

Coming of Age in the U.S.A.: The Girl Athlete in Young Adult Literature, 1900-1983

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Since the turn of the century the girl athlete has been a part of popular young adult fiction. These fictitious heroines have preserved -for some, created - a view of the place of sport in the lives of adolescent females. This study focuses on these athletes' rites-of-passage into adulthood. Generally the role of sport in the rites-of-passage was examined, but the primary concern was the initiation process itself. The study was limited to five novels which seemed to best represent the *genre* during their time periods: Edith Bancroft's *Jane Allen of the Sub-Team*, 1917 and *Jane Alien: Right Guard*, 1918; Betty Cavanna's *The Boy Nest Door*, 1955; Amelia Elizabeth Walden's *Basketball Girl of the Year*, 1970; and Linnea Due's *High and Outside*, 1980.

Although the five novels represented four different eras, the formula which the authors used to present the theme of growing-up was quite similar. First each girl encountered an incident, such as a birthday, or a feeling, such as a feeling of isolation, that indicated to her that she was leaving childhood. Once the separation occurred, each character entered a period of transition where they learned things to help them become responsible adults. Interestingly, in the four early novels the girl's physical appearance was enhanced by new clothes, new hairdo and/or cosmetics. All of these changes were deemed important to the new position she approached. In the most recent novel the heroine had little concern for her appearance.

It was also during this period that the participation in sports helped the characters' growth. However, this was only apparent in the four early novels.

The last phase integrated the girl into the mainstream of society. The lessons she learned during the transition helped her take a place in society.

The ultimate purpose of the rites-of-passage did not vary decidedly from Bancroft to Walden. Their purpose was to change girl into woman, and all that term implied. Due's character, however, did not fit the traditional mold.

In conclusion, there was not enough evidence in the literature presented to suggest a total change of purpose in a girl's rite-of-passage, though some change has occurred.