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"I MIGHT NOT EVER BE THE PERFECT HERO EVERYBODY WANTS ME TO BE, BUT THAT'S OKAY.":

Examining New Girl Heroes of the 21st Century in Animated Fantasy Series Aimed at Young Audiences

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ABSTRACT

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There is a recent increasing and notable demand for more female-centric stories and better female representation in media and one field where this demand has been answered is western animation. While research on female representation and female heroes in tv and film aimed at mature audiences has been done quite widely (for example Hohenstein, 2019; Tigges, 2017; Stabile, 2009) naturally there has not yet been a notable amount of research into newer animated series aimed at younger viewers that have responded to this demand for representation. As such, this thesis looks into the subject of girls as heroes (excluding super heroes, as they are a different category of hero) in recent major animated series aimed at younger audiences, using *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018-), *The Legend of Korra* (2012-2014) and *the Dragon Prince* (2018-) as primary analysis material. This thesis specifically examines shows aimed at young viewers that feature young female protagonists who are decidedly not adults yet.

Through closer analysis of the protagonists of the chosen series this thesis offers answers to what type of features and stories are present in these popular girl heroes, thereby shedding light on what it is that viewers enjoy seeing in girl heroes. The selected three animated series with girl protagonists from the last decade are examined through the theories of Katheryn Wright and Lori M. Campbell on female heroes, as well as the hero's journey and heroine's journey theories of Joseph Campbell and Victoria Lynn Schmidt, respectively. This thesis cannot and therefore will not give any kind of all-covering prototype image of the current girl heroes as a result, but rather gives a closer of examination of them through three popular series and their protagonists. Through examining these recent series, their protagonists and their stories more closely this thesis analyzes any the similarities and differences in personalities, characteristics and journeys, thereby giving an idea of what popular girl heroes in the 2010's are like.

The analysis reveals that the protagonists of these series do have similarities in both their personalities and stories, but also a vast multitude of differences, making them unique. The most important things that could be seen as contributing to their popularity are their emotional complexity and the way that they are portrayed as heroes, who are also at the same still just teenagers working through common teenage problems, such as the difficulty of navigating interpersonal relationships. Additionally, their stories are without doubt centered on inner growth and finding their own identities, while also showing the girl heroes as achieving heroic goals of defeating foes and saving people, among other things. The new girl heroes are multifaceted and reflect real-life teenagers on the path to growing up, which makes them compelling characters and intriguing protagonists.

Keywords: female heroes, heroism, feminism, female characters, animated series, popular culture, representation in media

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Examining New Girl Heroes of the 21st Century in Animated Fantasy Series Aimed at Young Audiences
Pro-gradu tutkielma
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Viime aikoina on noussut esiin yhä enemmän vaatimusta naiskeskeisille tarinoille, sekä paremmalle naisten representaatiolle mediassa. Yksi alue, jossa tämä vaatimus on kuultu, on länsimaalainen animaatio. Vaikka on olemassa jo laaja määrä tutkimusta naisten representaatiosta ja naissankareista TV-sarjoissa sekä elokuvissa, jotka on suunnattu aikuiselle yleisölle (mm. Hohenstein, 2019; Tigges, 2017; Stabile, 2009), ei ole kuitenkaan juurikaan tutkimusta nuorille katselijoille tehdyistä uudemmista animaatiosarjoista, jotka ovat nousseet esiin nyt kun on toivottu lisää naisrepresentaatiota. Tämän takia tämä tutkielma tutkii nuoria naissankareita (mutta ei naissupersankareita, sillä he ovat täysin oma kategoriansa) viimeaikaisissa suosituissa nuorille suunnatuissa animaatiosarjoissa, käyttäen ensisijaisena analyysimateriaalina sarjoja *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018-), *The Legend of Korra* (2012-2014), sekä *the Dragon Prince* (2018-). Tämä tutkielma keskittyy nimenomaan juuri nuorille suunnattuihin sarjoihin, joissa on nuori päähenkilö, joka selkeästi ei ole vielä aikuinen.

Näiden valittujen sarjojen päähenkilöiden analyysin kautta tämä tutkielma antaa vastauksia siihen millaisia piirteitä ja tarinoita nykyisillä suosituilla tyttösankareilla on, tämän kautta näyttäen mitä katsojat tämän kaltaisilta nykysankareilta haluavat. Valittuja kolmea sankaria analysoidaan Katheryn Wrightin, sekä Lori M. Campbellin naissankariteorioiden kautta. Tämän lisäksi näiden kolmen tyttösankarin tarinoita analysoidaan Joseph Campbellin maskuliinisen ”sankarin tarina”-teorian, sekä sen uudemman vastaparin eli Victoria Lynn Schmidtin feminiinisen ”sankarin tarina”-teorian kautta. Tämä tutkielma ei pysty antamaan, eikä yritäkään antaa kokonaisvaltaista kuvaa kaavasta, johon kaikki nykyiset tyttösankarit mahtuvat, vaan sen sijaan antaa yksityiskohtaisen analyysin näistä kolmesta tyttösankarisa, jonka kautta voi tehdä yleisiä johtopäätöksiä siitä millaisia ovat 2010-luvun tyttösankarit.

Analyysi osoittaa, että tyttösankareissa on samankaltaisuutta niin piirteissä, kuin tarinoissakin, mutta heissä on myös niin suuri määrä eroja, että he ovat kuitenkin ainutlaatuisia. Tärkeimmät asiat, jotka voi nähdä vaikuttavan heidän suosioonsa ovat laaja tunteiden kirjo, joita he näyttävät, sekä tapa, jolla heidät näytetään sankareina, jotka ovat kuitenkin yhä teini-ikäisiä nuoria, jotka joutuvat käsittelemään myös nuoruuden ongelmia, kuten suhteitaan muihin henkilöihin. Näiden teinien ongelmien lisäksi kuitenkin he silti ovat sankarillisia ja suorittavat sankaritekoja, kuten mm. voittavat pahat vastustajansa, sekä pelastavat ja suojelevat ihmisiä. Uudet tyttösankarit ovat moniulotteisia ja heijastava oikean elämän teini-ikäisiä, jotka ovat vasta kasvamassa aikuisiksi. Tämä tekee heistä mukaansatempaavia hahmoja ja kiehtovia päähenkilöitä.

Avainsanat: naissankarit, sankarit, feminismi, naishahmot, animaatiosarjat, populaarikulttuuri, representaatio mediassa

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin OriginalityCheck –ohjelmalla.

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1. Introduction

As the importance of representation in pop culture media been discussed much recently, among the discussion there has been an increasingly vocal call for more female-centric stories portraying women and girls in better and more varied ways. Particularly there has been call for female heroes that young girls and women alike can look up to and be inspired by. Where there is a nearly endless list of male heroes and superheroes in pop culture and mythic tales, women and especially girls are still very few. Rebecca Hains for example points out that in media girls have usually either been cast either a "princess in peril" or a token female character, who is the only female among a group of men. Hains uses Smurfette from *the Smurfs* as an example of the token female characters trope (161), and in fact, this phenomenon has been coined as "The Smurfette principle" already in 1991 by Katha Pollitt in her article about female characters in children's media, in which she describes the principle as the occurrence when "a group of male buddies will be accented by a lone female, stereotypically defined." This trope is unfortunately common and even *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, predecessor *the Legend of Korra* (one of the series examined in this thesis) falls victim to this in the first season, as Katara is the only prominent female as even most of the villains are male.

Characters such as Buffy from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) or Xena from *Xena the Warrior Princess* (1995-2001) have made the way for strong, very feminine female heroes and of them Carole A. Stabile actually argues in her paper that only Buffy is truly groundbreaking as a female hero, who no longer falls victim to the trope that women are in need of saving and protecting as part of their story. Such female heroes have made way for more female leads and recently for characters such as Arya Stark from *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-) and particularly its popular tv adaptation *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019). Characters such as Arya have also inspired younger and more "tomboyish" girl characters as heroes to rise after the more feminine heroes such as Xena, who, despite being strong and capable, still falls victim to "male gaze"[1]

[1] A term coined by Laura Mulvey to describe how women are often portrayed in film and tv media as sexual objects for the male viewer's pleasure

in her short leather battle skirt. However, this thesis will not be looking into these more adult-orientated series but will focus on American animated series for younger viewers, as it is one of the fields that has heard the call for more female representation.

As mentioned above, often these new heroes with their "tomboyish" manners subvert classic gender roles that have previously dominated the way female characters have been portrayed, even in shows for young audiences. Such main character heroes are still not notably numerable but can be found among others in the three series chosen for this thesis: *She-ra and Princesses of Power, the Legend of Korra* and *The Dragon Prince*. Of the three series *the Legend of Korra* is the oldest, having run from 2012 to 2014, while *She-Ra and Princesses of Power* and *The Dragon Prince* are both series that started in 2018 and are still running as this thesis is being made. It should also be noted that of the three series only *the Legend of Korra* is finished, while *She-Ra and Princesses of Power* currently has four seasons, premiering its fifth and final season in 2020 and *The Dragon Prince* premiered its third season in the fall of 2019 (with currently no information on season four's release yet). Therefore, this thesis will naturally only analyze the available material and will unfortunately have to disregard any and all major character changes appearing after the conclusion of this thesis. Furthermore, this series will only focus on the main series themselves, without regarding additional material such as comics or games. The series will be introduced in further detail at the beginning of chapter three, which contains the main analysis. Naturally there are other new series with young female leads that could have been chosen for this thesis as well, (for example *Carmen Sandiego* (2018) and *Hilda* (2018)), but these three were selected as they all take place in universes where fantasy features (such as magic or non-human characters) are normal everyday occurrences and have main characters roughly the same age (late teens, on the verge of adulthood).

There is a very good amount of research on female heroes and their representation in media (e.g. Hohenstein, 2019; Tigges, 2017; Stabile, 2009) already. However, most research focuses on adult female heroes such as Xena or Buffy, or on adult female superheroes such as characters from Marvel comics (Tigges for example focuses on both Xena as one prominent example). Research has been done also on female heroes (not superheroes) in fantasy fiction, notably for example the essay collection *A Quest of Her*

Own (edited by Lori M. Campbell), which is also a central theoretical source for this thesis. However, there is unfortunately yet to be a study of such a range on female heroes of in animated media, most likely due to the still woefully small number of such heroes. Furthermore, much research has not been done on the younger girl heroes that are specifically aimed at young audiences, though some examples exist in YA literature (which arguably is aimed at teens rather than children). Katniss Everdeen, main character of *the Hunger Games* series, has for example been studied much (for example Wright, 2016). Naturally *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* and *the Dragon Prince* are still very new as series, so much research on them cannot be expected to exist yet. However, there is very little research done even on an older series such as *the Legend of Korra*, though some exists, for example on minority representation in the show *(*Aranjuez, 2015). Female heroes of the same age range, such as Buffy, on the other hand have been studied in great detail (e.g. Stuller, 2013; Huttunen, 2005), but Buffy as an example is not suitable for this thesis as this thesis focuses on animated series for younger audiences and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is for a more mature audience. Considering the lack of research so far on this subject, there is value in examining this particular category of young audience orientated animated girl heroes of popular series, to give some insight into what kinds of characters we have and what kinds of stories they have. Through this it is possible to further understand what kind of content it is that is in demand right now in female-centric media for young audiences. Just as female heroes aimed at older audiences are valuable research material in understanding the themes and characteristics of popular female-centric stories, so are ones aimed at younger audiences.

This paper cannot and therefore will not even attempt give any kind of all-covering prototype image of the current girl heroes as a result, but rather gives a closer examination of them through three popular series and their protagonists. This paper's aim is to see if there are similarities in popular animated female heroes of this time (and if so, what those are) in an effort to understand what it is that makes them popular, which in turn will offer a some insight into what it is that consumers of this type of media want to see in these series. The main theory framework for this thesis will be Katheryn Wright's theory on the "new girl hero" and Lori M. Campbell's idea of female heroes as introduced in *A Quest of Her Own*. Additionally, this thesis will examine the girl heroes in relation to Joseph Campbell's hero's journey and Victoria Lynn

Schmidt's heroine's journey to closer examine the stories of the three girl heroes in order to see if they adhere to any pre-establish patterns of heroic journeys or if they perhaps subvert these pre-established patterns in some way.

The beginning hypothesis of this thesis is that there are most certainly similarities between the female heroes, but it is unlikely that a strict and universal pattern of characteristics could be pointed out from them as something that they all follow. Furthermore, the stories most likely may contain similar themes (which may be linked to their popularity) but will differ significantly in details when examined closer.

The first chapter following this introduction will outline the theoretical framework of this thesis, as well as define what will be considered heroism in this thesis. After the theoretical framework and terminology has been established, the following chapter is the analysis chapter. In the analysis chapter the girl heroes will first be introduced individually and anything of particular note about them that does not contribute to the main body of the analysis will be discussed in these sections. After this there will be the main analysis of all three together, comparing and contrasting them through notable characteristics and emotionally complexity, supported mainly by the theories of Lori M. Campbell and Katheryn Wright on female heroes. Following the main analysis, their hero journeys will be briefly examined through Joseph Campbell's hero's journey theory and its more contemporary counterpart, Victoria Lynn Schmidt's heroine's journey theory. Finally, in the last section of chapter three this thesis will also briefly examine the importance of bonds and friendship in these series, as the importance of these for the female hero is stressed both by Wright and Lori M. Campbell.

2. Female Heroes and Monomyths: Theoretical Background

Before examining specific theories on heroes more closely, it is crucial to define what will be considered heroism within the framework of this thesis. As a general term "hero" is very broad and its definition has been stretched to any and all directions to cover a wide variety of characters. Its history spans from as early the ancient myths that Joseph Campbell examines in his monomyth, containing characters such Gilgamesh and Prometheus, to what perhaps most people would today think of first when heroes are spoken of: superheroes. However, even Lori M. Campbell differentiates between a superhero and a hero, in this case a female hero, which is the central concept and focus of this thesis. She posits the idea that, a female superhero is a "a figure of idealized perfection or masculinesque power" while a female hero does not need to be (284).

So, how does one then define a hero? Antony Augoustakis and Stacie Raucci ponder the question as such: "Do we limit its use to those with superhuman abilities? Or to those who have taken a specific kind of journey?" (3). The importance of a hero's potential journey will be discussed in more detail below, in the section about Joseph Cambell's hero's journey and Victoria Lynn Schmidt's heroine's journey, but Augoustakis and Raucci's question is a valid one. However, it also leads to further speculation on what a specific kind of journey would be then and whether a different kind of journey would automatically disqualify one from being a hero. As defining a particular type of journey, despite the existence of theories such as those of Joseph Campbell and Victoria Lynn Schmidt, would be a difficult task so that it would give clear guidelines to who it would qualify as a hero and who would be left out by its criteria, this does not seem like a good way if the answer that is wanted is an absolute categorization of who is and is not a hero. Neither is the simple existence of superhuman abilities a good criteria, as this would also place villains and supervillains alike in the hero category. This too would be problematic, as not all villains even belong in the anti-hero category.

Augoustakis and Raucci further point out that while they discuss film adaptations of heroes from ancient legends it is hard to define heroism also because at the same time alongside these ancient mythical heroes exist everyday heroes who live much more mundane lives, while still in possession of superhuman

powers. Augoustakis and Raucci bring up the series *Heroes* (2006-2010) and its sequel *Heroes Reborn* (2015-2016) as an example of the mundane heroes. In the series every character is simply a regular, modern person (a cheerleader, an officer worker etc.), but they also possess tremendous supernatural powers that they sometimes have trouble living with. So, in this universe any regular person could potentially awaken to find they have supernatural powers, further complicating the categorization of who is a hero. Furthermore, Augoustakis and Raucci note that Joanna Paul, having studied classic heroes, also points out that the term 'hero' is not easily defined as its meaning now ranges from "the agent of the most outstanding and courageous deeds, to simply the (overwhelmingly male) protagonist of a narrative" (Paul 176, qtd. in Augoustakis and Raucci 3). Wright also points out that "the definition of heroism aligns with the cultural values of a specific time and place" (4). As evident from even such a minimal look into discussion on heroism, it is not an easy thing to define. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, just as Lori M. Campbell does in the introduction of her book, this thesis too will define a hero the same way Joseph Campbell does in *Power of Myth*: "A hero or heroine who has found or done something beyond the normal range of achievement and experience. A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself" (123). This limits the position of hero in a world with fantasy elements that are already beyond that of regular human capabilities to those that are portrayed usually only by the protagonist of the story. In this thesis it covers the three characters that are examined in closer detail in chapter three.

As the idea of heroism is now framed for this thesis, it is also crucial to discuss terminology. Lori M. Campbell's reasoning (which follows that of Pearson and Pope, authors of the early female heroes study *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* in 1981) for why the heroes examined in *A Quest of Her Own* are referred to as *female heroes* rather than *heroines* is that "[s]ince the female hero is only recently coming into her own, while the male version has been the standard and ideal for centuries, her representation of heroism must be considered in its own terms" (6). She further points out that female empowerment can be seen in fiction throughout history, even though the actual concept of a female hero does not form into anything distinctive until the second half of the 20th century (7). She continues by saying that "[u]p until then (and even after with characters like Xena and Buffy), if she appears at all, she most

often does so not as a hero in her own right but— in contrast to the characters discussed in *A Quest of Her Own* —as a super-heroine ; a figment of masculine imagination whose major super power is sexuality, enlarged to seem like real power" (7). Additionally, she points out that using this term in consequence with the above reasoning keeps the consumer of the female hero media reminded of the challenges the female hero has faced and will face as she evolves into a true hero (7). She does however stress that while it is unfortunate in some ways that we must be acutely aware of the challenges of the female hero, even so "besides being a practical way to differentiate her in the simplest way, 'female hero' is a *positive* term in its ability to highlight and celebrate her femaleness in tandem with her heroism— and with heroism more broadly" (emphasis in the original, 7). One of the things that Lori M. Campbell herself as well argues is that a female hero is not being "overly burdened by gendered or other social expectations" (284). This sentiment is echoed in co-creator and staff writer of the original *She-Ra: Princess of Power* series Larry DiTillio's comments in Tracy Brown's article when asked on how to make a series "girl-friendly". He commented that: "I think that the way you make things girl-friendly is you don't worry about the fact that she's a girl … You just let her do what everybody else does and do it the best she can. Then you're girlfriendly." DiTillio's comment makes a good point about how gender should not be necessary in making something "girl-friendly" or suitable for girls to consume and strongly supports the idea that a female hero, and particularly a girl hero, should not be "burdened by gendered or other social expectations." However, Lori M. Campbell also offers as counterweight a good point for why we cannot yet shed the prefix "female" from female hero, even if the female heroes have risen above some expectations. She argues that we have not yet gotten to a place in society where we could leave out the prefix female, and quotes Jennifer K. Stuller to further argue that we are also not yet in a place in society where "we could just discuss heroes and not have to focus specifically on gender[;] cultural ideas of sex and gender are present in our fictional stories, intended or not" (Stuller 19; qtd. in Campbell L. 7). As such Lori M. Campbell advocates the use of *female hero* rather than just hero or heroine, as it is partially still a necessity. However, paired with the above discussion on the reasoning on using the term female hero, the term also describes a "key transitional moment in her evolution" according to Lori M. Campbell (7). She states that the term female

hero “connotes both the remarkable strides the character has already taken and the distance she has yet to travel” (7). Following the logic of Lori M. Campbell’s reasoning above, the same logic is applied to this thesis. However, as a key difference this thesis will refer to the female heroes it examines as *girl heroes* in the actual analysis chapter, which is not to be taken as making them anything less than their adult counterparts, but to simply point out their youth, which is a central part of these chosen characters in particular.

Whereas Lori M. Campbell’s study on fantasy fiction female heroes focuses on written fantasy, Katheryn Wright’s idea of “the New Heroine” focuses on female heroes seen in movies and series as well. While the female heroes examined in Wright’s book are not any of the ones included in this thesis, they are similarly female heroes from works from the 2010’s, and most importantly they are all also young characters aimed at younger audiences (though arguably more at teens than children), just like She-Ra, Korra and Rayla are. This is different from Lori M. Campbell’s book, as the collection of writings it comprises of mostly focuses on slightly older, already grownup female heroes (though it is still a valuable asset for this thesis). Wright actually makes young age an important part of these new female heroes, for example when discussing *the Hunger Games*, as she states that “Katniss is also young, a teenager who assumes adult responsibilities after the death of her father and her mother's subsequent depression. She is compelling as a character because she is a work in progress” (*The New Heroines: Female Embodiment and Technology in 21st-Century Popular Culture*, 2). In this light it is interesting to note that many new female heroes that have recently emerged are younger and many very obviously being sold to younger audiences consuming pop culture as a role model and something to look up to. It could be simply a purposeful effort to give younger audiences new, relatable characters to attach to, or it could very well be as Wright says and there is an inherent curiosity about a character that is not “finished” yet. The audience therefore wishes to see how the character will develop and if they will potentially find some sort of finality to who and what they are.

Even Wright leans heavily on Campbell’s theory and points out that “[b]y studying rituals related to rites of passage in various cultures across the globe, his [Campbell’s] goal was to demonstrate how the

transition from childhood to adulthood is a critical juncture that parallels the hero's journey" (7). This also echoes the idea that the hero, through transformation, finds themselves and becomes something new, much like children transform into adults via often a challenging road. To see then a young female hero, male hero or other hero overcome their challenges, often through struggle as well, should be and usually is inspiring, particularly to a young viewer who might be faced with their own challenges of growing up. Lori M. Campbell also posits the idea in her conclusion that "[a]s Katniss' example illustrates, female heroism— like heroism in general— is a work in progress and success is typically not realized without pain and hard work" (*A Quest of Her Own*, 8). So not only is heroism itself a matter of evolving through various struggles (which might explain the importance of some kind of journey for the hero), but so is growing up. Those combined create a powerful and intriguing development for a young hero, who is maybe not quite a complete hero yet.

Wright also brings forward the important issue of gender and Joseph Campbell's monomyth, which will be briefly discussed later as well. Wright discusses the fact that the gender dynamics established in the monomyth by Joseph Campbell are still very tied to the time and place where they were created. She further argues that how Campbell focuses on clarifying masculine and feminine roles is a direct parallel to how women's place being the home was posited as an idea the United State in response to white, middle-class women heading into the workforce during World War II, which lead to a "burgeoning civil rights movement" (11). Carol A. Stabile makes a very good comment (albeit it is more contemporary and less historically significant) in the same vein in her paper on female superheroes that, "[t]he superhero is first and foremost a man, because only men are understood to be protectors in US culture", which is something to be kept mind even in this thesis, as the female heroes examined in this thesis are all from series made in the USA. While it was stated earlier that superheroes and the female heroes examined in this paper are very much different concepts, as per Lori M. Campbell's reasoning, the idea that a male hero is a protector persist even in narratives where the hero is not a "superhero" per say (consider for example Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* franchise).

The idea of a man being a protector is an interesting concept to consider here as well, as healer and nursing roles are usually reserved for women, but they do not usually allow them to be protectors per se. This theme is also present in Erin Wyble Newcomb's paper, where she discusses how Ursula K. Le Guin subverts the role of a healer in her book *Tehanu* (1990). Le Guin herself has written that "[w]omen's work, as usual, is the maintenance of order and cleanliness, housekeeping, feeding and clothing people, childbearing, care of babies and children, nursing and healing of animals and people, care of the dying, funeral rites— those unimportant matters of life and death, not part of history, or of story. What women do is invisible" (*Earthsea Revisioned,* 15-16). Yet, somehow these tasks, even though they are crucial and often hard, do not in most cases allow them to be seen as heroes or protectors. But, as Newcomb writes, "in Tehanu, Le Guin makes Tenar's care work visible and promotes both care work and care workers as material worthy of heroic stories" (97). Even Tenar, though her work seems like ordinary care work in *Tehanu*, goes on a journey tied to her work and through her work is a hero in her own right. Considering this it is important to note that Joseph Campbell's own reaction to Maureen Murdock's concept of a heroine's journey when presented with it in 1981, as told by Murdock herself in the introduction of *The Heroine's Journey*: Campbell responded to Murdock's model that women do not make the journey as "[i]n the whole mythological tradition the woman is there. All she has to do is to realize that she's the place that people are trying to get to. When a woman realizes what her wonderful character is, she's not going to get messed up with the notion of being pseudo-male" (18). Keeping in mind Tehanu's journey as a healer, as well the very journeys of the girl heroes examined in this thesis, female heroes have already begun to subvert Campbell's view. Rather than being a place where "people are trying to get to" the girls and women have moved to the role of the protector and the active fighter, but they have also found ways to be heroes through work that might have previously been seen as weak or unimportant in comparison to the work of a male hero as a protector, and this can still lead them to a journey of heroism. Regardless of their work or their strength, women are no longer the passives ones to be protected or the goal of a hero's journey, a prize waiting at the end of a long road. Simply because a woman is set in a healer role in a narrative does not immediately equal a poorly written female character nor does it take away from the potential of

heroism in a female character, as confirmed by Newcomb's paper on *Tehanu*. It is how the female character is written as using her role in pursuit of potential heroism that determines how well she is written. Considering the earlier note on Joseph Campbell's gender dynamics being tied to place and time, it is important to also point out the rigidness of said dynamics in the light Campbell's own statement, as well as the subversion of it by female heroes. Wright points out that Campbell's model places masculinity and femininity as two completely opposite things that will eventually merge together in the "Apotheosis" stage. In the very climax of the monomyth these two forces come together on a symbolic level to create an "androgynous heroic figure" (Wright, 10). Wright describes Campbell's concepts of the feminine and masculine as such: "Masculinity equates with adulthood, and 'Atonement with the Father' (who symbolizes power and authority) is the conflict at the core of the hero's journey. Figures associated with femininity, like the evil mother, goddess, and temptress, symbolize motherhood and sexuality" (10). Therefore, examining female heroes with Campbell's theory is interesting, but potentially also challenging, as Campbell's femininity is very distinctly removed from the masculinity of the journey. Feminine beings in Campbell's theory are mostly things to be overcome by the hero, so that at the end of the second act "the hero is a superior man, a born king" (*The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 159) for having defeated his quest with such ease. It remains to be seen then whether the hero's journey can support the female hero journeys at all and whether the feminine journey of Victoria Lynn Schmidt discussed later might offer assistance where Campbell's theory might fail.

For Wright the main things that make the new girl heroes are potential and the network that she creates around her and becomes part of during her journey. Wright argues that what is a key and defining characteristic of this new heroism is that "the character has a special talent and unique ability beyond the average person in the narrative world, much like Katniss does with her charisma and athleticism. Other characters in the narrative hope to maximize, and perhaps even exploit, these qualities. More so, her heroism is tied to the people, place, and things she encounters" (3). This does echo what Lori M. Campbell describes in her definition, as well as in Schmidt's feminine version of the journey of a hero. Additionally, based on Wright's words, heroism is not simply a collection of certain qualities that these characters

possess, but they are qualities that set them apart from others and how they use those qualities to affect the world and beings around them. Wright goes on to say that, "[w]ho the New Heroine becomes emerges through the complex interplay between the potential she embodies as a character trait and the networks she enters into as part of her journey" (3). It is therefore still pertinent to certainly examine what characteristics the girl heroes of the chosen series possess that make them unique or similar, but to then also see how those characteristics are affected by everything and everyone around them. Through this combination we can then consider what it is that makes them heroes and what type of heroes do we have.

Furthermore Wright does also discuss Murdock's heroine's journey as part of her theory and makes a very good point about it, once again in relation *The Hunger Games* and what makes Katniss so spectacular in her world: "These skills and abilities are part of what make her heroic, while Murdock focuses more on articulating the heroine's journey as the collective experiences of women in the late 20th century in response to second-wave feminism. In so doing, the heroine's journey downplays specific character traits that make Katniss from the beginning of the book and movie uniquely qualified to be the heroine" (14). Even within the confines of this thesis it is important to unearth the qualities that are unique to each of the female heroes, but to avoid making generalized comments about a certain type of journey or female hero that they all collectively represent, even though there might be similarities in all three.

Hero journeys and Joseph Campbell have both been briefly mentioned above and will be explained in further detail next, both in general as well as to explain their purpose in this thesis. Even today, one of the most central theories when one talks about heroes in narratives is Joseph Campbell's classic *monomyth* theory or the *hero's journey*, discussed in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). The hero's journey is breakdown of the common components that the journeys of most, if not all, mythical heroes have in common, and it is a framework that persists even now in modern narratives as a base for a protagonist's journey. Many employ it purposefully as it provides a solid narrative base (for example George Lucas admits it inspired him when writing the original *Star Wars* trilogy), while many also follow it without choosing so consciously. The theory itself has been revised and adapted since Campbell's original book (for example Leeming, 1981; Vogler, 2007), but most of the revisions follow a similar pattern, mostly

only condensing and streamlining the segments from what Campbell originally wrote. For the purposes of this thesis Campbell's theory, as well as Schmidt's variation of it (as discussed below), will be used to support the analysis of the girl heroes examined, but will not be the central analysis tool.

In general, by examining the new girl heroes through the classic hero's journey theory and its more modern counterpart it will be possible to see what kind of stories modern girl heroes have and whether the new female hero journeys conform to an age-old masculine pattern or whether they perhaps subvert it in some way and add something new to how a hero can progress through their journey. While Joseph Campbell's theory is old and, in some ways, perhaps even outdated, there is merit in the idea of the heroic journey even now. As discussed in the section overview, it is still visible as a popular source of inspiration for modern stories and even Augoustakis and Raucci bring up a journey right at the beginning of their consideration on how to define a hero. There are, after all, innumerable hero stories where they hero does go on a journey of some kind and far fewer where the hero simply does not go anywhere, spiritually or physically.

The journey may not always be a physical one, but might rather be a spiritual one, where the end result is still an evolution to what can be seen as heroism. Valeri Estelle Frankel for examples brings up Penelope from *the Odyssey* as an example that does not involve a physical journey. Joseph Campbell originally calls Penelope's story a "journey of endurance" (*Pathways to Bliss: Mythology and Personal Transformation,* 159). Frankel returns to this by pointing out that where Odysseus himself and his son Telemachus go on physical journeys on the sea, Penelope on the other hand "outwits suitors with her weaving for 20 years, all the while maintaining her faith and chastity while protecting her son and island. However, this journey involves no battles or flashing swords. It is a quiet task of patience and fortitude" (4). This perhaps has some echo of the earlier discussion about Ursula K. Le Guin's *Tehanu* and how women's work has been quiet but can be portrayed as heroic in something like Le Guin's book, therefore subverting Joseph Campbell's statement about women's place in the hero journey in a quiet, but nonetheless powerful way. Certainly, Penelope does not go to sea as Odysseus and Telemachus do, but her endurance can still be seen as a journey of its own kind. Whether these newer girl heroes still conform to the classic masculine

monomyth or to something newer like Schmidt's version of the feminine journey will therefore also be valuable to examine as well alongside the main analysis on them.

According to Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* the hero's journey can be divided into three acts, all of which have several sub-sections, forming a seventeen-stage journey (see table 1).

Table 1

A Summary of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey

I. Departure	**II. Initiation**	**III. Return**
1. The Call to Adventure	1. The Road of Trials	1. Refusal of the Return
2. Refusal of the Call	2. The Meeting with the Goddess	2. The Magic Flight
3. Supernatural Aid	3. Woman as Temptress	3. Rescue from Without
4. Crossing the First Threshold	4. Atonement with the Father	4. The Crossing of the Return Threshold
5. Belly of the Whale	5. Apotheosis	5. Master of Two Worlds
	6. The Ultimate Boon	6. Freedom to Live

The first act of the journey, "Departure", sets the hero in motion towards their actual transformation into a hero. The journey beings with something that pulls the hero from their normal life into something completely else, into what Joseph Campbell describes in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* as "a zone unknown" (9). Campbell also states in his description of the "Call to Adventure" that while the hero might be summoned to their adventure, it can also happen completely by accident, or "one may be only casually strolling when some passing phenomenon catches the wandering eye and lures one away from the frequented paths of man" (9). The call, whether accidentally found or summoned by fate itself can be followed by the hero actually refusing to follow the call immediately. This is not the most common pattern, but it is seen in stories, even in modern ones that have been influenced by Campbell's theory (consider, for

example, Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars: Episode IV - The New Hope* refusing to follow Obi-Wan Kenobi until his family dies and he has nothing left). Campbell describes this optional stage as almost futile on the hero's part, as they might try to resist the call, but eventually they will have to follow it, as everything they will try to accomplish while resisting will simply be delaying the inevitable that is waiting for them (54).

After the hero accepts their journey, whether immediately or after refusal and futile stalling of it, the hero will typically meet their mentor, who is usually an old man or an old crone that will offer the hero supernatural aid, either by giving them powers or some sort of artefact (63). Campbell describes this mentor as representing the "benign, protecting power of destiny" (66). Once again Star Wars works as a very clear example, as Obi-Wan (an old man) gives Luke both a physical aid in the form of his lightsaber, as well as powers in the form of teaching Luke about the force. It can, in a case such a lightsaber, be a very concrete aid that the mentor provides.

After receiving the aid from their mentor it is time for what Campbell calls the "Crossing of the first Threshold" in which the hero finally has to leave their own known world and set forth on the actual journey towards the unknown with the assistance of the mentor and the aid they have provided (71). The crossing is immediately then followed by what Campbell calls the "Belly of the Whale" in which the hero accepts that they must resign from their former world and self and transform into something new (83). Often some sort of setback or danger may be encountered in this part of the journey and the situation may appear bleak. Campbell describes it as the moment when "[t]he hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died" (83).

The departure is the shortest of the acts in Campbell's theory and even though within the story there may be some delay between the parts (especially if the refusal is a part of the journey), it is still a notably rapid development in the hero's journey, especially considering that hero is usually thrown into a completely new situation that they may have never had the skill or need to prepare for. It is worth considering after the steps of the departure that, while Campbell never actually touches upon the subject himself, is there a possibility to fail the departure and therefore fail in hero's journey already at the very start? Campbell does stress that even if the call is refused, it will eventually have to be accepted by the

hero, so is it to be assumed that a hero, once chosen by fate, is also protected by fate until the journey is finished? As mentioned above, Campbell does describe the old mentor character as the "benign, protecting power of destiny", so perhaps there is no room for a hero to fail catastrophically, as it would not make way for a satisfying journey. This returns us to the consideration of what is heroism. If one is unable to move through the entire departure act, has the title of hero been lost to them? There, unfortunately, are not really any examples of this, as it would indeed not lead to a satisfying story in any way, but it is an interesting thing to consider no less.

The second act, "Initiation", begins right after the apparent death of the hero at the end of the "Departure" act. The hero has finally resigned from their former self and is now faced with the task of actually becoming the hero that the journey is for. The first part of the initiation is the "Road of Trials", in which, according to Campbell, the hero is faced with a set of tests and often the hero might also fail one or more of the tests before succeeding in moving to the next stage of the act (89). According to Campbell, in the "Road of Trials" the hero is now aided by "the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region" (89) which further emphasizes the importance of the mentor that hero has met earlier. It is interesting to note that according to Campbell's theory then, despite its tone of presenting a lone hero, who through trials brings back a magnificent boon to others, a hero is generally not completely self-sufficient for overcoming these trials, but rather actually requires some sort of aid from an outside entity. This indicates that heroism is perhaps not simply a matter of some qualities a single person possesses, something that was also observed in Wright's theory.

Following the trials of the hero is the "Meeting with the Goddess" in which the hero usually receives further assistance in the form of some item or items that might prove helpful for the them a later part of their quest. As Campbell himself very poetically puts it in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*: "The ultimate adventure, when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome, is commonly represented as a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World" (100). After the meeting with the goddess however, interestingly the very next stage is the "Woman as Temptress" for the hero (111). In this stage the hero encounters some sort of temptation that would lead them off their quest.

While in mythical tales it is often an actual woman (for example the sirens for Odysseus), it is not absolute mandatory for it to literally be a woman. For Campbell a woman was simply a metaphor for temptations, which is an interesting view, but not one too surprising considering Campbell's reaction to Maureen Murdock's model of the heroine's journey.

After the temptations have been overcome by the hero, another great challenge awaits them. It is now that the hero faces the "Atonement with the Father" as Campbell puts it (120). The hero confronts a figure in their life that holds power in their life. Often it is in fact the father of the hero, or a father figure, but can be any being of power. After the confrontation the hero is initiated by the father and will move on again. In this stage the hero might be frightened of the "father" but when overcoming this part, they will find that the father and the "mother" from the previous stages reflect one another and that this too has been an important part of their journey (120). After the realization of the connection between the "father" and the "mother" the hero moves on to "Apotheosis", gaining a greater understanding of the world, which strengthens their resolve further, allowing them to reach the final stage of the second act: "The Ultimate Boon". In this final stage of the act the hero receives their grand reward from the gods, having finally reached their goal (157).

The third and final act of the journey, "Return", begins with the hero refusing to return from their new world to share the boon they have received. However, in Campbell's theory is a crucial part of bringing the story to its end that the hero does return. As Campbell himself puts it, to finish the story it is a requirement that "the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess, back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds" (179). Therefore, even though the hero may resist the return, it is as inevitable as the first steps to going on the journey were at the very beginning. The next stage is not mandatory but does occasionally occur if the boon was not so much given to the hero, as it was taken by him: in "the Magic Flight" the hero escapes with the stolen boon and as Campbell describes it, this part does not need to be dramatic or serious, but it can often simply be "a lively, often comical, pursuit. This flight may be complicated by marvels of magical obstruction and evasion" (182).

If the boon was however given willingly to the hero, this stage will not occur and the hero might immediately move on to the third stage, the “Rescue from Without”.

As the hero is unwilling to return to their previous life, they must be brought back with assistance. As Campbell puts it: "’Who having cast off the world,’ we read, ‘would desire to return again? He would be only there’ And yet, in so far as one is alive, life will call” (192). Therefore, it is inevitable that if the hero does not return themselves, then someone will come and bring them back (again echoing the idea of a hero requiring some outside assistance in their journey). The next difficulty (or the “final crisis” as Campbell describes it) the hero faces in returning is the “Crossing of the Return Threshold” (201). The hero must return but must also maintain the wisdom or the boon they have received from their journey, so that it can be shown to others in a way that they will comprehend it. As Campbell says: “He has yet to confront society with his ego-shattering, life-redeeming elixir, and take the return blow of reasonable queries, hard resentment, and good people at a loss to comprehend sense of the deed of the hero” (201-202). So even if the hero does manage to bring the boon back, they do not yet know the difficulty of explaining to the others what kind of life-changing thing the boon and the journey are. After the hero has managed the return with the boon, he must become a “Master of Two Worlds”, finding a balance between their original world and the world they have no experienced beyond the understanding of their fellow men (212-213). Finally, after finishing the journey and having returned successfully, the hero reaches the “Freedom to Live” stage, where the hero has surpassed fear of death and can now freely live in the moment (221).

Observing the theory in sections like this it becomes clear that this kind of hero journey is visible in many stories, even contemporary ones. However, Campbell’s theory is by no means perfect and has some blind spots that require additional theory for support. The biggest issue, and the one that will be supported by other theory in this thesis, is that naturally Campbell’s theory is inherently very masculine and male-centric as he mainly studied mythical male characters, which is visible quite clearly when going through his steps of the journey and considering the role of women in the theory. As such, it has been adapted into a feminine version called the *Heroine’s Journey* by Maureen Murdock in 1990, which was later revised by Victoria Lynn Schmidt in 2001. While the heroine’s journey is much less frequently used than the hero’s

journey, there are some notable examples, such as Rey from the recent *Star Wars* sequel trilogy (2015-2019) or Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Murdock's theory was originally made for use by psychologists and her book was for self-help purposes, rather than literary works, but Schmidt's later revision of Murdock's work is used in writing as it is purposefully more fitting for it, having been actually made to support writing fiction. Notably Schmidt has both a masculine and feminine hero's journey theory, but for this thesis only the feminine one will be examined, both due to space constraints, as well as unnecessary overlap with Campbell's already introduced original theory. It should also be noted, that even Schmidt's theory is slightly problematic as it assumes a strictly binary gender view. While she does have "gender-bending" section in the stages of both the masculine and feminine journey, it is still simply placing a man into a feminine journey pattern or a woman in a masculine journey pattern, without further consideration on gender or how it is portrayed.

The significance of the heroine's journey theory is twofold for this thesis: firstly, to see if modern girl heroes follow a traditionally feminine or a masculine heroic journey (or perhaps neither). Secondly, because of Joseph Campbell's reaction to Maureen Murdock's original heroine's journey model, as discussed earlier. Campbell's response about women not making the journey was a bold statement already at the time, but even more so with the emergence of more and more female heroes in recent years. Campbell's statement is very strongly also reflected in his theory already, as looking through the stages explained above, it is easy to see the role of a woman in the hero's journey is to lead the hero astray and to be the final goal to return to, as Campbell states. Schmidt's theory proposes a notably simplified structure to the journey (see table 2) and a very different journey in general when compared to Joseph Campbell's original work.

Table 2

A Summary of Victoria Lynn Schmidt's Heroine's Journey

I Containment	II Transformation	II Emergence

1. The Illusion of a Perfect World 2. The Betrayal or Realization 3. The Awakening—Preparing for the Journey	4. The Descent—Passing the Gates of Judgement 5. The Eye of the Storm 6. Death—All is Lost	7. Support 8. Rebirth—the Moment of Truth 9. Full Circle—Return to the Perfect World

It is immediately noticeable that Schmidt's version of the journey is greatly simplified from Campbell's, many parts of it having been stripped off or simply combined with others. It differs right from the beginning of the first act from Campbell's in that Schmidt positions the female hero in a place that the female hero herself sees as a perfect place or at least tries to believe to be one. As Schmidt points out the character generally employs some kind of coping mechanism, such as denial or subservience, to survive in their "perfect world" (ch. 24, stage 1). Before the female hero can be motivated to break out the "perfect world" it needs to be portrayed in a negative light for them somehow (ch. 24, stage 1). Eventually however the coping mechanism the female hero is using begins to shatter and it leads her to the second part of the first stage, "the Betrayal or Realization", where they eventually do realize that the world they have been living in so far is not perfect at all (ch. 24, stage 2). The hero must admit this to herself and then choose between leaving the place or remaining there as a "passive victim". Through this she is pushed to a fork in the road (ch. 24, stage 2). The third and final stage of the first act sees the hero preparing for an unknown journey by gathering tools she might deem necessary and bidding farewell to everyone around her. Schmidt also notes that "In her mind, she has a list of people she thinks will help her if she needs help" (ch. 24, stage 3) which greatly also echoes Katheryn Wright's theory that was discussed in more detail above, about the importance of the female hero's connection to others. It is worth noting here that already the first act itself differs from Campbell's quite greatly as a whole. Schmidt's theory positions the hero in a place where they *need* to escape from in order to reach their full potential, while Campbell's heroes can simply stumble upon a path that leads them out of their ordinary life. The end of Schmidt's first act also

puts emphasis on the female hero's connections to other people, whereas Campbell's theory (or Schmidt's own masculine journey theory for that matter) does not give any thought to that. Schmidt's theory seems to suggest then that female heroes have much more emphasis on not only themselves, but also the people around them, which is supported by Wright's theory discussed previously.

The second act, "Transformation", beings with the female hero losing all of the "external devices she thought would save her" as she faces her fears one by one and passes through the "gates of judgement." Each gate she passes strips her of something she thought would protect her (ch. 24, stage 4). This is followed by the "Eye of the Storm", where the female hero thinks the worst is behind now after the gates and begins to feel that she has come to terms with her situation. A false sense of security begins to root itself in her and she is lulled into a false feeling that the journey is now over (ch. 24, stage 5). This is quickly followed by the darkest moment of the adventure, which Schmidt has named "Death – All is Lost". The villain, whether a person or something more societal (such as societal expectations) returns and the whole situation turns around again. While the villain may have not taken the female hero very seriously so far, now they certainly do as they start to feel at least somewhat threatened by her success in the journey so far. However, the villain can also see that the female hero is already suffering from the inner turmoil she is facing and therefore "All he needs to do is give her a push, cut her down, and strengthen her weaknesses. He throws an additional betrayal at her or causes her to feel stupid, like a nonperson" (ch. 24, stage 6). Schmidt does point out in her stage four that it is only a mild prequel of what is to come in stage six and as described it does certainly seem that way. Considering how many stages fewer there are in Schmidt's theory the jump from stage four to stage six is very brief. Naturally stage five can be very long or very short depending on the story, but in simply theory terms there is only a very brief respite between two major causes of suffering for the female hero.

The third act, "Emergence" begins with stage seven, which focuses on what was already discussed earlier: "Support". As Schmidt writes: "The female journey includes the relation between the individual and the group. The hero goes through her own awakening and comes out willing to accept help from others" (ch. 24, stage 7). This is perhaps the most crucial difference to Campbell's theory and to Schmidt's own

masculine journey theory. Neither of the masculine journeys places emphasis on the support from others in the way that Schmidt's feminine journey does. While this could quickly be construed as weakness and that the female hero is incapable of managing through the journey alone, it should not be seen as such, as Schmidt also points out in stage seven: "She can't be betrayed again because she has her own strength and self-realization that can't be taken away from her." So, the heroine can stand her own ground and is strong but is also able to accept help from others to add to her strength. The masculine journey seems to glorify individualism, whereas the feminine journey celebrates the strength that is asking for help from other and succeeding with that help. Schmidt also stresses this point: "She accepts others as they are and embraces the female aspect of supporting one another. She begins to see the oneness that we all share together" (ch. 24, stage 7). As can be seen here, Schmidt even goes as far as to call it a "female aspect". This unity between the female hero and the other characters of the respective stories and how, if at all, it is formed is also a key thing to look for in the analysis of these new heroines, as Wright focused on this point in her own theory on new female heroes as well.

This unity and finding herself in Schmidt's theory leads naturally to stage eight, "Rebirth". The female hero has found herself and with the new strength of the discovery of her own potential, as well her new bonds, she is almost undefeatable and "tyrants and ogres would only find themselves laughed at in this stage" (ch. 24, stage 8). The female hero also does a great deal of internal reflection and finally "sees the big picture of life and realizes she can't even go back to the woman she once was and she doesn't want to" (ch. 24, stage 8). After she has reached her full potential, the female hero returns to what was previously her "perfect world" to complete the circle in the final stage of the story. Even Schmidt herself points out that "This stage is a smaller climax where the hero returns to the perfect world and sees it for what it is" (ch. 24, stage 9). Therefore, it can be assumed that the previous stages and the actual discovery of her own strength is the more important part of this particular journey, which is strikingly different from Joseph Campbell's hero's journey, where the ultimate glory comes from the return to the original world with the boon.

Schmidt's feminine journey is first and foremost an inner journey for the hero, echoing Murdock's original self-help idea with it. It is central to the feminine journey that the hero faces herself and through that comes to her transformation into something else. The feminine journey is cyclical and once the hero has gone through it, they can appoint someone else to go through with it, giving the possibility of the boon to others as well. As Schmidt writes: "Through the experience, others are changed and may even be forced to face their fears. She was once like them but now lives a better life. Does that mean it's possible for them to change as well?" (ch. 24, stage 9). So, the importance of bonds to others is also very heavily visible in the end as well. The female hero has accepted the option to ask for help from others and has received the help and now, whether purposefully or not, she may help others as well. The masculine journey on the other hand is about proving themselves to others. It is linear and it ends when the hero returns, giving no one else the direct opportunity to attempt it. Schmidt herself defines the two stories as being very different in this sense already from the introduction of both, as she states that "The feminine journey is a journey where a hero must go deep inside herself and change throughout the story. This hero awakens in Act I and moves towards rebirth" (ch.23). While then "the masculine journey is a journey where a hero resists inner change until Act III, where he must choose to awaken and find victory or choose to rebel against it and find failure" (ch. 23). Schmidt even states that in the masculine journey the hero "rejects the feminine journey of inner exploration" (ch. 23), clearly diving the two types of hero's journey with how the heroes find their transformation. This in itself gives an interesting platform for examining the chosen female heroes as they can be analyzed from the perspective of who do they prove themselves to and how introspective their journeys are. Hypothetically it might be argued that introspection of one's own feelings and actions might be something that would purposefully be written into heroes meant as good role models for younger audiences.

3. "I've never backed away from anything in my life!": Closer Analysis of the Three Girl Heroes

This chapter will look more closely into the three chosen girl heroes and will be the main analysis part of the thesis, examining the girl heroes with the support of Lori M. Campbell's and Katheryn Wright's theories, as well as by leaning on Joseph Campbell's and Victoria Lynn Schmidt's hero's journey theories for brief examination of their hero journeys. The three series the girl heroes are from will first be briefly introduced in the first part and any particularly noteworthy points about them that do contribute to the main body of the analysis will be discussed in their individual sections. After the introductions of the series, the characters themselves will be analyzed together and contrasted with each other.

3.1 Who Are They?

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, all three series are popular children's series from the 2010's. *The Legend of Korra* ran as early as 2012-2014, while *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* and *The Dragon Prince* both started in 2018 and are still due to continue, with She-Ra premiering its fifth and final season on May 15, 2020. As discussed earlier, all of these series take place in world with fantasy elements and the protagonists all possesses supernatural powers.

3.1.1 She-Ra, Princess of Power

She-Ra and the Princesses of power is a Netflix original series based on characters from the *Masters of The Universe* franchise most know for the popular 1980's *He-Man* animated series. She-Ra was originally the sister of He-Man and received her own spin-off animation series in 1985 under the title *She-Ra: Princess of Power*. It was remade, starting in 2018, this time written and conceived by Noel Stevenson (previously known for comic books such as *Lumberjanes*). Stevenson was given a great deal of freedom with the characters, and she gave all of them drastically different and updated looks in the new series. Where the original spin-off series' characters all appeared so similar that it easily seemed almost as if the same character would have simply appeared in different outfits, in the new version Stevenson gave the

princesses unique body shapes and a variety of skin and hair colors, making them much more unique as characters. Darren Franich quite mischievously points out in his article about the new series about the new designs that “the original cast of characters has been casually diversified, and newly illustrated to boldly suggest human beings have all shapes and sizes.”

Another important thing that Stevenson decided was to age the characters down from the original. They were previously all adult women, but while their ages have not been officially announced in the new series, Stevenson has remarked that they are teenagers (about 17-18). As such it gives us a young hero, which, again leaning on Wright’s theory, is a hero still in the process of developing, allowing the viewers to follow her development into potentially a fully realized adult female hero. While the series differs from original in the above-mentioned ways, it mostly keeps the same lore, mainly just fleshing out the characters more and giving each of them more depth, particularly the titular character herself. Tracy Brown writes in her article about the key fault in the old series, which according to her was that in the old series “[c]o-created by two male writers as a spinoff of ‘HeMan and the Masters of the Universe’ in an effort to reach young female audiences, She-Ra was He-Man's twin sister, and her story and identity were always connected with his.” In the new reboot by Stevenson, She-Ra is no longer tied to He-Man, and therefore the series is purely about her and her growth. Most notably in the original series Adora was rescued from the Horde by He-Man and only later chose to return to lead the Princess Rebellion, while in the new series she forges her own path in Etheria right from the beginning of the series.

The premise of the new series is that young Adora, a top-tier soldier of the evil Horde, has been raised to fight for the Horde and lives in the belief that all princesses are evil and the Horde’s most dangerous enemy. In the beginning of the series she stumbles out of the Horde territory (quite aptly named the Fright Zone) in an accident and is sent flying into the Whisperings Woods, a territory of the princesses that the Horde has been trying to take over. There Adora discovers She-Ra’s Sword of Protection, a powerful magical artifact which reveals Adora to be the current chosen vessel of the legendary warrior princess She-Ra, to whom Adora can transform into with the power of the sword by speaking the famous catchphrase “For the honor of Grayskull!” (made popular by He-Man in his original series). This revelation

sends Adora on a new path to fight against the evil Horde that she once served and to protect the planet with the help of the other princesses that she encounters throughout the story, as she soon discovers that the Horde has been the evil side all along. She ends up fighting not only the Horde, but also her childhood best friend Catra, who stayed in the Horde and cannot accept that Adora has chosen to side with the princesses. Adora is notable as a character as she begins the series as an antagonist unbeknownst to herself and shifts into protagonist on the side of good as she becomes She-Ra. The series has received several nominations (including the GLAAD Media Award) and good reviews, Franich for example describing it in his article as a "funny-wonderful pop fantasy animated like disco fireworks, fun for kids of all genders and any parents looking for something happy to cry about." She-Ra will be referred to as both Adora and She-Ra throughout this thesis, with the distinction that Adora refers to her non-princess form and She-Ra to her princess form.

An important thing of note in this series is the use of the word *princess*. It refers to a group of characters in the universe of *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* who have abilities beyond what is considered ordinary. Each princess's ability is also unique to them; for example, Mermista has her power to manipulate water, Scorpia has her scorpion claws and tail, Glimmer has her teleportation. The term "princess of power" also originates already from the title of the original series. However, as a term it has been put to a very different context (and most likely very purposefully so) in the new series. Princesses as a general concept are very deliberately marketed to young girls in particular as something desirable as princesses usually live luxurious lives and conform to ideal beauty standards (and often the idea of a romance with a prince is entertained as well, even in marketing for young kids). Alexandra Heatwole has written in her article about Disney's "princess culture" (labelled as such by many, for example Rebecca Hains) and the way that Disney markets their idea of a princess to girls. In the article she argues that Disney's early princesses such as Cinderella and Snow White strongly enforced an image of ideal passivity in the girls and strengthened the idea of "romance as rescue" while also positing more firmly the idea of women accepting the domestic duties of care and housekeeping. This is very similar to Wright's comment about how Joseph Campbell focusing on his clarification of masculine and feminine roles "parallels an effort

in the United States to affirm that the woman's place is in the home" (11) which came to be as a response to women heading to the workforce during World War II, which then incidentally took place right between releases of *Snow White* (1937) and *Cinderella* (1950).

Heatwole continues by saying that in response to the "princesses of the past, with their single-facet characterizations and uncomplicated romantic trajectories" not being enough for Disney to make profit anymore as feminism had taken great steps forward already, the later princesses such as Belle, Arielle and Jasmine had "a narrative that revolved around rebellion, self-knowledge, and choice", at least seemingly. Alas, according to Heatwole, in reality the desires that these princesses had, be it freedom for Jasmine, entry into the human world for Ariel or desire for adventure for Belle, they were achieved "through the heterosexual romances at the heart of these stories." She also states that despite the efforts to make them seem like a new, more capable type of princess, their stories are in the end "tales of self-sacrifice in the interest of heterosexual love." Similar to Heatwole, Rebecca Hains notes on the romance aspect of the princess culture that princess stories have "long underscored the presumed weakness of females and implied that helplessness is romantically desirable" (161). She argues that princess tales were reflection of the dependency and helplessness that society encourages girls to learn, leading to the belief that a man will one day take care of them (161). Aspects of romance will be discussed later in this chapter in the general analysis, but as a quick note on She-Ra it must be pointed out that there are currently no romances in the main cast (heterosexual or other) of the series and the princesses achieve their own goals and desires by themselves. So not only is there no heterosexual romance, but it also does not exist as a saving force in the series for She-Ra or the others.

Furthermore, while in She-Ra's universe princesses are also without doubt beautiful, and they all do have beautiful clothes and castles, they are more than just that. In the series the young princesses are all capable and unique and can even fight for themselves and others when they need to. They all have different strengths, personalities and aspirations in life. Princesses are shown as something strong and capable, while still able to live normal young lives (to the extent that it is possible to be "normal" in a fantasy world). As Brown describes it in her article: "Adora and her friends tackle a variety of everyday

teenage challenges, including dealing with bumps in friendships, living up to parental expectations, accepting new responsibilities and even going to prom." A princess is still something relatively glamorous in *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, with their castles and clothes and weapons, but it is also something much more powerful than the generic idea of a princess that Disney for example markets with its undertone of passivity and "romance as rescue". For Adora herself the transformation into the warrior princess She-Ra is the very source of her full power and being a princess is her most powerful form. This idea of princesses being able to fight has of course been toyed with earlier as well in, for example, the *Shrek* movies, where the princess Fiona is shown to be a rather capable fighter in some scenes and later the other Disney-esque princesses show similar skills in a humorous montage. But in She-Ra it is not made for laughs as it is in the *Shrek* films. Through this the series empowers the concept of a princess and makes it something desirable still, even if in a slightly different way than what it has been.

Similar patterns of strong princesses can be seen in some recent movies as well, for example Disney's *Brave* (2012) and the later *Frozen* (2013). In both of those the protagonist princesses are very much more capable and active than the previous ones have been (consider for example Snow White or Aurora) and notably do not have romances of any kind, not even a heterosexual one to save them. Hains even calls Frozen "refreshing" as it features two sisters who are complex characters that do not rely on a man to save them (161). But arguably Elsa and her sister are still very much tied to a very traditional idea of a princess and being a princess is not directly tied to their power. While Elsa from Frozen does for example have magic powers, which sets the entire premise of the first film, the concept of her being a princess is still a very traditional one, rather than one that would particularly empower the very concept of a princess. If the setting would be changed to her and her sister being of any the social standing than royalty, making them something else than princesses, it would work all the same. In *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* on the other hand the idea of being a "princess of power" is crucial and absolutely central to the whole setting. It is not that they are princesses who happen to possess otherworldly powers, but rather that they are princesses because they possess some power that makes them strong and unique. Therefore *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* immediately posits the idea that in this universe princess equals something strong

or heroic even. As Stevenson herself is quoted saying in Betancourt's article about the new series: "I think we are trying to broaden the description of what it means to be a female hero. What it means to be girly." Even Tigges in her paper on female heroes ponders that when it comes to female heroes "[t]he question is whether 'toughness' and 'femininity' are mutually exclusive." In the case of She-Ra and her friends they most certainly are not, but rather they can support each other as qualities. As a whole the idea of a princess *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* seems to rise up as a counterforce for Disney's dominating idea of "princess culture" and the passivity of girls it has advocated.

3.1.2 Korra, Avatar and Master of All Four Elements

The Legend of Korra is a continuation of the popular animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. In the world of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *the Legend of Korra* part of the population of the world possesses the ability to bend an element (fire, earth, water or air) to their will, but among these "benders" (as they are referred to in-universe) is one who is master of all four elements: the Avatar. Unlike benders there can ever only be one Avatar at a time and when the Avatar dies, a new one is born and must be trained to fulfil their role as the protector and peacekeeper of the world, continuing the Avatar cycle. The original *Avatar: The Last Airbender* series ran from 2005 to 2008 and was immensely popular, winning several awards, including the prestigious Peabody Award. The premise of the show, combined with its humor, characters with realistic emotional depth and troubles, as well as its good handling of heavy themes such as genocide and freedom choice among other things in a children's show made it as popular as it was.

In *the Legend of Korra* the events take place 70 years after the events of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, when the protagonist of the first series, Aang, has passed away. Unlike Aang, a member of nomadic monk-like airbenders, who was calm and favored pacifism over other solutions, the new Avatar is Korra, a headstrong teenage girl from a community of waterbenders near the South Pole, who is ready to fight and to be the Avatar. Korra must follow her destiny as the new Avatar, leaving her old life behind to train her powers so she can master the final element, air. She leaves the south to head to the central city of the world in her age, Republic City. It is there that she finally realizes the situation of the world as it truly is:

crime, particularly the organized kind, is on the rise the there is a strong anti-bender movement rising up to cry out about the inequality of non-benders in comparison to the benders. Korra begins to train with Tenzin, son of Aang, to master airbending as the final element in her Avatar training, while also dealing with the new challenges that she has discovered in the city and beyond it (ranging from crime to navigating interpersonal relationships with her new friends). The series details her journey from her humble beginnings to becoming a hero, through facing various villains and attempts of disrupting the peace and balance of the world, while also seeking to solidify her own identity as the Avatar.

Korra is remarkable as a protagonist as she is not only a girl of course, but also not white (firmly strengthened by the waterbender culture being heavily influenced by Inuit culture) and as discussed later in this section, she is also not heterosexual, as confirmed by the ending of the series and the creators themselves. *The Legend of Korra* is also the oldest of three series examined in this thesis and there is a notable amount of time before *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* and *The Dragon Prince* first aired. The inclusion of Korra is, however, a very deliberate choice as it highlights the fact that while we are now getting more strong female leads, there have also been popular ones before, albeit in lesser numbers. In an Neda Ulaby's article showrunner Konieztko admits that when the series was pitched, some executives from Nickelodeon had concerns about backing an animated action series starring a female lead. As Konieztko is quoted saying in the article: "Conventional TV wisdom has it that girls will watch shows about boys, but boys won't watch shows about girls. During test screenings, though, boys said they didn't care that Korra was a girl. They just said she was awesome." So, there was a place for female heroes such as Korra already in 2012, and most likely would have been already earlier as well. Korra is also notable here as she becomes an adult within the span of the series. She starts the series at the age of 17 and grows to be 18 in seasons two and three, but the last season begins after a three-year gap, starting her at the age of 21. Conversely, Adora's and Rayla's stories are still unfinished, so it is unknown whether they will grow into adults or not.

3.1.3 Rayla, From Assassin to Royal Protector

Finally, *the Dragon Prince* premiered in 2018 in the same season as *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* did. Aaron Ehasz, head writer and co-executive producer of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is one of the co-showrunners behind the series. While the series has so far not received as high a praise as the other two series in this thesis have, it has enjoyed popularity from the beginning. Much like both *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* and *The Legend of Korra*, *The Dragon Prince* also has been praised for its diverse characters, as well as strong female characters. Rayla differs from the other two girl heroes examined in this thesis in that she is one of two protagonists in the series, sharing the position with a boy named Callum. While the series does focus much on Callum in his quest to become a human who can do magic without resorting to questionable methods, it also focused greatly on Rayla's story of having to accept that her worldview has been biased and flawed, which leads her to try and help the last surviving eponymous Dragon Prince return to its parents so that peace may be restored, even at the expense of turning her back on her kinsmen.

The story itself is set in the continent of Xadia, where six primal elements (the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, the Earth, the Sky and the Ocean) give magic powers to the elves and dragons of the land. The humans however were unable to use primal magic and turned to unnatural dark magic. Because humans turned to dark magic, the elves and dragons drove them off to the far end of the continent, where they founded their own human kingdoms. Conflict between the humans and magical folk eventually led to the humans killing the leader of the elves, the Dragon King, and supposedly its last known descendant to assure the end of the bloodline.

The series itself begins 1200 years after the death of the Dragon King when Rayla, a young Moonshadow elf, takes part in a mission to assassinate the king of the humans and his descendant, prince Ezran. In a strange turn of events Rayla discovers that the last dragon egg is in fact still intact and thus begins her hero's path in working together with human king's two sons, Callum and Ezran, to protect the egg and bring it back to the land of the dragons. They are however challenged by the growing threat of humans led Viren (previously advisor to the now assassinated king who delves deep into dark magic to

pursue his goals) as well as the threat of increasing tension between elves and humans. Rayla, much like Adora, is a notable character in that she arguably begins the series as an antagonist but shifts into helping the other side, though unlike Adora she does not begin from a strictly evil point. The humans and Moonshadow elves are in conflict, but it is not as clear-cut as it is in Adora's case as to what is good and evil or which side is in the right or wrong.

The writers of *The Dragon Prince* seem to have gone for an almost role-switching type of scenario with Callum and Rayla, as Rayla is the more combat orientated and hotheaded of the two, while Callum is scrambling to learn magic and to learn to protect himself. Compare this setting for example to the popular book series *Harry Potter*. The main character Harry, as well as his best friend Ron to an extent, are rather hotheaded and prone to rush off to things, while their friend Hermione is book smart and does everything through meticulous research from books. This is the exact opposite of how Rayla and Callum have been set-up in *the Dragon Prince*, but it is more common. Female characters, especially girls, often are more passive and cautious as heroes than their male counterparts might be. Girls have to resort to books or other crutches to help them perform heroic acts, while male characters can often simply rush off into action without further consideration.

3.2 What Are They Like and Where Do Their Journeys Take Them?

So, are there similarities between the three girl heroes and if so, what are they? The simple answer is yes, there are, and they can be found first and foremost in their personalities, though not only there. But the longer answer is more complex and reveals that there also differences to be found, in both personalities and most of all their stories. At a first and very broad glance all three of them are strong and ready to defend themselves and others. They are also quite headstrong and prone to leaning towards fighting as the first option (at least at the beginning), but at the same time they are happy teenagers who find joy in many things with their friends, while also occasionally struggling with common teenage problems.

Upon the premiere of *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* there was some criticism over its similarity to *The Legend of Korra* in both story as well as characteristics of the girl heroes. Samantha Nelson

for example criticized Adora's similarity to Korra in her review of the first season of the *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, writing that Adora is "strong, tough, hotheaded, and a fish out of water in the world of princess luxury and palace etiquette, which are traits highly reminiscent of the title character in *The Legend of Korra*." While Nelson does not write about *The Dragon Prince* in her article, it should be noted that Rayla fits in with very similar characteristics as well. Let us then begin this analysis by first reviewing these qualities that Nelson has compared as similarities more closely.

3.2.1 "You're stubborn and headstrong, and you're our best friend!": Tough Girls, Anger and Violence in *She-Ra and Princesses of Power, The Legend of Korra* and *The Dragon Prince*

Certainly "strong, tough, hotheaded" all do describe these three very well, so much so that Tenzin even describes Korra as having been "hotheaded, and a bit selfish" ("Remembrances" 14:13-14:16) at the beginning of the series and Adora's dear friend Glimmer describes Adora with the words of the segment title: "stubborn and headstrong" ("The Portal" 13:57-13:59). That is of course not where their similarities nor personalities end, but as these are what comparison were drawn by the review, they will be examined first. All three of them do employ violence and are ready to fight at almost any given time, especially at the beginnings of the respective series. Korra is seen roughing up people for information on more than one occasion in the first season and Rayla for example threatens a person she does not trust with her assassin blades in an attempt to get her to leave ("The Midnight Desert" 7:12-7:17).

Notably all three are actually combat trained by their backgrounds: Adora is a top-notch soldier in the Horde, Korra's training to master the elements is done in part through combat training to prepare her for her role as Avatar and Rayla is an assassin, which puts them in a position where some degree of violence is even expected of them. This is immediately a very striking characteristic of these characters as violence is usually more associated with male characters. However, all three girl heroes are grown in the center of violence that is a very disciplined type of violence, rather than an impulsive or irrational kind. Assassins, soldiers and master benders all require rigorous training to hone their abilities and they employ those abilities usually only when it is truly called for. For all of them this practiced ability to fight and the use of

violence is a tool that is tied to their skills as something that they excel at. While violence is not something that could be considered a good example for young viewers, these backstories and the capability for fighting in order to defend themselves is something that can be seen in a somewhat positive light. Of course, preferably physical fighting is not encouraged for young viewers of any gender, but the idea that if ever a situation required it, a girl too can defend herself or others, holds some merit.

However, regardless of the very strict type of combat discipline of their backgrounds all three have been subjected to, they all do have a "hotheaded" nature, which occasionally combines with their capabilities as fighters to lead them into fights outside of fighting what could be considered a major evil in their story. Korra for example even proclaims herself that she is usually the one to start fights and does not really know how to prevent them. ("The Southern Lights" 08:56-09:00). Furthermore, she is described already in the first episode as strong, but "lacking restraint" when she is presenting her firebending skills ("After All These Years" 02:42). For Korra this is actually a central theme in the first season as she is trying to master the element of air, which is considered to be one of peaceful mediation and connection to the universe. Her instructor Tenzin even goes as far as to tell her that usually the most difficult element for the Avatar to master is the one furthest from their personality ("A Leaf in the Wind" 01:55-02:00).

Instead of showing interest in meditation Korra turns to the in-universe sport of "pro-bending", which is a fast-paced and exciting sport involving two teams using their bending skills to battle in a special arena. Furthermore, in the first, second and third seasons she defeats her greatest adversary of the season in a final grand fight that ends the story arc. This creates a very striking contrast to season four, where at the end she is faced with the totalitarian military leader Kuvira, who is attempting to rule the entire Earth Nation. Rather than fight her into submission at the very end, Korra eventually talks her down into surrendering, drawing from her own experiences of fear and pain to connect with her. She even states in season four that fighting is something the "old Korra" would do and that she would rather try to reason with Kuvira ("The Battle of Zaofu"). Of course, reasoning does not work with Kuvira at this point and some kind of battle is inevitable, but it is an important distinction in Korra's story that she no longer places violence as the first option in solving a situation. Towards the end of season one there is already hints that

she may grow to be less hotheaded as she agrees to run and hide from the antagonist, but in the very next episode after sneaking away from a gathering of her enemies, that she proclaims that she is not running from anyone and wants to "go back up there and knock some heads" ("Skeletons in the Closet" 01:39-01:42). This is followed, not much later, with her angrily declaring that she hates having to be patient ("Skeletons in the Closet" 01:50-01:52). Again, a striking contrast to the final season where the battle part of her final encounter with Kuvira is done with actual proper planning with her friends and allies ("Day of the Colossus") rather than rushing in to "knock some heads".

This early impatience and desire to handle things physically rather than by words shown in Korra is similar to Rayla's behavior in many scenes, and it is summarized quite clearly after Rayla has to admit that she and Callum cannot get past an ancient dragon by sneaking or fighting, after which, in a greatly annoyed and defeated tone, she declares, "Looks like it's down to my favorite course of action. Reason" ("Sol Regem" 10:21-10:24). Rayla has however shown the least proneness to "unnecessary" fights so far of the three, so, while she does display anger and frustration it is less likely to lead to a fight, but when threatened or attacked first she does usually respond in kind. Arguably this could be due to story elements as well, as out of the three girl heroes examined here, Rayla has the least contact with people outside her close friend group and antagonists, while Korra for example spends most of her time in cities with large populations.

Adora is interestingly shown as having very good skills at devising battle plans ("Roll With It"), no doubt due to her military background, but even at the end of the very same episode she ends up declaring that rather than go through with any of the many plans she and the other princesses came up with, they will do what they are best at: improvise (18:05-18:10). She too is quite impatient in many parts of the story, but also quite impulsive for that matter, which are two qualities that have not been tempered by her military training, but which can usually be found at the root when something does go wrong. So, all three of them do share a notable "hotheadedness" and impatience at first, which is a quality that Korra learns to temper by the end of her story and which Adora definitely also shows signs of tempering as her story progresses. In Rayla it is harder to see such a change, but once again, it must be remembered that her story is at a much earlier stage than Adora's or Korra's are.

While there is research on female and girl anger in general (for example Burt, 2014; Gavin, 2015), there is hardly any research on specifically how fictional women and particularly fictional girls portray anger and strong emotions. However, author Nicola Skinner for example has written an article about girls and anger. She very well points out that firstly, we have very few genuine "angry girls" in fiction in general and secondly, whenever we have had girls in older fiction who have shown anger it is something that is considered to be a "bad" thing about them and something to be controlled to become better, using Jo from *Little Women* (1868) and Darrell Rivers from *Malory Towers* (1946) as examples of a character actively ashamed of their tempers. Skinner continues by saying that there is a very certain lesson these books offer, which is: "lose your anger, and you will be an acceptable woman, worthy of love and capable of agency." Whereas these were older examples, Skinner then argues that modern girl characters are allowed anger in two ways: if it is justified by a sad backstory that "reveals trauma, grief, neglect, or abuse" or if it is a selfless anger that they feel for others. Skinner gives Jacqueline Wilson's *Tracy Beaker* books as examples of the first one and characters such as Hermione Granger and Katniss Everdeen for the second one. She elaborates on the second characters, saying that "[f]or example, while Harry Potter spends vast swathes of time feeling angry at his life – in other words, it's all about him – Hermione only really gets properly angry on behalf of other people, such as the house elves." This is very true for the characters she mentions and partially applies to the girl heroes observed in this thesis. But only partially.

While Adora for example gets angry on behalf of the people the Horde attacks at the beginning of the story after she has changes sides, she is shown getting angry on her own behalf several times as well. As will be discussed below in the light of her burden as She-Ra, she is for example visibly angry at the prospect that she does not get to choose her destiny, but rather was chosen as She-Ra and put on that path by others ("The Price of Power"). One could argue at a quick glance that Adora could be put in the first category of Skinner's proposed justifications for anger, but this does not quite fit her. While the Fright Zone and the Horde are portrayed purposefully as bad, Adora's childhood is not really that terrible when contrasted to the general mood of the Fright Zone, as she shown to be almost doted upon as a favorite, while Catra next to her suffers the neglect and abuse that could justify her anger in the series ("Promise").

As mentioned above, Korra goes from solving the big battle at the end of a seasons 1-3 with violence to solving the very end of the final big fight of the series in season four with talking, which could almost be seen as her losing her anger, but even in season four still, before the final battle and after her first attempt at talking sense into Kuvira fails, she accepts a battle with the words “it's been a while, but I got a lot of pent up rage" (“The Battle of Zaofu” 08:41-08:43). So, while she learns to maybe temper her anger or understands that it does not have to be the only solution, she does not entirely lose her anger. And even when she does put reason and words as her first choice, it does not make her any more or any less accepted by the people around her from earlier. So, Korra’s temper is not something bad about her, but rather for her it is more of a case of having matured to a point where violence need not be a solution necessarily, but she is still allowed to be angry as well. Similar to Adora, Korra does show anger when faced with injustice towards other people, for example when her friends are wrongfully imprisoned in season one (“When Extremes Meet”), or when she finds out her uncle was the reason for his father’s banishment (“Civil Wars, Part 2”). But she too is angry for her own self as well more than enough times. Season two offers a longer arc of this as she discovers that her father never told he had been banished from his original home in the northern water tribe. She is angry at her father for several episodes as she feels betrayed by him withholding such information from her, before the situation is resolved when the truth is out, and her anger shifts slightly to the above-mentioned anger towards her uncle.

But neither Adora, Rayla nor Korra show particular remorse over the whole aspect of their “bad” temper and the occasional loss of temper and this does not take away from them being accepted. Despite bursts of anger (though arguably proper anger is rarer in these shows than frustration perhaps), they are accepted as women and have full agency. So, as Skinner’s examples are from older fiction it might be that there is also room for angry girls and girls that are angry for themselves now. All three of the characters examined here argue with their friends on at least one occasion in the series, but they then apologize and move on, without specifically apologizing for a whole part of their personality, but rather for that one specific moment of anger that was aimed at a person who perhaps did not deserve it. None of them truly spend time reflecting on their anger and “hotheadedness.” So, they might be hotheaded and certainly

tough and strong, but those are also very human qualities even in girls, and therefore it is not a bad thing to portray it visibly, as these series also very firmly posit the idea that apologizing when you realize you were wrongly angry is an important balancing counterpart for your anger.

3.2.2 "Brave, loyal, but afraid.": Emotional Complexity in Modern Girl Heroes

Something that Nelson does not bring up as a similarity (or difference for that matter) in her review is the emotional complexity of the characters beyond three simple characteristics. Complexity of emotions female characters show is something that Valerie Estelle Frankel also touches upon, as she writes on showing emotions that girls "learn that to compete with boys they must never show fear or emotion, never risk being called "hysterical" or "shrewish" (20). Indeed, the concept of girls and women being hysterical if they portray strong emotions is something that is used against women and girls as an excuse to disregard their very valid emotions (consider for example the historical use of the word "hysteria" in relation to women in feminist movements). This, in addition to the concept of passivity of princesses discussed in She-Ra's sections creates a very unhealthy image of expectations on what girls should be like, stunting potential emotional complexity they might otherwise have. Oliver Sava writing about the series finale of *The Legend of Korra* points out the importance of this emotional complexity as he remarks that while there is call for strong female characters, "'strong' isn't in regards to physical ability, but quality and depth of characterization." Adora, Korra and Rayla all show a vast range of emotions from positive ones to very difficult ones and it is pertinent to show in these series that girls can have a wide range of emotions, going from joy to feelings such as anger and fear. Most importantly it is important to show that none of those emotions are invalidated by comments from others, especially not men. All three girl heroes examined here are shown crying on more than one occasion, whether from sadness or frustration or even happiness, they are angry as witnessed above and they are full of joy. No one tells these girls heroes in their series to not feel any of these emotions, even the more difficult ones, but rather in the case of the negative feelings they are usually validated or comforted when they do these show these emotions.

So, let us first then briefly examine the positive emotions first, as they are perhaps the most expected from a children's animated show. All three girl heroes show a healthy amount of a sense of humor, excitement and enthusiasm over various things and especially joy in success of others and themselves. Adora for example in the very first episode is shown as displaying almost childlike joy as she discovers for the first what festivals and horses are, as neither of those things exist in the Fright Zone. She very enthusiastically claims that "This is the best day of my life" ("The Sword Part 1" 10:52) to truly drive in the point that she has never experienced anything so joyful in the Fright Zone. She is shown to be witty and teasing her friends in a friendly manner, qualities that both Korra and Rayla also show to different degrees. Korra is for example seen taking part in playful competitions with Tenzin's children and expressing boundless joy over her and her team's victories in pro-bending matches, as well as being excited to take part in festivals in her hometown. Rayla on the other hand, when entering a human town for the first time, puts on a disguise to become "human Rayla" and then proceeds to jokingly throw out a few sentences that make light fun of humans and their culture ("The Dagger and the Wolf).

The importance of friendship is discussed in a later segment in more detail, but as a quick note here, particularly the joy of friendship and the successes the girl heroes reach together with their friends is something that is stressed much in the show. This, again, might be something already expected from what the target audience is, but it is still worth reiterating. As an interesting additional note, there is also the fact that all of these three series show the protagonists and their friends hugging and sharing similar physical contact on many occasions as well (both the girl heroes themselves as well as most men and boys they are close to), whether it be as a gesture of joy or as a comforting gesture. This is also a very interesting facet, as it shows even more prominently the idea that even if you are strong and tough, it does not mean that you cannot also be soft and vulnerable, which adds another layer of emotional complexity to the characters. There is after all a distinction between crying alone in solitude and in crying while hugging someone else, and the difference is arguably in hiding vulnerability versus allowing others to see it in you. Again, a very important point to show to children: strength does not mean you could not show others your vulnerabilities as well.

But there is a quite different set of emotions all three also show; hesitation, fear, grief and doubt over their own choices and capabilities, among other darker emotions. Lori M. Campbell touches upon this subject as well in her conclusion to *A Quest of Her Own*, noting that much like male heroes, the female hero "has flaws; she shows fear, she makes mistakes or misreads situations" (284). She adds to this that despite such flaws "she is extraordinary in her ability to enable positive change and shows superior bravery, assertiveness, and intelligence in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles" (284). Indeed, this is a very important thing to remember, when considering young girl heroes especially. They are still developing both as heroes and as humans. Just as Katheryn Wright mentioned Katniss to be a "compelling as a character because she is a work in progress" (2), so are the three girl heroes examined in this thesis. That is not to say that perfection and absolute lack of flaws should be expected even from an older female hero (or perhaps any other hero for that matter), but a young hero is obviously prone to the same mistakes as any young person might be.

Just as *She-Ra and Princesses of Power* showrunner Noelle Stevenson describes Adora in Brown's article as being afraid of "messing up" and "doing the wrong thing", the same can be seen in Rayla, and particularly in Korra. Throughout the story, despite Korra's determination and confidence in many situations, she is also shown as being afraid, second-guessing her own choices and hesitating when faced with difficult situations, and this applies to all three of them. As Brown describes in her article, these insecurities and flaws do add "a level of emotional authenticity" to Adora, but the same goes for Korra and Rayla as well, and they serve to humanize them and even make them relatable to a young audience. As discussed in Adora's case, these are very important features to show in a female hero, particularly to a young viewership. It eliminates the idea that a hero is never flawed in their judgement and always succeeds in what they do without any hesitation, when in reality most, if not all people will experience fear and hesitation in their ordinary lives, young people especially as they navigate the hardships of teenage years and the crucial parts of discovering their own identities. While not every teenager has a designated identity to fill in, such as being the Avatar, many have expectations laid upon them by parents and peers, which can

easily lead to negative emotions such as doubt and fear. But these series show that despite these fears and flaws it is not impossible to be a hero.

Korra's story as a whole is a very strong showcase of the dark and uncertain side of being a young hero, despite her self-proclaimed desire to have always wanting to be the Avatar ("Civil Wars, Part 1" 16:31-16:33). On several occasions, beginning already from the first season, she is shown as admitting to being afraid despite at first trying to show herself as being very brave. She is shown hesitating when having to decide how to act by herself in important moments as she is used to people guiding her and telling her what to do. She is also shown as falling into a near depression like state in both at the end of season one as she has lost her bending abilities and connection to the Avatar cycle, as well as at the end of season three when she is wheelchair-bound after her fight with Zaheer, main antagonist of the season. This is taken to an even further level when the beginning of the fourth season of *The Legend of Korra* actually even delves into a theme as heavy as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) and shows Korra working through it as she is plagued by her past battles that caused her to be hurt and damaged, despite ultimately being victorious in them.

She-Ra and Rayla do not have quite as severe of a storyline of fear and what it can cause (at least so far), but they also have their own fair share of similar feelings. Already at the final battle of season one when the situation is dire and She-Ra seems to be unable to save the situation, her friend Bow pleads her to tell him they can fix the situation. She-Ra, visibly defeated, only manages to weakly reply: "I'm... sorry" ("The Battle of Bright Moon" 16:18-16:33). There are several similar situations, often linked with She-Ra and Adora to what seems at those moment be inability to protect her friends, or with her ongoing struggle in having to be on the opposing side of her childhood friend Catra, who will not join her to oppose the Horde.

Fear is also shown as sometimes being a hindrance to unlocking further power, as for example Adora's former mentor Shadow Weaver tells Adora she is capable of healing her with the power of She-Ra, but that Adora is afraid of her power, "of it spiraling out of control." Shadow Weaver urges her to allow the fear to be felt, so she can move past it, and tells Adora she is "greater than [her] fear" ("The Price of Power"

13:55-14:07). A similar event is discussed in more detail below in the analysis of Korra's journey, as Korra allows her former enemy Zaheer to guide her back to the Spirit World and Zaheer too urges her to let the traumatic events haunting her play out so she can move past her fear of them ("Beyond the Wilds"). Similarly, as also discussed further below, Toph encourages Korra earlier to "release the fear" as Korra is plagued by the same visions when trying to remove the last of Zaheer's poison from her body ("The Calling"). So, the girl heroes are not urged to stop being afraid all together, but to accept the fear and move past it to better themselves.

Rayla then has her share of negative emotions as she comes to grips with the after-effects of her decision to join the humans, despite firmly believing it was the right choice. The first season has a very concrete display of this, as she has a ribbon on her left wrist that functions as proof of an assassin's commitment, which will not come off from her wrist until the target is taken care off and it will continue to tighten around her wrist as time progresses. As she diverged from her assassin path and the others of her group were captured, the work remains unfinished as the human prince Ezran still lives. The first season sees her hand slowly turn more and more purple and she begins to lose its functionality, eventually leading her to be unable to fight with both hands. The situation is eventually resolved when the eponymous Dragon Prince is born, and it manages to break the ribbon from Rayla's wrist, but this is only at the end of the first season, after Rayla has gotten a full season to ruminate on her decision and the very physical consequence of it.

However, the effects of her choice at the beginning of the series do not stop, but rather culminate in season three when she and Callum finally reach the homeland of the Moonshadow elves. There Rayla discovers that she has been made a "Ghost" so that none of her people can see her, which she describes to Callum as being banished magically ("Ghost"). She is able to get through to her uncle's husband Ethari, her other adoptive father, who tells her that everyone believes that Rayla betrayed and abandoned the rest of the group of assassins that went after the humans, as none of them returned. This magical banishment is made even heavier on Rayla as she admits to Callum that the same thing was done to her parents, when they had been assumed having abandoned their post of protecting the Dragon Queen. As Callum and Rayla

prepare to leave again, she asks Ethari if she can ever return home and Ethari truthfully, but in a clearly deeply saddened tone, replies that he does not know (“Ghost”). This leaves Rayla to mournfully leave her home again, now having to carry with her the heavy weight of knowing she might not ever have a home to return to, something that she is shown lamenting over in multiple following episodes. So even a very heavy theme such as loss of ones home because of their own choices is something that can be shown in a girl hero’s journey, but once again, it is not something that weakens Rayla even is she does understandably mourn it.

Interestingly Rayla is also shown as having an actual fear of water as well in the show, rather than just general fear over her own choices and ability to protect others, which is where she differs from Adora and Korra, who have not been shown as having such specific fears. Arguably such a specific fear, which is less tied to context, time and place, but simply always exists in her, could be seen as a more concrete flaw than the general fears discussed above. Narratively it is a very interesting choice as Rayla is the only character shown in the series as having a specific fear, but also the only character who is specifically called a hero in *The Dragon Prince*. This, in a very real way, posits the idea that having fears does not take away from heroism and again echoes Lori M. Campbell’s words about female heroes and their flaws. Rayla even tries to hide her fear of water from Callum and Ezran, but the truth finally comes out just as they are attacked by a large monster in the water and are thrown off their boat. Rayla makes it to land but realizes that Callum and Ezran cannot save themselves and she must go back to save them. After the situation is over Callum tells her it was brave to return and when Rayla tries to brush it off, Callum states that it was *heroic* of her, precisely because of her fear (“An Empty Throne” 21:40-21:47). Rayla seems confused by the thanks and compliments and Ezran very earnestly asks why she would try to hide something like her fear of water, to which Rayla mournfully replies that "The thing is, Moonshadow elves aren't supposed to show fear. Ever" (“An Empty Throne” 22:10-22:14). Again, much like with She-Ra and Korra above, Rayla’s past has told her that she is not allowed to be afraid, but now Callum and Ezran tell her in the same episode that it is foolish to believe something like that and that Rayla is allowed to have such a fear without being any

lesser for it. Callum kicks their boat away from the shore to drift off, very concretely showing support for Rayla and validating her fear, and three continue travelling by foot.

For Adora and Korra there is also a burden of status as a source of fear and anxiety that Rayla does not have as strongly. Certainly, Rayla has her mission as part of an assassin team, but she defies it and despite the heavy repercussion it causes her later, it does not so clearly hinder her, and she is on a relatively free path. But Korra as the Avatar is constantly being guided to do things and decisions are made for her. She is show multiple times as having been manipulated by someone into things she did not fully understand (most notably by the evil city councilman Tarrlok in season one and by her uncle Unalaq in season two), because Tarrlock and Unalaq for example tricked her and played on her trusting nature respectively. Korra for example comes to realize in season two that she has been sheltered away in the south by her father and Tenzin, her mentor, despite being the Avatar (albeit in season three we discover there is a real reason for this). She lashes out her father and Tenzin for keeping her locked away and thinking that they know what is best for her (“Rebel Spirit” 21:11-21-19). This is echoed on several occasions as well, up to the point that she admits to his uncle Unalaq in season two that she has grown so used to everyone telling her what to do that she is suddenly not sure how to act when no one is directly guiding her (“The Southern Lights” 16:56-17:28). She struggles with her own judgement and desire for freedom, while being unable to fully act on them due to her being the Avatar, who is expected to act in certain ways. She-Ra suffers from the same thing in her path, culminating in season three when she discovers she is from another universe entirely. She goes to Light Hope to ask about it and Light Hope confirms this and the fact that it would now be impossible to open another portal, promptly ending Adora’s pondering about whether she could go “home” to her own planet again. Adora desperately cries out "Don't I get a say in what happens to me? Don't I get a choice?" to which Light Hope only responds that no, she does not, as she is chosen for the role of She-Ra, but she does not get to choose her destiny (“The Price of Power” 19:52-20:02). As briefly mentioned above not every young viewer has such expectations burdening them, but for many this kind of heavy expectation of how they will live can be very relatable. It is therefore an important theme to bring forth in these shows and to then resolve it by having the girl heroes find their

own identities despite these constraints placed upon them or by breaking free of these constraints with their own determination. The concept of choosing your own path despite what some might expect of you is a strong message that is potentially an important one for many. Korra chooses her path by finding her way of being the Avatar; Adora accepts her role as She-Ra, but refuses to let Light Hope use her as a weapon to destroy the universe; Rayla defies her own family to follow her own judgement in what is right.

3.2.3 “Can I ever come home again?": The Heroic Journeys of She-Ra, Korra and Rayla

Next, to return to the very first comment in Nelson’s review in which she claims She-Ra and Korra are too similar, the “fish out of water” part admittedly does ring true for both of them, as well as Rayla, and this offers a good gateway into a brief observation on the hero journeys these girl heroes travel through. Indeed, Adora does struggle with her new princess life, but while there is no palace etiquette for Rayla to be confused by, she is quite lost in the world of humans, having spent her life in the secluded village of the Moonshadow elves. Korra faces similar problems in her story as she arrives into Republic City at first, having also been accustomed to the quaint life of her small tribe. Of the three of them however, only Korra steps into the new strange place with full knowledge of what she is doing, therefore starting her journey into heroism knowingly. As mentioned in the series overviews above, Adora and Rayla both end up accidentally into situations that lead to them changing over to the other side from the antihero or antagonist position. This is interesting when reflected towards the hero’s journey and heroine’s journey theories. Korra heads out on her path knowingly, having understood that she is the Avatar since childhood and even blatantly states in the show that “I didn't want a normal childhood, all I ever wanted to be was the Avatar” (“Civil Wars, Part 1” 16:31-16:33).

However, even though Korra steps on the path knowingly, she too quickly comes to a realization about the state of the world, shattering her previous image of it. As mentioned in the series overview, rather than everyone being happy in the big city and living luxurious lives, there is organized crime and a strong resistance towards benders, who are considered oppressor by some non-benders. Adora on the other hand stumbles into her path and even tries to deny it and the evil nature of the Horde at first,

echoing the first two faces of Schmidt's theory – "the Illusion of a Perfect World" and "the Betrayal or Realization". Adora has been taught that the princesses are evil, and the Horde is the good side, but it turns out that it is not. When she explores the Whispering Wood properly under Glimmer and Bow's captivity in the first episode, she comes face to face for the first time with the destruction the Horde has caused. She laments that it makes no sense to her as "the Horde would never do something like this" ("The Sword part 1" 20:29-20:31) but is forced to accept the reality of the situation no less and to reconsider her whole worldview.

As mentioned in the segment on Schmidt's theory, the first part of her feminine hero's journey theory has the hero in a place where she *needs* to escape from in order to reach her full potential. This is very strongly reflected in Adora's beginning, as in the Horde she cannot become a hero like she can as She-Ra on the side of the princesses. Rayla's beginning has a similar echo to it; she is forced to realize that her own worldview has not been as good as she had been taught, but rather there is more to it, as the dragon egg that was supposed to be destroyed by humans, actually still exist and the two humans she tried to kill are trying to protect it. It cannot be said as firmly on her part that she could not reach her full potential if she remained on the side of her kinsmen, but when considering the definition of heroism chosen for this thesis, it is unlike Rayla could have reached it by following the assassination path and therefore upholding the cycle of hate between the elves and humans.

Having now briefly examined the beginnings of their respective hero journeys, let us then examine the journeys more closely, one hero at a time.

3.2.3.1 Korra's Journey

For Korra's part we can examine her full journey as her series has finished already and this thesis will not include the comics and other media outside the original animated series. After her realization of the state of the world, she awakens into understanding the true meaning of being an Avatar and trying to help people. Arguably her story leans more towards Schmidt's journey than Joseph Campbell's model. While the "Supernatural Aid" could be seen as Korra meeting Tenzin and learning airbending, "Crossing the First Threshold" does not fit her story quite as well as Schmidt's proposed next stage, "The Awakening" does.

Korra does not so much leave her known world behind in this stage, only to end up in the "Belly of the Whale" and going through the apparent death of hero so soon, but rather she awakens into the realization of what she needs to do now as her sheltered image of the world has been shaken. A mentor does show up in the form of Tenzin, who, much like Schmidt describes in stage three, does not have all the answers as Korra needs to go on the journey for herself (ch. 24, stage 3). Arguably the Initiation stage of Campbell's theory could also partially apply to Korra's story. The Road of Trials could be seen as being her journey through seasons two and three, the Meeting with the Goddess could correspond to meeting Toph and she does have a literal atonement with her father in season 2, after first ending up in a disagreement with him. However, these parts do not match up to Campbell's order and parts such as the "woman as temptress" do not seem fit Korra's story logically. Here we begin to see more clearly the problem of why Campbell's hero's journey does not work on female heroes as well. As discussed in the theory section briefly, the fact that women and girls have shifted from a passive position in the story into actively making the journey themselves now takes them away from where they were in the theory as there is no longer a male hero who must for example come into marriage with the "Queen Goddess of the World".

In a more general note, simply the names of Schmidt's three acts seem to better describe what Korra's story includes than Campbell's act names do. Campbell's "Departure" and Schmidt's "Containment" could ultimately perhaps be switched as titles for the acts in Korra's story, but "Transformation" and "Emergence" do better describe her path into a stronger, more mature and better-balanced Avatar. Arguably "Containment" does however work too, as we discover in Korra's story that she was literally very purposefully kept in the south far from Republic City and more figuratively she has not finished her training yet, therefore still far from her full potential. "Initiation" in particular as an act name does not work as well to describe Korra's story, as she has already been initiated to her path from the moment she was confirmed as the Avatar and even her "atonement with the father" does not really initiate to her any new status. She also does not really receive an "ultimate boon" in the story. The closest to this would probably be the ability to airbend, but this takes place already in the first season and perhaps does not really qualify as an "ultimate boon" as it is simply an aspect of her skills that she had yet to fully master.

Schmidt's fourth stage, "the Descent", however can be seen in her experiences in the end of season of one and the story of season two, as she navigates first the challenges of the anti-bending group Equalists and defeats them, temporarily losing her bending and connection to the Avatar cycle and second, the second season's story of her opening spirit portals to connect the human Spirit Worlds, while also going through the traumatic event of having her Avatar connection completely severed for a moment, before regaining it. Season three on the other hand starts on a hopeful note again, as the open spirit portals have suddenly given new people the skill to airbend, therefore finally increasing the number of airbenders in the world from the four benders of Tenzin's family. All seems to be well and Korra enthusiastically helps Tenzin to gather the new airbenders together, so that Tenzin may train them, and the Air Nation can be reborn. This is quite clearly the "Eye of the Storm" for Korra, where seems well for the time being, until her darkest moment finally arrives. The sixth stage, "Death", occurs for Korra at the end of season three.

She of course does not physically die, but she is left weakened from her battle at the end of the season so badly that she is wheelchair-bound, and as show at the beginning of season four, requires strenuous physical therapy to recover use of her body. However, mostly this "death" is an emotional and spiritual one for Korra at this stage. She struggles with being the Avatar and as discussed in the earlier segment in this chapter, she shows symptoms of what is clearly PTSD. She is haunted by her losses and a physical manifestation of herself, which takes the form of her in a state of almost unhinged fury from an Avatar State[2] she was forced into by a poison Zaheer forced into her body at the end of season three. She is expected to return to Republic City in season four, but it turns out that she has lied to both her friends there, as well as her father about her whereabouts and is actually travelling alone in the Earth Kingdom, trying to follow this physical manifestation of herself to find out what it wants. The "death" of the Avatar is posited quite clearly as an idea here when a character remarks to Korra that she reminds him of the Avatar and the muses that whatever did happen to the Avatar? Korra responds to it gruffly "I wouldn't know" and leaves ("After All These Years" 22:01-22:13).

[2] A higher state of being for the Avatar, reached through a connection to their past lives, which strengthens their powers notably while the state is active

The next stage from “Death” is “Support”, which is a very decisively different stage in the feminine journey than what Joseph Campbell’s “The Road of Trials” in his hero’s journey as the following stage from the apparent death of the hero. Schmidt explains about the “Support” stage that the most important point about it is that where the masculine hero usually needs to do things alone to prove himself to the group later, the feminine hero on the other hands needs prover herself to herself (ch. 24, stage 7). This also rings true for Korra’s story in season four. Korra follows her vision of herself to a swamp where she finds Toph Beifong, originally an earthbending companion of Aang from *Avatar: The Last Airbender.* Korra already proved herself to herself physically by becoming physically fit again at the beginning of the season, but with Toph she must start the journey to prove herself to herself on the spiritual side of as well.

Toph notes that there are still traces of the poison Zaheer put in her remaining and she agrees to remove them, but Korra reacts too strongly to the attempt and Toph gives up, remarking that perhaps Korra wants the poison to stay so she does not have to go back to being the Avatar and worry about being hurt again (“The Coronation” 20:53-21:09). Toph then shows Korra to an ancient tree in the middle of the swamp, which has roots reaching all across the swamp, connecting all sides of it and all creatures in it. Toph explains that Korra has been disconnected from the ones who love her, as well as herself for much too long already (“The Calling” 17:52-18:02). Korra reaches out to the tree’s roots, immediately connecting with it to discover that Tenzin’s children, her friends, are looking for her in the swamp and they reunite happily again. The children plead to her that the world needs her back, but Korra quietly states that she is not the Avatar she used to be as she cannot even enter the Avatar State anymore. But this momentary hesitation does not stop her and Korra finds the resolve to have the last of the poison removed from her, only to have Toph tell her that she must it do it herself. Without hesitation Korra agrees and finally manages, for the most part releasing the fear caused by her last fights. As the poison is removed Korra is once again able to enter the Avatar State by herself and she heads out with Tenzin’s children to handle the current great threat, Kuvira (“The Calling” 20:10-22:04).

Korra almost shifts to the “Rebirth” stage here, as Schmidt describes the stage as one where the female hero has “found her strength and resolve, and she goes after her goal with gusto” (ch. 24, stage 8).

Korra actually states herself at this point that "She [Kuvira] needs to know the Avatar is back. The world needs to know" ("Enemy at the Gates" 02:19-02:22). She and Tenzin's children immediately head to the Earth Kingdom to present Korra to the people in plight there. However, as mentioned she only almost reaches the "Rebirth" stage here, as she is seemingly alright again, but actually still cannot enter the Spirit World without being plagued by visions of her battle with Zaheer and ends up losing to Kuvira. She eventually decides to go Zaheer, who offers to lead her into the Spirit World to reforge her connection to it. She hesitates at first but decides then that there is nothing left for her to lose and agrees. The vision of their battle returns immediately as she begins meditation but Zaheer urges her to let it play, as she must accept it happened to move past it. She eventually succeeds and wakes in the Spirit World, reconnected to it ("Beyond the Wilds"). Here we return to what was discussed in the section on fear. To reconnect to her true power, she must move past her past fear, but here again no one is telling her to completely shed herself of fear, but rather to accept it and let herself be transformed by it.

As Korra leaves the prison containing Zaheer, she states that she feels "whole" again. Mako asks if she thinks she can now forget what Zaheer did to her, to which she replies that she cannot, but she is ready to accept what happened and that this acceptance will make stronger ("Beyond the Wilds" 21:22-21:28). Now she enters the "Rebirth" stage, as according to Schmidt's it also contains another important facet about the newly born female hero, as she has "reclaimed her identity and her weapons and realizes she is the creator of her own fear. She has found her courage, used her brains, and won her own heart" (ch. 24, stage 8). These three things are what Schmidt argues as being needed by the hero so she can reach her goal. Particularly the aspect of being a creator of her own fear is something that is explored in Korra's story in the fourth season. It is her fear of returning to her life as the Avatar and potentially facing more dangerous battles that keeps her from being able to be reformed. As she is removing the poison from herself, Toph encourages her by telling her that fight is over, and she must now release the fear ("The Calling" 20:10-22:04") just as Zaheer encourages her to do when he helps her reconnect to the Spirit World.

Schmidt also point out that where the hero is now means that she has "a consciousness, a sense of connectedness and responsibility for one's actions" (ch. 24, stage 8). Schmidt explains that now the hero

acts from a “place of calmness like the samurai, instead of a place of reactive rage like a beast” (ch. 24, stage 8) and most importantly after this she is not reacting out of fear, but rather she is acting “out of power and truth” (ch. 24, stage 8). This too is very accurate for Korra’s journey and Schmidt’s description that the female hero is now “acting out of power and truth” has a very strong echo of what the Avatar’s function in the world is, as that is almost precisely how the Avatar should act. Particularly Schmidt’s point about beastlike reactive rage as opposed to calmness echoes what was discussed earlier about Korra and anger. Notable too is the use of words “act” and “reactive” as the former suggests a very deliberate choice and the latter very much the opposite. Considering then the “hotheaded” nature of Korra that was discussed earlier, this too echoes back to it as her action at the beginning of the series were often results of reacting quickly to something without further thought and now at the end of the series she actively chooses to act in a certain way, for example by deciding to attempt to talk to Kuvira before fighting her. While anger is still something she can feel most certainly, she no longer reacts out if, but rather acts on the calmness that she has attained through her story.

3.2.3.2 Adora/She-ra’s Journey So Far

Adora’s next step after her realization of the truth about the Horde and the Fright Zone then could arguably be seen as leaning towards Joseph Cambpell’s theory as she next meets Madame Razz, a literal old crone who helps her understand She-Ra somewhat better (“Razz”). This could be seen as corresponding to the “Supernatural Aid” stage of Campbell’s theory, though arguably Adora’s meeting with Light Hope later in the same season could also be construed as this. Several of her steps align with Campbell’s theory, but considering the rest of her story and the themes in it so far as discussed below, it pushes Adora’s journey towards Schmidt’s theory just as well as Korra’s did for herself, if not even better, considering that the rest of Campbell’s theory does not seem to fit She-Ra as well as Schmidt’s does.

For Schmidt the next part is the “Awakening” in which the hero has properly awakened to her new situation and reacts to it either by deciding to act or by succumbing to passiveness as the betrayal of her “perfect world” was too much. Adora very clearly decides to act as she quickly begins to help Glimmer and Bow to rebuild the Princess Alliance. Schmidt also points out that in this stage characters may “come out of

the woodwork to tell her she can't accomplish the goal, she needs help, or that she's crazy" (ch. 24, stage 3). This role is filled in Adora's story almost exclusively by Catra and it is in prominent in the first season that she will appear to taunt Adora for her choice to leave. This culminates in the final episode of the first season, when Adora as She-Ra fights Catra alone and Catra taunts She-Ra by saying that, their battle will not be over until she can see the looks on the faces of Adora's friends when they realize that she failed and was too weak to save them ("The Battle of Bright Moon" 12:35-12:44). She-Ra seems momentarily stunned with panic when she hears this, but snaps out of this, reflecting Schmidt's words about stage three and on how in this moment "the force of the betrayal she suffered pushes her to overcome this negativity" (ch. 24, stage 3). Quite literally at this point She-Ra regains her powers and glows with it, finding the strength to continue the fight.

Following the tremendous victory at the end of season one, season two focuses on Adora discovering more about She-Ra's past and solidifying her identity as She-Ra. Season three brings new catastrophe as the portal that the Horde has been building threatens to wipe out the entire planet unless Adora stops it. There is perhaps no notable "passing the gates of judgement" in seasons two and three (beyond Adora's increasingly strained encounters with Catra, who guilts her about leaving Catra and the Horde), but the end of season three echoes Schmidt's text again as she writes that at the end of this stage "[f]or the first time, she comes face-to-face with the villain or his goons and barely survives. She is cut down. She doesn't think she can last one more minute. This is not what she bargained for" (ch. 24, stage 4). Scorpia and Catra finally manage to capture Adora and imprison her, taking her sword to Hordak and Entrapta who open a portal with it that misaligns the entire timeline of the universe ("Moment of Truth"). Adora awakes in the past, back as a Horde soldier, but begins to remember the truth and the further she explores the world, the more it glitches and begins to disintegrate into nothingness. She turns to her friends Glimmer and Bow for help, but they cannot remember her as this is the wrong timeline and they are not friends. All seems hopeless properly for the first time and Adora is visibly at the end of her wits, but she prevails eventually ("Remember" & "The Portal"). While this seems like the darkest moment in She-Ra's story at the moment, it does not compare to the ending of season four. Again, this echoes Schmidt's theory

in that she also points out that stage four is merely a preview of what will occur in the sixth stage, Death (ch. 24, stage 4).

Season four begins with what can be read as the “Eye of the Storm” stage of Schmidt’s theory. The portal was broken, and the world restored to its original timeline, Glimmer becomes the new queen and it seems that the biggest issue She-Ra and companions face is the diminished threat of the Horde, which by now has become a normal state for them. However, this somewhat stable reality shatters when Adora discovers the true meaning of Etheria and She-Ra, both connected to the super weapon at the core of their planet Etheria, known as The Heart of Etheria. After the Heart of Etheria is activated by Light Hope, the guiding companion of incarnations of She-Ra, the power of the Heart of Etheria moves to She-Ra and will be activated through her sword, activating the Heart of Etheria as a superweapon devised by the ancient civilization known as the First Ones (of which Adora finds out she is one). She-Ra’s previous incarnation, Mara (similarly a First One), gave her life to stop this from happening and moved the planet Etheria into its current empty universe known as Despondos ("Destiny Part 1"). She-Ra’s tale is still unfinished, but season 4 ends with her resisting Light Hope, who is trying to active the Heart of Etheria through Adora this time. She-Ra fights Light Hope’s hold and eventually her words overpower Light Hope, who, despite being a programmed hologram, remembers her time with Mara and urges She-Ra to destroy the sword. Complying this command, She-Ra smashes her sword, ending the weapon’s activation sequence and at the same time giving up her own powers. Adora reverts back to herself, without any powers (“Destiny Part 2”).

This is without doubt the darkest part in She-Ra’s story so far and as such it could be argued that where the series currently is, is the “Belly of the Whale” (or the apparent death of the hero) in Joseph Campbell’s journey or more aptly the “Death – All is Lost” part of Schmidt’s journey. It can be only speculated at this point where the fifth season takes Adora, but starting with a stage akin to Schmidt’s seventh stage, “Support”, seems most likely as it would be most fitting considering the themes and tone of the series so far as much like Korra’s journey, Adora’s is without doubt one of inner growth and development. Joseph Campbell’s hero’s journey has the apparent death of the hero already at the end of the first act and it is only then followed by the hero having completely shed their former self and being

ready to become the true hero. However, in Adora's story the shedding of her former self occurs already the beginning of the story when she accepts her identity as She-Ra and turns her back on the Horde. Furthermore, in Joseph Campbell's theory the "Road of Trials" the hero faces comes only after the apparent death of the hero, but ultimately this too seems unfitting for She-Ra who has already faced most of her challenges so far. However, Schmidt's seventh stage, "Support", is followed by the stages "Rebirth—the Moment of Truth" and "Full Circle—Return to the Perfect World", which seem like far more likely scenarios to follow Adora's apparent loss of powers and imminent approach of the rest of the Horde's forces. Particularly Schmidt's note in the Full Circle stage about how "Most often, the person she was closest to prior to her awakening will be the one most influenced by her transformation" (ch. 24, stage 9) is a very interesting idea to consider as Catra and Adora's relationship has been so complicated already throughout the story. However, speculating further how this might develop in the fifth season would serve no function in this thesis and will therefore be left at this.

3.2.3.3 Rayla's Journey So Far

Finally there is Rayla's story, which is at the moment the shortest of the three girl heroes examined in this thesis and arguably is molded by her position as one of two heroes, as her story must run parallel to Callum's for the most part. Again, as pointed out above, her story too seems to begin in line with Schmidt's theory rather than Campbell's and would seem to continue along that line as well. There is no "Supernatural Aid" for Rayla in *The Dragon Prince*, but there is one for her counterpart Callum when he finds magic tool that allows him to begin to understand natural magic, that has been previously closed off from humans ("Bloodthristy"). Rayla on the other hand continues her path into the direction of the "Awakening", much like Korra and Adora did as well. She has been betrayed by her world view as the dragon egg still exists and as she attempts to leave with the humans, she must face her uncle and adoptive father Runaan, who berates her for her choice and quite literally follow Schmidt's words, where she suggests a character might call the female hero here "crazy" (ch. 24, stage 3), as Runaan tell Rayla "You've lost your mind" ("Moonrise" 12:54) when he realizes Rayla is defying her. He continues by calling her a fool and eventually goes as far as fighting her when she will not relent, despite Runaan himself having seen the

dragon egg at this point already as well but being unable to get over his belief that humans deserve the vengeance of the elves. Schmidt further points out that in this stage "The whole direction of the hero's life will be forever changed by her decision in this stage of the game" (ch. 24, stage 3). This is absolutely true in Rayla's case as her decision to side with the humans to return the egg, and in doing so, her decision to defy her uncle and her kinsmen puts her on a path that changes her life for good. The direction of Schmidt's theory holds true for Rayla as she moves on to the fourth stage, "the Descent". She passes her "gates of judgement" quite literally as she has to both deal with the mistrust and hostility that humans display towards elves, as well the humiliating and soul-crushing truth of her having been banished from her home because of her decision. Rayla's story is currently stopped at what clearly is the "Eye of the Storm" stage. At the end of the third season the Dragon Prince is born and brought to his mother, the Dragon Queen and the evil sorcerer Viren is seemingly defeated. Viren is however shown at the very end of the final episode in season three as very potentially being released upon the world again ("The Final Battle"), hinting at the very nature of Rayla's current situation as a falsely calm one. As there is no information about the next season yet, it is hard to speculate where Rayla's story next evolves, but the likelihood of continuing along with something like Schmidt's theory suggests seems greater than it transforming into something more akin to Joseph Campbell's journey theory. Interestingly Callum's story, while running parallel to Rayla's seems to follow a pattern much more like Campbell's story, even covering steps such as "Woman as Temptress" where quite literally a girl he is romantically interested in manipulates him into using the forbidden dark magic. When the story progresses, it might be interesting to see if there is very distinct binary gender division in the stories of the two protagonists and if that division reflects Campbell and Schmidt's theories on hero journeys.

3.2.4 "Take care of each other.": On the Importance of Friendship for Girl Heroes

Returning to Wright's and Schmidt's points about the hero's impact on the people surrounding her and the importance of that impact, this is a theme that is visible in all the series examined in this thesis. To reiterate, Schmidt points out that near the end of her journey, the female hero "accepts others as they are and embraces the female aspect of supporting one another. She begins to see the oneness that we all share

together" (ch. 24, stage 7). Wright similarly has pointed out that "[w]ho the New Heroine becomes emerges through the complex interplay between the potential she embodies as a character trait and the networks she enters into as part of her journey" (4). There is a certain inherent emphasis in children's shows particularly on friendship (consider for example the title *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*) already and it is an important theme in all three of these shows as well.

The most poignant example of the three is perhaps in *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*. Whereas Adora has formed friendships with the princesses, Bow, Seahawk and just about every other ally she has, the opposite can be seen in her antithesis, Catra. Catra's only true bond before the series was Adora, but as she left their shared "perfect world", leaving Catra behind, Catra does not even try to bond with anyone else in the same way. This builds up throughout the seasons until in the end of season four, when Catra finds herself abandoned by her peers and her plans all failing horribly. Adora on the other hand, though in conflict with Glimmer at the end of season four, is supported by her other friends, who strengthen her resolve and allow her to surpass the challenges she has faced so far in the four seasons of the show. Already the first season's finale hammers in this point on the importance of unity as the situation seems utterly hopeless when the Horde has made their way to Glimmer's home, Bright Moon. Glimmer, She-Ra and Bow are almost defeated and in the very darkest moment, the other princesses who Adora tried, but failed, to get to join a Princess Alliance earlier in the season arrive one-by-one to help, turning the tide (Mermista quite literally as she arrives with a large wave from the ocean). To really drive the point home the princesses each glow with a soft light of their own unique color as they unite to touch She-Ra, who then raises her sword, sending a rainbow-colored wave of their united power to wash the rest of the Horde away, winning the battle ("The Battle of Bright Moon"). While this example might a bit on-the-nose, it is a core idea of these series that while there are plenty of moments where the girl heroes manage alone, there are also many where they cannot prevail without the support of the network they have created for themselves and in those moments it is alright to lean on others for support and strength.

A grand moment for Adora, which carries over to later in the show, comes when the grand battle of the season is over. Glimmers mother Angella, who has been suspicious and untrusting of Adora and She-Ra

throughout the season, gently invites Adora into a group hug with her and her daughter. Adora is visibly emotional about this and hesitates, until Bow pushes her in, and they all hug happily with Adora transforming back into herself in the middle of it, smiling tearfully as she has finally been properly accepted into the group ("The Battle of Bright Moon"). This is later culminated at the end of season three when the portal opened by the Horde has nearly destroyed everything and Adora considers sacrificing herself to retrieve the sword that is causing everything at the center of the portal. Before she can do it queen Angella steps in to do it instead, but before she goes, she divulges to Adora that she has always been a coward in her own mind and let other be brave on her behalf, masquerading as responsible even though she was actually just afraid. As a final comment she says to Adora: "And then I met you. You inspired us. You inspired me. Not because it was your destiny, but because you never let fear stop you. And now *I* choose to be brave" ("The Portal" 17:49-18:39). While queen Angella's death is of course not a positive change in itself, Adora changed queen Angella by inspiring her with her own actions. Angella's words also posit the idea that even though Adora too must have been afraid many times, that did not stop her, which is a very different message than saying that Adora has never been afraid at all would have been. They also echo what was discussed earlier about these girl heroes having to at least once in their journey come to a point where they need to move past their fear to be able to move on. The fear should be felt and dealt with, as it can be overcome, but not allowing any fear is not what is taught in these series. Once again, we return to Lori M. Campbell and her words about how the female hero has flaws but is still "extraordinary in her ability to enable positive change and shows superior bravery, assertiveness, and intelligence in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles" (284). Adora has shown all of those qualities throughout the series and through that she has inspired queen Angella, among others, to be capable of showing "superior bravery" at a moment where it seems that all is lost already.

In *The Legend of Korra* and *The Dragon Prince* there is no one particular antagonistic character who would so clearly mirror Korra's or Rayla's situation, but in their cases the importance of their friendships and other relationships are greatly stressed as well. When either Rayla or Korra is on their own, usually after arguing with one of their closest people, they are much more prone to ending up in trouble or failing

in something that they were attempting to do. As these situations often follow a burst of anger, the hero acts recklessly in frustration and fails, but after realizing her mistake she is usually able to find a solution and succeed. Consider for example in the second episode of *The Legend of Korra*, in which Korra is frustrated by her inability to airbend and is angry at her instructor Tenzin, blaming him for her inability to bend air. Despite Tenzin forbidding it, she heads out to watch and consequently take part in the in-universe sport pro-bending. In her frustration with herself the team she has been taken into by Mako and his brother Bolin almost loses the match. Eventually, however, Tenzin arrives to berate her on her actions and command her to return home. Korra is further angered by this and defies Tenzin, once more angrily heading out to continue the match. In the midst of the final moments of the almost hopeless match, she recalls Tenzin's teachings about airbending and adapting that into her current situation, she is able to turn the match around. She then humbly apologizes to Tenzin for her behavior and they both admit to acting in a manner much too rash ("A Leaf in the Wind").

The strength found in comradery is a common trope in children's media in particular (consider stories like *Avatar: the Last Airbender* or *Harry Potter* for example) and combined with heroism it provides a good base for a strong, emotionally rich story. It reaffirms the idea that you can be a hero, but you do not need to be alone to do so, but rather that it is okay to admit weakness or fear and rely on others to help boost your strength. While She-Ra (and Adora really), Korra and Rayla are all more than capable of defending themselves and making it on their own, throughout their series they are shown as being further strengthened by their companions, either through emotional or physical support. As discussed briefly earlier in the segment on anger, the girl heroes are also shown fighting with their friends occasionally, but then apologizing and their bonds are strengthened further. Even if they hurt each other badly, in cases such as Mako and Korra's break-up, talking things out can still mend the situation.

However, conversely bonds and friendships also give good platform to dramatic twists. Nothing hurts quite as badly after all than seeing the protagonist and a friend hurt each other. Besides Adora and Catra's difficult relationship causing emotional drama, Adora and Glimmer's friendship for example took this turn in season four, arguably culminating in the moment when Glimmer blames both the Princess

Rebellion for being worse than even and her mother's death on Adora ("Boys' Night Out" 16:48-16:52). She tries to apologize immediately but is cut off and misses the opportunity. The episode continues a moment later with a fighting montage dubbed over with a song of the characters singing "it's fun to fight hard with friends" which works as a pun to both demonstrate the fun of fighting enemies with the help of your friends in the montage, as well as the awkwardness of She-Ra and Glimmer every time they look at each other in the fight and She-Ra looks away, hurt. The lyrics of the montage song switch at the end to "it's hard to fight with friends" and at the end of the battle Glimmer and Adora walk away from each other without a word. ("Boys' Night Out" 19:18-20:46) This sets them on a path of disagreement for the rest of the season, leading eventually to the finale where Glimmer, having gone to the Horde territory alone, ends up on the Horde mothership with Catra, while Adora is powerless on Etheria ("Destiny Part 2). As season five is only coming up, it is impossible to say with certainty where this rift between them will lead them but considering the tone of the show so far and the central themes of friendship and forgiveness of it, it is likely that Glimmer and Adora will reconcile in the last season.

As a final note to discuss about these girl heroes is the concept of romance, which is without doubt tied to the importance of bonds with other people discussed above. It is a common end result that a girl and boy end up together at the end of story if they have been through it together. For example even Korra's predecessor Aang ends up canonically romantically involved with Katara at the end of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (and most other characters are paired off similarly as well), everyone in *Harry Potter* is happily paired off into heteroromantic relationships and Percy Jackson and Annabeth Chase in Rick Riordan's popular *Percy Jackson & Olympians* YA book series end up together despite not getting along at first. There is a near endless list of examples, as the trope seems to be particularly popular in the YA category and once again echoes the idea of "romance as rescue" for girls that was discussed in the section on She-Ra's princesses. The common trope is that the hero eventually gets the girl, echoing Joseph Campbell statement about women being the goal that people are looking to reach.

But what about girl heroes? All three series are currently at a different situation in terms of romance and Korra is particularly interesting among them. Let us however observe the most unsurprising

one first: Rayla. At the end of season three Rayla and Callum end up together, which came as surprise to few, as it had been built up during the season. To keep up some suspense there is first some misunderstanding between them as Rayla kisses Callum earlier in the season after he spoke so kindly to her that she construed it as something more than it was. Callum then later kisses her and they confirm their romantic feelings for each other ("Heroes and Masterminds"). It is a very safe move from the creators, but there is always the question of whether or not it is absolute necessary to have a romance at all. There is quote that is often attributed to legendary Studio Ghibli film-maker Hayao Miyazaki (though it is impossible to find an actual source for it and therefore will not be directly attributed to him as a quote), that expresses frustration towards an "unwritten rule" that assumes that because a boy and a girl appear together in a piece of media, they must end up romantically involved by the end of it. Bryan Konieztko, co-creator of *The Legend of Korra* also cites this quote as a source of inspiration in his blog when discussing Korra's romantic arc in her series.

As mentioned, Korra's romantic arc is the most interesting and so far, of the three, the most groundbreaking. There is at first a crush on Mako, who could be seen as the resident attractive young male character of the series. He is handsome, cool and strong and amazing at pro-bending, making him a clearly ideal candidate for a romantic plot. But before Korra can say anything he ends up dating their future mutual friend Asami, the other prominent young female character in the series. There is much back-and-forth with Korra and Mako ending up together, but breaking up again, after which Mako and Asami end up together, until Korra and Mako end up together one last time in season two, before their final break-up. Their break-up is dramatic, but when they eventually resolve it properly and admit that it simply does not work between them, they part as friends, who respect each other and continue to support each other just as much as before. It is then in season four that we arrive at the most daring move by the writers; Korra and Asami end up together at the end of the season and the whole series. So, not only is Korra representation of a non-white character, but also of the LGBT+ community. Considering that *The Legend of Korra* is a show on Nickelodeon that is made for young audiences (though does have an older fanbase as well), the actual romance is very subtle in the show itself but confirmed by the creators themselves in their blogs. Konieztko

for example wrote in his blogpost that “Korra and Asami fell in love. Were they friends? Yes, and they still are, but they also grew to have romantic feelings for each other.”

While series such as *Adventure Time* (2010-2018) and *Steven Universe* (2013-2019) were able to follow later with more explicit depictions of same-sex relationships, *The Legend of Korra* did something very huge in their own, understandably cautious move. Konietzko himself also laments in the same blog post that confirmed the relationship of Korra and Asami, that the reason why they were so cautious and unsure about pursuing such an option, was not because same-sex relationships are not something to be taken seriously, but rather due to them being almost certain that they would not be able to “ever get away with depicting [same-sex romance] on an animated show for a kids network in this day and age, or at least in 2010.” He calls this inability to portray such things in a children’s show an unwritten rule of the field, which is why they worked in fear of it. So, it was norm even at the beginning of the 2010’s to assume that children were not allowed to see same-sex relationships. Konietzko, again in the same blogpost, makes this observation as well, to mirror the quote attributed to Miyazaki: “Just because two characters of the same sex appear in the same story, it should not preclude the possibility of a romance between them. No, not everyone is queer, but the other side of that coin is that not everyone is straight.” An observation that is worth considering, no doubt.

Regardless of the difficulty of making it reality, this confirmed same-sex relationship (and through that confirmed bisexuality) of Korra is one of the things that perhaps could be counted as being one of the most prominent and important about Korra. She is a hero in all the ways described above and beyond that, she goes on her journey as a hero and comes to the triumphant part where a male hero often “gets the girl” and so does she, but in her case it is for once an important step towards something greater. Furthermore this is not something that is pointed out dramatically or brought into question, but it is written as occurring completely naturally between Korra and Asami, and just like a typical hero might walk off into the sunset with their partner in the end, Korra and Asami walk hand in hand into the Spirit World, stopping only to look at each other in silence at the end as soft music fills the scene. This is a very important thing to show and most likely a very important thing to see for many young viewers, particularly as

something natural and normal. There has been much discussion about the importance of LGBT+ representation in TV, especially in the sense, that it is important because it means LGBT+ people are also seen. Jennifer O'Brien for example wrote in her article about the importance of LGBT+ characters being seen in media, as this allows LGBT+ in real life to stop being unseen or invisible. She further argues that "[w]hen people are able to see something represented, they are better able to understand and grasp who those people are, and this creates an important shift in the social consciousness to include people from a range of different backgrounds." Representation normalizes things and it is important that this normalization starts already at a young age, because it is often many young people who struggle with the difficult emotions and challenges of discovering their sexuality, especially if it does not fall in line with the expected heteronormativity of most societies. So, to clearly see on television that someone as strong and amazing as Korra, a hero, can be attracted to men and women completely naturally and is not made any less for it is an important thing. O'Brien further notes on this by saying: "when people see representations of themselves in the media, this can foster a great sense of affirmation of their identity. Feeling affirmed with one's own sense of self can boost positive feelings of self-worth, which is quite different than feeling as if you are wrong or bad for being who you are." This, precisely, is the important thing about what the team behind *The Legend of Korra* did.

She-Ra then falls somewhere between these two as at the moment, with four seasons done, Adora does not have an established romance with anyone. There is, in general, very little romance in She-Ra, as focus is on friendship and its importance. The show does bring LGBT+ representation to the forefront in other ways, such as by including the same-sex princess couple Netossa and Spinnerella (who is voiced by showrunner Stevenson herself) and by including a non-binary character in the fourth season. Arguably there is a tension in Catra and Adora's relationship that could be construed as unresolved romantic feelings and even if that is not the case there is a complicated and multifaceted relationship between the two, so it would seem less than likely for Adora to end up with someone else, if anyone at all. Franich, in his review describes the show as "a safe-for-kids show that never even gets around to explicit romance" and Catra and Adora's relationship with the following: "Stevenson and her collaborators take the fundamental glitter-

camp style as an opportunity to fit some impressively complicated emotions into the undercurrents of the Adora-Catra relationship.” So, while there are no explicit romances in the main cast of the series, there are other complex and multifaceted relationships to create an interesting and engaging narrative.

4. Conclusion

After examining these girl heroes more closely we can now conclude that they do in fact share similarities in characteristics in broad terms, but upon closer view there is such a multitude of unique things to each of them as well, that they easily stand on their own as distinct characters. They are shown as having flaws and fears, but joy and important friendships as well and most importantly they send a message that girls can be active and strong, even if you are not perfect and completely unafraid. They subvert what Carol A. Stabile calls “masculinist fantasies of protection” as they do not require a man to save them anymore. Furthermore, their stories are also varied and while there may be elements that have been seen in mythic hero stories about male heroes, their stories are more than anything about introspection and inner growth (with the occasional monster slaying and sword battle for additional heroism). That is of course not to say that all female stories are or should be about inner growth more than anything or that male heroes and others could not have a story about inner growth, but the idea is that a story about inner growth can often be just as (or even more) powerful than one about just slaying monsters. Furthermore, these series also confirm the fact that inner growth and heroic journeys with epic battles are not mutually exclusive, but rather can both occur in the same story, and both can contribute to the overall complexity of the story without diminishing the importance of the other.

Brown Johnson, former President of Animation and Preschool Entertainment of Nickelodeon, is quoted by Geoff Boucher in his article as saying that there is “a generational shift that encourages girls to feel powerful - and for boys to see them as equals and partners." Johnson specifically said this in relation to *The Legend of Korra*, a show that aired on Nickelodeon during her time there. This is an important thing to note with these characters and series, especially remembering *The Legend of Korra* showrunner Bryan

Konieztko's words in Ulaby's article about how test screenings of the series showed that boys did not care that the protagonist is a girl, they only cared that she was "awesome." That precisely is also an important point about these characters. Female heroes, and girl heroes specifically, no longer have to be tied to male characters to fulfil their role or to be heroic, but rather they are now allowed to be fully fleshed out and complex characters and they can stand on their own as equals next to male heroes, rather than as passive characters in need of saving through romance of otherwise.

In the end these girl heroes boil down to three important things. Firstly, to who is sharing these stories to us. Noelle Stevenson describes in Brown's article that the most important question for anyone wanting to be on the crew for the show, was "[d]o you love, respect and are interested in the stories of women?" Hohenstein and Talman on the other hand attribute the fact that "complex female characters are no longer a niche phenomenon but are well on their way to becoming the norm on television" to the fact that more women are behind the scenes as well working on these shows. Both of these comments combined makes it safe to say that a big reason for why we finally have such characters and shows is that there are people in decisive roles behind the scenes who care about women's stories, be it women themselves or anyone else. Women themselves especially are important as active members in the force behind these stories, as naturally they would best understand what it is that is wanted from these characters. Stevenson discusses in Brown's article the difficulty of being the only female writer in a room for a show as her task then was always to "latch onto the one or two female characters and defend them with [her] life." But as more women and others who truly care about portraying female stories properly in media are allowed to take active role in producing the stories, and the amount of female characters increases as well, there is no longer need for desperately attempting to protect the "one or two female characters." A multitude of female characters and writers means a diverse multitude of stories about women and girls can be portrayed.

Secondly, the female characters boil down to how Brown describes visiting the offices of the She-Ra staff was as if "the entire team vibrated with energy as they discussed 'She-Ra,' so excited to be creating the female-centric stories they themselves had craved to see on screen for a new generation of kids." While

this might simply be exaggeration by the journalist, it is undeniable that there is great importance in these female heroes for women themselves. Arguably *the Dragon Prince* is not purely female-centric, but the series does put strong women of various backgrounds and strengths into the spotlight increasingly much through the seasons, from Rayla to Callum and Ezran's military general aunt Amaya to characters such as Aanya who at the age of 10 is a formidable queen of her own empire after the death of her mothers. *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* and *the Legend of Korra* on the other hand are clearly female-centric and wanting to actively put women in the foreground as the carrying force of the shows so that their stories can be in the spotlight. In all three of these series about girl heroes the stories of women are put very purposefully in the foreground and the popularity of these shows are undeniable proof that these stories of multilayered and complex female heroes are what viewers want to see and invest in emotionally. For women viewers of all ages particularly these are finally stories that were not available when they were growing up, but which they can now experience.

Thirdly, to return to the title of this thesis, directly quoted from She-Ra herself ("Flowers for She-Ra" 22:17-22:21). As witnessed by closer examination of these three heroes, they indeed are not perfect, but even within the show itself, Glimmer responds to Adora's statement by saying, "Of course it's okay. Do you have any idea how annoying you'd be if you were perfect?" ("Flowers for She-Ra" 22:22-22:26). This perhaps is also one the biggest selling point of these girl heroes. It is without doubt the flaws and complex emotions and stories, filled with success and failure both that make these characters so compelling and popular. By showing these kinds of women and girls on television it is possible to offer a very diverse cast of female characters, that are not made any less valid by their possible similarities to other female characters. After all, in real life women and girls both share similarities and have differences as well.

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