a necessary stage of early girlhood, but one that is punished if it extends too far beyond early adolescence. In her Victorian American didactic novel, Susan Coolidge (1981), author of *What Katy Did,* severely illustrates the consequences awaiting strong-willed, imaginative tomboys who actively resist taking on a more feminine role, behavior, and comportment as they near adolescence. Introducing the reader to Katy, Coolidge stresses her protagonist's awkward appearance, writing,

> Katy was the *longest* girl that was ever seen…Whenever she stopped to think
> about her height she became very awkward, and felt as if she were all legs and
> elbows, and angles and joints. Happily, her head was so full of other things, of

plans and schemes, and fancies of all sorts that she didn't often take time to remember how tall she was. (1981, p. 14)

Her awkward appearance is the least of her concerns, however, as Katy struggles to behave in accordance with how her liberal father, who encourages her tomboy inclinations, urges her to act as well as the rules and regulations of her more conservative aunt. One day, in direct defiance of her aunt's orders, Katy tests the new swing that her aunt said was not available for use until the following day and falls, damaging her spine. In almost constant pain and unable to walk, Katy spends the next four years of her life lying in bed.

What this trauma evidences, as was first intimated in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and later in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, is that Katy's struggle through preadolescence is painful and distressing, a consequence of not adhering to social norms. Through Katy's unique situation, Coolidge is providing social commentary on the state of girlhood, the pains of adolescence and the expectations of women. After her accident, Katy struggles to maintain any hope that she will get better and regain mobility, often falling into despair. When Cousin Helen, Katy's favorite person and mentor, comes to visit, she finds her looking forlorn and thin, with red eyes from crying, sitting in a dreary, hospital-like bedroom. Cousin Helen, having also suffered paralysis brought on by illness, encourages Katy, saying,

But you can be of use…you can make your room such a delightful place, that [others] will want to come to you. Don't you see, a sick person has one splendid chance – she is always on hand. Everybody who wants her knows just where to go. If people love her, she gets naturally to be the heart of the house. (1981, p. 102)

With Cousin Helen's lessons and encouragement, Katy gradually develops into a kind, patient, maternal individual and becomes beautiful both inside and out as her awkward features transform into those of a beautiful, adult woman. Coolidge's message and challenge to her

readers is that, if Katy can overcome her tomboyish ways and learn to be the heart of the home,

girls facing fewer hardships should be able to do the same. After her accident, Katy recalls her

dying mother's request that she take care of the younger children. Shouldering the trials over

her four years of pain and paralysis, Katy becomes a strong, motherly figure, taking over the

duties of the household from her bed after her aunt dies, being a confidante and mentor to her

siblings, and an emotional support to her busy father. Significantly, she first walks downstairs

again on her mother's birthday, symbolically illustrating that she has truly become the heart of

the home as a result of her taming and reformation. She, having filled the role long since

unoccupied after the deaths of her mother and aunt, embraces her natural maternal and caregiver

characteristics and truly becomes an angel in the house.

Along with medical discourses surrounding the female body, dominant discourse

maintained that girls and women possessed an inherent asexuality. Truly good women and girls

were passionless, when it came to sexual activities. Of this, physician William Acton contributed

to what became an increasingly accepted myth that normal women lacked sexual impulses,

stating, "The majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual

feelings of any kind…The best mothers…know little or nothing of sexual indulgences. Love of

the home, children, and domestic duties, are the only passions they feel" (Reynolds & Humble,

1993, p. 13). As is evident in this statement, however, this asexuality was framed within a

heteronormative discourse where women were expected to strive to be wives and mothers,

eschewing all else. Interestingly, this concept of a natural lack of sexual passion not only applied

to certain women, such as the fallen woman or the prostitute, but also young girls who were

considered to be in constant danger of developing unhealthy sexual proclivities as they entered

adolescence.

To counter this, the Victorian girls' novel promoted the normalization of the asexual feminine ideal through its presentation of its female characters as they progressed toward proper adulthood where marriage and motherhood are unquestionable goals. Linda Gordon (1993), author of "Voluntary Motherhood: The Beginnings of Feminist Birth Control Ideas in the United States," notes that, "In many nineteenth-century writings we find the idea that the maternal instinct was the female analog of the male sex instinct; it was as if the two instincts were seated in analogous parts of the brain, or soul" (p. 216). In other words, men were granted the space and freedom, which reassured that sexual impulse was not only natural but encouraged. Women, however, were to only participate in sexual intercourse with the express goal of performing wifely duties and becoming pregnant. Dominant ideologies concerning feminine innocence and purity did not accept the notion that women could or should desire sexual contact that was not for the sole sake of pregnancy. With this also came the belief that motherhood was an innate desire and that all good and natural women wanted to be wives and mothers.

This image of a pure and innocent girl is particularly striking in Ruth Sawyer's (1936) novel *Roller Skates.* In a fictionalized account of Sawyer's own life, readers follow 10-year-old Lucinda Wyman through a year of adventurous independence. Born of an upper-class family to older parents, Lucinda is allowed the freedom to explore New York City, something she has longed for but has been denied until her parents go to Italy for her mother's medical treatment, leaving their preadolescent daughter a "temporary orphan" for the year. As he places Lucinda in a cab, her father kisses her goodbye and says, "Don't miss us. Have a rousing time. You'll never be free like this again" (Sawyer, 1936, p. 13). Here, as it becomes clear as the novel progresses, her father is alluding to both the freedom of her "temporary orphanage" and being out from under the watchful eye of her parents, governess, and Aunt Emily, but also the

freedom and innocence of childhood. As is described later in the novel, the reader becomes

privy to the significance of this year for Lucinda as Sawyer (1936) writes,

> It was habit for Lucinda to reach out for the world with fancy rather than with emotion. Not until she was grown was she to know that her family had always looked upon her as a cold, undemonstrative child who would stand stiff and unresisting while she was being kissed; visibly glad to have it over with; that rarely did she speak of love or proffer affection. But those who knew her that tenth year knew her as a child eager with her loving and her showing of it. She, herself, was conscious of a kind of awe at the way certain things and people stirred her from within, especially those people who gave generously of their trust to her. (p. 106)

As earlier depicted in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* childhood is a finite time of

innocence, imagination and discovery that will inevitably be replaced by the practicality,

maturity, and self-sufficiency of adulthood. With the impending arrival of Lucinda's parents

back from Italy she realizes everything is changing and skates to the park one last time, musing,

"How would you like to stay always ten…That's what I'd call a perfectly elegant idea!"

(Sawyer, 1936, p. 186). As is foreshadowed throughout the novel, Lucinda is unable to remain

in this stasis, but instead must give up her roller skates and the opportunities they afforded her,

enter puberty, and become a proper and feminine woman.

It is during this year, however, that Sawyer's protagonist Lucinda, wearing her hair

short, is constantly compared by herself and others to her controlling and meddlesome Aunt

Emily's "four docile daughters." Her cousins are beautiful, well-behaved, quiet and obedient

young ladies in the making who excel in the feminine tasks of sewing, looking pretty, sitting

still, and speaking quietly. Lucinda, however, possesses none of these characteristics or skills,

constantly struggling against her frustrations with the expectations imposed upon her as a

preadolescent girl and her desires for adventure, theater, and music. Upon meeting the

Browdowski family, with whom she would become very close over the course of the year, Mr.

Browdowski places his hand on her close-cropped hair, admiring the color, sleekness, and texture. This incident strikes a chord with Lucinda, as she realizes that she has never received this type of positive affirmation, noting, "The words sang themselves straight into Lucinda's heart. No one had ever said nice things about her hair before, or about anything else that made up Lucinda, for that matter. Aunt Emily referred to her often and openly as 'homely as two toads'" (Sawyer, 1936, p. 33). With the aid of the individuals she meets throughout the course of the year, she develops a new sense of self and begins recognizing positive characteristics in herself that she originally thought were absent.

What is most striking about Sawyer's depiction of her protagonist, however, is her rendering Lucinda as completely innocent and unmarred by the dangers and realities of life. For example, during the course of the year, Lucinda unabashedly reaches out to strangers, bringing them into her fold and welcoming them into her heart, despite warnings from her caretaker, Misses Peters, that she "…simply can't go about making friends with everybody" (Sawyer, 1936, p. 29). Through this openness, she is able to create a small community of support…It is during this year that she is confronted with two facts of life that have, thus far, eluded her. First, two friends die: "her Princess Zayda" is murdered by her jealous and controlling husband and four-year-old Catharine "Trinkett" Browdowski dies after a short illness. Second, and more emblematic of her innocence, Lucinda begins to learn about the process of pregnancy and birth. When asked how she learned to play the guitar so well, Lucinda responds, "I think I must have been born playing it. I can't remember a time when I didn't. Johanna says I was found under a cabbage; mama says the stork brought me. Either way, it doesn't matter, but I do like to think I was playing the fandango when I arrived" (Sawyer, 1936, p. 80). Her response is well-met by her audience, pleased that she is a proper girl, unfettered by the adult knowledge about

reproduction. Later, she skates to her friend Tony Coppino's home only to discover that, in a small, basement home already full of babies, there is a "new bambino, looking like a fresh-baked loaf of Italian bread, all wound up tight and snug" (Sawyer, 1936, p. 148). Surprised by new addition to the already large family, Lucinda exclaims, "Goodness gracious. How did it come – stork or cabbage?" (Sawyer, 1936, p. 148). Mrs. Coppino collapses in a fit of laughter while Tony, a year older than Lucinda, male and thereby wiser about babies and the secrets of reproduction, turns away from her and looks out into the yard to avoid further discussion. Again, no one corrects her, but instead they delight in her innocence, amused and refreshed by her virtuous and pure impression of birth. Although she is still murky on the details by the end of the novel, Sawyer's protagonist is becoming wiser to the world of reproduction through her friendship with Tony. Through this process, it is possible to see the dichotomy created about preadolescent bodies. Of this, James R. Kincaid (2004), author of "Producing Erotic Children," writes, "Childhood in our culture has come to be largely a coordinate set of *have nots*: the child is that which *does not have*…Innocence was that which we have been trained to adore and covet, to preserve and despoil, to speak of in hushed tones and in bawdy songs" (p. 10). Within Western discourse, preadolescent girls are at once both considered to be innocent in their asexuality, while bound for heterosexual adulthood where their innocence is preserved, to a degree, through marriage and childrearing.

Written in the early Contemporary era, Judy Blume's (1970) *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*, is an enduring bestseller and remains popular among preadolescent girls. Entering the sixth grade at a new school, readers join Margaret as she makes new friends, develops crushes on boys, goes to school, misses her grandmother, and struggles with finding conclusive answers to her questions about religion. Concerned about her nonexistent bra size and being the

shortest girl in the class, menstruation lies at the center of Margaret's world, monopolizing her thoughts with anxiety about when her period will come, how it will happen, and what it will feel like. Of the novel, Lerer (2008), author of "Tap Your Pencil on the Paper: Children's Literature in an Ironic Age," notes, "This is a book about how children can find meaning in the body: how we take control of life and, in the process, put our mark on the world" (p. 312). Feeling as though she will be the last of her peer group to grow, have her period, and fully enter adolescence, she turns to God in one of her frequent soliloquies, asking, "Are you there, God? It's me, Margaret. I just did the exercise to help me grow. Have you thought about it, God? About my growing, I mean? I've got a bra now. It would be nice if I had something to put in it" (p. 46) Readers can relate to Margaret's anxiety about the growth and development, or lack thereof, of her preadolescent body. As Ayse K. Uskul (2004), author of "Women's Menarche Stories from a Multicultural Sample," explains, "Women who started to menstruate later than others reported being worried, thinking that there could be something wrong with their body. It caused feelings of remaining childlike" (p. 674). Part of this anxiety is rooted in menstruation as a rite of passage for girls within Western discourse. As is evident from Uskul's observations, however, as well as the suspense and uneasiness experienced by Margaret, menstruation or the absence of menstruation reinforce many issues surrounding women's reproductive bodies, such as infertility, unplanned pregnancy, and concealing menstruation from males.

Margaret and her friends have unanswered questions and confusion about the physical changes they are experiencing and, as Margaret and her friends exemplify, puberty is shrouded in secrecy, making it mysterious and ominous for them. The pressure on them to somehow will their body into puberty consumes much of Margaret's thoughts and conversations with her friends. On the first day of school, her new friends interrogate her, asking, "Did you get [your

period] yet?" (Blume, 1971, p. 31). For Margaret and her peers, menstruation and breast growth both mark a rite of passage from little girl to grown-up woman. Praying to God and asking Him to help, she begs: "let me be like everybody else" (Blume, 1971, p. 101). In one frantic prayer, Margaret tells God: "Gretchen, my friend, got her period. I'm so jealous, God....Nancy's sure she's going to get it soon, too. And if I'm last, I don't know what I'll do. Oh, please God. I just want to be normal" (Blume, 1971, p. 100). Lerer (2008) reiterates,

> …*Are You There God?* Rises to the level of the literary. It illustrates how moments of great understanding come not just on the prairies or the oceans, but in bathrooms of the suburbs. Everyday experience is in itself a wonder; and throughout many of Blume's books the point is not to shock with unremitting naturalism, but to show how, at our most physically natural, we can make our mark on the world. (pp. 312-313)

The power of Blume's novel and the angst read through the uneasiness of prepubescent Margaret is that approaching puberty, changing bodies, and body image are tenuous issues for preadolescent girls. The very real and concrete anxiety elicited for preadolescent girls by the impending nature of female puberty, the current changes occurring within the body at the start of puberty, or the fear that menstruation may not occur, is reflected in the novel's realism and communicates to preadolescent female readers that they are not alone in being worried and confused as they approach adolescence.

As is reflected by Lerer's quote, however, as well as Blume and critics of the novel, the notion that menstruation is and will be for all female readers a natural and absolute part of their coming of age tale is problematic because menstruation is not a guarantee for all girls. The novel ends with Margaret's elation as, sitting down on the toilet, she sees evidence of blood to mark her first period. Of this, Blume (1971) writes, "…I looked down at my underpants and I couldn't believe it. There was blood on them. Not a lot – but enough. I really hollered, 'Mom – hey Mom

– come quick'" (p. 147). Although the author's express goal is to give voice to girls' anxieties around puberty, what is absent from critical discussion of this novel and dominant discourse surrounding preadolescent female bodies approaching puberty is that menstruation is not always a reality for all girls. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the average age most girls begin having periods is at age 12, but menstruation usually occurs anytime between the ages of 9 and 18. Less than one percent of girls experience primary amenorrhea, or absent menstruation, which occurs when a young woman has reached or passed the age of 16 and has not had her first period. The possible causes of amenorrhea include gene or chromosomal disorders which may affect reproductive organs; hormonal issues or imbalances; physical defects in the reproductive organs resulting from birth defects, tumors, or infections that occurred in the womb or shortly after birth; or lifestyle factors, such as excessive exercise, eating disorders, and stress (NIH, 2014).

In disputing the gender binary, focusing specifically on intersex bodies and using Butler's (1993) critique that the only "bodies that matter" are the ones that can be clearly and easily categorized as either male or female, Stephanie S. Turner (1999), author of "Intersex Identities: Locating New Intersections of Sex and Gender," writes,

> Intersexed bodies can matter (i.e., can only exist socially) only if they can be
> made to fit within the dimorphic sex schema that follows from concepts of what
> male and female persons should look like and how they should act. Medical
> intervention is almost always deemed necessary in order to make the unruly
> intersexed body conform to one or the other gender, whether it be the male
> associated appearance of muscle mass or the female-associated act of reception in
> heterosexual intercourse (both of which can be hormonally or surgically
> engineered). (p. 458)

According to Cheryl Chase (2002), author of "'Cultural Practice' or 'Reconstructive Surgery'?: U.S. Genital Cutting, the Intersex Movement, and Medical Double Standards," notes that

children born with non-normative genitalia are regularly "normalized" by excising parts of the genitals, a practice that was adopted in the 1950s and has been maintained within the medical community as the most appropriate protocol for handling cases of intersex children (p. 127). Genital surgeries are routinely performed within the United States' medical community on approximately five children every day, because they are born with ambiguous external genitalia (Intersex Society of North America, 2008). Current medical practice holds that intersex children "can be raised successfully as members of either sex if the process begins before two-and-a-half years" (Chase, 2002, p. 127). While intersexual anatomy may be indicative of an underlying issue, such as an adrenal disorder, more often than not, intersex individuals' genitals are neither painful nor harmful to their health. Therefore, pediatric genital surgeries, where any genital appendage within three-eighths inch is trimmed and the infant is assigned as female, are entirely cosmetic in function and destructive. Instead, as Anne Fausto-Sterling (1993) has argued in "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are not Enough," much of the reclassification effort directed at intersex bodies has to do less about their personal choice and identity, and more with remedying the challenge their physical anatomy poses to the gender binary and compulsory sexuality (p. 24).

Conclusion

Through a poststructural feminist analysis of Baum's *Wonderful Wizard of Oz,* Coolidge's *What Katy Did,* Sawyer's *Roller Skates,* and Blume's *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret,* it is possible to see that the majority of preadolescent literature for girls is still deeply entrenched in imparting messages to readers regarding heteronormative ideas about femininity and feminine comportment. Feminine comportment is limiting in terms of the amount of space preadolescent girls can expect to fill, as exemplified by the porcelain princess Dorothy

encounters in Baum's novel. It is also limiting because girls receive messages through media as well as through the literature they are exposed to, that their bodies must look and behave a certain way. In other words, girls are exposed to impossibly high beauty standards with few positive and empowering images to counteract these messages, as well as told their bodies will and must mature to menses in order to be considered truly feminine. Compounding these messages, however, within Western discourse, preadolescent girls are at once both considered to be innocent in their asexuality, while bound for heterosexual adulthood where their innocence is preserved, to a degree, through marriage and childrearing. Rooted in white, middle-class standards, with little regard for differing bodily experiences as a result of race, class, sexual identity, intersexuality, ability, and more, these illustrations and standards of idealized femininity are impossibly high, as well as contradictory.

Feminist resistance within preadolescent literature for girls should be grounded in the ability for women and girls to manufacture for themselves images and metaphors that adequately represent experiences of women's bodies with express attention to how feminine bodies traverse the world with regards to class, race, sexual identity, and ability. As Adrienne Rich, in "Notes Toward a Politics of Location" writes, "Even to begin with my body, I have to say that from the outset that body had more than one identity" (2003, p. 450). In order to change the resounding discourse which pervades preadolescent girls' ideas regarding femininity and feminine comportment, authors of preadolescent literature for girls must endeavor to present new and more holistic visions of body image, as well as a new language to discuss feminine bodies.

Chapter 5: Race, Class, and Queerness

Issues of Identity within Preadolescent Literature for Girls

Adolescence is generally the period in a young person's life when searching for individual identity, while simultaneously contending with society's norms and struggling with moral issues, can generate frequent personal conflicts. As Genyne H. Boston and Traci Baxley (2007), authors of "Living the Literature: Race, Gender Construction and Black Female Adolescence," note, "In the United States, adolescence is the time when self-identity is at its peak because of the ability to become 'self-reflective' and 'self-conscious'" (p. 562). By virtue of their passage into and through adolescence, however, youth begin to incorporate their prior lived experience with their current circumstance to begin building and developing a more firm sense of self. Developing a model on the construction of identity, James E. Marcia (1980), author of "Identity in Adolescence," considers the adolescent's struggle with and discovery of their own identity as a time of "moratorium" where they explore and experiment with various ideas, beliefs, and behaviors before committing to any (p. 156). In addition, much like ideas and perceptions about feminine body and space, interpretations of and answers to identity can be found through young girls' social networks. For example Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997), author of *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race,* writes that adolescents grapple with many questions and influences on their quest for personal and social identity, factoring in:

> Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is
> reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, the
> store clerk? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented
> in the cultural images around me/or am I missing from the picture altogether?
> (p. 18)

Gender identity is an important factor in grounding an individual's identity, but this aspect of identity is further compounded by numerous other identities, including but not limited to race, class, sexual orientation, and ability. Prior to the already challenging time of adolescence,

however, preadolescents can be introduced to and begin this quest for identity by being exposed to more diverse, contrasting, empowering, and positive representations of identity. Therefore, preadolescence is a critical period for intervention in confronting negative identity formation and can promote more healthful and holistic ideas about identity as girls between the ages of 8 and 12 begin to encounter and navigate more physical, social, and academic challenges at this stage of development (Boston & Baxley, 2007, p. 562).

Usually, preadolescence for girls has been represented within literature as a time of preparation for the transition into adolescence and eventually womanhood, but also as a time of reprieve when girls are allowed freedoms and indulgences that they will later have to abandon in order to comply with hegemonic standards of femininity. Implicitly, girls are represented as either a tomboy or as a person who is vulnerable, gullible, and in danger. Within both portrayals, girls' autonomy, strength and resilience is denied, along with questions of power and identity, as the tomboy is reformed and the vulnerable girl is saved. As Lourdes Torres (1991), author of "The Construction of the Self in U.S. Latina Autobiographies," notes, "The use of fiction does not lessen the need of readers and critics to consider the extratextual conditions which produce the text – that is, the social and political forces that shaped the 'self' who produced the text…" (p. 273). Torres is arguing here that readers and critics must be aware and mindful of the author's multiple and intersecting identities. Taking this a step further, however, it is important, when addressing representations of identity within preadolescent literature for girls, to also be cognizant and exacting of the way characters' selves are produced and illustrated.

Overall, throughout my analysis I found a lack of intersectionality among gender, class, race, and sexual identities across the preadolescent novels for girls selected for this project. This means, for example, that the protagonist may have been queer or of color, but she was seldom

both. Cassie, in Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry*, is the exception to this, occupying both

the status and identities of working class and Black. Despite this, however, Cassie and her family

were substantially wealthier, with a wealthy uncle and a two working parent household, than the

other members of their community who identified as working poor. This is important to note

because, as Eliane Rubinstein-Avila (2007), author of "Examining Representations of Young

Adult Female Protagonists through Critical Race Feminism" notes, few authors, critics, and

readers of preadolescent literature "…are critical of the larger institutional barriers young female

protagonists face, and few still address the cumulative discrimination faced by female

protagonists of colour, especially those who are poor, working class and/or queer" (p.371). As a

result, authors unintentionally imply a universal standard that does not provide adequate analysis

or authentic illustrations of empowerment and resistance to these institutional barriers and

marginalizations. Although there are a multitude of identities through which preadolescents must

navigate, this chapter will focus specifically on race, class, and queer identities and how these

identities are represented or absent from the best sellers discussed in this project.

Race

With few exceptions, the vast majority of female protagonists within bestselling

preadolescent literature for girls are white and middle class. Lynn Phillips (1998), author of *The*

Girls Report: What We Know and Need to Know About Growing Up Female, notes, "…social

barriers often create even more difficult hurdles for girls of color and/or low socioeconomic

status…who are marginalized within a society that confers privilege on not only maleness, but

also whiteness and so-called middle class values" (p.6). Encountering this image of ideal

girlhood and femininity within the fiction they read, but also through other dominant media

images in advertisements, magazines, movies, and television, girls of color struggle to find

empowering representations of themselves, if they can find them at all. Gina L. DeBlase (2003), author of "Missing Stories, Missing Lives: Urban Girls (Re)constructing Race and Gender in the Literacy Classroom," notes the importance of addressing identity formation of preadolescent girls of color through reading, stating, "By exploring how groups of girls of different racial backgrounds participate in and understand literacy events…we may more fully understand the differences in how girls' transactions with literacy contribute to and help shape their social identities" (p.280). Being mindful of essentializing representations of girlhood which assume that storylines and characters are accessible to all girls can help inform new femininities that challenge the assumed homogenization and disregard for race.

Multicultural Literature

With the rise of the middle class, the 19th century was marked by extensive changes within education and literacy among girls. The 20th century, however, integrated and ushered in significant changes regarding what type of literature was getting published, making space for and accommodating more authors of color, specifically by and about Black Americans, than had previously been recognized for the authenticity and accurate depictions of minority experiences. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, more minority voices and perspectives, specifically Latino, Asian, and Native American, emerged in literary discourse (Boston & Baxley, 2007, p.564). According to Violet J. Harris (1994), author of *Teaching Multicultural Literature in Grades K-8*, multicultural literature is defined as literature by and/or about people who are members of groups considered to be outside the sociopolitical dominant white standard of the United States. Expanding upon this, Boston and Baxely (2007) note, "Multicultural literature strives to improve self-esteem, develop cultural integrity, acknowledge and celebrate differences, and provide insight on social issues and various value systems" (p.566).

Of multicultural literature for children, preadolescents, and young adults, the authors delineate three different types – specific, generic, and neutral. Specific multicultural literature, according to the authors' classification, stresses the experience of growing up as a member of a particular non-white culture, with emphasis and acknowledgement of the importance and variations of things such as, but not limited to, family structure, daily life, language, social mores, clothing, and food. For example, as referenced and analyzed in chapter 3, Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, first published in 1976 and winner of the Newbery Medal in 1977, is an example of specific multicultural literature. Critically acclaimed for candidly exploring race relations and social injustices through the experiences of her young female protagonist, Cassie, Taylor's depictions, use of dialogue, and details of Black life during the Great Depression make her novel a particularly authentic novel. As Boston and Baxley (2007) note, "Mainstream audiences, who avoided revisiting the deeply rooted racism in our country, embraced Taylor and her work" (p.564). Neutral multicultural literature is generally found in nonfiction books where the emphasis and focus is placed on the content, but the book features pictures of persons of color. Finally, generic multicultural literature introduces minority characters, but provides limited information about the particulars that define the characters' specific culture or race, comparing them instead to American standards (Boston & Baxley, 2007, p.566). For example, Carol Ryrie Brink's (1973) novel, *Caddie Woodlawn,* which was first published in 1935 and received the Newbery Medal in 1936 but has enduring popularity, introduces readers to Native American characters, but fails to identify their tribal heritage, instead painting an appallingly stereotypical and racist depiction of these secondary characters.

Multicultural texts are important for young, preadolescent readers because they, if written with attention to cultural and racial authenticity, can help foster positive images and promote

literacy. Through the evolution and ever-growing presence of multicultural literature, a meaningful dimension of these works includes the author's presentation of a reliable and accurate insider's view of their culture and experience in the world. As bell hooks (2004), in "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," writes, "I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me" (p.154). It is this absence of giving voice to marginalized identities and confronting the silences or stereotypes that plagues early preadolescent literature that was constructed in accordance with a white, middle-class standard. Multicultural literature can help alter and reformulate new ways of presenting, illustrating, and discussing race and racialized identities within preadolescent literature for girls. With engaging stories and affirming characters, authors of multicultural literature can undoubtedly affect the literacy experiences of preadolescent readers, particularly those of color. Readers who share and connect with the author's cultural identity may gain insights about themselves, their families, and their communities, as well as the value of their own personal experiences (Au, 2001). In seeing reflections of themselves and their cultural and racial identities, young female readers can connect to literature in a new and empowering way, as they navigate their own multiple and converging identities. It is imperative that positive images abound within preadolescent literature for girls to combat and counter negative images that are produced and circulate in the society and media. In doing so, authors can help give testament to readers' own experiences and struggles for identity.

Regarding representations of Native American/American Indian persons, Mildred Creech (1994), author of *Walk Two Moons,* introduces a variety of different personal struggles throughout the novel that influence aspects of many characters' identities. For example, the author introduces the many ways death can impact an individual's sense of self through her female protagonist Sal's father and grandfather as they work to navigate through loss and become reoriented in their identities after the deaths of their children and later their wives. Sal's mother's quest for identity after a miscarriage that resulted in her inability to reproduce, ends in her untimely death. Of this, Sal reflects, "My mother, my father, and I all seemed fine and happy at our house until the baby died. Could you actually say that the baby died, since it had never breathed?" (Creech, 1994, p. 175). As the novel progresses, however, she comes to recognize and accept her mother's insecurities and struggles with identity that were ever present before the miscarriage, leading to her desire to explore her sense of self outside of the home and away from her family. In being confronted with and observing her friend Phoebe's relationship with her mother and connection to her mother's own life and story, Sal is able to reflect upon and make sense of her own life, her Native American heritage, her mother's death, and her subsequent fate to navigate her burgeoning femininity without her mother's guidance.

Drawing connections between Phoebe's abandonment by her mother and her own mother's absence, Creech's novel is ultimately about Sal's search for identity. As she recounts Phoebe's reaction to her mother's, Mrs. Winterbottom's, disappearance, Sal is also coming to terms with her own mother's passing. Upon first meeting Mrs. Winterbottom, Sal is immediately aware of some discordance in her behavior of which her family seems to be oblivious. For example, watching and listening to Phoebe's mother during dinner, she observes, "Mrs.

Winterbottom baked and cleaned and did laundry and grocery shopping. I had a funny feeling that Mrs. Winterbottom did not actually like all this baking and cleaning and laundry and shopping…" (Creech, 1994, p.30). From her perspective, Sal is able to see and understand why Mrs. Winterbottom may have left her family, while Phoebe is unable to comprehend the abandonment and immediately suspects her mother has been kidnapped. From this vantage, she watches uneasily as her friend's crisis, so similar to her own, unfolds before her. Trying to share her experience with Phoebe and help her confront a potential reality that took Sal a long time to confront, she cautiously tells Phoebe, "Phoebe, you know when you said that your mother would never leave without an explanation? Well, she might. A person – a mother – might do that" (Creech, 1994, p.194). While recounting the story, Sal's grandparents subtly try to bring attention to the similarities between Sal's mother's abandonment and death and Phoebe's mother's sudden departure. Of this, she states, "They didn't say anything, but there was something in that look that suggested I had just said something important. For the first time, it occurred to me that maybe my mother's leaving had nothing whatsoever to do with me. It was separate and apart. We couldn't own our mothers" (Creech, 1994, p.176). This fact is made palpable as Phoebe's mother returns, escorting a son she had given up for adoption before meeting Mr. Winterbottom and fearing her family's repudiation, but asking them to accept her and embrace this long hidden part of her. Sal's mother, however, does not and cannot return.

Struggling to truly believe that she can exist in a happy, comfortable state without her mother to guide her and share in her maturation, her process of healing, cultivating her own space, and recognizing her own unique and distinct identity outside of but influenced by her mother is restorative and an important part of her preadolescent development. Recalling how closely linked her own personal being was to her mother's, Sal muses about how her emotions

mirrored her mother's and how she always knew how to feel when she was with her. Without

her, she enters a numb state, unsure how to navigate her grief. Remembering her first moment of

clarity, however, Sal recollects,

> One day, about two weeks after she had left, I was standing against the fence
> watching a newborn calf wobble on its thin legs. It tripped and wobbled and
> swung its big head in my direction and gave me a sweet, loving look. "Oh!" I
> thought. "I am happy at this moment in time." I was surprised that I knew this all
> by myself, without my mother there. And that night in bed, I did not cry. I said to
> myself, "Salamanca Tree Hiddle, you can be happy without her." (Creech, 1994,
> pp. 38-39)

In telling Phoebe's story to her grandparents, Sal also draws connections to the memories of her

life with her mother. Sal's mother's quest for identity leads to her tragic death, but through her

death, Sal is able to make connections to her and her mother's shared Native American heritage

and their affinity for storytelling.

Dispersed throughout the novel are Sal's reflections on her and her mother's Native

American heritage. Contrasting the labels "Native American" to "American Indian" throughout

the novel demonstrates a facet of the identity conflict in which she is embroiled. For example,

reminiscing about the postcards she received from her mother during her travels, Sal recalls,

> My mother had not liked the term *Native Americans.* She thought it sounded
> primitive and stiff. She said, "My great-grandmother was a Seneca Indian, and
> I'm proud of it. She wasn't a Seneca Native American. *Indian* sounds much more
> brave and elegant." In school, our teacher told us we had to say Native American,
> but I agreed with my mother. *Indian* sounded much better. (Creech, 1994, p. 57)

Later, stopping at the Pipestone National Monument, on the journey to see her mother, Sal

continues to grapple with the complexity of racial and cultural identity recounting, "We went to

the Pipestone National Monument and saw Indians thunking [sic] away at the stone in the quarry.

I asked one if he was a Native American, but he said, 'No. I'm a person.' I said, 'But are you a

Native American person?' He said, 'No, I'm an American Indian person'" (Creech, 1994, p.73).

Her attempts to label and distinguish her own racial and cultural identity become clear through these exchanges, weaving themselves into her other preadolescent understandings of herself as a developing and maturing girl.

The complexity of her identity is made more nuanced as readers join Sal in tracing her Seneca roots of which she, like her mother, lacks a firm foundation, while simultaneously valuing her heritage. Sal and her mother are aware of, but not attuned to, their Seneca heritage. At the start of the novel, Creech's protagonist reflects upon this aspect of her burgeoning sense of selfhood as though it somehow made her appreciate, connect with and value nature and the land more. Of her name, she reflects,

> Salamanca, my parents thought, was the name of the Indian tribe to which my great-great-grandmother belonged. My parents were mistaken. The name of the tribe was Seneca, but since my parents did not discover their error until after I was born and they were, by then, used to my name, it remained Salamanca" (Creech, 1994, p. 7).

Furthermore, throughout the novel, Sal recounts Blackfoot and Navajo stories, as well as a knowledge of Sioux history that her mother shared with her over the course of her short lifetime. Through this reiteration and taking a "specific" multicultural literary approach, Creech is not homogenizing tribes and devaluing their unique histories and oral traditions. Instead, she is demonstrating Sal's journey toward and exploration of her Seneca roots and her racial and cultural identity. Commenting on the realism behind this investigation and inquiry that does not leave the reader with images that perpetuate pernicious stereotypes, Hazel Rochman (1993), author of *Against Borders: Promoting Books for a Multicultural World*, writes, "For once in a children's book, Indians are people, not reverential figures in a museum diorama. Sal's Indian heritage is a natural part of her finding herself in America" (p. 24). In contrast to historical

treatment, where preadolescent literature has frequently depicted Native American characters as foreign, as an "Other" that must be assimilated into American culture, or as war-painted and barbaric needing to be saved by white benevolence, Creech avoids these dangerous stereotypes about Native Americans within preadolescent literature.

Although a non-native author, Creech's novel has been lauded by critics as having made significant contributions to preadolescent literature. It must be noted, however, that novels featuring a protagonist of color and/or written by an author of color exist in far fewer numbers compared to literature created about and by white authors. According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center, of the 4,500 children's books published when Creech's novel was published in 1994, 70 were by and/or about American Indians. In 2013, according to the Center's most recent statistics, of the 5,000 books published, 34 books were about, and only 18 were by, an American Indian author. While publishing trends generally show an increase in the number of books published by authors and illustrators of color, it is important to note that Sal's character and her experiences have been constructed by a white, middle-class author.

Boston and Traci Baxley (2007) label authors like Creech "outsiders," because they attempt to explore and traverse the experiences of another race (p. 564). The result and danger in this, they note, is that, "Often times, outsider authors place more emphasis on how the out-group view the in-group. When this occurs, stereotypical images can reflect the opinions of simply the out-group, casting members of the in-group in a negative manner" (2007, p. 564). Implicated by her "outsider" author status, Creech's portrayal of Sal and her mother in *Walk Two Moons* has generated a concern about accurate and authentic portrayals of what it means to grow up Native American and female in the United States. Creech does not possess an authoritative, insider view

of the culture of her characters. As Rudine Sims Bishop (1992), author of "Multicultural

Literature for Children: Making Informed Choices" notes,

> My claim here is not that an author from one group cannot write worthwhile
> books about another group, but that the resulting literature is not likely to be
> claimed by members of the featured group as THEIR literature…[with] those
> elements that characterize the body of literature the group claims as its own.
> (pp. 46-47)

The debate about whether or not authors who do not claim the identity of their protagonists have

a right to tell those stories is a complex one, but considerable care must be taken to accurately

reflect the experiences and literature of a culture. In addition to taking great care to honor and

present a respectful and accurate portrayal of a cultural or racial group of which an outsider

author is not part, the author must take considerable thought and analysis to determine why they

feel compelled, and whether or not they are the best person to tell a particular story.

Within preadolescent literature for girls, the theme of identity illustrates the personal and

social conflicts many protagonists' attempt and work to resolve throughout the novel. Remaining

cognizant of the significance of race in this process, and offering more female protagonists of

color, helps address and provide examples of how these characters personally and socially

respond to societal definitions of race (Boston & Baxley, 2007, p. 572). Authors must continue

to demonstrate how both external and internal members of characters' immediate social circles

and communities convey messages about race, and also explore how the protagonist determines

for herself how she chooses to identify racially. Preadolescent female readers can benefit from

authentic representations of this struggle as they experience adolescence. This can help provide

alternative images of girlhood to those which are implicitly framed by the parameters of

whiteness.

Class

As indicated earlier, a vast majority of female protagonists in preadolescent literature for girls are white and middle class. In fact, preadolescent literature for girls is all but devoid of critical analysis of the structural barriers that discriminate against women and girls. Compounding this, however, is the lack of attention to the particular issues that arise, as a result of these same systemic marginalizations, when faced by women and girls of color as well as women and girls who identify as working-class and poor and/or queer. Focusing specifically on issues of class, this section seeks to address how preadolescent literature addresses or ignores how a girl's social class impacts her identity formation and sense of self.

Literature for girls developed within a context of major structural and systemic changes during the Victorian era. Class divisions became more poignant as the middle-class grew and began to operate as a cohesive group. Having benefitted from and amassed fortune during the Industrial Revolution, the middle-class began converting economic success into political power to challenge upper-class and aristocratic rule and privilege. In doing so, they strove to establish a society based on merit rather than pedigree and lineage. According to Vellucci (2005), with the rise of the middle-class came the ascendency of the middle-class girl literary figure. Excluded from the productive sphere (working outside of the home) as a result of increasing urbanization and industrialization, middle-class girls were instead expected to learn their proper role as emblems and preservers of their families' social standing (p. 72). The girls' novel became instrumental in socializing girls with the dominant values of appropriate young ladyhood and the developing female body in accordance with middle class standards.

It is of little surprise, then, that the standard of womanhood remains middle-class. The modern and contemporary eras have embraced consumerism as a way of selling femininity and

selfhood. Hamilton-Honey (2012) notes that American society was developing around ideas about consumption as a marker of and in connection to individual achievement and contentedness in the Modern era. As Hamilton-Honey (2012) writes, "Since girls in particular were encouraged to read for self-development, series books were a sensible place in which to promote the idea that consumerism was the new, modern-road to self-fulfillment and happiness" (p. 768). With the rise in consumerism also came the expansion of the space women could occupy and the productive sphere became a place where, even if they were not working within it, women and girls could exist as paying customers.

Louise Fitzhugh (1964), author of *Harriet the Spy,* offers a frank and transparent commentary about the American class system through the eyes of her 11-year-old protagonist, Harriet. Harriet, obsessed with routine, awakens, has breakfast, goes to school, has a tomato sandwich for lunch, returns home from school for a slice of chocolate cake and a glass of milk, and departs on her spy route. The people Harriet ritualistically observes along her route are members of different social classes leading different lives from her own upper-middle class family, but Fitzhugh's protagonist connects to them in unique and personal ways. For example, Harriet is fascinated with the large, Italian Dei Santi family, who own and operate a grocery store and wonders what it would be like to be part of a large and vocal family, so different from her own. Of this, she writes in her journal, "What is it like to have brothers and sisters? One thing, whenever they yelled, it wouldn't always be at you. Sometimes it would be at your brother then you could laugh" (Fitzhugh, 1964, p. 57). At the same time, however, she struggles with her burgeoning recognition of class division as she notes, "Once I thought I wanted to be Franca [Dei Santi] and live in that family. But she's so dull if I was her I couldn't stand myself. I guess it's not money that makes people dull" (Fitzhugh, 1964, p. 57). Along her route, she also spies on

a number of others: Amanda Plumber, a rich woman who first takes to her bed in order to escape the problems of being alive and then later decides to engage herself in a whirl of social activities for the same reason; the Robinsons, a wealthy, childless couple who purchase large, gaudy, and bizarre items to show off to their acquaintances and give their life meaning; and Harrison Withers, a recluse who lives with 26 cats in his two room apartment.

It is with Harrison Withers that Harriet finds herself most connected as he cares for his cats, makes wicker cages, and has almost no human contact. During the time when Harriet is mourning her loss of Ole Golly, her nanny and confidante who resigns from her position in order to get married, Withers is forced to relinquish his cats to Animal Control and falls into a deep depression. Observing his pain from her safe and concealed vantage, Harriet writes, "I will never forget that face as long as I live. Does everybody look that way when they have lost something? I don't mean like losing a flashlight. I mean do people look like that when they have lost?" (Fitzhugh, 1964, p. 164). As Harriet is beginning to recover and establish her own understandings, however, Withers smuggles a tiny kitten into his apartment and begins the process of once more blissfully absorbing himself in making wicker cages and caring for his pet. By the end of the novel, Harriet recognizes that, while she is fascinated by him because he loves his work, she is also frightened by him because she can sense her own reclusive tendencies and desire for order and routine.

The most striking element of this novel, however, is Fitzhugh's illustration of the resiliency of preadolescents as they grow and develop a sense of self through interactions with each other. Caught up in the fun while playing tag in the park, Harriet leaves her treasured notebook, in which she has recorded distasteful and critical comments about her classmates, unattended to go play a game of tag and it is picked up and read aloud by her classmates. As a

result, she is ostracized by her fellow classmates, but also her best friends Janie and Sport. Janie

dreams of becoming a mad scientist and is hurt upon reading in Harriet's journal, "Who does

Janie Gibbs think she's kidding? Does she really think she could ever be a scientist?" (Fitzhugh,

1964, p. 184). Sport, however, is more deeply affected by his friend's remarks when Janie reads

Harriet's words to him: "Sometimes I can't stand Sport. With his worrying all the time and

fussing over his father, sometimes he is like a little old woman" (Fitzhugh, 1964, p. 182). Sport,

who is the sole caretaker of his alcoholic and struggling writer father, dreams of order in his

unpredictable and chaotic life. Offering a glimpse into his private space, Harriet narrates an

afternoon at his apartment, complete with an apron-clad Sport doing household chores and a

groaning, infantile father behind closed doors. Of his need for order, Harriet narrates,

> You would have known it was Sport's room because it was as neat as a pin. There
> was a little cot, made up army fashion, one straight chair, and a little desk. The
> desk was absolutely bare. Sport took a ring of keys out of his pocket and started
> unlocking the drawers to the desk. "You see these books? These are my books."
> He stepped back proudly. Harriet looked. Each drawer was filled with large
> ledgers. On drawer held a cashbox, which was always locked. (Fitzhugh, 1964,
> p. 50)

Here, it is revealed that Sport, unlike Janie and Harriet, does not come from an upper-middle

class family, but instead comes from a single-parent household, struggling to make ends meet. In

trying to fill the role of both child, who dreams of being a basketball play, and caretaker, who

must lock up the money his father brings home so he does not spend it on alcohol and gambling,

Sport serves as a direct contrast to Harriet and someone she struggles to understand and truly

relate to as she navigates the complex nature of social class.

Both during and after her departure, Ole Golly serves as a guide through Harriet's social

awakening. Of this, Harriet writes, "Ole Golly says there is as many ways to live as there are

people on the earth and I shouldn't go round with blinders but should see every way I can. Then

I'll know what way I want to live and not just live like my family" (p. 32). Through Harriet's unspoken quest for identity, vision, and her struggle through preadolescent development, she discovers her own resilience, but also the dark reality that the world will remain as it is.

Fitzhugh's ultimate message is not a negative one, but rather a realistic awareness for her protagonist and her readers to comprehend. Reading messages in *Harriet the Spy*, however, Anita Moss (1978), author of "Louise Fitzhugh," reminds readers, "Fitzhugh's novel resonates with social consciousness and with just indignation" and her characterizations "attempt to shock readers into awareness that middle-class urban children may be lost in the wilderness" (pp. 292-293). What the author is referring to here is that the somewhat whimsical or eccentric characters Harriet encounters during her day-to-day, as well as her spy route, come from the sheltered world and reality Harriet inhabits. Unlike Sawyer's protagonist Lucinda, in *Roller Skates*, who befriends everyone she meets and invites them all to a Christmas celebration and her debut of "The Tempest," or DiCamillo's Opal and her dog, who single-handedly unite a town across class and race, Fitzhugh's Harriet presents the reality of class division in a poignant yet innocent way. Harriet is a young preadolescent girl with a vivid imagination who cannot and will not change the reality of the world in which she lives within the course of the novel. She can, however, through her covert spying and detailed journaling, draw attention to the unavoidable class divisions that she witnesses through her spying. Through her personal relationships, Harriet provides commentary and alerts readers to some of the systemic issues present within the class system. It is her refusal to ignore what is around her and her steadfast dedication to understanding this system that makes Fitzhugh's novel such an important commentary for preadolescent girls on identity formation and class divisions, as she engages readers in thinking about social differences.

Queerness

When defining "queer" preadolescent literature for girls, it is imperative to be explicit about what the term means and how it is being used in this particular project. As Michelle Ann Abate and Kenneth Kidd (2011), editors of *Over the Rainbow: Queer Children's and Young Adult Literature,* write, "'Queer' defies definition, indeed is that antidote to definition in any easy or clear sense. The term at once fortifies and dismantles the notion of a stable or knowable self, in relation to gender and sexuality especially but not exclusively" (p. 4). The term "queer," is traditionally used to denote a deviation from what is considered to be normal or standard. Having first emerged in the English language in the sixteenth century, it has historically meant strange, unusual, eccentric, singular, and out of alignment (Abate & Kidd, 2011, p. 2). It also has roots, however, with specific sexual alterity, which first emerged in discourse about gender at the turn of the twentieth century and remains taboo within modern and contemporary preadolescent literature for girls, because dominant discourse surrounding girlhood relies on the idea that girls are pure, innocent, and asexual until they are prepared to enter a traditional heterosexual union.

The latter definition regarding sexual orientation has become more pejorative as well as more closely associated with non-normative sexual attraction and/or gender identity, but it has been reclaimed as a term of personal or collective pride in the wake of the progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Utilizing both of these interpretations of the term, it is possible to see where queerness within preadolescent literature for girls and queer characters are defined by outside of what is considered "normal." Stephen Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (2004), editors of *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children,* write, "In telling stories about children and sex, our culture's storytellers have long gestured to the stories that ought not feature children: stories that make children 'queer' in a number of distinct ways and therefore are rarely told" (p.

x). As Bruhm and Hurley succinctly observe, the normalizing language of dominant heteronormative discourse largely resists queer stories of preadolescence or overt referencing and depicting queerness within preadolescent literature for girls.

Aligning the preadolescent girl and her childhood with an unquestionable heteronormative future has several problematic effects, however. For example, one effect is that the teleology and the narratives of the preadolescent girl are heterosexually determined. In other words, the narrative pressure to produce an acceptable and proper ending to stories allows the protagonist a brief moratorium of play, experimentation, and fancy, before her ascension into her heterosexual future. As Bruhm and Hurley (2004) write,

> The utopian projection of the child into the future actually opens up a space for childhood queerness – creating space for the figure of the child to be queer as long as the queerness can be rationalized as a series of mistakes or misplaced desires, in this sense the figure of the child is not the anti-queer at all. Its queerness inheres instead in innocence run amok. (p. xiv)

Within these stories, however, it becomes apparent that, with this insistence upon heteronormativity and protagonists' unquestioned path toward heterosexual marriage and childrearing, adult authors are more concerned about idealized girlhood and femininity rather than how female protagonists actually experience adolescence. Jo March, for instance, can be as queer as she likes, as long as she can tolerate the teasing and chiding of her sisters and eventually resolves herself to a heterosexual union. Alice, too, may exist in a queer state in her dreams and childhood sorrows and joys, as long as she can be imagined telling her stories to her children and grandchildren when she is an adult.

Understanding preadolescent literature for girls as queer rather than narrowly as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT) helps broaden the interpretive possibilities. For

example, analyzing the character of Jo March through a queer lens helps identify particular Victorian issues of queer desire, and helps explain how she exists as an enduring modern and contemporary character. According to Annamarie Jagose, author of *Queer Theory: An Introduction,* "While, to a large extent, the terms 'homosexual,' 'gay' or 'lesbian' and 'queer' successively trace historical shifts in the conceptualization of same-sex sex, their actual deployment has sometimes been less predictable, often preceding or post-dating the periods which they respectively characterize" (p. 73). Consider this. While Jo states that she often feels a kinship with women that she does not feel with men, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (1985), author of *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America,* calls such intense female relationships as Alcott presents between Jo, her mother, and her sisters, "homosocial relationships," which were common in the nineteenth century (p. 60). Of this, she writes, "Women, who had little status or power in the larger world of male concerns, possessed status and power in the lives and worlds of other women" (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, p. 60). In other worlds, as Victorian women were denied the authority and privilege available to men, they were able to construct female homosocial worlds where they could gain some of the power denied to them by patriarchy, deriving their strength and power from other women admitted to this homosociality. Remaining mindful of this, while Jo is certainly a queer character, refusing to conform to gender propriety and Victorian heteronormativity, overt sexuality was considered to be taboo in the nineteenth century, so it is challenging and problematic to simply characterize her as a lesbian character. Within modern and contemporary standards, however, Jo's preference for women and her homosocial passion can be read as empowering with distinctly lesbian subtexts.

As Butler (1990) in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* writes, "That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has not ontological status apart from the

various acts which constitute its reality" (p. 136). In adopting this notion, one can read Jo's

gendered performances as characterized in masculine terms. Her refusal to perform her

prescribed gender role and her rejection of a socially inscribed heterosexuality can be

contemporarily read as a strong affirmation of queer identity. Jo's queer performances and

nonconformist behavior throughout *Little Women* are evident from the first page of the novel

where she renounces the restrictive Victorian femininity her sisters so effortlessly execute. In

response to Meg and Amy's attempts to get her to recognize that she is a "young lady," Jo

exclaims,

> I ain't! and if turning up my hair makes me one, I'll wear it in two tails till I'm
> twenty…I hate to think I've got to grow up and be Miss March, and wear long
> gowns, and look as prim as a China-aster! It's bad enough to be a girl, any-way,
> when I like boys' games, and work, and manners! I can't get over my
> disappointment in not being a boy, and it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to
> go and fight with Papa, and I can only stay at home and knit like a poky old
> woman. (Alcott, 1947, pp. 5-6)

Her sister Beth consoles her and advises her to continue performing the masculinity that

she finds most comfortable. That Beth is the only other character in the novel who refuses

to take part in the Victorian marriage plot is significant, because she can relate to her

sister's frustration regarding the status of women and the limitations of marriage. Beth

and Jo have no desire to leave the homosocial environment of their home where they are

loved, empowered, and accepted to settle and be subjected to the self-repression that

heterosexual marriage would demand of them.

Several times throughout the novel, Jo makes it clear that she never intends to marry. The

subtext of these claims is that she has no desire to align her gender performances with those of

Victorian heteronormativity. Including her older sister in her plans, she declares that she and

Meg will be "old maids" and when Laurie teases her about the eventuality of a suitor coming to

carry her off to a life of marriage and childrearing, she vehemently counters, "I'd like to see anyone try it" (Alcott, 1947, p. 152). Much later, she discloses to her brotherly friend that she does not foresee herself pursuing any heterosexual affairs because, "I should feel like a fool doing it myself" (Alcott, 1947, p. 226). In response to Meg's married life and her sister's comparison of her to a chestnut burr, Jo decides, "An old maid, that's what I'm to be. A literary spinster, with a pen for a spouse, a family of stories for children, and twenty years hence a morsel of fame, perhaps" (Alcott, 1947, p. 440). Two recurring themes resound through Jo's explanations as to why she will never marry. First, she recognizes that within the demands of Victorian heterosexual marriage, she will lose her personal power and agency. Second, she does not wish to disrupt the harmony of her home life.

After Beth's death, however, the homosocial environment of her home begins to change. Disclosing to her mother her pain, Jo says, "I'd no idea hearts could take in so many – mine is so elastic, it never seems full now, and I used to be quite contented with my family; I don't understand it" (Alcott, 1947, p. 438). With Beth's death and Meg and Amy married, Jo's heart is in fact empty, with only her mother to fill her homosocial relationships, leaving her feeling alone. To remedy this, and bowing to patriarchal pressure, Alcott's alternative to Jo's desolate suffering is to also immerse her in Victorian compulsory heterosexual marriage plot. Alcott, describing her unanticipated decision to pair Jo with Professor Baehr in a letter to her friend, Elizabeth Powell, then an instructor at Vassar, writes, "

> "Jo" should have remained a literary spinster but so many enthusiastic young
> ladies wrote to me clamorously demanding that she should marry Laurie, *or*
> somebody, that I didn't dare to refuse and out of perversity went and made a
> funny match for her. I expect vials of wrath to be poured out upon my head, but
> rather enjoy the prospect. (Alcott, 1987, p. 125)

While Beth, the sister Jo loves and is endeared to most, is alive, Jo is allowed to exist textually in the provisional safety of a homosocial relationship. Upon Beth's death, however, Jo has little left of the support for her non-normative proclivities and must resign herself to the expectations of Victorian femininity.

What becomes evident through this analysis and through the clear lack of preadolescent literature for girls that can be categorized as queer or include a character who identifies along the LGBT spectrum, is that there is an undeniable need to both acknowledge and articulate preadolescent girls' potential and authentic queer identities. Through this process, authors can tell a new story to girls about their identities, rewriting the heteronormative narrative to provide space for these identities to which many girls can connect. Of this reimagined future of preadolescent literature, Bruhm and Hurley (2004) write, "A discussion of the narrative constraints of the queer child encourages us to take stock of the temporality of normative life narrative, to investigate and isolate our investments in a past and a future where the child is a placeholder for adult desires" (p. xxxiv). The panic and discomfort around stories that include non-normative lifestyles directly relates to discourse and narratives that idealize the innocence, purity, and asexuality of children. This discourse provides limited identities for young, preadolescent readers as they approach adolescence.

Conclusion

Today's preadolescent girls need a wider array of characters that illustrate female identities in positive and empowering ways. In addition, girls do not possess singular and universal identities, but rather have multiple and intersecting identities that they must navigate as they develop and approach adolescence. Ignoring this results in the depiction of a universal standard within preadolescent literature for girls that does not provide adequate analysis or

authentic illustrations of empowerment and resistance to institutional barriers and marginalizations that stem from girls' race, class, and/or queer identities in relation to their gender. Intersectionality across various identities, including but not limited to race, class, and queerness, must be addressed within preadolescent literature for girls in order to provide more authentic representations of girls' lives and experiences.

As young readers discover and explore aspects of themselves, it is important to understand and remain conscious of how their individual ideas about gender, race, class, and queerness in relation to self-esteem, self-worth, and identity can be affected by what they read. Identity is closely linked to self-esteem and self-worth, which are largely shaped by ideas and messages about what is valued in mainstream society. To be a successful contributor to preadolescent literature for girls, an author must demonstrate, in her work, a commitment to authentically representing the human experience. According to Joyce West Stevens (2002), author of *Smart and sassy: The strengths of inner-city Black girls,* authors should consider various adolescent development theories that provide insight into girls' lives by creating characters and situations that actually portray the real-life experiences of the readers. In order for girls to more fully connect to their literary experiences, it is important that they see themselves and representations of their lived experiences reflected in the literature. For girls in particular, this will mean a richer array of stories and characters with which to relate and connect. In reading about protagonists and storylines that speak to their individual experiences, they can also find their power and voice as they encounter the complexities of adolescence.

Engaging with the creation of novels that address issues of race, class, gender and queerness, as well as their intersections, is vital. Simply producing novels about "diversity," however, will not change the status-quo. Rather, authors must be willing to reflect upon their

own backgrounds, knowledge, experiences, beliefs and ideologies that shape their social

constructions and subjectivities in order for them to produce novels that will help guide and

influence young preadolescent readers along their path to personal identity construction. In doing

so, they will open up a new and empowering literary world for their young and developing

readers, preadolescent girls in particular.

Chapter 6: Moving Forward

Recommendations for Preadolescent Literature for Girls

The preadolescent novel is an important historical, social and cultural discursive site of gender identity, gender appropriate behavior, and conceptions about the female body and sexuality, race and class. The goal of this project has been to examine how the female protagonists, as well as some supporting characters, in select preadolescent novels for girls adhere to or subvert the traditional binary gender roles, gender appropriate behavior, and notions of body and space, as well as how each female protagonist conforms to dominant discursive constructs regarding heteronormativity. Currently, there is great deal of research and analysis of children's literature and young adult fiction, examining literature's role in children's and young adults' process of identity formation, as well as their conceptualizations about gender identity and gender appropriate behavior. There is little research and interrogation, however, of traditional binary gender roles and representations of gender appropriate behavior in girls' preadolescent novels, aimed at 8- through 12-year-olds. For much of the existing research, preadolescent novels are lumped into children's literature or young adult literature. This project addresses the need to critically examine preadolescent literature for girls in its own right.

The preadolescent novel for girls can serve as an important and critical arena to begin addressing and providing positive examples of how to begin navigating the difficult waters of identity and fast approaching adolescence. The results of my analysis show that the vast majority of female protagonists within bestselling preadolescent literature for girls are still white, heterosexual and middle-class. Moreover, I found a lack of attention to intersectionality regarding gender, class, race and sexual identities across all the best sellers selected for this project. This means, for example, that the protagonists are either of color or queer, but seldom both. As Joel Taxel (2002), author of "Children's Literature at the Turn of the Century: Toward a Political Economy of the Publishing Industry," points out, nonmainstream voices are too often

silenced across fictional literature and "ignored by society's dominant modes of cultural expression" (p. 180). In fact, Taxel also states that novels that deal with multiple, complex, realistic issues such as race relations, prejudice, discrimination and homophobia are "deemed risque´," leading publishers to believe these novels possess limited marketability (Taxel, 2002, p. 179). While it is notable that contemporary preadolescent literature for girls is, in fact, represents more accurately some of the complexities of our current preadolescent female experiences, it remains largely limiting in its scope.

My analysis also showed that characters are described using generic words to denote a general essence of empowerment. Descriptors such as "strong," "feisty," "clever," "independent," "resourceful," "confident," "brave," and "creative" are used widely across fiction to describe preadolescent female protagonists, particularly tomboy characters. These descriptors, however, are seldom defined or articulated in detail. According to C.S. McKinney (1996), author of "Finding the Words that Fit: The Second Story for Females in Young Adult Literature," these characters are said to be on a quest for a sense of self and their own emerging strength and voice, finally arriving at a "successfully constructed way of knowing that allows them to achieve identity and build stronger relationship with others" (p. 11). Thus, despite the need for non-stereotypical, nontraditional, and positive and empowering female protagonists, most of the protagonists in novels for preadolescent girls on bestseller lists embody mainstream, conventional expectations. In fact, with few exceptions, they are caretakers or maternal figures who are expected to tend to someone or something. Thus, as Karen Karp, Candy Allen, Linda G. Allen, & Elizabeth Todd Brown (1998), authors of "Feisty Females: Using Children's Literature with Strong Female Characters," note, among the many preadolescent female protagonists who are portrayed as "strong," "feisty," "hardy," and "risk takers," few, if any, threaten or challenge

mainstream social norms (pp. 89-90). Instead, in spite of what these categorizations may imply, female protagonists within preadolescent literature for girls remain relegated to the traditional narrow and restrictive gender boundaries rather than challenging or transcending them.

It is important to more fully understand the construction of gender roles and the ways in which race, class, and sexual identities have been and are still addressed within preadolescent literature for girls, because readers connect to the literature and develop an understanding of themselves as gendered beings through the fictional stories they read. Through a concerted effort to give voice to marginalized identities and confront the silences and stereotypes that persist in preadolescent literature that has been constructed in accordance with a white, middle-class heteronormativity, authors can create new ways of presenting, illustrating, and exploring ideas about girlhood and identity, as well as body and the space girls inhabit within preadolescent literature for girls. With engaging stories and affirming characters, authors can undoubtedly affect the literacy experiences of preadolescent readers. In seeing reflections of themselves and their cultural, racial, sexual, and gender identities, young female readers can connect to literature in a new and empowering way, as they navigate their own multifaceted identities. Positive images in preadolescent literature for girls can combat and counter negative images that are produced and circulated in popular media that dominate other sectors of the media. In doing so, authors can help give testament to readers' own experiences and struggles to construct their own identities. This approach would also provide critical commentary on larger institutional barriers and intersectional discrimination faced by female protagonists of color as well as working class or poor, and/or queer.

In addition, there is an undeniable need to both acknowledge and articulate preadolescent girls' identities beyond the limits of heteronormativity. The panic and discomfort around stories

that include non-normative lifestyles directly challenge discourse and narratives that idealize the innocence, purity, and asexuality of children. This discourse is limiting for young, preadolescent readers because it forecloses issues of difference. Through this process, authors can tell new stories to girls about their identities, rewriting the heteronormative script that has characterized preadolescent literature for girls.

To help young readers make connections between the texts, their lived experience, the entrenched discursive and social constructs throughout institutions, as well as the impact of oppressive and marginalizing institutional barriers, authors must develop new stories, abandoning archaic tropes and committing to the creation of empowered female protagonists and images of girlhood for their readers. In doing so, these novels can simultaneously operate as a mode of resistance to a discourse of heteronormativity within preadolescent literature for girls that ignores the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality and the systematic injustices different girls experience. In order to change the prevailing discourse of preadolescent girls' ideas regarding femininity and feminine comportment, authors of preadolescent literature for girls must endeavor to write stories that integrate issues of race, class, gender, and the body as integral parts of preadolescent girls experiences.

Furthermore, feminist criticism of preadolescent literature for girls should be grounded in the ability of women and girls to create for themselves images and metaphors that adequately represent experiences of women's bodies with express attention to how feminine bodies traverse the world with regards to class, race, sexual identity, and ability. As Rich (2003) writes, "Even to begin with my body, I have to say that from the outset that body had more than one identity" (p. 450). The reader's own agency must be recognized and affirmed when creating empowering and positive literature for girls. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* John Locke (1959)

extracted the figure of the child from original sin and instead presented the idea of the child as a blank slate. As he or she matures, the child learns, develops, and is formed through experience. Adopting this idea and acknowledging that readers come to fictionalized texts with their own lived experiences means that literature can be a catalyst for identifying structural or systemic issues and enacting social change. Preadolescent girls can benefit from novels that provide them with positive role models of empowered girls, while also offering depictions of social realities related to issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality.

In creating new, positive, and empowering literature for girls, authors must be sensitive and judicious about these recommendations as they look toward the future of preadolescent literature for girls. Who tells a story matters because the storyteller or author writes from a particular location with a particular perspective (Rich, 2003). He or she has the power to define for the reader a world in which language can normalize and affirm some behaviors and identities while dismissing or devaluing others. How a story is told, who is rendered visible, what narrative biases frame them, and what language is used, carries moral weight in communicating to readers what is normal, what is desirable, and who they should strive to be.

In telling stories about girls and girlhood, authors need to confront the dominant heteronarrative and its normalizing language, which produces essentializing and limiting stories of preadolescence and silences other stories and experiences that are the lived reality of many readers. Girls' self-esteem and identities should be cultivated, encouraged and emboldened in order for them to believe in themselves and their futures. Therefore, representations of girlhood within preadolescent literature must develop and expand to offer readers more complex and multifarious female characters who can speak to readers' lived experiences and provide a

broader range of role models in ways that engage readers in thinking about and constructing their gendered, sexed, raced, class identities in more complex ways.

I hope this work helps to shape the ongoing conversation about the portrayal of girls in preadolescent novels for girls, identifying key issues, problematic themes, and ideas regarding more empowering images of girlhood. Through an examination of the multiple ways in which the figure of the girl has become a site of competing ideologies, I believe that future authors can expand their critical and theoretical lens, learn to ask increasingly more provocative and challenging questions about what it means to be a girl, and create stories and images of girlhood that a broadly inclusive readership of girls can relate to and help shape their sense of self.

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Children's Books by and about People of Color Published in the United States

Statistics Gathered by the Cooperative Children's Book Center
School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Children's Books By and About People of Color Published in the U.S.
2002-

Year	Total Number of Books Published (Est.)	Number of Books Received at CCBC	African / African Americans		American Indians		Asian Pacifics/ Asian Pacific Americans		Latinos	
			By	About	By	About	By	About	By	About
2013	5,000	3,200	67	93	18	34	90	69	48	57
2012	5,000	3,600	68	119	6	22	83	76	59	54
2011	5,000	3,400	79	123	12	28	76	91	52	58
2010	5,000	3,400	102	156	9	22	60	64	55	66
2009	5,000	3,000	83	157	12	33	67	80	60	61
2008	5,000	3,000	83	172	9	40	77	98	48	79
2007	5,000	3,000	77	150	6	44	56	68	42	59
2006	5,000	3,000	87	153	14	41	72	74	42	63
2005	5,000	2,800	75	149	4	34	60	64	50	76
2004	5,000	2,800	99	143	7	33	61	65	37	61
2003	5,000	3,200	79	171	11	95	43	78	41	63
2002	5,000	3,150	69	166	6	64	46	91	48	94