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It is no secret that a large part of the current young adult population is sexually active in some way. According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, 47.9 percent of high school males reported having engaged in sexual intercourse in a 2005 survey. Male teenagers are often seen as hormone-driven and sex-crazed, with thoughts primarily consumed by how to have sex and from whom they can get it. In young adult literature, novels with female protagonists often portray males in this way, with the female characters trying to function around their advances. This focus of this study was to determine whether male teenagers are portrayed in that way in novels where they are the protagonists. Twelve current young adult novels were read, analyzed, and discussed, with emphasis on the males' sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Headings:

Young Adult Literature

Content Analysis --- Young Adult Literature

Young Adult Literature --- Evaluation

Sexual Behavior

BOYS WILL BE BOYS...OR NOT? AN ANALYSIS OF SEXUAL ATTITUDES
AND BEHAVIORS OF MALE TEENAGERS IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

by
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Introduction

It is no secret that a large part of the current young adult population is sexually active in some way. A 2005 study of the National Center for Health Statistics found that more than half of American teens between the ages of fifteen and nineteen have engaged in oral sex (Perez, 2006). Similarly, according to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), 46.8 percent of high school students (45.7 percent of females and 47.9 percent of males) reported having engaged in sexual intercourse in a 2005 survey. Approximately 6.2 percent of them reported having sexual intercourse before the age of 13 (SIECUS, 2009). Stone (2006) affirms that teens are thinking about sex, talking about sex, and doing it. This is not a new or recent development in our society, but the methods that young adults are choosing to gain information on the topic is changing. Many young adults are turning to media, rather than to family and friends, for their information about sex. According to a study titled “The Truth About Adolescent Sexuality” published by SIECUS, 61 percent of adolescents [ages twelve to seventeen] said the media have provided them with information or advice about sex in the past, 57 percent said their friends have, and 55 percent said their parents have (Pattee, 2006). Young adult (YA) literature is one form of media to which teens are turning for that information.

Young adult literature can be defined as the books that are being written today for teens that are designed to help them cope with the time and culture in which they are approaching adulthood (Bodart, 2006). Given that teens are looking to this genre for information about important topics such as sex, adults that work with them, such as teachers and media specialists, need to be familiar with these books and the attitudes and information they are relaying to teens. Studies have looked at female characters in YA literature and their beliefs about, attitudes about, and encounters with sex (MacGregor, 2004), but their male counterparts have not been studied as extensively. It is just as important to understand how males' sexual attitudes are portrayed in YA literature because both male and female readers gain information about males through these stories. Male readers may use this literature to form their own identities and to guide their sexual behavior, while female readers may use it to try to better understand the males around them.

The purpose of this research study is to analyze current YA literature to better understand the ways in which heterosexual males' sexual attitudes are being portrayed, whether as "sex-crazed teenagers" or as complex individuals with fears and confusion about sex. This study is significant because it is an area of YA literature that has not yet been extensively studied in the academic literature. This study is also important because it may shed light on the sexual attitudes to which teens are being exposed through literature, and may help the adults who work with them better understand teens by becoming more familiar with this form of influential media. For adults, this understanding is important because it can lead to improved communication between teens

and adults, and better understanding of why teenagers feel and act as they do about this topic. This knowledge can also be used to address any errant information and assumptions that teenagers may get from these novels.

Literature Review

Current academic literature shows the power and influence that YA literature has in the lives of teenagers. Bodart and Pattee both discuss the various reasons that young adults are drawn to this genre of literature. Bodart (2006) points out their need for characters with whom they can identify. She states that while many adults are concerned about and uncomfortable with the subject matter covered in YA literature, teens have a desire to see topics such as sexuality in their stories because they reflect reality without sugarcoating it. She argues that through reading young adult literature, teens are able to vicariously experience the reality that they or their friends may eventually face.

Pattee (2006) reiterates these points, and adds that sexually explicit young adult literature may also be beneficial as a supplement to school sexual education programs. She emphasizes teenagers' needs for this genre as an information source, as it offers young readers both realistic and needed information about sex and the sex act, as well as a private, safe place to try on new feelings of sexual desire. Through reading sexually explicit YA literature, teens are able to increase their knowledge base about the opposite sex without actually performing the acts for which they may not yet be physically or emotionally ready. Author Lara Zeises echoes these sentiments in Perez (2006), stating,

“In young adult fiction, the sex goes beyond the physical. With fiction you get to explore the emotional impact of whatever choice your character makes” (p. 20).

Stone (2006) agrees that the use of sex in YA literature can educate readers through the reflection of reality, stating, “...books are possibly the safest place for them to learn about sex - not just the physical part but also the complex web of emotions that accompanies it. Through fictional characters, readers can ponder multiple perspectives and gain insight into this new world that they are beginning to encounter” (p. 463). She also discusses the topic in terms of identity development. While her discussions of identity and attitudes focus on gender identity and homosexual issues, some of the same questions those characters face can be applied to heterosexual characters as well, such as the idea that teens often find sex to be more complicated than they originally thought.

Stone addresses another interesting topic when she discusses the reasons behind authors’ choices to include sexual material in their novels. She questions what the role and responsibility of the author may be in offering information to teens that may be using the stories to help form their sexual identities. She says,

I would like to see books for teens reflect male and female main characters who are allowed to be healthy sexual beings, able to experience sex and intimacy without feeling ashamed or being punished. That being said, I also want to be responsible about how sex is portrayed to a group of people first setting out to experience it...Telling the truth about its complexity - as many YA authors are doing today - is incredibly important. (p. 465)

Sullivan and MacGregor each focus on specific aspects of teen sexuality found in YA literature. Sullivan (2004) discusses novels that depict first-time sexual experiences of

teenagers and how they have changed over the past 40+ years. He argues that many of the sexual experiences of teens depicted in early YA literature resulted in dire consequences, such as pregnancy and venereal diseases. Judy Blume's *Forever* changed that perception. Sullivan states, "Blume was the first to break the taboo by showing teens enjoying sex and going unpunished for their actions" (p. 461). That is not to say that the characters take sex lightly. After dating for a while, Michael and Katherine "thoughtfully discuss having sex beforehand, building up to it by exploring each other's bodies and engaging in other sexual activities" (p. 461). Sullivan believes Blume depicts the discussion as a thoughtful, equal experience for both the male and the female characters.

Sullivan's belief is a contrast to the opinion of Marie Painter (1985), who describes the male character in *Forever* in a different way - as one who persuades the girl into sexual activity. Painter states, "With a directness of teen language and emotion, the reader is led through the boy's persuasion of the girl, his ejaculation in her hand, and their specific sex experiences and feelings" (p. 43). She calls *Forever* an "explicit sex novel for young people" (p. 43) and goes on to state, "The thrills of dating and the sweetness of first love are no longer part of today's theme. Instead we have "relevant" topics as central to a book's theme" (p. 43). Painter seems to clearly disagree with the use of sex in young adult literature, contrasting the theme of those novels which "reflect the current realism of society", such as *Forever*, with others that "depict tenderness, moral support and families deeply concerned about young people and their problems" (p. 46), such as *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, and *All Together Now*.

Sullivan (2004) continues his article by discussing other novels told from both male and female perspectives that portray the male characters in a variety of ways. In Norma Fox Mazer's *Up in Seth's Room*, the male character is sexually experienced and puts pressure on the female character to have sex. Norma Klein's *Beginners' Love* shows a male character and a female character who give little thought to the act of sex, with no discussion of feelings. James Bennett's *Plunking Reggie Jackson* displays a sexual relationship based entirely upon lust, with the male character treating the whole situation like a game. Sullivan calls Melvin Burgess' males in *Doing It* "relentlessly horny, sex-obsessed characters" and "realistic". In contrast, Jim Heynen's *Cosmos Coyote and William the Nice* show a male character that shows understanding of the female's religious beliefs and patiently understands her decision to wait to have sex.

MacGregor (2004) examines how females' sexual roles are depicted in YA literature. Her argument is that female sexuality in the genre is not being displayed in a positive light. She sees much of the genre as novels in which a type of sexual warfare is being fought, with females having to defend themselves from the pressures of males. While much of her article is focused on the idea that female teen characters should be portrayed as willing participants who enjoy sex, MacGregor also points out that a large number of novels have male characters who always have sex on their minds and seem to "need to pressure [females] in order for anything sexual to happen" (p. 465). She also notes Pamela Pollack's statement in her book article, *Sex in Children's Fiction: Freedom to Frighten?* (1980), that young adult books characterize "boys as being at the mercy of their hormones and girls as being at the mercy of the boys" (p. 468).

In his article, *Sympathy for the Devil*, Burgess (2004) presents a viewpoint that differs from the previous ones discussed. Burgess is a well-known YA author whose novels are often seen as ‘pushing the envelope’. When discussing *Doing It*, one of the novels discussed by Sullivan (2004) above and used in this study, Burgess states that he wanted to write about young male sexual culture, which he describes as “not always a pretty sight” (p. 296). He calls this work a piece of psychological realism and goes on to state, “the idea was simply to show ordinary lads in all their warty glory, wanting as much sex as they could get but genuinely concerned not to do anyone down in the process” (p. 296). His comment can be seen as an agreement with Sullivan’s perception of the male characters being “relentlessly horny, sex-obsessed”, but it also adds an element of gentleness to the portrayal by stating that they did not intend to harm anyone in the process. That gentleness is not always a part of the sex-crazed teenage male stereotype presented through YA literature.

Bereska (2003) studies YA literature from a sociological point of view and examines the roles YA literature plays in the development of masculinity in young men. She states that in YA literature, an “overt emphasis is placed on the body” and “there is no distinction made between the emotional and physical” in male characters (p. 162). This could be an explanation of why males are often portrayed as the “sex-crazed teenager” in YA literature: they have the emotions and their only means of expression is through physical acts.

For the most part, the current academic literature describes the sexual behavior and attitudes of male characters in YA literature as hormone-driven and constant. There are some exceptions, but they are the minority. While the novels discussed in the articles are written by male and female authors, most of them are stories told by female narrators and protagonists. In those novels, readers see the males the way the females see them and do not get to see what is really happening inside the males' heads and hearts. This study addresses that missing piece by focusing on recently published novels with male narrators and protagonists.

Research Questions

The main purpose of this study was to investigate how male teenage protagonists in young adult literature are portrayed: as hormone-driven, sex-obsessed people whose sole desires are to have sex with as many girls as they can; as confused, insecure teens that may be driven by their hormones but can and do control their physical desires; or as males who want to demonstrate their feelings to the females they love in a physical way. In order to determine an answer to that question, the following questions were considered (taken in part from Bereska, 2003):

- Do the male characters have any emotional attachments to the girls with whom they have sex? Is there any concern for the emotions or desires of the female characters with whom they want to have sex? Is there a limit for the male characters on how far they will go to have sex?

- Do the male characters have any emotional connections to the act of sex? Do they have expectations of what sex should be like? Do they have any feelings about what they've done after they've lost their virginities?
- Where do they get their sexual information? Do they talk to other characters about sex? Are their sexual attitudes influenced by other male characters in the novel? By females?
- Do the male characters have fears and questions about sex? Do their attitudes about sex change over time in the novel?
- Does sex consume the males' thoughts throughout the novel?
- Do the female characters ever initiate the sexual activity? Do the female characters ever put pressure to have sex on unwilling male characters?

Design of the Study

Because the field of young adult literature is so extensive, I analyzed a small sample of novels. Keeping the methodology example of Bereska (2003) in mind, I chose a sample size of twelve novels, many of which were suggestions made by school and young adult services librarians on the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) listserv. To be included in the sample, a novel had to be designated as a young adult novel; that is the novel had to be classified as and published in the young adult literature genre and marketed for readers between the ages of 12 and 19.

In selecting the books for the sample, two criteria were used. The novel had to have: 1) a male heterosexual protagonist who was between the ages of 12 and 19 and 2) a

publication date of 1998 or later. I placed my focus on recently published novels in order to provide information on what teenagers most likely are reading now. As I was focusing on the portrayal of male sexual attitudes, there also had to be clear descriptions of actions, words, and thoughts of the male characters. Those are most easily found when the main protagonist (and usually narrator of the story) is male. I chose to focus on heterosexual characters because while there is a large expansion of Gay/Bisexual/Transgender YA literature, trying to analyze both heterosexual and homosexual attitudes would be too large a task to accurately capture in one study. I chose to study heterosexual attitudes with this study because I was interested in how the attitudes portrayed could affect both the male readers who could be using the novel for development of their sexual attitudes and the female readers who could be trying to gain information about the males in their lives.

Selected Novels

After reviewing a list of book suggestions, seeing titles in previously completed academic studies, and reading book reviews from *School Library Journal*, *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)*, and others, I decided on the following twelve novels:

- *Twisted* by Laurie Halse Anderson (2007) - Tyler Miller is an average high school student who has traveled through life in the background. After he commits an act of vandalism and has to spend the summer working for the school, his new physique attracts the attention of Bethany Milbury, the school's queen bee and the secret love of Tyler's life. His dreams come true when Bethany begins spending time with him, but when pictures of a drunk and naked Bethany begin circulating

at school following a party, all fingers point at Tyler. His life suddenly becomes a roller coaster ride and he's forced to make difficult decisions to take control of it again.

- *The Making of Dr. Truelove* by Derrick Barnes (2006) - After a disappointing attempt at sex with his girlfriend, Diego Montgomery allows his embarrassment over his lack of performance to push her into the arms of an All-American basketball star. In order to win her back, Diego allows his friend J to talk him into learning more about sex and advising others on it, taking on the online persona of Dr. Dexter Truelove. What begins as a successful venture soon changes pace and Diego realizes that being Dr. Truelove isn't all that it's cracked up to be, especially when he's not attracting the attention of the one person he wants.
- *Doing It* by Melvin Burgess (2003) - Dino, Jon, and Ben are three teenage boys whose lives seem to revolve around two things: girls and sex. While they share this similarity, they are living three very different lives. Dino finally gets the girl he's been wanting but he can't figure out why she won't sleep with him, even though she says she wants to. Jon's best girl friend suddenly becomes his girlfriend, but he's so hung up on what everyone else is saying about him being with a "plumper" that he might ruin a good thing before it starts. Ben's affair with his young drama teacher is quickly losing his interest, but when he tries to end it, he's hit with bigger problems that are more dangerous than the affair.

- *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky (1999) - The story of Charlie's life is told through a series of letters to a recipient, who is unknown to the reader. Over the course of one year, Charlie openly discusses and deals with a variety of circumstances that include making new friends, having a crush, being introduced to drugs and alcohol, coping with mental illness, and trying to be a teenage boy.
- *Looking for Alaska* by John Green (2005) - When Miles "Pudge" Halter leaves his Florida home to venture into the Great Perhaps by enrolling at an Alabama boarding school, he isn't sure what to expect. When he meets the Colonel, Takumi, Lara, and Alaska, his real adventures begin. He would follow Alaska anywhere, but when she goes somewhere that he cannot, Miles must figure out how to deal with life without her.
- *Slam* by Nick Hornby (2007) - Sam's life is moving along quite nicely, filled with skateboarding, conversations with Tony Hawk, and his new girlfriend, Alicia. But when Alicia gets pregnant, Sam's life takes a drastic turn for which he knows he's not ready.
- *Heavy Metal and You* by Christopher Krovatin (2005) - Sam's true love is heavy metal music. When he meets Melissa and tries to integrate her with his music and

his life, things don't go as he hopes they would. He loves Melissa, but he's not sure he's ready to give up who he is to be with her.

- *Where the Kissing Never Stops* by Ron Koertge (updated reprint, 2005) - Walker's life hasn't been so easy lately. His father passed away, his girlfriend moved away, and his comfort food is catching up with him. To top it all off, his mother's new job involves her taking her clothes off. Walker's not sure he can handle it all. But then he meets Rachel and life suddenly isn't as bad as he thought.
- *Inexcusable* by Chris Lynch (2005) - Keir Sarafian is a nice guy. He knows it and he knows that everyone else knows it. That's why he can't understand why Gigi Boudakian could possibly believe that he did what she says he did. Keir loves Gigi and would never hurt her, let alone rape her. But it's possible that Keir isn't seeing things as they really are.
- *King Dork* by Frank Portman (2006) - Tom Henderson has a lot to deal with: school bullies in student and administrator form, a mother who keeps too many secrets, a stepfather who tries way too hard, and a friend who he's not sure he really wants to be friends with. Add to that a mysterious girl and secret messages in his deceased father's copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* and Tom may have more than he can handle.

- *Hard Love* by Ellen Wittlinger (1999) - John Galardi is delving into the world of zine writing with his zine, *Bananafish*. He's inspired and captivated by Marisol, the author of *Escape Velocity*. The fact that Marisol is a lesbian does not deter John from falling in love with her, and he soon learns that his love is anything but easy.
- *Getting the Girl* by Markus Zusak (2001) - Cameron Wolfe has grown up in the shadows of his two older brothers, Ruben and Steve. Watching Ruben go from girl to girl only makes Cameron realize how different he and his brother really are. Cameron wants nothing more than to truly love a girl and have her love him back. He has finally found the right girl, but the fact that she's Ruben's ex-girlfriend threatens to drive the brothers apart and stop Cameron's newfound love before it starts.

Data Collection

Once I selected the twelve novels for analysis, I began collecting data by reading each book. As I read, I underlined any content that had to do with sex or love. These included personal thoughts by the protagonist, conversations between the protagonist and other characters, and actions toward the protagonist's self and others. My focus was to determine the number of male characters that are portrayed as sex-crazed teenagers (those with little control over their sexual desires, who pressure females into having sex, and whose minds are consumed by sexual thoughts at all times), and the number of male characters that are portrayed as teenagers who want to have sex with females for whom

they have emotional feelings and who may experience fears and questions about sex. Determinations of each character were made through analysis of the sexual attitudes and behaviors found in each story. For the purpose of this study, I defined *sexual attitudes* to be the personal thoughts and conversations with others, and *sexual behaviors* to be the actions the protagonist took towards himself and others.

Data Analysis

Once I completed reading the novels, I reviewed my data for patterns and trends relating to sexual attitudes and behaviors. As discussed above, I attempted to group characters based on the sexual attitudes and behaviors demonstrated by them in the novels. I also reviewed the data for other patterns that emerged, such as the gender of the author. The findings are presented in the discussion section below.

Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this study is the level of subjectivity with which I analyzed the novels. I conducted the research myself, without any additional judges, as finding others willing to commit the time and effort required to read and analyze twelve novels in a span of a couple of months is hard to do. Because I analyzed these characters based on their actions, words, and thoughts, I may have perceived some of them differently than others might have.

A second limitation on this study is the size of the sample. The genre of young adult literature is so extensive that it would be very hard to attempt to cover the whole thing. I

tried to select enough of a variety of recent novels to adequately discuss a variety of types of male characters.

Discussion

While reading these novels, I found that a few main themes emerged. First, the majority of male protagonists had emotional feelings and attachments to the females with whom they had sex, as demonstrated by their personal thoughts about the girls and the actions they took to express their affections to them. Second, many of the males had thoughts about what sex would be like before they experienced it and their attitudes about sex changed over time, as reflected by their personal thoughts. Third, many of the females were equally involved in the initiation of sex and some actually pressured the males for sex. These themes are discussed thoroughly in this section, with supporting evidence from the novels for each. They are arranged in the order of the research questions listed above.

Emotional Attachments to Girls and to the Act of Sex

A range of emotional attachments were exhibited by the male characters towards the females with whom they had or wanted to have sex. In eight novels, the male characters showed some form of love or intense liking. In three novels, the male characters had emotions of love for one female but performed sexual acts with another female. In two novels, the male's attachment for the female grew out of their sexual contact.

Love or Intense Liking Prior to Sex

The eight novels in which the male characters demonstrated emotional attachments prior to the first sexual encounter were *Slam*, *The Making of Dr. Truelove*, *Twisted*, *Inexcusable*, *Where the Kissing Never Stops*, *Heavy Metal and You*, *Getting the Girl*, and *Hard Love*. The males in these novels all showed emotional attachments to the females, as evidenced by their personal thoughts and words and actions towards them, but their feelings ranged from deep love to intense liking. Often, they felt they had deep love but then realized that they really only felt intense liking. In *Slam*, Sam doesn't think he's interested in having a girlfriend when his mother tells him he needs to meet Alicia. But once he sees her and hears her laugh, he "could feel some part of me flip over...all of a sudden, I was desperate to make this girl like me" (p. 21). Sam is taken by her beauty and he soon finds himself hoping "that the conversation would turn into something else - a kiss, and then marriage, after we'd been out for a couple of weeks" (p. 26). Their first date was memorable for Sam, and not only because they had sex. As he's retelling the story to the reader, he states:

All I'm trying to say is it was really special, that day, and I can remember just about every second of it ... Maybe some people would think that because of what happened later, it was all just tacky and grubby, typical modern teenager stuff. But it wasn't. It was nothing like that at all. (p. 38-9)

Sam and Alicia continue dating, say "I love you" to each other, and continue having sex. He even feels that "life only happened when I was with Alicia" (p. 52). Although Sam's feelings later change and he decides to stop dating Alicia, he appeared to have emotional loving feelings toward her before they had sex.

The same feelings are shared by Diego in *The Making of Dr. Truelove*. Diego is deeply in love with his girlfriend, Roxy, before they attempt to have sex for the first time. He

states, “There are plenty of days I still wonder what she sees in me, and why she gave me a chance in the first place ... She makes me feel like a person, like someone who deserves some attention” (p. 12). Then, “She was, without a shadow of a doubt, the most beautiful, most interesting, and nicest girl I had ever been so close to” (p. 15). Even after he pushes her away following his embarrassing first attempt at having sex with her, his love for her is so strong that he thinks of nothing but how to get her back, leading him to get involved in his friend J’s crazy scheme to become the city’s sex expert, Dr. Truelove. Once they reunite at the end and Roxy tells him she’s not ready to have sex yet, Diego tells her how he feels: “Roxy, we could be as sex free as you want ... I just wanted to hear you laugh, follow your lips with every word that comes out of your mouth, and hold your hand. I love you, girl” (p. 226-7). Diego is the main character and an interesting contrast to his best friend, J, a secondary character. J is the extreme sex-maniac. He talks nothing of love, but of how many girls he wants to have sex with. Throughout the duration of the novel, the reader sees him sleep with no fewer than four girls, having a threesome with two of them. But J talks nothing of love, or of wanting it anytime soon, as Diego does.

In *Where the Kissing Never Stops*, Walker is still grieving over Debbie, his last girlfriend, moving away when he is set up with Rachel, the new girl at school. Walker doesn’t describe his affection for Rachel in the same way that Sam and Diego’s characters do, but it’s easy to see that he does care about her because of the way he’s terrified she’ll break up with him if she finds out his mother is a stripper. Walker and Rachel do eventually have sex, and he describes his feelings after their third time:

I didn't feel like I had scored with Rachel or got her or nailed her or any of the other charming phrases I'd heard Tommy toss around. I just felt close to her. She was - corny as this sounds - dear to me, and I felt privileged to have made love. (p. 168)

Later, after Walker tells Rachel that he loves her, he tells the reader:

I put my arms around her, and for a second it was like it had been when we were alone saying good night or under Kramer's oak and our skin just seemed to dissolve and our cells and our blood ran together and we weren't two people anymore, just one. (p. 221)

Keir, the main character in *Inexcusable*, repeatedly states his affection for Gigi Boudakian to her and to the reader. Though he is only friends with Gigi, as she is dating someone else, he tries to deny that he loves her but fails. He tells the reader, "I lied earlier because I loved Gigi Boudakian when I said I didn't" (p. 60). After Gigi tells Keir that she almost loved him, he states, "To be almost loved by Gigi Boudakian. What a wonder was that? What a horror was that? I was so proud ecstatic grateful angry I felt for that instant I knew what it was like to be fire" (p. 66). Though his feelings for Gigi are a mixture of emotions, they are intense and seem to be very real.

John's feelings for Marisol in *Hard Love* are similar to Keir's. He feels intense emotion toward her though she tells him nothing will ever happen between them romantically because she is a lesbian. John cannot help what he feels and tries to channel his feelings in other ways: by being the best friend she has and enjoying pretending that she's his girlfriend when she accompanies him to prom. John feels the pain of unrequited love clearly when he and Marisol get into a fight and she starts to pull away from him. He states, "I just wanted to be with Marisol; I wanted her to be with me more than anybody else" (p. 159). He even goes so far as to tell her that he loves her: "No! Marisol, I love

you!' I said, needing so badly to get the words out into the world, even if nobody wanted to hear them" (p. 165). Though John's feelings are not returned by Marisol, he realizes that by loving her, he has come alive again and for that he is grateful.

In *Getting the Girl*, Cameron wants to love a girl in every way, including physically. He is so desperate to love and be loved by a girl that he stands in front of the home of a girl that he knows doesn't like him, yet he does it night after night. When Cameron's brother's ex-girlfriend, Octavia, asks Cameron to stand in front of her house instead, he knows she's the one. He states:

She broke into me. It was that simple. Her words reached into me, grabbed my spirit by the heart, and reeled it from my body. It was the words and the voice, and Octavia and me. And my spirit, on the silent, shadow-stricken street. I could only watch her, as slowly, she collected my hand and placed it gently in hers. I took all of her in. (p. 89)

Cameron becomes captivated by Octavia, later stating:

When you're young and you're dirty, everything's about getting your hands on a girl ... or at least, that's what people say. It may not be what they think, but it's what they tell you. For me though, it feels like more than that. I want to hear her, and know her. I want to understand. (p. 114)

Cameron's feelings go beyond his physical attraction for Octavia and continue to grow even though the two never have sex.

Heavy Metal and You's Sam likes Melissa because she treats him like him, and not like who he should be. After their first date, he happily exclaims, "I wanted to dance, sing, throw my arms in the air, and fly away on the cold night sky. She was great. I'd made a catch. Hell, I'd made *the* catch!" (p. 4). There is a lot of physical contact between them, but Sam likes the other aspects of their relationship just as much. He says of his friends:

They didn't understand that feeling I got when it was just me and her ... like there was nothing else in the world that really mattered but her, there, staring into my eyes and smiling. Talking music with me. Talking philosophy with me. Talking anything with me ... They didn't know. (p. 105)

Tyler Miller's attraction to Bethany Milbury in *Twisted* is best referred to as an intense crush. While he has had this crush on her for years, it is mainly composed of physical attraction. He describes Bethany as the "Holy Goddess of Hotness" and "the Alpha Female of George Washington High - the most beautiful, the most popular, the queen bee" (p. 7-8). There are some moments where he describes liking something about her other than a body part, such as her laugh ("My stomach relaxed as if that one sound, her laughter, was what I'd been secretly hungry for my whole life" (p. 38)), but those are few and far between. Tyler's crush on Bethany is almost completely physical, as is her attraction to his newly-muscular frame.

Emotions of Love for One Female But Sexual Acts with Another Female

The male characters in this group are ones that performed sexual acts with females other than the ones to which they have emotional attachments. In *Looking for Alaska*, Miles has an intense attraction to Alaska Young. It stems from the physical but changes to something deeper as the novel progresses. He says of Alaska:

I could notice little but her ... the way she talked that first night about getting out of the labyrinth - so smart. And the way her mouth curled up on the right side all the time, like she was preparing to smirk, like she'd mastered the right half of the Mona Lisa's inimitable smile... (p. 30)

Miles believes he loves Alaska, though she tells him he doesn't really when she says, "Don't you know who you love, Pudge? You love the girl who makes you laugh and shows you porn and drinks wine with you. You don't love the crazy, sullen bitch" (p.

96). Although Miles acknowledges that that is partially true, that isn't what keeps him apart from Alaska. The main problem standing in Miles' way is that Alaska has a boyfriend who she loves. So when Miles meets Lara ("a cute sophomore from Russia" (p. 51)), Alaska encourages them to get together. While camping out in an old barn one night, Miles makes his move and kisses Lara. They begin dating and Lara performs oral sex on him a few days later. But his heart is always Alaska's, and he ends up making out with her while he is still dating Lara.

Charlie deals with feelings of unrequited love in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. He develops a strong attraction to his friend Sam, a girl who is a few years older than him. She tells Charlie that she's too old for him, but that doesn't quell his feelings for her. He has a sexual dream about her that embarrasses him, and has a hard time not thinking about her sexually after that. The more Charlie is around Sam, the more his crush grows until he tells the friend receiving his letters:

To tell you the truth, I love Sam. It's not a movie kind of love either. I just look at her sometimes, and I think she is the prettiest and nicest person in the whole world. She is also very smart and fun ... I am really in love with Sam, and it hurts very much. (p. 47-9)

When their friend Mary Elizabeth asks Charlie to be her date to the Sadie Hawkins dance, he agrees because, "I wanted Sam to be jealous...Sam wasn't jealous though. To tell you the truth, I don't think she could have been happier about it, which was hard...I wish I could stop being in love with Sam. I really do" (p. 112-3). Although Charlie harbors this emotional attachment to Sam, he goes on several dates and makes out with Mary Elizabeth several times. Of one such occasion Charlie states:

...she leaned down and started kissing my neck and ears. Then my cheeks. Then my lips. And everything kind of melted away. She took my hand and slid it up her sweater and I couldn't believe what was happening to me. Or what breasts feel like. Or later, what they looked like. Or how difficult bras are. (p. 126-7)

In *Doing It*, Dino has finally gotten the girl he's had a crush on for ages. Of her he says, "Going out with Jackie is the best thing that ever happened to me. The best. I knew it was going to happen. It felt right. By the time she said yes I felt like I'd been waiting forever" (p. 29). He feels they belong together because of how beautiful they both are, but he quickly becomes frustrated with her resistance to having sex with him. After Jackie fails to fulfill her promise of finally having sex with him after a party, Dino chooses to lose his virginity to a stranger who attended his party. He quickly devises a plan to continue seeing both of them - Jackie because he really does like her, and Zoe (or Siobhan, as he knows her) because she'll have sex with him.

Feelings of Love After Sexual Contact

Jonathon, also in *Doing It*, is one of the characters whose attraction to the female grows from their sexual contact. In the beginning, he finds himself mysteriously kissing his girl friend Deborah at a party. However, he doesn't think he actually has any romantic feelings for Deborah and feels slightly embarrassed that everyone else is seeing him making out with "a fat girl on the stairs" (p. 67). He argues with his hormones and tries to maintain that he doesn't have feelings for her, but after another make-out session on the street later that night, he states:

She reached up and kissed me. When she pulled back she put her hand on the side of my face for a moment, a very tender touch, then she turned and went inside. And I thought, That was so gorgeous. Help! (p. 94)

Even after he starts realizing he has those feelings, he still tries to push them away and deny them because of his concern about what everyone else will think of him dating a “plumper”. But eventually, he realizes how much he really does like her and starts dating her properly.

King Dork's Tom also has an emotional attachment grow from a sexual interaction.

While attending a party with his friend Sam, Tom wanders downstairs to the basement where he sees Fiona sitting by herself. She waves him over and begins a conversation. Before he knows it, she begins kissing him and his hand is on her breast. After a few minutes of this, she says she needs to go so that her boyfriend won't find out, and he never sees her again. But Tom can't get her out of his mind and spends the rest of the novel trying to solve the mystery of who she is and where she is. Part of this may have been because she was the first girl he ever kissed. As he says, “The Fiona couch episode had been the most successful interaction with a female in my life, surpassing many of my least plausible dreams” (p. 79). However, despite this attraction and longing for Fiona, Tom can also be grouped with the previous characters that had sexual contact with another character despite their emotional attachments. While on the trail of tracking Fiona down, Tom meets Deanna and receives oral sex from her on different occasions. Even after he finds and starts seeing Fiona (who is actually Celeste), he continues to see Deanna as well.

Personal Limits and Concern for Females

Most of the male characters do show concern for the emotions and feelings of the girls with whom they want to have sex. They don't treat the females as simple objects from whom they get pleasure. One exception is Dino in *Doing It*. He claims to love Jackie but then he dates Zoe behind Jackie's back so that he can have sex. He thinks this plan is brilliant because he looks like the caring boyfriend who doesn't pressure and he still gets to have sex. It backfires quickly. His friend Ben thinks his behavior is awful. Ben says:

Some of my mates are really horrible, the way they go on about their girlfriends. Dino's the worst. He's always going on about Jackie ... I reckon I know as much about Jackie's body as he does ... That's personal stuff, man! You shouldn't say that stuff to anyone, not even your best friend! (p. 212)

Ben also shows that he has limits when it comes to his own sex life. He has been having an affair with his teacher for a couple of years by the time we meet him in the novel, and he's starting to tire of it. He still thinks the sex is great, but he starts to realize that it's not enough to make him really happy. He also gets tired of the fact that Miss Young is always in control when they're together and how she always manages to get what she wants, regardless of how he feels about it. He says:

About a year ago, I'd have given almost anything to have done all the things I've done with Miss Young. And I have to say, it was great, but it was only great because I wanted to do all those things so much. It didn't really have anything to do with who I was doing them with. And some of it, I don't think I actually wanted to do with anyone ... It's like being trapped in a porn movie. (p. 211-3)

While Ben's situation is clearly one in which there are a lot of things happening that are wrong, he still shows his limits by deciding that he's had enough of it and that the sex isn't enough to make him stay.

Diego shows his limits in *The Making of Dr. Truelove* by not taking advantage of Toni's advances. While she may not have actually followed through with her proposals had he accepted, he still never even acted like he was interested in doing that with her. He was in love with Roxy and wanted to sleep with her because of that love, not because he just wanted sex. He also shows his concern for Roxy's feelings at the end of the novel when he reassures her that everything is okay even though they didn't have sex. Though Diego also wasn't totally ready, he didn't have to treat her with the care that he showed.

In *Twisted and Heavy Metal and You*, Tyler and Sam both show respect for the females by turning down their sexual advances. As previously mentioned, Bethany comes on to Tyler at a party. They had kissed a couple of times earlier in the evening, and Tyler thinks he's going to heaven when Bethany leads him to a bedroom upstairs. He says:

She pushed me down on the bed and pinned me in the hottest liplock of my life ... My brain stopped functioning. My hormones kicked into overdrive and grabbed the steering wheel ... And then, because I suck, my brain came back to life. And started wrestling with my hormones. (p. 125)

Although Tyler has had a crush on Bethany for years, and although he is finally getting what he's always wanted, he knows that he it wouldn't be right for her or for himself to have sex with her while she's drunk and he stops things before they go too far.

Sam turns Melissa down when she asks him to make love to her because he doesn't want her to have the same regrets about her first time that he does about his. He doesn't want their relationship to change because they moved too fast. Though he makes the right decision, he does question himself when she gets upset with him. He thinks:

What the hell is wrong with me? A beautiful girl who I was heels-over-head crazy about just offered me consensual sexual intercourse - and I was turning it down?! Why? Why couldn't I just switch my morals off and go for the gold? (p. 127)

In the end, he sticks with his morals, they don't have sex, and Melissa agrees that he is the one thinking clearly about the situation.

Emotional Connections to Sex; Expectations and Reactions to First Times

Unlike the number of novels in which the male characters show emotional attachments to the female characters, there were very few in the group in which the male characters showed any kind of emotional connection to the actual act of sex. *Slam* was the only novel in which the male character had any thoughts of how he really wanted his first time to be. Sam states:

I'd always hoped it would all be a bit more planned than that. I'd always hoped that we might have talked about it beforehand, so that when it happened we were both prepared for it, and it would be relaxed, and special. (p. 42)

Sex was a big deal to him because of how young his mother was when she had him, and it bothered him that he and Alicia didn't really talk about it before they had sex for the first time.

In *The Making of Dr. Truelove*, Diego worries about trying to have sex with Roxy again, but it doesn't have as much to do with losing his virginity as it does with how their relationship could change. They have just gotten back together when Roxy takes him to her house with the intention of having sex with him. Roxy asks Diego if he's ready and he responds that he is. But then his mind and heart begin taking control again. He thinks:

I'm wondering if I'm doing the right thing. Not only because of what happened the last time, but also what happened afterward; I don't want to lose her again. And who's to say that if we somehow have supernatural, professional, cataclysmic, astronomical sex that that will make us a stronger couple or that it's the thing to do right now? I'm confused. (p. 224)

They decide not to sleep together because they realize that neither of them is quite ready and there isn't any rush to do it.

The only other two novels that mentioned any kind of acknowledgement of the act of sex were *Where the Kissing Never Stops* and *Heavy Metal and You*. In both, the main characters reflect on what it felt like after they had sex for the first time. In *Where the Kissing Never Stops*, Walker lies on his bed and thinks:

So now I was a man. Was my diploma in the mail? And how about my lost innocence - where did it go? ... I tried to analyze what it felt like not to be a virgin anymore. I had stepped away from the millions who were and joined the millions who weren't. (p. 145)

While Walker is contemplative, he doesn't regret having sex with Rachel.

The same cannot be said of Sam's first time in *Heavy Metal and You*. After his first experience with sexual intercourse, he is filled with regret. He recounts, "Slowly but surely, I became aware. Aware of the silence in the room, of the thinness of the sheets, of my nakedness in someone else's bed. *Huh*, I thought. *I really wish we hadn't done that*" (p. 122). Sam's regret actually makes him turn down Melissa's advances later because he doesn't want her to have that same kind of regret about her first time.

Sources of Sexual Information, Conversations with, and Influences from Others

The male characters in these novels receive information about sex from a few different sources: family, friends, and the Internet. In three novels the male characters receive information about sex from a parent. The males are influenced by and receive information from their friends in seven novels, and one character finds information on the Internet.

The male characters in *Slam*, *Where the Kissing Never Stops*, and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* have discussions about sex with a parent. In *Slam* and *Kissing*, Sam and Walker's mothers talk with their boys. Both conversations center around birth control, and Walker's mother uses her conversation as a follow up to the conversations Walker had with his father before he died. Both boys are very uncomfortable and try to do everything they can to make the conversations end as quickly as possible. In *Perks*, Charlie's father talks to him about sex after finding out that Charlie has another date with Mary Elizabeth. His talk is more extensive than birth control and Charlie doesn't say anything that leads the reader to believe that he is uncomfortable. He says that his father is very smart about things like that.

Charlie also talks to his crush Sam about doing sexual things with Mary Elizabeth. This conversation occurs before Charlie goes out with Mary Elizabeth for the first time. Sam gives Charlie advice about how to handle sexual situations with someone more experienced, as Mary Elizabeth is because she's had other boyfriends in the past.

Miles and Lara receive sexual information from Alaska in *Looking for Alaska*. When Lara decides she wants to perform oral sex on Miles, she tries it and realizes that she doesn't know how to do it so they go to Alaska for a lesson. Alaska uses a tube of toothpaste to demonstrate, and Lara and Miles return to the TV room to try it on their own.

Conversations occur between the males in *Heavy Metal and You* and *Doing It*, but the only information that is exchanged is about what is going on, not how it is done. Sam's friends in *Heavy Metal* want to know if he's having sex with Melissa, but Sam won't give them any details. The boys in *Doing It* also discuss sex and Dino is very open with the details. Jonathon spends a lot of time denying that he's doing anything with Deborah, and Ben doesn't say anything at all about his sexual activity. Jonathon is somewhat influenced by the other males around him, but it's more about being with Deborah because of her size than about the sex itself.

Diego is the only character that gets sexual information from the Internet. In *The Making of Dr. Truelove*, he has to have knowledge about sex and relationships in order to write his column as Dr. Dexter Truelove, so he turns to the Internet. He doesn't use that information for his own relationship though. For advice on what to do about Roxy, he turns to his sister, Kris, who has a radio talkshow about love and sex. She gives him advice on sex and on his emotional relationship with Roxy as well. Diego also has many conversations about sex with his friend, J, but their opinions differ greatly and Diego never gets quite on the same page as J in regards to his attitudes about sex. It could be

said that Diego is actually influenced in the opposite way, to have his own beliefs about love and sex.

John, in *Hard Love*, is like Diego in that he also rejects his friend's attitudes about girls and sex. Brian is desperate to find a girlfriend and talks nonstop about girls. This really drives John crazy because he is just not interested in girls before he meets Marisol.

Brian's attitude and enthusiasm about girls actually increases John's disinterest in them. And though Brian tries to ask John about him and Marisol, and though there really isn't anything to tell, John refuses to say anything about her to Brian.

Fears and Questions about Sex

Just as there were few novels with male characters that showed some kind of emotional connection to the act of sex, there were also few in which the males had fears or questions about sex. *Slam*, *Where the Kissing Never Stops*, and *Doing It* all had characters that displayed some trepidation about having sex along with their desire to do it.

Just as *Slam*'s Sam had given thought to what he expected his first time to be like, he also had given thought to how it would all go and was concerned that he wouldn't live up to Alicia's expectations. He says:

As we were going up the stairs to her bedroom, I had this fantasy that Alicia would close the door, and look at me, and start to get undressed, and to tell you the honest truth, I wasn't sure how I'd feel about that. I mean, there was a plus side, obviously. But on the other hand, she might expect me to know what I was doing, and I didn't. (p. 32)

Sam clearly has fears relating to how he would perform and what Alicia would think about him.

Jonathon's hesitation in *Doing It* is similar to Sam's but for different reasons. He says:

I can be getting on really well with a girl but as soon as I get an inkling that there might be a chance of anything happening, I just freeze up. It's scary. Sex is...well, it's so rude isn't it? ... The fact is, I can't put together the sort of feelings that I get when I'm having a dirty big wank together with the kind of feelings I get when I'm having a nice friendly chat with someone. It just doesn't work. But here's Deborah, who I get on very well with and she actually appears to want me to do those things. It sounds too good to be true, right? Even better, she wants to do them back to me. I mean. Saying no - it just seems so stupid. Maybe I'm just scared. Maybe I need to bite the bullet and give her one and I'll feel better (p. 144)

Jonathon's feelings seem to stem more from fear of the unknown. He's unsure of how to reconcile his sexual desires and the feelings he experiences when he masturbates with the feelings he has about Deborah. He's hesitant to do something that he thinks of as dirty and rude with someone whom he regards as nice and good.

Walker's feelings in *Where the Kissing Never Stops* are along the lines of Jonathon's, except that he wonders how nice a girl Rachel really is. After she tells him that she's done "just about everything a girl can do" (p. 68), he wonders what that means. He says:

Did that mean she wasn't a virgin? And what if she wasn't? And what if she was? Would I like her less? More? ... I wasn't exactly how sure I felt. Everyone knew it was okay for girls to want to make love and even to want it as much as boys ... So it was okay, but was Rachel like that? ... Was I like that? (p. 68)

Walker's questions continue later as he thinks about their first time together. He wonders:

Was Rachel going to be the one? Did she want to be? And what would I do if she did? God, no wonder I didn't want the kissing to stop. I wouldn't know what

to do next. Rachel might know, but would she want to show me? I was pretty sure girls wanted the guy to be in charge. And even if she didn't mind being the leader, how would I go about asking, "Uh, pardon me, miss. But where exactly does this go?" (p. 91)

Walker experiences the same doubts about his abilities as Sam did about his. They both believe that the girls expect them to be in charge and knowledgeable about what they are doing. Despite these fears and questions, all three boys choose to have sex and find that the actual act wasn't as difficult as they worried it might be.

Change in Attitudes about Sex over Time

There were only a few characters whose attitudes about sex changed over time. In *The Making of Dr. Truelove*, Diego went from being totally ready and willing to have sex with his girlfriend in the beginning to being hesitant to take the plunge in the end. His attitude changed because of his fear that having sex would somehow drive them apart from each other again. He was perfectly willing to wait when she made it clear she wasn't quite ready either.

The third male character in *Doing It*, Ben, had a change of heart about who he was having sex with. At the beginning of the novel, Ben is enjoying the sexual relationship he has with his drama teacher, Miss Ali Young. He repeatedly tells himself what a lucky boy he is. But as the novel progresses, he finds himself feeling less enthusiastic about the secrecy and her possession of him and the situation, and more like he's missing out by not being able to talk to girls his own age. He says:

Apart from it all getting a lot too much, there's another reason. I mean, girls my own age. You know? Someone I can talk to. Someone I could really fall for. I

mean, the sex with Ali is great but it's not like it's the real thing, is it? It's just porn with a pulse. I want to...you know. Well, I want to fall in love. (p. 209)

Ben knows that he isn't really in love with Miss Young and finally decides that the sex isn't enough to make him stay in the situation.

Sam's feelings in *Slam* are similar to Ben's. After he and Alicia have been dating and sleeping together for a while, he begins to feel like he's given up too much of his other life to have her and the sex. He states:

Before you have sex for the first time, you can't imagine where it's ever going to come from, and you certainly can't imagine dumping the person who's providing it....All I can say is that, believe it or not, sex is like anything else good: once you have it, you stop being quite so bothered about it. It's there and it's great and everything, but it doesn't mean you're happy to let everything else go out of the window ... I wanted a girlfriend who would sleep with me, but I wanted a life as well ... And I was beginning to realize I'd paid over the odds. (p. 71-2)

Sex Consuming Males' Thoughts

While it is difficult to group or sort these books by the degree to which the male characters think about sex, it is clearly on their minds in all of the novels. None of the characters, however, are completely consumed by constant thoughts of sex. In most of the novels, the male characters primarily think about sex as it relates to a specific girl.

There are a couple of characters who think about sex in general, and that is mainly before they become involved with a specific female character. Once they meet the female, their sexual thoughts shift to her. I attempted to count the number of times each male protagonist thought about sex, but it was difficult to do conclusively as there were times where a succession of thoughts occurred in one situation. I have listed the numbers I compiled for each novel in the discussion below.

The two novels in which the characters spend the most time engaged in thinking about sex are *Doing It* and *The Making of Dr. Truelove*. Neither of these were surprises given their titles and/or storylines. Since *Doing It* focuses on three separate male characters, a great deal of thinking about sex occurs. There were approximately 25 occurrences of sexual thinking among the three characters. Dino thinks about how to get sex from Jackie, how to hide the fact that he's having sex with Zoe, how much all of the girls at school want to have sex with him, and how his mother is having sex with someone other than his father. Jonathon's primary thoughts are of Deborah and how sex would work with her, as well as whether he wants to have sex with her. But there is also a time when he is at the school dance, after he has become involved with Deborah, where he suddenly realizes how desirable all of the girls are. He wonders:

When had they become so gorgeous? ... Could it be that they actually wanted some spotty boy - maybe even some spotty boy like him - to come up and dance with them? Or kiss them? Or touch them and run his hands over them and under them and..." (p. 192)

Ben's thoughts are primarily on the sex he has with Ms. Young. He recollects many of the sexual events as he considers whether he wants to continue with it, and then about how he can stop it from continuing. He does think about a girl his age in who he is interested, but because of the way he has almost been oversexed, he doesn't think of having sex with her. Instead, he thinks of talking with her and taking her on dates.

Diego thinks in a sexual way approximately 25 times in *The Making of Dr. Truelove*, including the times during which he is responding to questions as Dr. Dexter Truelove. Even while he is thinking of Roxy, whom he loves for reasons other than physical, he

thinks of her often in a very physical and sexual way. His descriptions of how she looks are very sexual. For example, he says:

Damn, she looks delicious! It looks like she just put on a fresh layer of lip gloss before she came in. If I could throw my lips at her from across the room I would ... She's got a pair of liftlike shoes on that give her an extra three inches, which makes her legs look longer, and her ass is high and round; I can see it from the side. (p. 47)

He also describes his friend J's sister, Toni, in this way. While she is the one trying to seduce Diego, and he is the one turning her down, he still thinks of her and describes her sexually. Of one encounter, Diego says, "...her sexy voice vibrates as she peeks at me upside down between her juicy thighs. She finally leaves the room. That girl really gets my heart rate up (among other things)" (p. 37).

In *Getting the Girl*, Cameron thinks of sex approximately 8 times. With such an intense desire to love a girl and be loved in return, some of Cameron's sexual thoughts have a different context. He states:

It was just that I wanted to be touched by a girl someday ... Her fingers. In my mind, they were always soft, falling down my chest to my stomach ... I imagined it all the time, but refused to believe it was purely a matter of lust. The reason I can say this is that in my daydreams, the hands of the girl would always end up at my heart. Every time ... There was sex, of course...Wall to wall, in and out of my thoughts. But when it was over it was her whispering voice I craved, and a human curled up in my arms. (p. 2-3)

His thoughts clearly involve sex, but he also craves contact of the soul. That doesn't always keep him from thinking purely sexual thoughts, however. While looking at a men's magazine at the barber shop he thinks:

*Of course, the best thing about the *Inside Sport* magazine is not the sport, but the scantily clad woman who is planted on the cover. She is always firm and has desire in her eyes ... She has breasts you can only imagine your hands touching and massaging. (Sorry, but it's true.) (p. 36)*

Once he is seeing Octavia, Cameron's thoughts shift to and dwell on her. He says, "Before, life was about getting girls (or hoping to). Not about getting to know them, or actually *getting* what they were about. Now, it was much different. Now, it was about *one* girl, and working out what to do" (p. 112). All of his thoughts, sexual or not, are centered around Octavia.

In *King Dork* and *Where the Kissing Never Stops*, Tom and Walker both admit to engaging in sex-centered thinking. Tom says, "It seems as if I am always horny" (p. 51). While this is the first sexually-based thought that he has in the book, and it doesn't come until 50 pages in, it is the kind of declaration that makes the reader think that sex is always on his mind. Walker conveys a similar idea when he says, "God, I think about sex a lot" (p. 3). This admission comes much earlier in the novel than Tom's did and is preceded by a fantasy in which he rescues barely-covered girls in the wild and, "Their gratitude [knows] no bounds" (p. 3). After both characters' statements, they become involved with Fiona and Rachel, respectively, and any sexual thoughts they have become focused on those girls. Tom had approximately 12 instances of sexual thoughts, and Walker had 14, among the higher numbers of the group.

In *Twisted*, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, and *Looking for Alaska*, the male characters' sexual thoughts are generally focused on the girls with whom they are either involved or infatuated. *Twisted*'s Tyler Miller's thoughts center, for the most part, on sexual fantasies involving Bethany. He has more than one fantasy of her that he describes in the book, and even states, "She'd been in my homeroom since seventh grade.

She'd had the starring role in most of my fantasies since then, too" (p. 7). He also experiences "a noticeable lack of penis control" (p. 107) whenever he's around her. But while one girl does consume most of his thoughts, he still notices the other girls in school. During one seemingly-"clothing optional" school day, Tyler describes the scene as, "[The girls] weren't completely naked, but they were showing so much skin that you did not have to use your imagination ... It was awesome ... Before the first bell of the day rang, most guys were semiconscious with lust" (p. 61-2). Bethany wasn't present that morning, but Tyler still had fuel for his sexual thoughts. In all, he had approximately 14 occurrences of sexual thinking.

Charlie almost always thinks about Sam in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, except for when he masturbates. He says, "I don't like to look at pictures. I just close my eyes and dream about a lady I do not know ... I never think about Sam when I do it" (p. 27). He chooses not to think about Sam when he masturbates because he tries to think of her only as a friend, though he often fails. He is still attracted to and turned on by her, but he doesn't want his sexual thoughts of her or actions towards her to feel cheap to him. As he tries to think of her as a friend rather than a sexual partner, he only has approximately eight occurrences of sexual thoughts.

Miles notices every inch of Alaska and thinks of her often in *Looking for Alaska*. He also has one of the higher numbers of sexual thoughts with approximately 14. Miles' first description of Alaska is that she's beautiful, and he says:

And not just beautiful, but hot, too, with her breasts straining against her tight tank top, her curved legs swinging back and forth beneath the swing ... It was

right then ... that I realized the *importance* of curves, of the thousand places where girls' bodies ease from one place to another ... I'd *noticed* curves before, of course, but I had never quite apprehended their significance. (p. 19)

Miles continues to let Alaska consume his thoughts, and gets caught staring at her cleavage as well. When they share a bed at the Colonel's house over Thanksgiving, Miles says, "We had separate blankets, and there were never fewer than three layers between us, but the possibilities kept me up half the night" (p. 92). His thoughts do include Lara when they start dating later on, but she never takes Alaska's place in his heart or his mind.

Sam's mind in *Slam* never seems to be consumed with random sexual thoughts, coming out with approximately five occurrences of sexual thoughts. He thinks about Alicia in a sexual context while they are dating and having sex, but after she becomes pregnant he is so focused on that that he doesn't go back to the sexual thoughts. In *Inexcusable*, Keir only thinks that way about Gigi. He never mentions any other girls and doesn't really discuss thinking of Gigi at all unless he's describing events that involve her. Keir has one of the lowest numbers of sexual thinking, with approximately three occurrences.

Sam in *Heavy Metal and You* also only thinks of one girl: Melissa. The only other girl he mentions in a romantic or sexual way is Mina, the first girl with whom he had sex. Even though he does mention her, her name only comes up as he is recollecting his first time. Sam's descriptions of Melissa are somewhat sexual, but there is also a romantic undertone which conveys the idea that his love for her has to do with more than sex. For example:

I pulled her close in my arms for another moment of worldly bliss. We held each other tightly and tumbled onto her bed, giggling and touching and falling, caught in midair. Floating. I was floating, momentarily, with the girl I adored. (p. 31)

Sam really doesn't talk about or think about sex when he's not thinking about Melissa, and has approximately eight occurrences of sexual thoughts.

Like Sam, John in *Hard Love* also only thinks of one girl. Before he meets Marisol, he doesn't think about girls or sex much at all. He states:

I can't stand it anymore, the constant talk about girls and sex. I just don't feel like thinking about that stuff. Maybe it's weird, but I'm not interested in it. I mean, it worries me a little sometimes, because I guess guys my age are supposed to be like Brian, lusting after pouty lips and big boobs. But to me, the mystery of female body parts is one I'd just as soon not solve. (p. 19)

His sexuality starts to awaken after he starts spending time with Marisol but it happens slowly. He's extremely attracted to her, though he never really talks about doing anything sexual with her. It's the little things that make him excited, such as briefly seeing her legs (because she only ever wears pants) and the feeling of her fingers brushing his forehead. He actually doesn't think about sex much at all, and has the lowest number of sexual thoughts at approximately two.

Females Initiating Sexual Contact

There are at least eight novels in which females initiate sexual contact beyond just kissing. These occurrences range from sexual touching to oral sex to intercourse. While some of the requested acts don't actually take place, all are suggested by the female characters. Some of the males are unwilling to pursue these advances because of moral

reasons (Tyler in *Twisted* and Sam in *Heavy Metal and You*) or because their hearts and minds are on other females (Diego in *The Making of Dr. Truelove*).

In *Looking for Alaska*, it is Lara who initiates the oral sex that she performs on Miles. They are sitting in the TV room at school and have just finished making out with each other when Lara asks Miles if he has ever gotten a blow job. Then she tells him she's never given one. Miles thinks of her voice "dripping with seductiveness" and says, "It was so brazen. I thought I would explode...I mean, from Alaska, hearing that stuff was one thing. But to hear [Lara's] sweet little Romanian voice go sexy all of a sudden..." (p. 126). His reference to Alaska is appropriate as she is the other female who initiates sexual contact in this novel. In fact, Alaska is the one who has to give Lara a lesson on performing oral sex before Lara can give Miles the blow job. It is later in the book when Alaska plays Truth or Dare with Miles and dares him to make out with her. She then guides his hands around her body before breaking off the contact. Alaska seems to know exactly what she's doing, and it seems the other students know this about her as well.

Rachel also initiates contact in *Where the Kissing Never Stops*. She and Walker are standing in the hall at school when one of her books slides down into the large cardigan she's wearing. Instead of pulling it out herself, she asks Walker to reach in and retrieve it. He says:

Gingerly I put my hand inside. I could feel some ribs. Under her blouse her body was warm and firm.

"Down more, I think."

"You city girls are shameless."

"Did you find it?" she whispered. We were very close together and my blood was starting to percolate.

“Unfortunately.” (p. 99-100)

Before they part ways to go to class, Walker tells her that he liked finding her book and she grins and replies, “I’ve got a whole library at home” (p. 100). Rachel sends a clear sexual message to Walker that he happily accepts.

The females in *The Making of Dr. Truelove* and *King Dork* are much more forward in their requests for sexual contact. Toni repeatedly tries to seduce Diego in *Truelove*.

Though he believes, and she later confirms, that she does it just to mess with him, she still manages to get a rise out of him. Of one occurrence he says:

She had one hand on the steering wheel and the other on my thigh for the whole ride. I readjusted my position, but I couldn’t escape ... The chorus bounced in my head for what seemed like an eternity as Toni gently scraped her fingernails over my knee ... Yet oddly enough ... I was aroused ... she’d never turn down an opportunity to use me as a human stick shift. (p. 94)

There are also descriptions of other females in Diego’s life (such as his sister Lita, his female classmates, and one of J’s girls) who don’t hesitate to tell the males what they want sexually.

In *King Dork*, it is Fiona who initiates the make out session with Tom. And when he talks to Deanna on the phone for the first time, she suggestively tells him he better come over to her place. Upon his arrival, he is immediately taken back to her bedroom where she kisses him and then performs oral sex on him. This routine happens repeatedly, even when she visits Tom in the hospital. It’s also the females who begin a competition game with each other called “Dud Chart”. Tom explains the object of the game to be:

...for each girl to score points on the chart by flirting with [dorky, nerdy guys] or making out with them in various ways. Like you’d get a certain number of points

for flirting, for kissing, for getting to different bases ... Different guys had different values: the less desirable the guy, the higher the score. It was originally supposed to be just flirting and making out, but like a lot of dare-type situations, the stakes escalated as the game went on. (p. 188)

While the girls may not be serious about being with the guys, they are still doing the initiating in each circumstance.

In *Twisted*, Bethany tries to initiate sex with Tyler at a party but he doesn't go through with it because she is drunk. Sam tells the reader in *Slam* that it is Alicia's idea for them to have sex. He doesn't describe the actual conversation or much of what exactly happens, as he's describing his thoughts and fears more than anything, but he does state that it is her idea, they're in her bedroom, and she goes to find the condom.

In *Heavy Metal and You*, Sam and Melissa are also at her house when she initiates the sexual contact. As they're having a discussion about past relationships, Sam tells Melissa that he isn't a virgin and she says that she is because she's waiting for the right guy.

Melissa then makes it clear to Sam that he is that guy. He says:

“C'mere”, she whispered, and slid across the couch ... her shirt went over her head, a movement that surprised me, but in the best possible way ... I felt my skin prickle and my muscles grow taut, and right then reality existed only in the places where our flesh touched ... Her voice came out ragged, quickly, frantically. “Make love to me, Sam.” (p. 125)

Sam denies her request and Melissa doesn't understand how he could be rejecting a request from a girl to have sex.

Two requests that aren't denied take place in *Doing It* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Deborah in *Doing It* initiates a make out session with Jonathon outside of her house shortly after their first one at the party. Jonathon recalls:

We stood there holding hands. She moved up very close to me and said, "Aren't you going to see if I run away screaming from [your penis]?" ... She came right up to me and kissed me and put her hand on it so it went up like a rocket inside my jeans. "Yum" she whispered. (p. 92)

Miss Young also initiates sex with Ben and he willingly accepts, though that is a different type of seduction as she is an adult teacher and he is her fifteen-year-old student.

As discussed previously, Mary Elizabeth initiates the sexual contact with Charlie in *Perks*. Although he is in love with Sam, he follows Mary Elizabeth's lead and makes out with her. Charlie says that they do the same things on subsequent occasions, but he doesn't say who initiates them.

Conclusion

My purpose in doing this study was to show that male characters who actually think about sex before doing it, who have questions and fears about it, who have emotional attachments to the females, and who have thoughts of things other than sex are the minority in young adult literature. I found the opposite to be true. In the twelve books that I read, 13 of the 14 male characters studied did not fit the sex-crazed male teenager stereotype. They did not think only about sex, use females just to have sex, or obsess over how to have sex. Only one (Dino in *Doing It*) showed the qualities of a male teen who only wanted sex and would do whatever he could to get it. On the contrary, most of the male characters in this study can be seen as positive role models because they

demonstrate respect for the females around them, show self control, and choose to have sex with females with whom they have emotional attachments. These characters are also relatable to teens because they deal with issues and feelings which many teens experience in their own lives.

Most of the female characters in these novels are also cast in a positive light in regards to their sexual attitudes and behaviors. They are portrayed as willing sexual partners who have their own desires. Many of them initiate sexual contact with the males, and none of them seem to be at the mercy of the boys and their hormones, as MacGregor (2004) referenced in her article. Also in contrast to MacGregor, I didn't see any evidence of females having to participate in sexual warfare with the males. The closest thing to warfare was Jackie's resistance to sex with Dino in *Doing It*, but it was due to an issue that she had within herself rather than with him. The females, as with the males, were presented as well-rounded characters in regards to sexual attitudes and behaviors. I'm unsure if the female characterization had anything to do with the fact that most of the novels' authors were males, though I do believe that the well-roundedness of the male characters could be partially contributed to their male authors. Except for Burgess' Dino and Lynch's Keir, the males displayed an appropriate balance of sexual desires and emotional involvement.

While conducting my research, I noticed a few other interesting trends. The first is that while the majority of the novels' authors were male, it was one of the two female authors who created one of the most physically-oriented male characters. Laurie Halse Anderson

wrote Tyler in *Twisted* as a boy who was almost purely in love (or lust) with Bethany because of the way she looks. He has few actual conversations with her and rarely describes something he likes about her that is not part of her physical appearance. I'm not sure if the author did this because she thinks this is how teenage boys choose the girls in which they are interested, or if that was just how the situation would have been because Bethany had never allowed Tyler to be around her enough to learn anything else about her. It also interested me that the other female author, Ellen Wittlinger of *Hard Love*, wrote her male character as one who isn't very sexual at all before he meets Marisol. He actually dislikes talking about girls and sex and is tired of hearing about it from his friend Brian. When compared to each other, John and Tyler are at opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to interest in girls and sex.

A second observation that I made is that sexual attitudes did not seem to be affected by socioeconomic status or education. The characters lived in a variety of settings: Sam in *Heavy Metal and You* lived in an expensive home in Manhattan and attended a private school; John in *Hard Love* and Keir in *Inexcusable* lived in single parent homes and attended public schools; Diego in *The Making of Dr. Truelove* lived in a nice home in Washington, D.C. with his father and doctor-mother and was the leader of the math club at his private high school; Sam in *Slam* lived with his single mother and had just started thinking he might actually be able to go to a college somewhere; and the boys of *Doing It* lived with their families in suburban homes and attended public school. Though their situations varied, none of it had any effect on the boys' sexual attitudes and behaviors. The varying determinants seemed to be the people around them, not the places.

And finally, it has been previously discussed that the media, including the Internet, is influential in the development of sexual identities in teenagers. I was surprised that only one character in the novels sought sexual information on the Internet, which is not an accurate portrayal of reality. Teenagers seek information of all types from the Internet and other forms of media, especially health information (Pattee, 2006; Hughes-Hassell, Hanson-Baldauf, and Burke, 2008). They also gain information from what they hear and see in the media.

Reflecting on the results of this study, which showed that not all young adult literature portrays male teens as sex-crazed, I now have the following questions: Are ‘real’ male teenagers really hormone-driven and sex-crazed, or is that just the image the rest of the population has of them? How many of them act this way just to fit in, and how many of them are really obsessed with engaging in sexual acts? And where do they get the idea that they need to be ‘all about sex’? Is it from music, movies, and television, or from the other males around them? Finally, can the positive male roles in literature that have been discussed in this study be used to combat the stereotypes projected on male teenagers by other teenagers and the rest of the population? All teenagers, all people in fact, deserve to be recognized for who they really are. Being a teenager is hard enough without having to deal with stereotypes and images placed on them by others, and my hope is that we *can* use literature and other positive forms of media to help male teenagers be who they really are in a safe and healthy way.

Teenagers can be hard to understand, work with, and relate to. For adults who live or work with them, it is vital that they try to understand where these young people are getting their information and examples. Along with monitoring what teens watch on TV or access on the Internet, adults need to familiarize themselves with what teens are reading. Young adult literature has the opportunity to be an active part of that media and to help shape the way teenagers think about sex. I share the opinions of Bodart, Pattee, and Stone, among others, that sex needs to be depicted and discussed in YA literature in order to give teens the opportunity to experience it vicariously and sort through their feelings on the subject before actually trying it themselves. There needs to be a variety of characters and stories presented to teens through literature in order to allow them to find situations with which they can relate and from which they can learn. As the choice of reading material is often personal and reflective of an information need or social interest, the knowledge of what a teenager is reading can open a door to a wealth of information about him or her. While this knowledge may not make it easier to actually talk with the teen, it can still help the adult stay informed and aware of any problems or issues the teen may be facing.

This study has attempted to shed light on some of the examples from which teens may get sexual attitudes and beliefs. It can be seen as a starting point in the topic, as many other studies are needed to fully understand the many aspects of this issue. Studies can also be done using the same questions but focusing homosexual male characters and their sexual relationships in YA literature; comparing female perceptions of males with male perceptions of themselves in regards to sex and vice versa; and further comparing female-

written male characters with male-written male characters in regards to sexual attitudes.

This is a topic that is broad and varied, but is important to the development of sexual attitudes and behaviors in teenagers today.

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