

While YAL has made great strides to be inclusive and empathetic in its depiction of various groups of people in the last few decades, one type of character has been left behind. Focusing on the conference's inspection of empathy in YAL, this paper discusses the negligence of this genre throughout its history to display empathy to plus-sized female adolescent characters, also referred to as the "big girls" of YAL. Their depictions are still vastly disempowering and disenfranchising. From Judy Blume's *Blubber* to Deirdre Riordan Hall's *Sugar*, motifs such as characters overcoming fatness, "fat shaming" obese characters, and depicting less satisfying endings for characters based on their sizes continue to remain staples in how to depict the "big girl" experience. These motifs, however, are just a few examples of how conventions in the YAL genre can objectify characters and take away from their complexity as a human being.

Touching on the work of scholars such as Cress and Holm, I review prior research on empathy in children's literature to establish the meaningful strides that have been made in depicting empathetic characters through time. I then apply these concepts to a close reading of novels with plus-size female protagonists such as Julie Murphy's *Dumplin*, Tanita Davis' *Peas and Carrots* and Erica Perl's *Vintage Veronica* to show how big girls somehow got left behind during the empathy movement.