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Abstract

“Some Things Rarely Change” examines the intersection between popularity and identity anxieties in young adult novels from two decades, such as Anne Emery’s *The Popular Crowd* (1961), Nan Gilbert’s *The Unchosen* (1963), Jerry Spinelli’s *Stargirl* (2000), and Sarah Mylnowski’s *Bras and Broomsticks* (2005). It focuses on appearances of popularity, how girls become popular, and the ironic treatment popularity. The article uses Erik Erikson’s theory of development and Bourdieu’s theory of the *habitus* to shed light on thoughts about identity and popularity. I argue that though the theories change and though some superficial details shift, the general treatment of popularity and identity anxieties remain the same, keeping the same sense of irony, suggesting that popularity is empty, and advocating that readers be themselves.

Some Things Rarely Change: The Intersection Between Popularity and Identity Anxieties in Young Adult Novels

While numerous young adult novels address popularity or the need for acceptance, few scholars seem to acknowledge the intersection of popularity and the need for acceptance and identity anxieties. When I talk about popularity, I would like to expand the idea to the desire for acceptance in a particular crowd, typically one that is higher in social status. Most of these novels treat popularity with a sense of irony while showing the connections of the desire for

acceptance and anxieties about identity. The texts I examine come from the 1960s and the 2000s, and they show how this connection has persisted through about five decades.

The phrase “young adult literature” did not appear in popular culture until 1960. Even then, it was rarely mentioned. In the mid-1970s, however, the phrase’s usage began to escalate, increasing by 78%. Its use increased by 192% from the 1960s to the 1990s¹. Though some authors wrote novels with young people in mind before the sixties, this information suggests that novels written specifically for young adults were rare. I have chosen two novels written for young adults from the 1960s: *The Popular Crowd* by Anne Emery, which was published in 1961, and *The Unchosen*, which was published in 1963. Because there were not as many novels for young adults during this time period, these books are significant. Both of these novels were published before the first “big boom” in young adult literature.

In addition, I have selected two 21st Century novels: *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli, which was published in 2000, *Bras and Broomsticks* by Sarah Mylnowski, which was published in 2005. Though there are many young adult novels from the 21st Century that show an intersection between the desire for acceptance and identity anxieties, these novels stuck out as being extremely representative of the group, especially since I remember students reading *Stargirl* when I was in middle school and my sister and her friends reading *Bras and Broomstick*—admittedly because of my recommendation—when they were about thirteen. These are influential books that are present in the minds of teen readers. All of these novels reveal an intersection between the desire for popularity and identity anxieties, and though thoughts about identity change slightly from the 1960s and the 21st Century, the authors’ ironic treatment and

¹ For a chart on the use of “young adult literature,” visit https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=young+adult+literature&year_start=1800&year_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cyoung%20adult%20literature%3B%2Cc0.

basic definition of popularity remain the same. Some of the superficial details, however, such as how the girls initially become popular, shift.

As Barbara Shoup says, “[s]elf-discovery drives YA [young adult] novels” (“Think Like A Teenager”). This emphasis on self-discovery makes these novels relatable to teenagers, who are still in the process of finding themselves. Several scholars talk about body image, clothing, and conformity. In a few of my evaluations, I will extend Beth Cooley’s argument about Jerry Spinelli’s *Stargirl* being a Christ story and a text against conformity and Kay Young’s argument that objects and clothing can change your identity by showing how these issues are related to popularity and identity anxieties. I will also extend Beth Younger’s discussion about the connection between sexuality and body image. In order to see how ideas about popularity and identity changed between the 1960s and now, I will also examine a Harvard study about popularity, which I will use to show that theories of popularity have existed for several decades and that girls are more likely to conform; Erik Erikson’s theory of child development, which I will use to show thoughts about identity in the 1960s; and Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of *habitus*, which I will forefront, using it to show the *habitus* of the popular crowds and how this theory of identity creates anxieties.

To remain consistent with the novels from the 1960s, all of the protagonists from the novels I selected are teenage girls. The oldest book from the selection is Emery’s *The Popular Crowd* (1961), which focuses on the protagonist’s desire to change her social status in her high school by dating her school’s star football player. Underlining her desire, however, is an intense anxiety about identity. Likewise, in Gilbert’s *The Unchosen* (1963), the protagonist struggles with her weight and longs for a boyfriend as a way to rise from the “category” (6) of the Unchosen. Popularity issues still exist in books from the 21st Century like Spinelli’s *Stargirl*

(2000). The protagonist is a free spirit who changes her name according to who she feels she is at the time. She transitions from being homeschooled, where she had no peers to judge her or to herself with, to attending a public high school. During her time in the public high school, Stargirl experiences a rise and a sharp fall in popularity. After this fall, she explores a different identity in order to regain popularity. Mylnowski's *Bras and Broomsticks* (2005), the second novel from the 21st Century, is quite similar to *The Popular Crowd* in that the protagonist desires to change her social status in her school by dating a popular boy in school or by gaining dancing skills, which is considered a popular and well celebrated activity.

Though some scholars discuss what makes a girl desirable—body image and sexuality—which has to do with popularity, and though other scholars discuss conformity, or resistance to conformity, which suggests an anxiety about their identity, they do not discuss the intersections between popularity and anxieties about identity. When I say identity, I mean who they are as people and their social standing. Understanding this connection as well as how popularity is represented in these novels is important because it reveals what influences the minds of the young adults who read them. The slight change in the representation of popularity and the intersection between popularity and anxieties about identity suggest that there is more of an emphasis on a girl's ability to change her identity by herself in the 21st Century than in the 1960s. However, regardless of superficial changes or changes in theory, I argue that the overall intersection between and treatment of popularity and identity anxieties persist. In the first section, I will examine theories that relate to acceptance and identity. In the second section, I will examine the definition of popular groups. In the following sections, I will examine how this definition creates anxieties about identity, as seen through the actions taken to become popular,

and in the final section, I will examine how all of the endings suggest anti-conformity and being your true self.

I. Theories Relating to Popularity and Identity

Psychology and theory from both decades provide lenses to understanding how people viewed both popularity and identity. The Harvard study from the 1960s on popularity and acceptance suggests that it is likely that American girls have a stronger desire for acceptance than American boys (“Need for Approval” 35), which might be why more young adult novels concerning popularity have female protagonists. Girls are more likely to conform because of their need for approval is stronger. Because of their sex roles, boys are expected to be more aggressive, but girls are expected to be more submissive. Girls who conform to “ladylike” behavior are more accepted (36). Girls’ need for approval pushes them to become friends with other girls who are similar to themselves, so they are more equal when compared to each other (39). This study shows that popularity was desired in the 1960s, just as it is desired in 2013, and that girls often conformed to one definition of popular. The study illuminates popularity and suggests why girls feel the pressure to change themselves. It also shows why understanding why popularity’s representation in young adult novels is important.

Self-development and identity are also important psychological topics. Erikson, a well-known psychologist during the 1960s discusses identity and developmental stages, which he divides into eight parts. He suggests that development before adolescence involves how other people’s actions affect the child², while development during and after adolescence mostly

² In the first developmental stage, for instance, Erikson says that mothers create trust by caring for the baby, which eventually forms the foundation of the baby’s sense of identity (221).

depends on the decisions the child makes and his or her actions³ (Erikson 221; 228). It is during this stage that people essentially begin to try to understand who they are as individuals, which involves understanding and feeling the pressures of social situations. Teenagers are “now primarily concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are” (228). Erikson says that this time involves a “search” for identity and that people would rather “mutually” identify than accept differences (228). Erikson’s ideas relate to popularity and acceptance, as well as moral issues. This suggests that adolescents are trying to find one solid sense of who they are as people. It also suggests that their search to find themselves could create a tension with society, which would ultimately push them to conform and, therefore, change their identity.

Bourdieu’s theory of the *habitus* is a more recent idea concerning identity. In order to examine how hierarchies influence one’s view of a work as aesthetically pleasing, Bourdieu “appropriate[d]” and reexamined the idea of *habitus*, which is a concept several medieval readers of Aristotle used (Leitch 1662). Bourdieu defines *habitus* as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” that are produced by “structures constitutive of a particular type of environment” (Bourdieu 72). Leitch simplifies Bourdieu’s definition by saying that *habitus* is “nondiscursive knowledge about how to act within a certain field” that creates “routinized behaviors” specific to that field (1662). Bourdieu concentrates on environments concerning social hierarchies or fields that a person associates or identifies with (Bourdieu 89), ultimately saying that people are not born *with habitus* but are born *into* it and unconsciously raised by it. He points out that, because of *habitus*, people are not necessarily consciously following rules of a society or group to reach a goal. Their

³ Erikson suggests that it is in their adolescence that individuals begin to use the skills they developed in social situations (228).

habitus allows them to automatically react to and “cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations” (72). People take on mannerisms and wisdom specific to their field. People mostly express their *habitus* mostly through body language and how they react to situations (87). When someone, however, uses it in the incorrect field, the *habitus* comes across as abnormal (78). *Habitus*, then, is essentially social instincts conditioned and constructed by where and how someone grows up. The “field” Bourdieu describes could translate to classes (upper, middle, or lower), education level (high school or college), nations, or regions of a country.

Unlike Erikson, Bourdieu suggests that it is not an adventure in self-discovery that creates identity, but it is our environment that shapes us. People naturally begin to take on mannerisms based on their environment. His theory suggests that it is difficult to shape and change your own identity because you would have to adopt another group’s *habitus* without making a mistake. Even though ideas have changed since the 1960s, these core issues remain the same, though some superficial details about how the girls try to change their identity alters. The theorists from the two decades have battling ideas about the formation of identity, but their theories begin to coincide in young adult literature. I will use Bourdieu’s *habitus* to show how the popular groups are fields of their own that create identity anxieties. The protagonists try to alter their identities to enter the field. Erikson’s idea of discovery, however, is essentially what drives the novels and suggests how the novels end.

II. The Popular Groups of the 1960s

The novels from both decades reveal a *habitus*, a collective identity, for each novel’s version of the popular group. The novels from the 1960s, in particular, create a clear definition of popularity through appearances and body image. In the first chapter of *The Popular Crowd*, the

habitus of popular girls is defined clearly. Sue Morgan, the protagonist, observes a group of popular girls at a football game in order to understand their “routinized behaviors,” as Leitch puts it (Leitch 1662). Sue watches as they put on “unsmiling expressions that she recognized as this year’s look” (Emery 7), a behavior from their *habitus*. The narrator comments that, though “Sue did not notice,” the girls “were remarkably alike” (7), which aligns with the Harvard study that says girls have friends similar to themselves. Sue does notice that almost all of these girls have long, blonde hair that is curled under. One girl’s hair “was turning more blond each week” (8). They have “flawless” figures and complexions (8). Sue notices that the girls “were all wearing, like a uniform, dark Bermuda shorts and dark-print blouses” (8). As the Harvard study suggests, these girls socialize with and associate themselves with people who are like them. If they do not fit the mold originally, they conform, just like the girl with brown hair slowly dyes her hair blond. A key word here is “uniform” (8). Everyone in this group presents themselves in the same way, even though the “look” might be transitory, as “this year’s look” suggests. This crowd creates a model for who and what a girl should be. They are what people should desire to become.

Emery shows how this model of what people should desire to become creates identity anxieties by showing Sue’s obsession with her physical features, which do not match the Popular Crowd. While watching these girls, Sue “put[s] her hand without thinking up to her own brown hair,” which Emery describes as “short and crisp” (8). With this small gesture, Emery reveals how desiring popularity causes anxiety. Sue absently compares herself to these girls and finds herself lacking, as not only a girl but also a human. While her hair is almost right, and while she has a decent figure and complexion, her clothes are “all wrong” since they are light colors, instead of dark colors (8). Again, she associates herself with lacking something and therefore

with not being good enough. Sue also sees that the girls who are popular have a stronger sense of confidence around boys than unpopular girls do (10). Sue sees that there is one definition of beauty, one definition of girls who are desirable. Sue recognizes that there is a separate *habitus* for various friend groups, just as there is a separate *habitus* for different geographical locations or education level. Not all of these girls recognize what they are doing, but Sue sees that she is not one of them, recognizes what they do, begins to question her identity, and desires to take on the *habitus* of the popular crowd. Emery uses the *habitus* to show a clear division in social standing, where popular people are on top. The novel shows how popularity creates a desire to conform to a group by altering physical features.

In *The Unchosen*, another novel where popularity causes identity anxieties, Gilbert's protagonist, Ellen, also sees that there are different categories of people. The distinction she focuses on is between what she would call the Chosen and the Unchosen. She places her two friends, Kay and Debbie, and herself in the Unchosen category, the side that lacks something. Like with *The Popular Crowd*, Ellen sees that there is a difference in who and what are considered desirable. When introducing her friends to the reader, Ellen first considers their looks. Though she does not define what the popular girls look like, she defines what they do not look like. She says,

Looking at us you might wonder how it happened [how they became friends], for we were about as different as three girls could be. I was awkward and pudgy, with dark hair and pale blue eyes and too-big mouth and apple-dumpling cheeks. (2)

Ellen focuses on what she considers wrong with herself, and most of what she considers wrong is too big. Her weight, her mouth, and her cheeks, for instance, are all too big.

Ellen, however, takes pride in the idea that she is better than Debbie and Kay. She describes Debbie as “outweigh[ing] her by ten pounds,” “inches shorter” than herself, and like “a big doll, with her flaxen hair and round, bright, slightly protruding blue eyes and pouting mouth” (2). Ellen describes her as fat, again suggesting anxieties about popularity and weight, and by calling her a “big doll” (2), childlike. These features mean that she lacks control and that others likely look down on her.

She describes Kay as the least attractive of the three because she has “thousands of freckles and sort of orange hair” and is much too tall, “duck[ing]” her head to appear shorter and fit in with her friends (2). Though Ellen does not say Kay is overweight, she focuses on how Kay is still too big because she is too tall. She tries to “shrink herself” (2) in order to fit in, which will allow her to go unnoticed. This suggests that the *habitus* of the popular crowd gives her anxieties about who she is and what she looks like.

Because Ellen uses these negative terms to describe how she and her friends look, I infer that the popular, desirable girls who would fall into the Chosen category are the opposite. They are thin, as opposed to Debbie and Elle who are overweight. Unlike Kay, they are not too tall and have clear complexions. They likely have blonde hair since Ellen describes her own hair as “awkward” (2). Because they do not fall in the Unchosen category, they have boyfriends or at least go on dates. Gilbert’s portrayal of popularity aligns with the *habitus* of the popular girls in *The Popular Crowd*. They are all alike, just as the Harvard study suggests. Because Ellen and her friends do not fit into that mold, Ellen feels that she is lacking and has anxieties about her identity. Her concerns suggest that she is unhappy with who she is as a person—or how others perceive her—and that she needs to change.

Both novels portray a solid version of the popular crowd's *habitus*. These versions create a clear physical difference as well as a difference in confidence between those who are popular and those who are unpopular. The girls feel like they lack something. The novels show how the unpopular girls' recognition of the gap creates anxieties about their identities.

III. The 21st Century: A Shift in the Crowd

The dominance of and admiration of popular groups persist in young adult novels nearly 40 years later, but there is a shift in the definition of the popular group. The definition exists but becomes less solid. In *Stargirl*, the protagonist, also named Stargirl, does not immediately notice a difference between herself and popular students. The other students, however, clearly notice. Leo, the narrator, immediately says that she does not fit in because she wears a long dress (Spinelli 4), carries a canvas bag (4), plays the ukulele (5), and wears no makeup (5). Because the students notice that she is different, it suggests that there is an unwritten dress code, like in *The Popular Crowd*.

Her appearance, however, is not what eventually makes her unpopular. Her actions eventually separate her from the crowd, and the crowd begins to shun her. Leo tells her that cheering for both school teams during a basketball game and helping a hurt player from the other team (137) began the crowd's distaste for her, which suggests that they are angered because she would not choose a side—or choose to identify with a side—and follow that side's actions. He also says that she does not fit in because she goes to funerals of people she does not know and sings “Happy Birthday” to students she has never met before (137). When Leo tells her why she is not accepted, he tells her what she has *done* that is wrong, not that what she looks like is the

problem. As Leo says, “Everybody *acts* [emphasis mine] pretty much the same” (137). This suggests a shift in the representation of popularity.

Mlynowski’s *Bras and Broomsticks* suggests a similar shift from a solid definition of the popular group to a group that is slightly less defined by appearances alone. The protagonist, Rachel, is similar to Sue from *The Popular Crowd* because she wants to become popular and have a boyfriend. Like Ellen from *The Unchosen*, Rachel gives names to the separate groups, which shows that she notices distinctions. She names the popular group the A-list, while she is on the B-list. Unlike the novels from the 1960s, this novel does not provide one definition of popular appearances, which disrupts the idea of the Harvard study as well as *habitus*. One of the popular kids lives in a massive brownstone, which suggests that popular people have money and/or connections, and the A-list often throws exclusive parties and hangs out after school at invite-only locations, which suggests that popularity depends on who you know.

While many of the girls seem to be thin, there is not one definition for what is desirable. The guys consider Mercedes, one of the upperclassman popular girls, hot. She is thin and has “the body of a ten-year-old” (Mlynowski 123), which suggests that she does not have a developed body. Anna, on the other hand, is well developed and also desirable (129). However, while appearances does not seem as important to changing identity, Rachel is still concerned about wearing the best thing to represent herself as attractive and fun, which suggests that it does still play a part in identity and popularity.

Stargirl and *Bras and Broomsticks* both still show that groups often weigh physical features to determine popularity, and girls are still considered outsiders if they do not fit in. However, there is less of a focus on physical features and more of a focus on their actions, which suggests that actions are more important to identities.

IV. The '60s: Boys, Appearances, Conformity, and Identity

In these young adult novels, the girls see their identities as something bound to what they are associated with. Young argues that women can change their identities by using objects or clothing to insert themselves into an imaginative story. Changing clothes to become someone else is a type of “play” (Young 287)—one that is “revisionary” (287). The characters Young analyzes know themselves differently when they look different (292). In some cases, this type of “playing dress up” is a “practice of self-exploration” (295) that leads to discovering their “true sel[ves]” (301). Young’s article clearly identifies the connection between clothing and identity, as well as how their attempt to use clothing to become someone else reveals their identity anxieties. The same idea works for ideas about altering weight or even “trying on boys” to change identities. Many of these young adult novels, like *The Popular Crowd*, *The Unchosen*, and *Stargirl*, imply similar ideas about clothing and anxieties about identity.

In the two novels from the 1960s, it is the girls’ associations with boyfriends that initially allow them to make the change in identity and social status. Sue sets out to be “Someone” (Emery 29). The capital “s” suggests that she wants to be important and that she wants to change herself from “someone” with a lowercase “s,” which she seems to define as “no one.” Sue knows that the best way for her to be Someone is to be popular, and the best way to be popular is to date the “right boys” (29). This suggests that the boy has the ability to change the girl’s identity.

When Sue begins to date Pete, the Popular Crowd begins to notice and include her, which suggests that her identity has begun to change. She becomes more social and less studious (55). As soon as she shows the other girls in her high school the friendship ring Pete gave her when he asked her to go steady, she knows that she now “belong[s] to the Popular Crowd without

question” (54). Pete, not her actions, solidify her popularity and alter her identity in other girls eyes by making her enviable and by giving her a position of power in class activities (56). Her actions and identity change after being associated with a boy. In this case, the boy—like the clothing in Young’s example—that first changes someone’s persona.

Ellen approaches her distaste for her own name in a similar manor. She does not like her name, which she says is too plain and lacks “romantic allure” (Gilbert 1). Her name is a major part of her identity, and she thinks her name suggests that she is not Someone. She wants to be accepted so she is no longer an Unchosen. The best way to change her status is to have a boyfriend. Once Ellen and her friends have boyfriends, their popularity increases and their identities alter. Ellen comments that when Debbie and Kay found out about Norris, her pen pal boyfriend, they “began to treat me [her] differently” (30). Debbie, for instance, says that Ellen cannot understand her situation because “[a]fter all—you’ve [she’s] got Norris” (33). Having a boyfriend changes her identity in that she is now in a different category, one that is unable to understand not having a boyfriend. When her classmates find out about Norris, they too treat her differently, and her “status at Easton began very gradually, almost imperceptibly, to grow” (34). It may have been slow, but a boy still changed her identity in the eyes of her peers. In Ellen’s mind, having a boyfriend gives her the allure that she believed her name lacks.

In both of these novels, it is the girl’s association with a boy—not the girl’s actions or personality—that allows her to alter her identity. The boy has agency and is in charge, while the girl must alter herself in order to remain in good graces with society. This creates an even greater anxiety about maintaining this new identity of someone’s girlfriend. It is significant that it is the boy who comes first and not the action.

Because these girls recognize that popularity partially depends on appearances and because they recognize that changing appearances can help change their identity, they all alter their looks. In *The Popular Crowd*, Sue notices that she does not look like the girls in the popular crowd. In order to adopt their *habitus*, Sue begins to change her appearances. She notices their “‘serious’ expression,” which they wear because smiling looks “‘too naïve,’” and begins to “‘practice” the expression (Emery 25). She also alters her hair.

It was becoming, and it looked exactly like all the other girls in the Popular Crowd. Furthermore, she had been using a little bleach in the shampoo water, lightening her hair gradually, so no one would notice, and this morning it was sunny blond, instead of the mousy light brown it had been all her life. (65)

When her sister sees her, she immediately praises her by saying that she looks like a popular girl (65), which affirms Sue’s desires and efforts. This passage shows how her desire to become popular leads her to shift her identity. It shows that changing appearances does work when it comes to changing *habitus*. It is significant that she calls her natural hair “mousy” while she calls her blond hair “sunny” (65). “Mousy” is negative, but “sunny” is positive. This distinction results from her observance of the Popular Crowd’s *habitus*.

Ellen tries a similar approach to changing her identity to become more desirable; however, she focuses on her weight instead of her hair or her clothing. In order to keep her “boyfriend,” she goes on a diet. When it does not work, she goes on an extremely unhealthy diet. She eats only on certain days, but on other days she only drinks water, referring to them as her “water days” (Gilbert 89). She believes that in order to keep her pen-pal boyfriend, she must change her body, which is part of her identity as the Unchosen. In this case, changing her body is

like Young's example of putting on new clothing. These novels show how girls try to take on another group's *habitus* by using Erikson's idea of exploration. However, the novels suggest that a boy is the one who has the most significance when it comes to changing identities.

V. The 21st Century: A Slight Shift in Order

While the novels from the 21st Century have the same theme or message, they take a different approach to how the girls handle their desire for popularity. The boy does not come first, but second. It is their actions and decisions that come first. In *Bras and Broomsticks*, Rachel notices that popular people take part in certain sports or events, like swimming and the annual fashion show. When the fashion show needs one more girl to try out, she recognizes that the girl would have "automatic A-list status" (Mlynowski 105) because of something she can do. Rachel convinces her sister, who recently discovered that she is a witch, to cast a spell that will help her have rhythm (106). So, Rachel alters something about herself to be able to act like the A-list and to fit in, but it is different from changing her appearance to catch a guy and use him to become popular. This change is about what she can do, not simply about what she looks like. She initially proves herself with actions. As soon as she is part of the fashion show, members of the A-list congratulate her (148) and invite her to their exclusive hangouts (153). She begins to date Raf, a popular boy, but it does not necessarily increase her popularity. Being popular and having a boyfriend go hand in hand, but this again suggests that her actions are what propel her to her newfound popularity.

In Spinelli's novel, *Stargirl* initially rises to popularity because of her actions, though these same actions also become responsible for her downfall. Leo says, "The change began around Thanksgiving. By December first, Stargirl Caraway had become the most popular person

in school” (Spinelli 36). Leo contemplates how Stargirl became popular and focuses on her actions. When she becomes a cheerleader, she “never stop[s] cheering” and leaves no one out (36), so she entertains and gives back to everyone. He wonders if it is because Stargirl stood up to another popular girl and because others then backed her up (37). Both of these are actions that solidify her popularity. Though she begins dating Leo, this change does not alter her popularity.

When she loses her popularity, Stargirl tries to do what Sue from *The Popular Crowd* does and change her identity by changing her clothing and some of her actions. Like Ellen from *The Unchosen*, names fascinate Stargirl and should fit the person. When changing her identity, she reverts to using her given name, which is Susan. She changes her identity to become “normal” in order to fit in and regain her popularity. Leo says that she wears “jeans and sandals, had burnt-red nails and lipstick, painted eyes, finger rings, toe rings, [and] hoop rings” and no longer carried her canvas bag, rat, or ukulele (139). Leo is thrilled because she looks “magnificently, wonderfully, gloriously ordinary” and “vanished into a sea of *them*” (139-140). Basically, Leo no longer sees her as Stargirl. To him, she has completely changed her identity, stripping herself of Stargirl and taking on the persona of Susan, who is like everyone else.

In addition to changing her clothing, Stargirl also changes her actions. She no longer cheering for both teams, singing “Happy Birthday” to students, or even eating foods that most kids don’t eat, like anchovies (141). Just like Young says, Stargirl tries to take on a new identity by changing her clothes and by aligning her actions with her clothing. While Stargirl does not regain her popularity by changing, this change does show how the desire for popularity and acceptance creates anxieties about identity.

There is a shift in how these girls attain popularity between the 1960s and the 21st Century. In the 1960s, the girls get a boyfriend, who then alters their identity, and then change

something about themselves, particularly their clothing and their body, which further alters their identity. Like Young says, these girls try on something new to become someone else. The girls from the 21st Century have the same goal, which is to be popular and to change their identities, but they do so first through actions. Though they gain boyfriends in the process and try to alter themselves, either with clothing or with a dancing spell, they gain their popularity because of what they did, not by who claims them.

VI. Same Ending: Understanding Yourself

The continual struggle for young adult readers is understanding who they are as well as how they compare with society. Cooley considers conformity a “descent into...hell” (Cooley 366). She compares various aspects of Stargirl’s journey, particularly her original refusal to conform, to Christ. Cooley uses John Stephens’ discussion of female selves and Judith Butler’s theory about the differences between “*expression* and *performativeness* in the creation of gendered selves” (366). Cooley relates Stargirl’s change in identity to Stephens’ second way of viewing makeovers, which involves identity being “‘the performance of attributes’ which are ‘generated within time and place’ and imitate a superficial social ideal” (366). This idea applies to all of the girls in these novels.

Though they might have slightly different ways to achieve their popularity and identity changes, all of these novels end with Cooley’s idea that conformity is not fulfilling. Sue from *The Popular Crowd* comes to terms with the fact that she does not need Pete or the others. When talking to one of her brothers, she says, “Part of the trouble was that I didn’t know what I’d do without Pete and the Popular Crowd” (Emery 168), which we can assume she means that she thought she needed them to become Someone and to change her identity. When she says that

“this crowd [the Popular Crowd] is different than me [her]” (170), she recognizes that she changed her identity in order to fit a *habitus* that she was not a part of and did not want to be a part of. Sue recognizes that she “has to be myself [herself]” “before I [she] could be Somebody” (170). With these last quotes, the novel carries strong anti-conformity and pro-individuality agendas. This suggests that her time being popular and faking her identity was just a mask for her true self. In fact, it is popularity that causes her to lack what is most important.

Ellen from *The Unchosen* struggles when Norris never comes to meet her and when her other friends, Debbie and Kay, find boyfriends, but in the end she ends her diet and reaches a conclusion similar to Sue’s, but her conclusion has to do with her name. All it takes is a young girl in the hospital for her to understand that identity is different than she thought. The girl tells her that the name “Ellen” is pretty, but it is “*different pretty*” from names like Christine or Rosemary (Gilbert 212). Because she says that it is “*different pretty*” (212), she suggests that there are many different definitions of pretty, popular, desirable, or one’s self. The name “Ellen,” the girl says, is like “water [...] cool and clean” (212). The young girl takes a name that Ellen considers plain and shows her how it can also be beautiful when examined in the proper light. The young girl’s comment causes Ellen to think of what other people would associate with her name, and she comes up with many different descriptions, like “hard-working,” “dependable,” and “brave” (212), which allows her to understand that “[a] name is what you make it” (213). Ellen sees that she has options and that she has more control over her identity, which is more important than fitting in. Being yourself gives your more control over your life.

When Stargirl’s attempt to become popular by conforming and being Susan fails, she becomes Stargirl once more. She identifies herself with her clothing—a long skirt and hair ribbons (Spinelli 161)—and with her actions—playing her ukulele and giving students happy-

face cookies (161). Though the students still do not necessarily accept her, Stargirl accepts her identity as someone different from the popular crowd and as someone who could not be happy as Susan, though she might change her name again like she changed it before from Pocket Mouse to Mudpie to Hullygully (63). Her name is “something I [she] wear[s], like a shirt” that she throws away when it does not fit (63). She recognizes popularity as something not as important as her happiness and her true identity. She fully rejects the idea of conformity and popularity when she attends the school’s dance as Stargirl, gets a few students to join her in the bunny hop (a nontraditional and goofy dance, and especially when she kisses Hillari, the queen popular girl, on the cheek at the school’s dance (Cooley 367). Stargirl finds fulfillment in being herself.

Because *Bras and Broomsticks* is the first in a series, Rachel’s revelation about popularity and identity is not as strong as Sue’s, Ellen’s, or Stargirl’s. Still, Rachel realizes that changing her identity based on an ability she did not have, meaning dancing. She realizes that the popularity she wanted “was worthless” because everything was fake (Mlynowski 298). Because she used a false identity, she made only “[f]ake friends” and a “[f]ake love” (298). She begins to accept her identity when she dances “without even a trace of rhythm” (307) at her father’s wedding with her B-list friends, showing that she is okay with not being able to follow all of the rules of popularity because she wants something real. Like Sue, Ellen, and Stargirl, Rachel realizes that changing identities to gain popularity is not beneficial. Because they change themselves to gain something, they actually lose something more significant—themselves. Though they felt like they were taking control over their lives by altering their identities to become popular, they actually have more control and are more satisfied with their lives when they embrace their own identities.

Though they have a few superficial differences, in the end all of these novels treat popularity with irony, arguing the idea that while it is possible to adopt a new *habitus* and therefore change identities, that the change is false and that the new identity is empty. All of these texts show an intersection between popularity and anxieties about identity that remains consistent although ideas, like Erikson's and Bourdieu's, about how identity is formed and even what identity is change. Regardless of whether or not the girls achieve popularity, all of these texts discourage conformity and treat popularity with a sense of irony. These texts reveal the negative affects the desire for popularity can bring about, but they all advocate individualism and finding the true self by showing how their female protagonists handle these anxieties. These anxieties can produce habits that detrimental to health, such as extreme dieting, in order to change their identity and increase their popularity. While they do not necessarily suggest that popular people are evil or that it is wrong to be popular, these texts do suggest that what is wrong is not being yourself. It is wrong to conform and put on a false face. The novels show their teenage audience that letting go of the desire for popularity allows them to see their true identity, which vanquishes anxieties of identity and opens opportunities.

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