

Young Adult Fiction, Feminist Pedagogy, and Convergence Culture:
“Fangirling” as a Feminist Act

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Abstract

JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy, and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga are widely recognized as three of the most successful recent young adult franchises. Although it may not seem so at first, each of these series has a preoccupation with feminist learning; each series' author, whether explicitly or implicitly, addresses the extent to which their protagonists and fans can learn feminist lessons within, or from, these texts. Each protagonist does seem to undergo some kind of learning experience, and by measuring these against what feminist education scholars such as bell hooks call a feminist pedagogical model, I show that the reality of what is expressed in these texts does not necessarily align with the ways Hermione, Katniss, and Bella have been discussed by critics and fans. Further, I argue that despite their divergence from the didactic nature of earlier feminist young adult fiction, such as that written by Judy Blume, by making connections between young adult fiction and what fan theorist Henry Jenkins calls "convergence culture", young readers of Rowling's, Collins's, and Meyer's texts, through their critical and creative engagement with online fan activities, are actually participating in a kind of feminist education that interestingly embodies the aims of feminist pedagogy.

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Introduction: “Fangirling” as a Feminist Act¹

From its roots in children’s literature, fiction for young adults has grown exponentially over the last two decades. In 2014, publishers reported a 3.3% drop in adult fiction and non-fiction sales, while books targeted at the preteen to early adult demographics rose in sales by 22.4% (Stampler). As it has developed, young adult fiction (YA) has been marked by several trends relevant to feminism: examination of power relations, the presence of diverse and powerful female protagonists, and a focus on the development of voice and agency in these female characters. Series such as *Nancy Drew*, first appearing in 1930, and Judy Blume’s body of work, the bulk of which was published in the 1970s, took up these themes long before authors like JK Rowling, Suzanne Collins, and Stephenie Meyer explored them in their more recent bestselling teen series. However, Blume in particular was engaged in a kind of feminist educational project by working with these feminist ideas in her novels. By broaching sensitive topics such as menstruation, death, racism, and masturbation, Blume was able to teach her young female audience about feminism and women’s issues; most feminists would likely agree that young adult fiction served in this case to facilitate feminist learning. In contrast, Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, Collins’s *Hunger Games* trilogy, and Meyer’s *Twilight* saga have not necessarily been perceived as feminist or pedagogical, and the feminist status of both the authors and their characters has been widely debated. In this project, I argue that despite dealing with very different feminist issues than Blume, these recent young adult fiction phenomena can foster spaces for feminist learning.

As young adult literature scholar Roberta Seelinger Trites (1997) has suggested, rather than debating which texts have “better” feminist politics, characters, or messages, we might

¹ “Fangirl” is typically used to denote a (usually young) female fan, and implies a particularly gendered expression of fandom (obsession, hysterical crying upon meeting/discussing objects of fandom, etc). Similarly, “fangirling” is the participation in “fangirl” behaviour, and/or the acknowledgment of oneself as a “fangirl”. See also Jenkins *Textual Poachers*, and Trier-Bieniek *Fan Girls and the Media*.

think about what kind of feminism, or feminist learning, can be found in texts, and whether a text's ability to spark discussion about feminist issues is more useful than establishing a "feminist fiction canon", or policing author's and character's feminist identities (*Sleeping Beauty* 6). In *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (2000), Trites describes how YA fiction can be used as a part of education, to teach about "competing voices,...competing ideologies,...discourses of power, historical contextualization, and how various multicultural novels create implied readers" (147). Additionally, she posits that feminism can be *found* in young adult fiction, and need not be intentionally placed there by authors. Feminist role models may be offered in a didactic way, but readers can also experience consciousness-raising alongside the protagonist, or make critiques about gender politics or oppression that the characters (or authors) themselves do not necessarily notice or share (*Sleeping Beauty* 4-6). By focusing my reading more on the active role of readers than on strictly didactic content, I will argue that these books and the cultural phenomena they have generated extend opportunities for feminist learning into the digital sphere, and so have the potential to educate readers in a way that responds to a more contemporary moment in both feminism and youth culture.

Further, I argue that because of their huge fan followings and digital presence, these three YA fiction series have the potential to educate readers and fans about feminism in a way very much aligned with feminist pedagogical ideals. In their 2009 book *Feminist Pedagogy: Looking Back to Move Forward*, Robbin Crabtree, David Alan Sapp, and Adela Licona extend the educational theory of Paulo Freire and bell hooks (which I will expand upon below) by describing the feminist pedagogical model, highlighting three key components that seem especially relevant to this argument: a feminist curriculum, a non-hierarchical method of teaching, and most importantly an ultimate goal of participation in activism and a view of learning as transformational, rather than reproductive of existing social structures (Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona 4-9). Though Rowling, Collins, and Meyer are not engaging in a feminist

educational project in writing their books in the same way as Blume did, nor would they necessarily describe their texts as pedagogical, YA fiction's ties to digital media and fan culture mean that these books and their authors no longer stand alone. No book in isolation could successfully embody all the characteristics of feminist pedagogy, yet the YA sphere in its multifaceted forms has the potential to embody feminist pedagogical ideals in such a way that these literary and cultural phenomena foster feminist learning.

Though feminism and feminist texts can have no singular definition or set of traits, we might think of Blume's work as offering one model of feminist fiction for girls with which other YA works can be compared. Blume's body of work is widely recognized as feminist: not only has she personally advocated feminist activism and attention to feminist issues, but she deals so overtly with what some would consider "controversial" women's issues that her work has often been banned from libraries for its frank discussion of female puberty, masturbation, and sex. Most notably, *Forever...* emphasizes female pleasure and orgasm as normal and important parts of teenage sexual relationships, and avoids characterizing female sexuality as immoral or life-altering. What distinguishes Blume from many of her successors, however, is her deliberate engagement with this educational project. Blume's readers sought out her works specifically for their educational content, whereas in the more recent internet age this kind of knowledge can be found elsewhere. Blume expresses that, along with wanting to provide realistic, straightforward lessons about puberty and sexuality, she has always hoped to stimulate in young girls the internal imagination and confidence that she had as a child (Blume, "Sexual Honesty" "Judy Blume"). Because of both her explicit feminist stance and her intention to use YA literature to convey to her female teen readers lessons about puberty, reproductive health, and the importance of forming strong female identities, Judy Blume's body of work represents an ideal point of comparison for other YA texts that seem to be presenting feminist lessons.

There have, however, been two important cultural shifts that change the way teen readers interact with young adult fiction: the changing concerns of the feminist movement, and

the development of the digital sphere. First, the concerns of feminism itself have strongly influenced the concerns of YA fiction, since, as Trites notes, “no organized social movement has affected children’s literature as significantly as feminism has” (ix). Critics like Trites (1997), Younger (2009), and O’Keefe (2000) have shown that young adult fiction is indebted to feminism in several ways. Just as the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s paved the way for Blume’s active and vocal girl protagonists to address sexuality, reproductive rights, and media representations of women, so too have the ever-evolving concerns of various feminist projects influenced contemporary young adult authors. Thus, what young adult fiction says to its vast female readership has changed dramatically since 1970. Activists and scholars have pointed to the ways that earlier (“second-wave”) feminist projects largely addressed the concerns of middle-class white women and failed to include those of women of colour, the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, and the economically disadvantaged (among other marginalized groups). Writers of YA fiction have responded to these expanded concerns; in more recent young adult texts, we see a focus on race and class oppression and on social justice advocacy, as well as on the importance of challenging of binary gender norms and oppressive structures. While Blume’s texts may be more simply identifiable as feminist, contemporary works address a different and more diverse set of feminist concerns: for example Meyer’s representation of mental illness or Collins’s engagement with poverty and class struggle.

The second important change to the cultural context for young readers is the advent of digital media and its connection to youth and fan culture. Paul Mihailidis notes, in his 2014 *Media Literacy and the Emerging Citizen*, that “the emerging landscape for dialog [sic] online is actively reshaping how we think about community and participation in the 21st century” (2), and that “young people are relying more and more on peer-to-peer information platforms” (3). In the foreword to the new edition of his 1992 book *Textual Poachers* (2013), digital culture and fan theorist Henry Jenkins contends that because digital networks give fans “a greater capacity to respond publically to academic and journalistic representations,” academics have “ethical

obligations to write in conversation with the communities [they] are studying” (xiii). So, as youth become increasingly engaged with digital media, these literary phenomena cannot be analysed without considering the ways that they have also become cultural phenomena. Jenkins would describe this phenomenon as convergence culture: “a cultural shift [where] consumers are [now] encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” (Jenkins 3). Readers are able to engage with these texts and gather new ideas and information outside of the novels themselves through films adaptations, celebrity culture, online fan communities, analytical blogs and discussion forums. These venues are an integral part of how readers enjoy and engage not only with the literary work but also with the feminist discourse surrounding these texts; thus *Harry Potter*, *Hunger Games*, and *Twilight* need to be understood not just as books, but as larger phenomena. As a consequence of this expanding YA fiction digital sphere, not only feminist scholars but also teen readers themselves are making claims and engaging in discussions about the gender politics of these popular texts. These two cultural shifts, of feminist concerns and of the relevance of digital media to literature for teens, have dramatically changed the conversation about feminist YA fiction.

I argue that each of these three popular series contributes to feminist learning in two ways: the books themselves are preoccupied with feminist learning, and they also have spawned fandoms where such learning is taking place in new and exciting ways. This is not to say, however, that Rowling, Collins, and Meyer have taken up this project in the same way as Blume did. Rather, each is distinguished by her relationship to feminism and her claims about the educational value of her texts. Both Rowling and Meyer have publicly identified themselves as feminists, and have stressed that girls and women making their own choices is a cornerstone of their feminist stance (Rowling “Women of Harry Potter”, Meyer “Is Bella...”). In contrast, Collins has remained conspicuously silent on the issue of feminism, yet is discussed as the creator of an iconically feminist character nonetheless (“Literature’s feistiest feminists”). Rowling has stated she is committed to creating strong and powerful female characters, and so

seems to be intentionally attempting to teach feminist lessons in the *Harry Potter* series and reinforcing them in her extratextual commentaries about her texts (“Women of Harry Potter”). Collins has expressed hope that *Hunger Games* will convey the importance of thinking critically about consumer culture and the horrors of war; this implies that she does aim for her text to have some educational value, but again does not make clear her feminist stance nor discuss gender in her series, suggesting that she perhaps does not consider it to have *feminist* educational value per se. Conversely, Meyer has insisted that her protagonist was never intended to be a feminist role model, saying: “I never meant for her fictional choices to be a model for anyone’s real life choices. [Bella] is a character in a story, nothing more or less” (Meyer “Is Bella...”). What is interesting here is the response of critics and fans to these declarations: while there have been mixed opinions about the feminist status of Rowling and Collins, Meyer has been almost universally discredited by feminist critics despite devoting time in interviews and on her website to articulate the ways she sees her work as compatible with feminism. However, it is important to note that these authors need not explicitly intend to teach feminist messages: each series contains many implicit lessons that warrant unpacking, particularly since, as I argue, these implicit lessons are not beyond the notice of teen readers, and often constitute an important part of what these novels seem to teach their readership. Whether or not these authors personally identify as feminists, I maintain that their work functions as a site of feminist learning, even though they are not intentionally didactic in their writing in the same way as Blume was. Rather, since the cultural context for young readers has changed, readers of these authors are likewise learning in a different way than Blume’s readers did.

Accordingly, this thesis examines the young adult fiction sphere as a form of feminist pedagogy which fosters unique spaces for feminist learning that bridge the gap between literature and digital media. I argue that Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, Collins’s *Hunger Games* trilogy, and Meyer’s *Twilight* saga, widely recognized as the “big three” of YA publishing,

demonstrate how this kind of feminist learning might work successfully. These series are the most suitable for this study, since each has garnered an enormous fanbase and has been widely discussed by feminist scholars and by young adults themselves. Each series has an active and vocal teen girl protagonist: *Harry Potter*'s brilliant and powerful Hermione Granger, *Hunger Games*'s resourceful yet dangerous Katniss Everdeen, and *Twilight*'s passionate and intuitive Bella Swan. These characters have been taken up by readers in a significant way, which itself suggests that these texts have the potential to function as feminist teaching tools, since a feminist pedagogical model relies on the engaged participation of its students. I argue that because of the forum for feminist pedagogy created by the rise of internet culture, each of these series has the potential to educate youth readers about feminism and oppression, despite the effects of what have been criticised as the series' less desirable traits: a focus on individualized feminist identity, a disregard for intersectionality, and a lack of interest in fostering feminist activism (Heilman, Childs, Dietz). These novels generally, as well as their protagonists (Hermione, Katniss, and Bella) individually, do not necessarily represent a well rounded model of feminism, insofar as the characters' status as feminist role models is debatable and the novels themselves do not unambiguously portray worlds in which the protagonists are able to pursue feminist goals. As this thesis will show, however, the novels and surrounding media phenomena have generated feminist debate and activist projects among fans in spite of, or in some cases because of, these failures to provide ideal models of feminism. Whether readers identify with these girls, think they are powerful, or question their feminist status, they are participating in conversations about what constitutes feminism and a complex female character: in this way, their "fangirling" is a feminist act.

While many scholars have discussed the representation of gender in these three series, and some have written about presence or absence of feminism in these texts, the focus has largely been on content. Fewer critics have looked at the content of these texts alongside the larger cultural phenomena surrounding the book series, or considered how readers are

responding to them as an important part of this cultural and academic conversation. My thesis addresses this gap in existing feminist YA scholarship. In asking whether these texts and their protagonists are feminist, critics have responded in similar ways to *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games*. Two conflicting camps seem to have developed. Critics like Helen Berents, Eliza T Dresang, Sonya Sawyer Fritz, and Miranda A Green-Barteet argue that Hermione and Katniss are characterized as having influence, agency, and strength, thereby situating them as positive feminist role models, while others, like Elizabeth E Heilman and Ann Childs, disagree, instead critiquing the problematic gender roles within Rowling's and Collins's series. Berents (2012) suggests that Hermione's role as a fighter in the overarching war against evil that is the crux of *Harry Potter* characterizes her as active, and that because within the plot she occupies traditionally masculine spaces, she can be seen as empowered in the text (Berents 50). This is echoed by Dresang's (2002) insistence that Hermione's character and *Harry Potter* in general can be read as representing women and girls as "strong, intelligent, thoughtful, [and] compassionate" (212). Critics have read Katniss similarly; Sawyer Fritz (2014) seeks to track Katniss' trajectory from "a girl who is merely defiant" to her being able to "embrace her own rebelliousness as empowering and effective" (22). Further, Green-Barteet (2014) suggests that Katniss's acts of rebellion both define and contribute to her subjectivity, that "by rebelling, [Katniss] comes to a greater understanding of who [she is], the roles [she is] expected to perform...and how [she is] being manipulated" (42). In contrast, many critics are less convinced that Hermione and Katniss are as empowered as they might seem. Heilman (2003) especially seeks to dismantle this perception, pointing to the many ways Hermione embodies negative female stereotypes such as crying, shrillness, and hysteria in the early *Harry Potter* books. She also notes the subjugation of other female characters such as Molly Weasley (the epitome of the sacrificial maternal figure, with little character development of her own) and Fleur Delacour (portrayed as preoccupied by physical appearance and as the clear loser of the Triwizard Tournament, a wizarding competition in which she is the only female participant) (228).

Similarly, in her reading of *Hunger Games*, Childs (2014) describes how the rebel organization that Katniss eventually joins, which seems to valorize her as a feminist leader, also works to negate female friendships, placing the political as squarely dominant over the personal (200). Thus, in terms of content at least, Rowling's and Collins's series have been criticised in much the same way for failing to offer a consistent feminist curriculum to their readers.

While opinions on how well Hermione and Katniss function as feminist role models are mixed, the vast majority of *Twilight* criticism concludes that Meyer's series is far from feminist, and that Bella represents the exact opposite of a feminist role model. Tammy Dietz (2011) finds the popularity of *Twilight* "deeply disturbing", and argues that "Meyer has captivated millions of young readers with a story about subordination, dependency, and self-sacrifice to the point of self-collapse" (104). Rhonda Nicol (2011) examines the many cultural and critical comparisons of Bella to Buffy Summers, "vampire slayer and feminist darling" of Joss Whedon's 1997-2003 television hit *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, noting that "Buffy/Bella comparisons often tout Buffy as a good, progressive feminist role model and Bella as an anachronistic throwback to prefeminist conceptions of a feminine ideal" (113). Though early in her chapter it seems as though Nicol wants to emphasize the similarities between Buffy and Bella, both good and bad, ultimately her argument is that both series perpetuate negative ideas about female sexuality, and that Buffy is less progressive than she seems. Brynn Buskirk (2014) attempts to redeem Meyer and Bella by arguing that Bella occupies a masculine or monstrous role, rather than one of feminine subordination (since her decisions drive the plot, and she holds a kind of power over Edward, her vampire boyfriend). Ultimately, Buskirk suggests that it is these traditionally masculine traits, and in turn Edward's perceived femininity, that make Bella a positive feminist role model (160-161). Buskirk's reading is, however, in the minority. With some exceptions, *Twilight* has been condemned by critics as antifeminist.

While criticism on these three series is extensive, and many scholars have looked at the lessons (feminist, antifeminist, or apolitical) that Rowling, Collins, and Meyer potentially teach

their readers, there seems to be one common thread between the texts that has been overlooked in previous criticism. Each protagonist is presented with narratives about how she should be successful, and this ultimately informs the implicit curriculum that *Harry Potter*, *Hunger Games*, and *Twilight* present. These narratives constitute what feminist scholar Sara Ahmed calls “happiness scripts.” In her 2010 book *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed explores how feminism often challenges socially imposed ideas about happiness: about what should cause happiness, how one should react to happiness, and how happiness for certain groups is constructed as more important than that of other groups. She coins the term “feminist killjoy” to describe how feminists are viewed when they question dominant ideas about happiness; speaking out against injustice or oppression inevitably disrupts or subverts the pre-established happiness script, and kills the joy of those who benefit from existing normative structures. Similarly, one subverts the happiness script if one is not made happy by those things prescribed as appropriate “happiness objects”, or if one is made happy by *inappropriate* “happiness objects” (Ahmed 56). Examples of traditional happiness scripts include the idea that women should “find happiness in the happiness of a good man”, and that minorities (Ahmed most specifically discusses people of colour and queer people) are inherently unhappy, since their very existence opposes dominant ideas that associate happiness with whiteness and heterosexuality. An important nuance of this concept is that not only are happiness scripts externally enforced, but sometimes they are also internalized, resulting in people with already marginalized identities experiencing a conflicted relationship with happiness. Examining the extent to which the characters or the books in general critique or capitulate to dominant happiness scripts that demand that female characters find happiness in socially prescribed ways forms a significant part of my analysis of the different kinds of feminist learning made possible within the *Harry Potter*, *Hunger Games*, and *Twilight* series.

As I argue in each chapter, Hermione, Katniss, and Bella are presented with, and in some cases ultimately internalize, the traditional happiness scripts of their patriarchal societies.

However, recent feminist discourse has arguably created a new kind of happiness script, and one that has been extended by the conventions of YA fiction to create a new archetypal character: the “exceptional girl.” If the traditional or dominant script reinforces the idea that girls and women should find happiness through a focus on personal and romantic relationships, marriage, motherhood, and homemaking, the opposing script that seems to be presented by some models of feminism suggests that, instead, women should find happiness in pursuing academic and career goals, delaying long term romantic partnerships indefinitely, and distancing themselves from typical markers of femininity. In reality, either of these models (or another alternative, or a combination) can lead to happiness for some people, but because of the ways the “exceptional girl” model disrupts the more normative expectations of women, it is popularly perceived as more feminist, particularly in the case of YA fiction. As can be seen in the criticism discussed above, feminist scholars (understandably) have a preoccupation with unpacking the characteristics of a “strong female protagonist,” yet often this criticism fails to consider how this preoccupation has given way to the creation of the “exceptional girl” as a new prescriptive model of female identity; this girl is active, vocal, disinterested in femininity, and usually has some invaluable skill or power which allows her to take control (of some facet of her life, or of a greater world issue). Sarah Projansky, in her work on media representations of girls and female celebrities, discusses a similar character type: the “can-do” girl (4). The “can-do” girl, like what I call the “exceptional girl”, “[dazzles the world with her] achievements, athletic abilities, intelligence, and self-confidence” (5), but unlike the “exceptional girl” exists as part of a binary. The “at-risk” girl, Projansky argues, exists as a cultural enforcer of “can-do” behaviour: “the can-do girl must be vigilant, lest she become at-risk” (Projansky 4). In chapter two, I argue that Projansky’s terms are useful in describing fans’ relationship with YA celebrities, but I retain use of my own similar term, “exceptional girl”, elsewhere to more clearly emphasize the role each series’ genre—the school story, dystopian fiction, and romance—plays in enforcing conflicting female happiness scripts on these protagonists. While there is nothing necessarily wrong with

this new cultural ideal, it has the potential to offer a similarly narrow scope of what girls should aspire to be. I will argue in each chapter that the female protagonists of *Harry Potter*, *Hunger Games*, and *Twilight* are actually presented with several conflicting happiness scripts, and that in part this is a result of the conventions of the different genres Rowling, Collins, and Meyer are writing within.

While textual analysis of the novels will form an important part of assessing the potential *Harry Potter*, *Hunger Games* and *Twilight* have to teach feminist lessons to their readers, it is important to note that arguments about how well the protagonists measure up as feminist role models tend to place undue focus on the content of the books in isolation from the social contexts in which they are read. This not only fails to consider important changes to the cultural context of both feminism and youth culture, but also underestimates the significance of the role of readers in the learning process. I address this limitation by drawing on a tradition of feminist scholarship that emphasizes the ability of readers to reinterpret texts and to glean from them unique or even subversive meanings. Judith Fetterly's *The Resisting Reader* (1978) argues that female readers must "change literary criticism from a closed conversation to an active dialogue" (xxii) between the "implied reader" and the self (xii). Similarly, in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984), Janice Radway troubles the conception of "popular culture as something mindlessly consumed by individuals, where only academics are able to draw the "true" or important meaning" (5-6). She argues this assumption on the part of academics does not account for the ability of readers to "[appropriate popular culture's] meanings for their own use" (Radway 6). While she stresses that hers, like any other, is not the definitive reading, she maintains that it offers a more radical interpretation of how and why women read popular novels: that far from being mindlessly consumed for pleasure, these books are sought out of "dissatisfaction, longing, and protest" (215). Resisting reader theory has been extended more recently by Susan Driver in *Queer Girls and Popular Culture: Reading, Resisting, and Creating Media* (2006), where she identifies "popular cultures [as] intensely

passionate sites through which learning and enjoyment overlap in the daily experiences of girls” (1). Driver focuses particularly on the ways that queer youth, a particularly marginalized group, can access and develop important identity-forming strategies by critically interpreting pop culture (11). Though she focuses on forms of media other than novels, her work supports my argument by characterizing engagement with popular media as a potential learning experience. These theorists each acknowledge readers’ power to make meaning out of texts and allows for reading to be understood as a political act, even or perhaps especially the reading of texts that might seem ideologically problematic. This theoretical tradition anticipates the more recent work of young adult fiction scholars like Trites, who similarly focuses on the active role of teen readers in finding and/or critically assessing the feminist potential in YA texts.

As I noted above, YA literature’s connection to the digital sphere has resulted in new forms of fandom and engagement (both critical and creative). Henry Jenkins’s work on fan culture and media convergence allows me to articulate the ways YA fiction’s connection to digital media shapes its alignment with feminist learning. In the introduction to the 2013 edition of *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), Jenkins argues that fan studies (or what he calls the “aca-fandom”), has always been a “feminist project” (xi), and that a fan studies approach differs from “more traditional ideas about spectatorship” in that it theorizes fandom as a participatory culture and fans as active participants in “a complex set of relations between producer and consumers” (xxi). He theorizes that the typifying of fans as “crazed” or out of touch with reality can be attributed to “anxieties about the violation of dominant cultural hierarchies. The fans’ transgression of bourgeois taste...[threatens] those who have a vested interest in maintenance of those standards” (*Poachers* 17). In his more recent work, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006), Jenkins articulates his concept of convergence culture and explains how it fosters collective meaning making; rather than internet media permanently displacing print media, these two kinds of media have converged in a way that significantly impacts our experience of popular culture. Similarly, media

corporations and consumers no longer occupy distinct roles, and individuals now participate in discussions and in the creation of fan content, and thus rely on other fans for a fully fleshed out experience of the media. Jenkins posits that although his theories have initially applied only to fan culture, “collective meaning making within popular culture is starting to change the ways religion, education, law, politics, advertising, and even the military operate” (*Convergence Culture* 4-6). I will use Jenkins’s theory of convergence culture to argue that although the young adult fiction sphere may initially seem neither pedagogical nor feminist, and has sometimes been criticised as commercialized and ideologically problematic, the interaction of the literature itself with its digital fandoms allows for a reading of the YA sphere as a space for feminist learning.

Consider, for instance, two recent pop culture events, and the ways they exemplify convergence culture and demonstrate how *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games* need to be understood not simply as literary texts but also as complex phenomena that fans engage across media platforms in a participatory setting. On September 20th 2014, Emma Watson, the British actor who plays Hermione in the *Harry Potter* films, made what was widely hailed as an iconic speech at the United Nations as the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador promoting the “HeforShe” campaign, “a solidarity movement for gender equality that brings together one half of humanity [men and boys] in support of the other half of humanity [women and girls], for the benefit of all” (HeForShe). Dozens of blogs and articles were published by *Harry Potter* fans unpacking her speech, both praising Watson for taking a clear feminist position, and criticizing her speech for its universalizing assumptions about women and its failure to offer a more “intersectional” understanding of systems of oppression,² and discussing how Watson’s speech might compare to the forms of activism Hermione undertakes in the *Harry Potter* books. In this way, Watson’s position as a spokesperson for feminism has been considered alongside Rowling’s

² “Intersectionality” indicates a feminism that attempts to incorporate the experiences of all marginalized groups, including people of colour, the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, the economically disadvantaged etc, rather than focusing solely on those issues that largely affect white middle class women in the West.

representation of Hermione as an activist and used to start online discussions about *Harry Potter*, feminism, and the significance and limitations of celebrity activism. This media event invites comparison with the controversy that developed less than one month earlier on August 31 2014, when nude photographs of Jennifer Lawrence, the American actor who plays Katniss in the *Hunger Games* films, were leaked onto the internet. Lawrence characterized this invasion of her privacy as a “sex crime” (*Vanity Fair*), and sparked an important discussion about celebrity privacy and bodily autonomy. She argued against the view that invasions of her privacy were only to be expected because of her celebrity, and maintained that her decision to photograph herself nude was nobody’s business but her own (*Vanity Fair*). Just as Watson’s speech prompted online discussions of celebrity feminism among *Harry Potter* fans, Lawrence’s comments and the popular journalism covering this event were taken up and discussed online by Lawrence’s fans (many of whom are also *Hunger Games* fans), contributing to a collective understanding of the event and its cultural blowback. Lawrence’s negative experience echoes Collins’s portrayal of Katniss’s position as an unwilling celebrity in *Hunger Games*, and her feminist response encouraged fans to consider the feminist implications of *Hunger Games* as well, both by criticising sexist expectations placed on female celebrities and praising Lawrence for her response to these issues. These events, though not directly connected to the film franchises the two celebrities respectively work for, were immediately taken up by YA fans as a way to expand their knowledge of and participation not only in their fandoms but in feminism as well. In these examples of convergence culture, because the fictional characters Hermione and Katniss are regarded as feminist role models, Watson and Lawrence not only act as feminist mentors as well, but are also evaluated by fans and commentators for how well they fulfill this role. These examples make clear that Jenkins’s theory of convergence culture offers important resources for important facet of understanding YA fiction as a space for feminist learning. While many scholars have already discussed the relationship between YA and convergence culture, my

reading suggests more specifically that this relationship can be employed in characterizing fan activities as a kind of feminist learning.

Reading the *Harry Potter*, *Hunger Games*, and *Twilight* series and their associated media phenomena as examples of convergence culture shows how these series can be further understood to enable a specific form of feminist learning, one aligned with the principles of feminist pedagogy. This model of education builds on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, which was extended by feminist education theorists like bell hooks and Robbin D. Crabtree, David Sapp, and Adela Licona, who found that Freire's work presents an androcentric viewpoint, yet is nonetheless useful for articulating a less oppressive education model. Feminist pedagogy places emphasis on distancing education from what Freire called the banking model, which views knowledge as a commodity to be passed from teacher to student rather than a transformative experience or a practice of freedom that encourages questioning the content of the lessons, the methods of the teachers themselves, and the oppressive structures that traditional education serves to reinforce. Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona's *Feminist Pedagogy: Looking Back to Look Forward* (2009) lays out the key characteristics and aims of this learning model, emphasizing three components: a feminist curriculum (information about feminist issues and texts as well as intersectional critiques of traditional classroom material); a participatory learning process rather than one that perpetuates a power imbalance between teacher and students; and a drive towards consciousness-raising and activism as the ideal end goal of the learning (rather than a goal of exam success or of reproducing dominant worldviews and educational models) (Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona 4-9). In each of the following chapters, I use these three categories (curriculum, teaching methods, and end goals) to analyze both the extent to which Rowling's, Collins's, and Meyer's novels thematize feminist learning, and to what extent these novels (intentionally or not) are able to successfully teach feminist lessons.

More importantly, however, I argue that whatever one concludes about the educational models represented in and by the novels themselves, the online fandom activities that are

integral to how fans experience the *Harry Potter*, *Hunger Games*, and *Twilight* series have the potential to teach feminist lessons in a way that even better exemplifies the curriculum, methods, and end goals of feminist pedagogy. While the messages explicitly or implicitly presented by the texts themselves sometimes offer a conflicted or incomplete model of feminism, by using resisting reader techniques, largely in these online fan spaces, youth readers can create and contribute to a better curriculum inspired by these novel series. Because they are engaging with online discussions about the feminist value and limitations of these series, and by writing, sharing, and responding to fan fiction inspired by the novels and films (among other creative fan activities), teen readers are not only learning about intersectional feminism and how to conduct a feminist analysis, but are also developing critical reading and writing techniques alongside their technical and creative writing skills. In addition to providing opportunities to expand the curriculums presented in the book series, the online fandoms of *Harry Potter*, *Hunger Games*, and *Twilight*, though they do so in somewhat different ways, embody the participatory, non-hierarchical teaching methods encouraged by feminist pedagogical theorists. Readers/feminist learners are able to subvert the usual educational power dynamics by participating in online discussion forums, creating fan fiction and fan art, and engaging critically with the popular journalism and celebrity culture connected to Rowling's, Collins's, and Meyer's series. Boards on social media sites like Tumblr and Pinterest, as well as fan-specific forums and other social media sites dedicated to analyzing power relations, gender dynamics, oppression, and representation in these literary and cultural phenomena allow feminist learners to resist facets of these texts they find ideologically problematic through discussion and debate with other fans of all ages and education levels. In the case of fan fiction and fan art sites, readers can share their creative projects as a means of reworking the texts themselves by rewriting them in ways that they find more convincingly feminist. Finally, I will consider the extent to which these texts and related phenomena may present a kind of education that has the potential to be, as hooks advocates, transformational rather than reproductive of existing oppressive structures.

Ideally this transformation would take the form of literal attempts at world changing through activism, but could also be exercised through consciousness-raising, identity-forming, and the transformation of education itself. It is important to note, however, that in the case of otherwise privileged teens, for whom identity-forming particularly is less challenging, a drive towards explicit activism is most ideal. Conversely, youth further marginalized by race, gender identity, sexuality, or class, often seem to recognize the higher stakes in the communities formed through online fandoms, and thus are empowered in different ways as a result. By reading these novels within the larger context of fan responses such as these, this thesis explores ways that these fandoms are participating in a kind of education aligned with the principles of feminist pedagogy.

In each chapter, I begin with a textual analysis of the educational experiences represented in the book series and then discuss how its feminist potential is more fully realized in the expanded sphere of the fandom. In the textual analysis sections, I argue that the way each series has been culturally perceived and criticised is informed by the different educational experiences and happiness scripts presented by each genre, and offer a feminist reading of how each protagonist responds to the happiness scripts she is presented with. Then, I show how each text's fandom constitutes an exciting example of feminist pedagogy, arguing that the resisting reader techniques employed by fans in their online fan activities have the potential to offer a more feminist, participatory, and transformational kind of education than traditional institutions or the books in isolation. Chapter One focuses on Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Here I unpack in more detail the work of Freire, hooks, and Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona to offer a more thorough understanding of the feminist pedagogical model I measure the educational strategies within these texts against. I argue that while Hogwarts School may at first seem like a progressive institution that allows Hermione to pursue feminist goals, Hermione's education actually serves to reproduce antifeminist happiness scripts and undermine her attempts at activism by idealizing Hogwarts in a way typical of the conventions of the school story. Because

the *Harry Potter* fandom is the most overtly connected to feminist pedagogical ideals, I will use it to set up a framework for my arguments about *Hunger Games* and *Twilight* in subsequent chapters by describing these connections in detail. I will also argue that although the *Harry Potter* books themselves fall short of offering a consistently feminist learning experience, *Harry Potter*, through its fandom and the YA sphere, nonetheless functions as a site of feminist pedagogy and learning.

Chapter Two extends the framework set up in Chapter One with an analysis of Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy. Though this series is less explicitly connected to education than Rowling's, which is set predominantly at Hogwarts School, Collins's series is similarly preoccupied with feminist learning. Katniss is praised by critics as a tough, girl-power protagonist and the ideal feminist role model for teen readers, but I suggest this may be too simple a reading. In learning how to survive first in her oppressed district, then as a celebrity in the Capitol, and finally as the figurehead of a revolution, Katniss is presented with both antifeminist and feminist happiness scripts, but finds that neither make her feel happy and safe. Thus *Hunger Games* presents a much more complex set of questions about feminism and anti-oppressive struggle, many of which feel intentionally unresolved by the end of the series as Collins portrays Katniss as deliberately rejecting the role of feminist role model, despite the norms of dystopian fiction which suggest that the "exceptional girl" will take power from this role. Accordingly, the fan response to this series has taken up complex questions about feminism and pop culture by engaging with *Hunger Games* celebrities as well as Collins's novels. For this reason, in Chapter Two I expand on Jenkins's work on convergence culture, and introduce Sarah Projansky's work on celebrity culture as a means of arguing that recent celebrity culture, like *Hunger Games*, is more preoccupied with feminist learning than it first may seem. Chapter Three deals with Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga: the least overtly connected to feminism and by far the most widely criticised text I examine in this thesis. *Twilight* obviously has a more complicated relationship to feminism than *Harry Potter* or *Hunger Games*, but I

suggest that it may actually be the most effective as a pedagogical tool for this reason. Here I develop my use of resisting reader theory to suggest that multiple readings of Meyer's series are possible, and that although *Twilight* seems to present Bella with happiness scripts typical of the romance genre, the lessons she learns are actually more similar to those that Hermione and Katniss learn than one might expect. I will also explore the writing and reading of subversive and queer *Twilight* fan fiction³ as an important method of feminist learning, which not only offers lessons about creative writing and sexuality (in a very different way than Blume's works do) in a participatory, community learning forum, but also allows teen writers to take up the ideologically problematic elements of *Twilight* and re-imagine them in a more satisfyingly feminist way. Further, I show how this learning experience can result in queer fans finding important, transformative, support networks that, as Driver notes, can positively contribute to their identity forming.

To conclude, I hope this thesis will serve three purposes: first, to re-conceptualize the recent young adult fiction sphere as a catalyst for feminist learning that allows unique opportunities, not only for learning a feminist curriculum, but also for participating in a form of learning which disrupts classroom power imbalance and encourages real world application of knowledge through transformative education practices and activism; second, to examine the ways young adult fiction fandoms, as a form of convergence culture encompassing novels, films, internet media, public discourse, and celebrity culture, are able to bridge the gap between literature and digital media. Finally, I hope to characterize "fangirling", a particularly gendered mode of expressing enthusiasm for a cultural phenomenon, as a subversive act of feminism.

³ Fan fiction is a largely internet based genre of creative writing that uses established characters, settings, plots, or even simply "worlds" to create new stories. Fans of various cultural phenomena take up points of interest from their fandom's narratives and write poetry, short stories, novellas, and even full length novels, which are then posted on online forums for other fans to enjoy and give feedback on.

Chapter One
Hermione Granger and the Ivory Tower:
“I’m Hoping to do Some Good in the World!”

“He’ll be famous—a legend—...there will be books written about Harry—every child in our world will know his name!” (Rowling, *Stone* 15)

Many critics and fans have noted how prophetic this line from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997), Rowling’s first instalment of the *Potter* series, has been. Of the three YA series this thesis examines, *Potter* has been taken up the most both academically and culturally. In brief, Rowling’s seven-part series, published from 1997-2007, chronicles the young life of Harry Potter, boy wizard, and his magical education at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry—a boarding school housed in a Scottish castle, invisible to non-magical people (“muggles”), where British wizards from ages 11-17 receive their magical training. Harry, along with his best friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, take lessons in spell-casting, potion-making, and wizarding history under the shadow of the wizarding world’s dark history, and indeed Harry’s own horrific past. As the story progresses, these dark forces begin to regain power, putting the protagonists in conflict with other students and faculty within Hogwarts, the corrupt magical government, and the Dark Lord Voldemort’s racial supremacy group the Death Eaters. Themes of bravery, morality, oppression, and the power of love and friendship permeate the series at large, while the individual novels deal with issues of trust, integrity, initiative, stress, and maturity.

The story is told from Harry’s perspective, and although the main narrative is about this male protagonist’s development, part of the appeal of this series is Rowling’s presentation of Hermione as more than Harry’s friend and sidekick: she begins to function as Harry’s teacher, conscience, healer, and advisor, while simultaneously being self-expressive and actively pursuing her own goals. She is, in every way, an “exceptional girl,” and thus has been widely praised as a feminist role model. While the lessons Harry learns are perhaps more explicitly stated in the text, Hermione too is learning a variety of important lessons that form part of the

novel's "curriculum"—the content Rowling's work presents to her readers. In fact, Hermione is the preeminent student: her thirst and desire for both knowledge and success give her a drive unlike any of her peers. She reveals to Harry and Ron in their first meeting that she has "learnt [their] set books off by heart" and "[gotten] a few extra books for background reading" about the wizarding world (Rowling, *Stone* 79). Hermione, like Harry, comes from a muggle family,⁴ yet she becomes an unrivalled source of information in their peer group, quickly surpassing even Ron (who comes from a large magical family) in her knowledge of wizarding history, law, and politics, as well as in magical theory and ability. It comes as no surprise that Hermione takes her education at Hogwarts *very* seriously. Unlike Ron, her character develops independently from Harry's, and so in this way, she (more so than Ron) becomes a protagonist on her own. Similarly, because of the way female fans have championed Hermione, a large proportion of fan responses to *Harry Potter* imagine Hogwarts through her eyes. Looking at Rowling's representation of Hogwarts and at *Harry Potter* fan activity through a Hermione-focused lens reveals how YA fiction offers possibilities for feminist learning and allows us to trace the connections between feminist pedagogy, Rowling's implicit lessons about feminism and education, and fandom participation.

This chapter will have three components. I will begin by introducing Rowling's claims about the feminist value of her series, and the didactic role she embraces as a YA author. Rowling's approach to her books recalls that of earlier YA authors like Judy Blume, in that she has stated that she views them as a kind of feminist educational project (Rowling, "Women of Harry Potter"). However, Rowling, unlike Blume, uses extratextual commentary to exert

⁴ Rowling makes clear early on that magical ability is passed on genetically, and that it is extremely common for non-magical parents to produce a magical child (usually called a "muggle-born"). The major antagonist in Rowling's series, Lord Voldemort, seeks to exterminate those witches and wizards with muggle heritage, purify the wizarding race, and oppress the muggle population (who he sees as little more than animals). The followers of his racial supremacy group, the Death Eaters, as well as those who support but do not necessarily serve Voldemort, often call muggle-borns "Mudbloods", which Rowling characterizes as a very offensive racial slur. Albus Dumbledore (headmaster of Hogwarts and Harry's mentor) has made fighting Voldemort, and the oppression of muggle-borns generally, his life's work. Harry's parents, powerfully magical and loyal to Dumbledore, were killed in his infancy by Voldemort, and he was raised by his muggle Aunt and Uncle. Hermione's parents are muggle dentists.

authority over the curriculum her texts teach their readers. Second, I will examine the extent to which Rowling's explicit claims and implied messages about the feminist value of her texts, and of Hermione's status as a feminist character, are actually representative of what is expressed in the *Harry Potter* novels. Here I will look to feminist education scholars, outlining their criticisms of traditional education styles and the changes they propose to move Western education towards a feminist pedagogical model. I will use this feminist education theory to assess the model of education employed at Hogwarts. Rowling's public statements about feminism might lead one to expect her novels to imagine a progressive model of education compatible with feminist pedagogical ideals. However, as I will expand on below, the idealization of Hogwarts implicit in the structure of a typical school story (perhaps unintentionally) aligns Rowling's sentiments about education with an outdated pedagogical model that feminist scholars would tend to criticise—one that teaches students to conform to the dominant happiness scripts of their society, rather than asking critical questions or engaging in activism. Unfortunately, it is difficult to reconcile the traditional education model presented by the *Harry Potter* novels with what Rowling explicitly states are her intended lessons in her extratextual online presence. I will argue that Rowling's books not only idealize this traditional, institutionalized form of learning, but also that this idealization undermines her claims to be offering feminist lessons through her portrayal of Hermione. Ultimately Hermione is unable to achieve feminist goals, in part because of the happiness scripts Rowling has made implicit to the wizarding world, and in part because of the characteristics of the school story genre, which tends to present a utopian view of the traditional boarding school experience.⁵ Although Hogwarts itself does not offer a feminist model of pedagogy, Rowling's reliance on the conventions of the school story serve to idealize it anyway, and so while Hermione makes several attempts to disrupt her education in a more satisfyingly feminist way, which are disclosive of the implicit

⁵ This genre sometimes serves to idealize, if not the methods of traditional boarding schools, than the possibilities for learning that students have access to as a result of attending these institutions. Those stories with female protagonists are usually modeled after male narratives of achievement.

(yet seemingly contradictory) claims Rowling makes about education in her series, ultimately Hermione is relegated to the position of the feminist killjoy. Finally, I will show how some *Harry Potter* fans are using their fandom activity as a mode of feminist learning that goes beyond the limited and contradictory lessons Rowling offers in her novels. This chapter will offer an overview of how fandom activities can be considered as part of a feminist pedagogy, providing a baseline for more complicated discussions in future chapters.

Rowling's relationship to her fans differs from that of earlier YA fiction writers like Blume, both in the kind of feminist content offered and in the degree to which fans have access to authorial commentary. The feminist value of the lessons about puberty and sex in Blume's novels is largely obvious, and unlike Rowling she does not necessarily spell out for readers what these lessons are. There are two reasons for this: the changing concerns of the feminist movement, which have changed what kind of feminist lessons authors attempt to convey, and the advancement of digital media and internet culture by the time of Rowling's publishing, which results in an ability to expand on her messages through online extratextual sources. Blume's *Deenie* (1973) and *Forever...*(1975) exemplify the kinds of feminist messages relevant to 1970s teens. Protagonists Deenie and Katherine are placed unambiguously in situations and conversations that provide young readers with important, and in Blume's time, progressive information about sexuality and women's health: while Deenie discusses masturbation in her middle school health class, Katherine visits her local Planned Parenthood for a full chapter to have a pap test and ask questions about birth control options. This kind of curriculum was precipitated by the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s, where reproductive health and female sexual liberation were prominent issues. Rowling, writing at a different moment in feminism in the 1990s and 2000s, when information about these topics is more available to the majority of girls in industrialized nations, seems to be more interested in teaching her readers lessons about gender equality, anti-oppressive activism, and the power of communication and respect. An equally important difference between these two authors is the advent of the internet

and the increasing popularity of digital media and online fan culture in Rowling's time. Because readers have access to Rowling's Twitter feed and her interactive fan site *Pottermore*,⁶ they do not need to rely on the books alone to isolate the feminist messages Rowling might be trying to convey—she is able to reaffirm implied messages to fans through these other means. Thus, through her active engagement with fans online, Rowling has been able to state her intended curriculum⁷ more directly than even Blume did, and also apply the feminist lessons she sees in her texts to current political and pop culture events⁸ as a way of further reinforcing her message. Thus, the potential for feminist learning in Rowling's text has a very different context than Blume's texts did in the 1970s.

Rowling's extratextual involvement is fairly extensive, but the feminist messages and claims about her series she espouses in these sources do not necessarily correlate with what is actually presented by her novels. Rowling was heavily involved in the Warner Bros film adaptations of her series, gives many extensive interviews, publishes companion texts,⁹ and has created *Pottermore*. She seems to offer a feminist curriculum in these media: many of her posts encourage the focus on equality, justice, and fairness implied by her series.¹⁰ Through these various extratextual sources, especially interviews, DVD special features, and bonus content published by Rowling on *Pottermore*, we have an understanding of Rowling's personal politics. For example, we know that she identifies as a feminist and aims to create positive female role models (Rowling, "Women of Harry Potter"). Further, she has noted that her previous humanitarian work with Amnesty International was the inspiration for Hermione's interest in

⁶ Pottermore is an interactive website published by Rowling, where readers can explore bonus material such as expanded epilogues, character back stories, and further information about the wizarding world, as well as read reflections by Rowling on her process, sources, and connections to the text.

⁷ As I will argue below however, Rowling's intended curriculum does not necessarily align with what her series actually seems to teach its readers.

⁸ A recent example is Rowling's Tweet declaring that US presidential candidate Donald Trump is worse than Voldemort (Rowling, @jk_rowling "How horrible").

⁹ Some of these companion texts are Hogwarts textbooks (such as *Quidditch Through the Ages*), while some expand the storyline (such as the very recent script to *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*). These texts are distinct from bonus content, such as the majority of *Pottermore* content.

¹⁰ For many examples, see Rowling's Twitter feed (@jk_rowling).

anti-oppression activism (Rowling, “J.K. Rowling Interview”). Given the sentiments Rowling expresses in these forums, one might assume that her series advocates for progressive education, particularly insofar as it affects the learning experiences of girls like Hermione. Indeed, the curriculum that Rowling implies in her texts might at first seem to align with what she explicitly endorses in interviews and online commentary. The novels largely focus on the importance of equality and the power of love and friendship over bigotry and evil. The more obvious anti-oppressive sentiment in *Harry Potter* is in the battle against Voldemort, a racial supremacist, but through Hermione and other female characters the books also imply that girls and boys should be treated equally, and that girls and women are powerful, smart and successful. However, despite Rowling’s espousing of feminist goals, perhaps in part because of the constructs of the school story genre, some lessons about education implied by her novels diverge significantly from the lessons that she claims to be teaching.

Harry Potter can be considered a feminist series in that it prominently features a powerful and diverse cast of female characters. Some scholars (Kniesler, Gladstein) argue that women exist in virtually all roles in wizarding society and at Hogwarts. Professor McGonagall, the powerful and influential deputy headmistress, is a friend and advisor to Dumbledore and is highly respected by her students. Women teach in (the wizarding equivalent of) male-dominated fields at Hogwarts (both the sports coach, Madame Hooch, and the Arithmancy¹¹ professor, Professor Vector, are female), and overall seem to be equally represented on the staff. There is at least one female Auror,¹² Nymphadora Tonks, whom Harry looks up to as a role model for a career he hopes to pursue. Furthermore, as Gladstein notes, women in Rowling’s wizarding world are neither universally good nor universally bad. Women take on powerful roles in both the corrupt magical government and in the ranks of Voldemort’s death eaters. Fans widely consider Dolores Umbridge, magical bureaucrat and Hogwarts interloper, to be as evil as

¹¹ A specialised elective, usually a method of Divination (fortune telling) but here the wizarding equivalent of Math or Physics, studying the magical properties of numbers and their connection to magical theory.

¹² An elite division of magical law enforcers who specialize in fighting the dark arts.

Voldemort himself, and in 2009 novelist Stephen King famously compared her to Hannibal Lecter (4-5). Similarly, Bellatrix Lestrange is the most feared of Voldemort's followers, having committed various horrific crimes in the first wizarding war. Her subsequent imprisonment in Azkaban prison¹³ only makes her more dangerous, and after her escape in *Order of the Phoenix* she becomes Voldemort's most valuable lieutenant. Overall, girls and women are shown to be intelligent, nuanced and complex, good at sports, good at magic, and academically successful in all areas.

In these ways, we can see that Rowling does offer some feminist content to both Hermione and her readers. However, this content is complicated by the conflict between conventions of the school story and the feminist claims Rowling makes about her series. The school story, as I mention above, tends to idealize boarding school, and institutional education generally, by focusing on morality, the excitement and importance of inter-house rivalry, the fear of expulsion, and the ability of the school to teach the virtues specific to its culture (in most cases, English culture) (Steege, 145-153). Because Rowling is, perhaps unintentionally, working within the norms of this genre, she thus idealizes Hogwarts, and by extension the wizarding world, by presenting it as objectively good. We hear from Hermione that Hogwarts “[is] the very best school of witchcraft there is” (79), and later when we see the other two major European schools, they are presented as distinctly less admirable than Hogwarts—Durmstrang Institute because of its connection to the Dark Arts, and Beauxbatons Academy because of its perceived femininity. Furthermore, Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts, is characterized as the wisest, most powerful, and most just person in the wizarding world for most of the series. With Hogwarts under his leadership, it seems we are meant to accept it as fundamentally good. Similarly, Hogwarts was founded by two men and two women, all four of whom are called the

¹³ Azkaban is a uniquely horrific penitentiary guarded by Dementors, fantastic creatures who emulate the experience of depression in humans around them, feeding on their happiness until only the darkest parts of their soul remain. This could be characterized as a kind of psychological torture.

greatest practitioners of magic of the age, which suggests the institution itself is rooted in gender equality.

The goodness of Hogwarts, characterized as the fundamental pillar of British wizarding society, is part of what Sara Ahmed would call the “happiness script” of the wizarding world: simply put, the script, or perhaps in this case “happiness narrative” is more appropriate, is the belief (by both readers and characters within the text) that this society is essentially just, equal, and good, and those who disrupt it (especially the series’ major antagonists, the Death Eaters) are individually evil. In her attempt to imagine a more feminist world, Rowling seems to have actually imagined one where gender oppression (and we may assume, by extension, other forms of oppression) simply does not exist. Rowling has said that in the wizarding world women can fight as well as men, as magical prowess is not equal to physical strength (Rowling, “Women of Harry Potter”). Presumably she means in battles or war, but this claim is extended and somewhat corroborated by a few things in the novels and on *Pottermore*, such as lists of previous heads of Hogwarts and Ministers for Magic (head of magical government), that prominently list female leaders dating back to the 16th century (Rowling “Ministers for Magic”). More recently, the idea of a society with no history of oppression (except allegorically, as it pertains to the oppression of muggles and muggle-borns by those with magical blood) was further corroborated by Rowling’s Twitter feed, where she stated that there is a “sense of kinship between all wizards, no matter what their race” (Rowling, “Mutual respect”). This idealistic representation of wizarding society acts as a part of the happiness script of the wizarding world. Rather than debate, as many critics and fans have, the feminist status of *Harry Potter*, Rowling, and her individual characters, I instead argue that Rowling attempts to pen a world, and thus a school, where feminist concerns are irrelevant because gender inequality does not exist, and so ultimately does not present a reality where her protagonist can make and achieve explicitly feminist goals. In trying to show readers what a world without gender inequality and other forms of oppression could look like, Rowling makes it impossible to fully endorse Hermione’s

feminist activism, since it disrupts the happiness scripts she has prescribed to the wizarding world.

There are obvious problems with Rowling's attempt to create an ideal world by reimagining human history without gender and racial oppression, especially since she does not successfully address all facets of oppression, and focuses on an allegorical representation of racism (the oppression of muggles and muggle-borns by Voldemort and his Death Eaters) while ignoring the sexist and explicitly racist aspects of her world and narration. Critics Elizabeth Heilman and Christine Schoefer have pointed out that the books are also not as feminist as one might want, since men hold all of the central positions: "no girl is brilliantly heroic the way Harry is, no woman is experienced and wise like Professor Dumbledore" (Schoefer). Despite the quality of these characters, Hermione is not the protagonist, McGonagall is not the Headmistress, Umbridge is not the Minister of Magic, and Bellatrix is not the Dark Lord. Of Harry's peers, only Hermione is allowed to be a dynamic and complex character, while other girls (especially classmates Parvati, Lavender, Pansy, and Cho) are little more than stock stereotypes of teenage girls (respectively: loyal best friend, drama queen, mean bully, and overly emotional/heartbroken girl). Some might claim that Ginny Weasley and Luna Lovegood,¹⁴ two important characters that have been taken up by fans almost as much as Hermione, are as active and potentially feminist as Hermione, but I argue they are stock characters of another kind: girls who define themselves as different from "typical girls". Ginny is characterized as brave to almost the point of foolishness, tough, good at offensive magic, great at sports, and uninterested in typically feminine pursuits. In the early books, her obvious crush on Harry causes her to be a silent and red faced source of embarrassment to him, but ultimately she grows out of being Ron's "kid sister" into someone Harry desires. She reveals to him that it was on Hermione's advice that she "relax[ed] a bit around [him]" and started "go[ing] out with some other people"

¹⁴ Ginny is Ron's younger sister and eventually Harry's love interest. Luna is a classmate and friend of Ginny's.

so that Harry would “take a bit more notice” (Rowling, *Prince* 603). It might seem that Luna is actually “not-like-other” people.¹⁵ Her interests are out of sync with teenagers generally, but really her main character traits are in obvious contrast to the stereotypical concerns of teenage girls specifically. Most noticeably, she does not care what people think of her (Harry often notices other students laughing at her appearance or ideas, and she is neither concerned nor upset). She is similarly uninterested in typically feminine activities and she says exactly what she thinks and means (unlike Harry’s love interest Cho, whose unclear motives and comments confuse and infuriate him). In this way, much of Ginny’s and Luna’s appeal comes from an obvious devaluing of typically feminine characteristics. Furthermore, Hermione’s character only develops after she grows out of what Harry and Ron consider her more obnoxious, and stereotypically feminine, behaviours; in the early books, her bossiness and shrillness are at the forefront of her character, but eventually she learns to be more likable (Heilman, “Blue Wizards” 226-228, “From Sexist” 148). So, while valid arguments can be made for the gender equality of Rowling’s series, ultimately the books portray female characters as secondary to male characters, and generally devalue typically feminized attributes. Thus, we can conclude that either Rowling’s model for what a post-gender world should look like is incomplete, or that her attempt to create it was unsuccessful.

Seemingly because the wizarding world is meant to be a paradigm of gender equality, feminism is never explicitly addressed in Rowling’s texts, but we can find several passages indicating that all usual forms of oppression and inequality still exist therein. There are a few moments where Hermione angrily points out examples of Harry’s and Ron’s sexism, but these comments are largely ignored or the sexism is immediately “justified.” In *Half-Blood Prince*, as Harry searches for the identity of a mysterious former Hogwarts student who, through notes left in an inherited textbook, he has come to admire, Hermione reminds him that there is nothing to

¹⁵ When the trio meets Luna, she is already well known at Hogwarts for her eccentric behaviour and strange beliefs. We might compare her to a muggle conspiracy theorist.

indicate the student's gender. When she says to Harry that "the truth is that you don't think a girl would have been clever enough" to be the author of the notes, he is "stung" by the suggestion, telling her "how could I have hung round with you for five years and not think girls are clever?... I just know [the student] was a bloke, I can tell" (Rowling, *Prince* 503). It seems that what Harry means to say here is that while he acknowledges that girls can be intelligent, he cannot imagine himself identifying with one at the level he has with the "Half Blood Prince". Similarly, when the trio is on the run in *Deathly Hallows*, they have difficulty finding enough food, and often bicker about low (and less than delicious) provisions. Hermione, charged with much of the responsibility on this journey, asks the boys, "why am I always the one to sort out the food? Because I'm a *girl* I suppose?", to which Ron replies, "no! It's because you're...the best at magic!" (Rowling, *Hallows* 241). In both cases, Hermione's critique of the boys' attitude is met with insincere reassurance that the problem is not that the boys are sexist, but that she is too easily offended.

Similarly, other than muggle-borns, those characters who are in some way disadvantaged are portrayed as suffering because of their own decisions, rather than because of structural barriers. The best example of this is the Weasley family: Harry quickly infers, on meeting Ron on the train to Hogwarts in *Philosopher's Stone*, that his new friend comes from a large¹⁶ and poor family (Rowling, *Stone* 75). Draco Malfoy¹⁷ is quick to notice this too, and is constantly belittling Ron and his siblings for their economic disadvantage. He tells Ron in their first meeting that the Weasleys are known for having "more children than they can afford" (Rowling, *Stone* 81), and although readers understand this to be an act of bullying, the novel implies that Malfoy should be criticised for pointing out an unpleasant truth, rather than unfairly judging the reason for the Weasley's financial instability. It seems we are meant to

¹⁶ Ron is the second youngest of seven children.

¹⁷ The trio's schoolyard antagonist, who comes from a wealthy pureblood family, spends much of the series making snide remarks about Harry, Ron, Hermione, and their families. Malfoy's father is a Death Eater, and so he was raised to believe (as many, but not all, purebloods do) in the superiority of wizarding blood.

understand that Malfoy is correct, and the Weasleys are disadvantaged not because of any inequalities in wizarding society, but for two main reasons: because their father Arthur decides to pursue a career out of passion and not for financial gain,¹⁸ and because they have chosen to have so many children. What is interesting is that it seems that we are meant to admire them for making these choices—they value family and happiness over material wealth, and so they choose to be poor. In this way, any onus that might be put on the wizarding government to value and provide equal compensation for careers that prioritize wizard-muggle relations, or to value and fund domestic labour, is instead placed on the Weasleys themselves. A similar argument could be made for some of Hermione’s female classmates: Lavender Brown and Parvati Patil seem to not achieve as much academic success as Hermione not because Hogwarts fails to encourage and support female students, but because of their preoccupation with boys and lack of interest in “serious” subjects. Furthermore, Cho Chang¹⁹ is depicted as perpetually unhappy, and although Hermione attempts to explain to Harry and Ron that Cho is very depressed and needs further support from her friends and teachers, the boys still ultimately conclude that she is too emotional. In these two cases, it is assumed that these characters choose to be flighty and emotional, and thus no responsibility falls on Hogwarts to ensure girls are academically motivated, or to provide grief counselling or mental health services to students. Additionally, the novels present at least one instance of anti-Black racism: Pansy Parkinson vocally mocks Angelina Johnson’s “long braided hair,” asking her “why...anyone [would] want to look like they’ve got worms coming out of their head” (Rowling, *Phoenix* 261). This implies that despite Rowling’s claims, some elements of white supremacy do exist in the wizarding world, at least insofar as they pertain to Eurocentric beauty standards. In these ways it is obvious that the wizarding world is not free of oppression and that although Rowling seems to present

¹⁸ Ron’s father works in the “Misuse of Muggle Artefacts” office at the Ministry of Magic. Although he is passionate about muggle culture, the Ministry of Magic places little importance (and little monetary value) on his position.

¹⁹ At one point Harry’s love interest, whose boyfriend is killed by Voldemort in *Goblet of Fire*.

oppressive behaviour as an individual flaw of characters like Malfoy and Pansy, it does exist systemically in wizarding society and at Hogwarts.

In these ways, Rowling (intentionally or not) creates a world where because (some) women and girls are well represented (and further, because there is a focus on an allegorical antiracist struggle against the Death Eaters), there is no reason for them to challenge or change their society. It is therefore difficult to think about whether Hermione pursues or achieves feminist goals, because in fact she lives in a context where such things are impossible because they are assumed to be unnecessary. Likewise, by exploring oppression through the allegorical representation of Voldemort and his followers, yet creating a world in which it is assumed that no oppression based on gender, race, or class exists except as it pertains to wizarding blood, Rowling does not create a context where educators are driven to use feminist pedagogical strategies in their classrooms, and also fails to fully endorse the feminist learning strategies that Hermione attempts to develop on her own. Hogwarts, and the wizarding world generally, may initially seem very attractive to young readers, particularly in comparison to muggle elementary and secondary schools, in part because Rowling has constructed a world that seems to be comparatively progressive. Students, including girls, are learning hands-on skills and using them to fight racial oppression; yet although this seems radical at first, by comparing the Hogwarts curriculum, teaching methods, and learning goals to models criticised by feminist education scholars, we can see that Hogwarts actually serves to reproduce the existing structures of wizarding society. Again, because a major conflict in this society is a fight for racial equality, young adult readers may find the wizarding world refreshingly anti-oppressive and feminist, but it actually serves to diminish the need for more radical kinds of feminism.

Just as the wizarding world is presented by Rowling as progressive in some ways, the educational model at Hogwarts appears to be progressive but also shares some of the characteristics that feminist education scholars such as Paulo Freire and bell hooks have criticized as typical markers of traditional institutional education. Robbin D. Crabtree, David

Sapp, and Adela Licona (2009) note that “hegemonic educational practices...tacitly accept or more forcefully reproduce an oppressively gendered, classed, racialized, and andocentric social order”, and theorize that “pedagogy...is as much about social hierarchies and the ideological and political dimensions of education as it is about classroom practices” (1). Paulo Freire (2000) is among those credited with the development of critical pedagogy in his 1970 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which characterizes education as a tool of anti-oppressive struggle, and encourages students to “develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action” (Giroux). Freire, whose work is informed by Marxist class analysis of anti-colonial struggle (particularly in Brazil), is primarily concerned with issues of class activism and neo-colonialism. Some of the problems with a traditional model of education that Freire cites are the depoliticizing of learning, the focus on marketable skills rather than experiences, the unequal power divide between teachers and students, and the discouraging of questioning (76-77). Most germane to my argument is Freire’s critique of the educational model he calls the “banking system”, wherein academic success is measured on a student’s ability to consume, store, and later call upon information presented by a lecturer (72-73). In this model, students are presumed to enter classrooms “empty”, and leave “full” (Freire 73). Many feminist scholars have noted the implicit sexism in Freire’s work, which “constructs a phallogocentric paradigm of liberation—wherein freedom and the experience of patriarchal manhood are always linked” (hooks 49). Despite the somewhat sexist limitations of Freire’s model, feminist scholars have built on his concept of critical pedagogy to create a feminist pedagogy.

Rather than discarding this useful theory for its obvious flaw, feminist education scholars have incorporated “feminist theorizing [, which] offers important complexities” by challenging essentialized notions of gender identity, recognizing the changing and nuanced nature of power and oppression (and the oppressed), and acknowledging both the importance of feminist histories and the social locations of teachers (Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona 3). Most

significant to this argument is bell hooks's landmark text *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), which builds on Freire's theory. She posits that by entering classrooms as "active participant[s], not...passive consumer[s]," students have a means of combating "professors who [are] actively hostile to the notion of student participation" (hooks 15). hooks advocates a system of education that "emphasizes well-being...[where] teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization...if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (15). Where Freire's model emphasizes the importance of critical pedagogy as a part of anti-oppressive struggle in a postcolonial context, feminist scholars such as hooks have pointed to the ways this model can be adapted to address oppression of women and other gender oppressed people as not only a tool but an active and transformative practice of freedom.

From these various sources, we can understand the feminist critiques of a traditional, institutional education to centre on the problematic connection between knowledge and power in these modes of pedagogy. In traditional education institutions, teachers, because they hold power, control access to knowledge and determine what kinds of knowledge have value. When knowledge is transferred to learners, they do not gain the power to question this knowledge, or to give value to other ways of knowing; rather, those powers stay solely with teachers. In this model, which Freire calls the "banking system", not only does knowledge appear static and hegemonic, but it is also commodified (73). Because the only form of power students have access to is derived from consuming knowledge and reapplying it in ways that reinforce oppressive educational structures, knowledge becomes a commodity rather than a means of transformation. This model of teaching is thus predicated on a power imbalance between teachers and students, as success is measured on a student's ability to listen, absorb, and recall the lessons of teachers without question. hooks points out that the primary lesson always reinforced in this context is "obedience to authority," and therein lies "the difference between education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination"

(4). hooks's understanding of Freire's insight comes in part from her own childhood experience of adjusting from all Black schools in segregated Kentucky to racially integrated schools, where instead of being taught by Black women who considered teaching to be "fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle," she was "mainly taught by white teachers whose lessons reinforced racist stereotypes" (2-3). In the former, she was able to counter conflicting values and beliefs with ideas that led to personal growth, and in the latter, "knowledge was...about information only...[O]bedience, and not a zealous will to learn[,]...was expected of us. Too much eagerness to learn could easily be seen as a threat to white authority" (3). When knowledge is treated instead, as hooks proposes, as a transformative experience for both teachers and learners, a more neutral power dynamic between students and teachers that is genuinely empowering to students is possible. Conversely, when institutional education treats knowledge as a commodity, both the methods of teaching and the end goal of the learning centre on obedience to authority, insofar as the system relies on students not challenging the means and goals of their educations, as well as buying into the significance and correctness of the pre-existing education model and the oppressive social structures of which it is a part.

Sara Ahmed's work on happiness can be used to extend this critique of institutional education. In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Ahmed describes what she calls "happiness scripts:" socially prescribed narratives about where and how one should find happiness, in which those who fail to follow the script, or who do follow it but are not made happy as a result, are viewed as disruptive of the happiness of others. Thus, because these scripts are established and reinforced by dominant culture, marginalized people are accused of "killing others' joy" when they point out how the script (and therefore the culture) is actively devaluing their happy (or unhappy) experiences: the feminist killjoy "spoils' the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness" (65). To apply this idea to hooks's criticisms of traditional institutional education, students who disrupt the exchange of knowledge as a commodity, either by pointing to the power imbalance in the

teaching method or by questioning the validity of the knowledge/lessons themselves, are viewed as what Ahmed would call “feminist killjoys”. For example, while hooks describes her education in desegregated schools as an exercise in teachers’ control and authority (3-4), Ahmed might add that Black students were further controlled by the happiness script that desegregation presented; because desegregation was an important victory of the Civil Rights Movement, the dominant narrative suggests that Black students should be made happy by a classroom seemingly focused on equality. Yet in fact, as hooks describes, though many Black students found “white teachers[’]...lessons reinforced racist stereotypes”, questioning the lessons taught in these white classrooms was impossible, since it “could easily be seen as a threat to white authority” (3), and would also force hooks’s white classmates to confront their own privilege and complicity in the oppression of Black students. In this way, marginalized students are literally forced to conform to the happiness scripts set out by their institutional educations. In a model where knowledge and authority are absolute, there is no place for questioning the lessons or the model itself, and so *any* act of questioning becomes a killjoy act; any such student (already disadvantaged by the unequal teacher/learner power dynamic) opens herself to being branded disobedient by teachers (which could lead to removal from class, or a reputation that leads to other teachers’ prejudice against her) or potentially being bullied by other students (depending on the kind of issue and the manner in which it is raised, this is a very real kind of danger). Applying Ahmed’s theory to feminist pedagogy offers a solution to the problem of these “killjoy” acts: in traditional models there can be no resolution, since the disruption halts the reproduction of dominant (and oppressive) norms momentarily but has no means of going further. In a feminist pedagogical model, “killjoy” disruptions are instead a productive and welcome contribution, and act as part of a transformative conversation between teachers and learners.

While Freire, hooks, and Ahmed critique traditional education models and the happiness scripts they present, and offer nuanced ideas about what progressive, feminist education should

ideologically do and accomplish, Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona usefully break down what this model of pedagogy should actually look like. They characterize feminist pedagogy as having three main components: curriculum, teaching method, and end goals of the learning (Crabtree, Sapp, Licona 4). Rather than a definitive curriculum of approved feminist lessons and texts, they suggest that feminist pedagogy involves taking a feminist approach to all kinds of content by explicitly acknowledging the existence of oppressive structures and using this as a basis for encouraging students to think critically about prescribed knowledge in all subjects. Similarly, they argue that feminist pedagogy involves a teaching method that seeks to dismantle classroom hierarchies and encourage questioning and participatory learning, and that rather than promoting a single authoritative perspective, feminist instructors should also validate alternative epistemologies as part of their classroom practices. Through this more inclusive approach to various ways of knowing and learning, the life experiences of their students become valuable teaching tools, and are also treated as equally significant to the life experiences of, say, historical figures, or of teachers themselves. Finally, while the traditional end goal of evaluation is to encourage conformity to existing power structures and happiness scripts, Crabtree, Sapp and Licona describe the end goal of feminist pedagogy as “turning thought into action” and “empowering individuals within a larger project of social change” (Crabtree, Sapp, Licona 4). In the model that Freire and hooks criticise, academic excellence is prized as a commodity and is privileged above personal growth, which creates complacency not only about the academic structure and its unilateral epistemology, but also with the oppressive structures inside and outside of the education system (hooks 14). Thus the very principles of a feminist pedagogy are not met: hierarchy is enforced, alternative ways of knowing are invalidated, prescribed content is not critically questioned, and oppressive happiness scripts are ultimately reproduced. A feminist pedagogy would instead hope to result in a transformative experience, where a student’s self-awareness and consciousness are being continually exercised not just in the classroom, but as a broader practice of freedom, anti-oppression, and activism (hooks 39-40).

As I suggested above, based on her commitment to feminism and claims about her aims for the *Harry Potter* series, it may at first seem that Rowling would use her depiction of Hogwarts School to imagine a feminist pedagogical model. It is clear that Rowling is making a commentary on teaching methods and education models in her depiction of the various Hogwarts professors, and in some cases she seems to present Hogwarts as offering a pedagogical model that would address some of the concerns raised by feminist education scholars: in the novels, teachers who are disengaged from their students or overly authoritative in their methods, or who offer an outdated or manipulative curriculum, are characterized as unsuccessful educators, while those who are encouraging and approachable are praised within the text. For example, some teachers, like Remus Lupin and Pomona Sprout, are depicted as offering gentle guidance in lessons, and seem to listen to and care about their students' lives and progress. In contrast, Rowling characterizes other teachers, such as Dolores Umbridge, as explicitly oppressive and unsuccessful because of their outdated curriculum and methods. It seems readers are meant to recognise that "bad teachers" like these exist everywhere, and so Umbridge's removal is in some ways a triumph of progressive education. Participatory lessons in practical magic, and a goal of literally empowering students, seem to make Hogwarts a progressive institution. Alongside lectures, students are seen actively testing their skills and powers in practical lessons, learning kinetically and (especially in Hermione's case) tutoring other students where necessary. Finally, while exams play a major role in the lives of Hogwarts students, there is also a very obvious practical application of the skills and knowledge learned (either direct job and life skills, or the fight against Voldemort). Coupled with her public commitment to feminism, Rowling thus might be credited with imagining a space that seems to offer a more progressive education than traditional models.

But while a variety of classroom models are represented, some more closely aligned with feminist pedagogy than others, it is the happiness scripts of the institution itself (and wizarding society generally) that prevent Hermione and her female peers from receiving a more explicitly

feminist education. Critics who view Hogwarts as progressive fail to recognize that it actually subscribes to a pedagogical model Freire and hooks might criticise: one that presents an apolitical, unilateral epistemology rather than encouraging diverse perspectives, and one that relies on the banking system of education. The curriculum is confined to teaching students magical skills and subjects,²⁰ rather than providing broader knowledge of the structures of wizard and muggle society, and indeed many wizards have little to no contact with or understanding of the muggle world. This usually seems fairly innocent (such as when Ron's father becomes fascinated by simple objects like toasters), but also sometimes manifests in hateful prejudice (such as that propagated by the Death Eaters). Although students do study wizarding history, this course is seemingly apolitical, since there is no unit or lecture that focuses on the first wizarding war,²¹ and thus no critical discussion of the violent oppression that muggles and muggle-borns faced in that time, or the ways wizarding society either combatted or was complicit in this oppression. In this way, the curriculum presented at Hogwarts also includes the happiness scripts of the wizarding world. Rowling seems to reinforce Hogwarts as ideal by emphasizing the wizarding world, to which the institution of Hogwarts is an important pillar, as free of structural oppression. We can thus draw a few conclusions about the Hogwarts curriculum that liken it to the models criticised by Freire and hooks: it presents one epistemology as fundamentally true and important, it is aggressively depoliticised, it presents knowledge as something to be consumed and recalled when needed, and it reaffirms the oppressive happiness scripts of the wizarding world.

Similarly, while some aspects of Hogwarts teaching methods seem progressive in ways that Freire and hooks would approve of, in practice the school reinforces traditional power

²⁰ Hogwarts begins at age 11, and it is expected that students have been educated either in muggle elementary schools or at home in subjects such as literacy, composition, math, and social studies.

²¹ Voldemort first gained power approximately 20 years before the action of *Philosopher's Stone*. The years from 1970-1981 mark his violent rise to power, the Death Eater Rebellion (wherein Voldemort and his supporters seized partial control of the Ministry of Magic), the subsequent fall of the Ministry, and the dispersal of the Death Eaters after Voldemort's mysterious disappearance. This is to be distinct from the second wizarding war, which occurs in the action of books 4-7 (1995-1998).

dynamics and happiness narratives. Most classes at Hogwarts are lecture-based, and any participation is in the form of Socratic questioning—which can encourage thoughtful and critical engagement with class material, but most often in this case amounts to professors expecting students (especially Hermione) to simply regurgitate the reading assignment. While most classes also include lessons in practical magic, I would argue that this is less participatory than it might seem. Students have the opportunity to learn skills in a hands-on workshop, which could be considered progressive in that it departs from passive lecture style models, but the knowledge is still presented by professors as an intrinsically valuable commodity to be consumed by students who are discouraged from questioning what they are learning and expected to store the knowledge away for use in exams rather than using it to aid in personal or activist transformation. In *Goblet of Fire*, Hermione questions her Defence Against the Dark Arts professor’s decision to teach students how to repel the illegal Imperius Curse²² by “putting the...curse on each [student] in turn”. The volatile Professor Moody chastises her for criticising his methods, patronizingly stresses the importance of being able to fight the curse, and suggests that if she disagrees she should leave the class and not return (Rowling, *Goblet* 203). Several critics (Bassham, Birch) have posited that Rowling may be using the professors of Hogwarts to represent various teaching styles—Hermione and her peers encounter strict disciplinarians in Professors McGonagall and Snape, who have high expectations of their students and insist on the seriousness of their classrooms; they are also guided by gentle and encouraging Remus Lupin, who takes personal interest in students’ lives and encourages their active participation. There are also examples of explicitly “bad” teachers. Professor Binns, a ghost who has not altered his teaching routine since he “got up...to teach [one morning], leaving his body behind him”, typically “drones on” while his students look on with disinterest (Rowling, *Stone* 99). Harry notes in *Order of the Phoenix* that he had “heard just enough [before falling asleep] to

²² The Imperius Curse is one of three “Unforgivable Curses” in the wizarding world, “the use of any on a fellow human being will land you a life sentence in [prison]” (Rowling, *Goblet* 203). Casters of this curse can control the mind and body of their victims.

appreciate dimly that in another teacher’s hands this subject might have been mildly interesting” (Rowling, *Phoenix* 207). There is another instance, in the midst of a rash of mysterious attacks on students in *Chamber of Secrets*, when Hermione interrupts History of Magic to ask Professor Binns for information about a Hogwarts legend connected to the events; his reaction to her questions is very telling of his educational style—he is annoyed at the interruption, dismissive of her questions, and ultimately angry that his authority is challenged (Rowling, *Chamber* 115).

While some might argue that Binns is not representative of all teachers at Hogwarts, and in fact Rowling heavily implies that Lupin is their best and most successful teacher, Binns continues to hold his position even after his death, while Lupin must resign his post after one year because as a werewolf he is facing bigotry from other staff members.²³ Not only does this serve as a further example of institutionalized bigotry in the wizarding world, but this also clearly shows either that the Hogwarts administration supports traditionalist teachers like Binns more than progressive teachers like Lupin, or that it does not place any guidelines on how courses are taught, but assumes that wise and important wizards will automatically make good teachers. Thus we can assume that Lupin’s methods, while somewhat aligned with feminist pedagogical ideals, are present at Hogwarts accidentally and are not something intentionally fostered by Hogwarts. Further, the argument that Rowling may be attempting to valorize Lupin’s teaching method by contrasting it with the less progressive styles of his less successful colleagues does not account for her defence of teachers such as Moody or Snape, who are overly demanding and sometimes cruel to their students yet praised in the narrative for teaching students to master difficult subjects. Perhaps most germane to my point, and as I mention above, Rowling characterizes Hogwarts as objectively good. Thus we must accept that whatever implicit critiques Rowling is making of traditional education models, the explicit educational

²³ Lupin is a werewolf. Intra and extratextually Rowling likens lycanthropy to HIV/AIDS, characterizing werewolves as having difficulty finding gainful employment both because of their medical needs and the stigma associated with blood-borne diseases.

model she idealizes subscribes to a “banking system” model, predicated on an imbalanced power dynamic between teachers and learners, where questioning of specific lessons and of the educational model generally is largely discouraged.

Lastly, Hogwarts operates on a model of education where the end goal is not a transformative experience that leads students to participate in activism, but is instead the securing of meaningful employment within the existing social institutions of the wizarding world. Students sit end-of-year exams (written and practical), with standardized testing in years five and seven which determine what kinds of careers may be pursued upon graduation. Many fans²⁴ have pointed out that with a few exceptions, careers in the wizarding world are limited to retail, the civil service, and teaching. These are careers that largely exist to reproduce and reinforce the values of their society, and so again Rowling’s portrayal of the education system at Hogwarts implicitly reinforces the happiness script that Hogwarts, and the wizarding world generally, are ideal in their current form.

Thus we can see that in these three aspects of education (curriculum, teaching method, and end goals of learning), Hogwarts is an institution similar to those criticised by Freire, hooks, and Crabtree, Sapp, and Licon. While it is sometimes obvious that Rowling is attempting to teach a secondary set of lessons, Hogwarts is characterized by Rowling and reliable sources within the text as an objectively good and successful educational institution. From these examples, we have an idea of what Hermione’s education looks like: prescribed knowledge is passed on from powerful and wise professors, consumed by Hermione, and banked for later use. She is discouraged from questioning the curriculum and method of her lessons, and is expected to perform well on her examinations so that she can succeed in a career that reinforces the dominant structures of her society. Her excitement and engagement are not valued by her professors or her peers, and rather than precipitating a transformative experience of self-

²⁴ See for example Greenbrier and Kolding’s discussion on *Cracked.com*.

actualization, raised consciousness, or drive to activism via her education, her education actually teaches her to repress her ideas and be obedient to the authority of her teachers.

It is possible to argue that, in her portrayal of Hermione's response to the education she receives, Rowling is self-consciously criticizing these regressive aspects of Hogwarts education, and that the books are actually arguing that feminist pedagogy can and must happen outside of (or in resistance to) the limitations of institutional education. It seems that, through Hermione, Rowling heavily implies that the truly valuable kind of learning takes place outside the classroom, that there is more than one way to be smart, and that obsessive and high stress study habits do students more harm than good. However, it is troubling that in valorizing this unofficial education as more valuable than the official one taking place inside the classroom, Rowling presents the limitations of the official educational system as individual flaws of Hermione's rather than as structural problems with the institution of Hogwarts. In other words, the seemingly progressive lesson, in tune with the ideals of a feminist pedagogy, that real and beneficial learning takes place outside the traditional classroom, is regrettably taught to readers at Hermione's expense. Hermione not only seems to learn to curb her feminist "harping" and her activist projects, but Rowling also teaches her (and readers alongside her) implicitly that despite her academic success, her fanatic engagement with education is not in her best interest. Readers see her learn this lesson early on; in *Philosopher's Stone*, when, upon Harry telling her he is "not as good as [her]" at magic, she replies: "Me!...Books! And Cleverness! There are more important things—friendship and bravery..." (Rowling, *Stone* 208). What is interesting about this moment of self-reflexivity is that although Hermione seems to acknowledge Rowling's implied lesson in book one, her behaviour does not necessarily change. Later, in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Hermione is unsuccessful in Divination²⁵ class, and the professor tells her it is because she is narrow-minded and unable to give value to alternative epistemologies (Rowling, *Azkaban* 220). Similarly, in *Deathly Hallows*, Hermione interacts for the first time with Xenophilius

²⁵ Fortune Telling

Lovegood (who, like his daughter Luna, has beliefs that many find farfetched), and upon challenging his belief in a seemingly impossible object, he criticises Hermione in the same way, saying that because she has no imagination there will always be things she cannot understand (Rowling, *Hallows* 333). Thus, although these lessons are aligned with the ideals of feminist pedagogy, Rowling's alternative seems to not include changing education, but rather changing *students* who behave like Hermione.

In the first few novels of the series, Hermione is often characterized as being “bossy” and “shrill”, “nagging” the boys about rules and homework (Rowling, *Stone* 79, 116, 167), but by *Deathly Hallows* she is “biting her lip” (189), “let[ting] the matter rest” (193), and “frown[ing] at the floor while [Harry is] speaking” (411) rather than expressing her disagreement with him. In these ways, although readers certainly see Hermione grow as a witch and a student, they also see her grow into a more likable person: one who is less vocal about her unpopular opinions, and more willing to put others' development ahead of her own. So, it seems that Rowling may be conflicted about her authorial goals: while she openly states that vocal female characters like Hermione are an important part of a feminist YA education (Rowling, “Women of Harry Potter”), and notes that Hermione's activism and generally keen behaviour are meant to reference her own experiences (Rowling, “JK Rowling Interview”), she ultimately seems to not necessarily empower readers to change the method of their education, but rather to teach them that, as hooks notes of her institutional experience, too much zeal and eagerness in the classroom is a subversive and obnoxious act. Ahmed's work is easily applied to Hermione here, since her killjoy status at Hogwarts is obvious, yet her frustrations are never validated. Although it may seem that by having Hermione reassess her attachment to traditional academic achievement Rowling is aligning her explicit message with feminist pedagogical ideals, there is no clear conclusion to this narrative thread. Hermione, when she conforms to the happiness scripts presented by Rowling about Hogwarts and the wizarding world, is allowed to be an “exceptional girl,” and emulate the experiences of other (conventionally male) protagonists

typical of the school story who ultimately find success and happiness in their institutional education. However, when she instead disrupts both the traditional educational setting and the happiness script which upholds it as ideal, she is relegated to the role of feminist killjoy. Ultimately, because Rowling presents a world where feminist activism is not considered necessary, Hermione's "killjoy" disruptions have no resolution, and so she is not able to fully realize her feminist goals. Instead she learns to conform to the dominant narrative, which suggests to her that Hogwarts is fundamentally good.

Readers see that Hermione learns to conform to her society's norms both through her actions and the language used to describe her: not only does she learn not to be a killjoy in her challenging of her Hogwarts education, but also she learns not to openly challenge wizarding society with anti-oppressive activism. In *Goblet of Fire*, Hermione forms the activist group "The Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare" (or SPEW) to campaign for the rights and well-being of house elves²⁶. This is the most obvious example of Hermione acting as a feminist killjoy: while some characters express sympathy for house elves that are explicitly mistreated by their masters, none is interested in a campaign that would put an end to the system in which house elves provide free labour for wizards. Even characters she trusts and admires, such as Dumbledore, Ron's brothers, and Hagrid²⁷ support the wizarding norm of using house elf labour, telling Hermione that caring for humans is the sole aspect of house elf culture, and so the house elves are in fact happy to serve without compensation (Rowling, *Goblet* 210-211, 233). This pattern continues—each time Hermione points to this injustice, another character criticises her efforts and condemns her cause. Ultimately, the subplot is all but dropped from the narrative, and instead of vocal reactions at instances of oppression, readers see Hermione react with looks and gestures. Despite instances where mistreatment of house elves has direct and

²⁶ Small magical creatures "employed" by wealthy wizarding families as domestic servants. However, as Hermione points out, since they are unpaid and bound for life to the family they serve, they are actually slaves.

²⁷ Hogwarts groundskeeper and friend of Harry, Ron, and Hermione. Hagrid is sent by Dumbledore to tell Harry about the wizarding world in *Philosopher's Stone*, and they form a close bond.

obvious negative consequences, Hermione's activism on their behalf is never validated. Again, some characters, such as Dumbledore, agree that house elves should not be abused, but none agrees that the cultural practice is oppressive and should be abolished. Rowling mentions in one interview that she feels Hermione's attempt at activism is misguided, and that while "[her] heart is entirely with [Hermione as she] develops a political consciousness," she is "self-righteous" and "offends [those she is trying to help]" (Rowling "JK Rowling Interview"). While this sentiment does address the feminist criticisms of Hermione's activist campaign, many of which suggest that Hermione silences the house elves as she tries to advocate for them, it fails to offer an alternative that liberates the house elves while teaching Hermione a lesson about activism rather than dismissing her efforts, which serves as a further means of reinforcing oppressive structures. From extratextual information on *Pottermore* we know that Hermione eventually pursues a career in magical law, wherein she officially campaigns for a change in house elves' legal status and representation, but this further negates the significance of her activism by suggesting that systems of oppression can be easily dismantled by working within the existing bureaucracy. It is troubling that these are the major lessons she seems to take away from her Hogwarts education: again, the implication is that students should learn not to upset the system by questioning or challenging its happiness scripts, but instead to reproduce it, because undesirable aspects of the society are the fault of individuals and not the result of systematically oppressive structures.

Thus, Hermione does not ultimately learn to be the kind of student (like Harry) that Rowling seems to endorse, and what she actually learns from Rowling's implicit curriculum is to cling to the institutional structure of Hogwarts as objectively good, and to encourage Harry, who is successful in ways she is not. While I do not want to speculate what individual fans take away from this message, one result could be that young women who identify with Hermione learn that their eager engagement with their education (something that hooks would applaud) is undesirable, that they should defer to male peers rather than asserting their own ideas and perspectives, and that the end goal of their education should be conforming to existing

structures. So, despite what we may first think based on Rowling's personal politics and claims about her series, Hogwarts and the Wizarding World actually reinforce a pedagogical model very close to one feminist scholars have criticised.

However, if Rowling's portrayal of Hermione's education at Hogwarts is far from the feminist pedagogical ideal, fans of *Harry Potter* are addressing the limitations of the "curriculum" offered in the novels by learning, leading, and participating in a previously undiscussed forum that creates a more promising space for feminist learning. They, like Hermione, learn some implicit lessons from Rowling that could be considered feminist (and some that seem to reinforce antifeminist stereotypes and happiness scripts) but ultimately it is through online fandom activity that these young adults are able to learn lessons about feminism in a manner more closely aligned with Freire's and hooks's models. In this section I will first look to Jenkins's work on convergence culture and fan theory to argue that the *Harry Potter* online fan community is not only bridging the gap between literature and digital media, but also providing a kind of feminist education that novels alone never could. Next, I will expand on the kinds of curriculum, lessons, and goals some fans are engaging with in their fandom activities by looking at several examples of fan materials that go beyond simple enjoyment. While it is important to acknowledge that not all *Harry Potter* fans are necessarily engaged with feminism, by focusing on those who do attempt to critique, re-imagine, or refocus *Harry Potter* through a more feminist lens, I will characterize various kinds of online fan engagement as educational endeavours aligned with the principles of feminist pedagogy.

Jenkins suggests that by studying fan culture, we can "document a group insistent on making meaning from materials others have characterized as trivial and worthless" (*Poachers* 3). Two key terms from Jenkins' fan theory are collective meaning-making and collective intelligence: both denote a focus on community, with the former referring to the ability of fan groups to co-operatively define and discuss the valuable aspects of the fandom, and the latter referring to the ways fan communities contribute to the store of knowledge about the fandom

with reciprocal teaching and information sharing (50-53). An interesting facet of the *Harry Potter* fandom is that because the time of its publishing (in the late 1990s and early 2000s) intersects with the growing popular use of the internet, the *Harry Potter* fan community has always existed online. This distinguishes it from earlier popular media such as the *Star Trek* franchise;²⁸ “Trekkies” predate the internet, and although their fandom now exists online as well, it is not where their community was formed (rather the *Star Trek* fan community organized around conventions, fanzines, and fan writing). So, while Trekkies have been characterized as social outcasts for their fan activity, the nature of internet fandom means that *Harry Potter* fans have been able to interact with a community of fans all along. This fact is significant because it enables us to see how the *Harry Potter* fandom exemplifies what Jenkins calls convergence culture. Conventions, fanzines, and fan writing still exist alongside newer internet-based modes of fan expression. “New media,” as Jenkins calls it, did not wipe out the old ways of participating in fan activity, just as new forms of entertainment have not rendered older forms (print media etc) obsolete. Instead, these modes of expression and community building have been expanded and updated online, as well as supplemented with dozens of other previously nonexistent ways of participating (Jenkins *Convergence Culture* 2-3). An understanding of convergence culture allows us to read these fan activities as educational activities. Many fan theorists (Jenkins, Bond and Michelson) have identified *Harry Potter* as an ideal example of convergence culture, since fans can extend their experience across multiple platforms: the novels, films, video games, and online components like *Pottermore* each add something different and important to the *Harry Potter* fan experience. Because of their participatory nature, unlike what young adults may learn in a traditional literature course (even a comparably feminist one), the ways that online fandom activities engage community-building

²⁸ While this example may at first seem disconnected from a feminist discussion, in fact many scholars have written about women and gender in the *Star Trek* fandom. See for example Corse and Hartless.

and collective knowledge-sharing have the potential to teach in a way far more aligned with the principles of feminist pedagogy than novel study alone could offer.

While one could argue that participation itself is a somewhat feminist act, it is important to acknowledge that apolitical and antifeminist participation in *Harry Potter* fandom activities is also common. This section will rather address those fans that participate in ways which explicitly and intentionally disrupt the problematic aspects of Rowling's series by offering criticism, re-imagining characters and their motivations, or refocusing the series to address activism and education more directly than Rowling does. There are three important forms I will address: blogs and popular journalism, posts on social media platforms, and creative fan works like fan art and fan fiction. The significance of each of these mediums of expression comes in part from the fact that they have been characterized as trivial in much the same way as YA itself. Further, each of these modes of fan engagement can be aligned with the principles of feminist pedagogy. Though the curriculum is not always feminist, within the *Harry Potter* fandom there is certainly a large proportion of blogs and journalism that address feminist issues in the text. Similarly, while creative fan works sometimes focus on the heteronormative romantic pairings, there are many that subversively re-imagine the genders, sexualities, and races of Rowling's characters as a means of addressing diversity of representation. Of especial significance is the ability to easily share content more widely on social media platforms; fanzines contain similar content to some of these modes of expression, but pre-internet this content was far less accessible, and far more difficult to circulate. Making this content available on online platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr means that fans separated by geography and age (and possibly socio-economic class, since not all fans are in a position to travel to conventions) can interact with each other's ideas. Similarly, these fan activities value varied epistemologies, dismantle usual teacher/learner power dynamics, and encourage transformation through self-discovery, raised consciousness, and activism rather than reproduction of the status quo. There are several examples of ways that fans are already participating in a feminist education through

the *Harry Potter* fandom in a way that aligns their fan experience with the feminist pedagogical ideals discussed by Freire, hooks, and Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona. My analysis will focus on examples of fans who use their fan engagement to do one of three things: critically analyze the problematic aspects of Rowling's text, or use the text as a framework to comment on other social justice issues; re-imagine characters and their motivations by creating or discussing gender bent, race bent, or queered versions of Rowling's original characters; or refocus the series to address larger issues of activism, education, or other real world applications in a way that Rowling's novels alone cannot.

The practice of reading and writing blog posts, or of reading and sharing internet journalism, is an ideal example of young adults using their fandom engagement to critically analyze Rowling's texts, or using their fandom as a framework for understanding and discussing social justice issues more generally. In September 2015, Mia Oudeh, a Palestinian *Potter* fan, wrote an open letter to Rowling, expressing her disappointment in learning that Rowling had openly opposed the Palestinian "call for a campaign of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with international law and Palestinian rights" ("What is BDS?"). In her letter, Oudeh describes how *Harry Potter* had been a source of inspiration for Palestinian fans who found the wizarding racial war eerily similar to their own oppression by the Israeli government; she explains, expertly using the *Harry Potter* texts as a framework, why she feels the campaign to which Rowling had given her support could never free Palestine from its oppressors (Oudeh "Dear JK Rowling). We can see feminist pedagogical goals being met here in a few ways: the content of Oudeh's letter not only provides information on an anti-oppressive movement, but challenges Rowling's way of thinking; Oudeh disrupts Rowling's authority by suggesting that she has contradicted the sentiments of her novels, and also by sharing her ideas on Facebook, where thousands of other fans were able to see, share, comment, and learn from her within hours; finally, many fans noted in comments that this letter had led to their raised consciousness and engagement with this human rights issue—Oudeh points to the issue of

debating Israeli apartheid without hearing Palestinian voices, and by providing her own voice allows young adults with little knowledge of the history of this conflict to gain better perspective on this social justice issue. While many similarly focused pieces are more often written by those on the older end of the young adult range (20-25), because of the online nature of the *Harry Potter* fandom, fans of all ages can participate in this form of critical analysis by reading, sharing, and commenting. In this way, not only will young adults encounter information and discussions that are perhaps overlooked in a traditional educational setting, but they may be able to develop critical reading and writing skills earlier than a traditional institution might teach them, and similarly learn from alternative kinds of teachers closer to their own age.

Sometimes, the most valuable lesson in fandom activity is not the initial remark or post, but the conversation that follows. This is especially true of an interaction one fan, Twitter user @lordvoldemot, had with Emma Watson during a HeforShe question and answer session via Twitter in January 2015. @lordvoldemot tweeted Watson, saying: “my dad says I can’t be a [sic] engineer, ‘cause it’s a “men profession” what can I do to change that?”, and Watson snappily replied: “Become an engineer” (Watson “Become”). Although there is an obvious feminist lesson in this comment, and it was so widely shared that many fans were able to take strength from it (and also learn that Watson’s support of feminism is something they are interested in), more valuable was the discussion that followed this post. Fans were able to challenge Watson’s response by discussing what other potential barriers might prevent this young woman from becoming an engineer, and learn that perhaps an intersectional approach is necessary to tear down structures of oppression. We again see the neutralized power dynamic—in the initial instance, Watson puts herself on the level of her fans by Tweeting back, and in the subsequent discussion fans are challenging her perspective and using it to complicate their own ways of understanding gender oppression, and their own strategies for fighting it. In Chapter Two I will look more closely at the ways that fan interactions with YA celebrities and celebrity feminism more generally aligns with the principles of feminist pedagogy, but here I will posit more simply

that through online forums such as *Twitter*, fans are able to hone their critical and analytical skills through discussions about the novels. They can also extend their analysis to concepts and conversations connected to or generated by the greater fandom, and that social media platforms play a huge role in fostering feminist pedagogical spaces.

A second important way fans participate in feminist learning through their *Harry Potter* fandom is by creating their own stories and art that take up Rowling's narrative and characters, and re-imagining them in a way that addresses the problematic aspects of Rowling's original texts. Fan fiction and fan art have existed in many forms and many fandoms, but most exciting are the fans that take up aspects of their fandom object and re-imagine them in a more satisfyingly feminist way. While many fan fictions exist "correcting" some of the other less feminist facets of *Harry Potter*,²⁹ the trend of gender bending, race bending³⁰ and queering³¹ characters in fan art and fiction offers diverse representation to a series that presents a largely white, heterosexual cast. Of particular significance are such works featuring a Black (or mixed-race) Hermione. Race-bent fan art of Hermione has existed for years on Tumblr and other social media sites, and for many fans, seeing a Black Hermione is very significant. Alanna Bennett argues that "painting Hermione as a woman of color [sic] [is] an act of reclaiming her allegory at its roots", since "Hermione's story was always one involving a young girl living in a world aggressive towards her for her very existence" (Bennett). More recently, fans were able to see a Black Hermione realized: in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*³², Hermione is played by Noma Dumezweni, a prolific Black British actor. Despite Rowling's enthusiasm for this casting decision, I argue that young Black fans subverting an otherwise marginalized white character is

²⁹ Such as stories narrated by Hermione where she explicitly identifies as a feminist and an activist, or where some magical mishap reveals the gender inequality at Hogwarts to the students involved.

³⁰ The re-imagining of a canon character as a different gender or race.

³¹ The verb "to queer" is used in many ways, but here specifically denotes the re-imagining of a canon character as a member of the LGBT community

³² A new play produced and co-written by Rowling. *Cursed Child* picks up the original story with the trio as adults, and focuses largely on Harry's son. The play opened in July 2016, and the rehearsal script was released for fans unable to attend the live performance.

a powerful act, and that these fans, and not Rowling or the producers of *Cursed Child*, should be credited with this work.

Similarly, there are scores of examples of fan fiction writers who address the heteronormativity of *Harry Potter* by writing stories that re-imagine various characters (especially popular pairings are Harry and Malfoy, and Lupin and Sirius Black) as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or in a process of sex or gender self discovery. As I will address more explicitly in Chapter Three, many of these queer stories (particularly the erotic ones) are simply adding diverse representation without offering much nuance,³³ but their existence still suggests that young adult fans are engaging with *Harry Potter* in a way aligned with a feminist pedagogy. The content of the art and stories themselves (although sometimes addressing specific feminist issues) is less significant; the real curriculum here is in the messages these creative communities teach and reinforce. Fanfiction.net, one of the most popular (non-erotic) fan fiction sites, is headed with a simple banner advising users to “unleash your imagination.” Fans learn first and foremost that their creative contributions are interesting and important, but also, through what we might call a peer editing component, they can hone their creative and technical writing skills. Writers will often connect with other fan writers through the forum and “beta” each others’ stories: this could mean anything from offering suggestions about plot development, characterization, or narrative voice to more technical aspects like grammar, vocabulary, and writing dialogue. While perhaps fan fiction and fan art do not always lead these young adults to activism directly, the enjoyable, peer-to-peer nature of the way these youth are learning may cause them to question the ways they have been taught about reading and creative writing in institutional settings, and thus serve as a transformational education experience. Further, Jenkins cites the case of Heather Lawver, a teen fan fiction writer and founder of *The Daily*

³³ A similar argument could be made about the more heteronormative erotic fan fiction—while in many ways erotic fan fiction is subversive in itself, in that young adults (usually girls and other gender oppressed youth) are creating sexually gratifying content for themselves, and then sharing and discussing it with others, in the case of *Harry Potter* it seems this content does not necessarily offer criticism or ideas about the way sexuality is represented in the original text.

Prophet, a *Harry Potter* fan site where readers could post newsletter style stories to a fictional Hogwarts school paper. When dozens of teens in her online community were served legal cease and desist papers by Warner Bros Studios in 2001, calling their work copyright infringement, Lawver founded *Defence against Dark Arts*. In a triumphant example of grassroots organising, Heather was able to rally the building of a legal case in the defence of her fan fiction community, prompting all charges to be dropped and Warner Bros to release an official statement in support of *Harry Potter* fan writers. While Heather's case is exceptional, as I will expand on below fans often begin their engagement with something like fan creative projects, but ultimately find themselves in a position to become more involved with activist sects of the *Harry Potter* fandom.

Though individually these fandom activities may not seem explicitly connected to activism, the *Harry Potter* fandom as a whole participates in activism in two important ways. First, the forms of engagement I look at above offer end goals that attempt to disrupt the unilateral epistemology presented by traditional educational institutions by fostering self-actualization and consciousness raising, and this disruption of usual educational goals might constitute a kind of activist project in itself. Second, as fans become more involved in the online *Harry Potter* community, and potentially begin attending conventions,³⁴ they may ultimately encounter The Harry Potter Alliance. The HPA deliberately and self-consciously takes up fandom as an activist project, organizing campaigns that call fans to arms for the causes discussed in their favourite texts. Some notable examples of their work include a successful campaign to ethically source all chocolate sold under the *Harry Potter* trademark, literacy and library advocacy projects, and their most recent campaign *Protego*, which aims to combat “misinformation, prejudice, and discriminatory legislation” affecting trans communities (“The Harry Potter Alliance”). Similarly, HPA hosts The Granger Leadership Academy, a leadership

³⁴ Here I want to acknowledge the limit this represents: since conventions are even less accessible to the economically disadvantaged than internet based communities, this kind of fan participation is less radically feminist than one that is more inclusive.

conference for youth interested in learning how to launch activist projects in their own communities. HPA membership offers a feminist pedagogical experience at every level: by taking up the stories fans love and refocusing them as calls to action, HPA shifts the end goal of reading from reinforcing existing structures, and an understanding of readers as passive consumers, to transformation and activism, with an understanding of readers as participants and sometimes leaders in social change. Their organization offers youth a chance to learn about oppression and activism through hands-on community organizing and power-neutral discussion, framed by issues presented by *Harry Potter* and other popular fandoms.³⁵ Unlike blogs, which can critically analyse the texts and surrounding issues, and creative fan work, which can address the problematic aspects of the text by re-imagining them in a more satisfyingly feminist way, the kind of fan involvement HPA encourages seeks to refocus where the emphasis is placed in all facets of *Harry Potter*, and is thus an ideal example of how YA fandoms can act as part of a feminist education. Rather than focus on the literary content (or any potential messages Rowling may be attempting to teach), HPA mobilizes the ways that fans are already “taking control of media that has failed [them], particularly in representation, and making it better” to form an anti-oppressive curriculum based on the needs and interests of the fans themselves. Similarly, instead of focusing on what Rowling is saying about her series, members of all ages and levels of involvement are invited to work together in the creation of campaigns (through work with local chapters), and to present interactive workshops at conferences. Rather than focus on an end goal to this kind of educational experience, HPA Chapters Director Janae Phillips emphasizes a transformative experience, saying that when youth are presented with narratives where “teenage protagonists are quite literally saving the world and are empowered to do so,” the result is a generation of young readers with the skills

³⁵ For example, *Odds in Our Favor*, which launched in 2012, aimed to refocus the media focus on the romance plot of Suzanne Collin`s *Hunger Games* trilogy. Members were encouraged to use the hashtag #myhungergames on social media to share experiences of economic inequality and its intersections with other forms of oppression. This project ultimately partnered with “Fight for 15” and #blacklivesmatter protests demanding fair wages for fast food workers and other economically disadvantaged groups (“Harry Potter Alliance”).

and drive to turn “thought into action” (Phillips). The result is an organization that takes up *Harry Potter* and its fans to teach about oppression, human rights, and feminism in a way that truly embodies the characteristics of a feminist pedagogy.

This chapter has introduced several important concepts and ideas that I will extend in Chapters Two and Three. While I have shown that Rowling’s *Harry Potter* novels, despite Rowling’s explicit statements about their feminist educational value, perhaps do not offer as fully-formed a feminist statement as we may hope, it is important to note that important feminist work is being conducted in this fandom. Fans are not only participating in the ways I indicate above, but, whatever their shortcomings, Rowling and Watson have self-identified as feminist and participated in discussions and activism that have, to some extent, helped bring conversations about feminism into the popular culture sphere. Watson in particular represents an important example: although the nature of her feminism and the usefulness of her position with the UN has been criticised, unlike Rowling she has taken ample time to engage with fans in a meaningful way. Her position as a celebrity feminist still carries a kind of authority that affects the way fans learn from her, but as she noted in her recent interview with bell hooks as part of Paper Magazine’s “Girl Crush” series, she hopes to emulate hooks’s important text *Feminism is for Everybody* by “[trying] to talk to people who might not encounter feminism...about feminism” because while “[feminist discussions] can and should be academic, and that kind of thinking is so important,... it has to be a mass movement to make a big difference. I don't want to preach to the choir” (hooks and Watson). In this way, Watson is able to mobilize her celebrity, and her privilege, to advocate for gender equality in a way that offers feminist lessons for *Harry Potter* fans to engage with.

Chapter Two
Katniss Everdeen and Celebrity Feminism: “Thank-you for Your Consideration”

“Why am I hopping around like some trained dog trying to please people I hate?”
(Collins, *Games* 136)

Suzanne Collins’s *Hunger Games* series, published from 2008-2010, presents a very different kind of education, and a very different kind of feminism, than Rowling presents in *Harry Potter*. Though it may at first seem that the plot of this dystopian science fiction story has little to do with education, it actually poses interesting and important questions about the nature and value of feminist lessons. Unlike Hermione, whose institutional education ultimately reinforces a script that serves to reproduce the patriarchal norms of her society, Katniss Everdeen seems to be learning to transform her society through revolution, but actually is presented with conflicting happiness scripts that neither allow Katniss to be made happy by her society in its current form, nor give her the drive to change it. Both Hermione and Katniss have been praised as strong, “exceptional girl” protagonists, and while they do share many similarities, there are also two important differences. Although they both fight for justice, Katniss, unlike Hermione, does so in the public eye, and so her celebrity (and the issue of celebrity more generally) is an important focus of the series. Additionally, as I discussed in Chapter One, the potential for feminist lessons in Hermione’s fight for racial justice is complicated by the ways the conventions of the school story serve to idealize Hogwarts. The feminist lessons in *Hunger Games* may seem more obvious because of the conventions of dystopian fiction: Katniss’s world is predicated on a technologically advanced totalitarian (fascist) government and its oppression of the masses, and so Katniss’s role as a girl hero fighting this oppression is central to the plot. This difference of genre means that while Hermione and Katniss can (and should) be compared, they are perceived differently by critics

and fans looking for feminist content. *The Hunger Games*,³⁶ *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay* follow Katniss, a reluctant celebrity, as she struggles to survive and learn from both her unfortunate circumstances and her troubling fame. In this chapter, I will take up *Hunger Games* as an example of how feminist pedagogy can be exercised by the fandom of a text with fewer explicit ties to education, and without the explicit didacticism of the series' author.

Collins's story takes readers to Panem, the civilization built on the ruins of a North America destroyed by disaster and war, which is divided into twelve districts and ruled by the Capitol—a totalitarian, aristocratic government that draws resources and labour from the various districts in a large-scale feudal system. Among other oppressive facets of Panem, as retribution for a rebellion that took place 74 years before the action of the first book, the Capitol requires all district citizens to offer up their children (ages 12-18) to a public reaping each year, where one boy and one girl are chosen from each district to compete in the “Hunger Games”—described by Capitol propaganda as “a pageant of courage, honour, and sacrifice” (*The Hunger Games*), but functionally a televised fight to the death in an externally manipulated arena. The sole survivor (or “victor”) is rewarded with fame and wealth, but in most cases is too severely traumatized to enjoy his or her newfound celebrity. Some critics and fans have compared this tournament to that in Koushun Takami's *Battle Royale* (1999), but others (including Collins) describe it as more similar to the Ancient Greek legend of Theseus and the Minotaur. As the trilogy progresses, a new rebellion begins with protagonist Katniss as its figurehead; like Theseus, Katniss volunteers to serve as tribute in this sacrificial ritual, and must learn to navigate the tournament arena, but unlike Theseus she also must learn to navigate her position as the spokesperson for a revolutionary movement she does not fully understand. The series as a whole deals with themes of survival, oppression, class struggle, and identity formation, while

³⁶ For clarity, I will make a distinction between a few similar terms: I will use *Hunger Games* to denote Collins's entire series, *The Hunger Games* as the title of the first book, and “the Games” when referring to the actual event within the series, differentiated numerically if necessary (eg “the 74th Games” as the Games that take place in *The Hunger Games*, or “one aspect of the Games” when speaking more generally).

each of the three novels focuses on a different stage in Katniss's development as a woman, a celebrity, and an activist or rebel warrior.

An important distinction between Collins and Rowling is that, outside of the *Lions Gate* film adaptations, Collins does not provide extratextual commentary to her series. Rowling has been extensively interviewed, is active on social media, and has even created her interactive website *Pottermore* to provide fans with *Harry Potter* bonus material, but Collins has given only a few brief interviews discussing her thoughts and perspectives on *Hunger Games*. While Rowling makes clear her feminist stance and her feminist teaching goals in both the series and in this extensive extratextual commentary, Collins has not publically stated her stance on feminism or the importance of "strong female protagonists" in YA fiction. She does, however, seem to feel that her series can teach readers *some* lessons: in her limited, both in number and in topics discussed, interview material, Collins notes that she intentionally presents a comparison between child soldiers and child celebrities, and that she feels it important for young people to be exposed to the realities of war and oppression as well as what she perceives to be flaws in Western consumer culture (Collins, "Suzanne Collins"). This, in some ways, makes Collins more similar to Judy Blume; although both Blume and Rowling offer more specific, practical lessons to their readers, like Collins, Blume did not give extensive interviews in the heyday of her publication, and her educational project is explicit enough that further explanation is fairly unnecessary to understand her intended lessons. Thus, Collins seems to present feminist lessons in her books, but neither says explicitly that it is her intention to do so, nor denies that her series offers lessons at all. While Rowling, as I argued in Chapter One, ultimately presents a conflicted feminist message despite her seeming confidence about the feminist value of her series, Collins does not characterize herself as a feminist authority, and instead offers implicit lessons within the novels that point to the complexity of the feminist issues her series focuses on without providing external commentary or clarification. I argue that, ironically, Rowling's explicit feminism reduces her series' potential for feminist learning, not

only because of the limited nature of her feminism (insofar as she fails to adequately address the oppressive structures that are implicit to her construction of the wizarding world), but also because it presents her as a didactic authority. In contrast, Collins's refusal to take on an explicitly feminist leadership role allows for a more participatory form of learning. This is important because it gives agency to readers to interpret Katniss's learning experiences and story for themselves, and so (as I will expand on below) may make Collins's series more conducive to a feminist pedagogical model. In part because of the ways that Collins is a very different kind of YA author and celebrity than Rowling, the *Hunger Games* fandom has the potential to teach in a way aligned with principles of feminist pedagogy even more successfully.

This chapter will have two components. First, I will draw on feminist pedagogical theory and Sara Ahmed's concept of happiness scripts to analyze Collins's representation of the various kinds of learning (feminist or otherwise) that Katniss experiences throughout the *Hunger Games* trilogy. I will argue that while it may seem that *Hunger Games* is saying little about education, Katniss does have several educational experiences, and the problem of feminist learning is central to the books, insofar as Katniss learns through various means how to survive, in part by learning how to follow the happiness scripts presented to her first by the Capitol and then by the revolutionary leaders of District 13. Not only does she first learn how to survive in her disadvantaged circumstances, but when she arrives in the Capitol to compete in the Games, she must learn how to perform happiness as a celebrity. Once an armed rebellion against the Capitol begins in *Mockingjay*, Katniss must learn how to successfully perform her role as celebrity figurehead of the resistance, and is assured by those actually in charge that her survival depends on it. In both cases this largely entails performing her agreement with the dominant narrative being presented: first that the Games are a cause for celebration, and later that she is supportive of the rebel agenda despite their morally questionable tactics and leadership. I will argue that ultimately, Katniss seems either to internalize the happiness scripts she has been

forced to perform, or perfect her performance, to the degree that she confuses survival with happiness because of the ways her happiness is tied up in her ability to protect her sister Prim.

Second, I will draw on the work of Henry Jenkins and Sarah Projansky to examine how feminist learning takes place in the media culture surrounding the *Hunger Games* books and films. By combining Jenkins' work on "transmedia storytelling" with Projansky's work on young female celebrities, I will examine fans' engagement not only with the questions about feminist learning raised by Collins's novels but also with the models of celebrity feminism embodied by Jennifer Lawrence and Amandla Stenberg³⁷, the American actors who play Katniss and her arena companion Rue in the *Hunger Games* films. I argue that the different ways Lawrence and Stenberg have embraced celebrity feminism offers *Hunger Games* fans a chance to participate in what Jenkins would call a kind of "collective intelligence" or "transmedia storytelling" about feminism and pop culture (*Convergence Culture* 27, 97-98). Projansky identifies two kinds of "girl stars:" the "can-do" and the "at-risk" (2). I will show that these terms can be used to understand the effect Lawrence and Stenberg have on their fans, and the different ways these young celebrities function as participants in the transmedia collective understanding of feminist pop culture. While Lawrence seems at different times to embody both sides of this binary, Stenberg seems to subvert it in the ways Projansky identifies as ideal. Ultimately, I will argue that fans' engagement with the *Hunger Games* fandom's celebrity feminists is a kind of realization of feminist pedagogy, and perhaps one that has the potential to function even better than that of *Harry Potter*, since Collins is less explicitly didactic than Rowling and lets her text and fans speak for themselves. I will use Jenkins's and Projansky's work to posit that, especially in the case of the *Hunger Games* franchise, female celebrities and their various embodiments of feminism contribute to feminist learning as much—or potentially more than—the characters they portray or the authors that create them.

³⁷ Stenberg has reticently come out as a non-binary trans person, and uses the singular they/them pronoun, in place of the feminine she/her. I will retain the use of she/her in my discussion of Rue, a female character that they portrayed, but otherwise respect Stenberg's gender identity by using their chosen pronouns.

Unlike in Harry Potter, where schooling and education are explicitly thematic to the series, a study of education in *Hunger Games* demands an extension of what usually constitutes education to include alternative learning experiences that take place outside of traditional classrooms. In this part of the chapter, I will argue that although it seems at first that by the end of the series Katniss learns how to fight oppression, she actually learns that she must follow, or at least perform, antifeminist happiness scripts to simply survive. While little attention is given in Collins's series to what Katniss learns in school, there is a focus on her undergoing of several different kinds of learning experiences. First, alongside her formal public school education, characterized by Collins and Katniss as propagandistic and useless, and the lessons she learns about Panem from the annual broadcast of the Games, Katniss also works to learn how to survive in her disadvantaged circumstances as a citizen of the impoverished District 12. What she learns through more official channels, like her public school and the media, can be understood as the official happiness script of the supremacy of Panem's Capitol. However, she is simultaneously undergoing a more subversive, informal education about how to survive in ways not sanctioned by the Capitol. Then, as a contestant in the Games, she undergoes what I will call a "celebrity education" in which she is taught how to survive the Games, which partially entails promoting the official happiness script. Finally, after agreeing to join the District 13 revolutionaries by acting as a figurehead to the rebellion,³⁸ she eventually undergoes an "activist education." It might at first seem that the "celebrity education" she undergoes as part of her training as a celebrity-tribute is solely vapid and unimportant, and that it is her participation in

³⁸ Panem once had a 13th District which publically mined graphite but secretly produced nuclear weapons and advanced military technology. Capitol propaganda teaches that the first rebellion concluded with the demolition of District 13, but actually the two parties came to a nuclear detente. District 13 promised to "play dead" (thus sending a message to the other rebellious Districts) in exchange for being released from Capitol serfdom, and have survived independently in the 75 years leading up to the second rebellion. At the end of *Catching Fire*, Katniss is rescued from her second Games by the District 13 led resistance, and learns that District 12 has been firebombed by the Capitol as retribution for her perceived role in organizing the people of Panem. Much of *Mockingjay* takes place in the underground military complex that houses District 13, which has accepted all survivors from District 12 as refugees. The leader of District 13, Alma Coin, is appropriately named: she seems in every way to be as big a threat to Katniss as President Snow (or, the other side of the same coin).

an activist education that is progressive and feminist. In contrast, I will argue that the “celebrity education,” although its curriculum and methods are designed to enforce conformity to the official happiness script of Panem, ironically offers Katniss tools to survive and extends the subversive lessons she learned about survival in District 12, thus teaching her in a way more aligned with the principles of feminist pedagogy than it first seems. Further, while the education Katniss receives in District 13 claims to offer a revolutionary curriculum, its methods resemble traditional educational models critiqued by feminist education scholars, and ultimately are very manipulative, isolate Katniss from her peers, and are reproductive rather than transformative, in that they focus on teaching Katniss to conform to the expectations of authority figures rather than follow her own goals. I will begin by describing the three kinds of learning experiences that Katniss undergoes—first in her life in District 12, then in preparation for her role as a celebrity-tribute in the Games, and finally in preparation for her role as figurehead of the rebellion—and noting where they align or diverge from feminist pedagogy, before mounting my larger argument: that unlike Hermione, who first seems to challenge dominant narratives by acting as a feminist killjoy, but eventually learns to follow happiness scripts, Katniss’s learning experiences have a much more complicated and contradictory result. She first seems to privately criticise the oppressive structures of Panem, but not to subvert the Capitol enforced happiness scripts. As her education continues she begins to test out other scripts by acting as a killjoy and eventually a revolutionary, but ultimately finds that none of these scripts can keep her safe or make her happy.

An important facet of Katniss’s character is that she is driven by those factors that will allow her, and Prim, to survive. In each instalment Collins makes clear that Katniss will do anything to survive and ensure Prim’s survival³⁹. Katniss has placed all her hopes of happiness

³⁹ After the death of their father in a mining explosion, Katniss and Prim’s mother falls into a catatonic state of depression, and is thus unable to care for her children. Fearing they will be sent to a grim children’s home, Katniss becomes the head of her small family, first by scavenging and pawning their possessions, and eventually by learning to illegally hunt and gather in the woods outside of District 12.

and survival in the happiness and survival of Prim. Ahmed would call this an “inappropriate happiness object” (65). Young women, Ahmed says, are obligated by their societies to seek happiness in “the happiness of a good man”; similarly, parents may also “defer” their own happiness in the hopes that their children will be happy. Though a family bond would seem to make Prim an appropriate happiness object, I would argue that Katniss is subverting the scripts presented by Panem (that everything should be in service of the Capitol) in selecting an inappropriate happiness object in Prim (rather than a man with whom to reproduce more labourers). Her volunteering to replace Prim in the Games is indicative of this complicated relationship. With this argument in mind, Collins’s seemingly unsatisfying, heteronormative epilogue, which disappointingly echoes the tidy and conformist resolution of the *Harry Potter* series, takes new, complex meaning: rather than learning to follow happiness scripts, Katniss seems to give up on happiness altogether.

Part of what Katniss learns during her upbringing in District 12, in some ways the most disadvantaged district of Panem, is the official happiness script presented, and the ways it is enforced, by the Capitol. The script, essentially, is of the supremacy of the Capitol and the happiness of the citizens to serve as labourers and participate in the Games as a celebration of the benevolence of the Capitol. Thus, a key component of the Games is that it is not only a violent competition, but that it is filmed and marketed as a reality television show for entertainment of Capitol citizens, which is simultaneously mandatory for all district citizens to watch (Collins *Catching Fire* 4). Citizens of the Capitol are highly privileged, and have essentially given over control of the government in exchange for “panem et circenses:” in this case, ample food and luxury resources are drawn from the oppressed working districts, and entertainment is offered in the form of the Games. Part of the way that District citizens, including Katniss, are taught to conform to this script is through their schooling. We learn in

Katniss reasons that if she is killed in the Games, Prim may either starve to death (a common cause of death for the poor citizens of District 12) or be permanently overcome with grief.

The Hunger Games that children in District 12 attend public school until the age of 17, where they learn primarily about the history of Panem and the coal mining industry: long before she becomes involved in anti-Capitol activism (or even arrives in the Capitol for the Games), Katniss seems aware that District 12 education is a Capitol propaganda project. Her school operates under what feminist education scholars would criticise as an outdated institutional model. Katniss notes that every lesson always seems to “[come] back to coal” production and District 12’s indebted responsibilities to the Capitol (Collins, *Games* 48). Similarly, given that District citizens are under surveillance to prevent treasonous conversations,⁴⁰ we may safely assume that students are unable to challenge their teachers on the content or methods of these lessons. The end goal, as in all Districts, is to prepare citizens to enter the industry of their District (in 12’s case, coal mining), and is certainly not to develop critical thinking, raised consciousness, or interest in activism. Thus, the Capitol’s right to rule, organize, and oppress the Districts is reinforced from childhood. In these ways, it is obvious that Katniss’s District 12 education is neither progressive nor feminist, and that it serves to reinforce the oppressive happiness script used by the Capitol to control the citizens of Panem. However, from this education, and her life experiences in District 12, Katniss learns a further, implicit lesson: not only does she come to understand the happiness script presented by the Capitol, but she also comes to understand the nature of this script as a method of control. Just as she recognizes that her District school is a propaganda project, she acknowledges explicitly that the supremacy of the Capitol does not and cannot lead the people of Panem to happiness. At this stage in that learning process, though, this does not drive her to consider subverting the norms of her society through rebellion or activism; rather she implicitly subverts the script alone by surviving and seeking happiness in other ways.

Simultaneously, from a young age Katniss learns somewhat more feminist lessons about how to survive her oppressed circumstances, and after her father’s death she must put these

⁴⁰ Katniss mentions that she thinks it is better to let Gale speak out against Capitol oppression in the woods where nobody can overhear them (Collins, *Games* 15-16).

early lessons into practice and work to continue her survival education in order to feed her starving family. These lessons do not directly teach material that allows or encourages her to explicitly subvert the Capitol happiness scripts, but they teach her to survive in ways unapproved by Capitol authority, thus challenging the idea that citizens could be made happy, or even simply survive, by following the Capitol script. To some extent, this unofficial education exemplifies the principles of feminist pedagogy. The methods are participatory and allow Katniss to question her teachers and partially design curriculum for herself. The curriculum largely consists of two areas: food security and trade. Before his death, Katniss's father taught her many important hunting and gathering skills that later allow her to feed her family: not only archery (her signature skill), but also how to safely gather edible plants (and avoid poisonous ones), rudimentary bow making, swimming, and tree climbing. Similarly, her friend Gale instructs her in fishing and trapping. This content is somewhat progressive, in that it opposes what the Capitol wants her to learn by teaching her to survive independent from their oppressive structure, and further in that it teaches her that one *can* survive outside of Capitol control. Similarly, her father teaches her how to rely on trade relationships, forged in his life and cultivated by Katniss after his death, which allow her to barter in the District 12 black market for other goods. She also barter with Gale in their early friendship; the two meet while foraging for food in the woods, and after assessing each other's skills, Katniss offers to teach him archery and bow making in exchange for his trapping knowledge, and eventually they "stop haggling over every trade and begin helping each other out" (Collins, *Games* 11). Since both of their fathers were killed in the same mining accident, leaving their already destitute families vulnerable to starvation, this partnership is of vital importance to their survival. The value of cooperation and trade is a lesson she learns begrudgingly, as trusting other people after her father's death is not her instinct, but it seems to further subvert the Capitol happiness script by fostering community relationships that are mutually beneficial rather than beneficial of the Capitol. The methods of this education are more obviously aligned with feminist pedagogy. Katniss's two main teachers,

her father and Gale, offer gentle guidance and participatory learning opportunities, as well as the freedom to think critically and to engage in meaningful dialogue about the usefulness of the lessons: all important goals of feminist pedagogy. Finally, the end goal of her survival education encompasses both her literal survival and means of metaphorical survival, such as self-actualization, fulfillment and friendship, and the safety of her loved ones (particularly Prim); although this education does not necessarily lead her to activism explicitly, it is somewhat transformative since it allows her to understand the Capitol as an oppressive force and herself as marginalized by their happiness script. In these ways, Katniss's survival training can be viewed as similar to a feminist education of the kind described by hooks, Freire, and Crabtree, Sapp and Licona.

Once she becomes a tribute, Katniss's explicit training for the Games involves two important components: she must perfect the hunting and wilderness skills she has already begun to learn on her own, but more importantly, she must learn how to perform femininity and how to present herself as a tribute-celebrity in a way that serves both to ensure her own survival and to reinforce the happiness scripts presented by the Capitol. While within the Districts the Games are a show of the Capitol's dominance, for the tournament to truly fulfill its purpose the tributes must perform as though the Games are honourable and exciting rather than oppressive and horrifying. Despite the distinctly unglamorous content of the actual Games, tributes are given drastic makeovers and presented to the audience as young celebrities. Katniss is assigned a Capitol stylist and prep team to design and maintain her "look", along with a mentor to coach her in performing for the Capitol audience. From her stylist Cinna, she receives a dramatic makeover, and learns for the first time about Capitol beauty expectations. Similarly, Effie and Haymitch, Katniss and Peeta's escort and mentor (respectively),⁴¹ give Katniss a one day workshop before her first televised interview. Effie coaches Katniss in performing femininity,

⁴¹ Each District is assigned a Capitol representative to escort the tributes to events and help prepare them for public appearances. Each tribute is assigned a mentor from the pool of their District's living victors, but since Haymitch, a rough-tempered middle-aged alcoholic, is District 12's only living victor, he serves as mentor for both Katniss and Peeta in the 74th Games.

and Haymitch attempts to teach her how to perform the Capitol happiness script. These preparations constitute her celebrity training, and Katniss must perform this role to ensure her survival, first as a tribute-celebrity in *The Hunger Games*, and later as a victor-celebrity in *Catching Fire*. Similarly important is that, for a high price, citizens may support their favourite tribute-celebrities with gifts of food, medicine, weapons, and other survival tools, and so maintenance of one's celebrity image in the arena, alongside one's literal survival and combat skills, is a key factor to winning the Games. In *Catching Fire*, Katniss finds it particularly difficult to maintain the celebrity persona her stylist and mentor have designed for her, especially after the unusual events of her victory. In an attempt to manipulate audience sympathies, Katniss and her District partner Peeta present themselves as "star-crossed lovers", and threaten a double suicide so they can win the 74th Games as a team (Collins, *Games* 403). Katniss must perform multiple happiness scripts simultaneously to make her love story, and the story of her happiness to be a Games celebrity, believable.

Katniss's celebrity education may at first appear problematic; it teaches the importance of physical appearance, of putting on false personas to impress others, and also teaches tributes to abide by and reinforce the rules of the dominant structure. Alongside perfecting her hunting and survival skills—the Capitol provides gyms, training equipment, and tutors in various areas like knot tying and fire building, and in some cases Katniss also learns skills from other tributes—she must also learn the more difficult lessons about how to perform as a tribute-celebrity. While training for the Games, Katniss endures teachers who lecture her without her participation, and the only end goals seem to be her survival of the Games and the reinforcing of Capitol happiness scripts by any means. However, I contend that this celebrity education is in some ways an extension of her survival training, and shares many similar characteristics which are aligned with a feminist pedagogy. Because of the sponsorship aspect of the Games, Katniss must indeed learn how to "make people like [her]" (*The Hunger Games*), which in this case involves impressing the Capitol audience with her beauty, femininity, and happiness at

participating in the Games: this is the curriculum of her celebrity education. While this may seem similar to the antifeminist lessons she is presented with in District 12, it ultimately presents her with learnable skills that she can use for subversive purposes.

First, although the curriculum Cinna teaches her about conforming to Capitol beauty standards may seem to teach Katniss that part of her value comes from her appearance, it actually gives Katniss (and her readers) cause to think critically about beauty conventions and performative femininity. She notes after her body hair is removed that she feels “vulnerable” (Collins, *Games* 71) and that she “was so happy when it grew back in”, taking it as a sign that “things might be returning to normal” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 55). In *Catching Fire*, anticipating being once again made over for the Victory Tour,⁴² she comments that soon she will “be unrecognisable” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 13). Katniss continually suggests this disconnect between her “true self” and the performance of her celebrity self. This is an indication that although this lesson is intended to reinforce problematic happiness scripts (about both women and tributes in the Games more specifically), what Katniss actually learns is not that her physical beauty is itself valuable, but rather that it is *something that some people find valuable*, and therefore is a sometimes necessary survival skill. The emphasis of Effie’s curriculum is on conventional femininity as a performance; Katniss learns how to sit like a lady, walk in high heels, and to smile, laugh, and speak in a complimentary way. Rather than attempting to ingrain in Katniss that these skills should come naturally to her as a young woman, Effie stresses that they are societal conventions that anyone can learn. She even admits that she too is performing, telling Katniss to “pretend”, and saying: “I’m smiling at you, even though you’re aggravating me” (Collins, *Games* 134). Haymitch coaches her on “content,” having her try out several different celebrity personas. Again, while this may seem to be antifeminist content, teaching Katniss that she must change her personality to impress people, like Cinna and Effie, Haymitch is teaching

⁴² Each year’s victor, or in the case of the 74th Games, victors, must tour all twelve districts mid-way through the year. The ceremonies and parties they attend publically reinforce the Capitol script celebrating the Games, but also implicitly reinforce the power of the Capitol by keeping “the games fresh in [everyone’s] minds when they would rather forget” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 4)

her a skill vital to her survival of the Games. He similarly encourages her to pretend, and reiterates that “it’s a television show,” and that “all [the Capitol] want[s] is a good show” (*The Hunger Games*). Although he, Cinna, and (to some extent) Effie seem to be encouraging her to follow the Capitol happiness script, the subversive implication of this curriculum is that while performing these scripts is essential to her survival, she does not have to be made genuinely happy by them. In this way, Cinna, Effie, and Haymitch are also teaching her how to exploit the Games by playing to audience sympathies and expectations, and predicting the gamemakers’ conventions and goals. Thus, although Katniss’s celebrity education does not offer an explicitly feminist curriculum, it does ultimately allow her to at least internally subvert the happiness scripts the Games are meant to reinforce.

Not only does the antifeminist curriculum of Katniss’s celebrity education turn out to have some feminist potential, but it is taught in a way aligned with feminist pedagogy. Though Katniss finds her celebrity education frustrating at first, she ultimately appreciates that the priority of her teachers is her survival, and she learns to work with them and trust their instincts. Katniss receives her explicit celebrity education from Cinna, Effie, and Haymitch, but also participates in peer-to-peer learning with her fellow tributes, and has picked up implicit lessons from watching the Games in District 12; this could in some ways be considered a part of what she learns about Capitol happiness scripts, but since these lessons only occur to her as useful once she is a tribute, it is a relevant component of her celebrity education. These three kinds of teachers— Cinna, who encourages Katniss to have confidence in her abilities; Effie and Haymitch, who force Katniss to learn and grow while still allowing her to question their methods; and her own instincts and experiences, which she exchanges with and teaches to the other tributes to learn new ways to survive—teach in a way aligned with feminist pedagogy. As Cinna guides her through *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire*, he earns her trust by teaching her how to survive in the Capitol without exerting authority over her, instead allowing her to challenge and communicate openly with him. Most importantly, like her father, Cinna

encourages Katniss to learn things for herself, and helps give her the courage to trust in her own judgement. Effie and Haymitch are stern and demanding, but this does not necessarily preclude them from being feminist teachers: while they sometimes, especially before the 74th Games in *The Hunger Games*, seem to override Katniss's objections by insisting they know what is best for her, we do see some examples of their collaboration in *Catching Fire*. Once it is announced that the 75th Games will be played by existing victors, Katniss and Haymitch work together to develop a strategy that will keep Peeta safe, and Haymitch accepts Katniss's criticisms about the way their training was handled in the previous Games (Collins, *Catching Fire* 207-208). Finally, there are some lessons she learns in a collaborative, participatory way by interacting with other tributes (both in person and by watching the Games throughout her life) which further teach her in a way aligned with feminist principles. For example, she forces herself to not cry when saying goodbye to her family, because she has learned that those tributes who appear emotional at the reaping are often targeted as weak (Collins, *Games* 26). Furthermore, she picks up survival skills from other tributes (from Rue and Peeta in *The Hunger Games*, and from minor characters Finnick and Mags in *Catching Fire*), and this acts as a collaborative peer teaching experience; in this interaction Katniss holds a huge source of power, because people want her to teach them her skills, but also relies on others to teach her useful skills that she is unfamiliar with. Because these various teaching methods and experiences avoid the aspects of traditional education models that feminist scholars tend to criticise, and instead focus on interactive, critical engagement with material, in this case Katniss learns in a way aligned with feminist pedagogy.

These teachers help Katniss learn how to survive the Games as a tribute-celebrity, but literal survival is not the sole goal or outcome. While the immediate goal is survival, and the official goal is that she reinforce the supremacy and benevolence of the Capitol and the greatness and honour of the Games, the result of Katniss's education is that she also experiences a raised consciousness, in the form of an understanding of what it will take for her to survive (or what it will cost for her to survive). Ultimately, her understanding of the ways one might exploit the

Games as a construct drives her to commit two inflammatory acts of rebellion in the arena. The suggested double suicide serves as an obvious example, since Katniss and Peeta's refusal to kill each other for Capitol entertainment rebels against the happiness script which suggests that killing and dying in the Games is honourable. This constitutes a transformative experience: in District 12, Katniss learns how to survive, and while she acknowledges that the structures imposed by the Capitol are oppressive, she has no interest in subverting or fighting back. After undergoing this celebrity education, she understands the Capitol is not an inescapable force, but rather as a construct that depends on everyone participating in it, and which therefore can be manipulated in subversive ways. In these ways Katniss's celebrity education, despite how it first may appear, is both invaluable to her survival and ironically aligned with feminist pedagogy. The content, while not overtly feminist, allows Katniss to begin subverting Capitol happiness scripts by understanding that her unhappiness is valid. Her teachers encourage her to participate in and question their methods, and in some cases she is able to collaborate in mutually beneficial learning experiences with her peers. Though her celebrity education does not lead to explicit activism (since, as I will argue below, her activities with District 13's rebels are not as activist as they may seem), it does lead to a transformative experience for Katniss, since she begins to understand her position as a pawn in an oppressive happiness script, and in the long term it inspires her to want to make change in Panem.

Readers have praised Katniss's participation in District 13's rebellion as powerful and feminist, and indeed it seems to serve as the primary evidence of Katniss as an "exceptional girl" protagonist. There are a few reasons for this assumption: the rebels have many female leaders and generals (including Alma Coin, the leader of District 13), and Katniss is shown physically training to participate in combat against an oppressive government. This seems to extend her survival training, while additionally showing her how to use this training to overthrow power structures instead of just surviving within them. In this way, the rebellion presents its own happiness script—essentially that overthrowing the Capitol will liberate the peoples of Panem—

and constitutes a kind of feminist happiness script that these critics have been keen to valorize in Collins's text: that participation in a rebellion against an oppressive government constitutes a feminist activity.

However, critics and fans who celebrate Katniss's participation in the rebellion as an example of feminist activism may be overlooking an important and troubling aspect of this learning experience, since, as even Collins seems to suggest in the text, Katniss's "activist education" is actually manipulative, isolating, and authority-focused, and therefore much less aligned with feminist pedagogy than her celebrity education. The curriculum has two components: how to act as a spokesperson for the rebellion (in some ways this is an extension of her celebrity training), and military training. In the former, she mainly learns how to motivate the peoples of Panem to participate in the uprising through promotional videos and footage of her fighting the Capitol forces. Katniss describes her role as "the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 12), and Coin stresses that her safety (and that of Peeta, who has been taken hostage by the Capitol) relies on her performing her job well. Katniss's celebrity is thus co-opted by Coin, but rather than performing well as a means of surviving the Games, Katniss must perform well to further Coin's agenda. As in her District 12 education, Katniss must rely on information from a somewhat untrustworthy and manipulative source. Similarly, in order to take part in the coup of the Capitol, Coin demands that Katniss undergo District 13's rigorous military training. She learns how to operate weapons, march, and navigate the terrain of a battlefield (primarily the streets of the Capitol) rather than the woods or the arena. The overarching problem with the method of this education and its teachers is the emphasis put on following authority (of Coin, and of her military superiors) without question or criticism. In a final test designed to determine recruits' field eligibility, each candidate is tested in a simulated battle on several general areas, and then specifically on their area of greatest weakness. Katniss's final test involves receiving an order that contradicts her instincts, and she realizes that her military superiors perceive her greatest weakness to be her mistrust of authority

and resistance to following orders (Collins, *Mockingjay* 279). This is representative of the end goals of this activist education; from the perspective of her educators, she should ideally act as a mouthpiece for their rebellion, use her celebrity to manipulate the masses, and then die as a martyr for their cause. In these examples, the problems with her activist education are clear: the lessons are to trust authority and follow orders, which is not only out of sync with feminist pedagogy, but also in this case serves to undermine the significance of her attempt at transformative world changing by implying that militant activism and organizing will always be just as corrupt as the structures they oppose. The methods are not participatory or collaborative, and furthermore, unlike the content of her celebrity education, the emphasis is not on Katniss's survival or transformative experience but on the success of the movement at any cost.

In these three stages of Katniss's education—first in District 12, then in the Capitol, and finally as a part of the District 13 resistance—we can see a kind of trajectory in her feminist learning and role in performing the happiness scripts of the Capitol. Though her survival lessons in District 12 help her to understand her position as marginalized by the Capitol, and the ways happiness scripts are used to control the peoples of Panem, they do not inspire her to more actively subvert those scripts, and instead she learns how to survive within them. Later, as a tribute-celebrity (and then as a victor-celebrity), she receives a second official education as she is taught to perform and promote the Capitol's happiness script as a media celebrity, but at the same time this education functions in a potentially feminist way as she learns how to take on the role of feminist killjoy, and attempts to disrupt Panem more fully by refusing to perform the happiness script that suggests killing and dying in the Games is honourable.

An aspect of *Hunger Games* which warrants further exploration is Katniss's relationship with her arena companion Rue: when Rue is killed in *The Hunger Games*, Katniss covers her body with flowers and mourns her loss on camera. After Katniss and Peeta's victory, Katniss notes that the televised recap of the Games “omit[s] the part where [she] covered [Rue] in flowers...because...[it] smacks of rebellion” (Collins, *Games* 424). As Katniss's feminist learning

continues, Rue's death becomes symbolic of Capitol oppression, and some of her early killjoy acts seem to be in response to this. It is when she eventually realizes that killjoy acts are not enough to keep her (and her loved ones) safe and happy—that the system is too damaged for individual resistance—that she takes on the role of public revolutionary on *Mockingjay*. In this way she becomes a kind of feminist authority, and seems to fulfill her destiny as an “exceptional girl” within the narrative as well as a feminist role model for readers. However, unlike Hermione, whose similar trajectory is resolved by the end of her narrative, and is thus again able to be made happy by the traditional script initially imposed on her, Katniss ultimately finds that the role of exceptional revolutionary does not lead her to happiness either. She becomes more and more conflicted about the role she is playing in a movement that is increasingly revealed to be just as authoritarian and rooted in inequality as the previous government, and ultimately decides to sever ties with her role as feminist/revolutionary leader, her role as a celebrity-tribute, and her goal of personal survival by assassinating Alma Coin, who is poised to become the new leader of Panem. When Katniss discovers that Coin plans to use the same oppressive, vengeful tactics as the previous government by continuing the Games to control and punish Capitol citizens, she actively refuses the role of feminist authority (celebrity figurehead of Coin's revolution), and in so doing, seems to find closure in her narrative: she assumes she will be executed, and takes a kind of happiness in knowing that her final act was to *finally* disrupt Panem and challenge the oppressive structures of the Capitol in a public and meaningful way. Unfortunately, however, she does not find this closure and instead is returned, highly traumatized, grieving the loss of her family⁴³ and suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, to what remains of District 12. Collins then adds a troubling epilogue in which Katniss reflects on her recovery process and reveals that, despite her previous insistence that she would never have children, she and Peeta have since had two. This epilogue appears to have the same effect

⁴³ Prim is killed, her mother is offered work in another District (and seems to prefer to be away from Katniss), and Gale, her best friend and onetime love interest, because he may have been involved in engineering the explosion that killed Prim and many other children and medics, also leaves to work in another district and keep away from Katniss.

as that in *Harry Potter*, wherein Hermione has married Ron, had two children, and begun her career at the Ministry of Magic. However, Collins's epilogue is somewhat unconvincing; while Hermione's "happily-ever-after" focuses on the mundane realities of marriage and parenthood, Katniss's thematizes death and nightmares. None of the survival lessons she has learned equips her to survive in this state, and so what seems at first to be an unsuccessful attempt at a heteronormative happy ending actually seems to amount to Katniss relying on the other method of survival she attempting to resist internalizing: the performance of happiness scripts, despite these performances never actually leading to her happiness in the past. In this way it seems that Katniss has given up on happiness altogether, or at best conflated literal survival with happiness.

While this textual analysis serves to address some of the complicated questions Collins seems to be posing to her fans through Katniss's experiences of feminist learning, ultimately it still focuses on the content of Collins's text and fails to consider *Hunger Games* as a wider cultural phenomena, and further fails to consider how YA readers are contributing to making their fandom an educational experience. Other critics may question the relevance of focusing on celebrities in literary analysis, but I contend that part of the way young adults experience this literature is through their engagement with celebrity culture. Since Collins has chosen to become a less prominent figure and source of extratextual information than Rowling or Meyer, the more visible *Hunger Games* celebrities are those involved in the film adaptations, specifically Jennifer Lawrence and Amandla Stenberg, the actors who play Katniss and Rue. Both have taken up feminism as a key component to the nature of their celebrity, and like Katniss have had difficulty navigating their fame and how they are perceived by their audience.

As I gesture to above, critics who praise Collins for the feminist value of her text may assume too quickly that Katniss's story leads to her feminist empowerment. Actually, what is presented by the *Hunger Games* trilogy is much more complicated than that, and Collins does not unambiguously present Katniss as a feminist protagonist in the novels, nor does she make

very many concrete claims about her series at all. However, as I show in Chapter One, the ways that fans are engaging with YA fiction through digital media and online fan activities represents a more interesting and important means of these texts enabling feminist lessons. I will use Jenkins's and Projansky's work on convergence culture and female stars to posit that, especially in the case of the *Hunger Games* franchise, female celebrities participate, alongside fans, in a kind of transmedia storytelling that is actively building the cultural understanding of the feminist movement, and thus have more potential to teach feminist lessons than the characters they portray or the authors that create them. Henry Jenkins's work on fan culture, beginning in 1992 with *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, uses a few specific terms and concepts to explain his theories, many of which have already been applied to YA fandoms. While my discussion of Jenkins in Chapter One gives a brief overview of convergence culture more generally, here I will describe these terms in more detail as a means of extending the ways Jenkins's work has previously been used, and demonstrating the significance of YA celebrities and celebrity feminism to the potential feminist value of YA fiction.

Jenkins describes three major concepts of relevance to my project—participatory culture, collective intelligence, and transmedia storytelling. Within participatory culture, “not all participants are created equal,” since corporations still hold wealth and power to control media in a way individuals cannot.⁴⁴ However, new media technologies do allow media content to be produced, discussed, modified, and reproduced in a variety of forms by anyone with access to them. This concept has had a tangible effect on fan culture; where fandoms once relied solely on producers for authoritative content, individual fans of all ages are now empowered to produce content of their own, or rewrite content released by original producers, and add that content to what Jenkins calls the collective intelligence.⁴⁵ In this way “consumption has become a collective process”, and this, Jenkins contends, is “an alternative source of media power” (*Convergence*

⁴⁴ The ways that this idea intersects with the unequal power over media held by the Capitol warrants further investigation.

⁴⁵ A term originally coined by French cybertheorist Pierre Lévy.

Culture 4). The experiencing of media within a participatory culture allows for fans to come together and share the knowledge they each have, and by so doing create a collective intelligence which anyone can draw from. A similar term Jenkins uses here and elsewhere in his work is collective meaning-making, wherein a part of what participants can draw from the collective intelligence is meaning and significance that is not necessarily in line with that of the authoritative producer (*Convergence Culture 4-6*). YA fandoms both participate in a collective intelligence and engage in collective meaning making.⁴⁶

An interesting example of this in fan blogs or fan boards (on social media sites like Tumblr or Pinterest) is the idea of “headcanons” and the declaration of “headcanon accepted”. A “headcanon” is an extension of the world that does not necessarily contradict, but rather extends, canon material: in essence, an idea that in the creator’s head is part of the canon (or the authoritative material)—for example a fan may have a “headcanon” that after the fall of the Capitol, Katniss comes to regard Haymitch as a father, and with her help and support he is able to overcome his alcoholism, and this fan may share this with other fans online. Those who agree, or find their idea compelling or important may share this “headcanon” on their own profile, and declare the “headcanon accepted.” In this way this idea of Katniss and Haymitch’s post-book relationship, while neither confirmed nor denied by Collins or *Lionsgate*, becomes part of the collective intelligence of the Hunger Games fandom. Similarly, any meaning or significance drawn from this idea functions as an act of collective meaning-making.

Finally, transmedia storytelling is “the art of world making”, and denotes media producers who make information about and engagement with fictional worlds available across multiple media platforms, therefore encouraging fans to “[invest] time and effort” into their experience of the media for a more complete understanding of the world (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture 21*). Nicola Balkind discusses transmedia storytelling as a key component on recent YA fandoms like *Hunger Games*, noting that *Lionsgate* uses transmedia tactics in their advertising

⁴⁶ For further discussion see Ohlheiser (2016)

for the film release of *Catching Fire* (55). Jenkins cites the *Matrix* franchise as an example of transmedia storytelling, but more relevantly to this project, the *Harry Potter* fandom has become perhaps the most ideal realization of this term (*Convergence Culture* 97-98, Gupta 224). Rowling's novels no longer exist in isolation: as I discussed in Chapter One, the world of *Harry Potter* has been expanded by the *Warner Bros* film adaptations, video games, theme parks, and companion books, and Rowling offers world building information in the form of *Pottermore* posts, Tweets, and her two most recent projects *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.⁴⁷ Most of these elements could be enjoyed in isolation, but for a more complicated understanding of the *Harry Potter* universe, fans must access this varied content across media platforms. Further, fans contribute to this world building themselves through their fan activities, and many fans have now suggested that the content they have generated is more valuable than the authoritative content presented by Rowling (Ohlheiser). In this way, some fans are able to learn feminist lessons through critical engagement with a YA text. Jenkins's theory thus subverts our usual ideas about media consumption, suggesting that rather than making youth passive consumers, media convergence makes them active and critical participants.

This argument can be extended and applied to celebrity culture (and popular culture in general) by rethinking celebrity journalism and the content produced by celebrity feminists as spaces of critical reading, writing, and learning rather than what child psychologist Mary Pipher would nervously call "the junk values of mass culture" (Pipher 23). I suggest that both celebrities and fans are participating in the production of *Hunger Games* (and general YA) media, feminist media, and most significantly, feminist *Hunger Games* media. Together they are contributing to a collective intelligence about the feminist movement generally, and the feminist value of pop culture events, by contributing their individual knowledge on online platforms and participating

⁴⁷ Again, *Cursed Child* is a new play produced and co-written by Rowling which continues Harry's story as an adult, and *Fantastic Beasts* is an upcoming film about wizards in 1920s New York, for which Rowling wrote the screenplay.

in expanding ideas, and drawing meaning from these ideas, which in turn can be extended, critiqued, and shared by others. In this way, popular feminism is a form of media that can, and should, be considered a kind of transmedia storytelling, with celebrity feminists as an important kind of contributor. While young adults have access to information about feminism in more traditional forms, such as scholarly feminist writings (and perhaps through their institutional education, if they attend a school that offers such a curriculum), a large component of recent feminist discourse both comments on popular culture and is discussed in popular media forums. Online magazines like *Bitch*, *Bust*, and *Curve* and websites like *Jezebel* and *Bustle*, alongside other kinds of internet platforms such as social media, discuss a broad spectrum of feminist issues in a way that is both accessible to teen audiences and widely circulated. While much of this content looks at political, economic, and human-rights focused issues, pop culture events are presented in these sources as similarly important aspects of the current feminist conversation. Celebrity feminists have acted as important contributors to these conversations, particularly insofar as their individual statuses as intersectional feminists are debated in the context of larger issues.

Emma Watson poses a good example of how celebrity feminists act as important contributors to the transmedia experience of cultural feminism. As I discuss in Chapter One, in July 2014, Watson was appointed the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador; her speech promoting the UN's HeforShe campaign garnered a significant amount of press, and launched many online discussions about the capacity of such a campaign, of Watson as a feminist, and of celebrity feminism in general. Watson has been praised with comparisons to Hermione, with fans especially noting her academic success and involvement in social justice issues,⁴⁸ but also criticised by some who feel that her feminist approach lacks intersectionality and centers men

⁴⁸ Watson attended Brown University (2009-2014), and maintained a high GPA while continuing to work on films. Other than her work with the UN, Watson has lent her voice and support to environmentally sustainable fashion designers.

(McKenzie). In this case, Watson's celebrity feminism participates in a cultural convergence of media that can contribute to her fans' understanding of current feminist issues. Her status as a *Harry Potter* celebrity is considered alongside her contributions to the feminist movement, and so fans' response to Hermione as a potentially feminist character (in novels and movies) is partially understood through watching Watson's speech online, and then through reading blogs, celebrity journalism, and social media posts unpacking the speech, Watson, and Hermione. In this way, although fans could enjoy, and find feminist lessons in, Hermione as a character in a novel alone, in order for them to develop a nuanced understanding they must seek out other parts of the conversation (or, to use Jenkins's term, the story) across media platforms. Further, their participation in the construction of the transmedia story about this event contributes to the collective intelligence about feminist issues, feminist YA characters, and celebrity feminism, and to the collective meaning making about Hermione as a character. In this way, while many examples exist of celebrities who either offer apolitical or antifeminist lessons, celebrities who engage with feminism, and particularly those celebrities who are associated with youth culture or YA fiction, are participating in what Jenkins would call transmedia storytelling, where instead of building on a fictional world, they are adding, alongside their fans, to the collective intelligence about feminism and its intersection with popular culture.

Watson, like Hermione, seems in every way to be an "exceptional girl", or what Sarah Projansky would call a "can-do" girl. In her book *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination & Celebrity Culture*, Projansky contributes to the conversation about celebrity feminism by looking closely at the ways "girl stars" (including characters, the actors that play them, and other kinds of girl stars like children of politicians) are constructed and portrayed in media, and the ways that young girls experience and respond to this media (5). She cites Anita Harris, who identifies two archetypes: "the "can-do" girl who is 'confident, resilient, and empowered,' and the "at-risk" girl who 'lack[s] self esteem' and/or engages in risky behaviour" (2). Further, Projansky identifies two kinds of "alternative" girl stars, and by so doing reads past the binary

distinction between the “can-do” and the “at-risk” girl. These alternative girls are: “those who are not white” and “those who...can...be understood to do something more than simply reproduce [the can-do/at-risk] dichotomy” (64). I argue that we can see Jennifer Lawrence and Amandla Stenberg as reproducing and subverting (respectively) the “can-do”/“at-risk” dichotomy Projansky analyses in her work, and that this both informs their status as celebrity feminists and deepens our reading of Katniss. It seems that while Lawrence fits Projansky’s archetype for the “girl star,” Stenberg is becoming the exact opposite—they are not white, their sexuality is being discussed but they are not necessarily being sexualized, and they are tackling issues of minority oppression in such a way that simultaneously presents them as neither “can-do” nor “at-risk.” While fans are engaging with these two Hunger Games celebrities in very different ways, each is addressing feminism in some manner. Their positions within a convergence culture allow their voices to be heard by fans in new ways, but also allow fans to interact with them on their own terms, and have conversations of their own about feminism while participating in their Hunger Games fandom.

Katniss, again, has been praised as an “exceptional girl” for her perceived role in feminist activism, but I argue she more accurately fits Projansky’s “can-do”/“at-risk” binary: she is presented as “can-do,” but oscillates between seeming to actually achieve feminist goals and being “at-risk” in many ways. I think that Lawrence occupies a similar role in her celebrity feminism. She appears at first to be a “can-do” girl much like Watson: Lawrence has experienced huge success in her film career,⁴⁹ and she has also become very well known for her own celebrity, that is, the way she behaves now that she is famous. Although, again, fairly criticised by some for being a “white feminist” (Gay), she is wildly popular on Tumblr and in celebrity journalism for her outspokenness on a few feminist issues. In October 2015, she was featured in

⁴⁹ Lawrence has received four Oscar nominations, and one win (for *Silver Linings Playbook* in 2012).

Lena Dunham’s feminist newsletter *Lenny*⁵⁰ discussing the pay gap in Hollywood, and has also, on various occasions, spoken out against sexism both in awards show “red-carpet” interviews and in the film industry generally. For instance, when asked by a journalist to “tell [them] about the pieces [she] is wearing” at the 2013 Academy Awards, she took the opportunity to point out the inanity of his question by replying: “what do you mean? Like this is the top [gesturing to the top of her gown], and this is the bottom [gesturing to the bottom]” (Shoard). She is often quoted advocating for body positivity and diverse representations of women, sometimes by expressing serious sentiments about the pressure women (and especially celebrities) are put under to be extremely thin, and sometimes by vocalizing less serious desires for pizza, French fries, and junk food, dispelling the idea that women in the public eye should avoid high fat foods (Sullivan). In these cases she has behaved contrarily to what we expect from young female celebrities, and fans have responded enthusiastically to this, often describing her as “refreshing” (Walden). However, she has also engaged in what some would call “at-risk” behaviour: as I mention in my introduction, in August 2014 Lawrence’s iCloud was hacked and nude photographs of her were leaked onto the internet. This was an example of the public’s fear for her wellbeing, but she was again able to become a “can-do” celebrity feminist in her public response to this incident. In a *Vanity Fair* interview, she characterized this as a “sex crime”, and sparked an important discussion about celebrity privacy and bodily autonomy. She maintained that invasions of her privacy should not be expected because of her celebrity, and that her decision to photograph herself was nobody’s business but her own (*Vanity Fair*).

Amandla Stenberg has risen to a very different kind of fame—unlike Lawrence, who picked up a very mainstream kind of celebrity status and then had a bad celebrity experience, Stenberg’s career began with racist Hunger Games fans bemoaning them being cast as Rue before the film was even made. Despite explicit descriptions of Rue as having “dark brown skin”

⁵⁰ Dunham, another young celebrity feminist, is an actor, director, and screenwriter. She is most famous for her HBO show *Girls*, and for *Lenny Letter*, her informal feminist newsletter.

(Collins, *Games* 52), some were outraged that Rue would be played by a Black actor, and social media was flooded with fans saying that the character would be ruined because she does not look how they pictured her (Balkind 72). Collins's response to these fan reactions is telling; she makes even more explicit that Rue (and most of District 11) is intentionally Black, and that this is important to the plot, but dismisses criticisms of a white Katniss, saying that her race is meant to be ambiguous (Collins "Suzanne Collins Interview"). What Collins seems to imply here, and especially given the racially loaded images of Black District 11 plantation workers, is that there is no connection between race and class oppression in Panem. An interesting example of convergence culture that happened following this reaction is a Tumblr site created by one of Stenberg's fans, cataloguing all of the racist tweets about Rue/Stenberg after the movie was released. Many of the original posters were (appropriately) shamed by other fans for their oppressive comments, and ultimately either apologised or removed the offensive material (Balkind 73). After *The Hunger Games*,⁵¹ Stenberg used their relative fame to give voice and gain access to various activist projects, most of which focus on empowering Black women, girls, and members of the LGBT community. Their video "Don't Cash Crop on my Cornrows," made for a high school history class project, addressed cultural appropriation of Black hairstyles by non Black people; it was widely acclaimed, and started a broader discussion about "what...America [would] look like if it loved Black people as much as it loved Black culture" (Stenberg). Stenberg is very active on social media, and has garnered much of their fame through their Tumblr presence. Other recent projects include their work with Sebastian A Jones and Ashley A Woods on *Niobe: She is Life*, a comic book about a young Black female warrior, her appearance on the cover of TEENvogue, where they were interviewed by Solange Knowles

⁵¹ As Rue is killed in *The Hunger Games*, Stenberg only appears in the first film.

discussing their involvement in activism, and their short film “Blue Girls Burn Fast”, which they wrote and directed as a part of their application to Tisch School of the Arts at NYU.⁵²

These fan reactions in many ways set the tone for Lawrence’s and Stenberg’s rise to fame, and indeed to their statuses as important celebrity feminists. While Lawrence advocates attention to many important feminist issues such as the wage gap, body positivity, and sexual harassment, she tends to focus on issues that predominantly affect otherwise privileged women. Thus, like her being cast as Katniss, she has been criticised for implying that various systems of oppression (gender, race, class, sexuality) are not interlocking. While, like Rue, they have also faced racist backlash, Stenberg has rightly been praised as having an intersectional understanding of feminism, and particularly focuses their activism on amplifying the voices of Black artists and queer and gender oppressed youth. Since their appearances in the *Hunger Games* films, each has grown into a very different kind of celebrity feminist. While Lawrence, like Katniss, more simply reproduces the “can-do”/“at-risk” binary, Stenberg seems to subvert it in useful ways—they are not white, and they prioritize amplifying the voices of other people of colour, their sexuality is being discussed but they are not necessarily being sexualized, and they are tackling issues of minority oppression in such a way that simultaneously presents them as neither “can-do” nor “at-risk”. Thus, the contributions each makes to the transmedia collective understanding of feminism and popular culture seems to educate fans in different ways.

I will extend these ideas by arguing that engagement with YA celebrities, and the role of celebrity feminism in forming a transmedia collective intelligence about popular feminism, is a form of education aligned with principles of feminist pedagogy. In Chapter One, I argued that YA fandoms and their associated activities are acting as a form of feminist pedagogy: some feminist curriculum is presented by authors in the texts themselves, and this is extended by fans who produce further feminist content by critically analysing the texts or wider fandom, by

⁵² For further information on Stenberg’s many impressive accomplishments, see her website www.amandlastenberg.com.

reimagining content in more satisfyingly feminist ways, or by refocusing the story to address more explicitly feminist concerns. Unlike Judy Blume's didactic texts, and while some authors like Rowling do have lessons in mind, the activities the fandom participates in engage the community to teach and learn from each other, and encourage questioning of lessons and active debate. Often this fandom engagement leads to a transformative experience: for some teen readers this could amount to a raised consciousness or self actualization, but ideally it leads fans to participate in activism. The nature of celebrity culture is such that, especially in the case of the three fandoms this thesis addresses, female celebrities are always/already addressing feminism (even if only by omission), and that lessons learned from celebrity feminists are aligned with the principles of feminist pedagogy. Because many of the celebrities involved in the YA sphere are somehow addressing feminism, even a fan who mainly participates in fandom by reading heteronormative "happily ever after" style fan fictions is still very likely (given that the internet, as Jenkins argues, is the hub of fan activity, and spaces of fan activity often house multiple fandoms) to have been exposed to the criticisms of this narrative and given these criticisms some thought. Similarly, while some YA celebrities present antifeminist sentiments (such as Shailene Woodley⁵³), or decline to present their feminist stance (such as Collins herself), as Projansky notes, celebrities (and especially young, female celebrities) are open to criticism and discussion despite their power position in a way that other authority figures are not (183). Teens may see these YA celebrities as superlative peers, rather than teachers, and so although they hold a very real kind of power, it is not necessarily perceived as such by young adults. In this way, celebrity feminism acts as another kind of fan engagement that teaches under the principles of feminist pedagogy. Celebrities like Lawrence and Stenberg (and Watson, and Stewart on occasion) may present feminist content, which is then supplemented with celebrity journalism ; this content is then taken up by fans that discuss and "talk back" to the

⁵³ Woodley plays both Tris Prior, protagonist of Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series, and Hazel Grace Lancaster, protagonist of John Green's *The Fault in our Stars*, in the respective film adaptations. She has frequently been quoted rejecting feminism because she "loves men" (Dockterman).

celebrities and news outlets through their fandom activity. Finally, as with fandom activity more generally, they may encourage consciousness raising, self actualization, and activism—Stenberg specifically is so engaged in activism and feminism that their fans have come to understand feminist activism not only as a logical extension of feminism but as a principle.

While there is great potential for feminist learning in various embodiments of celebrity feminism, the kind presented by Watson (and further, by Rowling) is in some ways limited. I have argued that there is more potential in less explicitly didactic celebrity feminists, and particularly in those, like Stenberg, that subvert conventional expectations for how celebrity girls should behave. Watson acts more as a traditional teacher figure than as a collaborating peer. Though her age (currently 25) and connection to YA fiction still give Watson the potential to teach about feminism in a way aligned with the principles of feminist pedagogy, Lawrence and Stenberg may have the capacity to engage with YAs in a different way. Those who see them as funny and wise friends, rather than accomplished international human rights workers like Watson, may find their feminist messages less intimidating and easier to apply/incorporate into their own worldviews—where Watson hopes to effect a global change in the status of women, Lawrence wants to be taken seriously in her work, have fun with her friends, and eat a whole pizza when given the chance, and Stenberg, though engaged with serious human rights movements such as Black Lives Matter, is also exploring their identity and applying to university like any other young person. Both kinds of goals set an important model for the feminists today's youth are becoming, but Watson's feminist lessons come with an additional perceived authority which affects the way youth learn from her.

Chapter Three

Queering Twilight: Thinking Critically and Creatively about Problematic Texts

“I can’t always be Lois Lane,” I insisted. “I want to be Superman, too”” (Meyer, *Twilight* 324)

Though very different from *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games* in genre, plot, and reception, and despite its seeming disconnect from both the didacticism of Judy Blume and the implicit feminist messages of Rowling and Collins, *Twilight* serves as an important part of the current YA sphere and thus this conversation. Since its initial release in 2005, Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* saga has been criticised by parents, (anti) fans, and academics from a variety of angles. The series has been accused of being antifeminist, Mormon propaganda, “abstinence porn”, poorly written, and, most significantly to this project, Meyer’s protagonist Bella has been denounced as the “anti-Hermione”: a passive, bland, damsel in distress, and the worst kind of role model for teen readers (Cox). These criticisms are arguably valid, and certainly many *Twilight* fans enjoy this text simply as an escapist fantasy, and some learn the kinds of antifeminist lessons the above critics fear they will. However, *Twilight* also has amassed a following of young people who are able to find some feminist value in this romantic text. I will argue in this chapter that this is indicative of the ability of young adults to not only critically assess pop culture as they enjoy it, but also to learn feminist lessons from ideologically problematic sources. This chapter will argue that the *Twilight* fandom has the ability to educate readers in a way aligned with the principles of feminist pedagogy, and will make more clear the connective ties between the education, pop culture, and young adult literature theorists whose work I have made use of in this thesis. By testing my argument on a text like *Twilight*, where the feminist value of the lessons the text seems to teach is less immediately obvious, I will emphasize the significance of young adults’ active participation in their own feminist educations.

Further, this chapter will contribute to scholarship that disputes the “Ophelia Theory”: a term coined by critics of child psychologist Mary Pipher, whose 1995 book *Reviving Ophelia*:

Saving the Lives of Adolescent Girls argued that since young people do not have the cognitive ability to think critically about sexist media, exposure to this content distances teen girls from their “authentic selves”, putting them on a direct path to eating disorders, rebellious attitudes, and drug/alcohol abuse (22-23). In contrast, I will draw on the works of theorists in feminist, literature, and media studies (Projansky, Fetterley, Radway, Driver) to argue that in fact, young adult fiction fans can (and already do) think critically and subversively about the literature and media they are exposed to. I argue that fans active in reading, posting, and commenting on *Twilight* fan forums, or reading and writing *Twilight* fan fiction, are learning feminist lessons in a way that is aligned with the principles of feminist pedagogy. Working on fan fiction generally, as I discuss in Chapter One, offers both a creative outlet and a chance to teach and learn from peers about how to improve their writing technically and thematically in response to an engaged audience. More importantly, *Twilight* fan activities have the potential to offer an education that is, as hooks suggests it should be, transformational. Although perhaps explicit participation in activism represents an even more ideal end goal for feminist pedagogy, addressing and challenging gender roles, normative sexuality, and preconceived notions about media content that is viewed as stereotypically feminine is another important part of an important shift in popular culture that is being driven by girls in a radical way, and which allows them to participate in transforming themselves and the world/media around them. This chapter will extend my arguments from Chapters One and Two, but will also make important claims about the nature of texts that have previously been overlooked in studies of feminist YA fiction. Ultimately, I will use the feminist YA scholarship of Roberta Seelinger Trites to contend that there are many ways a text may be considered feminist, or to be a feminist learning opportunity, particularly if the protagonist undergoes a learning experience or if readers are given the opportunity to think critically about a wide variety of works. I argue that in this way, *Twilight* fans serve as a significant example of Trites’s theory in action, precisely *because* young women

are in some cases taking it upon themselves to account for the pleasure they take in this text as a part of their feminist learning.

This chapter will have three components. First, I will discuss the various criticisms of Meyer and the *Twilight* saga, using Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* to argue that these criticisms are partially rooted in the assumption that the romance genre (and other similarly feminine aspects of *Twilight*) is inherently trivial and antifeminist. Meyer positions herself as a very different kind of YA author and celebrity than either Rowling or Collins, functioning more similarly to the *Hunger Games* celebrities I discuss in Chapter Two. Meyer participates in conversations about feminism, and the values and limitations of her novels without characterizing herself as a feminist or educational authority, and so while she has been dismissed and criticised as an antifeminist romance author she has the potential to contribute to feminist learning in much the same way as Lawrence and Stenberg do. Although Bella's story, and the romance genre generally, seem to encourage readers to follow a problematic happiness script in which a woman comes to love some seemingly unsuitable man and ultimately finds her fulfillment through marriage and motherhood, I argue that the dismissal of this genre as inherently antifeminist is itself rooted in misogynist assumptions. Second, I will use Projansky's, Radway's, and Driver's works on "resisting reader" theory to argue that readers do not just passively absorb the ideological scripts presented in romance novels and other popular media, but have the ability to think critically about ideologically problematic aspects of media they enjoy. Although Meyer's series can certainly be criticised from a feminist standpoint, I argue that young readers can think subversively about Bella, a protagonist whom they possibly identify with for very different reasons than they identify with Hermione or Katniss⁵⁴, and about *Twilight*, and that they are capable of reading new significance and more potential for feminist lessons into a text that at first seems to offer little in the way of feminist curriculum. Here I will

⁵⁴ One major flaw critics have found with Bella's character is her quiet, shy personality and her low self esteem (unlike Hermione and Katniss, who are often outspoken and confident in their abilities). However, as fans have pointed out in online discussion forms, Bella may be "insecure, but tell me honestly, is there any tennage [sic] girl you know who isn't?" (Summers 321)

mount my textual analysis of the *Twilight* novels. While many have dismissed Bella as passive and overly dependent on male approval, and therefore a less promising role model for teen girls than Hermione or Katniss, I will argue that Bella continually expresses her autonomy and ultimately follows a script similar to that of Hermione and Katniss—one that does not simply conform to the conventions of the romance genre, but follows conventions typical of both the romance genre and of the “exceptional girl” narrative, and thus is neither as progressive nor as traditional it may first seem. I will also argue that multiple readings of *Twilight* are possible, and that fans may resist the happiness scripts often presented by the romance genre as fully as Bella does. In the final section of this chapter, I will refer back to my theoretical frameworks of convergence culture (Jenkins) and feminist pedagogy (hooks) to argue that some fans are using these “resisting reader” techniques as part of their online fandom activities to queer *Twilight*, explore their own sexuality, and learn about critical and creative writing through engaging with online forums and fan fiction, and that these activities constitute an education aligned with the principles of a feminist pedagogy. Throughout, I will use Trites’s work to situate these readings as of particular significance to young adult fiction, arguing that YA—and particularly those texts whose authors, like Meyer, engage in discussions without characterizing themselves as authoritative—has the ability to teach its readers in a way that radically disrupts normative ideas about education, and allows for youth to define, create, and discuss the kind of characters, stories, and feminism that they are looking for. Ultimately I hope to echo Trites’ argument, and to characterize YA fans as highly capable of critically reading popular texts to assess their feminist content and independently learn feminist lessons.

The first three novels of the series, *Twilight*, *New Moon*, and *Eclipse*, were largely criticised for their perceived lack of a “strong female protagonist”, for their focus on heteronormative relationships and gender roles (or, the importance of having a boyfriend), and for their stereotypical portrayal of indigenous peoples. Bella Swan, a nondescript teenager, moves to Forks, a rainy Washington State logging town, to live with her police chief father.

Readers (Dietz, Cox) were quick to criticise the “blankness” of Bella’s character, suggesting that rather than function to allow readers to imagine themselves in Bella’s position, Meyer had penned a character without a personality of her own. Bella soon notices and falls in love with a flawlessly handsome vampire, Edward Cullen; despite Edward’s insistence that he is dangerous to her, not only because he desires her blood⁵⁵ but also because of his supernaturally strong body⁵⁶, they begin dating and Bella becomes more and more involved in his fantastic world. The power imbalance in Bella and Edward’s relationship has been widely discussed; because Edward is essentially superhuman and Bella is not, he must often come to her rescue when she is threatened by other vampires. Similarly, he perceives her to be a very fragile being who needs constant protection, and although Bella often disputes this and asks him to treat her like an equal, readers and critics (Nicol) have suggested his overprotection is similar to that of an abusive partner.⁵⁷ After a particularly dangerous incident early in *New Moon*, Edward ends their relationship and leaves Forks in the hopes of keeping Bella safe. Bella immediately falls into a depressive episode, and remains in an almost catatonic state for several months: fans have widely criticised this perceived weakness, negatively comparing it to Ginny’s more constructive reaction to Harry and Ginny’s similar breakup in *Harry Potter*⁵⁸. She develops a close bond with family friend Jacob Black, and eventually discovers that he is part of a group of Native American werewolves/shape shifters that protect humans (and their land) from vampires. Critics (Burke) have noted that Jacob and his friends, who are dark skinned, long haired, and usually shirtless

⁵⁵ Unlike most Vampires, Edward and his family (made up of his adoptive parents and four foster siblings) feed on the blood of animals rather than humans.

⁵⁶ In Meyer’s story, vampires have hard, indestructible bodies, possess super strength, speed, and agility, and also often have enhanced mental capabilities and other supernatural abilities. Edward, for example, can read minds.

⁵⁷ In *Eclipse* Edward attempts to limit Bella’s freedom to see certain friends, whom he perceives to be dangerous to her.

⁵⁸ Rather than fearing he will harm Ginny himself, Harry worries that she will be hurt as a means of manipulating him. Unlike Bella, Ginny uses their time apart to organize an underground resistance within Hogwarts. However, also unlike Bella, Ginny has a large and caring support network with whom she can honestly and openly discuss her breakup, and is implicated in the fight against Voldemort almost as much as her ex-boyfriend. Bella is unable to seek support from anyone in Forks (for fear they would discover Edward’s secret), has no outlet to channel her feelings into, and is cut off completely from the world she had been flourishing in through her relationship.

in the novels and the films, are representative of the exoticised Other, and that generally the portrayal of the Native American characters romanticises their community in a way that relies on racist stereotypes. Jacob expresses romantic interest in Bella, and after Edward's return she finds it difficult to reconcile these two very different relationships, but ultimately chooses life as a vampire with Edward. This narrative has been heavily criticised as antifeminist, since it places overwhelming focus on the importance of Bella choosing a romantic partner, implying that dating should be at the forefront of a young woman's priorities.

The saga's final novel, *Breaking Dawn*, is mainly criticised for its portrayal of sexuality, childbirth, abortion, and marriage—many critics have suggested these are represented in an outdated and sexist way that is confusing to young female readers. Much to Bella's chagrin, the story begins with her and Edward marrying⁵⁹ after high school graduation and leaving Forks for a tropical honeymoon. One of the most interesting facets of their relationship is that it is Bella, and not Edward, who pursues a physical relationship and expresses her sexual desire; she insists that despite the potential danger to a human having sex with a supernatural being, she wants to experience sex as a human before she becomes a vampire. When they do have sex for the first time, it is entirely pleasurable for both partners, but the next morning Bella wakes up covered in bruises. Recalling the earlier discussions of Edward as similar to an abusive partner, and of the imbalanced power dynamic of their relationship generally, critics and fans pointed out the antifeminist implications of depicting a loving relationship which nonetheless results in the physical injury of one partner⁶⁰. When Bella unexpectedly becomes pregnant, her health is put in serious jeopardy by the hybrid fetus. Some have argued (Buskirk) that *Breaking Dawn* condemns abortion and essentializes women as nurturing mothers, because though Edward and

⁵⁹ Bella expresses embarrassment at the idea of having a traditional wedding at the young age of 19, but agrees on the conditions that she and Edward can have sex while she is still human, and that he will turn her into a vampire.

⁶⁰ Though it certainly makes for a jarring image, it is important to note that Edward is not violent during sex, but rather that the bruising is a result of his supernatural body coming into contact with her mortal one. Bella insists (both verbally and in her inner monologue) that she felt no pain, and enthusiastically expresses her gratification and excitement.

most of his family strongly advise her to terminate the pregnancy, Bella feels an immediate connection to the “baby” and refuses to consider an abortion even to save her own life, reasoning that in the event of her death in childbirth she can be reborn as a vampire (and indeed, this is her plan). Eventually, after weeks of subsisting on human blood and experiencing broken bones and other injuries as a result of her pregnancy, she dies during her emergency caesarean section and is revived as a vampire. She excels in her new form, outperforming vampires hundreds of years old in physical strength, self-control around tempting human blood, and honing of special skills which allow her to shield herself from psychological attacks by other vampires. Her baby is a vampire/human hybrid who grows into a child in a matter of weeks. These criticisms are often cited as evidence of Bella’s being a “setback to feminism” (Cox). Hermione and Katniss are typically read as progressive and feminist, but Bella is seen as antifeminist because she prioritizes family and romantic relationships rather than achieving other kinds of goals.

The ending of *Breaking Dawn* has also been criticised for an anticlimactic “fight scene” in which Bella uses nonviolent tactics to protect her family. The climaxes of *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games*, wherein Hermione and Katniss actively participate in physical battles, showing their skills and courage in defending their loved ones against injustice, have been read as more explicitly feminist, while Bella has been criticised as passive, and accused of “[not] DO[ing] anything” (Cox) to solve the major conflict she is faced with. The battle is between the Cullen family and the Vampire royal family, the Volturi, who think Edward and Bella have turned a young child into a vampire, something forbidden by vampire law⁶¹. While her vampire family gathers allies and prepares for a physical battle, Bella hones her newly developed supernatural

⁶¹ The Volturi uphold the Vampire laws, which mainly consist of preventing humans from discovering that vampires exist. They have a powerful guard of fighters, most of whom have special powers that allow them to psychologically manipulate or torture their enemies. The creation of “Immortal Children” (babies or children who are turned into vampires) is considered one of the most terrible crimes a Vampire can commit, both morally and practically, since the temperament of young children is not suited to vampire life. In some ways the Volturi could be characterized as a kind of corrupt government similar to the Ministry of Magic while infiltrated by Voldemort’s followers or the Capitol of Panem. This warrants further investigation, particularly as it relates to building an argument that Bella engages in a kind of anti-oppressive activism similar to Hermione and Katniss.

ability to protect those around her from psychological attack. On the day of the conflict, Bella is able to shield her group long enough to force the royals to listen to reason and understand that her child is no threat. The conflict is resolved non-violently, and Bella, Edward, and their child enjoy immortality and animal blood forevermore. Despite Bella's obviously essential contribution to the successful resolution of this event, her lack of physical fighting skills has led some readers to argue that Meyer portrays Bella as a helpless woman uninterested in anything other than romance.

These negative reactions to *Twilight* have existed alongside negative reactions to Meyer herself, particularly when compared to Rowling and Collins. It may at first seem that Meyer is far from the ideal feminist teacher. Although Meyer identifies as a feminist and takes time to explain and defend her position in interviews and on her website, most assume her books have no feminist value, most obviously because of her ties to the romance genre. Meyer freely admits that she is a fan of the romance genre (both as a reader and a writer), and as I mention above she also clearly states that she "didn't intend for Bella's choices to be a model for anyone's real life decisions" (Meyer "Is Bella..."). Unlike Rowling who claims to espouse the importance of feminism and strong female protagonists, and Collins who seems to claim that her texts can educate readers about important issues⁶², Meyer claims neither—she claims she simply wanted to write a love story that girls would like. This has been viewed as antifeminist, since she seems to implicitly teach Bella, and thus readers, that romantic relationships should be a priority over all other aspects of female life. This popular opinion led to the often repeated quote (falsely attributed to Stephen King) that "*Twilight* is about how important it is to have a boyfriend". This could be attributed in part to the perception of romance fiction as inherently antifeminist⁶³, and to Meyer herself being incompatible with mainstream feminism. Because Meyer is a practising Mormon, critics have argued that the antifeminism seen as inherent to the romance genre is

⁶² Insofar as she has said in interviews that she thinks YAs need to learn about the horrors of war and poverty (Collins "Suzanne Collins Interview").

⁶³ I will discuss this further below.

intensified by the patriarchal, repressive aspects of some Christian ideologies⁶⁴. Thus critics see fans of *Twilight* as passive consumers of romantic texts and antifeminist lessons about femininity which narrowly define acceptable female behaviour and sexuality. This criticism is not only flawed in its misogynist dismissal of stereotypically feminine genres and characteristics, but also in its assumption that female readers are unable to think critically about representations of femininity in media sources. Furthermore, I argue that such critics fail to take into account the ways that Meyer, unlike Rowling, is willing to engage in meaningful dialogue with her fans. Though Rowling identifies as a feminist, she has failed to address the concerns of critics and fans who point to problematic aspects of her work. For example, the lead up to the release of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, a film co-written and produced by Rowling which expands the *Harry Potter* universe through new characters in 1920s New York, included several *Pottermore* posts chronicling the history of the wizarding community in North America. Following the complaints of many scholars and fans that this material both co-opted and disrespected Native American peoples and traditional stories, Rowling has (to date) neither redacted nor apologised for the insensitive content. While Meyer at least acknowledges the criticisms of *Twilight*, and makes clear attempts to engage with fans in discussions about these perceived problems, Rowling seems to not hold herself accountable to her fans' concerns.⁶⁵ Thus, in both the position she takes and in her interactions with readers, Meyer is a very different kind of feminist author, and has possibly been held to unfair standards because of the antifeminist reputation of romance novels. Though she may initially seem less feminist than either Rowling or Collins, the position Meyer takes up as author (but not authority) is perhaps the most conducive to feminist learning in a way that feminist pedagogical theorists would advocate.

⁶⁴ Some critics have convincingly read Mormon ideology into the saga (Deitz), but I would argue that since it is far less explicit than Rowling's very obvious Christian imagery, themes, and bible quotes (particularly in *Deathly Hallows*), this fails to account for Meyer's exclusion from the feminist YA canon.

⁶⁵ As I mention several times above, Collins does not have a public stance on feminism or the feminist content of her series.

In her 1984 book *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, Radway argues that the romance genre, widely discredited for its connection to femininity, is actually stimulating to its readers in multiple ways, and particularly can be characterized as such when the focus is on the reader and the act of reading, rather than the content of a text. I not only refute the idea that *Twilight* cannot have feminist value because of its genre, but use Radway to further argue that teen readers are responding to the conventions of the romance genre in important and interesting ways through their *Twilight* fandom. The difference of genre certainly means that readers experience Meyer's texts differently than they do those of Rowling and Collins—*Twilight* is not an action fantasy or science fiction, but explicitly and intentionally a romance series. Critics and fans who make comparisons between the feminist content of *Harry Potter* or *Hunger Games* and *Twilight* often fail to consider that Bella's focus on her romantic relationship, while perhaps less subversive than Hermione's focus on racial oppression, or Katniss's direct involvement in a class war, is hardly surprising given that she is the protagonist of a romance novel. School stories and dystopian fiction, typically male dominated genres, allow for exceptional and heroic characters to go on quests, fight battles, and challenge oppressive social structures. These genres are sometimes home of "exceptional girl" characters that, because they take on the more traditionally masculine role of heroic adventurer, seem to follow a more feminist trajectory: Hermione and Katniss are typically read as "exceptional girls", while Bella, perhaps because of *Twilight's* genre, is read as unexceptional, and thus antifeminist.

Bella is some ways, of course, very different from Hermione and Katniss, but this can largely be attributed, again, to the genre and world she lives in—obviously Bella is more focused on her romantic relationships than on fighting an oppressive government, because hers is a love story and not a fantasy adventure or a post-apocalyptic science fiction. Similarly, her day to day concerns may seem comparably trite because she lives the life of an average small town teenager and not of a gifted witch in a magical boarding school or the celebrity figurehead of a revolution. These criticisms are in conversation with the heteronormative and often sexist narratives

presented by the romance genre, or what Ahmed would call their happiness scripts. We could similarly use Ahmed's term to describe the problems with these scripts: by suggesting that female fulfillment can be found in "the happiness of a good man" (63), and that romantic relationships should take priority in women's stories, the romance genre can serve to reinforce misogynist stereotypes. I argue that Bella may not conform to the happiness scripts presented to her as much as she may seem to—actually everyone around her is presenting a very different script: that she should not get married until after college (also, from Edward, that she should not become a vampire until after college) because she is too young to possibly know what she wants. Bella's careful decision to follow what we might see as a more traditional happiness script is actually in contradiction to a more modern happiness script that suggests the only way for women (and young people generally) to find happiness is to attend postsecondary school, focus on meeting academic and career goals, and then ultimately meet, marry, and have children with an appropriate partner at a later date. Similarly, recent feminist pop culture presents its own happiness script: namely that subverting the traditional expectations of young women will make young women happy (and further, will make them feminist). Thus, because Bella is not made happy by the things she is being told should make her happy, her usually traditional act is in this case kind of a killjoy act. So although it may at first seem that she unquestioningly follows a problematic happiness script typical of the romance genre, actually she subverts the expectations of her parents and peers by choosing to marry Edward, killing the joy of both these other characters and of feminist critics who seem to think she must be an "exceptional girl" (like Hermione and Katniss) to achieve happiness and be a suitably feminist character.

Readings of *Twilight* that simply dismiss it as antifeminist for its connection to the happiness scripts of the romance genre operate under what critics (Projansky, Driver) have called Pipher's Ophelia thesis: again, the idea that when girls are exposed to sexist and oversexualized media, or what Pipher calls "the junk values of mass culture" (23), they are always negatively impacted by what they see in a way more significant than any other factor of their

upbringing. She explains “that the culture is just too hard for most girls to understand and master at this point in their development. They become overwhelmed and symptomatic” (Pipher 13). She compares teen girls to “saplings in a hurricane”, whose “authentic” or “true” selves are lost in a storm of sexist media and confusion about where women and girls stand in the culture of the 1990s (Pipher 22). Pipher’s text, while extremely dated, does make some interesting points about the ways normalized sexism can affect young people, but also makes sweeping generalizations about economically disadvantaged parents, single parent households, girls who are preoccupied with physical appearance, and the idea of what constitutes a “healthy adolescent” in general (13). Pipher’s main thesis, though arguably valid in some situations, gives little credit to the autonomy and intelligence of adolescent girls, and also negates the significance of lessons and behaviours learned from sources outside popular media⁶⁶. Pipher’s book was a commercial success in its time, but more recently girlhood scholars such as Projansky have criticised these ideas, saying that in fact girls have a more nuanced and complex relationship to media. As part of her book *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination & Celebrity Culture* (2014), Sarah Projansky conducted a brief study of 8-10 year old children, recording discussions (both independent and led by her) about their relationship to mass media, and whether (particularly for girls) images of celebrity girls caused adolescents to negatively compare themselves to the spectacular girls they see on television. Largely, she found that the girls “have the analytical capacity to grasp the complexity of a text through their attention to detail, insatiable questions, and creative play” (Projansky 215). She concludes that, rather than disprove the Ophelia Thesis (as she set out to do), Pipher’s theory is actually “[beside] the point”, for two reasons. First, she found the girls in her study did not feel they were being sexualized or influenced by unattainable standards of beauty, insofar as they indicated that they

⁶⁶ For example, a young girl might feel bad about her body from seeing a narrow representation of female beauty in the media, but if her mother or female role models are prone to negative body talk and dieting, it could also have a profound impact on the girl’s self esteem.

were less interested in looking like the girls they saw than in having their power⁶⁷; second, she found that the sexualisation and focus on physical appearance that often plagues young female celebrities were not even the first things they noticed happening to the girl celebrities they encountered, and that the participants more often commented on the perceived fairness of their treatment by male characters (such as their brothers or teachers) (Projansky 214).

In a literary context, what Projansky is describing is resisting reader theory. First coined in the late 70s by Judith Fetterley (1978), discussed in the early 80s by Janice Radway (1984), and extended more recently with queer theory by Susan Driver (2006), resisting reader theory essentially accounts for female readers' ability to take power from identifying with texts that seem to not allow female identification, or that would seem to encourage forms of identification that are self-destructive (for example by encouraging women to identify with stereotypes that reinforce oppressive gender relations). While Fetterley more generally discusses the absence of women's stories in most of Western literature, and argues for the power that comes from subverting male protagonists for female identification, Radway focuses specifically on Harlequin Romance novels. Her argument disputes the idea that readers of romance novels are

passive, purely receptive individuals...[prevented] from appropriating [the text's] meaning for their own use [and thwarted in] any desire on their part to resist its message. Furthermore, [she disputes the idea that] it is...because readers misunderstand their reasons for liking particular stories that they...purchase tales that contribute to their continuing oppression...Because the typical romance reader is untrained in the techniques of literary analysis, it is thought unlikely that she will be able to identify all the relevant features or to describe their effects upon her (Radway 6-7).

Radway contends these arguments assume not only the superiority of literary critics over actual readers, but also fail to consider the difference between "the meaning of the act [of reading] and

⁶⁷ A significant part of her study asked children about Selena Gomez's character Alex in the Disney channel show *Wizards of Waverley Place*. Projansky found that rather than focusing on wanting Alex's (and Gomez's) looks, the girls wanted access to her magical powers (or in the case of Gomez, the power that comes with having an acting career) (Projansky 213-15).

the meaning of the text as read” (210). She finds instead that reading romance is “combative” of patriarchal norms, since it allows women to address needs “created...but not met” by their gender typed family roles, in that women are meant to be fulfilled by their caretaking, but actually a focus on caretaking leaves little time for personal gratification (Radway 211). The limit to this, Radway says, is that although in many ways Harlequin Romances help to create a female community, in that women understand the act of romance reading to be a female activity, this community is not fully realized because it is mediated through the private act of reading (Radway 212). Were this leisure activity to somehow culminate in a setting where further discussion and organizing could flourish, the “oppositional impulse” fostered by romance reading could lead to real social change (Radway 213). In the case of *Twilight* (and the other YA texts this thesis discusses), such a site of discussion and organizing is already flourishing in online YA spaces.

In the late 90’s, Trites applied resisting reader theory to children’s and young adult literature. *Waking Sleeping Beauty* seems to anticipate the work of later theorists (like Projansky and Driver) who argue for a more nuanced understanding of adolescent girls’ relationship to media. She argues that because girls have a critical relationship to media, we need not hold their hands through explicitly feminist fairy tales to teach them about feminism; rather, the equality issues presented in any text (either explicitly, implicitly, intentionally, or unintentionally) offer an opportunity for girls to think about gender issues, compare narratives, and learn from both the things they agree or identify with and the things they think are problematic (Trites 141). Like Radway, Trites resists characterizing popular literature as something that those who widely consume it are unfit to analyze. Instead, both hope to refocus the analysis onto the *act* of reading, rather than the *consumption* of media.

Resisting reader theory was further extended more recently by Susan Driver in her book *Queer Girls and Popular Culture: Reading, Resisting, and Creating Media* (2006). Although her text does not address novels, rather focusing on television, movies, music, and magazines,

and devotes more time to the discussion of girls' responses to pre-existing examples of queer media, I argue her theory can be easily applied to YA fiction studies to offer a more nuanced and intersectional analysis of the *Twilight* fandom. Despite its difference of focus from more explicitly literary resisting reader theory, *Queer Girls and Popular Culture* serves to extend Fetterley's and Radway's texts in several important ways. First and most obviously, Driver focuses directly on young women in a more recent context, and also complicates the relationship these contemporary youth have to media. Driver's predecessors focus on adult (and presumably on largely white, straight, middle class) women. Similarly, since Fetterley and Radway published in the 1970s and 1980s respectively, Driver's text, although already somewhat out of date in that it was written before the development of more recent forms of internet communication and community spaces (such as Tumblr), offers a more recent analysis of women's engagement with media. Echoing Radway's earlier argument accounting for why women read Harlequin romances, Driver makes the important point that "[queer girls'] response is not to forgo [problematic] pop culture entirely, but to approach and use whatever they can find" (15). Driver argues that since queer girls⁶⁸ typically have fewer and less diverse cultural role models, they have had to "use their imaginations to notice and evaluate popular culture beyond the intended codifications of commodified images" (12). In this way, she contends, youth navigate their like or dislike of popular media, along with their own identities, by developing analytical skills (15), rather than rejecting popular media that does not necessarily address their needs. This is because of their ability to think critically about the difference between what they are getting from and what they are looking for in media content. Driver articulates this by criticising the focus on distinguishing between popular/unpopular and heteronormative/queer media; ultimately she finds neither binary very useful, since they serve to frame "the very stakes of choice...through power relations that categorize and separate trendy inclusion and freaky

⁶⁸ Driver uses "queer girls" to denote any youth in a female or female presenting body who does not identify with heteronormative narratives about love, desire, and/or gender (2).

otherness as options” (16). Instead she advocates for youth analysing media in whatever terms make most sense to them, by choosing elements from either side of the presented binary or by constructing their own set of characteristics to measure media against (Driver 235). Second, she stresses the importance of internet spaces throughout her text, emphasizing that “youth make use of the internet as a realm to try out, play with, and perform their identities and desires through provisional combinations of images, words, and narratives” (Driver 170). Driver further notes the ways internet communities have evolved (and I would argue that since the time of her publishing, they have evolved even more) to allow for girls (particularly queer girls) to navigate media landscapes in unique ways, and in so doing they are able to extend their complex reading of pop culture by creating better contributions themselves, sharing them online, and ultimately steering the pre-existing culture towards [something “better” than what currently exists] (Driver 11). Finally, *Queer Girls and Popular Culture* emphasizes the engagement with these resisting reader techniques in online communities as central to identity forming (particularly queer identities, but this idea could also be applied more generally). Ultimately Driver concludes that

The Internet becomes a communal realm through which youth signify who they are by referencing common elements of popular culture. In this way, it becomes a creative medium of self-representation for queer girls who actively draw upon mass media icons, images, and stories as a way of culturally crafting their identities...[;] they become active media producers themselves, sampling and constructing their own visuals interwoven into nonlinear personal writing styles (Driver 238).

Bearing in mind this discussion of resisting reader theory, I will argue that *Twilight* fans can use these techniques to account for the pleasure they take from Meyer’s series, and the ways they might both find value in the pre-existing curriculum, and re-imagine it to better suit their needs. First, I will show that *Twilight* is actually more similar in its characters and themes to *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games* than one might first assume, and further that it is open to more than one reading. Fans who enjoy Meyer’s novels are not necessarily just looking for an

escapist romance fantasy, and may also be accessing these texts as a means of identity forming and creative learning. Then, I will examine the *Twilight* fandom to show how fans are in fact responding critically to the competing happiness scripts that Meyer engages with (both intra and extratextually) by debating and re-writing them for their own purposes.

Although Bella may at first seem very different from Hermione and Katniss, the two literary protagonists against whom she is most often measured, a closer reading shows that she is actually more similar to them than she first appears, and that many of the usual criticisms of Meyer's protagonist may be rooted in sexist assumptions about the happiness script typically presented by the romance genre. Otherwise, Bella shares some uncanny similarities to Hermione and Katniss—all three have similar personality traits, and ultimately could be categorized as “exceptional girl heroes”. Like Hermione, Bella is initially shy but ultimately a supportive and loyal friend, she is a good student who takes her studies and homework very seriously, and she finds her intelligence, maturity, and disinterest in typical teenage activities distance her from most of her peers. Like Katniss, Bella is focused on her family, who often rely on her for more support than should be expected of a teenager. Similarly, both girls prefer to spend time alone, again feeling a distance from others in their peer groups, and are specifically uninterested in typically feminine pursuits such as fashion (although Bella does show interest in homemaking activities such as cooking, and Katniss's hunting is more linked to femininity than it may seem because of her obvious connections to the Greek goddess Artemis). Further, Bella is eventually shown to be an exceptional vampire, and is able to save her family by using her unusually powerful supernatural abilities. Also interesting to consider (and in conversation with my similar points in chapter two) are the ways critics have responded to the women who play these characters in the film adaptations—while Emma Watson and Jennifer Lawrence are praised for being exceptional, in some ways they are simply conforming to what is expected of young female celebrities. Kristen Stewart, however, does not acceptably perform femininity or celebrity, and is very widely criticised, most often for not smiling in photographs. In this way,

despite being a romance heroine Bella shares some characteristics of the “exceptional girl” with Hermione and Katniss.

Similarly, Hermione and Katniss share many characteristics of a romance heroine despite their more action driven plots, yet are rarely criticised in the same way as Bella is. I suggest again that the criticisms of Bella may be rooted in misogynistic assumptions about the romance genre and the happiness scripts it typically presents. In contrast to Hermione and Katniss, who are usually viewed as feminist role models, Bella is particularly chastised for first focusing on interpersonal relationships and caring for her family, and then her early marriage to her first romantic partner—essentially for her interest in characteristically “female” concerns. Hermione and Katniss actually follow similar scripts in their respective series: both characters, like Bella, first act as caretakers and ultimately get married and become mothers at the end of their stories. Bella describes her mother as irresponsible (often taking on motherly tasks such as reminding her parent to pay bills and pick up her dry cleaning), and spends a large part of her free time acting as a homemaker to her father. This dynamic, often criticised by feminist YA scholarship, is actually remarkably similar to Katniss’s roles as breadwinner for her small family and surrogate mother to Prim, and also to Hermione’s constant mothering of Harry and Ron⁶⁹. Bella is further criticised for her young marriage, despite the major plot point that it is Edward who is interested in official marriage and a traditional wedding. In the epilogues to *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games*, readers learn that Hermione marries her Hogwarts sweetheart Ron in her early 20s, and has her first child at age 24⁷⁰, and that Katniss has (presumably) married and had two children with her love interest Peeta. Katniss’s age at the time of her marriage and childbearing is unknown, but it is similarly significant that despite her constant reiteration that she has no interest in marriage and children, she eventually agrees to make Peeta happy. Thus,

⁶⁹ Although a less direct example, Hermione often takes on the emotional labour of reminding her male friends to complete schoolwork, assisting them with assignments, and being available to discuss interpersonal problems, without necessarily asking Harry and Ron to support her in the same ways in return.

⁷⁰ Similarly, Ginny, typically praised as a tough girl power character, marries Harry and has her first child by age 22.

despite the heroic adventures of Hermione's and Katniss's youth, ultimately they both end up conforming to a similar romantic happiness script as Bella. Many critics (Cochrane, Buskirk, Dietz) argue that because Bella's behaviour could cause girls to place undue significance on traditional gender roles, having a boyfriend, marrying young, being a mother, and generally prioritizing relationships over academic or professional goals, the *Twilight Saga* and Bella as a character are representative of antifeminist, romantic happiness scripts, and therefore present a negative example for its young female readers. In fact, not only does Bella actually share "exceptional girl" characteristics with Hermione and Katniss, but Rowling's and Collins's protagonists ultimately follow happiness scripts similar to the one presented in *Twilight*.

Further, while Rowling (and Collins, though she does not say so as explicitly) assumes and expounds the importance and necessity of the lessons she sees her text as teaching in a manner much like Judy Blume, Meyer does not see her text as didactic in any way. This does not preclude *Twilight* from offering both positive and negative implicit lessons to its readers; however, I would argue that these are more similar to Rowling's than one might first assume. As I describe in chapter one, a major lesson the main characters of *Harry Potter* (and thus, its readers) seem to learn is that the power of love can conquer any evil, and Harry in particular learns that he must trust and value his loved ones in order to meet his goals. Though one could argue that Bella (and thus, *Twilight*'s readers) implicitly learns "how important it is to have a boyfriend", actually she seems to learn how to function as a member of a community, to trust the instincts of those around her, and that her love for Edward and their family can inspire her to overcome all odds. Below, I will expand this idea to suggest that *Twilight* fans are more capable of navigating the significance of these lessons than they have been previously credited for.

Coming back to Radway, I posit that there are elements of *Twilight* that allow some fans to imagine solutions to the "problems created but not met" (Radway 211) by the patriarchal structures in their lives. As I suggest above, young people (particularly girls and other gender

oppressed youth) are presented with conflicting happiness scripts. The more traditional script—that women will find happiness in the happiness of a good man, family, and home—has long since been challenged by generations of feminists, but it is far from being entirely eradicated and is still implicitly reinforced by heteronormative media. Simultaneously, teens are presented with several “feminist” happiness scripts via counterculture. The problem with *these* scripts is that they tend to rely on narrow, and sometimes outdated and inaccurate, definitions of feminism. I have already discussed some of these scripts above: most significantly the script that suggests women will find happiness through the rejection of this more traditional script, and by instead focusing on academic and career goals and delaying marriage/long term partnerships indefinitely. Of particular interest to this thesis, youth may be presented with the similar “exceptional girl” script, which largely seems to encourage young women (and other gender oppressed youth) to disassociate themselves with all facets of traditional femininity as a means of accessing not only happiness but also, implicitly, feminism. The obvious problem with both of these scripts is that, like the patriarchal norms they seem to oppose, they offer a narrow definition of female happiness, and further they do not allow for a feminism that embraces femininity and traditionally feminized roles as acceptable (or even possibly empowering).

The problem of these conflicting and competing happiness scripts forms an important part of *Twilight*'s narrative. In *Eclipse*, readers see Bella struggling to reconcile her feelings of sureness about committing to her relationship with Edward with the overwhelming pressure from external sources to pursue both university and other romantic partners. She explains to Edward that “people would immediately jump to [the] conclusion [that she is pregnant]! What other possible reason would...people have for getting married at eighteen?” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 15), and expresses her extreme embarrassment at the idea of having a wedding, noting that “the ultimate doom [would be] telling [her mother]. Early marriage was higher up on her blacklist than boiling live puppies” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 17). It seems that, because of the contemporary/“exceptional girl” scripts she has been presented with, Bella feels conflicted about

a wedding and a public declaration of her and Edward's intention to be together (literally) forever, despite her sureness that a vampire life with him is what she wants and what will make her happy⁷¹. Perhaps unintentionally, Meyer seems to challenge the notion that a modern, exceptional girl can only find happiness by rejecting marriage and instead pursuing other goals independently. In fact, Bella takes enormous pleasure in every aspect of her partnership with Edward (aside from the wedding itself), is allowed to become an exceptional girl-vampire, and ultimately gains newfound independence and confidence (both as an individual and in their relationship) after they agree to solidify their union. In her question and answer, Meyer gestures to the reader complaints that Bella marries and becomes a mother at age 19, and responds that "marriage is really an insignificant commitment compared to giving up your mortality, so it's funny to me that some people are hung up on one and not the other" (Meyer "Is Bella..."). Further, Meyer notes that those who suggest Bella's decision to get married is antifeminist may be prescribing to an exclusive brand of feminism that "seem[s] to be putting [its] own limits on women's choices" (Meyer "Is Bella..."). In this way, Meyer's story offers a chance for readers to complicate conflicting happiness scripts, thus, as Radway hopes, addressing the problems a patriarchal society presents them with but does not address.

Although there perhaps is not a focus on feminist learning within the *Twilight* novels themselves, there has been clear critical preoccupation with the possibilities of teen readers learning antifeminist lessons from Meyer's romance stories. The presumes not only, as I note above, that romance stories are always antifeminist, but further that readers cannot actively criticise and resist what is being presented to them. Bella's story does seem to follow a more traditional female happiness script (as is typical of the romance genre), but it also invites both queer and straight readers to identify with Bella as she struggles to reconcile her interest in this

⁷¹ Again, it is Edward who insists they have a wedding; he tells Bella it is because of the world he came of age in (though frozen at age 17, Edward was born in 1901), and offers it as a condition to agreeing to have sex with Bella before he turns her into a vampire. Though a case could certainly be made for this wedding as a manipulative tactic of Edward's, it is not within the scope or interests of this thesis to do so.

traditional script with the other scripts she is presented with—perhaps even in a way that Rowling’s and Collins’s texts cannot, since the romance genre allows for more direct interaction with these scripts (whereas Hermione and Katniss are only seen following traditional scripts in their respective epilogues). For this reason, readers may be able to, as Driver suggests, take what they can from this narrative and subvert it as a means of identity building by reading new meaning into Bella’s story. For example, early in the series Bella is very unsure of her identity, and finds that her desires and priorities do not necessarily line up with the ones that she is being structurally presented with. Meyer notes that Bella has very little power at the start of her story (Meyer, “Is Bella...”), and critics and fans have said that Bella’s personality and sense of self is underdeveloped (Cochrane). We might compare this to a young person who, like the queer girls in Driver’s study, feels confused and fragmented as their identity begins to develop, in part because they don’t have access to role models or images of women (or girls, or people more generally) who seem to correspond to what they are feeling, desiring, and looking for. She finds herself desiring an inappropriate subject (Edward) and not interested at all in the appropriate subject (another male classmate, Mike). Although both are obviously male, of the two Mike is clearly presented as the appropriate and Edward as the inappropriate one to desire based on the normative structures she has been presented with. Mike is presented as being, in every way, a typical boy next door or small town teenager—he vies for her attention, he is competitive with other young men (for her attention and more generally), Bella’s father knows Mike and his family, he drives a big truck, he works at the outdoor store, he is blonde, cute, and popular, and showers her with attention and compliments. Edward, on the other hand, is constantly presented as feminine and unacceptable in several ways; Bella must pursue him, he is uninterested in popularity, he is (or seems at first) shy and withdrawn, he is interested in classical literature and music rather than athletics (or again, it seems so at first), and Bella constantly describes him as being beautiful (rather than with a more conventionally masculine adjective). Later in the series, we could add to this list that he wants to wait for a physical

relationship (while Bella pushes him to have sex), and wants to have a big traditional wedding. All of Bella's female friends tell her he is not suitable (Jessica explicitly says "don't waste your time", and possibly implies that he is uninterested in girls by saying "apparently none of the girls here are good...enough for him" (Meyer, *Twilight* 16)). As Bella get more interested and involved with Edward (despite hearing from all sides and from normative structures that he is not someone she should be interested in), she starts to express that she "just knows" that he is what she wants and needs in a romantic partner, and that she did not think it was possible for her to connect romantically in this way. Further, as he expresses desire and love for her, she reflects that she cannot believe someone who feels so right to her is actually interested and *allowed* to be a part of her life (Meyer, *New Moon* 7). As she learns more about the vampire community, she seems to learn more about her own identity, and begins to feel that not only is the community the right place for her, but that the things that confused her about her own identity (and separated her from her peers) may actually be normal or even assets were she to "identify" as a member of this community (or transition from living as a human to living as a vampire). Once she does transition, she feels at home in her body and identity for the first time, excels for the first time, and feels powerful in ways she never has before.

Though this reading has to potential to essentialize and oversimplify coming out or transitioning narratives, I posit that it provides a useful example of the ways that these three resisting reader theorists (Fetterley, Radway, and Driver) argue women and girls can interpret texts in subversive ways. Fetterley's work suggests that it is subversive for a queer reader (or a reader with queer desires) to identify with a straight protagonist or a heteronormative plotline: although it seems to diminish the necessity for including diverse protagonists (by suggesting that they should be responsible for the labour of reading themselves into any narrative), Fetterley contends that it is a subversive act to force one's existence into a narrative that is attempting to exclude one's identity, or make certain identities invisible. Radway's text focuses on the idea of active reading, rather than passive consumption of texts, and this reading

similarly places the emphasis on what readers can do with the text, rather than the assumption that they are passive consumers who are powerless to critically reflect on how the text affects them and is in conversation with their own lives. Further, given that this kind of reading is flourishing in online fan communities specifically, it extends Radway's work by addressing her concerns that female communities are not fully realized within the private act of reading⁷². Finally, this reading exemplifies Driver's theory about the ability of (queer) girls to queer⁷³ texts as a way of subverting unsatisfying media by placing the focus in this reading on identity construction, and Bella's accessing of (queer) vampire communities to aid in her self discovery (and her self teaching).

I hope to characterize readings like this one as an example of what Jenkins calls transmedia storytelling, thus extending Driver's larger argument that media studies on young women should put the focus on what these girls are doing and saying (in this case in online communities), rather than on "truths" about them or their reactions to media (Driver 4). Although fans of both *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games* have generated online content that discusses, subverts, and re-imagines the less than feminist aspects of these series, I posit that the similar content generated by *Twilight* fans has a dramatically different result, since *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games* are more often perceived to have some feminist value in their original forms, and *Twilight* usually is not. Here it is important to note that in the fandoms of all three series (though perhaps most significantly in *Twilight*'s fandom), there is an overwhelming amount of content that is markedly less subversive; like in the *Harry Potter* fandom, there is lots of content that simply focuses on the pre-existing heteronormative romantic pairings. While this project's scope does not necessarily allow for a more detailed look at the phenomenon of either apolitical or aggressively heteronormative (and in some cases, explicitly sexist or misogynist) fan content, I also do not underestimate it as both an important facet of YA fandom

⁷² I will expand on this idea immediately below

⁷³ Here I am using queer as a verb; as Driver describes, "While *queer* is used to specify particular girls and their desires, it is more readily deployed to encompass an interchange between cultural signs and socially embodied subjects, mobilizing the term *queer* as a verb rather than securing it as a noun" (2).

studies and a limit to my argument. Nonetheless, by focusing on the examples of feminist content that do exist, and characterizing them as an example of what Jenkins calls transmedia storytelling, I hope to highlight the work of these more progressive fans, and distinguish their fandom activities as meaningful contributions to feminist pop culture.

Jenkins's work on convergence culture and transmedia storytelling helps to account for the significance of this online content as a crucial component of the *Twilight* fandom's potential for feminist learning. Recalling my discussion of Jenkins in chapter two, transmedia storytelling is a facet of convergence culture media wherein a "story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole...offering new levels of insight and experience" (97-98). Jenkins offers the *Matrix* franchise as an ideal realization of this concept, in that fans could enjoy the various elements of the story (through films, video games, animated shorts, and online fan discussions) either in isolation or as part of a whole, but in order to truly understand the whole narrative, they must put in individual effort to access it across media platforms. I argue that in order for its fans to understand where *Twilight* fits into narratives about feminism, and how to navigate their enjoyment of it with their possible interests in feminism, they are accessing online content in a way similar to *Matrix* fans: the *Twilight Saga* novels and films can be enjoyed in isolation from these other components, but for a more complete understanding of its narrative fans must put in personal effort to access other parts of the narrative across media platforms. Further, in the case of *Twilight*, feminist fans are putting in this effort in order to reconcile their enjoyment of Meyer's romance series with their interest in feminism and in queer politics. I will focus on two main online platforms: fan discussion forums and fan fiction. Though this is not strictly the same kind of content Jenkins has in mind, I argue it further emphasizes his notion of fan effort, in that not only must interested parties seek this content out, but in some cases they must actively generate it themselves. In this way, feminist *Twilight* fans participate in transmedia storytelling by participating in collective intelligence and collective meaning making;

participation in discussion forums offers a chance to work towards a greater understanding of the ways *Twilight* is situated in recent discussions of popular feminism, while fan fiction expands the *Twilight* universe and often addresses the feminist limitations of Meyer's original texts, allowing fans to draw new and more complex significance to a story they enjoy. Essentially, although Driver discusses the ways that online fan forums allow queer girls to subvert media as a means of identity formation (Driver 68-69), Jenkins's concept of participatory transmedia storytelling serves to extend the possibilities of Driver's argument by framing these girls more directly as "media producers" of subversive queer content (*Convergence Culture* 3). After my discussion of how these two platforms are working to contribute to the *Twilight* fan experience, I will make connections between this transmedia storytelling and feminist pedagogy, arguing that in the case of *Twilight* fans, the stakes are higher since the onus is more directly on the fans themselves to participate in both the collective meaning making and in their own learning experiences.

The first way that the *Twilight* fandom fosters feminist learning is through fans and anti fans engaging with Meyer's text by having critical discussions in online fan forums. Certainly such debates exist in *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games* fandom as well, but in the case of *Twilight* this debate is of especial interest, since Rowling and Collins are perceived to have provided more "correct" feminist protagonists and scripts. Sarah Summers (2010) analyses the most interesting of these discussion threads: in February 2009 a forum was opened on the official *Twilight* website called "*Twilight* is so Anti-Feminist that I want to Cry", and by April of the same year it "contained over 490 posts and had consistently been among the 15 most popular discussion threads about the novels" (315). Though the entire forum component of the *Twilight* website has since been removed, this thread and Summers's analysis of its content are indicative of the conversations fans and anti fans were having about Meyer's series at the height of its popularity. Summers concludes that not only does participation in this forum contribute to

the creation of “feminist e-spaces” (321), but that these conversations, as a part of convergence culture, allow young, predominantly female, readers to actively negotiate both readings of the text and definitions of feminism (319). Although these fans are not producing creative content, I argue this can be considered an example of transmedia storytelling, in that the way fans experience, interpret, and understand the primary object of their fandom (the novels and/or the films) is dramatically altered and extended by their participation “across multiple media platforms” (*Convergence Culture* 97). Again, I argue that although fans of *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games* also participate in these kinds of discussions, and although these discussions are further important examples of transmedia storytelling, in the case of *Twilight* fans this participatory culture offers higher feminist stakes because of the clear ideological problems *Twilight* presents and the ways its fans have been constructed as exceptionally passive media consumers. Actually they must engage their critical reading skills in a subversive and analytical way to respond to this text and account for their pleasure in reading it. Further, unlike Rowling (and to some extent, Collins), Meyer has penned novels that prompt readers to immediately challenge her feminist stance by relying on conventions of the romance genre. This conversation, as Summers indicates, expanded quickly to include an open discussion about the nature of modern feminism and what ought to be considered “feminist YA” and why (320). For her part, and as I will expand on below, Meyer has welcomed this discussion, while Rowling instead seems to exert authority over how her fans perceive the feminist nature of her series. In these ways, online discussion forums function as an important facet of *Twilight* fans’ active, educational role in transmedia storytelling.

Of the three series this thesis discusses, *Twilight* has inspired fans to do something especially interesting with their fan fiction, specifically because of the problematic aspects of *Twilight*. What particularly distinguishes erotic *Twilight* fan fiction is that fans are taking a text that has been so widely criticised for both reinforcing archaic gender stereotypes and for only

“appeal[ing] to 13 year old girls (and grown women who think like 13 year old girls)” (Inman) by offering sexually charged yet restrained love scenes, and using it to write feminist and/or queer erotica. Erotic *Twilight* fan fiction serves as an important example not only of transmedia storytelling as a way for readers to be creative and critical in their engagement with heteronormative texts that present them with conflicting happiness scripts, but also queer and feminist teens can and do read *Twilight* both pleurably and critically. “Fan fiction” is a largely internet based genre of creative writing that uses established characters, settings, plots, or even simply “worlds” to create new stories. Fans of various cultural phenomena take up points of interest from their fandom’s narratives and write poetry, short stories, novellas, and even full length novels, which are then posted on online forums for other fans to enjoy and give feedback on (Alter). Writers can provide tags and ratings to give readers an idea of the content: while fans have generated a significant amount of content in all genres, unsurprisingly many fans have produced content that is explicitly and intentionally erotic. While sometimes these erotic stories simply “fill in” the parts of the pre-existing narrative where sex might already seem to occur, others re-imagine the characters’ relationships more dramatically. Interestingly, *Hunger Games* seems to have inspired less fan fiction than *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*⁷⁴, and much of it imagines previous or future Games, or re-imagines the 74th Games with altered rules or characters, rather than as a means to comment on the gender politics in the original text. Perhaps this is because *Hunger Games* is a newer publication, but it could also be because Collins’s text is perceived to have more feminist female representation. Oddly, the *Hunger Games* fandom has also produced comparatively little erotica, whether feminist, antifeminist, or apolitical. Though the reasons for this might warrant further exploration, it is not within the scope of this thesis to do so. There is, however, both erotic and non-erotic *Harry Potter* fan fiction that deals with sexuality and gender in interesting and more satisfyingly feminist ways

⁷⁴ On fanfiction.net, the largest fan fiction database, there are 745,000 *Harry Potter* stories, 218,000 *Twilight* stories, and only 44,700 *Hunger Games* stories. In the “books” category, the top five novels with the most stories are: *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *The Hunger Games* (fanfiction.net).

than the series itself does⁷⁵. Since *Harry Potter* is written for an audience that includes preteens as well as teens, it avoids direct treatment of sexuality, although it does include some teen romance plots, particularly in the film adaptations, and so *Harry Potter* fans often simply add (typically heteronormative) sexuality to the story where they find it is lacking. When queer relationships are intentionally focused on, because of the perceived feminist nature of the original texts, and also the more explicitly feminist membership of the fandom, it seems to function in much the same way as the more heteronormative pairings and storylines which focuses on the canonical romantic relationships, or imagines the lives of the protagonists' children attending Hogwarts —filling in a missed opportunity for erotic content, rather than intentionally subverting the scripts presented. I think this could be, again, because *Harry Potter* is perceived to not need “feminist corrections” to its narratives about relationships, sex, and love; Hermione, unlike Bella, is already perceived to be a successful feminist heroine (and an “exceptional girl”), and so although her following of traditional happiness scripts is often re-imagined, it is not as a means of what Driver would describe as subversive media analysis for the purposes of queer identity forming.

There is a significant difference between this and erotic *Twilight* fan fiction, which sometimes rewrites the aspects of Meyer's series widely criticised for relying on outdated happiness scripts in a more satisfyingly queer and/or feminist way. *Twilight* deals with sex explicitly, and so I argue it does and means something different when fans write this erotically charged fan fiction: rather than simply incorporating sex into the narrative, *Twilight* fan writers are complicating (and queering) the gender and sexuality norms that they find dissatisfying in the pre-existing text. There are two kinds of erotic *Twilight* fan fiction that are of particular interest here: stories that re-imagine the gender dynamics in canon or non-canon romantic relationships, and stories that explore the vampire transition as a sexual or gender transition. As

⁷⁵ Especially the queering of Sirius/Remus and Draco/Harry—these two “slash” pairings are close to being the most popular non canon pairings (after Draco/Hermione).

Penelope Eate argues in “A New Dawn Breaks: Rewriting Gender Wrongs through *Twilight* Fan Fiction”, it is empowering to comment on a problematic narrative in this way; rather than avoiding such media, Eate finds that “through the participatory medium of fan fiction...readers are at once appropriating and resisting the saga’s narrative and in so doing, demonstrating [their] capacity to actively engage with...otherwise proscriptive texts” (21). She cites several examples of fan writers who have taken up the *Twilight* world with a new protagonist, rewritten Bella’s character as more explicitly active and powerful, or re-imagined the plot with Bella ultimately not choosing a relationship with Edward. In the latter cases, Bella often instead chooses Jacob, or a more feminist original character, but in many cases chooses Alice, Edward’s adopted vampire sister. More recently, since the publication of Meyer’s own *Twilight* fan fiction *Life and Death* (which, again, swaps the genders of most characters), fan stories are beginning to emerge featuring one or more male *Twilight* characters replaced with their female counterpart from *Life and Death* as a means of exploring female headed families and lesbian relationships. Secondly, there is a significant amount of erotic *Twilight* fan fiction that features Bella discovering that the vampire transition includes some kind of sexual transition as well: usually either that she will grow a penis, or that the sex organs change into something completely new for both genders, or that part of vampire powers is the ability to change genitals at will. Similarly, there is a huge fascination with male pregnancy stories (usually a Jacob/Edward pairing where the supernatural state of one of their bodies allows them to conceive and carry the other’s child). These examples of *Twilight* fan fiction, both those that imagine feminist solutions for the problematic aspects of Meyer’s text, and those that actively queer the characters and plotlines, seem to go further than other, similar, examples from other fandoms. My proposed reading of *Twilight* is offered further nuance if readers with queer desires⁷⁶ are not only hypothetically applying resisting reading techniques to this text, but also

⁷⁶ Even if they are straight, they are interested in reading and writing about something other than heteronormative vanilla sex. This definition of queer is partially informed by Driver (2).

actively finding and forcing feminism and queerness into a narrative that seems to exclude and silence them by focusing on heteronormative happiness scripts or narrow “exceptional girl” narratives. In this way, through participation in transmedia storytelling as readers and writers of fan fiction, a text that is ideologically problematic in the ways *Twilight* has been accused of thus becomes a model for positive identity formation through creative and critical response, and readers can learn and be empowered from their engagement with this pop culture phenomenon through resisting reader techniques and media production.

Similarly, Meyer herself encourages these debates, responses, and opportunities for feminist learning in a way the Rowling and Collins do not, through her relationship to extratextual material. Recalling my earlier argument that she does not see her work as didactic or her word as authoritative, Meyer approaches extratextual material as a collaborative project, rather than a chance to exert her authority. Unlike Collins who has produced none, and Rowling who has produced a plethora of definitive, authoritative work, Meyer has instead created bonus content in conversation with her readers. Rather than posting expanded universe information in the form of articles or short stories (like Rowling does on *Pottermore*), Meyer’s blog features lengthy question and answer segments to directly address questions and concerns her fans have posed about her series. Very significantly to this chapter, Meyer has also written bonus material that I would describe as fan fiction of her own work. *Midnight Sun* is an incomplete novella, retelling *Twilight* from Edward’s perspective. When the unfinished manuscript was leaked to the internet Meyer abandoned the project, but posted what she has completed on her blog. More recently, on the tenth anniversary of *Twilight*’s initial release, Meyer published *Life and Death: Twilight Reimagined*, a companion novel that swaps the genders of most characters. She notes in the preface that she undertook this project to address the concerns that Bella is an antifeminist damsel in distress, hoping to participate in a conversation with her fans about the perceived gender imbalance in her series. In contrast to Rowling, who seems to be saying that her word and authority are final, Meyer seems to instead imply that her work can be re-

imagined and rearranged for further enjoyment and/or alternate meaning—this more power neutral dynamic allows for readers to reinterpret Meyer’s lessons and engage in discussions with peers about the content and presentation of these lessons; thus Meyer (intentionally or not) seems to better facilitate learning aligned with the principles of feminist pedagogy than Rowling, despite the ideological problems with *Twilight*.

Twilight, thus, seems to be the most exciting example of fandom as feminist pedagogy that this thesis presents. Not only does the *Twilight* fandom align with the principles set out by Freire, Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona, and hooks, but furthermore it accounts for hooks’s notion of pleasure in the classroom by showing how what some have dismissed as “teen girl hysteria” can function as a subversive educational tool. To reiterate from chapters one and two, these various education scholars have contributed to the notion of a feminist pedagogy by first suggesting that traditional educational institutions put undue focus on the “banking model”, wherein students must uncritically absorb material presented by teachers and “bank” it for later use, typically in an exam and not a more practical application (Freire 72-73). When coupled with feminist theory, these ideas also highlight the ways that marginalized people and identities are further disadvantaged in a traditional education setting, since such unilateral epistemologies typically fail to include diverse representation or allow for students to challenge teachers about their lesson content or teaching methods. A more ideal model would offer a feminist curriculum, participatory learning, a neutral classroom power dynamic where learners are free to question both content and classroom management, and an ultimate goal of practical application of knowledge rather than traditional evaluation, most ideally through engagement with activism, but possibly also through consciousness raising and positive identity construction (Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona 4). As I show above, Meyer’s engagement with fans enables an altered power dynamic, particularly since she claims she set out to write a story and not teach feminist lessons (Meyer, “Is Bella...”). In this way, Meyer (somewhat surprisingly) exemplifies hooks’s suggestion

that, further, these three components (curriculum, teaching method, and teaching goals) should *engage* learners by offering “excitement...and pleasure in the classroom” (7).

As I posit in Chapter One, many forms of fan engagement align perfectly with these feminist pedagogical aims. In Chapter Two, I extended that argument by suggesting that young adult fiction fandoms offer some potential for seemingly apolitical and non-educational activities such as engagement with celebrity journalism to teach feminist lessons. Here, I will further extend these claims by characterizing *Twilight* as an ideal site for feminist learning. Despite its ideological problems, and in fact *because* of the problematic representations of gender roles and emphasis on heteronormative relationships, readers who are interested in both *Twilight* and feminism are constructing critical feminist curriculum, questioning the authority of Meyer and others who seem to hold power over the fandom, and ultimately applying what they have learned to their creative endeavours and the pleasurable imagining and reinventing of feminist and queer identities.

Though the novels themselves offer little in the way of feminist lessons, unlike Rowling or Collins, who both explicitly offer seemingly feminist lessons to fans, Meyer’s refusal of a didactic role facilitates fans to develop a potential curriculum for themselves. Rather than take for granted oversimplified “girl-power” narratives that may ultimately prescribe to an exclusive brand of feminism, feminist *Twilight* fans must access multiple media platforms and, through reading and discussion with other fans (or anti fans), develop ideas and opinions about what and how *Twilight* may be teaching its readers. If they ultimately decide that what it teaches is not representative of the kind of feminism they are interested in, as Driver suggests they need not discard the fandom entirely—fans can subvert the text where they find it problematic (in fan writing), thus contributing to the collective intelligence of the fandom that other readers can then access, or they can participate in “anti-fandom” by offering critical analysis in online forums, engaging in discussions about feminism and its role in popular culture (a kind of collective meaning making). In either case, fans are not only collaborating in the construction of

their own curriculums about feminism and pop culture, but they are also learning how to think and write both critically and creatively. The method by which fans learn these lessons is similarly aligned with feminist pedagogical aims. Despite the violently antifeminist sentiments that dominate many internet spaces, including but not limited to the threats of sexual violence directed at women who are fighting for feminist spaces online, as Summers argues, the nature of many fan specific spaces online is such that not only does there tend to be diversity in age, gender identity, race, class, sexuality, level of formal education, and geographic location, but in many fan communities there is a particular emphasis on “safe space”⁷⁷, positive fandom⁷⁸, and respect, thus serving as a kind of feminist counter-space. In this way, we might think of online fandom as having access to huge digital classrooms with a largely neutral power dynamic, where students are learning through participation in discussions, peer to peer teaching (such as the peer editing component of fan fiction), and independent exploration of feminist concepts and ideas. The end goals of this education add further nuance to hooks’s axiom that education should be transformative by offering a different kind of feminist goal: that young people be able to define feminism for themselves, and further that they should take pleasure and excitement from that transformative learning.

A further nuance hooks offers as a goal of feminist pedagogy is “the notion of pleasure in the classroom” (hooks 7). Although here she is referring mainly to post secondary education (and notes that “fun” is already part of the critical discussion about elementary and sometimes secondary school education), her description of the way excitement should function in and result from learning seems applicable to all kinds of education, and particularly to my argument about YA fandoms:

the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring. And if boredom should

⁷⁷ Usually denotes spaces with a commitment to respecting all members and actively combating sexism, racism, heterosexism, transphobia, etc.

⁷⁸ Positive fandom is a term used by the HPA, basically reinforcing that everyone is welcome, respected and safe, and presenting a commitment to have conversations about how that works and how to continually improve as a community.

prevail, then pedagogical strategies [are] needed [to] intervene, alter, even disrupt the atmosphere...[however] excitement in...education [is] viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process. (hooks 7)

Thus, for a truly *engaged* pedagogy, pleasure and excitement are necessary, because they give the learner another form of power and another means of applying that engagement to their own identity forming and consciousness raising. Part of this is the idea that if students are keen in the classroom (in the way that Hermione is) it is more work for teachers, unless those teachers can find a way to undermine the student's disruption (of the lecture/class/education). I think this can be compared to the ways that *Twilight* fans are often berated and criticised for being passive consumers of what Pipher would call the "junk values of mass culture" (23): I am interested in considering the possibility that because the learning goals here are so complex and potentially subversive (not only of patriarchal norms but also of educational institutions), the fervour teen readers have for texts like *Twilight* is characterized as a disruption that must be quelled to save traditional educators the trouble of analysing it more thoroughly as a text and a teaching tool. In a true embodiment of feminist pedagogy, teen girls getting whipped into frenzy, even over a story seemingly tied up in troubling happiness scripts typical of the romance genre, is a productive subversion of the way they are "supposed to" respond to literature, reading, and education.

I want to conclude this chapter by returning to Roberta Seelinger Trites, a scholar whose voice has guided much of this project, and her important argument that, in fact, young female readers are perfectly capable of learning about feminism while reading without adult supervision (139-141). In this way, while perhaps the larger argument this thesis makes is more easily applied to *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Games*, *Twilight* serves as an important extension of my claims about the feminist educational potential of recent YA fiction fandoms. Unlike in Rowling's and Collins's series, where problematic aspects are typically outshone by what seem to be more explicitly feminist characters and curriculums, Meyer's text, and her refusal of a

didactic or authoritative role, allows the possibility of a feminist pedagogy entirely driven by young fans themselves. This offers my argument some interesting stakes—by applying these claims to the *Twilight* fandom, I mean to posit that “fangirling” over even the ideologically problematic aspects of *Twilight* does not preclude teens from leaning about or identifying with feminism. Though Bella follows what Ahmed would call a traditional female happiness script typical of the romance genre, she is also an “exceptional girl”, and takes pleasure in both traditionally feminine activities and in having supernatural powers. Teen readers can use resisting reader techniques to read her story in multiple ways, and as Driver suggests this is sometimes a means of exploring their own conflicted experiences with the happiness scripts presented to them, and sometimes is a means of queer and/or feminist identity forming. These readings can spark critical conversations and creative re-imaginings that offer a more complex feminist curriculum to the fans that participate and engage with this fan content through transmedia storytelling. Most compelling is the potential this fandom has for mobilizing the excitement and the pleasure of teen readers as a means of education.

Conclusion: The Age of the Fangirl

Though the days of *Potter-mania* and *Twilight-fever* are long past, and while *Hunger Games* fans have taken up their fandom in somewhat different ways, these three YA series, and their fandoms, are still often at the forefront of discussions about youth culture and feminism. This is particularly true of *Harry Potter*: not only are JK Rowling and Emma Watson regularly commenting on feminist current events, but Rowling's two most recent projects have begun to foster conversations about the nature of *Harry Potter* fandom and the continued usefulness of Rowling's authority over representations of the wizarding world. These projects, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, not only represent Rowling's foray into new mediums (a further example of *Harry Potter*'s position as a transmedia story within convergence culture), but also perhaps the beginning-of-the-end of Rowling's authority over the feminist value her work presents. Fans have criticised the new play *Cursed Child* as subjugating female characters even more than some felt the original novels do, and noted (vocally and passionately) that Rowling's pre-release bonus material for the film *Fantastic Beasts* both co-opts and disrespects the traditional stories of Native American peoples. In both cases, and again despite fans' important and insightful criticisms, Rowling has thus far left these criticisms unaddressed. In response to this, The Harry Potter Alliance published an important blog titled "We are Book Eight", which emphasizes that although new material from Rowling will always be met with some excitement, the driving force behind fandom is now, undeniably, the fans themselves.

In contrast, Stephenie Meyer's tenth anniversary edition of *Twilight* includes *Life and Death: Twilight Re-imagined*, and an introduction which thoughtfully acknowledges some of the criticisms she has received from fans (and anti-fans) about the gender dynamics represented by the characters in the *Twilight* saga. While she freely admits that neither text offers a perfect solution to these criticisms, and recognizes that her feminist stance does not necessarily align

with what some would want of her, she encourages and applauds the conversations her fans have surrounding her texts. Unlike Rowling, who at best exerts her authority over the feminist value of her series, and at worst does not address her fans' concerns at all, Meyer offers a new text in the hopes of fostering further discussion about the values and limits of her work. Similarly, Suzanne Collins's silence forces fans to learn how to address the problems represented by the text, and so *Hunger Games* fans are some of those most directly engaged with activist projects such as "Odds in Our Favour", "Fight For 15", and "Black Lives Matter", which combat the Capitol-like oppressive structures in the real world.

Hardly a day passes without some event, publication, or post connected to YA, education, and feminism being brought to my attention; indeed, this has been one of the most rewarding and encouraging aspects of conducting this project. The Fall 2016 issue of *Bitch Magazine*, "Kids These Days", includes an important feature on YouTube sex education, describing how "Since only 24 states [in the USA] require sex ed in schools, YouTube serves a crucial role for young people wanting to find out about everything from condoms to consent" and "positive, inclusive, sex ed" (Mirk). Jackson Bird, trans advocate and Harry Potter Alliance communications director is prominently interviewed; he describes his experience of navigating his gender identity as a child in Texas, and the difficulty of his identity-formation without visible trans role models. Bird also discussed these issues in his keynote speech at the 2016 Granger Leadership Academy in Warwick, Rhode Island, where he likened the importance of queer and trans visibility in identity-formation to the importance of positive representations of feminist activists in the development of feminist identity and anti-oppressive consciousness (Bird). Similarly, my final days of work on this thesis align with the dates of the One Young World Summit in Ottawa, where Emma Watson, along with other important activists and youth delegates, will engage in discussions about prominent world issues, particularly those that affect disadvantaged youth. Just as the three series this thesis focuses on are still often at the forefront of discussions about YA, the questions this thesis addresses—about the nature of feminist

learning, and the value or limits of popular culture and YA in this education—are at the often forefront of discussions about youth culture, activism, and education.

There are, of course, a few limits to my argument, which often presents a utopian view of the possibilities it suggests. First, and most important to consider, is the overwhelming number of young adults to whom this kind of learning is inaccessible. While participatory culture offers many exciting possibilities, it also demands internet access, leisure time, and at least some interest in reading for pleasure. This limits my project in a major way, and although some of these privileged youth use their engagement in these activities to attempt to advocate for disadvantaged youth on both a local and global scale, a more radical approach to feminist education would prioritize amplifying the voices of those most directly marginalized by sexist, racist, colonial, and heteronormative structures, as well as those affected by poverty and economical disadvantage. Second, not all fans take up their fandoms activities in such ideal ways: as I acknowledge throughout this project, there are also many fans who at best take up feminism in these texts in too simple a way, most often fans engage with these texts apolitically and not as a means of education, and at worst they engage in ways that reinforce patriarchal structures, white supremacy, and heteronormative happiness scripts. This limit represents one of the many ways this project could be taken further. Certainly examples of sexually violent fan fiction warrants further study, as do the ways that pop culture feminism, and pop culture's use of feminism as a marketing tool, affect teens' perception of the continued relevance of feminism, and the importance of intersectionality and feminist activism.

This thesis has ambitiously attempted to both investigate the representations of and potential for feminist learning within Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy, and Meyer's *Twilight* saga, and to extend that potential to the conversations young readers have in participatory, online fan spaces. In the three chapters of this thesis, I have attempted to make connections between young adult fiction, digital media, education, and feminism by characterizing online fandoms as a space for feminist learning. Though *Harry*

Potter, *Hunger Games*, and *Twilight* each present, whether explicitly or implicitly, questions about the nature of feminist learning, critics and scholars who focus solely on the content of the novels themselves in discussions about the feminist value or limitations of these popular series fail to consider the critical reading strategies youth are applying to this content, the ways online fan spaces foster open forums of discussion and peer to peer teaching, and the cases where these discussions have led YA fans to a transformative educational experience.

In closing, I want to reiterate that while feminism and education have long been thematic to literature for young adults, both have come a long way since Judy Blume's didactic 1970s texts, and this is a cause for fangirl-worthy excitement. Young people, and particularly young girls, are now in many ways empowered to learn, lead, and create in the exciting ways I have suggested in this thesis—they want to achieve like Hermione, fight like Katniss, have conversations about celebrity feminism, engage with other fans online about social justice issues and feminist content, *and* creatively fantasize about being Bella (or being with Bella!) without necessarily being ensnared in the problematic aspects of their stories; honestly, what could be cooler?

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