Monsters In My Bed: Accounting For The Popularity Of Young Adult Paranormal Romances

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MONSTERS IN MY BED: ACCOUNTING FOR THE POPULARITY OF YOUNG ADULT PARANORMAL ROMANCES

by

WHITNEY A. YOUNG

Under the direction of Amira Jarmakani

ABSTRACT

Using textual analysis of 49 young adult paranormal romances, I answer what is it about the cultural milieu that makes these novels popular right now? This thesis argues that the discourse which emerges from the novels reflects contemporary discourse and narrative about the girls and young women who read this genre and who place themselves within this discourse and narrative. The novels respond to this discourse by offering instances where the girls’ ideologies, built on the discourses taught to them, can be temporarily restored when the narrative proves false. These novels also undermine the confining discourse which the girls find themselves stuck in.

INDEX WORDS: Young adult, Literature, Supernatural, Romance, Girlhood, Adolescence
MONSTERS IN MY BED: ACCOUNTING FOR THE POPULARITY OF YOUNG ADULT PARANORMAL ROMANCES

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WHITNEY A. YOUNG

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2013
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August 2013
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first and foremost want to thank my mom, Beck Young, for supporting me in every way through this process as well my dad, Terry Young for his quiet support. I also want to express my gratitude to my adviser, Dr. Amira Jarmakani, and my other thesis committee members, Dr. Susan Talburt and Dr. Megan Sinnott for their insight and patience. Lastly, I want to thank Dr. Susan Alexander for her advice and editing. I would not have gotten here without all of you.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

He leaned forward, his green eyes sparkling. “Laurel, you’re a faerie.”

Laurel’s jaw clenched as she realized how stupid she’d been. Taken in by a handsome face, conned into letting him lead her far into the forest, and even half-believing his outrageous claims. (Pike, Wings, 86)

The above is an excerpt from Aprilynne Pike’s Wings series. The heroine, Laurel, has met a strange boy named Tamani in the woods on her parents’ land. A few days prior, a flower blossomed out of Laurel back, which Tamani knows about. He tells her she blossomed because she is a fairy. Pike’s Wings is categorized as a young adult paranormal romance, a genre of literature.

Young adult paranormal romances depict an adolescent’s everyday life, usually a teenage girl’s, when it becomes entangled with the supernatural. The supernatural can be anything from ghosts, telepathy, genii, mermaids, psychics, fairies, and vampires to witchcraft, immortality, werewolves, and angels. The books feature a romance, often between oppositely sexed beings, a human and supernatural being who looks human. The story is usually told from a first-person perspective, usually a high-school-age heroine, though sometimes the narrator alternates between the heroine and the hero or, less often, among a few characters. Rarely, as in Beautiful Creatures, the story is told solely from the hero’s perspective. The narrative style and plot suggest these books are intended for young heterosexual women, who seem to comprise their chief audience, but they are also enjoyed by adult women and some men. My experience
attending midnight release parties and book signings suggests that most fans share the same demographics as their authors: white, female, and American.

The genre’s name, “young adult paranormal romances,” implies traditional romance novels and indeed some publishers who specialize in romance novels, such as Harlequin, have printed teen paranormal romances but the books I discuss are printed by general trade publishers, though it is possible the genre took its namesake from the romance industry as romance publishers have printed paranormal-themed adult romances since the mid-1990s.

Young adult paranormal romances are massively popular right now and have been for the last few years. National chain bookstores have a section solely for young adult (YA) paranormal romances (see Figure 1.1). Many, like *Twilight*, *Fallen*, *Evermore*, *Hush*, *Hush*, *The Hollow*, *Beautiful Creatures*, *Need*, *Shiver*, and *Wings*, are *New York Times* best sellers. Some, like *Twilight* and *Beautiful Creatures*, have been made into movies, and many other books have sold movie options. This brings me to the central question of my thesis: what is it about our cultural milieu that makes these novels popular right now?

The broad appeal of the young adult paranormal romance genre signals a cultural, rather than individual, significance. Thus, understanding the appeal of the genre will give insight regarding the cultural milieu for American girls and young women today.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Adolescence and Supernatural Literature

Many explanations for young adult paranormal romances and teen vampire novels’ popularity focus on the adolescence of the target market. Deborah Wilson Overstreet (2006) writes that many scholars argue that the appeal of young adult vampire books is because they deal with issues important to teens, like sexuality. This was also echoed by Anastasiu (2009) as
Figure 1.1 Photo of the “Teen Paranormal Romance” section at Barnes & Noble bookstore in Mishawaka, Indiana taken by author on July 5, 2011. That nearly half of the shelf space in the Young Adult (YA) section is devoted to adolescent paranormal romances shows how popular they are.
the reason *Twilight*, arguably the best-known young adult paranormal romance, is popular. Anastasiu believes that *Twilight* helps teens work through the specific physiological issues of adolescence.

In a blog entry titled “You Can't Kill the Undead: Or, Paranormal Romance Isn’t Going Anywhere,” urban fantasy author Kiersten White (2010) writes that young adult paranormal romances are popular because their stories are metaphors for teenage romance. As she explains, when you have a crush on someone in school, you do not understand their actions and are uncertain whether they like you too. Your crush is a mystery to you. Young adult paranormal romance takes the mysterious other and magnifies this divide by making it between two entirely different species. White suggests that these books offer hope that, if the protagonists can manage to bridge their divide and be together, then surely you and your crush can, too. Furthermore, White believes that young adult paranormal romances appeal to adult women who want to relive this first romance.

The problem with these theories is that they are uncritical of “adolescence” as a category. Adults do not have their sexuality worked out and they too, wonder about their potential romantic interest. Instead of looking to “adolescence” to explain the genre’s popularity, I look at what scholars and the media are saying about the genre’s specific target audience which is not all young adults, but girls and young women.

1.1.2 Girls Studies

One of the effects of this was a flood of popular books which used this research to promote the idea that girls had a development crisis and advocated adult intervention of girls. With this concern about girls came interest in marketing to girls and the marketplace flooded with consumer items celebrating the girl, creating a dual discourse of girls as potentially being in trouble and also celebrating the girl as a method to ward off this possible trouble (21-22). That this dichotomous discourse about girls and young women is still going on today is evident in the research in Girls Studies.

Anita Harris (2003) in *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* claims that with the campaigns of the feminist movement in the later half of the 20th century, the dominant presumption is that there no longer are any barriers to women’s achievement, and as a result, the expectation is that for women are able to do anything. This freedom means women are viewed as the new untapped resource in society, causing scholars and the media to look to girls as the future (2). This emphasis has led to increased scrutiny and regulation of girls’ lives to make sure they grow into the right kind of adult and ensure a successful future for society. The result is the dichotomous conclusion that women’s new freedom is the source of new opportunities and new problems for girls. This creates a polarizing discourse—girls as either “can-do,” ambitious, goal oriented, and consumerist; or girls as “at risk,” lacking drive, and engaging in risky behavior, such as promiscuous sex, drinking, and drugs leading to a dead-end life (14). Deborah Tolman (2002) in *Dilemmas of Desire: Teenage Girls Talk about Sexuality* supports Harris’ idea that girls’ sexual activity places them within a dichotomous discourse, stating that one of the few safe outlets for adolescent female sexual activity is within long-term relationships; other contexts risk their being labeled “bad girls.” “At-risk” girls furthermore, are typecast as from working-class backgrounds and of certain ethnic minorities leaving unspoken
“can-do” girls as white, middle or upper class (25). The polarizing discourse about girls has real-life implications for girls and young women, Harris writes, who are categorized, observed and regulated by figures of authority, such as parents and teachers, according to this discourse. If “at-risk” behavior is perceived in “can-go” girls, then intervention through private means like counseling is employed, as opposed to public institutional intervention, for “at-risk” girls, to assure the girls get back on the “can-do” track (34).

The discourse about girls Harris describes is further supported by discourse coming out of scholars and the media’s increased attention on violent, mean, and bad girls the last few decades, which Meda Chesney-Lind and Katherine Irwin examine in their 2008 book, Beyond Bad Girls: Gender, Violence, and Hype. In the 1990s, the focus was on girls in gangs but has shifted since the mid-90s to girl-on-girl bullying, typically accomplished through indirect tactics like ostracism and humiliation (17, 19). Girl gang members are frequently portrayed as poor, African-American or Latina young women who engage in formal delinquent behavior which garners intervention through public institutions like the juvenile justice system unlike the informal aggression of other “mean girls” (17). This corresponds to the discourse of the “at-risk” girl as poor and of particular ethnic minorities who is likely to be involved in intervention through public institutions (Harris 2004, 25). Chesney-Lind and Irwin write girl violence is portrayed as a consequence of girls’ newfound equality which is causing them to become more like boys—to masculinize. This sets up the idea of “good” and “bad” femininity with “good” girls acting in a traditionally feminine passive manner and “bad” girls as aggressive (12). The alleged increase in girl violence is a self-fulfilling prophecy as it justifies increased policing of girls and thereby finds more incidents of girl violence (31). Both Harris and Chesney-Lind and Irwin attribute the current dichotomous discourses about girls, which real-life girls are then
subject to, to society’s perception of the effects of women’s new freedoms brought about by the campaigns of the feminist movement. Thus, the discourses about girls Tolman, mentioned earlier, and Chesney-Lind and Irwin describe can be subsumed within the “can-do” “at-risk” discourse described by Harris.

As I will show Courtney E. Martin’s, *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: The Frightening New Normalcy of Hating Your Body* creates a discourse about girls which parallels the “can-do” discourse. Because all these discourses envelope one another, it shows these discourses work in conjunction to tell a story about a specific type of girl which is white, privileged girls and young women are ambitious, planners, and do not engage in promiscuous sex or delinquent behavior. This category of girls, white, privileged girls, is subject to this discourse and learns to tell it about themselves—they place themselves into this discourse. These discourses are not just a set of characteristics told about these girls but are part of a narrative which the novels reflect. This is important because when the girls place themselves within the discourse they also become subject to the narrative about them. As I show this narrative is reflected in the discourse emerging from young adult paranormal romances and so, these novels are popular now because they reflect to the story the white, privileged girl readers learn to tell about themselves.

Harris and Martin write that these girls are taught that they will have a brilliant future and come to expect this but these expectations are often not met. Martin’s discourse goes one step further than the “can-do” discourse Harris describes and writes that when these expectations of the future are not met, girls loose the ideologies of specialness and that they will go on to do and be great in the world. I will show young adult paranormal romances respond to this narrative by offering readers instances where the ideologies within the discourse they were subject to can be temporarily restored.
Examples of this restoration of specialness can be seen in popular sources reasoning to explain why young adult paranormal romances are popular. They argue that when the reader identifies with the heroine, it causes her to feel special. Carol Bristol (2010) notes that the hero in romance is always better than the average male—wealthier, more attractive, and smarter. One way for the hero to be more exceptional is to be supernatural. The supernatural hero often has had an eternity to accumulate wealth and cultivate his mind and, more importantly, he has abilities far beyond the typical human male. That the hero is distinguished above all men is a key element in the story since the heroine then becomes special by virtue of being loved by the hero. This sentiment was echoed by young adult author Nancy Werlin (2010) who stated that the hero is special because he can save the world, and the heroine is special because the hero loves her. Another way the heroine’s specialness is affirmed is the circumstances in which the hero falls in love with the heroine. Alexis Morgan (2010) observes that the hero in paranormal romance novels has isolated himself from society because of his supernatural status, so when the heroine slips past his guard, and causes him to care for her, maybe his first romantic relationship in centuries, this marks her as special. This is a being who could easily kill the heroine, but instead dedicates his abilities only to protect the heroine.

While the theories on the appeal of young adult paranormal romances are correct that the romance fulfills the emotional needs of the reader by being made to feel special, they miss other non-romantic aspects of the novels and, as I show, do not go far enough to explain what these books do.
1.1.3 Romance Novels

The theories on why readers read young adult paranormal romances are based upon similar theories regarding why women read traditional romance novels, that sans the supernatural, romances also have these characteristics.

Janice Radway in the classic *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984) looked at adult romance novels. She argued that romance readers, who tend to be mothers and housewives, are the sole nurturers of their families. The demanding role of family caretaker leaves the women emotionally drained. Radway argues that romance novels provide escape for these women by allowing time for themselves and by providing emotional nurturance, via the romantic and romanticized experiences of the novel’s heroine, not given by their families.

Other scholars have analyzed the motivations of teens who read romance novels. John Willinsky and R. Mark Hunniford (1993) conducted a modified version of Radway’s study and found that teens embed their expectation for the future onto the novels, believing that one day they will have a romance like the heroines’ and they will learn how to act in a future romantic relationship (93-95). Similarly, Christian-Smith (1993) found that teen romance readers view these books as a guide for how to interact with the opposite sex. Additionally, she found that, through the romance in the books, readers felt capable and cherished, which was in stark contrast to their lives where teens who read romances were labeled “‘reluctant’ or ‘slow’ readers” by their schools (50), so they were not seen as capable (53). I agree with Radway and Christian-Smith that the novels primarily fulfill emotional needs of escapism and feeling special, although I conclude the circumstances propelling readers to seek this out is different as the genre’s
primary readers are not housewives, mothers or reluctant students but white, privileged girls stuck in the discourse discussed previously.

1.2 Methods

The findings for this study are based upon a textual analysis of 49 young adult paranormal romances (see Appendix A for list). While I read more texts than those listed in the sample, the books selected to analyze offer a variety within the genre. By analyzing a wide variety of books, the commonalities in the genre could emerge. I took notes for each book on the plot, characterization of characters, and dialogue and then compared across the novels to find commonalities in the genre. After finding commonalities in the texts, I then compared the discourses emerging from the novels to themes in Girls Studies.

This sample consists of sixteen series and six one-shot novels which were chosen because they were recommended by Amazon.com’s “Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought” feature or they were a featured item in store at the bookstore Barnes and Noble. I was unable to locate any book clubs or websites dedicated to this specific genre although there are fan sites for specific series. These two sources, Amazon.com and physical bookstores along with word-of-mouth are the most common methods used by readers of this genre to choose books. I was personally introduced to *Twilight* and *Jessica’s Guide to Dating on the Dark Side* in the spring of 2008 through the recommendation of a friend. I had always been a fan of vampires and the supernatural, and when I visited Barnes and Noble while looking for more books like *Twilight*, I found a table of recommended books, “if you liked *Twilight*,” which is how I found Fantaskey’s *Jessica’s Guide to Dating on the Dark Side*. 
1.3 Outline of the Thesis

Scholars have focused on one young adult paranormal romance in particular, Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series which is, arguably, the most popular young adult paranormal romance. Scholars have discussed the covert meaning in *Twilight* (Click, Aubrey, and Behm-Morawitz 2010; Housel and Wisnewski 2009; Seifert 2009; Wilson 2011), including religious implications, as it is well known that Meyer is Mormon (Granger 2010; Gravett 2010). In *Deconstructing Twilight: Psychological and Feminist Perspectives on the Series*, Ashcraft addresses the question within the feminist community as to whether *Twilight* is a feminist or anti-feminist discourse. While her analysis is worthwhile, it is not my intention to argue whether readers should be reading these books or if they are feminist or not but rather, understand why they are popular. In Chapter 1, presents an overview of these theories on *Twilight*. I argue that the theories that focus exclusively on the *Twilight* series overlook aspects of young adult paranormal romances that become more apparent when examining the entire genre as they are present throughout the genre, pointing to a larger pattern. In Chapter 2, examines the discourse which emerges from the novels and discuss how these this overlaps with and possibly responds to the popular discourse on girlhood young adulthood.
CHAPTER 2: TWILIGHT

Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* saga is perhaps the best known young adult paranormal romance series today. The *Twilight* series consists of four books: *Twilight, New Moon, Breaking Dawn, and Eclipse*. *Twilight* follows 17-year old human Bella Swan’s move to Forks, Washington, where she falls in love with 104 year-old vampire Edward Cullen. The four books have sold 116 million copies worldwide and spent 302 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list (Parke and Wilson 3, 2011). The series’ visibility has been bolstered by a successful movie franchise. *Twilight*’s popularity and profitability spurred the expansion of the genre and serves as a model for other young adult paranormal romances’. In other words, *Twilight* set the conventions for subsequent young adult paranormal romances. In theory then, *Twilight*’s popularity could serve as a model for explaining the genre’s popularity; however, this is not the case. Theories on *Twilight* bypass aspects of the novels which are present throughout the genre that point to a larger pattern but have previously been overlooked because the focus has been solely on *Twilight* where these elements are not readily apparent. In this chapter I argue that *Twilight* needs to be decentered because only by analyzing the whole genre of young adult paranormal romance can their popularity be fully understood.

2.1 Twilight’s Influence

Gupta (2009) discusses how since the 1950s the publishing industry has gone through merges and takeovers creating conglomerates and that these conglomerates are profit-driven (159-160). Publishers’ concern is making money, and they consider a book valuable if an opportunity exists to sell the screen rights to media conglomerates who license the rights to reproduce these images on cross-promotional products; *Twilight* does this. The popularity of the *Twilight* series resulted in the *Twilight* films with their accompanying promotional and retail
products. Major retailers carry Twilight products ranging from bedding, dolls, lunchboxes, perfume, standees, puzzles to board games, soundtracks, styling irons, jewelry and apparel. Other publishers besides Twilight’s publisher, Little Brown, used the popularity of the series to market other books. For instance, other young adult paranormal romances, such as Wings, published by HarperTeen, feature Meyer’s endorsement of their book on the cover.

HarperCollins used the popularity of the series to market Wuthering Heights, Romeo & Juliet, and Pride and Prejudice. HarperCollins repacked the books which are known by fans to have influenced the saga, with Twilight-esque covers. The new covers feature the black, white, and red color palette from the Twilight series and mimic the flower image from cover of New Moon. The typeset was reformatted to mimic Twilight and the covers feature endorsements referencing Twilight such as, “Bella and Edward’s favorite book.” (Bosman). By referencing the Twilight series and its author, HarperCollins clearly hopes to appeal to the numerous Twilight fans.

Because of Twilight’s marketability on multiple fronts, I argue that publishers see a potential profit in publishing books similar to Twilight and published knock-offs in an obvious attempt to cash in on Twilight’s popularity. Several reasons can be given for why I believe this. First, the film rights to other young adult paranormal romance books have been sold, implying that publisher’s recognize the potential profits beyond book sales. Second, while there were predecessors to Twilight, like L. J. Smith’s Vampire Diaries (1991), there was no significant increase in the number of books in the genre until the publication of Twilight (see Appendix A and Figure 2.1). In fact, there was no “genre” of “young adult paranormal romances” until the publication of Twilight.

These young adult Paranormal romance predecessors may not have sold well because changes in the publishing industry to make young adult literature more accessible were not yet in
place. As Yampbell (2005, 348) notes publishers and book retailers, wanting to make young adult fiction more accessible, instigated changes throughout the book industry during the past decade. Prior to 2000, young adult novels were located in the children’s section of national bookstore chains like Barnes & Noble; however they were given their own designated shelving outside the children’s section as it was thought teens were too embarrassed to be seen there (Yampbell 352). Publishers also made changes to the books themselves by using one-word titles like *Spells*, *Evermore*, and *Need*, ambiguous or bold cover images, and high-quality looking covers, all in the hope of increasing a book’s “grabability” factor (Yampbell 357). Recently, publishers have begun advertising through online book trailers and on television. These changes in marketing can be observed throughout the young adult paranormal romance genre.

Lastly, and the most substantial indication that *Twilight* was the catalyst for publication of the young adult paranormal romance genre is that references to *Twilight* occur in the young adult paranormal romances which follow its publication. Notably, the formats are similar, with many written as sagas or trilogies paralleling the *Twilight* series. Furthermore, following the publication of the *Twilight* series companion novella, *The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner* (2010), other young adult paranormal romance authors released side-stories about other characters in the series. For instance, co-authors of the *Beautiful Creatures* series, Kami Garcia, and Margaret Stohl, released *Dream Dark* in 2011. Lauren Kate released *Fallen in Love* a collection of Valentine’s Day stories about the characters in her *Fallen* series in 2012.

Lastly, the stylistic content is also imitated. Literary tropes in *Twilight* are repeated, such as Edward’s skin sparkles in the sunlight, also is a trait of the hero in the young adult paranormal romance, *As You Wish* (Pierce 4). The dialogue too is identical or similar. For example, in *Twilight*, Edward tells Bella, “You are a magnet for trouble.” (Meyer, 174). In *Feather*, an
Figure 2.1: Publishing Timeline for Young Adult Paranormal Romance
almost identical statement is made about the heroine. “You’re a magnet for trouble, Elle.” (Ebner, 122). At times the dialogue in the subsequent YA paranormal romance is nearly word for word to *Twilight* dialogue. For instance, in *Twilight* when Edward and Bella have the following conversation:

“Will you promise me something?”

“Yes,” I said, and instantly regretted my unconditional agreement. What if he asked me to stay away from him? I couldn’t keep that promise.

“Don’t go into the woods alone.”

I stared at him in blank confusion. “Why?”

He frowned, and his eyes were tight as he stared past me out the window.

“I’m not always the most dangerous thing out there. Let’s leave it at that.” (Meyer 192)

In *Feather*, the hero also asks the heroine to promise not to go somewhere without explaining why:

“Just…” a grave sigh seeped from his mouth. “Just don’t leave the school grounds until I get back.” His eyes flashed away from me and I could see him looking to the windows. “There are things in this world you shouldn’t trust. There are things you need to know, but I don’t have the time to explain.” He leaned his elbow onto the foot of the bed. “I have to leave now. I know this seems abrupt but trust me.”

I nodded in acknowledgement of his request, remaining silent.
He stood and walked toward the door. “Just promise me, okay? Stay here, around people. When I get back, I can explain more.” (Ebner 105)

The scenes in post-*Twilight* young adult paranormal romances are also reminiscent of those in *Twilight*. In one scene in *Twilight* Bella is examining the snow chains her father put on the truck when a fellow student loses control of his van, which heads directly toward Bella. Just before she is hit, Edward Cullen saves Bella. A similar scene occurs in *Deadly Little Secret*. The protagonist, Camilla, is looking for a lost earring in the school parking lot when a truck—whose driver had gone into a diabetic induced coma—heads toward her and Ben saves her life.

The most obvious feature that post-*Twilight* young adult paranormal romances are an attempt to cash-in on *Twilight*’s popularity is that they have similar plots to *Twilight*. In the opening scene of *Twilight*, Bella has decided to move back to Forks, Washington, to live with her father so that her mother can travel with her new husband, a minor league baseball player. Bella noticed her mother’s unhappiness in electing to remain at home with Bella rather than traveling with her new husband, so Bella chooses to move in with her father even though this causes Bella misery. Unhappiness at the onset of the story is a common trait of the female protagonists of young adult paranormal romances though the cause of this misery differs.

In Forks, Bella meets Edward Cullen, whose behavior puzzles Bella; Edward acts distant toward Bella one minute and then friendly the next. Edward is a “vegetarian” vampire, meaning he abstains from drinking human blood so he must fight the urge to kill Bella. At the beginning of the series, Bella does not know that the scent of her blood is more appealing than any blood Edward has ever smelled. Edward is simultaneously fascinated by Bella as he is unable to read her thoughts, a special ability he has. Edward’s strange behavior causes Bella to be suspicious
and to seek the cause; eventually, learning he is a vampire. Like Edward, the male heroes of many young adult paranormal romances also display contradictory behaviors toward the female protagonist as they have a need to kill her while simultaneously experiencing a romantic affection for her. The plot similarities continue as the heroines seek to discover the cause behind this behavior and learn the male hero is supernatural. They soon begin a relationship, but the female protagonist’s life is somehow put in danger but not by him, so she is saved by the male hero. Edward saves Bella from James, a tracker vampire who is intent on killing Bella for sport, by killing James.

As mentioned in the introduction, there are two plots common in young adult paranormal romances; one in which the human girl falls in love with a supernatural boy and second in which the protagonist finds out she is supernatural and her male companion helps her navigate this new identity. While the latter does not contain the hero’s contradictory behavior toward the heroine, as he is not supernatural, the heroine’s all have similar characteristics as discussed later and her life is in danger in the first book. After the first book in any series, both plots follow the same basic narrative of Twilight.

After the first book in the series, the plot of young adult paranormal romances is that the heroine learns that the incident which first threatened her life is connected to a larger issue which, if not literally world-ending, affects more people than just herself. In the subsequent Twilight books, romantic issues still occur, such as the story line in which werewolf Jacob Black competes with Edward for Bella’s love. However, Bella and Edward are also occupied in averting threats against Bella and the Cullen family. In all young adult paranormal romances, while the romance plot continues through literary devices like a rival romantic interest, the non-romantic issue is the central plot. In the Twilight series, the larger issue centers on the Volturi, a
tyrannical coven of vampire royalty who enforce the laws of the vampire world. I will explain more about the larger crisis in the novels as I look at some of the many theories on *Twilight*’s popularity in the next section.

### 2.2 Theories on *Twilight*’s popularity

Given *Twilight*’s popularity, there are many theories attempting to explain the appeal of the series.

Natalie Wilson argues in her 2011 book, *Seduced by Twilight: The Allure and Contradictory Messages of the Popular Saga*, that the series is written in an open style which allows readers to get different messages from it accounting for its broad appeal (8). In Chapter 2, I show the discourse that emerges from the novels actually gives specific messages but which have a broad appeal.

Anastasiu (2011) and Seifert (2009) attribute the popularity of *Twilight* to Bella and Edward’s negotiation of their sexual relationship. In the first three books in the series, Bella urges Edward for more physical intimacy, but he evades her advances for fear of accidentally hurting her with his superhuman strength and because they are not married—since Edward was born in 1900, he believes in chastity until marriage.

Psychoanalytic theory offers insight into the negotiation of this sexual relationship. Karl Jung, building upon Sigmund Freud’s work, theorized that each new life stage requires individuals to undergo a metamorphosis to form a stable conscious identity, which is constructed unconsciously through the interplay between the “id,” one’s desires, and the “super-ego,” one’s morals. Anastasiu (50) believes that, for adolescents, who straddle the innocence of childhood and adult responsibilities, sex is a central issue in this transition. She argues the push-pull dynamic in Bella and Edward’s physical relationship represents the psychological struggle
between the id and super-ego in adolescence: Bella stands for the id while Edward is the super-ego. This metaphor assists adolescent readers as they traverse to adulthood. Anastasiu holds that Bella and Edward themselves are going through adolescent transition. Anastasiu argues that, prior to meeting one another, Bella and Edward are both living lives of “stasis,” with stable identities. Once they encounter one another, however, Bella and Edward begin going through the adolescent transition. This metamorphosis requires an individual to go from a stable identity to an unstable one. The protagonists’ unstable identities shape the central plot in the rest of *Twilight*. Describing Bella’s life prior to meeting Edward, Anastasiu writes,

Bella similarly has been living a life of stasis, forced into a premature maturity by taking on roles of responsibility where her mother would not. Her move to Forks further dramatizes this; in order to protect her mother’s happiness, she moves to a place where she expects her own happiness to be impossible (*T7*). Her intense sense of responsibility reflects the super-ego’s firm grip on her identity, subordinating all other desires. She also feels alienated from those around her and not only those who are her own age. She says, ‘Maybe the truth was, I didn’t relate well to people, period’ (10). Like Meyer, Bella has fallen into a ‘zombie’ way of life. (44)

Anastasiu rightly notices some features of Bella at the beginning of *Twilight*. First, Bella is forced to act as a parent to her mother and I would add, later to her father. Second, Bella sacrifices her own happiness for her mother’s, and she has never felt that she fit in. Anastasiu’s theory is notable as it is the only theory on *Twilight* to take into consideration Bella’s state at the
beginning of the series, but it misses other important aspects of Bella’s characterization.

Bella is academically high-achieving, which is revealed in a scene in which Bella and Edward complete a biology lab quickly. The teacher questions them, and Bella admits she has done this lab before in the advanced placement program in her hometown of Phoenix (Meyer, *Twilight* 47). Bella has no experience with dating and sex. While dress shopping with Jessica and Angela, friends from school, Bella says that she has never been to a dance. When Jessica dubiously asks hadn’t Bella gone to a dance before with a boyfriend, Bella states, “I’ve never had a boyfriend or anything close. I didn’t go out much” (Meyer, *Twilight* 153). Bella further confesses that she is a virgin (Meyer, *Eclipse* 59). These traits possessed by Bella exemplify the “good girl” in the bad girl/good girl dynamic identified as a common discourse about girls by scholars working in Girls Studies. It is important to recognize that Bella shares these “good girl” characteristics with the other young adult paranormal romance heroines.

I agree with Anastasiu’s claim that Bella’s emotional state reflects the readers’ lives. However, I do not believe that the sexual plotline is the primary reason for this identification, in part, because it is not applicable to the genre as a whole. Some young adult paranormal romances follow *Twilight’s* model and delay the couple consummating their relationship until the last installment of the series. Other best-selling series have the hero and heroine engage in sexual intercourse in the first book, while others never broach the subject. Another reason Anastasiu’s theory does not fully explain young adult paranormal romances’ popularity is that the books plots focus on issues other than sex. If the appeal of the genre is due to sexual relationships, then there is no reason to have a plot centering on a larger threat, as this is not obviously connected with the couple’s sex life.

Seifert (2009) focuses on the erotic aspect of *Twilight* to explain its popularity, writing
that Edward and Bella continually advance their physical relationship but stop short of intercourse, building readers’ anticipation and keeping them interested in buying more books. Seifert notes that there were mixed reactions by fans to *Breaking Dawn*, in which Edward and Bella finally consummate their relationship. Seifert suggests that, after the long emotional build-up, this was a letdown for readers. Seifert jumps to the conclusion that fans were negatively reacting to the sexual encounter, when the fan response may have been caused by other events. For instance, Edward, who has been dead for a century, impregnates Bella, and the pregnancy and birth would have killed her if Edward had not turned her into a vampire. Also, Bella’s best friend Jacob imprints on—meaning he becomes the soul mate of—their baby, Renesmee, and even though she grows at an accelerated pace she is still a child. There are many plot developments in *Eclipse* that could have caused fans to react negatively. The theory that the sexual tension between heroine and hero is the primary reason for the genre’s appeal also fails to explain the popularity of other series in which the heroine and hero have sex in the first book and others in which the subject of sex is not broached.

Scholars and popular media writing about *Twilight* have noted a number of connections in the series to fairy tales. Ashcraft (2013) notes there are numerous references to fairytales in *Twilight*; for example, Bella describes her life in fairytale terms many times (205-206). Ashcraft (2013); Bristol (2010); Murphy (2011); and Van Petten (2009) argue that *Twilight* has the same narrative structure as the Disney version of classic fairy tales that are familiar to many girls. Murphy explains the formula as, “Boy and girl meet. Boy and girl fall in love. Something threatens (once or repeatedly) to tear boy and girl apart. Love conquers all and they ride off together into the sunset” (60). While the *Twilight* series appears, at first glance, to follow this formula, closer analysis reveals differences. While Bella seems to achieve what one is told is
“every girl’s dream” by the close of the series—beauty, wealth, a devoted husband, and a child, which is unusual among vampires—*Twilight* does not have with the “happily ever after” ending typical in Disney fairy tales. “Happily ever after” implies that the danger has concluded, and while the couple may face challenges, everything will turn out for the best. At the conclusion of young adult paranormal romances, by contrast, while the immediate crisis has been averted, future conflict is inevitable. The Cullens’ standoff with the Volturi ends with the latter realizing they cannot win the fight and retreating. Still, as Edward notes, their conflict with the Volturi is not over. “‘But, yes, I’m sure they’ll recover from the blow someday. And then…’ His eyes tightened. I imagine they’ll try to pick us off separately” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 743). That young adult paranormal romances typically do not have “happily ever after” endings can be more easily observed when analyzing novels besides Meyer’s series. Often, the broader, non-romantic issues are left open-ended and there is a bittersweet ending for the heroine, in which she does not have it all.

Another common feature of the endings of young adult paranormal romances is the heroine’s recognition that the larger problem is partly caused by individuals in authority. As mentioned above, in the *Twilight* series, the larger issue centers on the Volturi, a tyrannical coven of vampire royalty who enforce the laws of the vampire world. Edward explains that the Volturi seek to destroy the Cullen family because they want Edward’s physic abilities and his “adopted” sister’s mind reading abilities. The Volturi know as long as the Cullen family is intact they will not willingly join them (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 601-04). Edward expresses his suspicion that the Volturi allowed Victoria to create a newborn vampire army to fight the Cullens, in *Eclipse*, as revenge for the Cullens killing her mate, James, in *Twilight*, although it is a criminal act. The Volturi arrived to dispense with Victoria’s army after the battle was over in
the hope the army had destroyed the Cullens. Edward also believes the Volturi, in *Breaking Dawn*, are using the accusation the Cullens turned a child, Renesmee, into a vampire, even though this is not true, she was born, as an excuse to punish and separate the Cullens. Edward and his family know the Volturi are behind these events for their own corrupt motives and after the stand-off, suggest one day standing up to them and their rule.

“Perhaps the time will come when our world is ready to be free of the Volturi altogether.”

“That time may come,” Carlisle replied. “If it does, we’ll stand together.” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 743)

All the young adult paranormal romance heroines recognize that the larger crisis they face is at least partially caused by corrupt authorities. Eventually, they overthrow the corrupt leadership, or it is implied that they will change the system for the better. Clearly, there is not a “happily ever after” in young adult paranormal romances, as many scholars of *Twilight* would have us believe; there is a lot more going on at the end of the novels. *Twilight* does not entirely conform to the typical structure of fairytales, but this only becomes apparent when examining the entire genre.

In her discussion of *Twilight*’s resemblance to fairy tales, Colette Murphy writes, “Edward and Bella’s relationship highlights one of the purposes of the fairy tale, which is to ‘take these existential dilemmas very seriously and address itself directly to them: the need to be loved and the fear that one is thought worthless; the love of life and the fear of death’” (60). Addressing human beings’ anxieties and desires is not an exclusive function of fairy tales. As
Jennifer L. McMahon (2009) argues, *Twilight*, like other vampire narratives, also does this through the reader’s identification with Bella. McMahon writes, one of the anxieties and desires that Meyer tackles in *Twilight* is “our own latent wish to escape anonymity and ascend to a state of supreme significance” (198). In Bella’s account of herself as a human, she sees herself as “average”—as most of the readers probably do—and yet, “god-like” Edward, as she often describes him, loves her. Later, she is the key figure in winning the battle with the Volturi. If not for Bella, who gains the ability to shield the Cullens upon becoming a vampire and kept the situation from escalating, the Cullens would have had to engage in a fight with the Volturi and not everyone would have survived. Like Bella, the heroines of young adult paranormal romances are often the only ones who can save everyone. Despite her ordinary demeanor, then, Bella must really be special. Young adult paranormal romances all contain the elements of the heroine as savior and loved by a “super” guy even though the heroines see themselves as ordinary so it is important to understand what these elements could do through their inclusion in the stories.

While previous theories on *Twilight* reveal important features of the story, they neglect much of what is essential to understand the appeal of young adult paranormal romances in our current cultural context. These theories bypass these elements because they are limiting their analysis to *Twilight*. By looking at the entirety of the young adult paranormal romance genre, we can see these features are part of a pattern pointing to something more. Although *Twilight* is the most well-known series in the genre and should not be ignored, it should not be the sole focus of scholarly analysis.
CHAPTER 3: YOUNG ADULT PARANORMAL ROMANCE NOVELS AND THE
CONTEMPORARY CULTURE OF GIRLHOOD

In this chapter, I map the out major discourses in young adult paranormal romances and
find these discourses reflect discourses and narratives on contemporary girlhood and may
respond to them.

3.1 Young Adult Paranormal Romances and the Discourses and Narratives of
Contemporary Girlhood

At the beginning of the novels, the heroines possess certain characteristics. They are
always good students. These girls have little experience with dating and sex. Their virginity is
explicitly mentioned in *Starstruck, Evermore, Sea Change, Swoon, Twilight, Jesscia’s Guide to
Dating the Dark Side, Jekel Loves Hyde*, and the *Dark Divine*. However, these heroines go
beyond just being “good girls.” They are high-achievers. In *Feather*, Estella has recently
graduated from high school and already has a bachelor’s degree (Ebner, *Feather* 17). Jill has “a
shot at valedictorian” (Fantaskey, *Jekel Loves Hyde* 39). The heroines are not satisfied with
being average; they want to be perfect, as Nora in *Hush, Hush* shows when she frets, “biology
was my toughest subject. My grade tottered problematically between A and B. In my mind, that
was the difference between a full and half scholarship in my future” (20). She is not satisfied
with earning a “B,” which some people would be happy to earn in their “toughest” class. Raven,
in Allison Van Diepen’s book of the same name, rarely turns in an assignment that is not an “A”
(10). The protagonists always have their lives planned out. Miranda from *Sea Change* notes,
“my summer, like most things in my life, had been all mapped out: As soon as school ended, I
was to start my dream internship at the Museum of Natural History in New York City”
(Friedman 2). Abbey, in *The Hollow* series, wants to own a bath and body shop. She constantly mixes new perfumes to sell to future customers, and, even though she is only in high school, she has the store’s location picked out, name chosen, a business plan, and the first year’s rent paid as an early graduation present from her parents. These characteristics are explained by some narratives within Girls Studies and the story they tell about girls.

Anita Harris (2003) in *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* argues the state of girls and young women is emphasized as indicative of and crucial to the future state of society. This is a departure from the past as Nancy Lesko (2001) asserts in *Act Your Age! A Cultural Construction of Adolescence* that youth in general or boys in particular have previously been regarded as the future (49). Harris claims that with the campaigns of the feminist movement during the later half of the 20th century, the dominant presumption is that there are no longer any barriers to women’s achievement, and as a result, the expectations for women have changed, women are seen as able to do anything. This freedom means women are viewed as the new untapped resource in society, causing scholars and the media to look to girls as the future (2). This emphasis has led to increased scrutiny and regulation of girls’ lives to make sure they grow into the right kind of adult and ensure a successful future for society. The result is the dichotomous conclusion that women’s new freedom is the source of new opportunities and new problems for girls. This creates a polarizing discourse—girls as either “can-do,” ambitious, goal oriented, and consumerist; or girls as “at risk,” lacking drive, and engaging in risky behavior, such as promiscuous sex, drinking, and drugs leading to a dead-end life (14). Deborah Tolman (2002) in *Dilemmas of Desire: Teenage Girls Talk about Sexuality* supports Harris’ idea that girls’ sexual activity places them within a dichotomous discourse, stating that one of the few safe outlets for adolescent female sexual activity is within long-term relationships; other contexts risk
their being labeled “bad girls.” “At-risk” girls furthermore, are typecast as from working-class backgrounds and of certain ethnic minorities leaving unspoken “can-do” girls as white, middle or upper class (25). The polarizing discourse about girls has real-life implications for girls and young women, Harris writes, who are categorized, observed and regulated by figures of authority, such as parents and teachers, according to this discourse. If “at-risk” behavior is perceived in “can-go” girls, then intervention through private means like counseling is employed, as opposed to public institutional intervention, for “at-risk” girls, to assure the girls get back on the “can-do” track (34).

The discourse about girls Harris describes is further supported by discourse coming out of scholars and the media’s increased attention on violent, mean, and bad girls the last few decades, which Meda Chesney-Lind and Katherine Irwin examine in their 2008 book, *Beyond Bad Girls: Gender, Violence, and Hype*. In the 1990s, the focus was on girls in gangs but has shifted since the mid-90s to girl-on-girl bullying, typically accomplished through indirect tactics like ostracism and humiliation (17, 19). Girl gang members are frequently portrayed as poor, African-American or Latina young women who engage in formal delinquent behavior which garners intervention through public institutions like the juvenile justice system unlike the informal aggression of other “mean girls” (17). This corresponds to the discourse of the “at-risk” girl as poor and of particular ethnic minorities who is likely to be involved in intervention through public institutions (Harris 2004, 25). Chesney-Lind and Irwin write girl violence is portrayed as a consequence of girls’ newfound equality which is causing them to become more like boys—to masculinize. This sets up the idea of “good” and “bad” femininity with “good” girls acting in a traditionally feminine passive manner and “bad” girls as aggressive (12). The alleged increase in girl violence is a self-fulfilling prophecy as it justifies increased policing of
girls and thereby finds more incidents of girl violence (31). Both Harris and Chesney-Lind and Irwin attribute the current dichotomous discourses about girls, which real-life girls are then subject to, to society’s perception of the effects of women’s new freedoms brought about by the campaigns of the feminist movement. Thus, the discourses about girls Tolman, mentioned earlier, and Chesney-Lind and Irwin describe can be subsumed within the “can-do” “at-risk” discourse described by Harris.

Another study on girlhood and young womanhood is Courtney E. Martin’s, *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: The Frightening New Normalcy of Hating Your Body*. Martin interviewed girls and young women about their life experiences and argues that girls and young women today feel they must be perfect, Perfect Girls, excelling in every facet of their lives: physical appearance, athleticism, and academic achievement. While Martin believes she is describing a phenomenon, by describing it, she herself creates a discourse.

It is apparent Martin is creating a discourse about girls when we compare Martin’s description of the Perfect Girl to Harris’ discussion of the discourse of the “can-do” girl and see the two mirror each other. Martin writes that for Perfect Girls there is “never enough accomplishment” (5). Harris writes that girls subject to the “can-do” girl discourse “were always conscious of not doing enough or being enough” (48). Both Perfect Girls and can-do girls are ambitious (Harris 17; Martin, 44-45) and planners (Harris 14; Martin 233). Martin’s discussion of how the Perfect Girl came to be parallels the discourse of how the “can-do” “at-risk” girl came to be. Martin writes that the Perfect Girl originates from the daughters of feminist mothers interpreting, “you can be anything” into “you have to be everything.” This is because they saw their mothers trying to be everything through the superwoman ideal made popular in the 80s which said a woman must be a great career woman, keep a beautiful home and appearance, and
be the best mother simultaneously (18, 39). This is not the fault of feminists but rather society which appropriated the feminist motto that women can do anything into a woman should be able to do everything. Martin, like previously discussed discourse about girls implicates feminism as a cause of the discourse.

As I have shown and will continue to show, Martin’s discourse of the Perfect Girl mirrors the discourse of the “can-do” girl which itself subsumes other discourses about girls. Because all these discourses envelope one another, it shows they work in conjunction to tell a specific story about a specific type of girl which is that white, privileged girls and young women are ambitious, are extensive planners acting out the steps necessary to achieve their goals, and do not engage in promiscuous sex or delinquent behavior. This category of girls, white, privileged girls, is subject to this discourse and learns to tell it about themselves—they place themselves into this discourse.

This discourse is reflected in the heroines of young adult paranormal romances. One can see this in the character Nora, who thinks in all-or-nothing terms; she is not happy with anything less than an “A.” Like Perfect Girls and “can-do” girls, the heroines are ambitious and achieving, being in advanced classes or earning a college degree, even though they have only recently graduated from high school. Perfect Girls and “can-do” girls achieve their goals by planning and executing the steps needed to reach them (233). This character trait is exemplified in the protagonists when Miranda admits her life has always been planned out, and Abbey has her bath and body shop mapped out. That they are “can-do” is also signified by the fact that they have not engaged in behavior which would jeopardize a successful future such as promiscuous sex since it is never implied or said that any of them have had sex before, or drink. As both Harris and Tolman discuss having promiscuous sex would label them “bad girls.” All the heroines of young adult paranormal romances are heterosexual, slim, white, and middle class, the
latter two which Harris writes are characteristics of the “can-do” girl. Thus, the heroines reflect
the discourse its white, privileged girl readers learn to tell about themselves and this reflection is
why they read these novels and answers why young adult paranormal romances are popular
now—because this discourse is present now. But, these discourses are not just a set of
characteristics told about these girls but are part of a narrative which the novels reflect. This is
important because when the girls place themselves within the discourse they also become subject
to the narrative about them.

When the reader is first introduced to the heroine of one of these young adult paranormal
romances, the heroine is experiencing upheaval in her life, the cause of which is often the death
of a family member or friend, or move to a new town. Because she has moved to a new town
and is the “new girl” or everyone knows she experienced a death (*Hush, Hush, The Hollow, Jekel Loves Hyde, Sleepless*), or she has unusual abilities, behavior, or appearance (*Wings, Meridian, Feather*), the heroine experiences isolation and misery from this situation. Sometimes the
heroine has never felt that she belonged, as in *Feather, Twilight*, and *As You Wish*. For instance,
in Carrie Jones’ *Need* series, Zara is sent to stay with her grandmother, ostensibly to pull her out
of her listlessness after her step-father dies of an apparent heart attack. Here, Zara reflects on
what she calls her “zombie-like” state in which she has apathy for everything she used to love
doing.

I used to be the type of person who was always in motion, always doing things,
writing letters, running through the streets, laughing with friends, moving. Always
forward. Moving.

Then I got stuck. My dad died and the only words I hear are *death, deadly, stillness.*
To never move. No forward. No backward. Just stuck. Gone forever, like my dad, a blank screen on the computer, an old photograph in the hall with no spirit in it, an ice patch on a road to nowhere, nothing. Just gone. (Jones, Need 62)

The heroines’ melancholy reflects Martin’s narrative on Perfect Girls. Martin creates a narrative on how the Perfect Girl typically functions throughout elementary, middle, and high school:

Setting short-term goals and going after them works beautifully for perfect girls throughout high school and college. By being so productive, perfect girls get a lot of attention, encouragement, affirmation, even love from teachers, parents, and coaches. They have constant reinforcement that they are, in fact, destined for greatness (233-34).

Martin writes there are support systems in the form of tutors, counselors, parents, and clear-cut goals to achieve success, like a set curriculum for graduation, during Perfect Girls’ school years to ensure they are successful (238) and thus, they receive praise from adults. Psychology Today advice columnist Hara Estroff Marano (2012) answering a female college senior’s letter for help, as she is burdened by the need to be perfect, writes that, by praising children’s success, “children develop the mistaken belief that no one will think well of you unless you are perfect” (33). This makes self-esteem contingent on performance, causing children to fixate on perfection, and based on external approval, leaving them vulnerable when they do not receive it. When Perfect Girls are praised, Martin writes, adults may suggest that they are “destined for greatness.” In other words, they are “special” and destined to do and be great things in the world. It is these are the ideologies girls subject to this discourse were subject to.
However, Martin writes that the expectations Perfect Girls were taught to have of their future do not necessarily match the reality.

But short-term goals aren’t as straightforward in tall buildings with matrices of five-by-five cubicles filled with other smart, ambitious people. Suddenly an onslaught of external forces—inaccessible supervisors, nasty coworkers, downturns in the economy, office policy, precedent—can derail a perfect girl from her path. Turns out that, unlike the design-your-own-major flexibility in college, the corporate hierarchy is pretty firmly set in its ways. Your boss does not intend to brainstorm a nontraditional career path for you that would allow you to bypass the coffee pouring and the collating on your way to real responsibility and prestige (234).

According to Martin, it becomes difficult for Perfect Girls to succeed in the post-college, because they are more affected by social factors and there are no clear steps to “success” unlike during their school years. Perfect Girls were told and expected a spectacular future but the future they imagined is now and they are not where they want to be (Martin, 249). As recent graduates with little previous work experience, Perfect Girls are most likely to be assigned menial tasks at their jobs, which do not reflect the idea they are important. This is problematic because Perfect Girls equate failure to achieve their goals with a lack of personal worth.

Martin’s narrative on Perfect Girls is echoed by Harris’ discussion of the narrative about “can-do” girls. She writes that “can-do” have the resources to ensure they do well and stay on the “can-do” track (34). “Can-do” girls and young women are encouraged to believe that given enough ambition and hard work they will go on to have great jobs, which in today’s society
means a fabulous lifestyle to go with it and they expect this (115, 42).

Harris writes, more girls are subject to the “can-do” narrative than there are high paying, consumer lifestyles available (45-46). Because the “can-do” discourse is founded in society where women’s achievements are now seen as limitless due to feminism, a woman’s achievement all depends on her ambition and hard work, and “nonachievement,” or not having a prestigious job, is seen as being her own fault (53). Thus, girls and young women who are told to expect a certain future blame themselves when they do not attain it, like Martin writes Perfect Girls do. While Harris’ discussion of the “can-do” narrative ends at the gap between what “can-do” girls were told to expect and reality, Martin’s narrative describes what happens to Perfect Girls physiologically after this. As I will show, young adult paranormal romances reflect Martin’s narrative of the Perfect Girl and responds to it.

Martin writes Perfect Girls cannot be successful all the time. I call instances when not everyone can be a winner the “adult world.” As one enters adolescence, instances where everyone cannot win—events in which we are in competition—become more frequent. For instance, there are relatively few spots at Ivy-League colleges for thousands of overqualified applicants, so despite being accomplished, many people are still not accepted. Or, no matter how much one tries, they may not earn a perfect score on the SATs. According to Martin, when Perfect Girls encounter these “adult” moments, when they are not successful, they face a threat to their ideology. They begin to question not only whether they can attain perfection, but also the other ideas that come with the Perfect Girl culture: that they are special and will do great things in the world. Martin writes these threats to the Perfect Girl ideologies in adolescence are brief, because girls have the support systems to put Perfect Girls back on track and thus, restore this ideology.
However, Martin writes, this changes when Perfect Girls move fully into the adult world, which for them, of course occurs after completing college, as Perfect Girl culture requires the completion of college. For Perfect Girls, at least part of their purpose of life comes from the idea that they are special and will do something important in the world but, as previously discussed, their experience upon entering the adult world usually does not reflect this idea. Unlike when Perfect Girls previously encountered moments which forced them to face their inability to achieve perfection, those support systems which had helped Perfect Girls bounce back after disappointment, are absent or rendered useless as one’s parents can encourage but cannot intervene when one has trouble at work. As a result, Martin writes, the Perfect Girls belief system starts to collapse. If they are not really “destined for greatness,” if they are not special and do not have something important to contribute to the world, as their parents and other adults told them, then they wonder what their purpose is.

Physiologist Robin Stern describes the emotional state of the women who seek counseling at this time in their lives.

Sometimes there is so much disparity between what young people are told to expect and what actually happens that they get disillusioned. The ones who blame themselves tend to get depressed. If they aren’t good at managing their tough feelings, sometimes they get stuck exercising massive amounts of control in order to just keep going, or worst-case scenario, they back off from the ladder altogether and give up the climb. It is all much worse if they grew up seeing themselves as special or precious. (Martin 238)
According to Martin, Perfect Girls at this time in their lives may feel discouraged.

This discouragement occurs during a new phase of life for young people in the United States and other industrialized countries, lasting from the late teens to mid- to late twenties, a period that scholar Jeffrey Arnett dubs “emerging adulthood.” In his 2004 book, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road From the Late Teens Through the Twenties*, Arnett describes emerging adulthood as a period between adolescence and adulthood, which offers the opportunity for self-exploration before entering into the commitments of adult life, such as a long-term job, marriage, and parenthood. According to Arnett, emerging adulthood is a recent development, triggered by the postponement of marriage and parenthood since the 1970s, a phenomenon which is the result of multiple social factors, including greater opportunities for women (Arnett 6-7). This echoes previously mentioned discourses about girls which name feminism as the cause for these new developments. Arnett does not discuss that emerging adulthood is a discourse created to explain the phenomenon of delaying normative transitions to adulthood caused by economic crisis. Arnett acknowledges that emerging adulthood is a phase of life available to those belonging to a privileged socioeconomic class which, again, corresponds to the type of readers of young adult paranormal romances (22). Thus, his description of emerging adulthood is another discourse told about white, privileged young women. I use Arnett’s discourse of emerging adulthood and the criteria emerging adults consider to be signs of having reached adulthood to show young adult paranormal romances reflect the discourse of emerging adulthood and the transition to adulthood. That is, the novels reflect the discourses and narratives about this time in young women’s lives.

Just as emerging adult Perfect Girls feel discouraged, as Martin writes, so too, do the protagonists experience upheaval in their lives and feel disconnected from life as Zara and the
heroines in other young adult paranormal romances do. Thus, the protagonists reflect popular narrative on Perfect Girls upon entering the adult world.

Shortly after the start of the novel, the supernatural enters the heroine’s life. The supernatural can be seen as a metaphor for the narrative about emerging adult Perfect Girl’s experience upon entering the adult world for a couple of reasons. First, the reader and heroine later find out that the melancholy the protagonist feels is often directly or indirectly connected to the supernatural, just like Martin’s narrative about Perfect Girl’s says their apathy arises from their entry into the adult world. For instance, for the former family member or friend’s death was caused by the supernatural or for the latter, the heroine moves to where the supernatural just happens to live. Other parallels arise in the heroines’ initial reaction to learning of the supernatural. When Zara learns her family was in hiding from her biological father, a pixie king, who wanted her mother as his queen, she thinks, “my head tries to wrap itself around it, but I can’t. The world is so different than I thought, so totally, ridiculously different” (Jones, Need 255). While the sentiment that the world is not what they thought it was is sometimes explicitly stated—not just in Need, but also in Twilight, Raven, and Feather—more often it is demonstrated through the heroine’s disbelief and shock that the supernatural is real.

The sentiment that the world is not what the heroines were lead to believe mirrors the narrative of Perfect Girls when they enter the adult world; they were raised to believe the world would function a certain way—that people would recognize their specialness and they would go on to do great things—but they learn that this is not the case; they are just another employee. Martin writes, when Perfect Girls realize that society does not function as they believed, their ideologies collapse. A parallel to this situation can be seen in Feather. Estella starts to argue that she cannot be an immortal who was “born” as an adult because she had a mother who left
her a letter. She thinks, “I trailed off, now realizing that all I’d ever believed in was false,” when she is told she wrote the note herself (Ebner, Feather 182). Her beliefs—just like Perfect Girls’ beliefs in Martin’s narrative are proven false.

Other proof the supernatural is a metaphor for the adult world in the Perfect Girl narrative is seen in the changes in the heroine’s behavior due to the supernatural. In order to deal with the problems the supernatural brings, she engages in what would be considered “at-risk” behavior, such as sneaking out of the house, skipping class, breaking and entering, lying, and sneaking into bars and clubs. In Deadly Little Secret, Camellia remarks how abnormal her behavior is, “still, I’ve never done anything like this before. I’ve never just taken off out my window, not telling my parents where I was going, or acted on pure instinct, without a set plan” (Stolarz 155). Not only is Camellia’s “can-do” girl status apparent in that she has never snuck out of the house before but, we again see a sign of the “can-do” and Perfect Girl: she has always had a plan.

The girls’ engagement in this atypical behavior is symbolic of Martin’s narrative of Perfect Girls not succeeding as they formally had when they enter the adult world. I also see this behavior as a sign of a break from the Perfect Girl model, which I will discuss later in the chapter. As Harris mentioned, adults watch “can-do” girls for any signs they are getting off-track and will use various private avenues to get them back on track. Further evidence that the heroines in the novels are “can-do” is that sometimes the adults in the books will also use private avenues to get them back on track. For example, both Abbey from Jessica Verday’s The Hollow series and Camilla in Laurie Faria Stolarz’s Touch series, are sent to therapists with the former also attending summer school and receiving tutoring after leaving school early.

Just as the supernatural reflects the emerging adult Perfect Girl narrative, the protagonists’ parental situation also reflects this narrative. In the novels, the parents are either
absentee; that is, too involved in their own lives to be around for the heroine, as in *Shiver*, *Swoon*, and *Deadly Little Secret*, or one parent is dead, and the remaining parent must travel for work or is consumed by grief, as in *Beautiful Creatures* and *Jekel Loves Hyde*. If and when the parents are around, they are oblivious to the supernatural goings-on, as the heroine is unable to tell them the truth, because people would think she is crazy, or she is forbidden from revealing the existence of the supernatural to anyone. Since her parents and guardians are unaware, they sometimes unintentionally impede her plans or misinterpret her “risky” behavior, leaving her frustrated. The parents’ obliviousness to what is really going on replicates the view many adolescents have of their parents as ignorant (Arnett 47). While this seems to point to the novels reflecting the discourse about adolescence rather than emerging adulthood, emerging adulthood is described as a period of feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood, and the parental situation in the books reflects both periods. Occasionally the parents or guardians know about the supernatural but they cannot help the protagonist, except in limited ways, as in *Beautiful Creatures*, *Jessica’s Guide to Dating on the Dark Side*, and *Meridian*. For instance, in *Jessica’s Guide to Dating on the Dark Side*, Jessica finds out she is vampire royalty and has an arranged marriage. Jessica looks to her parents for help in getting out of the marriage, but they are bound to uphold the pact (Fantaskey 26-29). Whether the parents are around or not, the heroine and her friends must deal with the supernatural by themselves, without adult support. This parallels the narrative of emerging adults upon entering the adult world, parents can no longer help their adult children fix problems like they once did.

As you can see, the discourse emerging from the novels reflects the discourse and narrative which goes along with it, particularly, the Perfect Girl narrative, which the novels readers—white, privileged, “can-do” tell about themselves and are stuck in. Not only do young
adult paranormal romances reflect this narrative but as I will show in the next section, they respond to it by offering instances in which the ideologies of specialness and doing great things can be temporarily restored, which Martin’s narrative says collapses upon these girls’ entry into the adult world.

The Perfect Girl narrative is present in discourses about contemporary youth, an example is of this being Jean M. Twenge’s *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (2006). While Twenge believes she is describing a phenomenon, like Martin, she is actually creating a narrative. Twenge writes that, since the 1970s, society has promoted self-focus, and having high self-esteem, the fact that one is special, regardless of one’s abilities through the idea that we all have different abilities which make us special. This can be seen in children’s athletic and academic activities where everyone who participates gets a prize. While teaching tolerance and instilling self-esteem are generally viewed as positive social rewards, Twenge writes this overpraise leaves this generation with unrealistic expectations and when these are not met the self-focus they have been taught causes them to over focus on these disappointments (7, 68, 109). And like Martin’s narrative that the Perfect Girls ideology of specialness is not supported by the adult world as it was during their school years, Twenge writes, “unlike your teacher, your boss isn’t going to care much about preserving your high self-esteem” (68). While the narrative of the Perfect Girl may be present in the larger culture all youth are socialized in, due to society’s current emphasis on girls teaching them they now have the world at their feet and can have a great future and that they are special is particularly prevalent for girls. Furthermore, the genre, “young adult paranormal romances,” maybe considered an appropriate outlet for females, not for males and so, that is why the primary readership of the novels seems to be female.
While I am not implying that all readers of young adult paranormal romances are subject to the discourses of emerging adult Perfect Girls, the books may be particularly relatable to them. They may also be relatable to Perfect Girls in school facing a moment of imperfection as Martin’s narrative says they face a threat to this ideology or youth as Twenge’s narrative holds. This is important because through the reader’s identification with the heroine, who reflects these discourses about them, instances are provided in which the ideologies of specialness and doing great things can be temporarily restored, which Martin and Twenge’s narratives say collapse upon entering the adult world.

3.1.1 Romance

The paranormal brings two things with it: romance and life threatening issues. The romance is the first issue that comes up in the books. As Carol Bristol (2001) notes, the heroes in romances are always better than regular guys, and paranormal heroes are no exception. One effect of being supernatural is often having supermodel good looks. Also, heroes are frequently rich, because they have had years to amass wealth or can magically make it appear. They are intelligent because they may be immortal or have a prolonged life span, so they have had decades to cultivate their mind. All this makes the paranormal hero better than the average human male—in other words, special. Because the special hero loves the heroine, she too becomes special.

Equally important to the hero’s specialness are the circumstances in which the hero falls in love with the heroine. As Alexis Morgan observes, the hero in the novels—and I would add, specifically the plot where the human girl falls in love with a supernatural guy—is usually a guy who has isolated himself from society, until the heroine comes along and makes him care. Edward from Twilight illustrates this when he tells Bella about his life before he met her compared to after. “Before you, Bella, my life was like a moonless night. Very dark, but there
were stars - points of light and reason... And then you shot across my sky like a meteor. Suddenly everything was on fire; there was brilliancy, there was beauty” (Meyer, New Moon, 514). The heroine is his world and changes him for the better. Though it promoting your life being centered around someone else and that you can change someone is not healthy, is does emphasizes the heroine’s specialness. This is important because it counteracts the discourse Perfect Girls were unintentionally taught, which is, as Hara Estroff Marano (2012) mentioned earlier, no one will love you unless you are perfect (33). While the heroines in these novels are “can-do,” it is clear they do not see themselves as perfect; yet, they have this “super” guy who thinks the world of them.

The authors use various tropes to signal that hero and heroine are meant to be together. One signs is reincarnation, as the couple continually finds each other and falls in love each time even though the heroine does not remember her past lives, like in Evermore and Fallen. Another sign is that the heroine is a doppelganger relative of earlier star-crossed lovers as in Sea Change. In Beautiful Creatures the heroine is the literally “the girl of his dreams” before meeting her in real life like. The two main characters in Jekel Loves Hyde have culturally paired names from the Robert Louis Stevenson novel, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886). Lastly, the hero and heroine are two halves of a soul as in Feather. The fact that the couple is meant to be together could offer a sense of greater purpose in that there is someone you are supposed to be with.

Although the couple is destined to be together, in many books there is a romantic rival, as in Wings, Twilight, Need, Deadly Little Secret, Fallen, Sea Change, Jessica’s Guide to Dating the Dark Side, the Dark Divine, Fairy Tale, and Sleepless. The romantic rival has two effects. In heteronormative society, females are socialized to believe that their self-worth comes from being
the object of men’s attention (Chesney-Lind and Irwin 20), so when the heroine is not only sought after by one man but two, this confirms her value. The love triangle is reflective of the discourse of emerging adulthood. Arnett (2004) writes that romantic relationships in emerging adulthood are “more identity-focused: ‘What kind of person am I, and what kind of person would suit me best as a partner through life’” compared to “adolescent love [which] tends to be tentative and transient. The implicit question is ‘Who would I enjoy being with, here and now?’” (9). The heroine in the novels is often caught between two love interests with drastically different personalities and sometimes species, human and non-human, and her decision over who to be with is about a female character's internal struggle to figure out who she wants to be. For instance, in Aprilynne Pike’s Wings series, Laurel discovers she is a faerie, and her decision to be with human David or faerie Tamani reflects what world she wants to live in, human or Avalon, the fairy world. In the end, the heroine chooses one guy, as of course she must be monogamous, and it is implied they will be together forever. That the heroine is special because she is with the hero is not something unique to young adult paranormal romances but is an argument for why romances in general are popular, as I stated in the introduction. However, what is new is that the romance undermines the Perfect Girl discourse by showing that one does not have to be perfect to be loved, as which girl readers of these novels unintentionally learn growing up.

3.1.2 Saving the World

As I mentioned in the chapter on Twilight, the heroine initially must overcome a personal conflict, which usually entails her life being in danger. Usually, this is part of a larger problem, which often has Armageddon consequences—at the very least, the threat expands to more than just herself, perhaps a group of people. An example of the latter is Maggie Stiefvater’s the
Wolves of Mercy Falls, in which Grace must save a wolf pack who were once human but can no
longer turn back from a hunting party who is out to kill them. In Carrie Jones’ Need series, there
will be a world ending war between Norse gods called Ragnarok, the Norse mythology
prophesized end of the world, in which weres (humans who can turn into animals), humans, and
pixies will choose sides.

These larger issues often echo real world concerns like environmental collapse, terrorism,
and war. The heroines recognize that these issues are at least partially caused by corrupt
leadership. For instance, in the Feather series, environmental disasters threaten the end of the
world. The environmental disasters are due to the gods who neglected their duty to watch over
the Earth and left humans to their devices, who polluted it. That the heroines are affected by the
actions of others reflects the narrative of Perfect Girls in emerging adulthood, as your “success”
is more likely to be affected by outside forces (your boss, economy, war, etc.) than in high
school or college just as the heroine’s lives are affected by other people. The heroines either
overthrow the corrupt leadership (Raven, Feather), or there is the implication that one day they
may change the system or culture (Wings, Twilight), but right now they have to fix the immediate
problem. For instance, in Destined, the last book in the Wings saga, Queen Marion only thinks
of protecting herself in an invasion rather than protect Avalon, the faerie realm; though she has
the power to do so, and as a result, much of the population is unnecessarily killed. Laurel is
tasked with one day replacing Marion with Yasmine as queen who will respect all fairies (280).

This idea that the heroines have or will change the world for the better harks back to Martin’s
narrative of the Perfect Girls’ upbringing which readers are subject to—the belief that one day
they will change the world. The protagonist’s potential to change the world can offer hope to the
reader that one day they still might change the world.
In dealing with this threat, the heroine illustrates her position as an emerging adult transitioning to adulthood. The heroine has to overcome many obstacles while trying to avert the crisis. She and her friends make a plan, but then the plan is derailed and they have to form a new plan. The revision of the heroine’s plans in the books is reminiscent of Arnett’s discourse of emerging adulthood. Arnett describes how emerging adults typically have a plan, but that plan is constantly readjusted.

Emerging adults know they are supposed to have a Plan with a capital $P$, that is, some kind of idea about the route they will be taking from adolescence to adulthood, and most of them come with one. However, for almost all of them, their Plan is subject to numerous revisions during their emerging adult years (Arnett 10).

The protagonist becomes the leader of the group. Many of the heroines complain that others are making their decisions for them, but they begin to make decisions for themselves which, according to Arnett is a sign of adulthood (210-211). For instance, Zara chooses to turn into a pixie in order to return her boyfriend from Valhalla, where the dead go, as she was inadvertently responsible for his death (Jones, *Endure* 224).

The heroine eventually finds out she is the only one who can ultimately avert the crisis; sometimes it is even prophesized such as in *Need*, *Feather*, and *Raven*. Imaging themselves as the heroine and being the only one who can save everyone reinforces to the reader just how unique they are, as well as their sense of purpose—that they matter. It is interesting to note that many of the heroines have a choice whether or not to save the world and decide that it is worth saving. She chooses to save the world, despite the fact that in some books, like *Need* and
Feather, it is likely this decision will likely cost her life. Some would say this is reminiscent of women sacrificing themselves for others, which may be true, but I believe this also shows consideration for others, which, emerging adults saw as a sign of having reached adulthood (Arnett 213-14).

Of course, the heroines do triumph, avert disaster, and live. They do this remarkable thing that makes them special, but few people in the world besides the friends who help them know they did this, so they don’t get credit. This situation mirrors and respond to the narrative of emerging Perfect Girls’ lives, as their bosses and co-workers may not recognize how special Perfect Girls were told they were growing up but their friends and family do recognize their specialness, the girls are not publicily recognized for it.

As I have shown, the discourse which emerges from the novels overlaps with popular discourses and narratives on girlhood and young adulthood. Through the reader’s identification with the heroine, who reflects these discourses and narratives, the novels respond to Martin’s Perfect Girl narrative by offering instances where the reader’s sense of specialness and purpose to do important things that Martin and Twenge’s narratives, which readers are subject to, can be restored.

That readers of the genre identify with the Perfect Girl discourse because she learns to tell the story about herself, writing herself into the narrative, would explain why a novel about a high-school age heroine is not necessarily about a high-school girl but rather reflects the discourse of an emerging adult Perfect Girl. As I mentioned earlier, the heroines’ parents in the novels are often not around, or if they are, they are not paying attention. Sometimes the girls are forced to act as the parent to their own parents. For instance, in the Wolves of Mercy Falls series, Grace cooks dinner as her father works long hours, and her mother is preoccupied with her
painting. While Ashcraft (2013) argues these same traits in Bella from *Twilight* show her adherence to traditional femininity (26-28), I argue instead that this shows that the heroines have had to be adults at an early age, just like the girl readers who are subject to the discourse of Perfect Girls, and thus, pressured with so much responsibility to accrue accomplishments at an early age. This may help these young women readers to see the discourse of how they got to where they are, having to be everything to everyone, to be perfect.

So, if these books do reflect emerging adult Perfect Girls’ narrative these readers find themselves stuck in then why not have the heroine be a twenty-or thirty-something and have the story dealing with these experiences in a “realistic” way instead of the supernatural? I believe the supernatural gives the readers an escape from their disappointing reality and that this storyline is an avenue for them to put the narratives they have built their lives around into context. In other words, it allows the readers to take the adult world—which is not what they were expecting according to the narrative they believe—and make sense of its strangeness.

Whether or not it was the intention of the novels’ authors, I show the discourse emerging from the novels do reflect some popular discourses and narratives on emerging adult youth and particularly, Perfect Girls and may respond to by restoring the ideology lost when these narratives are proven false. If readers’ ideologies are reaffirmed by the books, then it only serves as a temporary escape as they will still live in a world in which these discourses and narratives are still present. This could be why in my experience fans of the genre mention rereading books multiple times or seek other books in the genre.

**3.2 Undermining the Contemporary Girlhood Discourse**

When we read the discourse that emerges from the novels in conjunction with the discourse about girlhood, specifically Perfect Girl culture, as I have done throughout this thesis,
the heroines’ mental and emotional state in the epilogue has implications for readers who participate in this discourse.

As I said when discussing the heroine’s melancholy at the beginning of the story, the cause of the heroines’ depression differs from Martin’s narrative of the cause of Prefect Girls’ depression. However, there are connections between the heroine’s trying to be perfect and this causing her to be miserable. An explicit example can be found in *Forever*, the last book in the *Wolves of Mercy Falls* trilogy. As discussed earlier, Grace acts as the parent to her parents. She is also a good student; thus, she is a Perfect Girl. Grace disappears after arguing with her parents about her relationship with Sam, whom she snuck out to see after they grounded her when they caught him sleeping in her room. Because the adults are unaware that these events have to do with Grace’s dealing with werewolves, they assume her behavior is delinquent. When Grace returns, her parents confront her about her behavior, and she admits, “you can’t just wait until I start to choose my own family and my own life and my own happiness and say, no, Grace, that’s not allowed. Go back to being lonely and miserable and a grade-A student [emphasis added]” (Stiefvater, *Forever* 327). For Grace, having to be the parent and an A student, in other words, everything, the Perfect Girl, is synonymous with misery. Now that she no longer has these burdens, she is happy, and she does not want to go back. Grace clearly rejects the Perfect Girl discourse by the end of the series.

There are signs that other heroines no longer subscribe to the Perfect Girl ideal by the end of their respective novels. As I mentioned earlier, Miranda, at the beginning of *Sea Change*, has always had a plan, like the Perfect Girl discourse asserts, but by the last page of the novel, she thinks it can be nice not to have a plan sometimes.
We slid away from the harbor, and my legs felt steady this time. I thought again of sailors—fearful, excited, half mad, their minds filled with krakens and mermaids. It was easy to go a little mad out on the ocean, I thought, with no specific chart or guide other than the sky. But madness could be lovely sometimes [emphasis added]. (Friedman 290)

She does not always need her life mapped out, as the Perfect Girl discourse says she should, as she is no longer subscribes to the Perfect Girl discourse. This is not to say the heroines don’t care about what happens in their lives anymore; they just don’t feel the need to be perfect or have it all.

The example from Sea Change brings up another subject related to always having a plan and is also a sign the heroines no longer subscribe to the Perfect Girl ideal which is, not being in the moment. Perfect Girls are so focused on the future, on doing whatever is necessary to reach their goals, that they don’t live in the present, but the heroines at the end of the books are not this way. While the immediate threat in the novels is gone, the larger problem is not entirely resolved, and the next problem is on the horizon; for instance, in Endure, the concluding installment of the Need series, Zara has averted Ragnarok, but there are still rogue pixies around who are trying to end humanity. However, as I will show in a moment, she and the rest of the protagonists are not worried about what could happen. They live in the present, taking things one day at a time, in contrast to Perfect Girls. This is another sign that the heroines may no longer be trying to live up to this Perfect Girl mentality.

At the end of the heroine’s stories, with the exception of Bella in the Twilight series, the protagonists do not having everything. it is not the perfect life or having it all the Perfect Girl discourse says you should want, yet they, are content anyway. In The Haunted, the last book in
The Hollow trilogy, Abbey, who was set on having her own perfume shop, does not achieve this dream. Her best friend was mistakenly murdered by the supernatural when it was supposed to be her. She chooses to die, so that destiny is restored, but by doing so, she never opens her shop.

The heroines seem to be uninterested in trying to be perfect, effectively having rejected the Perfect Girl discourse. This may be because the girls are not entirely in the ideological system anymore. One reason being that facing these life-or-death events puts the heroine’s previous worries into perspective. Another reason may be that because many of the heroines in the novels end up becoming supernatural, it is they possibly don’t feel the pressure to conform to human standards like they used to. However, the most persuasive reason that the heroines are not interested in trying to attain perfection is because they have learned that they can be content, loved, and find where they belong without having to be perfect.

Not trying to be perfect or appears to make them happy, as evidenced when Zara compares her emotional state at the beginning of Need series to her mindset at the end.

When I first got to Bedford I was so full of fear that I had become nothing. I hardly felt anymore because feeling hurt too much. And now? Now I think of a quote my stepdad used to say. It was by Anandamayi Ma: “Be anchored in fearlessness. What is worldly life but fear!”

I have no idea who Anandamayi Ma is. I should probably look her up, but not right now, because right now I am so happy that I am not the only one who remains, that I am the one who risked everything so the world didn’t end, that I get to hang out on the grass and feel the sun and let Astley rest his head against my hip as he sprawls out and stares up at the sky. [emphasis added] (Jones, Endure 260)
Compared to her “zombie-like” state at the beginning, she is “happy” and care-free now, lounging in the grass with her friends, even though there are still threats from rogue pixies to deal with. Again, she is not worried about the future; she lives in the moment. That the heroines are happier not trying to be perfect undermines the Perfect Girl ideal. While the protagonists undergo this transformation, this does not necessarily mean readers through their identification with the protagonist also do; rather, this endpoint could be how readers want to be. Martin and Marano (2012) discuss the fact that girls feel burdened trying to be perfect. Readers are stuck in a discourse they are burdened by and are stuck in. That the novels undermine this discourse maybe why girls keep reading them so they may vicariously escape the confining discourse they are in.

Young adult paranormal romances may also appeal to adult women for the same reasons. Returning to Girls Studies, Ward and Benjamin write that Girls Studies has moved away from the connection between girls and women that it initially had (21). It is important to reestablish this relationship as the Perfect Girl or “can-do” girl today is the superwoman of tomorrow. If the Perfect Girl and “can-do” girl discourse is undermined by the discourse from the novels then the superwoman ideal, that holds that women must be the best at everything, may also be undermined.

The fact that the heroine is happy in the end is important because it gives the reader another message about contemporary culture. As I previously said, the supernatural is the cause of the heroine’s misery at the beginning of the novel. But by the end, the heroine has found her place in the world through her involvement with the supernatural. This is explicitly stated by Bella in *Breaking Dawn* when she compares herself as a human as a vampire.
As a human, I’d never been best at anything...After eighteen years of mediocrity, I was pretty used to being average. I realized now that I’d long ago given up any aspirations of shining at anything. I just did the best with what I had, never quite fitting into my world.

So this was really different. I was amazing now – to them and to myself. It was like I had been born to be a vampire. The idea made me want to laugh, but it also made me want to sing. I had found my true place in the world, the place I fit, the place I shined.

(Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 523-24)

Bella felt average as a human, but after becoming a vampire, Bella has found a place in the world where she is happy. The heroine’s sense of belonging is more often implied through the heroine’s contentment and comments that she “knows” herself. This knowledge can be metaphorical, like Miranda’s commenting that her “legs felt steady this time.” So, the heroine’s misery at the beginning and her happiness at the end is all connected to the supernatural. If the supernatural is a metaphor for the adult world, then the books are saying to readers who identify with this that they may be miserable now, but they are exactly where they need to be in order to find happiness which could reassure girls who were subject to the narrative that they would have a spectacular future but did not have this expectation met that they will eventually be happy.
CONCLUSION

This investigation was undertaken in an effort to understand what about the cultural milieu right now that make young adult paranormal romances popular. As popular as Tweight is, it cannot provide an answer to this question on its own; we must look at the genre as a whole, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 then, looked at the discourse which emerges from the genre as a whole. The discourse which emerges from the novels overlaps with the positive side of the dichotomous discourses on contemporary girlhood which privileged, white girls and young women learn to tell about themselves. When the girls place themselves within the discourse they also become subject to the narrative about them. This narrative tells these young women to expect a great future which does not pan out for many of them. As a result, the ideologies within the discourse the girls were subject to collapse. The reader identifies with the heroine because she reflects the discourse the reader tells about herself and the narrative she lives and through this identification I showed that the novels offer instances where the ideologies which are said to collapse when these girls enter the adult world can be temporarily restored.

To answer the question of what about the cultural milieu right now causes young adult paranormal romances to be popular: the novels reflect the discourse and narrative of its female readers. The girls become stuck in this discourse and narrative which the novels respond to by offering instances where the girls’ ideologies, built on the discourses taught to them, can be temporarily restored when the narrative proves false. These novels also undermine this discourse which the girls find themselves stuck in.

This study brought up questions to look at in the future. Part of this study is based on
what may occur when readers’ identify with the heroine, so it is important to see whether this reader identification actually occurs. This identification is contingent upon the heroine’s situation reflecting the reader’s reality, so one would need to see if this is true.

Also, when I conducted my study, some of the series I use in my analysis like *Beautiful Creatures*, *Hush, Hush*, and *Meridian*, had not concluded yet (see Appendix B for the books used in this study in comparison to the books now available) and some previous one-shots, like *Ruined*, have recently been turned into a series. It would be beneficial to see whether the same characteristics, especially in the epilogue, are still present in these stories.

Returning to Girls Studies, Ward and Benjamin write that Girls Studies has moved away from the connection between girls and women that it initially had (21). It is important to reestablish this relationship as the discourse the novels’ readers are subject to today is the superwoman discourse of tomorrow. As I have shown the Perfect Girl discourse is harmful for those who subscribe to it. It also is professionally harmful. Hara Estroff Marano (2012) writes, while one may feel that perfectionism is necessary for success, perfectionist attitudes actually interfere with success. As Marano explains,

> Especially in today’s fast-moving global marketplace, success hinges far more on figuring out what to do when things go wrong—which requires the cognitive clarity and mental flexibility that anxiety robs—than on getting everything right. Pushing for perfection impairs the ability to think on one’s feet, to take risks, and to be creative—exactly what is not adaptive today. Having high standards is good. But they inhibit performance when coupled with a fear of making mistakes. Perfectionism
also keeps you so focused on your own performance you can’t learn from experience. And here’s the big paradox of perfectionism—the incessant worry about mistakes actually undermines performance. No one enjoys making mistakes, but most prove to be great learning opportunities. (33)

As the Perfect Girl discourse is harmful so too is the superwoman discourse adult women subscribe to. As Shaw and Lee write about the superwomen ideal,

It is important to ask who is benefiting from this new social script. Women work in the public world (often in jobs that pay less, thus helping employers and the economic system) and yet still are expected to do the domestic and emotional work of home and family as well as stay “beautiful.” In many ways, contemporary femininity tends to serve both the capitalist economic system and individual men better than the traditional, dependent, domestic model (136).

As the two ideals are connected adult women should pay attention to the Perfect Girl ideal. That the Perfect Girl ideal is harmful raises several questions. What can feminists do to reclaim the idea that women can do anything, without the pressure of having to do it all and do it perfectly? In the meantime, what can be done to prepare girls emotionally for when they fail? Returning to Marano, who gives the young woman burdened with being a perfectionist some advice on how to combat this urge:

A two-pronged approach is needed. On one hand, you have to tackle the irrational beliefs
and thoughts you have about performance—that no one will think well of you unless you are perfect, that perfection is even a possibility, or that it is even possible to please everybody. And on the other, you have to take action and deliberately aim to do something imperfectly. (33)

It will be interesting to see whether young adult paranormal romances stay around as these elements which compel girls and young women to be perfect remain in our culture or if readers’ needs take on a different incarnation with the same elements.
APPENDICES

Appendix A

List of Young Adult Paranormal Romances Used in this Study by Publication Date

*Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer (2005)

*New Moon* by Stephenie Meyer (2006)

*Eclipse* by Stephenie Meyer (2007)


*Deadly Little Secret* by Laurie F. Stolarz (2008)

*Need* by Carrie Jones (2008)

*Feather* by Abra Ebner (2009)

*Jessica’s Guide to Dating on the Dark Side* by Beth Fantaskey (2009)

*Evermore* by Alyson Noël (2009)

*Wings* by Aprilynne Pike (2009)

*Guardian* by Abra Ebner (2009)

*Swoon* by Nina Malkin (2009)

*Fairy Tale* by Cyn Balog (2009)

*Blue Moon* by Alyson Noël (2009)

*Ruined: a Novel* by Paula Morris (2009)

*Shiver* by Maggie Stiefvater (2009)

*Meridian* by Amber Kizer (2009)

*As You Wish* by Jackson Pearce (2009)

*The Hollow* by Jessica Verday (2009)
Hush, Hush by Becca Fitzpatrick (2009)

Deadly Little Lies by Laurie F. Stolarz (2009)

Beautiful Creatures by Margaret Stohl and Kami Garcia (2009)

Fallen by Lauren Kate (2009)

The Dark Divine by Bree Despain (2009)

Raven by Abra Ebner (2010)

Captivate by Carrie Jones (2010)

Shadowland by Alyson Noël (2010)

Jekel Loves Hyde by Beth Fantaskey (2010)

Spells by Aprilynne Pike (2010)

Sleepless by Cyn Balog (2010)

Linger by Maggie Stiefvater (2010)

The Haunted by Jessica Verday (2010)

Torment by Lauren Kate (2010)

Beautiful Darkness by Margaret Stohl and Kami Garcia (2010)

Crescendo by Becca Fitzpatrick (2010)

Entice by Carrie Jones (2010)

Deadly Little Games by Laurie F. Stolarz (2010)

The Lost Saint by Bree Despain (2010)

Illusions by Aprilynne Pike (2011)

Passion by Lauren Kate (2011)

Starstruck by Cyn Balog (2011)

Forever by Maggie Stiefvater (2011)
The Hidden by Jessica Verday (2011)
Silence by Becca Fitzpatrick (2011)
Deadly Little Voices by Laurie F. Stolarz (2011)
Destined by Aprilynne Pike (2012)
Endure by Carrie Jones (2012)
Rapture by Lauren Kate (2012)
Sea Change by Aimee Friedman (2012)
Appendix B

List of Young Adult Paranormal Romances Used in this Study by Series

(e-books in a series omitted)

**books including in this study

*Beautiful Creatures* by Margaret Stohl and Kami Garcia

#1 *Beautiful Creatures* (December 2009) **
#2 *Beautiful Darkness* (October 2010) **
#3 *Beautiful Chaos* (October 2011)
#4 *Beautiful Redemption* (October 2012)

*Dream Dark* (companion novel) (August 2011)

*Dark Divine* by Bree Despain (Only the first two books are used in this study)

#1 *The Dark Divine* (December 2009) **
#2 *The Lost Saint* (December 2010) **
#3 *The Savage Grace* (March 2012)

*Fallen* by Lauren Kate

#1 *Fallen* (December 2009) **
#2 *Torment* (September 2010) **
#3 *Passion* (June 2011) **
#4 *Rapture* (June 2012) **

*Fallen in Love* (companion novel) (January 2012)
Feather by Abra Ebner
#1 Feather (January 2009) **
#2 Guardian (May 2009) **
#3 Raven (January 2010) **

The Hollow by Jessica Verday
The Hollow (September 2009) **
The Haunted (August 2010) **
The Hidden (September 2011) **

Hush, Hush by Becca Fitzpatrick
#1 Hush, Hush (October 2009) **
#2 Crescendo (October 2010) **
#3 Silence (October 2011) **
#4 Finale (October 23, 2012)

The Immortals by Alyson Noël
Evermore (February 3, 2009) **
Blue Moon (July 7, 2009) **
Shadowland (April 1, 2010) **
Dark Flame (June 22, 2010)
Night Star (November 16, 2010)
**Everlasting** (June 7, 2011)

*Jessica’s Guide to Dating on the Dark Side* by Beth Fantaskey

#1 *Jessica’s Guide to Dating on the Dark Side* (February 1, 2009) **

#2 *Jessica Rules the Dark Side* (January 10, 2012)

*Meridian* by Amber Kizer

#1 *Meridian* (August 11, 2009) **

#2 *Wildcat Fireflies* (July 10, 2012)

#3 *Speed of Light* (November 13, 2012)

*Need* by Carrie Jones

#1 *Need* (December 2008) **

#2 *Captivate* (January 2010) **

#3 *Entice* (December 2010) **

#4 *Endure* (May 2012) **

*Ruined* by Paula Morris

*Ruined: a Novel* (August 2009) **

*Unbroken* (February 2013)

*Swoon* by Nina Malkin

#1 *Swoon* (May 2009) **
#2 Swear (October 2012)

*Touch* by Laurie F. Stolarz

#1 *Deadly Little Secret* (December 2008) **
#2 *Deadly Little Lies* (November 2009) **
#3 *Deadly Little Games* (December 2010) **
#4 *Deadly Little Voices* (December 2011) **
#5 *Deadly Little Lessons* (December 2012)

*Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer

#1 *Twilight* (October 2005) **
#2 *New Moon* (August 2006) **
#3 *Eclipse* (August 2007) **
#4 *Breaking Dawn* (August 2008) **

*The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner* (companion novella) (June 2010)

*Wings* by Aprilynne Pike

#1 *Wings* (May 2009) **
#2 *Spells* (May 2010) **
#3 *Illusions* (May 2011) **
#4 *Destined* (May 2012) **

*Wolves of Mercy Falls* by Maggie Stiefvater
#1 Shiver (August 2009) **

#2 Linger (July 2010) **

#3 Forever (July 2011) **
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