Fall 2021

YOUNG ADULT BOOK COVER DESIGN AND ITS IMPACT ON READER INTEREST

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by

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Submitted to the School of Honors Committee

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

Southeastern University

2021

ii

Dedication

For Mom

Acknowledgements

Abstract

A book cover is one of the first steps in selling a book and is vital in catching a reader's attention. Still, many book covers in the young adult fiction market are ineffective at reaching their target audience. Since the birth of young adult books, cover design styles have changed drastically, yet little research has been done. Because of this lack of research, two new surveys were built to investigate what specific elements and styles of current young adult book covers appeal to readers. One survey was for readers, and one survey was for professionals working in the publishing industry. Results showed that book cover design appeal is subjective, as results were reasonably balanced across different design elements and styles.

Table of Contents:

Introduction

"Don't judge a book by its cover." Almost everyone knows this common phrase. While it is good advice not to write something off solely based on first impressions, this thesis is not meant to discuss the proverb's value as a metaphor. Now, look at the phrase from a literal perspective: don't judge a book by how it *looks*, but by its *contents*.

While that still sounds like solid advice, is it realistic?

The traditional publishing industry always packages their books nicely. They bring in designers, marketing experts, and publishing veterans to ensure this. In the modern era of Instagram and flashy visuals, aesthetically pleasing book covers seem more needed than ever. Many book lovers use tags like #bookstagram on Instagram to express their love for reading and book covers they find attractive. The tag #prettybooks alone currently has 327,000 posts on Instagram (#prettybooks). This is especially true when it comes to young adult fiction, commonly referred to as YA. Young adult fiction is not a genre but rather an age category of books designed for 13-18 years old readers. As of writing this paper, there are almost 350,000 Instagram posts that use #yabookstagram (#yabookstagram). Multiple Instagram users have discussed that they have bought books solely based on the covers. In her post discussing the public reveal of the cover design for a new young adult fantasy novel, @maryweberauthor says: "When this popped up in my inbox last week, I knew it was an immediate preorder" (Weber). Many commenters on the post admitted to buying books because of an attractive cover design.

As a fiction writer, reader, illustrator, and graphic designer, I have a unique perspective on young adult fiction, the book publishing industry, and cover design. I have seen many unsuccessful book covers—especially in the self-publishing industry—and how they impact the sales of well-

written books. This insight inspired me to approach cover design from a scientific perspective, specifically looking for the answers to these questions:

1. Do readers judge books by their covers?

2. Are there any specific design elements that attract a reader's interest more than others?

3. Is there a difference between the opinions of professionals working in the publishing industry and readers regarding cover design?

The following thesis will investigate cover design for current young adult books in the traditional publishing industry and discover whether or not specific design elements make readers more likely to pick up a book. These objectives will be accomplished by looking at other literature on the topic and performing a study including college students and professionals working within the publishing industry.

Literature Review

1. Introduction

Readers walk into a bookstore looking for new books to add to their shelves. A book cover is an integral part of a book, as it not only holds the pages together but it is also the first element a reader sees. This literature review will primarily discuss book covers for young adult fiction literature, also referred to as YA. Young adult literature is a marketing bracket within children's literature, specifically for ages thirteen to eighteen. This literature review will also focus on the traditional publishing industry, not the self-publishing industry. Traditional publishing refers to the publishing path where a press buys a book from an author and publishes it. In traditional publishing, the burden of editing, design, production, and marketing weighs on the publisher. So, this literature review will exclusively cover traditionally published young adult books for consistency in style and design quality.

I found very little literature about young adult book covers during research, and none were published within the last 2-3 years. There was also lack of concrete studies on objectively good book cover design. While many cited sources are related to book design, marketing, and general graphic design, they are not specific to young adult literature. There are also no studies on cover design elements and techniques that lead to increased book sales.

The four sections of this literature review will discuss a brief history of book cover design and young adult book cover trends, the design process in the traditional publishing industry, whether or not readers judge books by their covers, and ways to reach the correct audience.

2. A Brief History of Book Cover Design and Young Adult Cover Trends

Books did not always include binding. They were printed on loose sheets of paper, which the consumer—not the publisher—could then commission vellum or leather binding (Knowlton and Hackert). It remained this way for an extended period of time. Then, in the 1800s, William Pickering and John Murray developed methods that could better represent a book's contents and appeal to consumers. Pickering brought cloth binding to publishers, while Murray created a way to add gold-leaf lettering and other elements to book covers (Knowlton and Hackert). It seems as though this was the beginning of book cover design as part of the publishing process, which shows that it is a reasonably new artform. Since then, cover design techniques, styles, and trends have shifted dramatically, especially in young adult fiction.

Styles in young adult literature have changed over the years, as new trends have come and gone, which can be traced by looking at book covers spanning back to the 1980s (Fink). *The Outsiders* is the paperback that initially created a standard format for young adult literature (Yampbell). Authors Fink and Yampbell agree on and document some of the trends that followed. Teen book covers from the 1970s and early 1980s mostly show important scenes from the book painted with watercolors. The teens typically featured on the covers appear pensive (Yampbell). After the watercolor trend came photography. Photographed covers typically featured "brooding" and "contemplative" teens. This trend lasted from the late 1980s into the early 1990s (Yampbell).

An interesting pattern to note is that none of these trends lasted for more than a few years, showing that design expectations changed fairly rapidly. Book cover trends in the early 2000s— from 2001-2003—took a more representational approach and did not feature people. This gave the covers a more considerable appeal, not bound by a specific gender or culture (Yampbell). For brief context, young adult literature gained significant popularity around this time. Over the next two

years, young adult covers returned to character-based styles. In recent years, newer technology allows for covers to attract even more readers. These improved methods increased the use of foil, lamination, and holograms in printing, all of which are eye-catching to a reader (Yampbell). Looking at today's young adult book covers, one can see that these methods are still used. Most existing studies and literature on young adult book covers are at least 5-8 years old, which excludes more recent trends from consideration within scholarly articles. Therefore, this overview of young adult book cover trends remains incomplete.

3. The Cover Design Process in Traditional Publishing

Early in the cover design process, authors are asked for suggestions and ideas. A designer then takes the author's and publisher's suggestions (Harnum). The amount of say an author has in his or her book cover depends on the publisher (Harnum). The process of actually designing the cover is a team effort (Harnum). Typically, a publisher will utilize editors, marketing professionals, and graphic designers (Kratz). Cam Sutherland says that a design meeting at the University of Nevada Press includes editorial, design, production, and marketing teams. Disney-Hyperion relies heavily on sales and marketing teams for their designs (Fink). The use of various people with different skill sets ensures that a book is marketable (Fink). At HarperCollins Children's books, the art director says that making a cover requires digging into a book's themes, so the book cover has the correct mood (Fink). However, this may not always be possible. There may not be enough time to read an entire manuscript if a publisher even offers the designer that option. These factors can result in the cover being inaccurate, misleading, surface-level, or ineffective (Yampbell). Publishers choose specific pictures for cover designs because of their "sustainability" and high rate of appeal (Fink). As the one who physically creates the cover, the

designer first researches the covers of similar and recent books (Howarth). While every designer's process is different, Devon Estes, for example, begins by sketching out anywhere from ten to twenty concepts (Howarth). Estes then picks a specific concept and creates variations of it. She then makes different options with varying typography, colors, and sizes, which she uses as inspiration for a single cover (Howarth). The publisher considers every element of a book's design—especially the spine because it is often the first thing a potential customer sees. The "grabability" factor is one of a publisher's primary concerns regarding marketing (Yampbell). To keep an author's brand consistent, publishers usually hire a single illustrator for all of that author's books. This way, readers can easily recognize a loved author's book by the cover (Yampbell).

4. Do Modern Readers Judge Books by Their Covers?

Everyone hears the saying "don't judge a book by its cover," which usually means not placing judgment over something or someone based solely on its surface-level appearance or first impression. However, when it comes to literal book covers, the consensus among publishing professionals seems to be that readers do judge books by their covers. Many people simply assume that a book's content is its most significant part, while other parts do nothing more than bind it together. However, what is outside the book, in the eyes of publishers, is just as important. Many industry professionals say that a book cover is the leading piece of a book (Yampbell). In 2000, Publisher's Weekly conducted a study where they learned about reader interactions with book covers. The study showed that book cover art is heavily taken into consideration by those looking at books. The study also showed that covers hint at the book's tone, mood, and context (Knowlton and Hackert). Results of a key 2006 study performed by

Alain d'Astous, Francois Colbert, and Imene Mbarek suggest that an eye-pleasing book cover can rouse interest in a forthcoming book (d'Astous et al). In 2018, Arūnas Gudinavičius and Andrius Šuminas created a study to discover important elements that attract a reader's attention. The study specifically researched whether or not people of different ages and gender are swayed by different colors on book covers. At the end of the experiment, participants were asked to explain their motives for choosing a book cover, given a choice of five answers: "attractive title, friend recommendation, known author, nice cover, seen in advertisement," and an option for "other". The results of this survey showed that an "attractive title" was most popular at 54%; however "nice cover" came in second at 25% (Gudinavičius and Šuminas 442). Luís Leitão, Suzanne Amaro, Carla Henriques, and Paula Fonseca created a similar study in Portugal in 2017, to determine the main elements that impact fiction book buying (Leitão et al.). The study also researched whether or not these factors change based upon whether or not someone is buying a book as a gift or for his or her own use (Leitão et al.). Using all Portuguese participants, the authors created a questionnaire about book consumer habits, reading habits, book packaging, and more. They used Likert scales to determine answers. Like Gudinavičius and Šuminas's study, the results showed that a book's cover and title were the most important factors influencing a person's purchase of a fiction book (Leitão et al.). For a student in particular, attractive aspects of a book cover can influence him or her to check out a particular book (Fink). Author Megan P. Fink has witnessed many middle schoolers choose a book because of both the pages and the book cover, specifically when choosing between two books for a school assignment (Fink). Teen readers can be extremely judgmental of book covers (Sullivan). The way a book is packaged— the book cover—is a key way that publishers and booksellers can show readers the books that may interest them (Knowlton and Hackert). However, a cover can do even more than that.

People most often remember a book by its cover (Fink). Covers can even become like

trademarks or brands, which happens especially in popular young adult literature (Fink).

The danger behind readers judging books by their covers is that books can be tossed

aside, forgotten, or seen as low-quality literature. Specifically speaking about teen readers, they

can judge a book so harshly that an "unappealing" book cover can be the end of that book

(Sullivan). For example, movie novelizations are heavily judged by both readers and critics. The

cover of a movie novelization heavily implies its related film (Mahlknecht). Publishers tend to

use the film's marketing materials such as movie poster images, actor names, and such. While

this design style draws the book closer to the related film, it brings down the quality it could

carry on its own "as literature" (Mahlknecht). Readers who love the aesthetics of book covers

may be driven away from movie novelizations after looking quickly at a cover (Mahlknecht).

5. Reaching the Correct Audience Through a Successful Cover

Marketing is more than just selling something. It encompasses everything a company

does to sell to consumers. These steps include researching both the market and consumers, sales,

promotion, and every attempt made to increase the company's sales (Spencer). Typically,

marketing for a book comes from the publisher, the bookseller (or bookstore), media, and the

book's author (Spencer). Marketing and book covers are intertwined. A cover is essentially an

advertisement for the book, the first part of a book that the reader encounters (Munsen-

Warnken). Alain d'Astous, Francois Colbert, and Imene Mbarek liken a book cover to a

product's packaging (d'Astous et al). The book's publisher must have the knowledge to be able

to create a "successful" book cover so its features appeal to the appropriate readers, resulting in

more book sales (Gudinavičius and Šuminas). Knowledge of and skills in marketing are very

helpful for a graphic designer, whose goal is the success of what his or her employer is selling.
Streamlining the many crazy marketing variables into a cohesive design is part of this ability
(Harnum). Book covers have to have the ability to live up to or surpass a consumer's "visual
sophistication" (Yampbell).

Beliefs on the connection between a book's text and its cover vary. Some think there does
not need to be a connection. Some think a cover only needs to convey the book's tone and mood.
Others believe it should be a "diagram representation" or a kind of summary of the book's
contents (Kratz). The understanding of a book simply from its cover is intertwined with selling
the book. It creates markets, audiences, and even produces categories (Kratz). Research suggests
that book covers function as communication between a publisher and a reader of a specific
fiction genre, showing that book covers and knowledge of genres are intertwined (Gudinavičius
and Šuminas). Simply going to the bookstore can show genre conventions (Kratz). According to
results from a study done in the Netherlands, people—both avid and more occasional readers—
are easily able to identify a book's genre from looking at the front cover alone (Piters and
Stokmans). A book cover may not need to accurately represent a book's contents, however. In a
2006 study, it was found that the authors' hypothesis that possible readers would be more
interested in a book because its cover fit well with its contents was not supported by the study's
results. It was "tentatively" concluded that how accurately a cover represents a book is
unimportant, though the cover should still be attractive. The authors also noted that some
publishers use a specific book cover style across their book lists which turns that style into part
of the publisher's brand or "trademark" (d'Astous et al).

Different design and information elements on covers can be perceived differently by
readers. This is important for designers to be aware of so they make sure their designs give

readers the correct message. Typography, for example, affects the way people see a brand. Xiaobing Xu, Rong Chen, and Maggie Liu performed two studies looking at how people perceive brands based on the use of uppercase and lowercase letters. They found that when words are lowercase, consumers perceive the brand as "closer" and friendlier. When the typography is uppercase, consumers see that the brand has "strength" and more "authority." The studies also showed that this is dampened when the word design is more complicated (Xu et al). Another study, one involving academic books, found that library-goers tend to check out books whose covers are more information-bearing than those with plainer book covers (Knowlton and Hackert).

Since design choices are also marketing choices attempting to reach a book's specific audience, book covers can alienate certain readers. Different strategies in marketing, such as dominant definitions and separation of gender, can lead to harsh divisions, even unintentionally. Because a publisher's goal is sales, widening a book's audience is something they desire to do (Yampbell). For a teen, a book cover cannot be anything remotely embarrassing. It should look awesome, "sophisticated," fresh, and groundbreaking, along with making sure it looks more adult. It should not look like it's intended for younger readers; it should appear more mature (Yampbell). But even within this young adult cover style, there can be division. Megan Munson-Warnken performed a study about how gendered book covers influence readers of young adult books and their willingness to read books targeted at the opposite gender (Munsen-Warnken). Results showed that while there was not a large difference in a boy's versus a girl's willingness to read the study's "boy book" from looking at the cover alone, there is a much larger difference in a boy's versus a girl's willingness to read a "girl book" based solely on the book's cover. According to the study, a boy is much less willing to read a "girl book" from only looking at its

cover. The results also suggested that a girl reading a "boy book" out in public would most likely not be noticed by society, but a boy reading a "girl book" out in public would probably be teased, put down, and possibly even have his masculinity and/or sexuality questioned (Munsen-Warnken).

6. Conclusion

With substantial gaps in literature, there is a wide window of opportunity for studying the marketing and design elements involved in creating young adult book covers. As books have evolved with technology, they have gone from being printed without binding to a variety of cover design trends as years have passed.

Based on previous literature and studies, it is obvious that cover design plays a major role in a reader choosing a book to read. The saying to not judge a book by its cover does not ring true with literal book overs. In the young adult publishing world, appearances can mean life or death to a book. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that a book cover does its job, which entails reaching the correct audience. While there is no concrete literature on specific elements and methods that make a cover highly marketable, especially to teens, there are underlying principles which designers can look to and work on with marketing professionals. Publishers should know how certain elements on any design will be perceived by potential readers. Sometimes a cover is too specific, however, potentially pushing away certain reader demographics. This leads to an implied conundrum. How audience specific is too audience specific, especially when it comes to marketing to teens? At what point is a cover too exclusive? This is why it is important to learn what specific cover elements appeal to a wide variety of teens, not just ones of a specific gender, race, or cultural background.

Methodology

1. Purpose of Study

Based on previous research, a book cover is an important part of gaining a reader's

attention. The purpose of this study was to build on these findings to investigate which specific

elements and styles of current young adult book covers appeal to readers. This study was conducted

to notice and analyze trends in why readers and publishing professionals are attracted to particular

covers.

2. Participants

Participants came from two populations: students at a small private university and various

professionals working in the publishing industry. Various publishing industry professionals were

included in the study to gain the perspective of people who have a varying degree of input in the

cover design process. This opinions were compared with the consumer perspectives of the college

students. All participants were contacted through email, and participation in the online survey was

voluntary. The students were contacted through a mass email, whereas the publishing professionals

each received individual emails.

The survey included 36 students and 11 publishing industry professionals. Participants were

asked to identify their demographics. Of those college students, 18 read less than 5 books a year, 10

read 6-10 books a year, 3 read 11-20 books a year, 2 read 21-30 books a year, 1 read 31-40 books a

year, 1 read 41-50 books a year, and 1 read over 101 books a year. 9 students do not read young

adult fiction, 18 read 1-5 young adult fiction books a year, 5 read 6-10 young adult fiction books a

year, 2 read 21-30 young adult fiction books a year, 1 read 41-50 young adult fiction books a year,

and 1 read 51-100 young adult fiction books a year. Of the publishing professionals, 1 was an art

director, 5 were cover designers, 2 were published authors, and 3 held multiple roles within the publishing industry. These multiple roles included publisher, former literary agent, marketing strategist, and editor. All publishing professionals have worked with young adult books. 8 of the 11 professionals have worked for or with a major publisher in some capacity.

3. Survey

Both populations were presented with multiple sets of two different young adult book cover designs from the same genre. Each set of two represented a different genre, and each book cover met the following criteria:

a. The book cover was for a young adult book.

b. The book was from a major publisher.

c. The publication date was not before January 2020.

d. The book was an author's debut.

These criteria were put in place to narrow the study's focus and eliminate as much bias as possible. The first two criteria fulfilled the purpose of the thesis, since the focus is young adult book covers from major publishers. Recent publication dates ensure the book covers are current enough to keep this study as up to date as possible. The author's debut book criteria minimizes potential bias from participants, since there is a higher chance that a debut author's book is unknown to participants. If a cover from an established author was included in the study, a participant may choose that particular cover based on something other than design, such as name recognition.

After participants chose between the two cover designs, they were asked a series of questions to identify which design elements prompted them to choose that particular cover. These design elements included font (s), composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc. on the cover), colors, texture, portrayed objects, symbols, people, and overall style (e.g. illustration, photography). Some questions were multiple choice while others used a Likert scale. Multiple choice questions always had the option of "other" for the participant to explain. See Appendix D for the list of survey questions given to all participants.

Data Analysis

1. Population Analysis

The first survey was given to a population of 36 students from a small Christian university in the southeast United States. Students ranged from the ages of 18-30 years old. 72.2% were 18-20 years old, 25% were 21-25, and 2.8% were 26-30. Throughout this analysis, the student population will be referred to as "readers."

Half of the readers read less than 5 books a year. 27.8% read 6-10 books a year, 8.3% read 11-20 books a year, 5.6% read 21-30 books a year, 2.8% read 51-100 books a year, and 2.8% read at least 101 books a year. 25% of readers said none of the books they read each year are young adult. For 2.78% of readers, about a fourth of the books they read yearly are young adult. 27.78% of readers reported about half the books they read are young adult. The remaining 44.4% read almost exclusively young adult books.

The vast majority of readers (94.4%) also said they had picked up a book because of its cover. The remaining 5.6% of readers said they had not.

The second survey was given to a population of 11 professionals working within the publishing industry, mainly cover designers and authors. This population will be referred to as "publishing professionals." All participants within this population were over 25 years old and had worked with young adult fiction genres previously (see Figure 1 for specific genres). 16.6% had worked with a major publisher in some way.

YOUNG ADULT GENRES PUBLISHING PROFESSIONALS HAVE WORKED WITH
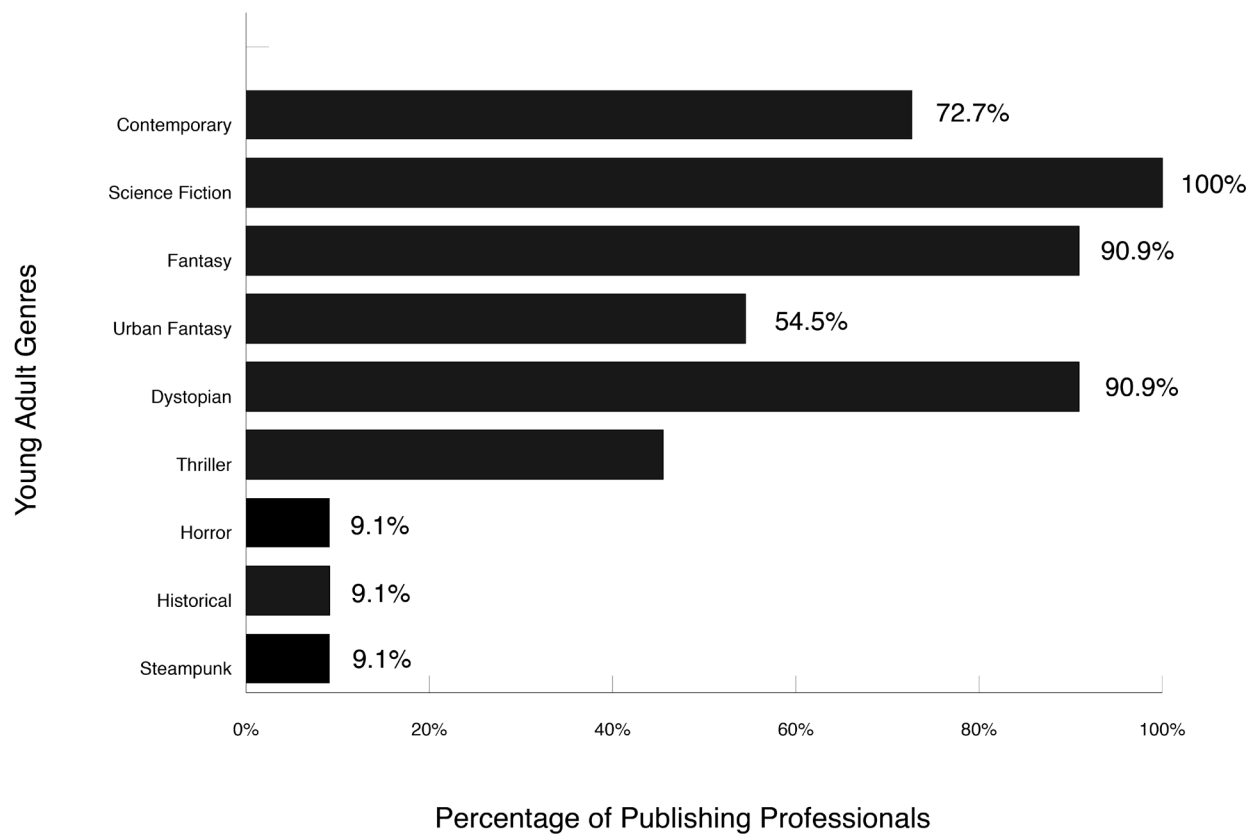
Figure 1

2. Thriller

      The first genre presented to both populations was thriller. Each reader and publishing professional was asked to choose his or her favorite between Figure 2 and Figure 3.
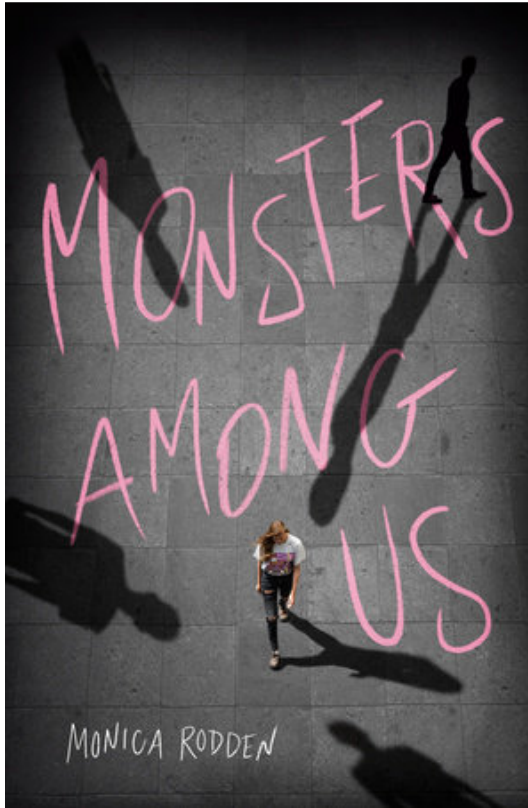
Figure 2. Rodden, Monica. *Monsters Among Us*. Crown Books for Young Readers, 2021.

Figure 3. Sparks, Lily. *Teen Killers Club*. Crooked Lane Books, 2020.

      69.4% of readers selected *Monsters Among Us* as their favorite cover, whereas 30.6% of readers chose *Teen Killers Club*. The publishing professionals leaned more heavily toward *Monsters Among Us*, chosen by 90.9% of publishing professionals. 9.1% of publishing professionals said *Teen Killers Club* was their favorite.

a. *Monsters Among Us*

All participants—readers and publishing professionals—who selected *Monsters Among Us* were asked a series of questions that targeted what specific design elements made them choose the cover. The graphic below (Figure 4) visually breaks down the cover design.

COMPOSITION

placement of type

size of type

composition

PORTRAYED IMAGERY

FONTS

style AMONG

handwritten

color

TEXTURE

COLORS
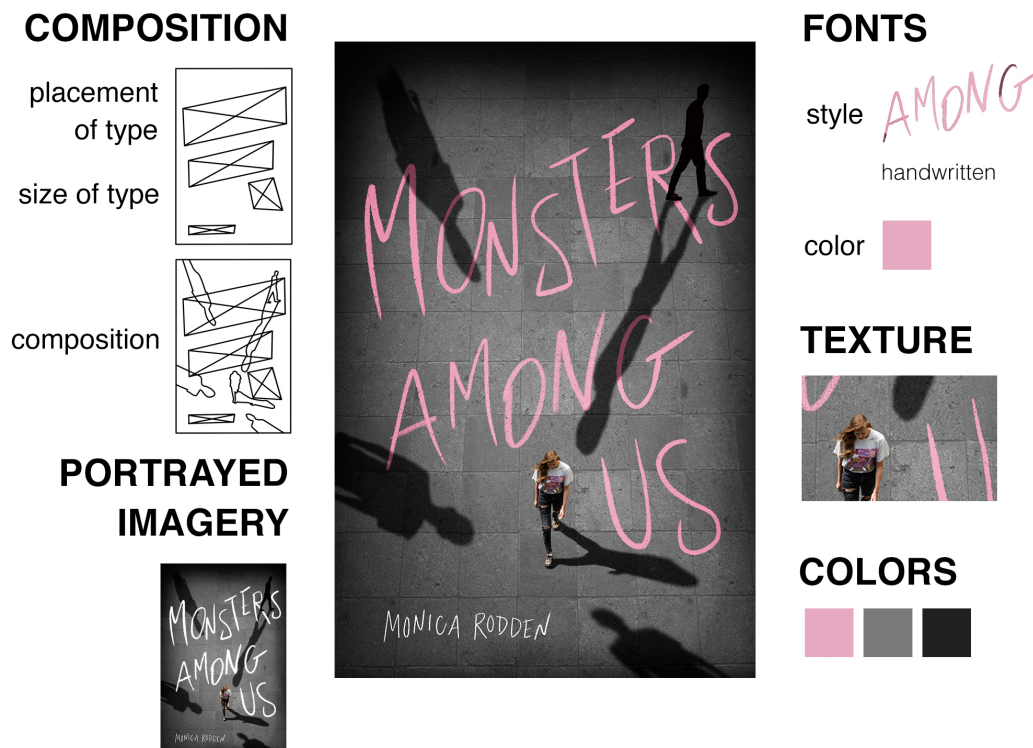
Figure 4. Rodden, Monica. *Monsters Among Us*. Crown Books for Young Readers, 2021.

Participants in both surveys were first asked which design element caught their attention first. 32% of readers selected "portrayed objects, symbols, or people," 23% chose the cover's composition, 18% chose the color of the font, 9% chose the font's style, 9% chose the placement of type, and 5% chose spacing of type. The remaining 4% of readers selected "other," writing in that "the title itself" stood out to them first. Contrasted with readers, 50% of publishing professionals said the design's composition caught their attention first. Colors, font style, type placement, and font

color were each chosen by 10% of publishing professionals. 10% of publishing professionals added

in their own answer, saying that the "strong concept" was the element that first caught their

attention.

   The next question prompted participants to select all of the design aspects they enjoyed.

These elements included font style, font color, type placement, colors, portrayed imagery, font size,

spacing of type, composition, and texture. For readers, the actual imagery on the cover was the

highest selected option at 68%. Composition and colors closely followed, each enjoyed by 64% of

readers. See Figure 5 for a comparison between how readers and publishing professionals viewed

the cover design.

Figure 5

Each participant was then asked to select his or her favorite design element of the cover. 44% of readers said that the 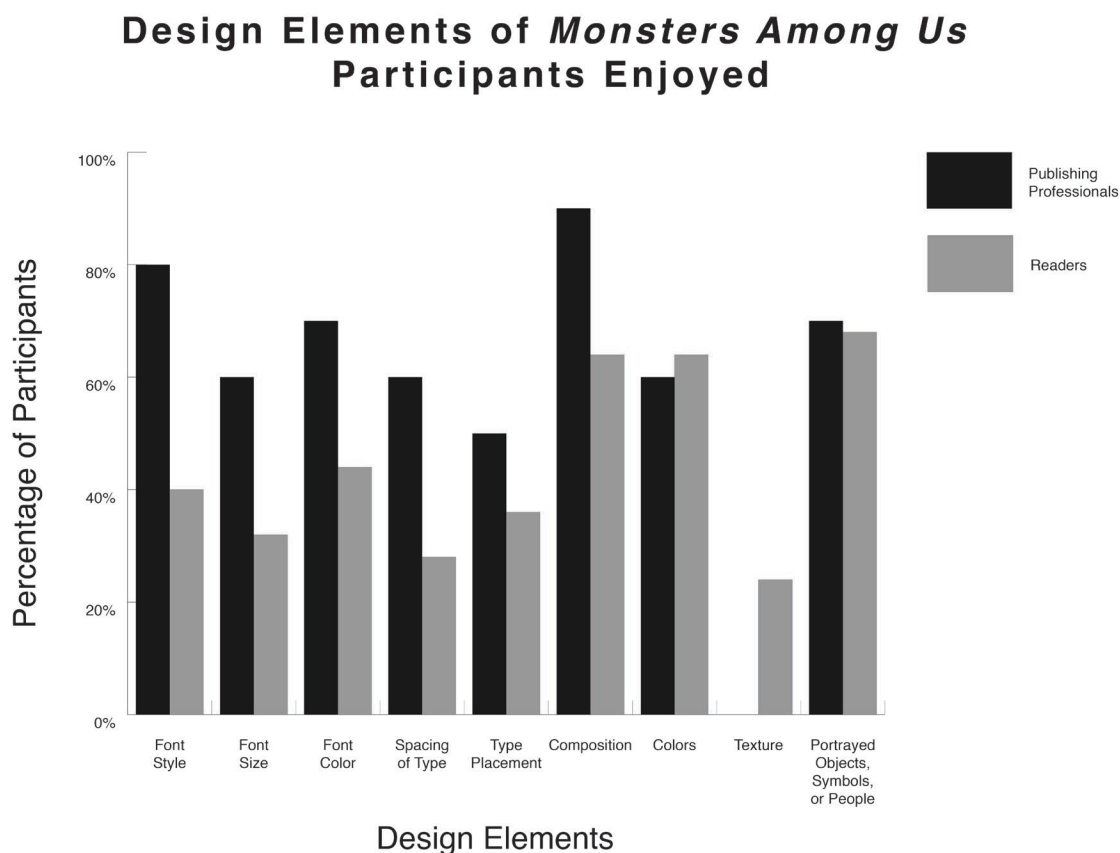portrayed objects, symbols, or people was their favorite part of the design. Composition took second place among readers, chosen by 24%. The cover's colors were reported as the favorite of 16% of readers. 8% of readers chose font style. Finally, the font's color was the favorite part of 4% of readers. The remaining 4% of readers wrote in their own answer, saying that their favorite part was how the cover was "more realistic." The publishing professionals had different opinions, however. 40% liked the cover's composition best. Font colors and portrayed imagery were each selected by 20%. 10% of publishing professionals identified the colors as their favorite part, and 10% chose type placement.

The final portion of the survey asked participants to respond to this statement: "If I saw this book cover while browsing online or in person, I would click for more information or pick the book off the shelf." Participants would then select a number on a Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (yes) to 5 (no).

Among readers, numbers 1, 2, and 3 were each selected by 24% of readers. 16% of readers chose 4, while 12% chose 5. Publishing professionals also had fairly even responses. 20% of professionals chose 1, 30% chose 2, 20% chose 3, and 30% chose 4.

Out of every reader who selected *Monsters Among Us*, 16% read young adult thrillers. Breaking down results of the Likert scale by those who enjoy thrillers, 25% chose 1, 25% chose 2, 25% chose 3, and 25% chose 4. 47.6% of the remaining non-thriller readers who selected *Monsters Among Us* showed positive interest in picking up the book, rating a 2 or below on the Likert scale. 23.8% of non-thriller readers voted number 1. Only 23.8% of non-thriller readers who selected *Monsters Among Us* voted a 5 on the scale.

b. *Teen Killers Club*

Teen Killers Club was the other young adult thriller cover option presented to participants. The image below (Figure 6) showcases different design elements of the cover in conjunction with the choices given to participants.
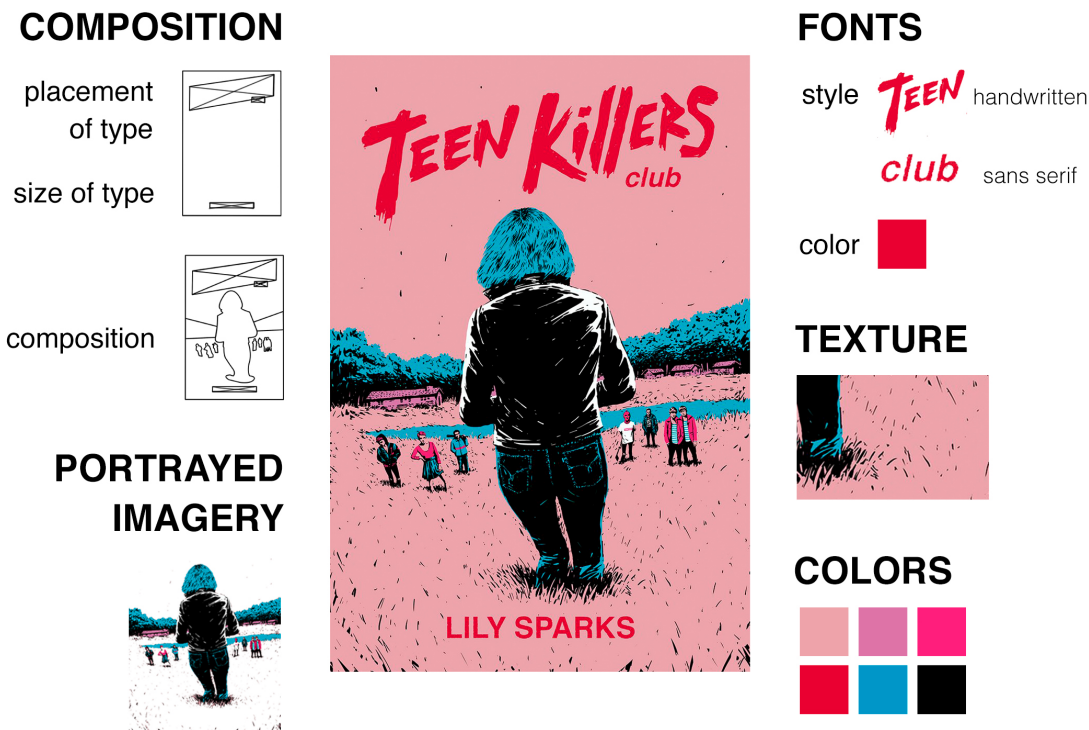
Figure 6. Sparks, Lily. *Teen Killers Club*. Crooked Lane Books, 2020.

72.7% of readers said the cover's color palette was the element that caught their attention first. 9.09% of readers chose composition, 9.09% chose font style, and the remaining 9.09% chose the cover's texture. Because the majority of publishing professionals liked *Monsters Among Us* better, only one professional selected *Teen Killers Club*. This publishing professional agreed with the 72.7% of readers who said the cover's colors first caught their attention.

In response to the second survey question, almost all readers who selected *Teen Killers Club* said that they liked the colors, and many enjoyed the font style as well. See Figure 7 for a comparison between elements readers and publishing professionals enjoyed.

Design Elements of *Teen Killers Club* Participants Enjoyed
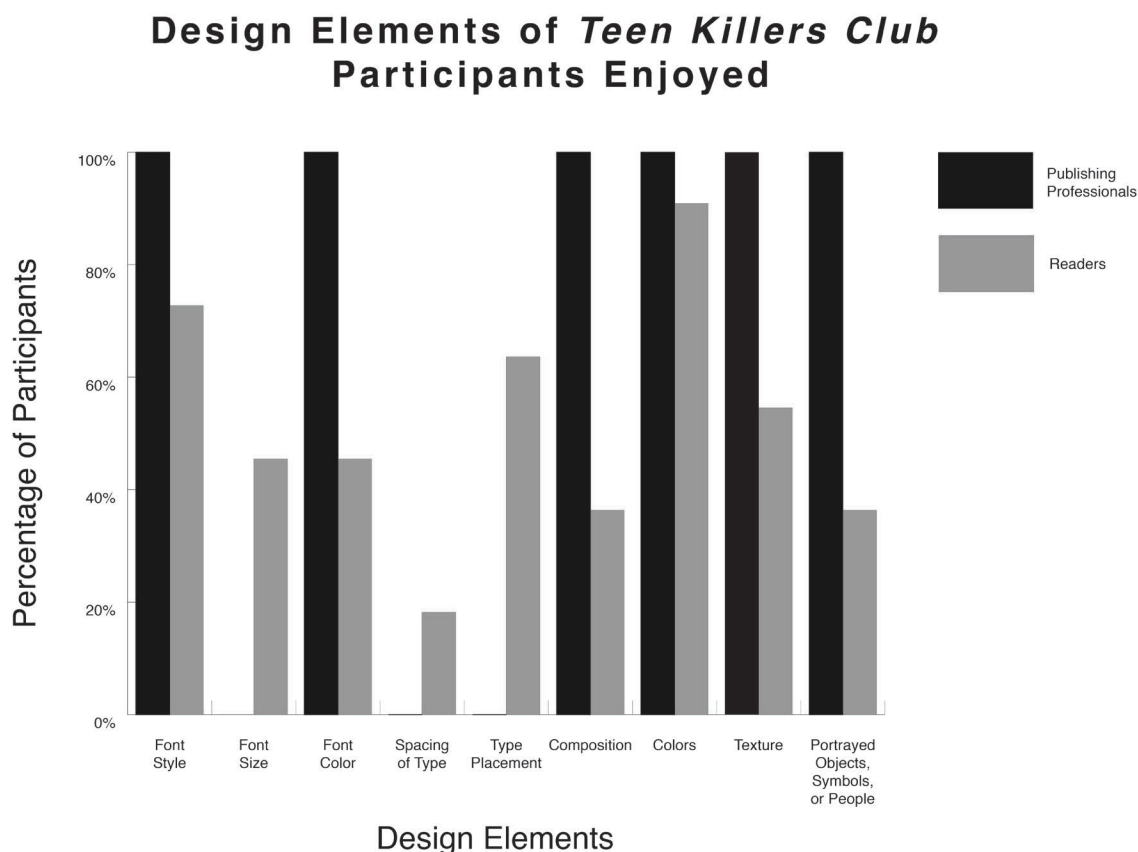
Figure 7

Moving on to the readers' favorite elements of the cover, 54.5% said colors, 36.4% selected composition, and 9.1% chose font style. The publishing professional who chose *Teen Killers Club* said that the portrayed imagery was their favorite part.

In response to the Likert scale, 36.4% of readers picked 2, 18.2% picked 3, and 45.5% picked 4. The publishing professional selected the number 3, a neutral response to the statement.

45.45% of readers who chose *Teen Killers Club* enjoy thrillers. Of this subset of the reader population, 40% gave this cover a 2 on the Likert scale. 40% rated the cover as a 3, a neutral

response. The remaining 20% of thriller readers gave this cover a 4 on the Likert scale. Of the

readers who do not enjoy young adult thrillers, 33.33% selected number 2, and 66.67% of chose

said number 4.

2. Contemporary

The second genre all participants were presented with was young adult contemporary.

Participants were asked to choose between two cover design options: *A Taste for Love* (Figure 8)

and *Happily Ever Afters* (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Yen, Jennifer. *A Taste for Love.* Razorbill, 2021.
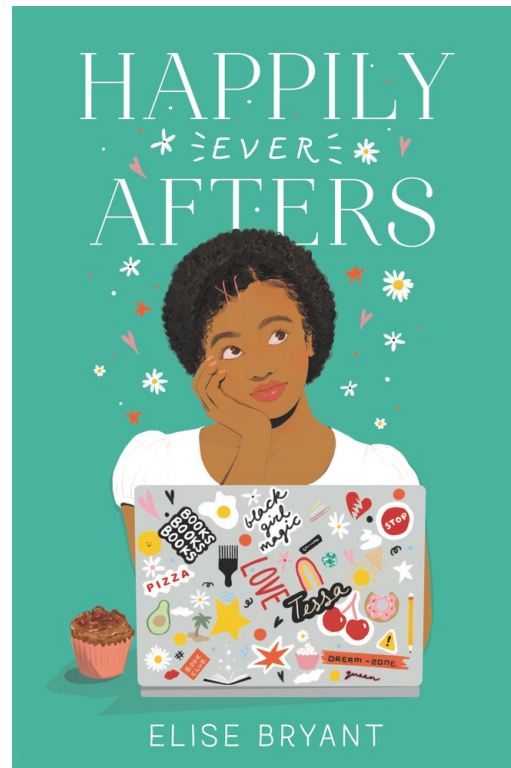
Figure 9. Bryant, Elise. *Happily Ever Afters*. Balzer + Bray, 2021.

Results from readers were fairly even. 41.67% of readers chose *A Taste for Love*, and 58.3% of readers chose *Happily Ever Afters*. When the publishing professionals were asked to choose their favorite among the two, 63.6% chose *A Taste for Love*, while 36.36% chose *Happily Ever Afters*. Even though results were similar among the two populations, readers tended to like *Happily Ever Afters*, while publishing professionals preferred *A Taste for Love*.

a. A Taste For Love

One of the cover options presented to participants was *A Taste For Love*. See the image below (Figure 10) for an analysis of cover design elements.

Figure 10. Yen, Jennifer. *A Taste for Love*. Razorbill, 2021.

33.3% of readers who chose *A Taste for Love* said that the imagery portrayed on the cover stood out to them first. 26.67% of readers responded that the cover design's composition caught their attention first. 20% of readers selected font colors. Type placement, colors, and font size were each chosen by 6.67% of readers. In contrast, publishing professionals noticed different design elements first. 28.57% of professionals selected colors. 28.57% of professionals chose composition. Font style, font color, and portrayed objects, symbols, or people were each chosen by 14.29% of publishing professionals.

Both populations were asked to identify all of the design elements they enjoyed. Most readers enjoyed the colors, and all publishing professionals liked the cover's composition. See Figure 11 below for a full comparison.
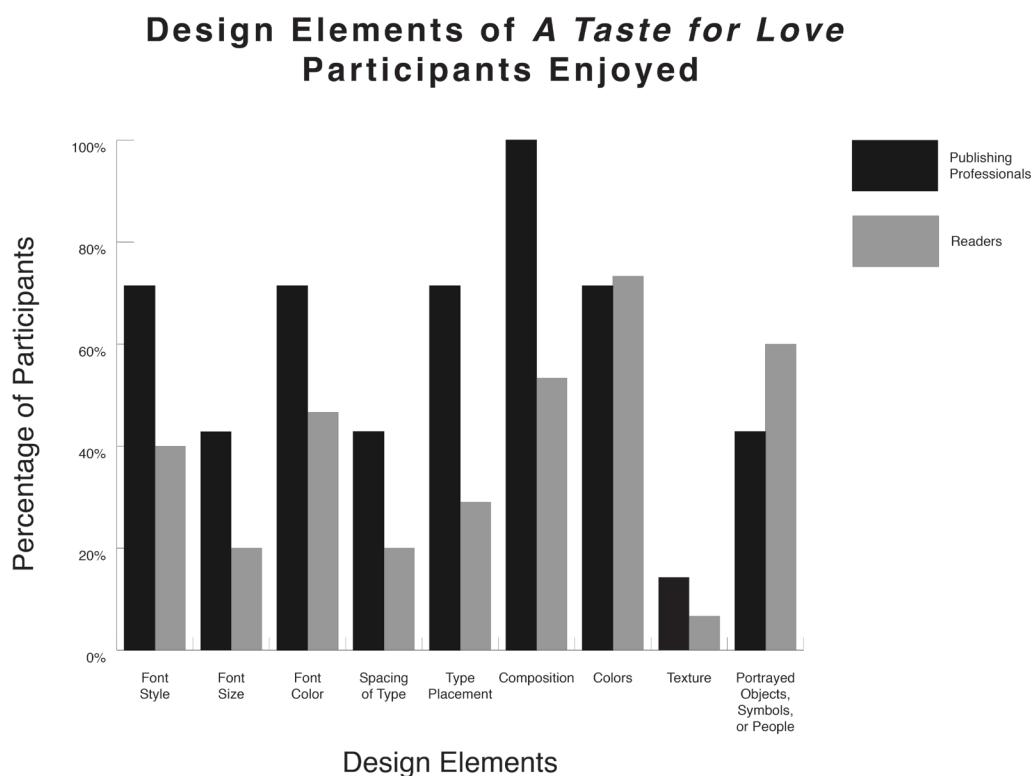
Figure 11

46.67% of readers selected the portrayed imagery on the cover as their favorite part of the design. 26.67% of readers selected font style. 13.33% reported that the color scheme was their favorite element. Finally, composition and font colors were each selected by 6.67% of readers. Among publishing professionals, the portrayed imagery was also one of the highest selected elements in this section, chosen by 42.86% of publishing professionals. Font color came in second for publishing professionals, selected by 28.57% of people. Composition was chosen by 14.29% of professionals, and colors by 14.29% of professionals.

Finally, participants were asked to respond to the following statement using a scale from 1-5, 1 being yes and 5 being no: "If I saw this book cover while browsing online or in person, I would click for more information or pick the book off the shelf." 20% of readers answered number 1, 16.67% of readers chose number 2, 20% of readers chose number 3, 20% of readers chose number 4, and 13.33% of readers chose number 5. 14.29% of publishing professionals chose number 1, 42.86% chose number 2, 28.57% chose number 3, and 14.29% chose number 5.

Of the readers who chose *A Taste for Love*, 60% enjoy reading young adult contemporary books. Out of this sub-group, 55.56% rated this cover positively as a 2 or below on the Likert scale. 11.11% gave it a 1, and 44.44% gave it a 2. 22.22% gave the cover a 3, and 22.22% gave it a 5, saying they would not pick up the book to learn more. Out of the 40% of readers who chose *A Taste for Love* and do not read young adult contemporary books, 33.33% rated this cover as a 1, saying that they would pick up the book. 16.67% of non-contemporary readers gave this cover a neutral 3, and 50% gave it a 4.

b. *Happily Ever Afters*

      Happily Ever Afters was the second young adult contemporary book cover presented to participants. See the image below for a visual breakdown of its design elements (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Bryant, Elise. *Happily Ever Afters*. Balzer + Bray, 2021.

      42.86% of readers reported that the cover's portrayed imagery caught their attention first. 23.81% of readers selected colors, and 19.05% selected composition. 9.52% of readers selected font style as the first part that caught their attention. 4.76% of readers chose "other," writing in that the "art style design" was the first thing that caught their attention. Like with readers, the majority of publishing professionals—75%—said the cover's portrayed imagery caught their attention first. The remaining 25% of professionals chose font style.

Both readers and publishing professionals were also asked to select all design elements they enjoyed about the cover of *Happily Ever Afters* (Figure 13).

Design Elements of *Happily Ever Afters* Participants Enjoyed
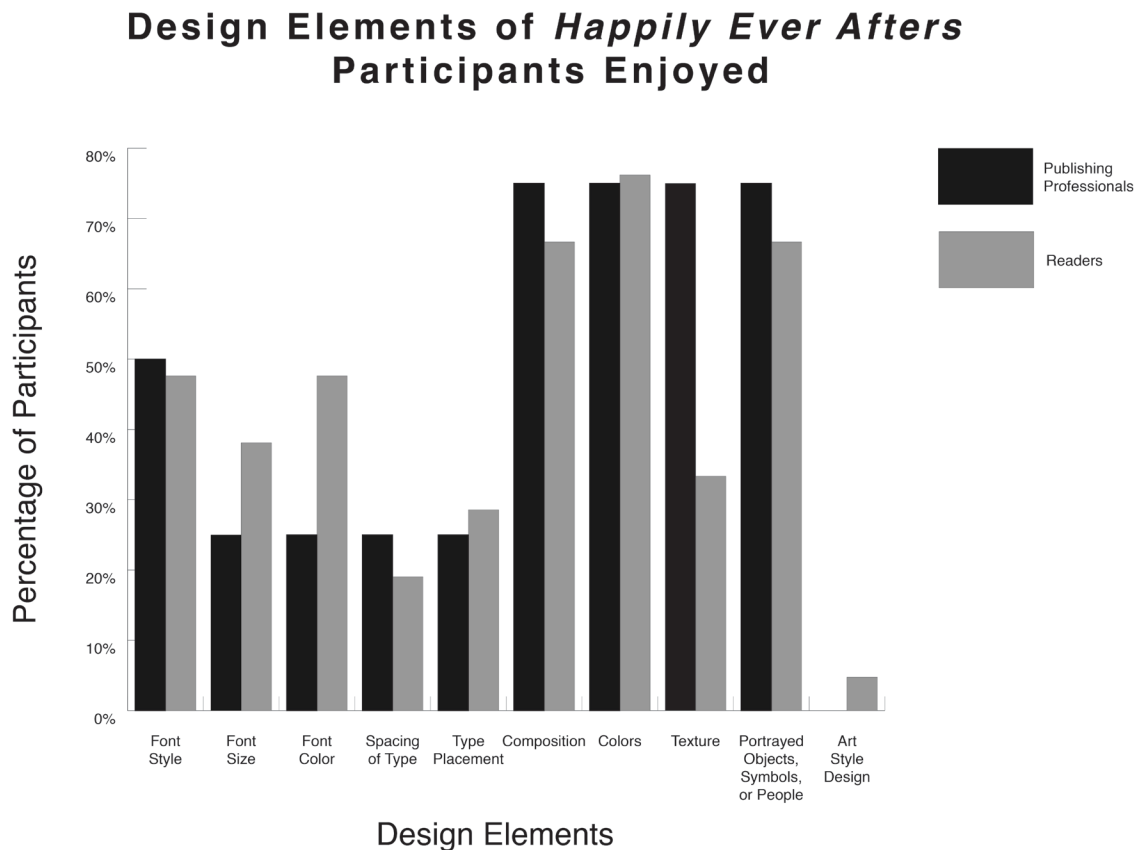
Figure 13

When participants were asked to choose their favorite parts of the cover design, the colors, composition, and portrayed imagery were all tied among readers at 28.57%. 9.52% of readers said that texture was their favorite, and 4.76% selected other, saying that "art style design" was their favorite element. For the most part, publishing professionals selected different answers. 50% of professionals said the cover's composition was their favorite, while 25% selected portrayed objects, symbols, or people. The remaining 25% selected "other," saying that the "illustration" was their favorite.

Answering the question about whether or not participants who selected *Happily Ever Afters* would pick the book off a shelf or click on it when browsing online, 9.52% of readers chose number 1 on the Likert scale, 23.81% of readers chose number 2, 23.81% of readers chose number 3, 27.27% of readers chose number 4, and 14.29% of readers chose number 5. When asked the same question, 25% of publishing professionals chose number 1, 25% of professionals chose number 2, and 50% of professionals chose number 4.

Of the readers who chose *Happily Ever Afters*, 52.38% said they enjoy reading young adult contemporary books. Out of this subset of readers, 36.36% gave this cover a 2 on the Likert scale, indicating that they would potentially pick up the book and look at it more closely. 18.8% of contemporary readers who chose *Happily Ever Afters* gave it a 3, 36.36% gave it a 4, and 9.09% gave it a five. Out of the readers who chose *Happily Ever Afters*, 47.62% do not read young adult contemporary books. Out of these non-contemporary readers, 30% scored the cover positively as a 2 or below. 20% gave it a 1, and 10% gave it a 2. 30% of non-contemporary readers gave the cover a 3, 10% gave it a 4, and 20% gave it a 5.

3. Fantasy

The next set of book covers presented to all participants were both from the young adult fantasy genre. The two fantasy covers were *Cast in Firelight* (Figure 14) and *These Feathered Flames* (Figure 15).

Figure 14. Swift, Dana. *Cast in Firelight*. Delacorte Press, 2021.
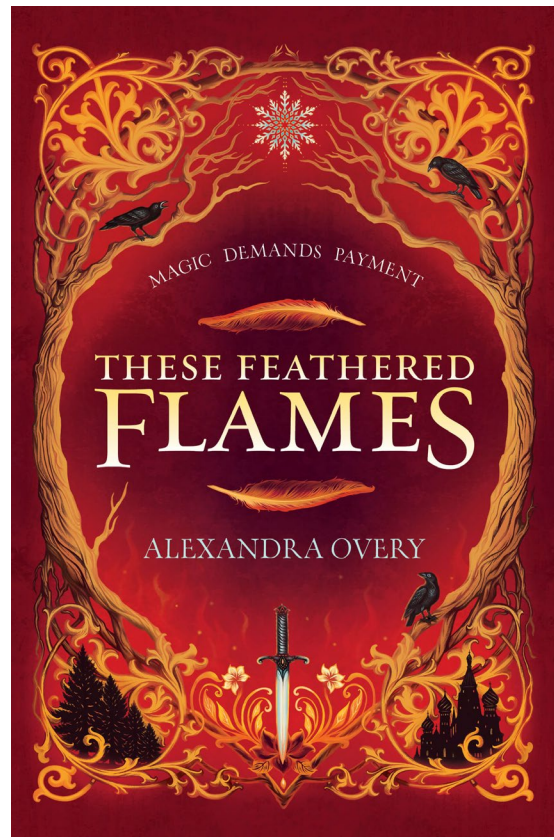
Figure 15. Overy, Alexandra. *These Feathered Flames*. Inkyard Press, 2021.

22.22% of readers preferred the cover for *Cast in Firelight*, whereas 77.78% of readers preferred *These Feathered Flames*. Data from the publishing professionals was almost identical, with 27.27% preferring *Cast in Firelight* and 72.73% preferring *These Feathered Flames*.

a. Cast in Firelight

     Cast in Firelight was one of the young adult fantasy covers presented to participants. See

Figure 16 below for a visual breakdown of the different design elements on the cover.

Figure 16. Swift, Dana. *Cast in Firelight*. Delacorte Press, 2021.

     Among readers, both font style and portrayed imagery were tied at 37% for the design

element that first caught their attention. 12.5% of readers selected colors, and 12.5% chose

composition. All of the publishing professionals who chose *Cast in Firelight* said that the

portrayed objects, images, or people was the first element that caught their attention.

     Participants were also asked to select every design element of the cover that they liked.

See a comparison of the opinions of readers and publishing professionals in Figure 17.

Design Elements of *Cast in Firelight* Participants Enjoyed
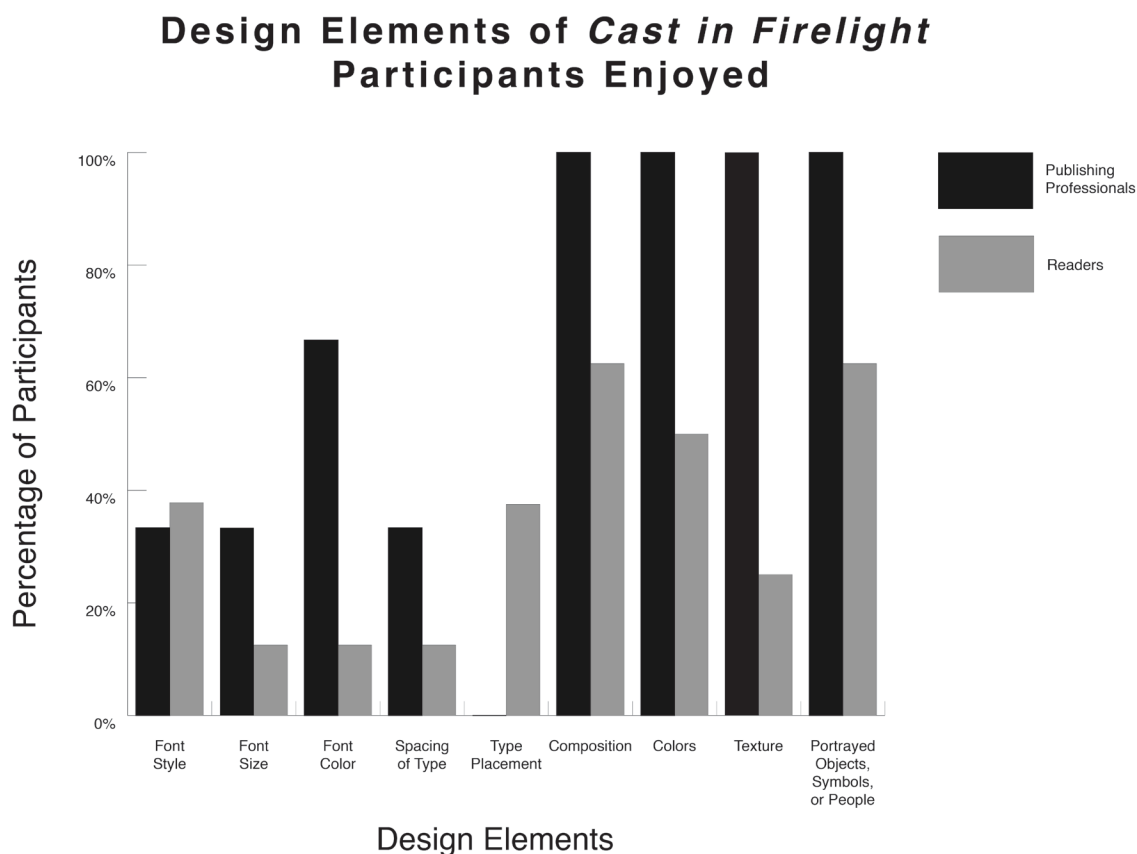
Figure 17

When asked to identify their favorite part of the design, 62.5% of readers selected the cover's portrayed imagery. 25% of readers chose colors, and the remaining 12.5% of readers selected font style. The majority of publishing professionals—66.67%—also selected the cover's portrayed imagery. 33.33% of publishing professionals chose composition as their favorite design element.

Finally, all participants who selected *Cast in Firelight* were asked whether or not they would pick the book if they saw it while browsing. Participants responded through a Likert scale. 12.5% of readers chose 1, 25% chose 2, 25% chose 3, 12.5% chose 4, and 25% chose 5. 33.33% of publishing professionals chose 2, 33.3% chose 4, and 33.3% chose 5.

Of the readers who chose *Cast in Firelight*, 25% enjoy reading fantasy. 50% of these fantasy readers selected number 1, saying they would pick up the book if they saw it while browsing. The other 50% of fantasy readers chose number 3 on the Likert scale. The other 75% of readers who selected *Cast in Firelight* did not read fantasy books. 33.33% of these non-fantasy readers gave positive responses on the Likert scale by selecting number 2. 16.67% of non-fantasy readers selected number 3, and 16.67% chose number 4. The remaining 33.33% of non-fantasy readers selected number 5 on the Likert scale.

b. *These Feathered Flames*

The second young adult fantasy book cover presented to participants was *These Feathered Flames*. See Figure 18 below for a breakdown of the cover's design elements.

Figure 18. Overy, Alexandra. *These Feathered Flames*. Inkyard Press, 2021.

32.14% of readers said that the cover's colors caught their attention first. 21.43% of readers reported that composition grabbed their attention first. 17.86% of readers selected font style. 10.7% of readers selected portrayed imagery, and 7.14% chose spacing of type. 7.14% of readers said font color first stood out to them, and 3.57% of readers chose font color. 50% of publishing professionals said the colors caught their attention first. Composition and portrayed imagery tied at 25% each.

Figure 19 (below) shows all of the elements participants enjoyed, including a comparison between readers and publishing professionals.
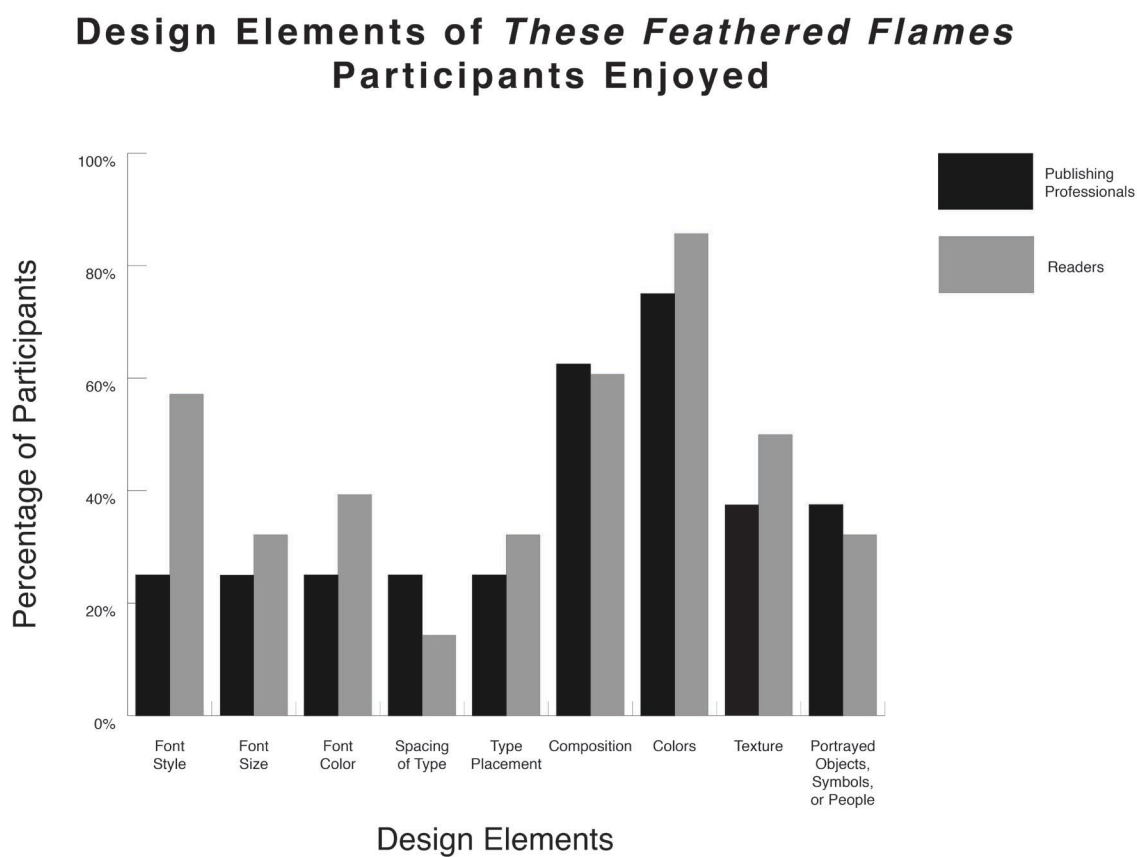
Figure 19

When asked to identify their favorite element of the cover design, 32.14% of readers chose composition, and 32.14% chose colors. 14.29% of readers chose texture, and 10.7% chose portrayed imagery. 3.87% of readers chose type placement, 3.87% chose font size, and 3.87% chose font style as their favorite element. Publishing professionals were also asked to choose their favorite part of the cover design. 37.5% of publishing professionals chose colors, and 37.5% chose portrayed imagery. 25% of publishing professionals reported composition as their favorite part of the cover design.

When asked if they would pick up the book if they saw it while browsing, 7.14% chose number 1 on the Likert scale, 39.29% chose number 2, 32.14% chose number 3, 7.14% chose number 4, and 14.29% chose number 5. 25% of publishing professionals selected number 1 on the Likert scale, 25% selected number 2, and 25% chose number 3. 12.5% chose number 4, and 12.5% those number 5.

Out of the readers who chose *These Feathered Flames*, 35.7% read young adult fantasy books. Of these fantasy readers, 10% chose 1 on the Likert scale, 40% chose 2, 40% chose 3, and 10% chose 5. 64.28% of readers who chose *These Feathered Flames* do not read young adult fantasy. However, 44.44% of non-fantasy readers chose a positive response of 1 or 2 on the Likert scale. 5.56% of non-fantasy reader chose number 1, and 38.89% chose number 2. 27.78% of non-fantasy readers chose number 3. 11.11% of non-fantasy readers selected number 4. 16.67% of non-fantasy readers said they would not pick up the book off the shelf while browsing by choosing number 5 on the Likert scale.

4. Science Fiction

The young adult science fiction book covers presented to participants were *Bright Shining World* (Figure 20) and *Rebelwing* (Figure 21).

Figure 20. Swiller, Josh. *Bright Shining World*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2020.

Figure 21. Tang, Andrea. *Rebelwing*. Razorbill, 2021.

77.78% of readers preferred the cover for *Bright Shining World*, whereas 22.22% preferred *Rebelwing*. The professionals were more balanced in their choices, with 54.54% choosing *Bright Shining World* and 45.45% choosing *Rebelwing*.

a. *Bright Shining World*

     Bright Shining World was one of the young adult science fiction book covers presented to participants. See Figure 22 below for an analysis on the cover's different design elements.

COMPOSITION

placement of type

size of type

composition

PORTRAYED IMAGERY

FONTS

style   B R I G H T   serif

J O S H   sans serif

color

TEXTURE

COLORS

Figure 22

     When asked what design element caught their attention first, 28.58% of readers who chose *Bright Shining World* said "color." 21.43% of readers said that the portrayed imagery first stood out to them. 14.29% of readers said the type placement was the first thing that stood out to them. 14.29% of readers selected composition. Font style came in fifth, chosen by 10.71% of readers. Texture was chosen by 7.14% of readers. 3.57% of readers reported that font size was the element that first drew their attention to this cover. When publishing professionals were asked this same

question, their top two answers were composition and colors, each selected by 33.33%. Font color

was selected by 16.67%. Type placement was chosen by 16.67%.

The graph below (Figure 23) shows each of the design elements participants enjoyed.

**Design Elements of *Bright Shining World*
Participants Enjoyed**
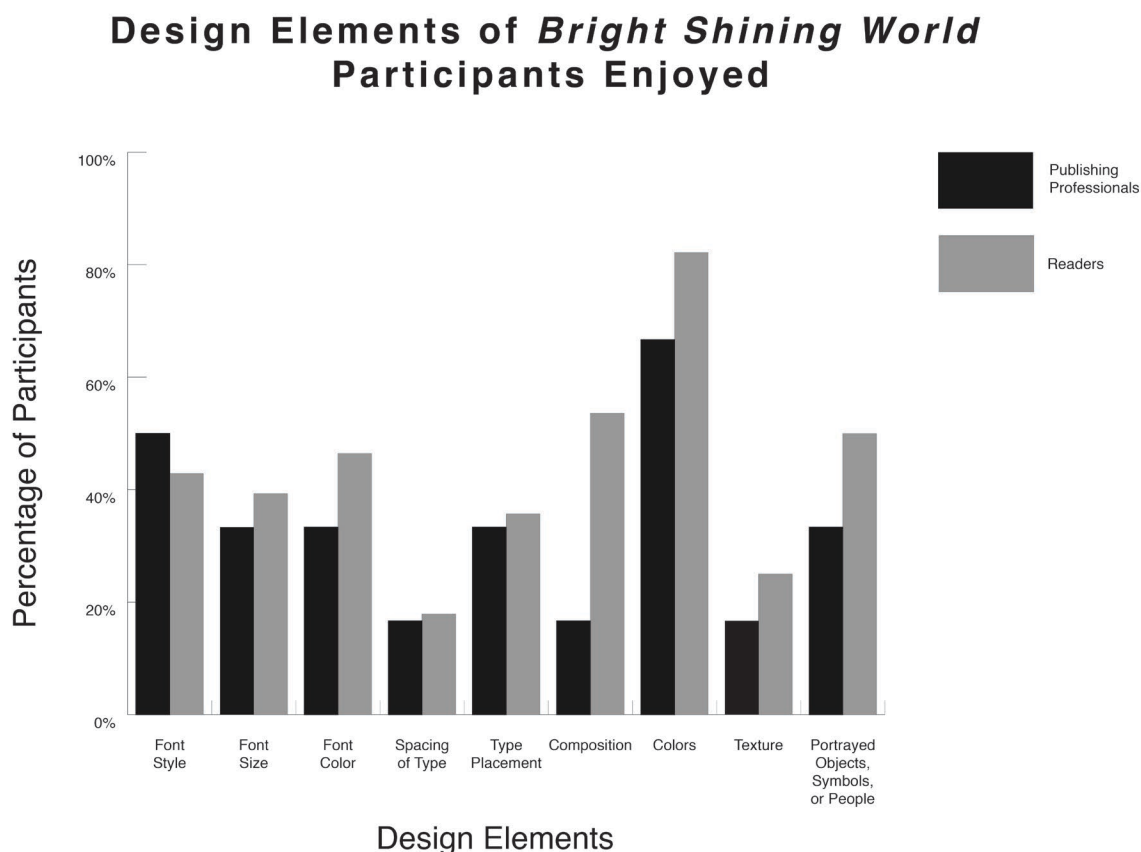
Figure 23

Survey participants were also asked to identify their favorite part of the design. 31.25% of

readers reported font style as their favorite element, and 31.25% chose composition. Portrayed

objects, symbols, or people came in third, chosen by 18.75% of readers. Spacing of type, colors, and

type placement were each chosen by 6.25% of readers. 33.33% of publishing professionals

identified type placement as their favorite part of the design. 33.33% said the composition was their

favorite. Colors and texture each were chosen as the favorite of 16.67% of publishing professionals.

Next, participants placed the cover on a Likert scale from 1-5 to indicate their level of interest in further investigating the book. 1 meant yes, they would pick up the book, and 5 meant no. 14.29% of readers selected number 1, 2.14% chose number 2, 21.43% selected number 3, 25% chose number 4, and 7.14% chose number 5. Publishing professionals were also asked to rate the cover for *Bright Shining World* on the Likert scale. 16.67% of publishing professionals selected number 2, 50% selected number 3, and 33.33% selected number 4.

Of the readers who chose *Bright Shining World*, only 25% enjoy reading young adult science fiction. Of this subset of the population, 71.43% rated the cover design positively on the Likert scale by selecting 1 or 2. 14.28% of science fiction readers gave the cover design a one, saying they would pick up the book off the shelf if they saw it while browsing. 57.14% of science fiction readers selected number 2 on the Likert scale. 14.28% of science fiction readers gave the cover a 3, and 14.28% selected number 4. None of the science fiction readers who selected *Bright Shining World* gave the cover a 5. Out of the readers who chose *Bright Shining World*, 75% do not read young adult science fiction. Of this sub-group, 38.1% gave the cover design a positive rating of 1 or 2 on the Likert scale. 12.29% of non-science fiction readers gave the cover a 1, saying that they would pick up the cover if they saw it while browsing. 23.81% of non-science fiction readers selected number 2. 23.81% of non-science fiction readers gave the cover a 3. 28.57% of non-science fiction readers chose number 4. Only 9.52% of non-science fiction readers gave the cover a 5, saying they would not pick up the book while browsing based on its cover.

b. *Rebelwing*

The second young adult science fiction cover presented to participants was *Rebelwing*. See

Figure 24 for a visual breakdown of cover design elements.
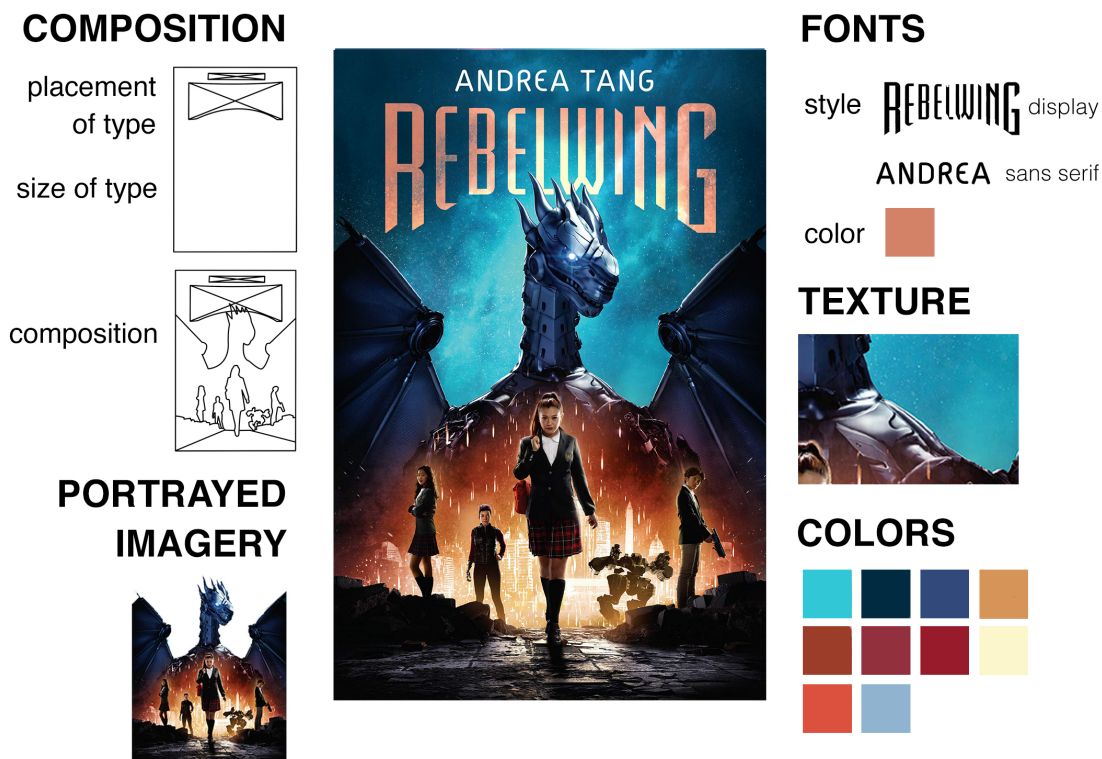
Figure 24. Tang, Andrea. *Rebelwing.* Razorbill, 2021.

50% of readers who chose *Rebelwing* said that the cover's portrayed objects, symbols, or

people was what first caught their attention. 25% reported that the cover's composition stood out

first, and the remaining 25% said the type placement was the first thing they noticed. 80%—the

majority—of publishing professionals who chose *Rebelwing* said that the cover's composition was

the first thing that caught their attention. The remaining 20% reported the portrayed imagery was

the first thing they noticed.

Participants who chose *Rebelwing* were also asked to identify all design elements they enjoyed. See Figure 25 below for the results.

Design Elements of *Rebelwing* Participants Enjoyed
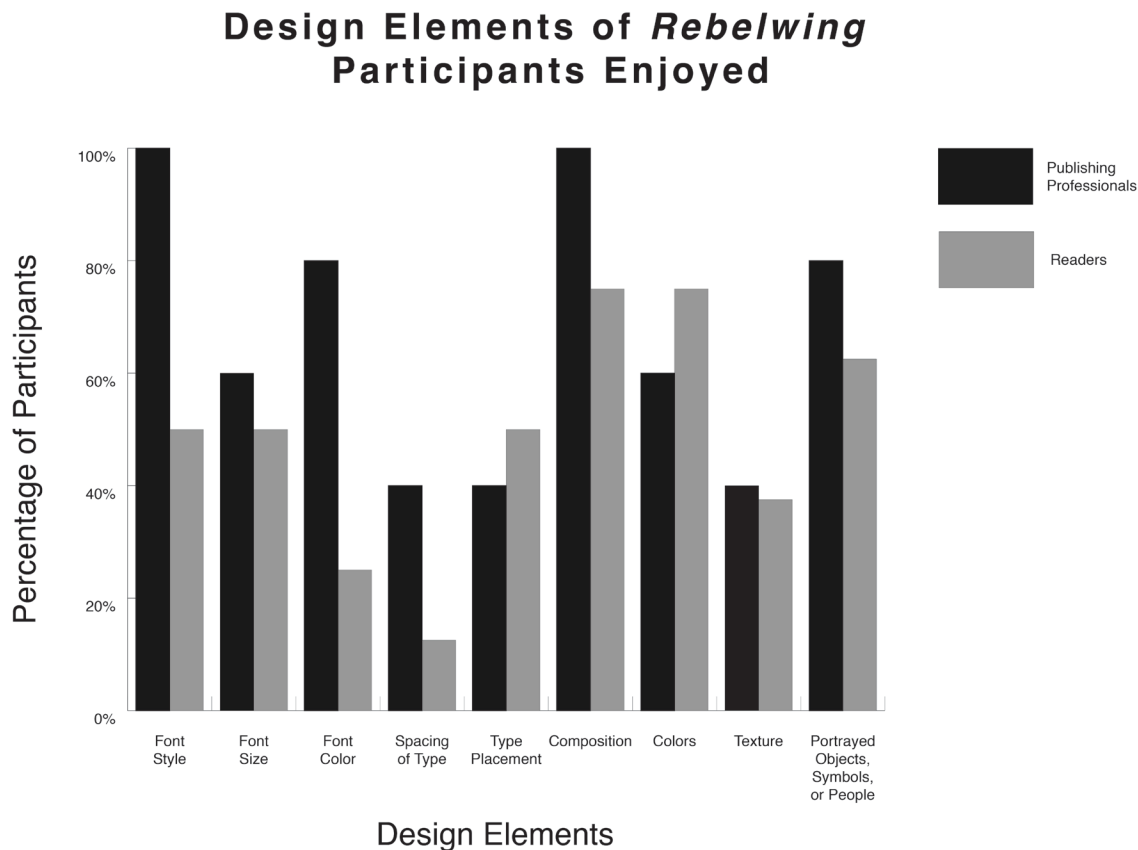
Figure 25

42.86% of the readers who chose *Rebelwing* said the colors were their favorite part of the design. 50% reported the portrayed objects, symbols, or people as their favorite element of the cover. 37.5% said composition was their favorite, and 12.5% of readers chose texture as their favorite. Font style, type placement, font size, and color of fonts were each the favorite of 3.57% of readers. 40% of publishing professionals identified the cover's composition as their favorite part of the design. 40% of publishing professionals said the portrayed objects, symbols, or people was their favorite. The remaining 20% selected font style as their favorite element of the design.

Readers were then asked to respond to this statement using a Likert scale: "If I saw this book cover while browsing online or in person, I would click for more information or pick the book off the shelf." The scale was from 1-5 with 1 meaning yes and 5 meaning no. For readers, the choices were divided evenly from 1-4. 25% of readers chose 1, 25% chose 2, 25% chose 3, and 25% chose 4. For publishing professionals, 20% chose 1, 40% chose 2, and 40% chose 4.

Out of the readers who chose *Rebelwing*, 37.5% read young adult science fiction. 33.33% of these science fiction readers selected number 1 on the Lickert scale, saying that they would pick up the book if they saw it while browsing. 33.33% of science fiction readers chose number 2, and 33.33% chose number 3. The remaining 62.5% of readers who chose *Rebelwing* do not read young adult science fiction. 40% of them gave the cover a positive rating of 1 or 2 on the Likert scale. 20% chose number 1, and 20% chose number 2. 20% chose number 3. 40% of non-science fiction readers chose number 4.

5. Historical Fantasy

The two young adult historical fantasy book covers presented to participants were *City of the Uncommon Thief* (Figure 26) and *In the Shadow of the Sun* (Figure 27). 44.44% of readers chose *City of the Uncommon Thief*, while 55.56% chose *In the Shadow of the Sun*. 63.64% of publishing professionals chose *City of the Uncommon Thief*, and 36.36% chose *In the Shadow of the Sun*.
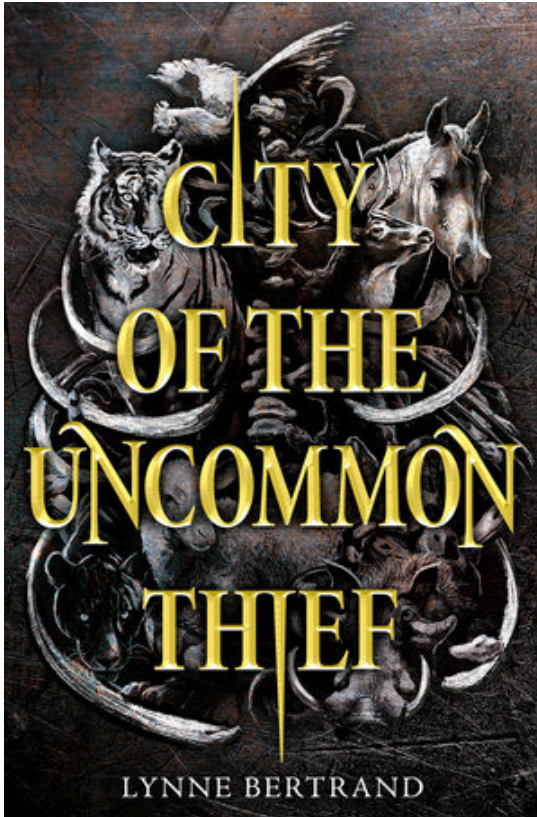
Figure 26. Bertrand, Lynne. *City of the Uncommon Thief*. Dutton Books for Young Readers, 2021.
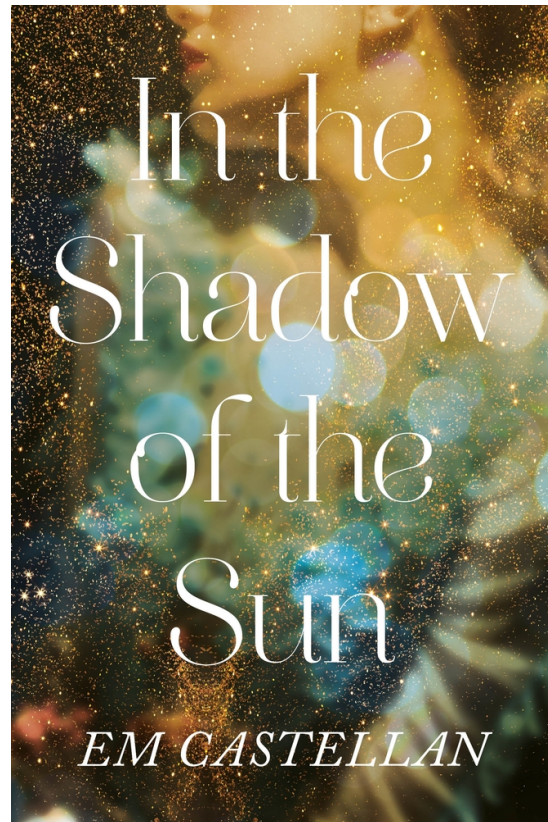
Figure 27. Castellan, E. M. *In the Shadow of the Sun*.
Feiwel and Friends, 2020.

a. *City of the Uncommon Thief*

One of the young adult historical fantasy book covers presented to readers was *City of the Uncommon Thief*. Figure 28 is a visual analysis of different design elements of the cover.

COMPOSITION

placement
of type

size of type

composition

**PORTRAYED
IMAGERY**

FONTS

style   CITY   display

LYNNE   serif

color

TEXTURE

COLORS

Figure 28. Bertrand, Lynne. *City of the Uncommon Thief*. Dutton Books for Young Readers, 2021.

56.25% of readers who chose *City of the Uncommon Thief* said that the font style was the first thing that caught their attention. 18.75% of readers reported that the cover's composition first stood out. 12.5% of readers identified portrayed objects, symbols, or people as the first thing that caught their eye. Texture and colors were tied for fourth place, each chosen by 6.25% of readers. All publishing professionals who chose *City of the Uncommon Thief* identified font style as the first thing that caught their attention.

Participants who chose *City of the Uncommon Thief* selected all design elements they liked about the cover. See Figure 29 for the results.

Design Elements of *City of the Uncommon Thief* Participants Enjoyed
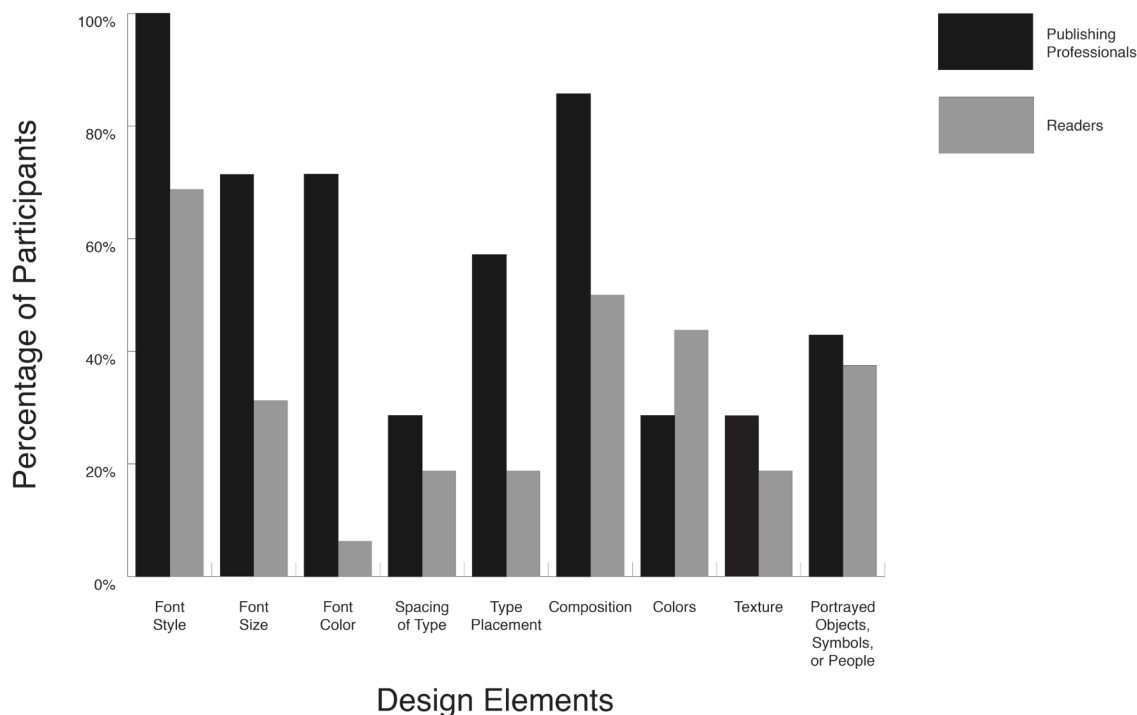
Figure 29

Font style and composition were two of the most popular choices among readers when identifying their favorite part of *City of the Uncommon Thief's* cover design, each selected by 31.25% of readers. 18.75% of readers reported that their favorite part was the objects, symbols, or people portrayed on the cover. Spacing of type, colors, and type placement were each chosen by 6.25% of readers who selected *City of the Uncommon Thief*. Like with readers, font style was the most popular choice for favorite design element among publishing professionals, as it was chosen by 57.14%. Composition was the favorite part of the design for 28.57% of professionals, and font color was the favorite for 14.29%.

Using a Likert scale, readers were asked if they would pick up this book if they saw it while browsing. On a scale from 1-5, 1 meant yes and 5 meant no. 18.75% of readers chose number 1, saying that they would pick up the book. 6.25% of readers selected number 2. 31.25% chose number 3, and 43.75% chose number 4. 42.86% of publishing professionals selected number 1, saying that they would pick up the book. 14.29% of professionals selected number 2. 14.29% chose number 3. 28.57% of professionals chose number 4. No one from either population selected number 5.

Of the readers who chose *City of the Uncommon Thief*, only 12.5% said that they enjoy reading young adult historical fantasy. Of those readers who enjoy historical fantasy books, half selected number 3 on the Likert scale, and half selected number 4. The remaining 87.5% of readers who chose *City of the Uncommon Thief* do not read young adult historical fantasy. Of this subset of readers, 28.57% gave the cover a positive rating of 1 or 2 on the Likert scale. 21.43% selected number 1, and 7.14% selected number 2. 28.57% selected number 3, and 42.86% selected number 4.

b. *In the Shadow of the Sun*

       The other young adult historical fantasy book cover presented to readers was *In the Shadow of the Sun*. See Figure 30 for an analysis of the cover design.

Figure 30. Castellan, E. M. *In the Shadow of the Sun*. Feiwel and Friends, 2020.

For 35% of readers who chose *In the Shadow of the Sun*, font style was the first thing that caught their attention. 30% of readers said that the colors jumped out at them first. 20% of readers reported that the cover's portrayed objects, symbols, or people caught their attention first. 15% of readers identified texture as the first thing that caught their attention. In contrast, 50% of publishing professionals said the placement of type caught their attention first. 25% of professionals reported colors as the first thing that jumped out, and 25% said composition caught their attention first.

Participants who chose *In the Shadow of the Sun* identified all elements of the cover design they enjoyed (Figure 31).

Design Elements of *In the Shadow of the Sun* Participants Enjoyed
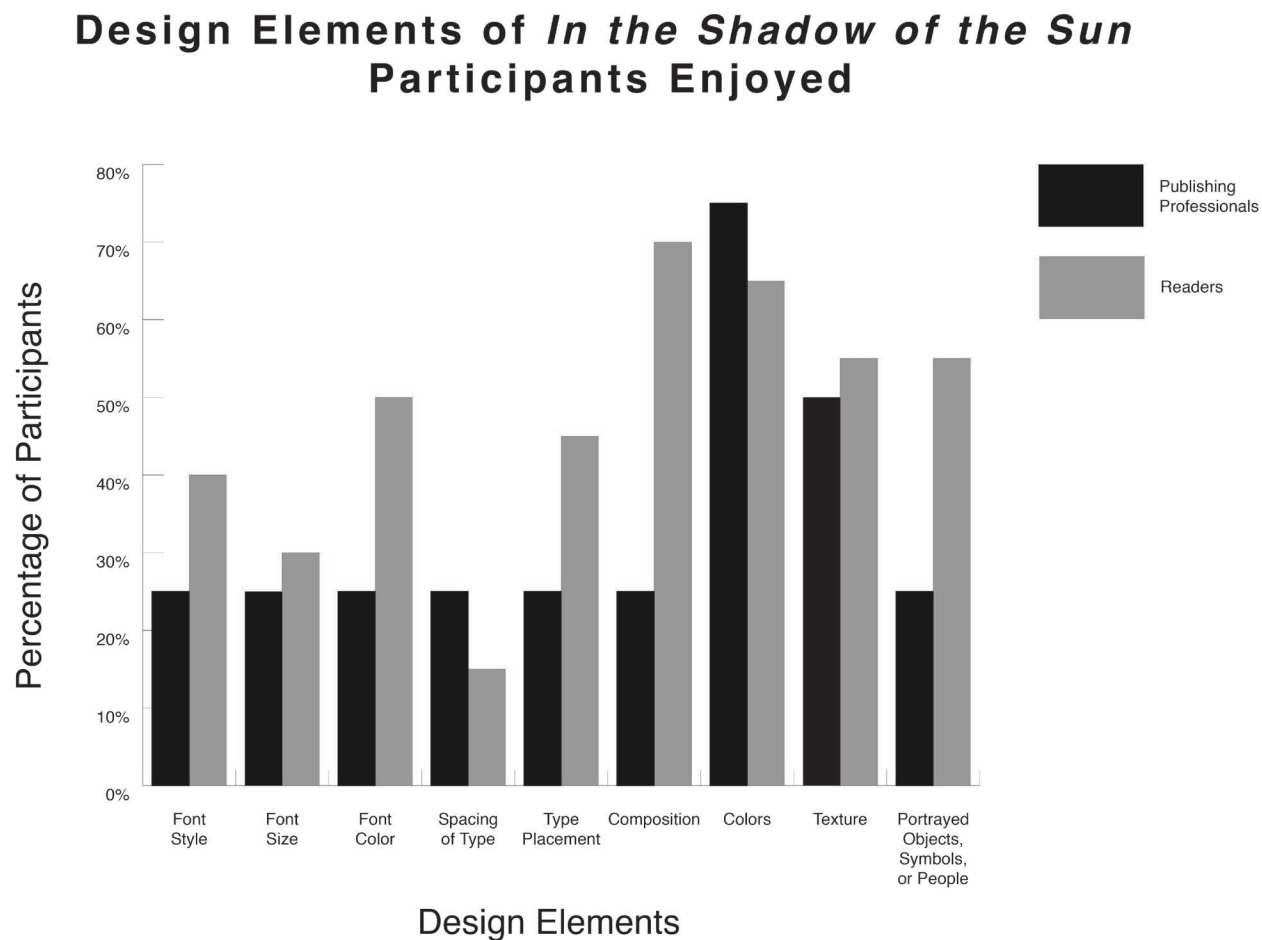
Figure 31

When asked to identify their favorite part of the cover, 25% of readers said the font style was their favorite. 20% of readers said colors were their favorite, and 20% said the portrayed objects, symbols, or people was their favorite. 20% said that the composition of the cover was their favorite part. 10% of readers identified that the texture was their favorite, and 5% said the type placement was their favorite part of the design. Publishing professionals' favorites were evenly distributed at 25% among concept, texture, composition, and portrayed objects, symbols, or people.

When responding to the statement in conjunction with the Likert scale, 10% of readers selected number 1, 15% selected number 2, 20% selected number 3, 30% selected number 4, and 25% chose number 5. Therefore, most of the readers who selected this cover would not pick up the book while browsing. Out of the publishing professionals, 25% selected number 1, 50% selected number 4, and 25% selected number 5. Once again, the majority of people would not pick up the book while browsing.

25% of readers who selected *In the Shadow of the Sun* reported that they read young adult historical fiction books. Of those readers, 20% selected number 1 on the Likert scale. 20% selected number 3. 60% selected number 5, saying they would not pick up the book while browsing. 75% of readers who selected *In the Shadow of the Sun* do not read young adult historical fiction books. Of those readers 26.67% selected a positive response of 1 or 2 on the Likert scale. 6.67% selected number 1. 20% selected number 2, and 20% chose number 3. 40% chose number 4. 6.67% of selected number 5, saying they would not pick up the book while browsing.

Conclusion

This thesis was designed to gauge what elements of young adult cover design make a cover successful. First, the study showed that the vast majority of readers judge books by their covers, which agrees with previous research cited in the literature review chapter. However, results of this study mostly showed that cover design is subjective. There were occasional trends in what participants preferred, but most of the time results did not drastically sway toward one particular cover design or element. Each cover was liked for different reasons. Often one participant's reason was different than another's, which explains why many of the results were similar. Despite this trend in data, participants strongly preferred one cover over another in the fantasy and science fiction genres. Both thriller cover options had a mix of opinions. The majority of publishing professionals strongly preferred one thriller cover over the other, whereas the readers were split more evenly. The other two genres—contemporary and historical fantasy—were more evenly split between the two.

For the thriller genre, most readers liked the imagery on *Monsters Among Us*, which showed a photograph of a blonde teenage girl walking among scattered shadows and silhouettes. One of the most liked elements on *Teen Killers Club* was the blue, pink, and black color scheme. Despite the pleasing elements in both covers designs, about half of the readers who chose *Monsters Among Us* showed at least some interest in the book, whereas a little over a third showed at least some interest in picking up *Teen Killers Club*.

In the contemporary genre, readers enjoyed the pastel pinks, oranges, teals, blues, and overall bright and feminine colors of *A Taste for Love*. A popular favorite design element was the photograph of a young Asian couple drinking boba tea. For *Happily Ever Afters*, readers especially liked the greens, teals, browns, oranges, and pops of red and pink on the cover. They also enjoyed

the cover's composition. Another favorite among readers was the specific imagery on the cover: an illustrated young black woman looking thoughtfully upward while sitting at her sticker-covered computer. However, *Happily Ever Afters* was less successful at gaining reader interest than *A Taste for Love*. Half of the readers who first selected *A Taste for Love* were at least somewhat interested in the book, while about a third of readers who first selected *Happily Ever Afters* were at least somewhat interested.

In the fantasy genre, one of the most popular elements of *Cast in Firelight* was the illustration of the man and woman in elaborate fantasy costumes surrounded by red and silver smoke. Another popular element of the cover was the composition. For *These Feathered Flames*, the reds, oranges, yellows, black, and touch of teal were top favorites among readers. Another favorite element of the cover was its composition: centered typography framed by illustrated designs. Just over a third of readers who originally chose *Cast in Firelight* were somewhat interested in the book, whereas almost half of readers who originally chose *These Feathered Flames* were interested in the book.

Some of the most-liked elements of *Bright Shining World* were the red, pink, blue, purple, green, and yellow colors. Two of the top favorites were the serif and sans serif font styles as well as the slanted composition. For *Rebelwing*, the element liked by most of the readers was the portrayed imagery of the mechanical dragon, city on fire, and the teenagers posed to fight. Almost half of the readers who chose *Rebelwing* said that the blue and orange color palette on the cover was their favorite part. Half of the readers who chose each cover showed at least some interest in that particular book.

The last genre was historical fantasy. Of the readers who chose *City of the Uncommon Thief*, one of the top favorite design elements was the decorative serif font. Tied for favorite element was

the composition: large typography centered and interwoven with the cover's imagery. Of the readers who chose *In the Shadow of the Sun*, many of the readers chose the cover's composition as an element of the cover they liked. This cover's composition also has large, centered type over the cover's imagery. The top favorite design element among readers who chose *In the Shadow of the Sun* was the serif font style. Both covers elicited a similar level of interest in readers.

The study had both strengths and weaknesses. One of the strengths was that many people participated in the reader study, and most read at least some young adult literature. Another strength was that cover designers and art directors who work for major publishers participated. Since the study focused on evaluating cover designs from major publishers to ensure the highest quality covers were evaluated, this ensured that the publishing professionals would also give high quality feedback.

One of the study's weaknesses was that there could be biases based on each cover's different title and concept. While cover design choices were limited to specific genres, the titles and concepts of the books were different. Like one reader responded, the title could have swayed a reader a particular way. Given more time, the study would be more accurate if the researcher designed each cover choice using the same title and premise. In addition to this lack of bias, the researcher could also design each cover a certain way to target specific styles, typography, colors, etc. to evaluate the effectiveness of the design itself.

Another weakness of this survey is that actual teenagers were unable to participate. Young adult literature is directed toward teenagers ages thirteen to eighteen. However, only adults were able to take the survey. Therefore, the readers evaluating the cover designs were slightly above the age range of young adult literature's target audience.

A third weakness of this study is that the population of publishing professionals was much smaller than that of readers. To more accurately evaluate the difference in opinions of readers and those who work in the publishing industry, it would be more beneficial for both populations to be fairly equal in number.

Because of limited research on young adult book cover design, there are many areas for researchers to explore further, especially to solve the shortcomings of this study. Researchers could give a similar survey to a wider audience, including students of various backgrounds and interests. Another way research could be done further is to create a study around each young adult genre, studying which elements are more successful. In addition, researchers could design specific covers to show to readers. They could even carry out the survey in person, having participants walk through a bookstore and see physical copies of the books being studied. Regardless of the method, book cover design is a fascinating field where storytelling, art, design, and marketing meet. As society becomes more visual, fully understanding the intricacies of book cover design and its marketing implications is vital to the future of the publishing industry.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

Title: Young Adult Book Cover Design and Its Effect on Reader Interest

Investigators: Megan McCullough, Professor Saied Farisi

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate what specific elements of young adult book covers from appeal to readers. You must be 18 years or older to participate.

What to expect: This research study is administered online. Participation in this research will require completion of one questionnaire. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You will be expected to complete this questionnaire once. It should take you no more than 20 minutes to complete.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks by participating in this study.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you. However, you may gain an appreciation and understanding of how research is conducted.

Compensation: You will not receive compensation for participation in this study.

Your Rights and Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this study at any time.

Confidentiality: Your identity will not be asked in this study. The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not record information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password-protected computer. Only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to these records.

Contacts: You may contact any of the researches at the following email addresses should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study:

Megan McCullough: _____

Saied Farisi: _____

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB office at _____.

If you choose to participate: By continuing, you are indicating that you are at least 18 years of age and freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

It is recommended that you print a copy of this consent page for your records before you begin this study.

Appendix B: Reader Survey Questions (Demographics)

1. **On average, how many books do you read per year?**
   o Less than 5
   o 6-10
   o 11-20
   o 21-30
   o 31-40
   o 41-50
   o 51-100
   o 101+

2. **How many of those books are young adult fiction?**
   o I do not read young adult fiction
   o 1-5
   o 6-10
   o 11-20
   o 21-30
   o 31-40
   o 41-50
   o 51-100
   o 101+

3. **How old are you?**
   o 18-20
   o 21-25
   o 26-30
   o 31-35
   o 36-40
   o 41-45
   o 56-50
   o 51+

4. **Have you ever picked up a book because you liked the cover?**
   o Yes
   o No

5. Select any young adult fiction genres you enjoy reading.
- o Contemporary (e.g. To All the Boys I've Loved Before, The Sun is Also a Star, The Hate U Give, Five Feet Apart)
- o Science Fiction (e.g. The Sound of Stars, The Stars We Steal)
- o Fantasy (e.g. Shadow and Bone, Six of Crows, Children of Blood and Bone)
- o Urban Fantasy (e.g. Crave, Infinity Son)
- o Thriller (e.g. One of Us is Lying, All Your Twisted Secrets)
- o Dystopian (e.g. The Hunger Games, Divergent)
- o Historical Fantasy (e.g. These Violent Delights, Romanov, My Lady Jane)
- o I do not read young adult fiction.
- o Other: _____

Appendix C: Publishing Professional Survey Questions (Demographics)

1. **What role do you play in the publishing industry? (e.g. published author, literary agent, cover designer, art director, editor)**

2. **What size publisher do you work for? (Select all that apply)**
   o Major publisher (e.g. HarperCollins, Macmillan, Hachette Book Group, Penguin/Random House, "Big 5 publishers")
   o Mid-Sized Publisher (e.g. Quirk Books, Entangled Publishing)
   o Small Press (e.g. Enclave Publishing)
   o I have done freelance work for a major publisher
   o I have done freelance work for a mid-sized publisher
   o I have done freelance work for a small press
   o I have at least one book published by a major publisher
   o I have at least one book published by a mid-sized publisher
   o I have at least one book published by a small press
   o I am a self-published author
   o I have sold at least one book to a major publisher
   o I have sold at least one book to a mid-sized publisher
   o I have sold at least one book to a small press

3. **Which book category do you work with? (Select all that apply.)**
   o Board Books (under age 3)
   o Picture Books (ages 4-7)
   o Early Readers (early elementary age)
   o Chapter Books (ages 7-10)
   o Middle Grade (ages 8-12)
   o Young Adult (ages 13-18)
   o Adult
   o Other: _____

4. **Select the young adult fiction genres you have worked with: (select all that apply)**
   o Contemporary
   o Science Fiction
   o Fantasy
   o Urban Fantasy
   o Dystopian
   o Thriller
   o I do not work with young adult fiction
   o Other: _____

5. **How old are you?**
   - 18-20
   - 21-25
   - 26-30
   - 31-35
   - 36-40
   - 41-45
   - 56-50
   - 51+

Appendix D: Cover Design Survey Questions Given to All Participants

Book Cover Selection 1

1. **Which book cover design intrigues you the most? (selection applies to the rest of the questions in this section)**

2. **Which of the following about the selected cover design caught your attention first?**
   o Style of font(s)
   o Size of font(s)
   o Color of font(s)
   o Spacing of type
   o Placement of type
   o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
   o Colors
   o Texture
   o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
   o Other: _____

3. **Which of these is your favorite part about the selected cover design?**
   o Style of font(s)
   o Size of font(s)
   o Color of font(s)
   o Spacing of type
   o Placement of type
   o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
   o Colors
   o Texture
   o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
   o Other: _____

4. **Select all elements you enjoyed about the selected cover design.**
   o Style of font(s)
   o Size of font(s)
   o Color of font(s)
   o Spacing of type
   o Placement of type
   o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
   o Colors
   o Texture
   o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
   o Other: _____

5. **If I saw this book cover while browsing online or in person, I would click for more information or pick the book off the shelf.**
   o 1. Yes
   o 2.
   o 3.
   o 4.
   o 5. No

Book Cover Selection 2

Book Cover Selection 1

1. **Which book cover design intrigues you the most? (selection applies to the rest of the questions in this section)**

2. **Which of the following about the selected cover design caught your attention first?**
    o Style of font(s)
    o Size of font(s)
    o Color of font(s)
    o Spacing of type
    o Placement of type
    o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
    o Colors
    o Texture
    o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
    o Other: _____

3. **Which of these is your favorite part about the selected cover design?**
    o Style of font(s)
    o Size of font(s)
    o Color of font(s)
    o Spacing of type
    o Placement of type
    o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
    o Colors
    o Texture
    o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
    o Other: _____

4. **Select all elements you enjoyed about the selected cover design.**
    o Style of font(s)
    o Size of font(s)
    o Color of font(s)
    o Spacing of type
    o Placement of type
    o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
    o Colors
    o Texture
    o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
    o Other: _____

5. **If I saw this book cover while browsing online or in person, I would click for more information or pick the book off the shelf.**
    o 1. Yes
    o 2.
    o 3.
    o 4.
    o 5. No

Book Cover Selection 3

1. **Which book cover design intrigues you the most? (selection applies to the rest of the questions in this section)**

2. **Which of the following about the selected cover design caught your attention first?**
    o Style of font(s)
    o Size of font(s)
    o Color of font(s)
    o Spacing of type
    o Placement of type
    o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
    o Colors
    o Texture
    o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
    o Other: _____

3. **Which of these is your favorite part about the selected cover design?**
    o Style of font(s)
    o Size of font(s)
    o Color of font(s)
    o Spacing of type
    o Placement of type
    o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
    o Colors
    o Texture
    o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
    o Other: _____

4. **Select all elements you enjoyed about the selected cover design.**
    o Style of font(s)
    o Size of font(s)
    o Color of font(s)

- o Spacing of type
- o Placement of type
- o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
- o Colors
- o Texture
- o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
- o Other: _____

5. **If I saw this book cover while browsing online or in person, I would click for more information or pick the book off the shelf.**
   - o 1. Yes
   - o 2.
   - o 3.
   - o 4.
   - o 5. No

Book Cover Selection 4

1. **Which book cover design intrigues you the most? (selection applies to the rest of the questions in this section)**

2. **Which of the following about the selected cover design caught your attention first?**
   - o Style of font(s)
   - o Size of font(s)
   - o Color of font(s)
   - o Spacing of type
   - o Placement of type
   - o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
   - o Colors
   - o Texture
   - o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
   - o Other: _____

3. Which of these is your favorite part about the selected cover design?
o Style of font(s)
o Size of font(s)
o Color of font(s)
o Spacing of type
o Placement of type
o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
o Colors
o Texture
o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
o Other: _____

4. Select all elements you enjoyed about the selected cover design.
o Style of font(s)
o Size of font(s)
o Color of font(s)
o Spacing of type
o Placement of type
o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
o Colors
o Texture
o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
o Other: _____

5. If I saw this book cover while browsing online or in person, I would click for more information or pick the book off the shelf.
o 1. Yes
o 2.
o 3.
o 4.
o 5. No

Book Cover Selection 5

1. **Which book cover design intrigues you the most? (selection applies to the rest of the questions in this section)**

2. **Which of the following about the selected cover design caught your attention first?**
   o Style of font(s)
   o Size of font(s)
   o Color of font(s)
   o Spacing of type
   o Placement of type
   o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
   o Colors
   o Texture
   o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
   o Other: _____

3. **Which of these is your favorite part about the selected cover design?**
   o Style of font(s)
   o Size of font(s)
   o Color of font(s)
   o Spacing of type
   o Placement of type
   o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
   o Colors
   o Texture
   o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
   o Other: _____

4. **Select all elements you enjoyed about the selected cover design.**
    o Style of font(s)
    o Size of font(s)
    o Color of font(s)
    o Spacing of type
    o Placement of type
    o Composition (placement of the text, images, objects, etc.)
    o Colors
    o Texture
    o Portrayed objects, symbols, or people
    o Other: _____

5. **If I saw this book cover while browsing online or in person, I would click for more information or pick the book off the shelf.**
    o 1. Yes
    o 2.
    o 3.
    o 4.
    o 5. No