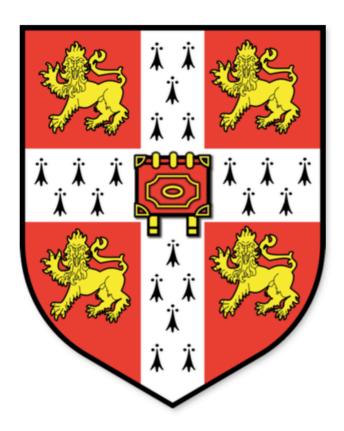# In-Group, Out-Group, or All of the Above:
The Advantages of Young Adult Literature for Empathic and Cognitive Engagement with Minority Protagonists

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Preface

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Relationship to MPhil Thesis

This dissertation was developed from original ideas created in my 2015 MPhil thesis, "Seeing Similarities to Overcome Differences: Opportunities for Empathy in Native American Adolescent Fiction." These ideas and arguments have now been reworked and adjusted to account for the much wider range of secondary research and primary sources examined during the PhD, as well as for the change in my academic opinions due to this further research. However, because the topic and the basis of my arguments are similar, there are occasional resemblances to work from my MPhil thesis, particularly in reviews of available secondary sources and in the basis of my argument. These have, however, been revised and reworked to account for new scholarship in the field as well as the wider and more in-depth research process undertaken in the PhD.

A Note on Language Use

Please note that this thesis uses American spelling.

This thesis uses "they" as a singular, ungendered pronoun for "the reader."

Abstract

Using the lens of cognitive poetics, this theoretical thesis examines how a majority or mainstream culture adolescent reader would use empathy with young adult novels featuring minority protagonists – that is, protagonists who are disabled, who are LGBT+, or who are of a minority race or ethnicity. In particular, this thesis focuses on the psychology theory of in-group and out-group categorizations, which demonstrates that we use more empathy with those we consider to be "like us" (in-group) and less empathy with those we consider to be "unlike us" (out-group). Because we are less likely to use empathy with out-group members, a majority culture reader is less likely to engage empathy with a text with a minority protagonist. This thesis argues that adolescence functions as a meaningful group categorization in young adult literature, and that it provides an in-group affiliation between the protagonist of a YA novel and an adolescent reader. It then further argues that this phenomenon changes how an adolescent reader would engage empathy with young adult novels featuring minority protagonists.

The thesis investigates how this change occurs by examining in detail intersecting group categorizations in recent mimetic young adult novels with disabled, LGBT+, and/or minority racial protagonists, and by considering the relationship these categorizations create between the reader and the protagonist. It also examines patterns of how these novels encourage or discourage empathic engagement, and the effect of group categorizations upon this empathic engagement. The thesis concludes that because adolescence is able to function as an in-group in young adult literature, YA literature offers a specific advantage for adolescent readers, in that it has the potential to allow them to use more empathy with out-group members than they otherwise would be able to. Because empathic engagement with fiction also develops empathic abilities in the real world, YA literature also has a specific potential for developing out-group empathic abilities in majority culture adolescent readers, affecting their perceptions and actions outside of their reading experiences.

Acknowledgements

I'm not sure I could ever thank everyone in my life enough for the immense amount of support and love I've received during my PhD. From those who have lent their ears for philosophical discussions or venting sessions, to those who have bit their tongues and refrained from asking exactly how it was all going (especially in these last few months), I appreciate it all more than you could know. I could easily write a book thanking you all, but since (as I keep reminding myself) I have to hand in this thesis at some point, there are a few specific people to whom I want to say a special thank you:

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I have also had the incredible support of my family, and without their belief in me I don't think I could have made it here. I desperately want to find the right words to thank you all for the tangible and (especially) for the intangible ways you have helped me through this.

Thank you to my amazing partner, Cornelius, who can light up a room with his very presence, and who certainly lights up our home and our days together. You brought me food in times of crisis, but knew never to imply that the crisis might have been caused by hunger until after the food had been digested. Cornelius, you saw me through the daily grind of this thing and somehow kept liking me. I know you hate it when I get sappy, but a more patient, caring, and loving partner I couldn't ask for.

Thank you also to my brother, Colin, who gallantly looks at every dog picture I text him, and whose quiet, unassuming, genuine kindness, which I can only try my best to emulate, pervades everything he does. Colin, my opinion from when we were little hasn't changed: you're still pretty much the coolest person I know.

And of course, to the two people without whom this really would never have been possible: thank you, thank you, Mom and Dad. You have inspired, cajoled, consoled, protected me and put up with me. You have listened to more than your fair share of melodramatic woe. You have made our family a bright place, a beacon of happiness and of safety. I wish I knew better how to thank you in a few short words. Your constant, unconditional love and support means everything.

Last – and though they may be least to some, they are never least to me – I want to thank my cat, Cassie, and most especially my dog, Ellie. To the indomitable, indefatigable, infectiously cheerful Ellie, who lay by my feet as I typed every single word of this thesis: my world would be much smaller and sadder without you in it. I did all my best thinking on long walks with you.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Before I had even thought about doing this PhD, when I was still considering joining the Children's Literature Research Centre at Cambridge for an MPhil degree, I had a conversation with someone about young adult literature that somehow ended up catapulting this whole research process into motion. "Young adult literature," she said, "ugh. I would *never* let my kids touch that rubbish. Once they turned nine or ten, I put them on Jane Austen and Tolstoy, and that was that." Trying to keep a straight face, admittedly my first thought was, "Yikes, I feel sorry for your kids." But after we parted ways, I kept wondering about what evidence she was using to support her opinions. Clearly, she thought young adult literature was juvenile at best, and harmful at worst, while adult literature was far better – and more beneficial – for her children. But where was she getting these ideas? Stereotypes? Popular culture? Call me a stickler for academic approaches, but she never cited me any reliable sources – or any sources at all. Born out of sheer annoyance came a desire to develop an argument against her ideas. In the end, I decided that she was making two major judgments about young adult literature, and about literature in general: one, that the purpose of literature was to be useful or beneficial in some way. And two, that young adult literature definitely did *not* fulfill that purpose.

I have an issue with both of these judgments, but this thesis only addresses the second. Interestingly, however, I think it was the first – that the purpose of literature was to be useful or beneficial – that prompted me to begin researching in cognitive poetics. I grew up in Silicon Valley, California, and despite moving halfway around the world, I have somehow found myself in its parallel "Silicon Fen" here in Cambridge. The fast-paced and results-driven outlook of the start-up culture that exists in both these spaces tends to place a huge worth on the concept of "usefulness," while devaluing anything that doesn't have immediate and quantifiable effects. I grew up resenting conversations about usefulness because they often excluded the arts and

humanities. Leaving aside the assumption that everything must exist because it is useful, there is another problem with the exclusion of topics that don't produce measurable results: *we can't always know what is useful*, because we might not have the right tools or even the right questions to determine that. Only very recently, for example, have we begun to produce studies showing that the arts and humanities make us smarter, more socially competent, and turn us into better people and better societies (though of course many have been saying this for decades). Subjects that might not immediately seem useful can actually be essential, and we wouldn't know it unless we found the right questions to ask. In a preface to my MPhil thesis, I stated that "I am discussing the usefulness of literature to show that usefulness isn't the only thing we should be discussing," and I hold firm to that caveat on my work.

On to the second judgment from my early critic, that young adult literature in particular is not useful or beneficial for its readers. Many would argue that adolescents are perfectly capable of understanding more "sophisticated" adult literature. What does young adult literature offer adolescent readers that other types of literature do not? Leaving aside enjoyment – not that it's unimportant – adolescents interact differently with young adult literature than they do with adult literature. What advantages does that present?

Before we come to these advantages, I must address another topic essential to this thesis. I am fascinated by ideas of how we categorize some people as "like me" and others as "unlike me." We do this all the time, but obviously if we worked hard enough, we could find commonalities or differences with anyone. So when, and why is a commonality or a difference significant? Of particular interest to me was how this happened with the significant "differences" that we consider to be minority groups: other races and ethnicities, disabilities, sexual orientations, and gender identities. When I started this research, I began by examining young adult literature featuring racial or ethnic minorities, perhaps because I wanted to address a group that was a true "difference" to me – I identify as both queer and disabled, though invisibly on both accounts, and so race and ethnicity was a minority group with which I held no personal experience. As I expanded my research back into representations of minority groups that I was more personally involved in, it became obvious that despite the personal connections, the vast amount of diversity in the LGBT+ and disabled communities meant that, for the most part, my personal experiences still accounted for very little of these groups, and that most were, in any case, also very much "unlike me."

All of these competing interests led me to the existing research in cognitive poetics on how reading fiction can change our capabilities, our thoughts, our opinions, and even our actions in the real world. Drawing on those conclusions, this thesis uses a specific psychology theory called in-group and out-group categorizations – essentially, a theory that represents the ways in which we categorize people as "like me" or "unlike me" – in order to pinpoint one of the specific advantages that young adult literature offers adolescents: the use of, and development of, empathy. This first chapter constructs my argument as to how the representation of adolescence in young adult literature changes, and even improves, how adolescent readers are able to use and develop their cognitive capacity for empathy through reading fiction.

Section I – Cognitive Poetics and Empathy

Cognitive Poetics

Cognitive poetics is a branch of literary theory that takes insights from the fields of neuroscience and psychology. The field does not treat literature as mere data, nor does it claim to be the "psychology of reading;" it is at heart a literary theory, and as such the literary context is "primary" (Stockwell, 2002, p.6). As my research into young adult literature deals with *affect* – that is, how and why young adult literature can specifically affect the adolescents that read it – cognitive poetics is particularly well suited to providing a framework for my arguments. Affect is markedly important to cognitive poetics, as cognitive poetics investigates not only our cognitive interactions with texts as readers, but also how and why those cognitive interactions affect our lives outside of fiction, both in the short and long term. If "literature has a specific potential for responding to social reality" (Stephens, 2011, p.12), cognitive poetics acknowledges that social reality also has the potential to respond to literature. In other words, fiction affects us, and through us the real world, more than temporarily. In *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, Peter Stockwell emphasizes this aspect of cognitive poetics:

> Cognitive poetics…sees reality and fiction not as cognitively separate, but as phenomena that are processed fundamentally in the same way. The consequence of this view is a principled recognition of the fact that literary works – whether fictional or not – have an emotional and tangible effect on readers and on the real world in which we live with literature (2002, p.152).

The reason that literature and reality are not "cognitively separate" is due in large part to the existence of mirror neurons. Mirror neurons were discovered in the brains of chimpanzees as recently as the late 1990s (see Gallese and Goldman, 1998; Iacoboni et al, 2005), and have since unlocked mysteries as to how we are able to understand the intentions and desires of others. These neurons fire when we ourselves perform an act – for example, the physical act of smiling – but also fire when we see others perform this act as well. Essentially, seeing another person smile causes our mirror neurons to fire as if we ourselves were smiling (Hogan, 2011, p.49). Though fiction does not always include visual stimuli, mirror neurons still fire in response to reading like

they do in response to real life. Reading about an action, rather than seeing it, even causes mirror neurons to activate motor neurons in the brain (Heath and Wolf, 2012, p.145; Speer et al, 2009). For example, motor neurons fire when we run, and mirror neurons cause those motor neurons to fire when we watch someone else running – but most importantly, *reading* about someone running causes mirror neurons to activate those motor neurons as well. This is why Stockwell is able to claim that fiction and reality, despite the different ways in which they present stimuli, are "processed fundamentally in the same way" (2002, p.152), and why fiction can affect us and how we think and act in the real world. Logically, a made-up story shouldn't have the importance and effect that it does, but our brains respond to fiction in a very similar way to how they respond to reality, and that creates real-world effects and consequences.

Because our brains react to fiction in this way, a reader interacts with fictional characters as if they, too, were real people, ascribing to them states of mind, full personalities, and motivations from both the past and future (Zunshine, 2006, p.10; Nikolajeva, 2014b, p.76). Cognitive criticism thus necessarily treats fictional characters as representations of real people rather than the semiotic textual constructions that many other branches of literary criticism see characters as (Nikolajeva, 2014b, p.76). These semiotic approaches view all textual elements, including characters, as "words alone [with] no referents in the real world" (Nikolajeva, 2002, p.8). Amongst literary critics, treating fictional characters as real people is often deemed naïve and unscholarly; Blakey Vermeule (2010) points out that there is an unwritten rule in the field that a distinction between fictional characters and real people must be maintained. She cites this as due to the influence of New Criticism, which "though maligned still provides a template for our profession" (2010, p.x). However, cognitive poetics must and does break this unwritten rule, since however "unscholarly" it may be judged, our minds do treat fictional characters as real people. In fact, this is a main theory explaining why we as a species engage with fiction. Both Vermeule and Lisa Zunshine agree that how our minds interact with fictional characters is the reason behind our seemingly odd investment in fictional stories, though they disagree on exactly why this is. Vermeule, in her book *Why We Care About Fictional Characters*, argues that our evolved preference for social information, which came about because it "provides emotional support, builds alliances, and creates feelings of well-being" amongst large groups, now urges us to gorge on social information provided from many different sources (2010, p.11). Though fiction imposes "two stiff tariffs at the outset, or two cognitive entry costs" – namely, suspension

of disbelief and our valuable attention – it "pays us back with large doses of really juicy social information, information that would be too costly, dangerous, and difficult for us to extract form the world on our own" (p.14). Zunshine, on the other hand, argues in her book *Why We Read Fiction* that the opportunity to practice, develop, and test one's mind-reading abilities with fictional characters is one of the reasons why we as humans enjoy fiction so much; it proves to us that the cognitive capacities essential to our survival and social standing are still working properly, and we derive pleasure from that knowledge (2006, p.18). I suspect that both hypotheses, which are in any case interrelated, are probably true.

Within literary theory, there are some compelling arguments as to why characters cannot (or perhaps should not) be considered as real people; Nikolajeva gives the examples that "literary characters do not necessarily have to behave the way real people do, and they do not necessarily follow the prescribed behavioristic patterns or the observed course of mental disturbances" (2002, p.9). However, even if characters are behaving in ways that real people couldn't (or wouldn't), our brains still attempt to construct identities, motivations, and backgrounds around them. This is one of Zunshine's (2006) main arguments – we intuitively take the behavior of characters and from their behavior interpret their mental states, and beyond that, their identity. While another argument against a mimetic view of characters at this point might be that "as compared with real people, literary characters are always incomplete" (Nikolajeva, 2002, p.154), this too does not stop our brains from filling in the gaps to give characters a full identity. Indeed, our brains also work with limited information about real people in the real world, and construct an identity around them in the same way. In fiction, we might actually be given more complete information about a person's identity and inner motivations than we are in real life (Hogan, 2011, p.68). The way Zunshine (2006) describes our brains taking information about characters and extrapolating mental states and identities can best be explained using the term mind-modeling.

Mind-Modeling Characters – Emotional Engagement and Empathy

Mind-modeling is a concept devised by Peter Stockwell (see Stockwell, 2009, p.140ff; Stockwell and Mahlberg, 2015) in an attempt to express the activity our brains engage in when reading about a character or when meeting a person in the real world. It encompasses attributing states of mind, emotions, motivations, and backgrounds to people or characters, based only on

the limited clues we are given, and from these creating a mental model of an identity. Stockwell and Mahlberg highlight that these mental models are constantly changing with adjustments and additions, stating that mind-modeling refers specifically to "the capacity that humans evidently have for imagining and *maintaining* a *working* model of the characteristics, outlook, beliefs, motivations, and consequent behaviors of others" (2015, p.132, emphasis added). As new information is gained, we add it to the working mind-model, or change the model accordingly. In real life, we build mind-models of other people using clues such as what they say, their tone of voice, their body language, their behavior, and any information we may happen to possess about their history, family, nationality, race, gender, etc. Oatley and Mar (2005), working in the field of psychology, also argue that we create mental models of people in the real world based on their actions and on knowledge about them gained from others (e.g. reputations), and that understanding fictional characters "involves similar processes" to creating these mental models of real-life people (p.189). However, when building a mind-model of a character, it can be built from clues that also include information not available in real life, such as direct access to a character's thoughts and feelings given by the narration.

Zunshine (2006) and other scholars often use the term "mind-reading" rather than mind-modeling, but Stockwell has begun to adopt the term mind-modeling instead, as it more fully expresses the fact that we as readers (and as people) are not only ascribing and interpreting others' mental states, but also their emotional states, motivations, history, and overall their *identities*. We are creating mental models of people, actively filling in the blanks between the clues we are given. Stockwell and Mahlberg also prefer the term mind-modeling to mind-reading as it emphasizes the active and creative aspect of the task, in which "incoming information and inferences" are clues from which we alter and reshape an already-existent "template" of an identity created by our own experiences and pre-existing presumptions about what it means to be a person (2015, p.133). Except where I directly cite critics using the term mind-reading, I too have adopted the use of the term mind-modeling. I feel it more accurately conveys the overarching activity composed of overlapping cognitive processes like empathy and theory of mind (to be discussed shortly), and also more accurately conveys the action a reader takes to create a relationship with, and from there an interaction with, a fictional character.

Under the larger umbrella heading of mind-modeling, I will be discussing the more specific cognitive functions of theory of mind, or attributing mental states to others, and

empathy, or attributing emotional states to others. Empathy and theory of mind are not the same thing, but they are closely related to one another, since of course emotions have a great deal to do with mental states, and vice versa. Theory of mind and empathy both use similar neural systems and areas in the brain (Siegal and Varley, 2002; Schulte-Ruther et al., 2007). Mirror neurons are also involved in the use of both functions; fMRI scans confirm that mirror neurons activate when using "emotional interpersonal cognition" (empathy and theory of mind, in other words), just as they do when using motor cognition (think again of the example of the physical act of running) (Schulte-Ruther et al., 2007). Mirror neurons are probably one of the reasons empathy and theory of mind exist in humans at all (Iacoboni et al., 2005; Gallese and Goldman, 1998). As Hogan (2011, p.49) describes it, using again the example of smiling, the physical act of forming a smile can make us feel at least partial happiness. When we see another person smile, our mirror neurons react as if we ourselves are smiling, and thus we begin to feel happiness as a reaction to the other person's original facial expression. This forms the basic principle of how we are able to use empathy to understand and interact with others. This is a highly necessary skill, as "attributing states of mind [to others] is the default way by which we construct and navigate our social environment" (Zunshine, 2006, p.6). Empathy, theory of mind, and mind-modeling are all evolved cognitive capacities (Oatley and Mar, 2005, p.188); while they are necessary to our social survival now, they were necessary to our physical survival from the very beginnings of the human species. Vermeule states that "no prehistoric child could survive without [these cognitive capacities], since once separated from the breast, survival depends on recognizing those who intend to threaten or love us" (2010, p.34).

Though mirror neurons are known to be essential to the activity of mind-modeling, there are many theories in the fields of psychology and neuroscience about how exactly our brains go about achieving these mind-models. Goldman (2011, p.36) notes that empathy, theory of mind, and mind-modeling can be achieved unconsciously through mirror neuron activity – i.e. the "effortless, automatic" firing of mirror neurons – or it can be a "more effortful and constructive process" of deliberately attempting to interpret another's thoughts and feelings. Iacoboni suggests that even conscious efforts involve mirror neurons, which new data show are far more complex than previously understood (2011, p.55-56).

Theory of mind is defined as the process of attributing mental states to others (Premack and Woodruff, 1978, p.515; Carruthers and Smith, 1996, p.3; Blair and Perschardt, 2002, p.27;

Gallagher and Frith, 2003, p.77). Modern research into what theory of mind is and how it works was jumpstarted by David Premack and Guy Woodruff's 1978 paper on the existence of theory of mind in chimpanzees. Since then, psychology scholars have tended to separate the hypotheses of how we use theory of mind into two different "schools of thought": the first school of thought, "theory theory" holds that we have a specific theory of mind or "a psychology that we use to represent to ourselves the beliefs, intentions, and desires of other people" (Vermeule, 2010, p.35). The second school of thought, "simulation theory," argues that "we simulate other people's states of mind using imitation and empathy. Simulation theorists argue that we cognitively put ourselves in another person's shoes and allow ourselves vicariously to go through whatever they are going through" (p.35). Many psychology scholars defer to one school of thought or the other, but Vermeule states that she herself sees no reason to choose between them. I agree – these two schools of thought end up generally representing two different methods of using theory of mind (and empathy and mind-modeling generally), and both are accurate representations of various methods by which we determine others' states of mind.

This brings us to defining empathy, the cognitive process discussed most in depth in this thesis. Defining empathy can be a particularly tricky topic, since as Coplan (2011, p.4) notes, there are myriads of definitions and uses of the term (see, for example, Coplan, 2004, p.143ff; Moshman, 2011, p.56; Prinz, 2011, p.212; Hogan, 2011, p.63; Nikolajeva, 2014b, p.85). Some critics define empathy as literally feeling what another person feels (e.g. Coplan, 2004, p.143; Prinz, 2011, p.212). Some create differentiated kinds of empathy for when the empathizer feels what another person feels, versus when they attempt to understand what another person feels without actually experiencing that emotion themselves (e.g. Hogan, 2011, p.63; Nikolajeva, 2014b, p.85). On a similar note, some critics state that empathy requires self-other differentiation, or the conscious separation of self-versus-other while using empathy (e.g. Coplan, 2004, p.144). This is often defined as "perspective-taking." Conversely, some critics state that empathy requires almost becoming the other person to the point of losing one's own feelings and even identity (e.g. Kaufman and Libby, 2012, p.2-3, who use the term "experience-taking"). Finally, some critics conflate empathy with sympathy, and to some degree with pity (e.g. Keen, 2007, p.159; Prinz, 2011, p.212; Hammond and Kim, 2014, p.9).

I define empathy more broadly than most critics; I define the general term of empathy as simply *understanding, or attempting to understand, how others feel*. Rather than reducing

empathy to only one method of attributing emotional states to others, this allows empathy to encompass multiple methods (e.g. actually experiencing another's emotions, understanding basic human patterns of emotions, conscious and effortful perspective-taking, unconscious firing of mirror neurons in reaction to an expression, etc.). This also prevents a conflation of empathy with sympathy or pity, as I can speak about methods of understanding another person's emotions without necessarily making claims as to what the *empathizer*'s emotions are. The "attempting to understand" portion of this definition is important, because I don't require the conclusions drawn from using empathy to be accurate in order to still consider the process itself to be empathy. While we are often mistaken as to what we think others are feeling, the cognitive processes used to make our interpretations are still firing. When talking about empathy and theory of mind together, I usually use the term mind-modeling, as a mind-model will necessarily involve both a person's mental state and feelings.

Types of Empathy – Further Detail

Because my definition of empathy is very general, it is useful to acknowledge in greater detail the different types of empathy: the different methods for attempting to understand what others' emotional states are. I have already addressed the fact that empathy can be unconscious and involuntary, or a conscious effort. There are also several *orders* of empathy and theory of mind that can occur in a chain of empathic interpretations. Higher-order empathy and theory of mind (what Lisa Zunshine (2006) calls "higher-order mind-reading") take place when we interpret emotions and mental states through a chain of other people: A thinks that B thinks/feels that C thinks/feels that D, etc. Most empathy is second-order when it comes to fiction (i.e. I, the reader, think that the characters feels…), but often readers must also interpret characters' emotions through the lens of other characters' perspectives. Zunshine theorizes that most readers can only cope with four orders of empathy and theory of mind, and that anything more causes the brain to lose track (2006, p.29).

Separate from orders of empathy and the distinction between effortful and involuntary empathy, however, are various *methods* by which we interpret others' emotions. Many scholars working on empathy have theorized various types of empathy, but I find it most useful to refer to the types of empathy laid out by Patrick Hogan in his book *What Literature Teaches Us About Emotion* (2011, p.278): *projective empathy*, or imagining oneself in the position of the other

person; *allocentric empathy*, or imagining the actual responses of the other person; and *normative empathy*, or imagining some "normatively standard" person in the position of the other person. Cognitive psychologists have some similar classifications of empathy types, typically calling projective empathy "affective sharing," "affective empathy," or "emotional contagion," and allocentric empathy "perspective taking" or "cognitive empathy" (Preston and de Waal, 2002, p.4; Eres and Molenberghs, 2013, p.1-2; Decety and Yoder, 2016, p.2), but I find Hogan's labels to be more valuable, as they allow for more nuance and are less likely to get confused with other concepts and terms.

Projective empathy

Projective empathy involves the type of empathy where one actually feels the emotions that the other person (or character) is feeling. This can be an unconscious firing of mirror neurons – an intuitive and involuntary sharing of emotion. It can also be a deliberate and conscious process of questioning how one would feel in another person's situation - "putting yourself in their shoes," as it were. The possibility of this conscious process is one of the reasons I dislike Decety and Yoder's (2016) term of "emotional contagion," because it erases the possibility for projective empathy to be anything but the unconscious and intuitive version. A more useful parallel concept to projective empathy would be the "simulation theory" school of thought about theory of mind that was discussed earlier (Vermeule, 2010).

While some critics define *all* empathy as projective empathy, or as actually feeling what another person is feeling, I find that very restrictive, as it means that empathy can become conflated with sympathy and pity. In any case, it is also simply untrue that all empathy involves substituting oneself for another person. Rabin et al (2010) demonstrated that although they use similar areas of the brain, autobiographical memory is a separate and distinct cognitive function to empathy and theory of mind. People with amnesia, for instance, still exhibit empathy and theory of mind capabilities. While projective empathy is a part of our empathic abilities, it is far from the only part.

Projective empathy can also be unsophisticated and inaccurate. Young children cannot understand that others might feel differently than they do about situations or events, and so project their own feelings onto others. Even after their brains develop and are capable of more advanced perspective taking, adults can often continue to make this error. Projective empathy

carries the danger of the empathizer thinking that everyone else would feel or even *should* feel exactly as they do. As an example, upon learning that a friend's child has come out as gay, the empathizer might put themselves in the parent's shoes and conclude that the parent must be feeling shame, as that is what they themselves would feel. In reality, however, the parent might be feeling proud of their child's courage to come out.

Allocentric empathy

Because it involves imagining the actual likely responses of another person, allocentric empathy requires taking into account knowledge of the other person, their history, their likes and dislikes, etc. It also involves interpreting the other person's emotions via their current actions, language use, facial expressions, and body language. It is close to the "theory theory" school of thought discussed earlier (Vermeule, 2010). Like all empathy, allocentric empathy is presupposed upon theory of mind, as it is necessary to understand mental states in order to imagine another person's actual emotions. It also relies upon mind-modeling, as it cannot take place without a mental model (however incomplete) of the other person's identity.

Allocentric empathy, too, can be either a conscious effort or an unconscious occurrence. It could demand a deliberate, conscious thought process in order to work out what others are thinking and feeling, but allocentric empathy can also happen unconsciously when mirror neurons fire "effortlessly" and "automatically" (Goldman, 2011, p.36). Lisa Zunshine claims that theory of mind, and therefore also allocentric empathy, often seem effortless: "we *intuitively* connect people's behavior to their mental states" (2006, p.16, emphasis added).

Allocentric empathy can also be more accurate than projective empathy. In the same example of the parent and gay child, the empathizer themselves would feel shame at the thought of having a gay child. However, if they know that the other parent is socially liberal and unbothered by traditionally conservative family values, the empathizer might come to the correct conclusion (or at least a closer approximation) of what emotions that parent is feeling. However, allocentric empathy and projective empathy are not mutually exclusive; you can use both at the same time. Understanding and imagining how you yourself would feel in a certain situation does not necessarily mean that you don't also understand how someone else feels in that situation, even if they feel differently than you do. In the original example, the empathizer might feel shame for the other parent, but can also understand that the parent instead feels pride, and can

separate those two conclusions. In reality, none of Hogan's (2011) three types of empathy are mutually exclusive. Most often, we use some or all of them at the same time.

Normative empathy

Normative empathy involves general knowledge of how people normally react to situations. This kind of empathy through patterns is learned very early on; studies show that even very young children understand that certain situations call for certain emotions. For example, an 18-month-old already understands that if another person breaks a toy, that person should be expressing sadness, not happiness (Chiarella and Poulin-Dubois, 2015). This kind of empathy can also be considered under the label of scripts and schemata.

Schema and script theory had its beginnings in the 1970s, when work by Robert Abelson and Roger Schank began to expand the research area (see for example Abelson, 1975; Schank and Abelson, 1977). Scripts and schemata are mental patterns of almost everything: "schemata are knowledge structures, or patterns, which provide the framework of our understanding. They shape our knowledge of all concepts, from the very small to the very large, from the material to the abstract" (Stephens, 2011, p.13). They are the psychological term for the "abstraction of social experience" (Mar and Oatley, 2008, p.176). Scripts and schemata can reference knowledge of the real world (see for example Schank and Abelson, 1977; Nelson, 1981) or, as Daniel Allington (2005, p.2) puts it, of "literature itself, for example governing readerly expectations of certain genres" (see for example Mandler, 1984; Cook, 1994; Semino, 2001). Though scripts and schemata can often be confused or conflated, Stephens provides a good explanation of how they relate: "whereas a schema is a *static* element within our experiential repertoire, a script is a *dynamic* element, which expresses how a sequence of events or actions is expected to unfold" (2011, p.14, emphasis added). As scripts are the dynamic element that can be changed or added to, I will mostly be addressing scripts and script theory in this thesis. Stockwell addresses script theory by giving the example of going to the pub: knowing how to order, where to sit, and other patterns are all involved in the "pub outing" script.[1] When you do something for the first time, like going to the pub at 18 when you become legally allowed to drink, you create a plan, execute

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[1] Stockwell uses the term "schema" in these examples, when arguably the correct label would be "script," as these patterns are dynamic in nature. As I am paraphrasing, I have used the term script to prevent confusion.

it, and over time and with experience that plan becomes a script (2002, p.78). There are "situational scripts" (going to the pub), "personal scripts" (how to act as a husband or wife), and "instrumental scripts" (how to switch on the lights) (p.77).

A large portion of scholarly work done in cognitive poetics examines the subject of script theory. Up until recently, this area of cognitive poetics was entirely separate from the area of mind-modeling. In the past few years, however, these two areas have become increasingly relevant to each other. Emotions can be scripts, which necessarily means that empathy can be a script as well. Normative empathy involves scripts because it involves general knowledge of the patterns of how people normally react to situations (e.g. the death of a loved one usually causes sadness, while a birthday celebration usually entails happiness). Even the action of knowing how to identify different emotions from facial expressions and body language can be scripts. As Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer states, "emotional scripts…rely on certain encoded emotions such as anger, jealousy, joy, or sadness in facial expression, gesture, posture, and language" (2012, p.131-2).

Emotional scripts are not the only scripts that affect empathic engagement with fictional texts. However, this short discussion and definition of script theory is sufficient to give a grounding of normative empathy for earlier chapters of this thesis. Script theory and its effects on empathy will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Empathy Development Through Literature

Like any cognitive abilities, empathy, theory of mind, and mind-modeling develop over time. While the ability to use empathy and theory of mind develops in early childhood, these cognitive tools can be further developed and strengthened through practice in late childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood. Though one would assume that practice in attributing states of mind to others normally occurs in real-world interactions with people, many cognitive poetics scholars argue that literature is an excellent way to practice empathy. Since characters are treated as real people by our brains, we use empathy with them just as we do with real people. Any and all of the types of empathy, theory of mind, and mind-modeling discussed in the preceding sections can and usually are used when a reader cognitively interacts with a text. Patrick Hogan even argues that interactions with fictional characters provide better empathic practice than do interactions with real people, as "our experiences of literary emotion are almost entirely

empathic" and, unlike in real life, don't have a large egoistic component (2011, p.68). Recent empirical studies have shown that interacting with fiction can help readers of all ages develop empathy, theory of mind, and mind-modeling capabilities. Mar et al. (2010) found that inferred exposure to children's storybooks and movies predicted preschoolers' theory of mind capabilities (preschool is around the age when theory of mind begins to develop: 4-6 years old). Kidd and Castano (2013; 2017) and Mar et al. (2009) found that reading fiction improved empathy and theory of mind capabilities in adults. Vezzali et al. (2015) found that reading fiction improved adolescent readers' long-term, real-life perspective-taking abilities (i.e. empathy), as well as improved attitudes toward stigmatized minorities. This potential for literature and fictional characters to develop readers' real-life empathic abilities will become key in later discussions, where it will be examined in further detail.

In-Group and Out-Group Theory – Identity Categorizations

Empathy might be an important cognitive capacity, but that doesn't mean that it always creates good outcomes. Empathy is often considered a virtue, one that leads to more altruistic and pro-social behavior. However, many critics disagree that empathy is necessary for, or even good for, morality. Although there are several critiques of empathy, one major concern is that empathy is biased. Simply put, "we have more empathy for those we see as like us" (Prinz, 2011, p.226), or "people will be more empathetic with those who are similar to them" (Houston, 1990, p.859). This is due to what psychology theorists call "in-group and out-group identity categorizations," where we see some individuals as "in-group," or like us, and others as "out-group," or different from us, often to the extent that we might view the out-group as hostile toward our own in-group. Examples of in-group and out-group categorizations might be which side of a war our country is on, which friend clique in school we are in, which political views we have, or whether we are genetically related to others. They can also take the form of the kinds of minorities or disadvantaged groups that we encounter in our society: race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc. Empathy is far easier to employ towards a member of that which we see as our in-group, and empathy is often impeded towards someone we see as out-group, even if they are in a situation that might have led us to otherwise empathize with them (Avenanti et al., 2010, p.1018; Gutsell and Inzlicht, 2010, p.841; Hogan, 2011, p.70; Gutsell and Inzlicht, 2012, p.596; Molenberghs, 2013, p.1533). This means that empathy – and mind-modeling in general –

can be less accurate with out-group members, and can cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations of behavior. For example, one study found that white observers interpreted a white person pushing a black person as playful behavior, while they interpreted a black person pushing a white person as aggressive behavior (Kunda, 1999, p.347).

Most often, however, rather than empathically misinterpreting out-group members, we simply use *more* empathy with our own in-group (Molenberghs, 2013, p.1533), and *less* empathy with out-groups (Avenanti et al., 2010, p.1018; Gutsell and Inzlicht, 2010, p.841; Gutsell and Inzlicht, 2012, p.596). A study by Brown et al. (2006) found that while participants did not respond to pictures of other races with "negative affect," meaning they did not view them as hostile, they did respond to pictures of their own race with more affect overall. As such, when viewing pictures of their in-group, participants "reacted with more displeasure to unpleasant pictures [e.g. a sad or crying face] and more pleasure to pleasant pictures [e.g. a smiling face]" (p.304). Participants therefore responded to members of their own race with more empathy than to members of other races. Mathur et al. (2010) reconfirmed this finding in a study that demonstrated that participants felt stronger empathy in response to pain when the empathic target was a racial in-group member, and felt weaker empathy when the target was a racial out-group member (p.1468).

That participants in the Brown et al. (2006) study didn't view members of other races with negative affect – i.e. as hostile – is likely because after the age of seven, children and adults distinguish between in-group and out-group members more in terms of positive than negative characteristics (Bennett et al., 2004, p.135). Rather than viewing out-group members as possessing negative traits, we usually view in-group members more positively than out-group members. This is especially the case when the out-group is a recognizable, stigmatized minority. Vezzali et al. hypothesize that this is the case because our social norms dictate that discrimination against others is wrong; we therefore ascribe in-group members with more positivity rather than ascribe out-group members with more negativity (2015, p.109).

Group bias affects all forms of empathy, including unconscious mirroring, cognitively effortful empathy, emotional sharing, and even the separate function of theory of mind (Eres and Molenberghs, 2013, p.1ff). Empathy for in-group members has even been found to be "neurally distinct" from empathy with humankind generally, activating additional areas of the brain (Mathur et al., 2010, p.1472). Empathy also has a stronger effect on real-world actions, such as

helping intentions, when the empathic target is in-group to the empathizer (Sturmer et al., 2006, p.943). For a review of many more individual studies demonstrating the effects of in-group and out-group bias on empathy, see Eres and Molenberghs (2013). Because empathy acts in this manner, it means that empathy can strengthen prejudices and cultural boundaries. As Hammond and Kim put it, "empathy can serve to regulate boundaries between in-group and out-group, citizen and non-citizen, and human and non-human, in deleterious and dangerous ways" (2014, p.9). Grouping in literature can also regulate these boundaries, in particular by strengthening biases and stereotypes. Hogan (2011, p.70) argues that literature is rife with in-group and out-group categorizations – characters categorize each other, readers categorize characters, and of course a novel can encourage the reader to view characters as in-group or out-group, thus manipulating the reader's cognitive interaction with the text. Biased empathy on the part of the reader means that grouping in literature can control how we understand and interact with a text. In some cases, a protagonist's out-group categorization will be strong enough that a reader will find an entire novel difficult to engage with. In other cases, while the reader might not find a character overtly or consciously distasteful because of their race, disability, sexual orientation, etc., they might end up using less empathy overall to understand that character. Hogan (2011, p.70) therefore concludes that although literature can help readers practice and develop their empathic abilities, literature can also promote damaging uses of empathy (or rather, damaging lack of uses of empathy), which can strengthen biases and ingrain in-group/out-group boundaries.

Intersectionality

In-group and out-group categorizations are, on the one hand, essentially meaningless. Identity categories do not mean the same thing to everyone. In *Empire and Poetic Voice*, Patrick Hogan gives the example that "no two people have precisely the same idea of 'African' or 'Catholic,'" though personal definitions of those categories may partially overlap with other people's definitions (2004, p.11). Hogan argues that it is in fact the "extension" of your definition of an identity category to include others, whether or not they are actually similar to you, which creates in-group and out-group categories in the first place (2004, p.8-9). For example, people often extend their Catholic identity to encompass all other Catholics into their

in-group, despite the fact that Catholicism means different things to different people, and that other Catholics might differ on important religious points.

Moreover, categorizing between in-group and out-group is somewhat nonsensical, as it constructs a false binary. No one is completely like us, or completely unlike us. One of the major issues with in-group and out-group theory is that it relies on a "single axis framework" (Crenshaw, 1989, p.140) of viewing identities and bias – it does not take into account how multiple alterities or identities affect one another. In other words, in-group and out-group theory fails to account for intersectionality – it was, after all, originally devised as a psychology theory, which as a field has historically had a hard time accounting for intersectionality (Cole, 2009; Goff and Kahn, 2013; for more on intersectionality, see for example hooks, 1984; Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990; Cohen, 1997; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Campbell, 2008; Crenshaw, 2011). Because everyone possesses many identities that could be considered group categories, these multiple potential categorizations compete, overlap, obscure, and intersect with each other. A person could be simultaneously both in-group to you and out-group to you for many various reasons.

However, despite being irrational, in-group and out-group categorizations still affect how we think, and still have an emotional impact, even if we consciously acknowledge that they are illogical. Humans instinctually categorize everything. Lakoff and Johnson claim that this is due to evolutionary requirements for early survival (1999, p.18). Categorizing into binaries, specifically, was an essential skill that was selected for. We needed to distinguish between food and not-food, safety and danger, prey and predator (p.17). Because we are a social species, those binary categorizations also involved the vital distinction between our social group, who are likely to help us, and those outside our social group, who might harm us (Mathur et al., 2010, p.1469). This evolutionary selection might be why we find it so difficult to stop thinking in binaries, even if we recognize that binaries are usually false. Regardless of whether or not in-group and out-group categorizations make sense in a modern context, our brains are still hard-wired to make them (Brewer and Caporael, 1990, p.237; Molenberghs, 2013, p.1535). Group categorizations therefore constantly affect our attitudes and actions in the real world.

As readers, we categorize fictional characters into in-group and out-group, and this still affects our interaction with a fictional text. Like real people, however, characters will rarely be fully in-group or fully out-group to a reader. Hogan states that "any attempt to create and

develop an individual character almost inevitably leads an author away from simple out-group reduction and toward elaborated individualization" (2011, p.71). When we build a mind-model of a character based upon the information that a text has given us, that mind-model will necessarily involve several conflicting in- versus out-group categorizations, as mind-modeling itself "allows us to understand that other people…are in some ways similar to us and in some ways different" (Stockwell and Mahlberg, 2015, p.132). Empathic engagement with a character is still affected by group categorizations – we will use more empathy with a character we consider to be in-group – but which of a character's conflicting identity categories takes precedent? If every character possesses multiple identities that could categorize them as both in-group and out-group, the question becomes what makes one identity category more important than others. For example, if someone is of your nationality (in-group) but not of your race (out-group), which categorization will affect your empathy bias? In the real world, this is normally determined by any number of things: who is doing the grouping and which categories matter most to them, what their past experiences are, what their motivations are, the context of the moment, etc. Hogan agrees, stating that identity categorizations are "contextual," and which identity is selected depends on surroundings and the situation (2011, p.71). In the example of nationality versus race, race may take precedent until nationality becomes particularly relevant – for example, in times of war. When there is an antagonistic out-group – like in a war, where a competing nationality is trying to attack – in-group categorizations become stronger and more significant (Laszlo and Somogyvari, 2008, p.123).

These factors are also applicable when readers categorize a fictional character, but the most important factor when reading fiction is the text itself. The narrative can manipulate which group takes priority at any given moment or in any given scene; certain categorizations will be fundamental to certain scenes and not relevant at all to others. If, over the course of an entire novel, an author wanted to appeal consistently to the largest audience possible, they could use what Suzanne Keen calls "broadcast strategic empathy," which "calls upon every reader to feel with members of a group by emphasizing common vulnerabilities and hopes through universalizing representations" (2007, p.xiv). All fictional texts do this at some point, of course – perhaps children's and young adult literature more than most – but while some texts use this strategy nearly constantly, more complex texts often shift and manipulate which of a character's groups take priority at various points throughout the narrative, blurring the lines between in-

group and out-group and tying together multiple axes of identity. With these more complex texts, a reader's various biases will compete, and empathic engagement will be more demanding.

To briefly sum up: empathy, theory of mind, and mind-modeling are all important cognitive capacities that are fundamental to the ways in which we engage with the world and with fiction. Fiction can also help to develop these cognitive capacities over time. However, empathy and its related capacities are biased along in-group and out-group lines, meaning that we use more empathy with people or characters that we identify as in-group. What groups take precedent to determine in-group and out-group boundaries can depend on context, and fiction in particular can manipulate intersecting group categorizations through narrative construction. The next section moves on to specifically discuss young adult literature, and lays out the first part of my argument as to how young adult literature differs from adult literature for adolescent readers.

Section II – Adolescence and Young Adult Literature

Biological Adolescence

I will now turn towards the specifics of this thesis, beginning with a discussion on the concept of adolescence. Though adolescence is now considered an obviously separate category from childhood and adulthood, this was not always the case. The psychologist Stanley Hall was the first to use the term "adolescence" to denote a separate stage of development, and this was only as recently as 1904. Even then, the existence of an "adolescent" or "teenager" did not become a common concept until the 1950s in the aftermath of World War II (Hilton and Nikolajeva, 2012, p.6). While the concept of adolescence may be new, the biological factors specific to adolescence do genuinely exist and are relevant. A biological definition of adolescence is not the only definition of adolescence – as will be discussed shortly – but it is important.

Defining adolescence by age is imprecise; while the beginning of adolescence is clearly marked at the onset of puberty, the biological end of adolescence blends murkily into the late teens and even early to mid twenties (Spear, 2000, p.418; Moshman, 2011, p.xvi). However, certain physical, cognitive, and psychological factors are all recognizable as biological aspects that occur during the adolescent period. These include the obvious outward physical changes of puberty, such as growing breasts, the onset of menstruation, growing pubic hair, deepening voices, growth spurts, and acne. The cognitive and psychological changes caused by a developing adolescent brain are less outwardly visible but still highly significant. An adolescent brain is very different to its childhood and adult counterparts, and some of the behaviors that we associate with typical teenage behavior can be attributed to changes in the brain during adolescence. Decision-making capabilities, housed in the pre-frontal cortex, are underdeveloped in adolescence, leading to difficulties with planning ahead and anticipating consequences, and therefore greater engagement in risky behaviors (Byrnes, 2003, p.236; Casey et al., 2008, p.63). Hormone levels, too, play a large role in shaping adolescent behavior (Sisk and Zehr, 2005, p.163). Inconsistent levels of hormones lead to the well-known adolescent mood swings of extreme emotional highs and lows (Rosenblum and Lewis, 2003). And of course, the onset of

puberty and its hormones brings with it a strong fascination and preoccupation with sex (Larsson and Svedin, 2002, p.263; Fortenberry, 2013, p.283).

Because the adolescent brain operates differently than a child or an adult brain, an adolescent's cognitive interactions with fiction will also be distinct. Earlier, I discussed how fiction has the potential to develop empathy and mind-modeling capabilities in its readers. The potential of literature to develop empathic abilities is of particular importance to adolescents. Adolescence is an essential time to practice empathy and theory of mind if these skills are to be used to their best advantage later in life. Different areas of the brain are used for mind-modeling as a child matures into an adolescent and then into an adult. Although both empathy and theory of mind develop early on in childhood, between the ages of 4 and 6, the neural systems that they use continue to develop and improve well past these ages (Moriguchi et al., 2007, p.361; Yurgelun-Todd, 2007, p.251). A study using fMRI scans suggests that the brain's "emotion processing and cognitive appraisal systems" do indeed develop during adolescence (Monk et al., 2003, p.420). During adolescence, the brain goes through a second period of myelination, in which the brain remodels itself by pruning unused or less-used neurons and laying down myelin sheaths for the neurons that remain, making the neural firing in those neurons faster and more efficient (Arain et al., 2013, p.449). Pre-myelination and pruning, the adolescent brain has more plasticity than an adult brain, but is less efficient, meaning that adolescents have greater potential to learn things, but the excess synapses in their brains slow things down. A pruned and myelinated adult brain will not be able to learn as well as an adolescent brain, but will be much faster (Blakemore and Choudhury, 2006, p.305). This all means that adolescence is a "use it or lose it" period – whatever cognitive abilities go unused and unpracticed during adolescence will be pruned, and their potential for later in life greatly reduced. If empathy, theory of mind, and mind-modeling abilities aren't sufficiently practiced in adolescence, they won't be able to be as developed as they could be later on as an adult. Empathy practice is therefore essential during adolescence: "experience with executive functions and certain social cognitive skills [like empathy] might be much more difficult to incorporate into brain networks once they are established after puberty" (Blakemore and Choudhury, 2006, p.307). As stated earlier, reading fiction is one major method of getting that practice.

Adolescent readers will find empathy more difficult than adult readers in their interactions with fiction. Adolescents may have more difficulty in reading the emotions of those

around them; they have more activation of the amygdala, the part of the brain associated with emotion processing, than do adults when looking facial expressions, suggesting that more effort is involved in the process (Baird et al., 1999; Yang et al., 2003). In studies where children, adolescents, and adults were asked to take third-person perspectives, children and adolescents were much slower in doing so than were adults, indicating it is more difficult for them to do so (Choudhury et al., 2006; Dosch et al., 2010). Children and adolescents are certainly capable of being accurate in their empathic interpretations (Dosch, 2010), but they are also at greater risk of being inaccurate. Choudhury et al. found that children and young adolescents had greater difficulty in separating first-person and third-person perspectives, and that they sometimes "imposed the self-perspective onto the other" (2006, p.171). They theorized that in adults and older adolescents, further brain development prevented these perspectives from blurring in this way. Adolescent readers, especially younger adolescent readers, will therefore find the opportunities for empathy use that a fictional text presents to be more challenging than would an adult reader.

Cognitive Poetics and Young Adult Literature: A Specific Theory

That children, adolescents, and adults all have distinct cognitive capabilities means cognitive poetics, as a field, must take that into account when examining texts that are aimed at children and adolescents. While cognitive poetics analyses on children's and young adult literature can certainly draw on the findings, theories, and research done on adult literature, they must necessarily be different than analyses on adult literature, as the cognitive capacities of readers are crucial. This is illustrated most clearly in Brian Boyd's analysis of *Horton Hears a Who* in his book on evolutionary and cognitive criticism, *On The Origin of Stories* (2009). In attempting to explain the success of Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hears a Who*, Boyd does not distinguish properly between the child and adult reader. When he does address the issue of the child reader, he dips into child psychological and neurological development, but only briefly, and only for the purposes of illustrating which developmental milestones Dr. Seuss included in his stories. There is little mention of how these developmental milestones would affect a child's reading of the book. Moreover, despite taking an evolutionary and cognitive stance on the text, Boyd does not fully address how the fact that the story is a picturebook might affect its analysis. Though he analyzes some pictures, he never mentions how the brain has evolved to process pictures faster

and more instinctually than words (LeDoux, 1996, p.146; Evans, 2003, p.26-7), nor how this might affect a young child reader, who might not be able to recognize the images' fictitiousness (Nikolajeva, 2018, p.111-2). Boyd more or less treats the book in the same way he treats adult literature, analyzing it on the same criteria, and in doing so fundamentally misinterprets the book's possible cognitive and evolutionary interactions with readers. He describes *Horton Hears a Who* as a "simple" and "unassuming" story, despite the fact that he even acknowledges that it deals with theory of mind, which children "do not assuredly attain until age five" (Boyd, 2009, p.329) and might not have fully developed when reading the book. For a young child, *Horton Hears a Who* requires complex and sophisticated cognitive capacities that may still be in the early stages of development, and therefore it presents a real challenge. Cognitively, it is not a "simple" story at all.

In short, I agree with Kümmerling-Meibauer and Meibauer (2013), who argue for a specific theory on cognitive poetics and children's literature (in their case, a cognitive theory on picturebooks). They argue that children's and adolescents' cognitive capabilities are key to any cognitive poetics analysis of literature for children and young adults. As they put it, "a deeper understanding of…children's literature…might be achieved when the total cognitive development of children is related to the works of art created for them…It all depends on cognitive abilities that develop over the course of time" (p.156). Maria Nikolajeva agrees; when considering empathic engagement with fiction, she highlights the differences between literature for young people and literature for adults: "young readers may not have mastered the ability to empathize yet, but they are in the process of developing this skill. Their involvement with young fictional characters, whose theory of mind is also in the making, is still more complicated than adult readers' engagement with adult fictional characters" (2014a, p.90). In my research, I adjust previous work in cognitive poetics, specifically in empathic engagement with fiction, to become a specific argument about how *adolescent* readers interact with *young adult* fiction. I do this in my close-up analyses of young adult novels by considering what opportunities for empathy are possible for adolescent readers, and how they might engage empathy based on the adolescent cognitive capabilities discussed in the previous section. More importantly, however, I construct a specific theory about how young adult fiction offers adolescent readers different possibilities for empathic and cognitive engagement than does fiction for adults.

Adolescence as a Group

The first part of my specific theory is the argument that adolescence itself functions as a group categorization. Not everything is significant enough to function as an in-group or an out-group. Having blond hair or enjoying potato crisps aren't similarities that are significant enough to form an in-group categorization that would affect empathy bias. Other similarities are only meaningful in certain contexts: liking dogs might not normally be significant enough to form an in-group empathy bias, but if your local politician begins campaigning to cull the stray dogs in your area, your community could become divided between those who like dogs and want to save them (in-group), and those who dislike dogs and are in favor of the cull (out-group). Is age a significant enough category to function as a group categorization? It can be – we often tend to socialize with people close to our own age; two people in their fifties will probably have more in common with each other than with someone in their twenties. But it might not always be a group categorization that is significant enough to affect *other* group categorizations, particularly out-group categorizations. For instance, two people who are of different races, genders, and sexual orientations probably will not find the fact that they are both in their fifties particularly significant. Hogan argues that age does act as a group categorization in Anglo Western countries, but only in the categories of childhood, adulthood, and senility, with adults on the top of the hierarchy (2015, p.338).

Though Hogan may not include adolescence in his age-defined group categorizations, it acts as a group entirely separate from both childhood and adulthood. In Western culture, adolescence is not merely a biologically-defined age. Adolescence is a cultural phenomenon upon which we place great social importance – so much so that it has become a social construct. To our culture, adolescence brings up a myriad of connotations and associations: strong friendships, awkward insecurities, rebellion against adult authority, strictly segregated social hierarchies, bullying, first loves, and first sexual experiences. It is a combination of awkwardness and excitement, apathy and passion; in the words of one of the earliest young adult authors, it is "the most vital moment of our lives" (MacInnes, 1996). Our culture even permits the definition of adolescence to take biological differences to extremes. Kokkola states that we as a culture are "in on the game of adolescence…the rules of the game allow teenagers to behave badly, to rebel and break the rules of 'adult' behavior, to be subject to extreme mood swings, to be stressed and anxious, to wear particular kinds of clothes, listen to particular music, to roam around in groups

or 'gangs' and to be incapable of resisting carnal desire" (2013, p.2). Adolescence even has its own culture: we see adolescents as a separate breed of person, "the supposedly classless class of youth as consumer and pioneer of style and 'cool'" (Vulliamy, 2007). Often a group becomes significant because it is also defined by the existence of an opposing out-group. In the case of adolescence, this role is usually played by adults. In Western culture, the term "adolescent" or "teenager" calls up images of a category in almost complete opposition to that of "adult." Adolescents view themselves as a distinct group that are often in conflict with adults. Hilton and Nikolajeva go so far as to describe adolescents as "alienated" from both adults and from society (2012, p.1).

All of these cultural definitions of adolescence mean that within the West, adolescence functions much more strongly as a group categorization than other age groups. We put significance upon it, and it therefore becomes significant.

Young Adult Literature

What does this all have to do with young adult literature? Young adult literature is an exploration and contemplation of what it means to be an adolescent. It is, fundamentally, an attempt to represent the adolescent condition itself – Nikolajeva states that it "takes on the challenge of representing a physiological and psychological condition through…language" (2014c, p.252). I would argue that young adult fiction also takes on the challenge of representing a *cultural* condition, in addition to a physiological and a psychological one. In other words, young adult literature is, at its heart, a representation of adolescence as a group.

It stands to reason that adolescent readers of young adult literature recognize this. Protagonists of young adult literature – themselves both a reflection of and a construction of adolescence – offer a commonality between themselves and an adolescent reader. As Karen Coats states, "as a body of literature, young adult fiction is organized around the same sorts of tensions that preoccupy the physical bodies and emotional lives of its intended audience" (2010, p.316). Many topics and themes in young adult literature are deliberate markers of the commonalities between the adolescent protagonist and the adolescent reader. For instance, Coats notes that in the modern young adult literature of the 21st century, humor and irony are defining features of the adolescent protagonist, and are also defining features of the adolescent experience in the real world (2010, p.325). In another example, adolescence is generally considered to be a

time of identity formation and discovery, and Nikolajeva argues that identity formation is the main theme of young adult fiction in general (2014c, p.251). The examples could go on and on, but importantly, all these commonalities serve to have the effect of creating an in-group of adolescence.

Moreover, if in Western culture we define adolescence as in opposition to the category of adult, nothing does this better than young adult literature. In the field of children's literature, the child (and the adolescent) are seen as oppressed groups; see, for example, the concept of "aetonormativity" in Maria Nikolajeva's book *Power, Voice, and Subjectivity* (2010), or the concept of power in Roberta Trites' book on adolescent literature *Disturbing the Universe* (2000). Of course, young adult literature focuses quite a lot on the oppressed (and frustratedly so) condition of the adolescent. I suspect that this leads to the creation of a more clearly defined in-group of adolescence, as the definition of adults as an oppressive out-group strengthens the feelings of solidarity within the adolescent, oppressed in-group. For all these reasons, I argue that adolescence functions as a *strong* in-group categorization between the protagonists of young adult novels and the adolescent readers of them, regardless of whatever other group categorizations are present. My further arguments as to the consequences of this will be discussed in the next section.

Before I move on, a brief caveat is necessary about the terms "young adult," "adolescent," and "teenager," which are often used interchangeably in popular culture. In general, I use the term "adolescent," sometimes substituting the more colloquial "teenager" when the sense is more cultural or informal. As for "young adult," Kokkola states that she finds the term "unhelpfully confusing and ambiguous" as it "cuts out the liminal zone of adolescence altogether" (2013, p.10). I agree, and I do not use the term "young adult" to denote an adolescent as an individual. I do, however, use it when discussing the genre of "young adult literature," as that is how the genre is now commonly known. I also sometimes use "YA" or "YA literature" as an abbreviation of the genre. While I could use the term "adolescent literature," it does not have the same connotations for the scope and current popularity of the genre, and would cause more confusion than necessary.

<u>Section III – Affect and the Reader</u>

I have been speaking of readers of young adult literature, but I have yet to discuss who those readers are, whether in general or in relation to this project. I have so far been discussing adolescent readers despite the fact that readers of young adult fiction do not necessarily have to be adolescents. Young adult fiction has experienced a boom in popularity in recent years and is now read by many adults – there are even a plethora of "crossover novels" meant to appeal to both adults and adolescents equally (see Falconer, 2009). However, the implied reader of young adult fiction is still, at heart, an adolescent. Nodelman and Reimer state that fictional texts "suggest in their subject and their style the characteristics of the reader best equipped to understand and respond to them" (2003, p.16), and the reader suggested by young adult fiction is undoubtedly adolescent. The reader I discuss in this research is also adolescent.

However, I am not discussing the *implied* reader of the various young adult novels that I examine. This research is theoretical, but it discusses the potential interactions between an adolescent reader and young adult fiction, and the potential impact those interactions could have on adolescents. There cannot be any impact upon an implied reader. But neither am I discussing real readers, as this project is not an empirical study (for reasons why see Section IV of this chapter). For this reason, because I am looking at *potential* interactions and impact, I will be using the term *potential reader* to delineate a hypothetical reader of the young adult novels examined in this thesis. I often shorten this in further chapters to "the reader," and where the term potential is not placed in front of reader, interaction, or impact, it is still intended.

The Potential Reader

The potential reader I address in this thesis is not simply an adolescent. I am examining specifically the potential impacts these young adult novels could have on *majority culture* adolescents, and so the potential reader I address is therefore also a majority culture adolescent. BJ Epstein states that there are "two major types of reading that people do: we might read books to see ourselves reflected, and we might see books to see other selves reflected" (2012, p.287). What happens when an adolescent reads a book with a protagonist who is an "other self" – particularly an "other self" that they consider to be fundamentally different to themselves? I

examine what happens when the protagonist of a young adult text is out-group to the potential adolescent reader in a major respect: the protagonist is of a minority group, and the reader is of the majority culture. This is an examination of challenging empathy; because of in-group and out-group empathy bias, an out-group protagonist means that empathic engagement with that text will be especially difficult for the reader.

Most children and adolescents end up reading books with protagonists who are very similar to themselves. Nikolajeva argues in *Reading For Learning* (2014b) that the way adults encourage children to read can affect their development. As children are frequently encouraged to "identify" with literary characters, it is often suggested that children might only enjoy a story if they are similar to (i.e. can "identify" with) one or more of the main characters. Nikolajeva theorizes that this causes children, especially novice readers, to "immersively identify" with a character to such an extent that they "become" the character (p.85). This causes the child reader to lose the opportunity for empathy development from reading: Firstly, the child is not using their full capacity for empathy, but merely exercising a simple and unchallenging form of simulation or projective empathy, which prevents any substantial empathy development from reading. Secondly, this attitude of habitual immersive identification often causes a child to discard texts in which the characters are not "just like them" (p.85) – meaning that texts that present more challenging opportunities for empathy (and therefore more potential empathic development) are never read in the first place. These habits are developed during early reading and carry on into adolescence, continuing to stunt the potential development of empathy and mind-modeling capacities. Janet Alsup, for instance, argues that adolescents reading solely about characters "just like them" can prevent individual growth and learning (2010, p.10).

So why is my potential reader a majority culture adolescent – an adolescent not belonging to any minority or disadvantaged groups? Majority culture adolescents in particular are constantly reading books with protagonists who are "just like them," since minority representation in young adult literature is so rare (see, for example, Cooperative Children's Book Centre, 2018). Majority culture adolescents are generally not used to reading books with out-group protagonists, and so in many ways, their empathic capabilities go unchallenged and undeveloped. Rudine Sims Bishop coined the terms "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" to reference diversity within children's books, with mirrors being books that reflect the reader's reality back to them (with protagonists who are like them), and windows and doors being books

that let a reader access a different kind of reality (about protagonists who are unlike them). Bishop is vehement that diverse books are essential not only for children and adolescents from disadvantaged groups, but also for the development of majority culture children and adolescents:

> Children from dominant social groups have always found their mirrors in books, but they, too, have suffered from the lack of availability of books about others. They need the books as windows onto reality, not just on imaginary worlds. They need books that will help them understand the multicultural nature of the world they live in, and their place as a member of just one group, as well as their connections to all other humans. In this country, where racism is still one of the major unresolved social problems, books may be one of the few places where children who are socially isolated and insulated from the larger world may meet people unlike themselves. If they see only reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world – a dangerous ethnocentrism (1990, p.1).

Bishop is not alone in this opinion. Arguing for readers to engage with texts about cultures other than their own, Hazel Rochman claims that "if you read only what mirrors your view of yourself, you get locked in. It's as if you're in a stupor or under a spell" (1993, p.11). When discussing Rochman's assertion, Mingshui Cai agrees with this need for "every culture to connect to other cultures" (Cai, 2002, p.118), but adds a caveat: that first and foremost, the mainstream culture needs to be one crossing the borders and doing the connecting. He states that "to achieve interracial and intercultural understanding and rapport, it is crucial for people from the mainstream culture to cross the borders into parallel cultures. We cannot assume that intercultural connection can happen on an equal basis. Therefore…we should direct our efforts to helping mainstream culture children understand and respect parallel cultures" (Cai, 2002, p.118).

Cai's argument is crucial, and is why the potential reader that I analyze is a "majority culture" reader or, in Cai's, words, a mainstream culture reader. When interacting with books featuring a minority protagonist, the opportunities for empathy will be the most challenging for majority culture readers. This is not only because a minority protagonist is out-group to majority culture readers, but also because those majority culture readers will have had far less practice empathizing with out-group members. Members of minorities know far more about the

mainstream culture than the mainstream culture knows about them – they must, as the mainstream culture is the dominant one. As Jackson maintains, "'Minority' people have had to be bicultural, bidialetical, and bicognitive…in order to achieve in mainstream society. By the same token, few demands were made on mainstream members…to learn about diverse cultures" (1993, p.300). This was recognized as early as the 1970s – Charles Valentine called this phenomenon "biculturation" when analyzing black culture in the United States, and stated that "members of all subgroups are thoroughly enculturated in dominant culture patterns by mainstream institutions, including most of the content of the mass media, most products and advertising for mass marketing, the entire experience of public schooling, constant exposure to national fashions, holidays, and heroes" (1971, p.143). Diane de Anda (1984) went on to extend this concept to all minorities, and dubbed it "bicultural socialization." Members of minority groups must be fluent in this "bicultural socialization," whereas majority culture members are never forced to be so. Members of minorities are even pressured to assimilate into the dominant culture (Cai, 2002, p.119), as is often the case with immigrants. Because majority culture members are not forced to "cross borders" in this way to learn about minority cultures, they will have the least practice in doing so. They will therefore have the most difficult time using empathy with those they categorize as out-group. This difficult, out-group empathy is the type of empathy that I wish to examine.

I do not diminish the importance of minority culture adolescents reading texts that feature protagonists of their own minority – the benefits of this are enormous and varied. It can be enormously damaging for children and adolescents not to see themselves reflected and represented in fiction. Bishop states that "when children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part" (1990, p.1). A huge body of research exists on this – see, for instance, Fox and Short (2003), Botelho and Rudman (2009), and Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (2017), to name just a few. However, because I am examining what happens when a protagonist of a young adult text is out-group to a majority culture reader, and how majority culture adolescents are able to practice the underdeveloped skill of using empathy with out-group members, this is an entirely different topic of research than what is covered in this thesis.

"Majority Culture" as a Term

"Majority" or "majority culture" as a term is intended as an overarching term for those for whom out-group empathy would be particularly challenging. It is not used as a term to denote a homogenous majority in Anglo Western countries, which in any case does not exist, but rather as an example of a potential reader who does not share the minority, disadvantaged group, or social division of a protagonist of a specific text. It also denotes a person who possesses social privilege because of their majority status. Of course, in many areas, minorities are becoming numerical majorities – for example, in California, Latino residents now outnumber white residents (United States Census Bureau, 2017). However, I still choose to use the term "majority culture" to represent not a numerical majority, but rather a majority of privilege. Other options for the term are less appealing – "dominant culture," for instance, brings up terrible connotations, while "mainstream culture" seems to denote that some cultures are more "normal" than others. "Majority culture" is thus the term that seems to have the least harmful implications.

What social divisions does the majority culture potential reader belong to? In essence, they belong to the social division (or group) that has the most privilege, and therefore the least experience with out-group empathy. In Anglo Western countries, which this project is restricted to, that means they are white (ethnically and racially), straight, cisgender, and able-bodied. Some of these divisions can be misleading. For instance, creating a binary of straight versus LGBT+ is misrepresentative – both gender and sexual orientation operate on a sliding scale, rather than in distinct categories. But many people have never questioned being anything but straight or cisgender, nor have experienced any of the difficulties that come with being in the LGBT+ community, and so their privilege still puts them into the categories of straight and cisgender. The disabled/able-bodied binary is also misleading. Some disability studies scholars (for example, Barnes, 2016) call for able-bodied people to be termed "temporarily able-bodied" as we all eventually will become disabled, even if only in old age. But just as a majority of the population has never questioned being straight, a majority of the population have never yet been disabled, nor are used to considering how being disabled affects a person's daily life. Majority culture in Anglo Western countries rarely contemplates the consequences of these social divisions; the privilege that creates delineates what is "majority culture."

Only in one respect does the term "majority culture" in this thesis extend to incorporate an underprivileged group. While technically a majority culture figure – i.e. a privileged figure –

would also be male, I am not making a gender distinction of my potential reader beyond the distinction that they are cisgender. This is for several reasons. While females are the underprivileged (cis)gender, female adolescents make up the majority of young adult literature readers (Epstein, 2012, p.291). Furthermore, white, straight, cisgender, able-bodied women are privileged in so many ways that empathy with an out-group character who is of a racial, disabled, or LGBT+ minority will still be incredibly difficult (Mathur et al., 2010, p.1468; Gutsell and Inzlicht, 2010, p.841). Many majority culture female adolescent readers will not have had to engage this kind of difficult empathy before. This is especially true considering that while male protagonists are the norm in children's and middle grade fiction, female protagonists are the norm in young adult literature (Sutton, 2015) – and so the majority of young adult literature protagonists are white, straight, cisgender, able-bodied females (regardless of how authentic those representations of the female gender are). In other words, most of young adult literature is a "mirror" for majority culture female readers, rather than a window or a door. However, in the analyses of the novels in this thesis, I do address, where relevant, the effect of some gendered statements, and consider the potential interactions and impact on male and female readers separately.

Adolescence, Young Adult Literature, and Impact on the Potential Reader

I now come to discussing the second part of the main argument of this thesis – namely, the impact that young adult literature has upon the majority culture potential reader defined in this section. In-group and out-group empathy bias makes clear that texts with minority protagonists present a challenge to majority culture readers: the protagonist is out-group to the reader, and therefore the reader might have less empathic engagement when cognitively interacting with the text. Challenging uses of empathy, like using empathy with an out-group character, can cause empathy skills to become more developed than simple uses of empathy. This, however, is only the case if the reader *takes up* the opportunity to use empathy. If the opportunity for empathy is too challenging – as with a character who is too alienating to the reader – the empathy might not take place at all. A reader might engage less empathy in interacting with a text, they might make more mistakes in their mind-modeling and come to incorrect or superficial conclusions about the text, or most significantly, they might discard the

text completely without having read it, classifying it as "unrelatable." These all represent a lost opportunity for empathy development.

My hypothesis is that young adult literature can, for adolescent readers, change how this challenging empathy takes place. I have argued that adolescence functions as a group category in young adult literature, and that it forms a strong in-group between the protagonist and the adolescent reader. This in-group categorization can have a large impact on the potential reader – the protagonist of a minority young adult novel is no longer out-group in all meaningful aspects. Various group categorizations, whether in-group or out-group, all have an effect on each other where they intersect and interact; this forms the basis of intersectionality. However, Yuval-Davis (2006) criticizes intersectionality as it has been used, especially within the political field, because despite its intentions, it still operates along the "single axis" framework that Crenshaw (1989, p.140) laid out as problematic. Yuval-Davis states that as it is being used, intersectionality is an additive rather than constitutive process (2006, p.195) – in other words, it views the effects of having multiple disadvantaged identities as merely amplifying that disadvantage, rather than viewing each of the identities as amplifying, obscuring, or even changing completely the effects of the others. This latter effect is what I argue adolescence does to other group categorizations created by a minority protagonist – adolescence as an in-group *changes* how the out-group categorizations affect the adolescent reader. In other words, these competing group categorizations change a reader's mind-model of a protagonist.

That adolescence affects how group categorizations interact also necessarily means that it affects empathy bias. It has been demonstrated multiple times that categorizing out-group members, such as those of a different race, into a novel in-group, such as an assigned team, can reduce the effects of out-group empathy bias (Van Bavel et al., 2008, p.1131; Van Bavel and Cunningham, 2009, p.321; Van Bavel et al., 2011, p.3343). Adolescence acting as an in-group in young adult fiction thus changes *how much* empathy an adolescent reader is able to use with a text: adolescent readers could be able to use *more* empathy with young adult fiction than they would with adult fiction that addresses similar minority themes. Here I can answer, at least in one way, my early critic's denigration of the value of young adult literature. Because adolescence performing the function of an in-group allows adolescent readers to practice more challenging empathy than they might have otherwise with general adult fiction, YA literature gives their empathic capabilities more opportunities to *develop* and *improve*. This indicates that

young adult literature has a specific advantage for adolescent readers that other forms of literature cannot offer: it holds the potential of greater development of adolescent readers' empathic and cognitive capacities.

Section IV – Research Restrictions and Methodology

Theoretical versus Empirical Research

Discussing impact and affect, as this research does, seems to lead more naturally into empirical research. However, I have chosen to make this thesis solely theoretical, *analyzing* rather than *measuring* affect. This is for several reasons.

Empirical research is certainly useful and valuable, in particular for examining how real readers react emotionally and cognitively to literature. Empirical studies on empathic interactions with literature generally take one of two approaches. Some use technology to directly investigate cognitive engagement during the process of reading. These studies (such as Speer et al., 2009) are done using fMRI scans, a relatively new piece of technology that can give live scans of the brain while participants are actually reading, showing which sections and pathways are in use in real time. Other empirical studies (such as Mar et al., 2009; Kidd and Castano, 2013; Vezzali et al., 2015) use self-assessed methods to measure empathy and theory of mind capabilities at various intervals before and after reading, in order to determine how reading fiction changed readers' empathy use, and whether empathy can be developed through reading fiction.

On their own, both of these approaches are inadequate in various respects. For one, emotions, emotional response, and especially empathy are all extremely difficult to measure accurately. Self-assessed measures for emotions and empathy, like the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) (Spreng et al., 2009), the Mind in the Eyes Test (Baron-Cohen et al., 2001), and the Empathy Quotient (EQ) (Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright, 2004) are useful methods of measuring empathic engagement and abilities both in general and directly before and after reading. However, they cannot measure empathy use or emotional response during the act of reading itself. Nor can they ever be completely accurate. Real readers, particularly young readers, have a limited ability to assess and describe their own emotions and reactions. As Hogan argues, people are not very good at assessing their own or other people's emotions in everyday life, and "we have little reason to believe that people would, in general, be any better at interpreting what guides their complex emotional response to a literary work" (2011, p.5). Technological means of measuring emotions and empathy, like fMRI scans, offer the advantage of seeing readers' reactions to fiction in real time, as different parts of their brain activate in

response to different stimuli in the text. We can even record the activation of mirror neurons in the human brain (Mukamel et al., 2010). However, this technology is unreliable in its own way. Right now, fMRI scans only show what areas of the brain are in usage. How to isolate and label complex emotions and various types of empathy from that information is a difficult question. Raymond Mar argues that empathy is "a notoriously heterogeneous concept…[it] is an umbrella term that actually refers to a host of subprocesses and related constructs. It is likely that conventional functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) approaches do not provide us with the temporal resolution needed to examine these…processes separately" (2011, p.113). Even if that were possible – the technology and its accuracy is likely to improve – there is the difficulty of deciphering *what features* of a fictional text prompted those complex emotions, and more importantly, *why* (Hogan, 2011, p.4).

While empirical studies' objectives are to learn about readers, theoretical studies' objectives are to learn about the fictional texts and what they have to offer from a cognitive perspective. Literary scholars are much better placed to theorize answers to questions that fMRI scans and self-assessed empathy measures can't adequately answer. Hogan argues that theoretical studies are necessary because literary critics, unlike the scientists involved in empirical studies like fMRI scans, have a great deal more experience and insight into the literature itself (2011, p.5). Literary theorists can recognize significant moments or opportunities in the literature because they have been trained to do so. Theoretical studies done by literary scholars are therefore essential to complement empirical studies done by cognitive scientists or psychologists: they uncover important questions for empirical research to answer, and they fill in the gaps that empirical research has left behind. This theoretical project draws on empirical studies to determine what we already know about empathic engagement, both in the real world and with literature, as well as what we know about adolescent cognitive development and capacities. It then melds this evidence with considerations and analysis of what young adult novels specifically offer readers, and uses these various strands of knowledge and as a springboard from which to create a new theory on the affect and impact of young adult literature.

Primary Text Choices

Up to this point in the chapter, I have been discussing YA literature mostly as a whole. However, in order for my arguments to be both coherent and consistent, I needed to restrict

which kinds of young adult novels I could examine. While I will obviously be looking at YA literature with a minority protagonist, the young adult novels that I restricted myself to making these arguments about are also mimetic (a reflection of the real world, i.e. not fantasy, science fiction, etc.), published in the last ten years from when I began selecting my primary text choices, and published originally in English in an Anglo Western country. In this section, I discuss why these restrictions were necessary, as well as the reasons behind my choices of specific primary texts to analyze in depth.

Anglo Western novels

I restricted my search to publications from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand, as these countries all have relatively similar versions of Anglo Western culture. Assumptions about which groups are in-group and out-group – and which groups are minorities – can't be made across cultures with a high degree of difference, and I had the most experience in Anglo Western cultures and could therefore make the most accurate arguments about it. I also wanted to avoid any variables with translations from other languages, since things as small as word choice can have a large effect on readers' group categorizations or empathic engagement. In the end, the texts that I chose ended up being solely from the United Kingdom and the United States; this is not because I selected for that, but because those texts ended up fitting best into the thesis. The UK and US also have the highest amount of publishing power, and so most of the possible texts I was choosing from were in any case from those countries.

Mimetic fiction

I restricted the scope of this research to mimetic fiction, as non-mimetic genres like fantasy or science fiction offer too many variables to analyze properly in such a condensed space. Non-mimetic genres often have alterities or minorities that do not exist in our world (for example, "mudbloods" in *Harry Potter*). They can also still include the minorities of our reality, such as race and disability, or else refrain from featuring them at all. Non-mimetic alterities – like mudbloods – won't create the same kinds of in-group and out-group categorizations as will minorities that exist in the real world, as they won't carry with them all the connotations, stereotypes, and histories that real-world minority groups do. The group categorizations of non-

mimetic alterities will therefore be determined completely by the author's positioning of which groups are in-group and out-group. Non-mimetic texts which do feature real-world minorities, meanwhile, can create a world in which those real-world minorities are not disadvantaged or oppressed. Moreover, group categorizations around real-world minorities can be affected by group categorizations of non-mimetic alterities. These are all interesting prospects to consider, and work in this area is fascinating. For instance, Vezzali et al., (2015) demonstrated that reading passages from *Harry Potter* about prejudice towards mudbloods caused students to feel less prejudice towards stigmatized groups in the real world – homosexuals, immigrants, and refugees – despite the fact that *Harry Potter* never discusses these groups. Non-mimetic texts thus have enormous potential for the type of effects I discuss. However, in the space of one thesis, it would be impossible to engage properly with all of the variables that non-mimetic genres offer while still convincingly providing enough evidence and discussion to make my original arguments.

Recent publications

Restricting my research to recent publications in the last ten years from when I began selecting primary texts in 2017 means my primary texts must have been published from 2007 onwards. In the end, I only chose two novels published pre-2010: Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) and Paula Yoo's *Good Enough* (2008). Restricting my research to recent young adult novels is a more important constraint than it seems to be. Karen Coats noted in 2010 that "teens who have instant access to images, information, and communication think differently than teens did ten years ago," and that because of this "our cultural narratives about adolescence have changed" (p.323). In the eight or nine years since Coats made that argument, these cultural narratives have continued to develop and change rapidly. If adolescence as a group is defined by cultural narratives, as argued earlier in this chapter, a modern adolescent reader will have a very different idea of what the adolescent in-group looks like than will a reader from ten or more years ago. Similarly, recent YA novels reflect a different understanding of what adolescence is than do YA novels from decades earlier. In an older YA novel, the cultural markers of adolescence that would normally convey an in-group commonality between the reader and the protagonist could be partially irrelevant to a modern adolescent reader. This is not to say that all older YA novels are irrelevant for the modern adolescent audience. However, if adolescence is to function as a strong enough in-group

categorization to affect the empathy bias of other out-group categorizations, the version of adolescence experienced by both the reader and the protagonist must be relevant to the same time period.

For this reason, I also excluded novels that were written in the past ten years but set in time periods other than the present. This is a popular choice for much contemporary YA literature, particularly given the current cultural nostalgia for periods such as the 1970s and the 1980s. Given that these novels are written recently, with a contemporary cultural understanding of the meaning of adolescence, I would argue these novels actually depict adolescence as an in-group more than novels written outside my publishing time frame. My arguments can still be valid with YA novels with minority protagonists like *The Smell of Other People's Houses* (Hitchcock, 2016) and *If I Ever Get Out of Here* (Gansworth, 2012) – both set in the 1970s – and like *Eleanor and Park* (Rowell, 2012) and *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (Sáenz, 2012) – both set in the 1980s. However, the fact remains that they do depict a different experience of adolescence than novels set in the present, and this introduces a variable that would need to be considered carefully. Because I wanted to keep my discussions consistent throughout the thesis, I excluded these types of novels from my primary text selections.

This brings up another issue: the fact that young adult literature is (generally) written by adults, and that the adolescence a protagonist experiences is merely a version of adolescence created by adults. This is idea of the "hidden adult" examined by Perry Nodelman (2008) that hides behind pieces of literature for children or young adults. Many critics argue that for this reason, didacticism is a fundamental part of children's and young adult literature (see, for example, Beauvais, 2015), and that this means that young adult literature is not about adolescence, but rather about "what it might or should be" (Hilton and Nikolajeva, 2012, p.8), or about pushing adolescents to grow up into adulthood (Trites, 2000). Didacticism, as dictated from the adult author onto the adolescent reader, would surely increase feelings of resentment within the reader, and prevent the adolescence created by the adult author from acting as an in-group categorization. However, the adolescent reader's perception of this is the most important issue: if the didacticism is not blatant, or if the depiction of adolescence is not obviously inaccurate, will they stop to consider the implications of the adolescent protagonist being a creation of the adult author?

Recent young adult novels have taken a more modern tack and have become far less didactic than their older predecessors. Using the example of how sex is depicted in YA literature (something adults have an extreme interest in controlling in adolescents), Kimberley Reynolds argues that young adult literature has changed dramatically since the turn of the century, switching from being didactic to having a more "in-your-face" prose (2007, p.122). This kind of "in-your-face," defiant prose has a much higher likelihood of encouraging an in-group categorization on the part of the adolescent reader. While it may still be written by adults, attention is not drawn to that fact as much as it is with didactic versions of YA literature. The defiant and rebellious nature also has the added benefit of casting adults as an antagonistic out-group that the adolescent in-group must stand up to. This kind of inter-group conflict strengthens perceptions of in-group commonalities, meaning that a modern "in-your-face" prose not only draws attention *away* from the adult author as an out-group member, but also draws attention *toward* the protagonist as an in-group member. Kimberley Reynolds made this argument on modern young adult literature in 2007, and since then this trend in YA literature has only strengthened. My earliest book choice, *True Diary* (Alexie, 2007), was recognized at the time of its publication for its unapologetic, frank, and blatant prose. I have chosen only books published from then on because they continue this trend, and because in recent YA novels, adult didacticism is far less likely to interfere with adolescent readers categorizing the adolescent protagonists as in-group. Even so, a few of the novels in this thesis have didactic elements; I have included them in order to give an example of how this more old-fashioned style can easily affect a reader's group categorizations and empathic engagement.

Even aside from readers' perception of the "hidden adult" author, YA literature can still be considered a depiction of adolescence as a group, despite its adult creators. Karen Coats argues that YA literature "*constructs* as well as reflects an idea of adolescence" (2010, p.324, emphasis added), and that "young adults fashion their identities from the images and discourses that culture makes available to them" (2013, p.53). Our cultural definitions of adolescence still affect adolescents' view of how their in-group is defined, despite the fact that those cultural definitions are mostly created and promulgated by adults. Adolescents therefore use YA literature, and other adult creations, to add to their idea of what adolescence as an identity means.

Adults creating a definition of adolescence through YA literature is also not a "one-way street." As Marah Gubar puts it, there is a "roundabout" in which "adult discourse about what

childhood is (or should be)…is also shaped by the comportment, doings, and utterances of young people" (2016, p.295). In this case, "childhood" can be replaced with "adolescence": adults create a definition of adolescence from which adolescents "fashion their identities" (Coats, 2013, p.53), but the "images and discourses that culture makes available" to adolescents, like YA literature, are themselves affected by how adolescents behave. Of course, Gubar's "kinship model" approach goes on to stress "the similarities that link children and adults" (2016, p.300). I would argue that cultural definitions of adolescence instead stress the *differences* between adolescents and adults. Importantly, however, viewing the two groups in opposition to each other seems to be key to the definition of adolescent identity, whether that definition is created by adolescents, by adults, or by both together.

Minority protagonist

We now come to the most important restriction on the selection of young adult novels examined in this thesis: the minority protagonist. In practice, this means that all the protagonists of the primary texts I examine are of a racial or ethnic minority, are in the LGBT+[2] community, are disabled, or are some combination of the above. However, like the term "majority" or "majority culture," there can be issues with using the term "minority" as a catch-all phrase that creates a sense of uniformity among members of different disadvantaged groups, or even members of the same disadvantaged group. Yuval-Davis (2006) criticizes the terms "identities" or "minorities" to denote disadvantaged or marginalized places within societies for this reason, and instead uses the terms "social divisions" (p.195) or "differences" (p.202). However, as Judith Butler (1990) notes, the list of terms for social divisions and differences (gender, class, race, sexuality, disability…) could go on endlessly, given the compounding of multiple identities and the influence of various contextual and historical factors. Some overarching terms – such as disability – are needed, despite the fact that they cover a huge and diverse range of issues and

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[2] The acronym that represents the LGBT+ community can take on many forms: LGBT, LGBT+, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA, etc. I have chosen to use the term LGBT+ in this thesis as a compromise between length and inclusivity. By no means do I exclude the existence of, nor the importance of, those who are queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and more. The + is meant to denote these groups, as well as the many other identities which fall into the LGBT+ community. It is always possible to add more letters and symbols, but longer iterations like LGBTQIA come across as distracting when repeatedly used in a long thesis. I therefore chose LGBT+ in order to have a term that was both inclusive and brief enough to prevent confusion.

divisions. Moreover, I find the term "social division" less recognizable and understandable, as well as too awkward, to use in place of "minority," while the term "difference" could be confused with a myriad of other factors. I therefore use the term "minority" in my research as an overarching term for those who are possessed of a marginalized or disadvantaged identity, social group, or "difference."

As Yuval-Davis (2006) notes, it's also important to address the problematic idea that there is a sense of uniformity or interchangeability between members of different minority groups. Alison Kafer and Eunjung Kim use the example of disability to demonstrate that this interchangeability fails to address intersectional issues. They state that inserting "disability" where there are terms like "race" or "sexuality" has risks; "the risk with such substitutions is that they proceed as if the terms are fully separate and separable – as if disability were not already present in constructs of race or sexuality – and as if the concepts do not have their own histories and logics" (2017, p.126). They go on to argue that "substitutive practices keep us from uncovering which differences come to matter and how" (p.126). Jennifer James and Cynthia Wu agree, stressing "the importance of understanding how disability has always been racialized, gendered, and classed, and how racial, gender, and class differences have been conceived of as 'disability'…The interplay of exclusion and privilege situate individuals in complex and often contradictory ways" (2006, p.8). Given that my research stresses the effects of what happens when multiple group identities overlap and intersect, it hopefully avoids the trap of considering any of these topics substitutive. However, at times I still find it necessary to discuss individually one group categorization, or one aspect of a character, in order to analyze its influences. When I do so, I wish to make clear that at no point am I considering any of these identities as fully separate or as interchangeable. As Kafer and Kim note, "it is possible to focus on one dynamic of inequality while still being critically aware of its entanglement in – rather than priority over – other dynamics" (2017, p.127).

Text selection

In making the actual choices for the primary texts that would feature prominently in my analyses, I searched through various lists of books with minority protagonists on sites such as Goodreads and Amazon, as well as used specific resources like the nonprofit organization We Need Diverse Books, which keeps a full list of awards and websites that identify YA books with

diverse protagonists. When choosing novels, I did not necessarily select for quality; some of the novels I chose provide good examples of issues I discuss *because* of their poor quality, some of the texts I chose I admire greatly, and some I found to be merely mediocre or middling. In each choice, rather than base the decision on quality, I wanted the novel to be a useful example of the issues and themes I discuss, and provide particularly clear evidence for the arguments I make. I tried to select a fairly equal number of books that featured protagonists of a racial or ethnic minority, protagonists in the LGBT+ community, and disabled protagonists. However, as several of my chosen texts had more than one protagonist, or a protagonist in several of these minority groups, the process was not exact. The appendix at the end of this thesis details the approximately sixty novels I considered for selection. In the end, I chose thirteen novels to examine in detail. Of these, five novels feature protagonists of racial or ethnic minorities, five feature protagonists in the LGBT+ community, and seven feature protagonists with a disability. These numbers add up to more than thirteen because four of the novels feature protagonists who are members of several different minority groups.

Within each of the larger, overarching categories – race/ethnicity, LGBT+, and disability – I attempted to choose a range of protagonists who represented various identities within those categories. However, my selection was limited not only by which books provided the best examples for my arguments, but also by publishing trends, which control the availability of books featuring protagonists of certain minorities.

Disability

I wanted my choices of novels with disabled protagonists to feature protagonists with both physical and cognitive disabilities. I succeeded in that respect, but I ended up choosing multiple novels with "repeat" representations: two protagonists have cerebral palsy (*Say What You Will* and *I Have No Secrets*), while three protagonists have OCD (*Say What You Will*'s second protagonist, *History is All You Left Me*, and *Turtles All the Way Down*). Meanwhile, I selected one novel with a blind protagonist (*She Is Not Invisible*) and one novel with a protagonist with a chronic illness, severe combined immunodeficiency (*Everything Everything*). To some extent, these choices follow popular trends in disabled YA literature. The most common physical disabilities that seem to be represented in mimetic YA fiction are cerebral palsy, blindness, and deafness, while the most common cognitive disabilities represented seem to be

OCD and autism (Disability in Kid Lit, 2018). I settled on these text choices, despite the "repeats" of certain disabilities, both because they provided the best examples for my research that I was able to find, and also because even within the repeated disabilities, there was a widely represented range of experiences.

Race/ethnicity

Recent publishing trends in children's and YA literature identified by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2018) show that most children's and YA books written about people of color feature protagonists who are black, followed closely by books written about Asian Pacific protagonists. Books written about Latino protagonists follow on the list, with between half to two thirds as many books as black protagonists. Books written about Native American, First Nations, or indigenous protagonists trail far behind, with less than twenty percent of the amount of books written about black protagonists. The table below, made from data compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (2018), shows these publishing trends in exact numbers over the past five years.

YEAR	NUMBER OF BOOKS RECEIVED AT CCBC	BOOKS WITH AFRICAN/ AFRICAN AMERICAN PROTAGONISTS	BOOKS WITH ASIAN PACIFIC/ ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN PROTAGONISTS	BOOKS WITH LATINO PROTAGONISTS	BOOKS WITH AMERICAN INDIAN/ FIRST NATIONS PROTAGONISTS
2018	3,653	405	314	249	55
2017	3,700	355	312	218	72
2016	3,400	287	240	169	55
2015	3,400	270	113	85	42
2014	3,500	181	112	66	38
TOTAL	**17,653**	**1,498**	**1,091**	**787**	**262**

In the end, my novel selections did not particularly follow these publishing trends. After selecting for a range of races and ethnicities, and selecting for those texts that functioned well as examples, I felt my choices provided a wide enough range to be a diverse selection. One features a Native protagonist (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*), one features a black

protagonist (*Dear Martin*), one features a biracial protagonist who is half black, half Japanese (*Everything Everything*), one features a Korean American protagonist (*Good Enough*), and one features a Japanese American protagonist (*It's Not Like It's a Secret*).

LGBT+

Young adult novels with LGBT+ protagonists have experienced perhaps the most dramatic boom in publishing and demographic changes in the past five to ten years. Five to ten years ago, LGBT+ young adult novels primarily featured gay male protagonists, which BJ Epstein noted as a distinctly odd gender bias, given that adolescent girls read more than adolescent boys (2012, p.291). The same pattern holds mostly true in the present; most LGBT+ young adult books are about gay males, with lesbian protagonists holding the second most common position. However, Christine Jenkins and Michael Cart identify several very noticeable changes in LGBT+ young adult literature since 2010, including the "dramatic increase in the sheer number of LGBT+ titles that are being published," as well as an increase in LGBT+ protagonists instead of secondary characters (2018, p.164). They also note an increase in the number of texts with bisexual, trans, asexual, and intersex protagonists, which barely existed before 2010, and an increase in the number of LGBT+ protagonists of color (2018, p.164-169). Epstein noted in 2012 (p.292), for instance, that there were barely any bisexual, trans, or asexual protagonists in young adult novels, while I was able to identify a recent flurry of young adult novels with bisexual, transgender, or asexual protagonists – nowhere near the number of novels with lesbian or gay protagonists, but still too many to identify individually in this thesis. In my primary text choices I aimed for a diverse representation of various identities within the LGBT+ community, and thanks to the newly available plethora of texts, was able to select novels that provided this diverse representation while also providing good examples for my arguments. I selected one novel with a gay male protagonist (*History is All You Left Me*), one novel with a lesbian protagonist (*It's Not Like It's a Secret*), one novel with a bisexual protagonist (*We Are Young*), one novel with a transgender protagonist (*If I Was Your Girl*), and one novel with an intersex protagonist (*None of the Above*).

Outline of Further Chapters

A brief overview of the structure and themes of further chapters in this thesis, which directly examine the chosen primary texts:

In Chapter 2, I discuss group categorizations in depth, examining how group categorizations operate within a fictional text, how adolescence functions as a in-group in YA novels, and how this affects other group categorizations in YA novels.

In Chapter 3, I move into discussing empathy while exploring YA novels whose protagonists are strongly out-group to a majority culture reader. I examine specific moments in the novels that offer opportunities for empathy use to the reader, identify two types of challenging empathy, and discuss what patterns of empathy use the novels encourage or discourage overall.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the concept of active empathic engagement, something that encourages the development of readers' empathic abilities. Having already discussed specific instances that create opportunities for empathy, in this chapter I focus on larger patterns in fictional texts, and examine how overarching plotlines or themes can affect active empathic engagement. I look at novels whose plots feature protagonists who change from an in-group member to an out-group member, or vice versa. I then discuss whether these plotlines create successful or unsuccessful strategies for encouraging readers' active empathic engagement.

In Chapter 5, I use the figure of the adolescent disabled detective as a specific example to further discuss and tie together the major themes of Chapters 2-4.

In the Conclusion, I examine in greater detail the repercussions of real-world effects of reading YA fiction, investigate some of the issues that come with considering fiction as a vehicle for empathy development, and discuss what these topics mean on a larger scale.

Chapter 2
Adolescence as a Group: Group Categorizations in Depth

This chapter begins the examination of primary texts by exploring how young adult literature can construct and even control a reader's group categorizations. While later chapters will consider the effects of group categorizations on empathy use and empathy development, in this chapter I will be focusing solely on the first parts of my argument: that adolescence functions as a group in young adult literature, and that young adult literature constructs adolescence as an in-group between the reader and the protagonist. This examination of how group categorizations function in YA novels will allow for an in-depth demonstration of how in-group and out-group theory, originally a social psychology theory, can be adjusted to suit literary discussions. Moreover, it will also provide examples of how the presence of adolescence as a group affects, interacts, and intersects with a reader's other group categorizations. These examples will provide a grounding from which to discuss a reader's empathic engagement in later chapters.

As a reminder of the discussion in the "Intersectionality" section of Chapter 1, whether we categorize someone as in-group or out-group can change depending on intersecting identities that take priority over one another. Hogan emphasizes that identity categories are "contextual" (2004, p.11), and which category has the most effect on grouping bias can depend on the surroundings and situation. While in real life, group categorizations are determined by visual cues, behavioral cues, and context, these things do not always exist in a fictional text, or may not cause the same effects as in real life. When considering group categorizations in fiction, the surroundings and situation are determined by factors both external and internal to the text: by both real-world context and textual construction.

Regarding external factors, depictions of a group may have wide relevance, or may only have relevance in certain contexts. For example, while some themes, like first loves, will be recognizable markers of adolescence in a range of Anglo Western contexts, other depictions of the adolescent experience are only relevant in certain situations. Adolescent readers in the United States, for instance, may feel that young adult novels that depict school shootings, like *This Is Where It Ends* (Nijkamp, 2016), *Silent Alarm* (Banash, 2015), or *Violent Ends* (Hutchinson et al., 2015), are essentially narratives about the current adolescent experience. In other countries or time periods, however, a school shooting plot line would not necessarily be a marker of adolescence in and of itself.

Regarding internal factors, the fictional text itself holds great influence over which group(s) takes priority over others in a reader's categorizations. All texts manipulate group categorizations to some degree. In-group and out-group divisions are "pervasive in literary works" (Hogan, 2011, p.70), and any text will lead a reader into categorizing some characters as in-group and some as out-group. This is true even in the simplest texts, when all this serves to do is set up which characters are the heroes and which are the villains. Plot lines themselves can be markers of a certain group – as in the earlier example, a plot line around a first love can serve as a marker of adolescence, and a school shooting plot line can do the same, dependent on context. However, textual construction and narration have perhaps the greatest influence on a reader's group categorization of the protagonist. A text with first-person narration that directly conveys the protagonist's thoughts and feelings encourages a much different group categorization than does a text with an external narrator, particularly one that has an adult perspective. Constructions like internal focalization, use of the first-person perspective, use of the present narrative tense, or use of free indirect discourse create a more "intimate" bond between the reader and protagonist (Nikolajeva, 2014c, p.253), encouraging an in-group categorization. Kümmerling-Meibauer cites various narrative strategies that can make unlikeable protagonists more accessible to a reader, including foregrounding, or "literary passages that are clearly marked by the author (for example: irony, different points of view…) in order to emphasize certain emotional conditions," as well as enhancement of awareness, or "literary strategies such as overstatement, enrichment, and repetition, which draw the reader's attention to the text's seminal passages and assertions" (2012, p.131). These narrative devices can re-center previously out-group characters, adding to a reader's mind-model of them and decreasing the amount of out-group bias.

On the other hand, other features of textual construction can serve to complicate a reader's in-group categorization of a protagonist. Narrative strategies that separate the reader from the protagonist can both confound previously simple group categorizations and also restructure how the reader has been interacting with an entire text. Nikolajeva cites defamiliarization, metafiction, unreliable narrators, and the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia (multiple narrative voices) and Nikolajeva's own concept of heteroscopia (multiple characters' points of view) as narrative devices that complicate a reader's interaction with a text (2014c, p.254-256). Especially when used with a character who would otherwise be unquestionably in-group, these devices can manipulate a reader into reevaluating every group categorization that they have previously made within a text.

Kümmerling-Meibauer (2012) and Vermeule (2010) both argue that an author can control a reader's use of empathy with a text. Kümmerling-Meibauer (2012) emphasizes that it is the author's positioning of the protagonist that affects this. Vermeule, meanwhile, highlights that how an author constructs a narrative – and where that narrative positions the reader – can affect the reader's "process of simulation and inference drawing…the author can toggle the switch [to turn the use of empathy off and on in us] at will" (2010, p.45). As empathy and group categorizations are connected, this same argument can be made of group categorizations: though an author cannot take away a reader's in-built biases and group identities, they can construct a text in such a way as to change how much of an effect those biases and identities have on group categorizations.

In the following sections, I examine four young adult novels – *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007)[1], *Good Enough* (Yoo, 2008), *We Are Young* (Clarke, 2018),

[1] Early in 2018, many allegations of sexual harassment against Sherman Alexie, among other misconducts, began to surface as the #MeToo movement gained momentum in the publishing industry. Many Native scholars and writers also pointed to how Alexie's writing has suppressed other Native authors for years, and that he had become, in essence, the default Native voice. For more details on this, please visit Debbie Reese's open letter about Sherman Alexie on her blog, *American Indians in Children's Literature* (2018). I would urge anyone interested in Native American young adult literature to look at novels such as Eric Gansworth's *If I Ever Get Out of Here* (2013), Cynthia Leitich Smith's *Rain Is Not My Indian Name* (2001), and Debby Dahl Edwardson's *My Name Is Not Easy* (2011), among others. *True Diary* should not be the only Native young adult novel that is widely known in the public consciousness. I chose *True Diary* as a primary text for this thesis before these allegations became public because it provided an excellent example of a phenomenon that I wished to examine. I have chosen not to replace it

and *It's Not Like It's a Secret* (Sugiura, 2017). This chapter provides examples of how YA novels featuring minority protagonists manage the competing and intersecting group categorizations of their protagonists, how their textual construction affects which groups take priority at various moments, and how they manipulate the reader into various group categorizations. In particular, this chapter examines how adolescence is able to function as a group in these YA novels, whether it is significant enough to be an in-group categorization between the reader and the protagonist, and how that affects other potential group categorizations caused by the protagonists' minority identities.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* (2007) is about Junior, a Native[2] teenager living in poverty on a Native American reservation who was born with hydrocephaly. Junior decides that he wants to go to school off the reservation, in a predominantly white town 30 miles away that has a better school, with the hope that he can someday pull himself out of the extreme poverty of the reservation. As the narrator, Junior is very blunt about the realities of living in poverty on a reservation and about the realities of racism, particularly by whites, towards Native Americans in the United States.

The novel constantly manipulates the potential reader into group categorizations, but also constantly fluctuates those group categorizations, so that at no time does the protagonist, Junior, remain stable as either in-group or out-group to the reader. *True Diary*'s main method of manipulating a reader's group categorizations is by portraying Junior as categorizing others himself – including both other characters and the reader. The narration is in first-person, and Junior categorizes almost everyone, including the reader, who he speaks to directly, as out-group to himself at some point in the novel. At other points, he deliberately emphasizes commonalities

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with another text because it still provides the best example I could find. It is necessary, however, to note the harm that Alexie has caused to women and to Native authors, and the harm caused to the range of Native voices available to the general public.

[2] While I label the protagonists of YA novels in this thesis as belonging to "minority" groups, it's important to acknowledge that some view it as a problem to address Native Americans as a "minority" population in the United States. Because of tribal sovereignty, tribal members possess dual citizenship in the United States (both American citizenship and tribal citizenship) and have a political difference to "minority" groups because they are sovereign nations with their own political systems (Cook-Lynn, 2007, p.86). However, they are still *oppressed* groups within the US, and so I have included a novel with a Native protagonist despite using the term "minority."

with the reader in order to accentuate their in-group status. Through Junior's group categorizations, the novel deliberately leads the reader into reciprocal categorizations. However, Junior's categorizations constantly conflict, intersect, and compete, and this combines to both push the reader away and draw the reader closer at the same time.

Junior as in-group to the reader

Adrienne Kertzer (2012, p.62-3) argues that *True Diary* doesn't necessarily fit the mold of YA literature because it doesn't possess what Trites (2000) argues are central adolescent themes of the YA genre: repressive parental figures and a maturation process about the understanding of mortality (Kertzer notes that while there are many deaths in *True Diary*, the deaths lead to considerations of alcoholism on reservations rather than a contemplation of the permanence of mortality). However, looking at *True Diary* as a contemporary YA novel, it has many markers of the modern YA genre as well as markers of modern adolescence. In particular, its humor, irony, and "in-your-face" prose about sexuality (Reynolds, 2007, p.122) are all markers of both the YA genre and of an adolescent in-group.

The adolescent experiences depicted in *True Diary* guarantee that adolescence functions as a significant enough group to cause a strong in-group categorization. Junior is vehemently, undeniably adolescent, and very open about the awkwardness and humor that comes with adolescence. Junior's dry humor is in itself a marker of his adolescence; Coats states that humor and irony are defining features of both the modern adolescent experience as well as the modern adolescent protagonist of 21st century YA novels (2010, p.325). Junior performatively plays the role of the humorous, ironic modern adolescent protagonist: he draws cartoons of the giant pimples he gets on the end of his nose on important days at school, he daydreams about romantic fantasies with the pretty girl in his class at his new school, and he openly acknowledges his adolescent male tendencies:

> *Naked woman + right hand = happy happy joy joy.* Yep, that's right, I admit that I masturbate. I'm proud of it. I'm good at it. I'm ambidextrous. If there were a Professional Masturbators League, I'd get drafted number one and make millions of dollars. And maybe you're thinking, well, you really shouldn't be talking about masturbation in public. Well, tough. I'm going to talk about it because EVERYBODY does it. And EVERYBODY

likes it. And if God hadn't wanted us to masturbate, then God wouldn't have given us thumbs. So I thank God for my thumbs (p.26, original emphasis).

Though it often goes unspoken, masturbation is considered one of the hallmarks of adolescence. This kind of "in-your-face" frankness about classic adolescent experiences – especially ones that a teenager would take pains to hide in real life – expresses camaraderie with the adolescent reader (particularly male readers in this context, though of course female adolescents masturbate as well). Junior declares to his fellow adolescents that they ought not to be embarrassed by their adolescent urges. *True Diary* deliberately makes the reader feel in-group to Junior through the conspiratorial and humorous tone Junior uses to describe their adolescent commonalities. This focus on Junior's adolescence is a narrative invitation to the reader to consider the protagonist as an adolescent in-group member.

Moreover, *True Diary* takes pains to bring an adolescent reader close to Junior's perspective. Narrated in first-person perspective and internally focalized through Junior, the novel allows a great deal of access into Junior's thoughts and feelings. Both Junior the protagonist and Junior the narrator are very much adolescents; the narration is past-tense, but it is past tense in the nature of a diary (as the title implies). This brings a connotation of immediacy, as if Junior is writing in past-tense at the end of each day or week, rather than as an adult looking back on his adolescence. Junior also writes this diary *for* the reader, in public discourse with the intention of being read. As the narrator, Junior speaks directly to the reader (rather than to a narratee) in a conspiratorial manner throughout the novel, often including phrases like "Well, what would you have done?" "Trust me," or conversational and joking phrases that appear to argue with what Junior assumes the reader is thinking: "That's right, I am a book kisser. Maybe that's kind of perverted, or maybe it's just romantic and highly *intelligent*" (p.30, original emphasis). By invoking the reader in this way, Junior treats the reader as a confidant and a friend: an adolescent equal. If, as Hogan argues, it is the "extension" of one's identity to include others that forms an in-group categorization (2004, p.8-9), then by speaking directly to the reader in this way, Junior extends his definition of adolescence onto the reader, categorizing them both under the same umbrella. Junior's categorization of the reader as in-group invites the reader into a reciprocal categorization of Junior; the reader is thus encouraged to treat Junior as an in-group member.

Junior as out-group to the reader

Despite the adolescent in-group markers in the novel, the narration often swings suddenly in the other direction, separating the reader from Junior and emphasizing that the reader and Junior are mutually out-group. Junior's race, and in particular his experience of Native life on a reservation (reservation life is very different to life outside it), creates an obvious boundary between the reader and Junior. While the potential reader whose responses I analyze is majority culture, it's significant that *True Diary*'s implied reader is also majority culture. *True Diary* treats its reader as non-Native: Junior's narration is constantly explaining the realities of being Native on a reservation.[3] These explanations already create distance between Junior and the reader, but the very fact that the novel takes pains to educate the reader about these issues stresses the fact that Junior lives in a very different world to the reader, and is therefore an out-group member. As the novel goes on, the depictions of Junior's experience of being Native continue to separate the reader from Junior as a protagonist, alienating and distancing them from him, constructing Junior's out-group categorization of the reader and in doing so cultivating the reader's reciprocal out-group categorization of Junior.

However, the narration manipulates the grouping in numerous diverse ways, constantly changing how race functions as a group. White people (and thus a majority culture reader) are always depicted as out-group to Junior, but that out-group is portrayed in various lights. Whites are sometimes cast as a villainous and antagonistic out-group, and other times as a more positive out-group that represents privilege and hope.

Whites as antagonistic out-group to Junior

In some instances, Junior, as the narrator, categorizes anyone non-Native as a decidedly antagonistic out-group that is hostile to his Native American in-group. The reader is explicitly included in Junior's out-group categorization. Through his explanations of the extremes of reservation poverty, Junior's tone can come across as defensive or even condescending, as if

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[3] Junior's tribal nation is not specified in the novel, and the novel depicts an experience of non-specified Native/reservation life. I do not mean to generalize and conflate various tribal nations and experiences while speaking of the depiction of Native experiences in *True Diary*; I use "Native" as an overarching term because the novel does not provide a more specific alternative.

Junior resents that the reader has likely had better opportunities than he has had. Junior's method of speaking directly to the reader emphasizes this issue:

> Do *you* know the worst thing about being poor? Oh, well, maybe *you've*
> done the math in your head, and *you* figure, poverty = empty refrigerator
> + empty stomach (p.8, emphasis added).

> *We* reservation Indians don't get to realize *our* dreams. *We* don't get those
> chances. Or choices. *We're* just poor. That's all *we* are (p.13, emphasis
> added).

Unlike when Junior conspiratorially addresses the reader as a fellow adolescent, this use of reader invocation depicts opposing groups. The reader, in this case, is decidedly "you" and not "we"; Junior positions the reader as against him, rather than with him. The reader is thus forced to interact with a narrator (and protagonist) who is making it clear that he views the reader as entirely out-group. If Junior considers the reader to be out-group, the reader would therefore have a difficult time resisting the urge to respond in kind by categorizing Junior as out-group as well. Just as Junior's in-group categorization of the reader as an adolescent encouraged a reciprocal response, so too the reciprocal response is encouraged here. When Junior treats the reader as out-group, the reader will treat Junior the same way.

Junior's out-group categorization of white people often portrays them as not only "unlike" Junior, but also downright hostile, ignorant, and wrong – in other words, an antagonistic out-group. In the United States in particular, this can be a touchy subject, with Native peoples trying to get official recognition of the wrongs done to them for centuries by the US government and the majority population. A large portion of the majority population, meanwhile, is unwilling to acknowledge the harmful representations of Natives in popular culture and the still-present harmful governmental policies towards Natives. General examples of these tensions include the Standing Rock protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline, the controversy and furor over sports teams names and mascots like the Redskins, the celebration of Columbus Day in public schools, and the popular narratives surrounding Thanksgiving as well as the decorations that often accompany the holiday. In fact, *True Diary* touches on several of these hot-button topics. The mascot of Reardan, the mostly white school that Junior transfers to, is an Indian, described by Junior as being "bright red" (p.56). During Thanksgiving, Junior asks his father what Natives

have to be thankful for, and his father responds that "we should give thanks that they didn't kill all of us" (p.102). Reading about topics like these from Junior's perspective, where he obviously considers white people to be a hostile out-group, might increase a white reader's discomfort, strengthening their out-group categorization of Junior.

Whites as aspirational out-group to Junior

At other times, Junior still views white people as an out-group, but regards that out-group in a more positive light. Karen Coats notes that while Junior still possesses out-group bias, that bias is not always negative: "[Junior] sees the members of his own in-group [Natives] as distinct and diverse individuals, some good, some bad, but most complicated mixtures of admirable and less than admirable traits. On the other hand, he pictures white people as a homogenous out-group of caricatured privilege" or as "imaginary exemplars of the mythical source of all hope" (2017, p.22). Despite this more positive light, Junior's bias is still present; Coats states that "this individuation of in-group members and lumping together of out-group members is a common feature of the bias, even when, as Arnold [Junior] does, you see the out-group as more appealing than the in-group" (2017, p.22). Junior's bias is depicted most clearly in Junior's sketch, shown on the right, of the difference between white and Native adolescents.

On the right, the "Indian" is represented by a portrait of Junior – the reader will know this as Junior has drawn himself before and is recognizable by his signature glasses. All the objects and statements on his side of the sketch are drawn from his personal, real-life experience. Meanwhile, on the left, the portrait of the white teenager is no one specific, but rather a representation of

Image redacted due to copyright restrictions

everything Junior imagines it is to be white and privileged. The reader is still cast as out-group and is distanced from Junior, but in this instance the out-group is viewed positively, with longing. Just as the potential reader is sometimes aligned with a group that is portrayed as villainous and malevolent, they are also in these moments aligned with a group that is privileged and desirable. Both of these narrative manipulations are, however, still alienating for the reader – whether enviable or villainous, white people are still the out-group, and still depicted in a "homogenous" and "caricatured" way. It could be particularly alienating for a poor white reader, who might resent Junior's conflation of being white with being rich. This discomfort is likely to be increased when, at other points in the narrative, the text depicts moments that still force a white reader to acknowledge that, regardless of poverty, their race still provides them with a privilege that Junior does not have.

The sketch, meanwhile, emphasizes Junior's out-group membership to the reader in a more immediate and efficient way than language and narrative are able to. The brain processes visual stimuli more quickly and more instinctually than it does language, in a "lower" pathway in the brain (LeDoux, 1996, p.146; Evans, 2003, p.26-7). Images thus have an instinctual impact that words lack, and this image's categorization of white people, and therefore the reader, as out-group will have an immediate and strong impact upon a reader's perceptions. Again, because group categorizations are likely to be reciprocated, the strength of this image's group categorization of the reader will produce a strong out-group categorization of Junior.

Junior's depictions of his disability, hydrocephaly, are also alienating enough to cause a strong out-group categorization. In the very beginning of the novel, he describes how many people on the reservation enjoy bullying him for this disability, which is visible by his larger head, his stutter, and his lisp. He bitterly describes what happens in reservation culture to kids like him: "Do you know what happens to retards on the rez? We get beat up. At least once a month" (p.4). He also draws a portrait of himself, highlighting how his disability causes him to appear to others – a caricature of the "retard" he feels others see.

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The narration and the image interact in a "counterpoint" (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2000, p.255) – Junior's cartoonish self-portrait pokes fun at himself, acknowledging that he must look silly and different to others, while the narration highlights Junior's disdain for those who take those differences too seriously. An able-bodied reader is challenged, by the counterpoint of word and image, to confront their own biases surrounding the appearance of disability: the image shows the reader how their bias might cause them to view Junior, but the narration expresses contempt for that bias, and in turn for the reader.

Intersecting group categorizations

True Diary depicts various conflicting group categorizations of the reader. While in each immediate moment a binary (in-group versus out-group) is functioning, the novel is constantly shifting, both building and destroying its own categorizations, and encouraging the reader to do the same. Junior himself has intersecting and competing categorizations of everyone, both other characters in the novel as well as the reader themselves.

In the examples I have discussed so far in which Junior is out-group to the reader, Junior has aligned the reader as taking the opposite perspective to himself. This is clear in Junior's combative tones, in his caricatures of white adolescents, and in the counterpoint of Junior's narration and his visual self-portrait. However, there are other instances in which Junior aligns himself *with* the reader, despite the fact that he acknowledges the reader is out-group. At one point, Junior describes how much he hates his white teacher when his teacher explains how educators were taught to beat Native children and suppress their culture, using the phrase "kill the Indian to save the man" (p.35). Though his teacher is at this point regretful of his past actions, and acknowledges the damage he did, Junior feels hate building towards his teacher when listening to the descriptions of what the teacher had done earlier in his life. In this case,

through Junior's narration, the reader is positioned as on *Junior'*s side of this argument. He speaks to the reader directly by saying, "Man, at that second, I hated Mr. P *hard*" (p.35, original emphasis), and then marvels with the reader about how Mr. P is "confessing" to him. There is even one of Junior's sketches included at this point, a humorous cartoon which pokes fun at the fact that this older man is confessing to a teenager (shown below).

By making Mr. P the butt of the joke, the cartoon affiliates the reader, who is meant to laugh, with Junior, who is making the joke. The fact that the reader is an adolescent, like Junior, and would laugh at an older man "confessing" anything to them, makes this all the more clear. Meanwhile, in a more "complementary" interaction between the narration and the image

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(Nikolajeva and Scott, 2000, p.225), the narration makes clear that the reader is meant to share in Junior's outrage at Mr. P's confessions. Though most readers would undoubtedly agree that Mr. P was wrong in his past actions, the hatred that Junior describes towards white people and the systematic policy they created to destroy Native culture might make a white adolescent reader feel uneasy and unsure. Through positioning the reader on his side, Junior forces the reader to share his perspective, and agree with his hatred of white people's actions – this means taking a group perspective *opposite* to the reader's own group.

At other times, Junior aligns himself with the reader but against Natives (his own group). When Junior decides to leave the reservation to attend Reardan, hoping for a chance at a better future, other Natives begin to ostracize him. People on the reservation hate him for leaving, calling him a "white-lover" or an "apple" (red on the outside, white on the inside), and viewing him as a traitor for leaving. Junior expresses bursts of resentment towards being Native, especially after he loses his grandmother, his family friend, and his sister in subsequent losses all related to alcoholism, a large problem on the reservation. When told of his sister's death in a fire accident after a party, he narrates his thoughts in all capitals: "OF COURSE THEY HAD A BIG

PARTY! OF COURSE THEY WERE DRUNK! THEY'RE INDIANS!" (p.205, original emphasis). Junior's narration here again addresses the reader directly, with the use of the capital emphasis and the phrase "of course." At this point, however, he aligns himself as with the reader but against Natives on the reservation, implying that the reader will share in his outrage and his resentment of the rampant alcoholism amongst his family and friends. Junior once again shifts his group allegiances, complicating a reader's understanding of where Junior stands in their own group categorizations.

True Diary seriously complicates group categorization on the part of the reader. To a potential adolescent reader, the novel at once invites the reader into a club of adolescent camaraderie, to enjoy in the in-group sentiment, and also alienates the reader through Junior's unflinching and blunt portrayals, casting either himself or the reader as out-group in various, ever-shifting ways. Were it not for the strong presence of adolescence in the novel, which allows adolescence to function as a compelling in-group, the out-group categorizations that Junior's narration creates might be too overwhelmingly alienating to allow a reader to interact with the text. Instead, the narration's strategy of constantly shifting Junior's group categorizations blurs every categorization a reader might make.

Clare Bradford argues that *True Diary* "interrogates the assumptions which shape relations between Indians and whites in the novel" (2010, p.47). By examining *True Diary* from the perspective of in-group and out-group categorizations, it's clear that one of the assumptions it interrogates is how whites and Indians group each other, and that the novel includes the reader in that interrogation. To go even further, the novel also interrogates group categorizations and their effects as a whole. Because the narrative structure manipulates a reader into categorizations that shift back and forth so much, the novel creates a scenario in which a reader could become *aware* of their own categorizations. When interacting with others, even one jarring shift in a group categorization is likely to make us aware of our own perceptions and biases. *True Diary* manipulates a reader into so many jarring shifts that a reader might begin to pay attention to how their perception of Junior is changing back and forth. The reader might analyze how and why they have categorized Junior, making a conscious acknowledgement both that they are grouping characters in the text, and that this grouping affects their interaction with the text. This is what is dubbed "metacognition" or "metacognitive orientation" (Kummerling-Meibauer, 2012, p.138): being conscious of one's own thought processes, and being conscious of one's own cognitive

interactions with a fictional text. The consequences of metacognition will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Good Enough

Paula Yoo's *Good Enough* (2008) is semi-autobiographical, and the protagonist, Patti Yoon, is a second-generation Korean immigrant living on the East Coast of the United States. Patti is in her last year of school and her parents put a great deal of pressure on her to perform perfectly to ensure that she will get into an Ivy League university. While her parents are intensely focused on her academic achievements, Patti secretly spends time nurturing her other, more characteristically adolescent and American interests: her fandom of a boy band and her developing crush on Ben, a boy in her school. The novel follows her through her struggles to make decisions about her future, whether that be following the path her parents want for her or following her own desires.

Good Enough at first operates in a somewhat similar manner as *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, in which the narrative creates an alternating push-and-pull of alienation and intimacy with the reader. As in *True Diary*, the shifting style of narrative encourages a potential reader to reciprocate by categorizing Patti as alternating between in-group and out-group, following the narrative's lead. *Good Enough* clearly delineates two conflicting groups for the protagonist – as American (and through this, as an adolescent) and as Korean – and these groups are often set in direct opposition to each other, unable to exist at the same time and within the same person without causing conflict. Patti negotiates between her various identities, shifting which group she identifies with depending on the situation. Mathison notes that this is a common pattern in Asian American fiction for children and young adults: "a linear delineation of identity does not express the complexity of the many different identities Asian American children and teens may be juggling…Asian American children, as depicted in fiction, are very adept at moving and negotiating between several different identities in different spaces and situations" (2018, p.5). While Patti may be adept at moving between her identities, however, she still struggles with her desire to resolve them. She continues to shuttle back and forth between her identities, unable to meld them into a cohesive sense of self. As Patti is pushed and pulled between her two opposing identities, so a reader is pushed and pulled between

categorizing her as in-group or out-group, though neither of those categorizations stay stable for very long.

Patti's trouble reconciling her Korean identity with her American adolescent identity is no great surprise. Though only semi-autobiographical, *Good Enough* is enough of an autobiography to follow common trends in Asian American autobiographies for children: "By recontextualizing the forms and themes of traditional American autobiography, [Asian American autobiographies for children] enact alternative modes of being and identifying as American, though itineraries often marked by separation and difference, rather than by easy integration" (Davis, 2006, p.187). The main focus of *Good Enough* is Patti's difficulties consolidating her multiple identities into a cohesive whole. As a second-generation immigrant, Patti is out-group to almost everyone in some way, and the reverse is also true – everyone is out-group to Patti in some way. This is due to the sheer number of identities that she must juggle: "First-, 1.5-, second-, and multiple-generation Asian American children and adolescents need to navigate between more than their ethnicity and the mainstream culture; they must also negotiate between their parents' homelands, their immigrant communities within the United States, their ethnic American (second-generation) communities, and mainstream American society" (Mathison, 2018, p.4). Patti negotiates all of these. Her parents are Korean, but she does not speak Korean nor understand much of what life was like for them in Korea. At her school, she is the only Asian student, and is teased on several occasions for her race. She is somewhat isolated; she categorizes her own parents as out-group because although they are of her race, they are not of her birth nationality, and she categorizes her fellow students as out-group, as they are of her nationality but not of her race. Neither her parents nor her fellow students share her own particular culture, which is influenced by her parents' culture but also by her experiences as an American adolescent. It's a small wonder Patti often feels most comfortable with her church youth group – a group of teenage second-generation Korean immigrants – but they, too, are sometimes out-group to her, as she pushes against the constraints placed upon her more than they do.

Symbolic representations of group categorizations

The novel uses several mechanisms to highlight how Patti categorizes others, including the reader. Food, for instance, is often a symbolic representation of Patti's alienation from, or

allegiance to, her conflicting groups. The novel is in first-person, present-tense narration, but the narration is often interrupted by the inclusion of Korean "Spam" recipes with explanatory notes as to what the Korean ingredients are, how to make them, and the importance of Spam meat in Korean culture. These recipes and their accompanying explanations separate Patti from the reader very effectively, placing Patti in a group as Korean and placing the reader solidly outside that group. Seymour Chatman would identify these recipes as "non-narrated" textual elements (1978, p.147). Like Junior's sketches in *True Diary*, these non-narrated elements often carry more of an impact than the narrative itself. While they are not necessarily images, their interruption of the narrative ensures the reader's attention is especially drawn to their contents. They fulfill Kummerling-Meibauer's (2012, p.131) identified narrative strategies of "clearly marked" passages and the "enhancement" of reader awareness, though rather than heightening a reader's connection to the protagonist, in this case, these elements serve to create distance between the reader and the protagonist. Only in these non-narrated elements does Patti address the reader directly; just as Junior directly addressing the reader and pointing out their lack of knowledge about Native life serves to make the reader feel as though they are out-group, so Patti's direct address in these recipes makes clear that the reader is out-group. She assumes that the reader has no knowledge of Korean food (otherwise the recipes would not be necessary), and provides specific instructions and notes to the reader that make clear they are not Korean: "Note: I'm assuming you have a local Korean grocery store somewhere in your town where you can buy the kimchi…If you don't, well, the only way to make kimchi is to ferment a bunch of cabbage underground for a few years. Good luck with that" (Yoo, 2008, p.71).

American food also features as a symbol that separates Patti from the reader. She rejects traditional American food – an indication of the reader's in-group – when feeling outcast from other students at school. At one point, she rejects a chicken patty sandwich (a typical American meal) after a racist incident at her school when a boy repeatedly imitates Chinese language sounds and then calls her a "Jap" (Yoo, 2008, p.80-82). This incident reflects the complicated nature of Patti's negotiation of her Korean American identity when in a white majority setting: Patti becomes not only Korean American, but also simply Asian American, due to American culture "generally stereotyping [Asian Americans] under one monolithic umbrella" (Mathison, 2018, p.3). Patti's rejection of typical American food in this instance emphasizes her discomfort

with the American majority culture's view of her identity. Her allegiance is placed with her ethnically Korean group identity, and she rejects American majority culture as a group identity.

Food in the novel also works in the opposite way, however, sometimes symbolizing Patti's allegiance to the reader's group. Patti loses her appetite for Korean food, which she normally finds comforting, when her mother prevents her from doing typically adolescent activities, like going over to her crush's house to play rock music, because she is not allowed to be with boys and must instead concentrate only on her schoolwork. Patti's frustration with the limitations her parents put on her (due in large part to their culture), and her longing to be a more typical American adolescent, is expressed through a bowl of noodles and Spam looking increasingly unappetizing. Though Spam is one of her favorite foods, Patti states herself that "I think I'm getting a little tired of all this Spam" (p.139) – expressing in actuality her exhaustion with cultural restrictions and her longing to be in-group to a majority culture reader.

Music genres in the novel are also common symbols that disconnect Patti's conflicting group identities. Patti categorizes classical music as Korean, since to her parents other kinds of popular modern music are more frivolous and not worth the attention. Rock music, which her crush Ben introduces her to, instead becomes associated with the majority culture American group, as she has to hide her obsession with a boy band from her disapproving parents. Rock music also becomes a symbol that connects majority culture American as a group with adolescence as a group – as rock and roll has traditionally been associated with Western adolescent rebellion for decades, so it becomes a symbol of Patti's defiance of her parents. Patti sneaks over to Ben's house several times to play rock music with him, accompanying his guitar with her violin. Ben has to teach her to improvise, which she has never done before, and tells her she must throw out her classical training in order to play well in rock, emphasizing the novel's portrayal of Patti's conflicting group identities as unable to coexist. In these "jam sessions," rock music becomes associated with improvisation, greater creativity, a lack of rules and rigidity, and a sense of high-risk and high-reward, though Patti struggles to accomplish some of these traits. All of these traits are also associated with majority culture America, particularly when juxtaposed against Patti's parents' Korean values of structure, safety, and predictability. "American" as a group is thus connected to and allied with "adolescence" as a group – both of which are in-groups to a majority culture reader.

Expectations are the most influential symbol that the novel uses to define Patti's conflicting groups and her relationship to the reader. Expectations define how Patti can be "good enough" in each of her identities. In Patti's experience, expectations are what define not only Korean culture, the more prevalent and noticeable example, but also what define the culture of the American adolescent. The most obvious example in the novel is through Patti's parents' Korean culture, and their exceptionally high expectations of Patti's performance. Patti describes her parents as conflating success and financial security with happiness, while she longs to have more choice in her day-to-day life as well as in her future plans. Less obvious, though still very prevalent, is the undertone of typical American adolescence placing demands on Patti as well. American ideals of youth demand that Patti follow her dreams and invest in her passions, regardless of whether or not this is a risky or difficult path to take.

Patti's music exemplifies these expectations. Patti plays the violin extremely well; she is what she calls a "B-tier prodigy," meaning that she is easily the best player in her state, but not an "A-tier prodigy" like another Korean girl who performed with the New York Philharmonic at the age of eight. Patti truly enjoys playing the violin, seeing it as a passion and source of joy. Her parents, however, see it as simply another way for her to get into Ivy League universities: unless you play with the Philharmonic as a child, music is too risky and insecure a career. However, Patti is told by her violin teacher that she should apply to Juilliard, and she is also pushed by Ben to pursue music as a career. Americans tell Patti it would be "a shame to waste her gift" (p.97). This pressure to pursue dreams in the face of risk and insecurity, and the sense that it is almost immoral not to do so, is as much of an expectation on Patti as her parent's expectations of her are. American-ness acts as a group and becomes represented by the drive to take risks and "follow your dreams" instead of looking for security. This kind of American culture is also very specifically American *adolescent*. These lessons and values are specific to the Millenial and Gen Z generations; while modern adolescents are taught repeatedly that they can do anything they set their minds to, and that they should reach for the stars, previous American generations were taught to look for financial security rather than pleasure or passion.

Patti is isolated from both the reader and from other characters by these expectations placed on her, whether to perform academically well and become successful and secure, or to risk everything to pursue her passion. These expectations define Patti's out-groups, and indeed distance her further from these out-groups, as she feels that neither set of expectations is really

the right choice for her. Both Korean-ness and American adolescence ask Patti to fulfill their expectations, and Patti cannot be "good enough" for both groups. As the narrative defines these groups, so the reader, too, is forced to define themselves by the same groups. An adolescent reader who is a majority culture, white American might thus be forced to question whether their own in-group is defined by the sometimes unrealistic and harsh expectations to follow one's passion regardless of future consequences or responsibility. The questioning of American adolescent values would create an uncomfortable alienation for a majority culture reader, who must cast Patti as both in-group, due to her American adolescent desires and behaviors, and out-group, due to her race and ethnicity.

(Un)resolved group categorizations

A reader engaging with *Good Enough* is encouraged to alternately categorize Patti as in-group and out-group at various points in the novel, as Patti negotiates her understanding of her own identity and her conflicting desires. By the end of the novel, however, this conflicting group categorization of Patti ceases to alternate, and instead settles in a muddled, unfinished, in-between state. Although the novel presents the end as a resolution of Patti's struggle between her conflicting identities, instead it ends up acting as a further convolution of the mutually exclusive group identities in the novel, with Patti wavering between two groups. The novel ends with a feeling that Patti has convinced her parents to allow her to follow her dreams, and the sentiment that this is the "right" path. Unlike in the middle of the novel, where Patti expresses some discomfort with being told she "should" pursue music as a passion and as a career or else it was a "waste," the end of the novel concludes on an odd note of Patti believing that the American way is "right" but also considering the fact that it might not even be possible. It is a somewhat garbled picture of both wholly believing in and yet also questioning the possibility of fulfilling American expectations.

Near the end of the novel, Patti is in a store with her father when a mother of one of her classmates loudly criticizes Patti's father's accent and speaks about how "these people" disrupt the country. Patti watches her father struggle to hide his hurt, and questions "what's the point of getting into a good college and becoming successful if in the end I'll still run into more people like Stephanie's mom who will never, ever believe that I'm good enough?" (p.284). However, on the last page of the novel, soon after this scene and without any further contemplation of this

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painful and complex racial issue, the novel concludes with Patti's graduation, where Patti herself states that her "possibilities are endless" (p.322).

Rather than attending Juilliard, Patti chooses that she would rather attend an Ivy League school to study music. This choice is meant to represent a "middle way" between the Korean expectations to get an Ivy League education and the American expectations of pursuing a risky career in music. This "middle way" conclusion is typical of Asian-American young adult literature: as Mathison states, "most young adult Asian American novels feature a plot structure in which the 1.5-generation and second-generation children realize that they do not need to reject their parents' native culture to embrace American society, but that both cultures can be synthesized within themselves to make their unique selves" (2018, p.12). However, *Good Enough* is not successful in depicting Patti's choice as a viable middle ground. The unresolved tension left from Patti's encounter with Stephanie's mother in the store overshadows this last scene, making it feel unclear, rather than the triumphant resolution it is meant to be. Patti decides to attempt the "American Dream" of pursuing her music, albeit at an Ivy League school, and the American Dream thus becomes "good enough" for Patti. However, there is no further acknowledgement that not everyone can achieve it because of the limitations American culture places on ethnic minorities. Unlike the beginning of the novel, there is also no acknowledgement of the fact that American expectations to follow one's dreams come from place of extreme privilege. Patti is told by an Ivy League interviewer, who herself risked everything to go into a career in music, that Patti has "all the time in the world" (p.219), and Patti states herself that her "possibilities are endless" (p.322). Yet these things would not be true for someone who didn't have a financial security net if their risky career went wrong – if you don't have a family or others who can support you in times of crisis, a risky career choice can mean homelessness. Risky choices are also not possible for those who have their own family to support. Patti herself experiences first-hand the limitations put on her because of her race in the scene with Stephanie's mother, and yet overlooks them soon after when believing in these "endless possibilities." This idea that working hard and believing in yourself will overcome bias and disadvantages is traditionally very American, but it places the onus of overcoming those disadvantages on Patti herself, rather than focusing on American attitudes in general as problematic. *Good Enough*'s conclusion demonstrates that while Mathison may be correct that many Asian-American texts for children and young adults *attempt* to show that disparate

identities can be "synthesized" to form a "unique self" (2018, p.12), actually synthesizing all the identities that Asian American adolescents must navigate is much more difficult and complex than it appears. The ability to synthesize these identities successfully in these novels might lead a reader into a more resolved and concrete group categorization of the protagonist. Failed attempts at synthesis, as in *Good Enough*, will cause the reader to be left with a convoluted and uncertain group categorization of the protagonist, as well as likely significant out-group bias towards the protagonist's ethnic identity.

As Trites (2000) argues, the "need to recognize one's own agency" is a "central pattern" in young adult literature (p.129). Patti sees her choice at the end of the novel as giving her this agency, but in fact, rather than escaping her parents' expectations, she merely succumbs to the American expectations she has been struggling with all along. Because the novel concludes without Patti resolving the racial issues brought up in the scene in the store, Patti's attitude *becomes* the American attitude. The novel thus ends on a note of deciding that the choice of being an American adolescent is "good enough," and with Patti seemingly joining the reader in the group of "American adolescent" after convincing her parents that their Korean expectations will not make her happy. The idea that American adolescent culture has also put unrealistic expectations onto Patti has been somewhat subsumed, and her overall sentiments are those of American adolescence as it has been represented as a group throughout the novel. Patti chooses a set of expectations to fulfill, and aligns herself with Western adolescence as a group – aligning herself with the reader and against her parents.

This idea of adolescent "agency," often depicted in a struggle against parents, means that in young adult novels, adults, particularly parents, often form an antagonistic out-group oppositional to the adolescent in-group fighting for agency and power. Because Patti chooses to defy her parents' Korean expectations and instead chases her creative dreams, Patti's parents become portrayed as an antagonistic out-group that is hostile to Patti's needs. Meanwhile, American identity as a group, while once also antagonistically out-group to Patti's needs because of the pressure it placed on her, is now centered as the in-group, and as the "correct" choice. For the reader, Patti's parents become an antagonistic out-group formed of both the adult (parental) out-group as well as the Korean out-group. The novel again allies adolescence as a group with majority culture America as a group, but significantly it also associates Korean as a group with adulthood as a group – both of which are out-group to the reader. The ending of the novel thus

encourages the reader to see Patti as choosing their own in-group, but importantly, to also see Korean expectations and culture as doubly out-group (both by adulthood and by race/ethnicity) and unable to coexist with their own in-group. Patti, as the protagonist, might end the novel more closely associated with the reader's in-group, but for the reader, her ethnic identity – and Korean ethnic identity in general – is pushed farther into the realm of the out-group.

In *True Diary*, where the narration forcefully manipulates the reader into alternating group categorizations right up until the end of the novel, the reader is compelled to consciously acknowledge that they are grouping characters in the text, and that this in turn is affecting their interaction with the text. While *Good Enough* begins with a similar phenomenon, at the end of the novel the reader is left with unresolved tensions between the alternating group categorizations, as well as with a conclusion portraying the reader's own in-groups as more correct or desirable. Unlike in *True Diary*, a reader may therefore be unconscious of how their group categorizations have been manipulated, and in particular unconscious as to how their out-group biases towards ethnic out-groups have been further entrenched.

We Are Young

We Are Young (Clarke, 2018) is set in Britain and features a bisexual female protagonist, Evan. Evan's mother has just married Tim, her new stepfather. Tim's son Lewis, Evan's new stepbrother, is in a car accident with three other teenagers. Lewis is the only survivor, but loses his arm. At first, everyone assumes the car crash was an accident caused by drug use, but Evan, digging deeper, discovers it was actually a suicide pact between the four teenagers, and that Lewis's survival was an accident. Meanwhile, Evan begins to struggle with Tim, who has turned out to be emotionally abusive. Evan also negotiates her relationships with her best friends and band members, a boy and a girl, both of whom she has dated in the past and both of whom she has lingering feelings for.

We Are Young features many themes that young adult literature scholars note are typical YA tropes: an experience and acceptance of death (Trites, 2000), an exploration of sexuality (Kokkola, 2013), and most of all a contemplation of adolescent power and agency (Trites, 2000; Nikolajeva, 2010). The theme of power and agency is explored in one of the most common ways for a young adult novel – as a rebellion against adult society. *We Are Young* constructs adults as an antagonistic out-group hostile to adolescents, a feature that, while common, strengthens the

power of adolescence as an in-group categorization. Less commonly, however, it also links Evan's bisexuality – which makes her out-group to a majority culture reader – with her adolescence, encouraging the reader to extend their sentiments of adolescent in-group solidarity onto the bisexual out-group as well. Moreover, the novel's conclusions as to the agency possessed by the groups of adolescence and bisexuality increase these feelings of inter-group solidarity.

Adults as antagonistic out-group

As in *Good Enough*, where Patti's parents formed an adult out-group that was antagonistic to Patti's needs and desires as an adolescent, *We Are Young* portrays adults as a nebulous, mostly homogenous out-group that is antagonistic to the in-group of adolescence. However, this adult out-group is formed not only of parental figures, but also of the adult world at large. Evan associates antagonistic adult power with the media, the police, politicians, and more, arguing that not only do they not understand her adolescent in-group, but also that they actively harm them by the power they exert. This is common in YA literature; Trites noted in 2000 that a defining feature of the genre is "adolescent protagonists who strive to understand their own power by struggling with the various institutions in their lives" (p.8) and that YA literature, unlike children's literature, "foreground[s] the relationship between the society and the individual" (p.20). This is still true with much of modern YA literature. The construction of an out-group on the opposite side of a direct conflict makes for a stronger in-group categorization; as Laszlo and Somogyvari note, an in-group categorization in literature becomes more significant with the depiction of an inter-group conflict that creates a sense of an antagonistic out-group (2008, p.123). Because of this conflict, adolescence acts as a strong in-group categorization in *We Are Young*, and as such is likely to take priority over other possible group categorizations.

Adults and adolescents form an us-versus-them opposition in Evan's first-person narration. Evan constantly uses "we" to describe adolescents and "they" to describe adults, encouraging the reader to share in her categorization of the two groups. Evan describes adult power structures as deliberately harmful to adolescents. When teens from local schools hold a memorial for the car crash, the local paper's headline is "Local Teens' Illegal Beach Rave" (p.164). Evan then becomes angry:

It dawns on me that they hate us. The media. It's the only explanation for the way they talk about us. They don't understand us, and they hate us for it. They call us lazy, irresponsible, dangerous, ungrateful. You hardly ever see positive stories about teenagers. There's the odd sporting or academic triumph, or a tragic battle with cancer. They only like us when we're excelling, or dying. No one's interested in the in between (p.164).

Evan also blames the police's stereotypes surrounding adolescents as the reason for their inability to determine the motives behind the car crash:

It bugged me from the start – it didn't look like they were friends, the four of them. That didn't seem to bother the police or the press – they were teenagers, and that was that. As if being in the same age group explains everything. People just jumped on the explanation about the warehouse party because they think that's what we do: we drink and take drugs and do illegal shit (p.250).

Evan depicts adults as holding negative and untrue stereotypes about adolescents, which cause adults to make decisions that actively harm adolescents' well-being. Moreover, while Evan sees members of her own adolescent in-group as individuals with various motivations and identities – this is why she is suspicious of why four teenagers who aren't friends would be driving together – she herself holds stereotypes about adults as a group, depicting them as a homogenous force that hates adolescents, that exploits adolescents, that stereotypes and scapegoats adolescents, and through all this that *harms* adolescents. As Coats notes, this individuation of in-group members and homogenous "lumping together" of out-group members is typical of group bias (2017, p.22). Evan depicts adults as having negative out-group bias of adolescents, and she herself has negative out-group bias of adults: the narrative draws a clear dividing line between the two groups and sets up the conflict between them.

The novel depicts mental health and suicide as issues that are particularly relevant to adolescents. While the novel acknowledges that individual mental health issues are no one's fault, it also portrays many of the mental health issues suffered by adolescents as partially inflicted by adults and adult society. In Evan's town, the local council withdrew funding for a hotline for young people with mental health issues. When Evan learns about this and connects it

to the car suicide pact, she blames adult power – politicians and adult stereotypes of her generation – for the reasons behind the suicide:

> Maybe if people woke up and realized that being a teenager is actually pretty fucking hard and it's not because we're always on our phones or don't know the meaning of hard work or any of those other bullshit things that people say. And maybe things *were* better in the 'good old days' because guess what? The world has gone to *fuck* and politicians are pissing away our future and no one fucking cares (p.252, original emphasis).

Again, adults form an out-group that, both through their actions and through their stereotypes of Evan's in-group, actively damage the in-group's interests. The reader is encouraged to see a crisis affecting their in-group members as the *fault* of the out-group. The reader is also unambiguously encouraged to view their adolescent in-group as *oppressed by* the adult out-group and the power it wields. These types of conflicts and power dynamics inspire feelings of solidarity in the reader between themselves and the protagonist of the novel.

The novel also links the cause of adolescents' mental health crises to specific adult actions. Like in *Good Enough*, unreasonable parental pressures and expectations form the basis of another depiction of adults as an antagonistic out-group. The boyfriend of James, one of the boys in the car, states that James was struggling with perfectionism and one of the reasons was that "there was pressure from his father. Donovan wanted James to succeed" (p.267). Tim, Evan's stepfather, becomes particularly associated with the adult out-group in the novel. Lewis tells Evan that Tim emotionally abusing him was the reason for him becoming suicidal; Tim was constantly telling Lewis to "man up" and get over his sadness, and exerted control over him by implying that Lewis was responsible for his mother's death. Evan herself feels parental pressure from her mother, despite their generally good relationship. When her mother says things like "What did I do to deserve a daughter like you?" Evan states that "every time she says something like this, all I feel is pressure. It feels like a warning – *you can't fuck up, I'm counting on you*" (p.54-55, original emphasis). These more specific instances, in which adults are not a homogenous, nebulous out-group figure, but rather a specific character, further emphasize adults' out-group nature to adolescents, even when the adult figures are more individuated. Regardless of whether the parents in these instances have positive or negative relationships with

their children, they all either deliberately or inadvertently harm their adolescent children's mental health.

Again, these are common YA tropes; Trites notes that parental figures "are more likely to repress than to support" adolescent protagonists (2000, p.56), and that adolescent protagonists often struggle against adult institutions (p.8). The conflict strengthening the categorization of adolescence as an in-group is typical of YA literature. However, *We Are Young* uses this conflict trope to do something more unusual: to create an association between the in-group of adolescence and a minority out-group.

Linking bisexuality and adolescence

As stated, *Good Enough* and *We Are Young* similarly cast adults as an antagonistic out-group; both even use the theme of parental pressures as one way to do so. However, in *Good Enough*, the adult out-group is also associated with the racial out-group, as Patti's Korean parents are the main figures representing both of these groups. Patti's struggles against her parents portray her as fighting to be in the reader's majority culture in-group, distancing herself from the Korean out-group. The opposite happens in *We Are Young*: the adolescent in-group is not associated with majority culture, but rather with the struggles of a minority culture: bisexuality. The adult out-group, meanwhile, is hostile to both the groups of adolescence and bisexuality. As the reader is led into a sense of solidarity with Evan, the adolescent, so a sense of solidarity is created for Evan, the bisexual.

Many of the symbols of Evan's adolescence are also symbols of her bisexuality. For instance, like most adolescents and YA protagonists, Evan has intrusive sexual thoughts that interrupt her focus on other subjects. With Evan, these thoughts occur both about male and female characters, in particular her band members, Sid (a boy) and Daze (a girl). In one scene, Evan's intrusive sexual thoughts continually interject into the narration of their band practice: "it's unwise to start thinking about her lips" (p.45), "the curve of her neck makes me think unthinkable thoughts" (p.46), and "he gets up and heads to the fridge…giving me a perfect view of his arse" (p.50). Moreover, as in *Good Enough*, *We Are Young* takes the history of rock music as traditionally associated with adolescence in Western culture and uses it as a symbol of Evan's adolescence. However, Evan's music and her band are also strongly associated with her bisexuality. Evan states that the first time she watched Daze play the drums was "the day I

realized that maybe, just maybe, I wasn't a hundred percent straight" (p.56). As Evan used to date both of her band members, sexual tensions with both of them pepper their musical association, despite the fact that they are all trying to be just friends: "I found myself in a band with two of my exes. The biggest surprise about that is that it's only *occasionally* awkward and confusing" (p.37, original emphasis).

The most significant connection between the groups of adolescence and bisexuality occurs during an inter-group conflict with adults. Evan's new stepfather, Tim, is the character most associated with the adult out-group due to his deliberately hostile actions. At the beginning of the novel, Evan is upset that her mother's marriage will mean a significant change for her. She drinks too much at their wedding reception and ends up having sex with one of the waiters, Marcus, outside behind the reception. Evan is upset about her lack of judgment in this instance, but tells no one and moves on from the incident as she tries to support her mother. Later on, however, Tim is showing her around his radio station when he ushers her into the sound booth and promises on live air that she will play a song for the listeners. When he puts a recorded track on to give her time to set up, Evan refuses to play multiple times. In the end, to save himself face in front of his listeners and force her to play, Tim threatens her: "'I saw you,' he whispers. 'Saw me what?' He pulls back a little so that I can see his face. He smiles as he says, 'I saw you fucking that waiter at my wedding'" (p.136). After he says this, to make clear what he wants out of this threat, Tim then says, "Play something cheerful, ok?" (p.138). He doesn't say anything more, but Evan understands the blackmail: "I had no choice…he would tell Mum if I didn't go along with what he wanted. Not that he threatened me. He just left it hanging there, watching me panic" (p.137).

Though not overtly stated, Tim's threat is a reference to his adult out-group oppression of three groups. The first is quite obviously adolescence; he has been associated with the antagonistic adult out-group throughout the novel, and in this instance he explicitly connects Evan's actions with the stereotype of adolescent impulsiveness – after Evan agrees to play a song, he says "I won't tell your mum about what you did. I was young once" (p.139). The second group is the female gender; the threat of the "slut" label ruining a reputation is far worse for a female than a male, particularly a female adolescent. Female readers of this moment will likely recognize this, increasing their feelings of in-group solidarity with Evan. The third group is bisexuality. Despite the fact that Tim saw Evan having sex with a boy, meaning that the threat

isn't overtly about non-straight sexual relations, bisexuality is associated with stereotypes of being sex-mad, lustful, and unable to control impulses around sexual behavior. Other stereotypes around bisexuality also surround Tim's threat to tell Evan's mother about her behavior, such as the stereotypes that Bonnie Kneen outlines about bisexuals: "closeted, deceitful, disloyal, and undependable" (2015, p.371). Tim blackmails Evan with these stereotypes, threatening to reveal her as a negatively stereotypical bisexual, and knowing the power those stereotypes hold over her. Evan fears this, stating that if her mother found out about her behavior, "she'll never look at me the same way again" (p.137).

Evan is forced to play something, but in doing so she attempts to regain power in the conflict. Evan chooses to play a sad song to make sure she doesn't satisfy Tim's desire for her to play something happy. Moreover, she uses her music – already formed as a symbol of both her adolescence and her bisexuality – as a tool in this conflict. Evan chooses a song literally *about* adolescence:

> We are old / Old enough to know better
>
> We are young / Too young to be bitter
>
> We are old / They say that we shouldn't cry
>
> We are young / They say that we're too young to die (p.120).

The song depicts adolescents as caught between the opposing forces of "young" (childhood) and "old" (adulthood), depicting adolescence in the middle as coping with the worst of both worlds. The lyrics class adolescents as "we," but more importantly class adults as an oppressive and dictatorial "they." That Evan plays this particular song in order to defy Tim clearly defines this moment as an inter-group conflict between the adolescent in-group and the adult out-group. However, because the undercurrents of Tim's threat have to do with Evan's bisexuality, and because music is also a symbol of Evan's bisexuality, Evan's use of this song is also a defense of bisexuality as a group. This moment links the groups of adolescence and bisexuality, standing them together against the hostile threats of a common out-group enemy. The song is a call-to-arms, calling on the adolescent reader to associate themselves *with* Evan and *against* the adult out-group. In doing so, the reader must also associate themselves with bisexuality, despite the fact that for a majority culture reader, bisexuality is an out-group. That the song becomes the novel's title ensures that the entire novel forms part of this joint call-to-arms: the reader is drawn

into a common association with both adolescence and bisexuality, and both groups are part of the "we" that pervades the novel.

Young adult literature is distinctive in that it is able to draw parallels between the struggles of its in-group, adolescence, and the struggles of oppressed out-groups. As mentioned in Chapter 1, children's literature theorists see children and adolescents as oppressed groups within children's and young adult literature (see Trites, 2000; Nikolajeva, 2010). Perry Nodelman (1992) argues that there are distinct parallels in the power dynamics between adults and children and between the "West" and the "Orient," derived from Said's exploration of those dynamics in *Orientalism*. Botelho and Rudman (2009) also draw a parallel between the power dynamics of childhood and those of race, class, and gender. Georgie Horrell examines these parallels in young adult literature specifically, noting that a postcolonial reading of YA literature can illuminate ways in which the power structures between adolescents and adults reflect the power structures of colonialism and its effects (2012, p.48). Horrell also notes that if the metaphor of children as colonized and adults as colonizers is followed through, adolescence as the transition between them holds the most potential for radical and transgressive narratives (2012, p.47). Therefore, if a young adult novel is able to successfully manipulate a reader into drawing associations between the adolescent power struggles with the adult group and the power struggles of other oppressed groups with the majority culture, it can create a sense of solidarity in oppression between the protagonist and the reader. It can mitigate the effect of group bias around the protagonist's minority, as that group categorization becomes less significant in the face of a common enemy: a joint, hostile out-group that the reader and the protagonist must face down together. *We Are Young* manages to draw these parallels between the in-group of adolescence and the out-group of bisexuality, and this strategy may decrease an adolescent reader's out-group bias with Evan.

(Non)erasure of oppressed groups

Both bisexuality and adolescence as groups in young adult literature face the antagonism of out-groups that wish to "conquer" or "erase" them. Adolescence is at risk of erasure in YA literature due to the threat of adulthood. Trites argues that YA literature often represents adult culture's need to repress adolescents (2000, p.142), and that for this reason YA novels "demonstrate that the only true form of empowerment comes from growing up and leaving

adolescence behind" (2014, p.1). Because of this, young adult literature is the only genre "written with the subversive ideological intent of undermining the reader's subject position" (Trites, 2014, p.1). Bisexuality, meanwhile, is under constant threat of erasure both in the real world and in fiction. Kneen notes that the "lack of bisexual visibility [is] so disproportionate that it is routinely referred to as 'bisexual invisibility'" (2015, p.361). Bisexuality in YA fiction is generally both underrepresented and misrepresented (see Epstein, 2012; Epstein, 2014). While the number of YA novels featuring queer characters has been increasing exponentially in the past decade, bisexuality representation has only just begun to increase in the past year or two. Kneen noted in 2015 that YA novels have "paid scant attention to bisexuals" (2015, p.362), and pointed out that Lydia Kokkola, in her book *Fictions of Adolescent Carnality* from 2013, stated that in YA fiction "bisexuality is treated so similarly to same-sex desire that I have not treated it as a separate category" (p.97). Bisexuality is also threatened by the dual opposing out-groups of both heterosexuality *and* homosexuality. Erikson-Schroth and Mitchell state that "bisexuality is fundamentally unsettling to the hegemonic institution of heterosexuality and its queer counterpoint, homosexuality, and is therefore ultimately ignored by both" (2009, p.298). They then go on to explain that in much literature, as in the real world, bisexuality is often "conquered" as the character makes a final choice in a partner and is thus defined by that partner's gender. Through this, the existence of bisexuality is "excised" (p.304).

In *We Are Young*, both bisexuality and adolescence make defiant stands for their existence and for their power. For bisexuality, this happens with Evan's continued existence as bisexual despite eventually rekindling her relationship with Daze. Ending up with a girl in no way "conquers" Evan's bisexuality; the novel gives no indication that this choice marks Evan coming out as lesbian or as experiencing only same-sex desire. She merely chooses to be with the person best suited to her, regardless of gender. For adolescence, this happens through the ways in which the novel does *not* "undermine the reader's subject position" as an adolescent (Trites, 2014, p.1). For instance, *We Are Young* could in some ways be read as a typical YA "problem novel," in which "the overarching 'problem'…is that the teenager is filled with angst about an aspect of their lives they cannot control and the resolution of their angst signals the onset of adult maturity" (Kokkola, 2013, p.16). However, Kokkola emphasizes that in the "problem novel" that erases adolescence through this onset of maturity, the problem is "situated in the domain of the individual and not in the surrounding community" (p.16). *We Are Young*,

however, very clearly situates the problem within the community and within adult societal institutions: for instance, the withdrawal of funding for an adolescent mental help hotline, and the blasé attitude of local politicians and media about the crisis of adolescent mental health. By the end of the novel, *We Are Young* depicts the adolescent protagonist as attempting to make change to the societal institution, rather than the other way around: Evan raises money to bring back the call center by creating a fundraiser in which her band plays at a ticketed event. Evan uses a typical symbol of adolescence – her rock band – in order to create change in the adult institutions in her town.

Granted, Evan makes changes to adult institutions in a fairly "acceptable" manner; however, she still makes change, and this is depicted as a change made by an adolescent, and in an adolescent manner, rather than as an onset of adult maturity. Older YA literature may be "concerned with subduing the perceived teenage threat by representing youth and youth culture not as disruptive and powerful but as impotent and puerile to readers who are anticipating and undergoing adolescence" (Reynolds, 2007, p.71), but much modern YA literature seems to be concerned with doing the opposite: representing adolescent culture as a powerful force, one that can make change and disrupt the establishment. Recent events in the real world have made clear that much of the current generation of adolescents – the readers of this modern YA literature – are both determined to make a difference and very capable of doing so, even if they do it from within social and governmental institutions: from survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school shooting in Parkland, Florida calling for gun control in the US in 2018, to the thousands of teenagers, inspired by the adolescent Greta Thunberg, who participated in school strikes for climate change action that took place across Europe in 2019.

In the final scene of the novel, in which Evan reunites romantically with Daze and they play for the fundraiser's crowd, both bisexuality and adolescence as groups gain at least some power. They remain linked; the two groups are oppressed together, and then reassert power together. The parallels drawn between the in-group of adolescence and the out-group of bisexuality continue through this narrative conclusion, and adolescent readers are encouraged to continue to associate their feelings of solidarity with Evan as an adolescent with their feelings of solidarity with Evan as a bisexual.

It's Not Like It's a Secret

Misa Sugiura's *It's Not Like It's a Secret* (2017) is, primarily, a romance story between the protagonist, Sana, and her girlfriend Jamie. Sana is Japanese-American, and the novel begins in the predominantly white state of Wisconsin. When her father gets a job in Silicon Valley in California, Sana and her mother move to join him, and Sana experiences a setting in which Asian-Americans and other minority ethnic groups are very common, even outnumbering whites. Sana felt same-sex attraction previously in Wisconsin, but in California, she develops a crush on Jamie, a Latina girl at her school, and eventually the two begin to date and fall in love. Through dating Jamie, Sana not only makes discoveries about her own sexuality, but also learns about hierarchies of privilege and opportunity amongst racial groups in the US.

Sana is out-group to a majority culture reader both because of her race and because of her sexual orientation. As with other young adult novels featuring minority protagonists, some of Sana's depicted experiences about her minority identity serve as markers of her out-group nature to a majority culture reader, and other of her experiences serve as markers of her and the reader's common in-group of adolescence. However, because of her multiple minority identities, as well as her interracial romance with Jamie, experiences that would normally serve as in-group or out-group markers for the reader end up becoming partially reversed. The novel's "first love" plotline, which would normally be a marker of a typically adolescent experience, is also something that would categorize Sana as out-group due to Sana's sexual orientation. Meanwhile, Sana's ethnicity would normally encourage a reader's out-group categorization, but her interactions with her Latina girlfriend end up placing Sana into an in-group position with the reader, due to the privilege that Sana experiences over Latinos as an ethnic minority.

Adolescent "first love" romance and sexual orientation

As the protagonist of a young adult novel, Sana of course has various markers of adolescence, including typical adolescent desires (she lists them as "Straight As. A love life. A crowd of real friends to hang out with" (p.3)). The most significant marker of her adolescence, however, is her first love with Jamie – essentially, the romance plot line as a whole. First loves or first sexual experiences are exceedingly common in young adult literature – even novels that don't revolve around them usually have some sort of love interest or crush for the protagonist, and the love interest is usually a "first" in some way. Obviously, exploring new and burgeoning

sexuality is one of the main features of the Western adolescent experience. It is therefore also a main feature of young adult literature, although more recently, as attitudes about sex and adolescents have loosened somewhat, YA protagonists are sometimes already sexually experienced. Even protagonists who are already sexually experienced, however, often have a "first" in the form of their first love or first real romance. In Anglo Western culture, we see first loves as a traditionally adolescent rite of passage. These first loves also possess the accompanying strong passions, intense drama, and formative experiences that come with the status of being an adolescent. Because of this, romantic plotlines in YA fiction are essentially plotlines about one of the main features of being an adolescent, and adolescent readers will recognize these plotlines as markers of the protagonist's adolescence – as markers of the protagonist's in-group membership.

Interracial YA romances have become more common in recent years as diversity in young adult literature has slowly begun to improve. The protagonists of interracial YA romance novels, like *Eleanor & Park* (Rowell, 2012) or *The Sun is Also a Star* (Yoon, 2016), usually deal with disparities between racial groups and the tensions that this causes in the romantic relationship (*It's Not Like It's a Secret*'s racial tensions are discussed in detail in the next section). While these racial tensions emphasize the minority protagonists' out-group status to majority culture readers, the romance itself is usually strongly representative of adolescence as a group. Often these interracial YA romances go out of their way to emphasize the adolescent nature of the love story. The back cover description of *Eleanor & Park*, for instance, states that the protagonists "fall in love the way you do the first time, when you're young, and you feel as if you have nothing and everything to lose" (Rowell, 2012). On the front cover is an endorsement quote from John Green stating that the novel "reminded me not just what it's like to be young and in love with a girl, but also what it's like to be young and in love with a book." Meanwhile, *The Sun is Also a Star* explores the entire concept of "meant to be" in adolescent relationships, and when the protagonists eventually become adults in the epilogue and consider their memories of each other, they worry that they have "romanticized it in the way of first loves" (Yoon, 2016, p.339). These emphases on *young* loves and *first* loves are in-group markers for adolescent readers, mitigating the effects of the protagonists' racial out-groups, and increasing the significance of in-group commonalities.

In *It's Not Like It's a Secret*, an interracial romance, the emphasis on the *first* love and *adolescent* love is still present. Sana and Jamie's relationship begins like any other adolescent love story – with second guesses and shyness: "My body is urging me to *kiss her, kiss her*, but my terrified little brain won't cooperate and move the requisite parts…Yes? No. Yes? No. Yes? No. Yes?" (Sugiura, 2017, p.151, original emphasis). Sana and Jamie kiss for the first time at the Homecoming dance – the stereotypical setting for either the beginning of, or the consummation of, American adolescent romances. Sana and Jamie are also dramatic and passionate in the way of typical adolescents coping with strong romantic feelings; they exchange romantic poems by famous authors and are unable to be apart for too long without beginning to feel desperate. Sana discusses her relationship with Jamie obsessively with her friends, who react with glee at the fact that Sana is in a relationship at all: "I *knew* it!...Sana, this is epic!" (p.186, original emphasis). When they break up, Sana wins Jamie back by bursting into Jamie's math classroom and reciting a love poem in front of the entire class. All of these fulfill various YA romance tropes.

However, unlike in other interracial romances, the first love plotline in *Secret* doesn't serve only as an adolescent in-group marker mitigating the out-group categorizations caused by race. In *Secret*, of course, the romance is lesbian, which is also out-group to a majority culture reader. Moreover, Sana's sexual orientation – and therefore her romance – gains significance as an out-group marker because it is compounded by her out-group race. Though Sana's friends (who are also Asian) want to dissect the details of Sana's relationship like any typical adolescent girls, they also react with surprise at the fact that Sana isn't dating a guy, particularly because she's Asian: "But you can't be a lesbian. You're Asian. Asian girls aren't lesbians!" (p.187). They also comment that Sana will be a "shoo-in" for any university if she puts on her application that she's an Asian lesbian. Sana herself doesn't quite feel ready to come out to the world at large; she states that "I don't want to fly a new freak flag" (p.82) – "new" meaning second, in this case, as Sana considers her "first" freak flag to be being Asian, which she was grateful became less noticeable after her move to California. Sana is also uncomfortable with public affection with Jamie, though she isn't sure whether this is because Jamie is a girl or whether it's the effect of growing up in a Japanese household with a culture where touching in public is rare.

Despite these effects, however, Sana and Jamie's relationship is still depicted fairly typically as a feature of their adolescence. For instance, when Sana, upset that Jamie might be breaking up with her, kisses Caleb (a boy), Sana realizes in the process that she is most definitely

lesbian. However, the main drama around this feature of the plot is not that Caleb is a boy or that Sana has decided she is definitely lesbian – it's that Sana has kissed *someone else*, which damages her relationship with Jamie. They live in a fairly queer-friendly area and neither Sana nor Jamie face any major instances of homophobia. In general, the emphasis on the fact that Sana and Jamie's romance is *adolescent* is greater than the emphasis on the fact that Sana and Jamie's romance is *lesbian*, or even interracial. The romance plot line of *Secret* still serves as an in-group marker for an adolescent reader; however, it is an in-group marker that is shaped and highly modified by two intersecting out-group categorizations. It is also an in-group marker that, like in *We Are Young*, associates the in-group of adolescence with the out-group of sexual orientation.

Racial groups and privilege

Sana is out-group to a majority culture reader because of her race, and the racial divides between Sana and a majority culture reader are often made very clear. For instance, having moved from Wisconsin, where she didn't know anybody who was Asian, Sana is delighted at the way her new Asian friends in California – though they are Vietnamese and Chinese, rather than Japanese – let her experience being among members of her own race:

> They get me like none of my Midwestern friends ever did. They don't
> think I'm weird or feel sorry for me. They make me feel normal. And
> special at the same time, somehow, like we're all part of an exclusive
> club with a secret handshake and everything (p.56).

This passage makes clear that whites are out-group, having made Sana feel badly about herself in the past, and also makes clear that Sana blatantly considers other Asians to form an in-group with her, this in-group being a "secret club." To a majority culture reader, this underscores the fact that they are not members of Sana's "club," and that the reader and Sana thus belong to different and opposing groups.

However, racial grouping in the novel is not as simple as Sana, the Japanese-American protagonist, being out-group to a majority culture (white) reader. In *Secret*, one of the main ways that race and ethnicity function as groups is the focus on privilege: which groups hold it, and which don't. On the one hand, a white reader holds privilege that Sana, as a Japanese-American, doesn't. A majority culture reader is seen as undeniably American, whereas Sana, who is American-born, isn't. In Wisconsin, Sana cheers along with her peers at a line about

Midwesterners during a Beach Boys song. Her white friends make fun of her: "Omigod, Sana, you look like a freak yelling for the Midwest…I mean, you do *not* look like a Midwest farmer's daughter!...It's like you forgot that you're, like, Asian or whatever" (p.14, original emphasis). Other features of the novel also call a majority culture reader's attention to their innate privilege – for instance, though sometimes the foreign languages that feature in the novel (Japanese and Spanish) are translated, mostly they are left without translation for the reader to make inferences about their meaning from context. Even the first line of the novel is in Japanese. The reader is responsible for understanding Sana's world, rather than it being Sana's responsibility, as the narrator, to ensure the reader has ease of understanding. This is rare; in most books published in Anglo Western cultures with foreign languages featured, a translation is provided to suit the majority culture. In this case, however, a majority culture reader, through the surprise at the lack of translations, will be forced to acknowledge how translations have generally provided them with privilege while reading. The reader is on Sana's territory, and not their own; by taking away an accustomed privilege for majority culture readers, the novel ensures that a majority culture reader feels out-group to Sana.

Once Sana moves to California, however, Sana and the reader are placed in an in-group together as racial groups that have privilege over others in the US. Sana moves from a place in which she was one of three Asians in her school to a place where there is what she calls "majority minority," where whites are a numerical minority. Sana rejoices in this, but the larger numbers of minority ethnic group members also make clear the differences in privilege not only between whites and minorities, but also between the different minorities themselves. Sana has to come to terms with her own privilege over other minority ethnic groups. The novel draws parallels between the privilege of whites and the privilege of Asian-Americans, who are often seen as a "model minority" in the US and who have far more advantages than other racial groups. Sana begins to experience this privilege when she meets Jamie's Latino friends. Jamie's friends are trying to convince JJ, a Latino boy, to go to university because there are more opportunities, but Jamie's friend Christina adds, "As long as white and Asian people don't take them all" (p.89). This is Sana's first experience of Asians being placed parallel to whites in terms of their privilege, but it is not the last. In the US, the majority culture treats Asian Americans very differently than other minority ethnic groups. Asian Americans are "not seen as a racial threat the way African Americans often are" (Mathison, 2018, p.4), and as *Secret* makes clear,

the way that Latinos often are as well. In addition, Asian Americans "are often used as a positive example to criticize other minorities, such as African Americans and Latinos" (Mathison, 2018, p.9).

Because of her privilege over Jamie's Latino friends, when Sana hangs out with them, she finds herself in a similar position that a majority culture reader would be in. When Jamie's friends have a debate about whether wearing hoodies is advisable ("Freedom of Expression, Tempting Fate, or It Doesn't Matter What You Wear, You're Still Screwed"), Sana feels she can't participate:

> I'm afraid that if I say, 'Yes, wear whatever you want,' someone will
> tell me I don't get it; if I say, 'No, people might think you're up to
> no good,' someone will wonder if that's what *I* think. I guess I can't
> blame them. I mean, what do I know? I feel like an imposter (p.215,
> original emphasis).

Though Sana is also a racial minority, this doesn't mean that she understands the negative bias that affects her Latino friends: "You'd think that as a Person of Color, I would feel some kinship here, some bond. But I don't, not exactly" (p.215). Sana capitalizes "People of Color" to make clear that the division between white people and minority ethnic groups is particularly important, or that it should be – casting the reader as out-group. But she also feels that in some cases, the division between whites/Asians and blacks/Latinos is the more significant line. A run-in with a police officer makes this division clearer. Sana is with Jamie and her Latino friends at night in the parking lot of a store. A cop shows up and begins to give Jamie's friends a hard time, threatening to take them in to the station. When he sees Sana, however, he becomes friendlier and chats with her about her grades and good Japanese food. He then leaves the group alone due to Sana's presence:

> I'm gonna let you and your friends go because you look like a good
> kid and I don't want you to get in trouble. But you need to find
> yourself a new…' He grins and winks at me. '…*girlfriend*, young
> lady. You keep hanging out with these kids, they'll drag you down
> (p.223, original emphasis).

These passages put Sana in an in-group with the reader: an in-group formed of racial groups that possess privilege, rather than the out-group of racial groups that face more negative bias.

Sana herself becomes the privileged perpetrator of racist thoughts and ideas, and she expresses opinions that white readers might agree with due to their shared privilege. At one point, she gets into an argument with Jamie's friends, and though she understands that what she is saying is wrong, her frustration with Jamie's friends gets the better of her. She tells them things like "You have to take some responsibility for getting their respect" (p.235), "All you have to do is work hard" (p.235), and "If you dress like a thug and act all hard, what are people going to think?...You *look* like thugs, you *act* like thugs, so how can you blame people for thinking that you are?" (p.237, original emphasis). Meanwhile, Sana's narration expresses how uncomfortable she is saying these things: "Something inside me squirms uneasily, poking and jabbing, but I squash it down. Surely if I can just explain myself, everything will be better" (p.237). Sana doubles down in her argument because she doesn't want Jamie's friends to think that she's racist, but her refusal to acknowledge the place of privilege that her arguments are coming from makes it worse. She knows this: "You know how if a drowning person can't swim, the best thing they can do is stop trying to swim, and just float? But instead they panic and flail, and the more they flail the worse it gets, and the worse it gets the more they flail? Right now, that's me. Flailing. Thrashing. And making things worse" (p.237). A majority culture reader may have had similar experiences like this in the past, playing Sana's role; even if not, they may have thought similar things, or else understand that these opinions are generally the attitude of the majority culture in the US. Sana and the reader may even experience the same discomfort with the evidence of their own privilege – Sana asks in her narration, "I'm not racist, am I?" (p.239).

Sana's experiences of being Asian American leave her both in-group and out-group to the reader. A white reader has privilege that Sana does not, but Sana and a white reader possess privilege that Latinos and blacks do not. As Li states, Asian Americans are stuck in a nebulous middle, "strangled between the authentic white subject and the oppositional black subject" (1998, p.10). Because a white reader is shown both the privilege they have over Sana, as well as the privilege that they and Sana share over other ethnic groups that face more negative bias, the reader is forced into an acknowledgement of privilege disparities – an important realization, but also possibly an alienating one.

Overall, the novel places Asians and whites in one group and blacks and Latinos in another. Of course, this depiction of two oppositional sides is not entirely accurate. Whites and blacks share some privilege that Latinos and Asians don't – for one, they are regarded as

American, rather than as immigrants. Mathison notes that "unlike Caucasians or African Americans, who are implicitly regarded as Americans, Asian American children, in real life and in fiction, may experience childhood as a site of transnational encounters fraught with anxiety, tension, and frustration" (2018, p.13). The novel addresses this issue from Sana's perspective – as in her experience in Wisconsin where her friends tell her that she's not "Midwestern" or "American" – but doesn't necessarily touch on it from the Latino perspective, as neither Jamie nor her friends experience being seen as immigrants during the course of the novel. Though these four racial groups can be placed in various pairings depending on what situation is at hand, the novel mostly places Asians and whites together and blacks and Latinos together. Meanwhile, only the Asian group shifts positions in the novel, from out-group to white Americans (as in Wisconsin) to occasionally in-group to white Americans (as in certain instances in California). Other groups – whites, Latinos, and blacks (though the black experience is hardly touched on at all) – remain stable in their positions, perhaps because Sana is the protagonist of the novel and so is the focus.

Sana, as the protagonist of *Secret*, shifts as Junior from *True Diary* does, from in-group to out-group and in between, depending on the situation in the novel. However, Sana is in-group or out-group to a majority culture reader in unexpected ways: in situations where the protagonist would normally be in-group, like during a romantic plot line, Sana is instead sometimes out-group due to her sexual orientation. In situations where a racial minority protagonist would normally be out-group, as when discussing racial issues, Sana is instead often placed in an in-group with the reader.

Adolescence as a Group and Its Effects

A reader can categorize a protagonist as in-group or out-group from a myriad of factors and different identities. Even when a reader's group categorization of the protagonist is constantly changing, however, each of that protagonist's experiences, and how the reader categorizes them based off those experiences, adds to a reader's mind-model of the protagonist. A mind-model can incorporate various group categorizations, but each of those categorizations affect how much bias (positive or negative) is associated with the mind-model. The construction of a YA protagonist's adolescence as an in-group categorization for adolescent readers can change how every other group categorization in the novel functions. It can also add a significant

in-group categorization to a reader's mind-model of the protagonist, lessening the negative empathy bias that comes with an out-group categorization.

When discussing in-group and out-group bias, Karen Coats (2017) notes the importance of "individuation" as a tool for preventing out-group categorizations. She cites a study done on four- to six-year-old Chinese children who looked at faces with either Chinese or African features. Out-group bias was reduced in these children by training them to "individuate" the out-group members (the African faces) by giving them each names (Xiao et al, 2015). Coats uses *True Diary* as an example that demonstrates individuation; by the end of the novel, Junior has "individuated" himself "by listing all the many traits that connect him to others by personal affinity rather than culture" (2017, p.22). Patrick Hogan, too, maintains that individuation will lead away from an out-group categorization (2011, p.71), and goes on to argue that any attempt to create a character will usually individuate that character to some degree (p.71). The more detail given to a character, the more that character is individuated. One of the most efficient ways of individuating an out-group character is to highlight commonalities between the character and the reader. Adolescence as a group can therefore help to individuate characters in young adult novels, giving additional information for a reader's mind-model of that character and ensuring that information reduces out-group bias by specifying important commonalities.

To begin to shift the focus toward the empathic consequences of group categorizations, adolescence *does* function as an in-group between the protagonist and the reader in each of the YA novels examined in this chapter. However, only in some of the novels in this chapter does it affect a reader's mind-model of the protagonist in a way that might make empathy with an out-group member more accessible. In *Good Enough*, for instance, the novel depicts the protagonist associating herself with the "right path" of the majority culture American in-group, while depicting the Korean-American out-group as wrong. Patti is certainly associated with the adolescent in-group, but only in a way that erases and devalues her out-group membership. This strategy of creating a parallel between the adolescent in-group and the majority culture in-group is unlikely to lead to adolescent readers developing their ability to use out-group empathy. On the other hand, the opposite strategy, creating parallels between the adolescent in-group and the minority out-group, can be a successful device to encourage adolescent readers to use empathy with out-group members. Both *We Are Young* and *Secret* do this through examinations of adolescent power and adolescent romance respectively, though *We Are Young*'s use of the

strategy is somewhat heavy-handed. Meanwhile, encouraging metacognition by making a reader aware of their group categorizations or their group privileges, as both *True Diary* and *Secret* accomplish by shifting the groups with which the reader and protagonist are aligned, can also enrich empathic engagement. As will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, fiction that enhances an adolescent reader's awareness is more likely to lead to significant (and beneficial) empathy use. Novels in which group categorizations oscillate back and forth enhance reader awareness more than novels that depict simpler, more clearly defined in-group and out-group categorizations. Finally, I will point out that novels for adults on similar themes cannot employ any of these strategies, which depend on adolescence functioning as an in-group between the reader and the protagonist; young adult literature alone is able to have these effects on adolescent readers.

Chapter 3
Challenging Empathy

The previous chapter went into detailed discussions on how group categorizations function in YA novels; in this chapter, while I will still include discussions on how each text situates a majority culture reader as in-group and out-group, as this is necessary to discussing empathy use, those observations will be briefer and less detailed. Instead, I will be discussing in greater detail specific instances in which a reader has the opportunity to use empathy. Any novel presents various opportunities for the reader to employ empathy and to mind-model characters. Whether a reader will take up these opportunities and actually engage empathy at each possible instance, however, is uncertain. Most readers will not use empathy or mind-model at every single opportunity a text offers. Some opportunities for empathy *require* a reader to use empathy just to understand the basic concepts of the story and the reasons for plot development; most readers will engage empathy at these moments, or else abandon the text as it grows too confusing. However, a text may also have *optional* opportunities for empathy, in which a reader does not need to use empathy to understand the basic plotline, but has a chance to use empathy in order to come to a more nuanced understanding of the text and of the characters. A reader's use of empathy in these instances is less certain. In this chapter, I will identify opportunities for empathy in four young adult novels, discuss if and how an adolescent reader might engage their empathy at these opportunities, examine how group categorizations might explicitly affect that, and ascertain what patterns of empathy engagement (or disengagement) this creates in minority young adult novels as a whole.

However, these opportunities for empathy are complicated by another factor: in this chapter I examine texts in which empathy is particularly difficult for a majority culture reader due to how strongly out-group each protagonist is. The novels analyzed in this chapter – *Dear Martin* (Stone, 2017), *Say What You Will* (McGovern, 2014), *History is All You Left Me* (Silvera,

2017), and *If I Was Your Girl* (Russo, 2016) – are all published in the United States (though this was not a deliberate choice for the chapter), and all are intended mostly for American audiences. Each one also has a protagonist who is likely to provoke extreme prejudice from majority culture readers. This severe out-group categorization of each protagonist will make it exceptionally challenging for a reader to empathically engage with these texts, since as prejudice towards an out-group member increases, so does the effect of group empathy bias (Gutsell and Inzlicht, 2010, p.841).

Given that empathy with these texts will be particularly difficult for a majority culture reader, one of the most important concepts that I will be exploring in this chapter is how the texts permit empathy to occur for majority culture audiences, regardless of whether that is the intended audience of the novels (I will note that while none of the novels appear intended solely for readers *not* of the protagonist's minority, as *True Diary* is, none of the novels appear written solely for readers who *are* of the protagonist's minority either). Group categorizations affect empathic engagement, but so do narrative factors; attributes that might promote an in-group categorization might also end up discouraging empathy use. For instance, present-tense, first-person narration promotes an in-group categorization between the reader and the protagonist. However, Nikolajeva argues that because of its simplicity, it can also lessen the incentive to use more complex forms of empathy; she points out that "we engage more strongly with fiction that offers challenge and resistance" in its language use and narrative style (2014a, p.97). This chapter thus distinguishes between two forms of challenging empathy: 1) *categorizationally challenging* empathy, or empathy that is impeded by the out-group categorization of the protagonist, and 2) *narratively challenging* empathy, or empathy that is complex due to textual construction, language use, and other narrative factors.

A significant part of the narrative factors analyzed in this chapter is the distinction between *representation* and *metarepresentation* in emotional language. How emotions are represented through language has a great effect on a reader's empathic engagement. Following the old adage that writers need to "show, not tell," Lisa Zunshine (2006) defines "showing" emotions in fiction as "representation" (closer to what we experience in real life – e.g. "he smiled" to mean "he was happy"), and "telling" emotions as "metarepresentation" (putting a technically meaningless label on an emotion in order to describe it more concisely – e.g. we know the label "happy" represents the range of emotions we feel when we smile, laugh,

celebrate, etc.). When it comes to fiction, Nikolajeva describes "telling" statements about emotions as being mediated through a narrative agency, and argues that children's literature often uses "telling" rather than "showing," stating that "children's fiction tends to have a strong narrative agency, possibly because authors do not trust their audiences to make inferences from showing. This tendency is especially strong in texts focusing on interiority: stating what the character thinks or feels rather than allowing readers to figure it out for themselves" (2014b, p.88). Young adult literature is not immune to this trend, with many YA novels simply stating characters' emotions. Though adolescents are more advanced than younger children, authors still might not trust that adolescent readers will be able to take on enough narratively challenging empathy to comprehend the novel.

However, "showing" encourages more empathic engagement than "telling": because language is inaccurate when it comes to describing emotions, "meta-representation, that is, putting a simple label on an emotional state, is less engaging than representation, or 'showing' by a wide register of narrative means available to fiction" (Nikolajeva, 2014b, p.134). For example, internal focalization that simply states what characters are feeling using metarepresentative statements (e.g. "he felt sad") leaves the reader with little empathic work of their own to interpret the characters' emotions. Emotional representation demands more complex empathic engagement, as the reader must work out from vague and indistinct clues exactly what a character is thinking or feeling. Oatley agrees, stating that empathic engagement with fiction is improved when a reader must make inferences about a character's emotional state, rather than be told directly how the character feels (2016, p.621). In one empirical study, participants who read Alice Munro's *The Office* exhibited greater understanding of the protagonist and identified more deeply with her than participants who read a modified version of the story in which the emotional representation was replaced with metarepresentation (Kotovych et al, 2011).

One common method of representing (rather than metarepresenting) emotions is through embodied emotions, the study of which is a large and rapidly expanding field (see, for instance, Johnson-Laird and Oatley, 1989; Niedenthal, 2007; Niedenthal et al., 2014; Trites, 2014; Lakoff, 2016; MacKenzie and Alba-Juez, 2019). Embodied emotions are a way to represent an emotion through physical sensations or actions. The example used earlier of describing "he smiled" to communicate that "he was happy" is a very simple instance of an embodied emotion. As we feel specific physical sensations while experiencing certain emotions, the description of those

physical sensations can communicate to the reader what emotions a character is feeling. This could be through statements of direct physical reactions that we know to be a response to emotions – for example, we know that fear causes our palms to become sweaty and our hearts to beat faster. If the narration states that a character's palms are sweaty and their heart is racing, a reader can interpret that to mean that the character is frightened or anxious. Of course, context must be taken into account; hearts can race due to other emotions as well – excitement, for instance. Generally, context will give the reader enough information to interpret what emotions a character is feeling from a description of their body's physical reactions. When less context is given, however, a reader must work harder – engage more empathy – to form a plausible interpretation of what emotions are being represented.

Embodied emotions don't have to be represented by a direct description of bodily reactions. Physical sensations tied to emotions can also be represented through metaphor. Readers will recognize, for instance, that when the narration states that a character's "stomach dropped," this is a metaphor describing the unpleasant physical sensation that often accompanies surprise and dismay. Trites states that "language use is embodied" (2014, p.15); we understand and communicate abstract concepts through embodiment and embodied metaphors (Gibbs et al., 1997, p.141; Yu, 2008, p.247). Some of these metaphors have become so common in English language use that we can immediately recognize the emotions they are associated with: fear is usually "icy," anger usually "burns," love makes our hearts "flutter," and strong emotions make our heads "spin." Other metaphors might be less common and therefore unfamiliar to a reader; these metaphors will form opportunities for empathy that are more narratively challenging than conventional or clichéd metaphors.

Given this chapter's consideration of two challenging forms of empathy, one of the main questions explored is what happens when they are combined. All of the novels in this chapter are categorizationally challenging, as they all have protagonists who are severely out-group to majority culture audiences. What happens when narratively challenging opportunities for empathy are combined with instances in which empathic engagement is impeded due to severe out-group categorizations? Narratively challenging opportunities for empathy can increase empathic engagement, as they require a reader to expend more empathic effort; however, whether a reader will take up the opportunities and actually engage empathy is affected by how categorizationally challenging the instances are. Will an adolescent reader be able to understand

a text that uses complex emotional representation, if engaging empathy with an out-group protagonist is already too difficult to begin with? The novels analyzed in this chapter provide various examples of how severe out-group categorizations make for categorizationally challenging empathy, how novels can construct narratively challenging opportunities for empathy, and how these issues combine to affect readers' engagement.

Dear Martin

Nic Stone's *Dear Martin* was published in 2017, with racial tensions in the United States rising to a fever pitch under the political climate and in the wake of a series of police shootings of young black males. *Dear Martin* tells the story of Justyce, a seventeen-year-old black boy headed for an elite education at an Ivy League university, who is involved in a police shooting that injures him and kills his friend. Like *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2017) and *All American Boys* (Reynolds and Kiely, 2015), other recent YA novels about police shootings of young black males in the US, *Dear Martin* uses the YA genre to attempt to take on a subject that has ignited racial frictions and created a series of activism, protests, and counter-protests, dividing American citizens and creating a fraught and even physically violent atmosphere around the subject of race relations and police violence.

Sensitive topics like this can create incredibly strong group categorizations, particularly ones that deal with recent events. Clear in-group and out-group lines have historically been drawn in the US between blacks and whites. The involvement of police further polarizes the issue, as for many white Americans police officers are figures of trust and respect, while for many black Americans they have become symbols of oppression, prejudice, and fear. Michelle Jarman, stating that "the need to address structural racism has been in graphic relief as activism against police violence has taken place across the United States" (2017, p.163), cites the case of Michael Brown's shooting at the hands of the white police officer Darren Wilson, the subsequent protests in Ferguson, Missouri, and Wilson's court testimony as examples of how a police shooting brings up long histories of oppression and racial divides. In his testimony, Wilson described Brown as looking like a "demon" and coming forward to attack him, in the moment when other witnesses describe Brown putting his hands up in surrender (Cave, 2014). Jarman argues that "in evoking a large, menacing, angry, black youth, a demon, Wilson calls forth a long history of oppressive images. From slaveholders' attempts to diagnose escaped captives as

mentally ill, from white supremacist production of black men as 'rapists'…to black youth still overrepresented as threatening – emotionally disabled – these legacies haunt and animate current racial tensions" (Jarman, 2017, p.164).

For a majority culture reader – that is, a white reader – this novel and its topic might evoke strong reactions. Justyce is out-group to the reader not only because he is black, but also because he is black in a situation that sets him against much of modern white America. Black men have always been seen by majority culture white Americans as antagonistically out-group; they are cast as dangerous, as threatening to the in-group, as "superpredators." Justyce is not only a black man – he is also a black man involved in a violent scene with a white police officer: a figure many white Americans would categorize as a high-ranking in-group member – a protector of the group. Add to this the rancor caused by protests and the attention drawn to racial barriers that many would like to believe no longer exist, and Justyce could end up categorized as formidably out-group to many white readers.

Out-group versus in-group

Within the first scene, the novel immediately begins to influence a reader's group categorization of Justyce. Justyce arrives in a parking lot to reluctantly check on his ex-girlfriend, Melo, who has once again gotten too drunk. Melo is physically described in a way that highlights both Justyce's adolescent sexual fixations as well as Melo's race: "Melo's dad is this Hall of Fame NFL linebacker (biiiiig black dude), but her mom is from Norway. She's got Mrs. Taylor's milky Norwegian complexion, wavy hair the color of honey, and amazing green eyes that are kind of purple around the edge, but she has full lips, a small waist, crazy curvy hips, and probably the nicest butt Jus has ever seen in his life" (Stone, 2017, p.5). This is an early acknowledgement of Justyce's adolescence – Justyce's description of Melo's most attractive body parts is a common YA trope, particularly with male protagonists. However, the description also sets the scene racially: Justyce is black, but Melo, while actually biracial, *appears* to be white. As Justyce is trying to lift a now-unconscious Melo into the back seat of her car, a police officer shows up and misinterprets the scene. He immediately slams Justyce into the ground, and when Justyce attempts to explain the situation, the policeman makes clear that his judgment is based on their apparent races: "I knew your punk ass was up to no good when I saw you walking down the road with that goddamn hood on…I know your kind: punks like you wander the streets

of nice neighborhoods searching for prey. Just couldn't resist the pretty white girl who'd locked her keys in her car, could ya?" (p.8). Here, Officer Castillo invokes the myth, created by politicians in the 1990s, of the black male "superpredator" wandering the streets of cities looking for prey (see Jarman, 2017) – a myth which the novel specifically addresses in later scenes. Even if a white adolescent reader is not aware of the origins of this stereotype, as they won't have been born at the time, they will certainly have been exposed to the idea. They will also likely hold unconscious, deep-seated prejudices formed from it. This first scene thus emphasizes not only Justyce's unfair treatment at the hands of police due to his race – something that continues to be emphasized throughout the entire novel – but also emphasizes to a white reader the ways in which Justyce is affected by culturally ingrained stereotypes, despite not fulfilling that stereotype himself. The reader must see their in-group, and themselves, reflected in the bias of the police officer – an alienating introduction to a novel that continues to address this touchy subject.

Justyce is not completely out-group to the reader, however; Justyce's adolescence is still highlighted in the novel in ways other than his description of Melo. All the adolescent characters in the novel speak in a vernacular most Americans would associate with teenagers, with words and phrases like "dude," "no beef," and "chill." The internal focalization through Justyce means the narration occasionally uses these phrases as well. The narration also uses a less formal writing style and the "teen" vernacular to imitate Justyce's thoughts – for instance, when Justyce describes Melo's father as a "biiiiig black dude" (p.5). All of this serves to highlight the teen characters' adolescence – and particularly Justyce's adolescence – in direct contrast to the adult characters, who don't use this speech pattern. Justyce is also involved in a romance, which serves as a marker of his adolescence. Throughout the course of the novel, Justyce falls in love with his friend SJ. Though Justyce is not sexually inexperienced, as he has an ex-girlfriend, he has never actually been in love before; as argued in Chapter 2, first loves are a classic theme of adolescence in Western culture. Like Junior in *True Diary* and Evan in *We Are Young*, Justyce also experiences intrusive sexual thoughts, yet another indicator of his adolescence. The free indirect discourse replicates the intrusive nature of these thoughts; for instance, when SJ throws her arms around Justyce to try and convince him of something, an intrusive line in the narration, making up its own paragraph, states "Boobs on the biceps" (p.79).

Even these in-group signifiers of adolescence, however, are affected by racial groupings. Justyce is reluctant to date SJ because his mother has warned him off dating white girls, who she

claims can't understand oppression. Justyce himself struggles with race when thinking about SJ after the shooting: "it's quite the predicament: wanting to touch and hug and kiss a white girl after a white man shot him and killed his best friend" (p.128). Though Justyce overcomes these feelings and eventually enters into a happy relationship with SJ, the novel still highlights Justyce's out-group categorization to a majority culture reader far more than it highlights his in-group categorization on the basis of his adolescence. *Dear Martin* is still recognizably YA, and recognizably centered around the theme of adolescence; however, it is an adolescence that is perpetually affected by the protagonist's out-group. Opportunities for empathy within the novel are therefore continuously categorizationally challenging.

Effects of heteroglossia: empathic engagement with multiple narrative styles

Dear Martin interchanges three different narrative styles that give the reader different levels of access to Justyce's emotions. Primarily, most of the novel is in a third-person present-tense narration internally focalized through Justyce. This is interchanged with occasional scenes written in the style of a play script, in which only the dialogue and stage directions are shown. Intermittently, the novel also includes chapters formed of Justyce's journal entries, in which he writes "letters" to Martin Luther King, Jr. detailing his progress in a personal experiment to "be like Martin" when dealing with difficult issues around race. This heteroglossia – the Bakhtinian concept of multiple narrative voices or styles of discourse – adds complexity to the reader's empathic engagement, as each narrative style gives context that others lack, and each alternately provides or withdraws internal access to Justyce's state of mind. Perry Nodelman describes this technique in literature for children and young adults as a "fictional collage" that the reader must interpret as a whole (2017, p.67).

In general, *Dear Martin* gives very little direct access to Justyce's emotions; it rarely uses emotional metarepresentation. During the third-person narration that makes up the bulk of the novel, Justyce's emotions are never outright specified despite the internal focalization. Instead, the reader is often left to interpret for themselves what emotions Justyce is feeling, given only abstract clues like embodied emotions or simple situational context. Justyce's feelings surrounding his burgeoning romantic attraction to SJ, for instance, are represented almost exclusively through embodied emotions. In one scene, the narration states that "as she steps out of the hotel elevator, smiling at him like he made the sun rise, his brain goes to mush" (p.75) –

"mush" being an embodied metaphor describing the effect that SJ has upon Justyce's concentration. At times, the fact that Justyce's emotions are not labeled is made overt: "That's when it smacks him again. That *feeling*. The one that makes his heart beat faster and his head go fuzzy when he's talking to her" (p.53, original emphasis). The text emphasizes the word *feeling* but refuses to label it, instead describing it with Justyce's physical reactions, forcing the reader to use empathy to determine that Justyce is romantically attracted to her. With these kinds of opportunities for empathy, a reader could use any of Hogan's (2011) three empathy types laid out in Chapter 1: the reader could use allocentric empathy to consider that there have been other instances alluding to Justyce's growing attraction for SJ in the past, projective empathy to understand that when their own heads feel fuzzy and their own hearts race, they themselves are attracted to somebody, and normative empathy to understand that the metaphors of "racing hearts" and "fuzzy heads" are common English-language descriptors of sexual and romantic attraction.

The near-entire lack of emotional metarepresentation in the novel *requires* the reader to use empathy in order to understand the basics of scenes and plotlines. The examples surrounding SJ are not too challenging, particularly for an adolescent reader familiar with adolescent sexual and romantic feelings and the common language tropes used to describe them. For an adolescent reader, it's not a huge leap from the information that SJ makes Justyce's head fuzzy/mushy to the interpretation that Justyce is interested in her romantically. However, the novel's lack of metarepresentation is more challenging when the novel addresses issues more unfamiliar for a majority culture adolescent reader, such as Justyce's emotions around racial issues. Much of the time, Justyce's emotions are not even represented through embodied sentiments; his emotional reactions are often left completely unaddressed and undescribed in the third-person narrative sections. A reader only has the context of the plot from which to extrapolate how Justyce might potentially be feeling. For instance, Justyce dislikes a group of insensitive white boys in his school who don't take racial issues seriously, but his friend Manny, who is black, hangs around with them. A reader might empathically interpret from context that this could make Justyce feel uncomfortable; however, the text gives no indication that this is the case. When these emotional information gaps happen early on in the novel, the reader lacks enough context to form an accurate empathic interpretation. In these instances, the intervening journal entry chapters act as an empathic crutch, particularly earlier on in the novel. Through these chapters' first-person

narration, Justyce (occasionally) metarepresents his own emotions. These chapters provide more information for a reader's mind-model of Justyce, making it easier for the reader to empathically interpret his emotions later in the novel when less context is given. In the case of Manny's relationship with the insensitive white boys, in a "Dear Martin" journal entry, Justyce says bluntly that "it really bugs me that Manny spends so much time with those guys" (p.37), thus filling in the gap with metarepresentation and giving the reader more information. This occasional information feed is necessary for a reader when, in other narrative styles, empathic interpretations are required to understand the basics of a scene's plotline, and yet very little emotional clues and context are given.

The play-script scenes offer the most narratively challenging opportunities for empathy, and they *require* a reader to take up these opportunities in order to create a basic understanding of the plot. Their narrative challenge stems from the total lack of internal access to Justyce's thoughts and emotions during particularly controversial scenes: because they remove internal focalization, the play-script scenes are where the text requires the most cognitive effort on the part of the reader. Characters' movements and physical reactions are stated in the style of stage directions, but other than these stage directions, the reader is given no indication of characters' thoughts or emotions. Seymour Chatman would describe the play-script scenes as lacking "narrator mediation," stating that this lack requires the reader to "infer themes from a bare account of purely external behavior" (1978, p.168). In particular, Chatman emphasizes that "pure speech records" like play scripts "require the implied reader to do more inferring than other kinds" of narration (p.175). Considered from a cognitive perspective, the inference Chatman refers to is empathic: i.e. inferring thoughts and emotions. That less information is given and that more inference is necessary means empathy is far more narratively challenging. However, it also means the reader is *required* take up the narrative challenge: the reader *must* use empathy to determine how characters' emotions are influencing the plot, but has to interpret what those emotions are solely from the dialogue and from past information given about characters.

In one example of a play-script scene, Jared, a white boy in Justyce's class who is insensitive around racial issues, puts forward ideas during a debate class in which the topic is whether America has achieved racial equality. The dialogue shows Jared making various statements like "black people have the same opportunities as white people in this country if they're willing to work hard enough" (p.25); "Not every white person who kills a black person is

guilty of a crime" (p.27) – this in reference to the police shooting of a black man in the news; and "you don't get arrested if you're not doing anything wrong" (p.28). Meanwhile, Justyce's reactions are only given in stage directions: he "takes another deep breath" (p.25); "grits [his] teeth" (p.27); "rubs his wrists again" (p.29); and "cracks his knuckles and shakes his head" (p.29). The reader must connect Justyce's reactions to Jared's statements through the context the novel has given. For instance, when Jared states that "you don't get arrested if you don't do anything wrong" (p.28) and Justyce "rubs his wrists" (p.29), the reader must connect this statement to the previous chapter's scene, in which Justyce got arrested for doing just that, getting bruised wrists from handcuffs in the process. The stage direction forms an explicit narratorial empathy instruction, leading the reader to empathically interpret that Justyce is expressing embodied anger in response to Jared's statement. Moreover, the reader is *required* to make that empathic connection, as without it, the scene and its stage directions make little sense.

The play-script scenes also act as a narrative device that mitigates the categorizational challenge of out-group effects. The play-script narration in this scene makes empathy with Justyce more accessible for a majority culture reader. If Justyce's opinion of Jared were spelled out, it might alienate a white reader to such an extent that they are unable to engage with the text. Many white Americans hold opinions similar to Jared's; a white reader may find themselves agreeing with Jared, particularly as his opinions are also expounded by plenty of American politicians and public figures. Were the narration to fully express Justyce's anger and disgust at Jared, in whom a white reader might see themselves reflected, the reader could be so alienated as to disengage empathy with the text completely, or discard the novel. Indeed, the text seems to anticipate this, as this kind of narration happens most often during scenes featuring difficult discussions on touchy racial subjects. Instead of being alienated by the controversial topics, the reader is required to indirectly perceive Justyce's stage directions as embodied emotions, and to use empathy to determine that Justyce takes deep breaths, grits his teeth, cracks his knuckles, and shakes his head because he is feeling frustration, anger, and disgust. In other words, the play-script scenes increase the narrative empathic challenge, but in doing so decrease the categorizational empathic challenge. Moreover, because the context of the novel demonstrates how Jared's statements are inaccurate, this kind of empathy from contextual clues forces the reader to consciously confront the veracity of their own beliefs, if they agree with Jared. The scene therefore not only prompts empathy use with Justyce where instead there might have been

disengagement, but also prompts a type of empathy use that could lead to real-world attitude changes.

Nikolajeva argues that mixed narration became a popular choice for YA authors as "an attempt to reflect a modern adolescent's ambivalent and fragmented worldview" (2005, p.192). In *Dear Martin*'s case, however, I would argue that the mixed narration is an attempt to encourage empathic engagement on the part of readers both in-group and out-group to Justyce. Suzanne Keen discusses various types of "strategic narrative empathy," in which texts are written specifically to appeal to the empathic engagement of either the in-group ("bounded strategic empathy") or the out-group ("ambassadorial strategic empathy"). A text might also use "broadcast strategic empathy" to appeal to members of all groups through depictions of common human experiences and emotions (2015, p.357). In *Dear Martin*, when scenes begin to address issues that are controversial between groups, the change in narrative style prevents the alienation of any one group. The novel does not use ambassadorial strategic empathy, as it is immensely categorizationally challenging for a white reader, nor does it use broadcast strategic empathy, as its themes are impossible to make universally appealing within the modern American context. However, it is not meant for a solely black audience, and it does not use bounded strategic empathy that would appeal only to Justyce's in-group. Instead, the novel uses heteroglossia to leave an emotional gap that prevents the alienation of majority culture readers, despite the narrative empathic challenge that gap presents.

Gender stereotyping: an optional opportunity for mind-modeling

One of the reasons that Justyce's feelings are not often metarepresented is that Justyce himself dislikes thinking about emotions. The internal focalization thus replicates Justyce's inability (or lack of desire) to identify and label his emotions. The novel makes clear this reluctance is caused by Justyce's internalized sexism about which genders are permitted to think and speak about complex emotions. He denigrates his friend Manny when he wants to talk to Justyce about relationships and feelings; Justyce calls these desires "girly" and associates "girly" with "bad." On various occasions when Manny has spoken about emotions, Justyce makes statements like "that's some girly shit you just said, dawg" (p.17), and "you sound like a damn girl right now with all this gossiping shit" (p.69). While the lack of emotional metarepresentation allows for plenty of opportunities for empathic interpretation, these occasional interjections

could alienate some readers, particularly female readers (given the disparagement of "girly"), as well as male readers who dislike the stereotype that males are unemotional. These instances do, however, create an opportunity for more social and cognitive interpretation. While Justyce is able to identify instances in which stereotypes of black people are untrue and harmful, he has still internalized harmful stereotypes about gender (i.e. that males are unemotional, and that female-associated traits are undesirable). This gives readers the opportunity to infer how easily stereotypes are internalized, even by people aware of various modes of oppression. It also creates an opportunity for readers to build a more complex mind-model of Justyce as a person, identifying motivations behind his sentiments, and understanding that his thought processes are not *always* reasonable. Having a mind-model of Justyce as occasionally fallible encourages a reader to consider their empathic interpretations more carefully and more deeply as the novel continues. These reflections are not *required* opportunities for empathy – a reader doesn't have to make them in order to understand the plot as a whole – and given their complexity, it's unlikely that most (or even many) adolescent readers will do them. They are, however, complex *optional* opportunities for empathy that a reader might engage in to come to a deeper understanding of the text.

Higher-order and multi-group mind-modeling

  Dear Martin relies upon the reader to make empathic interpretations from contextual clues. This can also be considered allocentric empathy (Hogan, 2011): imagining the actual responses of another person based off your knowledge of them, their history, their experiences, and their attitudes (in other words, your mind-model of them). However, this kind of allocentric empathy from context can be categorizationally challenging with controversial racial topics like a police shooting: the context given in the novel might not reflect the context a reader believes to be true in the real world.

  The police shooting in the novel gives context to a pattern of events where, in the real world, context is unavailable. As the general public can't witness exactly what happens during police shootings of black men, people must choose to believe a version of events given by witnesses or those involved. Often, the stories are conflicting. In the novel, on the other hand, the reader is allowed to witness the shooting *both* through Justyce's perspective and through the public's perspective, which is given through the narrative inclusion of news reports on the

incident. During the shooting scene, Justyce and Manny are playing rap music loudly and are at first amused by the middle-aged white man yelling at them to turn the music down. When he calls them "worthless nigger sons of bitches" (p.118), Manny yells an insult back. Justyce, nervous and trying to "be like Martin," "leans forward to reach for the volume knob" (p.119). Manny shouts "Oh SHIT!", the scene ends, and the next chapter is composed of three words: "BANG. BANG. BANG." (p.120). The novel next includes a news report about the shooting, and later on, further reports about how the off-duty officer who was the shooter claims that he thought Justyce and Manny were reaching for a gun.

Nodelman notes that the inclusion of news stories in children's or YA novels with multiple narratives can emphasize how "public events impinge on private lives" (2017, p.72). In *Dear Martin*'s case, it can draw a majority culture reader's attention to the dissonance between what a news story reveals and how the same narrative is perceived by those involved. In other words, it emphasizes the "private lives" of the characters, while also using the "fictional collage" to remind the reader of real-life news stories they might have consumed, prompting them to contemplate whether there may have been the same dissonance between the public event and the private lives of those involved. These comparisons require both higher-order and multi-group mind-modeling.

As a reminder, higher-order mind-modeling keeps track of a train of empathic or theory of mind interpretations, i.e. I think that Person A thinks/feels that Person B thinks/feels…(etc.). Most mind-modeling in interactions with fiction is second-order (I think that the character thinks/feels…) (Zunshine, 2006, p.29). In *Dear Martin*'s shooting scene, the reader must interpret via second-order mind-modeling that Justyce's reach for the volume dial was his intention to turn the music down. The reader must also use third-order mind-modeling to draw their own conclusion about whether the officer interpreted Justyce's motion toward the volume dial as an act of aggression, or whether the shooter is merely claiming he thought there was an act of aggression in order to give an excuse (i.e. I think that the officer thought that Justyce's intentions were…). With the inclusion of the news articles, the orders of mind-modeling become even more complicated, as the reader must interpret how the majority culture public is likely to feel about the incident based off the information given in the news articles (i.e. I think that the majority culture public will think that Justyce's motivations were…; I think that the majority culture public will think that the officer thought that Justyce's motivations were…). These are all

complex, narratively challenging opportunities for mind-modeling: Zunshine states that most adults can only keep track of four orders of mind-modeling (2006, p.29), and the inclusion of the news articles directly after this scene adds a fourth order onto the interpretations the reader must make.

Within these orders of mind-modeling, the reader must also keep track of each group's interpretations of the shooting (multi-group mind-modeling). The reader creates a mind-model of the majority culture public's reaction by using their knowledge of their own in-group as well as knowledge about real-life events: how did they interpret various people's intentions when reading about police shootings in real-life news stories? Then the reader must also create a mind-model of Justyce's perspective on the shooting by using empathy with an out-group member. Creating these conflicting mind-models might be difficult for a majority culture reader given common majority culture beliefs about real-world events (for instance, the belief that black victims of shootings did, in fact, behave threateningly). As the novel prioritizes Justyce's perspective over the public, the reader is forced to accept their empathic interpretation of the out-group perspective over their interpretation of the in-group perspective. Within an inter-group conflict, taking the out-group perspective is both difficult, and the requirement to do so is alienating. However, the text encourages the reader: Justyce as a character models how to do it. When Justyce discovers that Officer Tison (the officer who shot him and Manny) witnessed his partner get murdered by black men, he uses empathy with an out-group member himself: "Who's to say Garrett Tison's quickness to pull the trigger wasn't caused by seeing his partner killed by a black kid? It's no excuse, of course. But Jus *knows* that effects of trauma are real" (p.142, original emphasis). As Justyce is able to use categorically challenging out-group empathy (with the man who shot him, no less), so the reader is urged to do the same.

Group categorizations are stark in *Dear Martin*. Engaging empathy with the novel is doubly difficult; the text requires the reader, via various narrative techniques, to constantly interpret emotions and build mind-models, yet throughout most of the novel, the emphasis on Justyce's out-group affiliation is intense. In many ways, the fact that the novel's opportunities for empathy are narratively challenging allows for a reader to have more empathic engagement with the novel rather than less. Rather than the categorizational and narrative empathic challenges combining to make it impossible to engage empathy, the narrative challenges encourage *more* empathy use on the part of the reader: metaphors, embodied emotions, and contextual clues

engage the brain and invite empathy use, and using empathy with the novel is also required to even follow much of the plot line and character motivations. Moreover, the narrative challenges *mitigate* some of the categorizational challenges through the use of the common YA trope of mixed narration.

Say What You Will

Say What You Will tells the story of Matthew, a boy with OCD, who volunteers to become a peer helper for Amy, a girl in his class with cerebral palsy who speaks through a computer. They become friends, and slowly their friendship develops into a romance; the novel follows the story of their relationship through their last year of school and most of the year after.

Two out-group protagonists

Both protagonists of *Say What You Will* are disabled, an out-group category that carries a lot of subconscious prejudice in the Western world. Susan Wendell argues that empathy with disabled people or characters is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, as cultural associations with disability are so full of fear, pity, and revulsion that an able-bodied person would have a strong desire not to engage empathy (1997, p.248). Amy's disability will be easily recognizable to able-bodied readers. Alice Hall notes that physical disability, particularly the image of a wheelchair, is still the category that most people think of when imagining a disabled person (2016, p.76). Amy is not always in a wheelchair – sometimes she uses crutches – but for the most part she represents a common script of a disabled person. She also uses a Pathway computer to communicate; readers may recognize this from famous users like Stephen Hawking. Though Amy's computer speaks with an imitation of a teenage girl's voice – she specifically does not wish to sound like Stephen Hawking – her dialogue, spoken through the computer, is represented with all capital letters: a reminder that her speech lacks the inflections of a human voice. Amy, in other words, is an archetypal example of a disabled out-group member.

Matthew represents an even less accepted side of disability than Amy does, as cognitive disabilities carry more prejudice than physical disabilities. Dolmage states that there is a "disability hierarchy" in that "physical disability is more desirable that mental or psychological disability" (2014, p.46). Hall notes that cognitive impairment has often been the victim of "wider social avoidance" and that even the field of disability studies "has been criticized for its lack of

engagement with cognitive, intellectual, or neurological disabilities" (2016, p.128). Matthew himself acknowledges the difference between Amy's physical disability and his cognitive disability: "No one blamed Amy for the way she looked and sounded. But people *did* blame him for the washing and the tapping and the strange things the voice in his head made him do" (McGovern, 2014, p.95, original emphasis). Prejudice against disability in general is strong, and both Amy's and Matthew's disabilities would create a significant out-group categorization on the part of the reader, and therefore a significant categorical challenge to engaging empathy.[1] Matthew's disability in particular, however, would make his out-group categorization even more compelling, and empathy even more of a categorical challenge.

Metarepresentation as a solution to categorizationally challenging empathy

Say What You Will alternates chapters between Amy's and Matthew's perspectives in third-person narration, both internally focalized, occasionally showing emails and texts between the two of them. The novel's polyphonic narrative construction has the potential to create a lot of narratively challenging opportunities for empathy. Nodelman argues that including multiple characters' perspectives in children's and YA literature encourages young readers to detach from the text enough to "prevent easy identification" (2017, p.8), ushering readers into more complex empathic interpretations. For example, if the text were constructed so that focalization through Matthew created different empathic interpretations than focalization through Amy, empathy with the novel might be more narratively challenging. However, the novel does not make use of this potential. While *Dear Martin* gave the reader sparse clues from which to interpret Justyce's emotions, in *Say What You Will*, both Amy's and Matthew's chapters use internal focalization to spell out their feelings directly with metarepresentation. At one point in a chapter focalized through Amy, for example, it states that Matthew's blunt words to her "didn't embarrass her to hear it; it thrilled her" (p.23). This continues despite the heterglossia of multiple narrative styles; in an email that Amy writes to Matthew in first-person perspective, she identifies her own

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[1] It must be noted that in the context of literary disability studies, "terms such as empathy, pity, fear, and abjection are highly politicized and hotly contested" (Hall, 2016, p.47). It's important to remember that I am using a definition of empathy as "understanding, or attempting to understand, what others feel" – this does not necessarily delve into the realms of sympathy and pity; it is an ongoing cognitive process that happens both consciously and unconsciously while reading.

emotions with metarepresentation: "I've never felt this alone before" (p.230). These emotional labels – *embarrass*, *thrilled*, and *alone* – communicate to the reader what Amy is feeling, but don't create an opportunity for empathy: the reader has their empathic work done for them by the metarepresentative emotional labels.

Empathic engagement with Matthew makes for a more complex issue given that his disability is cognitive. As Matthew is not neurotypical, his mental state will be quite different to the mental state of a reader – more so than the differences between mental states of two neurotypical people. This means that some of his thoughts and actions – those driven by his OCD – won't have logical motivations for a neurotypical reader. Because motivations and intentions are necessary to build a mind-model, a reader might not be able to interpret Matthew's emotions from mere contextual clues, like they would with Justyce in *Dear Martin*. Contexts that would make Matthew feel strong emotions like anxiety or fear might not provoke the same reactions in a neurotypical person, and so a majority culture reader might not recognize which contextual clues are relevant for Matthew. Projective and normative empathy might be unattainable: in terms of projective empathy, a reader can't project themselves into the mental "shoes" of a person whose cognitive processes work differently. In terms of normative empathy, a person with OCD won't match a majority culture reader's understanding of a "normatively standard" person, and the reader, inexperienced in how a person with OCD thinks and feels, won't have a script or schema from which to base their interpretation of Matthew's emotions. In other words, a cognitively disabled protagonist could make empathic interpretations inaccessible.

The text solves this problem by using metarepresentation and by providing extensive emotional explanations. Like Amy's emotions, Matthew's emotions are given labels – "anxious," "panic," etc. These labels, while telling the reader *what* Matthew is feeling, still won't communicate to the reader *why* Matthew is feeling them, as Matthew often has illogical reasons (to a neurotypical person) for being anxious. In other words, metarepresentative labels might communicate emotions, but they do not create mind-models. At times, the text thus helps the reader to understand Matthew's motivations by characterizing Matthew's OCD as a "voice" in his head "telling him to do things. Wash his hands twice before lunch, up to his elbows. Wash them again after lunch" (p.13). The voice also gives the reader an understanding of why Matthew misinterprets other characters' emotions: despite Amy never having done anything to communicate that she no longer wants to spend time with Matthew, Matthew becomes distressed

that she feels this way; this illogical jump is connected for the reader by Matthew's voice telling him that "she's pretty much through with you anyway" (p.126). At other times, the free indirect discourse gives outright explanations of Matthew's emotions and the reasons behind them: "He couldn't skip [cleaning the bathroom]. Bad things would happen if he skipped it. He'd lose this job or worse. Someone in his family would get cancer. Amy would die…He could feel his panic mounting" (p.136). This instance labels Matthew's emotion (panic) and also gives a motivation for that emotion (the possibility that bad things would happen to Matthew's family or to Amy). Like the irrational jump between Amy's actions and Matthew's reactions, the reason for Matthew's emotion in this scene would be nonsensical to a neurotypical reader. The narration provides that reason for the reader, who without it might not have been able to make the connection.

Just as the text provides explanations of Matthew's emotions, so it provides an explanation of Matthew's disability. Dolmage argues that a character's disability is almost always "explained" medically at some point in fiction with a disabled character. Stating that the many tropes of disability in fiction create disability "myths," he calls this the "disability as pathology" myth – the myth that disability can't exist without "a medicalized explanation and definition" (2014, p.33). At first Matthew's anxieties and compulsions are not named; however, Amy identifies them, describing a book she read about people's illogical compulsions, that the problem is called OCD, and that Matthew's "got it" (McGovern, 2014, p.54). By labeling Matthew's cognitive differences, the text adds to the explanations of Matthew's illogical motivations. It gives a majority culture reader a concrete reason not only for why Matthew must act and feel in a certain way, but also for why the way Matthew acts and feels is different to the way the reader acts and feels.

Through these various forms of "explanations" – of Matthew's emotions, of the motivations behind them, and of Matthew's disability, the text essentially builds a mind-model of Matthew *for* the reader. It uses this self-created mind-model to make sure the reader can generally understand how the storyline is affected by Matthew's thoughts and feelings. However, these explanations, while making formerly inaccessible emotions available to the reader, leave very little up to the reader themselves to interpret. The already-existent mind-models mean that the reader's work is done for them. The text thus solved the problem of inaccessible empathy

with a neurodiverse protagonist, but in doing so, ended up getting rid of most of the text's opportunities for empathy.

Is there an in-group categorization?

Would an in-group categorization with the protagonists provoke more empathy use, despite the lack of significant opportunities for empathy? Adolescence does feature in the novel. Amy and Matthew go through various typical Western adolescent experiences, like asking and taking each other to prom and applying for university. The largest potential for adolescence to feature strongly enough to act as an in-group categorization is Amy's sexuality and her first-love romance with Matthew. These experiences are classic adolescent themes, but that Amy has a romance, desires to have sex, and even does have sex are all unusual and radical. Amy's disabled body would generally be a barrier for sexual possibilities. Abby Wilkerson notes that women with motor impairment face major obstacles in getting birth control or medical advice on sexual topics because of the dissociation between disabled people and sex or sexuality (2011, p.194). She goes on to argue that sexuality is "a culturally feared aspect of the body, with especially serious implications for those whose bodies are perceived as falling outside a fairly narrow and rigid norm" (p.193). Mollow and McRuer argue that disability and sexuality are "if not antithetical…then certainly incongruous," and disabled people are seldom "regarded as either desiring subjects or objects of desire" (Mollow and McRuer, 2012, p.1). This real-life prejudice spills over into fiction; Dolmage argues that another disability "myth" in fiction is that disabled characters are rarely allowed romantic relationships (2014, p.35). That Amy wants to be and acts as a sexual being could lead an adolescent reader into an in-group categorization, given that her first sexual and romantic experiences are markers of her adolescence.

The novel begins before Chapter 1 with an "unsent message found on Amy's computer in the hospital" that immediately makes clear that despite the protagonists' disabilities, the book is about love and sex: "You probably think it was all about sex, but that's where you're wrong. It was about love. And you. Mostly you. Other people would look at me and think sex was impossible but love was not. Then it turns out, both are possible and also impossible" (McGovern, 2014, no page). This preface sets the reader up to view Amy, at least, as a person who both desires sex and love and who also has experienced both. During the novel itself, Amy is defiant about her capacity to be sexual. When Matthew expresses discomfort at her talking

about sex, she defiantly asks, "DO I LOOK LIKE SOMEONE WHO SHOULD NEVER TALK ABOUT SEX?" (p.65, original emphasis). Matthew also notices Amy as a person possible to be sexually attracted to very early on in the book: "Amy looked even prettier than she had last spring, her face tan, her hair even longer and curlier than he remembered. It made him feel shy in spite of the emails they'd exchanged" (p.38-39). The text treats Amy as someone desiring of having sex, and also someone who others would desire to have sex with, and thus treats Amy as an adolescent rather than a nonsexual disabled person.

Amy and Matthew's adolescent relationship might be radical because of their disabilities, but in the end, it doesn't aid in an in-group categorization on the basis of adolescence. For adolescence to act as an in-group categorization on the part of the reader, there must be a sense of adolescent solidarity between the protagonist and the reader. *Say What You Will*, however, rather than creating a sense of adolescent solidarity through the "in-your-face prose" of more modern young adult literature (Reynolds, 2007, p.122), instead follows older YA tropes of didactic depictions of adolescence.

The consequences of Amy's sexual experiences certainly follow the patterns of didactic young adult literature. Kokkola argues that sexual "consequences" in young adult literature form a didactic atmosphere dictated from the adult realm. When an adolescent character has sex for the first time, they are "punished for their encroachment on the adult world, and suffer the calamitous consequences of premature entry into the adult world: the end of the relationship, sexual violence, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and, of course, death" (Kokkola, 2013, p.8). Amy and Matthew suffer many of these consequences. Amy has sex with another boy named Sanjay after prom because she wants to experiment before trying it with someone she cares about, like Matthew. She tells him that "I thought, here's my chance!...I wanted to see if my body could manage it" (p.234). Matthew and Amy fight, and Amy leaves for college soon after, where she lives alone with little to no social contact for months. This follows Kokkola's patterns precisely; she states that "the most common form of punishment is the damage done to personal relationships when teens allow their sexuality to get 'out of control'" (2013, p.53). Amy then becomes pregnant from this encounter with Sanjay, only discovering this five months into her pregnancy. This relatively unrealistic consequence is common enough in didactic YA literature that Kokkola gives it the name of the "virgin-to-mother" storyline: "the frequency with which adolescents conceive a child after a single sexual encounter is one of the most noticeable

features of the corpus" (2013, p.58-59). Amy's pregnancy then follows predictable patterns; she nearly dies from preeclampsia (the "death" consequence), and puts the baby up for adoption despite her intense emotional distress, something Kokkola calls the "most neutral 'solution' to the 'problem' of adolescent pregnancy," as it avoids the contentious topics of abortion and of teenage parenthood (2013, p.54). These calamitous, unrealistic, and moralistic consequences of Amy's adolescent sexuality are highly unlikely to create an in-group categorization on the part of the reader.

Meanwhile, Matthew's sexuality ends up following Dolmage's (2014) and Mollow and McRuer's (2012) predictions for depictions of disabled romance. Matthew's experience of adolescence, particularly his sexuality, is so affected by his disability that his adolescence is subsumed by it. He is not permitted to be a sexual being; he is incapable of doing much more than thinking Amy is pretty and exchanging a few chaste kisses. Matthew himself doesn't believe his body is capable of much sexuality, and conflates Amy's disability with his own views of his own body. He tells Amy that "I don't believe there's such a thing as casual sex for people like you and me. How could there be? We don't have casual relationships with our bodies. They're unpredictable, humiliating things that have failed us so much it's hard not to hate them, and impossible to imagine being naked with another person and relaxed at the same time" (p.254). Though Matthew says this about casual sex, in reality this applies to all sex for him, as he is unable to talk or even think about sex without descending into panic attacks brought on by his OCD. The most sexual act he is able to do is to fulfill Amy's request near the end of the novel to merely "lie on top of her" so that she can "feel his weight" (p.311). Between the consequences of Amy's sexuality and the suppression of Matthew's, the adolescent experiences of burgeoning sexuality and first love are contained entirely within adult-defined "appropriate" boundaries.

This didacticism, which an adolescent reader would surely pick up on, means that adolescence functions only weakly as a group categorization within the novel. It would be difficult for any in-group categorization on the basis of adolescence to take place, as *Say What You Will* drifts into older, didactic tropes of young adult literature, and all of the adolescent experiences and markers are dictated by adult norms. An adolescent reader is more likely to be alienated by the texts' depictions of adolescence than they are to have a sense of adolescent solidarity with the protagonists. Substantial empathic engagement with *Say What You Will* is

highly unlikely: there are strongly out-group protagonists, no significant in-group categorizations, and few real opportunities in the text that provoke meaningful empathy use.

History Is All You Left Me

History Is All You Left Me features another protagonist with OCD, but the texts treats OCD, and disability in general, very differently from *Say What You Will*. *History Is All You Left Me* is the story of Griffin, a gay teenage boy with OCD; it details his relationship with his boyfriend Theo, their breakup, and Griffin's grief after Theo's accidental death. The text alternates chapters labeled "Today" and "History." The "History" chapters feature Griffin and Theo's relationship and subsequent break-up once Theo moves to California to start university. The "Today" chapters feature the events after Theo's death, and how Griffin befriends Theo's new boyfriend from California, Jackson, as they cope with their grief together. By the end of the novel, the timelines are synchronized; the dates of the last "History" chapter catches up with the date of the first "Today" chapter.

Intersections of in-group and out-group

History Is All You Left Me intertwines its three major group categorizations (adolescence, sexual orientation, and disability), inextricably linking a reader's potential in-group categorization with strong markers of its protagonist's out-group affiliation.

Queer theory and disability studies see parallels between queer and disabled sexualities. McRuer argues that "queering entails rejecting cultural devaluation and reshaping heterosexist norms, and claiming disability entails bringing out the multiple differences that are compelled to pass under the sign of the same" (2003, p.96-97). In later work, McRuer goes on to argue that "by the early twenty-first century it was virtually impossible to be well-versed in disability theory without an understanding of how it was thoroughly intertwined with sexuality studies or queer theory" (2017, p.140). In *History Is All You Left Me*, this intersection of sexual orientation and disability is also entangled with an additional intersection of adolescence. This entanglement begins in a "coming out" moment of all three group categorizations in the first "History" chapter of the text. These three groups "coming out" at once is no coincidence; Kokkola argues that queer adolescents must come out more than majority culture adolescents, but that all of them must come out in some form: "whereas heterosexual adolescents have to 'come out' as sexual

desiring beings, queer adolescents have to 'come out' as being not only desiring beings, but as experiencing same-sex desire or other deviant desires" (Kokkola, 2013, p.107-108). Meanwhile, the entirety of McRuer's book *Crip Theory* (2006) draws a parallel between coming out as queer and coming out as crip – a term he defines in relation to "disabled" as queer is defined in relation to the LGBT+ community. Griffin comes out as a sexual adolescent desiring of a relationship practically at the exact moment as he comes out as both queer and disabled. Theo and Griffin both admit they have something to tell each other, and then count down to say their admissions at the same time: "'I think I might be crazy,' I spit out while he says, 'I like you.' Theo blushes, his half smile gone. 'Wait, what?...I thought you were going to say you like me. Are you gay, Griff?' 'Yeah,' I admit, for the first time ever" (p.11). While Theo wants them to date, Griffin can't consider dating Theo until he has "confessed" his disability – which, like in *Say What You Will*, is labeled ("I think I might have OCD" (p.11)), following Dolmage's disability as pathology myth (2014, p.33). Griffin's identity as an adolescent – a newly sexual being – is inextricably intertwined with his identities as gay and disabled: only once Theo has accepted Griffin's coming out as crip (in Griffin's words, as "crazy"), and only once they have both accepted each other coming out as queer, can Griffin and Theo begin their relationship and thus come out into their adolescent sexuality and first love.

The intersections between Griffin's in-group affiliation as an adolescent and his out-group affiliations as both gay and disabled don't preclude adolescence from functioning strongly as an in-group within the novel. Griffin's sexuality and sexual desires are a large part of this. Losing his virginity, in particular, is a significant marker of his adolescence. However, like Griffin's coming out moment, it intertwines his experience an adolescent with his out-group affiliations. The novel combines two radical sexualities – queer and disabled – neither of which are generally permitted to exist in YA fiction in a positive and uncensored manner. Unlike in many LGBT+ and disabled young adult novels, Griffin's first sexual experience is not excluded or glossed over. It is also a positive experience, which is even more rare for LGBT+ and disabled characters. Griffin's first time having sex is described in detail (though the nitty-gritty details of what-went-where are exempted). In the run-up, humor over the adolescent awkwardness is emphasized as Griffin and Theo put on music, joking it could be "Love Shack" but settling on scores from action movies, which Griffin describes as "epic" (p.49). They count down to taking off each piece of their clothes so that neither is naked first. Theo has to run across the room

naked to grab the condoms. When the actual act begins, the narration becomes more vague, though some details are still given:

> It's weird how it hurts at first; it's weird how Theo's talking to me to make sure I'm okay feels way better than everything else that's happening. It's weird how we're learning to do this together…It's weird how it's nothing like I thought it would be from the countless hours of porn watching I've clocked (p.50).

These kinds of details express relatively universal themes that surround our Western perception of first sexual experiences – awkwardness, nervousness, humor, discomfort, etc. That Griffin has a familiar-looking first sexual experience will encourage a reader to associate him with the adolescent in-group.

The sexual experience is also undeniably out-group – most obviously because it occurs between two males. While this might make a majority culture reader uncomfortable, the text includes familiar-feeling references to heterosexual experiences that mitigate how unfamiliar sex between two boys is. When asking if Griffin wants to have sex for the first time, Theo asks him "Do you want to practice repopulating the human race?" (p.47), despite the fact that two men having sex is not an act that would create children. Griffin refers to sex between him and Theo in reproductive, heterosexual ways as well; when they are buying condoms, Griffin notices the "family planning" section and states: "My family plan: don't start a family the next time we have sex. But condoms are only 98 percent effective, so who knows?" (p.62). Obviously humor is involved in these statements, as any reader would understand that pregnancy isn't a worry for Theo and Griffin, but the familiar references to facts learned about sex as an adolescent (the effectiveness of condoms as birth control, for example) allows a straight reader to see their homosexual sex as comparable, equal, and similar to heterosexual sex.

Referencing and mirroring heterosexuality is a common occurence in LGBT+ young adult literature. Crisp argues that YA fiction about gay males "reinscribes heteronormativity" because "literature written for and given to young readers contains depictions that reflect…what a society wants itself to be" (2009, p.335). In literature for children and young adults about LGBT+ characters, it is typical for the LGBT+ relationships to therefore "mimic heteronormative family structures and implicit values" (DePalma, 2016, p.828). *History Is All You Left Me* follows this trope to some extent, as it makes the sex scenes more accessible and

familiar for straight readers, but it doesn't completely reinscribe heteronormativity in Griffin and Theo's relationship. Crisp argues that many gay adolescent novels also group their gay male characters as "masculine" and "feminine" in order to reflect a more heterosexually traditional couple (2009, p.336). However, neither Griffin nor Theo, nor the other queer male characters of Jackson and Wade, are characterized within their couple pairings as having opposite-gender stereotypical traits. Wade even describes Theo and Griffin as "bros who kiss and have sex" (p.248), saying that that "sounds wrong" (p.248) but intending to communicate that neither Theo nor Griffin have any particular qualities that mainstream society might denote as stereotypically feminine or even stereotypically gay. Though the sex in *History* follows some gay YA tropes, it avoids others by refusing to couple any of its gay male characters within stereotypically heterosexual-seeming pairings. All of the sex in the novel, including the detailed scene of Griffin's first time, is clearly between two males. Its humor and familiar heterosexual references, however, make it more recognizable as a common adolescent experience to straight adolescent readers.

Griffin's sexual experiences are also out-group for another reason – his disability. As discussed in the earlier section on *Say What You Will*, disability and sexuality are generally incompatible in fiction, and disabled characters' sexual experiences are usually affected by or even prevented by their disability. Griffin doesn't only have sex, however – he also *enjoys* it. To a majority culture reader, this will be far more of an indication of his member of the adolescent in-group than of the disabled out-group; Griffin's sexual pleasure will in fact dissociate him in the reader's eyes from his disability. Mollow and McRuer state that "pleasurable sexual sensations are generally dissociated from disabled bodies and lives" (2012, p.1), and this usually holds true for both physical and cognitive disabilities, particularly severe cognitive disabilities. *Say What You Will*, for instance, denies pleasurable, positive sex to both its disabled protagonists. Amy is punished physically and emotionally for her sexual experience with Sanjay, which wasn't even that enjoyable in the first place, while Matthew is unable to even think of sex or sexual pleasure without having a panic attack due to his OCD. Aza, the protagonist with OCD in *Turtles All the Way Down*, which will be discussed in Chapter 5, is also unable to engage in sexual contact without her OCD interfering and making it nearly impossible to enjoy it. Griffin, however, is entirely capable of having sex and of enjoying it – and he does so, multiple times within the novel. Moreover, the sex in *History* doesn't follow didactic tropes as does the sex in

Say What You Will; characters aren't "punished" for having sex, but rather merely pleasurably experiment, as adolescents do. The sex in *History* may be queer and disabled – following some of the tropes of those categories and dismissing others – but the sex functions most strongly as a marker of Griffin's adolescence. The intersectional entanglement of these in-group and out-group categorizations doesn't interfere with adolescence operating as a group within the novel, nor with Griffin being affiliated with that group. While this means the opportunities for empathy in the novel are still categorizationally challenging, the challenge is mitigated somewhat by the entanglement of adolescence with Griffin's out-group identities.

Opportunities for out-group empathy: representative language

The out-group presence in the novel is strong – aside from Griffin's sexual orientation, his cognitive disability would make for an intense out-group categorization due to the extreme prejudices against cognitive and psychological disabilities as discussed in the section on *Say What You Will*. Griffin's OCD is a large feature of the novel, and attention is drawn to it repeatedly. It makes intrusive appearances in the first-person narration, interrupting scenes in the same way as intrusive thoughts would interrupt a thought process. Phrases like "this even-numbered day" (p.3), "4:18 – even minute" (p.6), and "I only have nine minutes, an odd number that's getting me really anxious, so I scratch my palm while running again" (p.7) intrude into Griffin's narration of one of the first scenes of the novel. They continue to interrupt scenes throughout the rest of the novel, intrusive enough and often enough to continually remind a reader that Griffin has a cognitive impairment and is thus out-group. This obviously affects empathic engagement; not only does it create a categorizational challenge to using empathy, but a cognitive difference also makes for a specific barrier to mind-modeling for neurotypical readers, again as discussed in the previous section. However, despite these barriers to empathy use, *History* manages to achieve the opposite result of *Say What You Will*; it encourages empathic engagement, as it describes Griffin's experience with OCD with representative, rather than metarepresentative, language.

Griffin's experience with OCD is described particularly with embodied metaphors, a type of representative language use that encourages empathic engagement on the part of the reader. Talking about how his parents respect his struggle with his OCD, Griffin states that "I'm lucky to have parents who know when to go to war with me and when to leave me alone in the

battlefield" (p.26). This complex metaphor communicates to the reader how strong Griffin's compulsions are, but it also encourages empathic engagement; a reader must imagine how powerful Griffin's emotions around his OCD must be in order to describe them in such stark terms as "a battlefield" and "going to war." Griffin's panic attacks are also portrayed with metaphors surrounding Griffin's physical reactions and embodied emotions. Various examples include "landslides of panic; I feel one bouldering through me now" (p.149); "I'm pummeling myself into the ground, and I'm drowning without trying to surface, all at once" (p.26); and "my heart is rioting, my chest is tightening, my throat is swallowing nothing, and my fingernails are going to war against my palm" (p.150). The metaphors used to describe Griffin's internal sensations are intensely physical – bouldering, pummeling, drowning, rioting, and again going to war. They are also unusual metaphors in that they are not common English-language representations of emotion, as in the case of clichéd metaphors like "icy fear" or "burning anger." This is a defamiliarizing use of language, which Oatley describes as "vividness of imagery" and "language that is particularly striking," and which he found to contribute to readers' emotional engagement with fiction (2016, p.621-2). These uncommonly embodied emotions create a narrative empathic challenge that invites readers to attempt to understand what exactly "bouldering panic" feels like.

Like in the case of Matthew in *Say What You Will*, the reasons behind Griffin's OCD-caused panic and anxiety won't be logical to a neurotypical reader, which makes it difficult for a reader to create a mind-model of Griffin. Where *Say What You Will* solves this problem by simply explaining everything outright – and therefore discouraging any mind-modeling on the part of the reader – *History* gives explanations for Griffin's OCD-related emotions, but less detailed explanations than in *Say What You Will*. They are also continually accompanied by the types of complex embodied metaphors and emotional representation discussed in the previous paragraph. Though the relative lack of explanations and emotional metarepresentation means that Griffin's emotions are less immediately accessible than Matthew's, it also encourages more empathy and mind-modeling on the part of the reader, as the text requires the reader to do their own work in interpreting emotions and emotional causes. In one instance, Griffin begins to descend into a panic attack because someone is sitting on his left in the library. The reader knows that one of Griffin's compulsions is to be on other people's left, but would probably find it difficult to comprehend why this particular instance sends Griffin into an emotional tailspin

when he has previously been able to cope with other instances of this. Griffin's reactions escalate:

> My breaths are tightening. I'm so itchy it's as if an army of ants is launching an assault on my body. I want to scream, but I'm in the library, the place of mandatory silence, a freak-out-free zone. It's one more thing I can't control. I try and keep calm by scratching my palm, but the whole thing is ridiculous. I can't bury my anxiety deep in my hand, like a dog and his used-up bone in a backyard (p.169).

This description gives a reader an explanation for why Griffin is unable to cope – that Griffin needs control but is being denied it. This is hidden, however, between embodied emotions (tightening breaths) and the slew of metaphors and similes used to describe his panic (an army of ants assaulting him, burying anxiety like a bone). The reader must work their way through the complex descriptors of emotions, engaging empathy all the while, to reach an explanation of the root cause of Griffin's panic. The reader, therefore, must do much of the empathic work, while still being given enough clues to mind-model a character with significant cognitive differences to their own.

Even when metarepresentative language is used to describe Griffin's emotions, it is accompanied by strong visuals of Griffin's physical reactions. At one point, Griffin is uncomfortable with the discussions other characters are having around him:

> I try to relax the tic in my neck, rotating it like usual, but it's traveling down my shoulders and spine, so I'm doing all sorts of stretches. I flick my wrists, weirdly tense as if I've been up late writing essays; I crack all my knuckles and even double-check to make sure they're all cracked. I'm discomfort personified (p.160).

While Griffin's emotion is metarepresented with the label "discomfort," the reader is also given a strong visual depiction of Griffin's physical reactions. This vivid imagery is likely to increase empathic engagement; Johnson et al (2013) have found that readers' generation of mental imagery while reading fiction significantly increases empathy use. Kidd and Castano (2013) also found that people do better on visual tests of empathy – specifically the Mind in the Eyes test, which identifies emotions from facial expressions – after reading nonillustrated fiction, leading

to the conclusion that despite not directly involving visual cues, reading fiction still improves visual empathy. Mirror neurons play an important role in this - as discussed in Chapter 1, mirror neurons, the neural basis for empathy, fire when viewing other people's physical reactions (e.g. smiling, recoiling, etc.), making us feel as though we are making the expression or physical movement that the other person is doing. They also fire when *reading* about physical movements (Heath and Wolf, 2012, p.145; Speer et al, 2009). Reading about Griffin rotating his neck, flicking his wrists, and cracking his knuckles – in deeply visual language, no less – would activate a reader's mirror neurons in response to the strong mental image the passage creates of Griffin doing these actions. The emotional label "discomfort" is barely needed, given how strong the empathic response to Griffin's embodied discomfort would be.

Griffin's OCD is an alienating feature of the novel: it creates a strongly biased out-group categorization on the part of the reader, and presents a real categorizational empathic challenge. However, it is also a feature of the novel that *creates* many opportunities for narratively challenging empathy, as Griffin's OCD-related reactions are communicated in engaging language that encourages and even compels complex empathy use.

Disguising the extent of the out-group categorization

As a cognitively disabled protagonist, Griffin would be strongly out-group to a potential reader. However, the textual construction of *History* prevents Griffin's cognitive disability from creating too much of a categorizational challenge for a majority culture reader. The most alienating revelations about Griffin and his cognitive disability are not given until close to the end of the novel. The extent to which Griffin is out-group to the reader is therefore not revealed until the reader has already overcome much of the categorizational challenge of employing empathy with Griffin.

Griffin's OCD is at first made light of; its seriousness is only addressed later in the novel. During their relationship, Theo treats Griffin's OCD as "quirks" that he embraces and plays along with. Theo makes Griffin's compulsions a theme for gifts that he gives to Griffin; for example, he makes an animation of a gryphon swerving to be on its compatriots' left-hand side, referencing Griffin's name and his compulsion to be on the left. Theo's carefree treatment of Griffin's OCD earlier in the novel makes it seem less an unfamiliar out-group and more a mere idiosyncrasy, a humorous feature of the novel which adds to the romance between Theo and

Griffin. However, later in the novel, Griffin acknowledges that Theo's treatment of his OCD as "cute quirks" is not accurate, nor altogether helpful for him, as his OCD has become a serious problem. In the middle of the novel Griffin mentions for the first time that "I don't think my quirks are actually quirks" (p.143). Griffin begins to treat his OCD more and more seriously as the novel goes on, finally agreeing to see a psychologist, until near the end of the novel he admits to himself that his OCD is genuinely damaging his life. His friend Wade wants him to think of his OCD as "limiting" rather than "controlling" his life, but Griffin knows that the opposite is true: "Not controlling. Limiting. I try to believe it, but I can't. My compulsions threaten my health, physically and mentally" (p.273). While his OCD would still make him out-group to the reader in the beginning of the novel, the most alienating characteristics of Griffin's OCD – the ones that present the largest categorizational challenge to empathy – are not discussed or acknowledged until later. This delays the intensity of the out-group categorization until a reader is already empathically engaged with the text, mitigating the categorizational challenge the novel presents until a reader is already cognitively invested.

Another alienating feature of Griffin's character that becomes increasingly conspicuous is Griffin's unreliability as a narrator. This fact is present throughout the novel, though subtle at first. The entire novel, both the "Today" and "History" chapters, are written in first-person, present-tense narration through Griffin's perspective. The alternating "Today" and "History" chapters mean that there are multiple narrators – older Griffin from the "Today" chapters, and slightly younger Griffin from the "History" chapters, both of whom make different interpretations of what events mean based on how much information they have at that point in time. That the younger Griffin narrating the "History" chapters is somewhat unreliable is obvious to the reader, who has more information than the younger Griffin does and can therefore notice when Griffin wrongly interprets other characters or events based on a lack of information. As the novel continues, however, it becomes clear that Griffin might be unreliable in other ways. As Nikolajeva states, "variants in temporal structure [in YA novels] promote reader engagement, for they open cognitive gaps the reader can then explore" (2016, p.138). These "cognitive gaps" grow wider as the novel continues. Because the text is internally focalized through Griffin, the reader must interpret Griffin's and all other characters' emotions and intentions through Griffin's perspective. In some instances, it's not altogether clear whether Griffin's perspective is correct. In one scene in a "History" chapter, Theo visits New York and Griffin takes him aside, asking

him if they are still "endgame" and if Theo would break up with Jackson if Griffin moved to California, to which Theo replies "probably" (p.241). However, later on in the scene, Wade tells Griffin that Theo got a single dorm room so that he could spend more time with Jackson the following year. A reader must interpret Griffin, Theo, and Wade's conflicting desires through limited information – did Theo really mean that he would break up with Jackson, or was he just cornered? Did Wade misrepresent why Theo was moving into a single dorm room because by this point he was romantically attracted to Griffin (something the reader knows from the "Today" chapters)? These are all complex, narratively challenging requirements for higher-order mind-modeling, but none of these competing interpretations are made clear; all the narration takes place from Griffin's perspective, and Griffin sometimes chooses to focus on certain facts and ignore others in order to reach an interpretation that pleases *him.* Crucially, the reader must also use higher-order mind-modeling to understand that other characters have different interpretations of events than Griffin does. The reader can therefore connect the fact that because various characters have competing versions of how events happened, Griffin's version is not necessarily objective, and that in some instances he might be interpreting events incorrectly and therefore narrating them unreliably. In fact, the act of discovering that Griffin is an unreliable narrator is one of the novel's narratively challenging opportunities for empathy.

However, just *how* unreliable Griffin is isn't revealed until much later in the novel. In the "Today" chapters, Griffin is an overt narrator, speaking directly to Theo who, though dead, becomes the narratee. Throughout the novel's "Today" chapters Griffin continually addresses Theo directly as "you" as he relates events in a mental discourse. *Why* Griffin is "talking" to Theo through his narration is left up to interpretation; it isn't specified whether this is a coping mechanism for Griffin's grief, wishful thinking on Griffin's part, or an actual delusion. As many people imagine talking to the dead in a time of grief, Griffin addressing Theo as a narratee does not seem especially odd in the beginning of the novel. On the first page of the novel, he "tells" Theo through his narration that "I know you're out there, listening" (p.1). At the time, it seems the kind of statement made when people express the sentiment that dead loved ones are still watching over them. This would not cause particular notice from a reader, nor ignite suspicion that Griffin is unreliable. Unless a novel falls into a category or genre where the reader is predisposed to be suspicious (like detective fiction, for example, which will be addressed in Chapter 5), it's unlikely that a reader will suspect a narrator of being unreliable without quite an

overt clue. As Zunshine notes, "readerly vigilance" for unreliable narrators "presupposes a constant state of suspicion that is difficult to maintain both in real life and in our engagement with the literary narrative" (2006, p.102-3). Zunshine calls this suspicion over whether sources of information are reliable or not "source-monitoring" (p.103). Like theory of mind and empathy, while source-monitoring is something that we are constantly engaging in and can seem effortless, "exaggerated and unrelentingly strong" source-monitoring is too "cognitively expensive" to do without a good reason. In other words, we are pre-disposed to treat narrators as reliable unless given quite a blatant reason to do otherwise. Zunshine emphasizes that this is the case even with experienced readers (p.103); adolescent readers, who are more likely than adults to be inexperienced, are therefore unlikely to break this pattern. An adolescent reader might treat Griffin as reliable until given the final proof that he is not at the end of the novel.

Only by the end of the novel, when Griffin starts seeing a psychiatrist, does it become clear that Griffin really believed Theo was listening to him speak inside his head:

> My psychiatrist is treating me with exposure therapy for my OCD, and medicine because she's diagnosed me with a delusional disorder. I'm not convinced she's right, but I have to face a version of the truth that's painful – you aren't actually listening to me. This thought gets me scratching my palm and pulling my earlobe, because if you haven't heard a single thing I've said to you since you died, then you died without knowing the truth [that Griffin was romantically involved with Wade before Theo's death] (p.291).

The last sentences of the novel, coming a page later as Griffin has begun taking medicine for his delusions, drive home the fact that Griffin, with his delusions, may have been wildly unreliable about many things, and could possibly have completely misrepresented much of the story: "I'm so happy you were my first, Theo, and you were worth all the heartache. I hope I wasn't living in some alternate universe where I wasn't actually your first love, too. But this universe is the only one that matters, and I have one last question for you: I didn't get our history wrong, did I?" (p.292). Griffin was once unshakeable in his perspective on events; that he only expresses doubt about his own reliability after beginning to take medication conveys to the reader that other delusions and misinterpretations may have occurred throughout the text.

This last, portentous question carries huge significance for empathic engagement with *History*. Firstly, that it occurs in the last moments of the novel prevents the text from being too much of a categorizational challenge. A delusional protagonist would create far more of an out-group categorization than if the protagonist solely had OCD. OCD is a fairly well-known disability, with many representations in popular culture. While still a cognitive disability that would cause a strong out-group categorization, it is still better known, and carries less prejudice, than other forms of cognitive or psychological disabilities like delusions. As with the extent and seriousness of Griffin's OCD, a reader is allowed to extensively engage empathy with Griffin *before* they are presented with the categorizational challenge; he won't have been *this* strongly out-group for most of the novel. By disguising the extent of Griffin's out-group categorization until the very end, the novel prevents a barrier to empathy from occurring. Secondly, this question creates dozens more narratively challenging opportunities for empathy, despite the fact that it occurs as the last sentence in the novel. A reader will have created empathic interpretations throughout the course of the novel, using information provided by Griffin to understand the plot in a certain way. When the novel makes clear that any of this information could be inaccurate, the reader is therefore encouraged to revisit these empathic interpretations and perhaps revise them. Both Nikolajeva and Kümmerling-Meibauer argue that narrative devices like those used in *History* encourage revisions to interpretations: Nikolajeva notes that varying temporal structure "allows us to oscillate between parallel narratives, to go back in time in the story, to re-live, re-play, and perhaps revise memories" (2016, p.137). Kümmerling-Meibauer argues that unreliable narrators encourage a similar interaction with fiction: they require readers to "reflect upon their level of knowledge before and after the reading of the novel. In this regard, they are above all challenged on the cognitive level" (2017, p.124) – meaning readers are presented with a narratively challenging opportunity for empathy. *History* therefore offers *more* narratively challenging opportunities for empathy because it offers them *twice*: once with the original amount of information given, and once again at the end of the novel with the new information given. These last opportunities to revise empathic interpretations are optional opportunities – a reader is not required to take up the opportunities in order to understand future plot points, as the question occurs at the end of the novel. However, a reader is encouraged by the tempting question (which even references the novel's title) to take up these optional opportunities for further empathic interpretation.

Like *Dear Martin*, *History*'s opportunities for empathy are both plentiful and encouraged. Though Griffin's intersecting out-group affiliations are strong, this does not cause the novel to be an overwhelming categorizational challenge. That Griffin is still portrayed very much as an adolescent, and that his adolescence is a large part of his out-group identities, allows a reader an in-group commonality to provide an access point for empathy use. Meanwhile, Griffin's cognitive disability actually *provides* numerous narratively challenging opportunities for empathy. Because many of these opportunities are optional – i.e. the text does not require the reader to engage with them to follow the story – the presence of adolescence is all the more necessary in the novel to promote adolescent readers' empathic engagement. Without it, the categorizational challenge of these opportunities might cause a reader to simply disengage, and the reader's empathic interaction with the text would be far more superficial.

If I Was Your Girl

If I Was Your Girl tells the story of Amanda, a post-transition transgender girl in her last year of high school. Amanda has moved away from her mother's town, in which she was physically attacked during and after her transition, for a new and hopefully safer start in her father's small town. Because no one knows Amanda in her new home, and she is able to pass as cisgender, she hides the fact that she is trans from everyone but her father. The story takes place in the Deep South of the United States, a geographic area that culturally has high levels of prejudice against the LGBT+ community. I chose this novel for this chapter not because of the geographic area it depicts, however, but because of the prevailing prejudices and intolerances against trans people that exist throughout Western culture as a whole.

While the entire LGBT+ community faces intolerance and bias, trans people face more than the rest. Barbir et al. note that "lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals have begun to gain an acceptance that transgender people have yet to achieve" (2017, p.154). Copp and Koehler found in a study of 416 American undergraduate students that attitudes surrounding the LGBT+ community differed depending on individuals' specific identities and gender: "attitudes towards gay and bisexual men were less positive than attitudes toward lesbian or bisexual women, and that attitudes toward transgender individuals were less positive than attitudes toward LGB people" (2017, p.277).

When looking at transgender YA literature, which in itself is an extremely new category, it's necessary to examine historic patterns of LGBT+ young adult literature, as they reveal the difference between the out-group categorization of a transgender adolescent protagonist and the out-group categorization of an LGB adolescent protagonist. "Historic" patterns might be a bit of a misnomer, as YA novels with LGBT+ protagonists were close to nonexistent until their numbers began to increase markedly in the twenty-first century. Just as attitudes towards the LGBT+ community have changed drastically in the last twenty years, so has the amount and type of YA literature with LGBT+ protagonists. It's thus important to acknowledge *when* critics have made their arguments identifying patterns in LGBT+ young adult literature. Because attitudes around LGBT+ subjects have changed so much so quickly, what critics argued five or ten years ago may be entirely inaccurate when looking at the field of literature today. Pre-2010, most LGBT+ young adult novels featured some type of storyline around the topic of homophobia. Wickens noted in 2011 that "in many contemporary LGBTQ novels homophobia is the overarching 'problem'…In order to problematize homophobia, authors frequently create antagonists with homophobic attitudes and behaviors" (p.153). Crisp argued in 2009 that adolescent novels about gay males that *don't* include homophobia as a major focus of the novel are not, in fact, mimetic fiction, but rather a form of magical realism. He cites as an example David Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy*, published in 2003 and set in a gay-friendly town in America. Crisp's argument had much more merit in 2009, given the attitudes around LGBT+ issues at that time and the existing range of YA literature with gay male protagonists. 2009 is a mere ten years ago, but I would argue that it is much more likely now for LGB teens to have an adolescence in which homophobia is not a main focus or struggle of their lives – particularly for those living in liberal, gay-friendly areas and families. It is therefore also possible to have LGB young adult novels that are both mimetic and that don't feature homophobia as their main topic – as happens in *History Is All You Left Me*, for instance. In *History*, the reaction to Griffin and Theo coming out in front of their families is casual: "Everyone breaks into smiles. Russell [Theo's father] laughs, 'That's it? I thought you were trying to leave the party to hang out elsewhere…the answer would've been no [to leaving], but I'm more than fine with you two dating" (Silvera, 2017, p.56). This is not to say that all LGB teens in Western culture will have an adolescence in which homophobia is not a main focus. It does, however, demonstrate how drastic changes in

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attitudes toward the LGBT+ community have caused similar changes in thematic patterns of LGB young adult literature.

Of course, as discussed, attitudes towards LGB people and transgender people remain very different; it's far more likely for an LGB young adult novel to lack homophobia as a major theme than for a transgender YA novel to lack transphobia as a major theme. YA literature with transgender protagonists really was nonexistent until very recently. In 2016, Bittner et al. stated that there were "over twenty" young adult novels published by mainstream publishers (rather than self-published) that feature transgender or genderqueer characters (p.955). However, most of the examples they cite are texts that have a transgender or genderqueer secondary character, rather than a protagonist. Only five of the texts that Bittner et al. cite are young adult novels with transgender or genderqueer protagonists: *Parrotfish* (Wittlinger, 2007), *I Am J* (Beam, 2011) *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* (Cronn-Mills, 2012), *Freakboy* (Clark, 2013), and *If I Was Your Girl* (Russo, 2016). I would add to that list *The Art of Being Normal* (Williamson, 2015), but otherwise have been unable to find any other YA titles with a transgender protagonist, although I was able to find *Symptoms of Being Human* (Garvin, 2016), which has a genderfluid protagonist. *If I Was Your Girl*, meanwhile, is ostensibly the first YA novel with a protagonist who is post-transition and has had gender reassignment surgery (Jenkins and Cart, 2018, p.205).

Interestingly, and perhaps due to the delay in attitude changes and publication, transgender YA literature seems to be following the patterns of YA literature with lesbian and gay protagonists from ten to twenty years ago. Along with homophobia, between 2000 and 2010 many LGBT+ young adult novels – at this point essentially just lesbian and gay YA novels – focused on themes of "homosexual visibility," that is, coming out "first to themselves, then to their friends and families, and finally in the larger world of their school community" (Jenkins and Cart, 2018, p.132). Transgender YA literature currently focuses on these two themes as major topics. Bittner et al. state that most transgender YA fiction "still conforms to a similar narrative arc, very much focusing on characters who wish for eventual gender confirmation surgery and who go through a comparable process, including a coming-out moment, a series of traumatic or violent episodes, and an eventual learning opportunity for a cisgender character (primary or secondary) so the trans individual can be accepted into a given community" (2016, p.948-949). *If I Was Your Girl* follows these themes to the letter (notably, so does *None of the Above*, the intersex YA novel to be discussed in Chapter 4).

What these patterns point to is that the amount of prejudice caused by a transgender protagonist would make for empathy that is severely categorizationally challenging for a majority culture reader. It's interesting to note that Meredith Russo, the (transgender) author of *If I Was Your Girl*, was so worried about majority culture prejudice towards transgender people that she attempted to construct the novel in such a way as to make empathy with Amanda easier for a cisgender reader. In her author's note at the back of the novel, Russo wrote a note to both cisgender readers and to transgender readers. When speaking to her cisgender readers, Russo wrote that "I have, in some ways, cleaved to stereotypes and even bent rules to make Amanda's trans-ness as unchallenging to normative assumptions as possible…I did this because I wanted you to have no possible barrier to understanding Amanda as a teenage girl with a different medical history from most other girls" (2016, author's note). Russo also reveals that she was worried about the effect this would have on her transgender readers, writing in a note to them that "it's okay if you're different from Amanda," who passes as cisgender, is exclusively attracted to boys, is conventionally beautiful, and has had surgery and hormones. It's telling that Russo was so worried about cisgender readers being unable to engage with the novel that she sacrificed what she saw as important and authentic representation for a more normative, easily relatable standard. The out-group categorization of transgender people in Western culture is that strong.

Group categorizations: gendered implications

Gender obviously plays a role in every novel, but unsurprisingly it plays a greater role in novels where the protagonist's experience of gender has been more complex than most. Because she is able to pass as cisgender, Amanda has experienced the world being seen as both male and female. She expresses discomfort at the overt male attention that being female attracts. When walking with her friends, she notes that "too many dads seemed interested in us as we passed, and for just a moment I missed the near-invisibility of life as a boy" (p.40). She experiences sexual harassment, and must force herself to ignore the intimidation: when climbing over some boys in a van to get to a seat, "something touched my butt during the maneuver. I made myself assume it was an accident" (p.92). This leads her to tell her boyfriend (who believes she is cisgender) that being a girl is "way harder than being a guy" and that "guys could never handle what we go through" (p.172). That Amanda has authority to declare this, given that she has

experienced both, might lessen the novel's categorizational empathic challenge for female readers, who might feel their gendered experiences are validated by Amanda's statements. In other words, Amanda is still out-group because she is trans, but she is also in-group because she is a trans *woman* who confirms the negative effects of sexism on the female in-group. Her out-group categorization causes a categorizational empathic challenge, but it also mitigates that challenge somewhat for female readers.

Of course, this means that empathy is more categorizationally challenging for male readers, who face real barriers to empathic engagement with the novel. This might be deliberate, as much contemporary YA fiction is written and marketed with an implied female reader in mind (Reynolds, 2007, p.74). This certainly seems to be the case with *If I Was Your Girl*. Even the novel's depictions of adolescence as an in-group would fail to mitigate the categorizational challenge for male readers, as all of Amanda's markers of adolescence are markers of a specifically and stereotypically *female* adolescence. I would imagine that the novel's categorizational empathic challenge is so great for majority culture male readers that most would discard the novel as irrelevant or uninteresting for them.

Empathically interpreting effects of trauma: conflating fear and love

If I Was Your Girl uses fairly simple emotional language. When communicating Amanda's emotions, the novel either uses metarepresentation – for example, "I felt my cheeks flush with shame and anger" (p.55) – or else uses common, uncomplicated embodied metaphors – for example, when Amanda is scared she wants to "roll up into a tiny, armored ball" (p.8), and when she feels joy she feels "floaty" (p.233). For an adolescent reader, who will doubtless have been repeatedly exposed to these common and even clichéd metaphors, this language use does not make for narratively challenging opportunities for empathy; adolescent readers are unlikely to have to put in significant empathic effort to determine Amanda's emotions.

However, one narratively challenging opportunity for empathy occurs when the novel emotionally connects Amanda's experience of being an adolescent girl (an in-group member) with her experience of being transgender (an out-group member). The emotional language representing Amanda's fear or anxiety is very similar to the emotional language representing Amanda's romantic attraction to her new boyfriend, Grant. Amanda's emotions surrounding Grant are nearly always embodied. In one example, when looking at Grant, Amanda describes

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her physical sensation as "the flutter turned into a tightening" in her chest (p.110) – fairly common usages of embodied metaphors when describing romantic attraction. However, sensations like her heart "fluttering" or "racing" and her chest "tightening" also occur when Amanda is fearful of people discovering she is trans. When this representative language is used without metarepresentation to accompany it, a reader must distinguish whether Amanda is feeling romantic attraction or fear.

In many instances, which emotion Amanda is experiencing is unclear because for her, romantic attraction and fear are linked. She has experienced violent trauma in the past when others have discovered she is trans. Sexual activity is inherently dangerous for Amanda, who now passes as cisgender; she believes romantic attraction is likely to lead to further violence if her partner discovers she is transgender. After first meeting Grant, Amanda states that "my hands stopped shaking and my breathing slowed, but for some reason I was afraid to consider, my heart wouldn't stop racing in my chest" (p.24). All of these physical reactions – hands shaking, breathing quickly, and heart racing – are possible reactions to *both* fear and romantic attraction. A reader must therefore use empathy to determine from the context of the scene, and from her past trauma, that Amanda is likely feeling both at the same time. Moreover, they must empathically interpret that for Amanda, romantic attraction *leads* to fear because of the prejudice and threat of violence she faces as an out-group member.

Amanda's emotions about her experience of being in love for the first time and her emotions about her experience of being transgender (in other words, her emotions about experiences of being either in-group or out-group to the reader) are represented in nearly the same way. In cases like this, empathizing with an emotion during a moment of in-group affiliation also requires empathizing with an emotion caused by an out-group affiliation, and vice versa. The metaphors and language used in these instances aren't particularly complex, and don't create narratively challenging opportunities for empathy in and of themselves; however, the addition of a categorizational empathic challenge – Amanda's history of being transgender – allows the text's language use to become more of a narrative empathic challenge.

Higher-order and multi-group mind-modeling

That Amanda passes as cisgender and conceals her transgender identity creates opportunities for higher-order mind-modeling. The reader knows that she is transgender, but

most characters in the novel do not. Every time Amanda considers coming out to someone, the reader must determine what Amanda is feeling (e.g. "I think that Amanda feels fear"), but must use higher-order mind-modeling to determine *why* (e.g. "I think that Amanda feels fear *because* she thinks that her friend will be angry/disgusted/violent/etc."). At one point Amanda attempts to come out to Grant by writing him a letter; in the end Grant doesn't read the letter, but in the moment beforehand Amanda states that "my heart started racing again and my stomach flipped back and forth" (p.201). A reader must interpret Amanda's emotions (fear and hope) as well as how Amanda imagines Grant will react (frightened of a bad reaction but hopeful that he might react well – otherwise she would not have written him the letter). Like in *Dear Martin*, the reader must also use multi-group mind-modeling: while they must interpret Amanda's emotions and her prediction of Grant's emotions (i.e. use empathy with an out-group member), they must also predict how they think Grant might actually react (i.e. use empathy with an in-group member at the same time). The reader would likely be using allocentric empathy with Amanda, using her history of trauma to understand her hopes and fears. The reader might also use allocentric empathy with Grant to predict his reaction for themselves, using their mind-model of him. However, because Grant is an in-group member, a reader might also use projective empathy to predict his reaction: "how would *I* feel if my first love told me they were trans?" This multi-group empathy use can prompt real-world effects. Because the reader has engaged empathy with Amanda to understand how hurt she would be if Grant reacts badly, the projective empathy the reader uses with Grant then encourages the reader to not only ask "how *would* I feel if my first love came out to me as trans," but also "how *ought* I to feel and how *ought* I to react" in order not to hurt them. This opportunity for multi-group empathy is optional, as a reader does not necessarily have to predict Grant's reaction; the text only requires a reader to use empathy to understand that Amanda wrote the letter because she thinks there is a possibility he might react well. However, as Grant is an in-group member, and therefore presents less of a categorizational empathic challenge, it's likely a reader could engage with this optional opportunity.

Like *History Is All You Left Me*, *If I Was Your Girl* creates narratively challenging opportunities for empathy through the out-group categorization of its protagonist. However, unlike *History*, in which opportunities for empathy are primarily created via the language use and textual construction surrounding the out-group categorization, *If I Was Your Girl*'s

narratively challenging opportunities for empathy are created by the conflicting group categorizations between Amanda, other characters, and the reader.

Out-Group Empathy: Handling the Challenge

Engaging empathy with a novel in which the protagonist is strongly out-group will always be categorizationally challenging for a majority culture reader. However, out-group categorizations that are very strong, carry great prejudice, or are especially alienating don't necessarily mean that engaging empathy with a text is impossible or even unlikely. Logically, one might argue that because a severely out-group protagonist will make it difficult for a majority culture reader to engage empathy, narratively simple opportunities for empathy in a novel with such a protagonist would mitigate the difficulty and make empathic engagement more likely. However, *Say What You Will* demonstrates that this is counterproductive. Instead, empathic engagement is incited through more narratively challenging opportunities for empathy, which stimulate cognitive engagement by forcing a reader to interpretively fill gaps in the novel. A combination of narratively challenging opportunities for empathy and depictions of adolescence that function as an in-group for the reader can work together to overcome the categorizational challenge of engaging significant empathic effort with an out-group member.

Not all of these novels succeed at this strategy, however. *Say What You Will* precludes empathic engagement, as it presents an extreme categorizational challenge without the benefit of adolescence acting as an in-group, and doesn't offer any narratively challenging opportunities for empathy to stimulate a reader. *If I Was Your Girl* is able to mitigate its categorizational challenge to a certain extent for female readers, and it presents a few interesting opportunities for empathy; as a whole, however, its simple language use and textual construction are less engaging than more complex texts, even for adolescent readers with less developed cognitive capacities. Both *Dear Martin* and *History Is All You Left Me* create narratively challenging, stimulating opportunities for empathy through various literary devices. Though both present extreme categorizational challenges, their depictions of out-group identities intertwined with adolescent experiences mitigate, to a certain extent, an adolescent reader's out-group bias. They create an in-group appeal for adolescent readers through their use of adolescent language, common YA narrative techniques, "in-your-face" prose about sexual experiences, and depictions of universal or shared adolescent experiences.

While we are more prone to making empathic misinterpretations with out-group members (Kunda, 1999, p.347), simple, unchallenging opportunities for empathy don't serve to alleviate this. Empathic challenges are beneficial for readers: narrative challenges require more empathic effort to create complex interpretations, further developing an adolescent reader's cognitive capacity for mind-modeling. Meanwhile, categorizational challenges are also important for readers to face, lest they only ever learn to use empathy with characters who are "just like them." A novel with a categorizational challenge allows majority culture readers to practice using empathy with out-group members, develop their ability to engage empathy in spite of out-group bias, and hopefully translate these skills into the real-world.

The main pitfall of empathy with out-group members is that we engage *less empathy overall* with them than we would with in-group members (Brown et al, 2006). One of the main risks of novels with severely out-group protagonists is that majority culture adolescent readers might discard the novels without reading them, labeling them as uninteresting or irrelevant to their interests. If they don't discard the novels, the cognitive effort of taking up a text's opportunities for empathy may not be worth it for readers. This is a particular risk with very complex, narratively challenging opportunities for empathy, or opportunities for empathy that are "optional" for understanding the plot. These types of opportunities are valuable, however, as they lead readers into deeper empathic understandings of the text, and allow them to practice more complex empathy than they would otherwise. YA literature has the benefit of mitigating this risk of engaging less empathy overall with out-group protagonists. Adolescence as an in-group can allow adolescent readers to take up challenging, beneficial opportunities for empathy. In this way, a majority culture adolescent reader can begin to improve their ability to empathize with out-group members, and the in-group appeal of YA literature lowers the danger of adolescent readers discarding empathic opportunities or even whole texts.

Chapter 4
Active Empathy

As discussed in Chapter 1, fiction has the potential to develop and improve readers' empathic abilities through the empathic practice it gives them. Many empirical studies have demonstrated both the correlation between regular consumption of fiction and heightened empathic abilities (Mar et al., 2009; Mar et al., 2010; Djikic et al., 2013; Oatley, 2016; Mumper and Gerrig, 2017) as well as causation between reading fiction and empathic development both in the short term (Kidd and Castano, 2013; Black and Barnes, 2015; Kidd and Castano, 2017) and in the long term (Bal and Veltkamp, 2013; Koopman, 2015; Vezzali et al., 2015).

In the real world we use empathy constantly, even merely to navigate basic social situations. The same is true with empathic interactions with fiction; any fictional text will cause a reader to make at least some simple empathic interpretations. But which instances help to develop empathic abilities, and which don't? In particular, which instances lead to empathy use that has real-world effects like those demonstrated by Vezzali et al. (2015), whose subjects showed changes in attitude towards stigmatized minorities? Given that many theorists separate empathy into types, it seems logical that one type of empathy is most likely to promote empathic development. For instance, one might assume that empathy that leads to personal distress – i.e. actually sharing another person's negative emotions – would be involved in prompting attitude changes and even pro-social (altruistic) behaviors; it seems logical that physically experiencing another person's distress ourselves would lead us to act on behalf of that person. However, FeldmanHall et al. (2015) found that personal distress is not a main factor in prompting altruistic actions. Instead, both FeldmanHall et al. (2015) and Decety and Yoder (2016) found that *active* cognitive and empathic engagement – in other words, a *deliberate*, *conscious*, and *effortful* use of empathy – is most likely to lead to both development in overall empathic abilities, as well as to "empathic concern," or the motivation to care for another's welfare.

I mentioned in Chapter 1 that empathy can be a conscious and deliberate process, or can be unconscious and unintentional, an involuntary sharing or interpretation of emotions prompted by mirror neurons. This applies to all of Hogan's (2011) types of empathy: allocentric, projective, and normative empathy can all be either active, conscious efforts or unconscious, seemingly effortless events. FeldmanHall et al.'s finding (2015) that personal distress was not a factor in prompting attitude changes and altruistic actions is particularly relevant for projective empathy, given that part of projective empathy is the actual sharing of others' emotions. However, projective empathy can also be a more conscious and deliberate process: it can be an active consideration of "how would I feel if I were in that situation?" – a conscious attempt to put oneself in another's shoes, as it were. Depending on whether they are active (conscious and effortful) or involuntary (unconscious and effortless), any of Hogan's types of empathy can either encourage or discourage further development in empathic abilities.

Readers' active cognitive and empathic engagement is therefore the most likely factor to contribute to empathic development and real-world attitude changes through fiction. Active empathic engagement with a fictional text is particularly important for adolescents, if they are to develop empathy through reading. As Coats notes, in adolescent brains, the "first responder to stimuli tends to be their amygdala, the emotional or gut reactions center of the brain, rather than their frontal cortex, which is responsible for calculating risk, moral considerations, and consequences" (2010, p.321). Active empathic engagement involves cognitive reasoning, which also happens in the frontal cortex; in order to develop empathy through fiction, therefore, adolescents especially will need more opportunities for empathy in texts that require significant conscious effort. This might be achieved through, for example, narratively challenging opportunities for empathy that are demanding enough to require readers' conscious cognitive effort. Some of the more narratively challenging opportunities for empathy discussed in the last chapter will require active empathic engagement. Another strategy to encourage active cognitive engagement is metacognition (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2012, p.138), discussed in Chapter 2, in which readers are made aware of their own thought processes and how they affect their interaction with a fictional text. Kümmerling-Meibauer argues that unlikeable or unpleasant protagonists in YA fiction prompt metacognition (p.138). As evidenced in Chapter 2, constantly changing which group categorization a protagonist is affiliated with can also have this effect,

jarring or surprising a reader into being more aware and therefore more actively engaged with the text.

However, rather than examining individual instances which present opportunities for active empathy, this chapter examines how active empathic engagement is affected by larger patterns within YA novels such as storylines or overarching themes. Specifically, this chapter examines how a protagonist's change over the course of the novel from in-group to out-group, or vice versa, is a feature of plot development that encourages or discourages active empathy use. These are not group categorizations that constantly oscillate back and forth, as those in *True Diary* or *It's Not Like It's a Secret*; rather, this chapter will be examining the effect of a group categorization that has one major shift during the course of the novel. In this chapter, I discuss two novels, one in which the protagonist shifts over the course of the plot from in-group to out-group, and one in which the protagonist shifts over the course of the plot from out-group to in-group. In *None of the Above* (Gregorio, 2015), the protagonist begins the novel believing herself to be a majority culture member, but finds out in a surprise diagnosis that she is intersex; she therefore transitions between being in-group to the reader (majority culture) into being out-group to the reader (part of the LGBT+ community). In *Everything Everything* (Yoon, 2015), meanwhile, the protagonist spends much of the novel believing herself to have Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (SCID), a sickness that means she must live inside her sterile home environment permanently. However, she discovers near the end of the novel that her mother had been lying to her, and that her illness was fake. The protagonist therefore transitions between being out-group to the reader (disabled) into being in-group to the reader (able-bodied).

I will be connecting these major moments of change in group categorizations with the promotion or discouragement of active forms of empathy on the part of the reader. In particular, I will be discussing each novel with regard to one of Hogan's specific types of empathy: projective empathy with *None of the Above*, and normative empathy with *Everything Everything*.

None of the Above

None of the Above features Kristin as its protagonist, an eighteen-year-old who believes she is of the majority culture. The novel goes to great lengths to depict her as a "typical" teenage girl. She navigates the politics of her teenage friend group, she is invested in her school's track

team, and she is preoccupied with the prospect of losing her virginity to her boyfriend after the Homecoming dance (at this point, a clichéd American adolescent rite-of-passage).

After having sex with her boyfriend, Kristin visits a gynecologist for a checkup, where the doctor discovers that Kristin is intersex: she has AIS (Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome), a form of intersexuality where an individual has XY chromosomes and internal testes, but the body is unable to respond to male hormones and so presents as externally female. Kristin is told she is unable to become pregnant or have biological children, and she will need to stretch her vagina in order to be able to have penetrative sex without pain.

While Kristin herself must come to terms with no longer being "typical," the diagnosis is no surprise to the reader; both the title of the novel and the back cover summary of the plot give Kristin's diagnosis away. However, even though the reader would expect Kristin's change from in-group to out-group, it still has consequences for the reader's empathic engagement with the novel, primarily because Kristin herself did not expect it.

"It could be you": a strategy to encourage projective empathy?

YA novels that center their plots on the sudden onset of a minority identity, such as *The Running Dream* (Van Draanen, 2011) in which the protagonist loses a leg in an accident, or *Lovely, Dark, and Deep* (Chen, 2018) in which the protagonist suddenly develops severe photosensitivity, often focus on the trauma of the protagonist's move from majority culture in-group to minority out-group. This usually contains depictions of other characters' reactions to the protagonist's new minority identity (often depictions of majority culture prejudice), as well as the protagonist's own perceived sense of their new minority (again, usually depicting majority culture prejudice). If written with a majority culture implied reader (or at least if not written with the sole purpose of representation for readers of the protagonist's minority), many of these novels that depict a protagonist going suddenly from in-group to out-group seem written with the underlying message for majority culture readers that "it could be you." As with *None of the Above*, great care is often taken to depict the protagonist as "typical" or majority culture, as well as to depict the transition from in-group to out-group as an unexpected shock. One intention behind this might be to promote projective empathy use on the part of majority culture readers, as it combines themes of the possibility that majority culture members can become out-group minorities ("becoming out-group could happen to you") with the prejudice that the protagonist

faces, which usually induces trauma ("the prejudice you hold could end up being directed toward yourself if you become out-group"). These novels' attempts to encourage a reader to consciously consider how they would feel in the protagonist's situation (given, as per the novels' message, that it very well could be their own situation) might also be with the intent to change majority culture attitudes about the out-group featured in the novel.

None of the Above certainly seems to follow these "it-could-be-you" novels' strategies of encouraging projective empathy to change majority culture attitudes. The novel has majority culture readers as at least part of its audience in mind; it includes quite a lot of medical detail about AIS to explain to readers what it is and what it means for Kristin. It also depicts in detail the trauma of Kristin losing her majority culture membership and her ability to navigate the world without experiencing prejudice or discrimination. When the doctor discusses what will happen going forward with her diagnosis, Kristin thinks that term is meant to cover up the new prejudice she will face: "*Go forward with your diagnosis*. It was nicer than saying 'learn to cope with being a freak'" (p.198, original emphasis). Kristin's own majority culture prejudice affects her view of herself as well as creates fear about how she will be viewed by others. Upon being diagnosed, Kristin reacts with the bias of a majority culture member to the concept of intersexuality. Having had no idea what intersex meant before the doctor explained it, she reacts with repulsion, particularly when the doctor uses the antiquated term "hermaphrodite" to communicate to Kristin what being intersex means. She is unable to even speak the word normally: "'What do you mean that I am a hermaphrodite?' Saying the word, my voice broke off into a whisper" (p.39-40). Kristin also worries about what her (majority culture) friends and family will think, and when her father is told of her diagnosis, she becomes upset thinking that he must be feeling "confusion," "shock," "revulsion" (p.42) and later "shame" (p.48).

As in the earlier examples of *The Running Dream* and *Lovely, Dark, and Deep,* the minority depicted in "it-could-be-you" novels is usually a disability, since practically speaking disability is the minority identity most likely to have a sudden and unexpected onset. In *None of the Above*'s case, however, Kristin experiences suddenly being placed in the LGBT+ community with no warning, in the same way that an accident or sudden onset of a disease places other protagonists in the disabled community. *None of the Above* emphasizes these parallels, in particular as it depicts being intersex as a medical diagnosis rather than as an identity: it depicts intersexuality as something that happens *to* Kristin, rather than something that she *is*. When

considering the news that she won't be able to have biological children, for instance, Kristin thinks that "it was selfish to think that adoption wasn't as good. I knew that. But it didn't change the way I felt, the gaping hole I could actually feel in my belly, as if I'd been the victim of some organ snatcher" (p.67). Kristin feels she has had something *stolen* from her. *None of the Above* is therefore distinctive in that it conveys an "it-could-be-you" message for an out-group that is frequently considered to be a choice, or the out-group member's own fault. The LGBT+ community faces the prejudice of having sexual orientations and gender identities seen as choices, or as something that is possible to change. This is of course untrue, but it makes the perception of an LGBT+ out-group identity different from the "faultless" and "blameless" out-group identity of a disability caused by an accident or illness. An LGBT+ identity is usually irrelevant to the "it-could-be-you" strategy, as sexual orientations and gender identities do not normally happen as a sudden surprise. Kristin, on the other hand, has had no inkling of being "different" previously, and she is given the news that she is intersex *by somebody else*. The novel therefore makes the "it-could-be-you" strategy, which is normally used in novels with sudden disabilities, relevant to an LGBT+ identity.

To sum up, the novel depicts intersexuality as a medical diagnosis over which Kristin has no control, and in doing so attempts to foster projective empathy on the part of majority culture readers through an "it-could-be-you" approach. A conscious use of projective empathy, in which a reader considers that "that could be me. What would I do – how would I feel – if it *were* me?" is a type of empathy that has been shown to promote both the development of empathic abilities as well as changes in real-world attitudes. Hakemulder found that readers imagining themselves in the shoes of an out-group character improved their social cognition abilities (i.e. they developed empathy, among other things), and also changed their real-world attitudes about the out-group to which the character belonged (2008, p.148-9). Hakemulder calls this role-taking or perspective-taking, but it is also a form of active projective empathy. Therefore, if successful, the "it-could-be-you" strategy of depicting a sudden move from in-group to out-group could potentially foster active uses of empathy, and develop both readers' empathic capacities as well as readers' real-world attitudes.

"It could never happen to me": likelihood of projective empathy

In actuality, however, a plot that depicts a major shift from in-group to out-group is not guaranteed to – and likely improbable to – lead to significant engagement of active projective empathy, particularly in adolescent readers. When faced with negatively perceived situations, most people tend to react with an opposite conclusion to one that promotes projective empathy – they feel that "it could never happen to me." This perceived invulnerability is common for topics as widespread as cancer risk from smoking (Weinstein et al., 2005) to the risk of impending natural disasters (Burningham et al., 2008). This "optimism bias" (Sharot, 2011) makes humans feel invulnerable to negative outcomes and therefore prevents them from imagining with any accuracy how they would feel about those outcomes. Both adults and adolescents demonstrate this psychological trait (Beyth-Marom et al., 1993), but adolescents are even more prone to it than adults (Wickman and Koniak-Griffin, 2013). This might be due to a psychology theory called the *personal fable*, coined by David Elkind (1967), which is a part of the egocentrism caused by the adolescent stage in cognitive development. Personal fable describes adolescents' tendency to believe themselves to be so unique that no one can understand their experiences or problems. Personal fable and the belief in one's "uniqueness" has also been linked to feelings of invincibility, an extreme form of optimism bias; both personal fable traits and invincibility traits rise sharply around the onset of puberty and then decline again in late adolescence (Alberts et al., 2007). The combination of optimism bias and personal fable in adolescent readers means that an "it-could-be-you" strategy to induce projective empathy is unlikely to succeed. Rather than follow the "that could be me" thought process logically into a conscious, active use of projective empathy, adolescent readers are more likely to dismiss the possibility of moving from in-group to out-group as irrelevant to their own lives. This dismissal is likely to occur regardless of the actual likelihood of the situation a novel depicts, whether a character becomes disabled by a car accident, a character is diagnosed with a rare disease, or a character discovers they are intersex. This is not to say that adolescent readers *won't* engage active projective empathy with Kristin in *None of the Above* – it's certainly a possibility – but the depiction of Kristin as having been a "typical" teen, an in-group majority culture adolescent similar to themselves, is not necessarily a factor that will contribute to that projective empathy.

Everything Everything

Everything Everything tells the story of Madeline, an eighteen-year old-girl with SCID, a disease that means that she is allergic to almost everything. For this reason, she lives entirely in a sterile environment, rarely seeing anybody in person but her mother (who is also her doctor) and her nurse Carla. Madeline begins a romance with the boy who moves in next door, Olly. This relationship begins online and through miming at windows, but eventually Olly comes inside her house. As they grow closer, Madeline becomes more and more dissatisfied with her life inside her enclosed sterile environment. Eventually Madeline chooses to go outdoors with Olly. and discovers that her mother has been lying to her about her illness for her whole life: she does not have SCID, and her mother had been keeping her inside where she felt it was safe. In other words, Madeline goes from being out-group to a reader because of her disability, to being in-group to a reader through discovering that she is just a "typical," able-bodied teenage girl.

The ending to *Everything Everything* fulfills a common trope of fiction that features characters with disabilities. In general, the only resolution allowed to a disabled character's story arcs is for the disabled character to be either killed off by the end of narrative, or else to have their disability miraculously cured (or, as in this case, turn out to be nonexistent). Dolmage, who identifies many tropes surrounding disabilities in fiction, which he calls disability "myths," labels this as the "kill or cure" myth (2014, p.34). *Everything Everything*'s ending also features a trope that Dolmage calls the "*disability ex machina*" or "*dis ex machina*," a play on *deus ex machina*, which Dolmage uses to describe how disability is often used to "wrap up" a narrative (2014, p.56). This is related to the "kill or cure" myth, as often the narrative is given a "satisfying" ending with either the death or the cure of the disabled character. It can also occur in a myth that Dolmage calls the "disability drop," in which a disabled character turns out to have been faking the disability all along (p.57). Patricia Dunn calls these disability tropes in fiction "a tired plot structure," stating that when the existence of a disability is done away with by disabled characters dying or getting cured, it "suggest[s] there's no place for disability in mainstream society" (2015, p.2). When Madeline discovers that she is not disabled after all, *Everything Everything* fulfills all of these interrelated tropes that serve to erase disability – though the "disability drop" occurs on the part of the mother who was lying about Madeline's disability, rather than Madeline herself.

The issue with these disability tropes is not that they are *never* true. Disabled people are sometimes cured (occasionally miraculously), and sometimes decide that they would prefer to die, especially in cases of terminal illness. Likewise, the conclusion of *Everything Everything* is not impossible. Though Madeline's mother's mental health issue is not diagnosed in the novel, the plot suggests that she has some form of Munchhausen Syndrome by proxy, a rare mental illness in which a parent or caretaker fakes or deliberately causes symptoms of an illness in a child. This does happen, but it is incredibly rare; however, cases tend to get a lot of media attention, and so it will seem more relevant or common to a reader than it actually is in real life. The problem with the kind of disability trope portrayed in *Everything Everything*, where the disability disappears by the end of the novel, is not that it *couldn't* happen. It's that while a miraculous cure, a mistaken diagnosis, or Munchhausen Syndrome by proxy happen extremely rarely in real life, they happen exceptionally frequently in fictional stories. In particular, the near-universal presence of these tropes can cause readers to feel that a "happy" or "satisfying" ending isn't possible unless the disability is erased in some way – meaning that the subconscious message is that disabled people who stay disabled, as most do, cannot possibly have a happy ending or a happy life.

One method of examining the effects of these kinds of tropes on readers is to consider them through the interrelated concepts of script theory and normative empathy. I discussed the basics of normative empathy, one of Patrick Hogan's empathy types, in Chapter 1, but I will now go on to provide a more detailed discussion on script theory and normative empathy in order to provide a framework for understanding *Everything Everything*. Hogan defines normative empathy as interpreting what someone else is feeling by imagining a "normatively standard" person in their position (2011, p.278). In other words, normative empathy can be used to interpret emotions by determining what someone must be feeling through knowledge of situational patterns. In the examples given in Chapter 1, in general we grieve at a funeral and are happy during a birthday celebration. Though these emotions aren't *necessarily* what everyone is feeling in those situations – it's perfectly possible to be happy that someone is dead, or to be upset at growing older – we know through learned patterns which emotions they are *most likely* to be feeling, or which emotions are *most appropriate* for the situation. The issue with normative empathy is that it requires both the situation and the empathic target (the person with whom one is empathizing) to follow normative patterns.

In the case of the empathic target, as I briefly touched on in Chapter 3 during discussions on empathy with cognitively disabled protagonists, normative empathy requires that the person one is attempting to empathize with is "normatively standard." In other words, if that person is different to one's own comprehension of who a "standard" person is and what their "standard" reaction would be, normative empathy is either impossible to use or else leads to inaccurate conclusions. This is important when considering what a majority culture reader's interpretation of a minority protagonist is – minority protagonists are, by definition, not normatively standard to a majority culture reader. Depending on the minority, emotional reactions and emotional motivations may differ completely to the reader's "norm." A reader's existing knowledge of emotional patterns therefore may not be relevant to the protagonist. When used in conjunction with these disability tropes, for instance, a majority culture member using normative empathy derived from the "kill or cure" myth might assume that all disabled people are sad, and that they wish to be cured. In fact, because of the "kill or cure" myth, a majority culture reader's vision of a "normatively standard" disabled person *is* someone who is sad. However, while this may be true of some disabled people, in reality it is certainly not the norm.

In the case of the *situation* following normative patterns, fiction plays a significant role in forming and following those patterns. Situations and plot lines in fiction follow fictional tropes and familiar patterns; this is where scripts become important. Just as emotions and emotional reactions are scripts, so are fictional tropes, like those that often surround disability. Readers will have existing scripts which they will recognize in novels – consciously or unconsciously – and which they will expect the novel to follow.

As a reminder, scripts are knowledge-based mental patterns of almost everything we encounter. They "frame our understanding, intelligence, memory, and expectations about the world" (Oziewicz, 2015, p.5). Fiction is formed of scripts – Marek Oziewicz argues that fictional stories are "script-based…information clusters" that help humans understand tasks and the world (2015, p.53). Fictional tropes, like Dolmage's "kill or cure" disability myth, are scripts precisely because they "express how a sequence of events or actions is expected to unfold" (Stephens, 2011, p.14). As Trites states, "so many scripts are based on stereotypical knowledge" (2014, p.49), and this holds true both in the real world and in fiction. Because scripts are a form of stored memory, previous reading experiences will create expectations of plot and character development (Allington, 2005, p.2; Stephens, 2011, p.15). From the patterns derived from their

previous consumption of fiction and of popular culture, an adolescent reader will have formed expectations as to how certain situations will play out in a novel. Common tropes like Dolmage's "kill or cure" myth will form a script for adolescent readers, and they will expect a story to follow this script, even if that expectation is unconscious (as so many of our minority-based stereotypes often are).

Adolescent readers will undoubtedly have encountered these disability tropes often enough to have formed a script around them, even if they are not voracious readers. Scripts form very early on in child development. Even 18-month-old children have emotional scripts, and understand that certain situations call for certain emotions; in an example given in Chapter 1, an 18-month-old already understands that if another person breaks a toy, that person should be expressing sadness, not happiness (Chiarella and Poulin-Dubois, 2015). In terms of scripts that form around minority out-groups, by 9 months of age, babies find it easier to recognize faces of people who are of the same race as their parents (Kelly et al., 2007). By fifteen months of age, babies are able to recognize unfairness (while watching two adults get toys divided between them equally or unequally), but they are less likely to recognize unfairness when the adult on the receiving end of it is a different race than they are (Burns and Sommerville, 2014). Fictional tropes like the ones that surround minorities are also formed very early, as popular culture reinforces them over and over. By the time a child reader reaches adolescence, disability tropes like the "kill or cure" myth will be heavily reinforced scripts. An adolescent reader of *Everything Everything* will likely be unconsciously expecting it to end in either a death or a cure, even before they begin to read.

As Dunn states, fiction has the potential to either break out of patterns, or to follow those patterns: fiction "can open readers' minds to entrenched discriminatory attitudes, or it can be complicit with those attitudes, making them worse" (2015, p.1). When analyzing scripts in literature, Stockwell gives five possibilities of how texts can affect already-formed scripts in the mind of the reader (2002, p.79). He states that most narratives are script "preserving" as they "confirm existing" scripts. When a script confirms a stereotype, it is script "reinforcing." A surprising element might create a script "disruption," or "a challenge to the reader's existing knowledge structure." Stockwell then argues that script disruptions can be resolved in two ways:

script "adding," the "addition of new facts" to the script, or script "refreshment," which is a radical modification or restructuring of the script.[1]

Scripts in literature can therefore be positive forces to adjust readers' attitudes and bias, or negative forces that ingrain and strengthen negative bias and stereotypes. John Stephens has a very optimistic view of diversity and bias in children's and young adult literature, stating that "on the whole, children's literature has sought to intervene in culture to affirm multicultural models of human rights and human equality, and it has done this by striving to transform the schemas and scripts that were common in Western cultures up until the mid-twentieth century and are still pervasive today" (2011, p.13). He argues that children's literature is script disrupting, that scripts about minorities in children's literature are "textually modified and have played a central function in positive representations of cultural diversity" (p.12), and that changes made within scripts about minorities "allow others to be conceptualized in fresh and nonthreatening ways" (p.13). However, I disagree. While some children's and young adult literature is able to do this, most doesn't. Given the distressing lack of diversity in children's and young adult literature as a whole (see for example Disability in Kid Lit, 2018; Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2018), I would argue that children's and young adult literature is, in general, script preserving. (Incidentally, the same is true for literature for all ages – the majority of literature does not affect our scripts other than to preserve and reinforce them; otherwise, these fictional trope scripts like the disability "kill or cure" myth wouldn't exist in the first place.) Even novels with diverse protagonists, like *Everything Everything*, can be, and often are, script reinforcing.

Stockwell makes the point that one method of judging "quality" or "good" literature is by how much it disrupts and affects existing scripts – the best literature has more of an impact (2002, p.79). Stockwell's suggested method is also relevant to judging how much a fictional text is able to promote empathic and cognitive development. Script preservations and disruptions have different effects on empathic engagement and empathic development. We know that surprise promotes active cognitive engagement. Likewise, a disrupted script promotes more effortful cognitive engagement because it is unexpected, and because the brain must adjust to the

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[1] Again, Stockwell uses the term "schema" rather than "script" in these descriptions of possibilities for how fictional texts can affect existing scripts. However, going by other definitions of schemata versus scripts – schemata being static, while scripts are dynamic – script is the better term to use here, and so I have substituted it where Stockwell uses the term schema.

new information and either "add" or "refresh" the old script. A disrupted script promotes an active use of normative empathy, as the reader consciously adjusts the pattern from which they are interpreting emotions. A preserved and reinforced script, on the other hand, will provoke no surprise – if scripts aren't disrupted, then readers rarely question or even consciously notice them. A preserved and reinforced script therefore encourages no active or conscious cognitive engagement, and merely uses the same neural pathways that the existing script has already built. This is an unconscious use of normative empathy. Literature that preserves and reinforces scripts will therefore not only prevent changes in attitude or bias, but will also discourage empathic development from reading.

As Madeline travels from out-group to in-group in the reader's eyes, her transition both preserves and reinforces multiple disability scripts, most notably the "kill or cure" myth. Though this chapter focuses on larger thematic and plot patterns in YA novels, a close examination of some specifics in *Everything Everything* will allow for further discussion on how the novel's plot-based change of group categorization affects both disability scripts as well as a reader's use of normative empathy with the protagonist.

Madeline as out-group

Madeline is also of a minority race: she reveals a short way after the beginning of the novel she is half Japanese American on her mother's side, and half African American on her father's (who is deceased) (p.45). However, other than this moment and one physical description that occurs when Madeline looks in a mirror, her race is hardly mentioned. Her race plays little role in her experiences during the narrative, and therefore might hold relatively little significance for a reader, who is rarely reminded of it. This is particularly true for majority culture readers, as they are likely so used to having white protagonists in YA novels that they might even forget that Madeline is not white (the "default" race in Anglo Western countries) as the novel progresses. Given that *Everything Everything* has now become a movie, however, readers might associate Madeline with being black or mixed race; the actress who plays her in the movie is half black, half white, and the movie changes Madeline's race to suit the actress. If a reader has seen the movie or advertisements for it, Madeline's race might affect group categorizations more strongly, especially as images are processed faster and more instinctively than words. However, Madeline's race plays little role in the novel itself, and even after the movie's release, covers of

the novel don't feature any images of Madeline. As the novel is the text that I am focusing on, I will merely acknowledge her race here as playing a small out-group role in a reader's categorizations, but not one to significantly affect other group categorizations in the larger context of the novel's opportunities for empathy.

Madeline's disability, SCID, is what features most strongly as a group categorization. The novel immediately forces the reader to categorize Madeline as out-group, as the very first sentence distances her from the reader: "I've read many more books that you. It doesn't matter how many you've read. I've read more" (p.1). Madeline speaks directly to the reader, rather than a narratee; like in *True Diary* when Junior speaks accusingly and directly to the reader about their lack of knowledge about poverty on the reservation, this direct address in *Everything Everything* immediately sets the reader and protagonist in opposition to each other. It classes Madeline as different to the potential reader, regardless of who that potential reader is. Madeline is essentially claiming outright that she is out-group to the reader, and this is even before her illness is mentioned. Madeline doesn't explain SCID until the third page of the novel. Instead, before this explanation, she enumerates how her habits are different from the reader's. Moreover, immediately after Madeline explains what her sickness is and what it means, the next few pages are composed solely of images of medical charts, which note Madeline's breaths per minute, the room temperature, and the air filter status. Like in *Good Enough*, these non-narrated textual elements are, in and of themselves, markers of otherness, and they emphasize Madeline's out-group status more blatantly than the narrative itself is able to do. All this occurs so near the beginning of the novel that within the first five pages, the reader will have categorized Madeline as firmly out-group because of her disability.

Disability scripts

The portrayal of Madeline's sickness might lead a reader to immediately categorize her as out-group, but it also immediately activates disability trope scripts in the mind of the reader. For instance, Madeline's nurse Carla tells Madeline that she is the "strongest, bravest person" she knows (p.33), following the trope that disabled people are in some way "inspirational" just for getting by. Of all disability tropes, however, the narration features the most references to the "kill or cure" script. Unlike in *None of the Above*, the reader won't begin the novel knowing that Madeline will go through a major group shift from out-group to in-group, since the fact that

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Madeline is not actually sick is meant to be a plot twist near the end. However, they will *expect* the group shift, even if only subconsciously, as the novel begins to construct Madeline's disability as conforming to the "kill or cure" script.

Madeline immediately begins speaking of her disability as though a cure is her only hope for a "happy ending" or a happy life. When she is explaining her disability, she states that "maybe I'm holding out hope that one day, someday, things will change" (p.14), even though there is "no hope of a cure on the horizon" (p.10). On her birthday, Madeline muses that "really there's only one thing to wish for – a magical cure that will allow me to run free outside like a wild animal…Instead I wish for something more likely than a cure. Something less likely to make us both sad" (p.11). These passages immediately make a reader expect her to be miraculously cured by the end of the novel, despite the fact that they appear to convey the opposite; once the word "cure" is mentioned in reference to a disability in fiction, this will immediately activate the "cure" script in the mind of the reader, leading them to expect this as a possibility. However, they also imply that Madeline cannot possibly be fulfilled and happy without a cure – a cure is the only possible way to have a happy ending, given that Madeline references the lack of one as something that will make her sad. Madeline *wants* to be majority culture. For a majority culture reader, this won't be surprising or script disrupting; rather, this just reinforces the view that being anything *but* majority culture – particularly being disabled – is horrifying, difficult, and sad, and that the difficulties associated with being disabled are essentially disabled people's main life experiences.

Madeline's narration of her disabled experiences also activates the "kill" part of the "kill or cure" script, as she indicates that her life with her disability is not a "real" existence, and that she is better off not living at all than living within her sterile environment. Madeline implies that, being house-bound, she isn't fully human: "The world barely knows I exist. I mean, I exist online. I have online friends and my Tumblr book reviews, but that's not the same as being a real person who can be visited by strange boys bearing Bundt cakes" (p.29). Once her relationship with Olly develops, her desire to leave the house grows stronger. Eventually, she decides that her life inside is not worth living, and leaves the house to run away with Olly to Hawaii. When she leaves the house, neither she nor the reader knows that she is not sick. For all intents and purposes, she is, if not committing suicide, at least acting in a way that she knows will bring about her very likely death. Madeline's narration of the moment she leaves confirms that she is

aware of these consequences: "It's a strange thing to find that you're willing to die. It doesn't come in a flash, a sudden epiphany. It happens slowly, a balloon in reverse…this pale half life is not really living" (p.167). When Olly asks her if she has a death wish, Madeline answers "Opposite" (p.173). All of this suggests that Madeline's disabled life was not worth living at all – that she is better off dead if she can't be able-bodied.

Madeline spends a few days in Hawaii with Olly until she has a health scare that puts her in the hospital, at which point her mother finds her. Upon the (supposed) realization that she can't live in the outside world, Madeline again expresses that her disabled life is not worth living at all. She states that "I don't really enjoy anything" (p.252) and that "I'll remain trapped there forever. I'm alive and I don't want to be" (p.240). Madeline also again invokes the "cure" script of creating a "happy ending," when she states that "I have no patience for books that pretend life has meaning. I have no patience for happy endings" (p.252), conveying that her life, as disabled, has no meaning, and that it can in no way have a happy ending. Eventually, this cure script, which the reader will have been subconsciously expecting, is fulfilled: the doctor who treated Madeline contacts her to tell her that she doesn't have SCID, and that her health scare was a result of a weakened immune system due to never being exposed to germs. When Madeline confirms the truth, the chapters begin to be labeled with how long has passed since the revelation, which is referred to as "A.D." (after death). The revelation essentially fulfills both the cure script and the kill script – Madeline's disability and her identity as disabled "dies," as implied by the A.D., while she is now allowed to begin her "real" existence. This is both script preserving and reinforcing, fulfilling the reader's subconscious expectations, doing nothing to provoke their active cognitive engagement, and discouraging any significant empathy development. There is no script disruption that would prompt a conscious consideration of why the concept of disability has come to be surrounded by these kill and cure scripts – nothing to provoke changes in attitude and bias.

Adolescence and disability

As Madeline shifts from out-group to in-group during the discovery of her mother's lies, it becomes clear that Madeline's adolescence (in-group) and her disability (out-group) are mutually exclusive. The novel's construction encourages the perspective that Madeline cannot exist as both in-group and out-group to the reader at the same time. This begins early, before

Madeline discovers the truth; her narration picks out markers of adolescence and then identifies them as impossible for her as a disabled person. On her birthday, Madeline states that "this year is a little harder than the previous. Maybe it's because I'm eighteen now…I should be leaving home, going off to college. My mom should be dreading empty-nest syndrome. But because of SCID, I'm not going anywhere" (p.10). Later on, as Madeline's relationship with Olly grows (another marker of adolescence, her first romantic relationship), her relationship with her mother deteriorates. Because of her disability, Madeline and her mother had had a relationship closer to friends than that of parent and adolescent. However, as Madeline develops her romantic relationship, she begins to hide things from her mother, abandoning the relationship that defined and was defined by her disability. Madeline leaving the house is a coming of age moment, defying her mother and her disability in order to fulfill her romantic relationship – her adolescence. Because this exodus allowed her to discover the truth, Madeline's adolescence quite literally *gets rid of* her disability.

When Madeline returns home after her health scare, she cuts off all contact with Olly, believing that if she can't fully be with him, she can't have the relationship at all. She denies herself her adolescent romance until she discovers that she is not sick. In other words, she cannot have her adolescence while she is still disabled. Because the two are mutually exclusive, Madeline's "happy ending" is that she gets to be an adolescent, rather than a disabled person who cannot experience adolescence. She *gets* to be in-group to the reader. The narrative conveys that the in-group is better, strengthening group-based empathy bias as Madeline transitions to in-group.

Normative empathy and the "happy ending"

Madeline's script-reinforcing transition into the in-group also means that the ending of the novel encourages a particular form of normative empathy that falsely creates a sense of the ending as "happy." The end of the novel sees the reunion of Olly and Madeline in New York City. In the chapter before she arrives, Madeline's adolescent experience is depicted as the only thing that could make her life meaningful. She summarizes her new interpretation of The Little Prince as "Love is worth everything. Everything" (p.302). This is emphasized further when in the last lines of the novel, Madeline surprises Olly in the bookstore: "I come out of hiding. I walk down the aisle toward him. The smile he gives me is worth living for" (p.305). This final line

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hits the reader over the head with two messages. Firstly, that this is, officially, the "happy ending," as the imagery of Madeline walking down an aisle toward a smiling Olly evokes the grand finale and "happily ever after" of so many romance stories – a wedding. Secondly, this last passage conveys that living as disabled would *not* have been worth living for, but an able-bodied life, and specifically a "typical" adolescent life, *is* worth living for – Madeline literally states this outright.

An adolescent will understand the ending of the novel to be a "happy" conclusion because that is the interpretation they have been led into by the scripts around disability in the novel. Because of the script reinforcement, an adolescent reader is encouraged to use normative empathy to interpret this ending as happy and joyous – not only this particular moment of triumphant reunion, but also the conclusion of the story as a whole. Whether "happy" is the correct emotion for the situation, however, is unclear when considered outside of the cure script. Using projective or allocentric empathy, a reader might determine that Madeline ought to feel traumatized and betrayed by her mother's lies and abuse, especially given how close their relationship was. However, the book spends little time on Madeline's anger, mostly depicting the passage of time after the revelation as a series of short chapters noting the passage of weeks, with a few angry encounters with her mother interspersed here and there. Madeline tells her mother before she leaves to see Olly that "I'm not sure this is home anymore," but narrates her feelings about her mother's mentally ill intentions to keep her safe as "I can understand that. Almost. I am trying to" (p.301). The chapter in which this occurs is even titled "Forgiveness." And yet, this occurs only eight or nine weeks after Madeline discovers her mother's betrayal. This seems an unrealistic amount of time to arrive at forgiveness of a parent who has lied, manipulated, and abused their child for all eighteen years of her life, even if the abuse stemmed from a mental illness. Even leaving aside the timeline, the space and narrative effort the novel spends on depicting Madeline's trauma at her mother's abuse is negligible compared to the space and effort spent depicting Madeline's reminiscences of her relationship with Olly and her hopes to rekindle it. A majority culture adolescent reader is able to brush off Madeline's trauma as an unfortunate but relatively minor side effect of a happy ending. The novel thus ensures, both by its narrative construction and by its script reinforcement, that a reader will use normative empathy at the story's conclusion in order to interpret the conclusion as a happy ending, and overlook any negative emotions or consequences that might otherwise have been more relevant.

Everything Everything discourages the development of empathic abilities as it preserves scripts time and again, failing to stimulate a reader's attention into active uses of empathy. More specifically, it also prevents the use and development of empathy with out-group members. This is due both to its depictions of disability as an out-group and to its depictions of adolescence as an in-group. *Everything Everything*'s depictions of disability are script preserving/reinforcing, but depictions of disability are more likely to lead to active out-group empathy when stereotypical scripts of disability are disrupted, prompting surprise and cognitive effort to add and refresh scripts. Meanwhile, depicting the adolescent in-group as mutually exclusive to the minority out-group, as in the case of both *Everything Everything* and *Good Enough* in Chapter 2, can't possibly help readers develop out-group empathic abilities. Adolescence as an in-group commonality only helps readers overcome the categorizational challenge of out-group empathy if a reader's mind-model contains both adolescence as an in-group and a protagonist's minority as an out-group. Adolescence functioning as an in-group is particularly beneficial if that in-group identity is intersectionally affected by other out-group identities. *Everything Everything*, on the other hand, ensures that its protagonist can only exist as one or the other – in-group or out-group – and so precludes the possibility of out-group empathy when Madeline's disability is erased by her adolescence.

Unsuccessful Strategies

Neither *None of the Above* nor *Everything Everything* have overarching plot- or theme-based patterns that encourage active empathy use. *Everything Everything* actually *discourages* conscious cognitive engagement, as it preserves every script it addresses, making for normative empathy that is both inaccurate and unlikely to be active or effortful. Meanwhile, *None of the Above*'s "it-could-be-you" storyline is less effective at prompting active projective empathy with its protagonist than it would logically seem to be; adolescent readers in particular are vulnerable to psychological traits that would suppress projective empathy with the out-group protagonist.

Better plot- or theme-based strategies for encouraging active out-group empathy in majority culture adolescent readers are discussed in the next chapter. The novels in Chapter 5 use their genre affiliations, plots, tropes, and even stereotypical disability scripts as tools to provoke readers' cognitive attention. Their overall construction (as well as their individual narratively

challenging opportunities for empathy) make it much more likely that they develop readers' out-group empathy through repeated, effortful active empathic engagement.

Chapter 5
The Adolescent Disabled Detective

Detective fiction as it exists in its various forms (mysteries, thrillers, suspense, and crime fiction among them)[1] provides particularly apt examples to use in any research combining cognitive poetics and minority (particularly disabled) protagonists. It is widely acknowledged amongst cognitive poetics scholars that mystery and detective stories promote both a great deal of, and very specific types of, cognitive engagement in their readers, including in particular empathy, theory of mind, and mind-modeling (see for example Zunshine, 2006; Fong et al., 2013; Nikolajeva, 2014a; Oatley, 2016). Likewise, within disability studies, the trope of the disabled detective is inescapable (see for example Shapiro, 1993; Murray, 2012; Dolmage, 2014; Dunn, 2015; Resene, 2016; Cheyne, 2017). Add the depictions of adolescence in young adult literature into the mix and we arrive at a perfect storm of empathic potential for adolescent readers.

Certain genres – detective fiction among them – have greater potential than others for offering opportunities for empathy to their readers. Fong et al. (2013) found that readers scored better on the Mind in the Eyes test (a visual test of empathic accuracy, where emotions are deducted from partial facial expressions) if they were habitual readers of romance or suspense/thriller genres (i.e. mysteries), but not of domestic fiction or science fiction. Oatley posits that in the case of mysteries, this might be because "a central issue is what is going on in the mind of the antagonist" (2016, p.620), and determining this requires active, higher-order

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[1] A brief note: the terms "mystery" and "detective fiction," which I use often in this chapter, are essentially synonymous in an American context, while in a British context, "mystery" also incorporates the supernatural or uncanny (Gavin and Routledge, 2001, p.5). I use the terms in their American senses – a "mystery" being an unexplained event that must be explained, and the "detective" as the person who solves the puzzle to explain it (hence why a mystery is "detective fiction").

theory of mind and empathy use. Importantly, however, Fong et al.'s study is correlational (though they have controlled for several important variables, including gender and age). Rather than accept outright the conclusion that mystery and romance genres are better than science fiction or domestic genres for developing empathy, I would argue the results of this study merely point to certain factors that make the mystery and romance genres particularly apt for empathy use and empathy development in their readers. Zunshine, for instance, acknowledges that "certain texts [or genres] engage one particular cluster of cognitive adaptations to a slightly higher degree than another" (2006, p.122). For instance, romance novels will engage "the mind-reading adaptation geared toward mate selection" while mystery novels will engage "the mind-reading adaptation gear toward predator avoidance" (Zunshine, 2006, p.152).

Predator avoidance is not the only cognitive adaptation that readers are encouraged to use in detective fiction. The genre also demands that its readers engage mind-modeling constantly, with each and every character, in order to follow along and attempt to solve the mystery alongside the detective. Nikolajeva states that "mystery, with all its genre variations, is a perfect field for mind-reading in fiction" because it is based on "the omission of essential information that is either hidden from the character or the reader, or both" (2014a, p.99-100). That hidden information can be determined using the clues of characters' actions and dialogue; empathy is required in order to interpret those clues and piece them together. Even scholars not focusing on cognitive engagement with fiction acknowledge that this is why detective fiction is an optimum genre with which to mind-model characters. For instance, Cheyne, a disability studies scholar, states that "crime, more than any other type of literature, encourages the reader to interpret bodies and behaviors" (2017, p.190). For this introduction, it suffices to end here with the recognition that detective fiction as a genre demands active and constant empathic engagement from readers; however, more on the specifics of detective fiction's opportunities for empathy will be discussed in the later sections of this chapter.

Before moving on to more specific discussions, one other concept requires an introduction: that of the disabled detective. Disability has a long history in detective fiction, with disabled characters generally adhering to one of two roles: either the "silent and constrained witness, unable to communicate vital evidence" or else the "'differently abled' detective, granted a particular type of insight precisely because of a disability" (Murray, 2012, p.179). The disabled detective generally has a disability that "becomes an asset" (Murray, 2012, p.180) for their

purposes as a detective – for example, the famous television detective Monk, who has OCD, is brilliant at his job *because* his OCD forces him to notice tiny details in crime scenes.

Whether the disabled character in the mystery story plays the silent witness or the disabled detective, these tropes are generally harmful to majority culture attitudes around disability. They "promote a fascination with disabled difference that renders disability a spectacle and enacts a form of voyeurism, in which it is always assumed that the consumer spectator or reader is non-disabled" (Murray, 2012, p.180). Moreover, the tropes "ultimately speak of a non-disabled *desire* on the part of a reader or viewer to give in to the impulse to view disability as a wonder," and this in turn "invites sympathy, pity, or amazement, all reductive encounters when seen in the frame of the politics of disability representation" (Murray, 2012, p.180, original emphasis). In other words, disability in detective fiction almost always showcases disabled people as "other" (Dunn, 2015, p.120) – as out-group.

The disabled detective trope in particular is what I will be focusing on in this chapter. It forms part of Dolmage's "overcoming or compensation" myth – that a disabled character must "offset their deficiencies" through "hard work or some special talent" (2014, p.35), ensuring that the able-bodied audience "does not have to focus on the disability, or challenge the stigma that the disability entails, but instead refocuses attention toward the 'gift'" (p.39). Murray agrees that the disabled detective is part of a "compensation narrative," as "the loss of one faculty allows for the development of another, more distinctive ability" (2012, p.180). Joseph Shapiro, meanwhile, dubs these disabled characters with distinctive abilities derived from their disabilities as "supercrips" (1993, p.16). As Dolmage notes, all of these interrelated tropes acts as "a demand placed upon disabled bodies (you had better be very good at something)" (2014, p.40).

While the disabled detective is in no way new – it is "a fictional tradition that can be traced through the history of crime, detective, and mystery fiction" (Cheyne, 2017, p.186) – the figure has more recently become specifically *cognitively* disabled, rather than physically disabled. Cheyne notes that there was a "boom in crime fiction with neurodiverse or cognitively exceptional investigators that began in the late 1990s and continues to the present day" (2017, p.186-7). Murray attributes this to scientific advancement. As the twenty-first century progressed, a major change in how we understood the human brain and, in particular, neurobehavioral conditions (i.e. cognitive disabilities) meant that there was a large increase in the amount of fiction written about cognitive differences. Fiction found, "in

neurological/disabled difference, both new topics and new ways to tell old stories" (2017, p.99). In particular, widely recognized cognitive disabilities, such as autism and OCD, became the common "new ways" to tell the "old stories" of detective fiction. Fictional detectives are, of course, traditionally "possessed of an extraordinary mind" (Cheyne, 2017, p.187) – as in the example of Sherlock Holmes, for instance – but greater understanding of neurodiversity has lead modern detective fiction to label those extraordinary minds with conditions of cognitive disabilities, as the modern BBC adaptation Sherlock has done by calling its detective, in his own words, a "high-functioning sociopath" (McCarthy, 2014).

The disabled detective is a complex figure in disability studies, one that, for all its harmful aspects, also has some positive qualities. Cheyne (2017), Murray (2012), and Dunn (2015) all argue separately that while the disabled detective trope is reductive, it can also help to overturn other disability tropes in positive ways. Murray claims that the disabled detective in some ways "redresses the balance" in a genre where disabled characters are "all too often…a prosthetic device" (2012, p.187). Cheyne agrees, stating that "while the larger tradition of crime fictions with disabled protagonists is not unproblematic," it also helps to position disabled people "by default as successful achievers" and as "active agents," as the expectations of the mystery genre are that the detective always solves the mystery successfully (2017, p.187). Dunn, meanwhile, suggests that supercrip disabled detective stories "suggest that in order to be invited into 'normal' society, [disabled people] need to become heroes or super solvers of crime," but on the other hand, if the disabled detective stories are "not too unrealistic," they can "draw attention to the strengths and talents that every individual has, instead of allowing people to focus only on the 'impairment'" (2015, p.128). The trope is therefore somewhat of a mixed bag, and depending on its implementation in individual stories, can be either a positive or negative representation of disability, or even both.

The organization of this chapter will be slightly different to the organization of previous chapters in this thesis. Rather than arranging the discussions by the primary texts themselves, as in previous chapters, the sections of this chapter will be based upon the three major themes Chapters 2-4 have discussed: group categorizations and adolescence, individual opportunities for empathy, and the encouragement of active cognitive engagement, seen in particular through the lens of script theory. This chapter examines three primary texts and addresses themes from each

in these sections. None of the primary texts – Penny Joelson's *I Have No Secrets* (2017), Marcus Sedgwick's *She Is Not Invisible* (2013), and John Green's *Turtles All the Way Down* (2017) – are typical examples of detective fiction as a genre. However, all are young adult novels with a mystery-based plot and a protagonist detective who is disabled.

Unusually, the first two of these three primary texts feature disabled detectives who are physically, rather than cognitively, disabled. Rather than having the "extraordinary minds" of the more traditional detective (Cheyne, 2017, p.187), these detectives have extraordinary *bodies*.

The protagonist of *I Have No Secrets* is Jemma, a girl with severe cerebral palsy. Jemma narrates the novel in a mental discourse; she is unable to communicate in any way with other characters as she is quadriplegic and almost completely unable to move. Jemma's carer, Sarah, is dating a man named Dan, who verbally abuses Jemma when no one is watching. Knowing that she can't communicate with others, Dan tells Jemma that he was the killer in a well-publicized murder. Jemma becomes desperate for a way to communicate, particularly after Sarah goes missing and she begins to suspect Dan of harming her.

The protagonist of *She Is Not Invisible*, meanwhile, is Laureth. Laureth is blind, but this is not revealed until part of the way into the novel. When her father stops answering communications and Laureth receives an email that someone has found her father's beloved notebook, she suspects that something terrible has happened to him. She enlists the help of her younger brother, Ben, and they travel from their home in the UK to New York City, attempting to follow the clues in the retrieved notebook to find their missing father.

The last primary text, *Turtles All the Way Down*, does feature a cognitively disabled detective, Aza. Aza is somewhat unusual in that she is a female cognitively disabled protagonist. In general amongst YA novels with disabled protagonists, female protagonists tend to be physically disabled while male protagonists tend to be cognitively disabled; this fulfills stereotypical gender roles (such as men being physically stronger and more capable) as well as stereotypes around individual disabilities (autism and OCD, for example, are disproportionately associated with men). While Aza's disability is not named in the novel or on the cover, the book was widely publicized as having a protagonist with OCD. In particular, it was publicized as a "coded autobiography" about John Green's own experience with his OCD, and that it referenced his "breakdown" after the success of *The Fault In Our Stars*, his previous novel from 2012 (Duerden, 2018). Given the stardom of John Green and the amount of publicity this book

received, most readers are likely to view Aza within the context of that publicity (i.e. as having OCD), and I will for this reason refer to her cognitive disability as OCD for the sake of clarity and brevity. In the novel, Aza and her friend Daisy discover that the wealthy father of Aza's friend Davis has gone missing while under suspicion for financial crimes, and that there is a $100,000 reward for information on his whereabouts. They decide to search for clues surrounding the father's disappearance, but in the process Aza begins a romantic relationship with Davis. She eventually acquiesces to Davis's request not to search for his father nor give the police information about his whereabouts. During these events, Aza's OCD begins to spiral out of control, increasingly affecting her ability to live a normal life and maintain relationships.

Young Adult "Detective Fiction" and Grouping the Adolescent Disabled Detective

Detective fiction is nearly ubiquitous, existing in various forms and often infiltrating other genres, including children's and young adult fiction. However, before delving into the topic of "young adult detective fiction," if in fact that is the correct term, it's useful to discuss the differences between detective fiction for adults and detective fiction as it exists in children's literature. Mysteries featuring a child detective(s) ("detective" used here loosely as a term describing the character who attempts to solve the mystery) are common in children's fiction (Gavin and Routledge, 2001, p.2), particularly in children's series fiction (McGee, 2010; Russell, 2010). Many critics argue that children's mysteries' true focus are not the actual mystery at hand, but rather adult topics like social class and wealth (Boone, 2001), or questions surrounding the adult/child divide (Routledge, 2001), including who holds the power of knowledge or secrets (Rudd, 2001; McGee, 2010).

Patterns of power and agency between different age groups are of particular interest for this chapter. Children's detective fiction can often uncover conflicts between childhood and adulthood. Chris McGee, for instance, argues that children's mysteries "are structured around a longing for knowledge" (2010, p.47), but that they often reveal an adult discomfort with children gaining too much power through their search for knowledge. The mystery stories question "what inherent boundaries are crossed when children seek out knowledge for themselves" (McGee, 2010, p.49). Similarly, David Rudd notes that in Enid Blyton's multiple famous mystery series, the mysteries the plots depict, which are always solved, act as a diversion from the mystery of more "adult" secrets that go unanswered (2001, p.96). Christopher Routledge, meanwhile, argues

that children's detective fiction specifically examines "the differences and tensions between adulthood and childhood," and that through putting a child in the role of the detective, "the discourse of adulthood attempts to overwhelm and eradicate the discourse of childhood" – something he calls "the perfect crime" of children's detective fiction (2001, p.64). This eradication happens as the child detective "must behave in rational, adult ways" in order to catch the adult criminal, who in turn is "often presented as irrational and childish" (2001, p.65). The capture of this adult criminal, then, removes both child*ish* and child*hood* behavior from society, as the criminal is eliminated and the child detective is rewarded for their adult-like behavior.

These are patterns of children's detective fiction, but the question remains whether young adult detective fiction follows them. More importantly, the question remains whether such a thing as "young adult detective fiction" exists in the first place. Traditional detective or mystery stories in the YA genre are difficult to find. In fact, Michael Cart argues that more complex mystery series that appear to be YA fiction are instead better classed as middle grade children's fiction (2016, p.98). There is also very little secondary research that exists on YA detective fiction as a genre or category. I would argue that this is because mystery stories in the young adult genre are not truly detective fiction. Even more than in children's mystery stories, in young adult "detective" novels, the original mystery to be solved ends up playing second fiddle to other plot lines or themes within the story. For instance, in one of the most famous YA novels featuring an adolescent "detective," Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003), the original mystery of who killed the dog is far less important in the novel than is the protagonist's search for his mother. Michelle Resene argues that *Curious Incident* is not so much a detective or mystery story as it is a coming-of-age story (2016, p.81). And yet, she notes that though it deviates wildly from the conventions of the mystery genre, it was specifically marketed as a mystery novel (p.81). Likewise, the primary texts in this chapter all feature mysteries and adolescent protagonists who must act as "detectives" in order to solve them, and yet that plot is not the true focus of any of the novels. In *I Have No Secrets*, the mystery of who killed the neighbor, Ryan, is already solved – both the "detective" (Jemma) and the reader receive that information at the very beginning of the novel, when Dan tells Jemma that he did it. In *Turtles All the Way Down*, the detective actively *stops* trying to solve the mystery of Davis's missing father; the novel's genuine focus is Aza's struggle with her OCD. Only in *She Is Not Invisible* does the protagonist's missing father continue to be a relevant mystery to solve

throughout the entire novel – but even then, the true themes of the novel are about Laureth's ability to navigate and act independently, rather than the mystery of her father's whereabouts.

Strictly speaking, none of the protagonists of these novels fill the traditional role of "detective." Moreover, none of the novels are really "detective fiction" – in fact, "young adult detective fiction" is a faulty term, as it doesn't necessarily exist. I will continue to use the term, however, as despite these facts, young adult novels featuring a "mystery" or "detective" *must* be considered within the realm of the detective fiction genre. This is not because they *fulfill* the conventions of the genre, but because they do the very opposite: they *address* the genre's conventions and then *play* on them to create an investigation of something else. Unlike children's detective fiction, which subtly explores more complex themes in an undercurrent to the main mystery plot, young adult detective fiction deliberately and demonstratively uses the mystery within the novel, and specifically the protagonist's role of detective, in order to openly subvert norms.

As stated, Routledge argues that children's detective fiction examines "the differences and tensions between adulthood and childhood" (2001, p.64). I argue that young adult detective fiction follows a parallel pattern: it examines the differences between adolescence and adulthood, while at the same time also examining the differences between adolescence and childhood. Like other genres within the overarching umbrella of YA, young adult detective fiction is another lens through which to examine the adolescent condition – or, as I have argued, another way of representing adolescence as a group. Other common genres within YA examine adolescence through some of its major themes as they are seen by the Western world. Romance, for instance, one of the most popular genres of YA fiction and a plot feature that YA novels rarely lack, examines the adolescent condition through the lens of what Western society considers to be one of the most important facets of being an adolescent: first love and sexual awakening. Young adult detective fiction operates similarly, using the mystery plot lines and the detective protagonist as a lens through which to examine another key facet of Western adolescence: the struggle for agency, control, and independence that was lacking during childhood but that adults refuse to fully cede.

As I have explored previously, agency and control are well acknowledged as classic themes of YA literature. Trites, in particular, argues that the "need to recognize one's own agency is a central pattern of adolescent literature" (2000, p.129). Trites goes on to argue that the

theme of agency in YA literature leads to the erasure of adolescence, as gaining agency while also coming to terms with the limits of one's agency is a key step in reaching adult maturity: "we achieve adulthood more comfortably if we recognize that we have some control over the various subject positions we occupy than if we feel entirely like objects, pawns, in other people's movements. But conversely, maturity also depends on our ability to maintain, when necessary, an object position" (2000, p.129). However, I would argue that young adult detective fiction – or at least, contemporary young adult detective fiction as it has existed in the past decade – does not follow this pattern. Rather than depicting adulthood as "overwhelming" or "eradicating" adolescence, young adult detective fiction turns the role of detective into a quest for adolescent power and an exploration of adolescent agency, without its detectives necessarily falling prey to adulthood in the process.

This is best exemplified by Jemma, the protagonist of *I Have No Secrets*. Jemma is a young adolescent; as she is only fourteen years old in the novel, she has only recently reached adolescence. When Jemma was ten years old, she was able to control her blinking and was taught to communicate "yes" or "no" through blinking patterns. Unused to being able to make decisions and have control, the young Jemma disliked this new ability: "All the questions made me feel panicky. I was used to watching, not deciding" (p.74). Soon afterward, however, Jemma lost the ability to control her blinking due to an infection. As a child, this felt liberating to her: "After I couldn't control the blinking, it's hard to admit, but part of me felt relieved. It was a relief to go back to just watching and not having to decide" (p.75). As an adolescent, however, Jemma experiences an awakening desire for this control: "It's different now. I'd give anything for the chance to be able to do it again. I'm older and there's so much I want to say…I want to make my own choices. 'Yes' and 'No' won't be enough, though – not to tell them about Dan" (p.75). Unlike in childhood, where a lack of control and decision-making felt liberating, now Jemma feels the inverse, that *possessing* control would be liberating. Jemma emphasizes that this is because she is "older now" – because she has reached adolescence, she wants more power and independence. She also connects this adolescent desire to the ability to capture the murderer. Crucially, the murder "mystery" (though it is not a mystery to Jemma), and Jemma's role as a detective, are what awaken Jemma's adolescent desire for control. Of course, she desires control for other reasons as well, and not just to communicate Dan's guiltiness. However, it is her role as detective – the need to solve the case, to catch the killer – that sparks this intense desire for

agency. It is therefore the mystery that pushes Jemma from being a child into an adolescent – that makes her desire for choices, for control, for the power to make her own decisions. Unlike Routledge's child detective, who eradicates childhood and becomes more adult through their detecting activities, Jemma grows out of her childhood and becomes an *adolescent*. The young adult detective novel therefore creates adolescence out of childhood, rather than creating adulthood out of childhood.

Unlike Trites' (2000) argument, *I Have No Secrets* does not then proceed to grow Jemma immediately through adolescence and into adulthood, thereby eradicating adolescence. Instead, Jemma stays firmly an adolescent. Throughout the novel, Jemma works with a doctor who is able to create a device for her to communicate via sniffing air through her nose, a rare physical reaction that she can control. When Jemma is finally given her sniffing communication device to use at home, she tells her parents and then the police about Dan's confession to her. However, the police don't believe her, and the reason for this is Jemma's adolescence: they tell her mother that "perhaps she just wanted something dramatic to say. She's a teenager, after all" (p.274). This makes clear that while Jemma's desire for agency has brought her into the adolescent realm, she does not have the agency nor the privileges of an adult. However, neither does the novel follow Trites' later (2014, p.148) argument that YA literature presents adolescence and youth as something that needs to be "outgrown." After the police fail to take Jemma seriously, she seeks out the help of a fellow adolescent: her sister, who was adopted into a different home and with whom she was recently reunited. When no adults will pay attention, Jodi and Jemma, the adolescents, are able to search behind the Co-op, somewhere Jemma heard Dan mention before, and in doing so are able to find Sarah, whom Dan has been keeping captive. The adolescents, rather than the adults, are the ones who manage to solve the crime – but in doing so, rather than growing into adult-like behavior as Routledge's child detectives do, Jemma merely grows more fully into her adolescent role. The confidence she gains from this allows her to begin to interact with other adolescents more, including her sister, and through these relationships she develops a very adolescent fandom of Glowlight, a rock band. Jemma's role as a detective doesn't cause her to act like an adult – it causes her to act like an adolescent.

What does all of this have to do with disability? The role of detective allows for a fundamental change in a reader's mind-model of a disabled adolescent protagonist. Young adult detective fiction is able to do something similar to how *We Are Young*, discussed in Chapter 2, associates the out-group with the in-group. In *We Are Young*, the out-group of bisexuality is connected to the in-group of adolescence by depicting a common enemy (adults). Young adult detective fiction associates the out-group of the disabled detective (disability) to the in-group of the disabled detective (adolescence) in a similar manner, by depicting both groups, in the role of detective, as searching for agency and control. Unlike in *We Are Young*, this focus on agency, or rather the focus on the lack of agency, does not involve a hostile out-group that attempts to take agency away. Rather, the role of detective provides the common ground between the in-group and out-group, granting agency to two groups that are normally denied it.

A detective *must* have agency; as Cheyne notes, "genre convention requires that the fictional detective be a person with agency, acting to gather clues, analyze them, and solve the mystery" (2017, p.187). The disabled detective trope can grant agency to disabled characters, a group who are generally deprived of it – as stated, though often problematic, the disabled detective trope does allow for disabled characters to be "active agents" and therefore contradicts "dominant perceptions of disabled people as passive and lacking in agency" (Cheyne, 2017, p.187). Likewise, the mantle of detective can grant agency to adolescents. When examining children's detective fiction, Routledge notes that "child detectives attend to things overlooked by, or invisible to, the adult gaze" (2001, p.64). Like the child detective, one of the adolescent detective's advantages is their "continuing interest in a problem or danger the adults have long since disregarded" (p.65) – this exemplified, for instance, in Jemma's ability to catch the murderer in *I Have No Secrets*. Routledge argues that detective fiction in general "describes, legitimizes, and even privileges marginal existences," as detectives are often "outsiders" (p.68). While the adolescent detective lacks the problematic "supercrip" overtones of the disabled detective, the existence of a mystery and the role of detective can allow for the creation and exploration of an agency that was previously lacking in both these groups. Thus, the framework of the mystery story allows for the reader to associate the detective's out-group– their disability – with the detective's in-group – their adolescence.

When Laureth, the protagonist of *She Is Not Invisible*, is confronted with the mystery of her missing father, she is only able to experiment with her own agency through the role of detective. Previously, both because of her blindness and her age, Laureth was not permitted to act alone or exert her own control independently: "On the one hand Mum won't let me do anything by myself, and on the other she's always telling me I have to learn to look after myself better because no one else is going to" (p.31). This is a classic adolescent complaint, but it is also caused by Laureth's disability. Taking on the role of detective and breaking rules in order to travel to New York City allows Laureth to act independently of both adult and sighted control for one of the first times in her life. Laureth's younger brother, Ben, is able to help Laureth with some things she would otherwise be unable to do, but Laureth is the driving force behind their search for their father. Laureth must figure out how to navigate the larger world. As a detective, Laureth is thus granted an exploration of agency that she would not normally be permitted either as disabled or as an adolescent.

The real focus of the novels in this chapter is not their mysteries, but rather what the mystery permits to happen: a *search* for agency. In *I Have No Secrets*, this is Jemma's desire to make decisions; in *She Is Not Invisible*, this is Laureth's desire to act independently; in *Turtles All the Way Down*, this is Aza's desire to be able to "author" her own existence rather than let her OCD control all her behavior. Note that the fulfillment of these desires – the protagonists finding agency, in other words – does not erase their disabilities any more than it erases their adolescence. *I Have No Secrets* doesn't intimate that the ability to communicate is inherently adolescent (Jemma had it when she was younger, after all); instead, it intimates that the *desire* for the control that communication brings is something specific to Jemma's adolescence, rather than her childhood. This means that there is not a demand on Jemma to be "cured" – or even to develop the ability to communicate – in order to become an adolescent, in the way that *Everything Everything*, for instance, depicted Madeline's disability and her adolescence as mutually exclusive. Laureth, meanwhile, does not suddenly discover that she has a near-magical ability to navigate a large city as easily as a sighted person; she is capable of it, but there are times when it is difficult. Likewise, the ending of *Turtles*, which is discussed more fully in the last section of this chapter, demonstrates that Aza finding ways to treat her OCD never cures or erases it.

Young adult detective fiction thus manages to associate the protagonist's out-group of disability with their in-group of adolescence through the themes of agency and control. Of course, this happens through the murky and problematic trope of the disabled detective. However, the addition of adolescence to this role – the creation of the *adolescent* disabled detective, in other words – creates a radical foundation upon which the more problematic aspects of the trope have a greater potential to be overturned. That potential will be covered in third section of this chapter, under the theme of script disruption.

Opportunities for Empathy with the Adolescent Disabled Detective

Detective fiction as a genre creates a myriad of opportunities for empathy due to how the reader must mind-model every character in order to gain clues to solve the mystery and, if necessary, catch the villain. Zunshine argues that detective fiction is like "lifting weights" for a reader's cognitive capacities for empathy, theory of mind, and mind-modeling, due to the effortful and active empathy use this requires and the way it allows readers to develop these capacities over time (2006, p.124). She also notes that the type of mind-modeling a reader must engage with detective fiction is not necessarily relevant in the real world. A reader must suspect every character, assuming that each one might be misleading the detective or might even be the villain – this is the cognitive capacity for "predator avoidance" mentioned earlier, as the reader must determine which character might be predatory. The assumption that everyone might be guilty or predatory, however, would not serve readers well if they employed it in the outside world (Zunshine, 2006, p.125). Detective fiction therefore might be developing specific types of mind-modeling that are not particularly useful to a modern-day reader.

However, for an adolescent reader, simply being encouraged to use a conscious, active form of mind-modeling will be beneficial to developing empathic abilities, despite the fact that real-world mind-modeling won't operate in the same way as in the detective genre. As previously emphasized, adolescence is a period of "use it or lose it" cognitive development: myelination and synapse pruning in the brain allow for easier development of cognitive capacities, but also cause the loss of unused and unpracticed cognitive capacities. For an adolescent, *any* opportunity to make conscious, active efforts at empathy, as happens when reading detective fiction, can be beneficial. Whether or not the type of mind-modeling that

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detective fiction encourages is relevant in the real world is a moot point; it is still valuable practice for adolescents during a key period in their cognitive development.

The expectations of the detective genre can also give readers more incentive and motivation to take up narratively challenging opportunities for empathy: these opportunities for empathy are a main part of the pleasure of reading the genre in the first place, since the fun of detective fiction is attempting to solve the mystery alongside the detective. Zunshine emphasizes that detective fiction is particularly strange given that the reader expects opportunities for empathy to be exceptionally narratively challenging. In other words, the reader expects to be misled by the text: "We open a detective novel with an avid anticipation that our expectations will be systematically frustrated, that we will be repeatedly made fools of" (2006, p.121). The empathic clues in the novel may be far more misleading, and lead to far more misinterpretations, than in any other genre. Most importantly, the reader *expects* this, and even *enjoys* it, and so goes into the novel already actively engaging empathy to their fullest extent. This is somewhat unique to the genre. For instance, as discussed in the case of *History is All You Left Me*, an unreliable narrator promotes active cognitive engagement – but in the case of detective fiction, *everything* can be, and often is, unreliable, since detective fiction must mislead the reader "to prevent them from making crucial inferences at the outset" (Emmott, 1997, p.31). And, unlike in *History*, that unreliability is not alienating to the reader, because the reader goes into the text expecting it to be part of the fun. Even when that unreliability stems from the fact that the protagonist is out-group because of a cognitive disability, it is more likely to engage a reader rather than alienate them. This can come into effect with young adult detective novels like *White Rabbit, Red Wolf* (Pollock, 2018), in which the cognitively disabled and delusional protagonist is so obviously unreliable that the front cover boldly states "This story is a lie" (the novel was even published in the U.S. version with that statement as its title).[2]

I Have No Secrets and Turtles All the Way Down

Because young adult detective fiction is often not truly focused on the mystery at hand, it sometimes means that these particular advantages of detective fiction don't apply. For instance,

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[2] Incidentally, however, when this unreliability stems from a cognitively disabled protagonist or detective, it also has the potential to become part of the more harmful trope of seeing disabled characters in detective fiction as a "wonder" or "exhibition."

the fact that the mystery is already technically solved in *I Have No Secrets* doesn't leave the reader open to trying to interpret other characters' behavior in order to gather clues. Likewise, stories that end up being hardly about the original mystery, like *Turtles All the Way Down*, generally mean that the detective-fiction-specific opportunities for empathy, like constantly interpreting others' thoughts and actions in order to solve the mystery, aren't present. This doesn't mean that challenging opportunities for empathy aren't present in *Turtles* – they are, particularly in the way that Aza uses metaphoric language to describe the experience of her OCD, in a similar manner to Griffin in *History is All You Left Me*. Aza metaphorically dubs her OCD-fueled thought patterns "thought spirals," and even acknowledges that metaphors and similes are the only ways she can describe these patterns – for example, after breaking out of one, she states that "I no longer felt like I was in a whirlpool or walking an ever-tightening spiral. I didn't need similes. I was located in myself again" (p.66).[3] The mystery plot, however, is not what presents most of the opportunities for empathy in the novel. This is because the reader doesn't follow along the plot trying to solve the mystery, as the "detective," Aza, ends up acquiescing to Davis's request and therefore deliberately tries *not* to solve it.

Only when the mystery is solved does Aza's avoidance of it become an opportunity for empathy. In the end, the mystery is solved by accident. Aza and Daisy happen to be in a sewer tunnel for an underground art show. They wander off into another tunnel only to discover that "the jogger's mouth," the phrase Davis's father had used in some notes, probably referred to exactly where they were hidden in the sewer at the mouth of the river. At this point, both Aza and Daisy guess the answer to the mystery, but because Aza tries not to think of it, the reader is left to interpret the answer through their dialogue and Aza's avoidance of the issue: "'How could he have been down here the whole time, though?' I had a guess, but didn't say anything. 'God, that smell…' she said, her voice trailing off as she said it" (p.267). The reader must interpret the way that Daisy's voice trails off as she mentions the smell as the fact that she, like Aza, has a guess, and that it is not pleasant. The reader must then connect the smell to the conclusion that Davis's father is likely dead in the tunnel somewhere. Aza's avoidance of the unpleasant issue leaves this conclusion unspoken, forcing the reader to interpret the behavioral clues without

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[3] Because I have already discussed the effects of similar metaphoric language use in the section on *History Is All You Left Me*, I will refrain from giving more examples or going into more detail on this effect in *Turtles All the Way Down*.

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narratorial assistance. Other than this instance, however, the novel's main opportunities for empathy do not stem from readers' attempts to solve the mystery.

She Is Not Invisible

She Is Not Invisible is the best example from this chapter's primary texts of how elements of detective fiction can create many opportunities for empathy. To solve the novel's mystery, the reader must use mind-modeling in order to derive clues from characters' behavior about where Laureth's missing father might be. The reader must do this in nearly every scene, with nearly every character, as they don't know which clues the novel gives are relevant for the solution to the mystery. Chatman (1978) separates narrative events in fictional texts into what he dubs "kernels," which are key to the narrative and "cannot be deleted without destroying narrative logic" (p.53), and "satellites," which are minor plot events that "can be deleted without disturbing the logic of the plot" but if deleted will "impoverish the narrative aesthetically" (p.54). Because detective fiction is deliberately misleading, when reading detective fiction a reader is encouraged to view all plot points as possible kernels: some will end up being satellites, red herrings put there to throw the reader off the track, but some seemingly insignificant events will end up being crucial to the solution to the mystery.

For instance, Laureth and Ben don't necessarily know if anyone has harmed their father during their search for him in New York City – and neither does the reader. However, there is a distinct possibility that someone has kidnapped him or otherwise harmed him, and both Laureth and the reader know this. At one point, Laureth and Ben pass through the lobby of their father's hotel and hear the manager speaking with some people. Neither Laureth nor the reader know yet that these people are, in fact, the villains, but this scene provides the first clue by associating them with bad behavior. While Laureth and Ben pass through the lobby, "there seemed to be an argument going on. There was a strong smell of stale smoke" (p.212). Then Laureth hears the manager's voice say that "we've already asked you to leave, and I'm not afraid to call the police to deal with this" (p.212). The reader can here use empathy to understand that the manager is frightened or disturbed enough by these people's behavior to call the police. Moreover, the reader will begin to associate the smell of stale smoke with bad behavior and, crucially, bad intentions. Though the mention of the smoky smell may seem trivial, a reader's expectations about detective stories – in which every piece of information might be significant – will ensure

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that they treat seemingly random information like this with more significance than it might have in real life. The reader is therefore likely to be consciously aware of these clues, even if Laureth isn't, as well as likely to be using empathy to interpret the hotel manager's response to these characters. This scene really is a plot "kernel," but a reader will have to treat *every* scene this same way, as if they are all kernels, if they want to solve the mystery alongside Laureth. This requires constant cognitive effort, keeping a reader aware and suspicious enough to empathically interpret each and every character in each and every scene. Not only does this encourage active empathic engagement, but it also encourages active empathic engagement *more times* than would otherwise be possible: no opportunity for empathy is "optional" to understanding the plot, and so a reader is required to engage in every single opportunity the text offers.

The reader must also use empathy with the absent figure of Laureth's father. Once Laureth and Ben regain possession of his journal, it provides clues to the mystery that must be interpreted with mind-modeling. Laureth herself makes clear the connection between the journal entries and her father's emotions and mental state: "Dad's notebook was doing my head in. Something about it scared me. Parts seemed coherent, but other bits were peculiar and disjointed, and it worried me that the Black Book was a reflection of Dad's *state of mind*" (p.182, original emphasis). The connection between the notebook and her father's emotions is made explicit for the reader, and occasionally the narration also does some of the empathic analysis for the reader – in this instance, "peculiar and disjointed" being metarepresented descriptions of Laureth's father's state of mind. However, much of the time Laureth's interpretations of the journal are left unsaid, and the reader must do the work to interpret the father's emotions, intentions, and motivations from his journal. At one point, for instance, a passage in the journal includes very little of the father's own thoughts, and is rather a compilation of summaries of various scholars that worked on coincidence who all committed suicide. While there are no emotions represented or metarepresented in any form in this journal entry, a reader must use empathy to understand that this list might point to the father's intentions or state of mind – and that the resolution to the mystery of where the father disappeared to is that he himself, being someone who works on coincidences, also committed suicide.

These, however, are all opportunities for the reader to engage empathy with secondary characters, and this thesis focuses on a majority culture reader engaging empathy specifically with a minority protagonist. Though a reader of detective fiction is generally encouraged to

suspect everyone, the protagonist/narrator and the detective (in these cases, the same person) are not generally the ones under suspicion.[4] Why, then, would detective fiction with an out-group protagonist promote the use and development of empathic abilities with out-group members, if the most important empathy happens with characters *other* than the protagonist? The answer is that the detective/protagonist acts as a filter. Particularly in the case of recent young adult fiction, in which first-person and internally focalized narration is the norm, the reader of a young adult detective novel with an out-group protagonist must empathically interpret the intentions and motivations of all the other characters – including potential suspects – *through the limited perspective* of the out-group protagonist. This may bring the reader to one conclusion about the solution to the mystery. Then the reader must use empathy with the protagonist themselves in order to understand what the protagonist's conclusion about the mystery is – and this may or may not be different from the reader's own conclusion. In other words, detective fiction with an out-group detective requires a large amount of narratively challenging, cognitively active empathy, and it requires this empathic practice to be constantly done through the lens of an out-group protagonist.

In the case of the disabled detective, this is particularly significant. Cheyne notes that because "the bodies and behaviors of the characters are just another potential clue or piece of evidence," detective fiction is not only suited to developing empathy, but also to developing empathy with a specific out-group that, historically, the majority culture has empathically misinterpreted: "the genre is thus ideally suited to problematizing how we read – and misread – disabled bodies and minds in the wider world" (2017, p.190). In *She Is Not Invisible*, this requires a reader to interpret a disabled body that is very different to their own: they must experience the entire novel through the perspective of a protagonist who is blind. This is a challenging prospect; the way a blind person interprets the world is fundamentally different to how a sighted person normally interprets the world. As Hall notes, novels with blind protagonists can make sighted readers "think in alternative ways about perception, and briefly… attempt to inhabit another form of consciousness" (2016, p.122).

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[4] There are famous examples of when this was not true, most notably Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), in which the protagonist (and also narrator) was revealed to be the murderer. However, this caused controversy amongst readers for the very reason I state here – that the genre expectations of detective fiction exempt the detective and the protagonist from suspicion.

At the beginning of the novel, Laureth's blindness itself forms a secondary mystery. *She Is Not Invisible* is rare in that it doesn't reveal that Laureth is blind – nor even allude to her blindness – on the back cover. Other young adult novels tend to somehow reveal a character's minority, particularly if it is a disability, on the cover, even if it is not explicitly stated in the book. This may be due to the disability trope that Dolmage calls the "disability as pathology myth" – the trope that a character's disability is almost always "explained" and "defined" in some way, particularly with a "medicalized definition" (2014, p.34). Disability is not allowed to exist without being labeled. Even when the fictional text itself resists this trope, all too often the publishing industry follows it. Many covers of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, for example, state that Christopher has autism, even though that is not actually mentioned anywhere in the novel itself. *Turtles All the Way Down*, on the other hand, is so well publicized that a reader will likely come to the novel with the pre-existing understanding (or rather, interpretation) that the protagonist has OCD.

She Is Not Invisible suffers from neither of these disadvantages. Nikolajeva points out that *She Is Not Invisible* is the rare YA novel whose narration creates a plausible representation of a disabled protagonist: it makes sense that Laureth's disability remains unnamed and not directly addressed until it becomes relevant for the story, as the novel is internally focalized through Laureth. Why would she explain her disability to herself, or directly think about it unless it is relevant? (2018, p.101). Obviously, there are clues that Laureth is blind before her narration reveals this fact; in the first chapter, for instance, Laureth asks her younger brother to find the gate agents, trips over someone's bag "or something" (making clear she's not sure what the object is), and is happy she can "find" the passports on the gate agent's counter inconspicuously. A reader will certainly notice these things are slightly odd, but may not put together the fact that she is blind for quite a while, after several chapters of these odd behaviors. The words "disability" and "impairment" aren't mentioned until page 42, and Laureth being blind isn't confirmed until page 54. Unless the reader has done research on the book beforehand, they may go into the novel not expecting Laureth to be out-group at all. In terms of empathy use and development, this is beneficial in two ways – firstly, the reader must use mind-modeling without context to interpret Laureth's uncommon behaviors before her blindness is revealed. Secondly, it removes many of the barriers of out-group empathy bias. A reader won't discard the book straight away without reading it on the basis that the protagonist is out-group. Moreover, by the

time Laureth's out-group membership is revealed, the reader will have already begun empathizing with her, making it easier for empathy use to continue with less interference from group bias.

Readers must also use higher-order mind-modeling to interpret other characters' emotions and states of mind through Laureth's perspective – the out-group perspective. They must also do so only with the information that Laureth is able to provide. This information is necessarily limited because she is blind, so the reader must mind-model with only partial clues. These clues are far fewer than a reader would be used to having from other fiction reading experiences, because visual empathic clues like facial expressions and body language are unavailable in *She Is Not Invisible*. The reader must also make their empathic interpretations from clues that will be unusual to them, like descriptions of vocal tones. For instance, at one point Laureth describes a boy's voice as having "gone a little flatter than before" (p.95). Though a reader likely won't be used to interpreting emotions purely from verbal descriptions of vocal tones, as this is generally uncommon in fiction, they are still able to use empathy to determine what that flatter tone likely means: that the boy is feeling colder towards Laureth than he was previously. Nikolajeva argues that these kind of empathic opportunities act as defamiliarization devices, narrative tools that increase cognitive engagement with the text (2018, p.104). This defamiliarization is both narratively challenging, since the reader will likely be unpracticed at the uncommon forms of empathic interpretation the novel requires, as well as categorizationally challenging, as it forces the reader into an unfamiliar, out-group perspective – quite literally into Laureth's experience. The double challenge of *She Is Not Invisible*'s opportunities for empathy is highly likely to contribute to adolescent reader's empathic development, as it requires constant, active cognitive engagement in order to meet the challenge. Moreover, these opportunities are, again, more likely to be taken up by readers than opportunities in novels of other genres: nowhere is the reader as encouraged to take up every opportunity for complex empathy as in a mystery novel. The reader *must* engage empathy through Laureth's perspective if they are to attempt to solve the mystery (one of the great joys and motivations for reading a detective novel in the first place, as Zunshine (2006) points out).

Empathic interpretations of other characters also add a layer of complexity – not only does Laureth not have access to emotional clues like body language and facial expressions, she also does not know how to interpret them even if she receives them. Even when her brother can

explain to her what someone is doing, she doesn't have the necessary experience to interpret that correctly. For example, in a flashback scene, her father is describing the "look" that people get when someone tells them about a coincidence:

> 'And it feels incredible, so you turn to the nearest person, and you tell them, and they have that look in their eye, and they say, in a really flat voice, "Yeah. That's amazing." And then they change the subject as fast as possible.'
>
> 'What look?' I asked. 'What look in their eye?'
>
> 'Oh, well, it's hard to say,' Dad said. 'They sort of look over your shoulder, not into your face, and you can just see what they're thinking.'
>
> 'You can see what they're thinking?'
>
> 'Not literally, Laureth,' Mum said. 'He just means you can see they're not impressed. There's no reaction on their face' (p.72).

Laureth requires her mother to not only describe the look, but also to interpret it into emotional metarepresentation for her, and most importantly, to explain the concept of mind-modeling via visual clues (that you can't literally "see" what people are thinking, but that you can intuitively connect the visual clues to an interpretation of their thoughts). That Laureth has trouble even with descriptions of visual emotional clues necessarily makes her an unreliable narrator of other characters' visual clues as told to her by Ben or others. The reader knows this, and so must treat any information she gives about visual emotional clues as unreliable or possibly incomplete.

She Is Not Invisible requires the reader to navigate the mystery plot line with all of these complex empathic lenses in place. These opportunities for empathy are both narratively and categorizationally challenging, requiring the reader to be actively and consciously engaged while trying to solve the mystery alongside the protagonist. While any novel with a minority protagonist offers the reader the opportunity to use empathy with and through the protagonist in similar ways, the presence of the mystery in *She Is Not Invisible* raises the stakes. The mystery plot creates opportunities for empathy that other plot lines wouldn't, such as the required constant empathic interpretations of secondary characters. More importantly, the mystery plot line, which encourages the reader to solve the mystery alongside Laureth, also means that the

reader's *motivation* to use empathy with the novel will be much higher, improving the chances that these opportunities for empathy will be taken up.

The Adolescent Disabled Detective as a Script Disruptor

At the end of the first section of this chapter, I stated that the addition of adolescence into the role of disabled detective – the creation of the adolescent disabled detective – builds a radical foundation that has the potential to upset the more problematic aspects of the disabled detective trope. This can be seen specifically as script disruption: a refusal to follow the patterns that readers will expect detective fiction and the disabled detective to follow. Young adult detective fiction with disabled protagonists – and in particular, the specific figure of the adolescent disabled detective – is a uniquely ideal medium through which to disrupt scripts. Because of this, it is also a medium that is uniquely and ideally suited to encouraging a reader's active cognitive engagement while reading, and through this ensure that a reader is consciously engaging empathy, thereby furthering the development of their empathic capabilities.

Uniquely suited to disrupting scripts?

Detective fiction is a genre that is full to bursting with scripts. Given the ubiquitous nature of detective fiction, readers will likely have formed these scripts whether or not they regularly partake in the genre. Christopher, the protagonist of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, acknowledges these scripts in their most basic of forms when he states that "this is a murder mystery novel" (Haddon, 2003, p.3), and that "in a murder mystery novel someone has to work out who the murderer is and then catch them" (p.5). Essentially, Christopher is pointing out that there are genre expectations as to what detective fiction is, as well as the patterns and outcomes it must follow. These patterns can be expressed as scripts. Older forms of detective fiction from the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century operated strictly by these scripts, as evidenced by detective fiction authors writing articles like S.S. van Dine's "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories" and Raymond Chandler's "Ten Commandments for the Detective Novel." More recent versions of detective fiction in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries follow these patterns less strictly, but detective fiction still operates on a formulaic basis. Stuart Murray emphasizes that detective fiction is "not simply fiction that details

the solving of a mystery…but also writing that relies on the idea of the *forms and structures* of detective fiction to support that central plot device" (2012, p.179, original emphasis).

Even when detective fiction does not follow its expected patterns – in other words, even when it disrupts the scripts of the genre – those scripts, and the genre's history, play an important role both in how the fiction is constructed and in how it is read. Resene argues that Christopher's assertion in *Curious Incident* that "this is a mystery novel" gives readers "an implicit promise that Christopher's novel will follow certain conventions of plot structure and that it will, in fact, reach a satisfactory conclusion" (2016, p.88). Of course, it doesn't follow those conventions, nor meet its promise to its readers – but this is deliberate. Detective fiction that disrupts scripts does so with a self-referential awareness of the expectations that it is failing to meet.

As I have argued, young adult "detective fiction" is not really detective fiction, because it fails to follow the formulaic patterns that the genre requires. However, because it recognizes and acknowledges those patterns – because it creates a postmodern play on those patterns – it must be read within the context of the genre. In other words, though it does not *preserve* detective fiction scripts, young adult detective fiction still *activates* detective fiction scripts in its readers. Christopher "promises" (Resene, 2016, p.88) readers that his novel is a murder mystery. Jemma, in *I Have No Secrets*, states that she tries "to think like Poirot" (Joelson, 2017, p.37), reminding readers that Jemma is a detective despite the unconventional mystery she is trying to "solve." Young adult detective fiction is simultaneously *not* detective fiction yet also *references* detective fiction. It is a medium full of script disruption, and it therefore keeps a reader's cognitive engagement active and aware, constantly encouraging and even forcing active empathic practice.

Like detective fiction, disability in fiction is also surrounded by tropes, or "myths" as Dolmage (2014) dubs them, that can be seen as scripts. These disability scripts are so plentiful and interconnected that it's possible for a piece of fiction to disrupt one disability script – for instance, that disabled people have no agency – by reinforcing another – for instance, the figure of the disabled detective. Disability and detective fiction together activate a large number of scripts, and the disabled detective thus carries the possibility of preserving those scripts or disrupting them – or even both. As Cheyne states, disability in detective fiction can be "simultaneously abnormal and normative" (2017, p.196). Importantly, while disabled detective stories have the possibility to be very normative and script preserving, or to be only somewhat disruptive, they also have the potential to be completely radical given the number of scripts

available to be disrupted: it's possible for them to be "a location for ideas of disability that refute the reductive" and that "outline [disability] as a complex space of human subjectivity" (Murray, 2012, p.181). This certainly does not happen all or most of the time – in fact, disabled detective stories are rarely so disruptive – but they do have to *potential* to be so.

Both *young adult* detective fiction and *disabled* detective fiction are therefore spaces that contain a large number of scripts. Put them together, and the figure of the adolescent disabled detective activates a record number of scripts. More importantly, the figure has the radical potential to actually disrupt them. Young adult detective fiction already disrupts many of the scripts of general detective fiction due to its postmodern play on the expectations of the genre. Given that young adult detective fiction also tends to examine themes of agency in adolescence, something that disabled characters rarely have, the adolescent disabled detective has the potential to disrupt the scripts around disability, too – including the trope of the "supercrip" disabled detective. This means that, if it fulfills this potential, the adolescent disabled detective is a figure perfectly suited to developing a majority culture reader's out-group empathy.

Disrupting the "silent witness" and "supercrip" scripts

As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, disabled characters in detective fiction tend to fill one of two roles – either the "silent and constrained witness unable to communicate vital evidence" or the "'differently abled' detective granted a particular type of insight precisely because of a disability" (Murray, 2012, p.179). Disability scholars agree that the figure of the disabled detective itself is not necessarily harmful or reductive, but it often is because it follows this role of the "supercrip" disabled detective who is granted super detecting powers *by* their disability, or who illustrates that disabled people can only be accepted into mainstream society if they are outstanding at a certain skill. I will be calling these harmful and stereotypical tropes the "silent witness" script and the "supercrip" script (this latter to distinguish between a detective who is disabled, and the stereotype of the supercrip detective).

Of these two roles for disabled characters in detective fiction, Jemma from *I Have No Secrets* is somehow *both*. She is the silent witness to Dan's confession and is unable to communicate her knowledge to anyone. However, she is also, at the same time, the protagonist and the detective. This not only gives her agency as the detective who both desires to catch the villain and has the appropriate knowledge to do so, but also gives her agency through the novel's

narrative perspective. While she may be a silent witness to other characters in the novel, she is anything but silent to the reader. The novel is narrated in mental discourse, in first person and present tense, and Jemma keeps up a steady stream of narration of her thoughts and conclusions both as a detective (when focusing on the crime at hand) and also as the protagonist of the novel (when focusing on other matters important to her). Jemma is a silent witness *with agency* – and this is even before she is able to communicate. In filling both the detective and the witness roles at the same time, Jemma fills neither: she is not quite a detective – since she is a witness, she already possesses all the relevant information: there is no mystery to "solve." However, as the protagonist/detective, neither is she a powerless pawn that serves as a tool for the plot. *I Have No Secrets* works with genre norms in order to subvert them; in preserving both scripts, Jemma also disrupts both scripts.

However, as a detective – even if an untraditional detective that doesn't have a mystery to "solve" – is Jemma a supercrip? After all, she receives the information about the solution to the mystery because Dan knew she was unable to tell anyone else: the mystery is therefore solved *because* of her disability. And yet, Jemma is not exceptional. When she learns to communicate via sniffing, she takes a long time to figure out how to get her messages across. She even loses opportunities to communicate Dan's guiltiness because she is too slow at sniffing, or because she forgets to communicate that information as her very first message. Moreover, even as someone who is told secrets because of her inability to betray confidences, she is not made "super" by her disability. Jemma states that others tell her their secrets because "they know I won't tell anyone else, so they think telling me is safe. The perfect listener" (p.7). But Jemma is not a perfect listener, nor even a good listener; she interrupts other characters' dialogue in her head (and therefore in the narration), and grows frustrated and judgmental, particularly with her carer's choice to date two men at once. She sometimes thinks uncharitable thoughts, such as "only Sarah would get herself into this situation" (p.25), and "I wouldn't get myself into such a mess in the first place" (p.27). Jemma's disability does not make her into a "super" listener who is inhumanly kind, sympathetic, and nonjudgmental – it merely makes *others* feel that she is. Jemma highlights this when describing why other people talk to her – "*they* know…*they* think" (p.7, emphasis added). She herself knows she is not really "the perfect listener." She is therefore successful at solving the crime, or rather receiving the information about the murderer, not

because of her "extraordinary" body, to use Cheyne's (2017) term. Instead, she only receives the information because *other* people perceive her to be different, and so treat her differently.

She Is Not Invisible, meanwhile, disrupts the supercrip script by explicitly bringing it up. Laureth discusses her distaste with her brother's Daredevil comics, which feature a superhero who was blinded by toxic waste. His other senses were so enhanced by this onset of blindness that he is able to fight better than anyone else. Laureth notes that while this may be a comforting fantasy for able-bodied people, it's very untrue: "People like the idea that if you went blind, your other four senses might become super-powered, but that's not how it is…trust me, if you're blind, your other senses do not help you 'see'" (p.115-6). Laureth attributes the supercrip script to able-bodied voyeurism and fear of disability: "People are fascinated by the idea of being blind, I've learned that. Fascinated, and scared too. I think that's where the blind hero comes in. *Oh, wow, he's blind but he still kicks ass*" (p.116-7, original emphasis). Daredevil is a commonly cited example of a supercrip – a literal superhero who is made super by their disability. The novel deliberately brings the script up and then analyzes why it is so popular to able-bodied audiences; this not only calls attention to the supercrip script, it also literally *explains* the script before proceeding to deliberately disrupt it. The rest of the novel makes clear that Laureth is nothing like Daredevil. Laureth is not super or talented because of her blindness, nor is she only able to solve the mystery of her father's disappearance because of it. Indeed, she often struggles with navigating a sighted world, and makes mistakes caused by her blindness.

The only moment that Laureth comes close to being a supercrip figure is when, in the final struggle with the villain who kidnapped and robbed her father, she tells her brother Ben to smash all the lights in the already dim hotel room and hallway. By doing this, she is able to escape from the villain and lead him down the stairs, where he falls and knocks himself out. However, even in this moment, Laureth is not super because of her blindness. She doesn't magically navigate through the dark hotel flawlessly while the sighted villain is left helpless. Instead, she has to pause to find the entrance to the stairs, and remember where all the obstacles are – and she nearly makes a mistake: "At the last second, I remembered the stupid way the stairs started in the floor of the corridor itself, and I forced myself to slow down, find the edge" (p.332). Taking out the lights means that Laureth merely evens the playing field between herself and the villain. She has more experience than the villain does at navigating without sight, but this does not make her super. Despite this, a reader accustomed to the supercrip script might view

this scene as script reinforcing if they interpret it to mean that Laureth is super without sight where others are not, particularly if details like Laureth's struggle to find the stairs are overlooked in the larger picture of the final chase. However, because of the discussion surrounding Daredevil and the supercrip script earlier in the novel, a reader's attention will have been on this script from the beginning. They will thus be consciously considering this script throughout the novel. Without that earlier discussion, the subtleties of this last scene might be lost. However, as that discussion holds the reader's attention on the script – and also forces them to notice as it is disrupted throughout the novel, during Laureth's struggle to solve the mystery and navigate a strange city – this last scene is far likelier to be noted as a continuation of the script disruption in the novel, rather than glossed over as script preserving/reinforcing. A reader's attention, their active and conscious cognitive engagement prompted by the surprise of an unfulfilled pattern, is what is necessary to observe this script disruption – but it is also what the previous script disruption throughout the novel has been causing.

Turtles All the Way Down also brings up the supercrip script in an explicit way, except that in this case, it is specifically the supercrip *detective* script. Because Aza is the more traditional cognitively disabled detective, the detective part of the supercrip script in the novel is made more blatant. OCD, along with autism, is one of the most common types of cognitive disability used in detective fiction to create the "extraordinary mind" of the detective. Aza's OCD, however, doesn't make her a good detective, and she openly acknowledges that. Aza's psychiatrist tells her an Edgar Allen Poe quote stating that "the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence." Aza, however, is unconvinced:

> I guess she was trying to make me feel better, but I find mental disorders to be vastly overrated. Madness, in my admittedly limited experience, is accompanied by no superpowers; being mentally unwell doesn't make you loftily intelligent any more than having the flu does. So I know I should've been a brilliant detective or whatever, but in actuality I was one of the least observant people I'd ever met (p.132-133).

Not only does Aza disrupt the supercrip detective script by claiming that her OCD doesn't help her detecting skills, she also goes one step further: she states that her OCD makes her a *worse* detective than she would otherwise have been. Aza emphasizes that this is because of her

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"thought spirals" (the phrase she uses to describe the pattern of her obsessive and repetitive thoughts). During a thought spiral, she is "aware of absolutely nothing outside myself" (p.133), and is therefore terrible at searching for clues or noticing others' behavior.

The novel does identify a superpower, however, even if it is one that Aza does not possess. Thinking over the William James quote that states "the greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another," Davis writes on his blog that "I don't know what superpower William James enjoyed, but I can no more choose my thoughts than choose my name" (p.58-9). This resonates with Aza when she reads this; she states that "the way he talked about thoughts was the way I experienced them – not as a choice but as a destiny. Not a catalog of my consciousness, but a refutation of it" (p.59). In other words, the novel sees controlling one's own thoughts as some sort of superpower. Bringing up a superpower – even literally calling it by that name – calls attention to the supercrip script in a very recognizable way. But in bringing up the script, the novel also disrupts it in the same moment. Aza's mind is not "extraordinary," but rather something she is not able to control; the novel makes clear that *controlling* one's mind, is, instead, the real superpower. And it is a superpower that Aza specifically does not possess.

Script disruption and agency

All three of these primary texts disrupt the scripts around the roles of disabled characters in detective fiction. In some cases, this is even due to the protagonists' adolescence and their role in the young adult genre: as they follow the YA deviations from the generic detective fiction patterns, so they refute the label of detective fiction and even the label of detective itself. These script disruptions promote active cognitive engagement and ensure that where the reader is using empathy, these attempts are conscious and deliberate, making empathy development through reading likelier. However, the adolescent disabled detective activates scripts other than the two roles of silent witness and supercrip detective – and nowhere are these other scripts, or their disruption, more plentiful and more complex than in *Turtles All the Way Down*.

Turtles All the Way Down, like *She is Not Invisible*, disrupts scripts like the supercrip script by deliberately bringing the patterns up and then directing attention to the ways in which the novel doesn't fulfill those patterns. But it also disrupts scripts surrounding detective fiction, disability, and the disabled detective through the *metafictional* aspects of the text – calling

attention not only to the fact that scripts exist within genre patterns, but also that the protagonist, the novel, and the entire genre itself is a mere construction of these scripts. Unsurprisingly, the theme the novel uses to create these metafictional aspects is agency and control. The presence of adolescence as a group once again allows a YA novel to be constructed in a way that encourages more conscious empathy use in its adolescent readers, giving them a greater opportunity to develop empathy through reading.

I discussed the adolescent search for agency and control in the first section of this chapter, but despite these being major themes of *Turtles All the Way Down*, I am discussing these aspects of the novel in this section as the themes of agency in the novel serve, primarily, to disrupt scripts. Because of her OCD, Aza feels as though she has no control over her thoughts or even her actions, such as when her anxiety about bacteria gets so bad that she begins to drink hand sanitizer. But Aza also sees her own lack of agency as part of her being an adolescent. She contemplates how the schedule of her days and her actions throughout them are determined not by her, but by the school system she is a part of. Aza equates her lack of agency in all aspects of her life as evidence that she is fictional: a character, rather than an author of her own story. This is what Aza means when she states that her thoughts are a "refutation" of her consciousness. Life, she states, "is a story told about you, not one that you tell" (p.1). This, of course, is metafictional, given that Aza actually *is* a fictional character. The novel emphasizes this metafiction from the very beginning of the story – the very first line, in fact, begins with Aza's introductory phrase of "at the time I first realized I might be fictional" (p.1).

The novel uses this metafictional lack of agency to disrupt scripts in several ways. On a larger level, it uses the concept of "destiny" and lack of agency to poke fun at the detective fiction genre, and even at genre in general. Daisy, Aza's best friend, tells Aza near the end of the novel that "my whole life I thought I was the star of an overly earnest romance movie, and it turns out I was in a goddamned buddy comedy all along" (p.241). Even Daisy, who doesn't feel the lack of control that Aza does from her OCD, sees herself as playing a predestined role in a genre. Meanwhile, the novel also makes deliberate references to detective fiction as a genre. Aza's last name is Holmes, and Daisy calls her "Holmesy" throughout the novel. Moreover, as noted earlier, Aza herself blatantly brings up the detective fiction script of the supercrip detective. In many ways, *Turtles All the Way Down* would be unrecognizable as detective fiction, given its extreme lack of focus on the mystery, were it not for these metafictional references to

detective fiction scripts. The novel therefore brings up detective fiction in an unnecessary manner, and in doing so, it activates the reader's detective fiction scripts. It then proceeds to disrupt them by being anything *but* detective fiction.

Turtles All the Way Down is also somewhat unique in that, unlike any of the other primary texts examined in this thesis, it has a retrospective adult narrator. This has many effects, some of them metafictional, but all of them contradictory. The narration remains first person, past tense, and internally focalized through Aza throughout the novel. However, the narrator is always covert until, at the end, it is revealed that the narrator of the story is Aza's adult self, who becomes an overt narrator in a passage detailing Aza's future:

> I know the secret that the me lying beneath that sky could not
> imagine: I know that girl would go on, that she would grow up,
> have children and love them, that despite loving them she would
> get too sick to care for them, be hospitalized, get better, and then
> get sick again…I, a singular proper noun, would go on, if always
> in a conditional tense (p.285).

One of the first consequences of this passage is that, for an adolescent reader, it becomes clear the narrator of the story is out-group – an adult, rather than an adolescent. An adult narrator might have an alienating effect for adolescent readers if the narrator is overt for the entire course of a novel, dictating the experiences of adolescence from an obviously adult perspective. This would have a limiting effect on an adolescent reader's empathy use. However, the late reveal in *Turtles* minimizes this effect. In *History Is All You Left Me*, where the extent to which Griffin is delusional is only revealed at the end of the story, the novel limits the alienating effects of an extremely out-group protagonist. Likewise, *Turtle*'s delay in revealing the out-group nature of the narrator means that the diminishing effect this would have had on an adolescent reader's empathy does not come into force until the novel is already over, after the reader has already been using empathy with the adolescent, in-group Aza the entire time.

Revealing the narrator to be adult – and therefore out-group – also has a positive effect on potential empathic engagement. *History Is All You Left Me* created further opportunities for empathy by revealing that Griffin is delusional and unreliable, encouraging a reader to look back upon instances in which they had made empathic interpretations and then reevaluate them, thus using empathy for a second time round. The revelation of the adult narrator in *Turtles All the*

Way Down also promotes more empathy development, but instead of doing this by providing further opportunities for empathy, it does this through encouraging active empathy through a script disruption: that of the kill-or-cure disability script discussed in Chapter 4. The passage in which the narrator becomes overt reveals that Aza never "gets better" in a permanent sense; she relapses multiple times throughout her life, and her OCD is something that she will always have. This script disruption is possibly the strongest disruption of the novel, given how much readers tend to expect a "happy" ending in these scenarios, and how ingrained the view is that "happy" endings do not include disabilities. The adult narrator thus provides a disruption that keeps the reader's cognitive engagement active, ensuring they continue to consciously and deliberately use empathy with the novel, despite the revelations of the narrator's out-group membership.

The retrospective adult narrator: metafictional script disruption in three genres

None of this previous discussion addresses, however, how the retrospective adult narrator also has metafictional aspects that disrupt scripts. Once again, the novel's themes come back to agency and control. In general, fiction plots depict the existence of a problem and then its eventual resolution, which brings a satisfying sense of closure by the end of the novel. This closure can also bring a sense of control: the problem has been solved, the world is put back into order, and human agency is (at least usually) what allowed this to happen. I call this the **problem → resolution → closure** script. This script is expressed in specific ways depending on genre. The adolescent disabled detective figure spans three genres – young adult fiction, disability fiction[5], and detective fiction, respectively – and these genres usually preserve this script in various iterations.

Within detective fiction, it expresses itself as **problem** (the existence of a mystery/crime) → **resolution** (detective solves mystery and/or captures criminal) → **closure** (detective has reasserted control).

Within disability fiction, it often expresses itself as **problem** (the existence of disability) → **resolution** (kill or cure) → **closure** (the unpleasantness of disability is erased, and therefore disability is kept controlled).

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[5] "Disability fiction" is not really a genre, but for the purposes of continuity in this discussion, I refer to it as such. As a label, it is meant to imply depictions of disability in fiction, with all the relevant scripts those depictions entail.

Within young adult fiction, particularly as argued by Trites (2000; 2014), it can express itself as **problem** (adolescence, lack of agency) → **resolution** (growth into adulthood, gaining adult agency) → **closure** (erasure of adolescence, adulthood maintains control over adolescence).

Turtles All the Way Down, however, does not preserve the **problem → resolution → closure** script within the bounds of any of these three genres. Instead, the script is disrupted through metafictional references about each genre's expectations. In other words, the script is disrupted through metafictional references to fictional scripts.

In detective fiction, for instance, solving the mystery ought to bring a sense of resolution to the novel. The fictional world of a detective has been knocked out of kilter because of the crime or mystery, but the detective comfortingly brings it back into control with the solution to the mystery. Though she does not call it a script, Zunshine states that the reassurance this resolution brings is why mysteries and thrillers are enjoyable in fictional form in the first place; after all, suspense is unpleasant in real life, where no such guarantee of fulfillment and resolution exists (2006, p.122). In *Turtles*, however, the mystery is solved by *accident* – the very epitome of a lack of control – and even the knowledge gained from the solution does not bring a sense of satisfactory resolution to the plot line. Rather than a triumphant moment of clarity, Aza is forced to realize the terrible answer to a mystery she never wanted to solve. She then must deliver the bad news of Davis's father's suspected death to Davis, for whom she cares deeply. Aza herself states that "you'd think solving mysteries would bring you closure, that closing the loop would comfort and quiet your mind. But it never does. The truth always disappoints" (Green, 2017, p.267). In openly bringing up genre expectations, the novel makes clear that detective fiction depicts an illusion: the existence of a mystery and its subsequent solution does not actually bring agency, control, or closure. More broadly, the novel insists that the control that exists in the detective genre does not exist in real life.

Meanwhile, the **problem → resolution → closure** script within disability fiction is disrupted by the adult narrator's openly metafictional references to the supercrip detective script as well as the kill-or-cure script. Aza, as the narrator, describes how the story ought to have gone if it followed the supercrip and kill-or-cure scripts, but she then proceeds to immediately disrupt them:

> The arc of the story goes like this: Having descended into proper
> madness, I begin to make the connections that crack open the long-

dormant case of Russell Pickett's disappearance…In finding the answer despite my madness, I simultaneously find a way to live with the madness. I become a great detective, not in spite of my brain chemistry, but because of it…And along the way, I realize that I have agency over myself…yeah, no. That's not how it went down (p.232-233).

Aza's references demonstrate that both the supercrip script and the kill-or-cure script are meant to preserve the **problem → resolution → closure** script. Becoming a supercrip detective ought to allow Aza to cure herself of her OCD ("along the way, I realize that I have agency over myself"). This cure ought to bring about closure, and this closure ought to bring Aza control and agency. Instead, Aza solved the mystery by accident, and Aza's disability does not play a role in that solution. Moreover, as the retrospective narrator reveals Aza's future, she demonstrates that the resolution and closure of the novel brought her no cure: she lives with OCD for the rest of her life.

Finally, within the genre of YA fiction, the adult narrator also disrupts YA scripts of "growth" into adulthood and adult agency. The discussion of Aza's future makes clear that not only did the mystery's solution not "cure" Aza of her lack of agency from OCD, but *adulthood* did not do so either: she repeatedly improves and then relapses throughout her lifetime. In older and more didactic forms of young adult literature, in which an overt adult narrator would not be so out of place, the prolepsis, or flash-forward, into Aza's future as an adult – her "growth" out of adolescence, as it were – would also be expected to bring closure to the end of the novel. After all, the young adult novel's classic resolution is, according to Trites, the "growth" out of adolescence (2014) and thus the eradication of adolescence (2000). However, adulthood gives Aza no more agency than did adolescence. At one point, Aza becomes fascinated by a metafictional quote from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which a character cries out directly to the author, "O Jamesy, let me up out of this" (Green, 2017, p.166). Later on, when Aza's worsening symptoms cause her to be hospitalized, the narration appears to become present tense briefly – indicating Aza's stream of consciousness – before reverting back into the adult narrator's past tense: "Can't describe the feeling itself except to say that I'm not me. Forged in the smithy of someone else's soul. Please just let me out. Whoever is authoring me, let me up out of this. Anything to be out of this. But I couldn't get out" (p.211). Aza begs for her "author" to let her up

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out of this – which is obviously metafictional – but the switching between present tense ("can't describe," "is authoring") and past tense ("couldn't get out") indicates that the narrator, the adult Aza, has no more control or agency than does Aza the adolescent protagonist. Though the adult narrator is recounting the tale, she cannot heed the protagonist's plea to let her "up out of this" – after all, neither the adult Aza nor the adolescent Aza is the author of the tale. This metafictional acknowledgement that the narrator is not the author – that the narrator, too, is part of the fiction – not only disrupts the YA script that adulthood brings more agency, but also completely does away with the illusion that *anyone* has agency, or that agency is even possible. For readers who are aware of the publicity about the novel in the real world, this script disruption can even take one step further. John Green has stated that *Turtles* is a "coded autobiography" referencing his own OCD "breakdown" (Duerden, 2018). If the *real* adult author, who ostensibly ought to be controlling the narrative, cannot control it (since it references his own inability to control his thoughts and actions), then agency and control truly are mere illusions. The novel makes clear that the **problem → resolution → closure** script does not exist any more in adulthood than it does in adolescence, and that it certainly doesn't exist in real life.

Using the example of Lemony Snicket's *Series of Unfortunate Events*, Chris McGee argues that metafictional children's mysteries that call into question the overall accessibility of knowledge, particularly the adult narrator or the adult author's access to knowledge, can help to divest the adult world of some of its power (2010, p.59). I would argue that *Turtles* does something similar, but in a specifically YA context: rather than examine knowledge, it examines the particularly adolescent themes of agency and control. It then uses metafictional methods to call the accessibility of agency and control into question. If the adult narrator (or the adult author) has no more agency than the adolescent protagonist, then adolescents and adults are on a more even playing field. Taking away the illusion of adult control will no doubt please adolescent readers, as their in-group gains some ground in the power dynamics with the adult out-group. An adolescent reader's allegiance with Aza, the adolescent protagonist, is therefore not diminished by the reveal of the adult narrator. Rather, the script disruption the adult narrator causes – which already ensures active cognitive engagement – serves to emphasize the in-group commonalities between Aza and the reader, creating even more of a likelihood of empathy use and empathy development.

The Potential of the Adolescent Disabled Detective

The figure of the adolescent disabled detective carries a huge potential for developing empathy in adolescent readers. The role of the detective creates a way to associate the in-group of adolescence with the out-group of disability, reducing the effects of empathy bias. Moreover, the opportunities for empathy with the adolescent disabled detective are numerous, given that detective fiction genre conventions create many opportunities for empathy. Because the adolescent disabled detective operates in the YA genre, where the detective is also the protagonist and is usually internally focalized, all these opportunities must be empathically interpreted through the lens of the disabled protagonist. However, readers are motivated to overcome the categorizationally challenging nature of this empathy, as they must engage empathy in order to solve the mystery, one of the main incentives for reading detective stories in the first place. The combined effects of the increased number of opportunities for empathy along with the high motivation for out-group empathy indicates that the *amount* of empathy adolescent readers can use with the adolescent disabled detective is vast. Most importantly, however, there is immense potential for the *development* of real-world empathic capabilities from reading young adult detective fiction with disabled protagonists. This is due in great part to the many possibilities for script disruption that the figure of the adolescent disabled detective produces.

This potential is not always fully met, of course; as stated at other points in this thesis, the majority of young adult literature is script preserving, rather than script disrupting. Not all adolescent disabled detectives will fulfill the radical potential their role presents. However, the three adolescent disabled detectives examined in this chapter all succeed in meeting their potential for engaging adolescent reader's empathic engagement with out-group members. They associate the in-group of adolescence with the out-group of disability, examining the possibility of agency through the role of detective without letting that role "eradicate" adolescence. They create numerous opportunities for empathy both with and through an out-group protagonist by utilizing reader motivations to solve the mystery – *She Is Not Invisible* in particular. And they all disrupt scripts surrounding the roles of disabled characters, adolescent characters, and even detective characters by self-referentially examining the conventions of the detective fiction genre. When the adolescent disabled detective's potential is met, as in the case of the novels examined in this chapter, the possibilities for adolescent readers to use and develop empathy while reading are prodigious. And, notably, those prodigious possibilities would not be possible

without the addition of "adolescent" into the role of the disabled detective – in other words, without the existence of young adult literature.

Conclusion
The Advantages of Young Adult Literature

I want to reiterate that as a field, cognitive poetics acknowledges that fiction and reality are processed in much the same way (Stockwell, 2002, p.152). The consequences of this fact are far-ranging, but for this thesis, the most important of these consequences is that readers interact with fictional characters as if they were real people. With regards to empathy and its interrelated concepts of theory of mind and mind-modeling, this means that the act of reading fiction not only *uses* the empathic abilities that we employ in the real world, but that it also *develops* those abilities, making us better at them in real-world contexts.

Empirical studies demonstrating these effects are for the most part quite new; until recently, there was little empirical evidence demonstrating decisively that reading fiction develops empathy. Now, however, we not only have the benefit of correlational studies demonstrating the positive relationship between reading fiction and enhanced empathic abilities (e.g. Mar et al., 2009; Mar et al., 2010; Djikic et al., 2013; Mumper and Gerrig, 2017), but also causational studies demonstrating that reading fiction improves empathy both in the short and long term (Kidd and Castano, 2013; Bal and Veltkamp, 2013; Black and Barnes, 2015; Koopman, 2015; Vezzali et al., 2015; Kidd and Castano, 2017). Every study has a setback, whether due to the difficulty of measuring empathy or due the difficulty of replicating results – both Samur et al. (2018) and Kidd and Castano themselves (2018) have had difficulty replicating the results of Kidd and Castano's famous original 2013 study. Oatley (2016, p.621) observes that many studies demonstrating causation between reading fiction and improved empathic abilities (e.g. Kidd and Castano, 2013; Black and Barnes, 2015) could be dismissed with an explanation of "priming" their subjects, as they operate on a short-term basis. However, he also goes on to note that there have been not only short-term causational studies, but also longer-term ones, including Bal and Veltkamp (2013), Koopman (2015), and Vezzali et al. (2015). Oatley

concludes that taken together, all these studies indicate that fiction does have an important effect on empathy (2016, p.621).

This thesis has been structured around two major arguments: firstly, that adolescence functions as a group categorization in YA literature, and in particular that it functions as an in-group between an adolescent reader and the protagonist of a YA novel. And secondly, that this first conclusion has the potential to allow majority culture adolescents to use more empathy with YA protagonists who are minorities, and thus a) develop more empathy from the act of reading than they would otherwise, and b) in particular develop skills at using empathy with out-group members.

Is there a problem with arguing that commonalities can make empathy easier with against whom readers hold biases? It can be a problem, for instance, to view literature with minority protagonists as needing to appeal to the majority culture, particularly if the way to do that is construed as making sure the "differences" in the literature are not too stark or alienating. Clare Bradford, a postcolonial children's literature scholar, argues that "when books by minority authors find white audiences, this is generally because they are not *too* different" (2010, p.49, original emphasis). For example, though Bradford describes *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* as a postcolonial text, she states that its wide appeal and success in majority culture markets is because it addresses "a conventional topic, the identity formation of its adolescent protagonist" (p.49).

Bradford sees this idea of "not *too* different" as a negative aspect of a children's or young adult novel. It can be, but I would argue that there are different forms of "not *too* different." A young adult novel that is deliberately constructed to be easy and agreeable for majority culture readers can make for both harmful representations of minorities as well as just plain bad literature. *Say What You Will*, for instance, fits this mold. It can also be highly problematic to pander to majority culture adolescents' desires to only read books with protagonists they can "identify" with, or protagonists that are "just like them." Not only does this prevent readers' empathic development – see Nikolajeva's concept of "immersive identification" (2014b, p.85) – but it also means that all fiction produced will cater to the tastes, opinions, and perspectives of the majority culture. Though matters are improving, this is probably the state of most of YA publishing today.

However, I don't think there is necessarily a problem with an important commonality helping to overcome out-group bias, as long as the differences between groups – as well as the power dynamics between them – are represented in accurate and nuanced ways. Bradford argues that True Diary is "not *too* different" because it addresses "the identity formation of its adolescent protagonist" – but what she describes is the depiction of adolescence as a group. Not only is this an integral part of YA literature, but it would also be unfaithful to Junior as a character to leave out the importance of his adolescence. For adolescents, and therefore for adolescent characters, adolescence is a large part of their selfhood, a significant group categorization that affects their daily lives, and can't be extricated from other facets of their identities. If adolescence functioning as an in-group in YA literature makes YA novels about minority protagonists "not *too* different" for adolescent readers, to a certain extent that is inevitable.

Let us also remember that the main danger of out-group empathy bias is that we simply use *less* empathy with out-group members. This is not (or not always) conscious or deliberate prejudice; because social norms dictate that discrimination is wrong, we don't necessarily view out-groups as more negative (Vezzali et al., 2015, p.109). Rather, our unconscious bias usually means that we simply view in-group members as more positive (Bennet et al., 2004, p.135), and we invest more empathic effort in our interactions with them (Brown et al., 2006, p.304). Literature that majority culture adolescent readers *do* find "too different," therefore, is likely to either be discarded or to present such a barrier to empathic engagement that there is less benefit to be had. Again, this is not to say that novels with minority protagonists must be written to be palatable for majority culture audiences. Instead, young adult literature has the advantage of its built-in appeal for adolescent readers (no matter its focus, it depicts themes relevant to their adolescent in-group). More importantly, the adolescent in-group helps adolescent readers to ascribe more positivity to minority protagonists, overcome some of the effects of out-group empathy bias, and therefore practice and develop their capacity to empathically engage with out-group members.

The examinations of primary texts in this thesis demonstrate that my assumptions are not always correct, or rather, that young adult novels with minority protagonists do not always fulfill the potential I have identified. Firstly, adolescence does not always function as an in-group between the protagonist and the reader in every YA novel. Palpably didactic forms of YA

literature in particular, such as *Say What You Will*, prevent adolescence from functioning as an in-group. Most contemporary YA literature avoids this, however; in most recent YA novels, with their "in-your-face" prose and lack of overt didacticism, adolescence does function as an in-group.

Importantly, however, adolescence functioning as an in-group in YA novel with a minority protagonist does not always help to develop adolescent readers' out-group empathy. If the adolescent in-group and the minority out-group are depicted as mutually exclusive – like in *Good Enough* and *Everything Everything*, for instance – then depictions of adolescence as an in-group will hardly serve to make empathy with out-group members easier. Instead, adolescence as a group must be one of multiple intersecting identities that all interact with and affect each other. Only then can adolescent commonalities help to overcome out-group bias.

In short, just because young adult literature has these advantages doesn't mean that it always meets its potential. In fact, most of the time it likely doesn't; as I argued in Chapter 4, given the lack of diversity in young adult literature as a whole, young adult literature is in general script preserving, and unlikely to develop readers' out-group empathic capacities. However, the outlook is not entirely bleak. More and more diverse young adult texts are being published and gaining popularity. Most of the primary texts in this thesis, through the various strategies I have identified, are likely to allow majority culture readers to use and to develop out-group empathy. As Kimberley Reynolds (2007) argues, children's and young adult literature is not always radical – but it does have the potential to be.

I must address one final caveat: many of the empirical studies surrounding empathy development from literature examine how "literariness" or "high quality" literature seems to lead to more empathy development than does popular literature (Kidd and Castano, 2013; Koopman, 2016; Oatley, 2016). I'd imagine that many of these scholars might define young adult literature as "popular" – but judgments on what texts are "literary" or "high quality" are obviously subjective. "Literary" fiction might contain complex or narratively challenging opportunities for empathy, but as demonstrated in this thesis, young adult literature can contain these factors as well. Kidd and Castano disparage popular "genre fiction" as reliant on "formulaic plots" (2017, p.475), but as the discussions in Chapter 5 demonstrate, a "formulaic" genre can provide an excellent canvas from which to deviate from formulas, disrupt scripts, and engage a reader's active empathy. Moreover, the categories of "literary" versus "popular" fiction are debatable and

loose, and there is often as much diversity in textual construction within those categories as there is between them. Finally, I'd like to note that one of the most famous studies demonstrating the effects of fiction on empathic development in the long-term (something Kidd and Castano's short-term studies fail to do) was conducted using the *Harry Potter* novels as primary texts – books that are surely both "popular" as well as written primarily for children and adolescents.

Karen Coats notes that "young adult literature is often viewed as a gateway drug used to entice readers to try the harder stuff…there remains a sense that YA literature is a house you pass on the way, and not a destination in and of itself" (2010, p.316-7). My early critic from the introduction took this view – and she likely imagined that if young adult literature is a "house you pass along the way," it is also a house you ought to pass completely by, without even a pause for pleasant conversation. Perhaps the entirety of this thesis can be summed up in this sentiment: young adult literature ought not to be passed by. It ought not to be overlooked. It *is* a "destination in and of itself" – and what's more, it's a destination that offers a specific advantage to adolescent readers that other forms of literature are unable to offer.

Is Empathy Even Desirable? Why Out-Group Empathy Is Important

While this thesis has extensively covered if and how YA novels with minority protagonists can develop out-group empathy in majority culture readers, less space has been devoted to considering why that would be such a desirable outcome.

While empathy, morality, and altruism are often thought of as being connected, whether empathy actually leads to either morality or altruism is a topic of fierce debate. Queer theory, disability theory, postcolonialism, and feminist studies all tend towards skepticism of the value of empathy, due to, as J. Keith Vincent puts it, "universalizing claims about the way the human mind works" (2015, p.199), or as Suzanne Keen puts it, "a distrust…in human universals" like emotions (2015, p.348). These fields also tend to be particularly skeptical about empathy that derives from, or leads us to, seeing similarities with others. Critics within these fields would argue that it can be damaging for those in the majority culture to find commonalities with minorities in order to empathize with them. Hammond and Kim argue that "empathy can be politically dangerous, constituting a liberal fantasy of knowing the Other without actually understanding histories of structural oppression and violence" (2014, p.9), and Keen argues that "using empathy to get at supposed commonalities or to reach certain judgments about complex

events exposes the empathizer to risks of oversimplifications, misunderstanding, and inadvertent harm" (2007, p.159). Shuman states that "empathy is almost always open to critique as serving the interests of the empathizer rather than the empathized" (2005, p.18), arguing that empathy merely makes the empathizer feel better about themselves and their own morality, or worse, upholds systems of dominance by causing the majority culture to pity and patronize the empathized.

I want to re-emphasize that definitions of empathy are important; these arguments against empathy fail to distinguish between empathy, pity, and sympathy. As empathy is defined in this thesis – as understanding or *attempting* to understand how others feel – sympathy and pity are not necessarily involved. Nor is an assumption of "universal" emotions. Whether or not we believe we are able to understand others, we will continue to attempt to attribute emotions and states of mind to them. That is how we have evolved. In fact, that we have the capacity for empathy at all makes clear that empathy *does* serve the empathizer: if it did not, it could not have evolved. Vermeule even states that we use empathy and related cognitive capacities in the modern day for similar self-serving reasons: "we use mind reading for roughly the same reasons that it evolved: to inspect rivals, to calibrate status, to nurture our interests" (2010, p.34). Zunshine, too, notes that our modern "social survival absolutely depends on being able to imagine other people's thoughts, desires and intentions around the clock" (2006, p.18).

However, empathy does not only serve the empathizer; empirical research has made consistent connections between empathy, morality, and altruism. In a study on adolescents, for example, those "showing the most advanced pro-social reasoning tended to be those who were best in understanding the perspectives of others, [and] this association of advanced morality with advanced perspective taking is consistent with other research on pro-social development" (Moshman, 2011, p.80). In another study, empathically aroused participants were motivated to help those in need even when they had easy access to both physical escape from the situation and psychological escape from the awareness of the other person's suffering. This lead researchers to conclude that empathy evokes altruistic behavior, rather than behavior that merely reduces one's own discomfort (Stocks et al., 2008, p.649).

In terms of empathy with out-group members, it has been demonstrated that feeling empathy for one member of a stigmatized group (i.e. a member of an out-group) can improve attitudes towards the entire group as a whole (Batson et al., 1997, p.105). Continuation of this

research also suggests that this improved attitude change provokes altruistic action toward the group as a whole, and not solely the single out-group member for whom empathy was felt (Batson et al., 2002, p.1666). Empathy that specifically derives from being able to see similarities in others – being able to identify in-groups when another person appears to be out-group – has also been shown to promote altruistic behavior. Multiple studies have demonstrated that empathy-motivated helping, i.e. altruistic action taken as a result of feeling empathy, is facilitated by the perception of similarities between the empathizer and the empathic target (Hornstein, 1978, p.177; Batson et al., 1981, p.290; Sturmer et al., 2006, p.944). For instance, in one study analyzing the reasons why certain people chose to rescue Jews in Nazi Europe despite the risk to themselves, researchers found that the rescuers tended to primarily perceive similarities with others, while non-rescuers tended to perceive differences (Oliner and Oliner, 1988, p.176). If adolescent readers are able to develop their empathy through young adult fiction, their moral or altruistic behavior may improve. Moreover, if they are able to practice perceiving in-group similarities in a protagonist who is out-group because of their minority, adolescent readers also gain the advantages that ability brings to moral and altruistic behavior.

Finally, empathy specifically developed from reading fiction has also been shown to lead to moral attitude changes. Vezzali et al. (2015) found that reading *Harry Potter* developed perspective-taking (i.e. empathic) abilities, and that when given *Harry Potter* passages that had to do with discrimination ("purebloods" versus "mudbloods"), both secondary school students in Italy and undergraduate students in the UK reported improved attitudes towards stigmatized groups in the real world, namely immigrants, homosexuals, and refugees. Vezzali et al. also demonstrated that these attitude changes were caused by improved empathic abilities: in the analysis of the survey results, "perspective taking emerged as the process allowing attitude improvement" (2015, p.105). These attitude improvements also lasted in the long-term, as shown by follow-up questionnaires, which determined both empathic abilities and attitudes about stigmatized out-groups, that were administered a week after the reading session. Young adult novels featuring minority protagonists, like those examined in this thesis, have a similar potential for developing readers' out-group empathy, changing their attitudes and prejudices about stigmatized groups, and through all this promoting more altruistic and moral behavior.

There are a few issues pertaining to definitions of empathy that are important to note. Decety and Cowell state that empathy should be regarded with caution when considering issues

of moral behavior and of social justice, and that while "the evidence supports a more moderate view of the role of empathy in morality," "cognitive reasoning is equally important for moral reasoning and justice" (2015, p.4). This is one of the reasons that I consider empathy as a concept intertwined with mind-modeling, and also why I distinguish between consciously active empathy and reflexive empathy – empathy and cognitive reasoning are not fully distinct, and active empathy, particularly when it is used to understand a more complex work of fiction, involves cognitive reasoning. Decety and Cowell, on the other hand, consider empathy as separate from cognitive reasoning. I also want to be careful to note that while I argue empathy *contributes* to moral and altruistic behaviors, it is not the *only* necessary component for morality or for making us "better people." This would be a very ableist view; those on the autism spectrum, for instance, have difficulty with perspective-taking, but this certainly does not make them immoral people.

Developing out-group empathy in majority culture adolescents

Given its potential for real-world changes in attitudes and actions, empathy, particularly out-group empathy, is a crucial skill to develop in adolescents. It's particularly crucial in majority culture adolescents due to the privilege they wield and the lack of practice with out-group empathy they get. A study demonstrated that people of higher socioeconomic status perform worse on empathy tests than do people of lower socioeconomic status (Kraus, Coté and Keltner, 2010, p.1720). More importantly, participants in this same study who were manipulated to *think* of themselves as having high socioeconomic status also performed worse on a test of empathy than participants manipulated to think of themselves as having low socioeconomic status (p.1721). The study theorized that this may be the case because power and privilege reduces the need for empathy in order to navigate the social world with impunity (p.1721). These results can also be extrapolated to theorize that greater privilege in general reduces the perceived need for empathic abilities – and so those with greater privilege will use, practice, and develop less empathy than they ought to.

The privilege of the majority culture also reduces the need for out-group empathy specifically. Those of minority cultures with less privilege are forced, in many ways, to use empathy in order to get by: Du Bois, theorizing on this in 1903, described how black people are "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" – with the "others" being the white

majority culture – in an act of "double consciousness" with the white out-group (1994, p.2). Lydia Kokkola argues that a parallel phenomenon occurs with women dealing with a patriarchal society, as well as the queer community dealing with a heteronormative society (2017, p.104). I would add to these examples those in the disabled community dealing with an ableist society. It follows that because of their privilege, majority culture adolescent readers will not have had these empathic abilities forced upon them, and will be the least practiced and least capable of taking an out-group perspective: a particularly disturbing thought considering they, as the most privileged, are the most likely to come into positions of power later in life.

Adolescence is an ideal time to begin fostering majority culture readers' out-group empathy. As Karen Coats puts it, "adolescents are at a threshold of emotionally engaged understanding that makes them particularly susceptible to the development of a generative identity," with generative identity defined as an ethical potential for selfless caring (2010, p.327). Both empathic and mind-modeling capacities as well as moral identity are still being developed during adolescence (Moshman, 2011, p.80). Because adolescence is a use-it-or-lose-it cognitive period, this means practicing empathy – particularly out-group empathy – is essential for adolescents. Whether and how much empathic abilities will be developed in adolescence is also not guaranteed; though certain cognitive changes will happen during adolescence, cognitive development during the adolescent period is "less predictable, less universal, less tied to age, and more a function of the individual's specific actions and experiences" (Moshman, 2011, p.217). If reading young adult novels with minority protagonists is a significant part of an adolescent's actions and experiences, out-group empathy is much likelier to be developed. Aside from biological importance, adolescence is also a period of social importance during which adolescents are primed to create and develop their own sense of identity. Coats recognizes that here, too, young adult literature holds great potential, as it "exerts a powerful influence over its readers at a particularly malleable time in their identity formation" (2010, p.315-6). Hopefully, this identity formation includes an increased capacity for out-group empathy, which in turn might lead to moral development as well as altruistic behavior.

It would be foolish to place all responsibility for majority culture adolescents' out-group empathy development, moral attitudes, and altruistic behavior onto young adult literature. Literature is not a magic cure, either for individual readers or for societies at large. As Keen puts it, "a society that insists on receiving immediate ethical and political yields from the recreational

reading of its citizens puts too great a burden on both empathy and the novel" (2007, p.168). The real-world effects of young adult literature are fundamentally the responsibility of readers. After having examined what young adult literature has to offer adolescent readers, we must "shift the emphasis to what people choose to do with their reading experiences, how they share them, and how they encourage themselves and others to act on feeling responses" (Keen, 2015, p.359). What young adult literature's unique advantages offer adolescents is the means and the opportunity to create developmental changes that they are then able to act on in the real world.

Appendix
Primary Texts Considered

      This appendix lists the primary texts I considered including in this thesis. The novels are sorted by larger overarching categories of minority groups, but some are repeated in each category as they feature multiple protagonists, or a protagonist of multiple minorities.

Novels With Racial/Ethnic Minority Protagonists

Title	Author	Year	Protagonist(s)
The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian	Sherman Alexie	2007	Native American male
Good Enough	Paula Yoo	2008	Korean-American female
Marcelo in the Real World	Francisco Stork	2009	Latino male with autism
Boyfriends With Girlfriends	Alex Sanchez	2011	Four protagonists, one Latino bisexual male, one white gay male, one white bisexual female, one Japanese-American lesbian
Everything Everything	Nicola Yoon	2015	Biracial black/Japanese-American female with SCID
All American Boys	Jason Reynolds and Brandon Kiely	2015	Two protagonists, one black male, one white male
Ink and Ashes	Valynne E Maetani	2015	Japanese-American female
The Sun Is Also a Star	Nicola Yoon	2016	Two protagonists, one Korean-American male, one Jamaican black female
Orangeboy	Patrice Lawrence	2016	Black male
This Is Where It Ends	Marieke Nijkamp	2016	Multiple protagonists, including Latino male, Latina lesbian, white lesbian
Something in Between	Melissa de la Cruz	2016	Filipina female
When Michael Met Mina	Randa Abdel-Fattah	2016	Two protagonists, one Afghani Muslim female refugee, one

			white male
Dear Martin	Nic Stone	2017	Black male
It's Not Like It's a Secret	Misa Sugiura	2017	Japanese-American lesbian
The Education of Margot Sanchez	Lilliam Rivera	2017	Latina female
Queens of Geek	Jen Wilde	2017	Two protagonists, one Chinese-Australian bisexual female, one female with autism and anxiety
The Hate U Give	Angie Thomas	2017	Black female
Little and Lion	Brandy Colbert	2017	Black lesbian female
You're Welcome, Universe	Whitney Gardner	2017	Indian-American Deaf female
Our Own Private Universe	Robin Talley	2017	Black bisexual female
That Thing We Call a Heart	Sheba Karim	2017	Pakistani-American Muslim female
Love, Hate, and Other Filters	Samira Ahmed	2018	Indian-American Muslim female
Odd One Out	Nic Stone	2018	Three protagonists, one black straight male, one biracial black/Latina lesbian, one biracial Korean/white bisexual female
Lovely, Dark, and Deep	Justina Chen	2018	Chinese-American female with photosensitivity
Anger Is a Gift	Mark Oshiro	2018	Black gay male with PTSD

Novels With LGBT+ Protagonists

Title	Author	Year	Protagonist(s)
Will Grayson, Will Grayson	John Green and David Levithan	2010	Two protagonists, one gay male, one straight male
Boyfriends With Girlfriends	Alex Sanchez	2011	Four protagonists, one Latino bisexual male, one white gay male, one white bisexual female, one Japanese-American lesbian
Openly Straight	Bill Konigsberg	2013	Gay male
I'll Give You the Sun	Jandy Nelson	2014	Two protagonists, one gay male, one straight female
Simon vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda	Becky Albertalli	2015	Gay male
None of the Above	I W Gregorio	2015	Intersex female
The Art of Being Normal	Lisa Williamson	2015	Two protagonists, one transgender female, one transgender male
If I Was Your Girl	Meredith Russo	2016	Transgender female
This Is Where It Ends	Marieke Nijkamp	2016	Multiple protagonists, including Latino male, Latina lesbian, white lesbian
You Know Me Well	Nina LaCour and David Levithan	2016	Two protagonists, one gay male, one lesbian
Girl Mans Up	M-E Girard	2016	Lesbian
Symptoms of Being Human	Jeff Garvin	2016	Genderfluid
Georgia Peaches and Other Forbidden Fruit	Jaye Robin Brown	2016	Lesbian
History Is All You Left Me	Adam Silvera	2017	Gay male with OCD
It's Not Like It's a Secret	Misa Sugiura	2017	Japanese-American lesbian
Tash Hearts Tolstoy	Katie Ormsbee	2017	Asexual female
Before I Let Go	Marieke Nijkamp	2017	Asexual female
Our Own Private Universe	Robin Talley	2017	Black bisexual female

Little and Lion	Brandy Colbert	2017	Black lesbian female
10 Things I Can See From Here	Carrie Mac	2017	Lesbian female with anxiety disorder
Queens of Geek	Jen Wilde	2017	Two protagonists, one Chinese-Australian bisexual female, one female with autism and anxiety
Leah on the Off Beat	Becky Albertalli	2018	Bisexual female
We Are Young	Cat Clarke	2018	Bisexual female
Odd One Out	Nic Stone	2018	Three protagonists, one black straight male, one biracial black/Latina lesbian, one biracial Korean/white bisexual female
What If It's Us	Adam Silvera and Becky Albertalli	2018	Two protagonists, both gay males
Anger Is a Gift	Mark Oshiro	2018	Black gay male with PTSD

Novels With Disabled Protagonists

Title	Author	Year	Protagonist(s)
Jerk, California	Jonathan Friesen	2008	Male with Tourette's
Marcelo in the Real World	Francisco Stork	2009	Latino male with autism
Five Flavors of Dumb	Antony John	2010	Deaf female
Mindblind	Jennifer Roy	2010	Male with Asperger's, savant
Girl, Stolen	April Henry	2010	Two protagonists, one blind female, one sighted male
The Running Dream	Wendelin Van Draanen	2011	Female with prosthetic leg
Catch and Release	Blythe Woolston	2012	Visually impaired female, severe scarring
The Fault in Our Stars	John Green	2012	Terminally ill female (cancer)
She Is Not Invisible	Marcus Sedgwick	2013	Blind female
Say What You Will	Cammie McGovern	2014	Two protagonists, one male with OCD, one female with cerebral palsy
Girls Like Us	Gail Giles	2014	Two protagonists, both cognitively disabled (unspecified) females
Blind	Rachel DeWoskin	2014	Blind female
All the Bright Places	Jennifer Niven	2015	Two protagonists, one male with depression and bipolar disorder, one female with depression
Everything Everything	Nicola Yoon	2015	Biracial black/Japanese-American female with SCID
Holding Up the Universe	Jennifer Niven	2016	Two protagonists, one male with cognitive disability (inability to recognize faces), one female
Turtles All the Way Down	John Green	2017	Female with OCD
I Have No Secrets	Penny Joelson	2017	Female with cerebral palsy

History Is All You Left Me	Adam Silvera	2017	Gay male with OCD
You're Welcome, Universe	Whitney Gardner	2017	Indian-American Deaf female
Love and First Sight	Josh Sundquist	2017	Blind male
A Quiet Kind of Thunder	Sara Barnard	2017	Mute female with anxiety disorder
10 Things I Can See From Here	Carrie Mac	2017	Lesbian female with anxiety disorder
Queens of Geek	Jen Wilde	2017	Two protagonists, one Chinese-Australian bisexual female, one female with autism and anxiety
Lovely, Dark, and Deep	Justina Chen	2018	Chinese-American female with photosensitivity
Anger Is a Gift	Mark Oshiro	2018	Black gay male with PTSD
White Rabbit, Red Wolf	Tom Pollock	2018	Cognitively disabled (unspecified) male, savant

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