

YOUNG ADULT BOOK COVER ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

The young adult novel offers an opportunity for its readers to escape and reflects developmental issues that are important to the twelve to eighteen-year-old age group; however, its success often hinges on its physical representation in the market—its book cover. Although teenagers are usually admonished to never to judge a book by its cover, research proves that most young adults do in fact make reading decisions based on a book's cover art (Jones). For this thesis, I conducted a visual rhetoric analysis on a selection of seventy young adult books that were considered the top books between the years 2003 and 2009 according to the Young Adult Library Association. I also conducted a visual rhetoric analysis on what young adult literary specialists Hipple and Claiborne consider the top twelve classic young adult books of all time between the years 1951 and 2005. Eight of the twelve books have been repackaged with different covers over the past twenty years; I examined several of these. I noticed that over the years certain cover art trends emerged. One trend included the way that the human body was fragmented on book cover illustrations. Although it may increase book sales, the trend of using the fragmented body as a way to draw in young readers could be a dangerous system in terms of symbolic imagery. By strengthening the idea that the body is most beautiful and culturally valued when it is segmented into parts, these books condone the idea that the body is an object and can be (and perhaps should be) manipulated by the artist and viewer.

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wonderful family: Mom, Dad, Christine, Simona, Massimo, and Marta. Thank you for your constant love, support, and inspiration. Mom and Dad—I could not have done this without your help, thank you.

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## INTRODUCTION

The young adult novel offers an opportunity for its readers to escape and reflects developmental issues that are important to address in the twelve to eighteen-year-old age group; however, its success often hinges on its physical representation in the market—its book cover. According to an Internet survey conducted by Leigh Ann Jones (published in *Library School Journal* in 2005), over seventy-five percent of young adults base their reading choices on a book's cover illustration (Jones 45). Although teenagers are usually admonished to never to judge a book by its cover, research proves that most young adults do in fact make reading decisions based on a book's cover art (Jones).

In the first section of my thesis, I define concepts in young adult literature in order to provide a clear understanding of how the genre functions in young adult culture. I introduce some specific young adult books from my analysis along the way in order to further illustrate terms in young adult literature. In the section entitled "Cultural Significance of Book Covers," I discuss how book covers function not only as marketing tools, but also as cultural artifacts that reflect the practice of reading. According to critics in visual rhetoric theory, a book's cover art has the potential to reflect and shape cultural values and ideals, such as individuality, sexual identity, and body images that are propagated in young adult culture. In "Visual Rhetoric and Book Covers," I identify and explain concepts used in the study of visual rhetoric. Cover art can be interpreted in various ways when analyzed through theoretical lens such as visual rhetoric, semiotics, gender theory, and color theory. By analyzing the cover's choice of color, spatial arrangement, typeface and words, photograph and body representation, we can gain some insight on how cover art functions and its influence on the readers (Drew and Sternberger 4). Content analysis shows there are common trends and patterns of photographic images, body

representations, symbolic imagery, and color combinations on book covers geared to attract the teenage audience. Conducting visual rhetoric analysis on book covers in young adult literature can potentially shed light on the adolescent cultural practice of reading (Moody).

I analyze the cover art of a selection of popular young adult novels published between the years of 1951 to 2007. In the first part of my analysis, I studied twelve of the most appropriate books in the history of young adult literature according to the survey entitled “Best Young Adult Novels” conducted by Ted Hipple and Jennifer L. Claiborne and published in 2005 by *English Journal*. Many critics, writers, and professors in adolescent literature studies have argued over the ideal book list that includes the top young adult books of all time. Although no list can be exact, I chose to follow The Hipple-Claiborne list because they formulated their book compilation by surveying a large range of adolescent literature authors and critics who have written books and specialized in the field (Hipple-Claiborne). Many librarians and young adult educators reference the Hipple-Claiborne survey when discussing important books in adolescent literature. For instance, Robert Beach referenced the survey in his 2006 edition of “Teaching Literature to Adolescents” and the Skokie Public Library features the survey on their website. Moreover, Hipple and Claiborne also surveyed which books teenage readers still enjoy, proving the chosen literature is still relevant in today’s reading culture. Eight books from the Hipple-Claiborne list have been repackaged over the years in order to become culturally relevant to today’s teenage readers. I conduct a time series analysis on eight books to see how the cover art has changed over the years.

In the second part of my analysis I looked at the most popular books in young adult literature over the past seven years, based on “Teen Top Ten” lists compiled by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) between the years 2003 to 2009. I decided to use this list

because it is based on votes collected from American young adults across the nation. Examples of bestselling young adult series that have appeared on the lists are Ann Brashares' *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2003)—a romantic series—and Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005)—fantasy novel/paranormal romances series—which have become cultural phenomena in the young adult media, spawning television shows, films, and dozens of similar young adult novel series on friendships, magic, and vampires. Although most of the books from these lists have only had one book cover, certain books have released new covers featuring the film and television stars who portrayed the characters in the original books.

One particular trend that I found significant in my research and analysis of book covers was the number of times the fragmented body is featured on young adult book covers. For instance, the model's eyes may be the focus of the photo, but the viewer does not see the rest of the body. The book covers I have studied in this project foreground a tradition of using the fragmented body as a physical representation for advertising books. In visual terms, I found that the images of fragmented bodies on book covers function as desirable representation of the text because the individuality of the model is censored to allow the reader the freedom to ascribe personal attributes to the characters in the text. The images are also alluring because the fragmented and exposed placement of the body dramatizes the sexuality of the body. In other words, images of the fragmented body images on book covers obscure the individuality of the model to allow the reader the freedom to ascribe personal attributes. The fragmented images of the body also dramatize sexuality by exposing bare skin or focusing on parts of the body that are often linked to sex, such as the naked torso, bare legs, and lips. Although it may increase book sales, the trend of using the fragmented body as a way to draw in young readers could be a dangerous system in terms of symbolic imagery. By strengthening the idea that the body is most

beautiful and culturally valued when it is segmented into parts, these books condone the idea that the body is an object and can be (and maybe should be) manipulated by the artist and viewer.

## YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE AND BOOK COVERS

### Definition of Young Adult Literature

Literary critics often debate the definition of adolescent literature and the young adult novel. Roberta Seelinger Trites argues that the young adult novel is specifically a book marketed to teens, while adolescent literature pertains to a larger category that includes novels about young adults during their teenage years such as Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1880) and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) (2). Amy Pattee defines young adult novels as books written by adults or young adults specifically for the adolescent reader (154). The protagonist is a teenager and "the story is told from the viewpoint and in the voice of a young adult" (49). In *Interpreting Young Adult Literature*, John Noell Moore defines the young adult novel as a "coming-of-age" story, centering around a protagonist(s) between the ages of twelve and twenty who deals with an adolescent issue such as first time love/sexual encounter, social or familial tension, or school related issues, just to name a few (3). Although the exact definition is debatable, a young adult novel often reflects common adolescent issues and expresses a form of change. Usually the novel dramatizes common developmental issues for adolescents such as body image, self-esteem, sexuality, and peer pressure (Merskin 52). Michael Steig notes that the tension that surrounds the process of categorizing and defining adolescent literature into "market-driven" terminology such as the "young adult novel" can ultimately end up segregating the genre into isolated categories (39). However, the institutionally created genres and "market-driven" definitions are an essential part of marketing books to consumers.

The main adolescent critic I refer to in my research is Pam Cole. Cole's *Young Adult Literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* provides accessible and clear terms for categorizing adolescent literature. In *Young Adult Literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Cole defines several types of young

adult novels by their specific genre or theme. Young adult literature arguably began with the development of the “problem novel”—realistic fiction that often addresses personal and social issues. For instance, S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967) is an early example of problem novels because they address adolescent issues such as teen pregnancy and peer pressure (Cole 98). Written when the author was only sixteen years old, *The Outsiders* remains a relatable story about the struggles of growing up as an inner-city teenager.

The most popular form of adolescent literature is still realistic fiction. Young adults often search for books that deal with realistic characters that reflect the reader’s normal life. Teen romance novels and series are also very popular in young adult literature. For instance Ann Brashes’ series *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*—which follows the growth and development of four girlfriends as they deal with death, love, sex, and new beginnings—has shown up twice on YALSA’s “Teen’s Top Ten List.” Sarah Dessen’s *Just Listen* is an example of romantic novel that also incorporates realistic adolescent issues such as anorexia and bullies. Young adult sports fiction hits home with many teen readers who are involved in competitive athletics. Chris Crutcher—winner of the Margret A. Edwards Award for young adult literature—has written several books that incorporate realistic fiction with athletic themes. For instance, in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (1993), the protagonist tries to handle the pressure from his high school swim team while worrying about his psychologically distressed best friend.

Young adult action and thriller novels are traditionally popular among young readers who are intrigued by mystery, action, and suspense (291). Lois Duncan is a classic mystery/horror writer whose books include *Killing Mr. Griffin* (1978) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1973) that was turned into a popular teen movie. Although James Patterson is normally an adult fiction writer, he has also developed an action series specifically geared towards young

adults. The *Maximum Ride* series (2006) is an adventure series about six young adults who are ninety-eight percent human and two percent bird.

Young adult fantasy has become immensely popular over the years following the success of children's books such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Young adult fantasy fiction is filled with magical characters such as wizards, fairies, and monsters, as well as mystical plot elements that involve the supernatural. Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series is an example of a paranormal romantic novel that centers around romantic relationships between fantastical characters such as vampires and shape shifters (Cole 177). Following the success of the *Twilight* series, several paranormal romance series such as Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy*—a series of novels that take place in a boarding school where vampires learn magic and half-humans like the protagonist Rose learn to be their body guards—and Kristin Cast's *The House of Night* series—a series that follow Zoey, a girl blessed with special powers and magical friends—have become popular with the young adult reader. Libba Bray's *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (2004), and its sequels, *Rebel Angels* (2005) and *Sweet Far Thing* (2007) combine mystery with the paranormal, when the protagonist Gemma uncovers her supernatural connection with an ancient cult.

Along the same lines as fantastical and paranormal fiction, science fiction novels also carry an intense allure for young adult readers. While fantasy fiction features stories about wizards and vampires, science fiction is grounded real scientific principles. In other words, the events in a science fiction novel can be explained in rational technological or scientific terms (Cole 347). Popular storylines in young adult science fiction are speculative of the future and usually involve futuristic societies such as in Scott Westerfeld's *The Uglies Trilogy*. For instance, M.T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002) paints a futuristic world in which almost every member

of society is equipped with an internal computer that is constantly feeding the human with an excess of new information.

Even though themes and topics in young adult literature overlap, the fact that there is such variety shows how much the genre has grown over the years. Young adult literature has not always been appreciated as a distinct genre. For many years young adult novels were often lumped together with the children's literature. However, young adult literature has many distinct qualities that separate it from traditional children's literature. Children's books often tell stories that help establish a child's sense of self and help them cope with daily stress. For example, in Judith Viorst's picture book *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (1987), the protagonist of the story faces a series of minor but disappointing events such as finding gum in his hair, being late to school, and not getting to watch his favorite television show. As the day draws to a close, Alexander's mother reassures him that everyone has bad days and they do not last forever.

On the other hand, the young adult novel questions the idea of self and the challenges the status quo (Trites 3). For instance, in Judy Blume's *Forever...*(1975)—a realistic fictional novel on sexual exploration and development—the protagonist Katherine goes through a series of wonderful days and not so good days while exploring her sexuality and learning the ropes of romantic relationships. Both books represent aspects of everyday life, but *Forever* portrays how the decisions teenagers face can be complicated and layered. Alexander's choices have immediate impact on his life, but Katherine's choices impact her life in many different ways—her actions always have consequences. For instance, when Katherine decides to become sexually active there is a whole chapter dedicated to her visiting a Planned Parenthood and taking birth control. In a proper young adult novel, like *Forever...*, the plot usually revolves around the

“protagonist’s struggle to resolve conflict” and often “addresses coming-of-age issues such as maturity, sexuality, relationships, and drugs (Cole 49). Unlike children’s literature, young adult literature does not close with a “storybook” or “happily-ever-after” endings (Cole 49). Instead, young adult novels leave the possibility of a future. In other words, life does not end at the close of a book or the resolution of a conflict, which sends the message that there will still be more challenges and opportunities to face as life goes on (49).

### Popular Culture and Book Covers

Whether consciously or subconsciously, most adolescent readers are influenced by a book’s cover art. According to research in young adult literature and publishing, the cover art of a book tends to have a strong influence on adolescent readers (Jones). In fact, the cover is one of the most effective tools in attracting, and communicating to the young adult reader. An Internet survey conducted by Leigh Ann Jones (published in *Library School Journal* in 2005) collected data of young adults’ impressions of various book covers (Jones 45). She found the three factors that influenced readers’ book selection the most were the cover, title, and the cover flap. Over seventy-five percent of the participants reported that the cover illustrations are the most influential factor when selecting a fiction book (Jones 45).

Traditional forms of reading, such as the young adult novel, are challenged by the wide assortment of entertainment options available for young adults today. For many young adults growing up in the United States of America, their lives are filled with a plethora of free and cheap media entertainment and outlets for self-expression, each vying for young adults’ beleaguered attention spans. Teenagers reportedly spend over fifty hours a week surfing the web, playing video games, and watching television (Horn). Free forms of internet sites such as Facebook™, MySpace™, Twitter™ and Instant Messenger™, just to name a few, gain greater

popularity every year (Horn). Some believe the increased cultural dependency on visuals has begun to decay the young adults' reading habits. Marianne Hirsch comments on the disintegration of literary appreciation in her article "Collateral Damage," noting that "in the current media age our students have lost their verbal literacy and have given themselves over to an overwhelmingly dominant, uncontrollable visuality" (1210).

Despite the excess of Internet, media, and other electronic sources of entertainment, most young adult readers still value the traditional "coming-of-age" novel that reflects the difficult issues associated with adolescence (Moore). Ironically, social networking sites such as Twitter, MySpace, and Facebook have increased young adult book sales (Horn). In fact, the young adult novel has been entering a "golden age" with book sales at their highest in years (Reno). About fifteen years ago, the young adult book market was dying. However, between the years of 1995 and 2005, young adult book sales increased over eighty percent earning close to \$500 million (Reno). Now about 650,000 teenagers report reading at least fifteen books a year and are interested in "proper teen reads"; in other words, the type of novel written with the young adult reader in mind such as books written by modern young adult writers such as M.T. Anderson and Jay Asher and published by young adult publishers such as Simon Pulse and Harper Teen. Although there has been an influx of many new successful young adult writers, many classic young adult books from the 1960s and 1970s still gain readership (Horn). For instance, Simon Pulse had repackaged Judy Blume's *Forever...* (1975), and Robert Comeir's *The Chocolate War* (1974) in order to make it more attractive to current teen readers (Horn).

The success of a young adult book often hinges on marketing strategies. Many authors have web pages geared towards attracting teenagers "on their own turf" by using video book trailers, blogs, pod casts, and other forms of virtual marketing campaigns (Goodnow).

Publishers have been advertising books on popular teen sites such as [www.alloy.com](http://www.alloy.com), which is a website dedicated to teens and offers a source of information on adolescent issues including college and health information. The website also sells clothes and books published by Poppy that include series such as Cecily Von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girls* series and Lisi Harrison's *Clique* series. Navigating the virtual world has become a necessity for young adult authors and publishers in order to have staying power with young adults. Although there are several different marketing strategies geared to attract the teen reader—such as websites and media advertisements—the book cover is an important physical aspect of that can launch a best seller.

## ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BOOK COVERS

### Book Covers as a Marketing Tool

Booksellers began to notice the marketing potential of the book jacket during the late 1890's (Drew and Sternberger 2). Book covers first appeared in England in the beginning of the nineteenth century as publishers first started to learn about the "rules of consumerism" (Powers). Publishers are often the gatekeepers who decide what books will enter our literary realm. Publishing houses are extremely influential on young adult literature (Cole 59). Publishers use many venues to attract readership and buyers, for instance through the Internet and various media outlets such as television and newspapers. However, the classic and oldest type of advertising tool for a piece of literature is a book cover. The cover illustration, the strength of an author's name and brand, and even the title can influence how a book sells. In book sales, it is essential to target a specific audience and create ways to allure readers into buying books through the book covers.

In the publishing world, books are considered to be commodities (Drew and Sternberger 34). Publishers attempt to attract and maintain the young adult book market by manipulating the paratext in the book (Yampbell 356). The layout of a book cover is designed specifically to attract readers and increase sales. In her article "Judging a Book by its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature," Cat Yampbell defines a book's grabability factor as anything paratext related, which inspires "intrigue, innuendo, and sensationalism" (Yampbell 358). This usually involves experimenting with book sizes, styles, and design formats. The reader negotiates meaning when introduced to the paratext of a book. Librarians and booksellers reported an increase in young adult reading sales when they manipulated the layout of the books

so teenagers did not have to go through the children's section in order to look at popular young adult books such as R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* and Ann M. Martin's *The Babysitters' Club*. In 2007, the Association of American Publishers reported that book sales are a \$25 billion industry (AAP). Advertising remains the most important and essential part of the United States publishing market (DataMonitor 10). According to the United States Data Monitor "Publishing in the United States Industry Profile", book advertising is the "most lucrative segment" of the publishing market and accounts for over forty percent of its market value (7). Moreover, the AAP reports that young adult book sales grew three percent since 2006 and are predicted to grow three to five percent every year (AAP). Teenagers have over \$90 per week in disposable income and are considered to have "primary purchasing power and influence" on more than \$190 billion annually (McCasland). Publishers seek input from teenage readers through focus groups and information from the American Library Association (ALA). The ALA sets up many different book lists that solicit teenage input—such as the annual Best Books for Young Adults List—and engage the suggestions from people in the young adult literature field (Goodnow).

Many question if the increased popularity of eBooks and print-on-demand technology means the beginning of the printed book's extinction. However, many critics suggest that "there is something special about the mass-produced book as an object—it is more than just a presentation of the ideas of an author" (Drew and Sternberger 1). A book's cover serves as a cultural artifact and a reflection of a historical period in time: "As compact as a time capsule, a book jacket holds forever the memory of the brief cultural period when it was in print" (Vienne 7). Even if paper books became extinct, cover images remain an essential part of the reading experience since it is the first form of communication with the reader. Without the cover, or at least a digital version of the cover, books lack that special form of visual communication and

advertisement. Especially in a social environment that is becoming more and more visually dominant, book covers are an important part of the cultural practice of reading. Without book covers, the publishers miss out on a large part of a possible reader demographic.

### Book Covers as a Cultural Artifacts

Several critics in literature and design studies have discussed the importance of book covers over the years and its symbolic and cultural influence book covers have on the practice of reading. As certain books become popular and valued as literary pieces, their covers begin to represent the text, the author, the illustrator and the publisher, but also the reader and the society and culture that surround her. In *By Its Cover*, Ned Drew and Paul Sternberger argue that a book cover is not just a protective sleeve; book covers have the power to reflect, propagate, and inspire cultural values and ideals about sexuality, gender, and individuality (8). In Gerard Genette's *Paratexts*, Genette analyzes all the elements that surround the books including its binding, title, and cover illustration in order to understand its cultural significance (5).

According to critics and writers in *Judging a Book by its Cover*, book covers serve as cultural reflections of significant issues in young adult literature and culture (Mathews and Moody 4). In her introduction, Nikki Ann Moody explains that the "cultural practice of reading" involves so much more than a book's written text. Book covers signify a material form of text that is key when understanding the history of reading practices over the years (Mathews and Moody 2).

When a book is published the book cover makes it become "a physical manifestation not just of the ideas of the author, but of the cultural ideals and aesthetics of a distinct historical moment" (Drew and Sternberger 8). For instance, in her article "Commodities in Literature, Literature as Commodity: A Close Look at the *Gossip Girl* Series" Pattee considers the young adult novel to be "anthropological statements that reflect not only the conditions of their making

but also authorial and social views of adolescence and the adolescent experience” (154). Pattee suggests the young adult novel may be partly based on an author’s experience as an adolescent, but also “the author’s current observations of youth culture” (154). She argues that critics should not limit their analysis of popular texts to the written morals and ideological messages; they need to include the examination of a book’s “textual conceptualization” (154). For instance, various forms of cover art reflect styles, moods, and inspirations of a specific cultural time period. American cover art and book illustrations follow design and aesthetic trends in popular culture. During the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Americans were seeking an identity that reflected local customs and topography through artwork (Hearn, Clark, and Clark 355). Many children’s book illustrations would depict the symbolic elements of American character. For example, artists often painted images of peasants and animals working together to finish chores or a courageous hero rescuing a damsel in distress are popular on fairy tale covers. These symbolic illustrations reflected American traditions and customs such as hard work and bravery (Hearn, Clark and Clark 355). Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many artists depict symbolic imagery that represents cultural practices and objects that are important to readers today. In other words, instead of a pastoral setting with peasants and animals, a book’s cover art may feature urban settings and images of the city life to attract young readers.

Readers tend to make personal connections with book covers (Drew and Sternberger 1). A book’s cover has the ability to invite the reader in; it is the first step in communicating to a reader and it expresses “an amalgam of form meaning” (Genette 17). Book cover critics Genette, Moody, and Matthews agree on using Jorge Luis Borges’ concept of viewing the entrance of a thing or place as a “threshold” or “vestibule” which offers the “possibility of either stepping inside or turning back” (Genette 2). These writers theorize that the cover has the ability to form a

relationship with the reader. The book cover has the potential to influence the reader in many different ways—she may be offended, amused, intrigued, or disinterested. The reader negotiates meaning when introduced to the paratext of a book. Besides conveying plot information, a book cover can present an encompassing image of the book's essence. In *Chip Kidd*, Veronique Vienne discusses the book covers of famous cover artist Chip Kidd who has designed over 1,500 book covers since 1986. Kidd explains the key to designing book covers is to understand “the spirit” of the text. Kidd likens book design as “visually solving a problem”; in their words, it begins with a response to the book's manuscript and an understanding of the author's intentions, since most authors have the final say on the book cover, “it's a logical starting point” (40). Vienne goes on to explain, “there is a subliminal language of images and typography that speaks directly to the subconscious mind of the potential book buyer” (40). An “effective” book cover accurately reflects the text's style, tone, and mood. An effective book cover does not only communicate what kind of book it is but what kind of audience would enjoy reading it (45).

As certain books become popular and valued as literary pieces, their covers begin to represent the text, the author, the illustrator and the publisher, but also the reader and the society and culture that surround her. Book covers have the power to reflect, propagate, and inspire cultural values and ideals in sexual, gender, and individuality. Book covers often follow trends in popular culture. Some young adult books go through multiple rounds of repackaging in order to appeal to different teen readers' tastes—some prefer bold, simple covers, while others are more drawn to photographs of models and scenes from a city (Watson). Recent young adult novels reflect the book cover publishing trends of similar best-selling novels in the market.

Sometimes, in order to create a culturally relevant and attractive cover, the illustration might betray the text instead of representing it. For instance, the first covers of Robert Comier's

*The Chocolate War* (1974)—a problem novel about high school bullying— feature specific depictions of the protagonist Jerry Renault, however, the 2000 version features a blurred picture of a boy throwing a punch. Although *The Chocolate War* has been placed number four in the American Library Association’s list of the “Top 100 Banned/Challenged Books in 2000-2007” due to its profane language and violent scenes, the covers usually take a more innocent route, glossing over the violent nature and emphasizing the male character. In the first edition, Jerry is in a baseball uniform while the 1990 edition features Jerry in school clothes—both images depict a typical school boy/athlete, but they do not express the themes of anger and fear that are present in the novel. In “Addressing Young Adults? The Case of Francesca Lia Block,” Chris Richards discusses the history of *Weetzie Bat* (1989) book covers, which, over the years, have gone through several different marketing changes in order to attract the right type of readers and represent the text appropriately. Richards explains how it was difficult to market because there was not a set target audience since the blended fairytale novel appealed to many female readers. He points out that publishers did not want to alienate male readers by using too many “girly” colors such as pink (Richards 147). Richards also notes that since the book was very light and seemed insubstantial it attracted the “reluctant reader” who may not go for the thicker, longer books. However, the text is not light; it deals with heavier issues such as drug use and AIDS (Richards 148). Actually, *Weetzie Bat*’s author, Francesca Lia Block, never intended her book to be exclusively for young adults; she thought it would be more appropriate for readers in their late teens and early 20s. The current cover uses vibrant bright colors and features the silhouette of a young girl dancing. The cover represents the uniqueness of the book—a fairytale-like story that deals with larger adolescent issues.

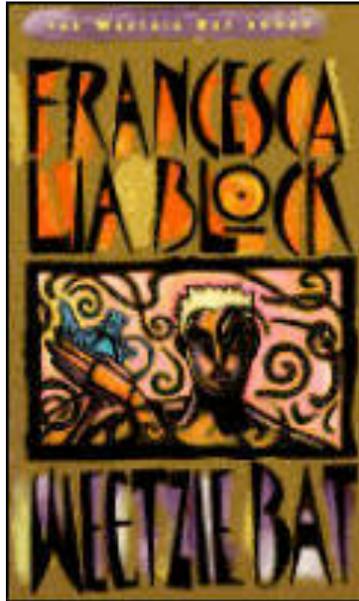


Figure 1. Cover Art for 1996 Paperback Edition of Francesca Lia Block's *Weetzie Bat* by David Diaz. All images are used with expressed written permission of the books' respective publishers.

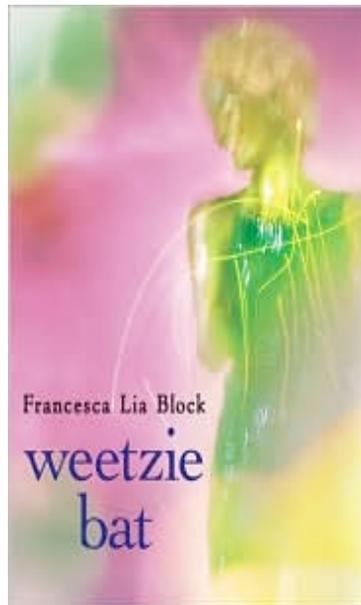


Figure 2. Cover art for 1999 Paperback edition of Francesca Lia Block's *Weetzie Bat* by Susan Scalora. All images are used with expressed written permission of the books' respective publishers.

## VISUAL RHETORIC ANALYSIS AND BOOK COVERS

In order to understand the influential role book covers play in the practice of young adult reading, it is helpful to understand how design critics analyze visual images. As Maria Grabe and Erik Page Bucy explain in *Image Bite Politics*, the visual experience is the most dominant mode in learning and “visual processing is central to building synaptic connections and ultimately forms the basis of extended consciousness” (13). Book covers are effective in marketing books because visuals affect people in a stronger and more lasting way than written text (Grabe and Bucy 14). Marketing and bookseller’s data show evidence of the importance of visuals in marketing and selling to teens. Since we respond so effectively to visual imagery, many advertising and marketing strategies aim to include visual representation along with their literal messages. Publishers aim to find book covers that enchant the reader and remain in the reader’s memory as a “pleasing optical experience” (Grabe and Bucy 14). Consumer psychologists found that teenagers are highly receptive to visual advertising (Wedel and Pieters). Advertising analysts maintain that children and young adults are often the most receptive to experimental art and unique design.

In *Reading Images*, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen define visual rhetoric as a type of communication that uses images to create meanings and construct arguments (2). The theoretical analysis of visual rhetoric is “richly connected” with popular culture and everyday life (Olson, Finnegan, and Hope 414). Since visuals often grab our attention first, they play a crucial part in our “rhetorical consciousness,” and need to be part of the conversation (Olsen, Finnegan, and Hope 414). Although it is hard to pinpoint exactly what attracts viewers to certain images, the visual configuration, symbols, colors, and form of the illustration does affect how

viewers may feel about a specific image. A certain visual configuration of the illustration affects viewers in a particular way. Certain gazes and gestures of the image invite the viewer into a kind of imaginary relationship; for instance, a cartoon smiling may ask for social affinity, a gloomy depiction of dark woods may induce fear, and a scantily dressed body may invite desire. The bottom line is that the image demands or elicits a kind of reaction from the viewers.

When conducting visual rhetoric analysis, it is important to identify the visual elements that compose the book cover. The process of visual rhetoric analysis can be boiled down into formulaic methods that pinpoint and define the specific parts of an image that make it valuable or desirable to the viewer. Kress and Leeuwen discuss how we can understand the rhetorical analysis of a cover illustration in terms of image act, social distance, and attitude (151-153). The “image act” is the intended effect the producer of the image wants the viewer to feel or notice (Kress and Van Leeuwen 116). The spatial positioning, color combinations, and typography on book covers help compose the overall image act. The term “social distance” means the spatial positioning between elements of an image that reflect social relations: viewers judge if the image gives off the impression of distant or intimate social relations (124). The spatial positioning of the image’s gazes and gestures invite the viewer into a kind of imaginary relationship (Kress and Van Leeuwen 129). An image’s “attitude” is the way the image expresses individuality, subjectivity, and social values (130).

An example of the suggestive power of an image act can be seen by visually analyzing the cover art of Jody Picoult’s *My Sister’s Keeper* (2004). *My Sister’s Keeper* is a realistic-fictional novel and not officially considered a young adult novel according to Cole, however, it made YALSA’s list for most popular young adult books and does include many adolescent issues as well as adolescent characters and voices—for instance the book uses different character

voices and viewpoints in order to narrate the story. The plot is about a family who scientifically engineered their baby so she would be blood marrow match for their dying daughter Kate. At age thirteen, Anna struggles between her loyalty to her family and her desire to be free of her responsibility to them. The cover shows a photograph of two girls with their backs to each other but one girl rests her head on the other one's shoulder suggesting a close-knit interpersonal relationship. By analyzing the image act on the cover of *My Sister's Keeper*, the reader can gain an understanding for the theme of the novel through its spatial positioning, gaze, gesture, and colors (Kress and Leeuwen 130). Although it is a photograph, the image of the models is shadowy, so it does not strongly assign physical features to the protagonists. The models' bodies take up most of the cover making them the focal point and center of the image act. The social distance between their bodies suggests "a closeness" or "an intimacy" between the protagonists because they are leaning in towards one another (Leeuwen and Gunther 132). However, since they face opposite directions, there is a sense of conflict and tension.

### Book Cover Elements

All the elements of a book, including inside text, outside text, visuals, and binding, can be studied as elements that help explain the literary and cultural function of a text. Genette developed the word "paratext" to encompass all the material forms of a text: "those things in a published work that accompany the text, things such as the author's name, title, preface, introduction, and illustrations." Genette explains that each material part of a book, such as binding, cover, and text, is serving a specific "literary function." The binding, cover, and title is more than simply a "sealed border" but instead a combination of design strategy and pragmatics that are meant to present a product and influence a public (Genette 2). The anatomy of a book cover is composed of several forms of paratext—such as font type, colors, and cover

illustrations—that work together to allure the reader and represent the written text. The specific images, colors, and typography featured on the book cover affect the overall appeal and message of the text. The typography on a book cover refers to the technique and art of arranging type design. On a book cover, the type can be modified in point size, font type, line positioning, and much more (Bringhurst 40).

The color choice used on a cover is an important aspect of book design because colors can influence a viewer's mood and perception of a book. In *Color: Messages and Meanings*, Leatrice Eiseman describes how colors project different psychological meanings depending on the shade of the color and the context it is in (2). I coded the name and meanings of the colors on the cover based on Eiseman's color wheel. For instance, the colors red, black, and white are popular on the young adult covers over the last five years. Eiseman also discusses how certain color combinations are effective at creating a mood or sending a message: "To establish an immediate message, color combinations should contain visual color cues that trigger specific responses" (80). Eiseman defines the "color message" by examining the combination of colors; usually there is a dominant color that conveys the message and a couple "subordinate and accent colors" that support the message (80).

Certain color combinations have the ability to subconsciously influence a reader's feelings about the book. Sometimes specific colors are paired together to create a certain mood and elicit specific emotional responses from viewers (4). The colors used in book covers also propagate messages and influence how the book is perceived. Table one identifies the color combinations on the cover art illustrations I analyzed. In the table one, I provide the names of the color combinations, list the colors that comprise the respective color combination, and note the message or meaning each color combination holds. In table two, I identify the specific colors

used on the *Feed* cover, what each color individually means, and how the colors come together to make up the color combination called “invigorating” (Eiseman).

<b>Color Combination</b>	<b>Colors</b>	<b>Color message or meaning</b>
Zesty	Bright orange, yellow, pink	Youthful and energetic
Sentimental	Browns, grays, blue, taupe	Nostalgic and reminiscent
Woodland	Dark green, deep reds, browns	Rustic and natural
Rich	Dark brown, gold, purple	Luxurious and sophisticated
Eye Candy	Bright pink, lavender, red	Sweet and enticing
Assertive	Vibrant red, orange, and black	Confident and bold
Mysterious	Deep purple, blue, and black	Intriguing and dark
Intimate	Light blue, pink, and beige	Romantic and delicate
Nightlife	Bright blue, black, and yellow	Urban and cool
Contemplation	Black, white, and gray	Classic and serious

Source: Eiseman, Leatrice. *Color: Messages and Meanings*. Gloucester: Hand Books, 2006.

Table 1. A List of Color Descriptions and Meanings.

<b>Color</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Teal	Serene, cool, tasteful, and confident (41)
Orange	Energizing, happy, youthful, and friendly (17)
Brown	Rustic, rich, and earthy (29)

The “color combination” of teal, orange, and brown “Zesty” is a color combination is “youthful. Vivacious, and over-the-top energy” (92)

Source: Eiseman, Leatrice. *Color: Messages and Meanings*. Gloucester: Hand Books, 2006

a. Describes the colors and meanings that are shown on the *Feed* cover

Table 2. Color Combination Breakdown for the Cover Art of M.T. Anderson’s *Feed*.

### Design Layout and Form

The images featured on book covers subtly create “consumer identity” as the pictures help establish relationships between the consumers and their environment (Hope 155). The

cover's elements work to create the illusion of some type of ideal world for the young adult reader. The reader becomes the subject of the ideological message the book cover represents—whether it is the regal lifestyles as seen on the covers fantasy books such as *A Great and Terrible Beauty* and *A Far Away Thing*, the intimate and feminine moments of romances such as *Just Listen* and *The Truth about Forever*, the intriguing and mysterious nightlife of realistic fiction as portrayed on the cover of *The Outsiders*, or fun and free spirit of a blended fairy tale *Weetzie Bat*. Designers of book covers need to know what type of paratext will attract the intended audience of the text.

Cover illustrations work as active sign-makers in the sense that they indicate to the viewer the story's general topic. For instance, the swimming pool background on the cover of *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* puts the book in a certain class, group, or genre of books that the title may not have grouped it under. In other words, the title may not mention swimming, but the cover image helps people make the link. A particular image on a book cover can place the book in a certain class, group, or genre, even if the title may not have grouped it under the same category. Kress and Van Leeuwen argue how cover illustrations work as active sign-makers in the sense that they indicate to the viewer the story's general topic. Some critics suggest that the images on a book cover are the most influential part of the paratext overall.

Along with color scheme, the design layout of the book covers influences the visual hierarchy for the consumer. The spatial positioning between elements in an image suggests the type of social relationship images on the cover might portray for the viewer. In *Picture This: Perception and Composition*, Molly Bang provides common principles of how viewers “make meaning out of shape and placement of objects on a flat surface” (56). For instance, flat, smooth and horizontal shapes give the viewer a sense of calmness and stability. Meanwhile, vertical

shapes are more visually exciting and tend to imply a sense of energy and rebelliousness since they defy the rules of gravity. For instance, the cover for Laurie Halse Anderson's *Twisted* (2008)—a problem novel about a high school senior named Tyler struggles balancing his father's demands to succeed and his peer's pressure to fit in—features a twisted red pencil against a black backdrop. Bang also argues that “pointed shapes” may make viewers feel more scared. For instance, Lois Duncan's *Killing Mr. Griffin* (1978)—a thriller/mystery about a group of high school students whose prank on a teacher becomes deadly. The *Killing Mr. Griffin* cover art features an eerie photograph of a man's shoes pointing up from roped up legs on the new edition of *Killing Mr. Griffin*. The rounder and curvier shapes like the locket and flowers featured on the *Forever...* covers promote feelings of security and comfort. Bang explains that content in the top half of a picture is in a “spiritual” space; the positioning evokes a sense of happiness and freedom. On the other hand, the content placed in the bottom part of a picture evokes feelings of sadness, heaviness, and constraint (76-78).

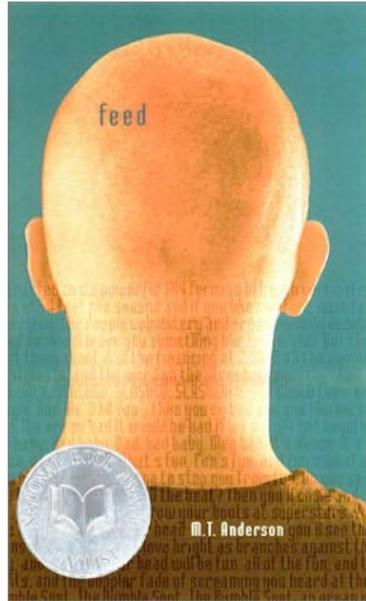


Figure 3. Cover art for the 2002 paperback edition of M.T. Anderson's *Feed*. All images are used with expressed written permission of the books' respective publishers.

## FINDINGS

In my book cover analysis, I noticed two trends in particular. First of all, most of the covers feature a human representation rather than an inanimate object such as a table or some kind of symbol or a scene such as a city skyline or a pastoral countryside. In other words, many books feature drawings of people or photos of a model in order to communicate the subject of the book. Secondly, the human body is often fragmented. When I use the word “fragmented” in terms of “fragmented body” or “fragmented face,” I mean that less than half of the human body is represented in the image.

I coded certain features of the cover’s visual text in order to study and analyze patterns that are significant among these covers. The elements of my coding scheme include use of photography, representation of the image in the text, human body representation, color combinations, and fragmentation of the body. I based my coding scheme on critics in design and visual rhetoric such as Kress and van Leeuwen. For instance, I refer to the illustration on the cover as an “image act,” which describes the actions and intentions that are portrayed in the illustration.

I first tabulated the number of times the human body appeared on book covers. Moreover, I looked to see if the body was fragmented or whole. If it was fragmented, I looked to see what part of the body is emphasized in the illustration. For instance, sometimes the eyes, torso, legs, or hands dominate the image act of the illustration. I also defined and their illustration form. For instance, some cover illustrations were in the form of photographs, while others were in the form of paintings or cartoons. I define photographic images as a digital or computer generated photograph of a person, place, or thing. Meanwhile, I define a painting as an image that has been drawn, sketched, or painted in a realistic manner. However, I consider the

image to be a cartoon if the rendering of the human body is made in an unrealistic manner.

Moreover, I identified the colors and scenery used in the background of the illustration.

<b>Book Cover and Edition</b>	<b>Illustration form and color</b>	<b>Cover image</b>
<i>Catcher in the Rye</i> (1951/2007)	Painting/assertive	Carousel
<i>Catcher in the Rye</i> (1953)	Cartoon/woodland	Body
<i>Catcher in the Rye</i> (1997)	Plain/contemplation	Title
<i>Catcher in the Rye</i> (2000)	Painting/assertive	Body
<i>The Outsiders</i> (1967/2007)	Painting/assertive	Stick figures
<i>The Outsiders</i> (1982)	Cartoon/woodland	Bodies
<i>The Outsiders</i> (1997)	Cartoon/mysterious	Body
<i>The Outsiders</i> (2006)	Photograph/mysterious	Body
<i>The Chocolate War</i> (1974)	Cartoon/sentimental	Body
<i>The Chocolate War</i> (1988)	Cartoon/contemplation	Body
<i>The Chocolate War</i> (1990)	Photograph/zesty	Body
<i>The Chocolate War</i> (2004)	Photograph/contemplation	Body
<i>Forever...</i> (1975)	Cartoon/sentimental	Unmade bed
<i>Forever...</i> (1976)	Cartoon/sentimental	Body
<i>Forever...</i> (1982)	Cartoon/sentimental	Body
<i>Forever...</i> (2007)	Photograph/eye candy	Body
<i>Forever...</i> (2007)	Photograph/sentimental	
<i>Killing Mr. Griffin</i> (1978)	Cartoon/woodland	Body
<i>Killing Mr. Griffin</i> (2000)	Photograph/mysterious	Body
<i>Annie on My Mind</i> (1982)	Cartoon/woodland	Bodies
<i>Annie on My Mind</i> (2007)	Photograph/eye candy	Body
<i>Weetzie Bat</i> (1989)	Cartoon/zesty	Body
<i>Weetzie Bat</i> (1995)	Painting/rich	Body
<i>Weetzie Bat</i> (1999)	Photograph/eye candy	Body
<i>Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes</i> (1993)	Painting/assertive	Body
<i>Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes</i> (2003)	Photograph/mysterious	Body
Source: Hipple, Ted and Jennifer L. Claiborne. "The Best Young Adult Novels of All Time" <i>English Journal</i> 94 (2005): 99-102.		

a. This table displays the book cover titles and the type of image illustrated on the cover

Table 3. A list of “Classic” Books and a Brief Description of the Cover Art Including Illustration Form, Color Combination, and Image Act.

In total, I studying the eighty-two books and analyzed one hundred book covers—seventy books from YALSA’s “Top Teen Reads” list and twelve books from The Hipple-Claiborne survey. I noted parts of the book’s text that describe what was going on in the cover. For instance, in Judy Blume’s *Forever...*, I noted specific parts of the text that seemed to epitomize the image on the cover.

Cover Image	Text Representation
A cartoon illustration of a bed	The bed (74)
A cartoon illustration of a locket with the picture of a girl’s face	Katherine receives a necklace for her birthday (143)
A cartoon illustration of flowers framing a picture of a girl’s face	Physical description of Katherine (20)
A fragmented photograph of a female’s chest adorned with a yellow flower and silver heart necklace	“Inside was a small silver disk, with Katherine engraved across it, on a slender silver chain” (143)
A cartoon illustration of an envelope sealed with a kiss	The letter exchanges (189-200)
A fragmented photograph depicting legs on a bed	The bed (74)

Source: Blume, Judy. *Forever*. New York: Pocket Books, 1975.

Table 4. Cover Image Description and Corresponding Text for the Cover Art of Judy Blume’s *Forever...*

I decided to focus my visual rhetoric analysis and discussion on the following books: S.E Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War*, Judy Blume’s *Forever...*, Nancy Garden’s *Annie on My Mind*, Francesca Lia Block’s *Weetzie Bat*, Chris Crutcher’s *Staying Fat for Sarah Brynes*, M.T. Anderson’s *Feed*, Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight*, Kevin Brooks’ *Road to the Dead* and Cassandra Clare’s *Mortal Instrument* series.

- Out of one hundred book covers, sixty-nine cover illustrations featured images of the human body
- Out of the sixty-nine covers that featured the human body, fifty-four covers featured fragmented images of the human body
- Seventy “Top Teen Choice” Book Covers
- Twelve Hipple-Claiborne Books; thirty book covers

#### “Top Teen Choice” Books and Book Covers

- Out of seventy book covers, the forty-three illustrations featured images of the human body
  - Thirty-four were images of a fragmented body
    - Ten focused on top part of the body such as face, back of head, eyes, lips, and/or hair
    - Ten focused on the middle part of the body such as the torso and/or arms
    - Three focused on the lower part of the body such as the legs and/or feet
    - Ten were fragmented, but did not focus on one particular part of the body
  - Eight were images of the full body
- Out of the forty-three body images, eight were cartoon illustrations
- Out of the forty-three body images, thirty-five amount were photographic images

#### Hipple-Claiborne Survey Books

- Twenty-six featured images of the human body.
  - Twenty were fragmented body images
    - Nine focused on top part of the body such as face, back of head, eyes, lips, and/or hair
    - Four focused on the middle part of the body such as the torso and/or arms
    - Two focused on the lower part of the body such as the legs and/or feet
    - Five were fragmented, but did not focus on one particular part of the body
  - Six were images of the full body
- Out of the twenty-six body images, ten were cartoon illustrations
- Out of the twenty-six body images, six were artistic paintings
- Out of the twenty-six body images, ten amount were photographic images
- Out of the twelve, eight have been repackaged.
  - Out of the eight books that were repackaged, seven of them were repackaged with images of the fragmented human body

## ANALYSIS

One specific reading trend that popular cultural and literary critics have noticed is that young adult readers often search for realistic representations of their life and environment when choosing a book by its cover (Appleyard). Readers are offered the chance both to see their reflection in the images and to transport themselves into the images (Hope 1). Since teenagers generally choose to read about their “own culture” and are attracted to illustrations that depict “familiar settings and familiar times,” book covers need to stay updated in order to attract the target audience (Jones 45). Beginning in the 1970s, publishers have seen the importance of placing realistic images of people on young adult book covers. They believed books would be more attractive if the young reader can personally identify with the character on the cover (Cosette 90). Since consumer studies show that female adolescents buy more books than adolescent males, many publishers focus on creating cover art that includes, or features, a girl (Cosette 90). Often times, if the book offers an outlet for leisure and escape, a reader will look to make a connection with the characters. Since the late 1990s, the prevalence of human character depictions became widespread again on book covers; now, however, the human depictions are photographic and more fragmented.

The technological advances of the 1980s and 90s influenced modes of graphic design and aesthetic ideals of art. The World Wide Web and other interactive digital forms of media promoted a more “open relationship between fragments and content” in design compared to the “rigid hierarchies” of the modern era (Drew and Sternberger 138). Postmodern design is marked by its decentered, nonlinear and fragmented notion of design (Drew and Sternberger 138). The influence of cubism and modernist art form introduced the design or photomontage to book covers, which is the “incorporation of a disembodied photographic face” (Drew and Sternberger

36). Post-modern designs on book covers leave room for the viewer to interpret the image.

Photographic representations of the human body on book covers are effective at portraying the real world. Book covers that feature photographs that remind people of the familiar lure them into making personal connections with the image (Barthes). The young adult book covers function similarly to Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation—the process by how ideology addresses individuals. The young adult book covers function as an “apparatus” that hails the reader/viewer to “misrecognize” herself through her identification with the fictional characters on the cover. Images that resemble the reader, especially photographs of young adults, hail the viewers to make connections with the text. Many of the covers use photographic fragmented bodies as the focal point of the image and dramatize the sexuality of the body, while still censoring the individuality of each model. Similar to the media and web representations of the body, book covers have been featuring more and more photographic fragmented images of the body, dramatizing sexuality and censoring individuality.

Of the forty-six new covers and twenty-six classic covers that featured the human body in some shape or form, forty-five featured the body in a photographic or realistic image of the body. The fragmented body images are often presented in photographic images, similar to the advertisements seen on billboards, magazines and the Internet. As discussed in Pattee's article, books are treated as a commodity in our capitalistic culture. In his *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes exposes the functionality of the photographic image used in different advertising campaigns. For instance, Barthes explains that the reader does not see some model on a cover; he subconsciously assigns specific features and details to complete his idea of the protagonist. A photograph of the human body on a book cover can function as a “mirror” which asks the viewer to “read the familiar...the known” so it even allows the reader to see himself on the cover if he so chooses ”

(64). Book covers featuring photographic and fragmented bodies can serve both the “example and the bait” which offer the viewer her “own likeness”, but also present a “clarified...superbly elevated” image of what life could be like (Barthes 65). Actually, an effective image or photograph lures the viewer in without them noticing. In Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, he applies linguistic terms to explain the allure and persuasiveness of the photographic image. As Barthes explains, an effective photograph is “invisible: it is not it that we see,” it being the object of the photo (6). To further elucidate a photograph’s subliminal persuasiveness, Barthes describes a picture as “a message deprived of a code” (6). In other words, the photographs on the covers are effective because it subtly sends a message to the viewer.

In the classic cover compilation, twenty-six of the book covers featured the human body in some form. However, the image of the human body became more fragmented in later editions of the covers. The fragmentation of the human body highlights how American culture values and views the human body. Of the twenty-six human image covers, twenty feature a fragmented body image. The time series of the *Forever...* covers reflect how cultural changes influence how the human body is presented on the cover. The cover art of *Forever...* has featured many different fragmented body parts over the years of publication. The first couple of covers featured a girl’s face, while the 1990s version moves down to show only the torso of a girl. The latest 2000 cover features the intertwined legs of a boy and a girl lying across a bed. This time series analysis exemplifies how the focus on the body has shifted. In the 1970s to early 1990s, many young adult book covers plastered a detailed facial photo or painting of the protagonist (Cosette). Lately, the artist’s focus has shifted to lower parts of the body, sometimes cutting off the head entirely.

An example of how human depictions on adolescent book covers have become more photographic and fragmented is the repackaging of *The Outsiders*. The first edition of *The Outsiders* is a sketched illustration of an assembly of stick figures running together and is colored in bright red, vibrant orange, black, and ivory—a color combination Eiseman calls “Assertive” and connotes a sense of excitement, youth, and power. The color combination on the new edition of *The Outsiders* connotes a “modern or urban” landscape through the combination of dark metallic colors such as shades of black, deep blue, gray and white, which Eiseman calls “Nightlife” (Eiseman 94). The new edition of *The Outsiders* cover features the photograph of a fragmented male model—presumably the protagonist Ponyboy—showcases a strong jaw, neck, and part of a torso. *The Outsiders* represent sexuality by the spatial focus on the male model’s Adam’s apple, however censoring the individuality by leaving out the eyes. The direction of his chin faces the left side of the book that makes it seem that he is looking off into the distance. The leather jacket and white t-shirt the model wears is reminiscent of a fifties type-casted rebel, like James Dean, but is vague enough to not insinuate a definite time period or definitive character.

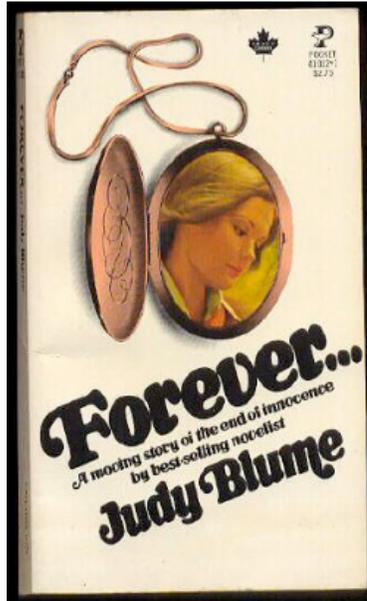


Figure 4. Cover art for 1975 paperback edition of Judy Blume's *Forever...* All images are used with expressed written permission of the books' respective publishers.



Figure 5. Cover art for the 2005 paperback edition of Judy Blume's *Forever...* by Carissa Pelleteri. All images are used with expressed written permission of the books' respective publishers.

On the more recent young adult book covers, the fragmented body often appears as the focal point of the image. Sarah Dessen's *Just Listen* features the fragmented body of a young woman. The body is cut down the center, but takes up one-third of the cover. The cover image starts at the girl's shoulder and continues down her torso and stops at her jean pockets. The girl's hand is in the center right part of the cover and her hands are grasping each other lightly. The protagonist of this book is Annabel Greene, a high-school student who is ostracized from her school because of a misunderstanding between her friends. Annabel holds her anger and sadness inside until she befriends a fellow high school loner, Owen. Owen and Annabel bond through their love of music and Annabel finally opens up to Owen because she feels like he can listen to her. Given the topic of the book, the hands represent tension and wanting to tell something. For instance, many people wring their hands when they are anxious to speak and talk. The dominant colors on the cover are white, pink, and blue; colors that usually signify soft, quiet, and nurturing tone (Eiseman 104).

Of the sixty-nine covers, nineteen focused on the top part of the body; in other words, body parts include the head or the neck. For instance, the covers of Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (1999), Walter Dean Meyers' *Monster*, M.T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002), *Extras* (2009), *Peeps* (2005), and Kevin Brooks' *The Road of the Dead* (2006), feature drawings or photographs of a fragmented head. Most of the time, the eyes were the dominant part of the fragmented image. Some people call the eyes the windows to the soul. Eyes can seem happy, sad, scared, dangerous, and sometimes mysterious. On book covers, the eyes are often representative of the protagonist looking outward. Eyes are often used as a metaphor for a channel or a passageway for looking into the future.

In Scott Westerfeld's *Peeps* and *Extras* feature a fragmented human face and there is an intense focus on the eyes. *Extras* is part of *The Uglies* trilogy; a series of science-fiction books that take place in a futuristic society that manipulates the human body in order to achieve beauty and perfection, while deleting a person's original and individual characteristics. The intense gaze and mysterious color combination set a fitting mood for the content of the book. In *Extras*, for instance, the gaze of the eye is facing the viewer/reader. In a way the book commands the viewer, the eye pulls the viewer in. The intense gaze helps connote the dramatic and dark story line of the series. The eyes are not happy and smiling, it is a cold and suggestive look. The dominant colors on the book are a sultry mix of black, blue and green shades—a color combination that, according to Eiseman, is both “mysterious” and “intriguing” (100). Similarly, the cover art from *The Road of the Dead*—a thriller/mystery about two young brothers who set out to find out the truth about their older sister's murder—features a photograph of a young man looking directly into the eye of the camera. In the photograph the boy appears determined and focused; however, the fact that his head is on its side suggests he is desperate and tired.

The *Speak* cover—which has kept the same cover art for over ten years—features a face fragmented by thin, silver tree branches. This image both represents specific text in the book and symbolizes the underlying mood of the novel. *Speak* is realistic fiction about a high school freshman that struggles to keep her traumatic rape a secret from her parents while the rest of her friends and classmates turn their back on her. The tree branches signify the protagonist's semester long art project that serves as one of the only sanctuaries for the troubled teenager. There are several times where the protagonist talks about being physically and emotionally “fragmented.”

On the other hand, an actual pair of eyes do not have to be in the picture in order to having meaning in the image act. Even though we may not see the eyes, we know the eyes are present and their intended focus carries meaning. For instance the *Feed* cover that features the back of a baldhead, also signals a coldness or lack of personal connection. Although the eyes are not in the picture, the direction of gaze suggests social tension, detachment and avoidance (124).

Of the sixty-nine covers, fourteen covers focused on the hands. Hands can carry a lot of energy and power in daily physical lives. In popular culture, hands are symbolic of power, energy, and balance. The image of hands folded together or clasped is iconic to friendship and allegiance. The cover illustrations on *Twilight* and *Annie on My Mind* are two examples of book covers that feature and focus on human hands. Sometimes hands can be a gesture of friendship or peace offering. They may also be symbolic in a romantic relationship. The *Twilight* cover represents a specific point in the text. The narrator, Bella, sits in the cafeteria with her dangerous new love interest, Edward, who happens to be a vampire. Edward acts cautiously and nervously around Bella because part of him thirsts for her blood. She knows this, yet cannot help but feel wildly attracted to Edward's alluring mystery. Edward, not nourished by dead bloodless food like pizza and apples, pushes his lunch tray towards Bella:

“Take whatever you want,” he said, pushing the tray toward me.  
“I’m curious,” I said as I picked up an apple, turning it around in my hands, “what would you do if someone dared you to eat food?”  
“You’re always curious.” He grimaced, shaking his head. He glared at me, holding my eyes as he lifted the slice of pizza off the tray, and deliberately bit off a mouthful, chewed quickly. (207)

The cover dramatizes the apple in the hand moment. A pair of ivory white feminine arms—presumably Bella's—stretch down the page and offer a bold and bright red apple in the hollow of its hands. The cupped hands and the apple make up the focal point of the image. The *Twilight*

*Series'* covers are good examples of the color combination called "Mysterious." The opalescent gray letters, deep red apple, hazy ivory arms, and pitch-black background work together to "symbolize the unknown, the intrigue that never fails to fascinate the human eye" (Eiseman 100).

The cover change for Nancy Garden's *Annie on my Mind* (1982) is an example of the switch from cartoon and straightforward images to photographic and fragmented images. *Annie in My Mind* is a realistic-fiction/ romance novel about two high-school aged women who fall in love during their senior year of high school. The original cover features a drawing of two young girls holding hands across a table. The illustration depicts a serious relationship between the two girls—their heads are bowed and eyes are closed. The 2007 edition of the book features a similar illustration in content, however very dissimilar in form. The new edition also features an image of two young women holding hands. However, the new cover is a photograph of two young women with their hands clasped loosely together. The girls on the second cover seem relaxed and casual as opposed to the first cover where the girls look serious and focused. The gazes and gestures of their body, such as the open laughing mouths invite the reader's desire for friendship, fun, and affinity. Unlike the 2007 edition of the *Forever...* cover, which features two pairs of legs tangled together and laying on a bed, the *Annie on My Mind* cover chooses to focus on a more neutral body part, which makes the relationship between the two women seem ambiguous. Moreover, the image act on the cover does not forwardly signal a lesbian relationship—the girls could be having a number of different relationships; and for instance, they could be siblings or friends. It is ambiguous that these two girls are in a lesbian relationship. It is possible that the publishers were afraid they would alienate potential readers if the cover overtly showed a lesbian relationship. Although the colors, models, and setting are very different on each cover, the image of the clasped hands remains a focal point in the picture.

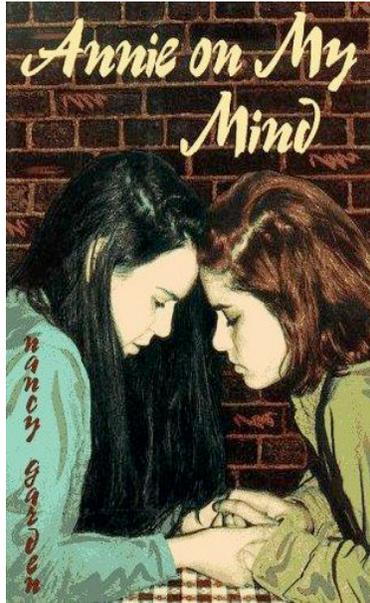


Figure 6. Cover art for 1982 paperback edition of Nancy Garden's *Annie on My Mind* by Nancy Garden. All images are used with expressed written permission of the books' respective publishers.

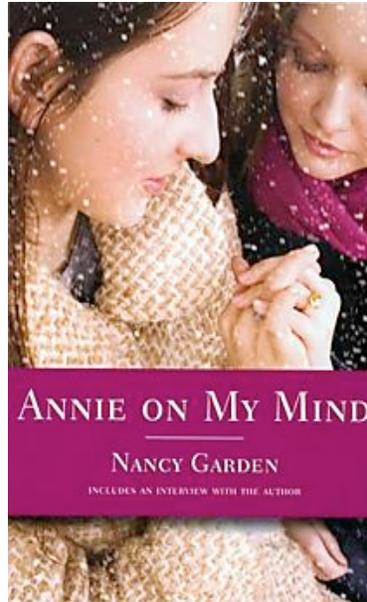


Figure 7. Cover art for paperback 2007 edition of Nancy Garden's *Annie on My Mind* by Ali Smith. All images are used with expressed written permission of the books' respective publishers.

Sometimes, the hands may be symbolic of energy and maybe even anger; for instance if they are clutching something and moving their fist in anger. The past covers of *The Chocolate War* reinforce the use a fragmented body and spatial positioning to illustrate social tension, toughness, and masculinity. In the novel, Jerry challenges the status quo at his school by refusing to partake in a chocolate bar fund-raising campaign, resulting in alienation, humiliation, and abuse from his classmates. However, the psychological warfare between Jerry and the Trinity School causes him much more harm than the physical punching scene in the book. The first several editions of *The Chocolate War* featured a painted illustration of a young male—the protagonist, Jerry Renault—in a button-up collared white shirt and cornflower blue tie holding a set of books to his chest. He stares at the viewer with a concerned, forlorn look, while at his side stands a dark shadow of a man twice his size with indistinguishable features. The image has shades of blue, black, brown, gray, and white. The lack of “primary, clean, and clear colors” denotes a “complexity that is meant to attract a more sophisticated eye” (Eiseman 102). Despite its “sophisticated” color palate, the childlike illustration and lack of bright colors alienates some readers. However, it does feature a splash a tiny red dots that look like splattered blood. The detailed blood patterns make sense because of the violent nature of the book.

The British version of *The Chocolate War* cover accentuates male phallic power by depicting a clenched fist aimed at the viewer and an angry furrowing brow of an otherwise blurry and indistinguishable male model. The new edition of *The Chocolate War* (released in 1990 by Random House) features a cover that seems inspired by other adult book covers and showcases a more confident yet undistinguishable version of Jerry Renault. For instance, the third edition features the blurred image of a bold orange and brown clenched fist aimed at the reader, similar to the cover of Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*. The fragmented depiction of a boy fighting or

throwing a punch appeals to the social and cultural value of masculinity, strength, and power (Kress and Leeuwen). The image depicts the boy in shades of vibrant lime green against an orangey tan backdrop, a color combination that suggests a “youthful, vivacious, top energy” mood (Eiseman 92). The image of an angry blurred boy is reminiscent of a sports ad or a fighter in comic strip. The blurred face censors the individuality of the boy and lends space for the reader/viewer to ascribe their idea of how protagonist Jerry Renault should look.

Besides the hands, the torso is often the most photographed and fragmented part of the human body on book covers. Cassandra Clare’s *The Mortal Instrument Series: City of Bones* (2008) and *City of Ashes* (2009), both fantasy/thriller books, use cover images that feature one of the gang members from the secretive vampire-slaying group called the Shadowhunters. The dominant colors on the cover are green, orange, and black that connote a “modern landscape” or “urban environment” (Eiseman 94). The images on the covers focus on the torsos of the two characters: Jace and Clary. Although their eyes are not showing, their posture and demeanor symbolize strength and energy. On the cover of *City of Bones*, one of the main protagonists, Jace, appears shirtless and his tattoos gleam with electric green. The tattoos that cover their body are their trademarks; they are representative of the wounds they receive in battle.

The focus on the torso may be effective in marketing because in some ways it is the least personal part of the human body. Many different people of various shapes, sizes, sexes, and races can identify with the image of the torso. For instance, *Staying Fat for Sarah Brynes* has two different covers, one cover features the blurred torso of a boy swimming—the narrator, Moby—and the other depicts a girl surrounded by flames who is supposed to be Sarah Brynes. Many cover artists such as Kidd create both a “male and female version” in order to not alienate potential readers (Vienne). The shadowy and/or blurry figures could be either male or female;

the ambiguity makes the cover accessible for both male and female readers. The new cover of *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* features the cropped image of a man's torso swimming in water. The body seems to be suspended in air, gently floating through the atmosphere. The image act strikes feelings of confusion and the unknown. Since the illustration depicts a watery scene, the body in the image is blurred.

It is interesting that young adult book covers often feature the torso as the focal part of the image since it is often the location of physical developmental changes for the adolescent body. For instance, most females begin to grow breasts and develop curves and most men become bigger and more muscular as they reach puberty. The focus on the torso also reflects the importance of body issues in adolescent culture. Most of the covers featured voluptuous or muscular torsos rather than weak or fat bodies. For instance, although *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* centers on a boy who struggles with some weight and body image issues in his past, the torso in the image itself is slender and toned.

## DISCUSSION

The popularity of bestselling books that feature photographs of fragmented body parts on their covers reflects a beauty ideal, cultural trends, and societal values. The covers reflect and reinforce teenage culture's growing visuality and tendency to fragment images and words. Although the fragmented body images on the covers of recent young adult literature may be optically pleasing form, the fact that we are visually objectifying the body troubles some critics. It is common trend amongst advertisers to use the fragmented human body to allure possible customers. In Anne Wysocki's "The Sticky Embrace of Beauty," Wysocki explains that while leafing through some advertisements in the *New Yorker* a photograph of a half naked, fragmented female body attracted her attention, but also angered her. The advertisement features a photograph of half-naked woman as the focal point. She reasons that she finds the image optically pleasing because it follows the design principles for visual arrangement. For instance, the photograph shows color contrasts, the body is in symmetrical alignment to the rest of the elements in the photograph, there is a consistent repetition of elements, and the proximity of the text and photograph are well placed. However, she was troubled by the reminder that everyday the media uses the image of the human body as a mere "tool" or "object" to market products. She argues that the post-modern cultural aesthetic that values artistic form over the content "emphasizes form in such a way that 'content' can be unremarkably disembodied—a very bad thing when the 'content' is a particular body" (149). Wysocki warns the artistic trend of using the human body as an advertising tool can potentially have a destructive influence on how young people view their bodies. Pushing the idea that the human body is an image to be manipulated and deconstructed in order to fit a culturally ideal form fosters a self-destructive tradition of treating human bodies as objects, not people.

## The Body on Young Adult Book Covers

The image of the human body is prevalent on many book covers in young adult literature. Out of the seventy top books in young adult literature, according to the Young Adult Library Services Association Top Ten list, forty-six of the covers feature the image of the human body. Out of the thirty classic book covers, twenty-six feature images of the human body. Many of the older, classic young adult novels, which have been repackaged in order to look more contemporary, now feature an image of the fragmented body. For instance, the first cover editions of *The Outsiders*, *The Chocolate War*, *Forever*, and *Weetzie Bat* featured illustrations that did not focus on the human body. However, new recent covers of these same books feature an image of the human body. For example, the first cover for *Forever...* featured an illustration on a girl's face on a locket. However, the new cover features an image of two teenagers' legs tangled together, lying on a bed.

As we can see in advertisements, films, media, and book covers, the rhetorical appeal to a reader's body is popular and effective at attracting viewers—even if it is only about part of a body. The fragmented body on book covers may be effective at conjuring up physical, cultural, and emotional associations. In *Appeals in Modern Rhetoric*, Jimmie Killingsworth argues that appeals to the readers' bodies work with other rhetoric appeals such as gender and race in order to form a complex rhetorical argument. Killingsworth argues that the body plays such an important role in our daily conversation that to leave it out “hinders effective communication” (69). Historically speaking, rhetoricians make appeals to the body because it signifies a valuable part of ourselves and because the common experiences associated with having a body unite us with people around us (70). For instance, we build our solidarity around the body and feel a kinship amongst each other when discussing the body since we all share a common sensitivity to

physical issues surrounding the sanctity of our bodies. We assign value judgments to our body and the bodies around us. Sometimes we are so entrenched with our “valuation of the body,” we do not notice how the rhetorical appeal of the body brings us together (Killingsworth 72).

However, some critics would argue that our body experiences are anything but common. The inequality among the valuation of bodies amongst different genders, ages, races, sizes and other physical traits truncate the discussion and create problems with the rhetorical appeal that was supposed to bring us together. For instance, Luce Irigaray argues in the phallic and patriarchal way we look at the female body generates the sexual indifferences that tear us apart. Irigaray explains that a lot of our literature, for instance the creation story from the bible, the female body is not a complete sex—it is a fragment of the male’s body. The idea that a woman is a fragment of her male counterpart generates a feeling of lack. Therefore, according to Irigaray, the feeling of lack continues to effect women’s feelings of power when associated with the body. However, men are not immune to cultural negative appeals to the body either. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud discusses how some people’s worries and fears are directly linked to “the inadequacies of their human body” (44). Freud argues that a person’s feelings of power are linked to the haunting suspicion that things are not what they seem to be; in other words people are aware of their mortality and know their bodies will not last (44-45).

Whether rhetorical appeals to the body tear us apart or bring us together, the visual image of a body intensifies this rhetorical appeal and makes it more memorable and influential (Grabe and Bucy 12). Body issues are often the theme or at least subtheme in young adult literature, usually related to body image, puberty, gender and sexual identity. As a young reader develops into an adolescent, he or she begins to search for “representation of experience or of a world we might wish to inhabit” (Appleyard 147). Adolescence marks a critical time in identity formation

for both males and females (Erikson). It is a period of “searching and introspection in which the individual constantly faces the perplexing question ‘Who am I?’” (Avery 53). An outlet for self-expression supports adolescent’s identity construction and development (Mazzarella 5).

#### The Fragmented Body on Young Adult Book Covers

Today’s young adults grow up in a fragmented, ever-changing culture, filled with endless media choices (Selfe 55). Modes of representation change due to media and Internet texts (Selfe 55). The fragmentation of the body on young adult book covers reflects our culture’s tendency to look at things as “marketable chunks” instead of a “coherent whole;” our culture becomes more and more fragmented due to intellectual property laws, media, Internet, television, and the general fast-paced society. In a culture where textual originality and authorship often face challenges resulting from intellectual property laws, people tend to shift between thinking of a text as a “coherent whole” and thinking of it as a set of “marketable chunks” (Selfe 207). Young adults are growing in a fast-paced and evolving society in which the modes of representation are much broader than language alone (Selfe 55). We can see visual evidence of our fragmented culture through the images in advertisements, Internet sites, communication, and written text.

Sometimes the obscurity and anonymity of the body on book covers allows imaginations to run wild. They offer a variety of possible interpretations a viewer and reader can develop themselves while reading the written text. The fragmented images of bodies facilitate the personal connection a viewer may create with characters in the text. By obscuring the model’s wholeness, a reader can interpret the image and infuse their own memories and expressions and “bring the symbolic sign to life” (Hope 16). Partial images of models serve to physically represent the protagonist in the book, while still leaving room for the reader to imagine the characters in her own likeness and ideal. Removing a significant physical feature such as the

eyes permits the reader the freedom to ascribe her preference of physical attributes to the characters.

John Berger explains in his book *Ways of Seeing*, we, as viewers, are often searching for the connection between ourselves and other images; “we never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves” (Berger 9). The ambiguous nature of the photographed model template invites the reader to ascribe personal characterizations to the protagonist. Images of real people on covers can potentially elicit a more personal response from a reader. Sometimes when a viewer sees an image of a person, she looks more closely to see what type of connection she may have with the person as opposed to a picture of an animal or inanimate object (Berger 12).

Moreover, fragmenting the human body is a method to appeal to a broad spectrum of readers is to create two cover versions for the book. Many covers obscure the individuality of the person by blurring their face or body; this way the model on the cover is not directly linked to just one gender or a certain time period. *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Outsiders*, and *The Chocolate War* repackaged their masculine covers for a more gender-neutral cover image. In addition to appearing gender neutral, the fragmenting and blurring of the body helps the cover stay current. For instance, the new edition of *Catcher in the Rye* opted to leave out a physical representation of the protagonist Holden Caulfield. One of the covers for *The Outsiders*, which is a novel about a group of boys, features a blurry image of a person at railroad station.

The fragmented body allows one specific physical feature to stand out on the cover, such as eyes, hands, hair, or part of the lower body such as legs, stomach, or chest. The symbolic messages that North American culture usually attaches to these body parts influences how the message of the book is perceived. Some cover artists, like Kidd admit to strategically covering

parts of the body to set a more “wholesome” tone and eliminate the “possibility of embarrassment for potential book browsers” (Vienne 40). However, sometimes covers promote feeling of provocateur and sensuality by using certain colors or body parts or settings. For instance, one way an image act can promote a feeling of sensuality is by making the focal point of the illustration bare necks, arms, and/or legs. For instance, the dominant body parts that stand out on *The Truth about Forever* cover are the models’ mouths, arms, and legs, which represent the ideal for feminine sexuality.

In American culture, it is common to focus on visual of the human body. In her article, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey draws similarities between the voyeuristic qualities of film narratives and the psychological condition of scopophilia, in the Freudian sense of the term (835). In his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud associates the psychological condition of scopophilia with the desire for a person to subject people as objects and place them under a controlling and curious gaze. The condition of scopophilia can be observed in more than just North America’s film history. For several years advertisements and other media sources have used parts of the fragmented body and elevated them into a status of fetish. The intense allure of the photographic and fragmented human body images indicate that the unconscious of our society sexualizes novels to make them interesting to young adults. Moreover, the fragmented images serve to represent how society subjects the body. Similar to advertisements and film, book covers have followed in suite with the design placement and layout of fragmented parts of the body on book covers.

In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf warns the dangerous effect of reducing the human body into fragmented, faceless images: “Today’s children and young men and women have sexual identities that spiral around paper and celluloid phantoms: the blank torsos in women’s

magazines, features obscured and eyes extinguished, they are being imprinted with a sexuality that is mass produced, deliberately dehumanizing and inhuman” (Wolf). In *The Lolita Effect*, M. Gigi Durham calls attention to the “distorted and exploitive ways in which [the body] is represented and manipulated by the commercial media” as seen in fragmented images of the body in visual text (2). Durham believes that the media has a way of “oversimplifying” definitions of teenage sexuality when they fragment the body and only present “marketable chunks” to the viewer: “we revel in a media environment that capitalizes on narrow, restrictive, regressive and often harmful definitions of sex, and any critique of them is dismissed as prudishness or censorship” (3). As Durham explains, the fragmentation of the human body “oversimplifies” the message of sexuality in teens. Wysocki also argues that the tendency for fragmenting the body is culturally created: “form comes from one’s egocentric experiences and one takes pleasure in seeing those experiences comfortably inscribed in other objects” (156).

Although the fragmented body on book covers allows for universality and character identification, the same obscurity and anonymity is oversimplifying the idea of sexuality and individuality. Anne Frances Wysocki argues in “The Sticky Embrace of Beauty” that when teaching visual rhetoric to students, teachers should evoke the question “why” do we find this image beautiful or appealing in the discussion (149). Wysocki notes that advertisers and graphic designers tend to let the “form” of the design override the “content,” which in the case of this analysis, the content is the human body: “these approaches assume a separation of form from content, but they emphasize form in such a way that ‘content’ can be unremarkably disembodied—a very bad thing when the ‘content’ is a particular body” (149). Wysocki argues that as viewers we need to be aware of the design choices artists chose and realize they have certain “consequences and effects” on teen culture (173). She argues that the objectification of

the body promotes violence against the body—if you can objectify it, you can also destroy it  
(168).

## CONCLUSION

The study of visual rhetoric teaches us that we cannot cast off the illustrations on the book covers as trivial or harmless; an image on a cover is “never just a picture”; they often reflect embedded cultural conventions and ideas of what the artist or photographer believes life should be like (Bordo 455). The objectification and fragmentation of the human body on book covers may be an effective marketing strategy, however, the objectification and manipulation of the body form on young adult book covers promotes violence against the human body.

According to Wysocki, if you can treat the image of the human body as an “object” in art that can be manipulated and cut apart, then you also condone the behavior with real people as well.

However, a complete overhaul in book cover design may risk publishers their most essential body—the reader. It is not a question of right or wrong, nor is it an admonishment to corporate marketing or cultural values. It reflects visual conventions and body representation in our culture. The point is not to judge the value of design choices, but to stay aware of our values and ideals, and try to understand why we value them. In the midst of all this fragmented debates on the objectification of the human body, the problem may very well fix itself. The evolution of aesthetic tastes and marketing trends seem to change at the click of our mouse button and may move on to objectifying and fragmenting something other than the body.

The value of fragmented bodies on book covers reflects how we view the body as an object. For instance, all the elements of a book, including inside text, outside text, visuals, and binding, invite study as elements that help explain the literary and cultural function of a text. Like a book, the different aspects of the human body can also invite study of elements that create a whole. However, in popular visual texts we often only see the body showcased in parts. Similar to how people often judge a book by its cover, a fragment of its essence, the human body

is often broken apart; lending its value to one singular fragment like a leg or an arm. The fragmented body has become a representative of the text on the covers of young adult books. Further analysis of book covers can help articulate how popular visual texts reinforce and reflect cultural values of individuality and sexuality through the objectification of the body. It is important to be aware of how the adolescent body is represented to young adults. Moreover, the images of the human body typically promote the culturally constructed idea that ideal and universal male and female bodies should be slender and toned, when that is not the case. Reinforcing this culturally constructed aesthetic ideal can be particularly harmful to emotional development of young adults. Adolescence is a crucial time for growth and development both mentally and physically without the additional stress of conforming to a body ideal. Teenagers are already constantly bombarded with images from the media, now they have to deal with the cultural body demands of book covers, too.

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