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After All This Time: A Study of the Appeal of Young Adult Fiction Series Among Young Readers

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After All This Time:
A Study of the Appeal of Young Adult Fiction Series
Among Young Readers

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the a degree
from the South Carolina Honors College

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Introduction and Purpose of Research

What is it about young adult fiction that is so addictive? Why do teenagers return to the same characters and situations over and over again in series fiction? This study explores the significance of young adult fiction series with a scientific approach, through the surveying of teenagers on the aspects of those series that are so meaningful to them. Through this study, a greater understanding of the way readers interact with literature is achieved.

The research portion of this study is largely inspired by *Reading the Romance* by Janice Radway¹, an investigation that explores the attraction of romance novels to women and the style and content of those novels. In that study, Radway focuses on repetitive and similar themes within the romance genre, and constructs an argument as to what may be the driving force behind that genre's popularity. Furthermore, she suggests analyzing the action of reading through multiple lenses that each focus on a different aspect in order to understand the complexity of the experience, such as defiance, complicity, and escapism.²

This study is constructed with a similar analysis, with a shifted focus to the following four young adult fiction series: *Harry Potter*, *Divergent*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Twilight*. Through this research, a better understanding of what makes popular literature popular is achieved, as there are compelling reasons why a young adult would turn to a book over other forms of entertainment. Lastly, the strands of commonality that weave through these series and prove attractive to a majority of young readers are also identified.

General plot summaries of each series can be found in the Appendix.

¹ Radway, Janice A. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1984. Print.

² O'Brien, Amy A. *Negotiating the Interconnections of Sociality, Identity, Fan Activism and Connectivity within the Twilight Community*. Diss. U of South Carolina, 2015. Print.

Comparative Publication and Cinematic Successes of Each Series

Before reviewing survey data and hypotheses, it is important to introduce and note the relative popularity of each series. It is crucial to understand which young adult fiction series are financially and numerically the most popular, as that understanding provides initial clues as to what young readers enjoy and what they don't. Then, this study will look more deeply into the characteristics of each series and attempt to find the markers of what constitutes a good young adult book.

The Harry Potter Series

The Harry Potter franchise is a behemoth, encompassing books, films, clothing, video games, worldwide Quidditch tournaments and associations³, and an entire theme park called The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, a part of Universal Orlando Resort. In London, fans can head to Kings Cross Station and pose with half of a shopping cart at Platform 9 ³/₄, or journey to the Harry Potter studio in Leavesden and take a tour for £44.95 which often needs to be booked weeks or months in advance for availability.⁴ Fans of the series no longer have to look to the books for the Harry Potter experience; rather, that world can now be found in real life.

The estimated worth of the Harry Potter franchise, reported by CNBC in 2014, is about \$24 billion.⁵ That number is expected to rise with the upcoming release of movies based on Rowling's Potter-related book *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, with the first slated for cinematic release in November of 2016.⁶ The creator of the franchise, author J.K. Rowling, is worth more than \$1 billion.

The franchise began with a single book- *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, published in 1997 and later retitled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* upon release in the United States in 1998. That book, the thinnest of the series at about 300 pages, hit the top of the *New York Times* best-selling fiction list in 1999, where it remained for a year.

Following *Sorcerer's Stone* was *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, released in the U.S. a year later in 1999, and the remaining five books of the septet. The following chart illustrates the publication dates, length, and estimated financial success of each individual novel of the series. It should be noted that the sales of each book are

³ "The International Governing Body for the Sport of Quidditch." *About the Sport*. International Quidditch Association. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.

⁴ "Ticket Information For The Warner Bros. Studio Tour London." *Warner Bros Studio Tour London*. Warner Bros Studios. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.

⁵ Giuliano, Karissa. "The World's First Billionaire Author Is Cashing in." *CNBC*. NBCUniversal, 31 July 2015. Web. 18 Feb. 2016.

⁶ "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, 19 Dec. 2015. Web. 4 Feb. 2016.

largely guesswork, as the downloaded e-books are exclusively sold through Pottermore, a website launched by Rowling in July of 2011.⁷

Table 1.1: The Harry Potter Series Book Publication Sales

	U.S. Release date	Pages (in U.S. edition)	Estimated worldwide sales ⁸
<i>Sorcerer's Stone</i>	September 1, 1998	309	107 million
<i>Chamber of Secrets</i>	June 2, 1999	341	77 million
<i>Prisoner of Azkaban</i>	September 8, 1999	435	Unknown ⁹
<i>Goblet of Fire</i>	July 8, 2000	734	66 million
<i>Order of the Phoenix</i>	June 21, 2003	870	55 million
<i>Half-Blood Prince</i>	July 16, 2005	652	65 million
<i>Deathly Hallows</i>	July 21, 2007	759	44 million

Each book release has been increasingly met with fan fervor and devotion, with midnight book releases and bookstore parties common. When *Goblet of Fire* was released in 2000, it was reported that FedEx trucks were deployed strictly to carry the thousands of copies of the book. Preselling was also very common, and in 2000, Amazon and Barnes & Noble together saw presales of over 700,000 copies.¹⁰ Furthermore, each book release broke the previous record of fastest selling novel of all time, as *Deathly Hallows* sold 15 million copies in its first 24 hours, beating *Half-Blood Prince*'s record of 11 million copies and *Order of the Phoenix*'s five million.¹¹

Furthermore, after author J.K. Rowling announced on February 10, 2016 that she was going to release for sale the script for the stage play *The Cursed Child*, commonly referred to as the eighth addition to the Harry Potter literary franchise, bookstores such as Books-a-Million have already begun planning midnight release parties.¹²

The corresponding movie franchises of each book, distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures, have also enjoyed incredible success in the United States and around the world,

⁷ Aquino, Judith. "The Brilliant Methods That Made Harry Potter A \$15 Billion Brand." *Business Insider*. Business Insider, Inc, 2011. Web. 12 Jan. 2016.

⁸ Sims, Andrew. "Harry Potter – History of the Books." *Hypable Fandoms*. Hypable, 5 Apr. 2012. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.

⁹ Exact data unknown as e-book sales through *Pottermore* are not reported publicly.

¹⁰ Fierman, Daniel. "The "Harry Potter" Craze." *EW.com*. Entertainment Weekly, 21 July 2000. Web. 15 Jan. 2016.

¹¹ "The Celebrity 100: #9 J.K. Rowling." *Forbes.com*. Forbes, 6 Nov. 2008. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.

¹² Sims, Andrew. "Booksellers Already Planning 'Cursed Child' Midnight Release Parties Because They Know You Need Them." *Hypable Fandoms*. Hypable, 12 Feb. 2016. Web. 14 Feb. 2016.

and those figures can be found in the table below. Overall, with a \$1.5 billion total budget for the eight movies- *Deathly Hallows* was split into two parts- the combined worldwide gross equaled about \$7.7 billion.¹³

Table 1.2: The Harry Potter Series Domestic Box Office Sales

	U.S. Release date	Domestic box office sales ¹⁴
<i>Sorcerer's Stone</i>	November 16, 2001	\$317.6 million
<i>Chamber of Secrets</i>	November 14, 2002	\$262 million
<i>Prisoner of Azkaban</i>	May 31, 2004	\$249.5 million
<i>Goblet of Fire</i>	November 18, 2005	\$290 million
<i>Order of the Phoenix</i>	July 11, 2007	\$292 million
<i>Half-Blood Prince</i>	July 15, 2009	\$302 million
<i>Deathly Hallows Part 1</i>	November 19, 2010	\$296 million
<i>Deathly Hallows Part 2</i>	July 15, 2011	\$381 million

The Twilight Saga

Although the *Twilight* franchise has weathered its fair share of criticism for plot and character development in both its books and films, it has still succeeded financially. It has inspired clothing, school supplies, posters, body pillows, lingerie, and even divisive teams of fans- Team Edward vs. Team Jacob, with, of course, corresponding team merchandise. With a devoted fan base, the franchise is one of the most successful among young adult fiction series.

Twilight, the first novel of the series authored by Stephenie Meyer, was published in 2005 and followed by three others within three years- *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*. The novel publication dates, lengths, and estimated book sales can be found in the table below.

To celebrate the publication release of *Eclipse*, at which point a significant fan base had been established, parties took place at more than 1,500 bookstores in 2007 and Meyer was joined by 2,000 fans at a sold-out event at the Nokia Theatre in New York. While at that event, *Twilight* fans were able to get signed autographs and participate in a Q&A with Meyer; 250,000 other fans watched the event via online streaming on *Entertainment Weekly's* website.¹⁵ Additionally, Meyer hosted an "Eclipse Prom" at

¹³ TIME Staff. "Because It's His Birthday: Harry Potter, By the Numbers." *Time*. Time Inc., 31 July 2013. Web. 15 Jan. 2016.

¹⁴ "All Time Domestic Box Office Results." *All Time Domestic Box Office Results*. Box Office Mojo. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

¹⁵ Memmott, Carol. "Record-breaking Sales for 'Breaking Dawn'" *USATODAY.com*. USAToday, 4 Aug. 2008. Web. 4 Dec. 2015.

Arizona State University. When tickets for the prom sold out in seven hours, Meyer agreed to hold a second prom that same day. Those tickets sold out within four hours.¹⁶

Table 2.1: The Twilight Saga Book Publication Sales

	U.S. Publication date	Pages (in U.S. edition)	Estimated worldwide book sales ¹⁷
Twilight	October 5, 2005	544	\$370 million
New Moon	September 6, 2006	563	\$322.5 million
Eclipse	August 7, 2007	629	\$262.5 million
Breaking Dawn	August 2, 2008	756	\$705.5 million

Three years after the series' literary debut, the first of four films was released and quickly earned almost \$200 million in North American ticket sales, contributing to a net profit of over \$1 billion. The *Twilight* film franchise also enjoyed success overseas, achieving a global box office gross of \$2.5 billion.¹⁸ The individual movie release dates and North American ticket sales can be found in a table below.

Table 2.2: The Twilight Saga Domestic Box Office Sales

	U.S. Release date	North America ticket sales ¹⁹
Twilight	November 21, 2008	\$192.8 million
New Moon	November 20, 2009	\$296.6 million
Eclipse	June 30, 2010	\$300.5 million
Breaking Dawn Part 1	November 18, 2011	\$282.3 million
Breaking Dawn Part 2	November 16, 2012	\$292.3 million

Financial success notwithstanding, the films were also met with quite a bit of criticism. *New Moon* was hit with a 28% rating on popular film analysis website Rotten Tomatoes, with the Critic Consensus noting, "The Twilight Saga's second installment may satisfy hardcore fans of the series, but outsiders are likely to be turned off by its slow pace, relentlessly downcast tone, and excessive length."²⁰ In comparison, the lowest

¹⁶ Irwin, Megan. "Charmed." *Phoenix New Times*. Phoenix New Times, 12 July 2007. Web. 16 Dec. 2015.

¹⁷ "Total Twilight Franchise Sales / Revenue." *Statistic Brain*. Statistic Brain Research Institute, 12 July 2015. Web. 2 Dec. 2015.

¹⁸ Pomerantz, Dorothy. "Looking At 'Twilight' By The Numbers." *Forbes*. Forbes Magazine, 16 Nov. 2012. Web. 23 Feb. 2016.

¹⁹ "All Time Domestic Box Office Results." *All Time Domestic Box Office Results*. Box Office Mojo. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

²⁰ "The Twilight Saga: New Moon." *Rotten Tomatoes*. Flixster, Inc. Web. 3 Feb. 2016.

rated *Harry Potter* film on the same website, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1*, earned a 78% rating. Furthermore, *Breaking Dawn Part 1* was nominated for 8 Razzies, awarded to the worst films every year.²¹

The Hunger Games Series

Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist of the *Hunger Games* trilogy, is known in the books as “the girl on fire.” The frenzy surrounding the trilogy- encompassing books, major motion picture films, jewelry, clothing, tote bags, home furnishings, and even shot glasses²²- is also on fire, and reportedly worth over \$4 billion.²³

Suzanne Collins’ trilogy consists of *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*. In August of 2017, Amazon announced that the trilogy had officially surpassed the *Harry Potter* series as a top seller and had sold over 65 million copies. Sara Nelson, editorial director of books at Amazon, noted, “Interestingly, this series is only three books versus Harry Potter’s seven, and to achieve this result in just four years is a great testament to both the popularity of the work, and, we think, the growth in reading digitally during that time.”²⁴ The individual publication dates and estimated book sales can be found in a table below.

The publications of the *Hunger Games* books were also celebrated through midnight release parties at bookstores around the country. At the official “Mockingjay Midnight Madness event” in New York City in 2010, fans enjoyed a tarot card reader, magician, and face painting. Minutes before midnight, Collins read a passage from the novel and gave our signed copies of the book.²⁵

Table 3.1: The Hunger Games Series Book Publication Sales

	U.S. Publication date	Pages (in U.S. edition)	Estimated book sales ²⁶
The Hunger Games	September 14, 2008	374	28 million copies / \$169 million
Catching Fire	September 1, 2009	391	19 million copies / \$99 million

²¹ Pomerantz, Dorothy. "Looking At 'Twilight' By The Numbers." *Forbes*. Forbes Magazine, 16 Nov. 2012. Web. 23 Feb. 2016.

²² "The World of the Hunger Games Gifts." *CafePress*. CafePress Inc. Web. 12 Nov. 2015.

²³ "Hunger Games Total Franchise Revenue." *Statistic Brain*. Statistic Brain Research Institute, 1 September 2015. Web. 2 Dec. 2015.

²⁴ Bosman, Julie. "Amazon Crowns 'Hunger Games' as Its Top Seller, Surpassing Harry Potter Series." *Media Decoder Blog*. The New York Times, 17 Aug. 2012. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

²⁵ Wilkinson, Amy. "'Mockingjay' Official Midnight Release Party: We Were There!" *MTV Books*. MTV, 24 Aug. 2010. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

²⁶ "Hunger Games Total Franchise Revenue." *Statistic Brain*. Statistic Brain Research Institute, 1 September 2015. Web. 2 Dec. 2015.

Mockingjay	August 24, 2010	390	18 million copies / \$89 million
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Lions Gate Entertainment recognized the potential success of bringing the books to film, and signed on to produce the film adaptation of *The Hunger Games* in March 2009, before the second installment of the book series was even published. Author Suzanne Collins decided to adapt the novel herself, and the movie was released in March of 2012. In its opening weekend, it earned more than \$152 million.²⁷ The movie was then followed by three others, as *Mockingjay* was split into two separate films. Release dates and estimated sales can be found in a table below.

Table 3.2: The Hunger Games Series Domestic Box Office Sales

	U.S. Release date	Domestic box office sales ²⁸
The Hunger Games	March 23, 2012	\$408 million
Catching Fire	November 22, 2013	\$424.6 million
Mockingjay Part 1	November 21, 2014	\$337.1 million
Mockingjay Part 2	November 20, 2015	\$281.7 million

The Divergent Trilogy

Divergent, the newest young adult fiction series of the four included in this study, was written by Veronica Roth and published in April of 2011. That same year, Summit Entertainment, the film production company that released *Twilight*, purchased the media rights for the book.²⁹ The film adaptation was released in March of 2014 and generated over \$288 million worldwide at the box office.

The novel series is made up of three books- *Divergent*, *Insurgent*, and *Allegiant*, and has inspired fan websites, clothing, faction-inspired jewelry, interactive quizzes to determine which faction fans would join, and even tattoos “that would make Tris Prior [the protagonist of the *Divergent* series] proud.”³⁰ The individual novel publication dates

²⁷ "Lionsgate Picks up Hunger Games." *Reuters*. Ed. Sheri Linden. Thomson Reuters, 17 Mar. 2009. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

²⁸ "All Time Domestic Box Office Results." *All Time Domestic Box Office Results*. Box Office Mojo. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

²⁹ Brissey, Breia. "Summit Entertainment's Post-'Twilight' Plans Are 'Divergent'" *MTV News*. MTV, 18 Mar. 2011. Web. 2 Feb. 2016.

³⁰ Murphy, Shaunna. "18 'Divergent' Fan Tattoos That Would Make Tris Prior Proud." *MTV News*. MTV, 11 Mar. 2015. Web. 9 Feb. 2016.

and lengths can be found in a table below. Overall, the trilogy was estimated to have sold 6.7 million copies in 2013, the year the last novel was released.³¹

Table 4.1: The Divergent Trilogy Book Publication Information

	U.S. Publication date	Pages (in U.S. edition)
Divergent	April 25, 2011	487
Insurgent	May 1, 2012	525
Allegiant	October 22, 2013	526

On its opening weekend in 2014, the first film adaptation of the trilogy earned \$4.9 million, a number that soon swelled to \$150 million in North America ticket sales.³² A year later, the second film, *Insurgent*, was cinematically released but earned \$20 million less. Individual film release dates (and anticipated release dates) and box office sales can be found in a table below. It should be noted that the third novel of the trilogy, *Allegiant*, is set to be split into two films- *Allegiant* and *Ascendant*.³³

Table 4.2: The Divergent Trilogy Domestic Box Office Sales

	U.S. Release date	Domestic box office sales ³⁴
Divergent	March 21, 2014	\$150.9 million
Insurgent	March 20, 2015	\$130.2 million
Allegiant	March 18, 2016	N/A
Ascendant	March 24, 2017	N/A

One reason for the decline in ticket sales may be due to the criticisms that followed *Divergent* in 2014. Andrew Barker, a critic for *Variety*, noted, “Unlike the ‘*Harry Potter*’ series’ tangible, fully dimensional Hogwarts or ‘*The Hunger Games*’ colorfully variegated districts, ‘*Divergent*’s vision of new Chicago doesn’t have much to

³¹ Roback, Diane. "Facts & Figures 2013: For Children's Books, Divergent Led the Pack." *PublishersWeekly.com*. Publishers Weekly, 14 Mar. 2014. Web. 9 Feb. 2016.

³² Lang, Brent. "'Divergent' Debuts to \$4.9 Million, Lionsgate Greenlights 'Insurgent'." *The Wrap Movies*. The Wrap, 21 Mar. 2014. Web. 9 Feb. 2016.

³³ Galuppo, Mia. "Final Two 'Divergent' Films Get New Titles, Logos." *Heat Vision*. The Hollywood Reporter, 10 Sept. 2015. Web. 9 Feb. 2016.

³⁴ "All Time Domestic Box Office Results." *All Time Domestic Box Office Results*. Box Office Mojo. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

distinguish it from a standard-issue post-apocalyptic pic.”³⁵ Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* wrote,

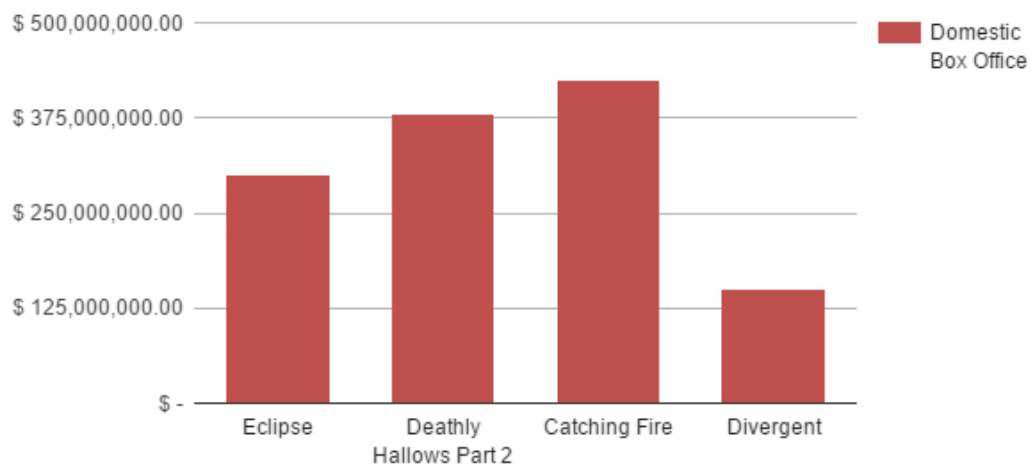
At the risk of alienating young-adult hearts, the faithful but dramatically flat film version of *Divergent*, from Veronica Roth's 2011 bestseller, couldn't stir palpitations in shut-ins. It's that bland and lifeless... At least *The Hunger Games* spawned two terrific movies and a breakthrough star in Jennifer Lawrence. Onscreen, *Divergent* ignites only indifference.³⁶

However, the success of the two remaining trilogy films remains to be seen, as the established fan base may well push North America ticket sales above \$100 million for each- certainly not a sum of money to scoff at.

Conclusions

Below is a graph illustrating the difference in the greatest domestic box office sales for each series, which may indicate a contrast in the size of each fan base. As estimated book sales are guesses at best, a comparison of the success of each film series may provide a slightly more accurate picture of the differing popularities of each work among all age groups.

Graph 1.1: Comparison of Each Series' Best Domestic Box Office Performances



From the data illustration above, it is clear that the *Hunger Games* franchise may be the most popular among fans of young adult fiction series, followed by *Harry Potter*

³⁵ Barker, Andrew. "Film Review: 'Divergent'" *Variety Film*. *Variety*, 16 Mar. 2014. Web. 19 Jan. 2016.

³⁶ Travers, Peter. "Divergent." *Rolling Stone*. *Rolling Stone*, 20 Mar. 2014. Web. 9 Feb. 2016.

and *Twilight*. The least financially successful film franchise is *Divergent*, and although it has another two films yet to be released, it is improbable that those would earn more than the more successful series of this study. This information supports the idea that young readers may enjoy fiction series that have accompanying films, an idea that is supported by the majority of survey participants who said they have seen the movies inspired by the four series included in this study. It also begs the question of how many young adults are inspired to read a written series after viewing the accompanying films, which future research should attempt to examine.

Research Methodology

To best gauge the interests and motivations of young adults in reading young adult fiction series, a survey of about 20 questions was created. Those questions covered some background information in reading interests, such as at what age participants began reading fiction series and how often they currently read them, and some questions about what they look for in compelling stories and protagonists. A copy of the online survey can be found in the Appendix.

Choice of Survey and Distributor

A survey was chosen as the research method to most efficiently obtain a large amount of participant data. Furthermore, surveys are easy to edit, distribute, and control with question randomization. Participants, who come from schools noted below, were not financially incentivized to fill out the surveys, but rather chose to take them at any point within the designated time frame. It took about six minutes to complete.

The online survey producer and distributor chosen for this study was Survey Monkey, which freely allows users to create and edit surveys, customize question layouts and randomization, test surveys with a preview link, email the final survey to participants, and analyze collected data. The collected data can be viewed en masse or users can select individual participants to view their answers.

Selection of Survey Participants

To most accurately obtain a picture of young adult reading interests, differently aged participants were surveyed. As the study seeks to understand young adults, participants ranged in age from 12-18, which covers both middle and high schoolers.

Surveys were distributed online to students at Ocean Bay Middle School and the Academy of Arts, Science and Technology (AAST), both of which belong to Horry County Schools in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Both schools provided diversity in student

ages, gender, and reading level. Other identifying information of the students, including name or address, were not provided to protect student privacy and anonymity. Students at Ocean Bay were invited to participate via email by Taylor Wims and Marion Touzel, who teach language arts to 7th and 8th graders, respectively. Students at AAST were invited to participate via an online announcement on their media center website. All students were eligible to take the survey.

In total, 319 students participated in the research in February. While the Ocean Bay Middle School students live in Myrtle Beach, AAST students come from anywhere in Horry County, which encompasses Myrtle Beach, Conway, Loris, North Myrtle Beach, Surfside Beach, and Aynor. That school was selected for this research due to that geographic diversity, as it provides a more broad sense of young adult interest beyond one city.

The spread of participant ages is as follows-

- 12 year-olds: 47
- 13 year-olds: 79
- 14 year-olds: 61
- 15 year-olds: 26
- 16 year-olds: 41
- 17 year-olds: 46
- 18 year-olds: 19

All collected student data has been used for analysis in this study.

Breakdown of Survey Results by Series

Full survey data can be found in the Appendix.

Harry Potter

How many participants have...

Read the series:	36% (115)
Read fanfiction based on the series:	17.6% (73)
Seen movies based on the series:	58.5% (186)

Participants ranked the series...

First (their favorite):	29.4% (93)
Second:	12% (38)
Third:	11.1% (35)
Fourth:	10.1% (32)

Hunger Games

How many participants have...

Read the series:	55.5% (177)
Read fanfiction based on the series:	23.4% (73)
Seen movies based on the series:	82.1% (261)

Participants ranked the series...

First (their favorite):	34.2% (108)
Second:	30.4% (96)
Third:	8.2% (26)
Fourth:	3.5% (11)

Twilight

How many participants have...

Read the series:	22.9% (73)
Read fanfiction based on the series:	10.9% (34)
Seen movies based on the series:	50% (159)

Participants ranked the series...

First (their favorite):	9.5% (30)
Second:	9.5% (30)

Third: 15.8% (50)
Fourth: 18.7% (59)

Divergent

How many participants have...

Read the series: 31.7% (101)
Read fanfiction based on the series: 13.1% (41)
Seen movies based on the series: 53.8% (171)

Participants ranked the series...

First (their favorite): 9.2% (29)
Second: 21.2% (67)
Third: 20.9% (66)
Fourth: 7% (22)

Initial Observations

Initial observations from the survey data include the following:

Reading habits

- Most participants said they began reading fiction series when they were five to 11 years-old.
- On average, most participants of the study read up to four books a month.
- About 66% of participants rarely or never talk about reading books with other people. 10% of participants said they do so often.
- Most participants said they find new books to read by visiting a bookstore or library. Once they pick up a book, most participants say they read only when they're in the mood.
- When it comes to rereading fiction series, participants are split. About 30% of them never, rarely, or sometimes reread series, and 14% do so often.
- When finished with a novel, most participants say they put it on their bookshelf to possibly reread it someday.

Preferences of texts

- The most popular book genres among the surveyed group include mysteries, horror stories, science fiction, and romances. Other reported answers included sports and manga.
- About 88% of participants think a boring main character should never be included in a fiction series. About 60% think a weak hero should also be avoided.

- In contrast, most participants think a main character who learns how to be independent and strong should always be included in a good work. The next popular choice was friends that help and support the main character.
- What should a female main character be like? Most participants said smart, brave, and independent. For male characters, the most popular answers were strong, brave, and protective.

Thoughts on young adult fiction series

- Overwhelmingly, most participants believe that main characters of fiction series are somewhat similar.
- Most participants believe the events that occur in fiction series are somewhat different., but about a third said a lot of the same things happen.
- About 55% of participants think the main characters change a lot by the end of the story, and about 14% believe the characters become entirely different people.
- Most participants say they read fiction series to explore other worlds and adventures. Other popular answers included that they're fun and easy to read, and that they provide an escape to real-life problems.
- About 78% of participants said people they know are at least somewhat similar to the main characters of the young adult fiction series. About 77% said they themselves are at least somewhat similar.

Preferences of specific young adult fiction series

- On average, about 72% of participants have read at least one of the four young adult fiction series. Only 28% of participants said they have not read any of them.
- 119 participants (about 37%) have read fanfiction based on one of the series. The most popular among the series is fanfiction inspired by *The Hunger Games*, followed by *Harry Potter*.
- About 92% of participants have seen a movie based on one of the series. The most viewed was *The Hunger Games*, followed by *Harry Potter* and *Divergent*.
- *The Hunger Games* was ranked the most popular series on average, closely followed by *Harry Potter*. *Divergent* ranked third on average, and *Twilight* was the least popular series.

Observation Analysis

Speaking very generally, it appears that most young adults read only a few books a month after finding them at a bookstore or library, and are most attracted to mysteries and science fiction. Once they pick a book, they read whenever they find time and don't usually talk about it with their friends. But if there is a movie inspired by one of the books, they almost always see it.

Their favorite books have strong and independent main characters who are surrounded by supportive friends. Those characters change a lot by the end of the story, and go on many adventures and travel to new places. The young adults also see a lot of themselves and their friends in the main characters.

The favorite books are easy to read, and a lot of the same things tend to happen in all of them. They help readers escape from real-life stresses and problems. After finishing a book, young adults will put it on their bookshelf, to possibly be reread someday.

Commonalities and Linkages Among Series

What encourages a young reader to read a fiction series? Why read about Harry or Katniss when you could watch one of the movies or hang out with friends? Perhaps because the characters of the series soon become like friends to the reader, and the story contains such adventure and fantasy that the power of the book outweighs the siren call of the television. After reviewing the data collected by the survey, hypotheses can be made as to why some series are evidently more popular than others among the surveyed young readers, and what makes a good book good.

Context

A series is successful when a young reader can connect to it. Therefore, a series must fall in line with current atmospheres regarding world events, politics, and popular culture in order to successfully hold the attention of young adults and represent their thoughts and feelings, or else readers will turn away from the work.

The *Harry Potter* series begs the question of cultural relatability, as it is the oldest series in this study but still the second most popular among those surveyed. That continued popularity may in part be due to the overwhelming incorporation of the characters and themes into popular culture, suggesting a young adult must be familiar with the work to understand many references to it that pop up in their lives. The merchandise and theme parks highlighted above certainly suggest that requirement of familiarity. But moreover, *Harry Potter* also contains enough progressive and overarching themes to remain relevant almost 20 years later, including a feminist idol in Hermione and a fear of political organizations devoted to disrupting peace.

The *Divergent* and *Hunger Games* series also tap into prevalent fears, anxieties, and longings that exist at the time of their publication. A tyrannical government that manipulates and controls advanced technologies to spy on or brainwash citizens can be found in both series, reflective of the growing technologies in the late 2000s and the fears associated with their potential utilizations. *Hunger Games* also represents an increasing focus on socioeconomic divides and class warfare, evident in the growth of movements like Occupy Wall Street that seek to decrease economic inequalities among citizens.

Fandoms

As noted above, a series is successful when a young reader can truly connect to it. But when that series can come alive outside of the pages of the book, and inspire a community of young readers to share their thoughts and create new works, that is

something special. As one survey participant wrote, “I love when [t]here is a huge fan base for a series and there is a community formed. I love the merchandise and the bonding between fans.” One of the greatest examples of that community building is the formation of fandoms, or groups of fans of a work, that then encourage even greater connections to the stories.

From the survey data, it is clear that some participants have enjoyed the fiction series so much that they have taken the time to read fanfiction, often shared among fandoms. The most popular fanfiction among those surveyed was inspired by *The Hunger Games*, followed by *Harry Potter*, which also happen to be the two most popular series overall. That connection suggests that some young readers are so enthralled by the fiction series that they have carried that enjoyment beyond the author’s words, and by doing so have found an even larger community of other fans. Furthermore, some fandom members have even written their own fanfiction as an expression of their love for different works. As Cath, a fictional main character of *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell, notes about writing fanfiction, “I’d rather pour myself into a world I love and understand than try to make something up out of nothing.”³⁷

But not all fandoms agree on everything. Some are split among teams, such as the Team Edward vs. Team Jacob split among *Twilight* fans. Those divides, however, offer fans a further concentrated community of those who think similarly to them, and provide a place for expression that proves a series’ popularity.

Furthermore, some fandoms go so far as to inspire or create spin-off movies based on the series. For example, beyond the immense success of the official *Harry Potter* film franchise, fan frenzy led to the creation of a viral video sensation of a musical in the spring of 2009. With accompanying lyrics and music, *A Very Potter Musical* sought to fondly parody *Harry Potter*. With songs such as “Granger Danger” and “Voldemort is Goin’ Down,” *A Very Potter Musical*, developed and performed by students at the University of Michigan, was uploaded to Youtube, where its scenes have been viewed over 12 million times.³⁸ That year, *Entertainment Weekly* named the musical one of the Top Ten Best Viral Videos of 2009³⁹, initially calling it “totally spellbinding” and thanking the student production team for “bringing this kind of joy into the world.”⁴⁰ Surely, such dedication and passion in producing work inspired by a series demonstrates a massive love for a young adult fiction series.

Conversely, the four series also garner critical communities, especially coming from “anti-fans.” As Matt Hills writes in “‘Twilight’ Fans Represented in Commercial Paratexts and Inter-Fandoms: Resisting and Repurposing Negative Fan Stereotypes,”⁴¹ “The *Twilight* phenomenon evidently has no shortage of anti-fans... as well as displaying

³⁷ Rowell, Rainbow. *Fangirl*. St. Martin's, 2013. Print.

³⁸ Team StarKid. "A Very Potter Musical Act 1 Part 1." *YouTube*. YouTube, 5 July 2009. Web. 23 Feb. 2016.

³⁹ Lyons, Margaret. "The 10 Best Viral Videos of 2009." *EW.com*. Entertainment Weekly, 29 Dec. 2009. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.

⁴⁰ Lyons, Margaret. "Fan-made 'Harry Potter' Musical Is Totally Spell-binding." *EW.com*. Entertainment Weekly, 23 June 2009. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.

⁴¹ Morey, Anne, ed. *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the Twilight Series*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2012. 2012. Web. 5 Jan. 2016.

tensions within its own fan ranks. For example, some teens describe Twilight Moms (an older generation of fans) as ‘creepy.’” *Twilight*, which was ranked on average as the least favorite fiction series among participants surveyed, also inspired a full-length theatrical spoof called *Vampires Suck*, released in August of 2010. Distributed by 20th Century Fox and grossing over \$80 million, the film parodies the original’s plot, cinematography, and main stars’ acting. Some of *Vampires Suck*’s more memorable moments include main character Becca believing Edward is a Jonas Brother rather than vampire, and a breaking of the fourth wall when Becca is caught between two sides of a battle between Edward and Jacob fangirls. Although the film managed to capture many of the sillier points of *Twilight*, it was widely criticized, with *Rolling Stone* critic Peter Travers summing up his review in four words: “This movie sucks more.”⁴²

While fandoms suggest a love for a work, the widespread presence of anti-fans may suggest general disdain for a work. Although *Twilight* had, and still has, a devoted community of those who can’t get enough of Bella and Edward, it also is known for the vitriol from anti-fans, arguing that some of the work’s more ridiculous or unrelatable plot points may represent what young readers *don’t* like in a book. For instance, Sarah Wagensellar Goletz writes in “The Giddyshame Paradox: Why ‘Twilight’s’ Anti-Fans Cannot Stop Reading a Series They (Love to) Hate,”⁴³

Anti-fans have made their reasons for reviling the series abundantly clear. From the sheer number and manic energy of the cheeky parodies of the books, the most prominent reason appears to be Meyer’s amateurish writing style... anti-fans complain about purple prose, poor plotting, and underdeveloped characters... (they) seem particularly concerned about the “Twilight” saga’s central relationship. Their objections are typical of complaints leveled against romances; the text reinforces the ideas that women are incomplete until romantically paired and that “true love” is unbalanced, codependent, and violent... Some attack the series’ relentless heteronormativity... Meyer’s use of the Quileute tribe is seen as problematic on many levels, from the casting of non-Natives in the movies to (their) role as subservient animals...

Goletz’s listed criticisms of *Twilight* may point to reasons for its relative unpopularity. Perhaps young readers are distracted by poor writing, or maybe current political atmospheres have taught younger generations to be more averse to traditional gender roles in relationships and racial stereotypes (as seen in the depiction of the Quileute tribe)- aspects of the work not largely found in the other, more universally loved fiction series, such as *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games*. Regardless, characteristics of *Twilight* may prove to be a lesson in what to avoid in future young adult fiction series.

⁴² Travers, Peter. "Vampires Suck." *Rolling Stone*. Rolling Stone, 26 Aug. 2010. Web. 19 Dec. 2015.

⁴³ Morey, Anne, ed. *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the Twilight Series*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2012. 2012. Web. 5 Jan. 2016.

Values and Lessons

Another common thread linking the four fiction series is the presence of lesson learning on behalf of the protagonists and the promotion of specific values. Harry and Katniss learn to depend on themselves and inspire others, Tris learns the importance of courage and independence, and Bella learns how to protect her family and friends. The importance of learned lessons was suggested through the open-ended survey responses, as the study participants noted what they love most about fiction series:

- “You get to [learn] stuff throughout the book.”
- I enjoy reading certain works... that have a sort of underlying political or social message that impacts society in such a way as to relate the suffering and pains of certain people to us in an easily accessible way, that way being reading.”
- “[I like] developing my thoughts by exploring foreign ideas and worlds.”
- “They have role model characters.”

The more popular series (*Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*) generally contain more character lessons and morals than the other (*Twilight*), suggesting the importance of those lessons. While Harry and Katniss are facing life-and-death obstacles and representing the good in a battle against corruption and evil, and Tris is attempting to bring together warring communities and save the lives of others, Bella’s main worry is remaining in a romantic relationship with a vampire. To be fair, Bella also attempts to resolve fights among friends and protect the life of her unborn child, but the overarching morals in *Twilight* don’t quite match those of the other three fiction series.

For example, some of the more compelling lessons for young adults include the following advice from Albus Dumbledore, Katniss’s father, and Four, respectively:

- “It is our choices, Harry, that show who we truly are, far more than our abilities” (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*⁴⁴).
- “As long as you find yourself, you’ll never starve” (*The Hunger Games*⁴⁵).
- “Becoming fearless isn’t the point. That’s impossible. It’s learning how to control your fear, and how to be free from it” (*Divergent*⁴⁶).

As it is clear that the surveyed young readers enjoy solid role models, the absence of one, which may be the case with Bella in *Twilight*, could be a turn-off for young readers at large. After all, why emulate a character who falls apart without her boyfriend, when you could idolize someone who saves all of humanity?

⁴⁴ Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. New York: Scholastic, 2000. Print.

⁴⁵ Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. London: Scholastic, 2009. Print.

⁴⁶ Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. Katherine Tegen, 2011. Print.

Motivations for Reading

After reviewing the open-ended survey questions, some similar motivations for reading fiction series among young adults became apparent, providing more clues to what makes a series considered good. Among those motivations were the exploration of new worlds and adventures; the ease of reading and entertainment value of the works; and the ability of a work to provide an escape from daily stresses and boredom.

The exploration of new worlds and adventures

- “They are a great way to escape your comfort zone and explore things beyond your perspective of the world.”
- “It is always entertaining when you open a new book or new movie to see what the author came up with with the names of the characters and the places you go and the people they meet.”
- “The journey you get with a character. It may leave you happy, laughing, or crying. But the best journeys are made by these.”
- “If you're looking for adventure, open a book.”

Entertainment value / ease of reading

- “I can always relax and read, it helps me feel calm and enjoy another world.”
- “My favorite thing about fiction series is the imagination and how the story continues. I love being able to finish a book and then knowing right away what book I'm going to read next.”
- “My favorite thing is the excitement coming from the characters and the actions they make to solve the difficulties in the situation.”
- “They are fun to read and are a great way to spend free time. I get absorbed into the story and cannot put it down until I finish.”

Escapism

- “They make you feel better about your life and they help you escape from anything and could be a good friend.”
- “Being able to forget about my problems & stress while doing something I enjoy. I like being able to forget about everything around me and focus what's going on with the characters.”
- “I love being able to escape from the real world and delve into a unique universe where I can forget my responsibilities. Reading fiction definitely provides that.”
- “Anything can happen and I can escape whatever problems I have in real life.”
- “Fiction series give me the chance to escape from the reality of life and slip into another world. It gives me a solace that I can't always find in everyday life. When I read them, I often find myself longing to live a life like the main character's.”
- “It gives me an escape from reality. It's an outlet in life that keeps me sane.”

Escapism is important to note for its dual-sided nature, as not only do young readers hope to leave their current lives for a mental or emotional respite, but they also

wish to specifically jump into the world of the character they are reading about. As one young adult expressed above, a real longing to be living the life of the protagonist can provide an especially compelling motivation to read a series and perhaps return to it in the future, as they view the literary world as superior to their own. Whether the main character is surrounded by a more supportive group of friends, has a romantic partner, or is being hailed as the hero of an entire civilization, it is clear that young adults may wish to actually put themselves in the shoes of their favorite character through reading, and look for works that allow them to do that.

Therefore, it is clear that the above motivations for reading among participants constitute the recipe for a good young adult fiction series. Future works should attempt to emulate what the four series of this study have done- be easy to read, be entertaining, bring the readers to new worlds and on adventures, and paint enough of a vivid and compelling picture so they can slip into the pages of the book and forget their real life stresses.

Relatability

The more relatable a work to young adult readers, the more loved that work then becomes. After all, why would a teenager want to read something that they cannot connect to or enjoy, when they could easily find those connections elsewhere? The most popular series, then, reflect what young adults are experiencing in their own lives, including a loss of innocence, a desire for importance and responsibility, a struggle with romance, and a dependence on supportive friendships. As one study participant noted,

My favorite thing about a fiction series is getting to see how the characters grow and are relatable or not to me in how they think as they experience the events of their story. It makes me feel a connection with them, almost like I'm making new friends. It's a way of helping me shape myself too, as seeing how they can grow I can say, 'That's how I want to be,' or 'That's definitely not something I want to be.'

Furthermore, survey data also supports the importance of relatability within the genre. Of the 319 young adults surveyed, about 78% of participants said people they know are at least somewhat similar to the main characters. About 77% said they themselves are at least somewhat similar, and about 19% said they were very similar or almost identical to the main characters.

Realistic themes and conflicts

All of the main characters of the studied fiction series have something in common: they forge their own paths and go on an adventure. They are not afraid to break societal norms in order to act as they believe they should. They follow their intuition, even if that means leaving family, home or safety. Surely, many young adults can relate to that.

All of the characters also struggle with romantic relationships. Harry is nervous to approach Cho Chang, and isn't sure what to make of his feelings for Ginny Weasley. Katniss finds herself in a love triangle between Gale and Peeta. Tris hesitates in entering a relationship with Four, and decides she is not ready to have sex with him. And Bella's entire journey surrounds the difficulties that face her in having a relationship with Edward. Young adults are not only trying to find their own identities, but they're grasping at the mechanics of negotiating romantic relationships, as well; as one survey participant wrote, "I will pretend to be the lucky man or young boy in the novel or story so that I feel loved or liked by someone."

When a fiction series provides a means of navigating relationships, young adults feel a connection to the work. Thus, although *Twilight* is the least popular of the fiction series of this study, it has still been read by almost a quarter of the survey participants, suggesting it may be very relatable in this regard. As Catherine Driscoll in "Girl Culture and the 'Twilight' Franchise" writes, "*Twilight* assembles adolescent rites of passage (prom, graduation) and experiences central to stories about adolescence (first love, loss of virginity, risky behavior), and it foregrounds questions concerning maturity..."⁴⁷ Additionally, Edward rejects many of Bella's sexual advances and insists on marriage first, which may represent Meyer's own religious conservatism and that of some young readers. Jackie C. Horne of "Fantasy, Subjectivity, and Desire in *Twilight* and Its Sequels" highlights Edward's resistance as especially relatable to some young adults, noting, "...for many readers, particularly younger readers just beginning to recognize and explore their own sexual feelings, [that] may feel like a relief. No longer having to worry that her sexuality may take her to a dangerous place, the young reader, by projecting herself into Bella, can express her sexual feelings without reserve..."⁴⁸

Furthermore, all of the main characters of the series experience a coming of age and loss of innocence. As Karley Adney in "The Influence of Gender on Harry Potter's Heroic (Trans)Formation" writes, "...in this fifth novel of the series, Harry battles teen angst while in the throes of puberty and growing into an adult wizard."⁴⁹ And as for the other main characters, Katniss learns that although her world is corrupt, there is something effective she can do about it. Tris realizes that some of her world's factions are entirely self-serving and aggressive, but she overcomes her fears to make a difference. And through a romantic relationship that tests her insecurities and friendships, Bella learns to have confidence in herself.

Tris's decision to leave her home district (Abnegation) and join a new community of people (Dauntless) may be very resonant to some young readers also facing that decision. She agonizes over whether or not to leave her family and home behind in order to find people who are more like her; similarly, many young adults agonize over the decision of whether or not to leave home and go to a distant college or trade school. In *Allegiant*, Tris thinks, "Maybe we're strangers no matter where we go. Or maybe we'll

⁴⁷ Morey, Anne, ed. *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the Twilight Series*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2012. 2012. Web. 5 Jan. 2016.

⁴⁸ Morey, Anne, ed. *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the Twilight Series*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2012. 2012. Web. 5 Jan. 2016.

⁴⁹ Steveker, Lena. *Heroism in the Harry Potter Series*. Ed. Katrin Berndt. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. Print.

make a home somewhere inside ourselves, to carry with us wherever we go,”⁵⁰ potentially providing inspiration to young adults who are expanding their comfort zones upon maturation.

The Hunger Games, the most loved fiction series among survey participants, perhaps most strongly expresses for young readers the journey and difficulties of coming of age and the trials of middle and high school. As Mary F. Pharr in “From the Boy Who Lived to the Girl Who Learned” writes,

War can be necessary, and sometimes good does win, but it’s never a clean win. Achilles comes to accept this grim truth in the *Iliad*, and Harry gropes toward it in his struggles, but Katniss learns it fully and has to act upon the knowledge- as though Collins had combined Harry Potter and Severus Snape. With her knowledge of ambiguity, Katniss will never be loved as the boy who lived, but as the girl who learns, she is even more consequential for the adolescents becoming adults in an uncertain world.⁵¹

It should be noted that the second most popular fiction series, *Harry Potter*, also contains unique aspects of coming of age that may resonate well with readers struggling with maturation. Hermione, a young female wizard who consistently supports main protagonist Harry, remarkably never loses her sense of confidence. As Katrin Berndt in “Hermione Granger, or, A Vindication of the Rights of Girl” notes,

Her coming-of-age conspicuously lacks what developmental psychology has termed the ‘confidence gap’, a phenomenon during which young girls lose their ability both to express their feelings and to voice their (potentially conflicting) points of view in a self-confident way due to cultural norms that expect them to be kind rather than demanding, and disinterested rather than engaged in achieving their tasks. Hermione appears to make the transition from childhood through adolescence to maturity without losing confidence in herself; she in fact gains further belief in her own abilities.⁵²

Harry also provides a stunningly authentic portrayal of the difficulties connected with maturation for those of the same socioeconomic and racial background. As Kathleen McEvoy in “Heroism at the Margins” points out, the character of Harry is effective because he is imperfect, and rather ordinary. He is familiar to readers because although he has flaws, he still behaves heroically. McEvoy continues, insisting,

Even after everything he has learned, Harry cannot let go of the anger inside him. This seems entirely understandable, especially for an emotional teenager. But rage, aggression and a thirst for vengeance hardly seem suitable character traits for the hero of a series aimed at adolescents. His flaws do make him seem real, though, and perhaps that is more

⁵⁰ Roth, Veronica. *Allegiant*. Katherine Tegen, 2013. Print.

⁵¹ Pharr, Mary, and Leisa A. Clark. *Of Bread, Blood, and the Hunger Games: Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2012. Print.

⁵² Steveker, Lena. *Heroism in the Harry Potter Series*. Ed. Katrin Berndt. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. Print.

important. ... Rowling does not give her readers a model of perfection, impossible to emulate in real life. Instead, she crafts a hero who is like her readers, a warts-and-all kid who still manages to do the right thing, who acknowledges his mistakes, learns from them and moves on to the next trial.⁵³

Thus, young adults, and especially young women, may be inspired by Harry and Hermione and feel a stronger connection to the series, even if their lives are quite different from the magical adventures at Hogwarts. After all, as one study participant said, “My favorite thing about fiction series is the sense of hope you gain when you can relate to a character.”

Personalities and emotions

Young adults experience a dizzying array of emotions in their everyday lives: anger, joy, confusion, love, excitement, boredom. So when they read about a character who is also feeling all those things, and learning how to manage those emotions well, they can relate. As one young adult wrote, “I like that when you read them, if there is enough detail, you can almost put yourself in each character's shoes and feel what they feel.”

The two most popular fiction series among those surveyed, *The Hunger Games* and *Harry Potter*, hold within their pages a full range of emotion. As Mary Pharr in “A Paradox: The Harry Potter Series as Both Epic and Postmodern” notes,

Not quite feeling like the legal adult he now is, Harry believes that he knows what he must do (the prophecy seems to require that either he or Voldemort must die); but as a fallible human being, Harry is still unsure of his actions, of how to set up and win a final confrontation. In this respect, he typifies the uncertainty felt in crisis by most adults, again enhancing the empathetic quality within the core of the character.⁵⁴

Katniss also experiences a lot of the same emotions as the readers learning about her. She understands her worth and purpose in intervening in governmental corruption, but she doesn't have to like it, similar to young adults who are torn between their responsibilities and enjoyments. As Pharr in “From the Boy Who Lived to the Girl Who Learned,” points out, “Like every epic hero, she is in the balance in the struggle of right against wrong... she accepts that destiny and confirms her heroism; but she does so with no heartfelt passion.”⁵⁵

Another common theme among main characters of fiction series is rebellion and independence. At times, Harry rebels against the inevitable duties placed upon him as an

⁵³ Steveker, Lena. *Heroism in the Harry Potter Series*. Ed. Katrin Berndt. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. Print.

⁵⁴ Steveker, Lena. *Heroism in the Harry Potter Series*. Ed. Katrin Berndt. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. Print.

⁵⁵ Pharr, Mary, and Leisa A. Clark. *Of Bread, Blood, and the Hunger Games: Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2012. Print.

infant. Katniss rebels against the societal norms and laws placed upon her by the government, inspired by Gale when he says, “We could do it, you know... Leave the district. Run off. Live in the woods. You and I, we could make it.”⁵⁶ Tris rebels against her own initial image of herself and her abilities, thinking, “But I will find new habits, new thoughts, new rules. I will becoming something else.”⁵⁷ And Bella rebels against what her friends think about dating a vampire, thinking, “I’m just going to do what I want now, and let the chips fall where they may.”⁵⁸

That tendency of rebellion also fuels a desire for independence, something vitally important for all young adults to feel in order to establish themselves as adults upon maturation. As Susan Dominus for the New York Times writes about *Divergent*, “[the series] also movingly explores a more common adolescent anxiety — the painful realization that coming into one’s own sometimes means leaving family behind, both ideologically and physically.”⁵⁹ That point is especially important as the survey data indicates young readers relate better to female main characters that are smart, brave, and independent, more so than those that are beautiful or funny. After leaving her family and faction behind, Tris even thinks, “Who cares about pretty? I’m going for noticeable.”⁶⁰

Young adults also want to feel important, even to the extent that they fantasize about being one of the most important people in the world. All of the main characters of the fiction series are given a task, whether it be to overthrow a government or fight an evil supernatural power, and they feel responsible for completing that task and becoming a savior or hero to those in need. Similarly, young adults may also desire a feeling of importance and purpose as they navigate what job they should pursue in the future or what they should choose as a major in college. By reading about Harry or Katniss, young readers may feel a connection to the characters’ feelings of responsibility and purpose. Also, survey participants stressed the importance of male main characters exhibiting traits of strength, bravery, and protectiveness, further highlighting a desire for a bold and meaningful purpose.

Participants also indicated that they enjoy reading about characters who also experience personal growth by confronting fears, and greatly believe that main characters of fiction series change dramatically. About 55% of participants think the main characters change a lot by the end of the story, and about 14% believe the characters become entirely different people. As one student noted, “My favorite thing about fiction series books is how greatly the main character changes from beginning to end.” That observation is especially astute, as the fiction series are essentially stories of change, whether entire governmental systems are overthrown, the characters join entirely new communities, or someone physically transforms from a human to vampire or werewolf. The protagonists remain true to their belief systems and moral codes, but they also mature emotionally and learn more about their own inner abilities and

⁵⁶ Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. London: Scholastic, 2009. Print.

⁵⁷ Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. Katherine Tegen, 2011. Print.

⁵⁸ Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight*. Little Brown, 2005. Print.

⁵⁹ Dominus, Susan. "In This Dystopia, Teens Must Choose Wisely." *NYTimes.com*. The New York Times, 12 May 2011. Web. 14 Nov. 2015.

⁶⁰ Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. Katherine Tegen, 2011. Print.

strengths. By representing personal growth and the triumph over fears of the unknown or change, the main characters are thus directly relating to their young readers and providing a means of internal expression. *Divergent* may take the crown in this regard, as it is entirely based on overcoming fear and encouraging positive change, with Tris remarking, “Though I have stood still while knives spun toward my face and jumped off a roof, I never thought I would need bravery in the small moments of my life. I do.”⁶¹

Dependence on personal relationships

Lastly, within almost every young adult fiction series is a main character depending on supportive friends; as Pharr writes, “All epic heroes have companions and mentors.”⁶² That feeling of community unites the pages of the book and the reader, as young adults surely relate to the desire of needing solid friendships when dealing with life’s struggles. In fact, when asked what should always be included in a good series, about 47% of participants chose “friends that help and support the main character,” beating other choices that included “a happy ending” or “lots of detail about faraway places.”

The prevailing importance of friend groups may be a reason why some fiction series are more popular than others. For example, *Harry Potter* was the second most popular fiction series among survey participants, and Harry’s success as a wizard is due in large part to the support of his best friends, Ron and Hermione, and other characters such as Dumbledore, Sirius, and Lupin. As Lena Steveker in “The Heroic Self in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* Series,” writes, “Since Harry is repeatedly presented as relying on his friends and family in his fight against Voldemort, his identity as hero clearly depends on the personal relationships he sets up with the people surrounding him.”⁶³ In essence, he gets by with a lot of help from his friends, and even chastises Voldemort for spurning them, remarking, “You’re the one who is weak. You will never know love or friendship. And I feel sorry for you.”⁶⁴

In contrast, the least popular series, *Twilight*, greatly lacks a tight-knit friend group. Bella initially makes friends at school upon moving to Forks, Washington, but cannot be bothered maintaining those friendships after falling in love with Edward. Once Edward leaves her in *New Moon*, Bella abandons everyone other than Jacob, to the extent that her father tries to bribe her to hang out with anyone else. Evidence of her disdain for friendships can be found in *Eclipse*, when rather than be excited to tell her friends about her potential engagement to Edward, she moans, “Can you imagine what

⁶¹ Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. Katherine Tegen, 2011. Print.

⁶² Pharr, Mary, and Leisa A. Clark. *Of Bread, Blood, and the Hunger Games: Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2012. Print.

⁶³ Steveker, Lena. *Heroism in the Harry Potter Series*. Ed. Katrin Berndt. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. Print.

⁶⁴ Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. New York: Scholastic, 2004. Print.

Angela will think? Or Jessica? Ugh. I can hear the gossip now.”⁶⁵ Therefore, it can be argued that young adults enjoy reading about main characters who welcome and encourage the help from understanding friends, as they too enjoy having supportive friendships in real life.

⁶⁵ Meyer, Stephenie. *Eclipse*. New York: Little, Brown, 2007. Print.

Study Evaluation

This study accomplished what it set out to do- find indicators of what makes a young adult fiction series “good,” in the eyes of surveyed young adult readers. By sampling 319 young adults and asking them what they look for in a good book, and which popular books they actually like, a better understanding of that initial question was found.

However, some improvements could have been made to the research methodology, mainly concerning the size of the reader sample. In future studies, a greater, more diverse sample size should be acquired, with greater diversity in terms of geographic area, educational background and socioeconomic status; for example, all of the participating schools are a part of the Horry County school district, which only sees a 35% minority enrollment.⁶⁶ As potential bias can be incurred when a sample is concentrated too heavily in one geographic region or economic stratification, any later attempt to continue this research should avoid bias at all costs and look to study more participants. Moreover, when analyzing the relative financial successes of each series, a way to separate adult readers from young adult readers would be helpful.

More questions can also be asked following this common vein of literary research. Participants could be asked more specific questions about particular series or about what exactly they look for in good books. Investigations on more current young adult fiction series could be beneficial. And research could also be undertaken using different methods, perhaps through personal interviews that may prove to be more open or honest.

Lastly, future research should examine how often young adults view films based on young adult fiction series, and then are inspired to read the series afterwards. That link may provide insight into the appeal of the films themselves and offer a greater perspective of what attracts young adults to the genre itself, regardless of the medium it is delivered through.

⁶⁶ "Horry 01 School District." *South Carolina*. Public School Review. Web. 05 Apr. 2016.

Conclusions

The young adults I surveyed like reading about other young adults in fiction series, as that act of reading offers them a connection to another being who acts and feels the same way they do. It is entertaining, it is easy, and if lucky enough, major motion pictures inspired by the series may be produced, allowing them to see what they imagined presented on the big screen or inspiring them to read the books afterwards.

Young adults are trying to figure themselves out. They're confused, rebellious, independent, and still trying to navigate the process of asking someone out on a date. They will soon be confronted with major life decisions, like picking a college and potentially moving far from home and family, but they look forward to finding their purpose in life and possibly making a difference in someone's life. They value supportive friendships and love solving problems with the help of people who care about them.

The main characters of young adult fiction series do all of the same things, just in different, more adventurous or fantastical settings. They save entire communities, battle evil enemies, become masters of magic, fall in love with supernatural beings, and yet, they're still imperfect teenagers. They are nervous, hesitant, and awkward around other people, and they make mistakes. But at the end of the day, they're heroes, and they give hope to the awkward, pimpled teenagers who are looking to them as sources of inspiration.

The 319 participants of this research provided many clues as to the major attractions of young adult fiction series. They like books that they can enjoy with others, possibly through the reading or sharing of fanfiction and movies. They started reading fiction series at a young age, so it feels natural to them. They don't read many books a month, but when they do, they like stories with some mystery or supernatural elements that offer them an escape from daily stresses. They believe the main characters are relatable and can teach them moral lessons. They're likely to reread books if they are entertaining, and hate a boring main character above anything else. Rather, they enjoy characters who learn how to be independent, smart, and brave and who surround themselves with good friends to stand up to the evil guy. And lastly, they like stories that bring them on an adventure and allow them to imagine new worlds and places they've never thought of before. After all, who wouldn't?

Although the four fiction series of this study are arguably dated, especially with regards to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, which was published in 1997, it is perhaps most remarkable that these stories are still consistently read and loved by young audiences. Certainly, the ability of young readers to connect with these texts remains consistently strong, as proven by the significant amount of young adults who have still read, and reread, them. In fact, that staying power is reminiscent of a promise in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*⁶⁷, following a revelation that Snape is still in love with Harry's mom, Lily.

⁶⁷ Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. New York, NY: Arthur A. Levine, 2007. Print.

“Dumbledore watched her fly away, and as her silvery glow faded he turned back to Snape, and his eyes were full of tears.

‘After all this time?’

‘Always,’ said Snape.”

Appendix

Plot Summaries

The Harry Potter Series

Harry Potter is the most miserable, lonely boy you can imagine. He's forced to live in the cupboard under the stairs, forced to wear his cousin Dudley's hand-me-down clothes, and forced to go to his neighbour's house when the rest of the family is doing something fun.

But Harry's world gets turned upside down on his 11th birthday. A giant, Hagrid, informs Harry that he's really a wizard, and will soon be attending Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry also learns that, in the wizarding world, he's a hero. When he was an infant, the evil Lord Voldemort killed his parents and then tried to kill Harry too. What's so amazing to everyone is that Harry survived, and allegedly destroyed Voldemort in the process.

Everything Hagrid tells him turns out to be true, and Harry starts learning how to use magic. He quickly becomes best friends with a boy named Ron Weasley and fellow student Hermione Granger. He is constantly busy trying to stay on top of the mounds of homework for Charms and Potions classes, as well as becoming a star Quidditch player.

Over the next seven years, Harry is forced to do battles with the wizard that tried to kill him so many years before, Lord Voldemort. He's able to overcome Voldemort each time with the help of his friends and mentors, including school headmaster, Dumbledore.⁶⁸

The Hunger Games Series

The Hunger Games takes place in a nation known as Panem, established in North America after the destruction of the continent's civilization by an unknown apocalyptic event. The nation consists of the wealthy Capitol and twelve surrounding, poorer districts united under the Capitol's control. District 12, where the book begins, is located in the coal-rich region that was formerly known as Appalachia.

As punishment for a past rebellion against the Capitol, in which a 13th district was destroyed, one boy and one girl between the ages of 12 and 18 from each district are selected by an annual lottery to participate in the Hunger Games, an event in which the participants, the "tributes", must fight to the death in an outdoor arena controlled by the Capitol, until only one individual remains.

16-year-old Katniss Everdeen, a girl from District 12, and Peeta Mellark are chosen. They are mentored by District 12's only living victor, Haymitch Abernathy, who won the Games 24 years earlier.

Peeta confesses his love for Katniss in a television interview prior to the Games, leading the Capitol to portray Katniss and Peeta as "star-crossed lovers." This revelation surprises Katniss, who harbors feelings for Gale Hawthorne, her friend and hunting partner. Haymitch advises Katniss to play along and feign feelings for Peeta, in order to

⁶⁸ "Harry Potter." *Summary at WikiSummaries*. WikiSummaries. Web. 15 Nov. 2015.

gain wealthy sponsors who can gift them supplies during the Games.

In the arena, the remaining tributes are alerted to a rule change that allows both tributes from the same district to be declared victors if they are the final two standing. After learning of the change, Katniss and Peeta begin to work as a team. When all of the other tributes are dead and they appear to win the Games together, the rule change is revoked. Katniss leads Peeta in a double suicide attempt to eat poisonous berries known as nightlock, hoping that the change will be reinstated and that they will both be victorious. Their ruse is successful, and both tributes return home victorious.

However, in the next following months Katniss learns that another Hunger Games, known as the Quarter Quell, will bring her and Peeta back into the arena. By forming alliances with other victors, she effectively escapes the arena, much to the dismay of the Capitol. Then, after teaming up with survivors of another district, she and Peeta are able to overtake the Capitol and establish peace within the districts.

The Twilight Saga

Isabella "Bella" Marie Swan moves from sunny Phoenix, Arizona to rainy Forks, Washington to live with her father, Charlie. Even though Bella never had many friends in Phoenix, she quickly attracts attention at her new school in Forks, and is quickly befriended by several students.

But when Bella sits next to Edward Cullen in biology class on her first day of school, Edward seems utterly repulsed. Edward is stunningly attractive, and inhumanly beautiful, yet he is an outsider too. When he saves her from a car accident in the school parking lot, she is confused by his superhuman speed and strength.

During a trip to La Push, Bella tricks a family friend, Jacob Black of the Quileute tribe, into telling her the local tribal legends and she finds out why, although the Cullens have lived in Forks for two years, they have never really been accepted by the townsfolk. Jacob mentions the Cullens, and says that most of the reservation believes that they are vampires, though he doesn't think so. During a trip to Port Angeles, Edward rescues her again, this time from a band of serial rapists and killers. Bella asks him if what Jacob said about his family is true. Edward admits that he and his family are vampires, but says that he and his family only drink animal blood to keep themselves from turning into the monsters unlike other vampires.

Edward and Bella's relationship grows over time and they fall passionately in love. Their foremost problem is that to Edward, Bella's scent is a hundred times more potent than any other human's, making Edward struggle to resist his desire to kill her. Eventually, he decides that it is too risky to keep up a relationship with her, and breaks up with her, leaving her devastated and depressed.⁶⁹ Edward mistakenly believes that Bella was killed, and decides to commit suicide in Italy. However, Bella makes it just in time to save him, attracting the attention of the vampire Volturi clan, who insist she must be turned into a vampire.

Edward refuses to turn Bella into a vampire until she marries him, which she eventually agrees to. During their honeymoon and while she is still human, they decide to have sex, and Bella soon finds out she is pregnant.⁷⁰ Desperate to save her baby, she remains human until giving birth, at which point Edward turns her to save her life. After defending her daughter Renesmee from the Volturi, she and Edward live happily ever

⁶⁹ "New Moon." *Saga Wiki*. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.

⁷⁰ "Eclipse." *Saga Wiki*. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.

after.⁷¹

The Divergent Series

In a post-apocalyptic Chicago, survivors were divided into five factions based on their dispositions: *Abnegation*, for the selfless; *Amity*, for the peaceful; *Candor*, for the honest; *Dauntless*, for the brave; and *Erudite*, for the intellectual. Each year, all sixteen-year-olds take an aptitude test that describes the faction for which they are best suited. After receiving the results, test takers choose a faction, no matter what their results were. Those who do not complete initiation into their new faction become "factionless" and are forced to live in poverty on the streets of the city.

Sixteen-year-old Beatrice Prior is born into an Abnegation family. She doesn't feel she belongs in Abnegation, because she doesn't see herself as naturally selfless. Her aptitude test results are inconclusive and indicate aptitude for three factions – Abnegation, Erudite, and Dauntless. The test proctor warns her never to tell anyone that her results were inconclusive because that makes her a "Divergent." On Choosing Day Beatrice decides to leave Abnegation and join Dauntless.

During her initiation, Beatrice renames herself Tris and befriends transfer initiates Christina, Al, and Will, but comes into conflict with fellow initiates Peter, Drew, and Molly. Initiation into Dauntless is composed of three stages. The first involves learning how to handle guns and knives and hand-to-hand combat with other initiates. Tris lacks the physical strength of most of her fellow initiates, but finishes in sixth place by beating the higher-ranked Molly.

Erudite stirs dissent against Abnegation leadership in the city's government and accuses Marcus, the Abnegation leader, of abusing his son.

The initiates enter Stage 2 of their training, which involves simulations similar to the aptitude tests. Initiates are forced to face scenarios based upon their deepest fears. Tris' Divergent abilities enable her to remember that she's under a simulation. She uses this advantage and wins top rank in the class.

The final stage of Dauntless initiation gathers all their fears in a single simulation landscape. All the initiates, including the Divergents, are aware they are under a simulation and must use the skills they've learned in the previous stages to overcome each obstacle. Tris's relationship with Four continues to grow as she prepares for this stage of testing, and he lets her into his own fear landscape. Four shares information he discovered about Erudite's plans to use Dauntless to stage an attack on Abnegation with Tris.

The night after the initiation ceremony, a serum induces a simulation and all the Dauntless become sleepwalking soldiers under orders to attack the Abnegation compound. The serum doesn't work on Tris or Tobias (Four) because they are Divergent. After fighting their way into the headquarters, the group boards a train to the Amity sector to find the rest of the Abnegation survivors.⁷²

Following brutal attacks, Tris and her group confront the remaining Erudite, but in the room an old video featuring a woman named Amanda Ritter begins to play. Amanda vaguely explains that the world had become corrupt, so the city was sealed away from the rest of the world to allow the Divergent numbers to increase. Amity would open

⁷¹ "Breaking Dawn." *Saga Wiki*. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.

⁷² "Divergent (novel)." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. Web. 13 Nov. 2015.

the fence forever and the population could re-enter the world.

Tris Prior is shocked by the video and is kidnapped by the Allegiant, a rebel group determined to reinstate their old way of life. The Allegiant invite her to a meeting the following night, sharing that they plan to send a group outside the city to find the truth. Driving through the unknown, they meet Zoe and Amar, who take the group to the Bureau of Genetic Welfare, where they learn the truth about their society.

Many years ago, the government believed that society's problems were caused by "bad" genes. In an attempt to create a better society, they began to modify people's genes, with disastrous results. The government set up "experiments" in an attempt to repair this mistake, establishing isolated cities across the remains of the United States. The hope was to raise enough genetically pure Divergent individuals to fix the "genetic damage" left in the wake of the Purity War.

Tris is then offered a position on the Bureau's council and is told of events taking place within the city, but learns the Bureau created the serums that led to the destruction of Abnegation and the enslavement of Dauntless. Repulsed by the Bureau's actions, Tris reconciles with Four and she begins to create a plan to save her city. The group decides to break into the Weapons Lab and use the memory serum to wipe the Bureau's memories.

During their break in, Tris is killed after sacrificing herself to save her brother. Four spreads Tris' ashes while ziplining from the Hancock Building, in memory of her. He accepts all that he has endured and reflects on his belief that while life damages everyone, people can always heal over time.⁷³

⁷³ "Allegiant (novel)." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. Web. 13 Nov. 2015.

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