

# The (Absent) Female Body: Cross-dressing Narratives in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction.

An exegesis submitted as part of a thesis for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide.

The thesis comprises:

Volume 1: Original novel, *Scapegrace*

Volume 2: Accompanying exegesis, "The (Absent) Female Body: Cross-dressing Narratives in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction."

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## Thesis Abstract

This thesis comprises of an original young adult novel, *Scapegrace*, and an exegesis exploring the erasure of the female body in young adult cross-dressing narratives. *Scapegrace* is a feminist fantasy novel that unravels what it means to be a woman in a man's world. In a setting inspired by the hedonistic Regency period, two worlds clash; the Decadents, in their glittering mansions, and the Grafter gangs in the slums below. Having spent the last four years slipping between the cracks of the city system, Lily Vance's life is set to change when a burst of power is torn from her – a power that only the male Decadents are supposed to possess. Kidnapped by a group intent on using her newfound abilities to their advantage, she is forced to choose; is she Lily or Lee?

The exegesis explores the key tropes of young adult (YA) fantasy fiction that features female-to-male cross-dressing. Twelve novels are analyzed (including the creative work), noting common tropes such as breast binding, masculine imitation, protagonist age and point-of-view. The main essay focusses on the absence of menstruation in cross-dressing novels. This is achieved through exploring current and historical views of menstruation from different cultures, ceremonies around menarche, and an in-depth look at menstruation in YA fantasy novels. The exegesis seeks to unpack the importance of the accurate depiction of menstruation in YA cross-dressing fantasy novels and why academic work around this topic also erases this natural bodily function and, by extension, the female body. The author reflects on her own creative piece and how *Scapegrace* (despite being self-consciously feminist) does not mention the cross-dressed protagonist's experience of menstruation while masquerading a boy.

**Thesis Declaration**

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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**Emily Francine Palmer**

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## Preface

Children do not stay young for long in this savage country. There are no toys for them to play with so they work hard and grow wise but this one, so pretty and the youngest of her family, a little late-comer, had been indulged by her mother and the grandmother who'd knitted her the red shawl that, today, has the ominous if brilliant look of blood on snow. Her breasts have just begun to swell; her hair is like lint, so fair it hardly makes a shadow on her pale forehead; her cheeks are an emblematic scarlet and white and she has just started her woman's bleeding, the clock inside her that will strike, henceforward, once a month. (Carter 257)

The onset of menarche is both a metaphor and a reality of possessing a female body. As Francisco Vaz Da Silva notes in regard to red and white symbolism in fairy tales, there "is a theme of passage from the purity of infancy (white) to the mature realm of procreation (red) ... the red-on-white stain embodies a threshold" (246). Angela Carter, in the above quote from her short story "The Company of Wolves", is aware of this symbolism in detailing an 'emblematic' scarlet and white; she is simultaneously re-writing a fairy tale and reflecting on the academic work surrounding the genre. A similar authorial self-awareness is demanded of creative writing doctoral students and this is an idea I have struggled with throughout my practice-led research.

My university career has seen me through the end of my teenage years and into my late twenties. In short, this means I have attended University of

Adelaide for eight years; eight years during which well-meaning relatives have been asking, with increasing insistence – *but what do you intend on doing after those creative writing degrees? What even is a creative writing PhD? What can you do with it?* The words to describe my novel, *Scapegrace*, come easily; *I am writing a feminist fantasy novel that explores patriarchal oppressions. It features a cross-dressed female character, Lily, in a setting inspired by the hedonistic Regency period in England.* The exegesis is harder to explain, in part because no-one (despite studying creative writing at an undergraduate and Honours level, pre-doctorate), has been able to explain it to me.

There is no all-encompassing way of writing the exegesis: no concrete definition, consensus, or template. The University of Adelaide's *Research Student Handbook* provides one framework that "the exegesis should contain a description of the form and presentation of the artistic practice which constitutes the remainder of the thesis and among other things an analytical commentary and consideration of the work in the broader framework of the discipline and/or repertory" (66); and yet, in a creative writing seminar back in 2015, discussing the exegesis, the facilitator suggested an exegesis could range from a literary essay to a creatively written car manual. In attempting to combine self-reflection and textual analysis, my exegesis likely lies somewhere in the vast space between those two possibilities.

My inability to quantify the *purpose* of my creative doctorate to my nosey relatives unfortunately mirrors the university sector's uncomfortable relationship with the practice-led PhD. In discussing the creative PhD in her article "Creative Writing as Research and the Dilemma of Accreditation" Jeri Kroll discusses having to prove its value; Nigel Bourke and Philip Nielson in "The Problem of the Exegesis

in Creative Writing Higher Degrees” reference the anxiety around the validity of the exegesis felt by both students and examiners; Brien et al. further emphasize that “the form and significance of the exegesis remains contested” despite the practice-led PhD having existed for over 20 years at Australian universities. Exegeses become problems, dilemmas, situations of anxiety and contestation.

What will *my* exegesis be, then? What are my choices?

Bourke and Nielsen note that four key types of exegesis are most frequently used; “First Order Journal Practice, Second Order Journal Practice, Literary Theory and Cultural Studies Theory”. Of the two journal practices, they define the first order as an “informal and anecdotal form of journal work” and the second as engaging “not only with the moment of writing, but the moments between writing – the ongoing, reflective, critical and analytical learning process of 'being a writer'” (Bourke and Nielson); the former, they assert, “often results in journal work of a highly individual and eccentric process leading to the writing of an unpublished, and perhaps even unpublishable, creative work”. Yet, they are also critical of the literary or cultural studies theory exegesis, as it risks hindering the development of Creative Writing as “an independent research area, with its own set of critical issues and debates that can *intersect with but not disappear into* other discipline areas” (Bourke and Nielsen).

Estelle Barrett defines the exegesis as “a means of articulating a more profound rationale for institutional recognition and support of creative arts research”. Tess Brady discusses that for her own PhD and accompanying exegesis, she acted like a “bowerbird”, in the sense that she “needed to acquire a working rather than specialist knowledge, not in one area but in a range of areas and disciplines”. Kroll states that “writers have multiple voices; they are functioning



split personalities” (“The Exegesis and the Gentle Reader/Writer”); this idea is echoed by Nigel Krauth, who calls practice-led research a type of “schizophrenia” in the sense that “the researching writer, trying to be creative writer, is forced back to the role of critic distanced from the process, as opposed to being critic inside the process”.

This idea presented by Krauth and Kroll echo my conflicting feelings about the relationship between my creative work and exegesis; between my identity as creative writer and critical reader. I want to become a published writer and to achieve this goal, I must write a publishable novel. *Scapegrace*, the creative work, fulfils these demands. It fits into a genre – fantasy – and an age bracket – young adult. I can write a covering letter to an agent, and name similar texts (such as Kristin Cashore’s *Graceling* and Tamora Pierce’s *Alanna: The First Adventure*, but more on those similarities later). Yet to write an accompanying exegesis, I must straddle the line between creative, academic, student, researcher, feminist and woman. Am I writing a feminist text, or a publishable one? Am I writing reflexively or spontaneously? Is my creative work informing or *informed by* my research and exegetical component?

In recent work around the creative writing PhD and its exegesis, higher degree by research students have described the exegesis as “‘reflective’, ‘critical’ and ‘demonstrative’” according to a study by Brien et al. in their article “Exegetical Essentials”, and they determine that “although there may still be no absolute agreement on what an exegesis is, there is consistent agreement about what it is not...[is is] not an explanatory text”. Once again, there is no definitive answer, but the field seems to be working closer to what the exegesis cannot be – it is no longer the journal practice detailed by Bourke and Nielsen above; the practice-led

researcher is not journaling their writing process and leaving it at that. Indeed, in his article “Evolution of the Exegesis”, Nigel Krauth details the initial expectation that an exegesis was “a sort of critical journal, a reflective account of processes undertaken while creating the accompanying work, having a close umbilical relationship to it”; this is now at odds with his increasingly “flexible notion of the relationship between exegesis and creative component” (Krauth). However, he does acknowledge that some universities still have traditional concepts of an exegesis; the University of Adelaide included, the previously provided definition showing an expectation of the relationship between exegesis and creative artefact.

I read the words of established creative writing academics, in articles where they reflect on practice-led research, and am left with more questions than answers. Where Bourke and Nielsen criticise the literary theory exegesis, Krauth writes positively about what he calls a “parallel text”, one in which “the candidate might be seen to stop being creative writer, becoming instead the more disengaged and critical humanities academic”. Yet he also suggests in later research that links between the creative and exegesis may be unnecessary. Maggie Butt questions the very definition of ‘publishable’ as an examinable criterion of the PhD, as “does it mean that a PhD student should never undertake experimental writing which would probably never find a home with a publisher looking to make money in the market place?” (54); and yet what is the purpose of a research degree that produces unpublishable work?

In her essay “Constructing Imaginary Narratives: Practice-led Research and Feminist Practice in Creative Writing”, Enza Gandolfo begins by declaring herself a feminist writer, framing this declaration as a challenge to “myths about

the creative process as spiritual, mysterious, magical and therefore beyond interrogation". Her feminist declaration also seeks to position creative work as "the product of our cultural backgrounds, our language, our understanding of the world as any other kind of work" (62). These are ideas I can relate to; I do not believe in the mythical creative process or rhetoric around the lightning bolt strike of inspiration. This PhD would still be half written if I had waited for such a thing. My creative work is the product of my life as a white, middle-class woman; a product of my childhood of reading; of my mother's encouragement to study English Literature; of my love of reading.

Perhaps, above all, this PhD can be traced back to my love of Tamora Pierce and her debut novel, *Alanna: The First Adventure*. This young adult (YA) novel tells Alanna's story; a girl who defies the patriarchal order, swaps places with her twin brother, and becomes a knight (while finding love along the way). I love cross-dressing narratives in young adult fiction; I love girls (and women) defying patriarchal regimes and forging their own paths. This was my sole intention in writing *Scapegrace*; to write a feminist fantasy; to write a strong female character; to engage with the novels I loved from my childhood.

Then, inevitably, came the exegesis. This self-reflective practice forced me think about both my creative writing and where it came from; in particular, the cross-dressing narratives which also fall in the same neat boxes as *Scapegrace*; aimed at young adults; fantasy novels written by women. Perhaps most pertinent for my exegetical practice are the words of Hayley Scrivener, who describes her ideal exegesis as "one that adds to my creative work, without being necessary for the enjoyment of it as a work of fiction. I want comfortable bedfellows, but not needy ones" (Cosgrove and Scrivener). The relationship between *Scapegrace*

and the exegesis is not needy, and yet the research complements the novel by looking in from the outside; comparing it to other texts; discovering its flaws and bright moments. While I wrote my creative work before conducting the bulk of my exegetical research (including identifying the 11 novels I examine in my literature reviews and, by extension, my exegesis), Appendix 3 clearly illustrates Scapegrace's adherence to many of the common tropes of cross-dressing fiction. Lily binds her breasts; she imitates masculinity; she does not menstruate. This enforces Gandolfo's point that our writing is a product of cultural background; my knowledge of 'acceptable' fictional themes, as well as taboo subjects such as depictions of menstruation, has both informed and inundated my creative practice. In erasing this female bodily experience, I become complicit. Complicit, despite the 48 times I menstruated during the four years of doctoral study that accumulated in this thesis.

As Butt says of the creative writing PhD:

The dissertation may draw on literary theory, but it may also draw on sociology, psychology, history, physics, anthropology, fine art, performance arts, philosophy, and so on. It examines the impact of all of these outside influences on the writer and the writing. It is a conscious reflection of the largely unconscious act of writing. (55)

In the discussion of the (absent) female body in female-to-male cross-dressing narratives, with a focus on menstruation, my exegesis has drawn on anthropological studies of different cultures and their traditions around menarche; it has examined the psychology behind menstrual advertisements and the history of menstruation. It cannot be classified as simply a literary theory essay, as menstruation cannot be considered simply through the lens of literature. The act

of menstruating is rebellious; it is fraught with medical difficulty; it is stigmatized culturally. Women are encouraged to hide the act of menstruating, occasionally to the extent of being barred from every-day activities and banned from intercourse or intimacy. Ultimately, my exegesis has forced me to reflect, consciously, on my creative work, on YA novels that have shaped my childhood (my mother first read *Alanna: The First Adventure* to me when I was eight, and I have read it myself almost every year since), and on the scholarly discourse around these texts.

As Eugen Bacon states, the “exegesis is both a product and a process. It implies reflexivity that will shape, substantiate, make connections between creating art and showing research gains”; I have used the exegesis both to make connections with my art and my research, but to also draw the thread tight and wrap it back around myself. My writing is informed by my life, and my research by my writing, and my writing by my research. As such, my exegesis is full of personal anecdotes and stories, reflecting critically on the way I move through and engage with the world.

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The creative work and exegesis seek to explore the key question raised by my research; *how* and *why* is the female body erased in these female-to-male cross-dressing narratives? To answer this question, I read and researched broadly to uncover texts that fit the parameters of the thesis; fantasy texts that featured female-to-male cross-dressing narratives. The scope of the thesis was determined by the novel, which features two key elements; a cross-dress female-to-male protagonist in a fantasy world rife with magic. This approach is justified by the PhD in creative writing itself, which operates under the methodology of practice-led research. Leila Green calls this the “making of the art as part of the in response to

a research question” (177), and Graeme Harper posits that the methodology of creative research may look like “drafting and redrafting...reading, note taking, annotating...workshopping” (165).

The consideration of the creative artefact therefore centred the research around similar texts of the same genre and target audience. Eleven similar texts were found, publication dates ranging from 1983 – 2018, which were then analysed to note common tropes such as breast binding, masculine imitation, protagonist age and point-of-view. A comparison of these common tropes to the existing literature and scholarly work in the field highlighted a gap in knowledge around the erasure of the female body while cross-dressed. Unless otherwise stated, all references to cross-dressing novels in this thesis relate to the 11 novels summarised in Appendix 1 or the creative work *Scapegrace*.

Using a mixed mode of personal anecdote, self-reflection and textual analysis, this exegesis considers the depiction of the female body in the 11 young adult fantasy novels, using the broad framework of intersectional feminism, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe the nature of combined marginal identities. As she later explained the concept:

Intersectionality is what occurs when a woman from a minority group...tries to navigate the main crossing in the city...highway is “racism road.” One cross street can be Colonialism, then Patriarchy Street ... She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms, those named as road signs, which link together to make a double, a triple, multiple, a many layered blanket of oppression. (qtd. in Yuval-Davis 48)

With this framework, I consider the intersections of race, class and other marginalised identities when thinking about female bodies throughout this thesis. Firstly, I examine the powerful impact of the makeover and reflecting on my own obsession around outward appearance and feminine presentation, before exploring the depiction of hair in the 11 young adult novels examined. The main essay focusses on the absence of menstruation and contraception in cross-dressing novels, exploring current, anthropological and historical views of menstruation from different cultures, particularly ceremonies around first menarche. Finally, I will discuss the absence of menstruation (and thus the female body) in these young adult fantasy novels and the corresponding scholarly work around cross-dressing. In order to draw conclusions about the erasure of the female body in these narratives, I engage with the scholarly work of Victoria Flanagan, Anne Balay and Nicole Brugger-Dethmers around cross-dressing in children's literature, as well as Marjorie Garber's work on cross-dressing and Adrienne Rich's concept of compulsory heterosexuality.

## A Very Hairy Start

**Twelve.** The hairdresser pauses, scissors poised around my long plait. She makes eye contact in the mirror. *Are you sure?* The one question designed to seed doubt. It holds a wealth of judgement. I *was* sure but assessing the sweep of her own tresses – it's the early 2000s, a time characterized by thick blonde tiger-stripe highlights – I am not anymore. She has pierced the tiny crack in my certainty, creating a gaping fault line. I look to my mother standing on my other side. She smiles, encouragingly. I nod. *I'm sure.* But it comes out the opposite. I flinch as the scissors snip shut. She offers me the plait, as if I will treasure it as a macabre keepsake.

**Fourteen.** The buzz of the clippers is loud, as the woman shaves the back of my head. They're warm against my skin. Revealing pale, tender parts of me. I did not ask for this. I cry in the car, hot embarrassed tears, and my mother storms back in to complain. Another stylist fixes the mistake but nothing can bring back my hair. Only time. I don't go to school for the last six weeks of the year; my parents lie and say I'm sick. I feel as if I am. My friends text and I pretend. *It's awful,* I say, and *Foxtel gets old so quickly.* I run my fingers over my shorn scalp, over and over. I don't recognize the girl in the mirror; she has highlights now, raising her usual dull brown to blonde. Peroxide recompense from the salon.

**Sixteen.** My friend writes the damning words. *You should grow your hair. No boy will ever want to get with you. They'd feel like they're kissing a dude.* I shut the MSN chat immediately.



**Twenty.** The bouncer hands back my driver's license. *You look like a boy*, he sneers.

**Twenty-two.** *Cut your hair*, a boyfriend pleads, *I love it short*. I twist the strands around my fingers. I have been growing it for six months, and the weight of the implicit insult is heavy against my chest: it doesn't look good.

**Twenty-three.** *You look like a bell-end*, a man says, a laugh in his voice. My bright red, blunt-cut bob has become a phallic symbol<sup>1</sup>. I swish it back and forth against my neck, unsure whether what I feel is a rush of power or insecurity.

**Twenty-five.** I joke about shaving my head. *I hate short hair on women*, yet another man declares, *never cut yours*. The words echo around my head, *deal breaker, deal breaker*. I'm in love, so I take the opinion to heart. Later, as I write this, I am ashamed. I should have seen that red flag. I should have known.

**Twenty-six.** The clippers buzz past my ear, cutting away the heavy weight from my nape. Unlike when I was fourteen, I asked for this. My best friend sits next to me and it is bittersweet. We've been sitting in chairs like these for the past four years together; a ritual of intimacy. This is the last shared hair experience. I am moving across the country, far from this familiar salon. We fit, her and I; she wears her otherness proudly, in half pink and half orange splendor. I hide mine, but love

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey J. Anderson writes that "hair carries symbolically the significance of a phallus" (80); this stranger's insult inadvertently aligned with psychoanalytic theories that link female hair-cutting to castration and loss of the mother. I am sure this is what he intended.

it, nonetheless. An undercut, hidden under heavy brown hair. The man I'm seeing replies to my Snapchat; *loving the look. As always.*

**Twenty-six, repeated.** *It's a high fashion bowl-cut,* my hairdresser declares, looking at my new shaved-sides, long-on-top, metallic-purple pixie. I am the new chic Joan of Arc. It soothes the remembered burn of the bleach, stripping away my colour. She takes a picture for her Instagram account. I buy a toning shampoo and hair styling wax to manage the new me. Women compliment me on the cut, voices admiring. They call me brave. They tell me not everyone could pull it off. They tell me they couldn't.

**Twenty-seven.** I decide to grow my hair, again.



*Pictured: The author over the last four years (2016-2020).*

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I have a long and complicated history with my hair. I have dyed it outrageous colours which never held fast – pink and purple and bright copper –, cut it short, battled to grow it long, bleached it to snapping point. Men have policed it through their comments, partially because of the weight and import I gave them. I have felt, over and over, that some part of myself was defined by it; the thick, fly-away mouse brown I try so hard to enliven. Never glossy, never sleek. I buy detangling sprays and heat protectant and fancy shampoos in hopes of changing its fundamental structure; in hopes of becoming something I am not.

I have been guilty of the post-breakup haircut, the reasons behind which clinical psychologist Seema Hingorrany explains:

Many women feel like their hair or appearance is still that one thing they have absolute control over. So, when they decide to chop off their tresses, it is mostly to adopt a new, fresher identity. The girl feels an intense need to move on and hence, the need to look different and new. (qtd. in Alexander)

A haircut can have a transformative power, beyond the obvious change in physical appearance. There is something to be said for the metaphor of 'lightness', ridding yourself of both a romantic relationship and a length of hair. Maybe I wanted to be the person Coco Chanel described, when she said "a woman who cuts her hair is about to change her life". To me, it has been an attempt to erase the tear-stained girl, the unloveable woman, and replace her with someone who is powerful. It is a tangible choice at a time where agency feels tattered. Ironically, this illusion of control is just that – an illusion. If long hair was not the accepted norm for women, a short crop would not be such a fraught and rebellious act. In changing my

hairstyle post break-up, I am not truly rebelling but rather enacting a cliched ritual of womanhood in making myself over.

This ritual acts in contradictory ways, as “both compliance and enablement are acted out, in many instances, through the body; we try to make ourselves over to match impossible standards, while this process represents itself as externalizing an inner authenticity both utterly typical and entirely our own” (Heyes 18). I am both becoming myself and one of the countless women who think physical change can result in social or emotional transformation. On Instagram, Australian feminist commentator Clementine Ford captioned a picture of herself with a short, platinum pixie as “will never not have short hair again”, implying a rejection of the long hair that aligns to feminine beauty. Yet women who rebel by cutting their hair still engage in misogynistic rhetoric whether purposefully or not. As Rose Weitz notes, “using the body as a political tool continues to place women’s bodies at the center of women’s identities. Moreover...the women who cut their hair short to declare their competence or independence imply by extension that women who do not do so lack those qualities” (680). So, women are put in an impossible situation; long hair adheres to patriarchal ideals; short hair is rebellious; short hair is mannish; short hair criticizes other women’s choices.

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Detailing a physical transformation on social media is not uncommon especially on Instagram, a photo-sharing platform. The year 2019 started with the Instagram ‘ten-year challenge’, a chance for people to post photographs of themselves a decade ago alongside a current picture. This appeared to be harmless way of showing how much you have ‘glowed up’ or improved in the last ten years. Yet as Natalie Reilly points out, such a simple challenge becomes dangerously significant

when celebrities start sharing their own before and after pictures. She quotes psychologist Vivienne Lewis, who states:

These sorts of images of celebrities highlight the unrealistic standards set for beauty, especially for women...It is unfair to compare a non-celebrity woman's body to one of celebrities. We don't have access or the money to afford the cosmetic surgery that celebrities have. (qtd. in Reilly)

Celebrities, regardless of whether or not they indulge in cosmetic surgery, have access to facilities designed to preserve their physical appearance such as personal trainers, chefs and doctors; facilities that are inaccessible to working or middle-class people due to expense. For example, an Australian personal trainer costs around \$40 to \$90 an hour ("Personal Training"), and rhinoplasty or a nose job can be from \$8,000 to \$20,000 ("Rhinoplasty"); perfecting my body and physical appearance is beyond my modest \$47,000 annual income. The ten-year challenge, then, becomes yet another way to encourage women to compare their bodies to others' and to see natural bodies as imperfect. This aligns with Leon Festinger's theory of social comparison, which argues:

That women evaluate their own appearance by comparing themselves with the sociocultural thin ideals of beauty presented in the media. Almost always this will constitute an upward comparison by which women fall short, resulting in dissatisfaction with their own body and appearance. (qtd. in Tiggeman et al. 91)

Instagram also enables a type of digital makeover, providing filters that smooth complexions and narrow or elongate natural features to make them more 'attractive'.

The makeover is not a new trope. Consider the fairy tale “Cinderella” from the Brothers Grimm, where a young scullery maid is magically transformed and wins the attention of the Prince. This makeover solves her social issues, as she is taken from drudgery and given the status she deserves. While her physical appearance is not mentioned until mid-way through the tale, the reader does not need to be explicitly told of her beauty. As Susan Brownmiller asserts:

Who can imagine a fairy princess with hair that is anything but long and blonde, with eyes that are anything but blue, in clothes that are anything but a filmy drape of gossamer and gauze? The fairy princess remains one of the most powerful symbols of femininity the Western world has ever devised, and falling short of her role model, women are all feminine failures to some degree. (44)

Again, it is a case of comparison designed to fail, whether the comparison is being drawn between normal women and celebrities, or normal women and fairy tale heroines. Furthermore, by imagining the long, flowing golden hair appropriate for a princess, the reader makes assumptions around Cinderella’s worthiness as “dark hair has connotations of mystery and evil. The long black hair of the witch contrasts with the golden tresses of the fairy princess” (Bryer 11).

Importantly, Cinderella is a passive agent in her own narrative. She does not facilitate her own transformation, other than acting like a dutiful, grieving daughter by weeping over the hazel tree planted in her mother’s memory. She waits while the Prince searches for her. The birds, not Cinderella, stop the Prince from riding off with the wrong woman. Even at the end of the story, the prince forcefully removes Cinderella without her consent as illustrated by the following line: “the prince took Cinderella on his horse and rode away with her” (Grimm 113).

This passivity is rewarded in the narrative as Cinderella achieves her happily-ever-after with the Prince, which sets an example of ideal femininity – one that adheres to the patriarchal preference for a woman who is attractive, emotional and inactive.

As Marcia Lieberman points out:

Women who are either partially or thoroughly evil are generally shown as active, ambitious, strong-willed and, most often, ugly. They are jealous of any woman more beautiful than they, which is not surprising in view of the power deriving from beauty in fairy tales.

(392)

This social belief is emphasized through contrasting Cinderella – a passive heroine – with her stepmother and stepsisters, who exhibit agency in the narrative. The stepsisters are arguably punished just as much for going after what they want – marriage to the Prince, a comfortable existence, power – as they are for being cruel to Cinderella.

As Naomi Wolf writes in *The Beauty Myth*, “a girl learns that stories happen to ‘beautiful’ women, whether they are interesting or not. And, interesting or not, stories do not happen to women who are not ‘beautiful’” (103). Gilbert and Gubar further explore this idea; “the immediate and predictable result of being beautiful is being chosen, this word having profound importance to a girl. The beautiful girl does not have to do anything of merit being chosen; she does not have to show pluck, resourcefulness or wit” (188). To be the heroines of their own stories, young women feel obliged to fit into the standards of feminine beauty, which usually involves enacting bodily change (whether this be through cosmetics, styling or surgery). The makeover thus becomes a requisite process for happiness, an idea

perpetuated and reinforced by popular media through films, reality television and magazine content.

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Reality television<sup>2</sup> shows engage with these narratives of transformation, makeover culture and the cosmetic gaze. The makeover show emerged as a strong sub-category in the reality television genre, and examples include *What Not to Wear*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *The Swan*. As Brenda Weber states, “reality TV mandates ... the reason one needs/deserves a makeover is some ‘unnatural’ separation between outside and inside, between internal subjectivity and external signification of selfhood” (78); these shows exist to close the dichotomous gap between interior feeling and exterior looks and, like Cinderella, the participants must be passive, placing themselves entirely in their stylists’ hands. The subjects have proven themselves ineffective at presenting in a traditionally attractive way, so must submit to a rigorous restyling of self, whether this involves a new wardrobe, haircut or exercise regime as determined by the TV show’s presenter or ‘experts’.

On *What Not to Wear*, presenters Susannah and Trinny brutally humiliate the participants openly discussing their failings in front of them. *The Swan* embodied what Carlen Lavigne calls “the violence inherent in the genre” (223), as its narrative involved extensive plastic surgery on its mainly female cast, changing them miraculously from ugly ducklings (the fairy tale reference being implicit in the title) into beautiful swans. The participants had control over this transformation,

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<sup>2</sup> Laurie Ouellette defines reality television as “an ambiguous term that encompasses the swatch of ostensibly unscripted programming featuring ordinary people as contestants, participants, and subjects described above. While scholars have identified shared conventions (use of nonactors, mix of fictional and factual elements) and distinct subgenres (makeovers, dating shows, docusoaps, talent contests, and so on), it can be difficult to pinpoint the exact lines between reality programs, documentaries, and fictional television programs” (5).



and were not allowed to see the result of their transformation until the finale. Even the rebooted *Queer Eye*, which sets itself apart with the self-aware “Not Just a Makeover” subtitle, transforms not only the participant’s appearance, but also house and mind (with the help of ‘culture’ adviser Karamo Brown). This outward makeover seeks to influence their inner selves and, supposedly, solves their social issues; they have the confidence to ask out their dream date or propose to their partner.

This is what Meredith Jones called, in 2008, ‘makeover culture’ and defined it as an attitude that “the process of continually becoming something better is more important than achieving a static point of complete” (qtd. in Latham et al. 153). For women, this often means plastic surgery in order to fit into perceived ideals of beauty – an ideal that, as Bernadette Wegenstein emphasises, has been shaped by men. She discusses a ‘cosmetic gaze’ which acts “in the service of normalization of deviance...and the eradication of cultural, ethnic, and racial otherness...The female body has born both the ambitions of this gaze and the weight of its inevitable failures” (61). This highlights the essential purpose of the makeover; to force its recipient to conform to the status quo. The movement towards conformity is clearly depicted in these reality television makeovers, which show that:

Self-realization and conformity to cultural ideals are twin virtues founded on one’s unrealized desire for belonging...makeover shows promise to make more truly themselves by making them look, dress, decorate, and desire as others ostensibly do. (Heller 1)

By accepting the makeover, the recipient is also being more, instead of less, like everyone else.

Additionally, as Lauren Byer points out that the makeover has the “tendency to insert its recipient into a conventionally feminized position of myopic self-scrutiny” (116). In a society which questions the authenticity of rape allegations by taking into consideration what the woman was wearing or noting her previous sexual activity<sup>3</sup>, women quickly learn to police their own behaviour and appearance. Self-scrutiny becomes an integral part of the female self, focalized on how women present their bodies to the world and how this appearance will be received by the male gaze. While this position is traditionally feminine, the ultimate point of the makeover is to enforce the gender binary, as “the makeover creates (more) feminine women and (more) masculine men” (Heyes 21). Men who receive makeovers may be passive recipients, shaped by the authoritative stylists into an appropriate form, but that final form is always one of increased masculinity.

An exception to this is *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, a show that features drag queens competing to become America’s Next Drag Superstar, hosted by the titular RuPaul. As Joshua Gamson notes, “gender and sexuality are critiqued, complicated, and undermined on *Drag Race*” (54). Drag performers themselves “[demonstrate] the constructed and essentially artificial nature of bi-gender dichotomy” by moving back and forth between genders at will (M. Gilbert 67). In this show, at least, the final form of increased masculinity is disrupted, queered, and feminized by the drag performance. However, *Drag Race* also does not fit

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<sup>3</sup> This called is rape culture, a term coined by second wave feminists in the 1970s. Rape myths suggest that “women enjoy being raped, and give credence to the idea that there are ‘blurred’ lines around consent, which has generated widespread disbelief of rape victims and low conviction rates of perpetrators” (Phipps 1). The onus is placed upon women to change their behaviour to avoid being raped, rather than on the rapist. For example; the mayor of Albury in Australia, Kevin Mack, responded to a rape of a young woman by issuing the statement ““I always have encouraged women not to walk alone, to have someone with them at all times, because that in itself is an invitation for someone to take advantage of you” (qtd. in Fettes). He suggests that women should avoid walking alone, implying that this provokes an attack and thus placing the blame on the victim of the crime.

neatly into 'makeover' sub-genre of reality television; rather, it is a talent contest in which the same participants compete for a prize over the course of a season, similar to *American Idol* or *America's Next Top Model*, and contestants are eliminated each week by a judging panel. It is not focused on the makeover, despite the recurring Drag Makeover Challenge, where the queens transform ordinary people into drag queens or kings; this challenge is still as an element of the competition.

The male makeover rarely appears in fictionalized narratives, only in reality television, emphasizing the feminized nature of the trope and the requirement for women to change their appearance to attract the male gaze. However, Lauren Byer points out a paradox in this assertion through her discussion of Harry Potter and what she calls his 'makeover' throughout the series, which "involves gaining control over his identity and making it his own, a process often nudged forward by the perils of self-estrangement and feminization" (119). She argues that:

Makeovers combine their fiction of producing an independent individual with the regulative pressure of normative gender ideology in order to produce individuals whose investment in their own autonomy prevents them from seeing themselves as normalized in any way, including their gender. (Byer 119).

Byer's work reinforces Heyes' assertion that makeovers support the gender binary, creating more feminine women and more masculine men. It suggests, however, that the recipient (Harry) would be unaware of his normalised gender, due to the makeover's focus on individuality and self-actualisation. The masculine makeover is also becoming more prevalent outside of pop culture, as evidenced by Latham et al.'s study on performance enhancing drugs. This study showed that

steroid use “align[ed] with the imperatives of self-improvement pervasive in makeover culture” and that the increased self confidence of the men was “implicated in normalisation” (Latham et al. 157); in feeling more confident in their stronger, bigger bodies, the men were also adhering more strongly to masculinity.

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In Hollywood film, the purpose of the heroine’s makeover is to win social acceptance and the attention of her (male) love interest (think of Sandy in *Grease*, whose leather-clad, sex-bomb makeover clearly appeals to male fantasies, or Mia in *The Princess Diaries*, who straightens her wild crop, and receives a literal crown as her reward for conforming). In cult 1990s hit *Clueless*, the female protagonist Cher, played by Alicia Silverstone, declares “everyone has a gift. Everyone has a talent. Mine is makeovers”. It would be difficult to find a heterosexual male character with a similar passion; indeed, hosts of makeover television shows are women or gay men, such as in *Queer Eye*.

*Clueless* emphasizes that the key purpose of the makeover is to capture the appreciative male gaze. Cher chooses a subject to improve, and when Tai returns to school post-transformation, baggy clothes replaced with skirt and midriff baring top, the camera lingers on the approving nods and attention from the previously oblivious jocks. Yet Tai’s newfound femininity and popularity enhance negative ‘feminine’ traits like cattiness and woman-on-woman competition. She eventually returns to her previous style and identity, dating the boy she originally liked, while retaining some aspects of Cher’s well-meaning makeover. While the movie highlights Cher’s mistaken assumptions around popularity and appearance, Catherine Driscoll argues the movie nevertheless “invites admiration of [Cher]. However ‘clueless’ she turns out to be, Cher’s knowledge and taste are not

dismissed” (59). The audience is expected to empathize with the blonde, thin and fashionable Cher rather than the daggy Tai.

Cher is aspirational, and several scenes are like watching a beauty vlogger on YouTube<sup>4</sup>. As Alice Lepert comments, Cher’s “preparations for her night with Christian resemble the makeup tutorials in teen magazines with extreme close ups of applying eye shadow, lipstick and lip liner” (135); the audience want to perfect her smoky eye, her carefully smudged liner. Ultimately, *Clueless* fans do not want to be Tai; true to herself, passionate about ‘uncool’ skateboarding and involved with the drop-kick marijuana-smoking boy. Although Josh, Cher’s love interest, does not fit with her fashionable desires, he is still an example of successful, bread-winning masculinity within the narrative. As a law-student, he represents the possibility of maintaining the lifestyle Cher has been provided by her own lawyer father; one of expensive cars, fashionable clothes, and mansions. Cher ends the movie clueless, rich, and popular. She undergoes no true transformation as she already represents everything to which women are meant to emulate.

Like teenage films, children’s literature is not exempt from the makeover. The makeover works to influence young women towards a primary goal of gender construction, which is to “prepare young girls for romantic love and heterosexual practices. Girls come to know that their value lies in men’s desire for them, and the characteristics and qualities that will assure their desirability are revealed in cultural storylines” (Parsons 137). The brainy Hermione of J.K Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series is not exempt from the lure of changing her outward appearance to appeal to the opposite sex:

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<sup>4</sup> A contemporary example is *NikkieTutorials*, a beauty vlogger with 13.4 million followers. Her videos range from makeup brand testing to seasonal looks, which follow the standard processes of transforming a plain, makeup-free face into dewy perfection. The sheer number of Nikkie’s video views and followers indicates the popularity and inspirational nature of this medium.

It was Hermione. But she didn't look like Hermione at all. She had done something to her hair; it was no longer bushy, but sleek and shiny, and twisted into an elegant knot at the back of her head. She was wearing robes made of a floaty, periwinkle-blue material, and she was holding herself differently, somehow – or maybe it was merely the absence of the twenty or so books she usually had slung over her back. She was also smiling – rather nervously, it was true – but the reduction in the size of her front teeth was more noticeable than ever. (Rowling 350)

Hermione has undergone a magical cosmetic procedure, altering her teeth and smoothing her hair in order to become more conventionally attractive. Despite her intelligence, this becomes a defining feature of her worth, teaching girls that good looks trump academic ability. Ron and Harry had barely considered her to be a 'girl' before this moment, thus denying womanhood to any who do not adhere to the norms of femininity. Rowling goes a step further to emphasise this: Harry "glanced up at Hermione to see how she felt about this new and more complicated method of dining – surely it meant plenty of extra work for the house-elves? – but, for once, Hermione didn't seem to be thinking about S.P.E.W. She was deep in talk with Viktor Krum" (352). She has abandoned her admirable pursuit of justice for oppressed house-elves to bask in the attention of her date, as if the donning of a beautiful dress cancels any intellectual passion. It also suggests that male attention is – for women – more important than activism.

This obsession with Hermione's mid-series transformation is not limited to the books or films – it also revolves around the actress who plays the character, Emma Watson, and her perceived makeover. At the close of filming the Harry

Potter film series, Watson cut her signature long, brown curly hair pixie short, and was quoted saying “for the nine years I was on ‘Harry Potter’ I was contractually obliged not to cut my hair, not to tan...All the normal things girls do, I couldn’t. So when I got the chance to change my appearance, this is what I did” (qtd. in Serjeant). For an entire decade – her entire formative, teenage years – her appearance was regulated by the Harry Potter franchise. Based on the statistics of gender inequality within the film industry – as detailed in the Atlantic, “of the top 250 films of 2017, 88 percent had no female directors, 83 percent had no female writers, and 96 percent had no female cinematographers” (Thompson) – this essentially meant her appearance was being controlled solely by patriarchal ideas of femininity. Indeed, all of the Harry Potter films had exclusively male directors and screenwriters. A transformation, for her, was contractually impossible, despite her character’s growth on-screen.

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My own hair and choices regarding it have set me apart; in high school, when it was pixie short to the long lengths of other girls, and in university, as I bounced between colours and cuts and never fixed on one thing or another. I hope it is sign of an ever-changing me in search of identity; in truth, I know it is a quest to become more attractive, to wedge myself into conventional beauty. I compare myself to other women; if I had long hair, if I had a fringe, if I was a blonde, what if, *what if*. This is, in part, what has drawn me to female cross-dressing narratives; in each there is an unwavering preoccupation with hair and female appearance that mirrors my own. I am constantly changing myself; I am trapped in an ongoing makeover. I try not to care about male opinion; I care desperately about male opinion.

The underlying and pervasive message of the makeover is just as strong in young adult cross-dressing novels whose characters seem to reject feminine ideals of beauty. Young adult fiction is defined by Victoria Flanagan as “[tending] to focus primarily on images and constructions of selfhood” (*Into the Closet* 215), June Pulliam describes it as “nearly always a type of *Bildungsroman*” (12), and Patty Campbell frames it as protagonists’ negotiation of adolescence, ultimately answering the question of “who am I and what am I going to do about it?” (485). Adolescence is a transformation, as the child becomes an adult. They have added social responsibilities – of part-time jobs, sexual relationships – and the physical changes wrought by puberty, like breasts and new bodily hair. The cross-dressing young adult female protagonist, as explored by this thesis, has the additional issue of navigating these developing questions of identity while disguising their sex. While puberty is an inevitable transformation, the cross-dressed protagonist undergoes another (mostly) willing transformation; that of dressing as a man.

Of the 11 novels examined by this thesis (see Appendix 1), half of these characters cross-dress willingly and the other half out of dangerous necessity, but all do so to escape the patriarchal repression of their sex. This might be to escape the fate of being an uneducated lady, as in *Alanna: The First Adventure* (1983), or to avoid being bred like an animal, in the case of *Defy’s Alexa*. Yet even in these novels, which reject traditional ideas of female beauty as women actively imitate masculinity in dress and mannerism, the characters are shown as consistently striving towards these very same patriarchal ideals of passive, fragile femininity. These cross-dressed women fight to escape their fates and yet actively work to return to them. They cut off their hair, and they miss it. They don breeches, but long for the oppression of skirts because they want to catch their lover’s eye. They



disdain their fellow women who never escaped at all, while enviously watching them flirt.

Alison Goodman's *Dark Days Pact* (2017) explicitly refers to her protagonist's loss via a hair-cut, noting "her hair fell to the floor in a relentless rhythm of snip, snip, snip. All her softness carved away... Did he think her ugly now? Unwomanly? Or was he relieved to see this stripping of her femininity?" (122). This connects the concept of long hair with femininity, and the haircut has the character lamenting that her love interest will no longer find her attractive. Like many of the cross-dressed protagonists, this transformative haircut indicates the beginning of their – albeit transgressive – journey back towards traditional femininity. *Defy's* protagonist has to "choke back a sob" when her long hair is cut, because "other than [her] hair, [she] could have passed as a boy" (Larson 3). In *The Folk Keeper* (1999), Corinna comments "my skin is the most striking thing about me – since I cut my hair, that is, which now merely puffs out from my head like a silvery dandelion" (Billingsley 8). In all the narratives referenced above, their hair is what sets them apart, both as women and *from* other women. Without it, they can easily pass as a man. This assumes that their femininity hinges on their long hair, and their subsequent make-under allows them to easily disguise their gender. This is made explicit in *Rebel of the Sands* (2016), where the protagonist Amani observes: "my sheema was loose around my neck, my hair tumbling free, making me a girl again. A girl in boy's clothes" (Hamilton 124). With her hair covered, Amani passes as a boy. Dressed the same but with her hair free, she can no longer disguise her gender.

These cross-dressed protagonists show a clear contempt for their feminine counterparts. These characters use a haircut to pursue empowerment; a great

and transformative haircut which enables them to, as Weitz puts it, “distance themselves from the system that would subordinate them” (670). These same empowered characters belittle the long-haired women who are unable to escape the system. In the case of *Eon* (2008), the titular character describes another woman as “coy”, her “giggles dropped into the hissing undertones of gossip” (Goodman 21); in *Mairelon the Magician* (1991), they are “bits of muslin” (Wrede 73); and *Flame in the Mist* (2017) frames girls as manipulative, playing one boy against another to cause pain (Ahdieh 214). Corinna, from *The Folk Keeper* (1999), fears that she is becoming a “sentimental girl. Swooning over the sunset and dabbing lavender water on [her] wrists?” (Billingsley 75). Disdain for traditional femininity reverberates throughout these texts in a concerning way. Women are othered by the cross-dressed protagonist; *other* women are sentimental, *other* women are obsessed with silks and luxury, and *other* women are self-conscious about their appearance. Thus, this hair-transformation continues to perpetuate a binary; not just of femininity against masculinity, but of one type of womanhood against another.

Despite disdaining their feminine counterparts, this transgressive ‘make-under’ inevitably reverts femininity. The cross-dressed protagonists – almost without exception – regret their lost tresses and long for their return (and thus a return to femininity) so they can pursue heterosexual relationships. For example; Alanna, in Tamora Pierce’s *Alanna: The First Adventure*, wants to wear dresses despite her knightly disguise, to attract the attention of Prince Jonathan. In *Walk on Earth a Stranger* (2015), Leah Westfall laments the loss of her hair as her only beautiful feature and later observes:

Two pretty blue-gingham dresses are now displayed in the window. The more I stare at them, the more I consider the possibility that I miss skirts even more than I miss my daddy's rifle. For some reason, the thought of meeting Jefferson while looking like a boy makes me feel funny inside. (Carson 188)

This directly contrasts her desires; a rifle, a symbol of the phallic freedom afforded by a masculine disguise, and the skirts – and by extension, femininity – that would win her male affection. Importantly, the male characters in *Alanna* and *Walk the Earth* – Jonathan and Jefferson – know the protagonists' sex so it is entirely unnecessary for Alanna or Leah to abandon their disguises to win attention from these men. This indicates that their knowledge of attraction exists solely within the heteronormative gender binary; they have been conditioned to assume men can only be attracted to feminine women.

While cultural conditioning is no fault of the victim, one must question why the female *authors* of these narratives do not transgress this heteronormative boundary, while they are already queering a narrative by including a cross-dressed woman. As Flanagan writes, “the cross-dressed body confounds the supposedly natural order between gender and natal sex, inviting questions about masculinity and femininity that necessarily destabilize these characters and reveal their constructed nature” (*Into the Closet* 13); and yet, the female characters in these novels return to their feminine subjectivity in order to fulfil heterosexual expectations. It is destabilisation without force. It is a suggestion of transgression without staying power. These women start and finish the narratives as heterosexual; as Flanagan observes, “female cross-dressers ... return to their former gender position with relative ease after their cross-dressing ceases,

suggesting their gender identities are not situated outside of the margins of socially constructed femininity” (*Into the Closet* 6). Ultimately, their cross-dressing is a disguise not an expression of gender identity; they start and finish the narrative as heterosexual women, a fact that is emphasised by their romantic relationships with men even during their disguise.

Alanna’s heterosexuality is an element explicitly referenced in Tamora Pierce in her afterword to a later novel in the series, *In the Hand of the Goddess*. Pierce reflects that, in the 1970s when she began writing the *Song of the Lioness* quartet, “Marion Zimmer Bradley and other women wrote women heroes, but with the exception of Anne McCaffrey’s Lessa in *Dragonflight*, they were nearly all gay or celibate, and I was neither. I wanted fantasy heroes who reflected my interests: warrior girls/women who liked guys” (247).

Tamora Pierce wrote a quartet that established tropes for the entire genre – a transformative haircut, imitating masculine mannerisms, breast binding – that has echoed through the canon. From 1983 to 2020, it is a canon that seems unaffected by publishing industry movements like We Need Diverse Books (whose mission statement is “putting more books featuring diverse characters into the hands of all children”) or the Vida Count (a non-profit feminist organisation who are “dedicated to creating transparency surrounding gender imbalances and the lack of diversity in the literary landscape”). Looking over the 11 YA fantasy novels examined by this thesis, it is hard to imagine now that a white, heterosexual woman wanted more visibility for herself, as these texts are overwhelmingly and almost exclusively white and heterosexual.

As Ursula Le Guin writes, “fiction is made out of experience, your whole life from infancy on, everything you’ve thought and done and seen and read and dreamed” (172). I have put an inordinate amount of time and thought and money into my hair. As a woman, I have been conditioned to act and look a certain way to achieve a certain set of socially prescribed goals; to strive towards an acceptable appearance that attracts the attention of a man, resulting in a husband and family. As a writer, then, perhaps it is not unusual for my fiction to reflect my personal experience; for my words to explore and critique ideas I have internalized; for me to wonder how other women experience their hair, and how my characters might do the same. To think further; how do we write women? How do we present them to a reading audience? By studying cross-dressing texts in the YA fantasy canon, I consider how fellow woman writers treat women and their bodies in the text; from physical appearance to mannerisms to the realities of being biologically female. Importantly, as the next chapter will discuss, this exegesis has pushed me beyond considering superficial outward appearances.

It has made me ask: where is the blood? The breasts? The babies? These women writers are writing women’s stories while simultaneously erasing female bodies.

The real question: *when* can we stop erasing our own bodies?

*Can* we stop?

**The Part Where We Defrost the Steak / the Time the Painters are in the Stairway or the Communists are in the Gazebo / the Week of Visitors of Both the Aunt & Shark Variety<sup>5</sup>.**

***I bleed***

As I begin this essay, I (aptly) have my period. My stomach aches; when I stood on the scales this morning, I was two kilograms heavier than usual. A bright red pimple stands out on my forehead, and I wear my baggiest dress to the library. My period makes me angry; the having of it, supposedly controlled by skipping the placebo pills in my birth control; the feeling of it, the weight that holds me to my chair. I am aware of every small rush of liquid into my underwear (carefully chosen that morning from my modest pile of Australian made Modi Bodi period panties). It makes me angry because of the unfairness of it; the repeated reminder of the femaleness of my body; the way it changes me, monthly, from my weight to my mood<sup>6</sup> and complexion; the final, unchanging nature of it, stretching across the majority of my life. I am 27, and I have bled for 16 years. I will bleed for decades longer.

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<sup>5</sup> Clue, a menstrual tracking app and website, conducted an ‘international period survey’ and discovered over 5,000 euphemisms for the word period across over 190 countries. These are a selection of my favourite originating from Germany, Denmark and Australia. See article “Menstrual Euphemisms” for more information.

<sup>6</sup> Menstruation has been proven to be a key trigger to depressive episodes in people with bipolar disorder, as a 2011 study titled “Triggers of Mania and Depression in Young Adults with Bipolar disorder” discovered. Menstruation ranks alongside stress, sleep deprivation, injury and decreased exercise in affecting positive mood (Proudfoot et al. 200). As Weston et al. notes, “psychiatric hospitalisations for women were significantly greater in the five days preceding menstruation” (43).

I know a lot about my period.<sup>7</sup> I know my Labrador will sniff my crotch without fail, nose wet against my thigh. He will destroy (and potentially consume) any used sanitary item he finds. I know that I will not want to have sex during it (and my partners usually will not either, although not for the same reasons). What is it about men and blood? They love it so much in video games, but not the natural flow of it from between my thighs. Germaine Greer famously wrote in her seminal text *The Female Eunuch*: “if you think you are emancipated, you might consider the idea of tasting your own menstrual blood – if it makes you sick, you've got a long way to go, baby” (57). My menstrual blood does not make me sick, precisely, but I was shocked when a sexual partner went down on me knowingly during my period. I wondered at the time if he was more feminist than me, considering he had potentially tasted *my* blood while I had not. He later proved himself to be what cabaret group Fringe Wives Club call a “feminist fuck-boy” in their show *Glittery Clittery*; in their Youtube video caption, they dare you to “tag a guy who respects you too much to date you, or thinks that hooking up with you means free therapy, or uses his lefty political views as an easy pick-up line”. In short, he claimed to be a feminist without treating women well; he eventually declared our ideology incompatible; he dumped me via an email. Tasting menstrual blood does not make someone a feminist. It does not even make Germaine Greer the type of feminist worth emulating, considering she has consistently made transphobic comments throughout her career – declaring that “trans women are not women” and that it “wasn’t fair” for Caitlyn Jenner to decide after living 40 years as a man to “decide the whole time he’s been a woman” (qtd. in John). I may remain unable (or

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<sup>7</sup> I did not know, however, that menstrual blood can be a source of stem cells, a type of regenerative cell that can be used for transplantation, treating neurological disorders and cancer. Compared to other types of stem cells, “MenSCs come from body discharge and obtaining them is non-invasive to the body, they are easy to collect, and there are no ethical concerns” (Lv et al. 325).

unwilling) to taste my own menstrual blood but *am* able to recognise gender identities outside of the binary.

I know my natural menstrual cycle is 35 days; this is at the longer end of the 24 to 38 days the website Clue describes as the typical cycle length “for adults not using any form of hormonal contraceptive or IUD” (“What’s ‘Normal’”). My cycle currently is not natural; I take birth control in the form of a daily pill. This shortens my cycle to a neat 28 days, with a strictly allocated four to bleed. Finding a pill with acceptable, *tolerable* side effects took some experimentation. General practitioners usually prescribe Levlen as a starting choice, one of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) subsidised pills; these cost approximately \$7 for a three-month supply. A bargain to avoid pregnancy, but a bargain that came with weight gain, acne, bloating and abdominal discomfort. According to Lisa Cox, Levlen is the “most recent oral contraceptive to receive a PBS listing”. This was back in 1992. Since then, new pills have come onto the market, and as she notes, “the newer-generation pills contain different hormones and usually a lower dosage than their predecessors, and can have additional benefits such as reducing acne in some women, or being less likely to cause weight gain as a side effect” (Cox). None of these newer generation pills are PBS subsidised; my new prescription for Yaz costs \$80 for a three-month supply. The comparison of \$7 to \$80 is ludicrous, and it is a difference that would lock low-income women into taking birth control that, while affordable, comes with side effects that impact on their quality of life.

I am lucky. As a middle-class white woman, with a partner who willingly splits the cost of birth control with me, I can afford Yaz. I can afford avoiding (some) of the discomfort that comes with possessing a uterus, by skipping my period or



at least lightening it considerably; I can afford to control my menstruation in the way society expects me to. This is a privilege that many low-income or marginalised groups of women cannot afford. My modest pile of Modi Bodi period underwear cost me \$30 a pair. On their website, they declare to their customers that “it’s time to ditch your tampons, liners, and pads and join the Modi Bodi Movement with our sustainable, luxuriously comfy underwear & water repellent swimwear” (“Our story”). Similar to their American cousins, Thinx, their website quotes the amount of sanitary items that end up in landfill<sup>8</sup> every year and the number a single woman uses in their lifetime.<sup>9</sup> They use colloquial, friendly language, patented technology (Modifier Technology™ in the case of Modi Bodi), and claim to have “empowered thousands of women globally to embrace their bodies, [and] open their minds” (“Our story”). Unfortunately, like many organisations commodifying feminism for their marketing materials<sup>10</sup>, their claims do not match the reality.

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<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, sanitary items are incredibly damaging to the environment. As Meenakshi notes, “disposable menstrual products (disposable sanitary napkins or DSNs) cause irreversible environmental damage due to the materials used in making the product, methods of product disposal, long de-composition periods of nearly 500 years and the ability of the DSNs to continually absorb groundwater even after disposal” and that India alone produces “113,00 million tonnes of menstrual waste each year” (245).

<sup>9</sup> “More than 12 \*billion\* pads and tampons are thrown out every year, and the average person with a period uses 11,000 pads, tampons, and panty liners in their lifetime — that’s a lotta landfill, y’all!” (Thinx, “F.A.Q”). Take note of their (overly) friendly and colloquial language. They are the sanitary company equivalent of a cool aunt.

<sup>10</sup> A classic example of the commodification of feminism comes from the rise of the Spice Girls in the 1990s as the commodification of the Riot Grrl movement. As Ellen Riordan writes, “as evident in most Bikini Kill (a prominent Riot Grrl band) songs are messages of self-acceptance and community support and love... Rather than take on the mundane topics of pop music, Bikini Kill songs tackle issues of rape, domestic violence, incest, abortion, body image and sexuality” (287). The Rrrt Girl movement was about creating a community for women and encouraging them to take action against the “patriarchal, capitalist institutions that may restrain them” (Riordan 287). The Spice Girls, an infinitely more popular and commercially successful group, appropriated this idea of empowerment for the mainstream. While their ‘pro-girl’ lyrics could be construed as feminist, Riordan points out that “although their song lyrics and interviews paid lip service to girls taking charge and engendering change, their image contradicted this, suggesting similar patterns of women’s oppression: the only way for girls to achieve power is to use one’s sexuality and looks” (290). Modi Bodi, despite claiming to ‘empower’ women, is only empowering a small selection of our population; thin, white, beautiful women who are affluent enough to afford their products.

Modi Bodi promote the rave reviews they have received from high profile women like Rosie Waterland, Bec Judd, Kimmy Smith and Mia Freedman – all of whom are affluent white women, and all (with the exception of Waterland) benefit from thin privilege<sup>11</sup>. Mia Freedman recently weaponised this thin privilege in an interview with author Roxanne Gay, openly wondering at the beginning of her podcast “Will she fit into the office lift? How many steps will she have to take to get to the interview? Is there a comfortable chair that will accommodate her six-foot-three, 'super-morbidly-obese' frame?” (qtd. in Noyes). Considering Gay was in Australia promoting her new book, *Hunger*, which explores her difficulties as a fat woman of colour in a world that does not accommodate her size, makes Freedman’s comments all the more problematic. Gay later called Freedman’s comments “cruel and humiliating” (qtd. in Noyes). By using Freedman as an example of their high-profile clients, Modi-Bodi clearly illustrate where their brand of feminism lies. It certainly is not about encouraging women to embrace their bodies, unless those bodies lie within a patriarchally mandated range of beauty; white and thin.

Their controversial rave reviewers aside, Modi Bodi’s price range<sup>12</sup> means that most women cannot afford to meet their cheerful command to ditch tampons or panty liners in order to save the planet. Menstrual sustainability therefore becomes an issue of class and economic stability; for low-income women,

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<sup>11</sup> Thin privilege is defined by Dr Linda Bacon as “a consequence of weight discrimination” (312). They detail the pervasive nature of “weight bias” in which research shows that “fatter people face discrimination in employment (including lower wages), barriers in education, biased attitudes and lower quality of care from health professionals, stereotypes in the media, stigma in interpersonal relationships and, over all, are judged negatively and treated with less respect” (312).

<sup>12</sup> A normal period lasts between 4 – 7 days a month. At \$30 a period panty, even catering for washing, you would have to buy over \$100 worth of products for a single menstrual cycle. The underwear also only last up to two years, which means this is an ongoing expense.

accessing basic sanitary items is difficult enough, let alone sustainable, reusable options<sup>13</sup>. Tampons and pads are expensive – a packet usually costs upwards of \$5 in Australian metropolitan areas and more in regional towns – and until recently, they were considered taxable items in Australia, a legislation that was colloquially referred to as ‘the tampon tax’. The inclusion of the 10% GST in the price of the sanitary products suggested, controversially, that these were “non-essential items” (Meixler), unlike ‘essentials’ like Viagra and condoms. Considering erections and sexual intercourse are optional and menstruation is not, it still took 18 years for the Australian government to abolish the tax. Even making sanitary products cheaper may not positively impact women from lower-economic backgrounds, as Eryk Bagshaw suggests “the greatest benefit from removing the tax is likely to flow through to wealthier women. The Bureau of Statistics found the top fifth of Australian households spend 87 cents a week on sanitary products, compared to 36 cents by households in the lowest fifth”.

From a young age, women are encouraged (either directly or indirectly) to discreetly manage their menstrual experiences, whether this be the blood flow or associated discomforts. We scurry to the bathroom with sanitary item discreetly held in our palms or hidden in our handbags to avoid the stigma of announcing our bleeding status to our school fellows or colleagues. Advertisements for menstrual items show pads absorbing blue liquid instead of red menstrual blood; as J.R. Thorpe notes, advertisers need to:

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<sup>13</sup> In their study of Indian women, Meenakshi noted that alongside menstrual stigma, one of the main barriers to purchasing sustainable menstrual products was cost. One participant said “it’s an investment of a thousand rupees. If it doesn’t suit me or leaks, the money goes waste. And I can’t even return the product. How do I explain wasting 1,000 rupees to my family?” (251). Additionally, the study made it clear that the consumption of sustainable menstrual products was limited to middle-to-upper class, educated, urban women (246).

Balance the need to demonstrate the products' absorption with the audience's possible cultural disgust reflex at seeing any menstrual blood-like substance. Their solution? Blue liquid ... other colour combinations — pink, purple, yellow or brown, even orange and green — have associations with different organic bodily fluids or functions. By contrast, blue is uniquely clinical and evokes cleaning products, like bleach or dishwashing liquid, emphasizing a sense of 'cleanliness' and hygiene.

Mindy Erchull notes that advertisements often depict women “wearing tight and/or white clothing” which is “not assumed to be the typical clothing choices of menstruating women” (34). They usually include images with “a clear view of the buttocks” (34), illustrating the absence of period stains or marks while objectifying the woman. Objectification is normal within a menstrual product advertisement because “idealized images of women would provide needed distance from realities of a women’s corporeal nature” (37); effectively, the perfection of the model serves to distract the audience from the distasteful necessity of selling (and thus advertising) sanitary items. These advertisements effectively erase menstruation, while conversely selling a product that exists only because of that very bodily function.

The word ‘sanitary’ is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED)

Online as:

Of or pertaining to the conditions affecting health, esp. with reference to cleanliness and precautions against infection and other deleterious influences; pertaining to or concerned with sanitation.

Also, occasionally of conditions or surroundings: Free from deleterious influences.

This suggests that sanitary product such as pads, tampons, cups or underwear are 'cleaning' women, and our periods are in some way dirty, unclean or unhealthy, when menstrual blood is in fact sterile. Unlike faecal matter, it does not carry bacteria or diseases; menstrual blood does not pose any health threat. As Germaine Greer suggested, we could indeed taste our period without consequence. Yet where toilet or scatological humour is a well-acknowledged form of comedy (see books such as *Captain Underpants* and *The Day My Bum Went Psycho*, or watch any *Mr Bean* movie), women are expected to keep quiet about their menstruation, and period humour is reserved for asking women experiencing any kind of emotion 'if they're on the rag'.

Libra, a company specialising in sanitary items, released an Australian campaign in 2019 titled #BloodNormal. Their slogan is as follows:

We bleed.

Every. Single. Month.

It's natural. It's normal. It's healthy.

And it's not blue dye. It's red.

Sometimes it's painful.

Annoying.

And just plain hard.

But not being scared to talk about it?

That's bloody awesome.

The campaign aims to normalises the discussions of periods among women and the wider community, breaking the stigma that surrounds menstruation. Libra

released several advertisements that refused to shy away from menstrual realities, depicting women bleeding in everyday situations, including one showing a woman with blood running down her legs in the shower. These realistic adverts received over 600 complaints calling them “distasteful”, “offensive” and “vulgar” (Koob), emphasising the public distaste towards the act of menstruation and the need for campaigns such as #BloodNormal. It became Australia’s most complained about advertisement of 2019 even though it did not depict violence, nudity or anything sexually suggestive. Considering how these themes are normalised by film, television and video games, while menstruation is erased, it can be assumed that violence or nudity would be less repugnant and thus less complained about than natural period blood.

Libra’s research into menstrual attitudes indicated that “three out of four Australian women say there is a greater stigma attached to periods than there is drugs or STIs, and a further eight out of 10 women go to great lengths to hide their periods” and “70 per cent of young Australian women would rather fail a class than have their peers know they are having their period” (Lloyd). While taking into consideration that Libra’s aim is to sell a product, not activism, these figures align with results from a survey taken by Plan International UK, a girl’s rights organisation researching period poverty and stigma. They found that “one in ten girls (10 per cent) have been unable to afford sanitary wear” and “49 per cent of girls have missed an entire day of school because of their period, of which 59 per cent have made up a lie or an alternate excuse” (“Plan International”). Even girls who have access to sanitary items want to skip school because of it; as a teenager, I forged sick notes because my P.E. teacher would not accept any other excuse for skipping the swimming lesson. How could I articulate to the burly male

teacher that I could not swim because of my period; because I had yet to learn how to insert a tampon, and would not learn until half a decade later, when I became sexually active and with it, infinitely more aware of my own body? A forged note it was, and with it a skipped lesson, a missed opportunity.

The impact of menstruation upon education becomes an urgent issue in low-income communities or countries where girls do not have adequate access to information about their periods or resources to deal with menstrual realities. Indeed:

Evidence from many countries indicates that many girls start their menstruation uninformed, unprepared, and unsupported to manage their monthly menstrual periods. Girls report hiding the onset of menses from others and missing school due to fear of a shameful menstrual leak. They demonstrate a lack of understanding of why menstruation occurs, how it relates to fertility, and when to expect their monthly periods. At the start of this normal biological phenomenon of sexual maturation, girls around the world report feeling afraid, ashamed, and confused. (Sutherland et al. 24)

Sutherland et al. go on to detail how lack of knowledge around menstruation may have long reaching impacts for girls, damaging their self-esteem and limiting their abilities to assert themselves in sexual situations due to previous reproductive ignorance (24). In addition to this, “inadequate sanitation facilities pose a major impediment to school-going girls during menstruation, compromising their ability to maintain proper hygiene and privacy” (Sommer et al. 1556). This, compounded with a lack of access to appropriate sanitary items, means that girls prefer to skip

school rather than face humiliation at the hands of their classmates or teachers (Sommer et al. 1557).

Nina Hall details similar issues experienced by remote Indigenous communities in Australia, after conducting interviews with community members. These interviews highlighted the additional barriers faced by menstruating women in low-income situations, including; the increased cost of menstrual products in remote townships, lack of adequate hygiene items (such as soap, or working bathroom facilities) and the internalised shame around menstruation that prevented positive conversations with other community members about any issues (Hall 2). Interviewees also discussed the impacts of colonialism upon menstrual education, stating:

Traditional forms of learning [aren't] necessarily functioning within families for everything ... Traditionally, it's a grandmother's role ... but a lot of grandmothers experienced mission times where there was very strong puritan Christian values around your body, which meant you don't talk about it. (Hall 4)

Menstruation also restricts girls and women from activities beyond that of formal education. Rather than an unvoiced taboo forcing them from public space, these are exclusions that are routinely and traditionally enacted upon menstruating bodies.

Adeline Masquelier writes about a *bori* possession ceremony she witnessed in Niger, where a menstruating woman was whisked away in disgrace after onlookers noticed a blood stain on her clothing (158); she goes on to discuss how in many parts of Africa menstruating women are “commonly barred from furnaces and forges, their exclusion highlighting the fundamental incompatibility



between provisional sterility and processes of fertility such as iron smelting – a transformative process seen analogically as a form of reproduction” (161). Mohamed et al. studied restrictive practises in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Island and Fiji, observing that:

When menstruating, girls may be expected to stay away from their peer group, avoid male community members, and not visit certain locations, such as churches ... menstrual taboos and norms direct girls and women to avoid cooking or eating certain foods, and in some cases, to avoid bathing during menstruation. (2)

Such restrictions would inhibit a woman’s ability to commit to education, a workplace or participate fully in community life. Mohamed et al. also noted in the study that all three countries subscribed to a “traditional restriction on sexual intercourse during menstruation” which “linked to beliefs around women being dirty or unclean ... and causing harm to men” (8).

Further examples of menstrual restrictions (both past and present) include; in 19<sup>th</sup> century France, women were “barred from wine-making, mushroom-picking silkworm tending and sugar refining, to safeguard the products of these industries from ruin” (Montgomery 139); British doctors prior to the late 1800s believed women should not be operated upon during their period (Hays 42); in Judaism a woman is “forbidden from touching her husband, passing objects to him, sharing a bed or seat with him without an object between them, wearing clothes that do not cover her entirely, wearing perfume, singing, or from sexually enticing her husband in any way” and both Hinduism and Islam restrict women from praying or entering holy sites during their period (Dunnavant and Roberts 123). Almost universally, these examples frame the menstruating woman as polluted or

unclean, and force her to be isolated from her community, religion or loved ones, and this view partly stems from the idea menstruation is a “failed reproductive cycle that did not yield an embryo” (Przybylo and Fahs 207). This disgust over a woman’s supposed failure to reproduce emphasises the idea that a woman’s main function is to bear young, and that they will be stigmatized or punished for these failures by social restrictions. These cultural messages permeate society, forcing women to internalise misogynistic thoughts about their body and its natural function, normalising the trivialisation and marginalisation of female pain or discomfort.

If menstruation is constructed as shameful and aberrant (as the female body’s key purpose is reproduction and anything deviating from that norm is problematic), then what must endometriosis, an abnormal and painful form of menstruation, signify? It is a disease which is defined as “a chronic inflammation” characterised by:

The presence of lesions – observed in and around the pelvis – containing tissue like the lining of the uterus ... Reported symptoms include pelvic pain during menstruation and other times of the month, pain during sexual intercourse, leg pain, and bowel and bladder problems such as cyclic diarrhoea and/or constipation. There is an association between endometriosis and infertility. (Young et al. 338)

Endometriosis often involves heavier and more painful periods, making the menstrual etiquette of hiding periods and the associated discomfort much more difficult for the woman. With endometriosis, women begin to lose control of their bodies and may also be prevented from fulfilling their reproductive destinies. Furthermore:

The frequency of words like 'enigma', 'conundrum', 'unknown', 'perplexing', 'mystery', and 'puzzling', in endo medical texts clearly recalls the discursive history that links female anatomy, sexuality, and psyche to the uncanny. Indeed, the medical investigation of endometriosis perpetuates the "gendering" scientific ritual of measuring the unruly body against the norms of the observing scientist. (Shohat 60)

This unruliness can be exemplified by Young et al.'s study, in which doctors apply descriptors like "difficult patient" to women who refuse to accept endometrial pain (and lack of treatment or cure) as a fact of their lives (350). It is important to note that the clinicians Young et al. speak to focus on reproduction and sexual intercourse as the sole outcomes of treatment, enforcing a heterosexual narrative with their diagnosis. Sex, here, is defined as the penis-penetrating-vagina variety and pays little attention to alternate intercourse. Additionally, little consideration was given to treating the ongoing pain of the patients (351), which prioritises heterosexual sex (thus pleasing the male partner) over the comfort of the patient. The study indicates an attitude of 'getting on with it' regarding endometriosis (350); women are supposed to silence their pain, at risk of being difficult or hysterical, and cope with chronic illness without ongoing support. This idea of hysteria is reinforced by Cara E. Jones' observation that "clinicians ... often interpret endo pain as psychosocial, arguing those with endometriosis catastrophize their symptoms. Rewriting pain as psychological suggests that those with endo are hysterical, denies them medical intervention, and reduces social support" ("The Pain of" 557). Jones points out that:

Physicians have consistently linked endometriosis to women's deviations from the prescribed social norms of marriage and motherhood. Therefore, endometriosis is not merely a physical condition; it is also a cultural construction that informs beliefs about the relationship between women's productive anatomy and their social roles. ("Wandering Wombs" 1083)

This suggests that women cause their own disease by rejecting motherhood and provides an explanation as to why treatment focuses on fertility instead of pain management in many cases. It seems unlikely that a male disease would receive the same response. Nancy Peterson, director of the Endometriosis Treatment Program in Oregon, observes:

If a man has a disease that causes him to be unable to father a child, to have unbearable pain during sex and unbearable pain during bowel movements, [which was] treated by feminizing hormones and surgery, endo would be declared a national emergency. (qtd. in Shohat 60)

This relates to the concurrent issue of birth control side-effects, which include continual bleeding, discomfort and bodily changes for women. A male birth control pill study was discontinued after men:

Reported side effects included acne, increased libido, injection site pain, myalgia, and mood alterations; 6% of men discontinued due to a side effect. The reported frequency of moderate to severe mood changes, occurring in some but not all sites, lead to an external safety review committee recommending stopping further injections before the planned end of the study. (Gava and Meriggiola 5)

These are the same side-effects experienced by women, in varying severity, from taking birth control, whether it be the Pill, injection or Implanon, but are deemed unacceptable by men. This lack of male birth control (other than the condom), continues to place the onus on women controlling their own bodies and being responsible for their reproductive functions, despite intercourse involving two parties. As well as the emotional and physical onus for managing fertility, it means women are expected to bear the financial responsibility for birth control which, as previously discussed, can be considerable. By framing birth control as a woman's responsibility, this logic also frames unplanned pregnancy as 'their fault' and eliminates a man's contribution to the process, once again blaming women for losing control of their unruly bodies.

As much of the literature discussed above fails to consider, women are not the only ones who menstruate. Both non-binary and transgender people can experience menstruation and require birth control, experiencing different barriers surrounding these issues to cis-gendered women. As Kanj et al. note, "social barriers to menstrual hygiene, such as use of public restrooms, may lead to concerns about personal safety and encountering transphobia" (413); their period becomes a site of danger for the trans individual, as it prevents them from 'passing' and is a signifier of their transgressive gender identity. While a cis-gendered woman may try and hide the evidence of her period, she takes for granted the right to use public restrooms safely and without violence; this is often not the case for trans people as "gender nonconforming behaviours, as well as disclosing or exposing one's gender identity, have been previously identified as risk factors for violence" (Testa et al. 453). Menstruation in cis-gendered women is stigmatized but nevertheless adhering to their assigned-at-birth gender; it is expected and

controlled by society through the application of an almost universal menstrual etiquette. Trans periods fall outside of accepted norms and thus can be used to further 'other' trans individuals and leave them open to a risk of violent reprisals.

Health care is another barrier to trans and non-binary people, with surveys showing:

Fewer than 50% of transgender respondents receive routine medical care... 19% of participants reported that they had been refused care because of their transgender status; medical care was often delayed because of financial constraints (48%), but respondents also mentioned worries about revealing their transgender status because of experience with (or anticipation of) negative attitudes on the part of healthcare providers (28%). (Chrisler 1239)

Avoiding healthcare professionals due to fear of transphobia leads to the neglect of standard tests, such as pap smears or breast screening, potentially leading to serious medical conditions. Financial constraints cannot be ignored in this situation, as access to healthcare requires money, both to visit the doctor and enact ongoing care regarding products and medication. As Davis and Wertz detail:

In 2008, the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) conducted a survey to assess the prevalence of discrimination impacting transgender and gender non-conforming people in the United States. The survey of 6,450 transgender people indicated rampant economic marginalization within transgender communities, including high rates of poverty, unemployment, and discrimination on the job. (467)

As well as being denied (or avoiding) healthcare due to their gender non-conformity, trans and non-binary individuals may be unable to access it due to poverty.

Transgender experiences of menstruation – including their lack of access to healthcare due to extreme poverty, discrimination and risk of violence – should be taken into consideration in discussions of periods and female reproductive health. However, most of the literature I have read on the subject is strictly heteronormative in nature, focussing on cis-gendered women's experiences of menstruation, which is a considerable gap in knowledge. Menstruation therefore becomes an intersectional consideration, which spans class, race and gender identity.

I bleed with privilege; the privilege of a woman brought up in a middle-class, white household in a Western society, where my mother has always been open about bodily functions and welcoming of questions. I bleed without chronic pain, and I do not have to fight for that pain to be recognised as real. I have the privilege of easy access to sanitary products, birth control and medical advice – courtesy of my doctor father, and my affluent socioeconomic background – and a partner who willingly shoulders the financial burden for half of my birth control. I do not have to feel the shame of my bleeding, as many women do, and am not culturally restricted during that time of the month. I have the privilege of my education; of friends also doing PhDs, who listen to me talk about my research, my menstruation and the associated discomforts of being a bleeding woman in a world who does not want us.

But I do bleed. As does half the planet, once a month, for most of their lives.

### ***They bleed***

First blood holds considerable meaning in numerous cultures and represents the moment that a girl becomes a woman. Isolation is a theme in menarche ceremonies. In Sri Lanka, for example, “the girl is isolated for some days; is bathed ritually, and then, with some recognition of specialness, is returned to normal life” (Winslow 607); the author notes that depending on the religion and region in Sri Lanka, this isolation may be for her own safety or the safety of the men in the village (610). The Fijian ceremony for first menarche also involves isolation because it is “tabu for the girl to go outside for four days” (Sniekers 410). While tabu means ‘taboo’ in Fijian, it relates to the concept of *mana*, a certain kind of power (410). It is suggested that “the outside world is polluting” which connects to the “sacred aspect of menstruation. Menstrual blood is sacred and has power, *mana*...a girl is unprotected when she goes outside during her first menstruation. She is thus vulnerable to evil influences” (412); therefore, the isolation is to protect her from falling prey to demons rather than to imply her bleeding body is a polluting influence.

In India, Brahmin ceremonies require the girl to remain in “a clearly demarcated outdoor area, indicated by a chalk design on the back porch or somewhere exterior to the house” due to her impurity (Dammery 76). During the ceremony, “one of her female relatives circles three times around the girl with a container of red aratti liquid... the container of aratti is carried through the house to be poured into the centre of the auspicious chalk design external to the front door. This destroys evil spirits known as *dirushti*” (77). A purifying bath follows, similar to the Sri Lankan ceremony, indicating that the girl is no longer a dirty or unclean influence on the community. Dammery argues that “cultures who maintain



the ceremony in some form, based on blood pollution and danger, provide evidence that a woman remains subject to men, both father and husband” (48); while it would be easy to claim that Australian menstrual culture is, in comparison, open and equal, she goes on to say that in Western societies “menarche is symbolised by silence” (48). This is just as oppressive and stigmatizing as an elaborate ceremony, enforcing the menstrual taboo.

Out of the 11 young adult fantasy novels examined featuring female-to-male cross-dressing, six mentioned menstruation and two contraception. One of these, *Defy* (2014) by Sarah Larson, mentions menstruation in a single line: a man asks a group of girls “how many of you have already started your monthly bleedings?” (22). The cross-dressed protagonist, Alexa, reacts to the question with a flinch; a reaction left unexplained by the author. Is it a flinch of disgust that menstruation is mentioned at all? Does it serve as a reminder of her own disguise, and the fate that would befall her unveiling? The reader does not get to know, as menstruation is then erased from the text; that single line is the only time the novel references menstruation in its 317 pages. Yet this is still better than the four novels that mentioned neither menstruation nor contraception. This is despite all the female protagonists being heterosexual (and engaging in sexual relationships during the narrative) and being at or beyond the average age of menarche. According to a survey by Harper and Collins, “statistics derived from a sample of 1391 schoolgirls drawn from both state and private schools showed the mean age of menarche to be 12.65 years” (44). As the literature review illustrates (located in Appendix 1 & 2), the female protagonists in all the novels range between the ages of 14 and 17; significantly older than 12.65. Thus, it can be presumed that these cross-dressed characters do experience menstruation at some point during the

text. Furthermore, as Nicole Brady suggests, “the implications of earlier puberty can be profound: shortened childhood, earlier sexualisation, potential for younger sexual experiences and decreased self-esteem”. This lack of adequate representation of natural female processes – particularly in novels which explore the realities of a woman masquerading as a man and are aimed at a female audience – speaks to the ongoing menstrual taboo in our society.

In *Alanna: The First Adventure*, the titular character experiences menstruation in a chapter titled ‘Womanhood’, which occurs approximately halfway through the novel. She wakes in the night in horror to find her sheets smeared with blood; blood that comes from what she describes as “the secret place between her legs” (Pierce, *Alanna* 152). Alanna flees into the city, and her friend notes that she is entirely “overset” (155), when he has never seen her scared before. Her period frightens her more than vicious bullies and her male masquerade. When she confides in a female healer, she is “ashamed” and embarrassed (157); the healer responds with laughter at her lack of knowledge. The healer observes that “[Alanna] you’re not used to your body doing things you haven’t asked of it, are you?” (158), which aligns with the narrative of a male body being controlled and contained, and a female’s being unruly. Alanna’s growing body is an issue for her cross-dressing, as it rebels in ways a man’s body does not; she declares that “it’s bad enough my chest keeps growing. Now something like this happens” (159). It is interesting to note that the healer insists that menstruation will not slow her down, which according to the previous discussion of menstruation is blatantly untrue. Mood swings, fatigue and depression are all associated with menstruation, as well as cramping and potential debilitating endometriosis pain. Periods do, in fact, slow women down. It also increases

Alanna's risk of being revealed as a woman. Obtaining the appropriate privacy and sanitary items to manage a period while in the field would be near impossible – especially considering she has already experienced issues with her refusal to swim publicly, before the onset of menarche.

Her first blood forces her to reveal to her best friend, George, the facts of her true sex. It is a moment that reinforces the idea that her cross-dressing is a temporary rather than permanent state. He asks, “surely you don't plan to be a pretty young man all your life?” to which Alanna replies with a brusque “of course not” (Pierce, *Alanna* 160). Furthermore, George insists he will call her Alanna in private moments, as “you should be reminded of who you are” (161). This eliminates any suggestion of a cross dressing identity, rather reinforcing a heteronormative narrative of gender binaries when the healer states “you cannot change what the gods have made you” and forces a contraceptive charm on Alanna despite the girl's insistence she does not want children (158). Menstruation and childbirth are intrinsically linked in this chapter, and Alanna's individual desires are dismissed in favour of the popular discourse around a woman's reproductive destiny. The chapter itself overtly states that it will deal with her ‘womanhood’, a term referring to her coming of age. In the medieval period she would have been considered a woman despite only being twelve years old. As Jeremy Goldberg states:

The minimum age for consent was understood to be fourteen for boys, but only twelve for girls. These ages were themselves related to Classical understandings of the age of puberty. Age of consent to marriage was thus tied to an understanding of the ages at which

young people were deemed capable of having sex and so of conceiving children, the primary justification for marriage. (17)

Legally, Alanna could have married and born children by this point in her life, despite only just experiencing menarche.

This chapter also explores the duality of Alanna's nature; in a short time period, she receives both her period (a signifier of womanhood) and a sword (a phallic symbol<sup>14</sup>). Receiving a weapon is "a constructed rite of passage from boyhood to manhood, conjuring up, consciously or not, images of a purported 'golden past' of hunter/warrior males. This may happen in a traditional cultural setting, as part of joining an urban gang or as part of military training in the national armed forces" (Myrntinen 30). Alanna is becoming a man and a woman in the same chapter. Yet when she visits her elderly professor (a surrogate father figure to Alanna) on his estate and is attacked by unknown magic while investigating a sword, she responds in a traditionally feminine way: "for the first time in her life, Alanna stopped fighting. She had used up all her air, all her strength, all her magic. She was weaponless" (Pierce, *Alanna* 176). Acknowledging weakness is not masculine, yet this defeat wins her the sword for as soon as she accepts her own death "the crystal on the sword blazed, its light penetrating the darkness in her brain" (177). This duality is repeated in other parts of Alanna's life; she is a twin; she possesses a strong gift for healing yet is a warrior and will kill others.

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<sup>14</sup> As defined by Blakemore and Jennet in *The Oxford Companion to the Body*; "the most basic phallic symbols in dreams were those resembling the organ in shape: sticks, umbrellas, posts, trees. Another kind of phallic symbol was provided by objects that could penetrate or injure: knives, daggers, or spears. Firearms belonged to both sets because of their shape and because they could injure. Other symbols of the phallus were provided by 'objects from which water flows' (taps, fountains, watering-cans) or by 'objects which are capable of being lengthened', which Freud exemplified with hanging lamps and extensible pencils". A sword is distinctly phallic as it is used to penetrate another's body and wield power over others (whether this be by violence or threat of violence). Previously, Alanna only used the wooden swords reserved for children or trainees in combat. Now she can wear a real sword on her hip, to be admired by her peers and masters. In this way, the phallic symbol lends her masquerade further credibility.

Like Alanna, the protagonist Kellen in *The Dream-Maker's Magic* becomes convinced she is mortally injured or sick when her menarche arrives. She becomes “panicked” and “afraid” (Shinn 32), convinced she is in the throes of some incurable disease. Unlike Alanna, however, Kellen describes the pain she experiences; “a thick, dull pain” in her stomach, symptomatic of the period cramps that most women experience (Shinn 32). This pain is erased in *Alanna: The First Adventure*, suggesting that the only inconvenience of menstruation is the blood. Kellen chooses to keep her affliction secret, but her best friend’s mother discovers the cause of her distress. Betsy provides an explanation and the appropriate sanitary items, expressing horror that Kellen’s own mother never discussed menstruation with her daughter. This frames the mother as “unnatural, even cruel” (Shinn 34), for not explaining the simple and natural fact of a woman’s life experience.

The fear that underscores Alanna and Kellen’s menarche is absent in Rae Carson’s *Walk the Earth a Stranger*; Leah Westfall is well aware of her monthly bleeding. The onset is described thus:

My belly had been feeling hot and tight for hours; I hope I’m not getting sick. Suddenly, wet warmth blossoms between my legs.

I freeze, pitchfork half raised.

No need to look in my drawers to know I’m in a heap of trouble.

Mama told me all about it, and once she made me wash her monthly rags so I’d understand. She said my time would come when I was seventeen or so, that since I wasn’t planning on having babies anytime soon, it would be a regular visitor.

... I’m a woman now. A woman with a big problem. (Carson 152)

Once again, the character suspects sickness but quickly realises the true nature of her discomfort. She discovers this while wielding a masculine tool, completing a masculine job, blending her two identities. Unlike Alanna and Kellen, her mother has prepared her for this rite of womanhood. Leah is aware of what is required and how this will affect her current masculine disguise as “stained rags are a different business entirely” as there is no way to “explain them away” (153). The comparison between her reaction and the others’ exemplifies the power of knowledge; Leah does not have to reveal herself to anyone in order to gain help and information; she does not panic, but is able to think and act rationally to solve her problem.

Her menstruation is referred to later in the novel as well, setting it apart from the other novels which only explore the first instance of menarche. Again, it is mentioned in conjunction to sickness – her friend Jefferson suspects she is ill because she must “slip away constantly to rinse [her] rags and change them for fresh ones” (Carson 237). This emphasises the ongoing inconvenience of menstruation – both as a risk to the cross-dressing disguise, and in general. It is ongoing, not a singular stressful event as the other novels may suggest. After a long day’s ride, Leah gets a bloodstain on her pants, a telling reminder of her female body. The bloodstain serves as a reminder of her female body to her friend (and potential lover), Jefferson, who is embarrassed when she reveals the reason for her absences; he blushes “down to the roots of his black hair” (237). This reinforces the idea that menstruation is only for women and revealing it to men risks their embarrassment. The line between women’s business and men’s is emphasised through the topic of childbirth; Leah shows concern for a pregnant woman and is rebuffed with “no, woman-sick. Forget I said anything. You wouldn’t

understand” (244). Leah notes that “men don’t talk about these things, much less hired help to genteel ladies” (244). Women’s pain is silenced and ignored by men. Although women are fully aware of the discomforts of menstruation and the potentially fatal risks of childbirth, they can only confide their fears to other women, not their male partners or relatives in these novels.

*Eon* (2008), by Australian author Alison Goodman provides an interesting comparison to the other novels because menstruation forms a key part of the plot and the character’s magical powers. Eona (disguised as the male eunuch or ‘Moon Shadow’ Eon) is a young peasant training to become a Dragoneye (a commander of the magical ‘energy’ dragons). Ancient texts indicate that women are never Dragoneyes as “they bring corruption to the art, and do not have the physical strength or depth of character needed to commune with an energy dragon. It is also thought that the female eye, too practised at gazing at itself, cannot see the truth of the energy world” (Goodman 2). Growing up in this patriarchal context, Eona develops an internalised misogyny which turns her against fellow women (engaging with stereotypes of coy and gossiping females). It also enforces her sense of inferiority, and she refers to her female essence as a “shadow self” (40). Importantly, this shadow self only emerges during her “Moon days” or menstrual cycle (40).

Throughout the text, Goodman emphasises the importance of energies: the energy of the world, dragons, and masculine and feminine energy. This idea of energy or essence aligns with the psychological ideology of gender essentialism, which is defined by Gilman and Meyer as “a set of lay beliefs about categories, according to which certain categories are seen as natural and arising from an inborn, causal force or ‘essence’” and that gender essentialism would consider

“gender categories as discrete and immutable” (409). This is in direct opposition to Judith Butler’s theories around gender performativity which describes gender as:

A certain kind of enactment; the “appearance” of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth; gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other (usually within a strictly binary frame), and the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power. (1)

The former considers gender as unchangeable and innate, the latter as a social obligation and fundamentally performative. Goodman appears to adhere to gender essentialism throughout her description of Eona and her powers, as she describes female and male energies and assigns immutable attributes to each. However, she could be engaging with ideas found in New Age Culture which has three gender beliefs as follows:

(1) Women and men are essentially different from one another and act out of these cultural/biological differences (as in “difference feminism,” where women are held up as superior because of innate spiritual and emotional sensibilities); (2) Women and men need to integrate their masculine and feminine sides to be whole, or to reach the goal of “divine androgyny”; and (3) Women and men should move “beyond gender” to inhabit a spiritual plane devoid of these “earthly” distinctions. (Crowley 5)

These New Age sensibilities are reflected within the text through Eona’s belief in her two separate selves. She constantly compares her identity as a disciplined young man training to become a Dragoneye to the weakness of her ‘shadow-self’



and feminine body. Eona attempts to eliminate her 'female' self by suppressing her period, which intrinsically links the idea of the femaleness and femininity to that of menstruation.

### ***How to stop the bleeding***

Since the early 2000s, the birth control pill 'Seasonale' has been available to menstruating women. It has 84 active pills (compared to the usual 21) and seven placebo pills, which means women would only 'have' to bleed four times a year (Johnson-Robledo et al. 353). This gives women the chance to have fewer periods (or none at all) and is called menstrual suppression or amenorrhea. As Hillard writes, the term "therapeutic amenorrhea was first used in the mid-1960s to describe the suppression of menstrual bleeding in women with hematologic disorders and coagulation defects leading to heavy menstrual bleeding" (631); it was originally intended to treat abnormal bleeding or medical conditions, rather than make women's lives more convenient. Supporters of menstrual suppression have:

Argued that menstruation is becoming increasingly obsolete, if not harmful. Pointing to the fact that women in earlier societies had far fewer menstrual periods as a result of later menarche, earlier first births, more frequent pregnancies, and longer periods of breastfeeding between pregnancies (when menstruation is typically absent), those in support of menstrual suppression have suggested that contemporary women experience up to 400 more menstrual cycles than their earlier counterparts. (Repta and Clarke 92)

Advocates suggest that the health benefits of menstrual suppression include: “relief from endometriosis, dysmenorrhea (severe menstrual pain), menorrhagia (excessive blood loss), epilepsy, chronic pelvic pain, acne, migraine headaches, mood symptoms, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), and the reversal of anaemia” (92). With these benefits in mind, it seems strange that any menstruating woman would choose to have a period when given the chance to avoid the pain, discomfort and inconvenience. Yet Repta and Clarke also point out how menstrual suppression is a way of ‘civilising’ the female body, traditionally framed as dirty and closer to nature than a man’s (93); by suppressing a natural function, women are masculinising themselves and enforcing the idea that femaleness is inherently wrong. J. S. Gunson, in a separate study of South Australian women, emphasises the contradictory nature of menstrual suppression, which is framed as “both a means of agency and medicalising control for women who adopt it” (qtd. in Repta and Clarke 94). Additionally, there are women who simply believe menstrual suppression is “unnatural” or “consider monthly bleeding as reassurance that they are not pregnant” (Hillard 633).

Research suggests that menstrual suppression is particularly appealing to women in certain careers, such as the military or rocket science, which are traditionally male dominated fields. This desire for menstrual suppression may indicate that women in these fields require their bodies to become more masculine in order to succeed. As Jain and Wotring point out, “the waste disposal systems onboard the US side of the International Space Station that reclaim water from urine were not designed to handle menstrual blood” (3); this is a space that is entirely designed for the male body if unable to handle the natural and regular fluid of a female’s. A study undertaken by Lori Trego indicated that menstruation

is amplified by military deployment; participants described heavier and more uncomfortable periods. For example, one participant mentions:

I don't know if it was because of the stress that we were under this assignment, but I would go like a couple of months, like three months, without having a period and then I had a period. It would be really heavy and at times I couldn't like move or do anything ... happened several times after that, I think it had to do with the stress of our job. (qtd. in Trego 344)

This study explores the prevalent issue menstruating while employed in a male-dominated field. This further emphasises how menstruation may adversely affect the cross-dressings protagonists of the novels examined in this thesis; in situations of increased stress and emotional or physical exhaustion, menses could become more severe and debilitating. Trego's study highlighted other issues, including the encumbrance of their heavy gear in dealing with menstruation, and the generally unhygienic conditions experienced in their daily lives while deployed (345), all of which would also impact the female cross-dressers, who occupy male spaces and wear masculine clothing that do not allow for feminine hygiene habits. Menstruation is not simply the inconvenience of bleeding once a month.

The high impact, physiological affects of menstruation have been recognised by several women's sporting teams. The USA national women's soccer team recently won the World Cup and credit some of their success to their period tracking approach. Their coach, Dawn Scott, implemented a personalised menstrual tracking system for her players after noticing that their cycle increased their recovery fatigue and effected their sleep patterns (Kindelan). This suggests that beyond pain, discomfort and potential bleeding embarrassment, women may

perform differently at different points of their cycle – whether on the field in competitive sports or in the workplace which requires prolonged concentration. Indeed, even drugs and alcohol can have varying influence upon a woman’s body during their menstrual cycle, as noted by Jenny Valentish in her creative non-fiction memoir *Woman of Substances*. She writes that “a female’s menstrual cycle causes fluctuations in her renal, cardiovascular, hematological, and immune systems, so it makes sense that these fluctuations would have a knock-on effect on the way her body processes substances” (155). Across the 28 days of the normal reproductive cycle, substances effect women differently; Valentish uses the example of the menstrual phase to illustrate how “the fatigue and low resilience of heavy flow days are likely to hasten the effects of drugs and alcohol” (151). Women cannot escape their period. It determines how they interact with the world and yet so much of our media – whether film, literature or television – erases menstruation entirely.

***I bleed, they bleed – but do academics bleed?***

People with biologically female bodies bleed. They might bleed once a month or once a year, but the menstrual cycle is a shared experience between them and has a regular and sometimes daily impact upon their lives. It may affect their performance physically, mentally or socially, in the workplace, the sports field or in the home. They may be unable to have sex with their partners due to debilitating period pain, or to participate in the everyday events in their community due to the perceived pollution of their blood. Across cultures, menstruation is perceived as dirty, corrupt and taboo; even in Western civilisation, images of it are censored or erased from advertising, film and television. In young adult novels the mention of

menstruation – if included – is overwhelmingly focussed on the menarche, the moment of first blood, while ignoring the ongoing impact within that character's life. The impact is particularly important during female-to-male cross-dressing, as the presence of blood becomes a marker of the female body and thus a threat to the male disguise.

In YA fantasy novels, set a medieval era without hormonal contraception and thus without the assistance of menstrual suppression, the struggle to hide monthly bleeding must be immense. Yet these novels and their corresponding scholarly texts that focus on YA fantasy fiction overlook this bodily struggle. It is vital to note here that every one of these young adult novels is written by a woman, as are most of the academic texts analysing the fiction. Women are erasing their own experiences. *I have erased myself from my own novel; the full weight of my stomach, the knots my intestines tie themselves into, the rush of blood that is often accompanied by other, uncomfortable bodily functions. Absent is the physical anxiety of my period; the desire to eat an entire block of chocolate combined with the social shame of my bloated waistline. *Scapegrace* does not mention menstruation. Lily has breasts that she binds and a boy that she kisses but no uterus, no blood. Despite writing a self-consciously feminist fantasy that features an independent female character with agency – a fantasy that dealt with female oppression and Lily's necessary erasure of her own female body through the use of breast-bands – I did not mention menstruation. This is testament to the pervasive and insidious messaging about our bodies that women are forced to internalise.*

The most significant academic writing on the intersection of young adult fiction and female-to-male cross-dressing is Australian writer and academic Dr

Victoria Flanagan, whose published works on the topic include the book *Into the Closet: Cross-Dressing and the Gendered Body in Children's Literature and Film*, the chapter "Re-Framing Masculinity: Female-to-male Cross-dressing" in John Stephens' *Ways of Being Male* and the article "Cross-Dressing as Transvestism in Children's Literature". These texts, particularly *Into the Closet*, discuss the broad spectrum of cross-dressing in children's literature, touching on young adult but also discussing picture books, film and fairy tales, which means much of her work is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, she does look closely at *Alanna: The First Adventure*, the consideration of which is vital for examining how academics may ignore or overlook menstruation in these narratives.

Flanagan presents three models or paradigms of gender disguise in her book *Into the Closet*: female-to-male, male-to-female and transgendered cross-dressing. While this thesis only deals with female-to-male, as the dominant form of cross-dressing encountered in young adult fantasy fiction, it is important to note that Flanagan's theory that "male cross-dressing is perceived as inherently sexual in nature (either in a fetishistic sense or in a homosexual context)" (*Into the Closet* 49). To ensure no implication of sexuality, the male-to-female cross-dresser is always forced to do so against his will, is never adequately disguised, and his cross-dressing is constructed as humorous (50). This inability to pass is contrasted with female-to-male cross-dressing, as these narratives "assume the visual presentation of the cross-dressed character will immediately be accepted as convincing" (27). While these cross-dressed YA protagonists are concerned with deepening their voices and lengthening their stride, this is what Flanagan calls 'acting' like a boy; there is little concern about visually passing. Similar to the male-to-female cross-dressing, "any suggestion of deviant sexuality is rebuffed (the

female cross-dresser's heterosexuality confirmed with a conventional romance upon narrative closure)" (59). Despite this, she notes the positive, gender disrupting nature of female-to-male cross-dressing, as these characters show how "masculinity and femininity, and the supposedly "essential" behaviours, skills, and attributes associated with these two genders, [need to] be reassessed and reconstructed" (130).

Unlike the other scholarly work discussed in this section, Flanagan does pay passing attention to what she calls the "issue of physicality" (*Into the Closet* 28). She notes that *Alanna: The First Adventure* (1983) is one of the few narratives to deal with breast-binding and menstruation, stating that most cross-dressing texts "choose to ignore the physical realities of a girl masquerading as a boy and the pubescent difficulties such a situation presents" (28). This is contrary with the findings of this thesis; as Appendix 1 illustrates, six out of the 11 novels discuss breast-binding and menstruation. This suggests that most of these novels do consider the physicality of female-to-male cross-dressing. Several examples include: in *The Dark Days Pact* "Helen rolled her shoulders, trying to ease the compression of her breasts under the tight band of wrapped calico" (Goodman 113); in *Defy* (2014) "I glared at the breasts that had doubled in size in the last few months ... I took a long strip of cloth and bound it around myself, as tightly as I possibly could. It hurt, but there was no other choice" (Larson 37); and *Walk on Earth a Stranger* (2015) "I wrap Mama's old cotton shawl around my chest as tight as I can and tuck in the edges ... Hopefully, my chest won't grow any larger" (Carson 78).

Nicole Brugger-Dethmers in her chapter "Cross-Dressing and Performativity", which appears in *Contemporary Adolescent Literature and*

*Culture: the Emergent Adult*, focuses more narrowly on young adult fiction, while also expanding the definition of cross-dressing to “referring to individuals crossing not just gender but also age, class, and ethnic lines” (77). Using *Alanna: The First Adventure* (1983) as the key example of a female-to-male cross-dressing heroine, she emphasises that Alanna’s acceptance of the female gift and her masculine warrior skills shows how “cross-dressers are able to synthesis these disparate parts of themselves” to create a stronger identity (82). However, her reading does not go beyond that of Flanagan’s, who also determined that Alanna “draws on elements of both masculinity and femininity, alternating between the two and benefiting from her knowledge of both” (*Into the Closet* 36). There is no mention of the physical realities of Alanna’s cross-dressing – such as breast binding, or menstruation – within this chapter. This absence seems remiss if Brugger-Dethmers defines these YA protagonists as characters who “cross a variety of categorical boundaries and grapple with the resulting physical, mental and social issues” (77); as evidenced in the previous examination of the history of menstruation, it is very much both a physical and social issue with which to grapple.

A return to feminine subjectivity is imperative to avoid any suggestion of sexual transgression within these texts. While, as Anne Balay notes, “these books give girls an expanded sense of their imaginary options: not only to choose masculinity instead of femininity, but also to persistently, deliberately choose both, and to refuse to choose entirely” (34), there is still a ‘reveal’ in every text; one that declares to their fellow characters that *this is a girl*. Alanna does subvert gender categories by embracing both feminine and masculine traits; she combines her healing gift, which engages traditionally feminine traits of compassion and caring,



with her physical strength and prowess with weaponry, which presumably result in kills on the battlefield. She does not switch between these traits like a costume (unlike her outward 'appearance'), instead using both in harmonious tandem. In this respect, the combination of masculinity and femininity gives her an identity that disrupts the gender binary. However, as Sarah Sahn writes, "Alanna's cross-dressing...shores up the categories of 'boy' and 'girl', by insisting that dressing as a boy does not make Alanna a boy" (158); this is an attempt to avoid any implication of 'deviant' sexuality in children's literature (Balay 19; Saxena 272; Flanagan, *Into the Closet* 3).

Therefore, YA fantasy can only transgress to a certain point; these texts can suggest alternate gender roles but cannot follow through with truly queering the narrative. This queering could look like the intersex Mulan character Lydia Kwan depicts in *The Walking Boy*, or the gender-queer Tobin in Lynn Flewelling's *The Bone Doll's Twin*, a girl magically transformed in childhood into a boy; however, these are adult fantasy texts, which feed into a canon of queer feminist fantasy and science-fiction. Other examples include Ursula Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness*, which explores a sexless and genderless alien society, or Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover* series, in which several characters are androgynous. These types of queer characters rarely exist within young adult cross-dressing novels<sup>15</sup>, perhaps for the reason of palatability that Flanagan explores in her article "Cross-Dressing as Transvestism in Children's Literature". She suggests that

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<sup>15</sup> Vandana Saxena does comment that "rather than understanding queer as homosexual, the cross-dressed adolescent emerged as a hybrid who ruptures the straightjacketed heterosexuality...Challenging the naturalness associated with heterosexuality and gender, the queer growth of the cross-dressed adolescent explores multiple genders and sexualities than inhere within heterosexuality" (305). While any queering of the heteronormative narrative has to be positive within these novels, it is difficult to accept this boundary as final. It may have been in 1983 when *Alanna* was published but it should not be now, especially when contemporary young adult fiction celebrates LGBTQIA protagonists. Some examples include Becky Albertalli's *Simon Vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda*, Emily M. Danforth's *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* and *Ida* by Alison Evans, two of which have been adapted to film.

female-to-male cross-dressing narratives are more prevalent than any other kind because they are more acceptable to the “adults playing a supervisory role in the process of choosing appropriate literature for younger readers. The reason for this acceptance is clear: the female-to-male ‘cross-dressing’ is not actual cross-dressing. It is simply a form of disguise” (5). There is no sexual deviance in these novels, a fact that is emphasised by the continual references to the protagonist’s ‘true’ sex or gender, and the conventional heterosexual marriage plot or romance that appears without fail in these texts.

This research and work around cross-dressing in YA fantasy fiction aligns with Marjorie Garber’s scholarly work on typical cross-dressing stories in literature and film. She observes:

Each [character] is compelled by social or economic forces to disguise himself or herself in order to get a job, escape repression or gain artistic or political ‘freedom’. Each, that is, is said to embrace transvestitism unwillingly, as an instrumental strategy rather than an erotic pleasure and play space...heterosexual desire is for a time apparently thwarted by the cross-dresser’s assumed identity, so that it becomes necessary for him or her to unmask. The ideological implications of this pattern are clear: cross-dressing can be ‘fun’ or ‘functional’ so long as it occupies a liminal space and a temporary time period...the cross-dresser is expected to resume life as he or she was, having, presumably, recognized a touch of ‘femininity’ or ‘masculinity’ in her or his otherwise ‘male’ or ‘female’ self. (70)

All the YA novels analysed in this thesis portray cross-dressing as necessary – either enforced by a family member, or to escape a patriarchal constraint – and

temporary. An unmasking or reveal moment is incorporated into every novel. Moreover, the female character longs for a return to her femininity, emphasised by lamenting her lost beauty (usually signified by the cutting of her hair as her 'singular' attractive feature), and her desire for an admiring masculine gaze. While the female protagonists do combine masculine and feminine traits in positive, gender disrupting ways (as discussed in the scholarly work around *Alanna*), they ultimately become 'female' again to their fellow characters, although this status has never been questioned by the reader.

This unquestioned heterosexuality and femaleness relate to what Adrienne Rich calls compulsory heterosexuality. In her article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Experience", Rich analyses several feminist texts and makes the argument that:

Each one would have been more powerful, more truly a force for change, had the author felt impelled to deal with the lesbian experience as a reality, and as a source of knowledge and power available to women...whether in a different context, or other things being equal, women would *choose* heterosexual coupling and marriage; heterosexuality is presumed as the "sexual preference" for "most women", either implicitly or explicitly. (633)

This applies to YA novels examined by this thesis, all of which possess an assumed, accepted, and *compulsory* heterosexual undercurrent. There is no question of any of the characters being lesbians; indeed, the cross-dressing protagonists show disdain for their fellow women, thus rejecting the companionship and camaraderie of shared female experience. The main characters side solely with their male comrades; in Alison Goodman's *Eon* (2008),

this becomes more than simple, internalised misogyny, when the disabled character Chart discusses assaulting female characters in the following interaction:

Chart twisted closer to me. He touched the bottom of the tunic. ‘So soft...like a girl’s bottom.’

‘How would you know,’ I scoffed.

‘Know more...than you.’ He wagged his eyebrows. ‘Maids think...poor Chart...doesn’t...know what he’s doing.’

I shook my head at his cheerful lewdness. (43)

The implication of a ‘cheerful’ lewdness is similar to using ‘boys will be boys’ as an excuse for toxic masculine behaviour. Fundamentally, Chart is using his disability to take advantage of the maids, while also calling them derogatory terms like “sluts” (25); Eona herself engages in similar language by implying they are coy, gossiping, and cruel. This aligns to Flanagan’s claim that female cross-dressers “willingly [seek] to approximate a masculine subjectivity” as opposed to lesbians who “define themselves against the patriarchal order” (*Into the Closet* 33). This is an erasure of female friendships, framing men as allies and women as the enemy of the cross-dressed female. Yet, if each woman cross-dresses to escape the patriarchal confines of their gender, then it seems impossible that the male characters can be allies, as complicit members of the patriarchal society. By extension, if female friendships are erased and the cross-dressed character aligns solely with the male world and engages in misogynistic rhetoric about their fellow women, there is no space for the lesbian experience to develop.

In the academic scholarship discussed, the young adult fantasy novels mentioned in regard to cross-dressing are limited to *Alanna: The First Adventure*

(1983), *Mulan* (both the original ballad and the Disney movie) and Terry Pratchett's *Monstrous Regiment*, which is questionably YA and intended as a satire of these very cross-dressing texts. This narrow focus is a failing of the scholarly work in this field, considering this thesis examines ten alternative YA novels that feature cross-dressing, all of which were published after Pierce's 1983 *Alanna*. This is an oversight in the field, as it upholds the white heteronormativity of *Alanna* as the definitive cross-dressing text, even though these articles, chapters and books are published post-2000. Academics should not be focussing exclusively on a book close to its fortieth birthday, when other examples are flooding the market.

The importance of discussing texts beyond *Alanna* is evident in Flanagan's work, as highlighted by the following passage from *Into the Closet*:

The majority of representations of cross-dressing in children's literature (even those within the female-to-male paradigm) use the third person narrative voice...this accords with the way that transgendered people have traditionally been marginalized and denied a voice of their own within contemporary Western culture, and also perhaps signifies the unwillingness of children's literature to delve too deeply inside the mind of the cross-dresser. (229)

This is contrary to the findings laid out in the literature reviews of cross-dressing fiction examined by this thesis (see Appendix 1). Of the 11 young adult texts, six feature a first-person narrative voice. This suggests that these characters are allowed their own voice, and the reader is permitted insight into their minds. *The Dream Maker's Magic* (2006) offers a fascinating discrepancy in Flanagan's logic, giving voice to a character that describes themselves as a "hybrid" (Shinn 148).

Kellen, while still achieving the heteronormative role of marriage at the end of the novel, is different to her fellow cross-dressers; she has been raised as a boy and the reader learns that “I did not really think of myself as a boy or a girl. I considered myself just Kellen. Just me” (Shinn 5). The village in which she grows up accepts this gender anomaly, although it does set Kellen apart from her fellows; she is not treated as a man or woman and learns the traditional skills of both genders. Published in 2006, it pre-dates Flanagan’s *Into the Closet*, and several other academic works discussed in the previous section.

Furthermore, several of these YA cross-dressing texts feature women of colour and societies beyond the swords-and-sorcery setting of medieval Europe and the familiar depictions of knights, castles, chivalry, and peasants. As noted by Jane Tolmie:

Many popular female protagonists continue to have staying power and high market value within particular systems of power, systems familiar to the medievalist even when decontextualized, displaced and relocated elsewhere in the space-time continuum of the imagination...literary heroines remain at their best when rising above external conditions that are against them in gender based ways.

(148)

This suggests that in part, the success of these heroines relies on the location of their oppression and the gender-based violence enacted upon them. Tolmie also uses *Alanna* as an example in her article, although she looks more closely at the adult fantasy texts of Marion Zimmer Bradley and Robin McKinley.

Yet, similar systems of male power exist outside of the white, European worlds of this kind of fantasy novel. While some of the cross-dressing articles have

discussed the Disney film *Mulan*, which features a Chinese lead character, the film and Disney as a company have been widely accused of cultural appropriation and whitewashing (Anjirbag 2; Yin 54). This white-washing is evident in the animation style; “good characters ... have big eyes and round cheeks and are drawn in curves, smooth, round, soft, bright and with European features, while villains ... are drawn with sharp angles, oversized, and often darkly” (Xu and Tian 184). Thus, there is an implicit suggestion throughout the Disney canon that white characters are intrinsically good, and non-white are evil.

Out of the 11 YA texts examined, eight featured white female protagonists and only three were women of colour; *Eon* (2008), *Flame in the Mist* (2017) and *Rebel of the Sands* (2016). Of those, only *Flame in the Mist* is written by a woman of colour. Renée Ahdieh’s *Flame in the Mist* tells the story of Mariko and follows the usual tropes of cross-dressing in YA fiction; she cross-dresses primarily to escape a situation in which it would be dangerous to be a woman, and then continues to do so to avoid an arranged marriage. In short, she tries to escape gender-based oppression within her Japanese-inspired fantasy world. The lack of diverse voices and diverse characters within these 11 YA novels speaks to a common problem in the publishing world, especially children’s literature. Rebecca Lim, an Australian children’s author, has commented that “when you write outside your lived experience from a position of power into a position that’s disempowered, you’re impacting the lives, cultures, ethics, histories, beliefs and stories of real people who should be given the space to speak for themselves” (qtd. in Thuy On). This implies that white authors like Alison Goodman should not be writing books like *Eon* (2008), which arguably appropriate and deform Chinese culture, similar to Disney’s treatment of *Mulan*. Yet regardless of cultural appropriation, the

existence of non-white characters like Ahdieh's Mariko and diverse non-European worlds further emphasises that *Alanna: The First Adventure* (1983) should not be the definitive text discussed by academics regarding YA cross-dressing narratives.



## The Bleedin' End

*The bandages unwound, ribboning towards the floor, revealing darkening welts. Lily's chest loosened; she took her first full breath of the day, hands running up and down her waist. She knew invisibility; how to win it, how to maintain it. The breast band a necessity; the breeches and waistcoat lending straightness to a form flawed with the dips and dimples of womanhood. She stretched, revealing the dark sparse hair sprouting from her pits.*

It seems fitting to finish with a quote from *Scapegrace*, my creative work. As a character, Lily may not experience menstruation, but the novel occurs over a matter of weeks rather than the month of a menstrual cycle. It would be easy to write this essay and insert menstruation into the creative work with informed hindsight. Easy to work in a scene where her breeches suddenly dampen whilst in the middle of a daring heist, and she must abandon her masculine task to wipe clean her disobedient female body. Yet this would defeat the purpose of an exegesis; to reflect on creative practice and process; to consider the broader influences upon our work; to be aware and critical of our own shortcomings as writers and feminists and researchers and humans. Lily experiences her female body through a flattened, painful chest; her body is marked by her breast-bands, her breath restricted. She knows the perceived flaws of her body, just as I and countless other woman are painfully aware of our own cellulite, our own lack of bodily perfection. Equally, she is aware of the power of invisibility; the power of erasing her female body. To Lily, the perfect body would be a man's; strong and independent, lacking in the weakness of womanhood. Yet she learns the strength

of women over the course of the novel, and that strength is not of muscle, as depicted by her developing admiration for the domestic Grace:

Grace had taken what the Rabbits threw at her, and refused to break. Perhaps she pretended to; perhaps she cried, and wailed, and raged against her lot. But she took it. Protected those who couldn't do the same. What was Lily, in comparison? A girl who turned her back on girlhood. A traitor. Complicit.

Grace's strength is resilience in the face of oppression, and continued compassion for those who cannot protect themselves; Lily never had the strength to protect the domestics nor empathise with their fates. This recognition of her own complicity illustrates her growth throughout *Scapegrace*, moving from a position of identifying with her male comrades to realising the abilities of her fellow women. Grace's unwanted yet visible female body – the body that did not fit into traditional feminine beauty and thus was discarded for domestic labour – is the one that leads the other women to freedom and ends their oppression.

This thesis has analysed 11 young adult fantasy novels that depict female-to-male cross-dressing. It has identified tropes that are shared between the texts, from imitating masculine mannerisms and breast-binding to common protagonist ages and points-of-view. In particular, this thesis has illustrated that there is a gap; in menstrual representation in YA fantasy fiction; in menstrual scholarship around cross-dressing narratives; and in my own feminist creative writing. Without change, without breaking the taboo, without writing and research and reflection on menstruation, girls will continue to experience their periods with shame. As Margaret Atwood writes in *Cat's Eye*: "I have periods now, like normal girls; I too am among the knowing, I too can sit out volleyball games and go to the nurse's

for aspirin and waddle along the halls with a pad like a flattened rabbit tail wadded between my legs, sopping with liver-coloured blood” (228). Menstruation is a shared experience and it must not be silenced or erased.

These young adult protagonists rarely experience their periods more than once in the narrative, beyond the first horrifying onset of menarche, where they believe themselves – due to ignorance – to be diseased or dying. Menstruation is a female reality that must be managed life long, but not for these lucky protagonists. It does not affect their physical prowess or mental vigour, and it rarely causes pain or discomfort (unlike the real-world examples of endometriosis discussed earlier, which can be incapacitating to sufferers). Is this menstrual event a simple narrative point which would be too boring to warrant a second or third mention? I would suggest that the lack of ongoing menstrual management points to the fact of these cross-dressing narratives; the gender disguise is temporary. These protagonists will never have to manage their unruly female body – and thus their period – long-term whilst in dressed as a man, as they universally abandon their male masquerade and return to their assigned gender.

Female-to-male cross-dressing in the 11 novels examined is never permanent and never an expression of the protagonist’s gender identity. Their cross-dressing is characterised primarily through the imitation of masculinity, through lengthening their stride, practicing taking up space, or deepening their voice. Other than binding their breasts, there is little concern placed on visually passing for their new gender, and the texts continually reinforce their feminine subjectivity. This is emphasised through either a heterosexual relationship, or a longing to return to femininity (illustrated through missing their long hair or desiring feminine accoutrements such as dresses and makeup). Although Alanna cuts her

hair, she inevitably grows it back. The gender binary may be disrupted by the protagonist's easy assumption of another gender, which highlights the constructed nature of masculinity and femininity, but all is 'set to right' by the end of the narrative. The female cross-dresser, without fail, redons her dresses and marries. My own adherence to these narrative arcs illustrates the pervasive nature of patriarchal discourse around gender and the female body.

\*

My body disobeys; it is messy; it bleeds. Yet every year that passes, I am less ashamed. Every word I write, I grow more confident. This thesis has made me talk about my blood and my pain and my body; with those who share my experiences; have worse ones to tell; or no experience at all with existing within a female form. This thesis has made me think about my hair, and the parts of myself that I give away so freely to those who do not deserve them.

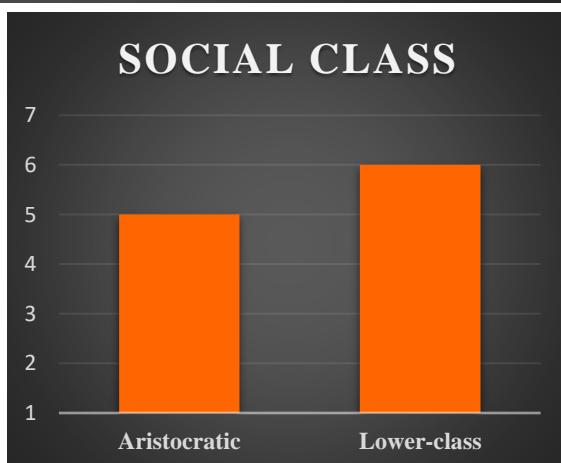
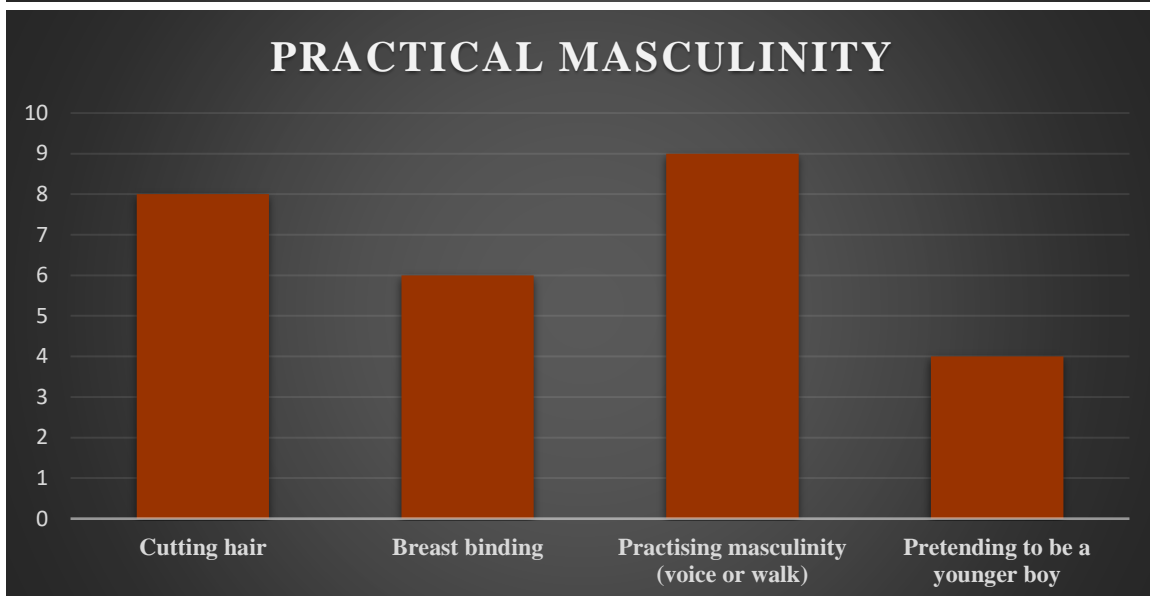
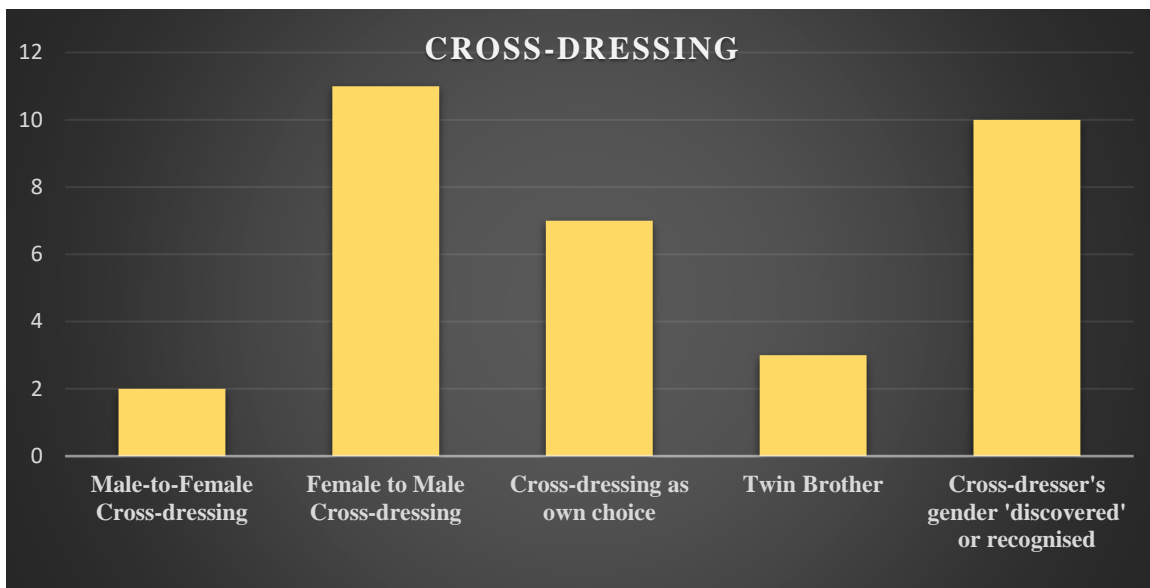
## **Appendix 1: Common tropes of young adult fantasy novels featuring cross-dressing**

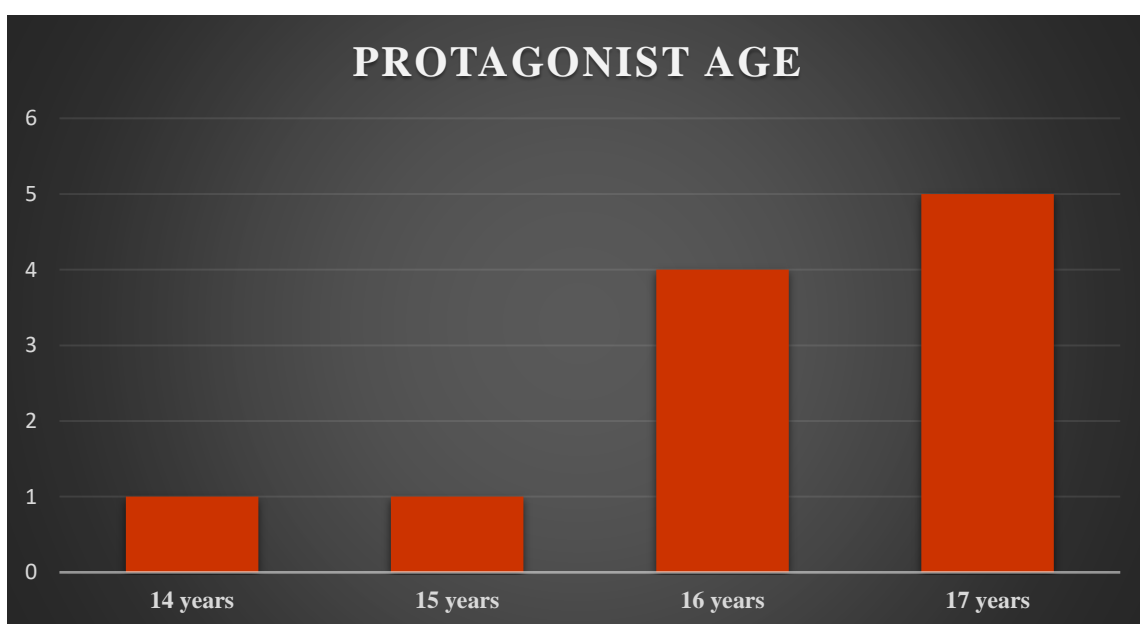
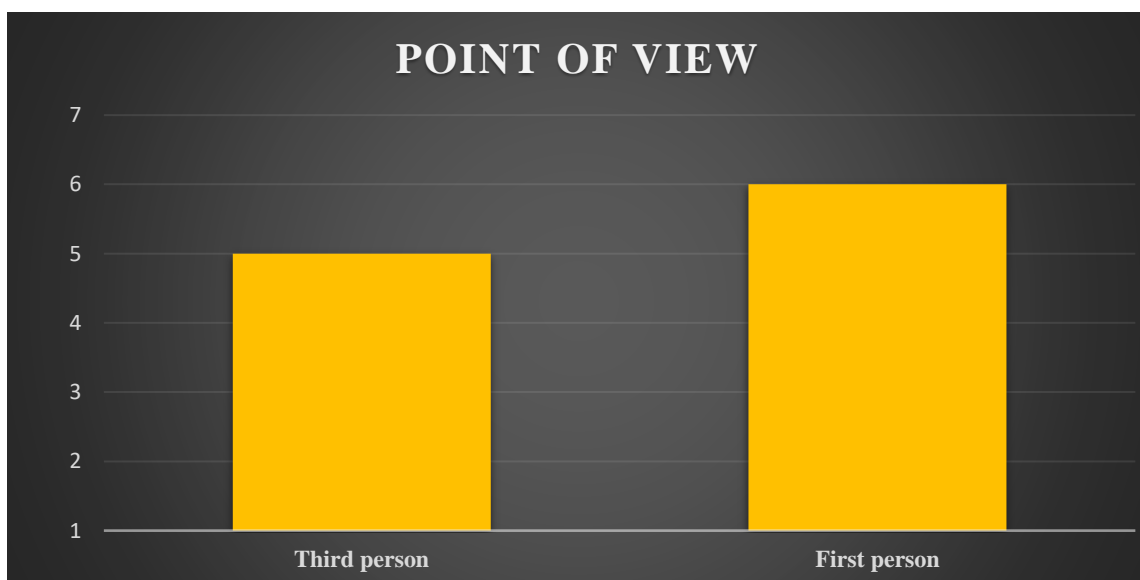
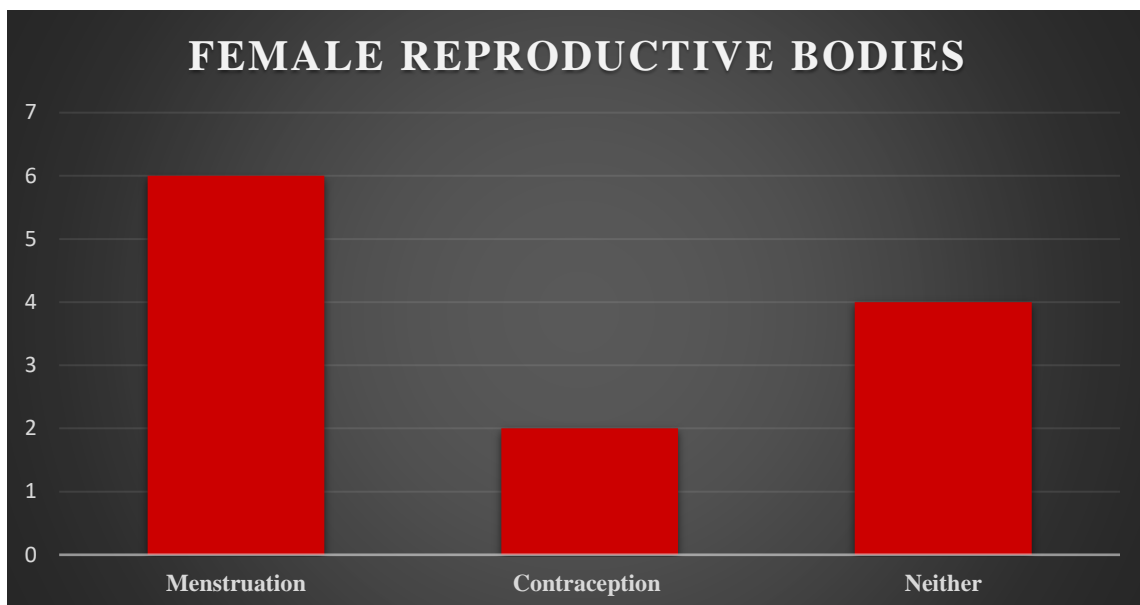
Eleven novels were reviewed and analysed to determine the common tropes of young adult fantasy fiction featuring female-to-male cross-dressing. The findings of these reviews are summarised in the below charts, and broken down in more depth in Appendix 2, where the novel summaries are provided in full. The methodology of content analysis was used, as defined by Chandler and Munday “a primarily quantitative type of formal textual analysis involving the systematic categorization and counting of recurrent elements in the form or content of texts”; in regard to these YA novels, the repetitive elements associated with cross-dressing were recorded. This yielded several common tropes across the genre including; breast-binding, the performance of masculinity (such as deepening the voice or lengthening strides), hair cutting and pretending to be a younger boy in order to pass.

This analysis aided the thesis in several ways. Firstly, it ensured each of the chosen novels fell within the ‘young adult’ bracket by determining the age of the protagonists; all were aged between 14 to 17 years, which aligns to both the onset of puberty and the target audience of YA fiction. Additionally, the content analysis highlighted not only the common tropes but also the common absences, such as contraception and menstruation. Only two novels discussed contraception, which should be a key consideration in novels featuring a relationship between two heterosexual partners. The mention of menstruation was almost exclusively in regard to menarche, the first onset of a woman’s period. The analysis emphasised the similar, horrified ways menarche was experienced within the texts, the characters assuming it was unnatural or a fatal disease.

Finally, the content analysis determined the protagonist's motivations for cross-dressing and their abiding attitudes towards other women. This is important for a feminist textual analysis as it highlighted the gender inequality, internalised misogyny and other gender-based oppressions that the protagonists experienced throughout their narrative. All 11 protagonists were forced to cross-dress out of necessity, whether to escape a dangerous situation that threatened rape or bodily harm, or to escape the repressive gender-role which they faced. The protagonists cross-dressed in order to fulfil a traditionally masculine role (such as to become a knight or a Dragon-eye), or to avoid an arranged marriage or enforced sex-work. The protagonist's attitude towards other women was key to understanding their internalised misogyny (in associating women with stereotypical female characteristics like manipulation and gossip). This misogyny aimed at fellow women indicated the cross-dresser's assumption of a masculine subjectivity, and thus adherence to the same patriarchal system which the protagonist escaped by cross-dressing.

Importantly, in regard to the creative work, it emphasised the common tropes evident in *Scapegrace*, such as breast-binding, while also revealing its lack of contraception and menstruation. This provided a chance for reflection on the creative work, writing process and the author's own internalisation of the stigma around menstruation.







## Appendix 2: Book summaries

<i>Alanna: The First Adventure</i> Tamora Pierce Atheneum Books for Young Readers // 1983	
<b>Summary</b>	Alanna of Trebond never wanted to be a lady. At 11, she swaps places with her identical twin brother, going to the castle to train as a knight in his stead. There she meets George Cooper, the king of thieves, and Prince Jonathan, the heir to the throne. Due to her small stature, she struggles with the rigorous discipline of the palace and must train twice as hard as the other boys to become proficient in the fighting arts. However, she wins the respect of the other boys when she thrashes a bully and becomes an outstanding swordsman through tireless dedication. At the end of the book, Jonathan asks her to be his squire, which cements her position as the best knight-to-be at court. The book seeks to bring together the 'warrior' arts with the maternal/mother goddess healing power with which Alanna is gifted.
<b>POV</b>	Third person
<b>Age/social class</b>	11-14 years (over course of novel), aristocratic
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Stubborn, loyal, honourable
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	To escape the patriarchal expectations of femininity to become a knight.
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual. Future relationships with Prince Jonathan and George Cooper
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	Considers other women 'soft' and 'silly'. In the first novel, there are no meaningful interactions with other women outside of maternal figures – her home healer woman, and George's mother, also a healer.
Female to male cross-dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Male to female cross dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Cross dressing as own choice – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> White heroine – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Twins – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Cutting off hair – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Breast binding – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Practising masculinity- Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Pretends to be a younger boy – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Menstruation – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Contraception – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> (doesn't have sex) Revealed as a woman – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Average Goodreads score: 4.27/5 out of 98264 ratings	

<i>Mairelon the Magician</i> Patricia C. Wrede Tor Books // 1991	
<b>Summary</b>	Kim is a street-waif in London who dresses as a boy for safety. Hired by a nobleman to investigate a magician's wagon, she gets caught in the act. Yet the magician – the contrary and unpredictable Mairelon – offers her employment as his assistant rather than punishing her. She soon realises Mairelon is not the simple street magician she first assumed; he is caught up in an intrigue involving stolen magical items. General mayhem ensues, involving counterfeit items and devious illegitimate brothers, until the magical set is reassembled, and order restored. Throughout the novel, Kim's sex is consistently recognised immediately by the magicians (Mairelon and his ally, Renee), and at the end of the novel she resumes wearing feminine clothing and is taken on as Mairelon's official ward and apprentice.
<b>POV</b>	Third person
<b>Age/social class</b>	17, lower-class
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Stubborn, loyal
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	To avoid the inevitable fate of poverty-stricken young women in London: prostitution.
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual. Future sexual relationship with Mairelon.
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	Generally positive. Kim admires Renee D'Auber for her beauty and sophistication. Was raised by 'Mother Tibbs', a street-thief who groomed young children for thievery. Kim quit after Mother Tibbs was hanged.
Female to male cross-dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Male to female cross dressing – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cross dressing as own choice – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> White heroine – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Twins – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cutting off hair – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Breast binding – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Practising masculinity – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Pretends to be a younger boy – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Menstruation – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Contraception – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revealed as a woman – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Average Goodreads score: 3.98/5 out of 7,890 ratings	

<i>The Folk Keeper</i> Franny Billingsley Atheneum Books for Young Readers // 1999	
<b>Summary</b>	Corinna Stonewall is an orphan, raised in foundling homes since childhood. She has masqueraded as a boy for several years, gaining the knowledge and powerful social position of Folk Keeper. She has never been normal: her hair grows 2 inches every night, she never gets cold, and always knows the exact time. An aristocratic family come to the foundling home and offer her a home, which happens to be by the sea. Corinna begins to flourish there, her appetite growing and her figure along with it. She learns she is one of the Folk, the child of the late Lord and a Sealm maiden he stole from the sea. Once she embraces her femininity, allowing her hair to grow, her Sealm maiden powers manifest. She embraces both the land and the sea, agreeing to marry Finian, a young man in love with sailing.
<b>POV</b>	First person, diary
<b>Age/social class</b>	15, orphaned but revealed as aristocratic
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Stubborn, vengeful, capricious
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	To avoid the drudgery of female tasks and gain the social power of the Folk Keeper
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual. Sexual relationship with Finian.
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	Scornful towards femininity and female clothing. Only real female interactions are between the maternal figures of Lady Alicia and the housekeeper Mrs. Bains.
Female to male cross-dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Male to female cross dressing – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cross dressing as own choice – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> White heroine – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Twins – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cutting off hair – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Breast binding – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Practising masculinity- Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pretends to be a younger boy – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Menstruation – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Contraception – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revealed as a woman – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Average Goodreads score: 3.93/5 out of 2,696 ratings	

<i>The Dream Maker's Magic</i> Sharon Shinn Penguin Group // 2006	
<b>Summary</b>	When Kellen was born, her mother became convinced she was a boy and raised her as such. Kellen grew up with the advantages and skills of both genders, often being mistaken for a boy. At school, she is bullied for her gender identity, and makes friends with a disabled boy, Gryffin. When she gets a job at the local restaurant, her female employer enables Kellen to wear dresses for the first time. Her life is shaken when Gryffin is revealed as the 'Dream-Maker' and moves to the royal city. Kellen follows a year later but is too nervous to approach the palace and her now important friend. Instead she disguises herself as a boy and works at a tavern. When Gryffin learns of her presence, he immediately comes to her and they begin a slow-burgeoning romance.
<b>POV</b>	First person
<b>Age/social class</b>	11 – 16 (over course of novel), lower-class
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Stoic, stubborn, practical
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	Her mother believed she was a boy at birth and raised her as such. Later she uses cross-dressing as a safety precaution in a new city.
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual. Sexual relationship with Gryffin
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	While growing up girls are portrayed as shallow stereotypes. Later, she befriends women at her employment (Emily and Sarah, and then later Leona). They are strong and resilient, while also embodying femininity.
Female to male cross-dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Male to female cross dressing – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cross dressing as own choice – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> White heroine – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Twins – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cutting off hair – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Breast binding – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Practising masculinity – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Pretends to be a younger boy – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Menstruation – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Contraception – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revealed as a woman – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Average Goodreads score: 3.92/5 out of 2,714 ratings	

<i>Graceling</i> Kristin Cashore Orion Publishing // 2008	
<b>Summary</b>	In the seven kingdoms, certain children are born with a 'Grace' – a heightened ability, indicated by their mismatched eyes. Katsa is Graced with fighting, and since childhood her strength and skill has been exploited by her uncle, the king of the Middluns. She considers herself to be like a savage dog, unfeeling and stupid. When she meets Prince Po of Lienid, while rescuing his kidnapped grandfather, Katsa is inspired to defy her uncle for the first time. Po and Katsa set off to discover the identity of the kidnapper, their investigations leading them to Monsea and the outwardly benevolent King Leck. They learn he has a Grace for deception, able to spread lies as truth. They rescue Bitterblue, his daughter, but Po is injured and Katsa is forced to leave him behind to save the girl. Upon arriving in Lienid, she finds Leck ensconced in Po's castle and kills him in a moment of clarity. She returns to save Po, finding him blind and vulnerable.
<b>POV</b>	Third person
<b>Age/social class</b>	17, aristocratic
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Stubborn, impatient, unsentimental
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	To avoid being recognised and to avoid traditional femininity
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual. Sexual relationship with Prince Po
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	Rarely encounters other women in the narrative, outside a maternal perspective (maidservant Helda) or female children. However, she expresses scorn for all feminine accoutrements, which presumably extends to feminine women.
<p>Female to male cross-dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Male to female cross dressing – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Cross dressing as own choice – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>White heroine – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Twins – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Cutting off hair – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Breast binding – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Practising masculinity- Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Pretends to be a younger boy – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Menstruation – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Contraception – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Revealed as a woman – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Average Goodreads score: 4.10/5 out of 322,842 ratings</p>	

<i>Eon</i> Alison Goodman HarperCollins // 2008	
<b>Summary</b>	Eona/Eon is a Dragoneye candidate and has been disguised as a boy since her master bought her from a salt mine. She poses as a 12-year-old 'moon shadow' or eunuch to excuse her soft figure and high voice. On Ascension day, she fails to attract the Rat Dragoneye, but the long-lost Mirror Dragon appears to her and she is elevated to Mirror Dragoneye. However, she has no access to her power or dragon, and no one to guide her. She studies with Prince Kygo and is assisted in court procedure by Contraire Lady Dela. Eona tries to become more masculine by taking the 'Sun drug'. Fellow Dragoneye Lord Ido takes control of her body during a ritual, and discovers she is a girl. When the Emperor is killed, his brother and Lord Ido seize power, and Eona, the Prince and their compatriots flee to join the Resistance. The Mirror Dragoneye (and thus Eona) is revealed to be a female, which breaks the trust between Eona and her friends.
<b>POV</b>	First person
<b>Age/social class</b>	16, lower-class
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Inquisitive, stubborn, power-hungry
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	Forced into it by her (male) master, so she could train to become a Dragoneye apprentice.
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual. Future sexual relationship with Prince Kygo.
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	Traditional women are portrayed negatively, e.g. Irsa, the catty maidservant who Eon slurs as a 'slut'. In comparison, she admires the Contraire, Lady Dela, although she sees no power in being a woman.
Female to male cross-dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Male to female cross dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Cross dressing as own choice – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> White heroine – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (Chinese? White author) Twins – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cutting off hair – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Breast binding – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Practising masculinity – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Pretends to be a younger boy – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Menstruation – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Contraception – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revealed as a woman – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Average Goodreads score: 3.98/5 out of 49,882 ratings	

<i>Defy</i> Sara B. Larsen Scholastic // 2014	
<b>Summary</b>	The kingdom of Antion banned sorcery when a Blevon assassin killed the queen. Now the two nations have been at war for decades. When Alexa's parents are murdered by Blevon forces, her twin brother, Marcel, forces her to disguise herself as a boy to avoid the breeding houses. Now 17, they are part of Prince Damien's royal guard. After Marcel dies protecting the prince, Damien, Alexa and fellow guard Rylan are kidnapped by a magician and are taken to the Blevon capital. Both men reveal they have always known about Alexa's sex, and harbour feelings for her. Damien has been working with the enemy king to overthrow his corrupt father. Alexa is sent back to Antion to kill a powerful magician; she succeeds but her face is irreparably burnt in the process. The king is overthrown, and Damien crowned in his place; he asks Alexa to be his queen, but she refuses, instead resuming her place as his personal guard.
<b>POV</b>	First person
<b>Age/social class</b>	17, lower-class
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Vulnerable, dutiful
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	To avoid the breeding houses, where the lower-class orphans are taken to be brood-mares for the king's army
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual. Sexual relationship with Prince Damien.
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	Expresses pity towards women in the breeding houses, but all other interactions are scornful (e.g. the women who try to get Damien's attention at court. The other women are stereotypes – the maternal Lisbet, the gossipy Tanoori.
Female to male cross-dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Male to female cross dressing – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cross dressing as own choice – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> White heroine – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (“olive skin”, white author) Twins – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Cutting off hair – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Breast binding – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Practising masculinity – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Pretends to be a younger boy – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (older boy) Menstruation – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Contraception – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revealed as a woman – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Average Goodreads score: 3.74/5 out of 17,820 ratings	

<i>Walk on Earth a Stranger</i> Rae Carson Greenwillow Books // 2015	
<b>Summary</b>	<p>Leah Westfall has a secret: she can sense gold. She disguises herself as a boy and heads for the gold plains of California to make her fortune and look for her best friend, Jefferson. After being robbed on the road, she falls in with a wagon convoy, and finds Jefferson also working for another family. Leah earns respect of the other travellers through her hard work. When she is run over by a wagon and injured, she is revealed as a girl. Several members of the convoy already knew she was a girl from the start. When asked if she wants to continue being a boy or a girl, Lee reaches a compromise: she will still work as a boy, and dress in trousers when she wants, but will not hide her identity. She begins to realise how differently women are treated in comparison to men.</p> <p>The wagon convoy reaches California, but not without losing some of their company to illness and heat stroke. Jefferson declares his feelings to Lee, who returns them.</p>
<b>POV</b>	First person
<b>Age/social class</b>	Lower class, 16
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Stubborn, opinionated, hard-worker
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	To escape her uncle, and to freely travel alone across the country without threat.
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual.
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	Teased by the girls in her hometown, Lee is wary of the women travelling in the convoy.
Female to male cross-dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Male to female cross dressing – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cross dressing as own choice – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> White heroine – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Twins – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cutting off hair – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Breast binding – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Practising masculinity – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Pretends to be a younger boy – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Menstruation – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Contraception – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revealed as a woman – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Average Goodreads score: 3.94/5 out of 12,640 ratings	



<i>Rebel of the Sands</i> Alwyn Hamilton Viking Books // 2016	
<b>Summary</b>	Amani Al-Hiza needs to get out of Dustwalk. Her uncle plans to marry her off or marry her himself. She dresses as a boy and enters a sharp-shooting contest, where she meets a foreign gunman named Jin. Unsuccessful in the contest, she returns to her uncle's house, only for Jin to run into her again, fleeing from imperial soldiers. She helps him, and together they escape Dustwalk. Pursued across the desert, they travel with a caravan until Jin is injured and Amani revealed as a girl. Jin directs her to a secret hideout, where they find the Rebel Prince Ahmed. He is building a rebellion, aided by his female half-Djinn spies. Amani is informed that she too is half-Djinn and possesses supernatural powers, although she has trouble discovering them. Along with the rebels, Amani helps subvert the Sultan's attack on Fahali city, and she unlocks her powers – she can control the desert.
<b>POV</b>	First person
<b>Age/social class</b>	16/17, lower-class
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Reckless and stubborn
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	To escape her hometown and the grim marriage arranged for her.
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual. Sexual relationship with Jin.
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	Her aunt and cousins are cruel to Amani, especially Shira who is portrayed as catty and jealous. Amani later meets the beautiful and brilliant Shazad, who fights better than any of the male characters.
<p>Female to male cross-dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Male to female cross dressing – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Cross dressing as own choice – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>White heroine – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (white author)</p> <p>Twins – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Cutting off hair – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Breast binding – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Practising masculinity – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Pretends to be a younger boy – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Menstruation – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Contraception – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Revealed as a woman – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Average Goodreads score: 3.97/5 out of 32,154 ratings</p>	

<i>Flame in the Mist</i> Renee Ahdieh Hodder & Stoughton // 2017	
<b>Summary</b>	On route to be presented to her betrothed, the emperor's second son, Mariko's convoy is attacked by the Black Clan. She escapes into the forest and disguises herself as a boy to infiltrate the Clan. Ranmaru and his otherworldly best friend, Okami, lead the clan, the sons of disgraced samurai. After Mariko proves her worth, Ranmaru rewards her with a trip to the imperial city, where she learns that the Black Clan give money to the poor. Okami, after rescuing Mariko after she falls from a cliff, realises she is a girl. When the Black Clan raid Mariko's family estate, to redistribute her father's wealth to the people, Mariko warns her family. Although Okami abandons her after this betrayal, she returns to warn the Clan about the impending attack from imperial forces. Her twin brother Kenshin and Prince Braiden attack the hideout, overwhelming the Clan forces. Okami and Mariko are taken to the imperial city as prisoners.
<b>POV</b>	Third person
<b>Age/social class</b>	17, aristocratic
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Intelligent, rational, curious
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	To prove herself as good as any boy, bringing her family honour and revenging herself on her would-be assassins.
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual. Sexual relationship with Okami.
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	Mariko derides feminine wiles. She later recognises the strength of her womanhood and that she does need her disguise to be powerful. Of the two women involved with the Emperor, one is a witch who enthralls him with her power and the other murders him.
Female to male cross-dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Male to female cross dressing – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cross dressing as own choice – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> White heroine – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (author woman of colour) Twins – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Cutting off hair – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Breast binding – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Practising masculinity – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Pretends to be a younger boy – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Menstruation – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Contraception – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (but does have sex) Revealed as a woman – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Average Goodreads score: 3.95/5 out of 19,333 ratings	

<i>The Dark Days Pact</i> Alison Goodman Walker Books // 2017	
<b>Summary</b>	When Lady Helen is revealed as a Reclaimer and joins the Dark Days Club, Lord Carlston goes against tradition and trains her to fight, dressing her as a man to hunt Deceivers. A Reclaimer orders Helen to search for a journal in the possession of Lowry, a former Terrene. Lowry demands to form the Terrene bond with Helen, in return for the journal, which is revealed to be a magical item that could destroy the Reclaimers. Carlston battles with the madness resulting from continued Reclaiming, and when it escalates, Helen strikes out on her own, determined save him even it means bonding with Lowry. The ceremony kills Lowry, and she finds the journal. A Deceiver ally confesses to Helen that she and Carlston are meant to be bonded as the Grand Reclaimer to fight the Grand Deceiver, and this bond will cure the madness.
<b>POV</b>	Third person
<b>Age/social class</b>	17, aristocratic
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Even tempered, brave, rational
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	To infiltrate male domains, such as taverns and gaming hells.
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual. Sexual relationship with Lord Carlston and betrothed to the Duke of Selburn.
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	Feminine concerns are portrayed as petty compared to her Reclaimer duties. She expresses dislike for Lady Margaret (obsessed with etiquette) and treats Pug, a kind-hearted but ridiculous girl, with barely concealed mockery. Her maidservant, Darby, is loyal and steadfast yet her morality is still questioned due to her lower-class status.
Female to male cross-dressing – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Male to female cross dressing – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cross dressing as own choice – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Twins – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> White heroine – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Cutting off hair – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Breast binding – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Practising masculinity – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Pretends to be a younger boy – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Menstruation – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Contraception – Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revealed as a woman – Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Average Goodreads score: 4.15/5 out of 3,524 ratings	

### Appendix 3: Summary of the creative work *Scapegrace*

<i>Scapegrace</i> Emily Palmer Submitted for PhD in 2020.	
<b>Summary</b>	In a setting inspired by the hedonistic Regency period, two worlds clash; the Decadents, in their glittering mansions, and the Grafter gangs in the slums below. Having spent the last four years slipping between the cracks of the city system, Lily Vance's life is set to change when a burst of power is torn from her – a power that only the male Decadents are supposed to possess. Kidnapped by a group intent on using her newfound abilities to their advantage, she is forced to choose; is she Lily or Lee?
<b>POV</b>	Third person
<b>Age/social class</b>	16, lower class
<b>Key characteristics</b>	Stubborn, independent.
<b>Motivations for cross-dressing</b>	To earn money for her father and to escape the marriage mart
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Heterosexual (relationship with Leon)
<b>Attitudes towards other women</b>	Dismissive of the 'sisterhood' between women; uncaring about the plight of the domestics.
Female to male cross-dressing - Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Male to female cross dressing - Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cross dressing as own choice - Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> White heroine - Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Twins - Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cutting off hair - Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Breast binding - Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Practising masculinity - Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Pretends to be a younger boy - Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Menstruation - Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Contraception - Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revealed as a woman - Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	

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