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"My adolescence was pretty cliche": ELA preservice teachers' perceptions of adolescence, adolescents, and their depiction in YA literature

Chea Lynn Parton

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By Chea Lynn Parton

Entitled
"My Adolescence was Pretty Cliche": ELA Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Adolescence, Adolescents, and Their Depiction in YA Literature

For the degree of Master of Science in Education

Is approved by the final examining committee:
Melanie Shoffner
Janet Alsup
Jake Burdick

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Melanie Shoffner
Approved by Major Professor(s):

Approved by: Phil Van Fossen 04/11/2015

Head of the Department; Graduate Program Date
“MY ADOLESCENCE WAS PRETTY CLICHÉ”: ELA PRESERVICE TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF ADOLESCENCE, ADOLESCENTS, AND THEIR DEPICTON IN YA LITERATURE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Chea Lynn Parton

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Science in Education

May 2015

Purdue University

West Lafayette, Indiana
“We are constantly being told that youth have lost their values, have become feral and violent, are oversexed and undereducated. No matter what the lament or explanation, adolescents are now seen as a problem.” Michael Apple, 2012, p.xiii
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Interactions with colleagues and students during my time as a secondary ELA teacher served as the impetus for this study on preservice teachers’ conceptions and perceptions about adolescence, adolescents, and their representation in YA literature. Scholars have explored and theorized adolescence as a social construct othered and marginalized by historical, economical, and political actions. The view that adolescence is constructed by society underpins this study which is rooted in grounded theory. This study pursues a better understanding of how preservice teachers conceive of their adolescent students, how they interact with those students during student teaching, and how they use their prior experience with YAL to understand adolescence. The preservice teachers in this study predominately viewed adolescence as an inherently negative experience and charged themselves as both student and practicing teachers with the task of guiding their students through it. Additionally, the preservice teachers believed that YA literature depicts adolescence and adolescents in authentic ways because YA authors can remember their own adolescence and use that as the
foundation for their texts. Implications for English education such as the use of Critical Youth Studies, a youth lens, and reflection as part of the curriculum are discussed.
INTRODUCTION

While working as a high school English teacher, I spent my lunches in the teachers’ lounge where my colleagues would bemoan the laziness, apathy, and rebellious nature of their students. When they weren’t fixated on these negative traits, they would tell success stories about students who were able to overcome their laziness and apathy to produce good work. It always troubled me. It wasn’t that I was immune to such thoughts—I was frequently frustrated by students working below their potential and what I perceived as apathy toward their education—but I seemed to have less trouble with the ‘problem’ students than they did. Perhaps it was because I believed those students weren’t problems; they had problems just like every other person in the world. They were people, and like me—their fellow person—they needed encouragement, admonishment, care, and respect.

Once, I was standing outside of my doorway high-fiving students as they entered my classroom when the teacher next door to me asked accusingly why my students always seemed to be excited to come to my class while they looked like they were “marching to their deaths” as they came to hers. I wondered if she really thought that students should be unhappy to come to class and that my students looked forward to
my class because it was easy. I held my tongue, but was tempted to answer that I treated my students like capable human beings while she—if her teachers’ lounge stories were any indication—assumed that her students were inherently flawed and incapable of the kind of thought she required of them.

Likewise, I would stand outside of my door during hall duty and hear students complain about teachers. The most frequent comments revolved around how out-of-touch they were and that teachers didn’t understand them, occasionally punctuated by a curse word or two. Probably somewhat due to my own youth and novelty, students considered me a good sounding board and would visit me during lunch and study hall to discuss the issues they were having. Their chief complaints were that certain teachers didn’t like them or understand them. Others complained about the lackluster teaching styles of some of my colleagues. On more than one occasion, students complained that my neighboring teacher hated them and refused to help them when they didn’t understand something. I never quite knew how to handle these situations. On the one hand, I wanted to act like a professional and show some sort of solidarity with my colleagues; on the other hand, I understood where they were coming from and was sympathetic to their complaints.

These experiences inspired me to wonder where this ‘us versus them’ binary came from and how we might begin to disrupt and deconstruct it. The answer to this question, in part, came in one of the first classes I took while pursuing my master’s degree. In this course, we explored ways in which teachers were depicted in fiction and film and how those depictions contributed to what Weber and Mitchell (1995) called the
cumulative cultural text of teacher. Given this new avenue of inquiry, this new lens, I
began to ponder this in the inverse. How had fiction and film contributed to a
cumulative cultural text of adolescence? I took a young adult literature course to
continue this avenue of investigation and began to see problematic depictions of
adolescents in my everyday interactions with media including TV shows, films, posts,
and memes on Facebook. Representations of adolescents and adolescence were
everywhere.

I watched TED talks on the mysteries of the adolescent brain, analyzed
characterizations of adolescents in commercials, became frustrated with their depiction
in films, and wondered if the popularity of their roles in YA literature was because
characters are typically given power (e.g., Harry Potter, Divergent, Hunger Games) or
agency (e.g., Sources of Light, Looking for Alaska, Boxers) that typically are not afforded
teen readers in reality. I found myself asking the same questions over and over again:
What is it about adolescence and adolescents that adults find particularly perplexing
and worrisome? Why do adolescents feel misunderstood? What about our culture
continues to fuel both, and is it irreparable or not? Anything that had to do with
adolescence, adolescents, or their representation in popular culture was up for
investigation and analysis.

On Facebook I came across a post by Elizabeth Gilbert (2015), of Eat, Pray, Love
fame, entitled “In Defense of Teenagers.” In it, she tells the story of being at a speaking
engagement where a teenaged girl stood up to ask her, “What advice do you have for
my generation? And where do you think we are going wrong?” Gilbert played the stern
adult and replied, “You know what’s wrong with your generation?” The young girl steeled herself for the response, and Gilbert continued, “Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I love your generation. You guys are wonderful. And don’t listen to anybody who says otherwise.” I was struck by the concern on the part of the teenage girl, the assumption that adolescents are going wrong somewhere, and the fear she displayed in waiting for Gilbert’s answer. Throughout the rest of the piece, Gilbert lists anecdotes and attributes she finds endearing and incredible about today’s adolescents. She closes the piece with an anecdote about her grandmother.

And as my 102 year-old grandmother once said to a room full of her descendants, who were complaining about KIDS THESE DAYS, “Hey! I knew ALL of you when you were 14, and you were all difficult. But you all turned out pretty good. These kids will turn out good, too.”

And suddenly, I had an idea for my thesis research.

Somewhere along the line, someone suggested that I read Nancy Lesko’s (2012) Act Your Age!. Reading it completely revolutionized the way I thought about adolescence and adolescents, and reaffirmed some of my misgivings about my experiences with the ways adults (especially my fellow teachers) characterize and (mis)understand their adolescent students. Ultimately, it inspired this project, which is why so much of the project revolves around that text. I also found that her work stands a bit lonely, with only a handful of scholars who have built research studies using her theory. The study that follows continues to contribute to and build upon that scholarship. My hope is that my research will continue to contribute to the conversation
surrounding cultural understandings of adolescence/ts and how teachers and teacher
educators can better prepare ELA preservice teachers to question their assumptions
before and during their time in the classroom.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The topics of adolescence and adolescents have long been the focus of conversations among educators, parents, authors, and scholars. The January 2015 issue of *English Journal* dedicated an entire issue to adolescence and its implications on the teaching of English. Psychologists and sociologists alike have taken to examining the stage, albeit from largely different viewpoints—psychologists focusing on the implications of physiological changes and hormones and sociologists tending to examine the implications of social construction. Likewise, there are differing opinions concerning at what age a person would be considered an adolescent. The American Psychological Association (2002) defines adolescence as the period of development between ages 10 and 19. However, because the Affordable Care Act allows young people to remain on their parents’ health insurance until the age of 26, some bloggers like Rick Moran (2013) argue that adolescence now extends from 10 to 26. More generally, a simple Google search defines adolescence as the period after puberty in which a person transitions from childhood to adulthood. Since the publication of G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence* in 1904, the concept of the transition from childhood to adulthood has been an issue examined and problematized from various perspectives and through different lenses. This study was guided by studies of the history of adolescent experiences, current
examinations of adolescence from a social constructionist perspective, and how both relate to young adult literature and the construction of adolescent identity have been considered.

**Historical Beliefs and Attitudes**

While adolescence as a popular term originated with G. Stanley Hall in the 20th century, the transition from childhood to adulthood did not. The conceptions of adolescence/ts during that transition are deeply rooted in and shaped by their historical moment. Beales (1985) examines the transition between childhood and adulthood in the 17th century, discussing the ways in which Puritan values shaped how adults viewed and interacted with children. Quoting ministers of the day, he sketches adult attitudes toward childhood and child-rearing. John Robinson wrote that children possessed in varying degrees, “a stubbornness, and stoutness of mind arising from natural pride” (Beales, 1985, p. 30) which parents were obligated to break and beat down. The result would be “humility and tractableness,” (as cited in Beales, 1985, p. 30) which parents could use as a foundation for building other virtues. Parents were encouraged to restrain children’s wills at an early age, “lest sooner than they imagine, the tender sprigs grow to that stiffness, that they will rather break than bow.” (as cited in Beales, 1985, p. 30). We believed that children should not know that they have a will of their own. However, John Robinson was not the only minister to preach or speak about childhood and childrearing during that time period. In contrast to Robinson’s advice, John Cotton encouraged his parishioners to be as little children, calling attention to positive traits of
children (e.g., humility, “innocency”, meekness, simplicity, contentment, and resting on promise and hopes) indicating that not everyone of the time period agreed on a singular view of youth or method of raising them (as cited in Beales, 1985, p.31). Despite the control or appreciation that parents were encouraged to have of their children, “the tasks of youth were thus similar to those of twentieth century adolescence: to determine what they wished to become and to obtain appropriate education or training so that they could be economically self-sufficient” (Beales, 1985, p. 36).

Constance B. Schulz (1985) examines the childhood experience in the 18th century. Unlike Beales, she begins by acknowledging that childhood experiences differed among regions of the U.S., socioeconomic status, and parental occupation. Schulz also maintains that the views of childhood and adolescence in this century were not monolithic: “The literary evidence of statute and case law combined with analysis of childrearing patterns, informs us about a wide variety of adult attitudes toward children and childhood, but does not necessarily tell us about the daily experiences of children” (Schulz, 1985, pp. 65-66). She notes that despite those differences, parental control, namely paternal control, of children was absolute, though she asserts, “The law, to be sure, recognized certain primary duties, such as protection, support, and education, that every parent owed to his children” (Schulz, 1985, pp. 64-65). As the nation continued to grow, change, and become more varied, parents’ conceptions of child-rearing and what children needed did so as well; however, Schulz acknowledges that “there is increasing evidence during the course of the 18th century that the transition from childhood to
adulthood did not take place as smoothly as adults would have liked” (Schulz, 1985, p. 74).

During the period between 1790 and 1870, the push for public education strengthened; parents and ministers were no longer the driving forces behind child and adolescent development. Barbara Finkelstein (1985) writes about the birth of public education: reformers rewriting textbooks, constructing teacher training, and initiating licensure procedures for teachers as well as politicking on laws requiring school attendance and limiting child labor. School was more readily accessible by a larger portion of the population and was perceived to check and balance school and parental teaching. She writes,

> Taken together, these two educative agencies would engage young people in a process that would link them to the community and individualize them simultaneously, leading them out from under their own baser instincts as well as society’s debasing ones, and thereby prepare them to reform the larger society into which they entered, or so the reformers hoped (Finkelstein, 1985, p. 135).

Thus, indicating reformers’ desire to see education become a source of social change and improvement.

In the beginning of the 20th century, rapid changes in the growth of the population, industry, and economy continued to fuel education reform. Cohen (1985) writes, “After 1900 the school’s major function became the fitting of the individual into the economy. By the teaching of specific skills and behavior patterns, schools would produce better and more efficient workers and citizens” (p. 283). Adolescence, or the
transition from childhood to adulthood, became a central focus and concern, leading to G. Stanley Hall’s publication of *Adolescence* in 1904. Cohen argues

> Even before the word appeared, as the title of G. Stanley Hall’s 1904 massive study, young people (that is teenagers) were becoming a defined group. Their organizations would be controlled by adults, they should be passive and not involved in adult activities. Youth was becoming more a stage of dependency, with the transition of adulthood—exit from school, entrance to the work force, departure from the family of origin, marriage, and establishment of a household—becoming regularized (p. 292).

There is a clear shift in the 20th century away from focusing on childhood to one with a much more narrow and intense focus on adolescence/ts, specifically. From 1908-1912, for example, junior high schools (housing grades 7-9), The Boy Scouts of America, The Girl Scouts, and other such groups were created to help manage and guide adolescents through what contemporary observers of adolescence characterized as “a time for grappling with growth, development, and life purpose” where it was “primarily [up] to parents and society for solutions to such a problematic time of life” (Cohen, 1985, p. 293). Later in the 1960s-70s, reformers would call for the creation of middle schools (housing grades 6-8) that would feature interdisciplinary team teaching, small learning communities, teacher advisory programs, and centers where students could catch up on needed skills. In that they fostered close communities with adults and provided extra avenues for study, Lesko (2012) argues that youth programs and middle schools are perceived to be a “powerful force to recapture youth adrift” (p. 79). Major changes in
policy and the structure of society have left a lasting impression on modern views and understandings of adolescence and adolescents. The various historical views, perceptions, and approaches to adolescence/its described by Beales (1985), Cohen (1985), Finkelstein (1985), and Schulz (1985) have informed and shaped contemporary conceptions of youth in the U.S.

**Modern Beliefs and Attitudes**

Adolescence in America developed largely out of the changing social and cultural climates of the 19th and 20th centuries (Bakan, 1971; Cohen, 1985, Lesko, 2012): “Three major social movements developed, all of which conspired to make a social fact out of adolescence: compulsory (and characteristically public) education, child labor legislation, and special legal procedures for ‘juveniles’” (Bakan, 1971, p. 981). As Vadeboncoeur (2005) suggests, these social movements (i.e., compulsory education, child labor legislation, and the juvenile justice system) were a “function of political, economic, educational and governmental discourse” that allowed adults to “impose on and negotiate with young people” (p. 6). Such movements created a separation between adult and adolescent power in politics and society writ large. Despite the separation, Giroux (1996) argues that “while pushed to the margins of political power within society, youth nonetheless become a central focus of adult fascination, desire, and authority” (p. 31). Though separated from adults in economic, educational, and governmental happenings, adults in the 21st century are still fascinated by and concerned with the adolescent experience and ‘problem.’ He also argues that despite
adult fascination with adolescence, now more than ever, adolescents have become precariously positioned at the bottom of a long list of political priorities, asserting the relations between youth and adults have always been marked by strained generational and ideological struggles, but the new economic and social conditions that youth face today, along with a callous indifference to their spiritual and material needs, suggest a qualitatively different attitude on the part of many adults toward American youth—one that indicates that the young have become our lowest national priority. (p. 31)

Because adolescents continue to maintain a separate and unequal position in social strata, some scholars have begun to argue and advocate for an interrogation of that position, what it means, and how it continues to affect not only individual teenagers but society as a whole.

According to Lesko (1996a), adolescence as a massified experience has become naturalized. Society, she claims, “has been conditioned to think that the depiction of teenagers that we see in the media is the way it should be and the way that it has always been” (p. 140). In this way, adolescence and its characteristics are often taken for granted. For example, she argues that numerous field studies confirm or begin with the assumption that friends are more important to teenagers than anything else. She critiques such a notion as a “taken-for-granted view,” (p. 153) one that massifies teens and assumes peer-orientation to be natural of all teens. Lesko (1996a) argues that we must critique these notions and work to “denaturalize” adolescence/ts by “calling into question key assumptions through rhetorical, historical, and feminist rereadings of the
production of particular knowledge about adolescents” (p. 140). By interrogating such notions of adolescence/ts, it becomes possible to see teenagers and their relationships to society in a way that might help society better understand where adult/teen relational issues come from and provide a space to think about how to change them.

One of the chief relationships Lesko (1996a) examines is that between student and teacher. Arguing that pedagogy and what science says about youth form a recursive relationship, she maintains that reexamining how society thinks about youth can have a positive impact on instruction. An emphasis on what developmental psychologists like G. Stanley Hall (1904) might call the “storm and stress” of raging hormones “positions teachers to question whether such hormonally burdened young people can respond capably to or successfully to substantive intellectual tasks” (Lesko, 1996a, p. 141). The question of capability furthers the power disparity between teachers (assumed to be capable) and students (assumed to be incapable). The power differential and negative assumptions of students can negatively effect on the learning environment. Examining this assumption could encourage more teachers to challenge their adolescent students with more higher-order-thinking activities instead of fewer. Moreover, Lesko (1996b) argues that “knowledge in secondary education also begins with conceptions of youth held by instructors, textbook authors, cooperating public school teachers, and teacher education students themselves” (p. 453). If what teachers impart to adolescent students as well as how they impart it all stem from unquestioned assumptions about those students en masse, teachers deliver an unexamined curriculum through unexamined methods. This curriculum continues to situate teachers in a “privileged, superior
position to the area of the population [they] define” (Lesko, 1996a, p. 149). This
privileged position marks “the teacher/student dichotomy unbalanced and wrought
with the tension of master/subject from the start” (p. 149). Only those adolescent
students who assimilate to the academic and adult discourse of teachers gain small
amounts of that privilege. Lesko (1996a) argues that “only those youths who are
compliant with and successful in meeting educators’ demands for how, when, and what
to learn and accept as important deemed mature and given some small measures of
freedom and responsibility” (p. 157, emphasis author’s).

In “Past, Present, and Future Conceptions of Adolescence,” Lesko (1996b) argues
that chronological age plays a large role in how people view and understand each other.
Using Bahktin’s idea of literary chronotopes, she analyzes the story of adolescent
development as a narrative with identifiable uses of time that has specific implications
for how adolescence/ts is/are easily stereotyped. She gives this example:

When we state, Rachel is 16, we communicate a world of difference. Teenagers
are deemed worlds apart from adults on the basis of age; they are said to inhabit
a different time, which is radically separate from the time of adulthood or
childhood. The teenage years are identified as tumultuous, turbulent, emotional
ones and distinguished from the presumed rationality, equilibrium, and
routinization of adulthood (Lesko, 1996b, p. 456).

Because they are worlds apart from adults in age and are still becoming, adolescents
possess a “natural inferiority” (p. 462) and maintain a status as “raw materials [that]
establishes adults as ‘engineers’ who know how to utilize raw materials to the best
advantage, who will transform those unfinished materials into productions in their own image” (p. 469). In this way, the developed are to become like the developer; once again showcasing the power disparity that exists between adolescents and adults, students and teachers.

Building on her earlier work, Lesko (2012) continues to explore these issues. In *Act Your Age!: A Cultural Reconstruction of Adolescence*, she identifies four “confident characterizations” of adolescents: (1) They ‘come of age’ into adulthood; (2) they are controlled by raging hormones; (3) they are peer-oriented; and (4) they are represented by age. It is not hard to find each of these characterizations in TV, movies, commercials, or literature.

Shows like *Saved by the Bell*, *Pretty Little Liars*, *Glee*, *The Middle*, feature teenage characters and rely on certain stereotypes (e.g., peer-oriented, rebellious, irresponsible, oversexed) to propel their plots. In *Glee*, for example, Lesko’s peer-oriented characterization is seen in the characters’ frequent changes in alliances, friendships, and relationships. Tina, one of the characters, pretends to have a stutter in order to create distance between herself and others for fear of being hurt. Another character, Rachel, struggles with her self-proclaimed “diva” nature and her desire to be liked and accepted by other members of the Glee club.

Movies like *The Fault in Our Stars*, *The Giver*, and *The Maze Runner* are silver-screen productions of stories about teens that originated in YA literature. Other films such as *Mean Girls*, *Juno*, and *Easy A* were screenplays first. In *The Giver*, Lesko’s coming of age characterization is illustrated by The Ceremony of Twelve (when characters are assigned
a career and begin their ‘adult’ lives) marks the moment adolescents enter adulthood. Likewise, Juno’s pregnancy in Juno complicates her adolescence and launches her into adulthood. In Mean Girls, Cady Heron demonstrates the peer-oriented stereotype as she struggles with her desire to be part of the ‘popular crowd’. In Easy A, Olive Penderghast also struggles with her peer-oriented ‘nature’ when she lies to a friend in order not to hurt her feelings, only to have that lie taken up by the rumor-mill, which she eventually uses to advance her social and financial standing.

Commercials also use these commonly held characterizations of teenagers to market their products. The following examples do not include the plethora of marketing campaigns for makeup, clothes, and skin products marketed directly to teenagers but are representative of Lesko’s characterizations of adolescents as peer-oriented and controlled by raging hormones. In an Allstate commercial, Mayhem, dressed as a teenage girl, is too busy with her phone and boy problems to pay attention. She crashes into another car saying, “OMG, Becky’s not even hot,” refusing to deal with the damage she has caused. In a Subaru commercial, called “Subaru Legacy vs. Male Teenager,” a teenage boy drives down the road too busy fantasizing about jumping rope with girls to notice that a garbage truck has stopped right in front of him. The Subaru has “eyesight technology” that stops the vehicle just short of the garbage truck. Both of these commercials showcase the oversexed and irresponsible nature of adolescents.

YA Literature includes texts that are about teens and marketed toward teens, but are read by adults as well. These texts focus on issues considered to be inherent to the adolescent experience (e.g., drugs, sex, bullying, relationship issues), and rely in part on
cultural assumptions about adolescence/ts to create their characters and plots. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* depicts adolescents dealing with a variety of these issues. Charlie is socially awkward, a wallflower, and begins experimenting with drugs, alcohol, and sex upon meeting and befriending step-siblings Sam and Patrick. His shy nature and desire to have friends are representative of Lesko’s peer-oriented confident characterization; the experimentation with drugs, sex, and alcohol are considered rebellious and risky behaviors in the teenaged population, thus illustrating the inability to make good choices due to raging hormones and are representative of the adolescent age group.

The “confident characterizations” (pp. 2-5) Lesko (2012) describes have become a major part of cultural artifacts and consumption. As a result, they have been naturalized as part of the adolescent experience, existing without question. Walking through history and the various institutions and systems society has developed in order to serve youth, Lesko (2012) once again calls for the critique of these characterizations and the way society reifies them.

These “confident characterizations” (Lesko, 2012, pp. 2-5) act as a type of panoptical prison (Foucault, 1975) whereby adolescents constantly subjected to the adult gaze internalize the gaze and begin measuring and policing themselves. Lesko (2012) argues that this practice can be seen in the way that adolescents constantly measure themselves against what adults have constructed adolescence to be and mean, which, she contends, may not be a good thing because “we have created a measuring stick of rebellion, apathy, sexual precocity, etc. What we assume adolescence to be,
they internalize and police their performance” (Lesko, 2012, pp. 94-95). In essence, adolescents perform the script adults write for them, which continues to further the chasm between the two, maintaining the “fixed opposition between adults and youth approaching the permanent opposition of the colonizer and the colonized” (p. 110). Moreover, the panoptical gaze, Lesko argues, renders youth in caricature: “[Adults] may watch and comment on adolescence with detachment and humor. Thus the characters in the narrative of adolescence may easily lose their humanity and become stereotypes” (p. 113). The loss of humanity and stereotyping she describes continue to yield clear implications for the way adults and teenagers, teachers and students, relate to one another and learn together.

Building on Lesko’s (1996a, 1996b, 2012) work, other scholars have investigated how future teachers’ perceptions and conceptions of adolescence/ts affect their thoughts about pedagogy as well as their current/future students. Finders (1999) uses a narrative inquiry approach to tease out how preservice teachers’ conceptions of adolescence/ts might function to regulate their pedagogical decisions. The theme of control emerged and continued to be a focus of the preservice teachers’ comments: “My greatest concern about teaching middle school students is not being able to have control of the class” (p. 252) and “I worry about the maturity level, as far as not being able to discipline them” (p. 252). Through interviews and coursework, Finders found that “left to their own devices, preservice teachers have little more than a set of prepackaged expectations and ways of interpreting supplied by our culture” (p. 259). She then begins to question and interrogate teacher preparation programs saying,
“Rather than leave the ‘texts’ of adolescence unexamined, we need to teach preservice teachers to explore how such texts constrain classroom practices and how such texts construct a self in the classroom culture” (p. 260), ultimately following Lesko’s (2012) call to begin critiquing the naturalized discourse surrounding adolescence/ts.

Lewis and Petrone (2010, 2012) build on both Lesko and Finders work by examining preservice teachers’ understandings of adolescence/ts as well as how those understandings affect pedagogy and curriculum. In their 2010 study, they investigate ELA preservice teachers’ conceptions of adolescence/ts and how those views affect curricular decisions. They recognize that age and biology are factors in adolescence, but that preservice teachers’ understanding of adolescence/ts is affected by other factors:

Examining adolescence as socially constructed does not suggest that people do not advance chronologically through the ages associated with this life stage, but rather that the ways that this period of time in people’s lives is understood is always contingent on ways of knowing and reasoning available at any one particular time and place (Lewis and Petrone, 2010, p. 399).

Because ways of knowing are affected by time and place, adolescence is not a universal concept or understood the same way the world over, making it a “social and historically constructed entity” more so than a “scientifically verifiable truth” (p. 399). Working under the assumption that “how adolescence is understood significantly affects the ways young people are advocated for/with, intervened on behalf of, and organized and taught in schools” (p. 398), Lewis and Petrone (2010) explore preservice teachers’ conceptions of adolescence, the connections preservice teachers make between
fictional teen characters and their implied adolescent students, and how those conceptions and connections inform the creation of curricular activities.

Using assignments collected from students in Lewis’s *Literature for Middle/High School Teachers* course, they collected and analyzed preservice teachers’ reading responses as well as the curricular activities they designed to go with the readings. Overall, Lewis and Petrone (2010) found that participants primarily understood adolescence to be a time of important identity formation as well as a dangerous time of life. They also found that participants valued YA literature as a “vehicle for transformation and real-life connection”; participants’ curricular choices were made in order to facilitate student engagement with texts in order to help them make sense of themselves as adolescents. (p. 401).

The preservice teachers created curricular activities out of their own attitudes, understandings, and values, which, as Finders (1999) demonstrated, are “prepackaged expectations” (p. 259). As a result of the study and findings, Lewis and Petrone (2010) also worked to rethink teacher education, arguing that “preservice and practicing teachers might benefit from developing instruction and curriculum by beginning with the perspective that young people are producers of and participants in varied and rich cultural practices” (p. 407). Ultimately, they advocate for “a view of teaching young people and preparing teachers to work with young people that begins by calling into question the very nature of how we come to know who it is we are setting out to teach” (407).
In another study, Lewis and Petrone (2012) examined preservice teachers’ reasoning about their future students. Using Critical Youth Studies (i.e., problematizing dominant understandings of adolescence in order to draw attention to the consequences of these understandings for young people as well as to rethink subject positions available for youth in society) as a theoretical framework, they investigated the ways their preservice participants thought about the population of people they would be teaching. They examined relationships between participants’ conceptions of their prospective students, their thinking about the function of English, and their own identities as teachers. The systems of reasoning that serve as the foundation for participants’ conceptions of their future students and how those conceptions affected their thinking about English, and their roles as teachers were also a focus of the study.

Seeking to denaturalize the normalized discourse that surrounds adolescence with preservice English teachers, Lewis and Petrone (2012) found that preservice participants conceived their future adolescent students from a deficit perspective that situated adolescents as “vulnerable, susceptible, and in need of particular forms of adult intervention” (p. 256). Preservice teachers understood their English content and roles as teachers to help their students navigate through adolescence (which they perceived to be a tumultuous time in life). They also drew upon systems of reasoning to create distance between themselves and their future students. Lewis and Petrone (2012), again, turn their thoughts to English teacher education as a way to help future teachers interrogate and denaturalize commonly held conceptions of adolescence and adolescents, explaining, “by examining common, naturalized discursive practices, it is
possible to disrupt the systems of reasoning preservice teachers have formed and are forming about adolescence and adolescents in terms of teacher” (p. 283).

Lesko (1996a, 1996b, 2012), Finders (1999), and Lewis and Petrone (2010, 2012) all take issue with historical and current cultural constructions and understandings of adolescence and adolescents. Lesko’s work lays the foundation for work in this area by examining how history and social movements have contributed to U.S. cultural conceptions of adolescence. Finders, Lewis, and Petrone build upon Lesko’s work to examine how historical and cultural constructions of adolescence/ts affect how preservice teachers reason and think about their future students as well as influence curricular decisions.

**YA Literature and Adolescent Identity**

Concluding her investigation into the way youth is socially constructed, Lesko (2012) advocates for a new approach to viewing adolescence/ts. Maintaining her position that we need to rethink how adults situate adolescents in society, she writes:

> Despite the risks of doing so, I think we have to advocate in a way that undermines the monolithic view of adolescents as supposedly all the same and fundamentally different from adults. We must move between and against the confident characterizations of youth, which involves including teenagers as active participants (not tokens) in educational and other public policy deliberations” (p. 186, emphasis author’s).
Undermining the monolithic view of adolescents can be done, in part, through literature featuring adolescent protagonists in a variety of different experiences and contexts. Spacks (1981) argues that stories yield a wealth of information about ourselves, our culture, and how we approach and understand certain aspects of both. She writes:

Fiction helps to focus shifting conceptions of the important, and adolescence, in our conception, is a time when important things happen. Novels, of the past and present, document the conceptualization through which society comes to terms with its young and the ways society assigns value ... Comparable distortions inform the literature of adolescence, shape the myths with whose aid we purport to understand the young. Examining those myths, we examine ourselves (p. 17).

Recent work on the use of YAL in secondary and higher education, as well as how it contributes to identity development, does just this.

Encouraging teen and adult readers alike to read such texts through a youth lens (Petrone, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2014) exposes issues with the way we view adolescence/ts in the same way that reading through a feminist lens exposes issues with viewing gender as a natural set of behaviors to be expected of women and men (Petrone, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2014). Because young adult literature (YAL) is often connected to adolescent identity formation (Alsup, 2010), YAL and the youth lens can be particularly useful in helping students and teachers come to new understandings of adolescent experiences.
In Alsup’s (2010) edited volume *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity across Cultures and Classrooms: Contexts for the Literary Lives of Teens*, the authors pose important questions and offer thoughts considering YAL and adolescent identity development. In the introduction, Alsup agrees with Jerome Bruner’s (2002) assertion that it is through narrative that we create and recreate our selves wondering, “So, given the focus on identity development during adolescence, and the importance of building narratives of the self, might not adolescence be the perfect time to read and explore literary narratives that encourage critical reflection?” (p. 4). While she and the other authors seem to advocate for the use of YAL in classrooms for this very reason, she also wonders, “Should teachers teach literature in order to support the identity growth and development of teens, or even to provide a sort of bibliotherapy? Or is this type of approach inappropriate, ineffective, and even dangerous?” (p. 8). In the chapters following the questions outlined in the introduction, various authors continue to explore the question of how YA texts may affect identity formation in adolescent readers (e.g., serve to disrupt or reify commonly held constructions of adolescence) as well as whether or not there is space in the classroom to teach YA literature.

Focusing on multicultural issues, Dangora (2010), Kuo (2010), Gilligan (2010), Anati (2010), Broz (2010), and Saldaña, Jr. (2010) argue the importance of portraying marginalized populations (i.e., African-American, Chinese, LGBTQ, Arabic, and Latino/a) and stories that reflect their experiences, highlighting the incorrect assumption that adolescence is monolithic while simultaneously attacking the stereotypes assigned to those various groups. Although these chapters speak to Lesko’s (2012) assertion
concerning variety in youth experiences, many still hold to the confident characterization that adolescents are coming of age into adulthood and into an identity that will be solidified once they breach that threshold. Gilligan (2010) argues

Fortunately, for the teenager, adolescence is widely regarded within contemporary society as a time when one is expected to assume various guises and personae. No one truly expects an adolescent to select an identity and maintain it for very long, and various aspects of the culture surrounding the adolescent exert variable degrees of influence on his or her identity development (p. 47).

It may be true that this is a widely regarded view; however, other scholars (Lesko, 1996a, 1996b, 2012; Petrone, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2014, 2015) would encourage questioning why it is that no one expects an adolescent to have a concrete identity and how that affects cultural attitudes toward adolescents. Why is it natural to assume that adults will have concrete identities while adolescents will not, and how do we see that naturalized discourse at work in YA texts?

Zdilla (2010) problematizes the notion that all YAL presents an authentic narrative of adolescent experience by recognizing the role of adults in its publication and labeling: “In American society today, YAL seems to be most often defined by adults for their specific purposes” (p. 194). If adults are writing the stories and defining the genre, is this not another example of the ways that adults construct the teenage experience? How then are readers to use such texts in pursuit of understanding youth experience and what it means to be an adolescent? Sarigianides, Lewis, & Petrone
(2015) argue that using a youth lens to question the representations of adolescent characters in such texts functions in the same way that we use other such lenses (e.g., feminist, critical race theory) to examine the canonical works taught in secondary classrooms. Using a critical youth lens with YAL in classrooms would function much like the use of a feminist lens to examine Chopin’s *The Awakening* or a postcolonial lens to interrogate representations of whiteness and blackness in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. All lenses lead students to question the representations of certain characters and systems in a way that disrupts the naturalized discourse surrounding the places of women/men, colonizer/colonized, and adult/adolescent in society, ultimately helping them complicate those natural binaries and social hierarchies that society uses to order and organize itself.

Carlin Borsheim-Black (2015) illustrates examples of using a youth lens to read various depictions of adolescents. Though the examples she gives come from activities used with her preservice teachers, she maintains that they can be adapted for use in secondary classrooms, which she argues is incredibly important:

> Critiquing dominant images of adolescence with secondary students is important for its potential to empower students to question underlying ideologies of texts, reflection on—and perhaps resisting—ways they, as adolescents themselves, experience limiting notions of adolescents/ce in their own lives (p. 30).

With students, Borsheim-Black (2015) examines assumptions about adolescence/ts through drawing and analysis of popular culture (e.g., commercials, films, and YAL), ultimately making “visible the social construction of adolescence, the ubiquity of
problematic images of adolescence in media and popular culture, and the ways YAL often communicates didactic messages to adolescent readers about conforming to social expectations” (p. 33). Using a youth lens to examine cultural artifacts—like TV, movies, and YAL—and the ways they present and depict adolescents and the adolescent experience is crucial to interrogating and disrupting the naturalized discourse that continues to reify commonly held characterizations of that life stage and the people in it.

**Challenges in Rethinking Adolescence/**

While recognizing and disrupting commonly held attitudes and beliefs about adolescence and adolescents is recognizably valid, in some ways, it is difficult to accept as such. In interacting with adolescents, like with any other stereotype, it is easy to make generalizations and project the characteristics of one adolescent onto other adolescents. The ease of labeling people in groups leads people to confidently characterize adolescents as naturalized stereotypes. Finders (1999) notes this very issue:

> The stereotyped image of the early adolescent was so pervasive that when I discussed this singular image with others, the most common reaction was ‘Well, it’s true.’ ‘Raging hormones’ came up in virtually every conversation I have had about early adolescents” (p. 259).

Disrupting something so naturalized is difficult, but Sarigianides, Lews, & Petrone (2015) caution against these kinds of naturalized attitudes, explaining
Many teens do seem to behave irrationally, irresponsibly, and as though they are bound by the hormone rushes of their bodies. However, we should question to what extent youth are simply showing us what we expect of them when they behave in these conventional ways (p. 17).

They also explain that just because a certain adult’s or teacher’s adolescent experience was not like those depicted or affirmed by society, it is still possible they could have ingested those common constructions and could/will enact those beliefs about young people in their interactions with them.

Another difficulty in denaturalizing the discourse surrounding adolescence and adolescents is that it can make adults feel unnecessary, especially teachers who feel one of their primary roles is to guide their students through the turbulence of adolescence. Though the thought that youth might not need adults as much as we think they do or should can be unsettling, it should not discourage adults from the process of reimagining adolescents: “Re-imagining adolescents as capable, knowledgeable, complex, and contradictory—affordances we allow for adults—affects one’s position in relation to youth in the classroom and in the world” (Sarigianides, Lews, & Petrone, 2015, p. 18). This does not negate the fact that youth do still need guidance, but that guidance need not rely on the stereotypes and constructions of adolescence/ts currently in place. Instead, “the teaching of literature can rely on the capacities of youth to explore and articulate their multifaceted understandings of the self and the world” (Sarigianides, Lews, & Petrone, 2015, p. 18). Despite our various ways of justifying the validity of the position adolescents currently hold in society, critiquing, criticizing, and
interrogating how and why that position came to be, is an important step forward in reimagining adolescents as members and active participants in society.

Tracing the developing attitudes and beliefs towards childhood and adolescence through history (Beales, 1985; Shulz, 1985; Finkelstein, 1985; Cohen, 1985) and into today allows us to see our cultural inheritance. Though situated in centuries that may seem antiquated in terms of thought and custom, the history explored here has had a lasting impact on the way society views, treats, and understands adolescence/ts today. Coming to a critical understanding of the ways in which adolescence is culturally constructed, preservice teachers, inservice teachers, and teacher educators must consider the history of that culture and the ripples that still echo in this post-modern era. Moreover, working to understand how that historical legacy has contributed to the naturalized discourse surrounding adolescence/ts enables preservice teachers, inservice teachers, and teacher educators to question and disrupt that discourse, ultimately affecting how they think about, understand, and interact with adolescent students (Lesko, 2012; Lewis and Petrone, 2010, 2012; Sarigianides, Lews, & Petrone, 2015; Borsheim-Black, 2015).
METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach of the study was qualitative and relied heavily on grounded theory as outlined by Creswell (2007), the key idea being that ideas and theories generated from the study are grounded in the data gathered from participants. As Weber’s (1946) work emphasizes, researchers are not free of bias and assumption. The grounded theory approach is most suitable for this study in order to decrease the chance that my own assumptions of adolescents and adolescence (which for the purposes of this study I define broadly as the transition from youth to adulthood between the ages of 10 and 26) would interfere with and skew my understandings of the data collected. Rather, in this case, the data itself is the driving force behind analysis and the source of the story it tells. The study focused on two research questions: “What beliefs, attitudes, and opinions do ELA student teachers hold about adolescents?” and “How do ELA student teachers use prior experience with young adult literature (YAL) to understand adolescence?”. 
Participants

The participants of this study were undergraduates enrolled in a student teaching seminar course at a large Midwestern research university. Twelve students participated in the study, five of whom were White males and six were White females. While all 12 participated in the pre-survey, one student was absent for the post survey. Of the initial 12, five students (three female, two male) agreed to participate in one-on-one interviews. Four of the interviewees were placed in semi-urban middle schools for student teaching while the fifth was placed in a large suburban high school.

Data Collection

Data for the study was collected via two surveys, one administered prior to participants’ student teaching experiences and one after, as well as from 10 interviews averaging 30 minutes each. Interviews were conducted under Kvale’s (1996) traveler metaphor in which the interviewer sees herself as “a traveler on a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home” (p. 4). Rather than ask structured questions, leading participants toward a desired destination, interviews were expeditions of exploration. Topics and questions came up organically to allow for unexpected discoveries or at the very least let the preservice teachers’ responses tell the story rather than my questions. Interviews were also informed by active interviewing techniques outlined by Holstein and Gubrium (1997) in which the “objective is not to dictate interpretation, but to provide an environment conducive to the production of the range and complexity of meanings that address relevant issues” (p. 123).
A survey (see Appendix A) of 15 multiple choice questions and three short answer questions was administered six weeks prior to student teaching. Designed to gather initial data surrounding my research questions, the survey consisted of two sections focused on attitudes about adolescence. The first section asked students to agree or disagree with listed statements proclaiming certain attitudes about adolescence. Students were given only choices of ‘agree’ or ‘disagree. The statements on the survey were as follows:

- Adolescence is a difficult time period of development.
- Adolescence is created by society.
- Adolescents are inherently rebellious.
- Teenagers participate in dangerous behaviors.
- Adolescents cannot control their impulses.
- Adolescents are generally apathetic when it comes to schoolwork.
- Adolescents are accurately depicted in YA literature.
- Adolescents should be given more responsibility.
- Adolescents should be treated more like adults.
- Adolescents' hormones negatively impact their ability to think critically.
- Adolescents have low self-esteem.
- Adolescence is a way that adult society keeps teens from having too much power.
- Friends are more important to teenagers than anything else.
• Teens have important skills, talents, and things to say and should be able to share them with the community.

• Teenagers need to be protected from themselves.

The second section of the survey asked preservice teachers to respond to three short answer questions about adolescence:

• How would you describe your own adolescence?

• How would your teachers describe you as an adolescent?

• Name a few YA texts you’ve read. In what ways do you feel they (in)accurately described and depicted the adolescent experience?

The survey was administered and collected anonymously on the first day of participants’ student teaching seminar course.

After completing their student teaching practicum, the students completed a second survey consisting of eight multiple choice questions and two short answer questions. Multiple choice questions included similar questions to that of the first; however, from rough coding of the initial data, I determined that some questions could be eliminated in order to narrow the focus of my inquiry. The statements on the post-survey were:

• Adolescence is a difficult time period of development.

• Adolescence is created by society.

• Adolescents are inherently rebellious leading them to participate in dangerous behaviors.
• Adolescents cannot control their impulses.
• Adolescents are generally apathetic when it comes to schoolwork.
• Adolescents are accurately depicted in YA literature.
• Adolescents should be given more responsibility.
• Adolescents should be treated more like adults.

On the post survey, students were given choices of ‘agree,’ ‘disagree,’ and ‘no opinion.’

The ‘no opinion’ option was added in an effort to determine the degree to which students considered the complexity of each statement as well as the strength of their responses when they did agree/disagree.

The second section of the final survey was comprised of two short answer questions about texts they taught and their developing understanding of adolescence/ts:

• Identify a text you read with your students that portrayed adolescence in some way and briefly discuss the authenticity of the portrayal.
• How has student teaching influenced your understanding of adolescence/ts?

I conducted and recorded individual interviews with five preservice teachers twice during the course of their student teaching experience. Two interviews were conducted per preservice teacher, one at the beginning of the student teaching experience and one at the end in order to gain more insight into the ways participants characterized and interacted with adolescence/ts. Unlike the surveys, one-on-one interviews allowed access to richer data. During the interviews, more time was allotted
for participants to respond with more depth to the questions I asked. Interviews were semi-structured in that some questions were prepared beforehand; however, following the traveler metaphor (Kvale, 1996), other questions were allowed to emerge during the course of the conversations.

In the first interview conducted at the beginning of the preservice teachers’ student teaching experience, examples of questions included “What are some of your past experiences with teenagers?,” “What do you expect from your students?,” and “Why do you want to work with adolescents?” In the second and final interview with participants, questions included “How do you think your expectations of students changed during your student teaching?,” “What did you enjoy most/least about working with adolescents?,” and “What do you think students taught you about adolescence/ts?” Topics in all interviews included issues surrounding attitudes toward adolescence/ts, interactions with adolescence/ts, and YA depictions of adolescence/ts.

Data Analysis

As data was collected from the surveys and interviews, I used open coding to generate major categories central to the questions guiding the study. Inductive coding (Creswell, 2007) revealed two major codes concerning the preservice teachers’ characterizations of adolescents: Deficit Characterizations and Positive Characterizations. Examples of responses in Deficit Characterizations are don’t know what they are, very impressionable, rebellious, vulnerable, and don’t like school. Examples of responses in Positive Characterizations are caring, compassionate, complex,
and need to be heard more. From these initial central codes, each category was further coded, breaking the initial categories into smaller properties. The codes that emerged from Deficit Characterizations included: (a) Coming of Age into Adulthood, (b) Controlled by Hormones, (c) Peer-oriented, (d) Represented by Age, and (e) School. Properties emerging from the positive categories included: (a) Intellectually Reflective, (b) Good Citizens, (c) Caring and Ethical People, and (d) Relationship to School.

After the initial separation of data using the refined codes, the data was revisited in order to examine the consistency of coding as well as the viability of the codes. For instance, initially I coded the characterization vulnerable as a part of the Peer-oriented category, which Lesko (2012) describes as “strongly oriented to peer’s ideas and influences” (p. 3). Upon reflection, I realized that vulnerability does not only signify being vulnerable to one’s peers as in Lesko’s definition, thus I determined that it was better suited for the Represented by Age category because adolescents are not only considered to be vulnerable to peer pressure but also to other aspects of society as well. I also initially began using the code “en route to a lifetime of meaningful work” in breaking the positive codes into their properties but determined this to be redundant because engaging in meaningful work contributes to good citizenship.

Following the same procedure, I coded the data concerning participants’ attitudes toward the depiction and construction of adolescents in YAL. Initial coding here also revealed two general categories: positive attitudes and negative attitudes. Examples of positive attitudes included represents common experiences adolescents go through and captures relatable issues. Examples of negative attitudes included glorifies
less than desirable actions, a lot of YA is worst-case scenario, and concerned by the focus of suicide, drugs, and sex. Because the responses given in response to this question were so similar and smaller in number, further categorization did not yield further insights and thus participants’ responses remained separated into only the two major categories. Again, codes were revisited in order to examine the consistency and viability of the codes. As discussed in the following section, this coding procedure and analysis were used to determine participants’ views, conceptions, and understandings of adolescence/ts as well as their fictional depictions in YAL.
FINDINGS

The study revealed three major findings: (1) The preservice teachers predominately considered adolescence (including their own) a negative experience. (2) The preservice teachers’ conceptions of how adults view adolescents was conflicted. (3) The majority of preservice teachers viewed YA literature as relatively true to adolescent experiences, making it relatable to students, and therefore a positive addition to their classrooms.

It is important to mention before discussing these findings that many of the preservice teachers acknowledged that it is “unfair to lump adolescents together,” that there is a diversity of experiences unique to individual adolescents. However, at the same time, they provided responses that are grounded in the view that adolescence is a universal experience. Despite the awareness that adolescence is not universal, preservice teachers’ responses to questions still generalized adolescents.

It is also important to note that the findings I discuss are representative of the majority of preservice teachers in the study, reflecting the most common and heavily prevalent ideas that permeated their responses to both interview and survey questions. Although not every preservice teacher completely ascribed to the same understandings of adolescence and adolescents, the data discussed describes most of the preservice teachers and is therefore considered to be significant.
Survey Data

Because experiences shape how we view and understand the world around us (Freire & Macedo, 1987), the way the preservice teachers characterized their own adolescence, as well as how they thought their high/middle school teachers would characterize them as adolescents, provided insight into the characterizations of adolescence/ts outlined in the interview portion of the study. Essentially, the data revealed an initial snapshot of how preservice teachers have ingested and assimilated the culturally naturalized discourse surrounding adolescence. Likewise, the (in)accuracies the preservice teachers reported in YAL on the pre-survey gave me a general sense of how they understood YAL’s representation of adolescence and adolescents before I began individual interviews. After rough coding, these insights helped me determine what topics and questions I wanted to discuss with the preservice teachers during their interviews.

The first items of both pre- and post- surveys asked students to agree or disagree with certain statements about adolescence and adolescents. Two questions on the pre-survey yielded one hundred percent consensus among the preservice teachers. All of the preservice teachers agreed that “adolescence is a difficult time period of development” and that “teens have important skills, talents, and things to say and should be able to share them with the community.” A majority of surveys revealed that students did not agree that adolescence is a social construct. They also disagreed that “adolescence is a way that adult society keeps teens from having too much power”.
The rest of the data revealed that the preservice teachers conceived of adolescence in a complicated and complex way. They agreed with some of the deficit statements such as “teenagers participate in dangerous behaviors” and “adolescents have low self-esteem,” which correspond to the more monolithic view of adolescence as a developmental stage rather than a social construct. However, they also agreed with statements like, “adolescents should be treated more like adults,” which question their current position in society in the social constructionist tradition. Likewise, the preservice teachers disagreed with some of the statements that cast adolescents in a negative light, like “adolescents are generally apathetic when it comes to schoolwork.” While they accepted some of the deficit and negative characterizations presented on the survey, the preservice teachers did not accept all of them, exposing that their attitudes and beliefs about adolescence are more complex than might initially be assumed.

On the post-survey, I revised the initial statements in order to gain better insight into the complexity of the preservice teachers’ views, narrowing the number of statements to focus more heavily on those that would reveal nuances in that complexity. I also included the option of selecting “no opinion” to emphasize the strength of their belief in the statements they selected the discreet agree or disagree options. The number of “no opinions” selected for particular statements also suggests an unwillingness to answer definitively one way or another on some of the questions, indicating that a statement is more complicated than a simple agree/disagree response. The only question where preservice teachers answered
definitively that they agreed with the statement was “adolescence is a difficult time period of development.” As in the pre-survey, this acknowledges a predominately negative view of the transition into adulthood. The only statement that received a mixed response but for which no one selected the no opinion option was “adolescents cannot control their impulses.” A majority of the preservice teachers disagreed. However, regardless of the choice preservice teachers selected, that none of the preservice teachers selected the “no opinion” option suggests all of the preservice teachers felt strongly about the choice they selected. Because the rest of the statements featured “no opinion” selections, a degree of unwillingness to reduce the issues mentioned to such a simple answer was evidenced.

Conceptions of Preservice Teachers’ Adolescence

The short answer questions further explored the preservice teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about adolescence, adolescents, and the authenticity of their depiction in YAL. The first short answer question asked students to describe their own adolescence. Their responses were coded using three major codes: deficit characterizations, identity formation, and cultural norms.

The deficit characterizations code was defined by responses in which the preservice teachers referred to themselves as lacking in some way during that stage of their lives. The preservice teachers predominantly referred to negative aspects of their adolescent experience. All five of them mentioned at least one negative aspect of their adolescence, echoing commonly held conceptions about the “storm and
stress” of that particular time of development, describing adolescence as “difficult” and “rough.” They also mentioned self-esteem issues, bullying, rebellion, and bad decision-making, again echoing societal conceptions of the difficulty of that age.

The identity formation code was defined by responses that referred to adolescence as a period of identity development. Echoing the commonly held conception of adolescence as a ‘coming of age’, the preservice teachers responded that it was a time of finding who they were, finding where they “fit in,” and that, at the time, they “had no idea who [they] wanted to be.”

The cultural norms code was defined by responses that included references to the existence of a normative adolescent experience. A few preservice teachers described their adolescence as normal. One preservice teacher described her adolescence as “on par with what society considers ‘the norm’,” another as “very normal and average,” and another as “pretty cliché.” None of the students defined what ‘the norm’ is or what would make their experience cliché, thus highlighting their assumption and acknowledgment of a culturally defined and accepted conception of adolescence.

To end their responses, most of the preservice teachers mentioned what they characterized as positive things about their adolescent experiences, namely that they have “grown up a lot since then,” they “learned their lessons,” and they “learned from [bad choices] which prepared [them] for adulthood.” While the preservice teachers believed these to be positive statements concerning their adolescences, such statements actually continue to reveal their conception of
adolescence in a deficit model. The positive aspect of the statements is overcoming and learning from bad adolescent decisions in order to make it out of adolescence and into adulthood, which situates adolescence as a negative means to an end rather than valuable in and of itself.

*Teachers’ Conceptions of Preservice Teachers’ Adolescence*

Because the preservice teachers were still technically (by age) considered adolescents themselves, I wanted to see how they would characterize their adolescence from a ‘more adult’ perspective. In order to get an idea of how preservice teachers understood how those who are ‘more adult’ than themselves would characterize adolescents, I asked them to tell me how their middle/high school teachers would describe them as adolescents. None of the preservice teachers gave exact quotes from their teachers; instead they answered with what they expected their teachers might say. Like their descriptions of their own adolescence, preservice teachers’ assumptions of how their teachers would describe them as adolescents were largely negative. They imagined their teachers would characterize them as odd, mean, quiet, and shy. One preservice teacher said that her teachers would characterize her as “desperate to be included in anything by anyone.” Along with these characterizations, the preservice teachers thought that their teachers would say they were good/bad students, bright, and quiet/too talkative, indicating that teachers’ understanding of their adolescent students was dichotomous and revolved around work ethic, intelligence, and social behavior.
YA Literature’s Conceptions of Adolescence

Interested in yet another aspect of adolescent construction and conception, I asked the preservice teachers to reflect upon how they felt YA literature (in)accurately describes and depicts the adolescent experience. Because YA literature arises from and depicts culture in certain ways, preservice teachers were asked to list some YA titles that they have read and describe how they perceive them to render accurate or inaccurate depictions of adolescence. The titles they listed reflected mostly current and popular selections including *The Fault in Our Stars, Paper Towns, Looking for Alaska, An Abundance of Katherines, Eleanor & Park, Perks of Being a Wallflower, Harry Potter, Thirteen Reasons Why, The Hunger Games, A Monster Calls, The Miseducation of Cameron Post, Speak*, and *Twilight*.

Their responses concerning the (in)accuracies of the texts on the survey provided a broader baseline for the preservice teachers’ attitudes toward the ways in which the adolescent experience is presented in YAL. After coding their initial responses, I had a better idea of what issues I wanted to discuss during the interview portion of the study.

Overall, the preservice teachers reported that YAL offered more accuracies than inaccuracies which coincided with their own conceptions and beliefs. They listed accuracies that largely reflected their characterizations of their own adolescent experiences and felt that the YA texts they had read “depict experiences that correlate with common adolescent experiences like love, death, bullying, resisting authority, friends, etc.” Others felt that YA novels illustrate adolescence accurately
as a time of self-discovery saying, “I think they address how we are all trying to figure out who we are and where we fit in,” which correlates to the identity formation answers given to the first question.

The preservice teachers were not without their reservations, though. They took issue with content, characterization, and morals. Some were wary of the way some YA texts “end up condoning bad choices” and set “a dangerous standard,” suggesting that the content in some YA texts glorifies the issues and choices that end up perpetuating those problems in the adolescent population. Others took issue with the “larger-than-life arc” that situates the main characters as special and “very polarized—good or bad—rather than complicated as in real life.” This view points to a perceived lack of realism and suggests that adolescents in fiction are essentialized whereas reality is much more complex than the plot, setting, and characters of a novel. Preservice teachers also found it problematic that “some stories act like a few steps will fix adolescent issues,” which affirms that adolescents have issues that need to be fixed but, in reality, are not that easily fixed.

While each of these three questions asked the preservice teachers to comment on adolescence from different angles (i.e., their own experience, the teachers’ conceptions of their experiences, the depiction of adolescence in YAL), their responses when taken together reveal certain beliefs and attitudes they carry about adolescence/ts as they prepare to be in the classroom with adolescent students during student teaching. Using this initial data, I designed questions for the
interview process to incite deeper discussion concerning the preservice teachers’ attitudes and beliefs.

**Interview Data**

As with the surveys, interview questions explored the preservice teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about adolescence/ts and their depiction in YA literature. Much like in the pre-surveys, preservice teachers’ responses during interviews reflected an overall negative and deficit attitude toward adolescence/ts but a positive attitude toward YA texts and their portrayal of the adolescent experience. During the interviews, the preservice teachers did acknowledge some flaws with commonly held perceptions of adolescence and adolescents but, in general, the preservice teachers responded to questions with similar attitudes to the deficit characterizations prevalent in their descriptions of their own adolescence and in U.S. society.

In both the first and second interviews, I asked the preservice teachers to perform a free word association exercise in which they were to say the first words and/or phrases that came into their minds upon hearing the words adolescence and/or adolescents. After transcribing both interviews and cataloging all of the words and phrases each of them listed in their responses to the prompt as well as throughout the rest of their responses, I initially broke them down into two categories: deficit characterizations and positive characterizations.
Adolescence as a Negative Experience

In the first interview, the preservice teachers listed 61 characterizations of adolescence in total, 46 of which were deficit (only three of these were descriptive of the stage, while the others referred to adolescents experiencing the stage) and the remaining 15 were positive. Deficit characterizations positioned adolescents as negative and lacking in some way. Examples included responses referring to adolescents as impressionable, vulnerable, and unsure of where they fit in, which cast them as lacking the ability to make wise decisions and resist peer and other societal pressures. Some of their responses were put forth as positive aspects of adolescents, but still situated adolescents within a deficit model. Examples included phrases such as can surprise you, smarter than people think, and understand some things better than adults do. All of these responses, though they position adolescents in a positive light, still operate in a deficit model in that they are exceptions. If adolescents “can surprise you” (emphasis mine), the assumption is that they typically behave in a way that does not. While some of their responses still situated adolescents in a deficit model, the preservice teachers did offer some positive characterizations. Some preservice teachers referred to adolescents as caring, compassionate, and need to be heard more. While the preservice teachers did offer some positive conceptions of adolescents, they were not significant by themselves because the data more strongly illustrated the lack of positive characteristics. Therefore, I will not discuss those positive characterizations in depth.
In the second interview, I began with the codes used in the first interview in order to explore any changes from their initial responses. Though I recognized the possibility that new codes might emerge after their time in the classroom, no new codes emerged from the data. The preservice teachers listed 65 words/phrases organized in the deficit category and 22 in the positive category. Words and phrases similar to those listed in the first interview were listed in the second.

Within both major categories of all interviews, I identified subcategories recognizing their similarity to Lesko’s (2012) four confident characterizations of adolescence (i.e., coming of age into adulthood, controlled by raging hormones, peer-oriented, and represented by age). Adolescent attitudes toward school was also a recurring theme, so I used these as the five codes to organize the deficit characterizations preservice teachers outlined during both sets of interviews.

The code Coming of Age into Adulthood was defined by responses that referred to adolescents developing their identities or implied that adolescents are not yet fully equipped to deal with adult issues. Phrases such as still learning right and wrong and finding who they are were included in this code because they indicate that the preservice teachers feel that adolescents have not yet reached a concrete adult identity or an adult level of moral reasoning. Words like pregnancy, drugs, and sex were sorted into this code because preservice teachers perceived them to be difficult for adolescents to grapple with or stay away from because they see adolescents as lacking adult moral reasoning and decision-making skills.
The Controlled by Raging Hormones code was defined by responses that indicated adolescents as possessing an unstable emotional or mental state. Phrases like *mind all over the place* and *get upset over trivial things* were included in this code because they reflect the perceived instability of the hormone-riddled adolescent brain as well as the inconsequential, thus unjustifiable, nature of their worries. Words like *unpredictable, crazy, and aggressive* were also included in this subcategory because they reflect the ‘raging’ and controlling nature of the hormonal changes adolescents are believed to be enduring.

The Peer-oriented code was defined by responses that referred to friends or the social behaviors of adolescents. Phrases like *want to fit in, guys flirt with girls, relationship drama,* and *very impressionable* were placed in this subcategory because they showcase their attitudes regarding adolescents’ need to be social (whether face-to-face with peers or through social media like Facebook) as well as how they are affected by that need. Words like *shy, timid,* and *nervous* also fit into this subcategory because they describe personality traits that relate to social interaction.

The Represented by Age code was defined by responses that described adolescents as an age group. Many of these responses are considered pejorative when used to describe people in the adult age group. For example, the word *rebellious* was used several times throughout the data to describe adolescents. It is representative of age in that it is typically used to describe adolescents, but when used to describe an adult, it is considered pejorative or an insult. Responses like...
difficult age group and vulnerable were also organized under this code, because adults are not typically discussed in these terms; this statement is deeply rooted in the age grouping done in the K-12 school system, thus definitely representative of youth. For example, I included vulnerable in Represented by Age because, while some might view vulnerability (for adolescents or adults) as a strength, as it was used by the student teacher in connection with other negative characterizations, “I don’t [think of any words when you say adolescents], I just see the word in red. The first thing I think of is that it’s just really hard and really painful. And I think vulnerable.” Because her assertion that they are vulnerable is listed along with other negative characterizations and there is no indication that she is changing the tone of her responses, I concluded that vulnerable in her opinion was a negative characterization.

The School code was defined by responses that referred to adolescents and their attitudes toward and interactions within the school setting. Phrases like don’t like school as they get older, don’t work up to potential, lack ambition in schoolwork, don’t care about school, and frustrate teachers populated this category because they showcase beliefs about how adolescents feel about and function in the school setting.

Overall, in the first interview, characterizations of adolescents as peer-oriented dominated the preservice teachers’ discussions of adolescents. They frequently mentioned the desire to fit in, relationship drama, boy/girl interactions and flirtation, and that adolescents are prone to bullying and being bullied. In the second
interviews, responses were dominated by comments situating adolescents as coming of age into adulthood and being represented by age. For more examples of responses sorted by code see tables 1 and 2 in Appendix B.

**YA Literature and Adolescence/ts**

The preservice teachers were asked two questions regarding YA literature and its representation of adolescence/ths: (1) Does YA present an accurate and authentic depiction of adolescence/ths? and (2) Is it problematic that YAL is written by adults? In general they were reticent to treat the YA genre as monolithic, expressing that it can and sometimes does render an authentic depiction of adolescence, but that it is too large and complex to say definitively one way or the other. One participant expressed it this way: “Different YA pertains to different types of adolescents.” While they recognized some inaccuracies, the preservice teachers also noted some accuracies in the representation of adolescence and adolescents in YAL. The preservice teachers expressed that YAL “represents common experiences adolescents go through,” “depicts the big things they face,” and “captures things like bullying, abusive boyfriends, abusive parents, personal tragedies, and relatable issues.”

These comments regarding the authenticity of representation in YAL were balanced by some concerns. Some of the preservice teachers were concerned that YAL presents an unrealistic happy ending to conflict: “A lot of YA has a happy ending which is not the case in real life.” Along with unrealistic happy endings, some of the
preservice teachers felt that the conflicts and issues presented in YA texts were overdramatized, saying “a lot of YA is worst-case scenario.” Others were concerned about the kinds of issues depicted in its content, worrying that it “glorifies less than desirable actions.” Another preservice teacher echoed this thought explaining that “a lot of it is about suicide, drugs, and sex,” which was cause for apprehension because YAL “helps construct our upcoming generations.” Overall, the preservice teachers noted that, though YAL is relatable to the adolescent experience, it may not be representative of all adolescent experiences.

In response to the question of whether or not it is problematic that YA literature is written by adults, the preservice teachers were conflicted. All five of the preservice teachers noted that it is not an issue because authors experienced adolescence and can remember it. Most of the preservice teachers were unconvinced of adolescents’ abilities to write their own stories; however, one participant responded, “I don’t think adolescents have the mental capacity to turn negative experiences into something positive,” noting that adults have the advantage of telling the story in retrospect rather than while in the thick of it. Others responded similarly saying, “Kids can’t write well enough to publish it for themselves” and “Teens don’t have enough to say yet, because they’re in the midst of it, and they don’t know.” Some of the preservice teachers retracted this deficit sentiment after saying it, acknowledging “that’s not correct,” but still struggled over whether or not adolescents could write their stories in the same way an adult could. Only one participant took issue with adults writing YAL saying, “Adults can lose
touch with current teen issues,” acknowledging that generational shifts might make it difficult for adult authors to write stories that are still relatable to adolescent readers. In general, the preservice teachers agreed that adults can remember their own adolescence and use that to write authentic portrayals of the adolescent experience and that adolescents lack the ability or opportunity to publish their own stories.

To further explore their attitudes toward YA literature’s portrayal of adolescence, the preservice teachers were asked whether they would use YA texts in their future classrooms. Just as they reported both accurate and inaccurate depictions of adolescence and adolescents, they indicated both positive and negative reactions to using YA texts with their future students. Some of the preservice teachers were enthusiastic about the possibility, reasoning that students would be more engaged and find reading more enjoyable because the stories are more relatable; because “YA is more fun than canonical works,” students would “enjoy YA more thus comprehend more.” More than teaching conventions and the structure of stories, preservice teachers believed that YA texts provide students “a chance to reflect” on different ideas and issues pertinent to their lives.

The positive aspects of teaching YA texts also extended to the preservice teachers themselves; as one of the preservice teachers noted, “I would be more passionate about teaching YA because I enjoy it.” The positive aspects of teaching YA literature identified by preservice teachers were balanced with some concerns. As noted earlier, the preservice teachers believed YA texts could offer a skewed view of
adolescence/ts, while introducing issues that were too complex for the secondary classroom. Because texts “could normalize things that are bad,” several of the preservice teachers believed “YA dramatizes unrealistic expectations of life.” As one preservice teacher explained, “I don’t want to bring in texts that encourage anything not truthful and not a good model.”

Adult Views of Adolescence/ts

While the preservice teachers believed that adults could create adolescent characters and stories because they are able to remember their own adolescence, they were less convinced that the same was true of veteran teachers. When asked to list characterizations of adolescents from the perspective of veteran teachers, they reported more negative responses than positive. Several of the preservice teachers explained that it is difficult for veteran teachers to understand and connect to adolescents because they are so far away from their own adolescence. This statement sits in direct conflict with their belief that YA authors are able to create accurate and authentic representations of adolescents and their experiences throughout adolescence.

Because the preservice teachers spent more time around other teachers as well as adolescent students, I asked them to report characterizations of adolescence/ts they either heard other teachers use or they think other teachers would use. Again, deficit characterizations dominated the preservice teachers’ responses. Overall, 23 deficit characterizations and five positive characterizations
were mentioned. As in the preservice teachers’ own characterizations of adolescence/tts, similar codes emerged. Preservice teachers reported that veteran teachers would/did characterize adolescents as pushy, emo, and irresponsible, demonstrating the belief that adolescents have not yet reached an adult level of patience, responsibility, or concrete identity. The preservice teachers also reported that veteran teachers would/did describe adolescents as controlled by the unpredictability of their hormones using words like crazy, testy, and jumpy. As with their own characterizations of adolescents, the preservice teachers believed that veteran teachers would/did also characterize adolescents by their social interactions and social groups with terms like loner, mean, dramatic, popular to nerd—every stereotype, and Drama Queen. Characterizations of adolescents as represented by age dominated the discussion of how veteran teachers would/did view and understand their adolescent students. Words like immature, little brats, worthless, obnoxious, and annoying were also mentioned. Preservice teachers also mentioned that veteran teachers would characterize students as unmotivated when it came to school and learning material.

Despite the overwhelmingly negative attitude the preservice teachers believed veteran teachers to have of adolescent students, they still believed that adults—teachers in particular—should serve as guides to help their students through adolescence. I asked the preservice teachers why they wanted to work with adolescents as well as what expectations they had of their adolescent students. Their responses to both questions predominately focused on a desire to help
students grow as people rather than to help them learn English/Language Arts (ELA) content. One preservice teacher explains: “I think that to help [adolescents] grow as people—to help them learn time management, learn that differences are okay, learn valuable life skills—is the thing is so important. Not just preparing them to go to college” Some students did express a desire to teach students “to present ideas well” and “use complete sentences and correct punctuation,” but primarily their responses focused on helping students grow as people.

The preservice teachers had a range of prior experiences with adolescents, including volunteering with College Mentors for Kids, coaching middle/high school sports, working as camp counselors, interacting with siblings, participating in field experiences, substitute teaching, and working part-time jobs. Their range and depth of experience indicated a desire to interact with young people despite the negative conceptions they harbored. When asked why they wanted to continue to work with adolescents, the preservice teachers expressed a desire to connect with students and to help them develop skills that will make them better people. Some of the preservice teachers focused on the opportunity to work with students who share experiences similar to their own, reporting that they “wanted to reach kids who remind them of themselves at that age.” For one participant who experienced quite a bit of bullying, the goal was “to find kids who are bullied and give them a reason to come to school.” Whether they were reaching students with similar experiences or not, preservice teachers wanted to “leave an impact” and help students learn time management and other “valuable life skills.” They believed and recognized
themselves to be positive influences in the lives of their students. One preservice teacher expressed a desire to “change the world for at least one kid,” illustrating the belief that teachers can be and are agents of change in their students’ lives. Not only is this role something that the preservice teachers believed to be part of their job, but it was also something they said they would enjoy. One participant explained, “I like seeing these kids become better human beings whether they do well in the class or not.”

The expectations the preservice teachers had of their students reflected their desire to aid those students in their development as people. Instead of focusing on their students’ mastery of ELA standards, the preservice teachers’ responses revolved around helping students develop respect for others. They expressed the expectation that students be respectful and inclusive of others both inside and outside of their classrooms. In expressing the expectation that students “see each other and teachers as people,” preservice teachers revealed a desire for their students to see past the roles they each play in society, ultimately humanizing both students and teachers. One preservice teacher explained,

I want my students to know that I’m a person. I’m an authoritative figure to them. I’m their teacher, and I’m not going to be their friend and ask them to go hang out by any means, but I want them to feel comfortable around me.

While he understands that he occupies an authoritative role in the classroom, this preservice teacher saw adolescents as “people” who should not be “lumped together,” and hoped his students would see him the same way in order to foster a
deeper connection between them. The importance of the ability to see teachers as people extended into classroom performance; as one student reasoned, “Because when students hear [that you go to the mall], it makes you normal; it puts you on their level.” The preservice teachers believed that adolescent students connected with them more as a result of sharing their humanity (e.g., going to the mall, listening to the radio, going to the movies). Furthermore, they believed that their adolescent students wanted to work harder for them after students recognized teachers’ humanity. As this preservice teacher reported, “I think once they saw the better (human) side of me, I think they wanted to work a little bit harder for me than some of their other teachers.”

While the preservice teachers affirmed the ability for YA authors, as fellow adults, to recall their own adolescent experiences in order to create an authentic representation of adolescence and adolescents in their novels, they did not extend the same belief to veteran teachers. They believed that veteran teachers were too far away from their own adolescence to remember what it was like, making it difficult for them to connect with and understand their adolescent students. Despite this belief that veteran teachers are unable to connect with and understand their students, the preservice teachers still believed that one of the chief responsibilities and joys of being a teacher is to help adolescents grapple with their experiences as they continue to develop and grow into adulthood.
DISCUSSION

When I began this study, I had two questions: “What beliefs, attitudes, and opinions do English/Language Arts (ELA) student teachers hold about adolescents?” and “How do ELA student teachers use prior experience with YAL to understand adolescence?” Data collection and analysis revealed that preservice teachers’ perceptions and conceptions of adolescents are largely the result of a deficit model of thinking. Even when they offered positive characterizations of adolescents during interviews, those comments still positioned adolescents at a deficit.

Despite their overall negative view of adolescents, the preservice teachers expressed the desire to work with them. This is not to say that their interactions with students were not shaped by those negative and deficit views. The preservice teachers, because of their negative and deficit conceptions of adolescence and adolescents, believed that a large part of their job as a teacher was to be a good role model and positive influence for their students. Besides their duty to teach content, the preservice teachers believed that they were also charged with the duty of guiding students through such a turbulent time. With their guidance, which included high expectations, yelling, and tough love, they believed that they could help their
students on to the next stage of maturity. The respect, inclusion, and maturity they expected of their students informed their daily interactions with students and, they believed, served to help their students mature and “grow as people.”

The preservice teachers’ belief that YAL presents an authentic depiction of adolescence informs but also illustrates their conceptions of adolescence. Because YA literature relies on the naturalized discourse of adolescence to connect to readers (adult and adolescent alike), it continues to both demonstrate and reify the common characterizations of adolescence and adolescents. While the preservice teachers did acknowledge that there were issues concerning the depiction of adolescence and adolescents, a majority agreed that YA texts “represent common experiences adolescents go through,” making it more relevant and relatable to adolescent readers. In that they believed adolescents to share common experiences, the preservice teachers accepted adolescents as an overall massified and monolithic culture, despite their recognition that adolescents should not be “lumped together."

The findings revealed by this study also echo those found by Lewis and Petrone (2010, 2012) as they studied preservice teachers’ attitudes and beliefs concerning adolescents. The preservice teachers in their studies viewed adolescence as a tumultuous time of identity development and understood YAL to be a relatable vehicle for real-life connection. Their preservice participants, like mine, understood adolescents from a deficit perspective and believed one of their responsibilities as English teachers was to be guides for their students as they struggled to make it out of that tumultuous time.
Unlike the preservice teachers in Finders’s (1999) study, the preservice teachers in this study did not view themselves as exceptions to the adolescent rule, but rather as the rule itself, referring to their adolescence as “on par with the norm,” “normal,” and “cliché.” Including themselves under the same deficit model as their students did not alienate or distance them from their students as Lewis and Petrone (2012) found. Instead, it served as more of a show of solidarity; despite all that adolescents lack, they made it out and their students can too. This is not to say that the lack of distance is any less problematic because they were still working from a deficit model, but it does lessen the distance between teachers and students as found in Finders (1999) and Lewis and Petrone (2012), which in certain cases could be positive.

Despite the fact they acknowledged that it was unfair to treat adolescents as a mass or monolithic culture, the preservice teachers in my study predominately expressed views of adolescence/ts that echo Lesko’s (2012) confident characterizations as well as in the Finders (1999) and Lewis and Petrone (2010, 2012) studies which built on her work, ultimately showing that not much has changed since their studies were published. The preservice teachers in this study also expressed a conflicted understanding of how adults conceive of adolescents. These issues have brought me to two conclusions: (1) Critical youth studies should be taught as a part of preservice teacher education. (2) Preservice teachers exist in a liminal space within the adolescent/adult dichotomy, complicating how they understand adolescents as well as how other adults perceive them.
Critical Youth Studies in Preservice Education

Lewis and Petrone (2012) define Critical Youth Studies (CYS) as an interdisciplinary line of scholarship that attempts to problematize dominant understandings of adolescence both to draw attention to the consequences these understandings have for the material lives of young people and to help rethink subject positions available for young women and men in contemporary American society (p. 256, emphasis author’s).

The questioning of dominant understandings is crucial to CYS, but is not unique to CYS. Critical pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, and family diversity all call for the questioning of dominant understandings, differing only in what group or aspect of society is being understood. In “Critical Pedagogy: A Look at the Major Concepts,” McLaren (2009) defines critical pedagogy as “fundamentally concerned with understanding the relationship between power and knowledge” (p. 72) and highlights that “knowledge is always an ideological construction linked to particular interests and social relations” (p. 72). Instead of focusing on one particular marginalized group, critical pedagogy engages and interrogates dominant understandings and constructions of various kinds of knowledge and the ways it is disseminated. Culturally relevant pedagogy uses “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). In its rejection of more traditional ‘one-size-fits-all’ teaching methods, culturally relevant pedagogy questions those dominant methods and
rejects them in favor of a pedagogy that brings students’ culture—both in
knowledge and ways of learning—into the classroom. Family diversity examines and
questions the dominant perception of what makes a ‘normal’ family as well as how
those perceptions exist in explicit, implicit, and hidden curriculums within schools
(Turner-Vorbeck, 2008). Each of these approaches to questioning dominant
narratives, ideas, and understandings focus on different facets of society, but all aim
to explore, interrogate, and expose the ways those dominant narratives cast certain
groups and knowledges as lacking.

Geneva Gay (2000), referring to Dehyle (1995) describes the focus on what
certain groups lack as “deficit syndrome” (p. 23). She writes about it in terms of
ethnically diverse students being defined by their deficits:

In a school district in which 48% of the students are Navajo, and one of every
four Navajos leave before graduation, the causes of school failure identified
by the administrators were all ‘deficits.’ Among them were lack of self-esteem; inadequate homes and prior preparation; poor parenting skills and
low parental participation in the schooling process; lack of language
development; poor academic interests, aspirations, and motivation; few
opportunities for cultural enrichment; high truancy and absentee rates; and
health problems…(p. 24).

In this example, Gay (2000) outlines the ways in which Navajo students are
perceived to be lacking. This same deficit model of thinking is used to describe how
other marginalized groups are found to be lacking and is evident in the preservice
teachers’ perceptions of adolescents to be lacking in various aspects of development. Because of the deficit model or system used by preservice teachers to understand adolescents and the ways it functions to marginalize and ‘other’ them, CYS is a logical addition to the curriculum of multicultural education classes.

Preservice teachers would learn critical pedagogy (Bartolomé, 2004; McClaren, 2009) to question the hidden curriculum and other systems of power in the same course as Critical Youth Studies, which is itself a questioning of power. Likewise, as students learn culturally relevant pedagogy, inserting education into culture rather than inserting culture into education, (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive teaching, that teaching is a “contextual and situational process” (Gay, 2000, p. 21), they would learn what that means in terms of teaching all kinds of ‘others’ including race, LGBTQ, as well as adolescents. If, during the course of a multicultural education class, preservice teachers learn about family diversity (Turner-Vorbeck, 2008) and the ways the idea of a normative family alienates and marginalizes students through the explicit and hidden curriculum, it makes sense for them to think about how the overall power structure and hidden curriculum of schools does the same with adolescents because of their naturalized adolescence.

The triangle of race, gender, and class is ever-expanding to include different marginalized people groups. Multicultural education should not be a ‘dumping ground’ for all of the problems that society faces; however, the similarities between the tenets of CYS and other pedagogies already in the curriculum make it a logical addition. Furthermore, the environment in a multicultural class (e.g., the questions
that are raised and thought processes that are challenged) make it an especially suitable environment to begin questioning cultural constructions of and commonly held beliefs about adolescents. In this environment, critical reflection is required, and students are asked frequently to examine their own beliefs in a way that could prove fruitful for disrupting and interrogating the confident characterizations some preservice teachers hold to be true about adolescence/ts. Though it may not completely ‘cure’ students of their deficit thinking, it would at the very least ask them to examine their thoughts on the issue, which is a start.

Multicultural education is not the only place CYS should be explored. Content area courses in preservice curriculum would also do well to examine their content through a youth lens as well as discuss how to do the same with their students. The responses that preservice teachers gave during interviews regarding the depiction in YA literature demonstrate the need for more experience with reading through and applying a youth lens during analysis. While they were able to offer a few critiques of YA texts, the preservice teachers predominately felt that YAL, in aggregate, presents an authentic and appropriate rendering of adolescence. Many of the critiques the preservice teachers mentioned came from students who had previously taken a graduate level course in YAL in which such issues were discussed and teased out with classmates. With experience using the Critical Youth Studies perspective, students would be able to offer more critiques concerning the ways YAL functions within naturalized characterizations of adolescence and adolescents.
Because we prepare future English teachers to read texts through various lenses, adding the youth lens to the already established curriculum is a logical step to better preparing ELA preservice teachers to both read and teach literature and students through that lens. In point of fact, the addition of a youth lens would not really be much of an addition because preservice teachers are already reading YA literature and canonical texts that feature young people inside and outside of their coursework. In this way, the youth lens is not an addition to the curriculum but a way to capitalize on the knowledge that the preservice teachers are bringing into the classroom as well as the knowledge they are acquiring in the classroom.

Throughout their course work, preservice students in English education read canonical or frequently anthologized works like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” *Self-Reliance*, *Walden*, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in addition to more popular texts like *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, and titles in YAL. In these courses, students are presented ways of reading and critiquing texts using theories such as post-modernism, post-colonialism, new historicism, structuralism, post-structuralism, feminism. They learn to apply the theory to text in order to explore, question, and analyze certain character constructions and depictions, plot devices, and themes. They learn to examine works like *Othello* and *The Tempest* through a post-colonial lens, examining and analyzing how race and the concept of empire interact in and bring meaning to both texts. Students read works like *A Room of One’s Own* and “The Yellow Wallpaper” through a feminist lens in order to explore, analyze, and gain a better understanding of how the depiction of women in the texts contribute
to or counter the dominant discourse concerning the experiences of women throughout history. Thus, reading and analyzing texts that contain or focus on the experiences of adolescents through a youth lens is well suited to the coursework and curriculum ELA preservice teachers encounter in their programs.

The inclusion of Critical Youth Studies and the application of a youth lens in English education classes, while it would not completely eradicate preservice teachers’ negative and deficit views of adolescence/ts, would at the very least broaden their critical understandings and introduce them to the idea of adolescence/ts as social constructs. The preservice teachers in this study had difficulty critiquing issues in YA texts, used a deficit model for understanding adolescence/ts, and grappled with the difficulty of figuring out where they fit along the adult/adolescent continuum. Using CYS and a youth lens in English Education methods classes would better equip preservice teachers like those represented in this study to more effectively question the dominant narratives and discourse about adolescence/ts to foster a better understanding of their future students and themselves.

As preservice ELA teachers learn to employ the youth lens in the context of CYS, reflection is incredibly important. It is not enough for preservice teachers to examine works of literature and outside perceptions and characterizations of adolescence/ts. They must also reflect upon their own understandings of their adolescent students. Ultimately, the use of reflection—“conscious interrogation of an issue of personal relevance with the intent to understand the issue and move
forward” (Shoffner, Brown Platt, Long, & Salyer, 2010)—can help preservice teachers face and continue to develop their understandings of adolescence, adolescents, and their individual students. Using a youth lens in English preservice education could look much like the activities (e.g., drawing a ‘typical’ adolescent and critiquing depictions of adolescents presented in popular culture) provided by Borsheim-Black (2015) but are not limited to those. Asking students to interrogate and reflect upon—whether through writing or discussion—the representations of adolescents in the novels, poetry, drama, and the critical and theoretical texts they read offers an opportunity to disrupt and denaturalize the discourse surrounding adolescence/ ts.

Preservice teachers in social studies education could interrogate the instituted policies (i.e., compulsory education, juvenile court, and child labor laws) that carved the separation between adolescents and adults, historical representations of children and adolescents, as well as major historical figures that achieved great feats as adolescents, to denaturalize common characteristics of adolescents and question their own attitudes and beliefs about them. Music and fine arts preservice teachers could study ‘child prodigies’ and problematize why they seem so amazing: How does their age affect their exceptionality? Preservice teachers in STEM could ask similar questions of teenaged inventors and mathematicians who have made major discoveries and/or engineered incredible devices and/or apps. While methods/content courses in English education seem best
suited for the inclusion of CYS, they should not be the only content area courses to tackle these issues.

Because teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and conceptions of adolescents (Lewis and Petrone, 2010) affect the activities, curriculum, and expectations teachers have of their students, it is imperative that preservice teachers learn to confront those attitudes and beliefs in order to best educate their students. Being exposed to Critical Youth Studies and reflection in a multicultural education class would provide an excellent foundation for further exploration in their content area teaching courses. Like Finders (1999) I understand that “even when biases and misconceptions are confronted explicitly, preservice teachers, who are continually bathed in a particular set of cultural norms, will face difficulty integrating disjunctions into the fullest possible understanding” (p. 262). What I propose is not a cure for deficit thinking in preservice teachers (as if such a thing existed) but more opportunities to engage with Critical Youth Studies to disrupt the naturalized discourse that defines adolescence/ts.

The Liminality of Preservice Teachers

Throughout the course of the study, the preservice teachers revealed conflicting ideas regarding how adults view and understand adolescence/ts. The preservice teachers believed that adult YA authors possess the ability to remember their own adolescence, explaining, “They experienced adolescence and can remember it” and so can use their memories and experiences as the foundation for
their fictional works. They did not, however, extend that belief to veteran teachers. One preservice teacher explained, “She’s a veteran teacher. I think she just sees [her adolescent students] as another round of kids,” suggesting that the age and experience of veteran teachers dulls their sensitivity and ability to distinguish between “batches” of students and recognize students as individuals. Another preservice teacher explained

I really just think that that time period [adolescence] is forgotten by a lot of those who are veterans, and I think it makes a difference of whether you have kids or not. I’ve noticed that some of the veteran teachers who have kids know how to treat kids better. The teacher I worked with, she doesn’t have any children of her own. She’s not a bad teacher by any stretch of the imagination; I will never say that about her, but you could tell. There was a disconnect for sure.

The preservice teachers perceived there to be a greater distance and disconnect between older veteran teachers who they believed to have more difficulty remembering their own adolescence and teachers without kids who have less personal interaction with adolescents. These preservice teachers believed that the distance in age and experience with kids of their own affected how well veteran teachers were able to establish a connection and relationships with their students. None of these issues were mentioned in their discussions about adult YA authors.

In trying to make sense of this, I began to consider the position of the preservice teachers themselves. While all of them meet the requirement of legal
adulthood (being at or over the age of 18), they still exist within the age range of adolescence, which has been argued to extend to 26. This overlap between adolescence and adulthood is tricky in and of itself, but it becomes even more so because preservice teachers are required by the authority granted to them as the head of a classroom to be adults. One student acknowledged that disparity in this way: “When I think of educators, I think of older educators. I don’t think of myself as an educator. I think of myself more on the student side, not on the teacher side. Maybe in 20 years I’ll think [differently].”

The gap that exists between the social constructions of adolescence/ts and adult teachers forces young teachers to simultaneously contend with the difficulties of getting their bearings as classroom teachers and resolving (or, at the very least, managing) the stark duality of those two identities. Remembering the names of 100 new students, creating lesson plans to correspond to different classes full of different students, grading the work of those 100 students, and focusing on meeting the standards is stressful enough, but compounded with all of that, new teachers are also forced to contend with policing their actions according to the societal constructions of two different age groups.

This conflict can also be seen in some of the preservice teachers’ responses. A few of them reported that the proximity in age to their students made it difficult for them to characterize adolescents as well as caused them to question some of their choices. One student explained, “It’s so hard to say [what my students taught me about adolescence] because I feel like I’m so close to their age. I’m really not
that different than them. I don’t know if that’s good or bad, but my personality is not that different.” She went on to say, “I can honestly say that I’m friends with some of my students. And I don’t know if I’m supposed to be. I don’t know if that’s an illegal thing or not, but I am.” This comment demonstrates the difficulty new, young teachers have in managing their identity as a/n (semi)adolescent versus their adult professional identity in the classroom. In various situations they must determine whether or not they are allowed to occupy more/all of one or the other. Because they are closer in age to their students, a majority of my students described themselves as ‘friends’ of their students. They were quick to point out, however, that they would not be “hanging out with students” and it was more of a professional friendship. Another preservice teacher described a situation in which a student said something that she knew to be a joke but felt like she needed to address in a teacherly and professional manner because her (older) cooperating teacher would see it as “crossing a line.” In these instances, young teachers must determine how to manage their conflicting identities in a way that appropriately addresses the situation.

The incongruity of their age and the adult responsibility expected of preservice teachers may cause some confusion as to how adults and veteran teachers do or should view and understand adolescence. Their conflicted responses might also arise out of the difference in interactions the preservice teachers have had with authors or their texts and veteran teachers. While they predominately reported hearing negative and deficit views of adolescents from the veteran
teachers with whom they worked during student teaching, their experiences with authors and the various types of adolescent experiences they have created led them to believe that YA authors are more equipped to access the memories of their adolescence. In this way, student teachers believed that YA authors were able to better understand and connect with adolescents and the issues that are felt to naturally plague them.

Also problematic were the preservice teachers’ initial comments and assumptions regarding adolescents’ inability to write and tell their own stories. Again, they viewed adolescents in a deficit model in which they lacked the introspection and writing ability to tell their stories in a compelling and publishable way. The preservice teachers asserted that “kids can’t write well enough to publish” and “adults are better at telling the story,” demonstrating a perceived lack of writing ability and sophistication. They also reported that adolescents “don’t have the mental capacity to turn negative experiences into something positive,” as they stated most YA texts do, again illustrating a perceived lack of intellectual ability and maturity. Essentially, they believed that adults could (and do) do it better.

A few of the participants retracted such statements during the interview, acknowledging that their initial assumptions were incorrect. While this is a step in a positive direction, it is still indicative of the overarching narrative our society constructs about adolescents. One preservice teacher wondered, “[adolescents] have the opportunity to publish, so why aren’t they?”, which reveals a lack of awareness of the complicated process of publication as well as the difficulty of doing
anything in the adult managed legal realm as a minor. A few teenagers do manage to publish at an early age (e.g., S.E. Hinton and Christopher Paolini), but as the exception, they prove the rule and are met with awe and wonder. It was the general assumption of the preservice teachers that adolescents do not possess enough experience to tell their stories, making it difficult for them to publish. Opening up the discourse to include adolescent voices, opinions, and decisions challenges both adolescents and adults to seek different understandings of themselves and society, ultimately fostering growth in both.

Because of their liminal position in the adolescent/adult continuum, the preservice teachers had difficulty knowing which position they could occupy during certain situations. At times, they wondered if they could offer worthy insights or characterizations of adolescence/ts because they were so close to that stage themselves, but at other times, they counted the closeness of age to their students as a positive attribute, one that would help them better understand and connect with their students. They also questioned the professional nature of those close relationships they forged with their students. These issues, along with their assumptions that adolescents cannot write or tell their own stories, are further evidence of the need for Critical Youth Studies, the youth lens, and reflection in English education. Learning about these theories as well as how to apply them can help young teachers better understand their conflicting (adult/adolescent) positions in society and better prepare them to cope with their liminality. Likewise, having a background in CYS can help them better answer their questions about why
adolescents do not write their own stories and extend the application of those answers to YAL as well as how certain texts reify or disrupt the naturalized discourse of adolescence/ts. Moreover, reflecting on these issues during their preservice education classes and throughout their practice will make preservice teachers better equipped to navigate and manage their dual identities as well as understand and connect with their students.

Limitations and Future Research

Due to a limited number of participants and time, the scope of this study is limited. Given more time, resources, and participants, I would like to investigate this topic further. Taking a more longitudinal approach to the study would provide more insight into how early career teachers’ perceptions, conceptions, and beliefs about adolescence and adolescents continue to change over the course of their careers. Additionally, the sample size for this study is small and contains preservice teachers from a single program. Broadening the study to look at preservice teachers in various programs across the country would provide a broader look and deeper understanding of the views preservice teachers in varying environments and college/university programs have of adolescents as well as provide further insight into the implications those views have for English education, writ large.

Building on this study, more research regarding how preservice and young teachers navigate and manage their adolescent/adult identities is needed. Building on Alsup’s (2006) work on teacher identity discourses, research is also needed to
obtain a better understanding of how preservice and young teachers enact and manage those identities inside and outside the classroom. Exploring their attitudes and management strategies would bring further insight into how age and experience serve to construct the identities of teachers and, in turn, define the roles of both teacher and student.
CONCLUSION

When I began this project, and throughout the course of its duration, I found myself constantly revisiting conversations from my secondary teaching days. I replayed talks I had with colleagues in the teachers’ lounge as well as students in the hallways during passing periods, lunch, and study hall, regarding how each role envisioned the other. I was surprised to find that young preservice teachers who have not even stepped into classrooms of their own had such negative views of adolescents. Their beliefs and attitudes echoed the dominant discourse surrounding adolescents and constructed it as a period of incompetence during which students need to be controlled and shaped into something that more closely resembles an adult. Given that society’s focus on adolescents as problems for society to “whip into shape”, as one preservice teacher expressed, underpins the student/teacher dichotomy, the student/teacher relationship is presented to preservice teachers as tenuous before they are even in teacher education programs.

As preservice teachers prepare to enter their own classrooms and interact with their future students, they still perceive adolescence as a difficult time in their students’ lives. They describe it as rough, painful, and difficult, which, as Lesko (2012) suggests, may lead them to believe that their students are not capable of critical thought. They charge themselves with the task of teaching their content, but
also with the larger task of guiding their students successfully into maturity and believe they need to be positive role models for their students. Despite the compassion and connection they feel they have with adolescents, they still operate under a deficit model with a predominately negative conception of those adolescent students.

Looking across the findings of this study, it is clear that in some ways these preservice teachers were beginning to question the monolithic, massified, and deficit characterizations of adolescents found in the naturalized discourse accepted and perpetuated by our society in different forms of cultural artifacts. While this is good, it is not quite good enough. Student teachers in English education programs need more opportunities to examine and interrogate commonly held conceptions of adolescence/ts as well as their own. Exploring these issues through a youth lens in multicultural education courses, as well as their own content area teaching courses, would allow preservice teachers to do just that. This creates the possibility for preservice teachers to create activities and curriculum with a deeper and more critical understanding of their students’ and their own positions within the structure and system of school as well as society writ large.

Preservice teachers should also be given the opportunity to examine their own liminal positions within the structure of society. The preservice teachers in this study had conflicting ideas about the (in)ability of adults in certain positions within society (i.e.,YA authors and veteran teachers) to connect with and understand adolescents. Examining how their own position as young teachers affects their
understandings and attitudes of both adults, adolescents, and the literature they teach offers insights and understandings that benefit the interactions that exist across all three.

In proposing a more prominent and recognizable presence of Critical Youth Studies and the youth lens in preservice teacher education, I stand with Lesko (1996a, 1996b, 2012), Lewis and Petrone (2010, 2012), and Finders (1999) in advocating for a view of teaching young people and preparing preservice teachers to work with young people that first questions how we know what we think we know about who we intend to teach. If we adopted such a model, perhaps adults would do less grumbling about ‘kids these days,’ perhaps teenaged girls would stop asking where they are going wrong with such conviction and trepidation, and perhaps teenagers would not need to be defended because they would be understood to be people rather than problems.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Pre-Survey

Please answer the following questions by selecting agree or disagree according to your own beliefs.

1. Adolescence is a difficult period of development.
   a. Agree   b. Disagree
2. Adolescence is created by society.
   a. Agree   b. Disagree
3. Adolescents are inherently rebellious.
   a. Agree   b. Disagree
4. Teenagers participate in dangerous behaviors.
   a. Agree   b. Disagree
5. Adolescents cannot control their impulses.
   a. Agree   b. Disagree
6. Adolescents are generally apathetic when it comes to schoolwork.
   a. Agree   b. Disagree
7. Adolescents are accurately depicted in YA literature.
   a. Agree   b. Disagree
8. Adolescents should be given more responsibility.
   a. Agree   b. Disagree
9. Adolescents should be treated more like adults.
   a. Agree   b. Disagree
10. Adolescents’ hormones negatively impact their ability to think critically.
    a. Agree   b. Disagree
11. Adolescents have low self-esteem.
    a. Agree   b. Disagree
12. Adolescence is a way that adult society keeps teens from having too much power.
   a. Agree  b. Disagree

13. Friends are more important to teenagers than anything else.
   a. Agree  b. Disagree

14. Teens have important skills, talents, and things to say and should be able to share them with the community.
   a. Agree  b. Disagree

15. Teenagers need to be protected from themselves.
   a. Agree  b. Disagree

Directions: Briefly, in a few sentences, respond to the following questions. If you need more room, feel free to continue your response on the back of this paper.

16. How would you describe your own adolescence?

17. How would your teachers describe you as an adolescent?

18. Name a few YA texts you’ve read. In what ways do you feel they (in)accurately described and depicted the adolescent experience?
Post-Survey

Please answer the following questions. For the multiple choice questions, circle the choice that most applies to you. For the short answer, write a brief response to each question. Use the back if necessary.

1. Adolescence is a difficult period of development.
   a. Agree
   b. Disagree
   c. No opinion

2. Adolescence is constructed by society.
   a. Agree
   b. Disagree
   c. No opinion

3. Adolescents are inherently rebellious, causing them to participate in dangerous behaviors.
   a. Agree
   b. Disagree
   c. No opinion

4. Adolescents cannot control their impulses.
   a. Agree
   b. Disagree
   c. No opinion

5. Adolescents are generally apathetic when it comes to schoolwork.
   a. Agree
   b. Disagree
   c. No opinion
6. Adolescents are accurately depicted in YA literature.
   a. Agree
   b. Disagree
   c. No opinion
7. Adolescents should be given more responsibility.
   a. Agree
   b. Disagree
   c. No opinion
8. Adolescents should be treated more like adults.
   a. Agree
   b. Disagree
   c. No opinion
9. Identify a text you read with your students that portrayed adolescence in some way and briefly discuss the authenticity of the portrayal?
10. How has student teaching influenced your understanding of adolescence/ths?
Table B.1: Coding from First Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coming of Age</th>
<th>Controlled by Hormones</th>
<th>Peer-oriented</th>
<th>Represented by Age</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>Unpredictable</td>
<td>Want to fit in</td>
<td>Difficult age group</td>
<td>Don’t like school as they get older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know what they are</td>
<td>Mind all over the place</td>
<td>Shy</td>
<td>Rebellious</td>
<td>Don’t work up to potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stubborn</td>
<td>Crazy</td>
<td>Absorb what’s around them</td>
<td>Vulnerable</td>
<td>Don’t like school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespectful</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Afraid of being wrong</td>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t care about school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still learning right and wrong</td>
<td>Get upset over trivial things</td>
<td>Technology obsessed</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack ambition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Frustrate teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding who they are</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guys flirt with girls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unsure of where they fit in</td>
<td>Relationship drama</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very impressionable</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fight and argue with each other</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prone to bullying and being bullied</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls/boys find each other</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Timid</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Impressionable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming of Age</td>
<td>Controlled by Hormones</td>
<td>Peer-oriented</td>
<td>Represented by Age</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>In high school become stressed out</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Too talkative</td>
<td>Need to get it together</td>
<td>Headphones in ears, slouching in desks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t enjoy corny humor in high school</td>
<td>Care about stupid things</td>
<td>Girls get upset over gossip and boys</td>
<td>Rebellious</td>
<td>Bad students by choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naïve</td>
<td>Lots of crying</td>
<td>Easily influenced</td>
<td>Need babysitting</td>
<td>Don’t care about teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues with responsibility</td>
<td>Squirmey</td>
<td>Cheerleaders are bullies</td>
<td>Push boundaries</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play blame-game</td>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>Friend-oriented</td>
<td>Teaching them feels like babysitting</td>
<td>Twiddling thumbs, drawing on desks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing</td>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Flirty</td>
<td>Talk about stupid things</td>
<td>Lack of interest in material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need discipline and yelling</td>
<td>Afraid to be wrong</td>
<td>Giggly</td>
<td>Non-accelerated students can’t perform higher order thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t make good choices</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Selfish</td>
<td>Can only learn so much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicted</td>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
<td>Little shits</td>
<td>Expected blank stares</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need positive influence</td>
<td>Manipulative</td>
<td>Need whipped into shape</td>
<td>Don’t care about school</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Driven by parents</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Need to be formed</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stuck on adult conveyor belt</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-centered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>