

# Performative Youth: The Literacy Possibilities of De-essentializing Adolescence

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What might happen if teachers instruct youth directly about historically situated views of adolescence? This 10-week qualitative study examines what happened when a Black Jamaican English teacher instructed Black and Latino seniors in AP English about adolescence as a construct and guided them to apply this sociocultural lens of youth to texts in English class and to their lives. Using scholarship based in critical youth studies and Butler’s theory of performativity, this study shows the effects of giving students access to alternative discourses about adolescence. This study contributes to scholarship focused on centralizing youths’ interests in literature curriculum, for the purposes of increased literacy engagement.

**S**cholars who hold to sociocultural views of literacy—and youth—provide much-needed research to counter deficit views of young people and their competencies within and outside of school literacy contexts. Sociocultural or constructionist views of young people identify “certain historical, societal, economic, and political conditions that seek to normalize and regulate youth” (Alvermann, 2010, p. 18). Such theoretical understandings of youth can also help researchers expose assumptions in policies and teaching practices that take problematic views of youth for granted. For example, by foregrounding the sociocultural factors structuring our education system, Vasudevan and Campano (2009) address how the “at risk” label gets readily mapped onto raced and classed youth. They highlight studies that showcase young people—especially youth of color or other disenfranchised youth—as capable, knowledgeable literacy activists, critics, and textual producers (e.g., Kinloch, 2007; Morrell, 2005; Staples, 2008; Vasudevan, 2006). Similarly, Alvermann (2010) explicitly takes up critical youth studies research that foregrounds adolescence as a construct in the interest of using it together with sociocultural views of literacy to shift perspectives of adolescence and adolescent

literacy. Another study intent on demonstrating youths' lived and embodied understandings and performances of gender and sexuality within a literacy classroom cites research endorsing views of adolescence as historically situated as part of the researchers' theoretical framework (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012). In other words, critical literacy scholarship writ large begins with premises of youths' assets, often grounding these premises on critical youth studies scholarship (e.g., Lesko, 2012; Vadeboncoeur & Stevens, 2005) in the interest of better ensuring increased literacy achievement for young people.

While this body of astute scholarship demonstrates evidence of youths' literacy achievements through portraits that refrain from deficit views, and expands teachers' and researchers' abilities to see and understand broader versions of literacy achievement in youth, little scholarship has focused on what happens when educators present young people directly with critical youth studies scholarship. Might doing so offer teachers additional ways to engage and compel youth through a literature curriculum if it were organized around critical conceptions of adolescence? This 10-week qualitative case study examines the effects of teaching youth of color about adolescence from a constructionist perspective in an AP English 12 classroom through the research question, *What happens when youth learn about adolescence as a construct?* This study shows that youth demonstrate understanding of the social category as historically situated; of how dominant discourses of adolescence function to constrain young people; and of possibilities for taking up agentic positions in relation to discourses of adolescence. These findings suggest that a curriculum foregrounding the ways that youth have been positioned socioculturally may offer specific affordances for engaging literacy achievement with young people—especially students of color—via classroom literary study. Throughout the article, I use the term *adolescence* or *adolescents* when referencing dominant, essentialist views of young people roughly between the ages of 12 and 19. I use the terms *youth*, *young people*, or *students* when speaking of the youth themselves.

## Theoretical Framework

I understand adolescence to be historically situated and traceable rather than a biologically based social category. Additionally, I recognize that adolescence, like other social categories, is produced through performance. Next I elaborate on these two theoretical pillars that inform this study.

### Historically Situated Adolescence

Adolescence has become a suspect social category. Scholars in a broad range

of fields have taken up constructionist views of adolescence to identify seemingly “natural” or essentialized views of youth made popular and dominant in the West through discourses identified especially by turn-of-the-century psychologist G. Stanley Hall (1904). Specifically, scholars in critical youth studies (Lesko & Talburt, 2012), curriculum studies (Baker, 1998; Gilbert, 2014; Lesko, 2012), psychology (Walkerdine, 1993), literary study (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004; Kokkola, 2013; Nikolajeva, 2010; Trites, 2000, 2007; Waller, 2010), and literacy education (Cormack, 2007; Lewis & Finders, 2002; Petrone, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2014; Vadeboncoeur & Stevens, 2005) counter dominant, reductive psychological and biological views of youth. They do so with a specific history of adolescence, exposing it as more of a cultural construct than one based on an “essence” of natural, predictable behaviors.

Employing a Foucauldian lens, Lesko (2012) traces a genealogy of adolescence to a time—the 1890s to 1920s—when leaders in multiple disciplines and institutions began to change the ways they thought about youth. At a time of tremendous anxiety about an unpredictable future of new inventions and challenges to nationhood and the dominant White, patriarchal status quo, ideas about youth changed as well. Lesko explains how authority figures on youth shifted from clergy to doctors and scientists who drew upon racist, sexist, and class-based discourses like The Great Chain of Being and Recapitulation Theory to define a developmentally bound, stage-based view of adolescence. In short, what many Westerners have grown to expect as natural behaviors focused on having leisure time, a lack of responsibility, and reactions to body-governing hormones that come from “within” at a particular stage of development, Lesko and others expose as constructed. That is, they explain these seemingly natural effects in youth as ones shaped by cultural forces, exposing that youth were not always thought about in homogeneous, body-determined ways.

These historical forces gave shape to an adolescence conceptualized as middle class and raced White with a range of material implications, with the most dire affecting minoritized youth. Lesko (2012) supports the claim that adolescence is a raced category through two key beliefs of the time: The Great Chain of Being, a racist, tiered hierarchy of animals and humans; and the rigid, developmental assumptions of Recapitulation Theory that held that “each individual child reenacts the evolutionary climb from primitive to savage group, and finally to civilized society” (p. 27), allowing experts an easy way to rank all people. The implications for understanding adolescence as a raced and classed social category mean that, though being designated “an adolescent” often demeans youth, the category still remains a privileged one for some young people who are shut out of its borders. To that effect,

literacy education scholars postulate that “youth of color don’t get to be adolescents” (Groenke et al., 2015, p. 56). In fact, dominant expectations of a White, middle-class adolescence justify how some teachers “thrust some youth outside of our concern as abject” (Sarigianides, 2016). Such a constructionist view of adolescence—as raced, classed, and shaped within specific sociocultural forces—contrasts with an essentialist view of it as a natural life stage with predictable behaviors stemming from bodily changes. To note, both essentialist and constructionist views of youth rely on an essentialism around an age-based category to some extent. Fuss (1989) explains the difference between these discourses: “What is at stake for a constructionist are systems of representations, social and material practices, laws of discourse, and ideological effects” (p. 2). I take up such concerns directly in this study.<sup>1</sup>

Extant research has explored how ideas tied to adolescence generate implications for youth, teachers, and curriculum. For example, if teachers believe that “raging hormones” govern adolescents’ behavior, they seek strategies for controlling youth in their teacher preparation programs rather than appreciate a focus on theory or other content (Finders, 1999). Additionally, teachers maintain a distance between themselves and students whom they see as “other” to them (Petroni & Lewis, 2012). Further, stock views of adolescence inspire new teachers to select young adult literature (YAL) with protagonists, plots, and themes that match youths’ troubled “reality” (Lewis & Petroni, 2010). When new teachers are offered suggestions through preservice coursework to vary representations of adolescence—perhaps with YAL portrayals of youth as sexual—these suggestions are seen as too risky (Sarigianides, 2012). When experienced teachers have been given the same suggestions to use YAL that includes sexual youth, teachers worried that the texts would work as impediments to youths’ future happiness (Sarigianides, 2014). As one response to these problematic views of youth, some scholars, including myself, advocate for a re-imagining of adolescence in English teaching (Sarigianides, Lewis, & Petroni, 2015; Sarigianides, Petroni, & Lewis, 2017). Such scholarship begins to show teachers ways that revised perspectives on adolescence might affect students, though still mostly through changing teachers’ views of youth.

Some literacy studies begin to draw upon understandings from critical youth studies to teach youth directly. In “‘Gotta Be Worse’: Literacy, Schooling and Adolescent Youth Offenders,” Finders (2005) focuses on an alternative-to-incarceration program for middle school students. These young people understood that their criminal records—and, for some, parenting status—thrust them out of the category of a legitimate adolescent who follows a “proper” trajectory to adulthood. For these students, achievement came

from the recognition of peers who acknowledge them as having “worse” status than what society is convinced these youth already are. “Positioned as competent members of a community of youthful offenders on the one hand, but deemed failures in their schooling on the other, the performative choice was clear: their identity as resistant students had to be preserved” (pp. 112–115). Once students learned alternate discourses about their own social positioning and through which to achieve literacy competence, some employed this understanding to write an opinion article for the city paper talking back to normative discourses of adolescence. In this study, Finders pulled from her own understandings of constructs of adolescence to guide students to see how they are socially positioned as failures within this social category. Many of her students responded forcefully to this literacy curriculum, showing how knowledge around constructed views of adolescence compelled some youth in the group to engage with academic literacy.

But what would happen if teachers more systematically shared the history of the concept of adolescence directly with students? How might that understanding affect students’ literacy studies and conceptions of themselves and the world? Additional research remains to be done to show the effects of sharing knowledge of adolescence as a construct directly with youth in literacy contexts, especially with minoritized youth conceptually left out of this social category and, often, literacy achievement. This study addresses this gap by showing how one English teacher’s curriculum centralized the history of adolescence to engage students in rigorous literary analysis, writing, public speaking, and applications of these ideas to their lives.

## Performativity

This study is also informed by Butler’s (1990/1999) theory of performativity. Though conceived as a way to understand gender and sexuality as socially constructed and to critique essentialist views of femininity and heteronormativity, Butler’s feminist poststructuralist analysis of subjectivity also applies to other social categories such as adolescence. Through this perspective, subjects do not *ex*-press themselves when they speak, though this is likely the way they may experience what they say. Instead, they performatively constitute themselves as subjects through their speech and writing, drawing from available discourses to produce themselves as particular kinds of youth. “[W]hen one speaks, one speaks a language that is already speaking, even if one speaks it in a way that is not precisely how it has been spoken before” (Butler, 2004, p. 69). In her discussion of how repetitions of subjectivity could effect social change, Butler (1990/1999) says, “The productions could swerve

from their original purposes and inadvertently mobilize possibilities of ‘subjects’ that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible” (p. 39). Through performative understandings of adolescence, youth—and their teachers—could circulate repetitions of this social category with shifts that mobilize new possibilities for young people.

Arguing for the underused aspects of Butler’s theory of performativity in education, Ruitenber (2007) emphasizes the need for teachers and students to understand this “inherited nature of subjectivity”: “Educators must conceive of students, and *students of themselves*, not as autonomous agents, nor as passive recipients of tradition, but rather as subjects whose actions and identities both depend on, and can make changes to, discourses that precede and exceed them” (pp. 265–266, emphasis added). According to Ruitenber, for subjects to understand the socially constructed and discursively inherited category of adolescence sufficiently enough to take up possibilities for agency through subversive repetition, subjects need to understand both the provenance and the functioning of these discourses, and how this understanding may lead to agentic possibilities through discourse.

Understanding the genealogy of adolescence involves recognizing a traceable history to this social category, that society did not always think about adolescence the way most Westerners think of it today. Understanding the functioning of dominant discourses of adolescence includes noticing the varied effects of conventional views of adolescence for youth themselves and for their relationships with others. An example might include noticing positive or problematic values tied to being an adolescent in a range of contexts. Finally, if youth identify or take up possibilities for agency, this process might involve acting or speaking about adolescence in ways that differ from stereotyped views of youth. Additional examples and explanations for these discursive moves are offered below and in Table 1.

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## Methodology

### Research Site, Curriculum, and Participants

A grade 6–12 charter school in the northeastern United States, Youth Activism School’s (YAS) mission statement focuses on preparing its students for community action and leadership. (Pseudonyms are used throughout the

**Table 1.** Table of Analytic Codes and Explanations

<i>Performative Codes</i>	<i>Explanations and Examples</i>
Genealogy	Understanding that there is a traceable history to the concept of adolescence (e.g., historical facts about adolescents as apprentices and teachers before 1890s and shifts in thinking).
Functioning	Understanding how dominant discourses of adolescence work and with what effects (e.g., what it sounds like in people's conversation or in films; how it feels to be seen as an adolescent).
Agency	Understanding the possibilities of agency within existing discourses, especially through subversive repetition (e.g., see options as to how to respond to circumstances; identify as experts on the topic of adolescence in relation to other adults) or repetitions that reserve essentialist assumptions (e.g., designate self as exception to "rule" of adolescence while keeping others within it).

article, with all proper names for participants selected by the students and the classroom teacher.) Situated in a city predominantly populated by Black and Latino residents, student demographics mirror the community's socio-economic status and racial makeup: 72 percent qualify for federally subsidized school lunches, 46 percent identify as African American, 43 percent as Latino, and 8 percent as White. Students in the study consistently talked about the school's lack of resources. For example, they pointed out that track athletes had to practice in the hallways in the winter because they didn't have a gym. For research focused on the role of conceptions of adolescence in students' learning with an emphasis on how this knowledge might affect minoritized youth who may be more affected by raced and classed views of adolescence, this school proved ideal.

Rachel, a Black Jamaican teacher who immigrated to the United States as a high school student, embraced the school's activist mission. One of YAS's few teachers of color, and an instructor at the school for six years, Rachel discussed using literacy education to position students to understand the workings of power in their lives. She wanted them to learn to push back on injustices through the gains of what I recognize as a "critical English education" (Morrell, 2005) or even a "Critical Race English Education" (Johnson, 2018). Discussing her motivation for shaping this unit, Rachel explained: "I felt it was a personal responsibility to not only expose my students to these negative stereotypes [about adolescence], but to show them the far reaching and damaging effects that such discourses can have, to examine ways in which they show up in literature and life, and to empower them to speak back to these discourses" (individual interview).

A former graduate student in my course on YAL where I used critical youth studies to examine representations of adolescence in texts, Rachel felt

implicated by research about teacher views of adolescents. Though she said she was comfortable advocating for students on the basis of race when she felt they were being provoked by White colleagues, she still believed that

kids needed to be shielded and protected because they lived on the edge of the adolescent cliff, and so they needed restraints from themselves because they were continually “at risk.” I didn’t believe they were horrible human beings, but I believed that they would become that if I didn’t stop, protect and control them. (Rachel’s comments on drafts of this article)

In other words, though Rachel trusted and supported students and enjoyed them as youth, before our work together, she still relied upon stereotyped views of the students as adolescents who needed surveillance to avoid “risky” trajectories. When she revised her curriculum after our course, she saw it as an opportunity to teach them to speak back to the ways society sees them as adolescents, especially as minoritized youth. As a research participant, Rachel’s understanding of adolescence as a construct, her successful experience teaching literature, and her social justice aims for youth of color made her a strong candidate for this study.

Rachel designed her AP English curriculum on her own while also drawing from my YAL course. As we did in our graduate course, Rachel captured students’ initial views of adolescence by asking them to draw a body biography (Underwood, 1987) of a typical adolescent.<sup>2</sup> She relied on Lesko’s (2012) genealogy of adolescence to illuminate a traceable history for this social category. And she asked students to read the key literary text twice, first on their own and then through a Youth Lens (Petroni, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2014). The Youth Lens offers an approach to literary analysis that focuses on the question, *How do texts represent adolescence/ts?* A Youth Lens assumes adolescence as a construct and connects to an understanding of adolescence as performative by seeing it as a set of repeated performances of a discourse—“adolescence”—that already circulates, rather than a set of biologically based behaviors. All other curricular text choices and assessment designs were Rachel’s. She selected a former AP exam question about adolescence (see Table 2) for students’ culminating essay. She complemented this assessment with a required presentation to an audience of preservice teachers at my university where her students shared their learning about adolescence. Wanting to focus on adolescence but concerned about relying on YAL in her first-ever AP course (see Miller, 2013, 2014), Rachel selected a canonic high school text, Salinger’s (1951/1991) *The Catcher in the Rye*, for analyzing adolescence, together with the YA novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 1999), a text that references Salinger’s and complicates it



regarding class, especially. To inflect the course’s readings with race, Rachel used the film *Tough Guise* (Jhally et al., 1999), circulating questions about dominant constructs of masculinity, especially for men of color, in relation to the White masculinity presented in *Catcher*.<sup>5</sup> Students also read literary criticism on *Catcher* and research on adolescence.

**Table 2.** Overview of Rachel’s Curriculum

Texts	Assessments
<p><b>Literature</b>                      Chbosky’s (1999) <i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i>                      Kincaid’s (1978) “Girl”                      Salinger’s (1951/1991) <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i></p>	<p><b>Formative</b>                      Body Biography (Underwood, 1987) of a typical teen (groups)                      Literary Response Journals (individual)                      Identify key quotations in the reading and discuss their significance.                      Characterization Analysis Charts (groups)                      For one central topic in the novel (sex, school/ teachers, parents, other teens, society in general, himself) respond to five key questions to examine Salinger’s characterization of Holden in relation to adolescent norms.</p>
<p><b>Film</b>                      Jhally et al.’s (1999) <i>Tough Guise</i></p>	<p><b>Culminating</b>                      Practice Essay for AP Exam                      Prompt: “In some works of literature, childhood and adolescence are portrayed as times graced by innocence and a sense of wonder; in other works, they are depicted as times of tribulation and terror. Focusing on a single novel or play, explain how its representation of childhood or adolescence shapes the meaning of the work as a whole” (The College Board, 2008).</p>
<p><b>Literary Criticism</b>                      Aubry’s (n.d.) “<i>The Catcher in the Rye: The Role of Alienation</i>”</p>	<p>Presentation to university audience of preservice teachers                      Discuss what you learned about adolescence in your AP English unit focused on <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>.</p>
<p><b>Nonfiction on Adolescence</b>                      Arnett’s (2007) “Suffering, Selfish, Slackers? Myths and Reality about Emerging Adults”                      Dobb’s (2011) “Beautiful Brains”                      Finders’s (1999) “Raging Hormones”</p>	

The entire class of nine student participants identified a range of intended majors for college including history, creative writing, business, computer science, psychology (two students), biology, biomedical engineering, and nursing. Students also shared a range of hobbies including listening to music (screamo, post-hardcore, heavy metal, folk), playing heavy metal guitar, swimming, volunteering at a local hospital, Bible study, “unconventional martial arts that avoid the cash-grab belt system,” ice skating, writing “teen” short stories, competing in track and field (with state-level achievements),

dancing in church group, reading manga, and engaging in role-playing video games. The study included four males and five females. Two of the young men identified as Latino and the rest of the group, including all the girls, identified as Black, with four identifying as West Indian. All students qualified for federally subsidized school lunch. Several students described their parents as strict, indicated by surveillance of their screen time, early curfews, and lots of expected family time. All seniors recommended for AP English by their junior year English teacher, the nine participants were described by Rachel as intelligent and hard-working, especially in relation to other students at YAS, but not adequately prepared for AP-level reading, analysis, or writing.

In short, though the students voluntarily enrolled in the AP course, they were still vulnerable to losing interest in or stamina for its rigors. In fact, two students (not included in the study) dropped the class two weeks into the term, complaining about the difficult workload. Given the susceptibility of this group to disengage from the challenges of the AP course, studying the effects of this adolescence-focused curriculum with them would offer key data about its possible effects with other youth in schools, including non-AP students. Note that though I do not individualize the portraits of all nine student participants here because of space constraints, I purposefully set up their interests as varied and complex; I also add more detail to each student's portrait in the Findings as I share their comments in their own words about the unit.

As the White, middle-class, female researcher of this study, I also held to stereotyped views of adolescence when I taught middle school and high school English. Reading Lesko's (2012) Foucauldian analysis of adolescence in graduate school implicated me as a teacher, and so I began to integrate revised views of adolescence into my English teacher preparation curriculum. But I did not have firsthand experience using such curriculum with youth directly. For this reason, when I taught my YAL course, I informed teacher candidates that I was interested in studying units they might design around ideas learned in our class. Rachel responded to this invitation the semester after our course ended. I visited the school to describe the study to her students, to determine whether they wished to participate, and to give them a chance to ask me questions about its aims for educating future and current teachers. All students joined the study.

It is likely that Rachel's introduction of me as her professor and someone who wanted to study their class helped me gain access and trust as a White researcher entering their school space since students respected Rachel greatly as their teacher, especially on matters tied to racial injustice in the

school. As Rachel's former YAL professor, I was aware that Rachel likely felt added pressure in her teaching when I observed her to effect a curriculum that matched what she thought I would have wanted to see. However, she also affirmed feeling validated in her pedagogy knowing that I had been seeking a classroom to study that taught youth this content, and that she was largely responsible for the curriculum.

## Data Collection

Data for this study included all work produced by the students and curriculum produced by the teacher for a 10-week unit focused on adolescence in an AP English 12 class. Student work included formative materials responding to readings and media as well as literary interpretations applying a Youth Lens to Salinger's (1951/1991) *The Catcher in the Rye*. Teacher work included lesson plans with daily reflections as well as a graduate paper written for another professor analyzing her curriculum and pedagogy for this unit. Data also included observation notes from a visit to my university where students presented their initial and culminating views of adolescence to an audience of mostly White, preservice English teachers.

I also visited the school on seven occasions. Two site meetings included a mid-semester check-in with Rachel on the unit and another just with students, asking them about their emerging responses to the curriculum and responding to their evolving questions. I also observed three lessons in Rachel's classroom to see how she implemented key ideas of adolescence; how students discussed these ideas; and how they applied them to literature and other texts. After the unit ended, I conducted a two-hour semistructured focus group interview and 30-minute individual interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006) with all nine students and with Rachel, and I held two informal meetings with Rachel to discuss my views of findings and to ask questions about lessons that I did not have the chance to observe. I audiotaped and took notes of visits and interviews, which I later transcribed. Rachel commented on drafts of this article across multiple member checks (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). I have embedded some of her reflections directly into this article. Though I would have liked to conduct member checks with students as well, their departures to college and out of the area precluded that option.

## Data Analysis

I analyzed data through the main research question, *What happens when youth learn about adolescence as a construct?* Rachel captured students' initial views of adolescence in the opening assignment of the unit. Students shared

their first impressions of Salinger's Holden as well as their first impressions of a "typical" adolescent, and students described their peers—and sometimes themselves—via stereotyped views of youth as hormonal, reckless, and focused on peers' impressions. They also characterized Holden as a whiny adolescent who complained and cried too much. They did not like him as a character.

Once Rachel launched the explicit focus of adolescence as a cultural construct, I reviewed the data to see to what extent, if at all, students understood, agreed with, and possibly applied new ideas of adolescence to their literacy work in school and beyond. In other words, when students responded to questions about adolescence with descriptions of it as a constructed category with implications for young people, I tracked their responses as applying fresh perspectives about youth stemming from Rachel's curriculum.

More specifically, I reviewed the data through the lens of Butler's (1990/1999) theory of performativity. To what extent did students show evidence of understanding adolescence as performative, like gender, rather than in essentialist or biologically determined terms? Additionally, since this study centers on learning goals in school, I used Ruitenberg's (2007) recommendations for the features of Butler's theory that are most suited for schools, facets that capitalize on subjects' agentic possibilities for social change through "subversive repetition." I utilized Ruitenberg's emphasis of key facets of Butler's theory of performativity in three ways. To what extent could students in Rachel's class (1) understand adolescence as having *a specific genealogy*; (2) identify the *function of dominant discourses* of adolescence; and (3) see or enact *possibilities for agency* within the discourse's constraints (see Table 1). For example, when students shared the ways that they were surprised to learn that youth were not always thought about the way we think of them today, I tracked these responses as demonstrating an awareness that this social category has a specific genealogy. Additionally, when students identified the ways that youth were talked about and regarded by adults, or represented in media, and when they discussed the overarching ways such representations depicted young people, I tracked such responses as students' growing awareness of how discourses of adolescence function. Third, if students talked about—or enacted—an adolescence that strayed from the dominant discourse's stereotyped views of youth as hormonal, peer-oriented, involved in a slow coming of age, or as largely decipherable by age alone (Lesko, 2012), I tracked such responses as evidence of students' increased awareness that they are not "passive recipients of tradition, but rather subjects whose actions and identities . . . can make changes to discourses that precede and exceed them" (Ruitenberg, 2007, pp. 265–266). In short, my analysis tracked the extent to which students in the course

shifted their views from an essentialist to a constructionist view of the social category of adolescence and with what effects in their literacy work in and outside of school.

I also looked for data that maintained the dominant discourse of adolescence, understanding that discourse does not easily shift. Especially since my studies of preservice English teachers (Sarigianides, 2012) and inservice teachers of English and history (Sarigianides, 2014) documented teacher resistance to ideas of a constructed adolescence, I examined to what extent students would challenge this curriculum. Whenever students raised questions about the credibility of ideas of adolescence as a construct, I coded these as examples of essentializing discourse and paid attention to how students explained their ideas, seeking to identify any possible repetitions of the discourse that may not function subversively (see also Blackburn, 2005).

In the findings that follow, I share the results of tracking the three general responses to constructionist views of adolescence taught in the unit. For each of the three possible responses, I indicate whether all or just some of the students exhibited this perspective in captured data, something that was especially easy to track in the focus group interview where students added to and supported each other's responses to my questions or voiced opposition to what someone asserted. I also checked these views against comments shared by students in individual interviews for consistency. I share excerpts from as many students in the study as possible to capture their voices, and to illuminate their reactions to revising views of adolescence.

## **Findings**

Students' class work and interview comments showed the extent of their understanding of the genealogy of adolescence as a concept; how the ideas of adolescence function within and outside of literary representations; and possibilities for agency within discourses of adolescence. Findings also point to some students' partial reliance on essentialized views of adolescence in specific contexts. I discuss data tied to each of these findings below.

### **Understanding the Genealogy of Adolescence**

At study's end, I asked students, "What surprised you most in this unit?" The most repeated response, by all students, was the idea that adolescence was not always thought about the way we think of it today. Ann, who wants to study biology in college, commented, "That adolescence didn't always exist; that it's something that was created. Even the evolution of adolescence: what it is now, is not what it began as. Very surprising" (individual interview).

Julio, an aspiring historian, had always wondered about the history of this category, so Rachel's curriculum reinforced ideas he had learned from his reading. "Even before this class, I had that idea that it [beliefs about adolescence] was because of the history. It hasn't always existed, adolescence. If you read about the Great Depression, there were kids working ages 12–15; then child labor laws came in" (individual interview). Able to link new ideas about adolescence as a construct to facts around the Great Depression that break with contemporary stereotypes of youth, understanding the genealogy of adolescence bolstered Julio's suspicions about it.

Atticus, a self-described science nerd and aspiring psychologist, showed how learning alternate views of adolescence inspired more questions about the category's provenance.

The way it [adolescence] is usually described as a *life* period, everyone knows life is a cycle, so I thought it was a part of the cycle that's already been there. If this life cycle was created, why is it such a truth? What was it before? (individual interview)

For Atticus, learning that thinkers reshaped their ideas of adolescence at a specific time unsettled the idea of adolescence as a stable life stage, as an inevitable "truth." With this new information, Atticus had more questions: What were young people like or how were they thought about before all these changes to the concept? Tracing the social category of adolescence to its beginnings led some youth to pose more questions about its provenance and its implications.

## Understanding the Functioning of Discourses of Adolescence

Students readily identified sites in their school, home, and social lives where they could see a reliance on stereotyped views of youth and could discuss some implications for this reliance. When students discussed this realization, they expressed frustration about this emerging knowledge. Students identified multiple implications for the function of dominant discourses of adolescence.

### *Adolescence Thrusts Youth into a Double-Bind of Constraints*

As students sifted through the implications of stereotypes of adolescence, they began to see the inherited expectations of adolescence as a double-bind for them. Atticus's comments exemplify this realization, which was repeated by several other students:

They don't expect students in my age group to be mature, taking tough classes, which meant I was more "normal" to the adults. But as "normal" I was abnormal. If I'm abnormal because I don't fit into my age group, then where am I supposed to go? There's something wrong with them [adolescents] if there's nothing wrong with them; and there's something wrong with them if there is. It's a paradox: either way there's supposed to be something wrong. (individual interview)

Skylar, who identified as straight edge—an identity associated with hardcore music that involves refraining from substance use and, for some, sex—echoed similar insights:

Someone that is not focused on social functions, who stays away from drugs, and focuses on themselves and education, people think that's "abnormal," that you're not thinking like typical teenagers. It shouldn't be surprising or abnormal. You don't have to group everyone together. (individual interview)

Like others in the group, Atticus and Skylar understand that youth are criticized if they fit the parameters of the dominant discourse of adolescence since they are viewed through a mostly diminished lens. They also see that they are criticized if they do not fit these social norms, if they act more reserved, for example, since that makes youth social outcasts. Thus, students began to recognize that there was no easy way out of the negativity associated with adolescence. Youth are expected to act "young" and immature, but if they act in more socially responsible ways, they're viewed as "abnormal," leaving mature, thoughtful young people without sites of social recognition as adolescents.

**"If I'm abnormal because I don't fit into my age group, then where am I supposed to go? There's something wrong with them [adolescents] if there's nothing wrong with them; and there's something wrong with them if there is. It's a paradox: either way there's supposed to be something wrong."**

### *Adults Tend to See All Youth as the Same*

Another way that many of the students registered the effects of dominant discourses of adolescence was through discussing how some adults in their lives saw young people as all behaving similarly, regardless of individual differences. For example, Nicole, who would end the year writing her senior thesis on the discrimination of adolescents, shared how her pastor and other adults at her church spoke about adolescents as though they were all the same: "We all party. We all hang out with friends. We all do negative behavior. It made me realize how authority figures put us all in one category"

(individual interview). Additionally, Skylar shared that her grandmother regularly asked her, “‘Why not go to parties or hang out with friends, dress up nice and do girly things?’ The way she says it makes it seem like she *wants* me to focus on my appearance” (individual interview).

Starting to pay attention to how adults group youth in one basket, Nicole and Skylar could see that youth were viewed as hyper-social, superficial, narcissistic beings regardless of individual youths’ behavior.

### *Social Pressure to Conform Creates “Teen Angst”*

Over the course of the unit, both within their literary study of Holden in *The Catcher in the Rye* and through examples from popular culture, students began to reexamine seeming examples of “teen angst” and other traits expected of an essentialized adolescence. Students began to see emotional or resistant reactions by young people as youths’ understandable *responses* to social pressure to conform to unappealing expectations of adolescence. In other words, students began to reverse the causal order of emotionality or resistance in youth as justifiable *re*-actions by young people to unfair and/or unappealing social expectations thrust onto them. The students dignified resistance and other responses as a matter of principle rather than biology. In the examples below, students demonstrated this understanding through analysis of the film *Mean Girls* and of the character Holden Caulfield.

Skylar, an aspiring novelist, watched the film *Mean Girls* on her own during the unit. In her interview, Skylar explained how the character who originally was not an adolescent because she lived abroad most of her life, only became an adolescent—here defined as a “mean girl”—once she entered an American high school. To see that adolescence in this film is not about age or nature but about a set of taken-on behaviors reflects an understanding of adolescence as a construct taken up by youth through social pressure to conform. In other words, Skylar’s view of the film’s protagonist reflects a performative understanding of adolescence.

Students’ efforts to analyze representations of adolescence in literature took longer in this unit but led to striking changes in their literary interpretations. Students’ ideas about Salinger’s Holden shifted from seeing him as a whiny *individual* when they read the novel on their own, to seeing him as legitimately protesting the *cultural pressure* to be a specific kind of macho adolescent male after their work together as a class using a Youth Lens. In other words, students attributed Holden’s suffering to his inability or unwillingness to conform to conventional views of masculinity, especially as a sexual young man who was not supposed to show concern for women.



Ann demonstrated this point through her response to a critical article discussing Holden and Huck Finn as nonconformists: “The time period was a period of assimilation and Holden & Huck did not like this at all. They refused to conform and that caused the development of their rebellious, angry characters.” In her comments, Ann names traits typically tied to a naturalized adolescence—rebelliousness and anger—as an *effect* of characters’ refusal to conform to societal pressure. Refusing to conform, Holden—like Huck before him—*became* rebellious and angry, traits typically assigned as inherent to “moody” youth.

Tom, an avid martial arts practitioner, saw the role that parents played in shaping Holden’s miserable adolescence. In a formative assignment on *Catcher*, Tom listed several key lines in Holden’s characterization of parents, including Holden’s description of them as “nice and all . . . but they’re also touchy as hell” (Salinger, 1951/1991, p. 5). According to Tom, this touchiness results from worrying about their kids’ ability to fit in. “Salinger is saying that parents are one of the many *causes* of pressure within society and end up making their kids conform, or making their kids feel even worse about being an outcast because of their expectations.” Whereas many adolescents might be described as “touchy as hell” by adults, here Tom flips the designation onto parents because of their damaging concerns about youths’ social acceptance. I saw a similar reattribution of *adult* pressure rather than *peer* pressure to perform a stereotyped adolescence by Skylar, above, when she registered her grandmother’s pressure to be a specific kind of hyper-social young girl. In other words, students were beginning to see the roles played by adults in *encouraging* an adolescence that followed constraining social norms.

Julio, who idolized Howard Zinn, quickly took up discourses of adolescence as a construct from the start of the unit and remained steady in his views until unit’s end. Responding to a 2008 AP exam question (see Table 2) for his culminating assessment, Julio discussed Holden through conventional views of adolescence as either “a time graced by joy” or full of “terror and tribulation”:

Salinger uses Holden as a paintbrush to illustrate the picture of adolescence as a time of terror and tribulation. He depicts this young period of an individual’s life this way instead of a time graced by joy by showing the strenuous effect that society’s values and the definition of normal affects a person to be forced into subjectification and ultimately, in Holden’s case, be alienated as an outcast.

Taking up the essay prompt somewhat unconventionally, Julio identifies Holden as a youth depicted through “terror and tribulation” but not because

of natural forces. Rather Holden responds to “the strenuous effect” of normative social forces (“subjectification”) to be a version of adolescence that he cannot take up. Julio not only sees adolescence as a donned identity but also as one that causes suffering for youth like Holden. Far from seeing Holden’s complaints as angsty teen whininess, Julio’s thesis credits Holden with a sensitivity to unfair social pressure that accounts for his social alienation.

## Understanding and Engaging in Possibilities for Agency

Performative understandings of social categories such as adolescence give subjects a chance to vary the ways they take up a circulating discourse. Such performative shifts could operate as sources of social change that could affect the larger discourse in small ways. To varying extents, all students in the study gained access to fresh, agentic possibilities through Rachel’s curriculum on adolescence. Some shared new ways of seeing their own or their peers’ *performances* of adolescence. A few students’ agentic possibilities included a mixture of essentialized views together with constructionist views as they voiced their opinions around this new knowledge.

### *Shifted Performances of “Adolescence”*

The most profound and surprising effect of the unit was several students’ discussion of how the curriculum gave them insights into how they could perform an alternate adolescence than the homogeneous, demeaning one expected of them.

In her interview, Ann expressed shock that adolescence did not always exist as a concept, repeating a finding seen in all nine participants: “It wasn’t always a time when students were expected to be rebellious.” I asked her what effect this information had on her. “It made me not want to be what they expected me to be. It makes me want to fight the stereotypes even more, because all the ideas of adolescence are negative.” As an example, Ann, a Black student, described a recurring tension with a White teacher at the school.

There’s a particular teacher who pushed everyone’s buttons, but I find myself lately not allowing her to do that. I’m becoming more slow to anger in that situation, because she’s expecting us to start yelling at her and get upset with her. When I had a conversation with her a couple of days ago, she said something that normally would have upset me. I ignored it, and she immediately changed. She’s a nice lady. You can build friendships and good relationships that way. (individual interview)

As someone who does not want to be seen as a “type” but rather as an individual, Ann refrained from engaging with her teacher as a “rebellious teen”

and saw an immediate difference in the teacher's reactions to her. I found it interesting that this example of a performative change was also referenced by another student.

Dominique, a track and field star hoping to join the military before attending college, shared how the teacher had made Ann so angry in prior exchanges that Ann had yelled at her, "I hate you!" "But now, when the teacher gets on her nerves, she's quiet, just ignores her, because she doesn't want to be perceived as *that type* of adolescent. That's what I think" (individual interview). Perhaps Ann and Dominique discussed this shift in Ann as a result of the unit; I do not know. But I found it striking that Ann credits her learning in the unit for this shift and that Dominique does so as well, showing that the girls saw new performative options of adolescence available to themselves and/or others as a result of their learning.

Tom shared a different example about shifting his performance of adolescence. Tom, who planned to work on video game design after college, despised reading *Catcher*; he saw Holden's grumblings as ones too closely

mirroring his own. Similarly, he found Charlie's suffering in *Perks* to feel autobiographical of Tom himself. But in his interview he affirmed, "I grew up a lot in this unit. I had to change things" (individual interview). For Tom, in ways similar to Holden, the problem was his efforts to try to change peers' minds about their behavior. But through the unit he realized that "not all will see their flaws in logic. And if they do, they might not care because they're popular." In other words, explaining to friends that their adolescent

**For Tom, understanding adolescence as a construct . . . offered him performative options for an adolescence that may even look the same to someone observing him . . . but that offered him perspective and solace that he learned through the unit's teachings.**

behaviors only "hurt their own cause [as youth]," as he explained it to me, did not work, especially if their actions rewarded them with popularity. But with new ideas about adolescence, Tom adjusted his expectations of himself and others.

For example, I don't want to go to prom, but not because I can't dance. All they do is "grind." I don't even see that as dancing; it's weird people with sexual frustrations who made up a dance and somehow it got popular. I didn't want to go, but my date was going to go, and dance that way, so better it's me than someone else. Can't really convince people otherwise. I don't want to be the only one dancing regularly and I look like an outcast because of it. But they still grinded at prom. Some because their dates were doing it, some because they don't know any other way. They agreed with me, but they still do it just because society does it. (individual interview)

Even though Tom ended up attending the dance and even grinding with his girlfriend, his shifted ideas about adolescence released some of his own frustrations at the constraints binding him and others to do something he did not like. For Tom, understanding adolescence as a construct—and talking to peers about this understanding and its implications for dancing—offered him performative options for an adolescence that may even look the same to someone observing him—since he grinded like his peers—but that offered him perspective and solace that he learned through the unit’s teachings.

### *A Little Essentialism Here, a Little Constructionism There*

Though all students took up some facets of a constructionist version of adolescence in ways that allowed them to voice agency, some students maintained essentialist views of adolescence in some contexts. Even for the students who demonstrated understanding of and agreement with the idea of a socially constructed adolescence, some reserved an exceptionalism for themselves that concurrently maintained essentialist understandings of adolescence for their peers. In other words, students in the study got to redefine themselves in relation to peers at their school, yet they persisted in describing their peers as incapable or unlikely to understand complex, critical ideas of adolescence.

During the focus group interview with students, our discussion turned to the possibility of bringing these ideas to the school level at YAS. Tom commented first, “Can’t get them [other students] to listen.” Ann added, “Even if they do change, it will be for two weeks. They will slowly drift back to being mainstream after that.” To be clear, these data could be read as students merely asserting the intellectual investment required to get to the level of understanding that this group achieved with respect to revised views of adolescence. Still, it is also possible to read these comments more conservatively: knowledge of adolescence as a construct may have bolstered *these students’* discursive options at the cost of those of other youth in their midst (see also Blackburn, 2003).

Alexandris also proved to be an interesting case study on her own as a student responding to this curriculum, and for myself as a researcher. She presented another example of a student who took up some aspects of a constructionist view of adolescence while maintaining essentialist views of others. Yet, for a long time, I could only see her responses to the curriculum as “resistant,” since she consistently insisted that she and her peers at the school fit essentialist views of adolescence.<sup>4</sup>

Alexandris was the only student in the study who identified as popular at the school. She listed hanging out at the mall with friends and ice skating as hobbies she enjoyed when she wasn’t babysitting her neighbor’s kids on

weekends. Alexandris insisted on the validity of essentialist views of adolescence for two reasons. First, everywhere she looked students were acting like adolescents. “I look around and we *are* how they describe adolescents. Until someone can prove me wrong that we’re mature, headstrong people, I’m going to believe that [the conventional view of adolescents] is what we are” (individual interview). Rachel responded to this issue, explaining that some youth may look like adolescents because that is what they are expected to be, but these explanations did not appease Alexandris.

Responding to my question about which activities, if any, were helpful in getting her to think about adolescence, Alexandris said that she loved hearing others’ views about what they were learning. In fact, she affirmed that the unit opened up her mind: “Lenses help you see other stereotypes in different ways” (focus group interview). As an example, Alexandris shared that, as a result of the unit, she now noticed differences in representations of Black and White youth in television shows. “On TV, see white people and they live in nice houses and parents get them whatever they want. The Black shows, see drugs. On *16 & Pregnant*, they live in projects. White people go to good schools.” Even as Alexandris insisted on continuing to see real youth through essentialist views, learning about adolescence as a construct opened up her mind to looking for other constructs in the world, including the ways that race—specifically, raced adolescence—was presented in the media. Results like this underscore the ways Rachel effected a Critical Race English Education (Johnson, 2018) that encourages youth—especially youth of color—to not only critique but also to talk back to racist discourses that limit their representations and possibilities in the world.

These mixed views of adolescence led me to ask Alexandris about these inconsistencies. To this question, she revealed a sticking point for her with these new ideas.

In class, some people made points in discussion that I never would have thought of before. But once I make up my mind, I need proof to change it. That’s the thing for me. Nothing ever changes my mind. I feel like I’m right, so if you’re telling me something different, you’re questioning my intelligence. And I don’t like that.

To be fair, it is difficult to accept ideas that others seem to deny as false. In fact, even experienced teachers working through ideas of adolescence raise this concern as a potential sticking point (Sarigianides, 2014).

There is another way to think of Alexandris’s contradictory take up of this content. Compared to many of her peers in the class who identified themselves as socially marginalized in the school, Alexandris had a lot to

lose by seeing adolescence as a construct since her own performance as a “typical” youth rewarded her socially. Scholars have argued that when the curriculum presents nondominant ideas that clash with student expectations, prior learning, or ideas that challenge “sacred” facets of individuals’ identities in any way, then critical literacy projects in schools may be attempting to present “analysis and reason to angry students who [are], metaphorically speaking, fighting for their lives” (Janks, 2002, p. 20). In sharp contrast to Alexandris, other students in the class may have had much to gain by taking up such discourses. Perhaps, theories of adolescence as a construct offered some students an explanation for the problematic force to fit in socially that dignified their exclusion.

## Discussion and Implications

Since little research has focused on what might happen if teachers taught students about constructed adolescence directly, the fact that students demonstrated content understanding is significant. Students’ literacy work and discussion, interview, and university presentation comments displayed understanding of the genealogy, functioning, and performative aspects of adolescence. Students could discuss their surprise that adolescence was not always thought about the way Westerners think of it today, and they could identify ways that essentialist views of youth position them monolithically. Students could also point to ways they could enact or see adolescence differently so as not to be seen as typical teens, or could take up more performative views of adolescence when they were helpful to them, while still holding to more essentialist views when they were not. Given the complexity of the curricular content on adolescence, and Rachel’s insights about students not having had a lot of practice with challenging content at the school, this finding suggests that other, non-AP students may respond favorably to comparable curriculum as well.

More specifically, this study presents additional ways that minoritized youth often left out of academic literacies in school may respond with engagement to English curriculum by examining and responding to discourses of adolescence via literary study. Students engaged in rigorous literary and film analysis; crafted articulate and poignant public presentations for a university audience of future teachers; and engaged thoughtfully in discussion and in interviews with a university researcher, all around this content on adolescence within an English classroom. In other words, like Youth Participatory Action Research (Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2015) and other practices that position youth as active knowledge producers in educational settings (e.g.,

Christensen, 2015), sharing content focused on adolescence as a historically situated category with often-disenfranchised youth may motivate a similar kind of academic engagement with rigorous literacy practices within schools.

The study also exposed how youth—unlike teachers—responded to performative views of adolescence. In contrast to teachers for whom, arguably, much more is at stake in surrendering their thinking to revised views of adolescents (Lewis & Finders, 2002), nearly all students in the study took up the content about adolescence. Some even enacted performative shifts as youth as an identified response to this curriculum. However, nearly all students in the study demonstrated some resistance to the content as well, especially at first, as was evident in their initial views of adolescence. Studying adolescence as a construct proves counterintuitive or counter-to-dominant learning circulating in the world. Additionally, most peers at the school seemed to confirm stereotypes about adolescence, making these ideas suspect. For this reason, teachers and teacher educators considering such curriculum might think about how to anticipate and respond to these common challenges.

Additionally, examining the ways that discourse repeats problematically, either through student resistance to sociocultural views of adolescence or through their selective application of the curriculum (i.e., to themselves but not always to peers), opens interesting questions for additional research. How might exposure to the genealogy of adolescence and the functioning of dominant discourses offer some youth more ways to read the world and, perhaps, get motivated about additional literacy practices? Additionally, when students show resistance to rethinking adolescence, why might they do so? What losses might some students incur by revising understandings about this social category (Janks, 2002; Stillwaggon, 2017)? Finally, to what extent might an English curriculum focused on adolescence offer some youth opportunities for easing some of their own suffering, suffering that could be attributed to being expected to conform to social expectations that are unattainable for them, and how might this experience deepen their literacy engagements in and outside of school?

One of the intentions of enacting this study at YAS with this group of Black and Latino students was to see how learning about adolescence as a construct might affect youth typically left out of the conceptual boundaries of conventional adolescence by virtue of some facets of their identity (e.g., race and class). This study bore witness to the ire of the students as they began to note the double binds of a category that constrains and demeans them as youth whether they act like “typical teens” or not. For some, these realizations led to shifts in their actions and their reactions to expectations to fit social

norms as well as effected complex readings of texts. For others, it opened up new avenues of criticality, including ones around racial representations.

Yet, none of the students discussed this ire in relation to a *raced* or *classed* adolescence in ways that I—and perhaps Rachel—hoped. In other words, the curriculum did not bring special attention to how the concept of adolescence as a construct leaves out some youth *due to* race or class. In an American social context that holds such dire consequences for some adolescents whose bodies are perceived as threatening, this omission is a glaring one. Admittedly, teaching youth of color directly about how the social category of adolescence leaves them out conceptually and with material consequences ought to be approached with care: Students must trust the teacher greatly, as these students did Rachel, to engage in a curriculum that makes them so vulnerable.

Rachel had the most to say about this finding during my member check with her. Long after unit's end, she worried about whether her own encouragement of students to resist stereotypes of adolescence might have encouraged the girls, especially, to feel as though they needed to act more "White," especially in relation to White teachers who saw them as loud and brassy youth of color. She thought about this when she read about Ann's self-conscious shift in performances of adolescence in relation to the White teacher giving her trouble. She worried that her efforts to upend stereotypes around age ended up reinforcing expectations of Whiteness instead.

This finding effected revisions to my own YAL course for teacher candidates as well. Reading these data and following new research published since the study ended, it became clear to me that a much more explicit focus on raced adolescence was necessary in my course. I now focus on adolescence as a raced category right from the start of the course as something the majority White teacher candidates need to think about carefully. For example, we have read Myers's (2004) *Monster*, examining why the author chose to utilize three different genres through which to tell Steve Harmon's story. How do the images of Steve mostly reinforce stereotypes of Black, male youth behind bars and in surveillance cameras or court drawings? How do the court scenes, especially, in the screenplay distance the reader from Steve, showing him as a "character" in a play about which he has little control? In contrast, how do Steve's journal entries bring readers closer to him as a person through their emphasis on his feelings, his vulnerabilities and questioning of himself? In short, to what extent does Myers focus attention on society's response to Black male adolescence in this novel? How might the story look different if Steve were White?



I have done similar work with Hesse's (2001) historical fiction verse novel *Witness* in the course. This novel also offers readers a chance to juxtapose Black adolescence in Leonora to White adolescence in Merlin. When I use this text in class, I ask teacher candidates: What constraints does Leonora experience as a 12-year-old Black youth (e.g., not taking the gift of a typewriter from Mr. Field)? In contrast, what are some privileges that White, 17-year-old Merlin experiences (e.g., joining the Klan to light the cross on the field even though it's illegal)? With these shifts in my teaching, new teacher candidates see the modeling of how to think about and teach adolescence as a raced category in ways that may more easily make their way into their own English curricula. Still, more research around teaching youth about how this category works to shut them out of its borders and functions as another privileged space matters for literacy educators' work with all youth.

## Notes

1. Though I frame this study through constructionist views of youth, like any constructionist views, my study relies on essentialism as well (of "youth of color" and of "adolescents"), though one taken up strategically to examine the political and material effects of dominant discourses of adolescence on real youth, especially poor youth of color (Fuss, 1989).

2. See Sulzer and Thein's (2016) "Reconsidering the Hypothetical Adolescent in Evaluating and Teaching Young Adult Literature" for a discussion of the ways particular approaches to questions about adolescence/ts often set up classroom discussion for a focus on stereotypes around youth. My own teaching approach, which Rachel mirrored, set students up to focus on adolescent stereotypes in ways that Sulzer and Thein critique well.

3. This unit opened Rachel's academic year as a way to motivate students' interest in applying theory and literary criticism to texts and to begin scaffolding their writing for the AP Literature exam. Her selection of *The Catcher in the Rye* stemmed from her interpretation of it through a Youth Lens: she could see a rereading of Holden's angst as an understandable—rather than "typical teen"—response to a world expecting him to conform to traits of a sexualized male youth that he could not meet. Even in this unit, Rachel's use of the film *Tough Guise*, which exposes masculinity as performative and which features men of color, shows her interest in diversifying racial representations in the unit. Later in the school year, she would turn much more centrally to texts written by and featuring people of color (e.g., *Invisible Man*, *Contending Forces*, *The Bluest Eye*, *The Color Purple*, *Things Fall Apart*).

4. Many thanks for reviewer feedback on this article—especially on Alexandris's responses, which pushed me to see them as something other than "resistance."

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