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## Why Do Adults Read Young Adult Books?

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Portland State University

MA Book Publishing

**Why Do Adults Read Young Adult  
Books?**

By Monica Hay

May 2019

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to Andrea Somberg, Devin Ross, Kalah McCaffrey, and Adria Goetz for generously providing their time and expertise for this piece. Thank you to my advisor Rachel Noorda, for all her guidance in this research and beyond. Lastly, thank you to all the 2,139 readers who responded to my survey and made this work possible. Your input gave this piece life.

# Table of Contents

Research Question.....	4
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	4
Methods.....	5
The Survey Numbers: An Objective Look.....	7
What Are the Effects of Harry Potter and Twilight?.....	15
The Gender Divides: Women’s YA Dominance and Adult Fiction Misogyny.....	17
Young Adult as a Safe Space for Women.....	19
YA Stigma: Gender Related?.....	20
The Social Media Influence.....	22.
Why Are Adults Reading YA? The Themes and Additional Survey Comments.....	24
Nostalgia.....	24
Less Pretentious.....	25
Faster Reads.....	26
Escapism.....	27
Diversity.....	27
Less Graphic.....	28
Hopeful.....	28
Conclusions.....	30
Bibliography.....	31
Appendix.....	34

# Research Question:

Why do young read adult books? What does this tell us about gender and gaps in the market?

## Abstract

Young adult books are widely read by adults. Through interviews with publishing professionals and a survey of 2,139 participants, several reasons were discovered regarding why adults read young adult literature. In the research, the most common reasons were the influence of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*, the relatability for millennials, the social media presence of YA online, and the success of women writers in the category. Survey participants had more to add. The survey themes were nostalgia, “less pretentious,” “faster reads,” diversity, escapism, “less graphic,” and perhaps most importantly, hopeful.

## Introduction

Young Adult (YA) is a category of fiction that has gained popularity in the last decade. A quick Google search will yield the definition as, “a category of fiction written for readers from 12 to 18 years old” (Google Search May 4 2019). However, a Publisher’s Weekly article from 2012 claims that more than 55% of YA is read by adults. (Publisherly Weekly September 2012). One could say that this only makes up the people purchasing these books: adults for their children. That’s not the case. The Publisher’s Weekly study specifically asked who the intended recipient is—78% of adults reported getting the books for their own reading. Just two years later in 2014, Nielsen reported new numbers: “... publishers eager to promote young adult literature might do well to look beyond young readers: so far in 2014, U.S. consumers over the age of 18 buy nearly 80% of young adult books, both print and digital” (Nielsen December 2014).

There are countless articles online discussing this phenomenon. A Guardian article says “YA books are great for evoking nostalgia” and “...the universal applicability. New generations of young

people are constantly growing up...” (Howlet February 2015). Another article from The Atlantic says it’s about “The intensity of the first time” and “It all goes back to Harry Potter” (Kitchener 2017).

The Guardian also polled people on Twitter, asking them why they read YA; responses followed some common themes of “escape,” “nostalgia” and “easy to read.”

Aside from these articles, there is little research on this topic to backup theories on why adults read young adult books. We know that adults read a lot of YA, but why? In this paper we’ll be exploring possible reasons adults read YA, what the professionals think, and what readers think. Based on research and survey data, there are a myriad of reasons adults read YA: Perhaps not surprisingly, readers of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* are reading similar books to what they read in childhood and early adulthood. Adults, and specifically adult women, read young adult books because the genre is a safe space for them due to the dominance of women writers; millennials and young adults spend time on social media, where the young adult presence is strong; YA fiction is more relatable for young women than adult fiction; and lastly, because of the themes seen in YA fiction. In the survey, themes such as nostalgia, escape, diversity, and hope were all prevalent, and will be discussed through this piece.

## Methods

To understand why adults read young adult books, three main methods were used. First, four publishing professionals were interviewed for the professional perspective of the industry: Kalah McCaffrey, Children’s Book Scout at Franklin and Siegal; Andrea Somberg, Literary Agent at Harvey Klinger Inc.; Devin Ross, Literary Agent at New Leaf Literary; and Adria Goetz, Literary Agent at Martin Literary Management. They were asked similar questions, such as “why do you think adults read young adult books?”

To get readers’ opinions, readers were invited to participate in an online survey of 16 questions.

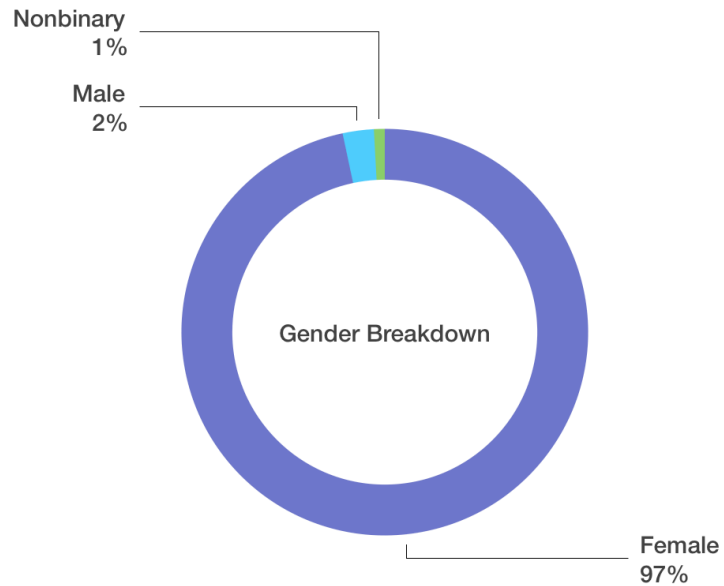
This survey was posted on Twitter and Facebook; on Facebook, it was posted on fan pages such as “YA Fantasy Addicts,” “A Court of Sarah J Maas,” “Harry Potter Fans Page.” 2,139 people responded to the survey.

The last method included using academic research, scholarly research, and overall findings through online sources. Through the paper, I’ll use a mix of all three methods to make my case.

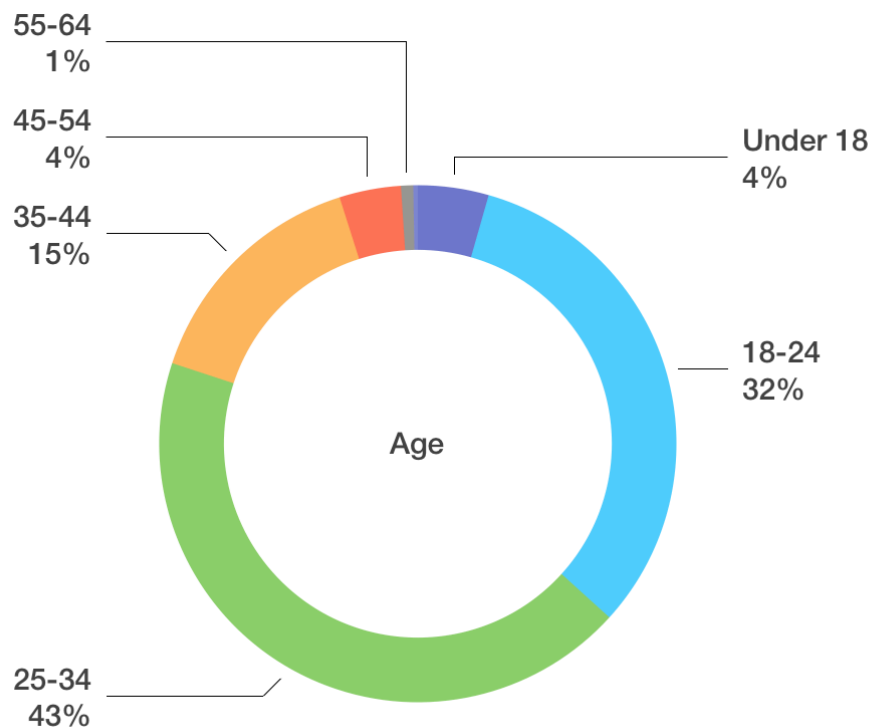
# The Survey Numbers: An Objective Look

For each question on the survey, a visual has been created to demonstrate the numbers. To see specific numbers, refer to the appendix starting on page 34.

## What is your gender?



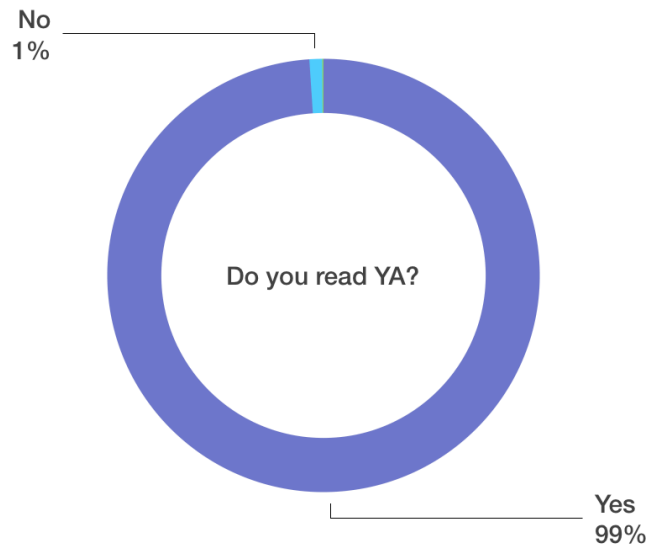
## What is your age?





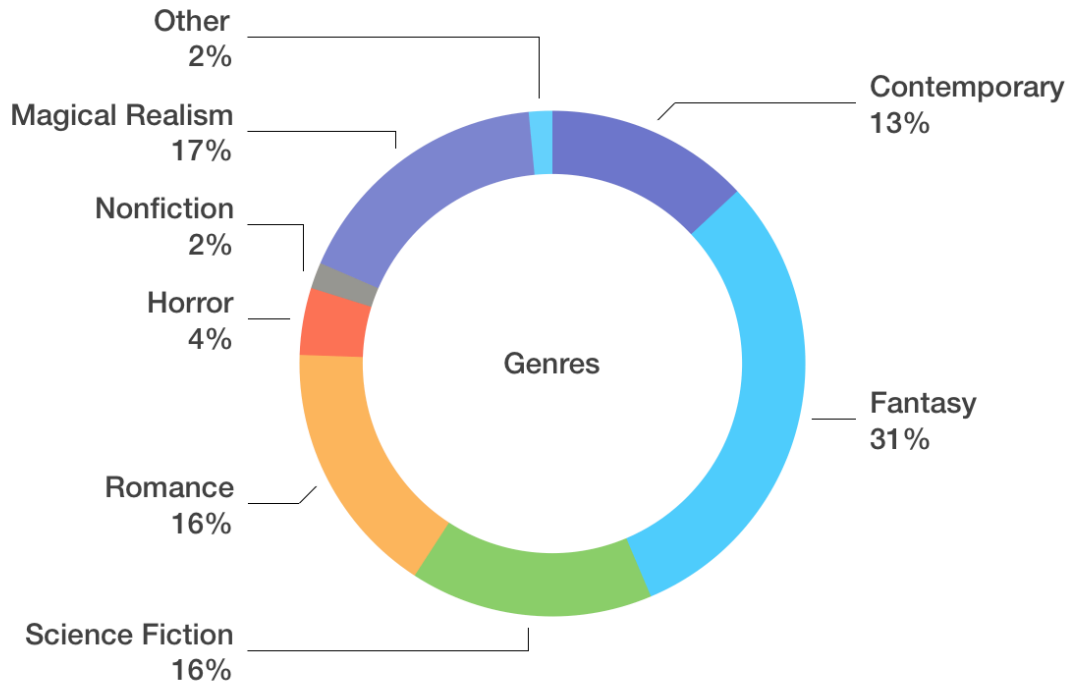
Answer	%	Count
Under 18	4.42%	93
18 - 24	32.30%	680
25 - 34	43.33%	912
35 - 44	15.06%	317
45 - 54	3.85%	81
55 - 64	0.76%	16
65 - 74	0.29%	6
75 - 84	0.00%	0
85 or older	0.00%	0
Total	100%	2105

### Do you read YA?



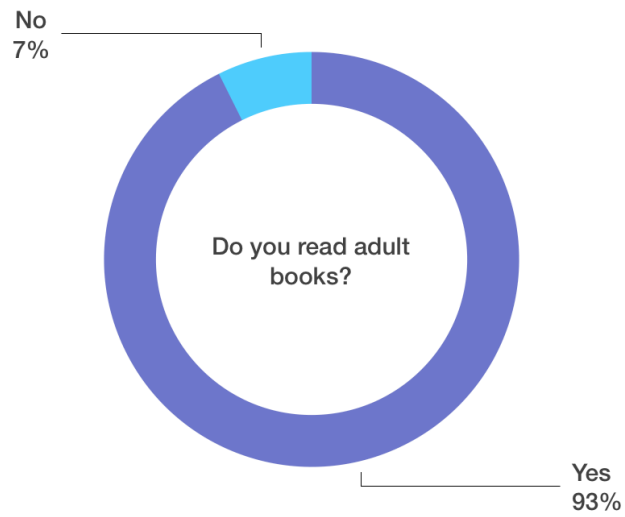
**If so, what genres do you read? Check all that apply.**

Perhaps most fascinating was the genre breakdown of YA books most widely read. In the text box of “other” many people also reported reading historical fiction, thriller, mystery, and paranormal.

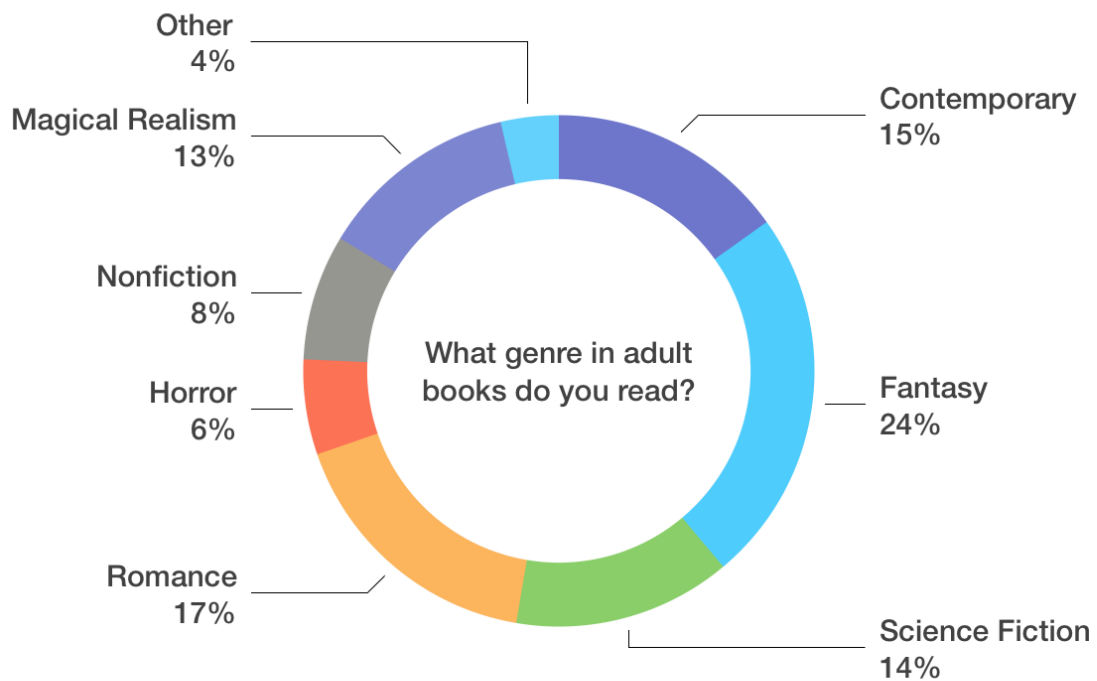


Answer	%	Count
Contemporary/Realistic Fiction	13.05%	844
Fantasy	30.58%	1977
Science fiction	15.54%	1005
Romance	16.38%	1059
Horror	4.28%	277
Nonfiction	1.67%	108
Magical Realism	17.00%	1099
Other	1.50%	97
Total	100%	6466

## Do you read adult books?

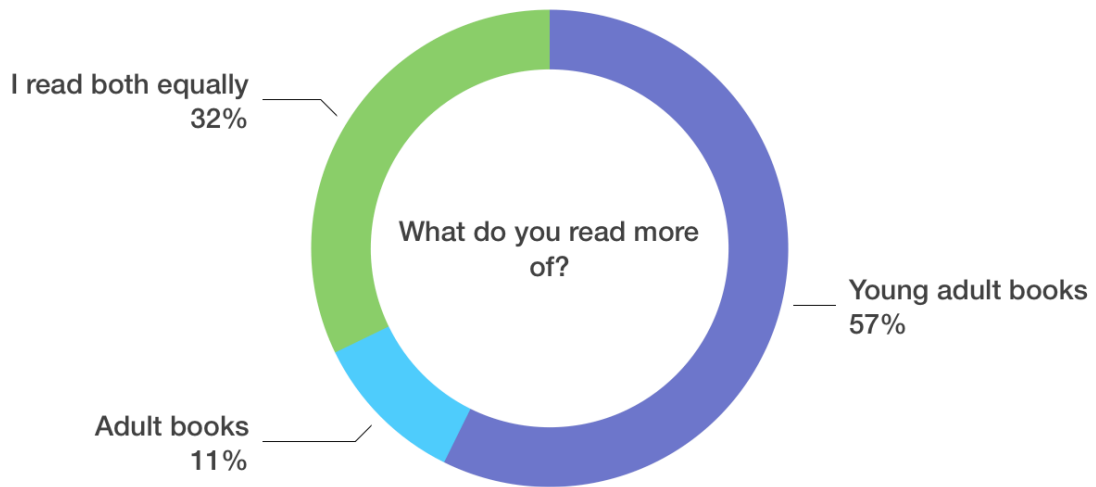


## If so, what genres do you read? Check all that apply.

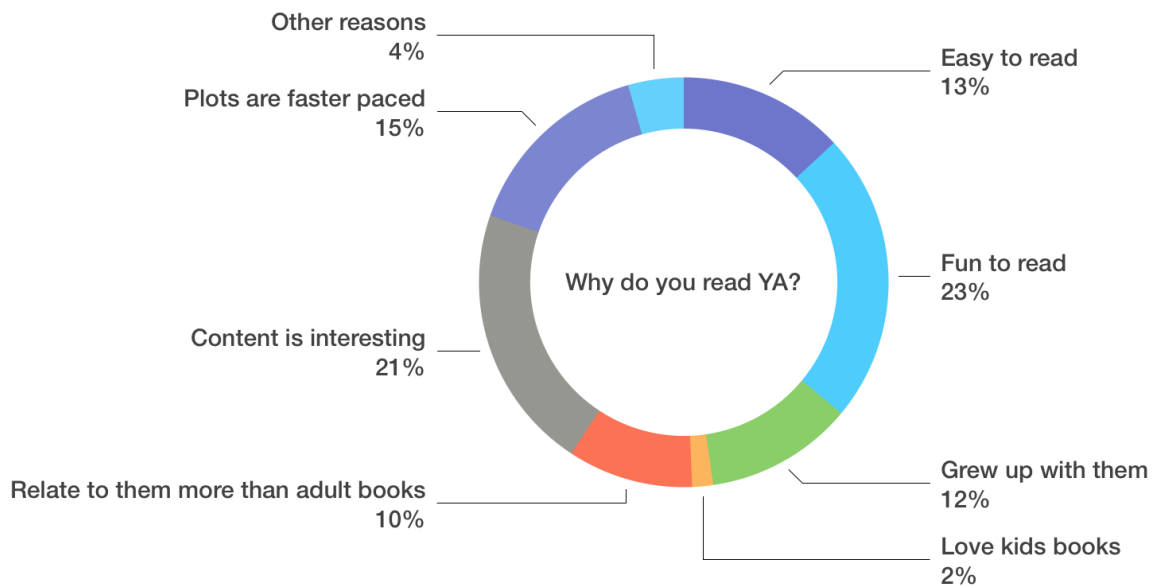


In the “other” text box the most popular genres were historical fiction, thriller, mystery, and thriller.

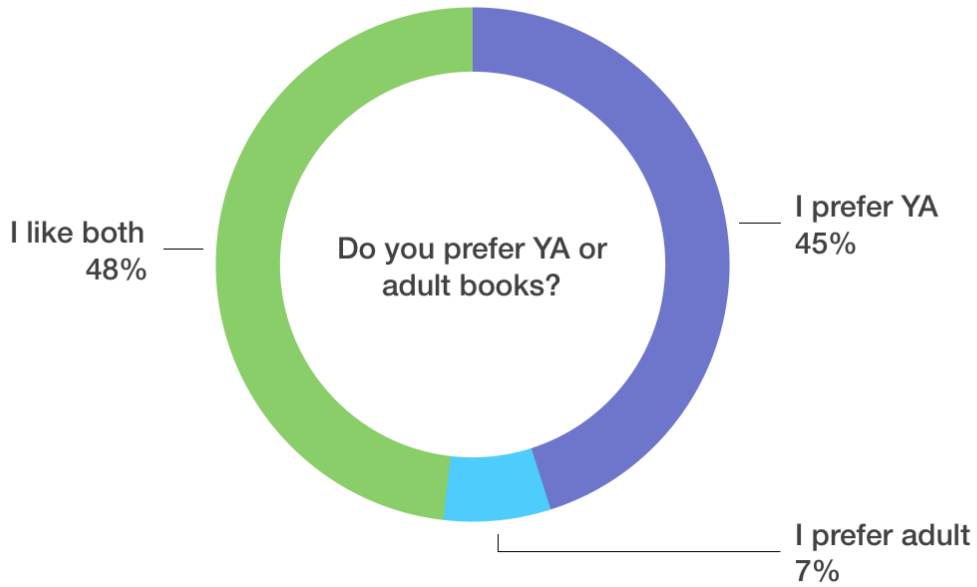
### What do you read more of?



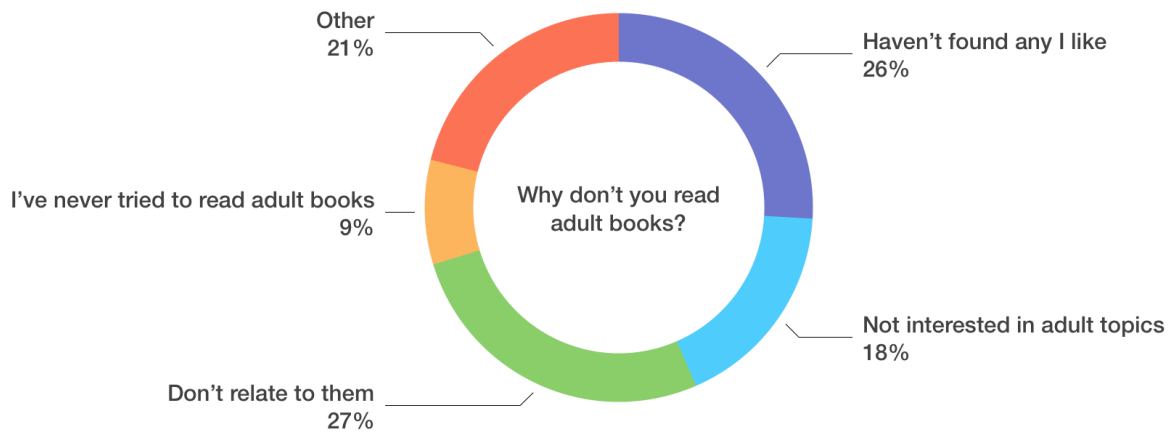
### If you read YA, what do you like about it? Check all that apply.



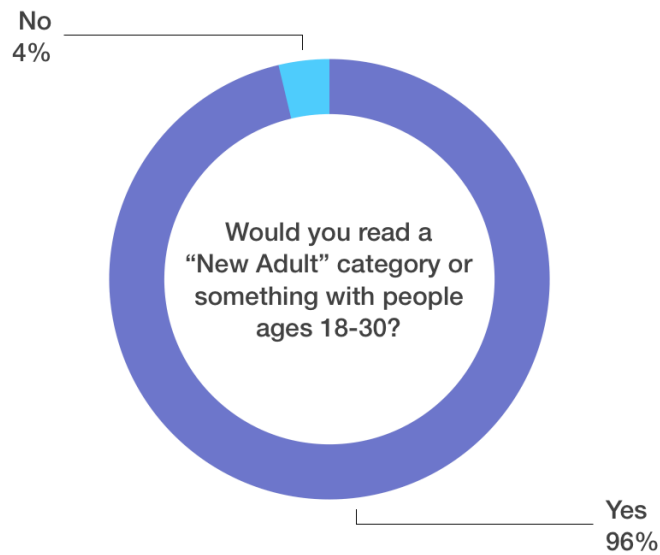
## Do you prefer YA or adult books?



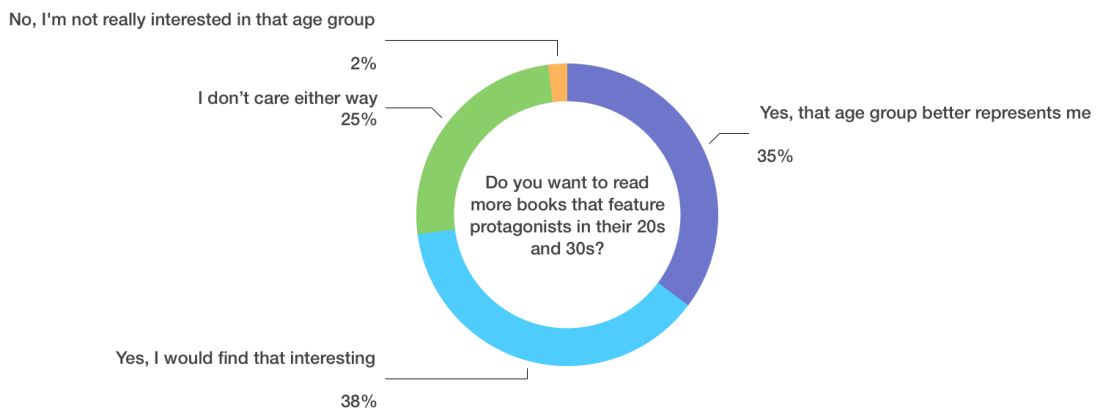
## If you don't read adult books, how come? Check all that apply.



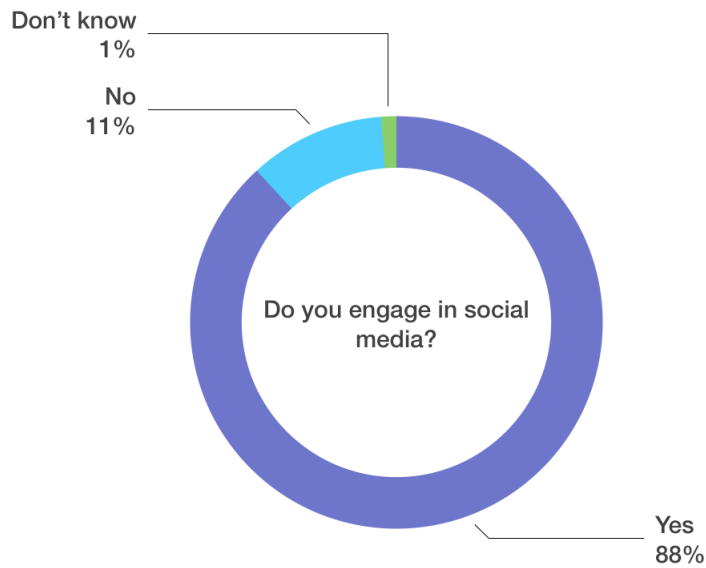
**Would you read a category like “New Adult” or something between YA and adult that represented individuals in their 20s and 30s?**



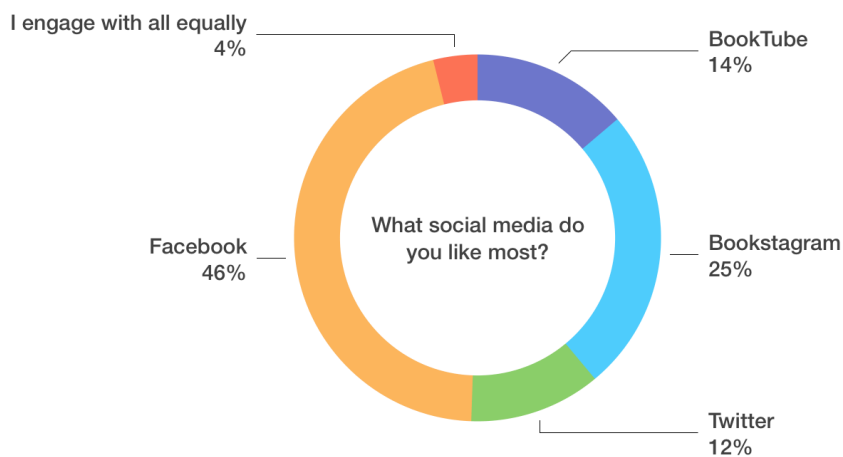
**Do you want to read more “New Adult” that represented people in their 20s and 30s?**



## Do you engage in social media?



## What social media do you like most? Check your favorites.



Among the additional responses, people said they used Goodreads.

People were then asked "Is there anything else you'd like to share about your reading interests, why

you read YA (if you do), or your thoughts on YA?” 1278 people said no, and 299 people said yes. There are 296 additional comments that will be discussed through this paper.

## What Are the Effects of *Harry Potter* & *Twilight*?

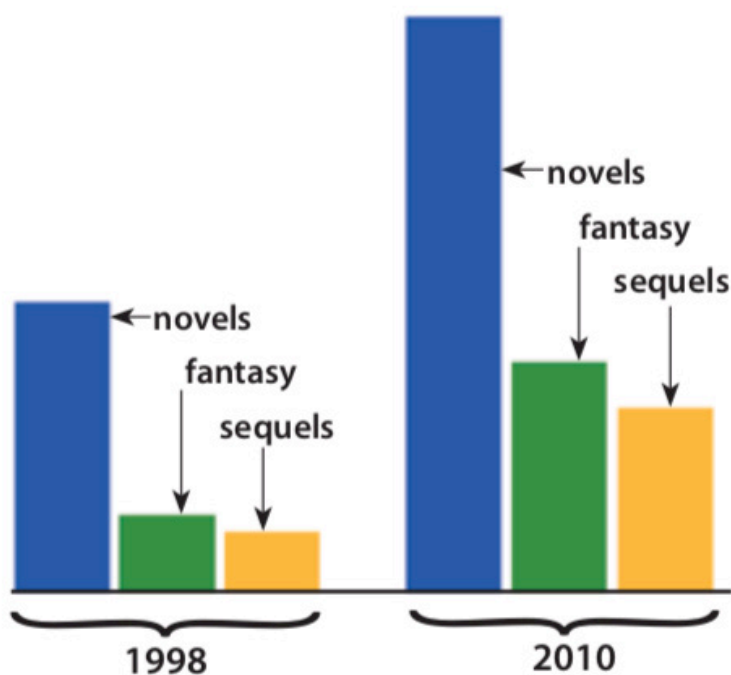
The *Harry Potter* series changed the game for children’s literature. It also helped put YA on the map for adults. “It all goes back to *Harry Potter*—because that was popular across the board with every kind of reader you can think of” (Kitchener 2017). *Harry Potter* opened adult readers’ eyes to books for children, where “There are a lot of people who, before *Harry Potter*, simply would never have considered reading a book for children” (Kitchener 2017). While *Harry Potter* was a turning stone for adults and their reading habits, it also started a decades-long trend for the children growing up reading it. Being bookworms from a young age thanks to the series, many started reading more books; many of these books were for children or teens. And these people kept reading in that genre. “As *Harry Potter* became an unexpected crossover success, middle grade and YA novels became conflated in the cultural conversation. A voracious appetite arose for books aimed at children that adults could enjoy too, and the appetite quickly shorthanded itself into ‘books for teens.’” (Grady 2017). Now, adults were reading teen fiction, and not only teens.

While *Harry Potter* prompted the buzz, *Twilight* pushed it into a new age. “While ‘*Harry Potter*’ started out decidedly middle grade, later volumes in the seven-books series edged into the YA category. Soon, everyone was trying to get into the action, as authors and editors were looking for the next big thing. And that turned out to be a debut YA novel about shimmering vampires and forbidden love” (Diaz 2015). *Twilight* has also met a lot of criticism that might have spurred the stigma against YA—which will be looked at later.



In the book *Critical Foundations of Young Adult Literature*, the authors look at “The Harry Potter Effect” in a chapter of the book. “*Harry Potter*, in particular, has helped propel youth culture as a key part of mainstream culture” (Thomas and Garcia 2013). Perhaps this is one of the reasons YA has become widely-read by adults: these books are now part of mainstream culture, and adults simply know about them (and choose to read them). The authors also say “...YA works have increasingly been embraced by adult readers, adult movie goers, educators, and literary critics. Part of the reason for these gains for YA literature is likely how these works speak to the greater human condition, and not just to the specific teen experience.” (Thomas and Garcia 2013). Devin Ross said something similar in her interview. When asked why she thought adults read young adult books, she said “It’s changed a little in the last few years. First it was because people were reading the top ten books in YA. But then it got popular” (Survey 2019).

It’s worth looking at the numbers. In “What Hath Harry Wrought?” by Roger Sutton, we learn about the increase in sales from before *Harry Potter* and after: “In 1998, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s*



*Stone* was one of the 652 novels reviewed by *The Horn Book*. In 2010, the *Guide* reviewed 1,298 novels, twice as many.... As you would expect, the success of *Harry Potter* meant a surge of fantasy publishing: the *Guide* reviewed 135 fantasy novels in 1998 and 415 in 2010” (Sutton 2012). The figure on the left gives a visual of the twelve-year difference in sales.

While *Harry Potter* changed the way readers relate to children's books, YA has transformed from what it was when it began. In some ways, YA has grown up with *Harry Potter* readers. In a survey response, one reader said, "YA has changed in the time of being a kid. It used to be like *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* but now it's finding an older demographic and putting much more mature content, which as an older YA reader I enjoy" (Survey, 2019). Another survey response reads: "I like the fact authors such as JK Rowling had made their work accessible to both young people and adults—she really changed the YA market in a major way" (163). Devin Ross similarly said, "What has been slowly happening is the YA audience has been aging up. That's because of people like us who read YA voraciously when it had its boom...and now we're still reading it in our adult years" (Ross, 2019).

## The Gender Divides: Women's YA Dominance and Adult Fiction Misogyny

The young adult as a category is dominated by women. The survey data illustrates this well: 97% of the survey respondents were women. As mentioned earlier in the paper, the survey was posted in young adult book channels such as "YA Fantasy Addicts" and "A Court of Sarah J Maas." Perhaps this is part of why so few men responded; the survey was circulated in YA-dominated social media channels. In NPR's "Your Favorites: 100 Best-Ever Teen Novels" people voted for their favorite teen books. "...63 percent were written by women—a parity that would seem like a minor miracle in some genres...As a comparison, you'd have to scroll all the way to number 20 on last summer's Top 100 Science Fiction and Fantasy list to find a woman's name" (Lewit 2012). That's a large gender difference between adult and young adult books. Both lists were readers' choice.

Based on these numbers, it's possible to make the argument that there's a misogyny problem in genre

fiction. The lack of female science fiction and fantasy (SFF) authors in this NPR poll is not the fault of readers, necessarily; especially in 2011, it was harder to find women writers in SFF. However, the lack of representation is stark when comparing the list to teen fiction's list. It's been several years since these NPR articles were released. However, YA shows no signs of slowing down in regards to female author dominance. Out of 100 young adult books releasing in 2019, only 7 were written by men. Devin Ross said, "I couldn't tell you the exact percentage of YA authors who are women, but it's likely over 75%" (Ross, 2019).

Teen fiction often features women or girl protagonists. "YA lit offers heroines to suit every mercurial mood and developmental stage, from spunky, disaster-prone Anne Shirley...and the modern ass-kicking incarnation of Katniss Everdeen" (Lewit 2012). It's one of the strengths of the genre; girls have heroines to look up to. However, in Robert Lipsyte's NYT opinion article "Boys and Reading: Is There Any Hope?" Lipsyte believes that boys aren't being represented. He admits that while girls are willing to read books about boys, teenage boys "rarely read books with predominantly female characters" (Lipsyte 2011). There lies one of the problems. YA has a wealth of strong women characters; therefore, naturally, YA has found a female readership. But boys historically don't want to read those books. Boys read books that feature fellow boy protagonists. That is a discussion in itself that this paper can't cover; the main point is that YA is the "girl" genre due to the lack of male readership, and possibly due to its female author dominance.

# Young Adult as a Safe Space for Women

YA has become a place for women to read books by other women. Because YA is so female-driven, this has created a huge audience of not just teen girl readers, but adult women who'd like to read a story about fellow women. YA has, in a sense, embraced women, and is a place women are celebrated more than other genres. This is shown in the survey data, where several people mentioned YA's strength in women characters through the additional comments: "Usually I read YA with a female lead who becomes strong and is usually the hero of the story" (56); "They [YA] are full of energy and strong female characters beating all odds" (58); "[YA is] More female centric than adult fantasy" (59); "A lot of YA books I have read in the last couple years have had stronger female heroine...without all that patriarchy" (68). (Survey 2019).

In the interviews with professionals, Devin Ross touched on gender dynamics. She discussed issues with relatability in adult fiction. "Women's fiction wasn't written for young women until recently; our generation of women are getting married and having kids at a later age, so books about marriage and children often get read by middle-aged women" (Survey 2019). Ross added, "This makes YA relatable in a whole other way" (Survey 2019). It's possible that women's fiction's lack of representation for millennials and younger women overall has caused adult women to head for the young adult section, where the books are more relatable than their adult counterparts.

In "The Real Story Behind the War Over YA Novels" author S.E Smith discusses the hatred for young adult books. First, Smith says, "there's a strong whiff of sexism underlying the wave of YA hate—the genre is heavily dominated by women" (Smith 2014). Smith goes on to discuss the challenges millennials face—the burden of student debt, a difficult economy to penetrate, and what Smith calls "a legacy of broken promises" (Smith 2014). In Reimer and Snell's piece "YA Narratives: Reading One's Age" they discuss Smith's article, and make the observation that "Young adult literature might well be

appealing to those forced to occupy childhood well into their thirties, because of the preoccupation of the form with periods of transition, uncertainty, and identity formation” (Reimer and Snell 2015). It seems that relatability is a large part of millennials interest in YA; the younger generation is not connecting with adult books as easily, and so YA is where they turn.

This is also mentioned in the additional survey comments: “YA is full of adventure and growing up. Making difficult decisions and learning how to live life. Being in my mid twenties this is super relatable” (162); “The plots are fresh and the characters are relatable and engaging” (137). “YA literature has extremely relatable characters from the beginning. You are quickly very invested in their fate. Many YA characters are going through transitional periods of growth and dealing with feelings of being an outcast before finding their place in the world. This too is extremely relatable for many people.” (83). One person said, “No whining about mortgages and divorce/co-parenting woes” (66), which is perhaps a comment on the way that adult fiction is not relatable—or it’s a comment about nostalgia and escape from real life.

## YA’s Stigma: Gender Related?

There is another concerning issue: there is a stigma that YA books are “not serious” and hold little literary value. It’s obvious when researching YA that many people think it’s an embarrassing category. For example, there is Slate article “Against YA: Adults should be embarrassed to read children’s books” where the author says books like *The Fault in Our Stars* “could plausibly be said to be replacing literary fiction in the lives of adult readers. And that’s a shame” (Graham 2014). She also says *Divergent* and *Twilight* are “transparently trashy” (Graham 2014). S.E Smith rightfully criticises Graham in his piece, where he says that “Trashing YA is a conversational avoidance tactic: Rather than confronting the realities faced by Millennials, older adults (and privileged Millennials) choose to attack the coping

mechanisms people use to understand their new social role” (Smith 2014).

The issue is also discussed in Abbey Crawford’s dissertation “Is YA Growing Up?” where she has an entire section on the debate about whether YA literature matters and its place as a literary form. “As the young adult category contains such a variety of forms, from more mature realistic fiction to simple chick-lit, it is often difficult for readers and critics to take the category seriously” (Crawford 2018). Notice that Crawford uses words like “simple chicklit” rather than giving it the legitimacy it warrants. This connects with Mary Ryan’s piece about women’s fiction: “Women’s literature has rarely received the respect it deserves” and mentions “there has been <<a long tradition of discounting women writers and their readers>>” (Ryan 2010).<sup>1</sup>

I’d like to argue that YA’s roots—*Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, etc, along with its women-centric nature—is creating the stigma against it. Historically, books by women have always been seen as “lesser.” In addition, people don’t respect what teens like, nor do they respect teenage girls. YA faces its scrutiny from misogyny and ageism. This attitude permeates the whole industry. Devin Ross explained, “People don’t take you seriously when you say you rep [represent] YA. People don’t see the value in YA and Children’s books. They see it as frivolous. Adult publishers think they’re more sophisticated” (Ross 2019). When asked if gender plays a role in the young adult market, Kalah McCaffrey said “Definitely. I’m not a scholar in this but other people are. I’ve seen observations that women have been forced out of genre spaces by white male authors. It’s sort of by default classified into YA. As for readers, boys are not encouraged to engage in female stories, so they go right into the adult market after leaving middle grade” (McCaffrey 2019).

Perhaps to illustrate this point, Andrea Somberg mentioned in her interview that an author she represents was encouraged to initial her name on the front of her books when she wrote an adult book; this

1 Ryan is referencing Well’s 2006 piece “Mothers of Chick Lit” in her argument that women writers are scorned.

way, men would still pick up the book. This famously happened to JK Rowling, whose name is Joann. Victoria Schwab, who writes in several spaces, did this as well; her *A Darker Shade of Magic* trilogy, an adult fantasy, has her initials on the cover, whereas her young adult books feature her full name. This is not a new phenomenon.

## The Social Media Influence: Millennials Get Book Recommendations Online

In the survey, participants were asked what social media they use most. Facebook was most popular at 1288, but this is skewed because so many people took the survey from a link on Facebook posts. Bookstagram was also quite popular with 711 participants accessing it. What's most common about all of these platforms? They all have a heavy YA presence. In the New York Times article "Meet the YouTube Stars Turning Viewers Into Readers" "BookTubers"—YouTubers who talk about books—are discussed. Christine Riccio is introduced first. "Now at the age of 27, with close to 400,000 subscribers, she is YouTube's most popular "BookTuber," chronicling books for a largely millennial and teenage audience" (León 2018).<sup>2</sup> BookTubers Jesse and Christine both agreed "That's the thing about BookTube...If you're not a big reader, it inspires you to become one" (León 2018). Christine consistently talks about the main goal of her channel: she wants to inspire people to read. What's also clear is that BookTube focuses mainly on YA. "There are hundreds of BookTube channels, most focused on the Young Adult genre" (Hughes, 2017).

This is the norm when looking at many social media channels—YA spaces are everywhere, and they're loud. A quick hashtag search for #yalit or #ireadya on Instagram will yield 506,057 posts. To contrast this, a search for #literaryfiction brings 33,155 posts. This may be one of the reasons so many

<sup>2</sup> In fact, since this article was published in 2018, Riccio published her debut novel *Again, But Better* with Wednesday Books May 7, 2019.

adults—specifically younger adults—read YA. They see it everywhere online. Literary fiction is simply less circulated online. Notice that the author of the Times article specifies “viewers” and not “kids.” Anyone can go online—people from any age, gender, etc. If an adult finds “BookTube” and is recommended several different YA books, why wouldn’t they read them?



# Why Are Adults Reading YA? The Themes and Additional Survey Comments

Through examining the survey data, several themes and common words arose. Some we've discussed already: relatability, female-driven market, nostalgia, and the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* phenomenon that ultimately transformed young adult literature. Some of these themes were part of the survey itself, with questions asking why adults read YA and giving several options to choose from. However, many themes were in additional comments. Under the "list more reasons" regarding why people enjoy YA, 318 people wrote responses. The amount of people who wanted to express themselves is significant on its own. Going through the data, it was clear that young adult literature is a significant piece of these readers' lives—that there is joy and relief in reading these books. The most surprising and significant theme that came through the comments was hope. We'll look at these comments in this section.

The themes were:<sup>3</sup> nostalgia, enjoyment, "fun and faster to read," "relatable," escapism, diversity, "less graphic," and hope. When doing a word search, these were the words used most often: "Fantasy" 90 times, "Enjoy" 61 times, "Relate" 39 times and "Relatable" 18 times, "Like" 198 times, "Diversity" 13 times and "diverse" 17 times, "good" 60 times, "love" 100 times, "fun" 29 times, and "plot" 33 times. Through the following paragraphs, I'll discuss the theme, and provide comments from the survey to demonstrate.

## Nostalgia

This was one of the most popular themes through the survey. Some examples of this in the additional comments:

<sup>3</sup> There are several themes that came up in the survey responses, but the themes discussed were the most prominent. We won't have the space and time in this piece to look at every theme.

- “A lot of themes involve first times for things (standing up to authority, first love etc) and it helps me relive those moments” (59).
- “Nostalgia. Remember what it’s like to be young again” (72).
- “I just love the fantasy and losing myself in that world. It’s like living my young adult life in another world” (153).
- “I think adults are drawn to YA because of the protagonist’s young age. There are usually less problems when you’re and for most people, reflecting on their lives at that age, reminds them of a less stressful time in their lives when the possibilities seemed endless” (166).  
“I feel like reading YA, brings color back to my life in such a mundane world” (169).

People mentioned “being young again” and even suggested that adults might like YA because of the protagonists age. Perhaps part of the reason adults read YA is because it’s called “Young Adult”—and this name appeals to people who want to tap into that feeling again.

## **Less Pretentious**

A surprising comment was less about why people read YA, and why they avoid adult books. Several people mentioned that adult books are stuffy and less about the story.

- “[YA] tend to be less literary. Often less conceited with less showing off by the author.” (64).
- “I care more for characters than any other part of the story, and characters tend to be the main focus of YA. I also sometimes find adult books are more pretentious in their writing” (54).
- “They don’t try too hard to be ‘literary.’ Sometimes I just want a story!” (60).
- “I also love YA because it is (usually) not pretentious—it’s all about the story, not trying to be the next Great American Novel. I enjoy my fair share of “literary fiction” too, but there’s something so

refreshing and sincere about YA fiction” (167).

- “I feel like with YA the authors don’t over use giant words to make themselves sound more “intelligent” or “grownup” like most adult fiction writers use” (167).
- “I like the themes in YA fiction: themes of identity, finding yourself, deciding who you want to be, finding your moral compass, making good choices. Also, YA fiction feels much more honest and vital; I often find adult fiction is too contrived, overwrought, full of itself” (165).

## **Faster Reads**

Ross mentions this in her interview: “YA fantasy is structured in a way that adult isn’t. With [adult] books like *The Name of the Wind*, it doesn’t really start until after 100 pages. That’s not the case with YA—the plot is inserted by page 30. It’s easier to get sucked into, easier to become a page-turner” (Ross 2019). She also says, “Young adults don’t have a lot of time. We’re early in our careers, we’re raising kids, and we want a book to start more quickly” (Ross 2019). Adriz Goetz said this, too: “They can be a quicker, zippier, easier read than some adult books. They are also packed with emotion” (Goetz 2019).

- “Especially in the fantasy genre, YA plots have a much faster pacing than adult books” (133).
- “YA books get to the point faster and make for a fun quick read” (82).
- “They just grab my interest. And because they are (most of the time) smaller than adult novels, I feel like I can read it quicker” (49).
- “They generally don’t take nearly as long to complete as adult books do and I just don’t have much free time in my schedule” (Survey 52).

## Escapism

This theme was provided as part of the survey itself, and has been mentioned in many of the online articles mentioned above. It came through extensively in the additional comments.

- “It’s like an escape from reality (the fantasy element of it) and they’re often very funny. I love when the theme is a young person who has a boring life gets swept into some magic world (HP, Shadowhunters, etc) and has to prove themselves—which they always can. Gives me the inspiration I need in my life” (55).
- “I use them as an escape” (57).
- “Escape from reality. You get to leave all the problems of today’s responsibilities, and disappear into a land on fantasy and magic” (60).
- “It’s a place where I can forget all my worries” (73).
- “Not as heavy as most adult books. I read as a fun escape, not to get depressed or stressed out” (59).

## Diversity

One of the most important aspects mentioned was diversity. McCaffery also mentioned this in her interview: “YA is much faster to embrace diversity” (McCaffrey 2019).

- “More diverse and I feel represented and it has a welcoming community” (65).
- “They provide a great platform for diverse voices” (65).
- “Easier to find books with diversity and unique themes” (67).
- “One of the hooks of YA for me is its diversity. Adult books are yet to embrace the queer community the way YA books do” (125). “
- I really enjoy how multicultural and diverse the books are becoming” (168).
- “YA is highly readable, much more diverse than most book categories, and (in my opinion) have the

most original story concepts” (154).

- “I really like that the YA genre is incorporating more characters of color. When I was a teenager, I never read about a person of color until I read the Babysitters Club and there was a character named Claudia who was of Asian descent” (126).

## **Less Graphic**

Respondents felt strongly about violence, rape, and overall graphic nature of adult books. Through the comments, I found several instances where people appreciated that YA features less of this type of content. This is important for lots of people, as much of this content is triggering.

- “Generally they do not contain graphic depictions of rape, torture, violence all of which I find objectionable” (51)
- “Generally less graphic. I love fantasy and some science fiction, but adult books tend to be a lot more graphic” (57).
- “The few adult books I’ve stumbled across are just considerably more graphic with violence, sex, and profanity and I would really not prefer to have to worry about coming across that when I’m reading” (77).
- “When I am feeling anxious, I know that a YA book isn’t going to leave me feeling worse (less dread/less scary/less violence/etc)” (52).

## **Hopeful**

Hope came up several times. Many of the respondents mentioned the need for hope and happier endings. Similar to violent themes, many people prefer to avoid books with difficult endings, as they can be hard to process and sometimes even cause emotional damage.

- “They’re happier, adult books sometimes feel too close to real life, so I enjoy escaping into a fantasy

world where the teens are the heroes. Also it's so important to remember that young adults are the key to our future!" (53).

- "They are full of energy and usually full of strong female characters beating all odds. They also contain a lot of hope. In contrast many adult novels are downers and too realistic. YA, especially fantasy ones, create true escapism and fill you with light" (58).
- "They tend to have less deaths and tragedy in them. I love epic books with action, but they take a toll on me emotionally" (73).
- "They aren't always as dark or hopeless as adult books" (62).
- "YA books are about changing the world, overthrowing power, not settling for the status quo. Adult books tend to be more about only the change and growth of one character. Not a society, not a government, not the world. It's like adults have given up on changing the world. It always seems to take someone under 20 to do it" (86).
- "Often less serious and depressing than adult fiction" (71).
- "I don't need to read about someone's midlife crisis or super depressing things which is what I feel like literary fiction is. YA usually ends on a hopeful note" (58).
- "I read YA because they make me happier or more hopeful about the world. I use them as an escape" (57).
- "Also they tend to deal with characters that are less jaded by time and age. They are young and hopeful. They are young enough to make changes in their world and see the results" (134).
- "YA lets my mind escape to a place where everything is still possible, and the world is full of hope and romance. There may be danger, there may be hardship, but there is always hope for a new beginning" (84).

## Conclusion:

Adults read YA for many reasons. We've discussed the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* influence, the gender divides, the safe space for women looking for female-driven stories, and the power of social media in what people see online. We've looked at themes from the survey participants. It's clear that young adult has given joy to readers of all ages and fills a gap that adult fiction is not offering, for adult women, especially. The need for hope in literature was the most surprising theme—but also one that speaks volumes. The amount of responses the survey received shows that adults want to be legitimized in their love for YA—perhaps they want to be seen and respected. There are conversations about teenagers losing their genre online, which this piece won't have room to cover, but publishing companies are aware of the conversation, and some have created solutions. For example, Wednesday Books, an imprint of St. Martin's, was created as a “crossover” genre meant to fill the gap for adults reading young adult books. “St. Martin's press is proud to announce the launch of Wednesday books, a new crossover, coming-of-age imprint that will publish books for both the adult and young adult audiences” (Children's Book Council 2016). This perhaps will help fill the gap discovered in the survey—adults wanting to read books that reflect more of the millennial experience (or what “New Adult” could have been). Hopefully this will create a trend that will change the future of publishing for the better.

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# Appendix:

The survey questions included:

What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Nonbinary

PARTICIPANT	NUMBER
Female	2,031
Male	52
Nonbinary	18

What is your age?

Age

- a. Under 18

Answer	%	Count
Under 18	4.42%	93
18 - 24	32.30%	680
25 - 34	43.33%	912
35 - 44	15.06%	317
45 - 54	3.85%	81
55 - 64	0.76%	16
65 - 74	0.29%	6
75 - 84	0.00%	0
85 or older	0.00%	0
Total	100%	2105

- b. 18-24

- c. 25-34

- d. 35-34

- e. 45-54

- f. 55-64

- g. 65-74

- h. 75-84

- i. 85 or older

Do you read young adult (YA) books?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't know what YA is

Answer	%	Count
Yes	98.95%	2082
No	0.95%	20
I don't know what YA is	0.10%	2
Total	100%	2104

If so, what genres do you read?

- a. Contemporary/Realistic Fiction
- b. Fantasy
- c. Science Fiction
- d. Romance
- e. Horror
- f. Nonfiction
- g. Magical Realism
- h. Other

Answer	%	Count
Contemporary/Realistic Fiction	13.05%	844
Fantasy	30.58%	1977
Science fiction	15.54%	1005
Romance	16.38%	1059
Horror	4.28%	277
Nonfiction	1.67%	108
Magical Realism	17.00%	1099
Other	1.50%	97
Total	100%	6466

Do you read adult books?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Answer	%	Count
Yes	92.63%	1948
No	7.37%	155
Total	100%	2103

If so, what genres do you read? Check all that apply.

- a. Contemporary/Realistic
- b. Fantasy
- c. Science Fiction
- d. Romance
- e. Horror
- f. Nonfiction
- g. Magical Realism
- h. Other

Answer	%	Count
Contemporary/Realistic Fiction	15.11%	1010
Fantasy	23.77%	1589
Science Fiction	13.79%	922
Romance	17.04%	1139
Horror	6.01%	402
Nonfiction	7.94%	531
Magical Realism	12.67%	847
Other	3.66%	245
Total	100%	6685

What do you read more of?

- a. Young adult books
- b. Adult books
- c. I read both equally

Answer	%	Count
Young adult books	57.30%	1205
Adult books	10.51%	221
I read both equally	32.19%	677
Total	100%	2103

If you read YA, what do you like about it? Check all that apply. If you want, leave a longer answer in the text box.

- a. Easy to read
- b. Fun to read
- c. Grew up with them
- d. Love kids books
- e. Relate to them more than adult books
- f. Content is interesting to me
- g. Plots are fast paced
- h. List more reasons (text box)

Reason

PARTICIPANT	NUMBER
Easy to read	956
Fun to read	1,675
Grew up with them	851
Love kids books	121
Relate to them more than adult books	723
Content is interesting	1,536
Plots are faster paced	1,119
Other reasons	320

If you don't read adult books, how come? Check all that apply. If you want, leave a longer answer in the text box.

- a. Haven't found any I like
- b. Not interested in adult topics
- c. Don't relate to them
- d. I've never tried to read adult books
- e. Other (please explain)

Answer	%	Count
Haven't found any I like	25.91%	149
Not interested in adult topics	17.57%	101
Don't relate to them	26.78%	154
I've never tried to read adult books	8.70%	50
Other (please explain)	21.04%	121
Total	100%	575

Would you read a category like "New Adult" or something in between YA and adult that represented individuals in their 20s and 30s?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Answer	%	Count
Yes	96.28%	2020
No	3.72%	78
Total	100%	2098

Do you want to read more books that feature protagonists in their 20s and 30s?

- a. Yes, that age group better represents me
- b. Yes, I would find that interesting
- c. I don't care either way
- d. No, I'm not really interested in that age group

Answer	%	Count
Yes, that age group better represents me	35.21%	738
Yes, I would find that interesting	37.74%	791
I don't care either way	25.00%	524
No, I'm not really interested in that age group	2.05%	43
Total	100%	2096

Do you engage in social media content about books, such as “BookTube” “Bookstagram” Twitter, or Facebook groups that talk about books?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Don't know

Answer	%	Count
Yes	88.16%	1854
No	10.65%	224
Don't know	1.19%	25
Total	100%	2103



If so, what do you like most? Check your favorites.

- a. BookTube
- b. Bookstagram
- c. Twitter
- d. Facebook
- e. I engage with all equally

Answer	%	Count
BookTube	13.80%	390
Bookstagram	25.15%	711
Twitter	11.60%	328
Facebook	45.56%	1288
I engage with all equally	3.89%	110
Total	100%	2827

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your reading interests, why you read YA (if you do), or your thoughts on YA?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Answer	%	Count
Yes	18.96%	299
No	81.04%	1278
Total	100%	1577

## Appendix for Interviews:

Why do you think adults read young adult books?

Do you think gender plays a role in the young adult market? Why or why not?

What do you think of the discussion that teens are losing YA?

What do you think about the fact that YA books are read so widely by adults?

Do you think there is a gap in the market for adults who are reading YA?

Through some of my research, I'm seeing that women authors feel pushed into YA. Do you think this is accurate?

I've heard some women talk about YA fiction as more relatable than adult fiction. For example, a book tuber talked about how she likes young adult books sometimes more than adult books because she thinks adult books tend to be sexist, and it's harder to find adult books that reflect the millennial experience. What does this conversation look like in the publishing world? Are publishers aware of this?

What do you think a possible solution is? A New Adult category, or something else?

Where do you see the young adult category going from here?