

Living a Thousand Lives:

*A research on narrative identity construction among
adult readers of young adult fiction*

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The title of this thesis is based on a quote by George R. R. Martin (2011): “A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies” (p. 452). This feels certainly true to me, and I think for most readers. Fiction lets us enter entire new worlds, experience them as if we are actually there and take things from it to comprehend events in our own daily lives. For many readers, fiction equals life and reading equals breathing. This is the same for me, which is why I dedicated my master’s thesis to fiction. I did not even have to think about a subject for this research, it was clear from the beginning it was supposed to be about fiction – Young Adult fiction, more specifically.

Niels van Poecke, my supervisor, introduced me to the theory of narrative identity that is central to this thesis. I am very glad Niels was appointed as my supervisor, because otherwise I would never have done a research so heavily based on theories regarding philosophy and sociology – and I would never have believed I was capable of performing such a research. I would like to thank him for his endless interest in both my thesis topic and my own wellbeing, his valuable feedback on all my writings and his willingness to supervise me for over a year.

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I leave you with a quote by philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1991), whose theory on narrative identity is central in this research and whose words perfectly summarize this thesis, and in my opinion, also everyday life: “Fiction cannot be completed other than in life, and life cannot be understood other than through stories we tell about it” (p. 435).

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Every literary work [...] opens up a horizon of possible experience,” (Ricoeur, 1991b, p. 430). Fictional narratives present the possibility of entering entire new worlds and experiencing ‘a thousand lives’. Ricoeur’s (1991) theory on narrative identity implies that narratives, whether fictional or not, are the medium through which we construct our life stories. Whether they take place in fantastical countries, faraway planets or the high school around the corner: each of them offers us new experiences, gives us new insights and lets us comprehend the world around us.

Fictional narratives come in many forms. This thesis focuses on young adult (YA) fiction and its role in narrative identity construction. Over the last ten to fifteen years, YA fiction has taken on a large segment in the book market. Abrams (2015) reports that young adult (and children’s) literature sales make up 12% of all book sales in 2014 in the USA. Novels such as *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Paper Towns* (2009) and *The Maze Runner* (2009) have been adapted to the big screen in the recent years. These facts show that YA literature has become extremely popular over the last years.

YA fiction is, however, not a newly invented genre. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) introduced the term in the sixties to define books written for adolescents aged 12 to 18 years, but YALSA now acknowledges these ages are relative. They can be expanded from 10 to as far as 25 years old (Cart, 2008). Both Cart (2008) and Cole (Andersen, 2015) admit that the term ‘young adult literature’ is not as static as it appears. Similar to children’s literature, YA literature covers all sorts of literary genres, from contemporary fiction to fantasy, science-fiction, mystery, etc. (Kaplan, 2005). Most YA novels are coming-of-age stories, featuring an adolescent protagonist who usually struggles with issues regarding growing up, identity formation and finding one’s place in the world (Nilsen & Donelson, 2000; Hill, 2014). They deal with various, complex concepts, varying from friendship, family, love, loss and (mental) illnesses (Kos & Teale, 2009).

Most YA novels feature a teenager as protagonist and are marketed towards adolescents (Andersen, 2015). It is therefore unusual that the largest audience group of YA novels are not adolescents, but adults (Andersen, 2015). According to a study executed by Publisher’s Weekly in 2012, 55% of YA readers are older than 18, while adults aged 30 to 44 account for 28% of the sales (“[Publisher’s Weekly]”, 2012). These numbers makes one wonder why YA literature is so popular amongst adult readers, who find themselves generally in a different life phase. McAdams (1985) argues that due to its complexity, the narrative

identity of an individual does not emerge until (late) adolescence which take place approximately between the age of 13 to 18 (McAdams, 1985). This adult reader group is made up of individuals aged 20 to 35, who reside in the life phase of young adulthood. Therefore, they are pre-eminently suitable to investigate with regards to narrative identity, as they already have a partly or fully developed life story.

1.1 Previous research

Ricoeur's (1991) theory on narrative identity stands at the basis of this research. His approach is a pragmatist one, as he argues that everyday experiences form the foundation for the construction of the self. These experiences do not just take place in daily life, but also make up narratives. Ricoeur (1991a) states that fiction has a crucial role in both life and the construction of the self. He sees narratives, both fictional and factual, as the medium through which we shape our (narrative) identity. When interacting with a narrative, there are elements with which we identify and subsequently integrate into our own life story. This identification with fiction can be seen as a threefold process, consisting of three levels of mimesis (De Mul, 2000).

Ricoeur (1991) suggests that art – and thus fiction – is situated in daily life. The role of art in everyday life, as well as the utilization of art, is known as cultural practice (DeNora, 2000). Previous studies done by Radway (1984), Long (1986) and Usherwood and Toyne (2002) demonstrate how consumers of literature use fiction in everyday life. Usherwood and Toyne's (2002) study focuses on the motives of reading imaginative literature. Their findings correspond with those of Long (1986) and Radway (1984), who researched women's reading groups. The uses of fiction reported include escapism, educational purposes (both literary skills and practical knowledge of the world), self-understanding and personal development. In Long's (1986) study, the last two practices are closely related to the interpretation of the reader and show that it is much more important than what the writer tried to convey with his or her story.

While these studies create insight into how individuals use fiction in their daily lives, they do not demonstrate how art relates to (self-)identity construction. DeNora's (2000) study on (popular) music does. Again, the interpretation of the listener is more important than the actual meaning of the song. DeNora's (2000) study also shows that individuals use music to 'self-regulate': by listening to certain types of music, they get themselves into a particular mood or 'mode of agency'. Music is also used by listeners to get rid of or work through certain moods, as well as for purposes of self-perception (DeNora, 2000).

Kokesh and Sternadorni (2015) researched the impact of YA fiction on identity construction of adolescent girls with regards to femininity. They list a few effects that fiction can have on its readers, such as identification, parasocial interaction and relationships (one-sided relationships between the reader and fictional characters), perceived realism and narrative transportation. The latter two refer to the effect of ‘seeing’ a narrative unfold in the mind’s eye and the feeling of being transported into the world of a narrative. In addition, Mar, Oatley, Djikic & Mullin (2011) discuss so-called narrative emotions, such as empathy and sympathy, which can be evoked by stories. These, and other emotions, can lead to changes in the self (Green, 2004; 2005).

The studies mentioned are all sociological in nature, though the theory of narrative identity construction also has roots in psychological disciplines, such as personality psychology. Just like Ricoeur (1991), McAdams (1985) suggests that narratives are the means by which identity is formed. By making meaning of experiences in the past and relating it to one’s present self, individuals can understand and develop their own self (McLean, 2010; McAdams & McLean, 2013). The construction of narrative identity is a complex task, which requires a certain social and cognitive maturity. This is why it does not arise until (late) adolescence (McAdams, 1985). It is made up of elements from one’s autobiographical memory. By constructing such a life story, it gives an individual a sense of continuity, order and unity, which is vital for one’s well-being. Narrative identity helps one communicate to him- or herself, as well as to others who they are (Singer, Blagov, Berry & Oost, 2013; McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Finally, this thesis discusses the construction of (narrative) identity from a postmodernist perspective. Holstein and Gubrium (2000) distinguish between two types of postmodernists: the ‘affirmative’ ones, like Gergen (1991), are still rather optimistic about the self in postmodernist times, while ‘skeptical theorists’, such as Baudrillard (1994), deny the self altogether. But there is a third option, which this thesis, written from a pragmatist perspective, adheres to. It implies that the self can maintain postmodernist characteristics, but still be grounded in everyday life. Lyotard (1991), Foucault (1970) and Giddens (1991) support this view.

1.2 Research question

This research is written from a pragmatist perspective. It focuses on the role of young adult fiction in the everyday lives of its adult readers. It attempts to find out which motives these readers have to consume this kind of fiction, how they utilize YA fiction in their daily lives

and what they prefer in the novels they read. This study also looks into the role of YA literature in the construction of narrative identity of adult readers. Therefore, the main research question of this research is: *For what purposes do adult readers of young adult literature consume this type of fiction and what is its role in the construction of narrative identity?*

This study will be an exploratory, as well as a descriptive one. It will employ a qualitative method. In order to get a detailed overview and a thorough understanding of the motivations, aesthetic experiences, cultural practices of adult readers of YA fiction, in-depth semi-structured interviews will be conducted. By interviewing these readers, it is attempted to understand which role YA fiction has in their lives, how they identify with elements in this kind of fiction and how it has contributed to the formation of their narrative identity.

1.3 Relevance

Young adult fiction has proven to be extremely popular. Over the last ten to fifteen years, the genre has gained immense popularity. The growth in novels published, book sales, film and series adaptations prove that this genre is here to stay. YA fiction is read by individuals of all ages, especially adult readers. Nevertheless, research concerning this specific group is lacking, particularly in combination with narrative identity construction. Previous studies done on narrative identity, the role of art and cultural practices, mostly focus on other disciplines, such as, most notably, (popular) music (DeNora, 2000; Negus, 2011; Van der Hoeven, 2014). Kokesh and Sternadorni's (2015) study does focus on YA fiction and identity construction, but does not include narrative identity. McAdams and McLean (2013) state that there is a need to explore "the role of broad cultural contexts in the development of narrative identity" (p. 233).

Adult readers of YA fiction seem to be an extremely suitable group to investigate with regards to narrative identity construction. It is safe to assume that due to their age, these readers have a fully developed narrative identity. Yet they avidly consume YA fiction – which deals mostly with questions concerning identity formation, growing up, figuring out who one is, etc. (Nilsen & Donelson, 2000; Hill, 2014). By studying this group and the role of YA fiction in narrative identity formation, new insights can be created. Why do they, despite their age, consume YA novels? How do they aesthetically experience these novels? How do they use YA fiction in their daily lives? What is its role in narrative identity formation? This thesis can contribute to the field of arts and culture studies, by filling in the gap in the academic

literature by providing new empirical research on both YA literature and its role in the construction of narrative identity.

Furthermore, the results of this study can contribute to insights on how readers perceive and receive YA fiction. This information can be helpful for actors in the literary field, like publishers, libraries, book shops, writers, etc. The knowledge that adults are the biggest consumer group of YA fiction can be used to market new novels towards this specific target group, instead of the usual adolescent group. YA novels are now mostly grouped together with children's literature, but creating a new category could benefit advertisements and sales. Especially in non-English speaking countries, this information can be used to decide which novels to translate and publish. In addition, this study can also benefit actors within the educational field, such as schools, teachers and institutions that focus on the promotion of reading. It can develop insights into what readers attracts to this type of fiction, and thus how individuals can be influenced to read (more). YA fiction can be used as an intermediate stage to progress from children's literature to more complex adult literary works. Lastly, this study can contribute to the understanding of narrative identity and well-being, as studies have shown that making meaning of past events, as well as the continuity and unity a life story provides, leads to better psychological well-being (McAdams & McLean, 2013; McLean, Breen & Fournier, 2010).

1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis is structured as follows: the next three chapters make up the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 explores the development of the YA novel, which finds its origins in the *Bildungsroman*. An academic definition of YA fiction is given and its characteristics are examined, as well as current trends and issues within the genre. Chapter 3 looks at several ways to receive, perceive and interpret an artwork. The audience itself is also investigated with the help of Bourdieu's (1984) theory on distinction. By discussing Radway's (1984), Long's (1986) and DeNora's (2000) studies, amongst others, it is investigated how audiences utilize art in everyday life and how it contributes to (self-)identity construction. Chapter 4 explores pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, which is used as a stepping-stone to discuss Ricoeur's (1991) theory on narrative identity. This chapter also looks at debates on the life story within the field of psychology, as well as the role of (narrative) identity in a postmodern world. After that, the research methods used in this thesis are explained, and in chapter 6, the results of this study are discussed. Finally, a conclusion follows, in which the research question is answered and recommendations regarding future research are made.

2. YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Young adult literature as a genre has a long history. Even though the genre has gained its popularity only during the last twenty years with books such as *Harry Potter* (1997), *Twilight* (2005) and *The Hunger Games* (2008), novels written specifically for adolescents have been around much longer. The first YA novels were published in the 1940s and 1950s and the term ‘young adult literature’ has existed for over sixty years. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) came up with the term in the sixties to indicate novels written specifically for adolescents in the age category of 12 to 18 years old (Cart, 2008). The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature defines the YA genre as “An area of ‘children's’ literature addressed to the adolescent/teenage market” (“[Oxford Reference]”, 2016).

This chapter dives into the origins of the YA novel. Most YA novels are primarily coming-of-age stories, in which adolescents search for both their identity and their place in the world (Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015). In turn, coming-of-age stories find their origins in the *Bildungsroman*, a genre first seen in the historical movement of Romanticism (Nilsen & Donelson, 2001). Furthermore, it is attempted to find a more academic definition of the YA genre, just as its more recent history will be examined. Lastly, current trends in and issues of YA fiction will be described.

2.1 Definition and characteristics of young adult literature

Even though YA literature has officially been around for over sixty years, the genre as it exists now is still relatively new. That is why defining YA fiction is a difficult task (Hill, 2014; Andersen, 2015). To begin with, the term ‘genre’ is perhaps not the best way to describe it, as YA literature is – just like children’s literature – an age indicator. While YALSA categorized it as novels written for children in the age bracket of 12-18, they have recently broadened their original classification. The recommended age range is now more flexible and has expanded from 10 to as far as 25 years old (Hill, 2014; Cart, 2008). Secondly, YA fiction nowadays covers a broad range of literary genres. Cart (2008) mentions that while in the sixties YA books were mostly realistic, contemporary novels, these days YA novels cover every genre from fantasy and science-fiction, to history and war topics, just to name a few. Of course, some genres are more popular than others. *Twilight* brought on a whole new range of vampire books, while *The Hunger Games* made dystopian science-fiction novels popular. *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) gave contemporary novels once again a new boost.

Additionally, YA stories are not just published as written novels, but also as other forms of narratives such as graphic novels, poetry collections and non-fiction books (Cart, 2008).

YA fiction can thus be defined as a genre written specifically for and about adolescents (Hill, 2014). It covers a wide range of genres, ages and forms of publishing. Nevertheless, a YA novel does need to have some characteristics in order to be considered as such. According to Becker (1974), artworks are created according to conventions, or previously made agreements that determine the characteristics of an artwork. Society consists of social and symbolic worlds and in turn, an art world consists of organizations and people. Different art worlds have different conventions: for example, music has different conventions than literature. However, within an art world exists different genres that each have their own conventions, such as science-fiction and contemporary literature. Becker (1974) argues that understanding of the artwork and emotional responses will be heightened when the audience is familiar with the artwork's conventions. Thus, conventions create meaning. However, an artist can be held back by conventions, yet, Becker (1974) argues, artists can also diverge from them to create something completely new (Alexander, 2003).

The YA genre, too, has its own conventions and characteristics. As previously mentioned, most YA stories have coming-of-age elements in them. The protagonist, often a teenager between the ages of 12 and 18, has to overcome struggles and needs to deal with self-defining events and conflicts during the story. Regardless of the genre of the novel, these conflicts usually revolve around growing up, finding out who one is and their journey towards the shaping of an identity and adulthood (Nilsen & Donelson, 2000; Hill, 2014). Moreover, these stories do not always end happily ever after, something children's books often do (Andersen, 2015).

Other characteristics include that YA novels often have a first-person perspective and are written in a 'distinct teenage voice'. Parents are usually absent or on negative terms with the main characters. For example, in *The Hunger Games*, the mother is depressed, leaving the protagonist to care for her younger sister (Nilsen & Donelson, 2000; Hill, 2014; Andersen, 2015). Additionally, YA novels are marketed towards adolescents, written by and for young adults and around 300 pages long (Andersen, 2015). However, these characteristics are not as static as they seem to be. For instance, *The Book Thief* (2005) both features a child as the protagonist and is over 500 pages long, yet it is labelled as a YA novel (Green, 2006). Cole admits that there are novels that deviate from these factors and are still considered YA literature (Andersen, 2015). It is not the main character's age that determines whether a book is considered a YA novel, but the themes the story deals with (Backes, 2014).

2.2 *The Bildungsroman and coming-of-age stories*

In essence, YA novels are coming-of-age stories. They find their origins in the so-called *Bildungsroman* or ‘novel of formation’, which can be seen as the predecessor of the YA novel (Van Lierop-Debrauwer, 2010). The name of the *Bildungsroman* already reveals its purpose: it is a novel in which the protagonist journeys from being a child or adolescent to adulthood. This (often psychological) journey is mostly a quest for identity and personal growth ([“Oxford Reference: Bildungsroman”], 2016). Moretti (1987) states that ‘youth as the meaning of life’ stands at the foundation of the *Bildungsroman*. The genre of the formation novel (*Entwicklungsroman*), of which the *Bildungsroman* is a part of, covers all novels that have coming-of-age elements within them (Van Lierop-Debrauwer, 2010).

Van Lierop-Debrauwer (2005) states that the idea of adolescence came into existence in the nineteenth century as a result of social-economical changes in that particular time period. However, the idea of transitioning from child to adult has been around longer and the first *Bildungsromane* originate from the late eighteenth century. Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795) is seen as the prototype of the formation novel, which all the other novels are modelled after. The *Bildungsroman* is native to Germany, but other countries have adopted the formation novel as well. In Great-Britain novels such as Charles Dicken’s *David Copperfield* (1849) and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) were published under the rubric of the *Bildungsroman*. The US saw the publishing of the initiation novels *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1884) and the much later *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951).

According to Van Lierop-Debrauwer (2005), the *Bildungsroman* consists of three stages. In the first stage, the protagonist is still a child, growing up concordantly. During the second stage, the young protagonist goes on a journey alone, either literally or mentally, in search for its identity. While finding love and friendship, the protagonist is also faced with the harsh reality of the world. These conflicts with themselves or their surroundings seem to be part of growing up and ‘finding’ an identity. Moretti (1987) mentions that some of these conflicts or themes *Bildungsromane* discuss are for example alienation, love, conflict of generations, society, etc. During the final stage, the protagonist finds himself and returns back home, ready to participate in society. The novel ends with the protagonist reflecting on his place in society. *The Catcher in the Rye* has this classic three-stage narrative. The *Bildungsroman* often has a concordant ending, whereas the more dramatic *Desillusion*-novel does not always end well. A well-known example is *Die Leiden der Jungen Werthers* (1774) by Goethe (Van Lierop-Debrauwer, 2005).

Goethe's novels are prototypes of Romantic literature. Around the time of the early German Romanticism (*Frühromantik*), which took place around 1790, the idea of *Bildung* or self-education first appeared. Seen in the context of social and political history, *Bildung* was an indirect reaction to the French Revolution, yielded by the Enlightenment. At first, early romantics, like Friedrich Schiller (author of *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 1794), responded enthusiastically to the revolution and the new ideas that it produced. However, once they realized what kind of horrors it actually brought forth, they concluded that the French Revolution, as well as the newly established French Republic was a failure. The people of France were not educated well enough for these high moral ideals. That is why the early romantics turned to *Bildung* or self-growth. They reasoned the people should be educated in order to run a successful republic and that this education was the highest goal to achieve (Beiser, 2003; Schiller, 1794)

According to the romantics, the education of the people could only be accomplished through art. Aesthetic education could provide them with sensibility, of which desire, feeling and perception were all a part. The romantic movement – taking place after the *Sturm und Drang*-movement – is known for its emphasis on subjectivity, emotion, imagination and connection with nature, which completely opposes the rational and objective view of the Enlightenment (see Beiser, 2003). Especially the sublime, referring to the overwhelming power of nature, played a large role in Romanticism. Reality, on the other hand, was not that important, but personal experience was. Goethe, a member of the *Sturm und Drang*-movement, contributed to the emergence of Romanticism as a historical and artistic movement by writing *Die Leiden der Jungen Werthers*, a quintessence of romantic literature. Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is equally seen as a literary romantic milestone (Beiser, 2003; Benton & DiYanni, 2005; Korsten, 2005; Van Lierop-Debrauwer, 2010).

While the romantics tried to transfigure ordinary experience into something transcendental, the realists, who developed their aesthetic ideology subsequently, were much more concerned with depicting life as it is. They denied the spiritual and the powers of nature. The realist movement, which, just like Romanticism, was a reaction to the industrial revolution and capitalism, tried to describe the harsh reality of modern, everyday life. They did so by relying on language. Imagination was less important than description (Korsten, 2005; Taylor, 1989). Especially in Great Britain, writers of *Bildungsromane* wanted to demonstrate how unforgiving life could be. The novels of Charles Dickens demonstrate this extremely well, as for example *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Great Expectations* (1861) both

tell the coming-of-age stories of ill-fated youngsters in Victorian England (Beiser, 2003; Benton & DiYanni, 2005; Van Lierop-Debrauwer, 2010).

2.3 *The emergence and evolution of the young adult genre*

The *Bildungsroman* is seen as the predecessor of the YA genre (Van Lierop-Debrauwer, 2010). However, while *Bildungsromane* featured adolescent protagonists and described their journey from childhood to maturity, they were not actually written *for* that particular age group. In fact, adolescents were still considered to be (older) children well into the twentieth century. Because children started working early in life, they skipped the adolescent phase and became adults almost instantly. This changed around 1900, when more children went to secondary school to earn an education (Cart, 2010). In high school, children resided in the company of peers, resulting in the gradual emergence of youth cultures, though they centred mostly on social life within the school. Adolescents were still widely regarded as children until the 1930s and 1940s. The notion that these older ‘children’ belonged to a separate age group with their own needs and interests, did not emerge until the 1950s, when psychologists such as Erikson (1968) defined these new life stages of human development (Cart, 2010).

The term ‘young adult’ was hardly used until after World War II, but that changed during the 1950s and 1960s. Instead of being a rather unnoticed age group, teenagers started to develop their own identities, tastes and lifestyles (Bennett, 2001). Young adults were being recognized as their own separate age group. Although youth cultures did exist before World War II, they started to become more dominant in society after the war, especially in the US. Due to economic welfare and mass production, young people started to become more financially independent. They began to consume different products than their parents, as the industry recognized them as a separate target group and responded to their needs. This meant that products were created especially for them, such as clothing and music. It also brought forth a whole new literary genre, namely ‘Young Adult Literature’ (Eyerman & Jamison, 1995; Bennett, 2001; Cart, 2010.)

Many early ‘young adult’ novels were originally published for an adult *or* a children’s audience. In the nineteenth century, books for children were often highly didactic. Children’s books that could be read for the sole purpose of pleasure were not published until 1850. They include *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Little Women* by Alcott (1868) (Myracle, 1995). The latter can be seen as an initiation novel and perhaps as one of the first novels for young adults, as it was especially written for a young (female) audience (Bell, 2011). Alcott’s novel opened up the book market for this brand new genre (see also Myracle,

1995). Alger's *Ragged Dick* (1868) is usually mentioned in the same breath as *Little Women*, as his novels were published around the same time and marketed towards teen boys. *Little Women*'s influence brought on a whole range of 'domestic' girl books, while *Ragged Dick* gave rise to adventure books for boys. The 'Stratemeyer' series, as invented by Edward Stratemeyer, included *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew*. These were published around 1900 and even though they were written for young adults, they still had extremely moralistic stories (see e.g., Myracle, 1995; Crowe, 2002; Nilsen & Donelson, 2001; Cart, 2010; Bell, 2011).

While Alcott's and Alger's novels evidently lead to a whole new range of YA books, there is still some debate on what exactly the first 'real' young adult novel is. Cart (2010) sees Daly's *Seventeenth Summer* (1942) as the beginning of the YA genre, even though it was originally published for an adult audience. Trupe (2006) names the much later published *The Outsiders* (1967) by S.E. Hinton, while Hayn, Kaplan & Nolen (2011), Myracle (1995) and Nilsen & Donelson (2001) all suggest that the initiation novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J.D. Salinger is the first YA novel (also originally written for adults). According to Cart (2010), *The Catcher in the Rye* makes use of a first-person narrator who sounds like a real teenager, something that had not been done before. The first-person narrator is currently a common aesthetic feature in YA literature. Furthermore, unlike previous books which were seen as innocent and 'happy reads', novels like *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Outsiders* deal with more adult themes and confront its readers with harsh realities (Cart, 2010; Hayn, Kaplan & Nolen, 2011). This trend is still on-going in modern YA novels, as many deal with complex themes.

In the seventies, the YA genre really started to develop into its own literary genre with many new novels published, such as *The Chocolate War* (1974). This critically acclaimed novel dealt with serious themes and showed that books for young adults can end badly (Cart, 2010). It changed the YA genre radically, especially in the seventies and eighties, when the so-called 'problem novel' surfaced. These books revolved around a single realistic, but rather 'darkish' theme, such as bullying or abortion. They frequently had a high moral, which was often more important than the actual story. While adolescents read these books enthusiastically, adults were less excited. In the late seventies, however, the problem novel started to become less popular as the stories became more formulaic and unrealistic (Cart, 2010).

The eighties saw a rise of both the (high school) romance and the horror novel, continuing into the nineties (Cart, 2010). In the late nineties the YA genre underwent a big change when *Harry Potter* (1997) was published. Not only did the series boost the genre, it

also lead to an increase in adults reading YA novels. Many novels such as *Harry Potter* and *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999) were marketed as ‘cross-over literature’: books that were both suitable for teenagers and adults (Cart, 2010). Though the trend of cross-over literature has come and gone, the majority of YA books are still being read by adults (Andersen, 2015).

It should be noted that most of the literature on YA fiction mostly focuses on novels published in the North-American continent. Additionally, though there are many YA ‘classics’, some of which have been mentioned above, there does not seem to be an established canon. It is even argued that YA novels are not ‘worthy’ of being included in the literary canon (Cart, 2010). Daniels (2006) argues that lack of literary criticism regarding YA literature is part of the problem. It does not “offer enough substance” to be considered canonical literature (ibid, p. 78). However, many YA novels have literary qualities, are critically acclaimed and have been awarded with prizes. This indicates a shift in the literary field: these YA novels are starting to form a new domain within this field (Bourdieu, 1993). For example, the Michael F. Printz award “is an award for a book that exemplifies literary excellence in young adult literature” (“[Printz-award]”, 2016). Some novels that have been awarded are *I’ll Give You The Sun* (2014) and *Postcards from No Man’s Land* (1999). Other awards – specifically aimed at YA fiction – include Margaret A. Edwards Award (for a lasting contribution to YA literature, previously won by writers such as Markus Zusak), the Morris Award (best YA debut) and the Carnegie Medal, won in 2016 by Crossan’s *One* (2015).

2.4 Current trends and developments in young adult literature

Ever since the publication of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* in the early 2000’s, the YA genre has enjoyed a boost. There have been some developments and trends since the publishing of these series. As previously discussed, *Twilight* brought on a whole new range of paranormal books, featuring fantastical creatures such as vampires and werewolves. Examples are *Beautiful Creatures* (2009) and *The Wolves of Mercy-Fall* (2009). *The Hunger Games* lead to new takes on the dystopian and post-apocalyptic genre with series such as *Divergent* (2011) and *The Fifth Wave* (2013). Some of the titles mentioned above have been or will be made into films. Green’s bestseller *The Fault in Our Stars* about two ill teenagers, inspired many writers to write contemporary novels about teenagers who struggle with illness, but also about teenagers with completely different lives who fall for each other. *Eleanor & Park* (2012) and *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012) are a few examples, both of which are critically acclaimed novels (Tarulli & Brendler, 2014).

These last two books contribute to the diversity of YA novels, as *Eleanor & Park* feature a American-Korean boy and a girl who struggles with weight issues, while *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Secrets of the Universe* explores Latino culture in the US and homosexuality. Though there has been an increase in diversity in YA literature, the last few years there has still been a call for even more diversity in YA fiction, specifically in the US. According to Miller (2014), when society becomes increasingly diverse (in terms of audiences), so should literature. Both YA publishers and novels have been criticized for paying too little attention to writers with a different background, not presenting people of colour on book covers and novels featuring mainly white protagonists. According to Lam (2011), readers with a different background have trouble identifying with characters who are so different from themselves, while representation can in fact lead to more self-value. Being able to find oneself in fiction can also make individuals – especially young people – more invested in reading (Caillouet & Sanford, 2014). Moreover, Lam (2011) argues that reading about completely different characters than oneself can provide readers with alternate views on living one's life (Miller, 2014). It is important to note that diversity does not only refer to multiculturalism, but to a diverse variety of characters within YA novels who differ in race, gender, sexual orientation, body type, or characters that dealing with (mental) illnesses or disabilities (Miller, 2014).

This chapter has explored the origins, characteristics of and trends within young adult literature. The following chapter will look more specifically at various theories regarding reception and perception of art in general – and literature in particular. It will also demonstrate which cultural practices are related to the perception of art, which serves as a stepping stone for the chapter after that, which explores the construction of the self and narrative identity.

3. RECEPTION AND PERCEPTION OF ART

Young adult fiction is a form of literature, which in turn is seen as a form of art. As all (institutionalized) art forms, YA fiction is consumed by readers. There are, however, many ways and reasons to consume – and interpret – an artwork. Therefore, this chapter on aesthetic experiences will explore this phenomenon. The study of aesthetics is concerned with questions about art, such as what it is, why it is considered art and why it should be valued. Additionally, sociology, psychology and other disciplines are also concerned with aesthetics, resulting in different theories on art perception (Van den Braembussche, 1994; Freeland, 2001).

This chapter will first look at the artwork and how the audience interprets it. Several elements of art and their respective theories such as emotions, imagination, pragmatism and cognitivism will be explored. Then, audiences itself will be investigated further with help of Bourdieu's (1984) theory on taste and distinction. Lastly, this chapter will look at *how* audiences use artworks in their daily lives and how it contributes to the construction of the self. This will be done by discussing studies of Radway (1984), Long (1986) and DeNora (2000), most notably.

3.1 *Imagination in art*

Imagination plays an important role in both creating artworks and interpreting them. The concept of imagination is explored in various ways by several theorists, as each kind of artwork is related differently to another kind of imagination (Currie, 2001). Relevant to this thesis is the connection between imagination and fiction: Ricoeur (1991a), a theorist central to this thesis, himself ascribes a large role to imagination in the *(co-)creation* of fiction. He bases these thoughts on Goodman's (1978) notion that symbolic systems make and remake the world. Ricoeur (1991a) distinguishes between the image as a copy and the image as fiction. The copy merely refers to the thing it represents, which he calls 'reproductive imagination'. It does not actually produce something itself. But fiction does: it refers to things in a 'productive' way. Through imagination, it creates something new. Ricoeur (1991a) even compares this way of productivity to "reality shaping" (p. 117). Fiction can change, invent and discover reality. Fiction does this by means of metaphors, as they are productive images of language. By making new combinations of already existing components, other, more complex images are created. Therefore, it augments reality.

Similarly to Ricoeur (1991), Gregory Currie (2001) distinguishes between two kinds of imagination, the first being the ‘recreative imagination’, where the image resembles the thing it simulates or represents. It cannot be described without any reference to the thing that is being represented. It does not have to be creative, other than the second kind of imagination, namely ‘creative imagination’. According to Currie (2001), this does not simulate anything, but instead creates something entirely new that goes beyond conventions and expectations. This kind of imagination causes the creation of valuable art (Currie, 2001). Both kinds of imagination are important to art. Creative imagination is crucial when it comes to the production of (complex) art, but also to interpreting it. Perceivers create meaning from symbols and metaphors in art, something both Ricoeur (1991) and Goodman (1978) also emphasize. Recreative imagination however, is important when it comes to engaging with artworks, because Currie sees this as the ability to put oneself in another person’s (or character’s) place (Nichols, 2004).

3.2 Emotions in art

Aristotle believed that the most important function of art was to stir up emotions among the audience. But these emotions should be ones of pity and fear, so that the audience would not make the same mistakes as the characters in the play (Van den Braembussche, 1994; Pappas, 2001; Freeland, 2001). Many scholars agree that the idea of art containing, expressing and/or ‘purging’ emotions is one of the most common and best-known interpretations of the aesthetic experience. This theory is known as the expression theory or expressivism (Van den Braembussche, 1994; Freeland, 2001; Graham, 2001).

While the general idea of the expression theory holds that art communicates feelings, there are different views on how art does this. Tolstoy (1899) states that art only consist of emotions. The main task of an artist is to express feelings he has experienced in his work, so that the audience can experience the same. However, Freeland (2001) criticizes Tolstoy by arguing that while it certainly works for certain kinds of art, it does not for all types (Graham, 1997). Moreover, she argues that the artist does not necessarily need to feel the emotions expressed in his work. It is the work that conveys emotions, not the artist itself (Freeland, 2001).

Collingwood (1945) does believe that the creation of art springs from the emotions experienced by the artist. But other than Tolstoy, Collingwood (1945) argues that the artist does not necessarily have to be aware of these emotions. By creating a work, the artist explores and identifies his own emotions (Graham, 1997). Therefore, art always has a strong

connection with daily life in which these emotions and experiences are situated. This more pragmatist view is also emphasized by Ricoeur (1991) and Dewey (1934). But, as Collingwood (1945) states, the artwork does not have to be physical in order to be created. Instead, he ascribes a crucial role to the act of imagining. Art has two equally important elements, namely imagination and expression (Graham, 2001). Through imagination, the artist can express himself. Therefore, the artwork can exist solely in the mind of the artist as a form of self-knowledge (Van den Braembussche, 1994; Graham, 1997; 2001).

3.3 Pragmatism in art

Engagement with art – and more specifically the experience resulting from that engagement – is central to the theory of pragmatism (Freeland, 2001). Dewey (1934) supports the view that art should have connections with everyday life, just like Currie (2001), Collingwood (1945) and Ricoeur (1991). Dewey (1934) believes that artworks should not be exclusive and isolated from everyday experiences. By for instance putting artworks in a museum or ‘on a pedestal’, it is removed from the everyday lives and experiences of people, making it inaccessible (Freeland, 2001). Dewey (1934) diverges from the dominating view that art, the attitude it requires to appreciate art and the experience art conveys, should be completely removed from daily life. Instead, he argues that this connection should be restored. Aesthetic experiences are also present in daily life and art is a refinement of these experiences. Moreover, the artwork itself does not matter the most, but the *experience* brought forth through appreciation of the work (Veldeman, 2013; Shusterman, 2001).

These aesthetic experiences, Dewey (1934) argues, are active and imaginative processes, (Veldeman, 2013). He claims that in a sense, all ‘conscious experience’ is on some level imaginative. All human beings, not just creative individuals, are able to imagine. It enables human beings to envision what is not present at the moment and to imagine all sorts of possibilities (Chambliss, 1991). Art embodies those possibilities. Dewey (1934) sees imagination as the ‘power in action’ that creates new elements in art. Ideas are images of something that could be turned into something real, if the imaginer actually transforms the idea into something that exists. This transformation, this action, is needed to find out the meaning of the idea (Chambliss, 1991). The idea, or ‘inner vision’ and the ‘outer vision’ (the actual artwork) combined equals ‘imagination’ (Dewey, 1934). Different from Collingwood’s (1945) radical idea that an artwork does not even need to be created, Dewey states that by transforming it into something tangible, it will be different from the actual idea. To him, the medium of art *is* as important as the idea itself (Chambliss, 1991).

Simultaneously, not just the creator of art, but also the receiver has to actively imagine. Dewey (1934) states that an “aesthetic experience is imaginative” (p. 272) and that all experiences are embedded in the interaction between the individual and his environment, whether that is another person, an idea or an artwork. However, an experience does not become meaningful until the receiver connects both old knowledge from earlier experiences and the newly perceived knowledge. This “conscious adjustment of the new and the old is imagination” (Dewey, 1934, p. 272). Much like Ricoeur (1991c), who claims that the reader is the one to complete the written work, Dewey (1934) notes that the perceiver has to ‘recreate’ the artwork in order to experience and appreciate it. Just like the creator who had to live through several stages in order to arrive at the final product, the perceiver too has to go through these phases, according to his own interests (Dewey, 1934). To be able to perceive, the consumer has to create his own experience while consuming an artwork (Veldeman, 2013). This corresponds with Currie’s (2001) concept of ‘recreative imagination’, especially because Dewey (1934) also emphasizes that recognizable, everyday emotions and events in art makes it more familiar for the perceiver. Moreover, Dewey does not seek to define art or find truth or value in it: to him, the improvement of an aesthetic experience is more important (Veldeman, 2013).

3.4 Cognition and worldmaking

Freeland (2001) categorizes Dewey’s art theory as a cognitive one, as Dewey states consumers can attain knowledge from art and the (aesthetic) experience brought forth by art. Art contains knowledge that gives individuals ideas on how to perceive their surrounding world or “otherwise grapple with reality” (Freeland, 2001, p. 166). However, what kind of knowledge an individual acquires from art and how he or she interprets it, is dependent upon their personal situation and earlier attained knowledge (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984; Freeland, 2001). This notion that art communicates ideas is called ‘cognitive theory’. While expressivism states that art conveys emotions, cognitive theory focuses on ideas, thoughts and knowledge, and ascribes a large role to interpretation (Freeland, 2001).

Not just Dewey (1934) developed certain ideas on how art expresses ideas. As mentioned previously, Ricoeur (1991) sees fiction as a way to produce new realities. Similar to this, Goodman (1978) believes that the world – and thus art – is made up of numerous symbol systems. These systems can be seen as a sort of ‘language’. Each kind of discipline (including science and art) is made up of its own system, as they all communicate in a different way: fiction is written in words, whereas a music score consists of musical symbols

(Freeland, 2001). This means that these systems are culturally constructed (Nünning, 2010). By construing such symbol systems, which can be seen as ‘worlds’, we at the same time ‘make’ our world (Goodman, 1978; Ricoeur, 1980; Freeland, 2001). Goodman (1978) states, “worldmaking as we know it starts from worlds already on hand, the making is a remaking” (p. 6). Worldmaking is not merely a representation of what already is. It is an active process that constructs new patterns and versions, meaning endless world versions can exist next to each other (Nünning, 2010). That what is relevant in one world, can be completely irrelevant in another one. This may already vary between different kinds of artworks within a genre, such as paintings. Equally, some elements may be more emphasized than in other worlds. Making artworks, and thus worlds, requires being both inventive and (re-)creative (Goodman, 1978).

Just like Dewey, Goodman (1968) sees the aesthetic experience as an active process. To him, viewing an aesthetic experience as passive activity is absurd. It is a dynamic process in which individuals have to identify an artwork’s symbol system, interpret it and in turn reorganize “the world in terms of works and works in term of the world” (Goodman, 1968, p. 241). In other words, engaging with art broadens our perspective of the world. Such an encounter will change our experience and skills (Goodman, 1968; Freeland, 2001). Similar to Currie (2001), Goodman (1968) calls this aesthetic experience or attitude “creation and recreation” (p. 242). In that sense, Goodman’s theory can be seen as cognitive. Interestingly enough, he also mentions emotions, which function in a cognitive manner. Instead of seeing emotion and cognition as two ends on a spectrum, Goodman (1968) argues they arise simultaneously. Nevertheless, the emotions that are being felt while consuming an artwork, are experienced in order to *understand* the artwork, and therefore the world. How much emotion a work possesses or the intensity of the experienced emotions do not matter much. Emotions also do not need to be positive: negative emotions, such as horror or disgust can lead to comprehension as well (Goodman, 1968). This was also emphasized by Aristotle, who believed that tragedies (plays) could lead to what he called catharsis. Catharsis is the effect that emotions such as fear and pity can have on an audience. By experiencing and releasing these emotions while sympathizing with the hero, it would ‘purge’ or purify the audience. In this way, it would regulate their emotions in everyday life (Pappas, 2003).

3.5 Taste and the perception of art

As the theories of Dewey (1934), Goodman (1968; 1978) and Currie (2001) all have shown, audiences are key in interpreting, understanding and using art. However, as previously

discussed, the way individuals interpret art is dependent on their knowledge of art, as well as their socioeconomic backgrounds (Alexander, 2003). This has not just been emphasized by Dewey (1934); Bourdieu's (1984) theory on distinction, for example, has explored this notion extensively. He calls this knowledge on (high) art 'cultural capital' and argues this is what determines *how* an individual approaches and interprets an artwork, but also *what kind of art* he or she prefers. Bourdieu (1984) argues that when an individual possesses a large amount of cultural capital, he or she is more likely to prefer more complex art, because they have the knowledge to interpret it accordingly (Bourdieu, 1984; Kraaykamp & Dijkstra, 1999).

The amount of cultural capital an individual has is linked to the *habitus*: an internalized system of dispositions that is linked to the socioeconomic environment in which the actor is embedded (Bourdieu, 1984). The habitus determines the daily lifestyle of an individual and all its aspects, including, for example, manners, preferences in clothing, perception and appreciation (or taste) of art, literature, etc. (Bourdieu, 1984; Daenekindt & Roose, 2014). The habitus, and therefore cultural capital, is inheritable: a child from a culturally-oriented family has more chance to gain knowledge on art and is therefore better able to interpret and understand complex art forms. This is what Bourdieu (1984; 1989) calls the *embodied* state of cultural capital, as it is internalized within the individual over time. Although it is possible to attain it later on in life by self-improvement, it requires effort. The *objectified* state is the most straightforward form of cultural capital to come by: it refers to (the possession of) culture in a material form, such as books, paintings, musical instruments and so forth (Bourdieu, 1989). The *institutionalized* state of cultural capital, finally, is slightly easier to acquire than the embodied state, though it requires time and effort, as it refers to academic diplomas and titles. It gives an individual status and legitimizes their knowledge on culture. Moreover, the institutionalized state is also inheritable: children of highly educated parents are more likely to attain knowledge and skills from their parents and are thus more likely to complete a high level of education themselves. This cycle reproduces social and cultural distinction between classes (Bourdieu, 1984).

According to Bourdieu (1984) and many other empirical studies such as those by Kraaykamp and Dijkstra (1999) and Daenekindt and Roose (2014), highly-educated individuals incline to prefer high art, while lower-educated individuals favor low or popular culture. High culture tends to be more complex and therefore requires more knowledge on art and culture. This also applies to literature. *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984) includes a study which researches taste in books between social classes in France. Modern authors and poetry are preferred by the upper class, while the working class rather reads detective and romance

stories (Kraaykamp & Dijkstra, 1999). Kraaykamp and Dijkstra (1999) argue that this is, amongst other reasons, due to the complexity of these novels. When an individual reads novel that matches his or hers cultural and literary ‘competence’, it will result in a higher aesthetic appreciation and levels of pleasure. Anything too simple or too difficult will either result in boredom or frustration. However, if a reader has enough literary and cultural competence, it is likely they will favor more complex literary novels. Kraaykamp and Dijkstra (1999) therefore conclude that a novel’s complexity is a motive for (not) reading it.

Bourdieu (1984) sees ‘complexity’ as a characteristic of high art. In order to be able to decode and value complex art, cultural competence is required. As cultural competence is part of an individual’s habitus – and thus their system of dispositions – as a whole, Bourdieu (1984) calls this the ‘aesthetic disposition’. The aesthetic disposition enables individuals to perceive complex art that does *not* directly refer to schemes and codes that occur in daily life (Daenekindt & Roose, 2014). Bourdieu (1984) argues that high art is perceived with a ‘pure gaze’, meaning that viewers ‘distance’ themselves from the artwork – and therefore everyday life – and observe and evaluate predominantly the form. It can bring forth an ‘intellectual-aesthetic experience’ (Alexander, 2003). Moreover, formalism and symbolism are important in high art. The ‘popular aesthetic’, on the contrary, opposes the aesthetic disposition: individuals with lower cultural competence apply daily occurring codes and schemes when perceiving (popular) art. This means there is little distance between the artwork and the viewer. Familiarity, identification, emotion and entertainment are favored aspects of popular art. This explains why individuals with low amounts of cultural capital prefer realistic and functional artworks, such as landscapes or portraits (Bourdieu, 1984; Daenekindt & Roose, 2014).

Bourdieu (1984) has been criticized for his unambiguous and outdated view, as nowadays cultural consumption and taste patterns seem to be much more complicated. Peterson and Kern (1996), for example, have demonstrated that while high status groups do in fact consume high art forms, they *also* care for popular art forms. They are ‘omnivorous’ in their consuming behavior. Van Eijck (1999) mentions this is due to the fact that nowadays, not every member of a high status group has a similar social background. Some lower status individuals have climbed up the social ladder through education or otherwise, which is also known as ‘upward social mobility’. Education can also lead to different patterns of cultural consumption (Nagel, 2004). While Griswold, McDonnell and Wright (2005) state that highly-educated parents are likely to expose their children to written material more often, Kraaykamp and Dijkstra (1999) mention that literary classes and mandatory reading in high school can

lead to greater literary competence and that reading books can increase cultural competence, even later on in life.

3.6 Uses of art in everyday life

Bourdieu's (1984) ideas on perception of art can be compared to those of Collingwood (1945), Dewey (1934) and Ricoeur (1991), as he too makes the connection between art and everyday life, albeit in a different manner. Both the popular and aesthetic disposition can be applied to everyday choices and objects, such as clothing, decorating and cooking. But while the popular aesthetic is closely related to codes and schemes in daily life (which can be seen as experiences in everyday life), the aesthetic disposition distances itself from these codes and schemes, as well as from everyday life itself (Daenekindt & Roose, 2014). Bourdieu (1984) argues that individuals with a large amount of cultural capital who apply the 'pure gaze' to everyday objects, distinguish themselves even more from other classes, as only they employ it in this way. In addition, Alexander (2003) mentions that while enjoyment of the arts is common to all classes, the way it is being enjoyed (should an individual 'work hard' to enjoy it or is it merely fun and easy?) can differ as well.

The 'uses and gratifications' approach questions why individuals use media and for what use. It holds that the audience is active in its agency and seeks out different forms of popular culture in order to satisfy certain needs (Katz, Blumler & Gorevitch, 1973). However, it can be argued that this approach is too simplistic: it implies that audiences only consume media (or cultural products) to satisfy their needs and the media will provide it to them. It focuses too much on what audiences 'get' out of the use of cultural products, but not what it means to them (Alexander, 2003).

Another aspect the uses and gratifications theory ignores is both the role of art in the daily lives of consumers and *how* they consume and use cultural products (DeNora, 2000; Griswold, McDonnell & Wright, 2005). The use of art – and more specific – fiction in the context of daily life is also known as cultural practice (DeNora, 2000). This is very much in line with Dewey's (1934) pragmatist ideas that art should play a role in the everyday lives of individuals. The concept of 'cultural practice' find its origins in symbolic interactionism, as individuals act towards objects (such as art) based on the knowledge they have on that particular object, as well as that this knowledge is obtained through interaction with other individuals (Denzin, 2004). Similarly, Barton & Hamilton (1998) state that practices are embedded in a broader social context, connect people with one another and "include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities" (p. 7). Griswold, McDonnell and

Wright (2005) also state that reading is a social matter, as reading is not just a solitary act, but rather it connects individuals. Especially book clubs and reading groups bring people together to discuss books. Both Long's (1986) and Radway's (1984) studies on women's reading groups demonstrate this. Additionally, Barton and Hamilton (1998) state that practices are not just behavioral actions, but also include emotions, values, and social relationships. However, different areas of life call for different literacy practices. They are part of larger social goals and cultural practices and can change over time when new knowledge is acquired (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

While Barton and Hamilton (1998) mentions practices such as entertaining oneself, communicating with others, making sense of one's world, and participating in social life, Usherwood and Toyne (2002) write about completely other literacy practices (see also Griswold, McDonnell & Wright, 2005). They speak about satisfying needs through reading and motivations for reading 'imaginative literature' (including fiction, poetry and script plays). However, these can be seen as literacy or reading practices, especially because they state individuals are not always aware of such needs, and motivations can be fluid.

The most common motivation for people to read is to escape, to 'get carried away' (Currie, 2001; Usherwood & Toyne, 2002). However, 'escapism' is a complex concept and can be understood in multiple ways, as readers want to escape from a range of things. They for example want to get away from their daily, busy lives and relax with a book, or escape from their state of mind, such as sadness or loneliness. Radway's (1984) study on women who read romance novels demonstrate this particular practice. Other readers want to be transported into other 'worlds' that are described in narratives, or 'become' one of the characters and live their lives through reading. Those stories do not need to be completely different from a readers' life, as sometimes readers like to read about recognizable experiences. Similarly, some readers like to relate to situations described in novels to make sense of events in their own lives (Usherwood & Toyne, 2002).

Another motivation for individuals to read is to acquire practical knowledge on the world and improve their literacy skills (Usherwood & Toyne, 2002). In Radway's (1984) study, education was, next to escapism, the second main reason for reading romance novels. In addition, books can contribute to self-knowledge and personal development (Usherwood & Toyne, 2002). Long's (1986) study on woman reading groups show that many women use books for self-understanding. Their interpretation of the book are based on personal reasons, rather than the actual meaning of the book. This corresponds with Dewey's (1934) pragmatist view that experiences in everyday life stands at the foundation of one's interpretation of an

artwork. Long (1986) states that by looking at interpretations, it can contribute to understanding both the text and the 'inner dynamics' of the reader. Additionally, she has noticed many readers talk about characters as if they are real. Readers look for characters and stories they can identify with and feel closely related to. Why an author has written a character in a particular way is not important: the readers' opinions matter more. By talking about their own opinions and reactions, "complex processes of self-definition" (p. 606) are at work, by for example questioning their own values (Long, 1986).

3.7 Art and the construction of the self

Radway's (1984) and Long's (1986) studies create a better understanding on how individuals use (romance) novels in their daily lives and even show how they contribute to personal development and self-definition, while Bourdieu (1984) demonstrates how one's cultural preference and socioeconomic background are related. However, they do not demonstrate how art relates to the construction of identity and the self. Usherwood and Toyne (2002) do mention that individuals who read identify themselves *as* readers: they feel like they would lose part of themselves or their identity if they could not read anymore. While DeNora's (2000) study focuses on (popular) music, it does show how individuals utilize art in everyday life in relation to the construction of (self-)identity. Here too, the interpretation of the listener is more important than hearing a musical piece 'correctly'. Moreover, the practice of listening to music contains much more than the reception of a song. Many respondents say they 'need' to listen to certain kinds of music in different situations. They self-consciously use music in order to 'self-regulate' their daily lives. By listening to certain kind of music, respondents try to get into a certain mood or 'mode of agency' that is demanded in particular situations, such as relaxation, to motivate themselves, concentration, and so forth. It shows music has 'transformative powers', meaning it changes something for or in listeners: "it 'does' things, 'changes' things, 'makes things happen'" (DeNora, 2000, p. 48). Respondents use music also as a medium to get *through* certain moods, by for example listening to rock music at full volume. This shows that music can evoke emotions, but it can also be used to get rid of bad feelings or work through them. It therefore depends on the way individuals utilize music and how they interpret it. The last cultural practice that DeNora (2000) identifies is self-perception. This practice corresponds with Long's (1986) practice of self-definition. DeNora (2000) defines self-perception as the practice of music helping individuals to find the "the me in life" (p. 69). She argues that individuals locate their selves in music by mirroring their selves and therefore helps identify their identity (DeNora, 2000).

In this chapter, various theories regarding the reception and perception of art has been discussed to demonstrate how audiences perceive and interpret artworks. These audiences and their uses of artworks also have been explored. This discussion has served as a means for the next chapter, which will delve deeper into topics of self-identity construction, and more specifically, the construction of narrative identity. Particularly, the role fiction has in this formation will be explored.

4. NARRATIVE IDENTITY

The previous chapter has shown that individuals utilize art in everyday life in many ways and for various reasons. Both art and the utilisation of art play a part in the construction of (personal) identity of the individual. Such thinking about these cultural practices (like identity formation, social interaction, mood regulation, structuring one's day, etc.) find its origins in pragmatism and symbolic interactionism. Through the interaction with others, our self is constructed (Mead, 1934). Ricoeur (1991) argues that narratives or stories subsequently play a role in identity formation and, more specifically, the narrative identity of the individual.

This chapter will explore the origins of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism as introduced by James, Cooley, Mead and Blumer (see for a theoretical overview: Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). This discussion is meant as a stepping-stone for a discussion of Ricoeur's (1991) theory of narrative identity. Furthermore, this chapter will look more closely at debates on the construction of narrative identity within the field of psychology, including sub-fields such as cognitive science, social psychology and developmental psychology and personality psychology (Singer et al., 2013).

4.1 A pragmatist view on the self

Pragmatism has a long history, beginning with philosophers such as Aristotle and Dewey, some of whose ideas have been already discussed in this study (Morris, 1962, in: Mead, 1934). Next to Dewey, William James, Charles Horton Cooley and George H. Mead are seen as key pragmatist thinkers. Pragmatism revolves around the belief that practices and experiences in everyday life lays at the foundation of the construction of the self. Their belief that the self should be situated in everyday life completely opposes the theories of philosophers like Descartes, who sees the self as something that is transcendental to social life. According to Descartes, the self is not derived from experience; it exists, because human beings are able to reason ("I think, therefore I am"). Moreover, the self is universal and therefore the same for everyone. Pragmatists such as James, Cooley and Mead disagree with all of this, instead proposing a so-called 'empirical' understanding of the self in which 'empirical' refers to experiences individuals have in daily life which form the basis of the construction of the self and self-identity (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

While James, Cooley and Mead all belong to the pragmatist tradition, they all developed the theory according to their own thoughts. James was the first one to reject the idea of the transcendental self. He argues that the self is empirical: it is shaped through

interaction in various social environments. Everyday experiences form and change the self of an individual, making it a unique one (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Regarding the self, James distinguishes between the subjective “I” and the objective “Me”. “I” refers to the self as the source of awareness. He argues that individual possesses some form of self-awareness, since we are always using pronouns like “I”, “me” and “myself” when we are communicating to ourselves or to others (Leary, 1990; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). The “Me”, on the other hand, refers to the object connected to that source of awareness which we indicate with pronouns such as “mine”. The empirical self, then, is divided into three forms. The material self refers to anything material that we feel belongs to us (such as our bodies, families or possessions). The social self refers to our relationships with others, and the spiritual self to our subjective consciousness or our “I”. These three forms, however, are not sharply distinguished parts of the self. Instead, James states that they are all important elements that express who we, and others, are. They “feature our identity in practice” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 24). Moreover, the social self of an individual is fluid. There is no “idealized state of being” as Descartes claims (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Instead the self, situated in everyday life, keeps changing and developing in interaction with others (Leary, 1990; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

Similar to James, Cooley (1902) ascribes an important role to both communication and everyday life. He also talks about the ‘empirical self’, but renames as it the social self, as he wishes to emphasize the social aspect of identity formation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Cooley (1902) argues that we have an instinctive feeling for our own individuality, namely ‘self-feeling’. It exists at the core of the social self. The experiences and interactions we encounter in the world shapes the self, which is a process called socialization. However, it also influences the way we see ourselves. Cooley (1902) introduces the concept of the “looking-glass self”. The principle of the looking-glass self has three elements: we imagine how appear to the other, we imagine how the other might perceive or judge us based on that appearance, and the resulting self-feeling (or how we view ourselves). The opinions of others are thus not very important in this theory, but the imagination of these opinions as they appear to us are (Cooley, 1902; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

Even though Mead’s (1934) theory is similar to those of James and Cooley, he attributes an even greater role to social interaction and experience in relation to self-formation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Mead (1934) believes that society shapes the self of individuals, meaning the self is a social construct. An individual does not have a sense of self at birth, but that it is developed through social interactions, whether they are exchanges with others or

inner conversations with their own selves (thinking). These interactions are exchanges of symbols and (vocal) gestures, meaning language plays a central role in identity construction. Mead has identified two forms of interaction, which are “conversations of gestures” (Blumer (1969) calls this non-symbolic) and “the use of significant symbols” (symbolic). Non-symbolic interaction takes place when someone responds to an action without interpreting it; symbolic interaction does involve a sense of interpretation (Blumer, 1969). Moreover, social interactions are not merely outings of human behaviour, but they form them, too. We are able to place ourselves in the position of others through symbolic gestures and by doing so, we develop our self-consciousness. Social interaction makes us see ourselves as the other sees us (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

The development of the self-consciousness starts early in childhood and consists of three stages. Stage one is the ‘preparatory stage’, in which children imitate others around them while playing. However, these imitations cannot be seen as real interactions as children only copy the behaviour of others. In stage two, the ‘play stage’, children take on the roles of others. They for example play “mum and dad”, trying out other points of view than their own. The ‘game stage’ is the third stage, during which children learn to play their own role in an organized game and simultaneously take on the roles of the others involved. They also come to understand that the players in the game and their actions are related to each other (Mead, 1934; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

The fourth and final stage revolves around what Mead calls the “generalized other”, or the organization of individuals in a social structure and the conventions that come with these structures. This could be a game, but also society as a whole. The generalized other is what gives us our “unity of self” (Mead, 1934, p. 154). We behave accordingly to what the generalized other expects of us, enabling us to take on multiple roles at once. This is what shapes the objective side of our social self, our “Me”, according to Mead. Our “I”, however, is subjective and impulsive, and responds to the “Me”. Lastly, the opinions of our “significant others”, who are the most important people closest to us, also strongly influence how we see and behave ourselves (Mead, 1934; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

4.2 Symbolic interactionism

The theory of symbolic interactionism originates from Mead’s theory, but it was his student Blumer who organized Mead’s thoughts on mind, self and society and gave it its label. Symbolic interactionism is one of the dominant theories on identity within sociology. It revolves around the relationship between individual and society, and how individuals respond

to meanings they have constructed in interaction with others. Blumer (1969), a member of the Chicago School, argues that symbolic interactionism consists of three assumptions. The first assumption is that individuals act towards objects (which could be physical objects, but also other human beings, situations, etc.) based on what those objects mean to them. Second, these meanings originate from social interactions with others, as objects can have different meanings for different individuals. And third, meanings can change. Individuals constantly interpret and reinterpret these meanings during interactions with other people. In other words, social interaction is central to the process of meaning-making. We not only make meaning of the world around us, but also of our own selves (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Blumer (1969) adds that as human beings, we have a self and are therefore able to communicate and interact *with* ourselves, something Mead (1934) also has observed.

4.3 Mimesis and narrative identity

In the same tradition of Dewey, James, Cooley and Mead, Ricoeur (1991a) argues that experience is key in the construction of identity. However, these experiences do not just occur in daily life, but also in fiction. Ricoeur (1991a) suggests that fiction is both an essential component of life and of the self. Readers have the chance to enter stories, or narratives, through reading them, and therefore experiencing them themselves. In this way, these narratives become not only part of the identity of the reader, but also are the *medium* through which identity is constructed. He argues that an individual initially does not know who he or she is, but that through narratives (both fictional and factual, in the form of storytelling or everyday talk and interaction), personal identity is constructed. Obviously, this construction of narrative identity is never finished, but continues throughout an entire lifespan, ending only with death (De Mul, 2000; 2004).

To understand how Ricoeur has come to these conclusions, it is crucial to clarify how life and fiction relate to each other. In order to explain this, Ricoeur (1991b) uses Aristotle's theory of mimesis, meaning that fiction can be seen as representation of life. Aristotle bases his theory on mimesis on Plato's earlier ideas of art and imitation. Plato sees art (usually in the form of tragedies or skilled crafts) as mimesis or imitations of human life. According to Plato, reality should be defined as belonging to the noumenal world of Ideals Forms or Ideas – which lies beyond our everyday (phenomenal) world. Everything in our world is in fact a copy of these Ideas. Art, consequently, fails to imitate or depict these 'eternal ideal realities', as they are imperfect imitations of copies (Van den Braembussche, 1994; Freeland, 2001).

Aristotle, however, disagrees with Plato. He argues that art such as tragedies and other forms of literary drama (*mythos*), despite being ‘imitations’, actually leads to a new production. Art does not just imitate life; it rather represents or produces it (Ricoeur, 1991b; Freeland, 2001). That is what makes them ‘art’ (Graham, 1997). Imitation (mimesis) can only occur through human action or *poiesis* (production). The production of reality in fiction is not merely an imitation of a ‘pre-existing’ object, but actually *produces* something new and therefore enhances its meaning. Because as Ricoeur (1991c, p. 138) states, “mimesis brings about an augmentation of meaning”. However, what makes an imitation *poiesis*, according to Aristotle, is the arrangement of various incidents into a plot or *mythos*.

All art can be seen as ‘imitations’ of reality, including plays and literature. There are multiple views on what makes art ‘realistic’. Other than Plato’s unyielding view on mimesis, the ‘mimetic quality’ of art can also refer to the way reality is represented. Aristotle states that an art work can be ‘unrealistic’, because the human types, actions and thoughts are universal and therefore still recognizable to the audience (Van den Braembussche, 1994; Graham, 1997). The creator of an artwork shows what he thinks is possible in that particular work, even though it is unrealistic in the sense that it could not happen in real life (like the mythical plays in ancient Greece) (Van den Braembussche, 1994). Nonetheless, it can still be ‘oriented towards reality’ (Bruck, 1982). Additionally, individuals can enjoy and even learn from plays by speaking to their feelings and senses (Pappas, 2001; Freeland, 2001).

Mythos plays a central part in Ricoeur’s theory on mimesis. He suggests that the process of identification with fiction happens through a threefold mimesis. Mimesis¹ is the first level of this threefold process and refers to the “narrative prefiguration” or “pre-narrative qualities” of everyday life (De Mul, 2000; 2004). With this, Ricoeur (1991c) means that human beings act through practical, already existing knowledge on intentions, motives, circumstances, ideals, desires, reasons, and so forth. Because this knowledge already exists, everyday life, Ricoeur (1991c) argues, is “pre-narrated”. Moreover, human action is always mediated by symbols such as signs, rules and norms. Through these symbolic conventions, we are able to interpret situations and narrate actions (Ricoeur, 1991a; 1991b). Lastly, there is the understanding that human actions and experiences have temporal characteristics. Therefore, Ricoeur assigns a crucial role to the link between time and narrative. He argues that we make sense of the “ordinary experience of time” (1991d, p. 338) by organizing experiences and events, that usually seem chaotic and fleeting, into chronological narratives. Narratives are both used to comprehend and express one’s experience with time and temporality (Ricoeur, 1991b; De Mul, 2000; Negus, 2012).

Everyday life, Ricoeur (1991b) states, can be seen as both an activity and a wish “in search for a narrator” (p. 434). Because of the “pre-narrative qualities of human experience” (ibid, p. 434), we are looking for ways to translate these qualities into narratives. This configuration of life into explicit narratives is the second level of mimesis. Mimesis² has to do with Aristotle’s *mythos* or the arrangement of a string of incidents into a plot (also called “the act of emplotment”). A narrative consists of heterogeneous events, but these are, however, all related to each other and form the beginning, middle and end of a story. Moreover, there are no unrelated elements in the plot; all elements are related to each other, meaning the plot is ‘concordant’. (De Mul, 2004). However, just like everyday life, a narrative consists of both fortunate and unfortunate events. Therefore, a concordant plot is constantly threatened and interrupted by discordant events. But without this interruption, there would be no story. It is what makes the narrative plot a ‘dynamic whole’. Ricoeur calls this contradiction a ‘discordant concordance’ (De Mul, 2004). Lastly, a story has a temporal dimension, meaning that the passage of time is represented through the heterogeneous events that are structured around acting (and suffering) characters. This, together with the spatial dimension of a story, creates an entirety (Ricoeur, 1991a; 1991c; De Mul, 2000).

The process of identification is completed through mimesis³, the third level, which is the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader (Ricoeur, 1991a; De Mul, 2000). According to Ricoeur (1991a), it is the reader who completes the story. Through the act of reading, mimesis¹ (prefiguration) is connected through mimesis² (configuration) with mimesis³, or the narrative reconfiguration of a life. This means the reader identifies with the story and applies narrative elements to his or her own life story. De Mul (2000) mentions that with the help of narratives (fictional and factual), individuals are able to create a coherent life story of their own. Just like in stories, individuals are constantly confronted with discordant events, which may shape both their character and their life story. That is why the shaping of the (narrative) identity of an individual is an on-going process (De Mul, 2004).

4.4 Constructing a life story

Ricoeur (1991) focuses solely on literature when talking about narrative identity, but the construction of a life story has its roots in many different disciplines, such as cognitive science, personality psychology, social psychology and developmental psychology (Singer, Blagov, Berry & Oost, 2013). McAdams (2008; 2013) engages mostly in personality psychology, suggesting that narrative is “the vehicle by which identity is constructed” (McAdams, 1993 in: McLean, Breen & Fournier, 2010, p. 166). By reflecting on experiences

in the past and relating it to the self in the present and future, the identity is developed. In other words, the individual makes meaning of these past experiences in order to understand the own self (McLean, 2010).

Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity is closely related to the construction of an individual's life story (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In fact, the life story *is* the narrative identity of an individual. Narratives – fictional or not – help a person construct their life story, which consists of elements from their autobiographical memory. These elements can be events from the past or goals set in the future and are constructed in such a way that they form a coherent story (McAdams & McLean, 2013). This gives individuals a sense of continuity, something McLean (2008b) argues is crucial for a person's well-being. Creating a life story also provides them with order and unity. Additionally, it helps human beings express who they are to themselves, as well as to others (Singer et al., 2013; McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Singer et al. (2013) suggest that a narrative identity consists of three components, namely autobiographical memories, narrative scripts and life stories. In turn, autobiographical memories consist of life-story memories and self-defining memories. Linked to long-term goal pursuits, life-story memories are usually more detailed, well-remembered and significant than other memories. Once these memories are important enough, they can be linked to other significant life-story memories, making up a 'chapter'. This way, they become self-definitional for a person's life story. These self-defining memories are intense and well-rehearsed. Because of shared themes and a particular order of events, they remain more or less the same in a personality or identity throughout the years. Lastly, narrative scripts are created when related scenes are linked together. Scenes are defined by Tomkins as events where emotional responses (affects) are directed to "an object of affect". Scripts, in turn, determine the 'rules' of how an individual will predict, interpret and respond to a scene. These scripts, together with the memories mentioned above, form the life story (Singer et al., 2013).

McLean (2008b) adds that once a life story is formed, newly integrated experiences can either lead to the revision and change of one's identity or to confirmation, and thus stabilization, of an individual's identity. Narratives are used to explain who one is and why one has changed or stayed the same. Habermas and Bluck (2000) call this 'autobiographical reasoning': the development of one's narrative identity or life story. Through self-reflective thinking and talking about one's own past, links between the past and the self are formed in order to understand who one is. By transforming experiences into narratives, one is able to make sense of him-, or herself (McLean, 2008b).

Given the complexity of narrative identity, McAdams (1985) argues that it does not emerge until (late) adolescence. According to Erikson's (1968) theory on psychosocial development, forming an identity is one of the most important tasks during adolescence. During this specific phase, adolescents reach a certain social and cognitive maturity, including formal operational (abstract) thinking. McAdams argues that the construction of a narrative identity provides answers to key questions raised by Erikson (1968), such as 'Who am I?' and 'How did I come to be?' (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2008; McLean, 2008a; McAdams & McLean, 2013).

However, the skill of storytelling that plays a large role in narrative identity development is formed at a much younger age. Through the reminiscence of personal events between parents and children, children acquire narrative skills and learn which memories are worthy of sharing with others (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). It also gives them a sense of the 'storied self' (McLean, Pasupathi & Pals, 2007). Equally, it helps them to learn how to make meaning of these events. McAdams and McLean (2013) claim that individuals use meaning-making to go beyond plots and small details. It enables them to see that a particular story is embedded in a larger narrative and therefore understand what it says about who they are as a person. The skill of meaning-making increases with age, as it is connected with abstract thinking and reasoning, and reflecting on that thinking. But also the managing of paradoxes and contradictions and self-understanding is connected to meaning-making (McLean, Breen & Fournier, 2010; McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Habermas & Bluck (2000) add that during adolescence, individuals are able to see themselves as the protagonist of their own life story. As mentioned above, adults possess the necessary cognitive abilities to collect and connect certain memories and construct those into a life story that is coherent. This 'global coherence', meaning a text in its entirety, consists of four types, namely temporal, causal and thematic coherence and the cultural concept of biography. Similar to Ricoeur's (1991d) theory on narrated time, temporal coherence refers to the ordering of events. This can be done in a chronological order, which is most common in Western cultures, but the use of cyclical orders, including multiple timelines and flashbacks, also occurs in some narratives. The fourth type, the cultural concept of biography, refers to certain events and facts that are expected to be included into the life story, such as birthdays or locations (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Singer et al., 2013).

4.5 Narratives and the construction of the self

As previously discussed, mimesis³, or the narrative reconfiguration of narrated time, is completed when the reader recognizes certain (narrative) elements in a (fictional) story and integrates it into his or her own life story (Ricoeur, 1991a; De Mul, 2000). This includes both identifying with the story and the characters within that story. Kokesh & Sternadorni (2015) state that identification is “one of the main mechanisms through which people develop their social attitudes and construct their identities” (p. 142). Cohen (2001) argues that the identification with fictional characters is an active way of (media) reception. Individuals experience the text from the ‘inside’ and feel as if the fictional events are actually happening *to them*. These so-called narrative emotions are different from aesthetic emotions, which are experienced through the appreciation of the *form* of the artwork (such as writing style) (Mar, Oatley, Djikic & Mullin, 2011). In this way, readers can experience how it would feel to lead a multitude of different lives (Green, 2005).

Chapter 3 has demonstrated that imagination plays an important role in interpreting art. This is also true for identification. Through imagination, we can see ourselves behaving and being someone else, in this case fictional characters. It requires forgetting ourselves and *becoming* the other, which Kaufman and Libby (2012) call ‘experience-taking’. This includes the experiences a character has, but also their thoughts, goals, traits, etc. (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). This process of ‘becoming the character’ is closely related to Mead’s (1934) theory as explained above, in which children learn to take on the role of others. Additionally, Erikson (1968) states that the connection between identification and identity construction is most important in adolescence: by identifying with others and imitating particular characteristics, the identity is formed. Of course, these others can both be real and fictional (Cohen, 2001).

Next to identification, Mar et al. (2011) also categorize sympathy and empathy as narrative emotions. While sympathy is merely the emotion of ‘feeling for the other’, empathy actually evokes a similar emotion in the person reading about the fictional character. When experiencing empathy, the reader is, however, *not* becoming the character, but it is caused by imagining or observing the other’s emotion and being aware that one’s own emotion is elicited by the other (Mar et al., 2011). Mar et al. (2011) add that because imagination is at work when interacting with a narrative, empathy can easily occur. Mentalizing, or the cognitive ability to infer what is going on in the mind of others, is at work when processing fictional (or real-life) events. This also allows individuals to understand narratives, as narratives are first and foremost social in nature, telling stories about human relationships (Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz & Peterson, 2005). The worlds described in narratives are

simulations of real-life situations and social experiences. Mar, Oatley and Peterson (2009) therefore state that engagement with narratives can enhance one's social skills, including feelings of empathy.

Even if readers do not always identify completely with fictional characters, it is still possible that so-called 'parasocial' interactions or relationships occur. By being submerged in the experiences of fictional characters, readers establish a one-sided relationship with those characters (Kokesh & Sternadorni, 2015). Through repeated exposure (by reading a novel or series consisting of several hundreds of pages) a reader can become attached to a character, feeling they have become friends with that particular figure. Kokesh and Sternadorni (2015) add that these friendship-like feelings are stronger if the reader perceives the story as realistic or plausible. Perceived realism, as it is called, is connected to the intense mental images an individual has while reading a novel. Readers can 'see' the story unfold in their mind's eye and become completely immersed in the fictional world, as if they have been transported themselves *into* that particular world. Readers suspend all real-world facts while reading and accept the rules and facts of the fictional world. This feeling of being 'lost in a book' is what Green (2004) calls narrative transportation. This requires concentration, but emotional involvement as well. Some stories make readers want to revisit them over and over again (Green, 2004). Interestingly, studies have found that women are both more likely to form parasocial relationships with characters and experience greater narrative transportation in comparison to men (Green & Brock, 2000; Kokesh & Sternadorni, 2015).

Narrative transportation is more than just being absorbed by a story, as narratives can actually change (the self of) an individual. As mentioned earlier, fiction can certainly be used as a way to escape from daily life and the self, but it can also *change* the self (Green, 2004). Mar et al. (2005) even state that narratives can have "lasting, real-world consequences" (p. 695). These changes are for example related to one's beliefs, attitudes or insights (Mar et al., 2011). The latter is most likely to occur when strong emotions are involved, which has also been demonstrated by DeNora (2000), especially when the reader can understand those emotions with the help of the narrative (Green, 2004). Narratives give readers the opportunity to visit other worlds and explore different possible lives or selves. These other (social) worlds and selves can be a source of influence, other than the reader's own social environment. It can "loosen the boundaries of the self" (Green, 2005, p. 58) and offer new perspectives, which can eventually be integrated into the self. On the other hand, narratives can also influence readers to re-examine their selves, when it shows certain *similarities* with past experiences of readers. But while all sorts of fiction can lead to narrative transportation, literary works are more

likely to lead to ‘transportations of the self’ and changes in beliefs (Green, 2004; Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015).

4.6 Postmodernism on narratives and identity

This chapter has demonstrated how (fictional) narratives play a role in the construction of narrative identity. However, at the end of the twentieth century, postmodernist theorists started to question this socially shaped, yet self-conscious self. Seen in the context of postmodernity, with all its upcoming communications technologies, globalization and media saturation, a “crisis of confidence” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 56) surfaced. Because how can we still be agentic individuals and direct control over our lives in this kind of environment? Does the self even still exist? (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

Postmodernist theorists differ greatly in how they react to this crisis. Holstein and Gubrium (2000) make a distinction between two types of postmodernist theorists. ‘Affirmative’ theorists, such as Gergen and Denzin, are still rather optimistic about the self in postmodernity, while ‘Skeptical’ theorists, such as Baudrillard, are more cynical. They seriously doubt both reality *and* the reality of the self, even declaring the self as dead. Affirmative theorist Gergen (1991) does confirm this reality of the self, but is worried about the social saturation of the self. The postmodern world is overflowing with meanings, relations and technology, such as television, internet and other forms of media. This information overload causes what Gergen (1991) calls ‘multiphrenia’ or personal saturation and fragmentation. In contemporary life, individuals have numerous commitments, thus having to split themselves into multiple ‘self-investments’. As the amount of technologies increases, we are likely to employ those technologies for self-expression. However, by utilizing technologies, the possibilities are increased again. This cyclical spiral sends us into a state of multiphrenia (Gergen, 1991). In contrast, skeptical postmodernist Baudrillard (1994) argues that the postmodern world exists in a state of ‘hyperreality’. We are surrounded by images, signs, images of images and signs of signs. They are fragmented and incoherent. Important events are merely visual experiences on a screen, making the question of what ‘really’ happened irrelevant. Because we do not know what is real and not, it is impossible for us to construct an authentic self, leaving us with no identity at all (Baudrillard, 1994; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

Despite the arguments of postmodernist sceptics, this thesis is written from a pragmatist point of view and strongly argues that identity can still exist in a postmodernist world. To support this argument, this thesis turns to Holstein & Gubrium (2000), as they too

wonder if there is a possibility in which a self can maintain both its postmodernism characteristics, but still be grounded in everyday life. For this, they consider theories of Foucault (1970) and Lyotard (1984). The latter does not affirm or reject the crisis of confidence, but instead *transforms* it. He argues that the self is no longer based on ‘metanarratives’ or grand narratives of our time, such as political and religious ideologies that try to explain the workings of the world. As an alternative, Lyotard (1984) states there are only more local narratives about the world, whether they are grand or just ordinary. A person is located at the intersections of particular communications circuits or ‘nodal points’, which in turn construct the self. These circuits all have their own ‘language game’: their meanings and articulations are socially organized. Furthermore, the self is not at all isolated, but the manifold institutional circuits (including art) determine who and what we are. With this, Lyotard (1984) turns to a more pragmatist approach, still seeing the self as “a practical project of everyday life” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 70), thus recognizing a person’s agency. We ourselves can be held responsible, both practically and morally, for our actions. The self is as real as anything else, it is a “practical discursive accomplishment” (ibid, p. 70). It is both narratively created *and* lived (Van de Braembussche, 1994; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

Foucault (1970) offers the second option of maintaining the self in postmodern times. According to Foucault (1970), the self is located in discourse. A discourse is a system of ideas and knowledge regarding a specific subject or particular field. Spoken and written statements (similar to the language game) determine what is true and what is not within that field; it constructs subjectivities about that field. Discourses are embedded in (social) institutions, such as family or prison. They hold power in defining what is normal and abnormal, having a governed function. As such, there are many different discourses, which hold the truth about many subjects (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). While Foucault (1970) believes individuals construct and communicate their selves according to these discourses by putting up a ‘performance’, Giddens (2013), similarly to Lyotard (1991), assigns a larger role to human agency (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Social structures and human agency exist right next to each other. Though social structures do determine how certain things work, human agentic action can lead to changes within a structure. In addition, Giddens (1991) states that in pre-modern times, self-identity was not an issue, as social status, gender and heritage would define who one was. In late modernity, however, self-identity is not a given. We must constantly ask ourselves who we are. This reflexivity stands at the base of self-identity construction. Our self-identity in turn is found in autobiographical narratives (i.e. narrative identity), which helps us explain who we are.

This chapter investigated pragmatism and symbolic interactionism. Ricoeur's (1999) theory on narrative identity has been discussed, as well as debates on the life story within the psychological field. Lastly, narrative identity has been explored from a postmodernist perspective. The next chapters will discuss research methods, the results of this study, and finally, a conclusion will complete this thesis.

5. METHODS AND DATA

The main purpose of this research is to create insight into understanding of the lives, experiences and everyday practices of adults who read YA literature. Therefore, this study makes use of a qualitative research method. Kvale (2007) states that qualitative methods are used to approach certain social aspects ‘from the outside in’, meaning that everyday practices and experiences of individuals are analysed. This way, it can be attempted to understand and describe how individuals construct meaning of the world surrounding them. Conducting interviews is one way of accessing the narratives of these individuals. It is especially vital to hear the stories from people themselves, told in their own words, as it is their experiences that are being studied. Therefore, this study applies the method of in-depth active interviewing (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). An active interview is an interpretative, meaning-making conversation in which both parties take an active role. Once the data has been gathered, the results will be drawn up through narrative analysis, a form of content analysis, which commonly deals with ‘storied forms’. One approach of narrative analysis is to thematically organize stories. It focuses on *what* is being said, rather than *how*, thus making this research a descriptive one predominantly (Kohler Riessmann, 2000; 2003).

5.1 Theoretical concepts

The main research question for this thesis is: *For what purposes do adult readers of young adult literature consume this type of fiction and what is its role in the construction of the narrative identity?* The most important theoretical concepts embedded in this research question are: *young adult literature*, *narrative identity* and *adult readers of young adult literature*. In order to be able to construct interview questions that are relevant for this research question, these concepts need to be operationalized. This will clarify what is meant with these concepts in the context of this research, while simultaneously assuring the validity of this study.

The first theoretical concept is *young adult literature*. In the context of this study, YA literature is seen as (fictional) novels written for adolescents from the age of approximately 10 to 25 years old, using YALSA’s broadened definition of YA literature. Most YA novels have an adolescent protagonist, who has to deal with and overcome conflicts common in a teenager’s life, which usually revolve around coming-of-age issues. YA fiction covers every literary genre. This concept is mainly important to find respondents, but also to construct interview questions on YA literature.

Narrative identity refers to the life story of an individual. It is shaped through narratives, both fictional and factual. When a reader identifies with a narrative, he or she applies certain narrative (elements) to his or her life story (Ricoeur, 1991). Therefore this thesis sees ‘narrative identity’ as the life story of an individual.

The last concept is *adult readers of young adult literature*. Narrative identity does not emerge until adolescence, which occurs between the ages of 12 and 18 (McLean, 2008; McAdams, 2001). Other studies by for example McLean (2008), McAdams (1985) and Habermas & Bluck (2000) do not mention a specific age in which narrative identity arises. They do mention that certain cognitive changes must have taken place before an individual can construct a narrative identity. Additionally, narrative identity needs time to develop (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Singer, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to interview adults of a certain age who have had enough ‘time’ to develop their narrative identity. This, in combination with YALSA’s broadened definition of YA fiction and the age of adult consumers of YA literature (aged 18 and up), means that in the context of this research, adult readers of young adult literature are seen as individuals from the age of 20 to 35 years.

5.2 Active interviewing

This study will use in-depth, semi-structured interviews in order to gather data. This will give an authentic understanding of the experiences of people. Interviews are conversations between two (or more) people that result in information, whether they are highly-structured surveys or more informal, loosely structured exchanges (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Bernard, 2000). These forms of interviewing create narratives. However, Miller and Glassner (2011) mention that during interviews, not just narratives, but social worlds are created, which can be studied. This is not just on the account of the respondent, but also of the interviewer, as both “create and construct narrative versions of the social world” (Miller & Glassner, 2011, p. 124).

Interviewing is not a one-way monologue, but instead it can be seen as a meaning-making interaction, which is called ‘active interviewing’ (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; 2011). During the interview, meaning is constructed through interpretative practice, meaning the interviewer takes on an active role, interpreting the interviewee’s words. By directing the interview and suggesting linkages between certain aspects, both parties construct new meanings together. This can lead to new interpretations that the interviewee would not have thought of by him or herself (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

As is the case with every research method, it needs to be assured that this interview method is valid and that the data is trustworthy. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) mention that validity works differently when interviewing actively, as both participants have a role in constructing a narrative. However, there are ways to assure validity. The researcher needs to be as unbiased and unopinionated as possible, so that his or her own views do not interfere (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The interviewee needs to be comfortable, so that they feel comfortable to talk freely. The topic list used during the interview is also extremely important, as it is based on the theoretical concepts embedded in the research question. By using a topic list, it is quite certain that the interviewer addresses topics that need to be discussed. Comparing answers from different interviews to check if they are in line with each other is another way to assure validity (Bernard, 2000).

5.3 Interviewees

For this study, 9 individuals have been interviewed. The unit of analysis in this research is therefore individuals and more specifically, adult readers of YA literature. However, the stories they will tell during the interviews will be analysed through narrative analysis. Therefore, narratives can also be seen as a unit of analysis.

The individuals had meet with a few conditions in order to be considered as a respondent. As explained previously, the respondents need to be between the ages of 20 and 35, as the narrative identity is constructed during (late) adolescence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Singer, 2004). By selecting adults older than 19 years old, it can be assumed they are in possession of a developed life story and are able to tell this story without many difficulties. Naturally, the respondents needed to be avid consumers of YA literature. In order to be sure that their life story had been influenced by YA fiction, it was required that they see themselves as fans of young adult literature and preferably read at least around 5 YA novels a year. It was also required that the respondents all reside in The Netherlands, in order to be able to interview them face-to-face. According to Holstein and Gubrium (2011), this method is most suited for long interviews that include complex questions. Moreover, a comfortable environment where the interviewee feels at ease, generates more open answers.

Respondents were contacted in several ways. The young adult 'Bored to Death Book Club' meets every month at the local bookstore in Rotterdam. Members were approached during several of the meetings. Four respondents are a book club member and live in (the) Rotterdam (area). Respondents were also gathered through the usage of the social media networks Goodreads and Facebook. Both networks allow users to join certain groups. On

Goodreads, an ad was posted in the group ‘Fanatieke Nederlandse Lezers’ (Avid Dutch readers), resulting in one respondent, and on Facebook, it was posted in the group ‘Young Adult fiction’ (two respondents). One interviewee contacted the researcher herself, as she got the post forwarded by a friend. This can be seen as the snowball method, in which respondents who are acquainted with other consumers of YA literature recommend other possible respondents. Lastly, one interviewee was acquired through a Dutch forum for young women. All interviewees are female, are Dutch citizens and reside in The Netherlands. Their educational levels differ from intermediate vocational education to university.

The methods of gathering respondents mentioned are forms of purposeful sampling, instead of random sampling, in order to be sure the respondents’ life story reflect the literature they read and are therefore representative for this study. Because the respondents were chosen according to several criteria, this can be seen as criterion sampling (Coyne, 1997). It is important to note that the fact that all respondents are female, is coincidental. They were not selected based on their gender. Multiple attempts were made to contact male readers of YA fiction. However, this proved to be more difficult than initially thought, as very few male readers responded to the ads first-hand. The few male readers who did seek out contact, did not follow up on this. That is why, after various attempts, it was decided to continue with only the respondents who were willing to participate. It may be concluded from these experiences that YA fiction is not read by many male readers or that they do not feel the need to talk about it. Lastly, a tenth interview was conducted. Unfortunately, the quality of both the interview and the sound recording were poor, and therefore it was decided not to use this interview in for data analysis.

5.4 Respondent list

Name	Age	Educational level	Educational level parents
Francisca	27	MA, university	Mother: High school Father: Intermediate vocational education (MBO)
Maritza	27	MA, university	Both parents: MBO
Esmée	28	MA, university	Mother: MBO Father: BA, University
Savitri	25	BA, Higher vocational education (HBO)	Mother: Higher vocational education (HBO) Father: MBO

Caitlin	24	Intermediate vocational education (MBO)	Mother: HBO Father: MBO
Iris	22	MA, university	Both parents: MBO
Jenny	32	BA, HBO	Both parents: MBO
Jade	30	MBO	Mother: High school Father: MBO
Jamey	23	BA, MBO	Mother: High school Father: MBO

5.5 Interviews

10 interviews were conducted for this study, though as mentioned earlier, only 9 interviews were coded and analysed. All interviews were performed personally and took place either in a public space such as a cafe or a library, or at the respondent's or the researcher's home. The duration of the interviews varied from 70 to 120 minutes. All respondents gave written permission to sound record the interview and use it for research purposes. The interviews were conducted from the months of August to October 2016.

Before conducting the actual interviews, a practice interview was executed to ensure the questions were understandable, so that they could be adjusted if necessary. The interview topic list was based on six major topics, starting with the more 'easy' topics and building up to the most complex ones, giving the respondent time to get used to answering questions and talking about their experiences. The first major theme discussed the respondent's reading history and their experiences with reading YA literature. The respondents were also asked to describe how *they* would define the YA genre and why they appreciated YA fiction. Subsequently, the respondents were asked to describe their reading behaviour and their usage of YA literature, both practically and socially. The last topic went 'beyond the reading experience' and discussed topics such as identification, recognisability and influences of YA fiction on the self. The interview was concluded with general questions on cultural preferences and their personal profile. However, the interview topic list was used as a guideline. If interesting topics came up, it was sometimes decided to follow up on that to learn more about the respondent's experiences. Topics were not always discussed in this specific order, as it was preferable to let the conversation proceed as natural as possible. Additionally, some questions were elaborated on, while others were discussed briefly. The interview topic list can be found in appendix 1.

5.6 Narrative analysis and coding data

Once all the interviews were conducted and transcribed, the data was analysed. This research makes use of a narrative analysis method. This method can be used to research individuals and their life story. It only deals with the spoken word about experiences or (life) stories. This method is mostly used for qualitative research and is derived from literary methods (Smith, 2000). As Ricoeur (1991) focuses mainly on fiction, this method is most suitable for this research. Narrative analysis sees the story as the research object. Kohler Riessman (2003) has defined several models of narrative analysis. In this research, the thematical model is most appropriate, as it focuses on *what* is said. The story's content is most important. It can be used to find "common thematic elements across research participants and the events they report" (Kohler Riessman, 2003, p. 3). By organizing data through thematic analysis, patterns and themes will come up, which in turn can be interpreted (Kohler Riessman, 2003).

The narrative analysis method is very similar to content analysis. Both start with transcribing the interview (Smith, 2000). The interviews were transcribed *ad verbatim* (word for word). Smith (2000) states it is important to add all possible information, such as emphasis on certain words, pauses and non-verbal communication. Additionally, it is useful to pinpoint exactly how to transcribe the interviews. During transcription, some parts may attract attention, which can already be marked for future use (Kohler Riessmann, 1993).

Narrative analysis is about reducing a large amount of data into smaller, manageable amounts. This is done by coding: marking and identifying certain characteristics in the data that seem relevant to answering the research question. Coding can be done in several ways. As this study is a qualitative, explorative one, the data has been coded inductively, meaning the categories and themes emerged while going through the material (Smith, 2000). This means it is not possible to formulate a hypothesis (Boeije, 't Hart & Hox, 2009). To ensure reliability, inductive coding needs to be done in a consistent manner. Keeping track of codes will guarantee reliability and validity (Smith, 2000; Bernard, 2000). Because no existing coding system is used, it is essential to research the data the way it is meant to be researched, based on the research question. Inductive coding requires interpretation, which is why the researcher should be objective towards the data and only draw conclusions that correspond with the material (Smith, 2000).

5.7 Coding and analysing process

After all the interviews were transcribed *ad verbatim*, they were coded in *Atlas.ti*, computer software that is designed specifically to reduce large quantities of text to categories. As

mentioned previously, the interviews were analysed through inductive coding. According to Saldaña (2015), texts can be coded through descriptive coding, meaning a part of the text is summarized into one word or category. They can also be coded through in vivo coding, where actual words or sentences from the text are used as a code. Both methods were used for this study. During the coding process, certain categories and themes already surfaced. After all the interview transcripts were coded in *Atlas.ti*, the categories and their respective quotes were reviewed and where needed, recategorized. The categories were then exported to Excel to create an overview of the relevant categories. Certain categories were gathered into similar groups according to the literature. For example, the codes ‘emotional response’, ‘parasocial relationships’ and ‘imagination & perceived realism’, made up the group ‘aesthetic experience’. Both the *Atlas.ti* and the Excel files were used when writing the results. By doing so, the writing of the results section proceeded smoothly, as illustrative passages from the interviews were already categorized and thus could be used at once.

6. RESULTS

This chapter gives an overview of the results that emerged after analysing the data. The results are categorized and drawn up according to Ricoeur's (1991) theory of mimesis and narrative identity formation as a triple mimesis. Ricoeur (1991b) argues, as discussed (see above) that the construction of narrative identity can be seen as a threefold process, existing of three levels of mimesis. Mimesis¹ consists of narrative prefiguration of everyday life, meaning that human action is based on practical, already existing "pre-narrated" elements, such as intentions, ideals, desires and motives. These elements are symbolically mediated through rules, norms and signs. Stories can be seen as a representation of everyday life, since mimesis² signifies the configuration of the pre-narrative qualities of life into explicit narratives, both fictional and autobiographical. By 'translating' a string of heterogeneous events together, it forms a story with a beginning, middle and end. A plot consists of both concordant and discordant elements, because just like everyday life, a story consists of both fortunate and unfortunate events. This makes a story a 'discordant concordance' (Ricoeur, 1991b; De Mul, 2000). Mimesis³ completes the process of identification with fiction. Mimesis³ signifies the intersection of the world of the text and that of the reader. The act of reading is what connects mimesis¹ (prefiguration) with mimesis³ (reconfiguration), through mimesis² (the configuration of life into fiction). Thus, it is the reader who completes the story, when one identifies with a narrative and applies certain narrative elements to his or her own life story (Ricoeur, 1991a; De Mul, 2000).

The three levels of mimesis have been used to form an analytical model in order to organize the categories that emerged from the narrative analysis. However, the answers that the respondents have given during the interviews – and the categories that surfaced during the analysis – are not that unambiguous. They do not belong to just *one* category within a level. Answers often contain more than one passages that belong to several categories (or levels). The quote below demonstrates this unambiguity:

(Jenny): The second Twilight book, New Moon. My love life wasn't all that great, and the same happens in that book. I talked about it with friends. Everyone thought it was badly written, but to me, it was so recognizable (...) which made it so emotional for me. Maybe that's why I have a soft spot for Twilight. (...) [The break-up] happened to me while I was reading it. It was one big cry fest.

As one can see, several topics are touched upon in this quote, including the experience of emotions, identification, interaction and recognisability. That is why some categories may be discussed more than once.

This chapter is structured as follows: first, a profile of the respondents will be drawn up to demonstrate who these individuals are. Their personal profile, educational levels and socioeconomic backgrounds will be described. Their first encounters with (YA) fiction, along with their own definition of YA literature will be reviewed. After that, the categories that emerged from the analysis will be discussed with the use of Ricoeur's three levels of mimesis in a subsequent order.

6.1 Respondents' background

For this study, 9 individuals have been interviewed. Besides their interest in YA fiction and reading, they also share similarities regarding age, gender, educational level and socioeconomic background. These factors are all described in this paragraph as to create an overview of who these respondents are. All 9 interviewees are female. Though this is completely coincidental, it could be said this sample is not entirely representative of the population. However, as previously discussed in chapter 5, male readers of YA literature were hard to find, so it could also be argued fans of YA fiction are mostly of the female gender. The fact that all interviewees are of Dutch origin *was* a criterion to be selected. Most of the respondents live in large urban areas in The Netherlands, and 5 of them live in the Rotterdam area. Age was another criterion the interviewees had to meet, as they had to be between the age of 20 and 35. The youngest respondent is 22 year old, the oldest 32. The others are all evenly spread between those ages. Nevertheless, they do all find themselves in different life phases. At the time of the interviews, 4 respondents were still students, while the rest had jobs. Only one respondent has children.

7 interviewees are also quite similar in educational level. They are highly educated (either university or higher vocational education) and have BA or MA degrees in predominantly alpha sciences. 4 respondents have a degree in languages or publishing/library sciences, while 3 work with books in their professional life. 2 respondents have a lower education level, namely intermediate vocational education. The interviewees' parents however, do differ in their education. Most parents' educational level is either higher or

intermediate vocational education, but only one of them graduated from university later in life. A few parents only graduated from high school.

Most respondents grew up in a middle-class environment. According to Bourdieu (1984), the socioeconomic environment in which an individual grows up in, determines one's *habitus* and thus the amount of cultural capital one has, as it is rooted in the *habitus* of the individual. Bourdieu (1984) argues that individuals with more cultural capital are inclined to have more knowledge on complex art forms— and therefore what kind of art one prefers. Moreover, the embodied and institutionalized state of cultural capital also determines the kind of education one receives, as it is inheritable. This maintains the reproductive cycle of social and cultural distinction. However, many respondents have obtained a higher education level than their parents, meaning they have moved up the social ladder (Van Eijck, 1999). Nevertheless, they do differ in their taste in culture. Some respondents obviously prefer high art, such as theatre, complex literary works and art-house movies. Others have a preference for popular art, preferring musicals, blockbuster movies and more popular music. And some interviewees are 'cultural omnivores', who consume both 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' forms of culture (Peterson and Kern, 1996).

6.2 First encounters with reading and young adult fiction

The respondents have all acknowledged that both the act of reading and (the content of) YA fiction play a significant role in their daily lives. It is, however, interesting what has initiated this. During the interviews, the respondents were asked about their first encounters with reading in general and YA literature in particular. Every single interviewee has grown up with books, starting to read at a young age (either in kindergarten or elementary school). However, they can roughly be divided into two groups. The first group had parents or grandparents who spent a lot of time reading, meaning they were always surrounded by books. This group has been read to by their parents, and made frequent trips to the library *with* their parents. The second (significantly smaller) group was less stimulated by their parents to read. They had parents who read one specific genre (like romance novels) or very little. Some respondents were dropped off at the library, while their parents went to do something else.

Looking at Bourdieu's (1984) theory, it can be said that the families of the first group have more (embodied) cultural capital. Respondents from the first group are all highly educated. However, as discussed previously, most of their parents are not. Griswold, McDonnell and Wright (2005) argue that highly educated parents are more likely to expose

their children to literature. Yet despite this argument and those of Bourdieu (1984), their parents did expose the respondents to written materials. In addition, respondents from the second group, who did not get stimulated at home to read, now do consume a lot of books. A few have even obtained a master's degree at university, though some of these respondents still prefer popular culture over high art. Therefore, it can be concluded that while some forms of cultural capital can be obtained in a life time, other forms are indeed rooted in one's *habitus* and are less inclined to change.

Similar to their first encounter with reading in general, the respondents can also be divided into two groups when it comes to their first encounter with YA fiction. The largest group recalls reading their first YA novels in secondary school. The other group started reading YA fiction after the age of 20. Most respondents started reading YA fiction under the influence of friends or social media, or while browsing through the internet. *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games* and novels by John Green are mentioned most often in relation to the interviewee's identity formation. Especially the first two series seem to be rather significant in the respondent's lives. For most, the Harry Potter series is the first encounter they had with YA fiction. While the three Harry Potter novels are often categorized as middle-grade books, the respondents all see Harry Potter as the beginning of the YA genre. Maritza (27) explains:

(Maritza): So it started with Harry Potter, but at first, I actually didn't like Harry Potter. While I didn't even know anything about it, but I just didn't like fantasy back then. (...) Harry Potter just isn't for me, and my mother said, hey, go read Harry Potter. She got the third book from the library for me, because the other parts were already lent out. (...) I had it at home for three weeks and when I almost had to return it, I thought, okay, I'll read it. I don't want to, but I'm going to anyway. And then I read it and it was so much fun and I've been a fan ever since.

Almost every interviewee mentions the Harry Potter series as books that either stuck with them or were even important to them personally. Many of them have grown up reading the Harry Potter books, like Esmée (28):

(Esmée): Yeah, Harry Potter of course, because I've read those books so many times that I know them by heart. Just because of that, they stuck with me. The books you grew up with and the excitement of waiting for a new book to be released. So I think that they stuck with me in that way. Because they were my first obsession with literature.

For other readers, the Twilight series by Stephanie Meyer is their first encounter with YA literature:

(Savitri): When I was fifteen, I came across Twilight and then I started to read again. (...) It's funny. I was a member of a forum. On there they said: you have to read this, it's so much fun, it's about vampires. And I thought: that's cool. So I started to read it and became completely obsessed. (...) It took over everything. Back then, only Twilight and New Moon were released as books. I started pretty early. (...) That book has been read at least 20 times. It almost falls apart. For me, it's sentiment. It's not the best book ever written, but it has really roused my interest in reading.

Savitri (25) states Twilight is 'not the best book ever written'. Other respondents agree with her. While Harry Potter is seen as a well-written series, Twilight often is not. Especially the fact that the protagonist, is willing to give up her entire life and identity for her true love seems absurd to most readers. This shows that some of the values respondents have can be influenced or strengthened by certain novels. This will be explored in a later section. Twilight is also often compared to Harry Potter, because it provided a similar reading experience (such as waiting for the next book or film to be released, going to midnight releases at bookstores, etc.).

6.3 Definition and characteristics of young adult fiction

The respondents were asked to describe the YA genre according to their own definition, so it could be found out what attracts readers to this genre, and if their interpretations correspond with the characteristics (and conventions) found in the literature on YA fiction. As previously discussed, defining the YA genre is not an easy task, as it is rather an age indicator than an actual literary genre. This is agreed upon by almost all of the respondents. The flexibility of the recommended age range is also touched upon often. Iris (22) states:

(Iris): YA fiction is literature meant for the age of 12 to 18, but we all know that this age varies. I think it's more between the age of 15 and 25, the people who read it. And I think YA literature isn't really a genre, but more an age indicator, because YA covers all sorts of things.

Many respondents agreed that the genre has become increasingly popular in the last few years and has even ‘reinvented’ and ‘outgrown’ itself. Savitri says that “it seems to be more accepted nowadays” as an actual genre, rather than just seen as ‘children’s books’.

Additionally, many different genres were mentioned within the YA ‘genre’, and some were mentioned more often than others, such as fantasy, dystopian and science-fiction, and contemporary fiction. Interestingly, the four most popular YA novels and series (*Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, *Twilight* and *The Fault in Our Stars*) are covered by these genres, which were coincidentally also the novels that were mentioned most frequently by the respondents in relation to their (narrative) identity. This will be explored more in depth in the next paragraph.

When asked what YA entails for them, most respondents state it is literature for and about adolescents who are struggling with issues regarding growing up, finding one’s identity, dealing with life questions, and so forth. Esmée was the only one to refer to them with the term ‘*Bildungsromane*’. Their relationship with their parents was mentioned, too: protagonists either have to break free from their parents or deal with issues regarding their parents, such as illness, death or divorce. The fact that parents seem more absent than not in YA stories was not touched upon. Though many themes addressed in YA books were mentioned, the ones that recurred most were (homo)sexuality, good versus evil, and societal issues.

The writing style of YA novels was also touched upon regularly. Most interviewees see YA books as accessible ‘easy reads’ with a simple, unambiguous writing style that do not require much analysing. They are often compared with adult literature and seen as less pretentious and more straightforward. However, a few respondents mentioned that some YA novels are beautifully written and address difficult topics. The distinction between literary and popular YA was made a few times, as will be demonstrated in a later paragraph. Some prefer these books over the more ‘commercial’ YA and look for novels that confront them with societal problems, like Esmée. Interestingly, the respondents who favour these books are all highly educated (either university or higher vocational education). This could be seen in line with Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of distinction, as the more highly educated respondents prefer the more complex novels, while the interviewees with a lower education favour more popular stories.

Lastly, the characters in YA stories were referred to rather regularly. While most YA characters are usually accessible and easy to relate to, many respondents say they are often weird, dramatic and over the top. YA novels also often have a ‘group of unlikely characters coming together’. Moreover, the word ‘dramatic’ was used more than once to describe YA

stories. Savitri says about this: “Usually the drama in such a book is *so* immense, so out of proportion”. However, the interviewees seem to agree that characters are one of the most important features of a YA novel and that it is favourable to have well-written, round characters – meaning a character has its own personality, background, motives and desires, rather than just being used as a prop in a story. The importance of character development was emphasized too; some respondents even say a story is not worth reading if characters will not go through some form of development.

6.4 Structuring and experiencing time

(Jamey): “[I read] usually during mealtimes, it’s a good time to read while you’re eating. But mostly in the evenings, I think. Before going to sleep. And after dinner, I’ll pick up a book and read about three hours. Just whenever I can, but mostly in the evening.”

Mimesis¹ signifies the temporal characteristics and experience of time in everyday life. Narratives are one way of structuring our experience of time (Ricoeur, 1991c). In the fragment above, Jamey (23) discloses how she uses YA novels to structure her day, namely by reading during mealtimes and in the evenings. Respondents were asked to describe how their week looks like in terms of reading (YA) fiction. This was done in order to find out their reading behaviour and how they structure their daily lives around the act of reading. Examples of reading behaviour is mentioned in both this and the next paragraph, as it is related to both categories.

Just like Jamey, most interviewees stated that they can and will read anywhere, at any time of the day. Some respondents mention that they are always occupied with reading and books in one way or another:

(Esmée): I always read in the morning before I go to work – I work three days a week, so always on the train. I spend ten minutes on the train, so that’s a really short time. But I also listen to audio books, so I read more books at once. I have one book as an audio book, so I listen to that in the morning while getting ready and going to the train station. Then on the train, I read about fifteen minutes, then again on the way back home. Then while biking and doing groceries, I listen to my audio book. And then at night I sometimes read as well, but only if I have nothing else to do.

Esmée structures her day very clearly around the act of reading, as she mentions several times of the day during which she picks up a novel. Francisca (27) has a similar reading routine:

(Francisca): Usually I'm free on Mondays and Wednesdays, so then I read a lot. On those days, I try to go to Coffee Company, have a drink and read for about an hour. But on other days, I spend a lot of time traveling, so I read mostly in the mornings. In that sense, I'm a morning reader. (...) But if I have the day off, I can read the entire day. So that's how my week would look like, and on Saturdays I also start the day reading. I'm also a 'lunch reader', so if no one else at work has lunch break at the same time as me, I'll read. And at home, between doing groceries or cleaning the house, I also like to read at lunch time. Yeah, it would look like that.

According to Ricoeur (1991d), humans make sense of “the ordinary experience of time” (p. 338) and the chaos that is life through the use of narratives. It is through storytelling, that we give coherence to our interpretation and understanding of time. Stories structure time, but it also gives guidance to our pre-narrative qualities such as intentions, actions and motives. These form the basis of our habits and routines (De Mul, 2000). All three fragments show that the days of these readers is mediated by books and the act of reading. Many respondents use reading as a means to break away from the routine of everyday life, by for example reading during mealtimes, while traveling or in between homework assignments. Therefore, it can be argued that readers explicitly use stories to regulate and structure their experience of ordinary time.

In addition, the most popular time to read is at night before going to sleep. Jenny (32) says she reads “often two hours before going to sleep, so I can unwind”, mentioning one of the practices that will be discussed in the next paragraph, namely relaxation. So-called ‘seasonal reading’ (Flatt, 2008) is less popular amongst the interviewees. Many respondents mention that they do not specifically pick out stories that correspond to the season they reside in at that particular moment. So while time is structured around reading on a daily basis, larger time periods are not considered that often. Though all respondents do keep track of their read books and participate in the annual Goodreads ‘reading challenge’, in which users can set a yearly reading goal. In this case, time does play an explicit role.

6.5 Cultural and literary practices

Using fiction in order to break away from the repetitive structure of everyday life can be seen as a cultural practice (Negus, 2012). Other cultural and literary practices were mentioned by the respondents when answering the question on organizing one's week around reading. One practice has to do with settings and place in which interviewees read. The most common place for respondents to read is either at home, on the couch or in bed, or in public transportation. Almost all respondents mention that they usually do not create special circumstances in which they read, and most do not mind background noise or music. Savitri uses books in particular to cancel out noises in public transportation:

(Savitri): When I'm on a packed tram or metro, I really like it when I can shut everything out. The sound doesn't matter. If it's a good book, I get sucked into it like that. It's a way to shut everything out.

Here, Savitri says she can cancel out background noises by 'getting lost in a book'. This can be interpreted as escapism, one of the main motivations for people to read (Currie, 2001; Usherwood & Toyne, 2002). This literary practice is mentioned by all respondents, though in different forms. Some respondents say they wanted to relax and take their mind off daily problems, such as work or school. Relaxation can be seen as a form of escapism, as it is categorized by Usherwood & Toyne (2002) as a way to get away from everyday life. Other interviewees directly stated that they wanted to escape from their everyday lives and enter a completely different world that is unlike ours, like Savitri does here:

(Interviewer): You're looking for something that isn't connected to reality, but something else entirely?

(Savitri): Yes, it's a form of escapism, 100%. I just want to be somewhere else for a while.

(Interviewer): Is it also a way to escape from your own emotions or... the situation you're in at that particular moment?

(Savitri): The situation... Sometimes it's more a way to experience certain emotions. That may sound odd. Sometimes I have difficulty dealing with things, things that happen. For example, I'm taking longer to finish my degree. Last year was a really bad school year and everything went wrong. (...) At that time I had books and that was really nice. I could sympathize with someone else's problems. Usually the drama in such a book is so immense, so out of proportions. It has nothing to do with my school work, or deadlines, or things like that. So it's a different kind of stress that they experience, which I enjoy. Because it was so different. Their

problems are more... With school, there are deadlines you're working towards. It's a constant form of pressure. She has to train to defeat the strongest wizard in the world, but that's a problem that's relevant right now. Or they're in some precarious, vague situation, where everything goes wrong. But they manage to survive. I like that it's different. And it's inspiring too, because they survive. And then I think: all hope isn't lost yet, maybe I can do it as well. I'm going to do my best. If they can survive, so can I.

Savitri says she wants to escape from her daily problems – namely school and deadlines - and by reading about problems that are so unlike hers, she is even inspired to deal with her own issues. The capacity of stories to influence and inspire readers is discussed more extensively later in this chapter. Both escaping from personal feelings *and* wanting to experience certain feelings is also mentioned multiple times by respondents. Maritza even discusses both practices in one sentence:

(Maritza): Sometimes you read something sad, that you really feel the need to let it all out and sometimes you think, no, I want to be distracted, so maybe then you read something that's light and fun, and that makes you feel better.

Some interviewees agree with Maritza, saying they use (sad) stories in order to 'have a good cry' and release negative emotions, such as sadness. Others, when feeling sad, like to read light-hearted books in order to change or manage their mood. Sad stories would 'just make them more sad'. This is partly in order with DeNora's (2000) study on music and the social organization of everyday life. The respondents' utilization of books show that they – just like in DeNora's (2000) study – 'self-regulate' their emotional state of mind by picking out books with stories that either evoke, confirm or change moods. Some interviewees pick up books they have already read, to re-enter a 'safe, familiar space'. As will be demonstrated later, readers do use stories to process certain emotions and events by reading stories about similar events (Usherwood & Toyne, 2002). However, in DeNora's (2000) study, respondents used certain music *genres* to get into certain 'modes of aesthetic agency' which were demanded in particular situations, such as listening to rock music in order to get through a certain mood. But in this study, it can be said that the act of reading is more important than the actual novel (and thus its genre). The act of reading itself is what regulates the mood of a reader. Caitlin (24) explains:

(Interviewer): But it isn't that when you're sad, you pick up a book to get away from those sad feelings?

(Caitlin): Yeah, I do want to pick up a book, but it doesn't matter what kind of book it is. It doesn't matter.

(Interviewer): So it can also be a sad book?

(Caitlin): Yeah, sure. Because not your own sadness and reading itself always makes me calm, so it doesn't matter what kind of book it is, to lighten to mood, so to say...

The practices of regulation of moods, relaxation, 'getting carried away', and escapism are all intertwined, as has been demonstrated. A fifth practice that was mentioned by almost all respondents is that stories encourage them to think about certain social matters and their own lives, even though it is more often an unforeseen circumstance than not. This practice is already linked with mimesis³, in which the world of the text and the world of the reader intertwine. The fact that novels can have significant influence on one's way of thinking is discussed extensively in paragraph 6.9. Iris for example states early in the interview that she does not read YA books for that reason, but later she says:

(Iris): (...) The Boy In The Wine Cellar. It's about a boy in Brussels and another boy. One of the boys has a normal life, and the other boy is a refugee who has to go into hiding in a cellar, and then they become friends. I think those kind of books are more impressive, also because it's a hot topic right now. Looking at what they did to Calais. Sending all those children onto the street. It says more than for example The Selection or something.

(Interviewer): So you want to read a book that teaches you something?

(Iris): Yeah, a bit.

(Interviewer): And also discusses certain societal issues?

(Iris): I think I read two kinds of books: the ones that are nice and easy to read, really commercial, and the literary ones, that I want to learn something from.

Iris also makes the distinction between 'commercial' (popular) YA and literary YA, of which the latter is more inclined to teach her something. This distinction has been made by several more respondents. Similar to Iris, Maritza states that occasionally education is more circumstantial than intentional:

(Maritza): Sometimes it is because it's nice to escape, to quickly read something and that way, you escape from the world around you. But of course there are books that touch you and makes you think, wow, I really learned something from this. (...). And that you learn

something about a certain era or how something works. For example with The Miseducation of Cameron Post, well, that's a book that shows really well how in a specific time period – like the early nineties, how they handled homosexuality in an extremely conservative state in the United States. That is just... pretty awful. And then she's send to a camp to be cured of her homosexuality, which will never happen, of course. So that's just tragic to read about and at the same time you think, wow, because you know - you remember a newspaper article you've read or a documentary you've seen. You know it's real and that's just heart-breaking. So yeah, informative too. And also – it broadens your world view, I think it always does (...). And sometimes you realize its effect while you're reading. When you just want to read to relax, but then you learn something or it broadens your view or it has a whole different effect than you initially started to – read that book, yeah.

By reading this novel, Maritza has learned about this particular topic and it has broadened her perspective of the world. Education – both literary skills and knowledge on the world – is categorized by Usherwood & Toyne (2002) as a literary practice, but it is also discussed in Radway (1984) and Long (1986). Literary skills are mostly mentioned in relation to learning the English language, as all respondents are Dutch native speakers. Personal development and self-knowledge is also part of the educational literary practice. However, as fiction influences one's personal development and (narrative) identity - and thus signifies mimesis³ – it will also be discussed in its respective paragraphs.

6.6 Aesthetic experiences and preferences in YA fiction

(Jenny): Usually it's written in such a way that's nice and easy to read (...) In these books it's like: everything goes wrong. Two heroes show up. They're going to fix it all. And then there's a happy end. Sometimes that's just nice to read.

Mimesis² represents the translation of pre-narrative traits of everyday life into a (fictional) story. Thus, (aesthetic) experiences that fiction brings forth, just as one's preferences regarding (YA) novels, can be linked to the second level of mimesis. In the fragment above, Jenny explains why she is attracted to this kind of fiction: both the predictability and the easy writing style makes her want to pick up YA novel. The writing style has already been mentioned as a characteristic of YA literature, and almost every respondent gave it as one of the reasons why they read YA novels. Maritza simply says: “(...) I read it, because I like it, and because there are so many beautiful books and I don't want to pass up on them.”

However, as expected, the interviewees are attracted to this genre for many different reasons. This research attempted to discover what makes YA literature so attractive to its readers (independent of their age). The respondents' answers regarding this question included characters, emotions, imagination, topics and values, which will be discussed next.

As demonstrated in paragraph 6.3, characters are an important feature in YA novels for most respondents. Not only because they identify with certain fictional characters – which is a part of mimesis³ and thus will be discussed extensively in its respective paragraph – but also because they compose so-called parasocial relationships with them. Reading about characters can generate one-sided relationships, in which the reader cares about the characters as if they are his or her friends (Kokesh & Sternadorni, 2015). This phenomenon was mentioned by a few respondents during the interviews, like Jenny does here:

(Jenny): Certain characters become your favourite ones. (...) You start to love certain characters, when bad things happen to them. (...) But usually not at the start of the book. I first need to bond with those characters.

Some interviewees say they feel connected to certain characters, feeling extremely involved in their experiences and emotions, have 'really strong feelings' for some of them, or miss them after finishing a book (or series). Jenny prefers series, because she is already familiar with the characters. Some characters actually feel like friends, like Savitri clarifies in the next passage:

(Savitri): Looking at Twilight I would say they were my friends. Back then it felt like that. It feels like you really know them. (...) [Right now] I wouldn't really call them my friends, but it does feel like you're really involved in these people's lives. You want certain things for them. So from a distance, not as friends, but I do feel involved.

Kokesh and Sternadorni (2015) argue that parasocial relationships can be stronger when the events are plausible or realistic within the context of the story, whether it takes place in a different country or planet. The events also need to be compatible with the knowledge of the reader. Jamey clarifies:

(Jamey): I can really imagine it and see it in my mind and then... I think it's pretty realistic. I just love the fact that you can see a story unfold in your head.

This, and emotional involvement, can lead to perceived realism and narrative transportation. Both refer to the mental images a reader has while consuming a novel. They can ‘see’ the story in their mind’s eye, which can lead to the feeling of being ‘lost in a book’ (Kokesh & Sternadorni, 2015; Green, 2004). This ‘getting sucked into a story’ is mentioned by Jamey, Jenny, Caitlin and Savitri. They can see the story unfurling in their minds while reading. Caitlin for example states she prefers novels over films, because her experience is more intense when she imagines the story herself. The wish to imagine – and thus experience - a narrative in their own way is expressed by several other respondents. Just as the importance of the writing style and the use of descriptions, especially when it comes to the characters’ emotional state. “You have to really describe and show things, not just tell about them,” Savitri says.

Emotional responses are closely linked to these reading experiences. Jamey explains how:

(Jamey): Yes, there was a book that released emotions. I could sympathize with the story, but I didn’t identify with it. I could just imagine it really well. I’m kind of sensitive to it. But it differs. Sometimes it is recognizable. At other times I just really sympathize with the story.

Here, Jamey distinguishes between the occurrence of identification and empathy. However, she also states stories can ‘release emotions’, especially when she can imagine them clearly. It can be argued that narrative transportation can thus also lead to emotional involvement (Green, 2004). Almost all respondents emphasize the importance of emotions in a story, though the effects can be different, depending on the narrative and the reader’s interpretation. Some readers merely feel touched by a story and have to cry as a result. Others actually recognize certain situations from their own daily lives, which causes them to relive certain emotions. As mentioned previously, some readers look for those kind of confrontations. Of course, joy, anger and disgust amongst others, are also experienced by readers. Francisca explains: “But also the fact that you get really happy or if your character gets really happy, so you really go through those emotions”.

Respondents also gave other motives for reading YA novels. For example, Caitlin says she prefers the YA genre because of its diversity in topics. Other respondents gave the same reason for consuming YA fiction. In relation to this, the interviewees were also asked why they, despite not belonging to the target group, prefer to read YA novels. Next to the literary practices discussed earlier, the respondents also gave other motives. Jamey, Esmée and Jenny,

amongst others, also indicate that enjoyment is one of their main motives to read YA literature. Others use YA fiction to create some variation in their reading material. And a couple of respondents simply kept reading YA novels once they became adults or stated that “it wasn’t that long ago I was a teenager myself”. Furthermore, the comparison between YA literature and adult fiction was made frequently. It either lacks the flexibility that YA stories seem to have, is more complex, harder to read, or is less recognizable to its readers. To Jamey, YA novels are actually more complex than adult literature, which is why she prefers the former. This segment simultaneously demonstrates well why adults read YA fiction:

(Jamey): But I think it’s the story, the themes that are discussed and the rapidity of a certain book. I just like reading stories about teenagers and about that age, because it’s way more complex, their train of thought as well. They’re going to puberty and they experience all sorts of things, how they deal with it and what it does to them. I think it’s more interesting. Because to me, adult books are more boring than YA, to be honest. So I think it’s way more interesting and complex than another book, you know.

6.7 Discordancy in life and fiction

(Jamey): There is something that turns [the characters’] entire lives upside down.

Jamey’s statement is a brief summary of discordancy in fiction, namely unfortunate events that completely turns the characters’ lives around. Mimesis² represents this discordancy, as narratives are made up of both fortunate and adversative elements, just like everyday life (Ricoeur, 1991b; De Mul, 2000). Individuals, just like fictional characters, are constantly confronted with unfortunate events. Obviously, the respondents in this study have been confronted as well. Interestingly, many interviewees opened up about discordant events in their own lives *after* they were asked to name novels that stayed with them, or were meaningful to them in some way. Some respondents were comforted, helped or influenced by the novels they read. That is why this section has some overlap with mimesis³, as their lives intertwined with these novels.

The respondents who opened up about conflicts in their lives can be roughly divided into two groups, namely interviewees who were confronted with events that involved other individuals and the ones who struggled with their own identity. Francisca and Esmée belong to the first group. Both interviewees had friends who committed suicide or made an attempt,

though they dealt with it differently and used different novels to deal with the situation. In the next fragment, Esmée talks about *It's Kind of a Funny Story* (2010), a novel about a suicidal teenager:

(Esmée): That one really stayed with me. Why... I read that book after a friend of mine committed suicide. So it was very recognizable for me, the way [the main character] talked and the way my friend talked, so that's why it stayed with me. It was pretty hard to read as well, and it was a book that made me think: I'm not going to read it again. (...) I wanted to read it to experience how it might feel, how it possibly might have been from his side. How the people around him dealt with it, those kind of things. So kind of dealing with it by reading about it.

Esmée says she turned to this novel, because of its specific topic. She thought it might help her understand how her friend must have felt. It also helped her deal with the situation. Thus, it can be said that this particular utilization is connected to the cultural practice of self-understanding and personal development (Radway, 1984). While Esmée did not elaborate on any emotions she felt during this situation, Francisca experienced it differently:

(Francisca): I think in All The Bright Places... What struck me as odd, what I myself didn't experience, is that at some point that boy wants to commit suicide. But I was so upset with my friend. Because how can you do something like that? Think about the people around you! Actually, I didn't feel that sorry for her. Okay, yeah, that she apparently had been so unhappy that she felt she had to do that, but I felt so sorry for the people around her. And in All The Bright Places it was like everyone accepted it, or something? I don't know – I felt like that afterwards. They were like: it's okay like this, this is what he wants, so it's okay. And it upset me so much. Yeah, okay, you got rid of your problems, but I really felt like – it had been so much more realistic if [the other characters] had gotten angry or whatever. But that's the thing with depression. It was very well described [in the book] that for example you can't and won't do anything. It's not like you don't want to, it's that you can't. And I found it so much more interesting, because at some point in a different book, it said that people who are depressed are usually not the ones to commit suicide, because people who are depressed don't see a way out, even suicide is too much of a hassle, or something (...) and I understood it better, I think. It made me understand why my friend tried to kill herself, because yeah, it's a way to get out of the situation. Despite the fact that it still upsets me that she did it, but uhm, that she felt like she had no other option and that's what it taught me, so yeah. (...) So partly

All The Bright Places, *even though I didn't really agree with what was happening [in the story]*.

Francisca did not pick up *All The Bright Places* (2015) herself, but read it with her book club. However, the story made her see why her friend might have turned to such a drastic decision. Just like Esmée, it gave her insight in someone else's situation and feelings. So next to the cultural practice of self-understanding and personal development, it also contributed to feelings of empathy with both respondents. The novels let them imagine and thus experience how it would have felt for their friends, processing the event in the meantime. Mar et al. (2011) call this process mentalizing, which is the cognitive ability to deduce what is going on in someone else's mind. In addition, narratives can lead to self-re-examination, especially when fictional events correspond to real-life events. Francisca adds:

(Francisca): It's something that really made me reflect on myself. I felt like I wasn't such a good friend, because I blamed my friend to wanting to kill herself. (...) It really bothered me that I felt that way, because in the story they were more forgiving, or something. And it made me think, oh, maybe I should also have been more forgiving. So yeah, that's an example in which it really made me reflect on myself – also about depression, in the sense that I didn't realize how it is. I just didn't know. (...) Or that I for example don't consider as much how other people feel. (...) I can still learn from it.

Despite not agreeing with how the events in the story turned out, it did make Francisca reflect on the way she reacted to the attempted suicide of her friend. Furthermore, it led to the awareness to be more considerate of other people's feelings. Green (2004; 2005) states that these changes in someone else's attitude or insights are more likely to occur when intense emotions are involved, in this case it was dismay. *All The Bright Places* offered Francisca new perspectives on this particular event, educated her on the topic of depression in general and changed her attitude towards others. Thus, it can be argued that a change occurred in the self (Green, 2004; 2005; Mar et al, 2011).

Caitlin, who belongs to the second group, struggled with her own life and identity. In the next passage, she talks about her mental problems:

(Caitlin): In the time period I had to stay at home, a few years ago, when I also discovered YA, I read a lot as a pastime. To be able to escape from everyday life I used to read a lot of YA.

(...) It was simply to take my mind off things. It wasn't that I was constantly thinking and brooding – yeah, to create some peace in my mind.

This quote shows that Caitlin used YA novels to escape the worries of everyday life, while she was ill. When asked if there were any novels that were recognizable to her, she tells about the series *Shatter Me* (2011). It tells the story of a girl who cannot touch anyone without hurting them.

(Caitlin): It felt like I met myself in these series. Since then it has been my favourite series, I reread it every six months. Just how the main character was stuck inside her own world and had to learn to accept herself with all the problems she had, and how she became stronger when she transformed her fears into a strength. That really spoke to me (...) Some thoughts or passages that were described, that made me think: how does the author know me? How does she know this? That was really odd and scary to read, but also beautiful. Like, I'm not the only one.

(Interviewer): Was it also confronting?

(Caitlin): Yes, very confronting. But that's also good, because it makes you think, and that series really has become an example for me, for what I want to achieve.

(Interviewer): Some sort of inspiration?

(Caitlin): Definitely. (...) What she achieves. She learns to – according to her it's a... not an ability, but a curse, what she has. And how she learns to turn it into a strength, and believe in herself is like, just so inspiring. And if I look at myself, I can see in which phase I am compared to her in the story. So that's nice to know. It's very inspiring. (...) It's also a reminder for myself: I'm not there yet, but I'll get there. It's possible. I just have to believe in myself and know that I can do more than I first thought.

In this fragment, mimesis³ is strongly present, as the worlds of the narrative and the world of the reader collide (Ricoeur, 1991b). Caitlin almost literally 'reads herself' in this novel, as she states she "met herself in this series". She strongly identifies with the main character, Juliette, up to the point that she wonders how the writer can 'know her'. This is similar to DeNora's (2000) finding that individuals find themselves in music and use it to identify "the me in life" (p. 69). Caitlin identifies with Juliette and finds herself in this character and her problems. Her struggles seem to mirror Caitlin's: while Juliette has to accept her curse, so Caitlin had to accept hers, which is her illness. She even mirrors the phases of her own illness to those of Juliette in the story. The fact that she rereads the series every other six months shows that she

wants to revisit this narrative world and wants to be transported back into it. Green (2004) argues that narrative transportation can lead to changes in the self. This is demonstrated by the fact that the strength shown by Juliette is an inspiration for Caitlin. Narratives like *Shatter Me* can give an individual new perspectives, like it does for Caitlin, which can eventually be integrated into the self. (Green, 2005). It helps Caitlin to accept herself and her illness, and to keep believing in her own abilities.

A similar change happened to Jade (30). In the next fragment, she talks about the dystopian novel *The Test* (2013):

(Jade): [The main character] needs to learn things to become the leader of the nation. It has a fragment in which she has to undergo all sorts of tests to discover different qualities. And on the day of the initiation they have to do all these tests. Then, when they return to the university, they have to get to the other side of an abyss and they have to find out how. There's only one bridge, but it's open and they can't get to the other side. (...) Her entire group is looking for a solution. But she just sits down. If you want to be a leader, you have to be able to decide: enough is enough. Because sometimes you have to stop trying and know your limits, instead of going on and destroy things. And then admit, I can't do this alone, I need help. (...) I experienced that a lot myself. (...) I'm allowed to say: I can't do it alone. (...) That kind of vulnerability also has a strength. (...) Sometimes you really have to sit down and admit you can't do it on your own, that you need help. That keeps coming back. That's something that left an impression on me.

While the identification with this narrative is not as strongly present as in Caitlin's example, Jade did use this novel to reflect on herself. As a single mother, she has to juggle work and family life. *The Test* led to the realization that it is alright to ask for help sometimes. It made it easier for her to admit and accept this:

(Jade): It does get easier. Especially because it is described as a strength. Her vulnerability is shown as a strength. It's not always a matter of failure, but sometimes it's better to admit it. Otherwise you destroy things by wanting to go on. (...)

Therefore, it can be argued that this novel has had an influence on Jade by giving her new insights, namely that giving up is not always a matter of failing. Similar to Caitlin, *The Test* led to a change in Jade's beliefs (Green, 2004; 2005).

6.8 Interaction

Many respondents emphasized both the significance of reading in their lives and the sense of belonging they get from sharing their reading experiences with friends, during book club meetings or online. For many, interaction with other readers – whether direct or indirect, for example online – is part of their daily lives. This demonstrates Griswold, McDonnell and Wright's (2005) statement that reading is a social affair. Mead (1934), Blumer (1969) and Ricoeur (1991) all emphasize the importance of interaction in the process of meaning-making. One's own experiences stand at the basis of interpretation (of a narrative) as the worlds of the text and reader interweave. This is what mimesis³ implies. Interaction is therefore part of mimesis³, as it signifies interaction with others, but also interaction between the reader and imaginary world. When sharing those interpretations, it can lead to a reinterpretation of a narrative (Ricoeur, 1991; Ezzy, 1998).

Interviewees either stated they enjoy discussing books with other people in real life, or expressed the desire to do so. Some respondents only seek one-sided interaction on the internet, by reading and writing reviews, rating books on Goodreads and watching videos on 'BookTube', a book-related corner on YouTube. Savitri says:

(Savitri): Sometimes I know that for example a booktuber has a review uploaded about a certain book... So I look it up again. (...) So I go back to that video and watch it. Like that, it feels like I'm talking to someone about it, even if the video's a year old. "Yeah, I feel the same way". So then I leave a comment to get it out of my system.

(Interviewer): In what way is it valuable for you to share your reading experiences? What do you get out of it?

(Savitri): It just makes me happy. When I can talk about books. To let it all out. I don't really have anyone who I can talk with about books. Sometimes it's nice – even if it's just a comment – then it's out of your system... It makes me happy.

Savitri has the need to share her thoughts on novels, which she does by watching videos on YouTube. However, she does state she wants to talk to other readers in the setting of a book club, because "it seems like so much fun to talk to people about that one book in real life".

Some respondents also seek out 'real life' interaction with other readers. They for example discuss books with friends or are member of a book club. When asked why they share their reading experiences, many just simply stated they 'like talking about books'. Reasons such as getting and giving recommendations, getting new perspectives on a novel,

getting one's taste in books validated, and making new friends were also given. Interestingly, a few interviewees talked about convincing 'non-readers' of the value of reading. Caitlin explains:

(Caitlin): I think I share my reading experiences to show others how beautiful something can be, but also to let them know what they miss out on if they don't read books.

Caitlin's statement demonstrates how important reading is to her. She believes non-readers miss out on certain experiences if they do not read. Similarly, interviewees expressed why they valued sharing their reading experiences. Next to sharing their enthusiasm or negative feelings about a book and seeking interaction with other readers, discussing books was mentioned most often. By talking about a particular book, readers can share their experiences and interpretations with each other and get new perspectives on a story. Jenny states that "sometimes you read an entirely different book". This corresponds with the pragmatist view that readers interpret a story according to their own experiences, something Long (1986) has also argued. Discussing these stories can in turn broaden one's own perspective, like Jenny clarifies here:

(Jenny): I think it teaches you something about your own reading experience. From which perspective you read a book. I think I also like it when others broaden your own view. Like: "Sure, you can interpret it like that, but on this page, that character says this and this in that way. That's not from this time. It's unacceptable." Then I think, oh, of course. I had completely missed that bit. A book can broaden your mind, but talking about it with others can broaden it even more, I think.

In this quote by Jenny, but also in statements uttered by other respondents, elements from Mead's (1934) pragmatism, Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism and Ricoeur's (1991) idea on social interaction can be found. Meaning-making is a process of interpreting and reinterpreting. Jenny states that by discussing stories with other readers, sometimes her interpretation or view on a novel changes. Maritza says something similar:

(Maritza): If we share experiences during the book club meetings, it's just nice to listen to others. And if the discussion starts to become more profound, you get other insights into a book that you maybe hadn't thought of. So that's just really nice, you learn something about a book or you learn to look at it from a different perspective.

Jamey also confirms this:

(Interviewer): In what ways is it valuable for you to share your reading experiences with others?

(Jamey): I especially like it when someone else has ideas about it. It kind of creates a connection. Then there's a kind of recognisability. It's nice to talk about it together. Otherwise you remain alone with your own thoughts. But it's also interesting if they did or didn't read it and have a different opinion on it. "Oh right, if you look at it like that, that's also interesting". I think it's important to get other insights, and recognisability, and to connect with each other.

Jamey talks about 'connecting with one another'. By sharing reading experiences, it creates recognition: someone else may have had the same reading experience or interpreted the story in a similar way. It demonstrates that social interaction is not just important when it comes to interpreting a novel. It also gives readers a sense of belonging. The fact that many respondents look for interaction with other readers already proves this, but it is also explicitly expressed by some. Maritza says she enjoys 'being amongst like-minded people', while Francisca feels less alone knowing 'she is not the only one'.

(Interviewer): Why do you share your reading experiences with others?

(Francisca): [The book club] has absolutely enriched my life. I started talking about books with people outside of the book club as well. (...). Plus it's nice to know I'm not alone. That I'm not the only book lover and there many other people who are also book lovers. And that it's a perfectly acceptable way to spend your time, that you don't have to do something else if you don't want to. So yeah, realizing there are other people like me.

6.9 Identification, recognisability and influences on the self

(Maritza): It's always more than just reading books right? You want to get something from them. No, it's not just for the sake of reading, because then – if it would be just about that, why would you read books?

Mimesis³ signifies the last stage of identification with fiction, in which the reader completes the story by integrating elements from narratives into their own narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1991c). As Maritza so aptly puts it: it is always more than 'just' reading books. Ricoeur

(1991c) argues that the pre-narrative qualities from life, which are translated into narratives, come back to life through the act of reading. This last paragraph will discuss recognisability and identification with narratives, as well as the influence novels have on its readers.

Identification and recognisability with elements in narratives typically happened when the respondent could recognize themselves in either the character or certain situations in a story. Identification with characters mostly happens when their personality (such as being clumsy or socially awkward), values, behaviour and hobbies (like reading) corresponds with the reader. The interviewees do differ in their preferences regarding identification. Some interviewees identify rather quickly with a character and state they need to feel a certain connection with them in order to enjoy the story. They need to be able to experience it from the character's point of view. Others respondents state they do not necessarily need to identify with a character.

For a few respondents, some specific situations were extremely recognizable. In the next fragment, Maritza talks about *Fangirl*. Both the situation and the main character's behaviour were familiar to her:

(Maritza): Cath, she's really anti-social – of course she has issues, which prevent her from doing certain things. There's one scene where she's just arrived in her dorm and she can't even go to the cafeteria, or she doesn't want to, because it's too much. And then she eats some left-over cookies. I experienced the same thing, because I went to the States for a few months after graduating from High School. (...) It was so much fun that I got to go, but if you've just arrived, it's scary as hell. And I didn't know where to go. I just couldn't get myself to go to the dining hall in the morning to sit there and eat, despite being really hungry. (...) So then I ate something that I had left over and it was such an awful feeling. And the first time I went to the dining hall, I just sat there, like, having no friends. And that feeling, thinking: I'd rather stay inside my dorm than going out, which doesn't make any sense. That was so recognizable.

For other interviewees, reading about similar experiences in novels helped them accepting or dealing with a certain situation, like the examples of Esmée and Francisca mentioned in paragraph 6.7. Below, Savitri explains her thoughts on this:

(Savitri): I think it's part recognisability (...) because it is nice that certain emotions or thoughts are validated, because someone else is also going through the same thing. And it makes it okay or something, sometimes?

With regards to beliefs and insights, the elements most mentioned by the respondents were empathy and sympathy, as well as changes in worldviews and values.

(Savitri): You learn to put yourself in the place of other people. You learn how other people experience certain things. That everyone deals differently with different things. Sometimes you learn to look outside your own perspective. (...) Even if you haven't experienced the same thing. If you experience it from their point of view, you can understand it.

Here, Savitri talks about experience-taking, as discussed by Kaufman and Libby (2011). Narratives allow us to take on the role of others, and by doing so, it can lead to education about experiences, traits, goals, and so forth, of other individuals. Jamey discusses this in the next segment by talking about *Wonder* (2012), a story about a boy with a facial deformity:

(Interviewer): Could you give an example of a novel that changed your view on others, directly or indirectly?

(Jamey): Wonder. That was an intense story. I think it's very difficult, because I worked at a school for mentally disabled children... That's hard for me, because I don't know what the best way is to react to them. I treat them like everyone else, but it does require a certain attitude. And a book like Wonder makes you realise what it does to such a person, what your perspective is on them. That made me realise that people with disabilities, they have to interact with completely different people. Everyone reacts differently to it and that's tougher than being an average person. For instance when you're maimed, other people will react differently to you. You stand out. I think it's important to be aware of how you deal with that.

Experiencing empathy is different from experience-taking: it is not about becoming the character, but being aware of the emotions in the other and experiencing (similar) emotions. This process, called mentalizing, is connected to the cognitive ability that allows us to interpret thoughts and emotions of others when processing narratives (Mar et al., 2011). In Jamey's case, it taught her to become more aware of how she perceives other people, especially in everyday life. Other respondents expressed undergoing a similar process, in which a novel caused them to become more open-minded.

(Esmée): Only Ever Yours, yeah. I feel like that's a book that really taught me something, because it's a serious topic, but also because it shows really well which emotions are present in extremely exaggerated environments. In that case, of course it was very exaggerated with

all those girls and how they acted. And it made me see that it's actually really bad how we as women treat each other and how mean we can be to each other. (...)

(Interviewer): Did it work in a reflecting way? Did it made you think that you have to treat people differently? Or women?

(Esmée): Yeah, it made me more aware of how mean you can be towards other without thinking about it, and it made me go, oh why do we do this? It doesn't make sense, can't we as women see – that you don't see each other as enemies, but as friends. And that you can try do that as well with people you don't really know that well. It made me more aware of that.

Only Ever Yours (2014) is a dystopian novel about girls who are trained to become wives and indoctrinated with the idea that they have to reach physical perfection. It has been critically acclaimed and awarded several times. Both Green (2004) and Koopman and Hakemulder (2015) state that changes in the self are more likely to occur when reading literary works. This novel is also mentioned by Francisca and Maritza as an influential novel:

(Interviewer): Did YA novels have any influence on your own values? Or the way you look at certain issues?

(Maritza): (...) Only Ever Yours for example. Of course it's a really horrible book to read, but yeah, in a good way. It can give a certain insight, like, yeah, it's very extreme, but that's kind of how the world – a certain society – works. So yeah, values, I think it made me more open-minded, unconsciously, made me think differently, or made me think, this and this is important. This is how it should be.

Becoming more open-minded, thinking differently and being more critical towards certain moral and societal issues is mentioned by several respondents. The topics talked about include homosexuality, racism and diversity. In addition, YA novels made several interviewees realize that they maybe should be more open towards other people. As Caitlin says: “It has been an eye-opener, that we are not always as open-minded as we think”.

6.10 Young adult fiction and identity formation

In paragraph 6.6, preferences in YA fiction were discussed. However, a fifth element surfaced when the interviewees were asked what attracted them to this kind of fiction, which is that everything seems possible within YA stories. These ‘possibilities’ are interpreted differently by the interviewees, and some interpretations demonstrate very clearly how readers relate YA fiction to everyday life, which typifies pragmatism. That is why it is being discussed in this

paragraph. One interpretation is related to the escapism practice that was discussed earlier in this chapter. For example, Jamey states: “I especially like that it doesn’t relate to reality, because it proves that everything is possible”. Some respondents agree with her: they do *not* want to read about everyday life, but about something completely different, like other worlds, alternative futures and supernatural creatures. Other readers seek for stories that translates everyday life into narratives, which corresponds with Ricoeur’s (1991c) idea of mimesis³. Francisca states: “For me, YA fulfils the wish to read about a normal person, who gets dragged into a situation and then has to make certain choices”. And some interviewees find themselves between those two extremes, like Iris and Jade:

(Interviewer): Books that take place in the future... Does that appeal to you because it doesn't relate to everyday life, because it's nothing like it?

(Jade): Yeah, but also because it is more closely related to this time period than people realize? I love dystopian stories. There's so much that can be translated back to our time. For example society, that's happening right now as well.

(Interviewer): So quickly summarized: everything is possible, but at the same time it has a certain connection with reality, with everyday life?

(Jade): Yes, that's the best way to put it.

Many respondents relate science-fiction YA novels to either their personal situation or to society as a whole. Dystopian stories are popular amongst these readers and despite being futuristic novels, several interviewees related it to everyday life, like Francisca: “Post-apocalyptic stories are believable, because they discuss societal themes, and it makes you think, oh this can go wrong [in our society]”. This demonstrates Ricoeur’s (1991a) thoughts on augmentation: fiction makes us see reality in a different perspective. Caitlin says: “This might happen if we go on like this.” Jenny says something similarly:

(Interviewer): Are dystopian novels a way to read something that's not connected to reality? That isn't related to your daily life?

(Jenny): It could be. I never thought about it like that. It's nice to read something unrealistic. (...) I do realize it could become reality in the future. That's how they're usually written, that you recognize certain things. I think it's kind of creepy.

So despite reading dystopian novels as a way to escape from everyday life, Jenny does realize there is a connection, after all.

The second way to interpret possibilities is mentioned by Jade, as she sees these possibilities as the freedom to make certain choices in life and to form one's identity:

(Jade): (...). I don't want to do what everyone expects from me, that limits me. I want to have more choices. That is why I tend to choose YA. Because in YA, it is accepted to have more possibilities.

Despite being one of the older respondents, Jade explains that she is at a point in her life where she is trying to figure out what her identity and place in the world is. Some (discordant) life events have encouraged her to start searching again and YA fiction is helping her with this exploration. This is in line with De Mul's (2000) statement that identity formation is an on-going process, which continues our entire lives. Jade even mentions this herself:

(J): I think it's restrictive to think that it only happens with teenagers, or certain age groups. In my opinion it continues your entire life, the need to develop your own identity. For me that's the most important aspect. Developing yourself, but also personal growth. Possibilities. Not limiting yourself, but knowing you have that freedom, to go wherever you want, that everything is possible.

In this segment, Jade also mentions the cultural practice of self-perception, self-understanding and personal development (DeNora, 2000; Long, 1986). She uses YA novels to figure out who she is or wants to be. In addition to this, Caitlin states that YA fiction addresses all sorts of issues that are recognizable to not only teenagers, but to individuals of all ages:

(Caitlin): I think that's the nice thing about YA: it discusses everyday problems. Everyday problems, or really intense issues, that you can deal with at any age. (...) That's something that's discussed in many youth novels: figuring out what you want, what you want to do with your life. Questioning who you are, how you can improve yourself. Things like that.

These 'everyday problems' are heavily related to life questions that are discussed in YA novels, like the examples Caitlin gives. Savitri too, struggled with these kind of questions:

(Savitri): (...) Last year I didn't have such a great year and I didn't feel very good. It's nice to look for certain books in which characters go through something similar. That doesn't have to be the exact situation. For example in Dante and Aristotle Discover the Secrets of the

Universe, *Dante goes through a 'who am I? I don't understand any of this' phase. And it's nice to read in which someone goes through something similar. That he'll get through it eventually.*

This 'quest' to figuring out who she is, may explain why Savitri likes to read YA fiction, despite being older. She expresses she does not feel quite an adult yet, but rather still a young adult:

(Savitri): Sometimes I'd rather put myself in a younger person's position, than someone who is 25 years old. I keep getting older, but I don't feel like I'm getting older. Sometimes I still feel like 17 or 19. I don't feel like I'm 25, someone who has her life together, you know. It's just nice to lose yourself in a story where things are more simple than in an adult life.

Despite being an adult to the outside world, she does not feel like that herself. According to McAdams (1985), narrative identity construction can provide answers to these grand life questions, such as 'who am I?'. Therefore, it can be said that she uses YA fiction to figure out her place in the world and that YA novels help her in the construction of narrative identity.

Finally, in some cases, respondents stated that some books, or the act of reading, *feel* like part of their identity. Francisca thinks that "everything you read, you integrate into your identity". She feels that the act of reading has been 'identity forming' for her. Esmée says that the novel *Fangirl* "really feels like my identity", as she is able to identify with the main character extremely well. Additionally, many respondents identify *as* readers, and some even state not being able to read again would feel like a loss, something that Usherwood and Toyne (2002) mention as well. Therefore, it could be said that reading itself has also become a part of their (narrative) identity.

7. CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

This study has researched the role of YA fiction in the construction of narrative identity among adult YA readers. The research question of this study was: *For what purposes do adult readers of young adult literature consume this type of fiction and what is its role in the construction of narrative identity?* It has been demonstrated that there is a likely link between consuming YA fiction and narrative identity formation, and that readers identify with elements from YA novels and integrate some of those into their (narrative) identity and life story.

The first finding has to do with the motivations of adult readers to consume YA fiction. It has been shown that respondents utilize YA fiction in several ways. One cultural practice that has been discussed is the structuring of time. By structuring one's daily life around the act of reading, coherence is given to the experience of time. Some readers use novels to 'break away' from the routinized (and repetitive) nature of everyday life (Ricoeur, 1991d, Negus, 2012). Escapism, or getting away from everyday life, has been mentioned very often, as well as understanding the world around oneself (Radway, 1984; Usherwood & Toyne, 2002). Lastly, the cultural practice of self-perception, or finding "the me in life" in fiction (DeNora, 2000, p. 69), occurred regularly, as readers sometimes literally 'read' themselves in YA novels.

Discordancy in life is the second finding and is related to the cultural practices mentioned above. Just like in fiction, everyday life is a constant opposition of fortunate and unfortunate events (Ricoeur, 1991c). Many respondents opened up about discordant events in their lives when talking about novels that were important to them personally. They were comforted, helped or influenced by these novels. It for example helped them understand or deal with the situation, gave them new perspectives, and in some cases even led to changes in the self (Green, 2004; 2005). Several examples have demonstrated that YA novels do have the capacity to influence readers.

The third and last finding is connected to these influences, namely that elements from YA novels do have some influence on its readers and their narrative identity. Firstly, interaction with other readers is important to most respondents, and talking about books with others gives them new perspectives on narratives itself. YA fiction also has influences on beliefs, insights and values, which can all lead to changes in the self (Green, 2004; 2005). Especially feelings of empathy occurred often, and some respondents stated their view on others, and moral and societal issues, was influenced after reading a certain novel. Secondly,

some respondents prefer to read YA novels, because of the possibilities it provides. Possibilities in fiction can refer to the escapism practice, but also to finding out who one is. Adult readers see YA fiction as a way to figure out their place in the world, despite being older. Narrative identity formation is one way of providing an answer to such grand questions (McAdams, 1985; Erikson, 1968). That is why it can be said that YA fiction plays a certain role in narrative identity construction.

7.1 Contributions, limitations and future research

This study has contributed to the academic field of arts and culture studies by providing new empirical research on the role of art – more specifically YA fiction – in narrative identity construction. It has also created new insights in the cultural practices of individuals regarding YA fiction. Furthermore, it has demonstrated that young adult fiction does play a role in the construction of narrative identity construction.

This thesis is exploratory in nature, as it tried to create insight into the motivations and practices of adult YA readers, as well as the role of this kind of fiction in their narrative identities. Its exploratory nature, however, is what also makes it limited. These limitations may be indications for future research regarding this topic. The largest limitation of this research is its homogenous sample. The sample consists of only ten respondents. This sample is too small to be able to generalize the results, especially in regards to class, cultural capital, and the influence on YA fiction on narrative identity formation. This also applies to the nationality of the interviewees, as they are all of Dutch origin. Although this was a deliberate decision, this study could be improved by executing it on a much larger scale. Dutch citizens of other backgrounds could be included, or citizens of other countries, so that results can be compared based on nationality. Other ways to increase data is to do a follow-up study that includes both qualitative and quantitative data, which makes results both more generalizable and significant.

The second limitation lies in the respondents' gender, as all interviewees are female. The lack of male respondents does not give a complete image of adult young adult readers, as it has been noticed by the researcher that male YA readers do exist. By increasing both the sample size and including male respondents within the sample would increase the validity of this research, as well as the ability to generalize results. A recommendation for future research could be to compare both female and male readers to research if they differ in their motivations and practices concerning YA fiction. According to Green and Brock (2000) and Kokesh and Sternadorni (2015), women are much more likely to experience parasocial

relationships and narrative transportation. The latter can lead to changes in the self. A study with both genders can lead to new insights on this element.

This study was done to create insights in the motivations and narrative identity construction of *adult* readers of YA fiction. Nevertheless, it could be interesting to repeat this study with a group of adolescent readers, namely the target group that YA fiction is written and published for. Studies show that the life story and identity formation develops in adolescence (McAdams, 1985; Erikson, 1968). By studying adolescent YA readers, it could be researched how YA fiction influences their narrative identity and its construction.

Finally, this thesis has contributed to the understanding of discordancy in the life of the individual, and the role of YA fiction in this. Instead, discordant experiences (such as death, loss, divorce, etc.) in everyday life could be investigated on a larger social scale. Researching this from a postmodernist perspective, which characterizes the self as ‘fragmented’, could provide new insights on discordancy and the role of fiction in this (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Interview topic list

Getting to know you

- Why did you decide to participate in this research?

Reading history

- When did you start reading books in general?
- Who played a role in this? Parents, family members, friends, teachers?
- When did you start reading YA-novels?
- Who of what played a role in this? Family, friends, teachers, internet?
- Can you tell me about your reading history and evolution? (Which books, genres, ages, etc.)
- Has there been a period in your life in which you read a lot of YA? Why?

Genre

- Can you give a definition of the YA genre?
- Which elements does a YA novel have?

Your interest in YA

- Which elements appeal to you in YA literature?
- Is that:
 - The characters?
 - The interaction between elements?
 - The writing style?
 - The emotions?
 - The subjects/genres?
 - World-building?
 - The perspective?
- Are there classic YA novels you like to read of have read in the past? Which ones? Why (or why not) do those appeal to you?
- YA is written specifically for young adults. Why do you like to read YA?
- Which three YA novels have stuck with you and why?

Reading behaviour

- Imagine you have to keep a diary about your reading behaviour for a week. How would a week look like?
- For example:
 - When do you read?
 - Where?
 - Under what circumstances do you read? (In silence/with music, alone/in presence of others, etc.)
 - Are there certain moods that makes you want to read YA?
 - Do you have other activities besides reading YA?
- Which other books do you read? (other genres, for other ages, non-fiction).
- Is there a genre next to YA you like to read a lot? Why/why not?
- Are there genres you don't like to read? Why not?

Recognizing elements

- Do you recognize elements from your life in YA-novels?
- Which elements?
- Can you tell about a novel that was very recognizable for you and why?
- Which elements are not recognizable for you at all?
- When can you identify with a character? Can you think of a character from a YA novel you identify with?
- Did you recognize situations in your own life *after* reading a YA novel?

Utilization of YA fiction

- Which effects does reading YA novels have on you?
- Why do you read YA?
- Because it is:
 - Relaxing?
 - Entertaining?
 - Informative?
 - A way to escape?
 - A way to regulate your mood?
 - A way to learn something? (literary competences, general knowledge?)
 - A way to learn something about the world/yourself?
- Can you give an example from a book you've read?

Social use of YA and social interaction

- Do you share your reading experiences with others? Why (not)?
- In which ways do you share your reading experiences with others?
- Why (or why not) do you want to share your reading experiences with others?
- In which ways is it valuable for you to share your reading experiences?
- How do you acquire new YA-titles to read?
-

Beyond the reading experience

- In what other ways is YA-literature of value in your life?
- Did it influence:
 - Choices in your life?
 - Values?
 - Your view on certain issues in life?
 - Your look on others?
 - Political preferences?
- Can you give examples by means of a book?
- Which three YA-books have been important to you? Why? In what way?
- Has YA a reflecting effect on you and in what way? In what way?
- Has YA an inspiring effect on you and in what way? In what way?

Perferences in art and culture

- Do you have hobby's? Which ones?
- What else do you like to do in your free time, next to reading?
- Do you participate in culture related activities? If yes, which ones?
- What do you prefer in:
 - Films?
 - Series?

- Music?
- Theater?

Personal details

- What is your age?
- What is your place of birth?
- What is your place of residence?
- What are you studying/what have you studied? What is your highest level of education?
- What do you do for a living?
- What have your parents studied? What is their highest level of education?
- What do/did your parents do for a living?