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Antoinette Giamalva MLIS  
*Delta State University*

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# Does Family Matter: The Parental Roles of Young Adult Media

By Antoinette Giamalva  
Access Services Librarian, Delta State University

## Introduction

In young adult media there are different roles that parents of the main characters symbolize. The role of parental figures can vary in their original conception and throughout media forms. Readers and viewers have their opinions about how parental figures representation should be characterized. Sometimes parental figures are what drive the stories along in a more interesting manner. The four types of parental presences represented are: a healthy parental presence, lack of parental presence, a broken parental presence, and a substitute parental presence. Readers and viewers of young adult media have many questions about the roles that parental figures have in the young adult main characters lives. What exactly is the role of the parental figure? Should there be any parental presences at all? How does the story flow with or without them? This article will explore examples of all four different parental presences in media forms of television series and books.

The role of parental figures can vary in their original conception and throughout the media forms itself. Readers and viewers have their opinions about how the parental figures should be represented and if they should be represented at all. Sometimes the parental figures are what drive the stories along in a more interesting manner. This article will explore examples of all four different parental presences in the media forms of television series and books. Data will be collected from popular television and book series.

## The Parental Presences

The role of parents is important in young adults' lives no matter what presence they might have. In the book *Teen Genreflecting 3: A Guide to Reading Interests* (2011), Diana Tixier Herald states, "Teens are all about relationships with those they are attracted to, those with whom they live, and those with whom they spend all their time..." (p. 21). Herald goes on to state that "Adolescence is also when teens

evaluate what family means to them; for many it is a time of drawing away, but for others it is a time of clinging to those lifelong relationships" (p. 21). The four presences that will be researched and discussed are: a healthy parental presence, a lack of parental presence, a broken parental presence, and a substitute parental presence.

### *Healthy Parental Presence*

A healthy parental presence is when the young adult has a strong bond with their mother or father and usually steams from the nuclear family. The healthy parental presence has its positives and negative but overall the young adults in the end appreciate having their family there to support them. In the book *Essentials of Young Adult Literature* (2010), Carl M. Tomlinson and Carol Lynch-Brown explain that "the period of time from middle school through high school is usually spent in close contact with family members. Stories often show the struggle between parents and adolescents" (p. 44). Even though problems exist between adolescents and their parents it does not mean the parental presence is broken, but just a normal family element.

In the book series *Percy Jackson and The Olympians*, Rick Riordan portrays a healthy relationship between the main character Percy and his mother, Sally. Percy and Sally have been on their own and the way Percy thinks of his mother is one rarely seen in young adult novels. In *The Lightning Thief* (2005), Riordan describes how Percy thinks of his mother before we meet her, "Her name is Sally Jackson and she's the best person in the world" (p. 29). Later in the same chapter, we see that their bond is so close that, Percy remarks,

My mother can make me feel good just by walking into the room. Her eyes sparkle and change color in the light. Her smile is as warm as a quilt. She's got a few gray streaks mixed in with her long brown hair, but I never think of her as old. When she looks at me, it's like

she's seeing all the good things about me, none of the bad. (p. 32-33)

It is clear from the text above that Sally truly loves her son because she tries to understand his expulsion from school and knows that he is special.

Sally harbors a secret from Percy and he does not make her feel bad about keeping the secret. He does not have time to adjust to the betrayal because she is kidnapped and taken to the Underworld. When he finds out where she is he never loses his focus on finding her. In the book *The Lightning Thief* (2005), we see Percy's thoughts on the matter, "All I cared about was my mom. Hades had taken her unfairly, and Hades was going to give her back" (p. 159). This is presented as a strong healthy parental presence, because they have been through so much together that all he wants is to get his mother back.

Another book series that represents a healthy parental presence is between Clary Fray and her mother, Jocelyn, in *The Mortal Instrument* series by Cassandra Clare. Jocelyn is a single parent protecting her daughter's life from secrets of the past, but their relationship is more challenging than Percy and Sally's. Jocelyn does not tolerate Clary's normal teenager attitude. In fact she is scared of Clary getting hurt that she tries to micromanage her life. In the book *City of Bones* (2007), Clary talks to her best friend Simon about how her mother reacted when they were late, "'I disappointed her, I let her down, I made her worry, blah blah blah. I'm the *bane* of her *existence*,' Clary said, mimicking her mother's precise phrasing with only a slight twinge of guilt" (p. 19).

Clary keeps the feelings of teen angst racing through her, but when her mother is kidnapped, she does change. Their mother and daughter relationship proves to be a healthy parental one when Clary does not waste any time racing towards their apartment to try to save mother. Their healthy parental presence rises above any hard feelings that might have been there before. They are a strong family of two and will stay that way.

Where the past examples have shown secrets that challenge a healthy parental presence, in the

*Divergent* series by Veronica Roth, the healthy parental presence is strong; however, no big secrets are revealed. Even with a small strain on their relationship, Tris could not think about killing her parents during a simulation. The decision she makes can be seen in *Divergent* (2011) through her thoughts, "I released the trigger of my gun and drop it. Before I can lose my nerve, I turn and press my forehead to the barrel of the gun behind me" (p. 396). This parental presence represented is a healthy one. Even though Tris is a young adult, she still values the importance of family.

In the television series *Teen Wolf* there are two illustrations of healthy parental presences. Melissa McCall and Sherriff Stilinski both are excellent parents to the main characters Stiles Stilinski and Scott McCall. Scott McCall and his mother have been on their own and so has Stiles and his father. Melissa and Scott have such a close relationship that they can talk to each other about almost everything. For example in the first season in the episode, "Wolf Moon" (Mulcahy, 2011) it depicts this close relationship:

Melissa: Is this a party or a date?

Scott: Maybe both.

Melissa: And her name is?

Scott: Allison.

Melissa: Allison. Nice.

The close relationship between Melissa and Scott is depicted again later on in the third season when Scott cannot control his werewolf powers in front of his father. Melissa takes him aside and says,

Melissa: You told me, you and Stiles learned a way to control this.

You find an anchor, right? Find your anchor.

Scott: My anchor was Allison. I don't have Allison anymore.

Melissa: Then be your own anchor. You can do this, Sweetheart. Let me tell you something every teenage doesn't believe, but I swear to you is the absolute truth. You fall in love more than once. It'll happen again. And it'll just be as amazing and extraordinary as the first time and maybe, just as painful.

But, it will happen again. I promise and until then be your own anchor. (Mulcahy, 2014).

This speech illustrates that Melissa has accepted her son's changing into a werewolf, and provides a strong support system for him. Even though she may be supportive and understanding, she has the ability to be firm and reprimand him when needed.

For Stiles and his dad, they have a slightly different relationship than Melissa and Scott. Their relationship resembles a strong healthy parental presence, because they are the only family they have left. In "Perishable" (Lynch, 2014b) during the fourth season, this earnest feeling of just having each other is represented through this interaction:

Sherriff: I keep things from you because you don't need to know everything.

Stiles: Yes I do. I have to know everything.

How else am I supposed to take care of you?

Sheriff: You're not supposed to take care of me. I'm the dad, you're the son. You get it!

Dad...son. I take care of you.

Stiles: We're supposed to take care of each other.

Even with the healthy relationship of wanting to help each other survive, Stiles and his father have a close enough relationship that when one messes up in life, they are not mad at each other, and if they do get mad it is not for long. When Stiles gets his dad put on probation at his job this scene unfolds in the second season episode, "Raving" (Mulcahy, 2012):

Sheriff: It was decided that the son of a police chief stealing police property and having a restraining order filled against him by one of the towns most respected attorney did not reflect well on the county.

Stiles: They fired you.

Sherriff: No...it's a leave of absence. It's temporary.

Stiles: Did they say it was temporary?

Sheriff: Actually no. You know what, it's fine. Don't worry about it. We're gonna be fine.

Stiles: Hey...dad. I don't get it. Why aren't you angry at me?

Sheriff: I don't know. Maybe I don't want to feel any worse than I already do, by, ah... having to yell at my son.

Through the trials that Stiles and his face, they overcome hardship, representing a healthy parental presence in Stiles' life that he values and he would go and save him at any cost, just like Scott would do for his mother.

Another example of healthy parental presence within a young adult television series is *Supernatural*. Dean Winchester and his father are constantly on the road hunting demons in an unstable environment. Their demon hunting and travel created a unique bond between them. In the book *TV Goes to Hell: An Unofficial Road Map of Supernatural* (2011) edited by Stacey Abbott and David Lavery, Simon Brown in his essay "Renegades and Wayward Sons" states, "But as Dean openly admits, this isn't actually his world at all; it is his father's. He says, 'I worshiped him. I dressed like him. I listened to the same music' (Sgriccia, 2009). Like his father, he is a mechanic, and thus is able to take care of the car his father gave him. The aforementioned trappings that surround Sam and Dean are all adopted by Dean to imitate his dad (p. 67).

Dean had a healthy relationship with his father because he wanted to be just like him. John's disappearance and death affects Dean hard enough that he would stop at nothing to get him back or save his life, even make a deal with a demon.

According to the research, a healthy relationship helps main characters grow into outstanding citizens and idolize their parents. They have a good head on their shoulders and the bond is unbreakable through hidden secrets, attempts on their life, and anything that might stand in their way of a good relationship.

### *Lack of Parental Presence*

Lack of parental presence is when the young adults in the media do not have a parental presence in their lives at all, and it may come from death or abandonment of a parent. According to Meredith Goldstein in her article "Grown-ups Make a Comeback in Young Adult Books," (2014) "dystopian

novels often demand that the adults are out of the picture for plot purposes” (p. 2). Not only does a lack of parental presence seem to produce a good plot for the young adult main characters, but Donna E. Norton in her book *Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introduction to Children’s Literature* (2011) explains, “strong young protagonists in contemporary novels often overcome obstacles related to family problems caused by adult family members” (p. 366).

Out of the book series, two are in the Dystopia genre, *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2011) and *The Maze Runner* (Dashner, 2012), through both of these book series we see a lack of parental presence in their lives. The parents are phased out of the story or given a negative representation that the main characters in the series have to be the responsible party.

In *The Maze Runner* series by James Dashner, Thomas’ mother makes a huge sacrifice at the end of *The Kill Order* (2005), “she’d known the knock was coming far before it happened. And she wanted to be strong for her son. Make the boy think that the new life that awaited him was a good thing” (p. 325). Her son has been chosen to help find the cure for their world. She knows that this means she has to let him go, but it is hard for the both of them because he was so young and she loves him.

We see how Thomas fairs in *The Maze Runner* (2014) when he is sent to The Glades without any memories of his parents. Once he is established in The Glades he takes on the leadership of the band of boys to help them survive. With no parental figures in his life, this does not stop him from becoming a big brother of the band of boys. The lack of parentage has made him grow up fast; however, he has grown in strength and a good moral upbringing.

In a way Thomas’ character resembles Katniss in *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins, except she had a parental presence in her life before losing them. Katniss Everdeen lost her father in a mining accident and her mother withdrew from their family due to depression. Katniss had to provide for her family to survive. Katniss never forgave her mother for withdrawing when they needed her. This is

depicted in Katniss’ thought in *The Hunger Games* (2008), the district had given us a small amount of money as compensation for his death, enough to cover one month of grieving at which time my mother would be expected to get a job, but she didn’t. She didn’t do anything but sit propped up in a chair or, more often, huddled under the blankets of her bed, eyes fixed on some point in the distance (p. 26-27). Katniss was mother, father and sister to her sister, Prim as life continued on for the Everdeen family.

When Prim is selected during the reaping, Katniss steps up and protects her by taking her place. It is hard for Katniss to leave her family, given a lack of parental presence due to her father’s death and mother’s withdrawal. Before she goes to The Games she constructs a list of instructions for both Prim and her mother so they can survive. She talks with her mother before she leaves and tells her, “You can’t clock out and leave Prim on her own. There’s no me now to keep you both alive. It doesn’t matter what happens. Whatever you see on the screen. You have to promise me you’ll fight through it!” (p. 35). Katniss is more of a parent to her mother, since she has not been there in her own life as a parental presence. We can see how Thomas and Katniss’ characters have built strength and independence due to the lack of their parental presence. However, within the television series of *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Flash* lack of parental presence breaks or makes the main characters.

Elena Gilbert in *The Vampire Diaries* experienced a loss of substitute, or adoptive, parents and a lack of parental presence. In the first season during the “Pilot” episode (Siega, 2009), viewers witness Elena trying to make herself stronger; she says, “I will no longer be the sad little girl who lost her parents. I’ll be someone new. It’s the only way I’ll make it through.” Throughout season one we see her trying to be a brave young woman getting over her loss by being a helping hand to her Aunt Jenna in raising her younger brother, Jeremy.

Elena has barely gotten over the loss of her adoptive parents when she loses her biological parents. Her

biological parents have formed an alliance with a murderer who wants to kill her. Only her biological father, John, tries to save her life at the end, trading his life for hers. In a letter to Elena in the second season episode of “The Sun Also Rises” (Sommers, 2011), we see John Gilbert saying,

Elena, it’s no easy task being an ordinary parent to an extraordinary child. I’ve failed in that task, and because of my prejudices, I’ve failed you. I’m haunted by how things might’ve played out differently if I’d been more willing to hear your side of things. For me, it’s the end. For you, a chance to grow old and someday do better with your own child than I did with mine. It’s for that child that I give you my ring. I don’t ask for your forgiveness, or for you to forget. I ask only that you believe this; whether you are now reading this as a vampire or as a human, I love you all the same as I’ve always loved you, and always will.

As John sacrifices his life for Elena’s it is obvious that he really does try to make amends for giving her up and siding with the enemy.

After the death of her biological parents, her adopted parents, and then her substitute family of Alaric and Aunt Jenna, Elena does not become stronger, but in fact weaker. Her mental state becomes emotionally unbalanced, and she takes each new death of her friends harder. The lack of parental presence has hindered her character’s growth and made her weak.

Unlike Elena, Barry Allen does not grow weaker. He loses both of his biological parents—his mother to death and his father to jail. His mother dies and his father is accused of murdering her and is arrested. We see that Barry does not want to stop searching for his mother’s true killer to avenge her death and clear his father’s name. Through the twelve years after his mother’s death, he never forgets her. She was always there to encourage him after being bullied as we see from a flashback in the pilot episode of the first season. Nora Allen tells him, “You have such a good heart, Barry. And it’s better to have a good heart than fast legs” (Siega, 2009). His mother helped him through challenges and when life gets

rough he misses her and tries to remember her advice.

His father is in his life more than his mother, but he does have that lack of fatherly presence due to being in jail. This lack of fatherly presence drives Barry to focus his free time on trying to clear his father’s name leading to a stunted social life. Overall, the lack of his parental presence in his life has made him both weaker and stronger—it has made him weaker in not helping his character grow in a healthy life, but stronger in being a better fighter and a more determined young man.

Overall, a lack of parental presence can break or build a character. However, it depends on how the lack of parental presence happens and how the relationship was before they were abandoned.

#### *Broken Parental Presence*

A broken parental presence is one where the parent figures are in the lives of the main characters, but it is not a healthy presence. It is harmful to the main characters emotional or physical growth. Judith A Hayn and Jeffery S. Kaplan (2012) explain that “all young people are curious about who they are, how they fit in, and more importantly, how they are perceived by others” (p. 20). If a young adult has a broken relationship with their parental role, then as they try to figure out “how they fit in” they might get lost.

In the book series, *The House of Night* by P.C. Cast and Kristin Cast, the main character, Zoey Redbird has a negative parental presence in her life. Zoey’s thoughts of her step-father are seen in *Marked* (2007) on the very first page as she names, John Heffer, “the Step-Loser.” P.C. Cast and Kristin Cast set the scene in the book to show that her step-father is really a loser with how he reacts to her when she is marked as a vampire. When he gets home he says, “Get thee behind me, Satan!” (p. 22). John goes on and says, “I told you that your bad behavior and your attitude problem would catch up with you. I’m not even surprised it happened this soon” (p. 22). He even refuses to send her to the academy that could help her with her transformation.

Zoey's step-father is the reason that her relationship with her mother changes from a healthy parental presence to a broken parental presence. Zoey wishes that their relationship could be back to how it was, as demonstrated with Zoey's thoughts in the book *Marked* (2007), "Ah, hell! I was sixteen years old, but I suddenly realized that I wanted nothing as much as I wanted my mom" (p. 16). She yearns for her mother's care, even when it is broken. She wants their relationship to be fixed and reaches out to her. She gets denied; however, as we see this scene unfold, "Just... just tell him I'm spending the next couple days at Kayla's house because we have a big biology project due.' I watched my mom's eyes change. The concern faded from them and was replaced by hardness that I recognized all too well" (p. 18). Zoey tries to convince her mother to see how she has changed, but it only further breaks their relationship. The scene shifts to her mother, reasoning with her on her decisions with her new husband,

'I think that's the problem, Mom. You don't care enough to be aware of it. You haven't cared about anything but John since you married him.'

Her eyes narrowed at me. 'I don't know how you can be so selfish. Don't you realize all that he's done for us? Because of him I quit that awful job at Dillard's. Because of him we don't have to worry about money and we have this big, beautiful house. Because of him we have security and a bright future.' (p. 18-19)

Zoey's broken parental presence pushed her to run away from her home to her grandmother's to find help.

A different type of broken parental presence is shown with Bella and her parents in the series *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer. Bella's parents have not been in her life as parents. Her mother is more of a teenager, and her father is someone she only sees on occasion and calls him by his first name and not dad or father. In the beginning of the series Bella is being moved to Forks, Washington a town she never wanted to visit. In *Twilight* (Meyer, 2005) Bella's thoughts show how she really felt about traveling to

Forks when she explains, "that I'd been compelled to spend a month every summer until I was fourteen. That was the year I finally put my foot down" (p. 3-4).

Julie Just in her 2010 article "The Parent Problem in Young Adult Lit" states that "In *Twilight*, the only reason Bella meets the supernaturally good-looking Edward in the first place is that she has moved to her father's place in gloomy Forks, Wash.; that way her mother can follow around her new husband, a minor league ballplayer" (p. 1-2). Even though the move to Forks results in Bella dating Edward, she is still sacrificing her happiness for her parents. Bella sacrifices a lot for her mother—instead of it being the other way around—by leaving her friends, a sunny state, and everything she has really cared about to move to a place and lifestyle she does not like and a place where she does not have any friends.

Although her father attempts to be a father to Bella throughout the series once she arrives, it is obvious that their relationship is indeed a broken one because as we see in *Twilight* (Meyer, 2005) when she arrives and is greeted, "'Mom's fine. It's good to see you too, Dad.' I wasn't allowed to call him Charlie to his face" (p. 6). We can see from here and in Bella's thoughts throughout the book, she never refers to him as father or dad in actuality and only Charlie, no matter how hard he tries to be that parent figure. He seems to be in a losing battle.

Unlike in books, a broken relationship in television is often depicted throughout the series and tends to be utilized to move the plot more than it does in a book series. For example, in the television show *Teen Wolf* when Scott McCall's father comes back into his life, he is disrupting everything in it. A prime example of this is when Rafael McCall is trying to get answers from his son in the third season episode "Silverfinger" (Lynch, 2014a). Scott does not really care what his father thinks:

Rafael: I don't need a warrant. I'm your father.

Scott: No, you're a gene donor. I got my hair color from you. And that's all I got. So you're not allowed to play tough dad with me.

Even when Rafael tries his best to explain why he had been gone from his life, Scott doesn't want to hear it. Scott states it clearly in the third season "This house is full of accidents. The stairs? Maybe it was an accident. Maybe it was worse, but I don't need your apology. So see you at graduation. Or whenever you decided to show up again" (Andrew, 2014b). Their relationship has a long road to mend, but it appears that Rafael will be sticking around, instead of disappearing again. Where Rafael is actually trying to make up for his broken parental presence, Esther and Mikael Mikaelson in *The Originals* (Plec, 2013), make no effort to mend their relationship with their children, but instead try to end their life.

It is true that Rebekah, Elijah, and Niklaus Mikaelson are older than the normal young adults, but they have been stuck in their young adult bodies for centuries and their broken parental presence has been the theme of the show. Ever since its creation, creator Julie Plec knew that this series would be about family. In *The Vampire Diaries*, season three, Plec (2011) says in the special feature "The Original Vampires: The Beginning":

The season is about family. When we were able to take the Original family, and met the siblings and meet the mother and meet the father it became very clear to us that rather than it beginning a monster original tale, it really needed to be a tale of a family that had loved each other so much that in trying to keep it together, it tore it apart.

No matter how many years have passed, the parents have always had this control and fear over their children. In the third season of *The Vampire Diaries*, this is shown in a conversation with Niklaus and Rebekah, in the episode "Ordinary People" (Tobin, 2011) about their fear of their father,

Niklaus: Father would not like you handling a blade.

Rebekah: If I want to wield a blade, I shall wield a blade. Father need not know.

Niklaus: He'll find out. He always does.

Rebekah: That is because you always tell him.

Niklaus: I cannot help it. He frightens me.

Rebekah: He frightens us all. That is why we stick together as one. Always and forever.

Right, traitor?

Niklaus: Right.

From the beginning, this family has been split into children versus the parents.

In the season one DVD box set of *The Originals* a special feature called "The Original Vampires: A Bite-Sized Backstory," we learn from Elijah's narration that their father "mercilessly hunted us for centuries, laid waste to half of Europe." Even their mother Esther has made an indestructible weapon to kill all of her children, and we hear directly from her that her "only regret is that I didn't let you die a thousand years ago." Through this tormented family who has been in battle for thousands of years, there is a broken parental presence that can and will never be mended until one side of the war has truly fallen. The effects of that this war has on Niklaus, Rebekah, and Elijah is shown in how they view their own relationships and ultimately their own children-parent relationships.

In the end, a broken family does provide a good plot element and help the main characters grow. The broken family does effect the growth of the main character(s) by either making them stronger or in a negative way into their adulthood

#### *Substitute Parental Presence*

A substitute parental presence is gained when the main character cannot trust or tell their real parents what is going on, due to a threat on their life, or that their nuclear family has been removed from their life. This presence can be defined as either an extended or alternative family group. According to Carl M. Tomlinson and Carol Lynch-Brown (2010), an extended family may consist of "aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins" (p. 44). The alternative family group has many different types of groups, for the sake of this article it is defined as family friends and community members.

The book series that characterized this type of presence are the *Harry Potter* series and the *Twilight* series. Within the *Harry Potter* series the main character, Harry Potter, had a number of substitute



parental presences, such as his Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon, The Weasley family, Remus Lupin, and Sirius Black. Harry's aunt and uncle gained custody over him after his family was murdered and "he's lived with the Dursleys' almost ten years, a ten miserable years," (Rowling, 1997, p. 29).

Within those ten years, he was subjected to mistreatment. His aunt and uncle made him live in a cupboard below the stairs and treated him as an unwanted guest. This display of disdain towards him did not change at all through the book series. In the book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), Harry is about to go to the Quidditch World Cup with the Weasley's and his aunt and uncle does not tell him good-bye:

'Well...bye then,' Harry said to the Dursleys. They didn't say anything at all. Harry moved towards the fire, but just as he reached the edge of the hearth, Mr. Weasley put out a hand and held him back. He was looking at the Dursleys in amazement.

'Harry said good-bye to you,' he said. 'Didn't you hear him?'

'It doesn't matter,' Harry muttered to Mr. Weasley. 'Honestly, I don't care.' (p. 48)

This interaction demonstrates that is a normal feeling of discontent that Harry has with his aunt and uncle.

When Harry learned of his true identity and makes his arrival at Hogwarts, he runs into other substitute parental presences that are more of a positive influence in his life. For example as soon as he meets the Weasley's in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1997), Molly Weasley takes a motherly hand with him. She shows him how to get through the wall to get to the train, even before officially meeting him. This motherly affection is further seen in a Christmas scene:

'I think I know who that one's from,' said Ron, turning a bit pink and pointing to a very lumpy parcel. 'My mom. I told her you didn't expect any presents and-oh, no,' he groaned, 'she's made you a Weasley sweater.'

Harry had torn open the parcel to find a thick, hand-knitted sweater in emerald green and a large box of homemade fudge.

'Every year she makes us a sweater,' said Ron, unwrapping his own,' and mine's *always* maroon.'

'That's really nice of her,' said Harry, trying the fudge, which was very tasty. (p. 200-201).

Molly Weasley automatically included Harry in this family tradition and continues through the rest of the series as a surrogate mother in the wizarding world. Not only does Mrs. Weasley embrace Harry but the whole family embraces him as one of them. Harry Potter also has family friends of Remus Lupin and Sirius Black, who appear in the third *Harry Potter* book, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, 1999), Lupin protected him from the actions of the dark lord, and Black even offered Harry refuge from his aunt and uncle. Black and Lupin are other positive substitute parental presences in his life who remain strong within their journey of his young adult life.

Harry Potter is not the only literary character that has had a substitute parental presence. Bella Swan and Edward Cullen had substitute parents. In some ways, they shared the same substitute parents, Carlisle and Esme Cullen, in the *Twilight* series. Even though they have the same substitute parents, they each have a different, yet similar relationship with them.

Carlisle saved Edward's life when he was stricken by sickness at the age of seventeen and brought into the Cullen coven when Carlisle turned him into a vampire. Throughout the years even though he was raised as a vampire by them, he never calls them mom or dad, just simply by their first names. In town, Edward is believed to be the adopted son of Carlisle and Esme, but that is just to keep up appearances.

Carlisle and Esme care about Edward and that can be seen in the first book of the *Twilight* (2005) series when Edward comments to Bella how they feel about him finally finding someone to date:

'Are happy to see me happy. Actually, Esme wouldn't care if you had a third eye and webbed feet. All this time she's been worried about me, afraid that there was something missing from my essential makeup, that I was too young when Carlisle changed me... She's

ecstatic. Every time I touch you, she just about chokes with satisfaction.’ (p. 327)

Just as with Edward, Carlisle and Esme took in Bella Swan, but before she was a vampire. They became very protective of her because she was special to Edward and could see that she would be a big part of their family one day. When her life is threatened by another vampire, they are quick to help her. For example, Esme is willing to be mistaken as Bella and says that they are “Trying to confuse the smell. It won’t work for long, but it might help get you out” (p. 402). Esme is willing to risk her life for Bella because she is part of their world and needs guidance and a parental hand when it comes to knowing how vampires work, especially when one is still human and needs protection.

In the television series, *Supernatural*, *Teen Wolf*, and *The Flash*, there are examples of substitute parental presences. The show *Supernatural* has an underlining message of family between the two brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester. When their father is murdered, they have Bobby Singer and the Harvelle family who takes on the role of substitute parental presence in their lives. In the book *TV Goes to Hell: An Unofficial Road Map of Supernatural* (2011) edited by Stavey Abbott and David Lavet, Simon Brown states in the chapter “Renegades and Wayward Sons,” “Once John dies, Bobby takes on the mantle of the father figure” (p. 72). Bobby takes on teaching them to hunt, giving them guidance and a hit on the head when they go astray. Sam and Dean learn to appreciate him and even though they do not call him an uncle or even another father, the bond that is created through the series. The Harvelles, according to Bronwen Calvert in the chapter *Angels, Demons, and Damsels in Distress* of the same book explains:

If we put the Winchester’s and the Harvelles into a family context the characters’ relationships make more sense. Jo as ‘sister’ to Sam and Dean is understandable: indeed, the questions of her parentage hovers in the background once the brothers have met Ellen and learned that ‘John was like family once.’ (102)

Ellen takes a maternal stance toward the brothers, calls them ‘boys,’ and offers them first a place to stay at the Roadhouse and then advice and information in the same way that Bobby does (2011, Brown, p. 102). The Winchester boys, though parentless never truly are alone with the community of family friends around them.

Another character that has a family friend that takes the place of their mother is Stiles from *Teen Wolf*. Stiles’ mother died when he was young and Scott’s mother took up the role has a surrogate mother throughout his life. One example of this is when Scott’s mom holds him when he is having a nightmare and tries to bring him out of his manic state in the third season episode of “Riddled” (Andrew, 2014a). In “Silverfinger” (Lynch, 2014a) of *Teen Wolf*’s third season when Stiles goes to Melissa for help for his friends, she notices that he is different and takes him into a hospital room, where she works. It is evident that she has his best interest at heart as if he was her own son as she gives him a sedative. Stiles’ responds to all of her caring in this episode by saying, “Thanks mom” and we finally get to see that our assumptions on that relationship is true.

In the television show *The Flash*, there is another example of a different substitute parental presence, one that almost resembles some of Harry Potter’s family presence, but a family friend who actually takes in the main character Barry Allen. Through the series that Barry and Joe West have a close relationship, but there is always a push and pull that Joe is not his true family. Barry’s mother has passed away and his father was convicted for her murder when he was eleven years old.

Joe’s fatherly instinct comes in frequently and tries to protect him even at an early age as shown when he tries to abide by Henry’s, Barry’s father, wishes to keep him away from the prison in the first season episode, “Fastest Man Alive” (Nutter, 2014):

Barry: Then why can’t I go see him!

Joe: Because I said so.

Barry: You’re not my father! You can’t tell me what to do!

Joe: Right now I'm the only adult who gives a damn about what happens to you. So yes, I can tell you what to do. Go to your room.  
Barry: I hate you!

This relationship develops into one of support through the years and Barry ends up working with him at the police department once he graduates college. Throughout the season, it is obvious that that Joe cares for him and wants to protect him, no matter Barry's age. In "Fastest Man Alive" (Nutter, 2014), when Joe finds out Barry has been putting himself in danger, he confronts him saying, "... and you're going to do what? Catch them? Are you sure? You think because you run real fast that you are invincible? You're NOT! You're just a kid, *my kid*" (Nutter, 2014). Barry grows to accept this at the end of the episode when he tries to apologize for saying he was not his father when Joe called him his kid yet again. Barry makes Joe feel accepted as he says:

You're right, you're not. You're just the man who kept me fed and in clothes. Who stayed by my bed 'til I fell asleep at night because I was afraid of the dark. Helped me with my homework. Taught me how to drive and to shave. You dropped me off at college. Sounds a lot like a dad to me.

Even though their relationship is a substitute parental presence, it mimics one of a real nuclear family and has its struggles just like a real family setting.

Research on substitute parental presence illustrates that even though someone may not be part of the original nuclear family the main characters gain support and at least a roof over their heads in some scenarios. The main characters can thrive under the presence regardless if it is negative or positive because they still learn from them and gain insight to the world in how they will grow up and overcome obstacles.

### Conclusion

Parental presences are important in young adult multi-media as provided in the research and examples above. Young adults can be supporters of the parents, whatever the type, being depicted, and these same young adult viewers and readers can be

the multi-media parents' harshest critic. In the *Boston Globe's* article "Grown-ups Make a Comeback in Young Adult Books" (2014) Meredith Goldstein quotes Nancy Siscoe, "It's rare to see a real, defined kid character in an adult novel. In teen and middle grade [novels], kids have to deal with adults. There's no getting away from them" (p. 3). In the real world, young adults are faced with some form of parental presence in their lives. Regardless of the form, it can shape the main character's experience in life and give life lessons to its readers and viewers as provided by the different main characters illustrated in this research.

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