YOUNG ADULT DYSTOPIAN AND GENDER IDENTITY: A STUDY OF THE LEGEND (2011) TRILOGY

DUNIA REMAJA DISTOPIA DAN IDENTITAS GENDER: KAJIAN TRILOGI LEGEND (2011)

Luthfia Ridzka Latiffa¹, Bayu Kristianto Mail²
Universitas Indonesia, Jl. Lingkar, Pondok Cina, Beji, Depok, Jawa Barat 16424
luthfialatiffa@gmail.com
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Abstract
There is no doubt that young adult dystopian novels are popular among their audience. Young adult dystopian novels offer readers a fictional medium to reimagine societal values, including, but not limited to, gender. In the 2010s, titles such as The Hunger Games, Divergent, and Legend rose to fame as they amassed millions of readers, further strengthening the genre’s popularity and influence among young adults. This article will specifically analyze the Legend (2011) trilogy by Marie Lu, a series of dystopian novels set in the post-apocalyptic United States. Using concepts of gender binary opposition and possibilities-potentialities, this article aims to uncover the trilogy’s attempt at reconstructing gender identity by presenting non-traditional roles in its story, notably in its depiction of the main character and supporting characters. The article will identify gendered representations within the trilogy, analyze whether the representations are consistent throughout the story, and study its underlying message concerning values present in the real world. Based on the analysis, this article found that the Legend trilogy tends to reproduce existing realities that already exist in the real world. However, it still offers a layered, non-traditional representation of both masculine and feminine gender identity through its characters.

Keywords: Young Adult Dystopian, Young Adult Literature, Gender Identity, Gender Roles, Legend

1. INTRODUCTION
In the past decade, young adult dystopian novels have taken the world by storm. In the 2000s and the 2010s, the young adult dystopian genre rose to mainstream media as The Hunger Games novel, which gained a lot of popularity, was adapted into a film in 2012. In the same year, The Hunger Games trilogy sold over 27.7 million copies (Roback, 2013) and its film adaptation released in the
same year grossed over $600 million worldwide according to Box Office Mojo, an internet site managed by IMDb that compares film’s budget and revenue. The rise of The Hunger Games gave way to more young adult dystopian books taking the spotlight, with novels such as Divergent and The Maze Runner gaining best-seller status and later being adapted into films. Among the books that have partaken in this young adult dystopian craze is the Legend trilogy written by Marie Lu, which has gained a total of 1 million reads on Goodreads for the first book alone.

The Legend trilogy by Marie Lu is set in a partially-flooded Los Angeles in a distant future wherein June Iparis, a fifteen-year-old prodigy from a wealthy family, is groomed to become her country’s top soldier. The country she lives in, the Republic of America, occupies modern-day United States of America’s west coast, while the continental US’ east coast is the land of the Colonies of America, a nation that is at war with the Republic. June’s perfect life crashes when her older brother, Metias Iparis, is murdered, and she is tasked to arrest the prime suspect of the murder, a teenage street criminal named Day. While her mission to capture Day is a big leap for her military career, she also finds out about the bitter truths about her beloved country in the process. Soon, she is tangled in the intrigue of war and politics. The war between the Republic and the Colonies escalates and recedes, and the trilogy ends with June and Day parting ways before reuniting again ten years later as adults. Lu’s the Legend trilogy is told from the point of view of its main characters, June and Day. The two characters take turns narrating the story.

Legend presents a post-apocalyptic setting of the United States, which serves as its dystopia. Dystopia, as defined by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, is “an imagined world or society in which people lead wretched, dehumanized, fearful lives.” In the context of literature, Demerjian (2016) stated that “dystopian works reflect society’s worries” (p. 1). The young adult dystopian genre allows stories to be told in a post-apocalyptic dystopian world, which offers a medium to test and depict values that might be considered unconventional in the real world, as well as allowing the characters to have identities that might otherwise be uncommon or untraditional in the real world (Smith, 2014; Hemphill, 2015). Among the possibly uncommon and untraditional values depicted in young adult dystopian literature is gender identity, which leaves room for an analysis.

Upon reading the surface of the text, the text seems to present a non-traditional view of gender identity in which female characters can assume traditionally masculine traits and vice versa. This paper will analyze how these representations of gender identity work out in the novels, as well as whether the books consistently challenge traditional gender identity throughout the story, or only incorporate non-traditional gender identity as a plot device. An analysis will also be made on how young adult dystopian fiction can offer a more diverse representation of gender identity.

Representations of gender identity in young adult dystopian fiction is not uncommon. The Legend trilogy, for example, has tried to present various representations of gender identity in its story. The study of gender in young adult fiction is noted in Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Young Adult Literature, “Gender plays an important role in post-disaster fiction, not least because of the genre’s capacity to offer a space where ‘normal’ rules of behavior have changed” (James, 2009, p. 166).

This article aims to answer the following research questions; how does the Legend trilogy portray gender identity? Does it count as reconstructing existing gender identity, or does it only replicate existing values? This article will analyze the depiction of gender identity in the Legend trilogy through its two main characters and a supporting character.

Literature Review

This article uses two concepts; binary gender opposition and possibility-potentiality (Muñoz, 2009), to identify whether the findings in the text are reconstructing gender identity or not. The basis for gender binary opposition comes from an analysis of sex roles conducted by Parsons (1953), which was referred to by Carrigan et al. (1985) as “gender personalities”.

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relative to the total culture as a whole, the masculine personality tends more to the predominance of instrumental interests, needs and functions, presumably in whatever social system both sexes are involved, while the feminine personality tends more to the primacy of expressive interests, needs and functions. We would expect, by and large, that other things being equal, men would assume more technical, executive and ‘judicial’ roles, women more supportive, integrative and ‘tension-managing’ roles. (Carrigan et al., 1985, pp. 555-556)

From the excerpt, the opposition between masculinity and femininity is in the roles the two genders assume, in which masculinity leans on “instrumental interest” and femininity on “expressive interest.” The distinction between masculinity and femininity as different and opposing one another suggests that a gender identity of a person is either one or the other. As the analysis was made more than fifty years ago, it was already widely accepted as a norm. The analysis done in this paper would like to examine whether the same notion is still relevant in a novel published in the 2010s.

Peterman and Lo (2022) recommended using two representations to analyze values within an imaginary world, a representation that “connects us to contemporary reality, tethering the story to our world” (p. 308) and another that “pushes us to imagine a different world” (p. 308). The concept, formulated by Muñoz (2009), is explained through two terms, possibility and potentiality. Possibility “exist[s] within a logical real … which is within the present and is linked to presence” (Muñoz, p. 99). On the contrary, potentiality “has a temporality that is not in the present but, more nearly, in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity” (Muñoz, p. 99). In short, the possibility-potentiality concept refers to the reimagination (possibility) or mere reconstruction (potentiality) of societal values in the text. When applied to young adult dystopian stories, this concept tries to identify values that are contested (potentiality) and values that are unchanged (possibility) (Peterman & Lo, 2022). The use of Muñoz’s possibility-potentiality concept is for categorizing the values present in the portrayal of the characters in Legend trilogy. Categorizing the values using Muñoz’s concept will then contribute to the analysis of whether authors need to insert new values in their works to convey a progressive message or not.

Past studies about gender identity in several popular young adult dystopian books yielded varied results. Smith (2014), analyzing Divergent, has found that while at the surface level there are symbols in the novels that allude to freedom of gender identity, it is not explored enough and end up confirming traditional gender roles. On the contrary, analysis on The Hunger Games have suggested that gender identity in the book is represented progressively as the characters’ portrayals do not conform to traditional gender roles (Kirby, 2015). The different portrayals of gender identity show that young adult dystopian works do not have the tendency to always reconstruct gender identity; sometimes it can just reproduce existing gender identities that conform to stereotypes about gender roles. As the portrayal of gender identity in young adult dystopian novels serves as a representation of non-traditional gender roles for youth, a similar approach done in previous research will be applied to analyze the Legend trilogy.

2. METHODS

This paper uses textual analysis as its method. It reads closely the texts of Legend Trilogy novels, which are Legend (2011), Prodigy (2013), and Champion (2013). The inclusion of all three books within the trilogy is aimed to observe whether progressive portrayals of gender identity, if there are any, occurs consistently in the story or not. There are three steps taken; First is to identify which moments in the books that serves as evidence for traditional gender roles (or the opposite of it); Second is analyzing whether the instances of traditional and non-traditional gender roles are consistent among the three books or not; And third, analyzing whether these instances of gender roles are challenged or deemed constant (within a dystopian world and in the real world).
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character Study: June Iparis, Day, and Metias Iparis

The dystopian genre, with its usually post-apocalyptic setting, depicts a world in so much chaos and disarray. Whatever societal values present in the said fictional society beforehand have been disrupted, which then allows new values to take prevalence. Among these new values are those associated with gender identities. This allows authors to depict various gender identities beyond the gender binary concept commonly depicted in the real world. Due to the fictional nature of the dystopian genre, it acts as a safe vessel for authors to include various gender identities in their narrative, even those that are still considered uncommon by a certain audience in the real world. In short, including portrayals of non-binary gender identity in the dystopian genre is one way for authors to include various gender identities in a work of literature as the genre offers a probable view of the future yet still maintains its fictional nature.

The young adult dystopian genre is effective in criticizing various aspects of contemporary society (Peterman & Lo, 2022). One way of criticizing is the way it depicts its main characters. For example, Suzanne Collins through her young adult dystopian work The Hunger Games, opted to present its main female protagonist as a strong character who is defined by her masculine attributes (Kirby, 2015). This finding points out that a woman can be known for her masculinity, and that femininity is not the only thing a woman is fit for. Marie Lu’s Legend tries to achieve the same effect through its depiction of its main female character. Immediately after Lu’s heroine June Iparis is introduced, the audience is given a strong impression of her. June’s initial appearance in her first chapter takes place when she was called into her Dean Secretary’s for seriously breaking campus’ rules. A few pages into the story from June’s point of view, we see her observing her Dean Secretary’s arm injury, and then correctly deducing the injury’s cause. The smart-but-unsavory comment she made about the injury earned her a disapproving response, and to that she replies, “I don’t just think I'm smart, […] I am smart” (Lu, 2011, pp. 12 & 13).

The quote serves as a definitive look into her character. The lines are straight-forward, and they give the audience an impression that June is first and foremost defined by her intelligence. The ellipsis put on the words “think,” and "am," shows that she wants to emphasize how smart she is. June's recognition of her outstanding intelligence is not merely a self-claim, as her intelligence is also a trait that other people see in her when they first interact with her. Throughout Legend, logic and deduction are the two things associated with June. Her possession of this skill, alongside her intelligence, is one of the things that drives the story forward.

June’s intelligence and logic are often highlighted, and it is usually followed by the description of her emotion. Her display of emotion is mostly related to other people she loves, such as her brother. It is also worth noting that in some instances, she tends to show emotion after a stream of thoughts driven by her logic. One example is on page 43 of Legend when she is called by her commander to examine her brother’s body. In that scene, she successfully deduces what had happened to her brother by analyzing the crime scene before she emotionally crumbles as she mentally processes that her brother had passed away. Another scene on page 78 of Legend portrays a similar situation. The scene describes June’s first encounter with Day when she tries to track him down. The two do not meet in person as they communicate through speakers and microphones in an alley. The excerpt from the book goes as follows, “Behind the details flashing through my mind emerges a black, rising hatred” (Lu, 2011, p. 78). “Details,” here refers to June’s deduction of Day as she tried to profile him through his voice. From the excerpt, June tends to show her feelings after she is done assessing her surroundings with her logic.

Relating to the implication of the “smart” quote and depiction of gender identity, Johnson (2005), describes logic, rationality, and strength, among several others, as values that make up the cultural description of masculinity, while emotional expressiveness is among several values traditionally associated with femininity. Thus, June’s high regard for her intelligence and her sharp
logic relates more to masculine attributes despite her identity as a young woman. June expresses her emotions although its description is overshadowed by the description of her intelligence.

So far, the portrayal of June Iparis in *Legend* creates a layered representation of gender. Despite June’s seemingly more masculine attributes, she is consistently described with feminine adjectives, and seemingly comfortable with her feminine identity as shown by how she adorned feminine dresses during formal event scenes. So far, from June’s portrayal, *Legend* tries to offer a portrayal of a female character that is not entirely feminine in her attributes. Through the depiction of June, it is shown that women can be so much more than their stereotypically-feminine trait. Women can be smart, strong, logic-driven, and very rational in their actions, while also displaying her feelings and emotions.

June’s intelligence and emotional expressions are not the only things that define her gender identity. We can see how she evolves as a character by looking at her fate at the end of the story. The epilogue of *Champion*, the third book in the trilogy, is set ten years after the events in the book have ended. June is now a 27-year-old military commander, the youngest in her rank. It shows that even after all she has been through, she can retain her prodigious status and carries on with her life without having her abilities diminished or erased altogether. This ending differs from other popular young adult dystopian novels in which the female protagonist either settles down and starts a family or even dies before the end of the book. June’s ending in *Champion* shows that a prodigious or extraordinary female protagonist in a young adult dystopian novel does not need to lose her prodigious abilities as she grows up.

The *Legend* trilogy is told from the perspective of joint main characters, June Iparis and Daniel “Day” Wing. Daniel, nicknamed “Day,” is a boy from Los Angeles’ slum sector that initially appears as a street criminal. He is a fifteen-year-old teenager at the beginning of *Legend*, the same age as June, and is portrayed to have the same level of intelligence as June. Based on their level of intelligence and physicality, Day is as much of a prodigy as June is. However, due to his poor financial background, he is cast out by the Republic’s education system and is not given the same opportunity as June.

Popular young adult dystopian books usually feature male protagonists that would eventually become the female protagonist’s love interest. Oftentimes these male characters are described as strong, brooding, and handsome, the qualities that are synonymous with male attractiveness. While Day eventually becomes June’s love interest, the aforementioned adjectives are not the words used to describe his appearance. Day’s physical appearance is not what one might consider as stereotypically masculine. In *Legend*, June’s first impression of Day is that he is “the most beautiful boy I’ve ever seen” (Lu, 2011, p. 109). The use of the word “beautiful,” commonly associated with feminine appearance, implies that Day possibly has an androgynous appearance. This is a different approach in presenting a male protagonist compared to some young adult dystopian novels published around the same time.

The novel’s placement of June and Day as joint main characters is also worth noting. Lu gives both her main characters equal chances to tell their stories from their own perspectives, which creates more depth in the story. Despite June and Day’s similar levels of intelligence and age, the characters have different economic backgrounds and live in different parts of Los Angeles. This allows the audience to look at the characters’ different upbringings, which results in different reactions to their surroundings.

To better explain the difference between June and Day’s ways of narrating the story, here is an excerpt from June’s perspective, taken from *Champion*.

“Oh,” he finally replies. “I’m sorry to bother you, then. I just . . . You look really familiar. Are you sure we don’t know each other from somewhere?”

I search his eyes in silence. I can’t say anything. There is a secret emotion emerging on his face now, somewhere between strangeness and familiarity, something that tells me he’s struggling to
place me, to find where I belong. My heart protests, reaching out for him to discover it. Still, no words come out.

Day searches my face with his soft gaze. Then he shakes his head. “I have known you,” he murmurs. “A long time ago. I don’t know where, but I think I know why” (Lu, 2013, pp. 366-367)

The quote is taken from the epilogue of Champion and is set ten years after the events in the book concluded. In the epilogue, June and Day are reunited again after being separated for ten years. Their reunion is filled with cautious gestures because ten years previously, as a result of his injuries from the war and his long-suffered illness, Day had to undergo brain surgery that caused him to lose a lot of his memory, including his memory of June. June decides to not remind him of her in order to protect him from bad memories associated with her. In this reunion scene between the two characters, June is still seen trying to protect Day by not taking the first step of making herself memorable to him, but rather allowing him to try and remember her first.

June is quite concise with her description of the moment. Again, she is seen “searching his eyes in silence,” maintaining her habit of analyzing people. In the quote, we can also see June’s decision to not actively try to remind Day of her. This decision was first done the years prior to this moment in the epilogue, in the hopes of protecting Day from traumatic memories associated with her. June’s protectiveness is expressed a few lines later: “The part of me that had once decided to step out of his life tells me to do it again, to protect him from this knowledge that had hurt him so long ago” (Lu, 2013, p. 367). In June and Day’s relationship, June tends to be protective of Day, not the other way around. Protectiveness itself is something that is commonly associated with the male person in a relationship, which again shows that June possesses qualities that are not commonly associated with being feminine.

We can then compare June’s perspective with Day’s in the same scene, which goes as follows, “Oh,” I reply, trying to turn my thoughts into something coherent. How can I tell her what’s going through my mind? I’ve seen you in my dreams. In glimpses. Fragments. I know the sight of you walking away. “I’m sorry to bother you, then. I just . . .” I frown again. Perhaps I’m just crazy. “You look really familiar. Are you sure we don’t know each other from somewhere?”

She studies my gaze in silence, as if she’s trying to remember something too. Or maybe she’s looking for something in me. My mind searches, desperately trying to place where she belongs.

I’ve seen you before.

My eyes go to her lips. I know those lips. A memory of me kissing her deeply, of her kissing me back. My eyes dart to her hands resting at her sides. I know those hands. A memory of me pulling her to her feet as a cloud of dust surrounds us. I look at her dark hair, her heart-shaped face, her small chin. I know this face. A memory of that chin resting against my shoulder, of her huddled beside me in a rocking train car.

The memories come faster now, scattered pieces of a once-finished puzzle.

A memory of her standing over me, stern and furious, then of her sitting on top of a building, drenched with rain, wounded and tight-jawed with hidden emotion. Of her in an underground bunker, her brow damp with fever. Of me carrying her in my arms. Of her whispering to me. I’m sorry, I’m sorry. A memory of us at night, together, asleep, her body pressed against mine.

I can see her face in my dreams, finally matching the figure of her walking away.

I shake my head. “I have known you,” I murmur. “A long time ago. I don’t know where, but I think I know why”. (Lu, 2017, pp. 17-18)

The quote is taken from Life After Legend, a short story about the events in the epilogue of Champion from Day’s perspective. Compared to June’s perspective of the moment, Day is more emotional and sentimental in his description. Considering that he has lost his memory of a woman he used to love, and is reunited with her again in a long time, it is understandable if he is overwhelmed with his emotions. The detailed description in this scene shows that Day seems to be more in tune with his emotions and is comfortable in expressing them and sharing them with the readers.
Another character analyzed for his gender identity is Metias Iparis, June’s older brother. Metias is first featured in the beginning of Legend when he picks June up from college (Lu, 2011, p. 14). A few hours later, he was murdered during a commotion at a hospital. It was first believed that Metias is murdered by Day. The stab wound on his body indicates that Day stabbed him with a knife through his heart. However, it was later revealed that Metias was assassinated by Thomas Bryant, his subordinate in the military who also happens to be his childhood friend and lover. Metias’ murder is the first conflict in the narrative that drives the story forward.

Although this character is a minor one, there is a lot to unpack about Metias Iparis, his identity, and its implication for gender identity. Metias is a soldier, which is considered a decent and admirable occupation within the narrative, considering its militaristic setting. Both in the story and in the real world, the military institution as we know it is not exclusive to a certain sex, men and women can participate as military officers. However, there seems to be a view in society that the military is associated with traditionally masculine attributes. This view is echoed by Madeline Morris (1996) in her book *By Force of Arms: Rape, War, and Military Culture*. Cited from an article that offers a different point of view regarding this matter, Morris viewed the military as “a ‘masculinist’ institution that encourages attitudes that correlate with a rape propensity” (Titunik, 2008, p. 144).

While there is an assumption that the military is associated with what is considered a stereotypical view of masculinity, the portrayal of Metias Iparis does not seem to agree. Outside of his occupation as a soldier, Metias is the sole caretaker of his younger sister, June. The two siblings were orphaned many years before the story started, and Metias, being twelve years older than June, took on the role of his sister’s guardian. Thus, within his family, he takes on a role that is not considered masculine by Parsons’ “gender personalities.” Based on a scene from Legend in which Metias had to miss his induction ceremony to the Republic’s military because he stayed behind to take care of a sick June (Lu, 2011 pp. 35-36), Metias takes his role as June’s guardian seriously, prioritizing the wellbeing of his sister before tending to his affairs.

Another aspect worth analyzing is Metias’ sexuality. Metias is gay, although he never openly came out to his younger sister during his lifetime. The truth about his sexuality was revealed in the second book of the trilogy, Prodigy. Due to Metias’ character being killed early in the story, his sexuality was not explored further. The decision to kill off an LGBTQ character indicates the use of a controversial trope regarding LGBTQ characters in narrative media such as literature, film, and television. Hulan (2017) described the trope as a portrayal of a romantic couple of the same sex in which one of them must suffer or die by the end of the story. As we look into it, the Bury Your Gays trope fits into Metias’ portrayal.

In Legend, Metias was killed because he had hacked into a confidential government database and thus found out about the gruesome methods the government has done to remain in power and control the population. When the government realized his espionage, they wanted to eliminate him before he could act upon the information he obtained. Metias’ military commander, Commander Jameson, sent Thomas Bryant, Metias’ comrade and childhood best friend turned lover, to kill him.

Metias’ murder was an act of punishment for conducting illegal espionage to the Republic and obtaining classified data. Although the main reason for Metias’ murder is illegal espionage, the murder also involves Metias’ gender identity, his role as military personnel, and his romantic feelings. There is an excerpt regarding relationships in the military that can be linked with Metias’ situation; “Officer and subordinate relationships are strictly forbidden. Harshly punished. […] any chance of a relationship would be impossible” (Lu, 2013, p. 103).

On top of the military rule regarding relationships, the choice of having Metias’ lover as his assassin also involves Metias’ identity in the murder. Making Thomas kill Metias makes the assassination more painful for both characters. That is because Thomas and Metias being in love violates the rules of not being romantically involved with one’s comrade, and thus the assassination becomes the punishment for it. Since Thomas and Metias are gay, the assassination then fits into the
Bury Your Gay trope; the gay couple cannot be together, so they must suffer. Making Thomas, Metias’ love interest, kill him proves a point; the assassination is more than just because Metias was guilty of espionage, it is also because he is in love with Thomas. In a way, Metias’ sexuality is also a reason why he was murdered. Thus, the use of the Bury Your Gays trope in Metias’ portrayal enforces the cliché that LGBTQ characters need to suffer to drive the story forward.

Thus, the depiction of Metias Iparis offers a new perspective while also recycles an idea already present in the real world. Metias’ gender identity is a flexible one and not strictly categorized as either masculine or feminine. However, despite the lack of rigidity in his gender identity, the portrayal of his sexuality is delivered through a trope that has long been met with criticism by scholars and audiences alike (Snarker, 2016; Waggoner, 2018).

Discussion: Reimagination or Reconstruction?

Young adult dystopian novels construct its story in an imagined future. However, despite its futuristic setting, it is possible for the setting to contain norms and values reflected from the real world we live in, on top of norms and values fabricated for the storyworld. The possibility and potentiality framework (Muñoz, 2009) allows an analysis of these norms and values, and to differentiate whether the story reimagines a value from the real world or reconstructs a completely new one. Possibility and potentiality also offer a connection between a dystopian future and our present-day society (Peterman & Lo, 2022). To better understand the concept of possibility and potentiality, here is an example for both concepts, taken from the Legend trilogy.

As was mentioned earlier, possibility is a reimagination of values. An example of this is the gap between the rich and the poor, a theme that is recurring throughout the story. An example of this is,

Dad found out that the Republic engineers the annual plagues. […] every time an interesting new virus appears in the meat factories, the scientists take samples and craft them into viruses that can infect humans. Then they develop an equivalent vaccine and cure for it. And then they hand out mandatory vaccinations to everyone but a few slum sectors. (Lu, 2011, pp. 245-246)

In the excerpt, a vaccine for the plague is like a luxury reserved for rich people, while poor people in the slums are left to fend for themselves against the deadly disease. This occurrence mirrors a reality in the real world where healthcare can be expensive and inaccessible for poor people. Thus, this excerpt is a possibility.

On the contrary, potentiality is reconstruction of value, a value that is not yet present in society, but can be imagined. An example of this is a few poor families’ celebrations after they are given a condolence gift by the Republic after their children failed the Republic’s Trial (Lu, 2011, p. 7). These families feel no remorse or sadness whatsoever even though they are told to never see their children again, and instead bask in the happiness that the government gives them money and one less mouth to feed. While this value is morally wrong in the real world, it makes sense why it exists in the storyworld, due to how poor these families are. The lack of moral discomfort experienced by these families is categorized as a potentiality.

The concept of possibility and potentiality will also be used to analyze the portrayal of the three characters mentioned in the earlier section. While the previous section analyzed some traits, the characters are portrayed with, the following analysis will categorize those traits into either possibility or potentiality, and find out whether the portrayal of the characters reconstructs gender identity or not.

In the case of June Iparis’ portrayal, her dominant trait is her logic and intelligence. June’s inclination to use her intelligence subverts traditional gender roles in which femininity is believed to be dominantly emotional, enforced by a stereotype that women are ruled by their emotions. On the contrary, intelligence, or in this case logic, is a value frequently attributed to masculinity. Based on June’s portrayal, intelligence as her dominant instinct is subverting traditional gender roles, thus
coding June’s portrayal as a potentiality. However, gender identity does not only involve logic and emotion and attributing them to either masculinity or femininity. We see now that gender roles involving logic and emotion are entirely constructed by society and are no more than what they are; stereotypes. Logic and emotion should be able to coexist together, as humans are capable of both. Interestingly, this coexistence between logic and emotion also appears in the portrayal of June Iparis.

June’s personality is not solely defined by her intelligence and logic. Aside from being intelligent, she is also shown to express emotions, although it usually comes as an afterthought. June’s emotions evolve throughout the trilogy, serving as one of the elements that aid her character development. She grows from being skeptical of abrupt romantic feelings in Prodigy (Lu, 2013, p. 37) to embracing her feelings and even making an emotional sacrifice despite it breaking her heart in Champion (Lu, 2013, p. 351).

On the surface, June’s ending in the epilogue of Champion might look like a potentiality. After all, main female characters in a young adult dystopian novel do not always retain their agency at the end of their story. However, looking at it in more detail, June’s life as a 27-year-old woman in the epilogue of Champion is not much different than the lives of many 27-year-old women in real life. June surely still has her prodigious abilities and is not merely fated to live happily ever after with her love interest, but working and having a career are also things that are experienced by women in real life. According to an annual statistic by the US Department of Labor, the labor force participation rate of women between the age of 25 and 34 years old in 2010-2020 fluctuates between 73.4-76.7 percent, which shows that it is common for American women in their late 20s and early 30s to work and have a career. By mentioning this, I do not intend to say that it is unfortunate that June’s empowering ending ends up mirroring a real-life situation. Although it is not entirely innovative, it is still a good example as it shows that it is fine for women to not yet settle down by the time she is 27.

Overall, June’s portrayal consists of more possibilities than potentialities, which means that her portrayal uses a lot of values that are already present in real life instead of establishing new values. Her outstanding intelligence and tendency to use her logic before her emotions is not unique to her character because there have been numerous smart and strong female characters before her. June’s ending, despite its progressive notion, is not a completely new occurrence as it is also experienced by women in real life. However, despite the lack of potentialities in her portrayal, she still represents a progressive female character. June is not bound by stereotypical gender roles that some people still believe today as she can embody what is considered feminine and masculine values.

While June Iparis’ portrayal is dominated by values that mirror those in the real world, Day’s portrayal is quite the opposite. It was previously mentioned that Day has an androgynous appearance and a placement as a joint main character, not merely the heroine’s love interest. Day’s portrayal, through his physical appearance and description, is a potentiality. Day’s description as a “beautiful” person does not erase his masculinity, or make him any less of a man. The potentiality lies in how the storyworld treats Day. He is never mocked or ridiculed for his appearance, despite it not being what people would consider masculine. Day is also comfortable in his identity as a young man, even assuming a stereotypically masculine role as a provider for his family, as he is seen collecting money for his family (Lu, 2011, p. 9). Aside from the description of his physical appearance, Day’s placement as a joint main character alongside June also contributes to a progressive gender representation. Making Day tell the story from his perspective allows him to voice his feelings and emotions on top of narrating the story. Talking about their emotions is something men in the real world are still not given enough opportunity to, as it is still considered a weakness. Day’s portrayal creates a layered representation of gender identity, in which a person can embody both femininity and masculinity.

Previously, the paper touches upon two aspects of Metias Iparis’ portrayal, which are the distinction of the roles he has in his occupation and family, as well as his sexuality. Looking through the lens of potentiality and possibility, the former aspect leans more toward potentiality. Metias’ occupation as a military officer and his role as June’s caretaker involve values from both masculinity
and femininity. While Metias’ occupation as a soldier has traditionally masculine values attached to it, his role as June’s caretaker is associated with feminine values, as the role of a caretaker is stereotypically filled by women. Thus, Metias’ portrayal shows, again, that femininity and masculinity do not have to be in binary opposition.

While Metias’ roles in his occupation and family represent a progressive gender identity in which gender does not have to be in binary opposition, the depiction of his sexuality leans more toward a possibility. Surely, the character of Metias Iparis serves as a representation of LGBTQ characters in young adult dystopian novels. However, the use of the Bury Your Gays trope in his portrayal is a recurring phenomenon in the representation of LGBTQ characters that has been a subject of criticism as it implies that LGBTQ characters must suffer for the sake of the story. The negative implication behind the trope hinders Metias’ portrayal from being an entirely progressive representation of an LGBTQ character, making this aspect of his portrayal a possibility.

From the numerous characteristics analyzed about the three characters covered in this paper, most of the characteristics fall under the category of possibility. This means that the portrayal of June Iparis, Day, and Metias Iparis mostly replicate existing gender values. However, despite only replicating values that are already present in the real world, it does not mean that the Legend trilogy merely replicates problematic values associated with gender roles. In fact, in the portrayal of its three characters, the Legend trilogy tends to represent gender roles in a way that opposes the stereotypical gender roles, namely Parsons’ “gender personalities” (1953) and gender stereotypes mentioned in Johnson’s The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy (2005). Lu, through her characters in the Legend trilogy, shows a portrayal that subverts these existing stereotypes by making her characters embody both femininity and masculinity and assume roles that are commonly associated with the “other” gender. Despite many values mirroring those in the real world, Lu is still able to portray June Iparis, Day, and Metias Iparis as characters with flexible gender identities, in the sense that the characters are not strictly bound by the stereotypes associated with their respective genders. The trilogy portrays gender identity, such as femininity and masculinity, as a spectrum. A female character does not have to be stereotypically feminine all the time, and it applies to male characters with masculinity as well.

4. CONCLUSION

All three characters analyzed in this paper, June Iparis, Day, and Metias Iparis, depict a layered view of gender identities: June with how her character combines both logic and emotions; Day with his androgynous appearance; and Metias with the dual roles he assumes, being June’s caretaker as well as serving in the military. Thus, the gender identity depicted in the book does not reflect Parsons’ “gender personalities” theorized in 1953, nor is it as strict as theorized. With the flexible gender identities represented by the characters, gender roles are depicted not in binary opposition, but as a spectrum. The characters can embody values that are not associated with the characters’ supposed gender.

Overall, most of the values embodied by the three characters fall under possibility in Muñoz’s theory of possibility and potentiality, which means that most of them reproduce values that already exist in the real world. Despite that, Lu still manages to include progressive values, an example being the career opportunity given to June in the epilogue. This shows that a novel does not always have to create new values to be progressive, it can take a progressive value that already exists and highlight it as a character’s strength. However, the progressive values presented by the portrayal of the three characters are tainted by the Bury Your Gay trope, a trope that places LGBTQ characters as sacrificial lambs to drive the narrative forward.

Thus, the question of whether gender identities portrayed by the trilogy are progressive or not is not a mere yes or no. It is a mix of both. While it is true that the Legend trilogy includes gender identities that are not limited to the binary opposition of feminine and masculine, the portrayal is not entirely progressive, as it still includes a problematic trope. All in all, gender identity turns out to be
a non-rigid structure. The portrayal of gender identity in characters such as June Iparis, Day, and Metias Iparis strays away from “gender personalities” and stereotypes created many years ago, which shows that the values related to gender can evolve through time. Values that are considered potentialities today may become the norm many years from now. Progressive portrayals of gender identities in literature shall pave the way for a more inclusive and stereotype-free gender identity in the real world.

While this article contributes to the discourse of the *Legend* trilogy, it is worth noting that it only analyzes three characters in the *Legend* trilogy, which is a fraction of what the story offers. There is an opportunity to analyze gender identity from other elements of the story, such as setting, theme, and plot. A deeper analysis of the setting of the story might offer new insight into how a militaristic country with a dictator at its head can construct a certain portrayal of gender identity. Aside from the portrayal of gender identity in other elements of the story, analyzing the trilogy’s readers’ perception of gender identity is also an interesting opportunity to dive deeper into. This article focuses on gender identity as portrayed in the story, and leaves out the readers’ perception of it. Considering that the target audience for the *Legend* trilogy is young adults, there is an opportunity to analyze whether the portrayal of gender identity in the trilogy can influence young adults’ views about gender or not. Lastly, in 2019, another novel that follows some of the characters from the *Legend* trilogy was released. Although the novel, titled *Rebel*, is standalone with an entirely new plot, studying this accompaniment novel might be useful when learning about the growth of the main characters, especially in the aspect of gender identity. Hopefully, by following these recommendations, studies in the future can fill in the blanks and make more varied and thorough examinations of the *Legend* trilogy.

5. REFERENCES


