A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND? IMPLICATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP ON FEMALE SELF-IDENTITY IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

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A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND? IMPLICATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP ON FEMALE SELF-IDENTITY IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

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2008

DEDICATION

To my husband, Jeff—

You give me the greatest of all gifts and a joyous outlook on life. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND? IMPLICATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP ON FEMALE SELF-IDENTITY IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

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Understanding one's self-identity is a key part of adolescence, especially for girls. But what external factors determine one's self-perception? By examining the works of five mass-market young adult authors, Ann Brashares, Meg Cabot, E. Lockhart, Cynthia Voigt, and Cecily von Ziegesar, evidence suggests that friends and peers influence a girl's self-understanding and subjectivity through ritual, shared environment, language, objectification and acceptance or denial of change in the relationship. This paper also looks at key theories of literature, including panopticism, subjectivity and the problem novel in their relation to mass-market literature for girls.

INTRODUCTION

The notions of friendship, acquaintance, and companionship long have been debated, with thinkers such as Aristotle, Cicero, and C. S. Lewis writing on the topic. In his *Ethics*, Aristotle notes that a genuine friend is someone who likes another for the sake of that person, relying on three characteristics to form an ideal friendship: goodness, usefulness, and pleasantry. If two people are truly friends, he argues, they will benefit one another for the sake of each other, forming an advantageous friendship that proves useful and ultimately pleasant. In *Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis recognizes the difficulty in developing such a friendship when he suggests that few modern-day citizens have close, nonromantic friendships: "Friendship is—in a sense not at all derogatory to it—the least *natural* of loves; the least instinctive, organic, biological, gregarious, and necessary" (58). Lewis even asserts that friendship essentially can only exist between individuals—the "herd," as he calls it, "dislike and distrust it" (58). Lewis claims that friendship arises from two or more companions recognizing that they share "some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, 'What? You too? I thought I was the only one'" (65). Although both Lewis and Aristotle accurately provide groundwork for understanding friendship, it must be noted that both were writing primarily of friendship between males (Lewis even

admits that he can only guess what female friendship is like). What about the friendships that grow between women? For that matter, can the same principles be applied to the friendships among girls and adolescent females? By examining the works of four young adult writers, Ann Brashares, E. Lockhart, Cynthia Voigt, and Cecily von Ziegesar, for their use of friendship among characters as a prevalent theme in their novels, along with sociological studies of women's relationships and discussions of feminist criticism and literary theory, I assert that adolescent literature offers an opportunity for authors to apply the principles of friendship to female characters, providing accurate representations of the struggles girls face within their friendship groups, most notably issues of creating one's sense of self-identity, that is, the awareness of one's individual and unique identity, in the midst of peer influence.

For the purpose of this paper, young adult literature will loosely be defined as novels written and intended for readership by children ages 12 to 19. Roberta Seelinger Trites narrows this definition to note that social institutions, social power, and how the characters react to these outside entities is what distinguishes adolescent literature from children's literature (*Disturbing the Universe* 2). She provides that characters in adolescent fiction "must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are [. . .] They learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist within the myriad social institutions within which they must function" (3). Further, Trites points to the defining factor of the YA novel as being the way such novels "rely on adolescent protagonists who strive to understand their own power by struggling with the various institutions in their lives" (8). Among these institutions Trites includes family, school, religion, sexuality, gender, race, class, and government (3). Arguably, a subset of many of these

institutions, particularly school, gender, and class, is peer relationships and friendship. YA literature gives its readers multiple opportunities to experience varied friendships within varied social institutions. It creates worlds wherein four girls can develop a sisterhood that lasts from birth to young womanhood as in Ann Brashares' *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* series or where the girls' focus on self-preservation and self-image in Cecily von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl* series can break and remake their friendship group. The rapidly expanding genre takes readers to a place where Ruby and her friends can suffer the dilemma of what matters most, the boyfriend or the girlfriend, in E. Lockhart's *The Boyfriend List* and where even award-winning authors like Cynthia Voigt can tear down the traditional notions of friendship by placing her characters in *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* and *Tell Me if the Lovers are Losers* in unusual situations where they must learn the true meaning of friendship. Friendship among characters plays a key role in the works of all of these writers for young adults, with each author contributing a different viewpoint on friendship, presenting notions of sisterhood, friends as enemies, cliques, positive and negative relationships, and what happens when outside forces threaten to change the group.

Just as Jane Austen's female friendships were based on cultural necessities—one could argue that Catherine Morland's friendship with Eleanor Tilney or Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* would not have occurred had any of the women been born to less-privileged families unable to spend weeks on end socializing at Bath—friendships among characters rely on necessary circumstances to bring and keep them together. Thus, although it's important to look at how the authors depict friendships in their works, it's just as important to examine how modern cultural norms and circumstances beyond the

characters' control affect the friendship groups. Do the popular, rich, and beautiful girls of von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl* clique really reflect today's teenagers and do issues of class matter to friendships? Do Anne Brashares' characters accurately reflect the roles individual girls play in collective friendship groups? Does E. Lockhart accurately portray what happens to girls' relationships when boys interfere? Was Cynthia Voigt ahead of the curve when she pushed her characters into unusual friendships in the 1980s, or was she reflecting what was occurring in society?

Any discussion of literary works must be situated within a critical examination of literary theory. A difficulty arises in finding critical responses to mainstream, contemporary young adult media. However, much of the criticism of literature for children and young adults can be applied to the wider topics included in the scope of this paper. For instance, critical theories such as Michel Foucault's panoptic theory and the problem novel have been re-examined for their connection to modern young adult literature. The examination of female relationships naturally leads to the need to critically discuss feminist theory, as well. Friends and peers influence girls' images of self-identity, thus theories of subjectivity and self-identity are critical to discovering the implications of friendship on self. In addition, notions of friendship must be examined through a sociocultural lens, therefore many sociological, cultural, and psychological studies of adolescent friendships will be incorporated to help bolster the conclusions of how accurate literature is in portraying girls' relationships. With an undergraduate minor in sociology and several years of experience working as a book editor in the educational publishing field (wherein I learned to dissect psychological research), I have discovered

the importance of weighing such research generally considered outside the norm for many literature scholars.

Approaching the topic at hand with a combination of a literary, cultural, and feminist viewpoints, I hope to provide a unique and introspective look at female friendships to support my hypothesis that modern YA literature, while slightly removed from most girls' experiences, indeed presents an accurate portrayal of the problems and possibilities inherent in female friendship groups, especially those affecting self-identity.

Why Friendship?

Modern literature for women (and girls) builds on its predecessors: writers such as Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Sarah Fielding, Louisa May Alcott, and Edith Wharton, are examples of how the theme of friendship can contribute to other elements of a novel. As mentioned previously, Austen's *Northanger Abbey* provides an interesting literary precedent for understanding female friendships. When the young protagonist, Catherine Morland, visits Bath under the guidance of her temporary guardian, Mrs. Allen, Catherine discovers how friendship can be both fickle and supportive. One of the young women she meets in Bath, Isabella Thorpe, befriends Catherine with the assumption that the Morland family (including Catherine's older brother) has a reasonable fortune, which Isabella aims to inherit by marriage. By serving as a "queen bee" to Catherine's eager to please persona, Isabella attempts to manipulate Catherine in several circumstances. One in particular helps highlight for Catherine the differences between false and true friendships. On a rainy morning, Catherine is distraught to think that her walk with her new friend Eleanor Tilney might be postponed. After the rain clears, Isabella arrives, suggesting a

carriage ride. Catherine, adamant to wait for Eleanor, protests, but Isabella insists. Her brother, John Thorpe, also insists, going so far as to tell Catherine that he saw Eleanor and Henry Tilney, her brother, driving off in their own carriage—the walk apparently forgotten or neglected. Catherine eventually agrees to come along, but sees the Tilneys coming for her along the roadside. When the Thorpes refuse to stop, Catherine reluctantly goes along with their plans. But, on the next occasion, when Isabella threatens to disrupt Catherine's walk with Eleanor, Isabella begins to cajole Catherine, attempting to make her feel like less of a friend if she does not join her on another carriage ride: "I cannot help being jealous, Catherine, when I see myself slighted for strangers, I, who love you so excessively!" (88). Catherine begins to recognize that Isabella's friendship only goes so far to suit her needs, in this case, being able to court Catherine's brother on a carriage ride: "Catherine thought this reproach equally strange and unkind. [. . .] Isabella appeared to be ungenerous and selfish, regardless of every thing but her own gratification" (89).

Throughout much of the novel, Catherine's friendship with Isabella is tested and found wanting. However, Catherine also has the opportunity to befriend Eleanor Tilney, who ultimately provides a supportive friendship that encourages Catherine's growth, particularly as she matures into a young woman. Catherine remarks that "with Miss Tilney she felt no restraint" in feeling secure enough to leave Bath to visit the Tilney home (145). For Catherine, Eleanor's friendship represents the knowledge that someone else sees her favorably for her own attributes, and not for her connections or supposed family status, especially in their invitation for her to stay with them at Northanger Abbey: "Her grateful and gratified heart could hardly restrain its expressions within the language

of tolerable calmness. To receive so flattering an invitation! To have her company so warmly solicited!" (129).

As both Austen and Lewis suggest, positive friendship relies on the knowledge that another has selected to love you despite who (and really, because of who) you really are as an individual. Literary precedent shows that friendship matters to women, that one's friends do help create one's self-knowledge, thus accurate portrayals of friendships naturally help create believable, realistic characters. Friendship in modern young adult literature owes much to this literary precedent. At the heart of literature for adolescents, many scholars claim, lies the notion of self: self-confidence, self-image, self-understanding. But, just as an understanding of one's self drives much of the focus of literature, an understanding of one's self in relation to others and the world pervades young adult novels. Thus, a study of friendship fits neatly into the world of young adult literature—providing a resource with which to examine teenage relationships in the context of how those relationships ultimately affect the characters' definitions of self.

Further, it's hard to read a YA novel written for girls and not find friendship of some kind, often playing a bigger role than most realize. Friends of female protagonists tend to make up the minor characters of these books, and with many YA novels taking place at school or between school and home, a teenager's friends naturally pervade the text—whether it is to deepen the pain of being alone, such as the loneliness experienced by Serena van der Woodsen upon her return to the *Gossip Girl* main stage of Constance Billard School for Girls where she no longer reigns supreme, or to provide the cause for friendship in the first place, as portrayed by the three college roommates of Voigt's *Tell Me if the Lovers Are Losers*. The notion of school settings leading to themes of friendship

crosses over into other sections of the YA genre as well—the *Harry Potter* series is well-known for its strong friendship between Harry, Ron, and Hermione based on their common bond of attendance at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (not to mention their shared status as outsiders); the protagonist of the Newbery Honor Book *Princess Academy* learns the importance of friendship during her time at the school in which she is trained to be royalty; and the popular fantasy/magic novels of Libba Bray (*A Great and Terrible Beauty*, *Rebel Angels*, and *The Sweet Far Thing*) center on her character, Gemma Doyle's, discovery of the dangers of crossing friendship with psychic-like abilities at the Victorian boarding school she attends, Spence Academy. And, the history of children's literature gives us L. M. Montgomery's Anne, who learns quickly which girls (and boys) she likes and dislikes at her new school, and Sarah Fielding, whose *The Governess; or The Little Female Academy* includes a memorable tale called "An Account of a Fray," in which the girls fight over the last apple, including Miss Dolly Friendly, who, Fielding tells us, "only was provoked to strike a Blow for Friendship's Cause" (Demers 150).

Thus, friendship cannot be overlooked as a pervasive and important theme in YA and children's literature. Girls' friendships are intriguing, complex, and certainly worthy of study. As Donna Eder notes, the lessons teenagers learn about friendship tend to continue into adulthood, including one's connections between affiliation and status and one's interactions with people considered to fall into different categories (163).

With the intense interest in why girls choose other girls to be their friends and of the roles girls play in various groups, combined with the relatively frequent inclusion of friendship in young adult fiction, the decision to look at how female friendship groups are

portrayed in literature for girls and determine whether these portrayals accurately represent real-life relationships came naturally.

Why YA Literature?

Literature specifically written for and marketed to teenagers is not new, but it certainly cannot be considered an old genre either. In her definition of the adolescent literature genre in *Disturbing the Universe*, Trites considers the genre to be a byproduct of the twentieth century, arising out of the decades following World War II (9). Using her definition of YA literature as centered on a character's reaction and interaction with the social institutions that surround him or her, as noted previously, the connection holds fast: social institutions certainly changed following World War II and the concept of marketing to teenagers increased in part due to the young adults' growing "economic resources and social autonomy" (Trites 9). The concept of providing means for teenagers to spend those economic resources and express their social autonomy has only grown, leading to increased numbers of young adult authors and books in recent years.

If any time were the right time to conduct a detailed analysis of young adult novels, it would be now. At a time when, on the whole, the publishing market faces drops in profit margins, the children's and young adult literature industry is booming. As Amy Pattee notes in her study of the commoditization of the *Gossip Girl* series,

> Just as the size of the "baby boom" generation contributed to the eventual constitution of the population known as "teenagers" and as a viable consumer market in post-World War II America, the size of the emerging generation of teenagers (known as "Generation Y") has contributed to a

> marked growth in attention to this demographic—considered the next "big spenders." ("Commodities in Literature" 158)

In 2006, research organization Mintel estimated teen spending would top $190 billion annually by year's end ("Teen Spending Estimated"). The publishing industry has not ignored these figures, either. As early as 1999, a *U.S. News and World Report* article recognized the growth of the publishing industry as a result of teen spending trends, noting that "with 31 million kids in the 13-to-19 age bracket, the book industry is revving up efforts to reach teenagers," mostly through new means of advertising and marketing (Morris and Eaton 66). In 2003, *Publisher's Weekly* noted that not only were publishers beefing up their advertising strategies, they also were creating new imprints and divisions centered exclusively on the teen audience (Rosen 84).

Anyone invested in children's and adolescent literature has seen the trend slowly growing toward offering teens more authors and books to choose from. In 1996, Caroline Hunt pointed to a discrepancy between the children's section at major bookstores and the adolescent section in her discussion of the lack of critical work on YA fiction:

> A visit to any chain bookstore will reveal how this works. Many young adult titles are issued as original paperbacks—far more than in the children's section. Many belong to series. There may be few or no reviews, as the standard reviewing sources tend to concentrate on hardcover single titles. In addition, far fewer individual authors are represented in the young adult section than in the children's section (even allowing for the fact that the young adult section is much smaller to start

> with); instead there are likely to be multiple titles by a few well-established authors. (Hunt 5)

What a difference a decade makes. Now, most major bookstores devote entire walls and corners of their stores to the teen section, a section that once filled only a few shelving units. For instance, in my local Barnes & Noble in Austin, TX, a relatively large metropolitan area, the teen section has migrated from approximately four stand-alone shelving units of five shelves each in 2005 (with many of the top shelves displaying only a handful of special promotion books whose spots have been paid for by their publishers based on sales trends) to an entire, floor-to-ceiling corner of the store in 2008, from being shoved between the foreign language section and the parenting and education section, to occupying prime real estate in the middle of one's journey from the Fiction and Literature section to the large, set-apart children's area.

Some attribute the growth to the phenomenal success of the *Harry Potter* series, which got children who are now teens and college students reading voraciously, while others attribute it to the rise of teen spending. Whatever the cause, more books for teens are being written, published, and devoured. Hans-Heino Ewers notes that as the publishing market for young adult literature has increased, so have the number of books with literary claims, lending to more possibilities for cultural prestige (91). As a result, scholars of children's and adolescent literature must take notice of the changes and take action by conducting and publishing more research and analysis of this ever-growing market. In part, I have chosen to focus on books with mass-market appeal; books and authors that may not be award winners (with the exception of Voigt, who has won both the Newbery Medal and the American Library Association's Margaret A. Edwards

Award) and books that some may consider fluffy or "chick lit." Regardless of what you call it, these are the books today's girls are reading (even Voigt's books, first published in the 1980s, are experiencing a comeback with slick new covers), and any study of female friendships would be lacking without them.

What to Expect in This Study

Chapter 1, "What Makes a Girl's Friend a Girlfriend?" will discuss two ways girls become friends—shared experience and shared environment—focusing on Brashares' *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* series, Lockhart's *The Boyfriend List* and Voigt's *Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers*. This chapter will present a brief history of thought on female relationships. In addition, the chapter will address advice provided to girls on making friendships and how communication affects relationships.

Chapter 2, "Good Girls vs. Bad Girls: Playing Our Parts" will examine the various types of friendships and friend groups (such as sisterhoods and cliques) as determined by sociologists, and how various characters in the novels portray those types, focusing on von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl* series and Brashares' series, and briefly touching on Lockhart's series. The chapter also argues that the panoptic theory applies to girl groups, in particular to the social hierarchy within those groups. Finally, I will analyze feminist and literary theory on issues of subjectivity and self-identity to propose that friendships greatly affect a girl's self-perception, to the point that she may change her subject positions to fit within a friendship group.

Chapter 3, "Best Friends or Worst Enemies? When Change Threatens the Group Dynamic," examines what happens when outside forces affect relationships. The chapter

will center on a discussion of physical change in Voigt's *Izzy, Willy-Nilly*, when Izzy becomes an amputee, changing both the way her friends see her and the way she perceives herself. A look at Lockhart's *The Boyfriend List* and *The Boy Book* contends that girls' relationships with boys can drastically change friendships, resulting in loss of friendship and the capability to understand one's true self-identity. A debate on the merits of the problem novel in young adult literature closes the chapter, suggesting that a reinvention of the problem novel is necessary to providing more realistic fiction for adolescents, especially girls.

Each chapter will serve to determine that the representations of girls' friendships in young adult novels both accurately portray real-life relationships and a girl's struggle with self-identity and that relationships are a vital theme in modern literature, playing an important role in both the elements of the novels and in their appeal to young readers.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT MAKES A GIRL'S FRIEND A GIRLFRIEND?

Robin and I knew of each other in high school. Although we attended different schools, our community was small and we often competed in local academic events. We were friendly to each other, knew each other's faces, and even shared smiles if we saw one another in town. Imagine my surprise when I walked into a rush event for my college sorority and saw Robin sitting among the potential new members. I happily encouraged her to stick with the rush process, thinking that we could definitely be friends. A couple of years and many late-night gossip sessions later, we were no longer just friends, but more than that—our relationship progressed to Robin's confiding in me about her eating disorder and my leaning on her happy spirit during the deaths of my grandparents. Since college, I've been her bridesmaid, and she's thrown me a bridal shower. We rely on each other when things are tough and when we just need to chat with someone who knows virtually everything about us. Our close friendship emerged from the combination of many elements—a familiarity from our past, a chance reunion, and her decision to join my sorority, giving us more time to get to know each other, plus our combined effort to stay in touch.

As my relationship with Robin demonstrates, girls' friendships form from a combination of elements. The same idea is true for the girls of young adult novels. Authors cannot simply say that their characters are friends—they must provide the story of how the girls became friends, and beyond that, they must present the evidence that these friendships continue to require interaction and effort on the part of the characters to maintain the relationships in order for them to be convincingly realistic. John Bushman and Kay Parks Bushman note that one of the strengths of young adult literature is its ability to portray strong, realistic relationships to which high school and middle school students can respond (90). This chapter will discuss the history of thought on female friendships, before looking both at how advice books for girls and sociologists see friendships evolving in real-life situations and how such friendships play out in young adult novels by looking at two works in particular, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* series, which features four girls who share a strong friendship that has developed into a sense of sisterhood and *Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers*, which offers a look at friendship that arises from the shared environment of a college dormitory.

Female Friendships: A Brief History of Thought

Women's friendships long have been a source of study for psychologists, sociologists, and feminists. Recently, books on the topic have filled Women's Studies sections of bookstores and libraries, with titles ranging from Terri Apter and Ruthellen Josselson's *Best Friends: The Pleasures and Perils of Girls' and Women's Friendships* (1999), to Karen Eng's *Secrets & Confidences: The Complicated Truth About Women's*

Friendships (2004), to Liz Pryor's *What Did I Do Wrong? When Women Don't Tell Each Other the Friendship Is Over* (2006).

Suzanna Rose and Laurie Roades, chronicling the connections between feminism and women's friendships, found that research reported same-sex friendships as relying heavily on intimacy and emotional and intellectual support (244). In exploring a wide variety of literature on the subject, they concluded that many researchers credit the women's movement with an increased valuation of women's relationships (244). Walker pointed to multiple researchers attributing gender norms to men's and women's friendships, with women thought of as having more intimate relationships involving shared emotions and talk, opposed to men having relationships centered on shared activities (246). Not surprisingly, Veniegas and Peplau discovered that women reported greater satisfaction with same-sex relationships than men did, especially in friendships that promoted equality in the relationship (280).

Same-sex relationships also appear to be important in adolescence, in part because such relationships impact those in adulthood. Apter and Josselson, citing friendships of women in the workplace, note that "grown-up women" can't "'get over' the dilemmas of friendship; we carry our adolescent selves around with us" (x). In studying women's relationships in the context of Lorrie Moore's *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?* Monica Fagan cited psychologist Carol Gilligan as referring to intimacy between women as "female relational development," adding that Gilligan argues that the bonding of girls and women is "inherent in the development of girls into women" (53). Gilligan, in her book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, also asserts that girls tend to define themselves through their relationships with others (170). Self-identity

in adolescence appears to affect relationships; just as friendships can affect the way a young adult defines him or herself. Child psychological development suggests that intimacy is paramount to identity development in adolescents and vice versa (Erikson 135). Discussing adolescents who have not begun to develop both a sense of identity and a true sense of intimacy (separate from a sexual intimacy), Erikson asserts that such individuals will only form stereotypical interpersonal relationships that create a "deep sense of isolation" in the individual (136). (Ideas on identity in adolescent friendships will further be explored in Chapter 2's discussion of subjectivity.) Going further than Erikson, Apter and Josselson suggest a much stronger influence of friendship on a woman's life, one that affects emotional and cultural identity as much as psychological identity (1). They assert that friendships change according to an individual's changing needs, creating patterns of "love and conflict that inexorably shape and change who they are" (1). "Within female friendship we satisfy our psychological hunger to explore different thoughts and feelings, to expand our understanding of our social and emotional worlds, and to exchange insights born out of that understanding" (Apter and Josselson 1–2).

But, before girls can report their friendships as satisfactory, before they can create bonds that affect their overall identity, before they can exchange insights born from love and conflict, they must first make those friends. Young adult novels present an interesting opportunity to examine the many ways girls become (and stay) friends, including the situations discussed in the remainder of this chapter: friends who share a past history and share a sororal bond and friendship that develops through shared environments, including schooling.

Making Friends and Keeping Them

In *Girltalk: All the Stuff Your Sister Never Told You*, an advice book for girls from the 1980s, Carol Weston advises girls to eschew boyfriends for girlfriends: "Be aware that your summer loves may not last until fall, whereas the friendships you make with girls now may last a lifetime" (44). In a more recent book, *Girlology: A Girl's Guide to Stuff That Matters*, published in 2005, medical doctors Melissa Holmes and Patricia Hutchison also emphasize the importance of girlfriends when they note that girls need to find at least one "true friend," defining true friendship as a "heart-to-heart, soul-to-soul, secret-sharing, help-you-through-anything, stand-up-for-you-always" relationship (26). Friendship is important to help a girl discover who she is and develop her independence from her family (Holmes and Hutchison 26).

How does a girl go about making such tried-and-true friends? Weston provides a top 10 list of ways girls can make friends:

1. Figure out whom you want to be friends with and why.
2. Get involved with afterschool activities.
3. Introduce yourself and remember names.
4. Master the art of conversation.
5. Develop charm.
6. Give and get compliments graciously.
7. Don't rush it.
8. Be willing to risk rejection.
9. Arm yourself with zest and zeal.

10. Give parties. (44–49)

Weston's advice, while solidly focusing on well-mannered responses to situations equivalent to an Emily Post etiquette book, is sorely outdated and out of touch with teenagers. For instance, her ideas on giving parties includes hosting a pot-luck or séance with a group of girls and throwing a coed "high tea" wherein boys show up in jackets and ties and girls wear old prom and bridesmaids' dresses, dating her advice (Weston 49). Most of today's teens, while still having slumber parties and the occasional Ouija-board séance for a dead celebrity, are likely to balk at the idea of a pot-luck or high tea table in order to increase their friendship circle. Instead, it appears that the majority of friendships are made at a different kind of table: the high school lunch table. Friendships also are formed through girls sharing various experiences, as will be demonstrated in the first section of this chapter.

A Sisterhood: Friends Through Time and Love

In her recently published series of novels focusing on four friends and their summer vacations, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* series, Ann Brashares marks her protagonists as friends from early childhood. Brashares' foursome of protagonists presents a uniquely positivistic view of women's relationships in close-knit groups built on years of sharing similar experiences, culminating in a sense of sisterhood. In fact, Carmen, one of the girls in the series, notes that she, Bridget, Lena, and Tibby "started being 'we' before we were born," with their mothers meeting one another in a prenatal aerobics class. Grouped together by their due date—September—the four mothers

"started hanging out after class, complaining about their swollen feet and how fat they were and laughing about [their instructor]" (Brashares 5–6). After the four girls were born, their mothers' support group continued as the girls were babies, but eventually disbanded as life became more "complicated," as Carmen tells it:

> Nowadays, our mothers act like friendship is an elective—falling somewhere down the list after husbands, children, career, home, money. Somewhere between outdoor grilling and music appreciation. [. . .] Eventually our mothers' friendship stopped being about them and came to be about us, the daughters. They became sort of like divorced people, with not much in common but the kids and the past. (Brashares 7)

Instead, the girls have remained friends, relationships built mostly on the shared bond of rituals. Communications studies tell us that communication behaviors that include rituals help sustain and maintain relationships (J. Elwood 7). Bruess (177) adds that rituals can create private relational cultures, increasing one's sense of togetherness or belonging in a group. The girls' rituals revolve around summer, from spending summers as toddlers at the community pool, to sharing chicken pox, to working at camps and taking classes, to hours as preteens by the pool in "a blur of baby oil and Sun-In and hating our bodies" (5). As Carmen notes, "Summer was the time when our lives joined completely, when we all had our birthdays, when really important things happened" (5). Naturally, then, the stories Brashares tells are set in summertime.

The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants opens with a simple conflict—the girls are facing their first summer apart as they all travel to different regions of the world (or stay home, in Tibby's case). Shortly before they part, Carmen and Lena visit a thrift shop,

where Carmen finds the pants for $3.49. Not bothering to even try them on, she takes them home and forgets about them, until her friends come over to help her pack for her visit to her father. When the girls discover the pants magically fit each of them, from the athletic build of Bridget to Carmen's curves, they decide to make the pants their new summer ritual—each girl will have one week in which to wear them, put their magic to use in her life, then send them along to the next girl. In an interview housed on the books' Web page within the Random House Web site, Brashares writes that she chose to have the girls share a pair of pants that were nonjudgmental—that did not allow the girls to judge their bodies in a way many women judge their bodies based on their clothing. She writes, "The Traveling Pants are the kind of pants that always love you. They fit my characters' bodies in a non-restrictive way" (*The Author of the Sisterhood*). Brashares allows her characters to use a piece of clothing in a way that transcends traditional notions of body image and self-consciousness. By fitting each of the girls, the pants allow them to share yet another experience. Taking the pants on as their symbol of friendship, the girls enact a new bond of sisterhood: "'Tonight we are Sisters of the Pants,' Bridget intoned when they'd formed a ring. 'Tonight we give the Pants the love of our Sisterhood so we can take that love wherever we go'" (Brashares 21).

Brashares clearly creates the idea of a sisterhood in order to reflect traditional sororal notions, including traditions or rituals. Modern Greek sororities require their members (who call themselves sisters) to learn and practice various traditions. These range from practices including club songs, handshakes, and the adoption of "little sisters," to more elaborate ones such as the wearing of specific outfits on certain days, participation in sorority pledge class hazing or induction ceremonies, and hosting

Homecoming events for alumnae. Moreover, by becoming a member of such sororities, the girls involved must agree to and "pledge" to (as part of the pledge and rush process) adhere to certain rules governing such traditions and rituals. In Brashares' novel, the passing of the pants requires rules as well, from the reasonable such as "You must never let a boy take off the Pants (although you may take them off yourself in his presence)," to the absurd such as "You must never wash the Pants" and "You must not pick your nose while wearing the Pants. You may, however, scratch casually at your nostril while really picking," to those centered on Carmen, Lena, Tibby, and Bridget's development of a sisterhood, such as "You must write to your Sisters throughout the summer, no matter how much fun you are having without them," "You must pass the Pants along to your Sisters according to the specifications set down by the Sisterhood," and "Remember: Pants = Love. Love your pals. Love yourself" (Brashares 24–25).

Communications studies also point to a ritual's ability to provide control over change (J. Elwood 8), readily apparent in this series as the girls utilize the pants in order to attempt to control the changes occurring in their own lives—from the first summer spent apart, to the final book in the series wherein the girls are split up at varying colleges. Throughout Brashares' series, her characters wear the pants when they perceive they most need the garment's magic—at a father's remarriage, before a first sexual experience, or when meeting a long-lost grandmother for the first time. The girls utilize their belief in the pants' magic to attempt to enact control over the situations they dread most—to feel a sense of comfort and self-confidence. However, they also utilize the pants to control their emotions, clinging to them when they need a bit of their friends in difficult situations, or avoiding them altogether when they recognize their friends would

disapprove of their actions. Clearly, the pants represent a powerful symbol of friendship for the girls, one that allows them to create a close relationship based on mutual trust and honesty far different from that of many girls in young adult fiction.

Traditional sororal notions also can be connected to Brashares' characters in the closeness of their relationship and sense of kinship among the girls—who treat each other more like family. In her study of nineteenth-century women's relationships, Carol Lasser notes that women's increasingly mobile lives and opportunities for work cut many of them off from their birth families (164). In addition, more women were attending college, allowing them to meet other women with similar interests in a close environment (the dorm setting and the shared experience of being a female college pioneer; Peril 10). As friendships among these women grew, they often referred to one another as sisters. Lasser found that such voluntary creation of kin:

> softened the often harsh realities of isolation in daily life, reinforced shared gender identities, promoted cooperation in reform endeavors, and strengthened networks among women working outside the domestic framework. Finally, it served as a framework within which women might share passion and intimacy with other women. (164)

Lasser found that these fictive sisters expected "mutual care and intense love" from one another, turning to each other in times of distress and success[1] (165). More recently, Seiden and Bart, interviewing 12 adult women who characterized themselves as feminists, found that the women's movement of the second half of the twentieth century helped same-sex friendships change—one such change was the creation of a substitute kinship system, fulfilling many of the obligations and rights reserved for typical

biological or legal kin (qtd. in Rose and Rhoades 245). Brashares' characters easily fit with this picture of fictive kin. They certainly rely on one another in both times of distress and happiness. They understand each other's birth families, but don't judge one another based on their families. The best example of exchanging real kin for fictive kin comes in Lena, who has a biological sister, Effie, who is a year younger than Lena and her friends. Lena rarely shares with Effie what she confides in her other friends. She needs Effie, if only to have someone else who understands their shared experiences in their Greek family (and for instance, in grieving their dead grandfather). But while Effie knows of her sister's troublesome love for Kostos, a Greek college student, and tries to help Lena by giving her advice, Lena confides her love and distress over Kostos to Carmen, Bridget, and Tibby far more than to Effie.

Lena's relationship with Effie clearly represents the power of positive female relationships. Much can be said for the idea that, as C. S. Lewis notes, someone else has chosen you as a friend particularly for who you are and what you share with him or her. In biological relationships, siblings inherently feel the need to love one another because of their familial ties. In positive friendships, however, girls can find approval from someone who doesn't *have* to give it to them, but who loves them for who they truly are. Through her sororal bond with her friends, Lena apparently feels more comfortable relying on their guidance and insight than her own sister's (although it must be noted that Lena often comments on how she feels that she and Effie have little in common)[2]. Such reliance on friends further proves Lasser's notion of the ability for female-female relationships to develop a sense of strong kinship, one built on mutual care and love.

Interestingly, although the characters of Brashares' series base their friendships on shared experience and ritual, it must be noted that without the original shared environment—their mothers' aerobics class and subsequent play dates after their birth—the girls might not have developed into such close friends based on their lifelong shared experience. Most girls do not begin their lives with their best friends laid out for them, as Carmen, Tibby, Bridget, and Lena do. Instead, many girls' first experience with making friends outside of their families or kinship networks involves attending school. The next section of this chapter will look at how friendships are formed through shared environment, in particular, the school setting.

Friends Through Shared Environments

Sociologist Donna Eder conducted a long-term study of interpersonal relationships among female adolescents, observing girls in middle schools in order to determine how friendships and friendship groups were created. Eder notes that she chose to study girls in middle school because during the periods of late childhood (ages 8 to 11) and early adolescence (ages 12 to 14), girls become more concerned with others' opinions of them and experience an increased desire to be well-liked: "Girls' friendships undergo considerable change with the transition to a middle school setting. First, students in middle school have a larger population from which to choose friends, which encourages the development of more distinct friendship groups" (Eder 155). To clarify, middle school offers more opportunity for meeting new peers as girls leave the structure of elementary school classrooms, in which they generally interact only with the other students in their classroom, for the freer environment of middle school, in which they

meet other girls in multiple grades through shared activities and change courses each hour, creating different peer groups. *Girlology* authors Holmes and Hutchison echo the difference between elementary school and middle school, taking a medical approach and telling girls that their brains are programmed as they hit adolescence to help teens become more independent from their families and figure out who they are as individuals (16). Part of that self-discovery includes friendships—making and breaking friendships based on changing interests. Eder's study adds a new dimension: she discovered that, in the lunch room setting, girl groups were defined according to seating arrangements and any girl who sat with a group two or more times was generally considered a group member. However, she also found that groups were quick to exclude those they did not want at their tables, commenting "This isn't your group" or "Your group's outside" (Eder 157). Girls also moved in and out of groups based on friends within various groups or their involvement in certain activities.

Focusing mainly on the idea of cliques in the school environment, Eder discovered that friendships are influenced by context, even the pairing of just two friends: "Dyadic friendships are influenced not only by larger friendship groups such as cliques, but also by the status structure of these cliques, by school activities, and by the school environment" (155). Roberta Seelinger Trites asserts that schools are one of the most powerful social institutions faced by adolescents: "School serves as the metaphorical representation of the many institutions that will influence adolescents throughout their lives" (*Disturbing the Universe* 33). Fictional adolescents, if realistically portrayed, Trites argues, also cannot escape the power of school: "School settings exist in adolescent literature to socialize teenagers into accepting the inevitable power social institutions

have over individuals in every aspect of their lives" (*Disturbing the Universe* 33). Thus, school, and the importance of shared environment, cannot be overlooked as an environment that affects the kind of friendships for this age group, as evidenced in E. Lockhart's novel of high school friendship amid romantic relationships, *The Boyfriend List*, and Cynthia Voigt's *Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers*, which chronicles the growing friendship of three college roommates.

School is provided as the catalyst in the relationship of Ruby, Kim, Nora, and Cricket in *The Boyfriend List*, all of whom attend a private preparatory school near Seattle. Ruby and Kim reflect the subjects of Eder's study, becoming friends at the lunch table: "Kim and I had been friends since kindergarten, when people teased her about what was in her lunchbox (red-bean cake and tofu) and I traded because I don't like peanut butter anyway and that's what my mother always packed" (22). Nora joins up with them "a couple of years later" as Ruby, the narrator, tells us and then comes Cricket, who begins attending their school in eighth grade. Their culminating friendship experience comes on a school trip:

> one day at the start of that year, we were all four sitting in the way-back of the bus on the class field trip to the natural history museum. We were fooling around and laughing and putting our feet up on the seat in front, making fortune-tellers out of folded paper and writing scandalous fortunes inside—until finally a teacher came back and yelled at us, which made us laugh even harder. (Lockhart, *The Boyfriend List* 22)

Without the shared environment of school, Ruby's friendships with Kim, Nora, and Cricket most likely would not have happened[3]. Ruby's parents live in a houseboat, not a

mansion like most of her classmates. She attends Tate Prep on scholarship, not her parents' money, like most of her classmates. And, while many of the students' parents know each other, Ruby's mom is a traveling performance artist, giving comedic monologues, and her dad runs a container plant gardening catalog from his home. Because of the class differences between Ruby and her friends, such relationships likely would not have occurred without the school setting. However, if must be noted that, while Ruby mentions the class differences between her and Kim, Nora, and Cricket, these differences are never the cause of the start or end of their relationship. Rather, the girls enjoy one another for the various attributes each brings to the group. Thus, Ruby's friendships are based solely on environment. School becomes an institution that defines her experience as an adolescent, in that it virtually creates almost her entire social context (she does have an outside friendship with the son of her parents' friend Juana, but the majority of the novel is based on her relationships in school). Lockhart, on her Web site, reveals why she chose to base so much of her novel in a school setting:

> High school is a microcosm of trapped individuals. They legally have to show up at this place, no matter how rotten it is. The other inhabitants are young, and stupid, and thoughtlessly cruel. It doesn't matter if your heart is bleeding, or if someone's going to beat you up, or you're getting harassed, or you're failing. You have to go. The emotions generated by this situation are extremely intense—great fun to write about. ("E. Lockhart: FAQ")

Lockhart is spot on in her assessment that compulsory attendance at school allows for the breeding of emotional intensity, often resulting in cruelty and insensitivity. Chapter 2

looks at the potential for friends to treat one another cruelly as group members take on various roles in their relationships.

Although Lockhart, like each of the other authors I focus on in this study, chooses to concentrate on the high school setting, Cynthia Voigt, in her young adult novel, *Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers*, places her characters in a collegiate setting. Her novel can still be considered as YA, however, in that the majority of the book discusses the freshman year experience of three young women, Ann, Niki, and Hildy, at a fictional women's college, Stanton College, in 1961.

Placed together as roommates from a "pot-luck" system, Ann, Niki, and Hildy represent three varied personalities and backgrounds. The copy of the novel that I own, a 1991 re-release, points to the girls' differences on the back cover. Each girl's name is written in bold, all-caps type, with a short description below:

> **ANN**
>
> Sensible, secure Ann. Life had always been predictable for her.
>
> **NIKI**
>
> Always in motion. Brash and often vulgar, she radiated an energy that sometimes intimidated people.
>
> **HILDY**
>
> She exuded a serene wisdom, self-assurance, and deep faith. But beneath her apparent simplicity was a most unusual way of looking at things.

Again, like the girls in Lockhart's novel, without the institution of schooling (and the tradition of on-campus housing at universities), Ann, Niki, and Hildy probably would not have known one another, much less become friends. Ann *is* predictable, from the East

Coast, pretty, and generally a good person (although Niki refers to her as a "stupid preppy bitch" and consistently mentions the circle pin and Topsider stereotype Niki considers "preppy"; Voigt 70). Niki *is* brash and vulgar, from California, the child of divorce, and seriously competitive and athletic. Hildy *is* self-assured and wise, but very conservative, from a large family in North Dakota, and set in her ways about money, marriage, and faith. The three personalities are forced to converge in the dorm room.

Niki and Ann immediately realize that their friendship is an unlikely one. Our first introduction to them occurs as they sit side-by-side at a welcoming assembly. Neither is very comfortable, yet Ann attempts to make small talk as they leave. At once, Niki begins to assert her unwillingness to follow Ann's traditional notions of friendship:

> Niki stopped abruptly. They were at the gravel path that led up to the front porch of the dormitory. "Why don't we just admit we're in a pigface position and cut the crap. I can't *do* all that small-talk stuff," she explained to Ann's surprised face.
>
> Feeling assaulted, Ann stepped back. In fact, she was surprised by Niki's vehemence, not her observation. She felt the same way, inept at conversation with strangers. But you were supposed to try to make a good first impression when you met people. (Voigt 4)

Ann, serving as the primary focus of the narration, struggles throughout the novel to discern if what she sees, if what she knows, is truly real. Using a philosophy professor as the girls' dean and role model, Voigt intertwines a sense of philosophical questioning in Ann's character—questioning that Ann never quite grasps as such. For instance, Niki immediately stereotypes Ann—telling her on page 15 of the novel that she is a "type,"

and not a unique one: “There are lots of you around, with tans and square jaws and that wavy hair. You all move the same way, muscular but not strong, somebody’s idea of femininity.” Meanwhile, Ann cannot define her roommates, except symbolically: Hildy as earth, Niki as fire, herself as water. She keenly observes the other two—their study habits, their time in and out of the room, how they sleep, how they eat—and attempts to find her place with them, her place in the dorm room and in the slowly blossoming friendship.

> Ann tried to figure out what they were like, Hildy and Niki. And Ann. Niki wore her intelligence like her jeans, close and comfortable. Hildy held hers like a lantern, to illuminate. And Ann? Like a string of pearls around her neck, in the dark of night on the wrong street, she nervously concealed her mind, her unquiet fingers both cherishing and proud. Was that what they were like? What she was like? (Voigt 48)

Ann sees herself caught between the two, in the midst of two extremes, wondering where exactly she fits in.

When the three girls elect to take volleyball for their physical fitness credit, the shared activity provides a catalyst for the girls’ interaction beyond the dorm room. Yet, the activity continues to allow for their varied personalities: Niki is fiercely competitive, flying across the court to save balls and cut off others; Hildy steps in as coach, leading the team calmly and reassuring her team members of her presence when needed; Ann finds that she plays the game well, but shifts in and out as a substitute, there when needed, but not overly concerned with her amount of playing time. While volleyball provides an outlet for the girls to bond outside of their dorm room, their experiences as

roommates are what lead to their ultimate understanding of one another as individuals. Within their room, the girls find outlets for debate and discussion, leading to that deeper understanding.

My edition of *Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers* includes a witty cliché on the front cover, one that turns out to be quite realistic: “Sometimes you learn more in college outside the classroom.” Except for volleyball class, the girls’ story is told entirely outside of the classroom. They spend much time talking about class work, even completing their assignments, but the majority of the story centers around two places: the dorm room and the volleyball court. In a presentation of novels for girls published around the turn of the twentieth century that focused on the college experience at a graduate conference, I found that those novels also included more emphasis on living arrangements as opposed to class time (L. Elwood 6). No definite reason for why this was so presented itself. However, when you look at both historical accounts of the collegiate experience for women and books like Lynn Peril’s *College Girls: Bluestockings, Sex Kittens, and Coeds*, which chronicles female coeds of the past and those of today, a common variable appears to be the importance of learning social skills, tolerance, responsibility, and friendship, which are more easily described by authors in settings other than the classroom. Further, the dorm setting allows the authors to place more emphasis on plot and character development than strict concentration on classroom scenes. “Much drama occurs in the dormitories and the authors tend to pick up on this possibility for advancing their plots and developing characters’ identities” (L. Elwood 6–7). Linda K. Shadiow, in discussing Voigt’s use of both internal and external spaces in her novels, notes that the interdependence of both settings creates tension, allowing for the growth of the characters

(72). Ann herself wonders about the potential for a strange physical place to affect one internally, “In a strange place, she thought, you are more vulnerable than at any other time. Everything conspires to keep you mentally off balance, ready to alarm” (Voigt 16). Shadiow remarks that Voigt uses this technique often, putting her characters in strange places by forcing them to take part in different experiences to expose their vulnerability: “The reader always has the concrete, external strangeness as a context for understanding the more abstract strangeness occurring on the psychological level” (Shadiow 71). Thus, the reader can understand Ann’s consistent worry, internal debate, and curiosity about her roommates, because the reader understands that her physical setting is unknown, uncertain, and on some levels, uncomfortable to her, especially at the opening of the novel.

In *Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers*, the construction of friendship ultimately relies on the shared experience of physical vulnerability in the residence of Ann and Niki and the experience they both have of growing close to Hildy. When Hildy spots Niki’s end-of-term English paper on her desk and realizes that Niki has taken an idea that Ann discusses with the girls, passing it off as her own, the girls’ first real quarrel ensues. Hildy believes it is plagiarism, Niki does not. In a heated argument, Niki condemns Hildy for taking the college’s scholarship when she knows she will only stay at the university for a year before returning home and getting married. Hildy, clearly upset, leaves Ann and Niki, takes off the glasses bought with the college’s money, and rides a bicycle nearly half an hour away to the observatory in a nearby state park[4]. On her ride, she is struck by a car and killed instantly. Ann and Niki grieve in their own ways, but ultimately realize that their shared love for their roommate can help them become better friends than

before. "'Are we going to be friends after all?'" Niki asks Ann. "'I mean, friends—not hello-how-are-you-people. I'd like that, Annie'" (Voigt 196). Ann comes to understand a new construction of friendship through her relationships with Niki and Hildy—one that centers not on tangibility or a certain amount of time spent with each other, but on true and honest communication, a deep sense of caring, and the willingness to call out each others' strengths and weaknesses. For, as Niki eloquently puts it, "You can't be friends with people who don't know anything about you—and don't want to" (Voigt 48).

Yet, girls remain friends with people who really don't know anything about them, and in some cases, refuse to accept a girl's individuality. Chapter 2 looks at some negative and positive representations of friendship, focusing on the various roles girls play in friendship groups and how those roles ultimately lead to subjectivity. Chapter 3 picks up on the idea of friendship as an influence on self-identity by discussing what happens to a girl's identity when her friendship group changes.

CHAPTER 2

GOOD GIRLS VS. BAD GIRLS: PLAYING OUR PARTS

The back of the DVD case for the movie *Mean Girls* features Polaroid-esque pictures of its stars. Under each girl's picture is scrawled a word: "Mean," "Meaner," and "Meanest." The DVD cover clearly shows each fictional character's role, with Regina George ("Meanest") leading the school's most popular group, "The Plastics." New student Cady Heron learns quickly that The Plastics, while the most dominant group in the grade, certainly isn't the only one: there are the Varsity Jocks, the Asian Nerds, the Black Hotties, the Art Freaks, the Girls for Whom Food Is a Friend, the Girls Who Don't Eat, and the list goes on. The *Mean Girls* message is clear—high schoolers fit into types, cliques, and other groups dependent on maintaining a specific stereotype. When Cady joins The Plastics with intentions to sabotage the leader, she finds herself changing. She essentially becomes a mean girl, manipulating the roles in the group to attempt to replace the leader and turn Regina's best friends against her.

Mean Girls isn't all satire. The movie is based on Rosalind Wiseman's book for parents, *Queen Bees & Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends & Other Realities of Adolescence*, a sociological study of relationships between preteen and teenage girls. Wiseman's book offers advice for parents to help their

daughters develop healthy friendships. *Mean Girls* writer Tina Fey, after having read the book, penned the screenplay for the movie, noting that it showed more like reality TV for teenage girls who face similar situations as Cady Heron everyday in the school hallways. Chapter 1 discussed two ways girls make and keep friends, including an analysis of friendships built in the school environment. But, both discussions presented positive representations of girls and friendships. Not every relationship is rosy and not all girls are meant to join in bonds of sisterhood like Brashares' characters. Just as the girls in *Mean Girls* are designated into specific roles within their friendship group, the characters of adolescent novels take on various roles. As this chapter will show, some get caught up in negative relationships where each girl plays a specific part central to continuing the power of one girl over others. This discussion will propose a new theory that reads fictional girl groups through a panoptic lens. The chapter also will discuss whether authors can (and do) represent girl groups where each girl is relatively equal in her role—where each girl's position within the group provides for a unique personality, talent, or ability needed for the group to remain cohesive. Both sections will culminate in a discussion of subjectivity and subject positions in adolescent literature, pointing to the author's need to incorporate subjectivity to represent realistic relationships.

Negative Representations of Friendships: The Clique

The friendship group most commonly associated with teenage girls is the clique, a group exclusively made up of a set number of girls. Maureen Hallihan notes that cliques need more than three members and each member must have some association or connection to two other members in the group (49). She adds that cliques tend to form

more often in structural environments that have fewer restrictions—in other words, in environments wherein adolescent interaction is strongly regulated (the classroom, for instance), girls have less opportunity to form and sustain cliques (46). Corresponding to this assertion is Hallihan's study of one school district, where she found few cliques in the fourth and fifth grades, where students stayed with the same peers from class to class and activities such as lunch and recess were clearly monitored. In the same district, Hallihan discovered significantly more cliques in the sixth grade than the elementary grades, and even more cliques in the seventh and eighth grades (51). Wiseman focuses on the clique to assert that girls take on specific roles in friendship groups. "Cliques are sophisticated, complex, and multilayered, and every girl has a role within them" (Wiseman 24). The roles Wiseman lays out include:

- **Queen Bee:** The girl at the top of the clique's totem pole; generally one whose popularity is based on fear and control. Wiseman likens her to a combination of the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland* and Barbie. The Queen Bee's characteristics include her ability to persuade her peers easily, intimidate others, charm adults, and make girls feel special by declaring them her friends; her affinity to show affection to one girl in order to reject another; her reluctance or unwillingness to take responsibility for her actions; and her feelings that if she's been wronged, she has the right to revenge.
- **Sidekick:** The second-in-command; the girl next in line to the Queen Bee and the one who shares the most similarities to the Queen Bee's characteristics. The Sidekick often works with the Queen to bully others, and her best friend serves as her authority figure, telling her what to do and think and even how to dress.

- **Banker:** The gossip who uses information to her own benefit. Wiseman notes that the Banker utilizes negative information in order to create conflict among other group members and strengthen her own status. She pumps others for information by innocent, friendly manners and her "cute and harmless" persona (Wiseman 29).
- **Floater:** The girl who doesn't associate with just one clique; she has friends in different groups and moves among them because everyone likes her. Wiseman notes that a key factor in the Floater's overall acceptance is that she has characteristics that shield her from other girls' cruelty: "she's beautiful, but not too beautiful, nice, not terribly sophisticated, and avoids conflicts" (30). The Floater has higher self-esteem than many of the other roles, and Wiseman notes, will actually stand up to the Queen Bee when needed. The key difference between Floaters and the other girls is that Floaters "don't gain anything by sowing seeds of discontent and insecurity among the other girls; Queen Bees do" (30).
- **Pleaser/Wannabe/Messenger:** The mimic, the pleaser, the girl who will do anything to get into (or stay in) the clique. Wiseman, who finds this the most fascinating of the roles, notes that this girl will attempt to mimic the more powerful girls in the group in order to increase her position. "She's a careful observer, especially of the girls in power. She's motivated above all else to please the person who's standing above her on the social totem pole" (Wiseman 33). In addition, this girl's position often is dependent on doing the Queen's "dirty work;" as Wiseman adds, "The Queen Bee and the Sidekick enjoy the convenience of making her their servant, but they love talking about her behind

her back" (33). She's also the girl most likely to be kicked out of the group, sometimes in order to fulfill a new role, as the Target.

- **Target:** The victim; this girl is often excluded from the clique or sits at the very bottom of the clique's totem pole and is only included so that the group has an easy target. The Target faces much of the other girls' cruelty, being set up for humiliation, being made fun of, or just, in some cases, being designated as a social outcast or loser by the most powerful clique so that the other cliques do not accept her into their groups. She often feels pressured to change herself in order to fit in. In some cases, the target previously filled another role, but has been dropped from the group because she has challenged someone higher on the totem pole.

Wiseman's theories on social roles connect to young adult literature by providing sociological evidence for the idea of social institutions that Roberta Seelinger Trites finds as the basis of most works of adolescent literature (*Disturbing the Universe*). Trites asserts that school settings in particular have the ability to create social institutions that adolescent protagonists must learn to challenge, in part because school "socializes teenagers into accepting the inevitable power social institutions have over individuals in every aspect of their lives" (*Disturbing the Universe* 33). This comes as a result of the heavy role of social politics in school settings. Robert Cormier examined dynamics of social institutions in schools in *The Chocolate War*, noting the powerful capabilities of teenagers to create their own institutions wherein one or two students reign over their peers as lords over subjects. Cormier wrote about the potential for student power at an all-boys school. However, a similar idea appears to exist in many teen novels written for

girls. In most cases, one girl rules a smaller group of girls, what Wiseman terms “the Queen Bee and her court” (24). Philosopher Jeremy Bentham, creating the ideal prison, proposed a panoptic theory of punishment—if the prison was shaped in a circle, and the guards sat in the middle of the wheel, from where they could monitor every move of the prisoners, the prisoners would be inclined to behave in order to please those at the center of the wheel. Foucault applied this idea to politics, asserting that people give rulers power “in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up” (202).

Thus, school politics naturally produce a new kind of panoptic. Trites, for example, uses Foucault to allude to a panoptic order in Cormier’s *The Chocolate War*, but I argue that such a theory might be even more applicable to girl groups, especially those that embody Wiseman’s roles. In the sense of the girl group, those internal mechanisms required to give rulers power involve girls in the group ceding decisions to the leader, asking for the leader’s opinion, avoiding disagreement with the leader, and even suppressing any sort of romantic feeling about the leader’s object of affection. Foucault asserts that visibility is the ultimate trap of the panopticon (200): “in the peripheric [outside] ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen” (202). And so stands the clique: One girl, the Queen Bee, sits at the center of the circle, watching the actions, decisions, and even minute choices (such as clothing) of the other girls. The other girls, standing at various points on the wheel, modify their behavior in order to please the group leader. The Queen Bee is always seeing, always watching the other girls to make certain they conform to her wishes—she is seeing without being seen, for often her guise of power is overlooked by

those she rules. The other girls in the clique are constantly watched, their every move visible, without ever looking beyond the surface at their actions. Some, like the sidekick, behave well enough in order to stand closest to the center, while others fringe the edges.

In preparing to defend "mean-girl books," Lianne George sat down with a panel of seventh-grade girls, all fans of books like *Gossip Girl*, seeking to find out if the books resembled real life. Although the girls attributed their enjoyment of the books to the excitement of the lavish, glittery, expensive, and materialistic cultures described (something far beyond their realistic means), for the most part, the girls said these books resembled real-life—at least the relational aspects and notions of social hierarchy. What's interesting is that the girls consistently refer to the need to be *seen* in order to move in and out of the popular friendship groups. As one of George's interview subjects, Julie, pointed out, "You have to make sure you're getting noticed *all* the time" (italics original, 1). How can one girl influence the others so greatly? As Terri Apter and Ruth Josselson point out, same-sex friendships have the capacity to produce and define cultural norms: "Because we are of the same gender, cultural norms about how we should look, how we should act, what we should say, when we should smile—and even how and when we can be sexual—are transmitted and enforced" (1–2). Group affiliation can lead to influences that girls conform to certain stereotypes in order to maintain balance within the group; often these stereotypes are based on cultural notions of identity[1].

Cecily von Ziegesar hits on the potential for a panoptic school society wherein girls take on roles of influence over other girls in her *Gossip Girl* series, especially in Blair Waldorf's reaction to her former best friend Serena's return to New York City from boarding school:

> At first, when Serena had gone to boarding school after sophomore year, Blair had really missed her. But it soon became apparent how much easier it was to shine without Serena around. Suddenly *Blair* was the prettiest, the smartest, the hippest, the most happening girl in the room. She became the one everyone looked to. So Blair stopped missing Serena so much. [. . . But] Serena was back. The lid was off the shoebox and everything would go back to the way it was before she left. As always, it would be Serena and Blair, Blair and Serena, with Blair playing the smaller, fatter, mousier, less witty best friend of the blond über-girl, Serena van der Woodsen. (*Gossip Girl*, italics in original 21–22)

Afraid to be relegated to the role of sidekick once again, Blair attempts everything in her power to ignore Serena's return, including refusing to stop other girls who cruelly make fun of Serena's too-short uniform in assembly, leaving the lunch table when Serena arrives, and consciously deciding not to tell Serena about an upcoming benefit party Blair is hosting.

One incident in particular, however, provides evidence for Blair's cruelty to her former best friend. It begins when Kati Farkas, a girl in Blair's group, passes a note to Blair:

> *Dear Blair,*
>
> *Can I borrow fifty thousand dollars? Sniff, sniff, sniff. If I don't pay my coke dealer the money I owe him, I'm in big trouble.*
>
> *Shit, my crotch itches.*
>
> *Let me know about the money.*

Love,

Serena v.d. Woodsen

(von Ziegesar, *Gossip Girl*, italics and formatting in original 55)

Blair's response is not to dispel the rumors that Serena was kicked out of boarding school for being a drug dealer, getting pregnant, or having a sexually transmitted disease. Instead, she plays on the rumors by responding on the back of the note and passing it back to the other girls:

Sure, Serena. Whatever you want. Call me from jail. I hear the food is really good there. Nate and I will visit you whenever we're free, which might be . . . I don't know . . . NEVER?!

I hope the VD gets better soon.

Love, Blair (von Ziegesar, *Gossip Girl*, italics and formatting in original 56)

Such cruelty is a byproduct of power. By treating Serena this way, Blair hopes to retain her position at the top of the school's totem pole, admitting that Serena is "out of it" or no longer within the most popular circle, and Blair wants her to "stay that way" (von Ziegesar, *Gossip Girl* 61). bell hooks connects two aspects of female life to cruelty among women: sexism and the lure of power. She argues that sexism teaches women "woman-hating," leading to conscious and unconscious abuse and hatred among women (48). In discussing power, hooks suggests that women learn and conceptualize the potential for power similarly to men: "Like most men, women are taught from childhood on that dominating and controlling others is *the* basic expression of power" (88). Rachel Simmons terms such power struggles between friends as *relational aggression*[2],

characterized by damage to or a threat to destroy relationships, friendships, or group inclusion, and including any act "in which relationship is used as a weapon, including manipulation" (43). In her observations of and discussions with girls, Simmons found that the majority of bullying within friendship groups occurs by girls holding positions of power within the group, namely the leader, who is able to set and direct social consensus and status within the group (36). Citing Michael Thompson, a researcher on relationships among children, Simmons notes that all children want three things from life: connection, power, and recognition: "The desire for connection propels children into friendship, while the need for recognition and power ignites competition and conflict" (9).

What about the other girls in the group, the ones who may not stand at the top, but still practice relational aggression? In talking with girls from ten schools in three regional areas, Simmons found that girls boldly admitted to destructive behavior, regardless of their place in the social hierarchy. Some of Simmons' subjects claimed that such aggression allowed them to move up the social hierarchy from a lower rung (16). Let's again look at this idea in relation to the *Gossip Girl* group: If Blair and Serena are the Queen Bees (and formerly, Sidekick) of the group, two girls, Kati Farkas and Isabel Coates, make up other members of the Serena/Blair clique. These girls tend to have roles that are a mixture of those set up by Wiseman. Both are Pleasers, both have been aiming for the role of Sidekick since Serena's departure, and both do their fair share of banking by providing information to Blair and others about other girls, including Serena. Kati and Isabel clearly want to be elevated within the group. Both are as frustrated upon Serena's return as Blair: "Both Kati and Isabel saw the girl who would inevitably steal Blair away from them and leave them with only each other, which was too dull to think about" (von

Ziegesar, *Gossip Girl* 23). In a reverse of this, in a later book in the series, *All I Want Is Everything*, Serena takes advantage of Kati and Isabel's desires to get in her good graces when she wants to host a New Year's Eve party. "Serena had always been better at delegating authority than doing all the work herself, so who better to call upon than the two girls who wanted so desperately to be her new best friends?" (von Ziegesar 175). Because Kati and Isabel share the role of Pleaser, Serena as the Queen Bee can manipulate their desires for friendship. Remember Wiseman's rules about the pleaser? "She's motivated above all else to please the person who's standing above her on the social totem pole. . . . The Queen Bee and the Sidekick enjoy the convenience of making her their servant" (33). Kati and Isabel certainly fit this bill, especially as they come to Serena's bidding—"'Oh my God, you're so *tan*,' Isabel crowed, kissing her on the cheek. 'Did you lose weight?' Kati asked, kissing her, too. As if Serena needed to lose weight"—before racing to their cell phones to contact the most important vendors in town, booking tons of food, plush invitations, and "more booze than they would ever need" (von Ziegesar, *All I Want* 175, 180). On the flip side of this, because Serena has moved in and out of the role as Queen Bee, Kati and Isabel are comfortable with using relational aggression in order to try to advance their places in the social hierarchy (with Blair as Queen Bee) when Serena originally returns.

And, although Kati and Isabel also serve as targets when Serena and Blair talk about them behind their backs, the main target in several of the books in the series is Jenny Humphrey, a freshman and daughter of a literary hermit who sends her to the fancy Constance Billard School for Girls for a good education. Unlike the other girls, Jenny does not have an unlimited cash flow, or connections through her parents to the most

popular girls in school (Kati and Isabel's parents are also friends with Blair and Serena's families). In the *Gossip Girl* world, one based solely on class (many of the girls' parents are the wealthiest adults in New York City) and one's ability to spend whatever she would like with no repercussions (Blair, Serena, and their friends frequent ritzy boutiques and Barneys New York, stay in expensive hotels, and give and receive lavish gifts), Jenny's outsider status makes her an easy target for the other girls. Jenny also has lower self-confidence than the other girls, in part due to her early blossoming and extra-large breasts (a common target of the others). However, Jenny desperately wants to be friends with Serena, Blair, and the others, offering to calligraph by hand hundreds of invitations for a benefit in exchange for being allowed to come, using her father's credit card to buy clothing she cannot afford, and approaching the others as often as possible, hoping to be invited to sit or hang out with them. Yet, despite her efforts, Jenny remains the target, eliciting thoughts from Blair that she looks like "a human Wonderbra" and, more cruelly, being pawned off by Blair to the slimy hands of Chuck Bass, a sex addict, who talks only to Jenny's breasts and attempts to force her into sex in a bathroom stall. Naomi Wolf notes that novels such as *Gossip Girl* and other recent hits based on the series (*The Clique, The A-List*) shy away from the means of subversion typically found in young adult novels (which she adds is closer to adult convention). Remarking that the mockery and cruelty of characters in the novels is based on scorn of "anyone who is pathetic enough not to fit in," Wolf likens such protagonists to "'Lord of the Flies' set in the local mall, without the moral revulsion" as the more popular girls "terrorize the 'losers' below them in the social hierarchy" (2). Yet, even despite the constant targeting, Jenny often

perceives a false image of potential friendship with the other girls; such false perception is what allows the others to make her a target of relational aggression.

Many Personalities, One Group: A More Positive Representation

Barash and Barash use biology to discuss how evolution appears in literature, and noted that, just as biologists are discovering more female-female competition, so are literary critics. Unlike male characters, however, Barash and Barash found that female characters show women's competition on a superficial level as opposed to a physical level (similar to the ways girls use gossip, rumors, and manipulation against one another): "the literary imagination pictures rival women as schemers and bad-mouthers who limit their backstabbing to the metaphoric" (59). As Barash and Barash point out, the competitive trope long has haunted women's fiction, with many protagonists facing challenges from rival female characters. Jane Austen perhaps is the best example from literature, as Austen includes a rival female character for her protagonists in many of her novels. In the case of Isabella Thorpe from *Northanger Abbey*, Austen provides a Romantic-era Queen Bee—by manipulating Catherine through her desire for female friendship, Isabella hopes to attain what she wants—the supposed Morland fortune. If the competitive nature of women is an ideal held up by literature, is it also one that can be subverted by literature? Just as many women writers have included positive female relationships, not every young adult author focuses on the cruelty and hierarchy of girl groups. Others use the idea of girls fulfilling roles within the groups in order to present a positive image of girl groups wherein each member's role contributes something for the greater good of the group. Brashares, for instance, clearly points to her characters' roles

in the novel and in the friendship group, but her group roles are more about personality than power. In the Prologue to *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, Carmen considers the girls as a group of friends not only descended from their mothers' friendship, but collectively grown into a single entity as a result of their many years together:

> We're the Septembers now. The real ones. We are everything to one another. We don't need to say so; it's just true. Sometimes it seems like we're so close we form one single complete person rather than four separate ones. We settle into types—Bridget the athlete, Lena the beauty, Tibby the rebel, and me, Carmen, the . . . what? The one with the bad temper. But the one who cares the most. The one who cares that we stick together. (Brashares 7)

It doesn't strike the reader as particularly odd that the girls settle into their various roles. After all, Brashares makes no point in hiding the fact that each of their mothers played a particular, diverse role, at least, in Carmen's point of view:

> Maybe our mothers never really had much in common besides being pregnant at the same time. I mean, they were a strange group when you think of it: Tibby's mom, the young radical; Lena's mom, the ambitious Greek putting herself through social work school; Bridget's mom, the Alabama debutante; and my mom, the Puerto Rican with the rocky marriage. (Brashares 7)

In her book *Princess in Waiting,* Meg Cabot takes a similar path—placing her characters into personality types as opposed to Wiseman's friend types. In Mia Thermopolis' group of friends (a coed group due to two of the girls' boyfriends), each person has a distinct

personality, and in Mia's words, a talent: Lilly is smart, but also self-assured, politically active, and unafraid to voice her opinions (or share her intellect); Michael, Lilly's brother and Mia's boyfriend, plays multiple instruments, maintains a Webzine, and designs computer programs; Boris, Lilly's boyfriend, is a classical violinist; Tina reads voraciously and is a good listener; Ling Su is a talented artist; Shameeka is "beautiful and gets straight As," and she's a good dancer and is unconcerned with challenging the school's social pecking order when she tries out for and makes the cheerleading team. And Mia, despite lamenting in the fourth book of the series that she has no talent to bring to the group, realizes that she's a great writer, capturing the group dynamics, exploring her feelings, and working through friendship problems in her journal (Cabot 117, 224). Each characteristic allows for a friendship group wherein each member contributes something and where each member's talents are recognized and appreciated (it takes both Michael and Lilly to help Mia realize her talent). Thus, in spite of Cabot's inclusion of a Queen Bee in her books (Lana Weinberger) and discussions of the popular kids (a group of which Mia vehemently denies she is a part), Cabot's primary friendship group is an overall positive one in which each member plays a contributing role. Similarly, Brashares divides her characters into types, but notes that it takes each of those type to hold the group together, in the words of Carmen, they are "one single complete person" (Brashares 7). It is the inclusion of positive, unique identities that provide group cohesion.

Subjectivity and Feminism: Understanding Subject Positions

Do the authors necessarily need to place the girls in positions within the group? Yes, they do, both due to the simple idea of a group constituting multiple individuals to make one whole and also in order to allow for the concept of subjectivity—especially female subjectivity—or the perceptions, experiences, and interpretations a subject marked as female has. In other words, each of us has specific perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of our world. As women, those change, creating a subject position of female. Judith Butler asserts that being female constitutes an ever-changing range of subject positions when she writes that "there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute the category of women" (1). In her book on feminist children's literature, *Waking Sleeping Beauty*, Roberta Seelinger Trites eloquently defines female subjectivity by turning to Jacques Lacan's study of language, noting Lacan's emphasis on language as the "sole determinant of being":

> The concept of subjectivity, then, implies that every individual is multiply constructed by a variety of sociolinguistic forces that act upon her or him. Because language and the institutions it represents are so fluid, any given individual can occupy simultaneously a number of subject positions, some of which can seem at times even contradictory [. . .] language is fundamental to how women come to occupy various subject positions. [. . .] The subject is who she is because language has so fashioned her. She has been constructed, as we all have been, by the cultural forces of language that have acted upon us. (26–27)

Adolescence adds another subject position. In fact, simply being in high school constitutes the addition of positions, Emily White argues, adding that high school hallways create an urge "to name and to grasp on another, to pin one another down as types, as species, as haves and have-nots" as teenagers attempt to find their places in high school society (14). The adolescent girls in young adult fiction can occupy many subject positions—daughter, student, sister, and friend. Within the friendship group, however, she also can occupy more positions. In part, these can be similar to those Wiseman establishes—for instance, the Queen Bee obviously uses language in a cruel or critical manner in order to keep other girls below her, often through rumors and gossip (which bell hooks notes happens daily among women who verbally abuse one another by spreading malicious gossip that supports sexist attitudes among women; 49). Rumors flourish in populations such as adolescent groups, wherein their members are "desperately trying to comprehend their environment" (Shibutani qtd. in White 35). The Queen Bee also uses language cunningly to place other girls in their respective subject positions by manipulating language into labels[3]: when she calls another girl her friend, or speaks of her affectionately, she allows the other girl to assume a new position as a member of her clique. Why would girls so readily asccept such objectification and turn it into a sense of subjectivity? In *Disturbing the Universe*, Trites asserts that young adult novels "tend to convey to adolescents that they are better served by accepting than rejecting the social institutions with which they must live. In that sense, the underlying agenda of many YA novels is to indoctrinate adolescents into a measure of social acceptance" (27).

Trites uses the idea of subjectivity to pinpoint characteristics of a feminist children's novel in *Waking Sleeping Beauty*. In doing so, she raises interesting ideas about the nature of relationships among women and their connection to feminist literature. Feminist literature, Trites notes, often uses the concept of women strengthening each other through relationships (81). In feminist children's literature, however, a sense of interdependency between the child and her (or his) friends allows for the child/adolescent's development as an individual, rather than the character's inculcation into a "prescribed social role":

> Rather than relying on her family or community to teach her how to continue in the repressed roles that women have so long been forced into, the protagonist of a feminist children's novel will learn from relationships how to take the subject position as a strong and independent person. (Trites, *Waking Sleeping Beauty*, 84)

Subjectivity is inherent to any study of adolescent literature, Robyn McCallum argues, in part because adolescence relies on the formation of concepts of personal identity and selfhood:

> Conceptions of subjectivity are intrinsic to narratives of personal growth or maturation, to stories about relationships between the self and others, and to explorations of relationships between individuals and the world, society or the past—that is, subjectivity is intrinsic to the major concerns of adolescent fiction. (3)

Adolescent literature, even when not attempting to be subjective, often inherently is subjective, mostly because many of the books considered to be for adolescents deeply

concern personal, social, or intellectual growth for their protagonists (McCallum 8). Voigt's *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* is a good example of this concept—Izzy must learn to accept her disability in the midst of adjusting to a new physical idea of herself, no longer the cheerleader, no longer part of a stable group of relatively popular girls—but Lockhart's *The Boyfriend List* might be a better example. Lockhart encases a story of personal growth within a comedic tale of heartache—Ruby's ultimate goal is not to tell readers about which boys she kissed, dated, or just hung out with, but to find a way to help herself overcome her anxiety and panic attacks. Self-assurance, self-reliance, and an understanding that she can be herself, that she can be Roo, without her best friend Kim (Kanga), ultimately proves to be more significant than the story of how her friendship with Kim ended due to the interference of a boyfriend.

Back to the question at the start of this section: Do the authors necessarily need to place the girls in positions within the group? I would still argue, yes, they do. Take for instance, Brashares' series of books. The girls clearly fit, within the group, into roles based on their personalities. But, at the same time, their inclusion in their group, their relationships with the other girls, allow them to be independent persons, to find self-identity. Bridget is always encouraged to pursue her winning nature at soccer—she's never told that the boys she plays with are better than she (and she often asserts her opinion that she's better than they). When Carmen suddenly becomes less opinionated, less self-confident, and relegates herself to behind the scenes work at a drama camp in the fourth book of the series (a self-effacement reinforced by a new, overbearing friend), *Forever in Blue*, her friends and her close relationship with them are what saves her from depression—Lena, Bridget, and Tibby recognize that the individual they've always

known as Carmen has changed, and they use their relationship with her to help her regain her confidence. The *Traveling Pants* series, while not necessarily written as "feminist literature," clearly fits Trites' definition. This theory is only strengthened with Trites' further assertion that feminist literature embraces positive aspects of stereotypes of females (including their propensity to develop and rely on relationships with other women) to their advantage (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* 80). When you compare Brashares (and for that matter, Voigt) to an author like von Ziegesar, the significance of a positive outlook on female friendships that encourage individualism and positive self-identity as opposed to fitting into a group in order to eschew stereotypical pictures of catty girls is clear: novels that present girls finding and keeping friendships that are meaningful carry more weight and resonance with their readers[5]. After all, Voigt's novels were written more than 20 years ago and *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* still remains on many middle school reading lists. Will the same be said for *Gossip Girl* 20 years from now? Probably not.

To further balance such an argument, feminist theory leans heavily on the interpretation of Lacan's theories of identity and language (see the quote from Trites above). The means by which authors present discourse between their characters carries relevant weight here. Brashares' characters communicate mainly via letter (occasionally through e-mails and chat messages). Their letters are powerful—some say much without saying anything at all, language only a true friend could recognize. Bridget's last letter to Lena displays such potential for language in the novels: "Lena, Something happened. It isn't how I imagined. I need to talk to you, but I can't say it here. I'm just . . . strange. I'm strange to myself. Bee" and a postscript: "Lena, I can't sleep. I'm scared. I wish I could talk to you" (Brashares 284). When Bridget, caught up in her perceptions of love

and assured of her ability to handle anything, writes this letter, she has just, at the age of 15, lost her virginity to a college-age counselor at her summer soccer camp. Although Bridget pushed the other counselor toward this sexual experience and clearly tells readers she wants to have sex with the counselor, the experience of actually losing her virginity leaves her shocked, uncertain, and at a loss for words. Deborah Thacker, in a study of feminine language in children's literature, notes that a truly feminist work of children's literature is able to go beyond the controlling aim publishers hold over popular fiction, by using discourse in a manner that promotes feminine ideals: "the emphasis on storytelling and the power of discourse in feminine plots and in the presentation of feminine characters indicate the awareness, on the part of many of these recuperated female writers, of the power derived from discourse" (4).

Further, Thacker's argument definitively excludes works like von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl* series from any potential consideration for feminist literature by asserting that popular fiction publishers seek to reinforce cultural ideologies and control any challenges, especially meaningful challenge to female stereotypes that provide readers with "a new way of approaching gender or inviting them to question the imposition of socially constructed modes of behavior" (5). Thacker alludes that such control comes both editorially and from the way that children's books are packaged, marketed, and reviewed (4), an idea that Amy Pattee found to be true in her investigation of the creation of the *Gossip Girl* series. Pattee discovered that *Gossip Girl* was created by 17th Street Productions, a book packager (also responsible for the *Traveling Pants* series and the *Sweet Valley High* series of the 1980s and 1990s), and Alloy, Inc. (a marketing firm for youth, which operated a catalog for teen girls in the 1990s). Unlike the *Traveling Pants*

series, which came about through a conversation Brashares had with colleagues and was then pitched to 17th Street, who opted to publish it with Delacorte (Lodge 1), *Gossip Girl* was the conception of the marketing company, who then hired a ghost writer to pen the series (Pattee, "Commodities in Literature" 155). Pattee notes that the series' creation allows for the transmission of the company's consumerist message to drive the content:

> The Gossip Girl series is the product of its situation within an historical period of time, during which consumption by teenagers is both encouraged and expected, and can be considered material evidence of one company's interest in cornering the teen market via the advertisement and sales of what it deems "lifestyle products" for teens. ("Commodities in Literature" 164)

Thus, the publisher quite obviously influences the message adolescent readers of the series receive. Despite the fact that it's far from a positive one (and certainly not one feminists are likely to embrace any time soon), it cannot be denied that it touches on aspects of girlhood femininity that sociological researchers such as Rachel Simmons and Rosalind Wiseman have found in their observations of and discussions with adolescent girls: Girls are not always nice to their friends. They do place labels on friendship. They often accept and serve in roles within groups. Sometimes those roles are negative ones fraught with cruelty and manipulation. But sometimes, those roles move beyond negative stereotypes and offer positive, caring relationships that value individuality over conformity and working through conflict together as opposed to having one girl always in the watchtower. By placing their characters within specific roles in the friendship groups, young adult authors can mimic real-life relationships, utilizing subjectivity to provide a

sense of authority and agency to their female readers. Every woman has been a girl, and every woman knows that you cannot just be a girl—you juggle the difficulty of being a daughter; a student; an artist, writer, athlete, musician, sex symbol, or fashion plate; a mean girl or a nice girl; *and* a friend, along with learning what it means to be female.

CHAPTER 3

BEST FRIENDS OR WORST ENEMIES? WHEN CHANGE THREATENS THE GROUP DYNAMIC

In *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, a television drama that premiered in Summer 2008, Amy Juergens, played by Shailene Woodley, discovers what happens when a girl begins to become sexually active, and more so, when she begins to interact with boys on a level beyond peer status. Her unplanned pregnancy, a result of a one-night affair with Ricky, the school's stud[1], at band camp, sends Amy's world spinning. Early in the first episode, Amy's two best friends, Madison and Lauren, come up to her locker, gushing about the cute new (male) counselor. "Do you know something more exciting than Mark Molina?" Madison asks Amy when she doesn't respond to their enthusiasm. "I had sex," Amy whispers in return, before simply nodding to her friends' eventual realization that her first sexual experience has resulted in her first pregnancy. In the first episode, Madison and Lauren buy Amy home pregnancy tests, clear out the girls' bathroom so they can have privacy, and try to help her come up with a plan of action. Lauren even successfully convinces Amy that she must see a doctor right away. "Falling in Love," the show's pilot episode clearly presents three close-knit girls willing to trust one another with their biggest secrets. The group dynamic changes drastically, however,

in the second episode, when Madison and Lauren accidentally are overheard talking about Amy's sexual experience with Ricky. Of course, in true television fashion, the persons overhearing the girls' conversation happen to be the best friends of Ben, Amy's new boyfriend. When word gets back to Amy that others in the school know she's had sex with Ricky, she immediately confronts him, asking him who he told. "I didn't tell anyone," he lies, adding "but did you tell those friends of yours? Who have they told?" Seeds of distrust immediately sown, Amy refuses to talk to her friends for the remainder of the episode, hanging up on them, ignoring their messages, and trashing their e-mails. Finally, she confronts them, wherein they swear they haven't told anyone (it appears their logic is based on the idea that they didn't directly tell anyone, they were just overheard). By the third episode, the group once again is threatened by an outside force, Amy's unborn child. "Do you think mom and dad will let you hang out with her, knowing she's had sex and is going to have a baby?" Lauren's older brother asks her. "My dad will let me still hang out with her, won't he?" Madison wonders aloud. In later episodes, it is revealed that Lauren is not allowed to see Amy outside of school, but Madison is able to visit her friend, thrusting her into the role of messenger between the two. Like many other fictional teens, Amy, Madison, and Lauren discover that outsiders play a powerful role in group relationships—with the ability to break down or strengthen friendships.

Reality insists that not all friendships are meant to be lifelong bonds of sororal love like those portrayed in Ann Brashares' *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* series. Friendships do end and best friends "break up" almost as often as romantic relationships. Two young adult novels, *The Boyfriend List* and *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* provide evidence for the idea that outside forces can create tensions in friendship groups, even between two

best friends, creating problems that can lead to the eventual parting of friends. This chapter will look at what happens when change threatens group dynamics, corresponding with a discussion of the problem novel in young adult literature.

Boy Trouble: When Boyfriends Come Between Girlfriends

Ruby Oliver's story is not a very unusual one: She has a boyfriend, Jackson, and a best friend, Kim. Her boyfriend breaks up with her after a few months of dating, and within a week, Kim calls Ruby to announce that she and Jackson are now dating. And, like many stories that follow this vein, Ruby is expected not to interfere with Kim's happiness, because Kim believes she has found her soul mate. Her pleading with Ruby takes on the tone that Ruby should remain Kim's friend, despite what has just happened: "'Please, Ruby,' Kim said. 'Don't be too upset. It just happened. We didn't mean it to. And I'd never do this to you, except the thing with you was never working out anyway—and I really think Jackson and me are meant to be'" (Lockhart, *The Boyfriend List* 131). Kim expects Ruby to believe that despite Ruby's feelings that her relationship with Jackson was going well, there obviously was something wrong that only Kim could see. Further, Kim tries to plead with Ruby to accept the situation, simply because on a normal basis, Kim would "never do this" to Ruby. When Ruby and Jackson share a kiss a short time afterward, Kim turns the situation on Ruby, accusing her of wanting to steal her boyfriend and ostracizing her from their group of friends. Ruby officially has been dumped—by both her boyfriend and her best friend.

E. Lockhart's novels about Ruby, *The Boyfriend List* and its sequel, *The Boy Book*, take the common theme of two girls struggling for the attention of the same guy

and turn it on its head, adding in a dose of humor and some unexpected circumstances to portray what can happen when an outsider, especially a male one, interferes with a female friendship. Utilizing a "nested narrative" structure ("a plot structure in which a framing tale contains some sort of story-within-the-story," Trites, *Waking Sleeping Beauty* 111), Lockhart tells the story of Ruby and Kim's falling out through chapters named for each of the boys on Ruby's "Boyfriend List" that she creates for her therapist, whom she has begun seeing after having a series of panic attacks as a result of Kim's announcement that she is going to date Jackson.

Ruby's story begins with her discussion of the list, which her therapist has instructed her should contain the names of "every single boy I have ever had the slightest little any-kind-of-anything with" (Lockhart 1). Ruby pointedly informs her reader that this assignment intends to help with her mental health, namely her issues with anxiety, expressing that, unlike other people she knows who see therapists, she is not a lunatic, tragic, or neurotic. Although Ruby considers it "weird to be fifteen and have a shrink," she also recognizes her need for help with an increasing number of panic attacks she's experienced (2). As Ruby informs us, all five panic attacks happened within ten days, the same ten days in which she:

- lost my boyfriend (boy #13)
- lost my best friend
- lost all my other friends
- learned gory details about my now-ex boyfriend's sexual adventures
- did something shockingly advanced with boy #15

- did something suspicious with boy #10
- had an argument with boy #14
- drank my first beer
- got caught by my mom
- lost a lacrosse game
- failed a math test
- hurt Meghan's feelings
- became a leper
- and became a famous slut

Enough to give anyone panic attacks, right? (Lockhart 4)

When the novel begins, Ruby is looking back on what has happened with Kim and Jackson by describing each of the boys on her list to her therapist. One copy of the list gets thrown in the trashcan at school, which is then discovered, photocopied, and distributed by Kim to every student at Ruby's preparatory school. The discovery of the list is not what incites Ruby's panic attacks, but Kim's original phone call telling Ruby about her new relationship with Jackson. The subsequent events bring on more panic attacks, prompting Ruby to feel as though her life is falling apart. Elizabeth Marshall notes that the "representation of adolescent girlhood as a period of crisis" appears frequently in a variety of texts written for or about young women (118).

Ruby's period of crisis, manifested by her panic attacks, hinges on the problem that what she believes to be all of her support systems (her friends) have abandoned her so shortly after an unexpected breakup with Jackson. Ironically, the loss of her friends does not occur because she initially opposes Kim's relationship with Jackson. Ruby notes

that the other two members of their group, Nora and Cricket, are still friends with her in the days after Kim's news about Jackson. In fact, both of the other girls attempt to comfort Ruby, believing she'll accept the relationship once she gets "over the shock" (Lockhart 153). Nora makes her cupcakes and frames Ruby a photo of the two of them. Cricket changes the subject frequently and puts cartoons in Ruby's cubby at school to cheer her up. Nora even drives Ruby off campus for lunch so that she does not have to see Kim and Jackson together. As Ruby assesses the situation in her group, "They were happy for Kim, and sorry for me, and they figured I'd be too shattered to deal for a week or two—and then we'd all go back to normal" (153). But Ruby cannot go back to "normal," as her sadness changes to anger at Kim[2]. Surprisingly, Cricket and Nora (and really, even, Kim, who pretends everything is OK) do not "de-friend" Ruby until after she and Jackson kiss at a dance in front of two of their classmates. In Ruby's defense, it must be noted that this quite obviously is not a one-sided kiss—Jackson kisses her in return and only pushes her away when he sees their peers come onto the deck of the boat they're on, claiming "in a strange, loud, public voice 'What are you doing? That's not how it is, now. We're here as friends. You know I'm with Kim'" (165). This situation prompts another panic attack and Ruby is forced to catch a ride to her own after-dance party from her friend Noel. Before Ruby even gets to the party, most of the school attending the dance knows about the kiss. Nora, for one, tells Ruby she is tired and leaves the party immediately (In one of her many footnotes scattered throughout the book, Ruby sums it up by stating that Nora actually leaves "because she was mad at me on Kim's account and was basically never going to talk to me again" [167].)

What's the big deal about one kiss? Part of the group dynamic between Ruby, Kim, Nora, and Cricket frequently mentioned is their insecurities about boys and the agreement they have to share their experiences with boys with one another through what they call "The Boy Book." Most important of the ideas included in this book are the "Rules for Dating in a Small School." Three of these rules come into play during the Ruby-Kim-Jackson debacle:

> 4. Never, ever, kiss someone else's official boyfriend. If status is unclear, ask around and find out. Don't necessarily believe the boy on this question. Double-check your facts.
>
> 5. If your friend has already said she likes a boy, don't you go liking him too. She's got dibs.
>
> 6. That is—unless you're certain it is truly "meant to be." Because if it's meant to be, it's meant to be, and who are we to stand in the way of true love, just because Tate is so stupidly small. (Lockhart 39)

Thus, Ruby has broken Rule #4 by kissing Jackson. But, Ruby argues, Kim has broken Rule #5 and used Rule #6 as a way to get around her indiscretion. However, in the politics of friendship, Nora, Cricket, and Kim only see a problem with what Ruby has done. Nora point-blank tells Ruby that she no longer is friends with her because of the rule: "Nora's voice dripped with venom. 'You can't make out with someone else's boyfriend, Roo,' she said. 'That's so against the rules'" (48). When Ruby attempts to explain that she feels Jackson is more her boyfriend than Kim's and that Jackson kissed her in return, Nora refuses to listen:

> "But there are circumstances!" I cried. "Can't you think how I must have felt?"
>
> "I never thought you could betray one of us like that. It's so wrong." Nora flashed her lunch card and stepped out of the line, walking fast like she wanted to end the conversation.
>
> I followed. "Don't you even want to hear my side of it?"
>
> "What side could you possibly have?" She flipped her hair over her shoulder and turned away.
>
> "So you're dumping me as a friend? Without even talking about it?"
>
> "I don't even know what kind of friend you are, anymore," she said, turning back.
>
> I couldn't believe she was saying this. After what Kim had done to *me.* (Lockhart, italics in original 49)

It is significant that the other members of their group place more value on Kim's version of the story than Ruby's, pointing to a lack of true relational communication between the girls. This also further reflects the idea discussed in Chapter 2, that one member of a group can influence the others to the point that they begin to exclude a group member without questioning what the leader is saying. Although Kim never is described as the leader, she certainly is portrayed as much more vocal and self-assured than Ruby. It could be that her confidence allows her to convince herself that what she has done to Ruby is not wrong. By proclaiming that she and Jackson "are meant to be" and that Jackson is her Tommy Hazard (a term the girls use to describe their perfect mates), Kim asserts to herself and Ruby that she has not broken any of the rules set up for

the maintenance of the friendship when boys interfere. Because the time Kim has spent with Jackson while he and Ruby were dating went unknown to the other members of the group, she also gets away with convincing Cricket and Nora that she has done nothing wrong and that Ruby's public kiss with Jackson is far worse than her decision that she and Jackson are "meant to be," despite the fact that he is already dating Ruby.

Ruby and Kim became friends in kindergarten, at the lunch table. As mentioned in Chapter 1, their relationship is based on the shared environment of school. Although the girls' relationship contains shared experience, Lockhart places much emphasis on the role of school and school-related experiences in their friendship. And, unlike those presented by Brashares in her *Traveling Pants* series, Lockhart tends to discuss shared experiences that end up negatively impacting the girls' friendships (although this could be a by-product of Ruby's inner thoughts on where her friendship failed). For instance, one key factor in Ruby and Kim's tension over boys occurs at a school Halloween carnival. Ruby is paired with Finn, Kim's boyfriend, at a face-painting table. A discussion regarding their respective cat and panther costumes leads to Ruby removing Finn's makeup and reapplying it. When she looks up from her actions, Kim is staring at her, "eyes narrowed. 'Mine,' she mouthed, pointing at Finn" (92). Even in recalling a particular shared experience, such as the one described, Ruby notes the school context, emphasizing that a teacher paired her with Finn and that Kim ultimately argues with Finn regarding his lack of attention to her in the school parking lot, resulting in Ruby, Nora, and Cricket following her to the school bathroom. Of the experiences outside of school that Ruby discusses, rarely is Kim involved. When she is, they tend to reflect school-sponsored events or school-related issues, such as the annual school field trip. Perhaps it

is the sense that their friendship is based more on shared environment than shared experience that something trivial can destroy their friendship; in this case, who broke the rules of The Boy Book technically by kissing another's boyfriend in front of others and who broke them by skirting the rules and spending time with the other's boyfriend without anyone else's knowledge. The divide over who hurt the other most continues into the sequel, *The Boy Book*, even though Kim is absent for most of the book, on an exchange trip to Japan. Ruby, still attached to her memories of Kim, goes through the various pages of The Boy Book to tell the story of what happens when the characters return for the next school year. During her junior year, Ruby isn't entirely friendless, enjoying the company of her carpool buddy, Meghan, and Noel, with whom she shares art class, but something is still missing for her in terms of the closeness she once shared with Kim. Kim and Ruby nearly make up at a school retreat, with Kim apologizing for spreading rumors about her and causing a rift in the group. But, when Ruby tells Kim that she has seen Jackson with another girl while Kim has been away, Kim refuses to believe her and insists that Ruby is making it up, being spiteful, and lying in order to try to get back at Kim. Ruby, however, as part of her therapy, decides to give Kim back a part of what meant so much to her about their friendship, The Boy Book, in the hopes that Kim will recognize that she has told the truth about Jackson because she still cares for her friend. Ruby wraps the book up and attaches a note, telling Kim that she isn't sure they will be friends again, but that she hopes one day they can "remember what it used to be like without such a ginormous quantity of bitterness" (Lockhart, *The Boy Book* 183). Ruby admits her faults and her inability to let go of some things, but finally asserts herself to Kim, writing that she was telling the truth about Jackson.

Cricket, the last to join their group, quickly fades away from it, befriending more popular girls in school and still refuses to talk to Ruby in the second novel. Nora, on the other hand, recognizes what she and the others have done to Ruby when Kim leaves for Japan, leaving her friendless. Some introspection and honesty with Ruby allows the two of them to slowly rebuild their friendship in the second book, to the point that Ruby does not allow Noel to kiss her, knowing that Nora likes him. When Noel asks Ruby why he cannot kiss her, she explains about the "code" between girlfriends and tells him, "I don't want to lose her like I lost Kim and Cricket, and I'm trying to figure out how to be a good person, and it doesn't always come naturally to me" (183). Despite this being one of the hardest things she's done, Ruby recognizes her need for growth and determinedly makes her way toward building a new self-identity, one that accepts imperfections and works harder to understand who she is as an individual: Roo, comfortable without Kanga. It is this growth that allows Lockhart's books to move beyond the stereotypes of mass-market fiction for adolescent girls to offer a positive role model for issues of self-identity and self-worth. Christina Rose Dubb suggests that adolescent girls benefit from reading about characters like Ruby "who are working through just this sort of identity-fashioning themselves" (221). More female protagonists who struggle through inner anxieties and learn to grow from the problems they face certainly are a much-needed addition to fiction for young girls.

***Izzy, Willy-Nilly*: The Inability to Cope With Tragedy**

Isobel Lingard, or Izzy, the main character in Cynthia Voigt's *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* also can be considered a good representative of a girl who must learn to achieve self-

growth despite psychological duress. *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* perhaps best demonstrates the adolescent novel that includes a true sense of realism—mainly because of the deep psychological underpinnings of the novel Voigt explores as Izzy comes to grips with an immediate and devastating change in her life. At a party, Izzy's date drinks too much and insists on driving her home. Their car crashes into a tree, and Izzy's leg is crushed, forcing partial amputation, whereas he only suffers from minor wounds. Voigt immediately forces the reader to accept both the problem and Izzy's psychological struggle in the novel's opening paragraphs:

> "Isobel? I'm afraid we're going to have to take it off."
>
> "Take it off, take it off," I sang, like a vamp song; but I don't think I actually did, and I know my laughter stayed locked inside my head. I think my voice did too.
>
> "Isobel. Can you hear me?"
>
> I didn't know. I didn't think so.
>
> *It* was my leg. I went to sleep. (Voigt, *Izzy*, italics in original, 1)

Immediately apparent, the problem is the loss of Izzy's leg (although how the amputation came to be needed is not revealed immediately). More importantly, as the doctors explain what is to happen to her, Izzy's voice stays locked inside her head, a dilemma that continues to haunt her throughout the novel as she grapples with emotions she thinks no one else will understand. Joseph Michael Sommers defines the problem novel of Judy Blume as allowing girls to "share difficult feelings surrounding an otherwise vexed and occluded public discourse" (259). This definition applies to *Izzy Willy-Nilly* quite well when you consider Izzy's amputation, a topic frequently avoided by those around her,

excluding the hospital staff. For Izzy's public (which, for the most part, is a private audience of friends and family), the amputation becomes such a matter of visible difference that their best approach for dealing with it is to work around it or accommodate it, but never really talk to Izzy about it. Discussing the amputation as anything other than a matter of fact occurrence adds to the vexation of the topic and continues to force Izzy's voice and emotions further inside her head. Marilyn Chandler McEntyre posits that serious illness or disability affects teens in a peculiar way, mostly because of the difficulty of the coping process and acceptance of sudden disruption of their lives, remarking that "the irony of sudden illness or disability in their lives can seem especially cruel, poised as they are in the midst of preparation for independence and adulthood" (133).

As everything changes around her, Izzy has to come to terms with her disability herself, an emotional goal that eludes her. Expectedly, she has highs and lows during her rehabilitation and recovery. Often, Voigt expresses Izzy's concerns through a miniature version of the character, whose actions change as her moods change. Part of Izzy's psychological struggle with her new self stems from social loss as her three best friends slowly move away from her. Suzy, Lauren, and Lisa come to visit Izzy in the hospital a few days after the accident. Significantly, when she first sees them in her doorway, Izzy thinks, they "looked absolutely normal" (43)[3]. Lauren is beautiful and wants to be a model. Suzy is stylish and boy-crazy. Lisa is popular, quiet, and the best listener in the group. The girls only visit her in the hospital this once and it's forced and uncomfortable, with the other girls talking over Izzy part of the time and standing silent for most of the rest. Izzy immediately notices the difference in the group dynamic, commenting that in

the past, they could talk for hours: “Nothing happened to any of us that we didn’t talk over with our friends. And now we couldn’t think of anything to say” (Voigt 47). Izzy’s disability serves as a barrier that the girls cannot cross: They cannot understand what it means to be crippled and they cannot begin to understand Izzy’s psychological grappling with her amputation. Most importantly, they don’t want to understand. After her friends hurry out when an excuse to do so arises, they almost become only a matter of Izzy’s memory—she thinks about them and their friendship often, but the girls rarely come to visit or even call. McEntyre does not find this separation unusual, noting that crises of illness or accident “reconfigure relationships within families and among friends” (132).

Suzy’s separation from Izzy is not surprising. Extremely self-conscious, Suzy talks fast and often, diets frequently, and worries about getting dates. The first mention of her occurs when Izzy mentions Suzy was “jealous, but happy” Izzy has been asked out by Marco, a senior. Marco takes advantage of Suzy’s jealousy and desire for attention from boys to ask her to call Izzy and apologize for him. “He says he’s really sorry,” Suzy tells Izzy. “He says he hopes you won’t try to get even with him or anything, because he says everyone who was there would get in trouble too, not just him, and he can’t even remember what happened” (Voigt 33). Marco uses Suzy in an attempt to serve his own interests, just as Suzy forgoes her friendship with Izzy and begins dating him to serve her own interests and relieve her insecurities with boys. McEntyre credits Suzy’s changed allegiance to reflect her adolescent mindset: “the potential social consequences of this crisis are more real [to Suzy] than the profound physical and psychological consequences Izzy has to face” (141).

Suzy's preoccupation with Marco both divides her from Izzy and opens Izzy's eyes to the type of friend Suzy was. At a visit to Izzy at her home, Suzy wears a letterman's sweater and mentions wanting to look at formals for the upcoming Christmas dance, which only upperclassmen attend (all of the girls are sophomores). Suzy's secretive nature bothers Izzy immensely. Izzy presses Suzy about the sweater, but Suzy refuses to budge. This refusal allows Izzy to contemplate how the girls' perception of her has changed with her disability: "I knew—although I hadn't thought of it until just then—that if we had too many things we couldn't talk about, we'd never manage to stay friends. They were deciding what those things were, as if I was too stupid to notice: me being crippled, Lauren, boys" (Voigt 162). When her mother comes into the kitchen after Suzy and Lisa leave and asks when they are coming back, Izzy voices her recognition of the distance between her and her former best friends: "'I don't think they are. Coming back.'" And, then, thinking aloud, she admits that maybe she has been swayed by Suzy all along, telling her mother, "'I'd never realized before how much Suzy influences people'" (Voigt 163).

Suzy's separation from Izzy for a boy's attention is sad but realistic. Lauren's distance from Izzy depresses her more, mostly because Lauren's avoidance of Izzy is a direct result of her disability, whereas Suzy's arises from her own poor self-confidence. Lauren's self-consciousness relies on a need for perfection in appearance. In her study of the use of adolescent literature in psychology classrooms, Sharon Stringer connects a sense of idealism in adolescence with their enhanced sense of self-consciousness, stating that self-esteem for young women decreases in adolescence, leading to a heightened need for peer approval (2). Tracy Nashel adds to this idea when she comments that because

"girls cannot trust their own instincts, their sense of self becomes external, or about other people's responses and reactions to them" (13). At the hospital, where Lauren does not speak, Izzy characterizes her as always being able to put on a dazzling smile, even when she is bored (indeed, when Izzy catches her eye, Lauren gives her a fake smile). Izzy first wonders if Lauren fears hospitals or if they make her uncomfortable, noting that the idea of sickness, weakness, and dying frightens certain people. Izzy soon realizes that Lauren's attitude has changed not because she is afraid, but because she sees Izzy's amputation and cannot stomach the idea of imperfection. Pushing the tray table away, Izzy looks at her "leg-and-a-half," seeing how the stump protrudes, then the blanket falls flat. Moving to the mirror, Izzy sees a reflection she characterizes as "terrible," and the idea of Lauren's inability to accept a flawed Izzy peeks into the back of her subconscious: "I looked at myself and I knew exactly what Lauren felt like" (Voigt 53). At another moment, after Izzy returns to school, she approaches Lauren, who says hello, then moves away before Izzy can speak: "Lauren couldn't even risk standing next to someone visibly crippled," Izzy thinks to herself (Voigt 255).

It is perhaps Lauren who allows Izzy to see how appearances can be deceiving. People treat Izzy differently because of her handicap, but, she realizes, they treat Lauren differently because of her outer appearance of perfection. Seeing Lauren in the hallway, Izzy notices that she wears too much makeup, poses as if for a photographer, and smiles falsely at those who pass her. "It was terrible—it was as if she was enclosed in a glass cage, posing for the people who might be watching" (Voigt 254). With everything Lauren has going for her, Izzy wonders, why does she have to keep herself locked away? Even Lisa cannot understand when Izzy tries to ask if Lauren is OK, mentally and emotionally.

Lauren and Lisa have not changed, but Izzy has, along with her perspective on those around her. Izzy sees her friends more objectively, significant to the change in the way she sees herself. By being more aware of the real characteristics of those around her, Izzy also can be more aware of her own identity. Suzanne Reid notes that Voigt's books often center on this idea of recognizing one's identity through understanding relationships: "Unlike traditional morality which, especially for women, teaches selflessness, Voigt's ideal is self-definition, an independence based on the acknowledged support of loving relationships that do not seek to limit or dominate the other" (117).

Izzy finally confronts her own insecurities about the changing group dynamics at a New Year's Eve party at Lisa's house. Lisa attempts to be helpful, settling Izzy in a chair, bringing her sodas, and inviting people over to talk to her. Suzy hangs around some, teasing Izzy about how she should have warned her about Marco, and trying to pretend they are best friends again. And Lauren avoids her completely, leaving a room if Izzy enters it, "her face a mask," her avoidance a reassurance that she is not connected to Izzy's imperfection. Izzy sees that her friendships have changed forever; unlike her new friend Rosamunde, the others, especially Lauren, cannot see beyond her disability:

> Unlike Lisa, who thought I needed special attention to help me through a tough situation, or Suzy, who thought I was likely to turn out to be popular again, Lauren thought I was a cripple.
>
> She was right, I was. Am. But that wasn't all I was, I thought, and besides, it was bad enough, she didn't need to add to it by avoiding me that way, even though I thought I could see why she felt the way she did, because

> she was so frightened of what would happen to her if she wasn't perfect to look at . . . (Voigt 270)

Lauren's inability to accept Izzy's disability, combined with Suzy's false friendship and Lisa's unhelpful "thoughtfulness," cause the group dynamics to shift considerably. As McEntyre puts it, "none of them knows how to recalibrate what was once a functional distribution of power and popularity in their little circle, nor how to reconcile their limited notions of diplomacy with the kind of honesty needed to identify what expectations and behaviors need to change" (141). None of the girls can get beyond the disability; they cannot break down the barrier. For Suzy, Lauren, and Lisa, Izzy has been redefined not by who she is, but by what she's missing.

While Izzy struggles to understand her crumbling friendship with Suzy, Lauren, and Lisa, she also recognizes the power of a true, supportive friend through her relationship with Rosamunde, a character Izzy previously saw as strange and not "the kind of person who I had for friends" (176). Rosamunde, unlike the others, is unafraid to address Izzy's amputation and does so matter of factly—helping Izzy accept what has happened to her and recognize that although her body has changed, she essentially is the same person. At the same time, Rosamunde provides for Izzy the opportunity for growth. Rosamunde's frank observations about Izzy's friends allow Izzy to open her eyes to the true characteristics of Suzy, Lauren, and Lisa. For instance, when Lauren continually avoids Izzy in order to make sure she is not seen with someone less than perfect, it takes Rosamunde's dismissal for Izzy to recognize that she no longer cares about Lauren's opinion of her amputation. "What do you care what a person like that thinks?" Rosamunde asks Izzy. "'I don't,' I told her, which was true" (255). Where Izzy

previously worried about her friends' opinions of her, she now recognizes that they were within a false context—the preservation of an ideal peer group. Rosamunde also encourages Izzy to read more, helping Izzy see her talent for English, and take up needlework, which provides Izzy an outlet for working through her thoughts and emotions. Izzy also provides a supportive relationship for Rosamunde, helping her gain true self-confidence, giving her an outlet that she both wants and needs, and providing her with a friend in whom she can trust, "more than she trusted herself" (277).

Surprisingly, for Izzy it takes the recognition that her peers, Rosamunde included, have truly seen her disability as a part of her new self, and even forgotten her handicap, to fully accept what has happened to her. It's important to note that this peer group does not include her former friends, but new ones she has made since the accident. When Izzy returns to school after her rehabilitation, she joins the newspaper staff, frequently working late to help the older staff members, two of whom, Tony and Deborah, are considered to be the most well-rounded, popular students in Izzy's school. Just as her mother thoughtfully removes each of her right shoes and makes multiple skirts so she will not have to fit jeans over the cast on her opposite leg, Tony recognizes her disability and works to accommodate her handicap by taking her crutches each day, helping her into a chair, and then bringing her the crutches at the end of the day. One day, after weeks of this routine, Izzy and Tony have a conversation about the future, with Izzy advising him to make the most of the time he has left in his senior year. Satisfied with the conversation, Tony leaves, forgetting Izzy's crutches, leaving them leaning against the wall furthest away from her.

> I was glad I was alone as I stood up on my one leg and started hopping over to where the crutches were. When I had them under my arms, I suddenly realized—
>
> Tony Marcel had forgotten my crutches.
>
> Inside my head, the little Izzy gathered herself up and did an impossible backflip, and then another and another. I knew how she felt. (Voigt 276)

It takes this instance of someone else forgetting her disability to help Izzy's self-concept begin to flourish again. In fact, as her confidence in her new self-image grows, Izzy even musters the courage to step in when Marco, the boy who caused the accident, tries to hit on a freshman cheerleader, realizing that she has done for the young girl what no one else would do for her. Her problem, and her ability to face it, has brought her growth:

> I breathed in all of what I had seen, all I had just done. . . . It was like one of the old movies, where the homely girl in glasses is made over and looks at her new self in the mirror for the first time. . . . "Oh, wow," I thought. It was the richness of it, the richness in me; there was so much more than before. Better too, I had to admit it, although if I could have gone back and changed things I wouldn't have hesitated for one minute to do that. (Voigt 280)

Although Izzy admits that she would go back to her old life in an instant if given the opportunity, she also creates and enjoys the sensation of recognizing a new self, one that has the ability to see beauty and flaws in others. Her new consciousness also applies to herself—she can see that there is more to her than the "nice girl" persona she accepted at face value before. Suzanne Reid asserts that Voigt proposes being "nice" for the sake

of it is inherently inauthentic and that by learning to react authentically (as opposed to reacting how she *thought* she should react), Izzy develops knowledge of her own abilities as an individual:

> In this novel, Voigt is reiterating the theme of her early books, where characters come to know themselves by moving beyond their first impressions and self-centered subjective impressions and reaching out toward new experiences to learn more about themselves and their world. . . . Izzy's first experiences in accepting the limitations of having a body different from our society's ideal are painful but ultimately lead to a recognition of her more important strengths. (53–54)

Izzy's development of a new self-image fits with the agenda of many writers of young adult fiction, which plays well into child development theory (Erikson, among others, defines adolescence by the increased sense of identity). Nashel argues that young adult works address similar issues to adult works, notably the idea of the female self in today's culture, but add a sense of immediacy or a need for the adolescent's achievements in self-identity to be realized within the novel: "a protagonist in YA fiction cannot look back from middle-age . . . and wonder if anything has possibly changed; change must be possible *now*" (44).

Reinventing the Problem Novel: Realistic Fiction for Today's Teens

The notion of change or solution long has been a key aspect of young adult literature. Stemming from term for the English "social-problem" novel popularized in Victorian literature (Blom 12), the adolescent problem novel began in the late 1960s and

early 1970s as young adult authors began to take on a series of “taboo-breaking topics” such as drug abuse, abortion, divorce, and homosexuality (Cart 63). However, as Cart points out, the problem soon overtook the novel, leading to realistic fiction not the least bit realistic where character and plot points were concerned, for the sake of social concerns (65). Benjamin Lefebvre characterizes the problem novel as “a subgenre of young adult realistic fiction in which character development and plot become secondary to a social problem being debated” (291). Citing critics such as Perry Nodelman and Roberta Seelinger Trites, Lefebvre suggests that the problem novel traditionally has been thought of as didactic and subversive as the protagonist struggles toward a solution for the problem (291). Cart notes that problem novels for the sake of societal problems gradually were replaced with richer and more rewarding realistic fiction in the late 1970s (71).

However, it appears that with the recent re-emphasis on teen literature as a viable market for publishers, problem novels have resurfaced. These new problem novels tend to cover one of several devastating events or behaviors that force psychological problems for the protagonists, such as rape, abuse, substance abuse, or self-inflicted destructive behavior, like cutting (Miskec and McGee 164). In my opinion, realistic fiction must continue to be written for adolescents in order to provide them with a medium for understanding the many struggles they face. I argue that, taking contemporary themes in young adult literature into account, it may be time to widen the perceptions of the problem novel to include protagonists who face situations less about social problems than about individual trauma or difficulty. In this respect, more recent problem novels such as Patricia McCormick’s *Cut* are moving in the right direction. However, they continue to

need a richer sense of how the characters grow as a result of the psychological problems in order to accurately portray realistic fiction from which teens can benefit[4].

In her book *Future Girl*, which discusses adolescent girlhood in the twenty-first century, Anita Harris provides the impetus for the possibility of including problems of individuality alongside those of social need: "It is young people who must try to forge their futures by mastering the anxieties, uncertainties, and insecurities conjured up by unpredictable times" (5). In creating the problem novel, young adult authors should attempt to take an unprecedented event or an ongoing dilemma and show the growth of that character as he or she attempts to master the "anxieties, uncertainties, and insecurities" that arise as a result of the problem. While the problem typically has been considered to be one of society in the past, it is important to note that behaviors such as those described by Miskec and McGee are quickly becoming societal issues, especially for young women.

Further definition is still needed—for instance, Cynthia Voigt's *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* most certainly could fall into a new definition of a problem novel when events related to physical trauma are solely considered. Izzy's amputation serves as the unforeseen event that prompts a radical change in her life that she must come to terms with. Ben Nelms and Beth Nelms consider the problem of *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* to lie in the readers' response—they see the reader as having the capability to give weight to the problem, noting that "Izzy cannot erase the sequence of events, and this sobering thought challenges the reader to consider consequences that may come of apparently innocent choices" (83). However, *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* does bring up societal problems that should be considered, such teen drinking and partying. Further, the lack of charges pressed against the boy whose

drinking causes the accident plays into a community mindset of "kids will be kids." Finally, the novel confronts the notion of a boy's negative behavior toward girls; until Izzy intervenes, nobody stands up to Marco for the way he attempts to influence girls younger than he into poor decisions, such as drinking. These problems are quite minor, however, in comparison to Izzy's amputation.

However, I would suggest that problem novels do not have to center solely on physical trauma any more than I argue they must concern social problems only; psychology and mental or emotional trauma also can play a large role in the problem novel and in some cases can be the sole "problem" at hand. For example, in E. Lockhart's *The Boyfriend List* and *The Boy Book*, Ruby's emotional struggles over the breakup of her friendship group causes severe anxiety, leading to panic attacks. The pain she faces at losing her friends creates a psychological breakdown, one for which she must receive therapy, just as the characters in Patricia McCormick's *Cut* (which Miskec and McGee clearly classify as a problem novel for its representation of self-inflicted cutting behavior) must attend therapy in order to attempt to overcome their trauma which manifests in more obvious physical means, cutting and eating disorders among them. In my opinion, novels such as *The Boyfriend List*, which include a strong sense of the protagonist's problem as an inner struggle instead of a societal or community problem, expose the problems with the conventional definition of a problem novel within the genre of realistic fiction[5]. Realistic fiction, especially that for children, often attempts to be didactic; perhaps it is this mindset of the need to teach a lesson or comment on a societal problem that so limits problem novels. It may be harder to teach a lesson when the protagonist is facing a dilemma that is primarily internal, but that does not mean that realistic fiction should not

face this challenge and present characters who struggle with inner growth or dilemma. Sharon Stringer teaches adolescent novels by Robert Cormier as part of a unit on adolescence in university psychology courses. She suggests that psychological struggles for a sense of identity in literary protagonists can mold the idea of "strength of character" for adolescent readers, adding that "Individuals' responses to conflicts, pressures, and setbacks partially determine the outcomes of tests of character" (2).

Young adult authors, therefore, must incorporate conflicts, pressure, and setbacks (or problems) in order to connect with their young audiences (while keeping in mind that they are still adults). This is not impossible, however. Many current young adult authors (some of whom are quite young themselves) place their characters in contemporary settings and incorporate very realistic struggles for their characters in order to maintain a sense of connection. Tracy Nashel agrees, stating that she has found "the works of many writers of young adult fiction resonate with respect for teens and with a real sense of connection to teenagers, and their desires and struggles" (21). What more realistic of a struggle can you get for teens than relational anxieties? Being a friend is a very real situation, and one that most teens can relate to. Having tensions and problems within friendships is probably even more realistic. By discussing those tensions (and not sugar-coating them by creating happy endings), today's young adult authors can offer their readers a therapeutic method of examining friendships, seeing how problems with friends can play out, and recognizing that not all friendships are necessary. More importantly, such struggles appear to raise other issues for teen girls, such as identity, peer pressure, and problems like eating disorders, anxiety, or self-mutilation. In the pursuit of being

loved and of feeling accepted by friends and peers, teens face situations ripe for literary study and worthy of being included in the books they read.

CONCLUSION

WHERE YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE FOR GIRLS GOES FROM HERE

The title of this conclusion is a loaded one. For starters, I alone cannot begin to predict where young adult literature will go from here any more than the writers of the 1960s and 1970s could have predicted that the phenomenon of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* would revolutionize the children's and youth publishing industry. What I can do, however, is look at various ideas of young adult literature in the context of my goal for this project—to examine contemporary YA fiction for girls and determine its sense of realism for what girls experience as members of friendship groups—and attempt to make some judgments about where the field *might* be going and what authors and critics can do to ensure issues that matter to contemporary young women take their place in the texts they read.

The Young Adult Community of Readers

Katherine Bucher and M. Lee Manning provide a list of what they believe are the purposes of young adult literature, including:

- providing pleasure reading,
- increasing literacy and the ability to analyze literature,

- depicting the functions of societal institutions,
- demonstrating the range of human emotions,
- teaching about diverse peoples and cultures,
- providing vicarious experiences, and
- revealing the realities of life. (10)

It is this last purpose that interests me the most. How can we, as adult writers and critics, ensure that young adult literature accurately portrays the "realities of life?" In her well-reasoned article, "Whose Community? Where Is the 'YA' in YA Literature?," Gail Gauthier notes that all readers and writers have the desire to understand experience (70). However, she proposes, the adult experience is so varied from the youth experience that adults writing for young adults create the potential for a lack of community for child readers:

> Children do not write books. They don't decide which books will be accepted for publication. They don't edit them. They don't illustrate them or get to choose the illustrations. [. . .] They don't decide which books will be put on the shelves in bookstores. They don't decide which books are purchased by libraries. They don't decide which books will be read and discussed in classrooms. [. . .] They have absolutely no part in the process. And while most adults don't, either, *someone like them does*. (Gauthier, italics added 72)

I emphasize the idea that "someone like them does" for the purpose of pointing out Gauthier's basic message: children and teens do not share the same experiences and realities as the adults who write for them. This puts adult authors in a powerful position

of creating a sense of culture *they* wish to see for teens in their novels. If they disapprove of the actual teen culture, if, for instance, they despise backstabbing, gossip, aggression, or overt sexuality, those adults are not going to choose to write a novel like *Gossip Girl*. Then, again, if an adult is in the shoes of a marketing professional aiming to exploit the increase in teen spending, he or she might choose to find someone willing to pen the next *Gossip Girl*. Despite the fact that more teens have opportunities for discourse about their identities and experiences via the Web, presenting a new dynamic of teen expression through mediums such as Weblogs, the culture presented in young adult fiction continues to be that decided upon and created by adult authors.

I agree with Amy Pattee when she states that young adult literature should not reflect a singular version of youth ("Disturbing the Peace" 243), and I do not mean to suggest that the varied experiences, values, and cultures of adult authors are not pertinent to the future lives of adolescents. What I do wish to impart is that, being a relatively young woman, I often find myself scoffing at adolescent literature that attempts to emulate ideas of youth culture and fails miserably—and it may be the prejudices of youth—but I often find that these ideas of teen culture are not accurate, in part because they are not very realistic. Gauthier saw a similar trend in the books her sons read as youths, noting that they often told her, "Like *all* of this would really happen" (74). Take for example, the popular teen novel *ttyl*, which tells an entire story in text message. While the author, Lauren Myracle, attempts to be realistic by incorporating a variety of pop culture references and "IM speak," she fails at her attempt to accurately portray young women because she inevitably tries too hard to connect to the youth culture. Apparently, to Myracle, the youth culture means an obsession with sex (and while I recognize that sex

is a major topic of interest to youth, Myracle's inclusion of sex talk borders on pornographic). The girls exchange text messages with information ranging from masturbation, to pubic hair, to dancing topless on tables, along with the expected discussions of who is sleeping with (or giving oral sex to) their peers. But, it is the frequent and unexpected inclusion of graphic topics related to sex that feels unnatural. Growing up in the digital age, where my friends and I communicated nightly via instant messenger, it is hard to fathom three friends feeling comfortable enough to discuss such graphic topics through electronic means. Myracle's text shocks adult readers, but I can't imagine that it really resonates with teen readers as being realistic. Another good example is von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl* books, whose group of rich, White, New York-dwelling socialites do not represent the majority of teen culture. While books like these offer a welcome escape from reality for female adolescent readers, I believe that more emphasis should be placed on novels such as Lockhart's *The Boyfriend List*.

What *The Boyfriend List* offers that the others do not is the capability for adolescent literature to incorporate a good mix of youth culture with realistic representations of relationships and adolescent struggles. Ruby and Kim's breakup is plausible simply because it is a theme common to literature and media—a friend wanting to date and/or actually dating another friend's boyfriend. Further, the notion that Ruby feels as though her entire support system has left her when her other friends refuse to talk to her also feels quite accurate (although some teenagers feel comfortable turning to their parents to talk about relationships, many rely on friends [Holmes and Hutchison 17]). And, her panic attacks represent a growing number of youth facing the struggles of mental and emotional health issues. Psychologist Bonnie Zucker cited research to

estimate that about one in ten children suffer from anxiety disorders, including panic attacks, and that, at some point in their lives, approximately twenty percent of children and adolescents will meet the official criteria for an anxiety disorder (12–13). Although Lockhart provides a good example of what young adult literature can aspire to, the truth remains that, as Amy Pattee suggests, "the reality this type of writing portrays is—like our symbolic concepts of adolescence—closer to our beliefs about the world and not necessarily reflective of the world itself" ("Disturbing the Peace" 252).

Musings on This Project

Naturally, as I undertook this project, I did so with an eye toward focusing only on friendships. But as introspection set in, along with mountains of research, I began to recognize that the idea of friendship encompasses so many variables. Friends are not made easily, nor are friendships always perfect. You cannot be a good friend—a truly good friend that is—without first understanding your own individuality and place in the world. For some girls, this requires being objectified by others, creating a sense of subjectivity, that, while potentially false, still defines your place in the relationship. But some girls have the power to break free of that objectivity and develop a new subjective self, often in the form of change to the group.

Whether they read to find a sense of self or to escape from reality, girls can use young adult literature as a means of understanding and learning to cope with realistic issues, including balancing relationships with other girls and women. Positive portrayals of friendship, such as those in Brashares' series are definitely needed, but at the same time, authors who present what adults may find to be negative messages, like von

Ziegesar, also occupy much-needed voids in young adult literature. Recently, I participated in a forum for Cogito.org, a Web site sponsored by Johns Hopkins University's Center for Talented Youth. I was invited to serve as an expert on book and magazine editing through my role as a professional editor. However, the conversation with the students quickly turned to literature for young adults. One student, named thdgirl, posting on a forum thread that sprung from this side conversation, noted that she enjoyed books like *Gossip Girl* in part because they offered her an avenue to see different ways of life and different attitudes toward everyday situations, but also because she felt there was a message to be garnered from the books: "I think of it as a moment of redemption or clarity. She who dies the most popular, or with the most shoes, or having been drunk the most, still dies" (3). thdgirl's recognition that *Gossip Girl*, while not being the most intellectually or literarily sound work, has the ability to promote food for thought for those reading and responding to the novel is significant to the future of YA literature—we have to realize as adult critics and writers that just because we see a book as stereotyping or negatively representing an aspect of society, the girls who read the books may find tools for understanding themselves and their cultures as teenager.

It is my hope that more young adult authors will begin to embrace themes such as friendship and the implications of peer groups and tell the stories of these themes in varied ways. Brashares, Cabot, Lockhart, von Ziegesar, and Voigt can serve as models for young adult authors looking to reinvigorate the community of young adult readers though actively considering what their lives are really like and pursuing publication of their stories of friendship—both the good and the bad.

APPENDIX

END NOTES

Chapter 1

1. Such relationships also occur among lesbian couples, whose friendships with their partners encompass mutual care for one another in combination with the intense passion and love of a romantic relationship. Lasser notes that some scholars have tried to point to a lesbian connection in such sisterhoods, a topic that most definitely merits critical study. However, because the novels discussed in this paper concern only heterosexual friendships, a discussion of lesbian friendships falls beyond the scope of this paper.

2. Just as Lena expresses that she and Effie have little in common, Effie seems not to need Lena because she is more social, outgoing, and open with her emotions than Lena. However, as the series progresses, their relationship as sisters evolves to where they realize that they need each other more.

3. As Chapter 3 will discuss, without the shared environment of school, the friends' breakup also might not have occurred.

4. Much is made of the importance of the glasses in criticism of this novel, in part because Hildy's glasses allow her to see more clearly, reflecting her black-and-white moral sensibility, but prohibit her from truly seeing in the way to which she has grown

accustomed—by emphasizing the world around her more clearly, Hildy's mind becomes muddled by the strong images, speeding up her decision making and hindering her original illusions of people. For example, Hildy's volleyball play is hampered by the glasses, which she eventually removes during games to allow the ball to "float" toward her. She also remarks that where she had once pictured her teammate Bess as goddess-like, yet after wearing her glasses, she notices the way Bess slouches and crosses her arms to de-emphasize her chest and stomach area. Hildy tells Ann that her glasses also have allowed her to characterize Bess as vain, seeing that "her eyes seek notice" of her beauty (Voigt 139).

Chapter 2

1. Trites argues that an adolescent's affiliation with a group also serves as a limiting factor, adding that "Identity politics matter most in adolescent literature, however, in terms of how an adolescent's self-identifications position her within her culture" (*Disturbing the Universe* 47). I tend to agree with Trites, in the sense that groups define their own culture and girls take on specific roles within those groups *and* begin to identify with those roles.

2. The number of books dealing with the aggression of girls has exploded since the release of Simmons' book, *Odd Girl Out* in 2002, which she claims to be the first to really look at the topic. Some more recent titles include: *Sugar and Spice and No Longer Nice: How We Can Stop Girls' Violence* (Prothrow-Stith), *Mean Girls Grow Up* (Dellasega), and *See Jane Hit* (Garbarino).

3. Thus the act of placing girls in subject roles becomes one of objectification. Building on Lacanian ideas, as well as criticism by Julia Kristeva on feminine discourse, Sally Kitch identifies language as a tool for both female repression and expression in literature (67). By repressing a girl's identity through language, Queen Bees and other dominant females can objectify another girl to the point that she begins to accept her subject positions. Thus, in the Foucauldian definition of power, when a girl accepts a role given to her by another girl, she accepts her status as a subordinate member of the group.

5. In her research on depictions of traditional femininity and sexism in children's novels, Angela E. Hubler interviewed more than 40 girls, concluding that what girls read can "play a role in their construction of female identity" (90).

Chapter 3

1. As many sociologists, Emily White and Peggy Orenstein among them, have noted, the promiscuous male often is considered to be a "stud," whereas a female who engages in intercourse with multiple partners is frequently referred to as a "slut."

2. Humorously, Lockhart has Ruby express her feelings in the following way: "I thought she was a conniving, lying, man-stealing bitch, and I hoped she would fall in a volcano and die a horrible lava death" (153). Passages like these make Ruby's voice appear so realistic that it's easy to forget she isn't a real person venting her feelings to you.

3. It has be wondered if the picture of the other girls as "normal" is an unconscious message to herself that Izzy no longer fits the stereotype of "normal" with her disability. The idea of normal vs. abnormal arises again on page 162, when the girls visit Izzy at home. Already sitting at the kitchen table in her wheelchair when they arrive, Izzy notes

that she cannot leave the table during their visit for the fear that doing so would "break the illusion that we were all just like normal . . . Sitting around the table you barely noticed that I was in a wheelchair. You couldn't see that I was, so we were just like before—as long as I didn't move" (Voigt 162).

4. McCormick does a good job in *Cut* of balancing a discussion of Callie's problem with her psychological duress, but Callie does not show much growth. Despite many sessions of therapy, she continues to cut herself. After running away from Sea Pines, her treatment facility, Callie expresses some desire to change, by asking her father to return her to the facility (McCormick 147). However, unlike Ruby, whose growth clearly is displayed in *The Boy Book* as she attempts to make amends, recognizes that she needs to continue in therapy despite feeling better, and thinks carefully about her actions regarding friends and boys, Callie's future is left open—she very well could go back to Sea Pines and make an effort to move past her cutting habits. Or, she could continue to ignore the therapeutic measures and find new means for self-destructive behavior.

5. Benjamin Lefebvre also sees a problem with the problem novel where characters are concerned, citing Perry Nodelman's viewpoint that protagonists in problem novels provide a single form of truth and a confirmation of only one individual's opinions and values (292). Lefebvre goes on to describe two homosexual characters in adolescent novels dealing with the problem of what one should do with a friend who is discovered to be gay, then asserts that because readers perhaps are led by the problem novel to look beyond the protagonists' decisions about their friendships and conclude that those decisions are wrong or misguided. He adds that "perhaps such ambiguity in the distancing of the protagonist remains the biggest problem of all" (292).

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