

**AN EXPLORATION OF HOW TEACHERS ARE INTEGRATING
LGBTQ+ YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE INTO THE SECONDARY
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM**

by

Brandon Schuler

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THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL
STATEMENT OF COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Dr. Tara Star Johnson, Chair

Department of English

Dr. JoAnn Phillione

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Christy Wessel Powell

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Approved by:

Dr. Janet M. Alsup

Dedicated to all of the students who need this in their lives as much as I did.

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ABSTRACT

Many local and national teaching associations and teacher preparation programs have called for the integration of LGBTQ+ Young Adult literature in the secondary English language arts classroom. However, in practice, classroom teachers continue to rely on classic, canonical works which often represent a white, cisgender male, heterosexual point of view. In choosing these canonical texts, the identities and experiences of the spectrum of LGBTQ+ students are excluded. The effects of this exclusion are harmful to both LGBTQ+ students and their peers. The purpose of this thesis is twofold: 1) explore how LGBTQ+ YA literature is currently being used in secondary English Language Arts classrooms and 2) provide a list of exemplary LGBTQ+ texts that teachers can integrate into their curriculum. In exploring these topics, I discuss various teacher hesitations in using LGBTQ+ texts in their classroom as well as successful ways teachers are currently integrating these texts into their curriculum. At the conclusion, I provide recommendations for novel selections and classroom appropriacy.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

I have always been an avid reader. Some of my earliest memories, both in and out of school, involve reading and then wanting to write my own stories. Naturally, I was the main character in the stories that I wrote, but the way I viewed myself would shift with the fiction that I was reading. I took the place of Frank and Joe Hardy of *The Hardy Boys* to solve mysteries, I survived alone on a deserted island like Brian did in *Hatchet*, and I was the chosen one at a very popular wizarding school— though, I wanted less of the drama and more to learn about various types of magic and magical creatures. I tried on identities through the texts that I would choose, and while certain pieces of characters would be a good fit, it never felt like a complete enough picture of myself. Still, I continued to love reading and made my way through many more series and standalone titles that were available in my school and public library.

Throughout my middle school education, my school participated in the Accelerated Reader program. This program measures the reading level and Lexile of a text and assigns it a number of points to reflect the reading difficulty of the text. To receive the points for a text, a five-to-ten question comprehension quiz— created by Accelerated Reader— would be administered via classroom or library computer. I was placed on the honors track throughout school, so I was expected to earn ten points every nine-week grading period. This was never an issue as I was reading anyway; however, many students struggled to attain their points. In an effort to combat this, the English teachers asked us to begin creating posters for books that we really enjoyed to give other students ideas about what to read.

During the next grading period, I found myself, for the first time in a long time, wondering which book I should read next. I remember looking over the posters that some of my friends had

made when one of them approached me to further suggest the one they had written about. My friend liked it enough to have asked for a personal copy, which he said he would let me borrow if I wanted. The book seemed interesting, and I did not have to worry about checking it out of the library, so I said yes. The next day, he handed me *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) by Stephen Chbosky. I devoured this book. The main character, Charlie, was only a year older than I at the time, and, while I could not empathize with many of the personal struggles he faced, I still saw a bit of myself reflected in his mannerisms, anxieties, and how deeply he felt emotion. However, what I noticed lacking in Charlie—and every other main character up to that point—I found fully and completely in one of Charlie's only good friends, Patrick, a high school senior who identifies as gay.

I knew that I was not interested in girls by the time that I got to sixth grade. I simply could not relate to the way my male friends would discuss their female crushes or why they placed so much emphasis on having a girlfriend. It was not until I read about Patrick in *Perks* that I realized that I, too, was gay. It was an exhilarating yet terrifying realization. I was finally able to place why I felt differently than my peers, yet I had only ever heard the word gay used in a derogatory context. Even in science classes when the term homosexual came up, the muffled laughter or outward jeering felt like an invisible weight that I had to carry. In *Perks* Patrick keeps his relationship a secret, and in my own life, I kept my relationship to LGBTQ+¹ media a secret.

Even though my late middle school years began to have a boom in the publishing of LGBTQ+ young adult novels (Lo, 2013), I still had a difficult time accessing these texts. First, I

¹ The terms that are used to talk about LGBTQ+ people are constantly evolving and extend beyond the identities referred to above. In attempting to be inclusive yet succinct, I have chosen to use the acronym LGBTQ+ as an umbrella term for all people who have non-normative gender identity or sexual orientation.

did not know where to begin to find these texts without thumbing through every selection in the school library or receiving a recommendation from a teacher or friend. Second, I could not outwardly ask for recommendations due to the fear of being outed as gay or even as someone who was even interested in reading about LGBTQ+ characters. Third, even if I were able to find these texts, I would have felt uncomfortable carrying them with me and/or taking them home for the same fears listed above.

When it came to books, I went through a years-long dry spell of not seeing myself represented. My teachers did not include texts featuring LGBTQ+ characters or even discuss possible queer readings of the texts we did have. One teacher was even offended and immediately banished the thought when a few of my classmates joked about the main characters in *A Separate Peace* (Knowles, 1959) secretly being in a relationship. For the entirety of my schooling, each of my teachers made the curricular choice to exclude LGBTQ+ identities and conversations about them.

Luckily, I was able to find some growing representation in television and film during that time that helped me begin to grow more comfortable and accepting of my own identity. When I began my undergraduate education, I chose to pursue a degree in digital media production. I was able to learn about the history of and how to produce film and television. Along the way, I took multiple courses in media criticism which really emphasized the need for broader levels of diverse representation. Our focus was on film and television, but I continued to connect to my experience of a lack of representation in the books that I read. At that point, I had come out to my close friends at college, so I began to read more books featuring LGBTQ+ books and watch more LGBTQ+ film and television. The stories that I was reading and writing, the short films that I was producing,

the artists that I worked with were— to the best of my ability— centered around the LGBTQ+ experience. I was actively creating the content that I wanted to have available after I read *Perks*.

When I eventually transitioned to teaching, my passion for this subject did not change. Later on, I will discuss some of the shortcomings of my teacher preparation program in regard to LGBTQ+ representation, but those shortcomings did not inhibit my own exploration of pedagogies that benefited LGBTQ+ students as well as how to effectively integrate these novels into my classroom. I am happy to say that I was able to consistently include LGBTQ+ topics and texts into my curriculum and classroom either through direct instruction and utilization or through my classroom library and text suggestions to my students. My first year teaching, I taught both honors and general ninth-grade. My administration at this school was supportive of me and my ideas, but I lacked the funding to pull in modern texts, and my classroom library was still developing. I leaned on the canon this year. While reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), we explored issues of race and identity as well as gender expression and expectations placed on Scout and Jem. We also discussed some of Shakespeare's sonnets in a poetry unit, and I purposefully included "Sonnet 20" as the subject of the poem can be interpreted as male which led to conversations around heteronormativity and assumed heterosexuality.

For the rest of my teaching career, I taught both honors and general seventh and eighth-grade ELA as well as Film Literature and Drama courses. My classroom library continued to grow along with the funding I was able to receive, which meant that my abilities to truly include LGBTQ+ texts in my classroom grew. I was able to utilize *Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda* (Albertalli, 2016) soon after its release with my students. I also attended conferences that grew my classroom library, and I prioritized LGBTQ+ texts so that I had as many options as possible for my students to peruse. Even if I could not use these as a class text, I was able to pull excerpts or

chapters for other lessons or as unit supports. My LGBTQ+ students were given the opportunity to see themselves reflected in the literature of our class, and their peers were able to begin or continue learning how to empathize with identities that differed from their own.

1.2 Research Questions

When it came time to choose the topic of my thesis, it seemed natural to continue the work that I have been passionately pursuing since I was a child. In my own education and while in the field as a teacher, I noticed a lack of inclusion toward LGBTQ+ identities, and I wanted to investigate why that disparity exists. As I note later on, many current and former education researchers have called for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ texts, but for various reasons, many teachers have not yet found their way into this practice. My research coalesced around the following two questions:

1. How is LGBTQ+ Young Adult (YA) Literature being used in the secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classroom?
2. What are some exemplary texts that could be used as a starting point for teachers looking to include LGBTQ+ identities in their curriculum?

To address the first question, I looked to various articles discussing LGBTQ+ YA literature texts that teachers have used successfully, seeking to understand how the teacher chose the texts that they did, for what purposes they were used, and the student outcomes or feedback. I also found various articles analyzing both pre-service and practicing teachers' reflections as to why they struggle to use LGBTQ+ texts in the classroom. These articles provided me with useful insight as I was searching through various resources to find exemplary texts that would work well in the classroom. These include lists from teachers and teacher-educator blogs, published articles, and

national organizations such as the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE), the American Library Association (ALA), and the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (ALAN).

I also want to acknowledge that I am approaching this topic as a white, male-presenting, gay person who has been able to consistently work in the field of education since receiving licensure as well as throughout my time in a graduate program. There are layers of privilege that I am afforded simply for the way that I look and the economic access that I have. I recognize these privileges and, in my endeavors, aim to ensure that the research that I have done as well as the curricular suggestions that I propose are inclusive to the many intersections of identity that exist within the LGBTQ+ community.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Case for LGBTQ+ Young Adult Literature in ELA Classrooms

Rudine Sims Bishop's article "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" (1990) plays a pivotal role in understanding the influence that diverse texts can have on readers. According to Bishop, books can play three unique roles. In one way, books are a window which allows readers to see into a world different from their own. Similarly, books can act as a sliding glass door—a portal that readers need only walk through to become a part of the author's imagined world. Lastly, books might act as a mirror in which the experiences of the characters are reflected back on the reader and can help them better understand themselves, their lives, and their experiences in relation to the world around them. Bishop's ideas in this article led to a cultural shift for those studying multicultural education and have been utilized by researchers to argue the benefits for the inclusion of texts that represent marginalized individuals. For my purposes, I am focusing on the representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ+) characters in texts and the influence that these texts can have on LGBTQ+ and cisgender heterosexual students in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms.

ELA teachers possess a unique opportunity to confront and combat homophobia and heterosexism in schools. Unfortunately, LGBTQ+ texts are often neglected in many schools' curriculum (Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Flores, 2021; Watson, 2005). When LGBTQ+ texts are included in a school's curriculum, acceptance of LGBTQ+ experiences is promoted and the identity of LGBTQ+ people is validated. Since such texts are more likely to be found in an ELA curriculum versus others, ELA teachers have a responsibility to their students to ensure that their texts are inclusive of diverse identities. In utilizing these texts, LGBTQ+ youths will see themselves reflected in the curriculum and cisgender heterosexual youth will have access to texts

that help them develop a more complex understanding of the experiences of others and bridge gaps in their knowledge and/or empathy. The texts that we choose, whether the text is explicitly used or simply displayed, take on meaning. Educational theorist Michael Apple calls these explicit or implied meanings “the official knowledge” (1993) of the classroom. As English teachers, this is reflected largely in the stories that we choose, whose voices are privileged, how we use the stories, whether or not these stories reflect the students in the classroom, and how we respond to these stories. Including LGBTQ+ voices and experiences in the curriculum speak directly to what is valued by the classroom and the teacher. Whether it is intentional or not, a lack of LGBTQ+ representation in school curricula further promotes the gender binary and assumes compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980). The inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities in school curricula helps combat these antiquated structures and establishes the idea that cisgender heterosexuality is not the natural or default state of being but one of many.

We know that in schools where the curriculum is LGBTQ+-inclusive, LGBTQ+ students feel safer, attend school more often, feel more connected to the school, and are more accepted by their peers (GLSEN, 2019). While some ELA teachers have found ways to implement LGBTQ+-themed texts in their curriculum, it is important that we remain critical of the texts that are being chosen. Too often, the stories that are chosen represent a singular view of the LGBTQ+ experience (typically that of white, male, metropolitan, and gay). In her Ted Talk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) discusses the dangers of a “single story” persisting in media. Adichie describes the negative impact that this can have on a subculture or group of people. In the case of these texts, many of the LGBTQ+ characters “were secondary, often dead or killed off during the narrative, or run out of town and separated from community and/or family” (Banks, 2009, p. 35). This “single story” might help readers develop sympathy for LGBTQ+ characters, but it also sends a message to the

reader that this is the only experience of LGBTQ+ people and that their sexuality is inherently controversial or conflicted against the larger society. This singular view limits the understanding of the LGBTQ+ experience for all involved and can further promote harmful stereotypes. It is also vital that both LGBTQ+ and cisgender heterosexual students are given the space and guidance to explore these texts and their growing understandings. While I believe that LGBTQ+ inclusion should spread beyond the ELA classroom, ELA teachers are uniquely situated to enact the necessary curricular change that effectively implementing these texts would take.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has called for educators to strengthen their knowledge of LGBTQ+ issues (NCTE, 2007) and have since continued to advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusion in schools. Part of this advocacy calls for LGBTQ+-themed texts to be utilized responsibly within the ELA classroom (NCTE, 2019). However, in practice, classroom teachers continue to rely on classic, canonical works. Texts that exist in the canon certainly have value; however, they are typically written from a white, cisgender male, heterosexual perspective and more often excludes the identities and experiences of many diverse students. It is important to note that ELA teachers can build units and choose canonical texts to read through a queer lens. For example, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), and Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) have main characters— Nick Carraway, Jake Barnes, and Holden Caulfield respectively— who can be read as homosexual (Wasiolek, 1992; Nissen, 1999; Werner, 2006). Teachers could feasibly include these texts in their curriculum with the intent to explore LGBTQ+ issues, but since these characters are not explicitly stated to be LGBTQ+, teachers would not need to explore this topic unless they chose to. The exclusion of these identities exacerbates the heteronormative structures that exist in schools. Sumara (2001) defines heteronormativity as “representing the way in which ‘heterosexual’ has become a normative

category against which all other subject positions are identified and judged” (p. 2). LGBTQ+ texts are a tool that can be utilized to disrupt this heteronormative structure and allow for students to engage with ideas and stories beyond that traditional canon.

As students may have trouble connecting to or engaging with canonical texts due to the age of the texts or the often unrelatable content within, ELA teachers should look to Young Adult (YA) literature as a way to meaningfully engage their students. YA literature is a growing category that spans many genre and subgenre styles. Proponents of YA literature have argued for the utilization of these texts in secondary ELA classrooms because of their ability to improve students’ reading skill, encourage students to read more books, provide teachers with possible books of interest to students, and provide support in the development of an inclusive curriculum (Reed, 1994; Curwood et. al, 2009; Steffel & Renzi-Keener, 2009; Dodge & Crutcher, 2015; Burke & Greenfield, 2016; Errichiello, 2019).

When LGBTQ+ readers are able to read a text that reflects their experience and interactions with the world, they can see that their identity is valued and being promoted. Cisgender heterosexual students and, depending on the text, LGBTQ+ students will also find value in these stories when acting as windows or sliding glass doors. In a position statement for the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), Michael Cart (2008) states:

[One] value of young adult literature is its capacity for fostering understanding, empathy, and compassion by offering vividly realized portraits of the lives— exterior and interior— of individuals who are unlike the reader. In this way young adult literature invites its readership to embrace the humanity it shares with those who— if not for the encounter in reading— might forever remain strangers or— worse— irredeemably ‘other.’ (Paragraph 11)

The human experience of LGBTQ+ students will likely have various similarities; however, the experience of a gay man versus a lesbian versus a transgender person will have unique attributes. Thus, a text that features a transgender person could still act as a mirror in some ways for other

LGBTQ+ readers while also acting as a window or sliding glass door in other ways. There is an ideological and educational value to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ YA literature in the classroom that teachers should not ignore.

When I began my teacher preparation program in 2014, one of the first classes that I was able to get into was young adult literature. The theme of the class was centered around teaching what my professor called ‘tough texts’, with our main course text being *Tough Talk, Tough Texts* (2011) by Cindy O’Donnell-Allen. The goal of this text is to help teachers learn how to prepare their students for conversations around various texts that brought up topics that are often considered challenging in a classroom setting (i.e. race, sex and sexuality, terminal illness, death) and utilize strategies that, hopefully, lead students to respond with empathy. I have fond memories of this class, but I look back now and recognize that there was a lack of content aimed at LGBTQ+ issues. Of the ten novels that we read in class, none of them featured a main character who identified as LGBTQ+. Thus, conversations about navigating conversations about sexuality in the classroom were solely focused on texts like *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) by Sherman Alexie which examines the coming of age experience of a cisgender heterosexual male or in texts like *The Book Thief* (2007) by Markus Zusak and *Between Shades of Gray* (2012) by Ruta Sepetys which examine the perspectives of two cisgender heterosexual female protagonists—Liesel and Lina, respectively—and their experiences during World War II. While the focus of these two novels is not on the main character’s relationships, both characters do experience varying degrees of heterosexual relationships with another character. We spent time in class discussing each of these characters’ burgeoning sexuality and how to approach these same conversations with our future students. These conversations were valuable and have since been

applicable, but with no focus on LGBTQ+ identities, the discussions were incomplete and left many others potentially unprepared to navigate them in the classroom.

As I continued through my teacher preparation program, this practice continued to hold true. In the first methods course that students take, we signed up for small-group projects to develop possible lesson ideas for a given text. Among the texts was *Boy Meets Boy* (2005) by David Levithan. This was the only text on the list that focused on LGBTQ+ identities. I, along with two of my peers, read and worked with this novel for a few weeks. The remaining students in the class focused on their own novels to complete the assignment, which meant, throughout the course of the semester, a vast majority of the students did not work with an LGBTQ+ focused text or do the thinking about their future LGBTQ+ students. In future methods courses, we kept a classroom focus on the canon while continuing to allow freedom of choice for individual practice. This meant that students were able to choose books focused on LGBTQ+ issues if they wanted to yet was not a requirement.

My experience as a student in a teacher preparation program is, of course, anecdotal, but it has been interesting to compare my own education to that of current pre-service English education students here at Purdue as well as what other pre-service teaching students are learning in various teacher preparation programs. For example, the requirements for an English education degree at Purdue includes Young Adult literature (YAL). In this course, students read a variety of novels from different genres. The current syllabus for Purdue's YAL class has a total of seven required texts (Pacheco, 2020). Two of the texts—*Nimona* (Stevenson, 2012) and *Spinning Silver* (Novik, 2018)—have varying levels of LGBTQ+ representation in them. Neither *Spinning Silver* nor *Nimona* has any outright LGBTQ+ characters; however, there are characters in each who are queer-coded, and the narratives pushed back against some harmful tropes that exist in media. So,

while it is not great or what I would call an exemplary LGBTQ+ text, it has the potential to bring about useful conversations surrounding LGBTQ+ issues. The integration of these texts and the various topics that could come from a class discussion could serve as a reference for how they could handle LGBTQ+ topics in their future classrooms.

2.2 Mental/Physical Health Risks Among LGBTQ+ Youth

Starting in 1999, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has been committed to gathering data about the lives and experiences of LGBTQ+ youth. Every two years, GLSEN analyzes and reports on LGBTQ+ issues in education in an effort to support LGBTQ+ youth and provide necessary interventions. The most recent report was completed in 2019, and, while the trends of violence, harassment, and feelings of safety have generally slowed down, they are still at unacceptable levels across the nation. Each year, the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) publishes a report called “Accelerating Acceptance” that measures the United States' acceptance and attitude toward LGBTQ+ people. The report from 2020 shows that citizens of the United States are more accepting of LGBTQ+ people and knowledgeable about LGBTQ+ issues than they have been in previous years (GLAAD, 2020), and I believe that the 2021 GLSEN report will support this when it is released.

I compiled data from the GLSEN report into three separate charts (See Figures 1, 2, and 3 below). Each chart corresponds to the categories listed above. Figure 1 represents the varying levels of safety that LGBTQ+ students felt being at school due to their sexual orientation (59.1%) or gender expression (42.5%) and whether that caused them to miss school due to said fears (32.7% missed at least one day while 8.6% missed four or more). Figure 2 displays the percentage of students who indirectly heard their peers use homophobic remarks (95.2% - 98.8%) or teachers and/or school staff using homophobic remarks (52.4%). Lastly, Figure 3 shows the percentage of

students who were direct targets of verbal harassment (68.7%), physical harassment (25.7%), physical assault (11%). It also shows the number of students who cited harassment but decided not to report it (56.6%), and it shows the number of students who cited harassment and received no action from their teacher and/or administrators (60.5%). As mentioned above, these troubling statistics often lead to students missing school more frequently than their peers. It also leads to lower educational aspirations and decreased academic success.

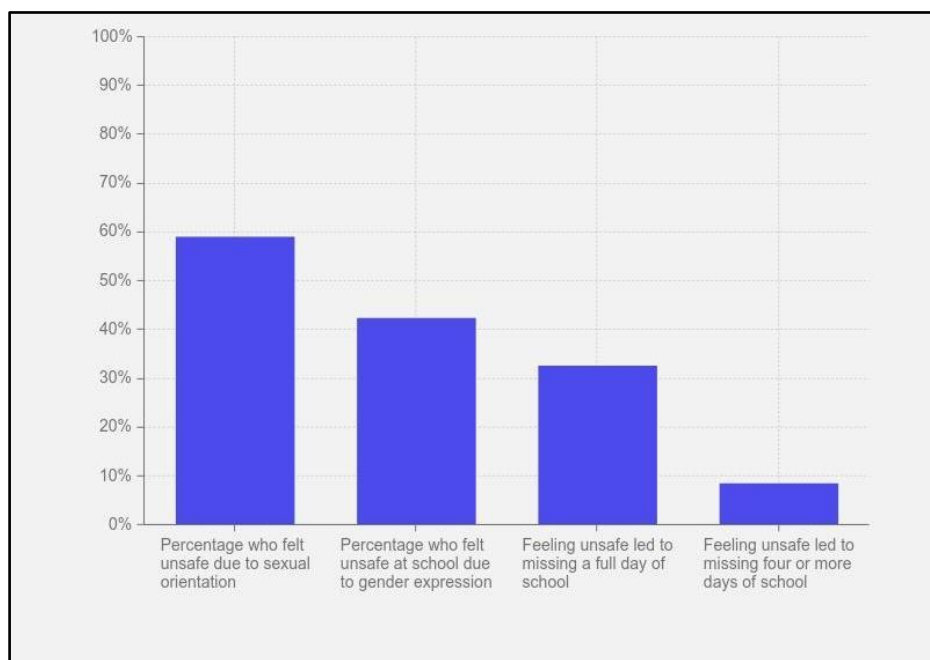


Figure 1: Feelings of Safety

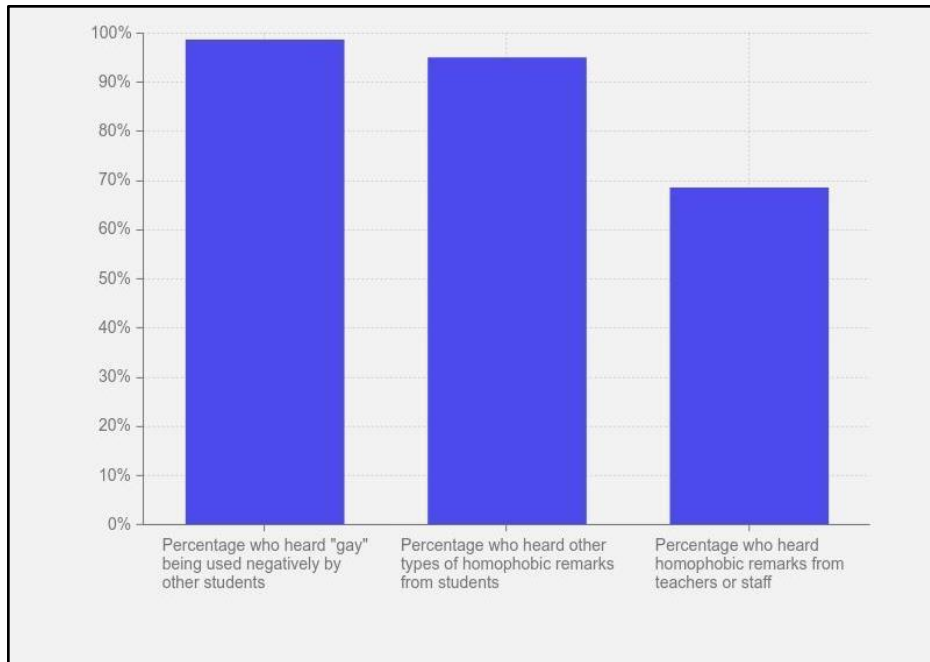


Figure 2: Hearing Homophobic Remarks

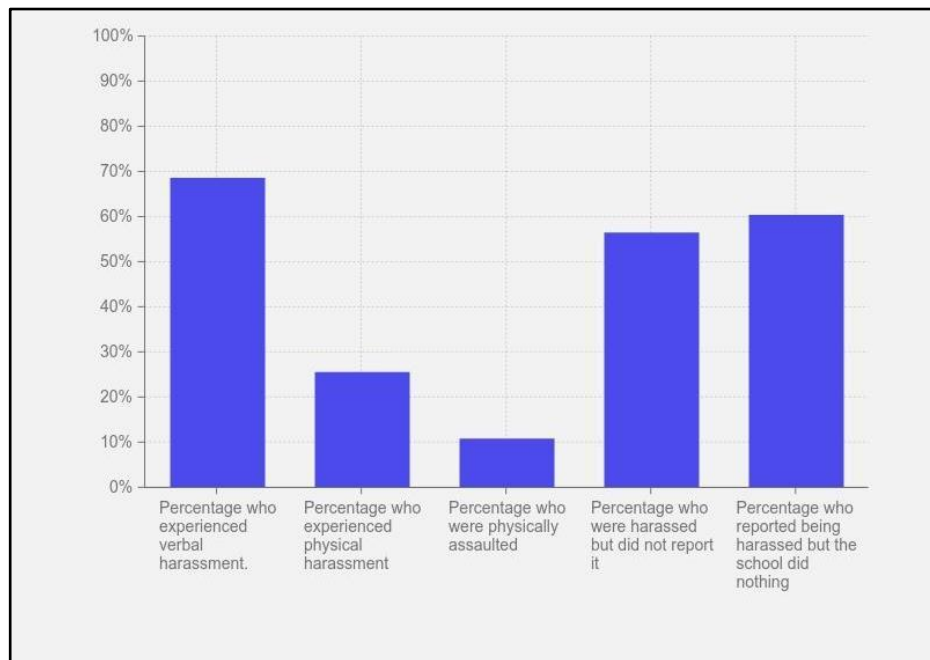


Figure 3: Verbal and/or Physical Harassment/Assault

The report also touches on the availability of resources to LGBTQ+ students. Nearly half of students said that they could find information about LGBTQ+ issues in their school library (more if they had internet access at home). However, only 19.4 percent of students reported learning about positive representations of LGBTQ+ people, history, or events. When schools implement and uphold policies that include and protect LGBTQ+ students, those students excel. In fact, LGBTQ+ students without these supports led to lower academic achievement and school engagement (lower grade point average, higher likelihood of failing a class, and less positive feelings towards teachers or school in general) when compared to their peers (Pearson, Muller & Wilkinson, 2007). This point further emphasizes the need for a more inclusive curriculum.

While my focus is mainly aimed at LGBTQ+ students in schools, I would be remiss if I did not include important statistics that affect these students outside of school as well. According to a national survey conducted by the True Colors Fund, 1.6 million youth experience homelessness each year and up to 40 percent of them identify as LGBTQ+ (The Cost of Coming Out, n.d.). When we take into consideration that the LGBTQ+ youth population is much smaller, this statistic reveals that a disproportionate amount of LGBTQ+ youth are experiencing homelessness when compared to their peers. LGBTQ+ youth are also more likely to become homeless at younger ages (Brown, 2013). There are many reasons that can LGBTQ+ youth might find themselves in a situation of homelessness, but the most critical factors are conflicts within their family.

Half of all teens get a negative reaction from their parents when they come out (The Cost of Coming Out, n.d.). The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) supports this finding as well as mentioning that more than one in four LGBTQ+ youth are forced to leave their homes after coming out to their parents, and 68 percent of teens have experienced family rejection after

coming out to their family (LGBTQ Youth National Policy Statement, 2012). According to the same report, without the support of their families, LGBTQ+ homeless youth are at higher risk for mental health issues, substance abuse, crime, and victimization. The Center for American Progress' Seeking Shelter report found that "42 percent of gay homeless youth abuse alcohol compared to 27 percent of heterosexual youth" (Cray, Miller & Durso, 2013, p. 18-19). Fifty-eight percent of LGBTQ+ homeless youth also report having been sexually victimized. The Seeking Shelter report continues and mentions that LGBTQ+ youth and the juvenile justice system are "undeniably intertwined" (p. 12). These youth who end up being homeless often find themselves in a cycle of incarceration due to the criminality of homelessness and the lack of support for them—either parental or otherwise— when they are no longer in the juvenile justice system.

Feelings of isolation along with a lack of social support either in the home, at school, or in both environments have contributed to LGBTQ+ youth contemplating and/or attempting suicide at higher rates than their peers. LGBTQ+ youth who come from highly rejecting families are 8.4 times as likely to have attempted suicide than LGBTQ+ youth who reported no or low levels of family rejection (Family Acceptance Project, 2009). These youth who experience varying levels of family rejection might also be at risk for their family seeking out conversion therapy. While conversion therapy has been banned in twenty U.S. states as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, there still is a long way to go. In 2018, The Family Acceptance Project found that LGBTQ+ youth whose parents tried to change their sexual orientation attempted suicide at a rate that almost doubled (48%) those whose parents did not. For LGBTQ+ youth whose parents attempted both home-based and out-of-home efforts to change their sexual orientation, suicide attempts nearly tripled (63%) those who had done neither. The rates of depression in these youth

more than doubled, and they also grew up to experience lower socioeconomic status, less educational attainment, and lower weekly income (Family Acceptance Project, 2018).

In 2016, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found that LGBTQ+ youth were three times more likely to seriously contemplate suicide and five times as likely to have actually attempted suicide when compared to their peers (CDC, 2016). That same report goes on to say that of all the suicide attempts made by LGBTQ+ youth were almost five times as likely to require medical treatment than those of their peers and four to six times more likely to result in injury, poison, or overdose. Youth who identify as transgender are even more at risk. In 2015, the National Center for Transgender Equality found that forty percent of transgender adults have attempted suicide, and ninety-two percent of those individuals had done so before the age of twenty-five (Herman, Rankin, Keisling, Mottet, & Anafi, 2016). It was also found that LGBTQ+ youth who experienced various types of victimization, such as physical or verbal harassment, increases the chance of them engaging in self-harming behavior by 2.5 times the average (Impact, 2010).

Developing and implementing curricula that are inclusive and supportive of LGBTQ+ identities is a necessary and important step toward building empathy and acceptance among their peers. These statistics show that school and home life can be an incredible challenge for LGBTQ+ youth. Thus, schools need to implement and uphold necessary policies that protect LGBTQ+ students, and ELA teachers must use their position to support and sustain LGBTQ+ identities through their curricular choices.

2.3 Classification Systems

Cart and Jenkins (2006) developed a categorical system to classify YA fiction specific to LGBTQ+ content. These two were the first to develop any such system. Bishop's (1982) work in categorizing African American children's literature served as a source of inspiration for their

classification system. Cart and Jenkins hoped to “create a model specific to GLTBQ content in YA fiction using category descriptors that reflect post-Stonewall GLBTQ history and experience to describe the evolution of YA literature with GLBTQ content from 1969 through 2004” (p. xix). The categories that they developed were: homosexual visibility (HV), gay assimilation (GA), and queer consciousness/community (QC).

These categories follow a sort of developmental chronology where HV books represented the 1970s and 1980s, GA the 1990s, and QC the early 21st century. While this chronology helps to distinguish the certain eras where these books were more prevalent, the classification system becomes more useful when the concepts of the categories are fleshed out. In books categorized as HV, a character will typically come out or be outed as part of the “dramatic substance” of the story (2006, p. xx²). GA books will feature characters who “just happen” to be gay, while adding little other substance to the story (p. xx). Lastly, QC books represents “GLTBQ characters in the context of their communities of GLTBQ people and their families of choice,” meaning that there are multiple characters who identify as LGBTQ+ who support each other in some way (p. xx). Blackburn et al. (2015) further expanded these categories— homosexual visibility, gay assimilation, and queer consciousness— by adding Queer (Q) in which characters in these books “experience sexual identity fluidly or express gender in multiple ways, or in which norms are disrupted” but not necessarily within a larger group of LGBTQ+ characters (p. 18). The new Queer category was developed in response to the expanding definition of LGBTQ+ identities as well as a way to represent more than one gender or sexual identity being represented in a given young adult novel; however, this new category does not only apply to texts from 2006–2015 when

² This reference comes from the introduction of the text, so the Roman numerals xx for pagination are correct throughout.

Blackburn et al. were developing their system. The Q category is able to be applied to texts from any time as long as they fit the established criteria. For example, Blackburn et al. identified the text *Fun Home* (2006) by Alison Bechdel as HV and Q, while listing the texts *Written on the Body* (1994) by J. Winterson, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948) by Truman Capote, and *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker solely as Queer.

While Cart and Jenkins looked at these texts with focus on various LGBTQ+ identities, the literature itself was not widely representative of LGBTQ+ people. Early books featuring LGBTQ+ people more often featured white, cisgender, homosexual, males than other LGBTQ+ identities. These texts were more likely to fall into the HV category, and while that visibility was important, the stories themselves often focused on similar plots or themes.

More recently, LGBTQ+ characters have been better represented as protagonists, acting as more accurate mirrors for LGBTQ+ readers and giving others a chance to develop empathy and recognize the breadth of interests and experiences within the community. However, it is important to remain vigilant about the texts that are being highlighted or promoted in various contexts but more specifically in the classroom. Blackburn and Buckley (2005) noticed that in situations where only a few texts were being chosen, the representation in those texts often placed LGBTQ+ characters in pitiable positions. For example, they saw an instance where the poem “How to Watch Your Brother Die” (Lassell, 1969) and the movie *Philadelphia* (Demme, 2000) were paired in a unit, and both show the experiences of a gay man who is dying of AIDS as the sole representation of LGBTQ+ experiences. Both texts are great pieces and have value, but when this might be the only visible representation of LGBTQ+ people, it sends a harmful message that same-sex desire is synonymous with HIV/AIDS and that it affects men specifically.

2.4 Teacher Hesitations

When ELA teachers introduce LGBTQ+ literature, it is not uncommon for those texts to be shown in isolation. However, we know that these texts should be continually offered and threaded throughout a curriculum. By doing so, we disrupt the thought that LGBTQ+ identities are undervalued, abnormal, or separate from the mainstream. This level of inclusion helps LGBTQ+ readers to “engage, participate, and identity themselves as readers and writers” (Vetter, 2010, p. 106). This also encourages equity and empathy for all students. Utilizing LGBTQ+ texts in the classroom, encouraging them for student projects, and/or having them available in a classroom library shows a commitment to inclusive representation and respect for LGBTQ+ people and their experiences.

Throughout my research, I realized that there is not a canon of LGBTQ+ texts in place. However, there were a few texts that were listed on various blogs, articles, and recommended lists from national organizations more consistently than others. While my focus is on the secondary ELA classroom, there were a couple of children’s books—*And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson & Parnell, 2005), *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Newman, 1989)—that consistently caught my eye. For all the reasons that it is important to integrate LGBTQ+ texts with older students, it is just as important that they are introduced to younger students as well. In *Reading the Rainbow*, Caitlin Ryan and Jill Hermann-Wilmarth (2018) discuss the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusivity in the elementary classroom. The authors cite Bishop’s windows and mirrors idea and suggest that texts chosen at this level facilitate conversations around “connecting to the diverse families in your classroom and school... responding to instances of bullying... [and] discussing LGBTQ-related events” (p. 23). Students in this age group mentioned that they experience bullying for “not conforming to gender norms... or ‘acting gay’” (p. 22). Students at this age are making connections and forming ideas about LGBTQ+ people and identities even if the adults in their lives may not

recognize it. We also know that picture books and children's literature can be used as a means to introduce or scaffold more complex subjects, which means these texts also have a place in the secondary classroom (Marsh, 2010). By integrating LGBTQ+ texts into the classroom, these students will have a structured setting to discuss their ideas and learn from each other.

The texts I found commonly listed at the secondary level include: *Boy Meets Boy* (Levithan, 2003), *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (Sáenz, 2012), and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (Green, 2010). These texts stood out during my research as they fell into the young adult category of fiction, which I think are better suited to the classroom for student engagement and connection. That is not to say that the traditional canon cannot be utilized if necessary. Popular canonical texts such as *The Color Purple* (Walker, 1982), *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Williams, 1955), and various Shakespearean texts could be used to explore and discuss LGBTQ+ themes and experiences. Still, with possible selections from the popular canon of texts, and a growing list of modern LGBTQ+ YA literature, it is troubling that so few of these texts are being utilized consistently in ELA curricula.

There are various concerns surrounding the use of LGBTQ+ YA literature. These concerns range from “pro-LGBTQ+” teachers who are afraid to use texts in their classroom (Thein, 2013) to teachers who fear a lack of knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues will hinder their instruction (Kuo & Alsup, 2010). In her research, Amanda Thein surveyed twenty practicing teachers in a master's level multicultural literature course about their comfort using or discussing LGBTQ+ texts and issues in their classrooms. Thein's study indicated that:

Most of the discussion engaged by most of the participants concluded that LGBT texts could not or should not be taught in the language arts classroom, even though most of the participants had neutral or positive stances toward LGBT people and issues. (p. 172)

In this circumstance, the word ‘most’ points to a majority percentage of responses across different grade level groupings— 73 percent of elementary teachers, 66 percent of middle school teachers, and 75% of high school teachers— gave negative claims or arguments as justification. When Thein analyzed the responses, she recognized a pattern of six concerns that these teachers discussed.

Some teachers feared whether it was appropriate to discuss LGBTQ+ issues in the classroom, thinking that LGBTQ+ issues immediately equated to also teaching about or having to discuss sex. Many others feared backlash or protest from the public or “ambiguous, unnamed ‘others’” (Thein, 2013, p. 173) in the political or religious space. Some teachers also feared that their students would protest or not be mature enough to handle conversations about LGBTQ+ issues. A few feared that their job would be in danger were they to teach LGBTQ+ texts. At the time of publication, marriage equality had not been passed— though, the now present legality of marriage equality has not deterred some fears of job loss (Page, 2017)— so the teachers felt justified in their concern of being fired.

Similarly, Woods and Harbeck (1992) found that many teachers, even those with LGBTQ+ identities themselves, chose to prioritize their teacher identity over their LGBTQ+ identity or activism. In their minds, these two may not always be able to coexist which led to “fear of professional repercussions... [or] personal danger and financial ruin” (p. 124). It is also important to note that many students may also hold similar fears. LGBTQ+ students and their supportive peers or those who are part of LGBTQ+ families may also feel pressure and fear when discussing LGBTQ+ issues. LGBTQ+ students may fear being outed through discussion of this content, and their peers may feel that there are social ramifications for supporting LGBTQ+ that they are not ready to face (Gilligan, 2015).

Another common concern was that teaching LGBTQ+ issues would end up doing more harm than it could do good. Perhaps that it would exacerbate any existing bullying or incite more students to use harmful language. Some who claimed this mentioned that they do not bring up or mention when an author they are reading is openly homosexual or has been read consistently through a queer lens. Many noted that “in an ideal world” (Thein, 2013, p. 175) they would be able to teach these texts or discuss these ideas, but the reality, for them, is imagined as more harmful than beneficial. Some teachers also claimed that it would not be fair to discuss LGBTQ+ issues or read these texts as it shows support for LGBTQ+ people, which might go against various religious beliefs, so integrating these texts and discussions in the classroom might be misconstrued as disrespectful to said religious beliefs.

In a similar study, Michelle Page (2017) of the University of Minnesota conducted a survey of 577 of the state’s English language arts teachers about their comfort level integrating literature with LGBTQ+ themes or characters into their curricula and classroom (Page, 2017, p. 3). The way these hesitations manifest is, of course, specific to the teacher, but reasons such as the teacher’s age and experience, religious beliefs, the school’s geographic setting or demographic, and lack of knowledge pertaining to LGBTQ+ issues and/or resources gave teachers pause.

Page found that, in general, “the older the teacher, the lesser the comfort level” (2017, p. 5) in regard to using or promoting LGBTQ+ literature. More experienced teachers are also confident and comfortable in their text selection, which meant that they were less likely to accept guidance toward newer texts or ideas. Younger teachers tended to also be less aware of the resources that were available to them through the library than their older peers. So, even if younger teachers were more intent on integrating LGBTQ+ texts into their curriculum, they were less likely to know where to begin.

Like Thein's study, Page also found that religion played a role in her survey as well. Eighty-nine percent of those surveyed aligned themselves to a religion. Those who held strong religious beliefs were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the integration or discussion of LGBTQ+ texts. However, Page found that simply having a religious faith was not enough on its own to affect the teacher's comfort level. Where the connection does exist, it depends on if a given religious faith has a day-to-day impact on the teacher's life. Those whose religion had a higher day-to-day impact felt less comfortable while those with lower day-to-day impact felt more comfortable. I think it is also important to note that "more than half of all respondents (53.4%) agreed that they would feel more comfortable integrating LGBT literature into their teaching if they had more guidance in selecting such texts" (Page, 2017, p. 6). Naturally, the teachers who held stronger religious beliefs or whose religions had more day-to-day impact were not interested in any additional guidance, but seeing that more than half were willing to adapt and accept guidance even though it may conflict with their religious beliefs felt like a step in the right direction.

The size of the community where the teachers worked also played a role in their hesitancy. Teachers who worked in larger communities— defined in this study as greater than 25,000 residents— were more likely to be comfortable integrating or discussing LGBTQ+ texts. Similarly, those who worked in larger schools— more than 1,000 students— had higher comfort levels. Inversely, teachers who worked in smaller communities or in more rural schools with fewer students felt less comfortable with the idea of integrating LGBTQ+ issues. Teachers in urban settings were almost "twice as likely to report a higher comfort level" (Page, 2017, p. 7) with discussing LGBTQ+ texts or issues. Rural teachers also cited being less aware of LGBTQ+ texts and issues as a whole whereas teachers in both urban and suburban settings expressed higher levels of comfort using LGBTQ+ texts. According to the survey "28% of suburban and 46% of urban

respondents reported using LGBT literature in the classroom” (p. 7). While teachers in rural areas trended lower on comfort levels regarding LGBTQ+ texts and issues, the survey still indicated that 18 percent of rural teachers were using LGBTQ+ literature. The ways in which these teachers are using the literature in their class is not specified, but I think the fact that nearly twenty percent of the teachers in a rural context felt comfortable enough to have LGBTQ+ texts in their classroom in some capacity shows promise for increasing their comfort in the future.

The last major hesitation that Page noted was related to the teacher's general insecurities toward the topic. In the survey, around 60 percent of teachers expressed comfort integrating or discussing LGBTQ+ issues; however, through other responses, we see that “a significantly smaller portion of them were actually doing so” (p. 7). Less than 25 percent of all teachers surveyed claimed to use LGBTQ+ literature in their class. Among those who chose not to use LGBTQ+ literature, the most common reason was due to potential pushback from parents or other community members, followed by lack of awareness or education about LGBTQ+ texts or a lack of budget or resources to purchase texts. Lastly, some teachers stated that teaching LGBTQ+ texts went against their value system. These hesitations existed in urban, suburban, and rural contexts, but they were more common amongst the teachers in rural areas.

Beyond these hesitations, school administration and library staff can also act as gatekeepers for LGBTQ+ YA literature inclusion (Booth & Narayan, 2018; Gower et al., 2017; Steck & Perry, 2015). The curricular planning process varies from school to school. I have worked in a school where I was the sole planner for the ninth-grade English classes, and I have worked in a school that had an established curriculum when I was hired. In either scenario, there was influence from outside pressures— other English teachers, administrators to consider, library/budgetary resources— that had a level of influence over the decisions I, and other ELA teachers, had to make.

In school systems where teachers may not have financial access to procure newer classroom sets of novels, they often rely on the library to provide students with a variety of diverse resources. Librarians have their own set of requirements and tasks to uphold within a school system, but one of those tasks is seeking out and maintaining upkeep of the books that are available to students. However, if a librarian holds bias toward LGBTQ+ people, they are unlikely to request these books for the library. Even at the request of teachers, they may stand their ground and hold to their personal beliefs or biases (Booth & Narayan, 2018). If this is the case, then these teachers are at an even greater disadvantage and may give up altogether for fear of challenging the established norms.

The role of administrators in this process can also influence the action of teachers. Administrators who are not supportive of inclusive policies in the classroom can direct teachers to make curricular changes. Clearly, the weight of this request would be heavy on any teacher, as any decision counter to what the administrators are asking could lead to a potential loss of employment within that school system. Having administrative support is also key in gaining and maintaining the support of the community as well. If the community holds issue with an inclusive curriculum, but the administration sees the value, then teachers have less to worry about. There might still be obstacles that the teacher will face, but a supportive administration will help to knock down many barriers and alleviate various fears (Gower et al., 2017; Steck & Perry, 2015).

A lack of knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues or how to find appropriate resources is also a common problem among ELA teachers. Many teacher preparation programs offer courses that discuss how to teach YA literature. However, the list of texts for a given class seems to vary depending on the professor. For example, Batchelor, Ramos, and Neiswander (2018) and Greathouse and Diccio (2018) wrote about working with pre-service teachers and exclusively

discussing LGBTQ+ texts while Kaywell (2001) and Santoli and Wagner (2004) focus on the genre of YA literature as a whole for their class. For the latter two, it means that their booklist also attempts to represent a spectrum of topics and experiences. While I believe that it is important to expose pre-service teachers to various types of YA literature that explore more diversity than just LGBTQ+ identities, the potential issue of a professor choosing not to include texts with LGBTQ+ identities represented exists. I mentioned earlier that this was the case in my own teacher preparation program's YA literature course. If this is the case, then pre-service teachers may find themselves entering the classroom with no exposure to LGBTQ+ YA literature or ideas about how to teach it, which could halt them from taking that step at all.

Each of the reasons given by the participants in these studies are harmful to LGBTQ+ students for various reasons. Ultimately, it others LGBTQ+ identities for the comfort of a more societally accepted point of view. Choosing not to attempt to combat the existing and harmful heteronormative structures as well as the gender binary. Even if in their personal lives teachers are outwardly supportive of LGBTQ+ identities or express anti-homophobic sentiments, if they are also holding an anti-stance toward teaching LGBTQ+ texts or discussing such issues, then they become complacent in their allyship which ends up actually being harmful to the LGBTQ+ students in their classes and schools.

2.5 How LGBTQ+ Texts Are Typically Used

In another section of her same study, Page (2017) asked the teachers in her survey who said they do use LGBTQ+ YAL in their classroom (around 52%) *how* they chose to integrate it. The most common integration of LGBTQ+ texts in the classroom was through student pleasure or choice reading from either the school library or a classroom library. Second to that was teachers using texts that emphasize themes like diversity, friendship, or family but are not explicitly

LGBTQ+. Third involved using texts that were already part of the school’s curriculum and using a lens of gender to analyze them. Fourth was the use of LGBTQ+ texts to explore the topic of bullying. The last reason given was that teachers were intentionally exploring and addressing the idea of sexual orientation. I adapted these data into a chart for visual representation. (See Figure 4 for full details). These data are consistent with Page’s other findings and teacher attitudes and fears toward LGBTQ+ text integration. Whether it is fear or an implicit or explicit bias, the teachers in this survey were more comfortable with students reading LGBTQ+ texts on their own time rather than having LGBTQ+ texts as a support or anchor text.

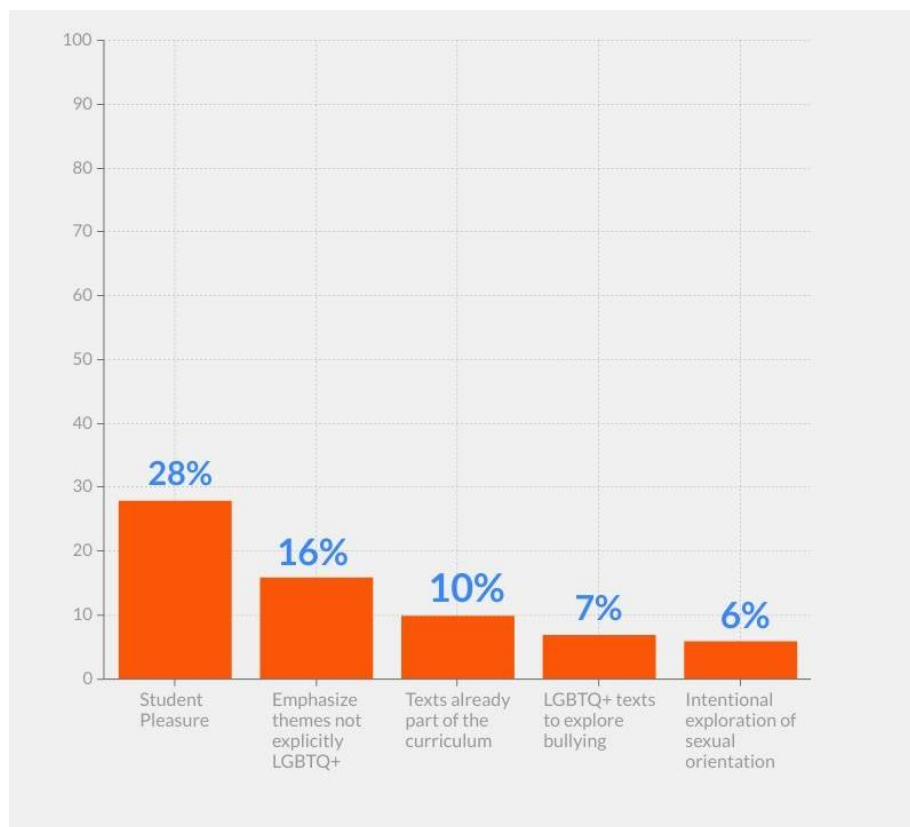


Figure 4: Teachers' Use of LGBTQ+ Texts

Page's research was unique in my review of literature in that it included such a large number of participants. However, many teacher researchers have chosen to write about their methods and successes or failures utilizing LGBTQ+ texts in the classroom. These qualitative studies offer a more nuanced perspective and provide more practical ideas for the classroom. For example, Henry "Cody" Miller (2019) writes about his experiences integrating LGBTQ+ texts in his own classroom and providing mentorship to his peers in an effort to have them feel comfortable doing the same. He suggests adopting "institutionally approved" (p. 6) language within a school's given initiative in order to frame these texts as mission-aligned. From there, he was able to include Sara Farizan's *If You Could Be Mine* (2013) and Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012) into a unit of his. His actions led to his colleagues feeling comfortable incorporating LGBTQ+ texts in their classroom since they were already within the bounds of institutional approval. Miller also worked with new colleagues across his district and across grade level to integrate LGBTQ+ texts throughout the school experience. His ninth-grade students would choose texts and read them in classrooms for kindergarten to fifth-grade. Lastly, he also mentored preservice teachers, who expressed "resistance and trepidation... while vocalizing the importance of such texts" (Miller, 2019, p. 7). Miller helped them develop standards-based rationales for their future classrooms in an effort to alleviate the fears they expressed. Miller's impact was seen throughout the school in just a few short years. More and more of the teachers in his school felt comfortable utilizing LGBTQ+ texts in their classroom, which meant there was more visibility on and conversations about these texts across the grade levels.

Kate Kedley and Jenna Spierling (2017) are teachers and teacher educators who also wrote about their experience using LGBTQ+ texts in their classroom. Specifically, they wanted to dispel

myths around gender and sexuality through use of LGBTQ+ graphic novels. *Adrian and the Tree of Secrets* by Hubert Joly (2014) was used to discuss the connection between gender and sexuality. The main character, Adrian, is mocked for his physical appearance as his peers compare his physique to that of a girl's. The gendering of his physique— and his peers using this to presume Adrian's homosexuality— is problematic for any person whose body, appearance, or gender expression do not fit within the boundaries of societal norms. Kedley and Spierling also use *Honor Girl* by Maggie Thrash (2017) to address this myth. This time, the protagonist, Maggie, faces criticism from peers when she decides to cut her hair short, similar to the boys. Again her peers conflate her gender and sexuality, presuming that since she has short hair, she must be a lesbian. However, we know that a person's appearance of outward expression cannot reliably be used to assume someone's gender or sexuality. By addressing this myth in the classroom, ELA teachers can help students understand that gender and sexuality are not inextricably connected.

Kedley and Spierling also address the myth that gender and sexual identities are permanent and fixed. However, the social definition of gender and sexuality have changed over time and can also be presented differently in different cultures or contexts (Butler, 1990; Marcus, 2005). In *Adrian*, the main character gets caught kissing another boy. The boy he kisses is a traditionally masculine guy. However, because of the way he looks and acts, his peers pigeonhole him into only ever being homosexual, but this other boy who kisses Adrian is masculine and has only kissed girls before this, so he is presumed to only be heterosexual. Similarly, in *Honor Girl*, when Maggie makes the decision to cut her hair, her peers believe she can no longer believe in any ambiguity with her sexuality. Since she is a girl with short hair, she must be a lesbian, and since it was visible to her peers, they will always believe it to be true. Again, we know this is not true, and we know that gender and sexuality are not permanent or fixed, but ELA teachers can use these— or

similar— texts to have this discussion with their students and get them to challenge their existing beliefs about gender and sexuality.

Lastly, Kedley and Spierling address the myth of what they call, *heterotrajectory*. They define this term as, “the assumed path (or trajectory) a character takes in a society that values heterosexuality” (Kedley & Spierling, 2017, p. 58). In other words, there are a series of societally imposed and understood steps that people will take as they grow such as falling in love with an individual of the opposite sex, getting married, and then having children. Anyone, regardless of gender or sexuality, can break from these norms, but there are often societal judgements for doing so. LGBTQ+ people may also have a harder time following these specific steps due to fears of coming out or societally imposed boundaries such as parental and/or adoption rights. In *Adrian*, Adrian’s mother is talking to his aunt about him and casually mentions that she hopes he will visit her when he has kids. His aunt questions whether he wants kids, but Adrian’s mother cannot imagine a reality where someone does not want to have kids. Adrian is not included in this conversation, so we do not get to hear how he feels about the subject. In *Honor Girl*, Maggie’s peers decide that she would be an easy match with a boy from a nearby camp. He likes to shoot rifles, and Maggie likes to shoot rifles, so the girls all take that shared interest and pair them together deciding then and there that they will have babies who like to shoot rifles as well. When it comes to the topic of heterotrajectory, an issue that LGBTQ+ youth might face is that they may not follow the assumed path. The coming out process is a prominent example of this experience—commonly with parents or guardians and other family members. There is a level of fear attached to this process that deals directly with rejection based on an individual’s identity. Due to ideas like heterotrajectory, family and friends might struggle to come to terms with what the life of an LGBTQ+ person could look like. We know that their lives can be as full and beautiful as that of

their peers, but since it goes against a norm, or the assumed path, it can be a cause of trouble or disconnect. ELA teachers exploring this idea could talk to their students about societal expectations that they recognize are being placed on them or what happens when they have tried to deviate from the traditional path.

Page (2017), Miller (2019), and Kedley and Spiering (2017) all took their research into the classroom to explore what ELA teachers are doing with LGBTQ+ texts or how they approach teaching them. However, the majority of scholarship on this topic comes in the form of suggestions or ideas about *how* to go about integrating LGBTQ+ texts in the classroom. Wickens and Wedwick (2011) wrote about the growing need for LGBTQ+ texts in the classroom, the evolution of LGBTQ+ YAL, and then gave a series of text suggestions based on themes that often fit with LGBTQ+ YAL (e.g. Truth Telling, Family Conflicts, Bullying). In another article, Crawley and Donovan (2020) wrote about an array of topics such as: creating an inclusive classroom, helping preservice teachers understand the value of these texts, strategically selecting texts, how to talk to parents or guardians, and how to find additional resources. This is, of course, valuable as teachers should actively be thinking about how to best serve their LGBTQ+ students. However, it is troubling that there are so many suggestions on *how* to effectively and meaningfully integrate LGBTQ+ texts into the ELA classroom, yet so few accounts of practicing teachers putting these ideas into action.

One of my goals in researching this topic was to understand how current ELA teachers are using LGBTQ+ texts in the classroom and what might be stopping them from doing more. I believe that a lack of experience with said texts, a lack of reliable resources, and a lack of training present teachers with another challenge in a profession that already has many challenges. Ultimately, I would like for this to serve as a stepping stone into further research that would allow me to begin

working in the classroom with teachers to develop strategies and practices that will help them begin or better integrate LGBTQ+ texts into their classrooms. For now, my hope is that the latter portion of this research project might act as an introductory guide to texts that pre-service and practicing ELA teachers can utilize to help them in their journey toward a more LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

In an effort to cultivate a list of exemplary LGBTQ+ YA literature with diverse authors, characters, and genres, I took notes while reading through various research articles and course syllabi. Using an internet search engine, I looked through the first five pages of results (50 results in total), specifically seeking out YAL courses designed for undergraduate students. From the first five pages, I was able to find 26 unique syllabi fitting these criteria. Of these 26 syllabi, I narrowed the list down to ten that I felt accurately reflect the levels of representation undergraduate students might expect to receive from a YAL course. None of the syllabi listed whether the course was a degree requirement for education students. All of the courses were instructed by professionals with Ph.D.s save for one course that was taught by two individuals with master's degrees in library science.

Three of the ten syllabi did not include any LGBTQ+ texts at all (Warner, 2008; Wood & Crawford, 2013; Oral Roberts University, 2014). One syllabus featured an LGBTQ+ text, but it was in a grouping of other optional texts, which meant that it is possible no students read that text (Johnson, 2016). Two syllabi featured a single text with LGBTQ+ representation (Thompson, 2008; White, 2016). One of the ten had one required LGBTQ+ text with an additional, optional LGBTQ+ text (McHaney, 2007). Two syllabi had two required LGBTQ+ texts listed on them (Cooper, n.d.; Schloesser Tárano, 2016). Lastly, there was one syllabus that had three required texts listed that involved LGBTQ+ characters (Foster, 2016).

A majority of the syllabi gave students a chance to interact with at least one LGBTQ+ text throughout the semester. However, of the seven syllabi that did feature LGBTQ+ texts, six of the seven featured stories about white, gay, cisgender males, with the other being written about a Latinx, gay, cisgender male. Two of the texts featured white, transgender males as main characters,

and one of the texts featured a lesbian character. While it is nice to see that syllabi seem to be frequently including LGBTQ+ texts, the levels of diversity within those texts is disheartening. Featuring mostly (or solely) white, gay, cisgender males speaks to the idea of a “single story narrative” (Adichie, 2009) that I mentioned above. When we introduce LGBTQ+ texts pre-service teachers, we should also remember to maintain a critical lens of the texts we feature as not to limit the backgrounds or cultural differences of the characters in these novels. By modeling this behavior— and discussing the thought process behind these choices— we hope that they will maintain this critical lens in their own text selection as they move into the field as practicing teachers.

I also found many of my research articles via internet search engine; however, I also utilized the references within these articles as ways to continue exploring each concept. Through reading these articles and syllabi, I was able to find many LGBTQ+ YA texts that I was not familiar with but still interested in exploring for these purposes. I am also an avid reader of this category in my own time, so I have a few blogs and social media pages bookmarked that I referred to. Also, the research that I read from Mollie Blackburn and her colleagues as well as blogs recommended through organizations such as NCTE and the ALA were particularly helpful in my search.

Looking through these resources, I was able to find numerous examples of LGBTQ+ texts. For example, NCTE has published blog posts that discuss various subgenres of LGBTQ+ literature. One of these blog posts was specific to LGBTQ+ Fantasy YAL, while another post focused on subjects such as family diversity, adversity/anxiety about LGBTQ+ identity, love, and family creation. The first list provided ten book suggestions, and the second provided twenty-five suggestions. Similarly, the ALA’s blog publishes many posts about various types of LGBTQ+ YAL. Certain posts focus on an individual book as it might relate to a topic while others contain

tens of books from various LGBTQ+ points of view. The same can be said for the research articles, syllabi, author blogs, journalistic articles, and social media posts that I explored. All in all, I looked through a few hundred books across all sources.

From this I began to see some patterns that helped me to design my own system for categorizing which texts I would want to include for this project. First, I noticed that many of the texts that were being promoted were close to ten or more years old— many ranging back to 2003, specifically to *Boy Meets Boy* by David Levithan. The LGBTQ+ experience in 2003 is different than that of 2021, so I wanted my list to also show that change. I chose to cut out any texts that were not published within the last five years. I chose five years as it marks the time since gay marriage became legalized in the United States. Books written in this time and with characters in a modern setting would likely reflect that reality, which impacts how the characters could be viewed by the reader.

Once I had eliminated texts based on their publication date, I began to look at the types of representation that were in each novel. Keeping in mind Cart and Jenkins' (2006) classification system as well as the updates made by Blackburn et al.— I decided that I wanted all of my chosen texts to fit into the queer consciousness (QC) or queer (Q) category as I believe it better exemplifies the LGBTQ+ experience and the spectrum of diversity within the LGBTQ+ community. I also placed emphasis on these since texts in the other two categories— homosexual visibility (HV) and gay assimilation (GA)— more often fall into the 'single story' narrative problem that I discuss above.

From the books that remained, I began to explore genre. This gave me a bit of trouble as many of the texts that I found were categorized as romance or at least had romance as a major or underlying plot point. However, I was still able to find a handful of books from a variety of genres.

Including a variety of genres in a classroom setting, whether that be as a class text or in a class library, is important so that students with varying interests are able to read in their preferred genre while still seeing a reflection of themselves or a window into the lives of others. Genre should not limit the reading experiences of LGBTQ+ students or their peers. While I did end up with a majority of my booklist in the romance genre, I was able to find books that also explored mysteries, fantasy, and historical fiction.

At this point, I had around 30 texts that I felt comfortable with, but I still wanted to cut my list down, so I began to look at the character diversity within the novels. Specifically, I was looking for diversity in LGBTQ+ identity, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and gender expression as well as the intersections of these identities. Using this to help cut down my list brought me to twenty texts. At this point, I felt that I could have included all twenty books on a list of exemplary texts. However, I found that there were a larger number of books that focused on a gay main character or set of characters than any other LGBTQ+, so I began to think about the final list of texts, and it became clear to me that I wanted an equal distribution of identities within the LGBTQ+ spectrum. In doing so, I hoped to avoid showing favoritism to one identity over another and give teachers a chance to explore various identities at their comfort level. I initially planned for my list of exemplary texts to feature a total of ten texts, but I extended that list to fifteen, so that I would be able to have three texts for each ‘category’ of LGBTQ+ identity. At this point, I began to read through and include or exclude books until I had three for each category that I felt were strong enough to be included and presented in a classroom context either as supplementary or as an anchor text.

All in all, I am happy with the list that I was able to curate, and I think each of the selections holds value for the secondary ELA classroom. The various genres, identities, and elements in each text speak to a variety of students while also being effective tools for classroom instruction.³

³ As I read each text, I thought through them from the point of view as reader for engagement and teacher for utility. The texts have varying levels of thematic and lexile (where available) difficulty so that they can be used in a variety of settings for a variety of purposes.

CHAPTER 4. EXEMPLARY TEXTS

For the purposes of listing and discussing each of these texts, I have decided to organize the list in accordance with how the main character identifies on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, the given genre, and whether I feel it is most appropriate for a high school or middle school context, or if it could work in both (See Figure 5).

| Title - Author | Published | LGBTQ+ | Genre | HS / MS | Lexile |
|---|------------------|-------------|-----------------------|---------------|--------|
| The Truth About Keeping Secrets - Savannah Brown | March 7, 2019 | Lesbian | Thriller | High School | 660 |
| The Henna Wars - Adiba Jaigirdar | May 12, 2020 | Lesbian | Romance | Middle School | N/A |
| You Should See Me In A Crown - Leah Johnson | June 20, 2020 | Lesbian | Romance | Either | 880 |
| The Fascinators - Andrew Eliopoulos | May 12, 2020 | Gay | Fantasy | High School | N/A |
| We Are Totally Normal - Rahul Kanakia | March 31, 2020 | Gay | Romance | High School | N/A |
| Infinity Son - Adam Silvera | January 14, 2020 | Gay | Fantasy | Either | N/A |
| You Don't Live Here - Robyn Schneider | June 2, 2020 | Bisexual | Romance | Either | N/A |
| Verona Comics - Jennifer Dugan | April 21, 2020 | Bisexual | Romance | Either | N/A |
| I'll Be The One - Lyla Lee | June 16, 2020 | Bisexual | Romance | Middle School | N/A |
| Felix Ever After - Kacen Callender | May 5, 2020 | Transgender | Romance | High School | N/A |
| Stay Gold - Tobly McSmith | May 26, 2020 | Transgender | Romance | High School | N/A |
| If I Was Your Girl - Meredith Russo | May 3, 2021 | Transgender | Romance | High School | 770 |
| Once & Future - Cory McCarthy and Amy Rose Capetta | March 26, 2019 | Queer | Historical/Fantasy | Either | 740 |
| Symptoms of Being Human - Jeff Garvin | February 2, 2016 | Queer | Mental Health | Either | 760 |
| The Backstagers - James Tynion IV; Illust. by Rian Sygh | July 25, 2017 | Queer | Graphic Novel/Fantasy | Middle School | N/A |

Figure 5: List of Exemplary Texts

Each section will contain information about the individual texts including a brief description of plot, main character(s), and any additionally important information that might help contextualize the novel. In general, these novels have broad levels of utility in the ELA classroom;

units with a thematic focus on identity or coming-of-age stories would likely be served well with these texts as anchor or support texts. Still, I will provide additional context for certain texts that deal with subject matter that may fit more directly in other thematically relevant areas.

4.1 Lesbian

The Truth About Keeping Secrets (Brown, 2019) is the only mystery/thriller novel on the list. The main character's name is Sydney; Sydney's father was the only psychiatrist in their small town, but when he dies unexpectedly Sydney's world quickly changes. At his funeral, June, a popular girl from Sydney's school, shows up. Sydney and June talk and grow closer, but Sydney feels like June is hiding something, and her father's furtive past is not helping. Sydney identifies as a lesbian, and, throughout the novel, she develops feelings for June. Due to the unexpected loss of her father, the main character struggles with loss, grief, and the concept of death. The mystery/thriller elements of this story might make it more engaging for students while still getting them to think about the bigger messages of the story. Sydney is a strong character and was one of the main reasons I chose this text, but I also appreciated that June is biracial, and the novel has multiple other characters who are on the LGBTQ+ spectrum and are from various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The Henna Wars (Jaigirdar, 2020) is about a girl named Nishat. Nishat, a Muslim, is a lesbian, and her parents are not accepting. Nishat wants to stay true to herself while still loving and respecting her family. The story picks up as Flavia, a former childhood friend, moves back to town and both girls decide to start a henna business for a school project. Now business rivals, Nishat has to navigate school stress, family stress, and trying to shake the crush she has on Flavia. This book deals with the two girls' relationship, of course, but there are also broader themes about

sisterhood, bullying, homophobia, and racism. Both Nishat and Flavia are women of color which leads to some of their struggles with classmates and each other throughout the book.

You Should See Me in a Crown (Johnson, 2020) follows the story of Liz Lighty, a black girl from small-town Indiana. Liz never felt like she fit in and has big dreams to get out. Unfortunately, her financial aid falls through, so her only hope is to win prom queen and the scholarship that goes along with it. Liz puts herself through the gauntlet of high school humiliation to try her best to win, but she also has to beat the new girl, Mack. Liz and Mack quickly bond and develop feelings for each other. This novel felt familiar like a classic coming-of-age novel would, and I appreciated that. The small-town setting with a lesbian romance is what ultimately drew me to this book, but the fact that there were other layers of cultural diversity throughout is also a major selling point.

4.2 Gay

The Fascinators (Eliopulous, 2020) is a fantasy novel about Sam and his friends James and Delia. Everyone in this world can use magic to varying success; Sam and friends are nearing graduation, and their friendships are being tested for the first time. All the while, Sam is pretty sure he is in love with his friend James, but some rival magic users are coming for James after he got into some trouble over the summer. The novel is action-packed and the magic system is interesting enough, but the romance between Sam and James still manages to be handled without overt drama. This novel also felt like a standard coming-of-age novel to me with a magical twist and multiple LGBTQ+ characters. The themes involved are not too complex, but students would still be able to engage with ideas about growing up and developing friendships and relationships.

We Are Totally Normal (Kanakia, 2020) follows two Indian-American teens, Nandan and Dave. Both teens are awkward and have trouble in social situations, and both question their

sexuality. They end up trying out a relationship with mixed success. Dave feels less pressure than Nandan who questions everything while trying not to let his anxiety overcome him. This story is mostly about Nandan and his journey toward self-acceptance. His worries throughout the novel relate to whether his family, friends, or social life will be altered if he were to be in a relationship with another man and if the hardships would be worth it. I think this novel speaks to the trouble that many have with labels— within the LGBTQ+ community but also in general—, trying to connect with peers, and figuring out who we are. Students at any level would be able to relate to the pressures that Nandan feels.

Infinity Son (Silvera, 2020) is a fantasy novel about brotherhood and acceptance. Emil and Brighton both always wished to be like the other celestials and have powers, but neither of them was so lucky. Still, they were fascinated and tried to be as involved as possible with helping celestials. Until they get attacked one night on the bus ride home and Emil finds out he does have a celestial power. From then, their lives become a whirlwind. Emil is thrust into the spotlight as a new celestial, and Brighton has to reconcile not having powers and watching Emil's life change so drastically while he remains relatively stagnant. Emil is not interested in fame or even having a power if Brighton does not also have powers. Emil is also gay and trying to figure out what that looks like for him both before his life as a celestial and now. I chose this novel for the fact that it is from the fantasy genre and that the main characters are people of color. There is also a diverse cast of characters throughout. There is some romance in this novel between Emil and another character, but the main relationship that is tested throughout is that of Emil and Brighton and their bond of brotherhood. I do not believe that this type of relationship is shown in this context enough, and I think students would benefit from it.

4.3 Bisexual

You Don't Live Here (Schneider, 2020) introduces us to Sasha Bloom right after an earthquake struck and killed her mother. With her father not in the picture, Sasha moves in with her grandparents. They have a picture in mind of who they want her to be: skinnier, a lawyer, and in a relationship with a rich boy. Sasha is not really on board with any of this, especially when she meets Lily Chen. Sasha and Lily form a bond and their relationship develops all while Sasha deals with the loss of her mother, her grandparents' fatphobic comments and general disapproval, and a guy named Cole who wants Sasha all to himself. This novel has a few aspects to it that are unique to the others on the list. Mainly, this one features a main character whose size is discussed and shamed in the book. The main character's love interest is also Chinese-American, which also deviates from the norm of this list. Overall, the conversations about grief, being true to oneself, and bodily autonomy could be engaging to students.

Verona Comics (Dugan, 2020) puts a modern spin on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Jubilee's parents own an indie comic book shop. At a comic book convention, Jubilee runs into Ridley, and they form a quick connection. However, we find out that Ridley's parents run a rival shop to Jubilee's, so their parents are not thrilled with the idea of them being together. Jubilee struggles to maintain balance with their budding relationship and her quickly-approaching future. This book is filled with LGBTQ+ representation, and it was one of the major selling points. Jubilee and Ridley are both bisexual and openly discuss some of the struggles they face with that identity, and Jubilee's parents and her best friend are lesbians. I also think the fact that it is a modern spin on *Romeo and Juliet* gives the text more versatility in the classroom. It is easy to see how this text might fit into a larger unit as support for *Romeo and Juliet* or another similar text.

I'll Be the One (Lee, 2020) follows the story of Skye Shin. Skye wants to be a K-Pop (Korean pop music) star. Her mother disagrees and thinks she should quiet down, lose some weight,

and draw less attention to herself. Still, Skye is determined to break all of these conventions and be the first plus-sized K-Pop star by winning a reality TV singing contest. Her confidence is tested throughout her journey, and she also has to figure out her feelings for a competitor named Henry. I chose this text because of how confident and open Skye is with herself. She is confidently fat, confidently bisexual, and just proud to be herself. She wants to be a star, and she is not going to let anyone get in the way of that. Skye gives us Korean-American representation as well as bisexual representation. Three of Skye's friends also identify as part of the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Students engaging with this book will likely notice the fatphobic comments more than many of the other aspects, and it could bring about very important discussions.

4.4 Transgender

Felix Ever After (Callender, 2020) tells the story of Felix Love, a black, queer, transgender man who simply wants to know what it is like to be in love. Felix is proud of his identity, but he begins to receive anonymous, transphobic messages that post his deadname and images pre-transition. Felix decides that he wants revenge, so he is going to catfish some guys in order to find out who is making the posts. Naturally, this backfires and Felix finds himself having feelings for the two guys he targets. Felix's journey is about embracing his identity and recognizing the love that he deserves from others. The romantic aspect of the story is also a natural extension to those lessons. Students would be able to read about a transgender experience and some of the struggles that can come with that identity as well as concepts like knowing your worth and bullying.

Stay Gold (McSmith, 2020) introduces us to Pony, a transgender man who wants to finish out his senior year in peace. He received a lot of negative attention at his old school after coming out, so he is hoping for a new and easy start. However, his anxiety still runs rampant for fear of being outed. Then he meets Georgia, a cheerleader who told herself that she would not date this

year. Pony wants to get closer to Georgia, but he does not want to have to come out at this school as well, and Georgia can not deny the sparks she feels with Pony. This plot lies at the surface; however, the majority of the story focuses on Pony's experience as a transgender man who is trying to hide his transgender identity. He faces off against his own dysphoria, suicidal ideations, and grief as well as the transphobia, homophobia, bullying, and assault from others. This novel is, in parts, tough to read, but I think the value that it brings outweighs some of the discomfort that it might bring to readers. With the array of topics present, teachers would be able to fit this into many different classroom contexts.

If I Was Your Girl (Russo, 2016) follows Amanda Hardy, the new girl at school. Amanda is a transgender woman who just wants to make friends and fit in the best she can. Then she meets Grant. She wants to open up to him, but she is not sure how to do so without revealing too much and risking her safety and losing him. Similarly to *Stay Gold* this book has darker elements to it such as depression, thoughts of suicide, bullying, and the outing of LGBTQ+ people. However, it does end on a more hopeful note, so that is appealing. There are also other LGBTQ+ characters featured in the text that are friends with Amanda who provide a level of support. This novel will help give students a realistic picture of what the transgender experience can be like.

4.5 Queer

Once & Future (McCarthy and Capetta, 2019) is a fantasy novel and a spin on the King Arthur story. The story's main character is Ari, a reincarnation of King Arthur who crash lands on Earth and pulls a magic sword from its resting place. She then meets Merlin and Guinevere. Once they all meet, they know that they must work together to stop the tyrannical Mercer corporation. Ari identifies as a lesbian, and engages in a relationship with Guinevere, but I chose to include this in the Queer category due to the incredibly broad cast of characters with an even more diverse set

of identities. There are so many diverse characters with regard to their cultural backgrounds and sexual identities that it was a natural choice for me to include. Beyond that, there is a natural tie-in with the original King Arthur stories. This novel puts a nice spin on those stories to make them more engaging and appealing to a modern audience, and it effortlessly weaves in all of the other aforementioned aspects.

Symptoms of Being Human (Garvin, 2016) tells the story of Riley Cavanaugh. Riley is genderfluid and expresses their identity depending on the day. However, Riley is not ready to come out to anyone but their therapist yet. So, their therapist thinks it might be a good idea for Riley to start an anonymous blog where they talk about what it is really like to be a genderfluid teen. This helps Riley and they start to feel more comfortable at school. At least until the blog goes viral and someone figures out that Riley is the author. Riley then has to decide whether they want to shut down the blog, a source of their happiness, or come out to the school and risk rejection. This book is unique in that it features a genderfluid character whereas many of the others on this list feature cisgender characters. The plot of the story is not necessarily the selling point, but the lived experience of a genderfluid teen and the authenticity that pours through is a major selling point as far as classroom discussions go. I find value in the novel as a whole, but I think it also contains passages or chapters that could be pulled to support other texts and thematic ideas.

The Backstagers (Tynion & Sygh, 2017) is the only graphic novel that I included on the list. I considered adding Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson or Magnus Chase graphic novel series adaptations as they have varying levels of LGBTQ+ representation in them, but I believe those texts are popular enough already. *The Backstagers* follows Jory as he moves to an all-boys private high school. He is immediately taken in by the school's stage crew and develops friendships and more with his new friends. Jory identifies as gay but, similar to *Once & Future*, the cast of

characters is so broad and there is such a varied degree of LGBTQ+ representation that it felt more pertinent to include it in the queer category. The cast is diverse in race and ethnicity, body size, and sexual identity. There is also a potential appeal to the story being a graphic novel as students may find more interest when they have a visual aspect attached to the text. The animation is impeccably done as well.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Recommendations

Through this research, I set out to answer a few questions. To start, I wanted to see how LGBTQ+ texts are being used in the secondary ELA classroom. What I found is that this information exists in a few different forms. First, research that asks teachers about their practices and rationales regarding LGBTQ+ texts and issues is available but in small numbers. Page's (2017) study is incredibly valuable. Much of the information she gleaned might seem obvious to those of us who have read about the subject matter, but having statistical data available helps us gain a clearer vision of the truth of what is happening in classrooms. For example, Page found that of the teachers who were using LGBTQ+ texts in their classroom, the majority of these teachers were presenting them to students as free choice reading or as part of a classroom library. Conversely, the teachers who were using LGBTQ+ texts to intentionally explore ideas around sexual orientation were in the lowest percentage of usage. It is important to conduct this type of research in order to see where and how growth needs to occur, which will help researchers and practitioners who are already more 'comfortable' using LGBTQ+ texts provide additional supports to help next steps occur. Second, the majority of available research was from the point of view of teacher researchers and/or teacher educators who sought to explain *how* or *why* teachers might integrate or select LGBTQ+ texts for their classroom. These resources are valuable and are a benefit to teachers looking for suggestions, but they can lack in practical application. Third, some practicing teachers and teacher educators who still work directly in the secondary classroom write about their experiences integrating LGBTQ+ texts and their successes and failures in using them. The few articles like this that I found were the most interesting to me as they detailed actual classroom practices, decisions, and—when possible—student responses. These articles can act as models

for preservice and practicing teachers who want to integrate LGBTQ+ texts into their own classroom. Since preservice and practicing teachers have expressed varying levels of fear and hesitation toward using LGBTQ+ texts in their classrooms, having these articles and models can be a pivotal tool in helping to alleviate those fears.

In my literature review, I also found that many preservice teachers are not being exposed to LGBTQ+ texts in their classes or they are only given a single opportunity to explore LGBTQ+ texts, typically in a YA Literature course. While this exploration of syllabi was not a main part of my research questions and also not a major part of the given teacher hesitations, this is a problem that can be resolved with relative ease. Teacher educators can address this issue by ensuring that preservice teachers are given ample opportunities to work with modern LGBTQ+ texts and begin thinking about how to integrate them into their future classroom. Teacher educators can model the necessary thinking when choosing these texts as well as explore further ideas about their classroom utility, possible pushback, and helping their LGBTQ+ students.

After seeing and exploring the different ways in which teachers are using LGBTQ+ texts in their classroom, I took what I learned and began to compile my own list of exemplary LGBTQ+ texts that could be used in the secondary ELA classrooms. The classification system developed by Clark and Jenkins (2006) which was later modified by Blackburn et al. (2015) guided my initial search. The work that they did helped point me toward books that represent a more modern view of the LGBTQ+ experience. The queer consciousness and queer categories of this classification system represent books with more complex understandings of LGBTQ+ people and identities, and I believe those lend themselves in more unique ways than texts classified outside of these categories. Beyond this, I held true to suggestions of researchers to read broadly in genre and broadly in regard to LGBTQ+ identity, racial and ethnic background, and gender expression. In

doing so, I ended up with fifteen exemplary texts that represent the broad category of identities that I hoped to achieve while also being engaging to students and having utility in the classroom. Teacher educators who are developing their syllabi can use this as a resource in texts that they can present to their preservice teacher students. Practicing teachers who are looking to upgrade their existing curriculum or develop new curricula can confidently look to this list of texts as valuable resources for many classroom contexts. These texts can serve as anchor or supplemental texts as teachers develop units of study. Excerpts of these texts could also be pulled to highlight specific struggles or issues that LGBTQ+ people face. Similarly, excerpts could be pulled to provide authentic contexts for students to engage with skills directly related to state standards. Teachers who are less comfortable integrating LGBTQ+ texts in their curriculum but still want to begin taking steps toward more inclusion can feel at ease placing these texts in their classroom library and recommending them for student choice reading.

5.2 Need For Further Research

With calls from national organizations to integrate LGBTQ+ texts into the classroom as well as growing support for creating safe and inclusive classrooms, the need for resources on how teachers can start this process are more important than ever. It is my hope that this project sheds more of a light on this important subject as well as offers a gateway into modern LGBTQ+ texts that are well-suited for the classroom and can provide ELA teachers with the opportunity to explore important, related topics with their students.

Through this process, I was happy to find the articles, syllabi, and other resources that led to my conclusions and a better understanding of a topic that I care about. However, there is still a need for further research in all of the areas that I have explored. More research should go into the preparation of pre-service and early practicing teachers as to how to best support, prepare, and

alleviate any fears to help them use LGBTQ+ texts in the classroom. This change calls on university instructors to ensure that their syllabi are inclusive to LGBTQ+ identities on a broad scale. These texts should not only be available in a course about young adult literature; instructors should be utilizing them in multiple methods and literature courses, especially since not all teacher education programs require a course on YAL. By including these texts broadly, it ensures that preservice teachers will have the opportunity to read and think deeply about LGBTQ+ texts multiple times throughout their undergraduate career with the support of their peers and instructors present. Just as it is true with secondary teachers as they create curricula, university instructors must be mindful of the choices they are making as those choices are also exclusions. Actively choosing to include LGBTQ+ topics and texts into a course is a change that could be implemented with relative ease.

I also believe that it is important to recognize that there are varying degrees of comfort that teachers have when it comes to discussing and integrating LGBTQ+ texts into their class. While that should not stop them from integrating these texts, it can certainly play a role in their hesitation. Teachers who are interested in implementing these changes need not feel pressured to immediately begin with an LGBTQ+ text as an anchor text for the whole class. Instead, teachers with contextual constraints can feel empowered to start small. It may be easier to start with a text that exists in the canon and do read it through a queer lens, discussing various connections between the characters, gender, and sexuality. As mentioned above, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *The Catcher in the Rye* are all feasible texts that teachers could begin with. Teachers who are more comfortable with the content and/or find themselves with fewer contextual constraints could feel emboldened to start integrating whole-class LGBTQ+ texts, support texts, and by having them

available for student choice. The overall change is likely to be slow, but I am optimistic that the change is coming and that the existing fears will fade or prove inconsequential.

When I first read Rudine Sims Bishop's article "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" (1990) I was in a media criticism class during my undergraduate program for film and television production. I had not considered teaching as a career at that point, so I found myself connecting it more to my knowledge of film and television. Bishop's article continued to pop up as I progressed through my undergraduate and teaching preparation program, and each time I read it, it became clearer that the ideas presented in it were very much aligned with my personal goals at every point in my life. When I was growing up, I longed for more LGBTQ+ literature, during my undergraduate career I created LGBTQ+ focused media, and as a pre-service and practicing teacher, I worked to implement LGBTQ+ and other diverse texts into my classroom. It felt and still feels important to do.

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