Prizing Cycles of Marginalization: Paired Progression and Regression in Award-Winning LGBTQ-themed YA Fiction

Dissertation

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Abstract

This dissertation is a text-based analysis of young adult novels that have won LGBTQ-focused awards, specifically the Stonewall Book Award and Lambda Literary Award. The project engages with queer theory (Puar; Duggan; Ferguson; Halberstam) and the frameworks of cultural capital and prizing canon formation (English; Kidd and Thomas; Kidd). Looking at the 61 YA novels that have been recognized by either Stonewall or Lambda between 2010 and 2017, I provide statistics about the identities, themes, and ideologies of and about LGBTQ people that are prominent within the awards' canons. Pairing these statistics close readings of representative texts provides a rich analysis of the way these awards both subvert and uphold understandings of those minoritized for their gender or sexuality.

Stonewall and Lambda aim to promote novels that provide diverse and inclusive LGBTQ representations. However, these representations construct understandings of LGBTQ identity that support hetero-, homo- and cisnormative constructions that are palatable to adult and heteronormative culture. Throughout, I refer to this often paradoxical balance as the pairing of progression and regression.

I explore not only what is considered excellence but also how these texts construct a vision of LGBTQ lives that still fit within oppressive models of society. Throughout my analysis, I additionally examine the difference between white LGBTQ

characters and LGBTQ characters of color to discuss the intersecting marginalizations of these populations, as well as promoting more inclusive and just scholarship. In this way, my dissertation shows how Stonewall and Lambda's simultaneously rebellious and oppressive nature blur the lines between heteronormativity, homonormativity, homonationalism, multiculturalism, and progressivism.

Dedication

To all the strong women in my life: Megan, Mom, Maggie, Leigh, and Sarah.

And especially Kaitie. You earned your little h. I like you, and I love you.

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Fields of Study

Major Field: Education: Teaching & Learning

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Chapter 1. Transformative Potential Amid Problematic Representation

The first LGBTQ-themed young adult (YA) novel I read was David Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy.* Though originally published in 2003, I didn't get my hands on it until 2010. By that time, I was in my mid-twenties, had graduated from college, and had been dating my now-wife for 3 years. I picked it up at a library book sale on a whim. I didn't know it was a YA book. I had never heard of Levithan nor knew about the corner of LGBTQ-themed YA books that he was dominating at the time. I only knew that it was a book about gay people like me and I wanted to read it. At the time, I kept a reading log in small notebooks, as I didn't yet know that Goodreads existed. The entry for *Boy Meets Boy* states that I read it from February seventh to the eighth. My entire review is a red heart. Looking back, this seems like a small and insignificant review for a book that has had a profound impact on my life. I remember being in awe of the text. Seeing issues of sexuality being discussed so openly and joyfully on the page was glorious to me. I wanted to live in the utopian world before me. It also opened my eyes to the world of young adult literature in a way I had not known before. At the time, I was working a receptionist job that left me with a lot of spare time. When I mentioned to a friend that I liked *Boy Meets Boy,* she proceeded to lend me a stack of YA novels she loved for me to read at work. I plowed through *The Hunger Games, Looking for Alaska,* the rest of John Green's work, more of Levithan's novels, and kept coming back for more. Somehow, amid the piles of reading I did in my teens and early 20s, I missed that there were tons of

great texts being written for people my own age. I certainly read Harry Potter, and I adored C.S. Lewis, but for much of my adolescence I was that snobby kid reading *The Odyssey* for fun in the lunch room and working through academic archaeology monographs in the summers. Reading *Boy Meets Boy* opened up a world to me that I had not known existed before. It was transformative. Not only did books exist that addressed the concerns that I faced as a young bisexual woman, but they were written with me (or me ten years previously, as the case may be) in mind.

Because of my own experience with ways in which YA books can allow you to feel validation of your own life, throughout my research I promote increased numbers and shelf space for books that feature traditionally under-represented and minoritized populations. Between movements like #WeNeedDiverseBooks and Gene Luen Yang's Reading Without Walls Challenge, the call has been made for young readers to incorporate a variety of life experiences into their reading. However, without studying the content of these books, problems of racism, heterosexism, classism, and other societal oppressions can be continued, all the while under the banner of "diversity" or "multiculturalism." This dissertation, then, analyzes one such body of diverse texts—LGBTQ-themed award winning young adult literature—in order to examine how social justice is or isn't present in the novels. I examine award winners due to their larger sphere of social influence, and their supposed excellence in portraying LGBTQ experiences and lives. Throughout this introduction, I will discuss the literature from which this project emerged, including the potential for YA literature as tools for change, and the history of LGBTQ themes within the canon of adolescent literature. Next, I explain my framework

of queer theory for reading the texts in my sample. Finally, I will lay out my methods, including why I examine award winners, my terms, and my research questions.

Literature Review

YA Literature as Ideological Tools

In roughly the past 15 years, YA literature has become a greater cultural touchstone, with books like *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games* capturing the imagination of not just teenagers, but the United States population at large. These books, and their movie adaptations, became blockbusters, drawing both young people and adults to purchase, read, and discuss these adolescent narratives (Hill). Recent estimates state "that adults are now responsible for an astonishing 65 to 70 percent of all sales of young adult books" (Cart [2016] ix-x). Typically, both children's and YA literature are supported by the disenfranchisement of young readers through the "hidden adult" that has control over the texts (Nodelman; Rose; Cadden). The popularity of YA literature as entertainment for adults only widens the distance between the adult author and teen reader. Therefore, rather than YA literature being a space for adolescents to explore their identities by proxy, the appropriated genre has grown into a space where cultural consumers of all ages come for entertainment. Adults read these texts written for teenagers and often push back against material that they deem inappropriate. As seen by the large amount of YA texts seen yearly on the American Library Association's banned and challenged list, many adults believe literature for young people should be upholding the status quo, rather than forwarding progressive ideals (McCallum and Stevens).

Due to the adult influence behind children's and YA literature, it is not surprising that these bodies of work perpetuate ideologies of the societies in which they are created. Young readers learn to be socialized into cultural norms through narrative. Robyn McCallum discusses how ideology impacts identity formation of teenagers. Because "[t]he ideological frames within which identities are formed are inextricably bound up with ideas about subjectivity, . . .[c]oncepts of person identity and selfhood are formed in dialogue, with society, with language, and with other people" (3). As adolescence is a transitional period "[i]t should come as no surprise, then, that ideas about and representations of subjectivity pervade and underpin adolescent fiction" (3). Further, McCallum posits within youth fiction the coming-of-age story is centered on "personal maturation . . . [and] is articulated in conjunction with a perceived need for children to overcome solipsism and develop intersubjective concepts of personal identity within the world and in relation to others" (7). In sum, the ways that novels present concepts affect young readers as they absorb cultural norms and understand them as normal; part of these norms is that teenagers need to grow up into adults who are not self-centered.

The status quo as maintained through the body of work for young readers can be seen through the small proportion of children's and young adult texts that feature minority populations (CCBC). With a United States population that is increasingly diverse, it is more important than ever for youth literature to be supporting diverse and inclusive stories. As Rudine Sims Bishop discusses, "books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in

imagination to become part of whatever world has been created" (Sims Bishop). Books can also be "mirrors" in whose reflection "we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience" (Sims Bishop). Sims Bishop goes on to state that children need windows to see the world in which they do not live, and mirrors to know they are valued. Therefore, if majority young people are taught to read as a way to see beyond themselves, giving them books with lives different from their own can cultivate empathy. Similarly, minoritized adolescents are given the opportunity to see their own lives, meaning that they are able to see value in their lived experiences.

However, texts for young readers are not solely conservative. Children's literature, as noted by Julie L. Mickenberg and Philip Nel, "historically has been a realm for expressing utopian visions and launching subtle critiques of the existing social order" (445). Julie L. Mickenberg, in *Learning from the Left,* traces the liberal-leaning history of youth literature in the twentieth century. She writes that during the Cold War, many who were blacklisted or greylisted by McCarthy "ultimately found work in the children's literature field" as it was less scrutinized and "operated below the radar of red-hunters" (4-5). Indeed, she sees a correlation between the left-leaning children's books available during the 1950s and the rise of the young people protesting issues like the war in Vietnam and civil rights in the 1960s. From then on "[b]ooks and other materials for children and young adults . . . began more consistently to confront racism, poverty, gender stereotypes, and environmental degradation, and to address children with a frankness that clearly no longer assumed their innocence" (280). Therefore,

> children who read in school textbooks that homosexuality is deviant can still check out from their school or public library *Heather Has Two Mommies* (1989) or *King & King* (2002)—children's books that normalize homosexuality—just as they can find many children's books that teach them about evolution, even in states that have tried to remove any reference to Darwin from school textbooks or science curricula. (281)

While books for young readers perpetuate ideological stances, they do not always do so from the perspective of furthering existing societal conditions.

As previously stated, seeing yourself in a book for the first time can be a transformative experience. Thomas Crisp has noted a similar event to the one I recount at the start of this chapter, saying that when he read *Boy Meets Boy* upon its release "I wept, because after 24 years, I finally saw the first representation of 'myself' in literature" ("It's Not the Book" 92). Due to the ways that YA literature spreads ideological ideals, it has potential to advance social justice; therefore, it is a natural medium to work toward more equity of minoritized and oppressed populations, such as LGBTQ people. The scarcity of narratives for and about LGBTQ teenagers contribute to misunderstandings, fear, and disgust that, inevitably, impact the rates of violence and suicide they face. Therefore, the novels that do exist are even more vitally important to give a face to gender and sexually minoritized populations. These texts need to be analyzed to see what messages they are transmitting to readers, both young and old.

A Brief History of LGBTQ-Themed YA Novels

The history of books for adolescents that feature LGBTQ content has been chronicled several times, most notably by Christine Jenkins and then later by Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins. The first YA novel with a gay character was published in 1969; John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* follows on the heels of homosexuality being discussed in more adult novels and pulp fiction. It was also, coincidentally, published in the same year as the Stonewall Rebellion. In addition to being the first YA text with gay characters, it also started a trend of sexual "deviance" linked to death and trauma. In *I'll Get There*, protagonist Davy's dog is hit by a car and dies in his arms shortly after he makes out with his male love interest. Davy links these incidents in his mind and is unwilling to continue his relationship with Altschuler.

From the single text in the 1960s, Cart and Jenkins found that eight novels with LGBTQ content were published in the 1970s. Many of these books left the implication that "the only good homosexual is a dead homosexual" (21). Further, there were "consequences" for being gay such as being in a traumatic or deadly car accident, growing up to be a bitter loner, being a mentor to a boy who rejects you for your sexuality, and/or dying at a young age (21-22). Roberta Seelinger Trites draws upon Jenkins' work to give a condensed summary of the clichés in LGBTQ-themed YA novels from the 1970s and 80s: "the stereotypical YA gay male is financially secure, attractive, and white; he lives on one of the coasts, loves the arts, has a troubled family, and has difficulty recovering from the loss of his first love. His sex acts are rarely described with any kind of detail; that is, he is often denied physical pleasure" (104). Trites adds to

Jenkins' findings that the character is likely an only child as well (104). In the early days of LGBTQ representation the view of homosexual lives was "unrelievedly bleak, lonely, danger filled, and—as often as not—doomed to a tragically early end, usually in a car wreck, because all these books were crowded with the worst drivers this side of my grandmother" (Cart [2010] 155). Further, Cart notes that "virtually every one of the central characters in these books was white and middle class. The first black character, Rosa Guy's eponymous Ruby, had appeared as early as 1976, but no other blacks would appear until the 1991 publication of Jacqueline Woodson's *The Dear One* and no Latinos until 1995" ([2010] 155). In addition to bringing intersections of race and sexuality into the mix, Guy's 1976 novel was also the first to portray lesbians for a young adult audience. However, Ruby's journey, like many of the protagonists before and after her, is not one of coming out or becoming comfortable with herself. Rather, her same-sex relationship is something she goes through on the way to heterosexual bliss; the prevalence of this narrative presupposes that homosexual acts are part of growing into "normal" sexuality, rather than its own, distinct desire.

The 1980s saw large increases in the number of LGBTQ-themed YA novels published with 40 released throughout the decade (Cart and Jenkins 40). While many of the same tropes and stereotypes from the 1970s carried over into the new books, there was some added diversity. For instance, the first novels featuring LGBTQ parents or parental figures, and LGBTQ teachers or mentors were published. Additionally, this was the decade where the trope of the gay best friend emerged. Between adults and friends, in 1980s novels "the reader is usually seeing the gay/lesbian character at a remove from the

protagonist" (51). 1982 saw the release of Nancy Garden's *Annie On My Mind,* which is sometimes referred to as the first "positive" portrayal of LGBTQ lives for adolescents as it features a "the gradual deepening of intimacy of teens falling in love" (55). And indeed, it presents the lesbian relationship as loving with a happy ending, rather than a problem that ends in disaster.

The 1990s brought an influx of LGBTQ-themed novels—seventy-five in fact! However, Cart and Jenkins name their chapter "Was More Less?" for apt reasons. During the 1990s, stereotypes and misinformation ran rampant. Despite societal awareness of AIDS, only thirteen of the novels featured characters who contracted the virus, and then it was only gay men, and usually adults. Further, many young women who exhibited lesbian or same-sex desire were raped as a consequence. During this time there were "comparatively few books that feature lesbian characters and none that portray lesbians in any type of relationship with male teen protagonists" (Jenkins 159). The gender segregation of these books continues the idea that LGBTQ characters must live solitary lives and are unable to understand or befriend those who are unlike them.

With the turn of the twenty-first century, "[t]he volume of titles giving faces to lesbian, gay, and bisexual teens also continued to grow significantly . . . From 2000 through 2008, no less than 165 GLBT titles were published, an average of more than 16 per year (compared with 1 per year in the 1970s, 4 per year in the 1980s, and 7 per year in the 1990s)" (Cart [2010] 159). In addition to the increased numbers, the early 2000s also saw the start of more texts that sought to be assimilative rather than simply pointing out that LGBTQ people exist. Further, Julie Anne Peter's *Luna* was released in 2004,

marking the start of trans narratives for adolescents (Cart and Jenkins 138). Bisexuality also became a more visible option for young characters exploring their sexuality during this time. While stereotypes of violence and internal and external homophobia were still present throughout this time period, their numbers decreased. Perhaps most notable, with the turn of the century, novels finally started to allow characters to have community with other LGBTQ people. Rather than facing a solitary life as the only (or only of two, if lucky enough to find a romantic or sexual partner) LGBTQ person around, books began to show characters within environments and friendships with others minoritized for their gender and sexuality.

Cart and Jenkins' survey extends to 2004, marking the end of overarching, large-scale studies of this body of literature. Some scholars have examined individual books or samples of books; others, like Malinda Lo, have done analyses of the numbers of books featuring LGBTQ content, but they are neither comprehensive nor provide the narrative-level analysis like Cart and Jenkins do. This is a gap I intend to fill with this dissertation. B.J. Epstein notes that "[w]hat used to be 'unacceptable' or 'taboo' or 'remarkable' in children's literature no longer is to the same extent" and this includes its treatment of sexuality and gender (16). However, the words Cart and Jenkins use in their conclusion still ring true: "GLBTQ literature needs to be – and is slowly becoming – more than coming out stories. It needs to include more stories about young people whose homosexuality is simply a given and who are dealing with other issues and challenges – emotional, intellectual, physical, social, developmental, etc. that are part of teens' lives" (166). Through examining the ways that Stonewall and Lambda promote certain texts, I

am able to analyze what ideas about LGBTQ populations are being dispersed into US society.

Discussions of Trends and Stereotypes

Research about the representations of LGBTQ-themed children's and young adult literature has increased as the body of literature has, with many scholars seeking to identify overarching trends that are present in the texts. However, some scholars (such as Reyonlds, Trites, and Epstein) discuss these trends while having a relatively small sample size. Others (Cart and Jenkins; Jenkins) have conducted widespread studies, but their findings seem dated when looking at contemporary works. While these past analyses have some limitations, they are important to review because of the foundation they build; part of the goal of this dissertation is to update and continue this work through this decade. Also, many of the findings from scholars like Cart and Jenkins are still used as accurate portrayals of what LGBTQ stereotypes are present in YA and children's literature. In order to update the stereotypes and trends, I must first set the scene of what is currently available.

Trites, in *Disturbing the Universe*, discusses that YA romances with LGBTQ content "employ a different set of ideologies" than those for straight teenagers "that are meant to empower queer teenagers" and these books have "a tendency to address how teenagers are affected when they develop their sexuality [while being] oppressed" (102). She goes on, saying

> the texts strive to reassure readers that gay or lesbian sex is not toxic or abnormal or even unusual. The very fact that the text implies that the act *needs* normalizing

> carries with it the same ideological implication that institutional discourses prohibiting heterosexual teenager intercourse carry: that which is already societally sanctioned, chastity, hardly needs normalizing. (110)

Because the subjugation of LGBTQ populations is centered in YA texts, the books also can perpetuate these oppressions. Epstein similarly posits that "the LGBTQ community faces prejudice because many people do not understand gender identities or sexualities outside of the heterosexual, cisgender norm" (65). It is logical, then, that many authors attempting to breakdown heterosexism do so by aligning gender and sexual minorities within heterosexual and cisgender norms, such as falling in love, staying monogamous, and the desire to get married and have children. Rather than breaking the norms of society, they work to assimilate LGBTQ individuals into the restrictive societal rules.

As discussed in the history section, scholars also discuss that high rate of death, pain, and violence within LGBTQ-themed YA, particularly for young gay men. For instance, Jenkins notes "there is [an] endangered status of gay males. . . . characters acknowledge the stress they feel in leading their lives in a potentially dangerous world, but, with few notable exceptions, there is a great deal of attention focused on the difficulties of being a member of a minority group, with little attention paid to the strategies and skills minority group members develop in order to survive" (154-5). One implication of this representation is that "[m]any of the gay/lesbian characters in these books . . . lead isolated and lonely lives" (155). In addition to the "consequences" of being LGBTQ that Cart and Jenkins lists, Epstein finds "causes" of gender and sexual minority, such as "[a]bsent parents, abusive or alcoholic parents, or traumatic sexual

experiences" (96). She also books give the impression that characters can "catch" gender and sexual difference (97).

Additionally, within the extant literature there are discussions of the stereotypical traits shown within LGBTQ communities, but they are unsupported by numbers showcasing how often the stereotypes occur. For instance, Cart and Jenkins write that early LGBTQ-themed YA "perpetuate stereotypes," as some characters are "pictured as unfortunates doomed to either a premature death or a life of despair lived in the darkest margins of society. Others are portrayed as sinister predators lurking in the shadows of sinister settings, or play the role of briefly viewed 'fags' or 'dykes' who are included only to confirm a more central character's naivete or sophistication" (xvi). Epstein discusses these stereotypes "such as gay men being camp and humorous" (63) and "being appearance-fixated, loving musicals, being catty, and gossipy, and not having much to do with women" (106). Lesbians on the other hand are "serious and feminist" (63). Jenkins similarly finds that in LGBTQ-themed novels "[f]emale characters . . . tend to fall into either the butch or the femme stereotypes" (115). Jenkins' study is comprehensive, but ends in 1992, leaving over 15 years unaccounted for where lesbians and queer women were more visible and becoming more nuanced.

In terms of the portrayal of sex and sexual acts, there is an imbalance between what is shown for LGBTQ teenage characters versus straight young people. Jenkins notes that YA literature as a whole "tread[s] a fine line between general and specific when describing sexual activity" (152). She continues, "fictional gays and lesbians seem to have *extremely* limited sex lives" (152). In fact, "[t]he majority of these books contain no

description of any sexual interaction—or even physical contact—between two lovers of the same sex" (153). While books for youth in general have become more graphic in their portrayal of sex since Jenkins' original 1993 publication date, the fact that gay men and lesbians are not allowed to have any sexual interactions is an often cited concept in contemporary discussions. Trites, for instance, discusses the ways that LGBTQ characters explore their sexuality discursively. "That is, the conversations and word choices they use to define their orientation matter far more than their actions do," (114), meaning that homosexuality is defined "more rhetorically than physically" (103).

All of these trends and stereotypes are damaging, as they allow for limited "flexibility or variety, which therefore makes LGBTQ people appear to be monolithic" (Epstein 62). Further, as Jenkins astutely notes, "the non-gay characters in these works do not seem to be depicted in such narrow ways" (117). Notably absent from these studies are nuanced details of the ways that trans, queer, or other genders and sexualities are portrayed. While Cart and Jenkins and Epstein do discuss novels that feature trans characters, neither provides detailed accounts of the narrative crutches like they do for gay men and lesbians. While it is understandable that some of this gap comes from the lack of YA novels with trans content (especially for Cart and Jenkins' 2006 publication date when only seven such texts had been released), as an increasing number of books with a diversity of identities are released, similar analyses must be done on these texts. This dissertation aims to partially fill that gap.

Prizing Culture

I analyze award winners here for several reasons. First, settings in which books exist matter for how they are perceived in the world. As noted by Crisp, "it therefore becomes important to explore this recent proliferation of gay adolescent literature within the context in which it is released" ("From Romance to Magical Realism" 334). The novels that have been given Lambda and Stonewall awards permanently belong to a canon of LGBTQ-themed YA texts that have been approved by adult gatekeepers. While there are many good texts worthy of discussion that have not been acknowledged by these awarding bodies, it is more likely that Lambda and Stonewall recognized novels are known by teachers, librarians, and booksellers, allowing them to have a greater influence in societal discussions about which LGBTQ persons are acceptable. Kenneth Kidd and Joseph Thomas, Jr. note that "children's authors rely on the American Library Association (ALA) and other systems of prizing more than adult authors rely on any one prizing apparatus" as being recognized allows authors to be more experimental, stay in print longer, and have new books published more easily (6). Winning an award not only allows for a spotlight on the novel in question, but gives that author's voice a bigger position in the LGBTQ-themed YA canon. Additionally, as mentioned previously, a large number of books featuring LGBTQ content for young readers are part of ALA's Top Ten Challenged Books each year. Because of these challenges or bans, Stonewall and Lambda awards play an important role in countering this attempted censorship and promoting novels that provide diverse and inclusive LGBTQ representations. However, by existing within established systems of patriarchy, white supremacy, and heterosexism, their text

choices are still limited to what publishing houses deem appropriate and ready for consumption.

Literary awards are often viewed paradoxically, being lauded as a gold-standard, while simultaneously critiqued for having a narrow focus. As James F. English writes, "on the one hand, cultural prizes are said to reward excellence; they bring publicity to 'serious' or 'quality' art. . . On the other hand, it is said that they systematically neglect excellence and reward mediocrity . . . provid[ing] a closed, elitist forum where cultural insiders engage in influence peddling and mutual back-scratching" (25). Additionally, Kenneth Kidd has laid out the ways in which the prizing of novels goes hand in hand with censoring: "to prize is to make a positive judgement about the quality of a text or idea, and thereby to participate in a cultural process of evaluation. To censor is to likewise participate in that process but to make a negative judgment about the quality of a text or idea" ("Not Censorship" 198). Kidd further states that both censoring and prizing have the same result of "greater publicity" and cultural capital ("Not Censorship"198).

When books are awarded prizes, their potential for being placed in the hands of readers increases. Publisher's Weekly has seen "sales spikes" of books honored by the National Book Award ("Measuring"). Rebekah Fitzsimmons elaborates: "literary prizes are a significant metric for transferring cultural prestige onto artistic products, and of converting economic capital into cultural capital" (160). Looking specifically at texts for young readers, Kidd has noted that winning the Newbery Medal "can more than double the sales of a book, as well as increase sales of the author's other books" ("Prizing Children's Literature" 168). Further, "children are often required to read award-winning

literature in school, adults often view award winners as credentials determining worth, publishers see them as moneymakers, and authors and illustrators bask in the recognition" (Yokota 467).

Kenneth Kidd and Joseph Thomas additionally state that "children's literature prizing in the United States and England was a carefully orchestrated by a network of librarians, publishers, editors, and to a lesser extent teachers. . . . The Newbery and Caldecott Medals were efforts in both public-making *and* taste-making" (4, emphasis original). Award-winning books not only receive a sales boost, but, because of the close relationship between librarians and awards for children's and young adult literature (the ALA does award over a dozen Youth Media Awards alone, after all), their support influences library purchasing, placing award-winning books into the hands of more young readers. Kidd and Thomas continue that, despite prizing existing to sell books, within children's literature there is an overarching feel of prizing as a service; rather than just to promote books for sales, librarians and other children's service providers work to prize books as a way to better educate and broaden young people's reading experiences (2-3).

Due to the impact that the awards have on what books are read, they also have the potential to shape young people's understanding of makes up the lives of gender and sexually minoritized populations. Kidd and Thomas note those who criticize prizes "worry that [it] affirms and secures social privilege" as the socially privileged tend to be recognized more than minoritized authors (3). Additionally, "[p]rizing creates canons, and canons are tricky things" (3). The Stonewall Book and Lambda Literary Awards for

young readers create a canon of LGBTQ-themed texts that are considered to be "good" in literary or political ways. This canon, then, perpetuates ideologies about what it means to be LGBTQ. Through analyzing these portrayals, this dissertation examines hetero- and homonormativity present in awarded titles, as well as the ways they forward both progressive and regressive traits.

I kept two things in mind throughout this project. First, throughout I often say negative things about the awards, but this does not mean I am against their existence or the work that they have done in promoting recognition of gender and sexual minorities. As Kidd and Thomas eloquently state, "while problematic, prizing is not a problem to be solved. Rather, it is a complex phenomenon with many facets and consequences. We may want to reform or improve prizing . . . [but] at best we can analyze the forms and functions of prizing and perhaps make modest changes or interventions" (4). This dissertation aims to gain a greater understanding of the ways that LGBTQ identities are portrayed, therefore, advocating for these steps toward interventions. Second, as stated by Junko Yokota, "award decisions are made by a group-conscious process and human factors and relations enter into such situations. This is an important point to keep in mind when considering the decision as that is relative to the circumstances, process, and participants and cannot be considered a definitive and absolute measure of quality" (469). Any criticism I have of books or the canons developed by Stonewall and Lambda in the pages that follow is not intended to undermine the work done by the committees who awarded the texts. I recognize the time, hard work, and dedication that goes into narrowing down the field to five texts and then choosing the "best" from that number

(indeed, I hope to one day serve on one such committee!). Rather than demean this work, I hope that by examining the trends seen in Stonewall and Lambda, I can point to the underlying issues at play—in authorship, publishing, marketing, and yes, awarding, to begin conversations that can breakdown the white supremacy, heterosexism, classism and other oppressions occurring within these systems.

Background on Lambda and Stonewall

The Lambda Literary Awards were first given in 1989, with the first Children's/Young Adult Literature prize being awarded in 1992. Lambda states that their awards "identify and celebrate the best lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender books of the year and affirm that LGBTQ stories are part of the literature of the world" ("About" 2018). When I first began research on Lambda in Spring 2015, their website contained criteria information that is no longer available. Additionally, despite several attempts to contact them for more information about their process, I never received a response. Therefore, I am including both current information here, as well as material that is no longer on the website. I distinguish dated information from current by including 2015 in my parentheticals. While I am aware that some of these details may have changed in the past three years, its inclusion still helps develop a more complete picture of how the awards work.

Lambda judges submissions "principally on literary merit and content relevant to" LBGT lives, though "literary merit" is never defined (Lambda 2015). In 2009, they changed the awarding criteria to state that authors must self-identify as LGBT in order to qualify for the award (Crisp "It's Not the Book" 91). In 2012, they revoked this rule (J.

Henderson), stating on their website that "Lambda Literary Awards are open to all authors regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity" (Lambda 2015). To be eligible, books must be published in English, and while self-published books qualify, books only offered in ebook format are not (Lambda 2015). Anyone can submit a book for consideration, but there is a $45 fee and one must provide five copies of the submission (though the website states that "publishers submitting 11 or more books pay $40 per submission") (Lambda 2015). The pay-to-play model Lambda uses is, presumably, to help fund the award, seeing that the Lambda Literary Foundation is a smaller organization than ALA. However, this entry fee also places a burden on self- and independently published books, as they do not have the institutional support of a major publisher. For the Children's/Young Adult Award specifically, they state that "individual works and collections of fiction, nonfiction, picture books, and poetry whose intended audience is young readers are all eligible; anthologies are not" ("Overview" 2018).

Each year, Lambda announces nominees for the awards in March, and the winners are announced during a gala in June. Winners are chosen by "more than 100 literary professionals, including booksellers, book reviewers, librarians, authors, and previous Lammy winners and finalists" (Lambda 2015). As of 2012, committee members must self-identify as LGBT (Edit Team). Lambda also quite prominently lists its sponsors for both the awards and the foundation on their website; these sponsors are often publishing houses. Sponsors for the 2015 awards included Harper Perennial, Simon and Schuster, Barnes and Noble, and several independent publishing companies. For the 2018 awards, the Amazon Literary Partnership is a sponsor. While I have noticed no correlation

between sponsoring publishers and winners or nominees, the presence of the corporate sponsors does raise questions if the pay-to-play model goes beyond entering a novel for consideration.

Notably, throughout Lambda's website they utilize "LGBTQ" as their term of choice; however, despite their inclusion of queer in the alphabetism, Lambda's categorization of the awards lack inclusion of queer or other non-LGBT identities. Lambda currently has 23 categories and none of them include queer in their names. Only one award, LGBT Nonfiction, is more inclusive in its description, saying that it awards "LGBTQ-themed works" ("Overview 2018). Additionally, two awards that are considered "Special Award Categories" rather than part of the 23 main categories are also more inclusive ("Awards" 2018). First, the Judith A. Markowitz Award for Emerging LGBTQ Writers "recognizes LGBTQ-identified writers whose work demonstrates their strong potential for promising careers" ("Overview" 2018). Also, the Visionary Award is "given to lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender individuals who have made a significant contribution to LGBTQ literature and/or the lives of LGBTQ people" ("Overview" 2018). The places where Lambda chooses to include queerness is striking for its inconsistency among other reasons. Within the 23 award categories themselves, LGBTQ only appears for nonfiction texts, perhaps suggesting that queerness is not attached history or concepts rather than people. However, when considering the special awards, queerness is attached to the works themselves as well as authors who create texts, but with no uniformity. Perhaps, through including queer, Lambda is attempting to be a more inclusive organization, but lack the awards and consistency to fully be embracing

queerness. Furthermore, the Children's and Young Adult Category is one of the many which explicitly states it awards "LGBT" works, nominally excluding queer identities.

What is now known as the Stonewall Book Award started in 1971, became part of the American Library Association in 1986, and added the Children's and Young Adult prize in 2010 ("History"). In 2016, they began awarding both a YA novel and a children's book each year. Information about the criteria and guidelines for the award is sparse, with the only rule seemingly being that entries must be "English language [work] published the year prior to the announcement date" ("Stonewall"). Perhaps this lack of criteria is not surprising as "the ALA Association of Library Services to Children's committees such as the Newbury or Caldecott have an elaborate and secretive consensus-building process" (Yokota 469). However, when comparing the information available for other ALA awards, such as the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature, which publically list specific guidelines for what they deem literary excellence, the absence for Stonewall is noticeable.

Anyone can suggest a book for the committee to review ("Suggest"). The committee that decides the awards "is made up of equal numbers of female- and male-identified members from various types of libraries across the United States;" however, there is no mention of queerness ("History"). The committee generally identifies five novels to be their finalists, choosing a winner from that number. The four remaining finalists are awarded Stonewall Honors.

Unlike Lambda, Stonewall exclude queerness from engagement with their awards by not including it in the names of any of their categories. Additionally, they utilize the

more misogynistic “GLBT” alphabetism on their site. Stonewall implicitly explains away the use of GLBT over LGBT(Q) by stating that their awards “mirror the growth of the GLBT publishing industry” (“History”). What is now known as Stonewall grew from being “the Gay Book Award” to “the Gay and Lesbian Book Award,” the “Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Book Award,” and finally added Transgender in 1999 (“History”). On the one hand, perhaps Stonewall’s lack of a queer category is an honest reflection of their process—throughout my entire sample, none of the Stonewall winners or honors interact with identities that do not fit into G, L, B, or T categories. On the other hand, by not including queerness as something Stonewall is attempting to recognize, Stonewall perpetuates homonormative pushes for gender and sexual identities to be easily categorized and labeled.

Just as with Lambda, I attempted to contact Stonewall’s committee several times for more information without success. However, I was able to obtain information from a former committee member about the process. This contact asked to remain anonymous, so I will call them Blake. Blake’s tenure on the Stonewall Committee ended several years ago, so some of the specifics might have changed in the interim. However, as with the old information from Lambda’s website, the details cultivate a fuller picture of Stonewall’s ideals. The criteria seen on Stonewall’s website, according to Blake, is basically the same material that the committee members receive, and “there is a lot of room for” the members “to use their own discretion in defining what it means for a book to exhibit ‘exceptional merit relating to the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender experience.’” They continue, stating most committee members “focus on positive representation” and that

this need for positivity has increased in the past years after Stonewall recognized controversial texts, such as *Almost Perfect,* portray a more complicated and troubling view of trans experiences.

While Stonewall does have an open process for submissions, the "primary way that the committee receives titles is through publisher submissions," like Lambda's method. Unlike Lambda, however, there is no fee to submit. The committee accepts ebook versions, and the committee does try to look beyond the Big Five publishers, even if it means "purchasing or borrowing from the library, or mailing a copy back and forth if only a few members are able to find it." During Blake's time on the committee, they received roughly 50 titles to consider. They speculate that part of the separation of Children's and YA awards is due to the huge growth of applicable material. Blake is currently serving on another committee for LGBTQ-themed youth literature, and received over 250 texts for consideration. As Blake notes, "It's a HUGE growth . . . and it's fantastic!"

Committee members do not have to identify as LGBTQ; the requirements are being a member of the GLBT Roundtable at ALA and having some "background in LGBTQ literature whether in libraries, scholarly pursuits, or other connections." Blake notes that there was talk of needing "certain voices needing to be listened to more closely on committees" such as trans people and people of color, who are able to speak to lived experiences with greater accuracy.

The ways in which both awards have vagueness and holes in their criteria and awarding process highlights how they might be problematic. While both proclaim to

award excellence and representations of LGBTQ lives, the lack of firm definitions of what constitutes these areas and a lack of committee members identifying as LGBTQ leaves the awards as having less creditability than the awards that carefully layout what constitutes excellence and how they name winners.

Theoretical Framework

Defining queer and queer theory is a bit of a fool's errand. Queerness, in its purest form, is unknowable and ever-shifting. The confusion of what constitutes a queer subject can be productive as it allows for conversations illuminating the restrictive forces of stable identities. José Muñoz provides my favorite definition of queer stating that "queers are people who have failed to turn around to the 'Hey, you there!' interpellating the call of heteronormativity" (33). Rather than being defined by unified identities, queer theory solidifies itself around an opposition to hegemonic power structures. As Judith Halberstam notes, foundational queer theorists "Foucault and Butler . . . believe that resistance has to go beyond the taking of a name ('I am a lesbian'), and must produce creative new forms of being by assuming and empowering marginal positionality" (53).

Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson discuss women of color feminism and queer of color critique as systems that "profoundly question nationalist and identitarian modes of political organization and craft alternative understandings of subjectivity, collectivity, and power" (2). These theories view "formations as comparative analytics rather than descriptions of identity categories" and "situate women of color feminism and queer of color critique as providing an alternative comparative method that, in its deep critique of the racialized, gendered, and sexualized devaluation of human life, gives us a blueprint

for coalition around contemporary struggles" (2-3). Queer theory and queer of color critique is in many aspects a hope for freedom; freedom from white supremacy, from hetero- and homonormativity, and from patriarchy. In theorizing forms of sexuality, gender, race, and class which resist definition, binaries, and normativity, queer theory strives for an equitable society for all persons, irrespective of the many intersectional facets of their identity that come together to form a whole, unique person. Because of this hope, studying queer theory and queer of color critique raises the question of how it engenders coalition, societal change and advocacy.

Throughout the dissertation, I specifically discuss homonormativity, as a principle that recognizes how progress and regression can be paired. I look at Lisa Duggan's definition of homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (179). For instance, the fight for gay marriage rights was a homonormative push that normalizes the institution of marriage, while continuing the subjugation of LGBTQ subjects that live in non-normative sexual and domestic relationships. I couple this concept with Jasbir K Puar's model of homonationalism, which is a

> transition . . . in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and families). The politics of recognition and incorporation entail that certain—but certainly not most—

> homosexual, gay, and queer bodies may be the temporary recipients of the 'measures of benevolence' that are afforded by liberal discourses of multicultural tolerance and diversity. (xii)

Homonationalism works to pair LGBTQ populations with "a proud American empire," that serves to justify other marginalizations, such as xenophobia and racism (Puar 1). By foregrounding the "benevolence" that comes from pushes for multiculturalism, homonationalism allows LGBTQ citizens to feel pride in their country, therefore buying into the neoliberal ideals that also oppress those who break from traditional ideologies. Rather than advocating for true equity among people, these strides for diverse and multicultural content often further the marginalization of minoritized by placing them in an impossible position—they are both the "same" as "us" (read as white, cis, heterosexual), while simultaneously different (Ferguson).

Argument

This dissertation examines the ways that LGBTQ awards for YA fiction consistently recognize similar narratives. While on the surface, these novels serve to prioritize positive, forward-thinking representations of LGBTQ people, often the awarded novels also rely on and further stereotypes that allow heterosexism to replicate. Throughout this study, I discuss this dance of "two steps forward and one step back" as the pairing of progression and regression. In the following chapters, I examine this duality by identifying the trends present in the award-winning novels and how they can serve to both forward queer ideals while also supporting oppressive systems. While my analyses often will often be critical of books and their representations, I do not mean to

suggest that there is no value in the texts which I see supporting repression. Just as there is no perfect book, I believe that there are very few, if any, novels that serve no purpose for any reader. That being said, my goal through the analyses in this dissertation is to understand where award-winning texts as a whole are positioned within the spectrum between heterosexist, oppressive society and an ideal, open, and queer world. My model of paired progression and regression emerges from the discussions of other scholars who have also noted their co-existence: E. Sybil Durand, for example, discusses the way that *Money Boy*'s protagonist becomes comfortable with his emergent sexuality while expressing distain for gay men who exhibit feminine characteristics. She poses the questions "what are the implications of challenging constructs of heterosexuality but leaving heterosexism intact?" and "what are the implications of normalizing homosexuality without disrupting heteronormativity?" (82). Similarly, Crisp states many LGBTQ-themed novels "look progressive and appeal to larger trends in popular media, but ultimately re-affirm what is often taken for granted (i.e., heterosexuality, hetero/homonormativity)" ("From Romance to Magical Realism" 345). Despite scholars identifying this problem, no one has performed a large-scale study of how many books interact with this duality, and in what ways. In addition to examining this duality within the scope of gender and sexuality, I also include more intersecting identities, such as race and ethnicity. The analysis conducted in this study is by no means comprehensive, but aims to show how Stonewall and Lambda's simultaneously rebellious and oppressive nature blur the lines between heteronormativity, homonormativity, homonationalism, multiculturalism, and progressivism.

Throughout this study, I discuss the lack of diversity of narratives, identities, and ideas that occur throughout LGBTQ-themed YA fiction. Progression as defined in this project, then, does not solely mean positive representation. Rather, progress is a forwarding of alternative lives, themes, ideas, identities, or concepts that affect LGBTQ characters. Unfortunately, this does have the downside of sometimes labeling a book as "progressive" simply because it exists—an example of this can be seen in Chapter 3's discussion of genderqueer characters. However, because throughout the history of LGBTQ-themed YA literature the same stories continue to be awarded, this expansion in the multiplicity of stories can help assure that more lives are being shown on the page. Notably, this definition of progression also looks toward more queer representation.

Just as progress is limited within the scope of this project, so is the use of regression. Because of the aforementioned lack of diversity of story, I define regressive books as those that rely heavily on the stereotypical and clichéd stories of LGBTQ lives. As previously stated, this is not to discount that some people inhabit these stereotypes, but rather it comes from a place of understanding that the consistent retelling of the same stories perpetuates a false single story of what LGBTQ people are. For instance, the long history of young gay men who end up tortured and alone is still found today in texts that are nominally written to be positive, such as Adam Silvera's *More Happy Than Not* (2016 Lambda Nominee), which ends with a men-loving-men character damaged and seemingly perpetually single (for more on the novel, see Chapter Two).

Throughout, I examine the books awarded categorizing the traits that are progressive and regressive. This concept seems to align with Kirk Fuoss'

recommendation of privileging the political over the artistic. Fuoss defines politics as "the struggle among competing interests for power to define, establish, and maintain a norm" and believes this should take precedent over art, as "the question 'Is this novel good?' makes little sense apart from the questions that contextualize this evaluative endeavor—namely, good for whom, and good at doing what?" (160). I understand Fuoss's goal in removing discussions of the author's prose from the discussions about representation. However, these items cannot be fully extracted from each other. So, I set out to examine the political implications of depictions of LGBTQ persons knowing the ways in which the books are written—ostensibly, their "goodness"—will inevitably factor into my analyses. Rather than try to remove the examination of art, I attempt to showcase the ways that it interacts with the political goals and impact of the text.

Sometimes it might see as though I am contradicting myself though this discussion. For instance, how can I be citing queer theorists and advocating for queerness while also supporting characters with named identities? This is not due to a lack of critical engagement, but rather a two-fold reaction to real problems I see in the canon of LGBTQ-themed YA literature. First, there is a lack of books that highlight identities beyond white, cisgender, monosexual, middle-class Americans. Seeing your lived experiences represented in a text is an influential moment that can be validating and empowering. Because of this, I believe we need more texts that addresses intersecting identities beyond these limited norms; this includes queerness, but we also need more texts with bi-, pan-, demi-, and asexuals. We need more books that tackle minoritized groups and the intersections of cultural norms and sexuality and gender. We need *more*.

This leads to my second reasoning for approaching the sample as I do: where US culture already is. As a country and global power, the United States is becoming increasingly accepting of LGB rights ("Changing Attitudes"). However, trans rights are still under attack ("Trumps Record"), and neither LGB nor trans lives are without real threat of harassment or assault ("New FBI Data"). Because of the dangers and strife that still follows the lives of those who are minoritized for their gender or sexuality, I worry that if YA literature leaped to fully embracing the fluidity and undefined attributes of queerness without taking steps to bridge the gap between where YA literature currently is—mostly coming out stories that live within binaries—and queer representation, it could do more harm than good for LGBTQ people living today, due to the potential it holds to further ostracize those who are different from the hegemonic norm. This is not to say that radical and liberatory representation should not exist. Rather, I believe that the canon of LGBTQ-themed YA literature should grow from where it is to include a greater diversity of stories and to expand the identities written about. As this expansion happens, I hope more queer, non-binary, and radical stories are also included, and that these inclusions will help dismantle heterosexism. I recognize that this approach to the needs of LGBTQ teens and their literature is not one that everyone holds. I acknowledge and respect those who advocate against neoliberalism and white supremacy by fighting for the elimination of identity categories; the fight is one that is needed. But I also worry about whose voices will be left out of a postmodern, identity-free view of society. Loren Henderson discusses these critiques of postmodernism and queer theory which does not always recognize the lived experiences of individuals. She notes "[i]t is ironic that, just as

African American men and women who identify as LGBT in general and bisexual in particular are gaining a toehold in academia, the authority of their voices *as* African American bisexuals are challenged through destabilizing these identities" (267). Until the minoritized, particularly people of color, are given an equal voice and equal rights in the United States, fighting for a pure erasure of identities will continue the racist, sexist, and classist structures which currently exist.

One facet I would like to discuss ahead of the chapters that follow is my use of framing novels. The framing novels serve to both set-up the prime concerns of the chapter, as well as showcase the most progressive text the sample has of each trend or identity I discuss. One noticeable problem in the chapters that follow is that each of these progressive framing novels feature men, and primarily men-loving-men. I am aware of this problem implicit in promoting only the lives of men throughout this project. However, this regressive framing follows the narratives in the sample. Men-loving-men, and often men more generally, are frequently allowed to be more complex and have a greater diversity of story than women and gender nonconforming characters. These framing novels, then, serve not only to show the most forward-facing stories present in Stonewall and Lambda, but also to show ways in which other narratives can and should progress.

Methods

My sample includes 61 novels and includes YA novels that have won the Stonewall Book Award or Lambda Literary Award or been a Lambda Nominee or Stonewall Honor from 2010 until 2017 (Appendix A). The sample starts in 2010, as it

was the inception of the Young Readers' category of the Stonewall Book Award. While Lambda's Children/Young Adult category dates back to 1993, I chose to use the same start date as a way to not only have similar numbers, but so trends and cultural norms are reflected equally in the data. The sample excludes children's and middle grade texts, anthologies, non-fiction, and informational texts in order to have a focus both of the age of intended reader and in the ways that identities are portrayed and discussed. This means that some years a winner will not be counted in the tally, or there will be fewer recognized texts if one or more of the aforementioned exclusions was awarded.

For the purposes of this dissertation, in order for a book to be counted into any given category, the identity or theme I'm considering must have a significance to the plot. For example, in the chapters where I discuss identities, there must be at least one character who both moves the narrative forward and fits into the specific identity for the novel as a whole to be counted. For instance, David Levithan's *Two Boys Kissing* does feature multiple men-loving-men characters, meaning that it is counted (once) in the men-loving-men category. Additionally, there is a prominent trans character, so the book also is tallied as a novel with trans content. There is a protagonist who is both men-loving-men and Asian American, and a secondary character who is both men-loving-men and Black; therefore, I count the book (once) as having LGBTQ people of color representation. However, when two of the characters go to an LGBT prom, there is mention of there being girls dancing with other girls at the event, but as no named characters are introduced, I do not categorize the book as having women-loving-women.

I utilize similar criteria for themes in the texts. In Chapter 4, when I discuss coming out narratives, the act of coming out must occur within the text of the novel (not referenced to having occurred), though it can be in flashback. This *does not* include moments like in Anna-Marie McLemore's *When the Moon Was Ours* (2017 Stonewall Honor) when protagonist Miel remembers the day she found out her best friend, Sam, is trans by walking in on him changing, because this happened over ten years before the events of the novel, and is revealed through narration, not a full-fledged flashback. However, *When the Moon Was Ours* is counted as a coming out narrative, because another trans character, Aracely, discloses to Sam and Miel throughout the course of the novel and her admission affects the course of events for the two main characters. While passing references to women-loving-women (or other themes or identities) can still be a mirror or window for readers, they rarely are as transformative as a plot that fully embraces the experiences of what these events or identities can mean.

Having located the set of texts, I read them, paying particular attention to the ways in which the texts construct characters' gender and sexual identities. Throughout the preliminary readings, I found trends in how LGBTQ lives are presented; these include the identities represented, the race or ethnicities of characters, and the use of bullying, suicide, and coming-out stories. These observations eventually became the basis of my chapters. I explore not only what is acceptable to the gatekeepers of YA literature but also how these texts construct a progressive vision of LGBTQ lives that still fit within regressive models of society.

Terminology and Categorization

Throughout the project my statistics serve to illustrate what sexualities or ways of being are well, over-, or underrepresented among award-winning YA novels. Throughout, I utilize the alphabetism "LGBTQ" as a way to distinguish people who are minoritized due to their gender or sexuality. I do this for the sake of brevity and clarity, as this is the most culturally recognizable short-hand for these populations. However, I do so cognizant of the fact that this perpetuates some of the same marginalization of other identities that I discuss in throughout the project.

For the sake of simplicity, I categorize characters based on the desires that they act upon and/or discuss throughout the text. That being said, I do not wish to claim or name identities for characters that do not self-label. As such, I use the overarching sexual categories of "women-loving-women" (WLW), "men-loving-men" (MLM), and "plural desires" (PD). These terms incorporate the often-utilized labels of lesbian, gay, bisexuality, and queer, among others, but have the added benefit of incorporating those that do not fit within any of these narrow definitions sexuality, also allowing for characters who do not self-define their sexuality to be properly accounted. For instance, in Lili Wilkinson's *Pink* (discussed in Chapter 2), the main character Ava has a girlfriend and calls herself a lesbian. However, she spends much of the book flirting with and desiring boys. While she does not name her plural desires as bisexuality, I place her in the plural desires category, because she sees both men and women as potential romantic partners. In contrast, though Ari in Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* does date a girl before admitting his feelings for his friend

Dante, I place him under the "men-loving-men" category. This is not to dismiss or erase plural sexualities but is an attempt to best represent the sexualities and gender as I read them within the texts. The difference in these two texts is the character's relationship to their sexual explorations. Ari as MLM makes sense seeing that Ari's growth throughout the novel progresses from naïveté and denial of sexual desire to understanding and embracing his wants. *Pink,* on the other hand, is centered on Ava's attempts to understand her plural desires. While I argue her lack of embracing a bi/pan/non-monosexual identity is an erasure, it is written in such a way that at least leaves open the possibilities for queer or non-binary identities, hence categorizing her in the plural desire category. Throughout all my statistics, I aim to count identities in a similar, holistic manner.

Similarly, I do not discuss queer as an identity label that characters take up. The reasoning behind this is two-fold. First, none of the characters in my study self-identify as queer, though some novels push back on the idea of labels in general (implicitly queering them). For example, in M-E Girard's *Girl Mans Up* (2017 Lambda Winner), when the protagonist discusses being asked if she's gay, she internally muses, "I don't think of myself as being gay, because that word sounds like it belongs to some guy. *Lesbian* makes me think of some forty-year-old woman. And *queer* feels like it can mean anything, but like—am I queer because I like girls or because I look the way I do? Maybe I don't know enough words" (65). This lack of a named engagement with queer as an identity term, makes me reluctant to attempt this as a category. Second, in categorizing characters as I do, the label of queer would complicate how identities and sexualities are

portrayed. For instance, if ten characters were queer, this would not give much information about their desires—are they men? Women? Genderqueer? Do they have same-sex desires? Plural desires? These questions are on some level reductive and inherently push back upon the tenants of queer theory. While I am aware that this persistent labeling can work to further perpetuate hetero- and homonormativity, it is also the nature of categorizing. In order to quantify the ways that LGBTQ characters are portrayed, I reduce sexualities and gender to countable figures. As a methodology, it certainly leaves some of my decisions and statistics up for discussion. However, the overall trends of identities portrayed are still relevant even with a margin of debate. Additionally, I do not presume that the identity categories I list are inclusive, in fact they leave out many forms of queerness. This gap is directed by the texts themselves—I do not list identities that are not represented within the texts. For example, no character in any of my sample texts are demisexual. Rather than citing this statistic as 0% throughout, I do not include it for ease of reading. In sum, WLW and MLM are characters who exhibit monosexuality with same-sex desires. And the term "plural desires" to refer to non-monosexualities, or individuals who do not feel sexual or romantic desire for one gender, including, bi-, pan-, or fluid-sexualities.

For the purposes of the study, I rely on Jody Norton's definition of trans young people as "children whose experience and sense of their gender does not allow them to fit into their sexed bodies into seamless accord with a congruent, conventional gender identity" (294). While she uses this definition to encompass trans children, I also use this to include genderqueer characters. Elizabeth J. Meyers defines genderqueer as "an

identity that has been embraced by individuals who feel that their gender identity does not fit clearly in the man/woman binary, even if they have undergone some physical transformations to make their body fit more closely within a male or female form" (39). I divide books featuring trans and genderqueer teens based on how the novels define these characters' gender. If a character is labelled as trans in the numbers that follow, it is because she or he explicitly uses that label or because their story is predicated on a journey from their birth-assigned gender to another. This definition of trans is focused, like most of the trans characters in my sample, in embodiment—how does the trans character transition from their birth-assigned gender? In what ways do they reject expected gender performance? In contrast, I root genderqueer characters in Judith Halberstam's conception postmodern renderings of queerness which rejects "body-centered identity" and instead has "a model that locates sexual subjectivities within and between embodiment, place, and practice" (5). Practically, within my sample, this means that genderqueer teens are those who do not conform to cisnormativity. This can include performing or identifying a gender identity that does not adhere to binary understandings of man or woman, through non-rigid identities such as gender fluidity, or a complete rejection of the binary as seen through those who identify as non-binary. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, these representations are scare in award-winning YA fiction, leaving room for a more nuanced examination of how genderqueer teens are represented.

Research Questions and Chapter Summaries

I began this dissertation with a set of four research questions that informed my reading:

a. What identities and ways of living are portrayed in award-winning LGBTQ-themed YA?
b. By privileging or erasing ways of being LGBTQ, how do LGBTQ YA literature awards continue or disrupt hetero- and homonormativity?
c. To what extent do these award-winning narratives disrupt hegemonic understandings of sexuality, gender, and identity? How do they support homonational portrayals of LGBTQ individuals? How are these conflicting ideologies balanced?
d. When intersectional identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, class) are represented, how (and how often) do they provide inclusive and equitable representations of these LGBTQ persons?

As such, my chapters are centered on an identity or trend identified within the sample and aims to answer the questions above when considering that trend or way of being. Each chapter begins with a brief discussion of a framing novel that interacts with the main topic of the chapter. This discussion leads into statistics showing how often the focus of the chapter appears throughout the sample. Following the statistics, I examine the trends of how the focus is represented, utilizing representative texts to analyze both the sample, and the affect that the trends can have on readers and society. In each chapter, I then conclude by returning to the framing novel to discuss how and why I view it as the most progressive in the sample for the topic of the chapter, before coming to conclusions.

This dissertation is organized into six chapters (plus two Interludes). In this Chapter 1, "Transformative Potential Amid Problematic Representation," I discuss the

overall aims, theoretical framework, methodologies, and provide an overview of the chapters that follow.

Following Chapter 1 is "Interlude 1: Race in the Sample." This short chapter discusses the prevalence of race and ethnicity within the sample, providing statistics for minoritized racial and ethnic groups and comparing these to the demographics of the US. This data is presented in this short Interlude because it will be drawn upon in each chapter.

Chapter 2, "'Being Boxless Was Too Confusing and Lonely:' Sexuality Contained By Oppressions," examines the representation of sexuality within Lambda and Stonewall awarded texts. I begin by discussing the prevalence of mono-sexualities within the sample, before progressing to the tropes and trends affecting MLM characters; specifically plot structure and masculinity, and the trope of the "Tragic Closet Jock" (Crisp, "Trouble with Rainbow Boys") to showcase how MLM are allowed to have varied embodiment of their sexualities, but their narratives are still predicated on linear journeys focused around coming out. For WLW, I compare the sample to Caroline Jones' study that found that lesbian is YA novels are strong and their feminist goals often overshadow their sexuality. Additionally, I examine the high percentage of LGBTQ-themed novels featuring WLW that are historical fiction and the ways that novels with WLW characters conform to heteronormative couple expectations. Finally, I examine the representation of characters with PD, particularly the disparities between when these desires are explicitly stated versus when it is implied. The stereotypes for these sexualities that appear most frequently within the sample highlight the ways that Lambda

and Stonewall privilege certain stories. This chapter concludes with a discussion the mostly progressive novel *Gone, Gone, Gone* as a vehicle for noting how even the most forward-facing of Lambda and Stonewall books advance homonationalist goals.

Chapter 3, "'There are Only Two Choices: Pink or Blue': Trans and Genderqueer Characters as Binary Crossers," focuses on the representations of trans and genderqueer characters within the sample. The chapter begins with stats of how often trans and genderqueer characters appear in the sample. From there, I discuss the high occurrence of trans narratives that are focused on journeys from one end of the gender binary to the other. Next, I examine the one novel (*Symptoms of Being Human*) that shows a genderqueer character. I conclude with McLemore's *When the Moon Was Ours* which is the only Lambda or Stonewall novel that allows for a trans existence without crossing the binary and the need for a greater multiplicity of trans and genderqueer narratives.

Chapter 4, "'I'm Tired of Coming Out. All I Ever Do Is Come Out': The Multiplicity of Coming Out and Disclosing Narratives," shifts from looking at identities present in the sample to examining trends present in the lives of LGBTQ characters. For this chapter, I focus on the ways that coming out is discussed within the sample, dividing the sample up into three of ways that the act of disclosure generally occurs. The first, Voluntarily Coming Out, occurs the most in the sample, and foregrounds the power and agency of the act. Next, Forced Coming Out and Disclosing, has a variety of ways in which the character is outed. I discuss these in order of prevalence: bullying and violence, being discovered during sexual activities, computers and technology, and not mean-spirited. Forced outings cause a loss of agency and trauma, but overwhelmingly end

positively for characters, suggesting that they can survive the worst-case scenario. The final mode of coming out narrative is Others "Just Knowing" in which characters in the LGBT character's lives are able to tell their gender or sexuality. This narrative reinforces ideas that LGBTQ people are able to be "seen" no matter who they are or how they appear. While certain ways of coming out are more prevalent than others, the sample as a whole defies expectations of coming out as a defining moment, and rather positions it as a continual, life-long process.

Chapter 5, "The Blood Was Pooling In My Nostrils": Further Ostracization though Bullying, Violence, Self-Harm, and Suicide," examines looking at the ways that abuse is portrayed and normalized within the sample. Looking first at bullying and assault, I discuss *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* (Reid, 2015 Lambda Nominee) as a regressive text that supports stereotypes of MLM and has extreme depictions of violence. I compare the book to *Jumpstart the World* (Hyde, 2011 Lambda Nominee) which shares some similar traits, but balances the violence with a caring family of choice. Next, I move to narratives of suicide and self-harm. I examine the circumstances and implications of Pablo's suicide in *The Vast Fields of Ordinary* (Burd, 2010 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Nominee) and Aaron's suicide attempt in *More Happy Than Not* (Silvera, 2016 Lambda Nominee). I also discuss how self-harm through cutting is used in 3 books in the sample. I close with a return to the framing novel, David Levithan's *Two Boys Kissing* (2014 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor), highlighting how this multi-focalized novel includes violence and abuse for almost all of its characters. Unlike the

other chapters in this dissertation, Chapter 5 includes the most regression, as the vast majority of narratives include violence and normalize abuse for LGBTQ characters.

Next, is "Interlude 2: Questions of Authorship." This short chapter provides statistics about the LGBTQ-identified authors of the novels in the sample. After an overview of all authors, I examine trans and genderqueer novels in-depth, allowing for an examination both of how Stonewall and Lambda perceive authorship, but also of my own biases about the criteria identity-based awards.

Chapter 6, "Into the Light: Awarding, Reading, and Teaching Progressive Texts," begins with a discussion how the sample promotes assimilation of LGBTQ populations rather than equity. Finally, I propose implications for educators and moments of hope for the future.

Interlude 1. Race in the Sample

In Benjamin Alire Sáenz's multiple award winner, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2013 Stonewall and Lambda Winner, as well as Pura Belpré Winner and Printz Honor) the two protagonists, Ari and Dante, are both Mexican American, and often discuss the ways in which they do or don't relate to their Mexican heritage. Dante is light-skinned, more comfortable with his MLM sexuality, and does not often feel Mexican. Dante often vocalizes his insecurities about his Mexican heritage saying things like "We're not really Mexicans. Do we live in Mexico? . . . [D]o we actually know anything about Mexico?" (44), "Everybody looks more Mexican than I do" (72), and "I still don't really know if I'm a Mexican. I don't think I am. What am I, Ari?" (172). Dante's insecurity is contrasted by Ari who is dark-skinned, relates to his latinidad more, but, is unable to accept his MLM sexuality until the end of the novel. While his connection to his ethnicity is more implicit than Dante's disassociation, Ari is aware of the differences between them, saying "I'm just more Mexican [and y]ou're the optimistic American" (20).

This short interlude looks at the way that characters like Ari and Dante are portrayed within LGBTQ-themed literature. There has been much discussion about the need for more LGBTQ POC within literature for young readers (Cart and Jenkins; Lo "Blog"; Trites; Durand; Epstein). For instance, Christine Jenkins notes in her study

"[o]nly three of the sixty books portray people of color as gay or lesbian, all of them African-American" (149). However, my statistics show that 39.3% (24) of all awarded novels feature at least one LGBTQ of color character (Appendix A). In fact, when thinking about the population in this way, the awards represent characters of color more than they appear in the US population at large (fig. I1.1).

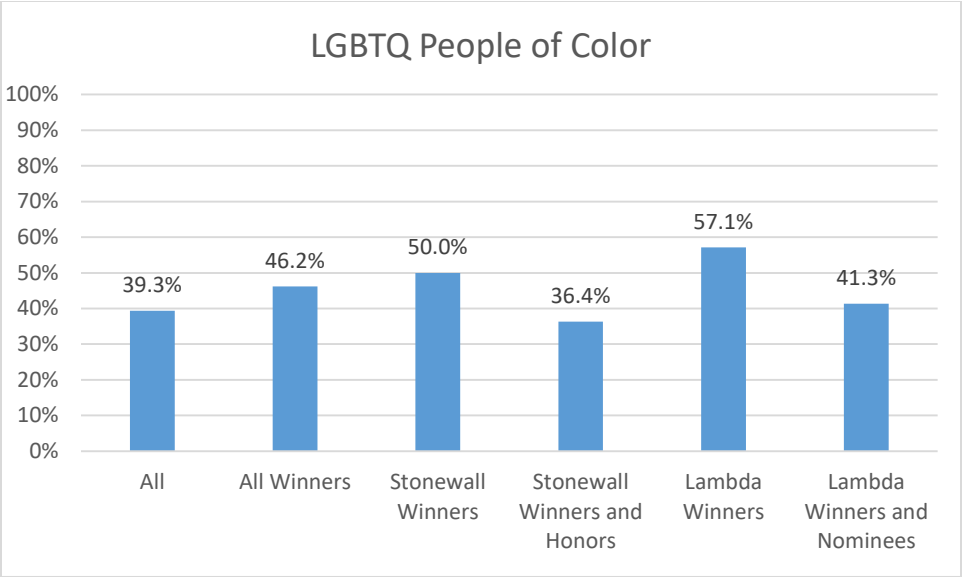

Figure 1. LGBTQ People of Color Across Awards

According to the US Census Bureau, ("Quick Facts"), as of July 2016, 61.3% of the US population is white, not Hispanic, meaning that 38.7% of the population is in some way "of color." At 46.2% (6 books), Lambda and Stonewall winners over-represent LGBTQ people of color, if US population is your guide. In fact, this statistic only increases when looking at all winners (46.2%), Stonewall winners (50.0%), and Lambda winners (57.1%).

Looking at individual racial and ethnic groups provide a more nuanced view of who is allowed to be represented on the page. Black Americans make up 13.3% of the

population, but only 9.3% of all sampled books, and 8% of winners. However, Black Americans are the only racial or ethnic group that is underrepresented in this study. Americans of Asian descent make up 5.7% of the population, but are represented in 8.1% of all books and 8% of winners. Native populations are 1.5% of the population, but seen in 3.7% of all books (though none are in winning texts). Finally, the Census Bureau reports that Hispanic or Latino persons make up 17.8% of the population, but Latinx individuals are within 18.0% of Stonewall and Lambda recognized novels, and 31% of winners. The census bureau does not collect data on people of Middle Eastern decent, but the Arab American Institute estimates a population of roughly 3.7 million Americans ("Demographics"). This means that approximately 1.1% of the population is Middle Eastern. Lambda and Stonewall novels also over-represent this population with 3.3% representation in all books, and 8% in all winners (fig. I1.2).

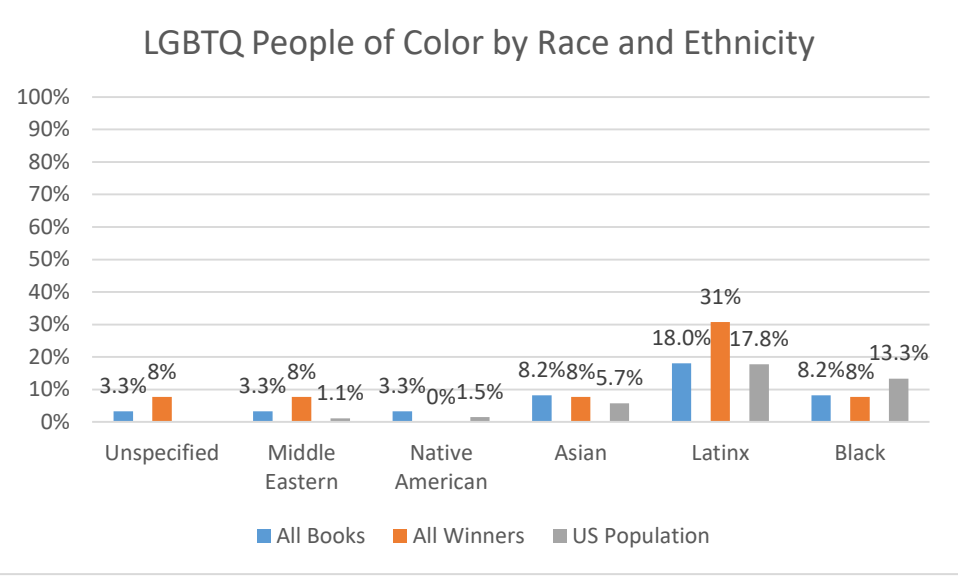

Figure 2. LGBTQ People of Color by Race and Ethnicity

The way that these statistics reflect the real-world data might suggest that LGBTQ YA literature does not have an issue with racial and ethnic representation, but rather is quite progressive. My initial thought was that possibly the committees that award the Lambda and Stonewalls awards are more aware of the overall white-washing of awards (Kidd "Prizing Children's Literature") and work toward a more diverse canon of texts. Malinda Lo additionally found in 2014 that 35% of all LGBTQ-themed YA literature released featured LGBTQ with minoritized intersectional identities ("2014 YA by the Numbers"). While Lo has not collected data for any other years, Cart and Jenkins only identify 11 texts released between 1969 and 2004 that include any LGBTQ people of color,[1] suggesting that this attention to racial diversity within LGBTQ YA literature is more recent. While data does not exist for the racial and ethnic diversity within the YA market at large, Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) studies the amount of racial and ethnic diversity within children's and young adult literature. They found in 2016 that US publishers' releases included Black characters in 8.3% of the books, American Indians in 1.1%, Asian characters in 7.9%, and Latinx characters in 4.9% ("Publishing Statistics"). LGBTQ-themed novels, especially award winners, have a higher rate of inclusivity. Perhaps this has to do with a sense of kinship that exists between marginalized groups. While being marginalized and underrepresented for being LGBTQ or your race or ethnicity are neither mutually exclusive nor linked, their oppressed states might mean that authors, publishers, and readers who write, look for,

[1] Two of these texts are biographies about James Baldwin, another, Marion Dane Bauer's *Am I Blue*? is a collection of short stories. Meaning that from this period, only 8 novels feature LGBTQ characters of color.

read, and prize these texts are more willing to be open to allow intersectional views of life than those that are aligned solely with majority groups.

The amount of LGBTQ people of color within the sample is encouraging, but it does not mean that work is done to make sure that novels for young readers are inclusive and representative of the world around us. Jill Hermann-Wilmarth and Caitlin Ryan discuss the importance of including intersectionality within LGBTQ-themed YA literature. They advocate for the use of intersectional views of life as a way to break down homonormativity, stating "[s]uch a perspective is also important when exploring sexuality, in that people on both sides of the hetero/homo binary experience relative degrees of privilege based on their other identity markers" (89). Further, "inserting that sexuality in intersectional conversations" is important "because it names and makes visible identities that have long been considered inappropriate and deviant, [and] it must also take into account the racialized, classed, and gendered ways sexuality is embodied and lived" (89). While contemporary novels might be doing a good job of matching the statistics of the real world, that is only within the small amount of LGBTQ-themed YA literature that is published each year. Lo found that only 47 LGBTQ-themed YA books were published in 2014, and that was an increase from 29 in 2013 ("2014 YA by the Numbers"; "2013 YA by the Numbers"). With such a small proportion of the YA book market focusing on LGBTQ lives and mirroring the real-world statistics of race and ethnicity, much work must be done within the publishing world to allow more readers to be exposed to minoritized characters. Additionally, while contemporary works might include a representative amount of LGBTQ people of color, when looking at the history

of LGBTQ-themed YA, white people are still incredibly overrepresented. The trend that this section of the YA literature publishing world is embracing is good, but it needs to not only continue, but grow in order for it to truly impact readers.

Where *Aristotle and Dante* succeeds, then, is not only by incorporating MLM Mexican Americans but having both young men grapple with their intersecting ethnicities and sexualities in explicit ways. While many of the texts in the sample do include POC LGBTQ characters, one half of their identity, usually their race or ethnicity, does not interact with the plot as heavily as the other. For instance, Alaya Dawn Johnson's *The Summer Prince* (2014 Lambda Nominee) takes place in a futuristic Brazil. Rather than engaging with the traditions and culture of Brazil, the book invents traditions and uses the country as an "exotic" location. In contrast, throughout Sáenz's text, readers are unable to forget that race and ethnicity affect characters and people. Rather than being characters who could be white except for the mention of brown skin, Ari and Dante showcase how lives are shaped by their experiences as MLM, Mexican Americans, and other intersecting identities.

Lambda and Stonewall award winning novels with characters of color interact with my model of progression and regression. While in some cases their balancing of these opposing forces are different from their white counterparts, they still show a consistent struggle with existing within the boundaries of societal "acceptability" and allowing for better forms of LGBTQ life. Indeed, even the amount of racial minorities present within the sample showcase the ways that Lambda and Stonewall break from homonationalism. Jasbir K. Puar states that homonationalist forms of LGBTQ acceptance

"operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also as the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects. There is a commitment to the global dominant ascendancy of whiteness . . . [that disavow] *populations* of sexual-racial others who need not apply" (2). By incorporating, and indeed awarding, forms of LGBTQ life that counter white supremacy, these novels work toward breaking the regressive model of US empire that only allows certain bodies to obtain equal rights and privileges. Throughout this entire dissertation, I am committed to considering issues of race and racism. In all the chapters that follow, I will discuss the percentages of characters of color that feature into the categories featured in each chapter. I also utilize novels featuring LGBTQ characters of color to analyze the sample at large. This purposeful inclusion serves not only to begin to fill the representation gap within the academy, but also to assure that the "norms" of white and middle-class characters do not dominate my discussion.

Chapter 2. "Being Boxless Was Too Confusing and Lonely:" Men-Loving-Men, Women-Loving-Women, and Plural Desires Contained by Oppressions

Lio, one of the two focal protagonists of *Gone, Gone, Gone* (2013 Stonewall Honor) tells readers, "This is my first GSA meeting ever. And I'm here for the sole purpose of picking up boys. Hopefully a few of them. I need one to make out with, but I would like a posse" (186). This quotation, besides being a joke highlighting Lio's nerves about the meeting, showcases the ways in which LGBQ-themed YA fiction has changed since its inception in 1969. As discussed by Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins, many of the early texts featuring sexual minoritized characters involve isolation, tragic romance, or sexless friendship. Lio's attendance of his high school's GSA allows readers to see that he has a community of MLM, WLW, and allies with whom he hopes to find both companionship and romance. Lio is not content with only one of these facets of life, but rather strives a full social and sexual life with other LGBTQ people.

This chapter focuses on characters like Lio, who have same-sex, plural, or other non-heterosexual desires. The Stonewall Book and Lambda Literary Awards for young readers award novels featuring sexual minorities in the vast majority of their recognized texts. In order to examine the ways in which LGBQ identities are represented by these two awards, this chapter gives statistics of how many recognized books feature characters of various sexualities. I begin with binary sexualities, namely men-loving-men (MLM) and women-loving-women (WLW), discussing the tropes and trends often seen in each. Next, I look at characters with plural desires (PD), examining which novels include

implicit PD verses explicit PD. Finally, I address *Gone, Gone, Gone* as a model of the best that Lambda and Stonewall has to offer in terms representation of sexuality. The texts I discuss below fulfill the values of Lambda and Stonewall, particularly the vague "merit" that both awards strive to recognize. Despite the missions of these awards, the books within the sample fall into my model of paired regression and progression. While the books awarded by these organizations strive for equitable representations, they also confirm cultural expectations that perpetuate hegemonic understandings of sexuality. In this chapter, therefore, I argue that these sexually diverse books forward a vision of LGBQ identities that still fit within societal oppressions.

Men-loving-men and women-loving-women

Within the entire sample of 61 novels, the binary sexualities of MLM and WLM are highly represented. 38 novels (62.3%) feature MLM and 26 (44.3%) feature WLW (fig. 2.1).[2] Because some books feature more than one LGBQ-identified character, these two identities alone add up to over 100%. This high level of representation means that if every novel recognized by Lambda and Stonewall featured only one LGBTQ character, it would be possible for *only* MLM and WLW characters to be represented. While I hesitate to state that the high percentage of these monosexualities in and of itself is regressive, their heavy over-representation work toward the silencing of other, more marginalized identities.

[2] Within the graphs for this chapter, I include the full statistics of identity groups that I quantified. While gender categories are not discussed in this chapter, I include them to allow for comparison across identities.

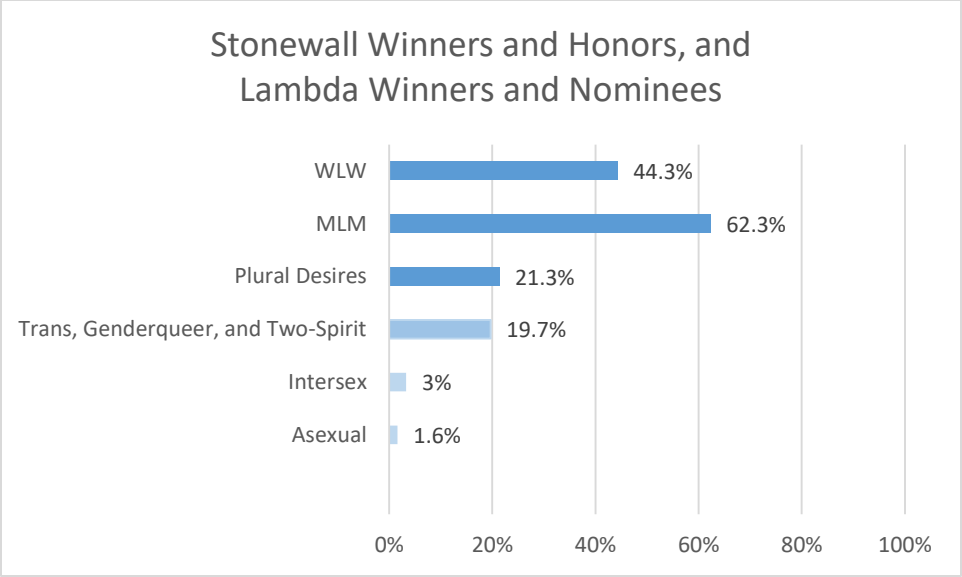

Figure 3. Stonewall Winner and Honors,

and Lambda Winners and Nominees

Highlighting WLW, MLM, and PD

Amanda Thein and Kate Kedley discuss how adolescence and uncertain or questioned sexuality are linked, stating "for LGBTQ youth—maturity, enlightenment, and adulthood are achieved through attaining a clear sexual and gender identity as gay man or lesbian rather than bisexual, questioning, transgender, or any other form of queer identity" (7). Therefore, the prevalence of novels that focus on WLW and MLM makes sense—just as many YA books focus on characters' exploration of sexual acts or independence from their parents as a way to assert their adulthood, WLW and MLM characters adhere to the cultural understanding that having a firm, binary sexuality signposts a transition point from adolescence into adulthood. Because these two forms of sexuality take up the vast majority of awarded texts, Lambda and Stonewall books give off the quick impression that binary monosexualities are more populous and, thus, more

valued than the non-binary sexualities or gender minoritized. These numbers do not improve much when looking at all winners; the MLM number drops to 46.2% (6 books) while WLW texts rises to 53.8% (7 books), still equaling 100% (fig. 2.2). Perhaps the fact that these sexualities are so prevalent in the sample mirror the availability within the market.

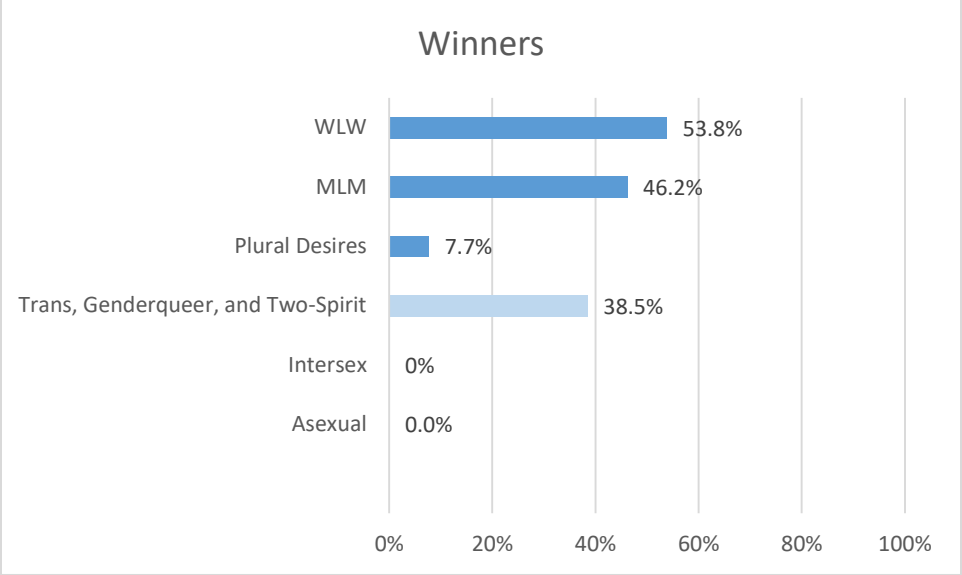

Figure 4. Winners of Stonewall and Lambda

Highlighting WLW, MLM, and PD

Previous scholars have discussed the lack of representation of the racial and ethnic minoritized in LGBTQ-themed adolescent texts (Matos; Koss and Teale; Durand). As discussed in the Interlude, within the full sample racial and ethnic minoritized people are represented 39.3% (24 books) of the time. However, only 14.8% (9 books) of the entire sample features WLW of color, and 21.3% (13 books) feature MLM of color (fig. 2.3). This 6.5% difference is smaller than the difference between MLM and WLW in the entire sample (18.0%), suggesting that the gendered divide is lessor among books with

minoritized racial and ethnic groups. However, when looking at the winners, this discrepancy grows dramatically. Only 15.4% (2 books) of Stonewall and Lambda winners have WLW of color, while 38.5% (5 books) have MLM of color, suggesting

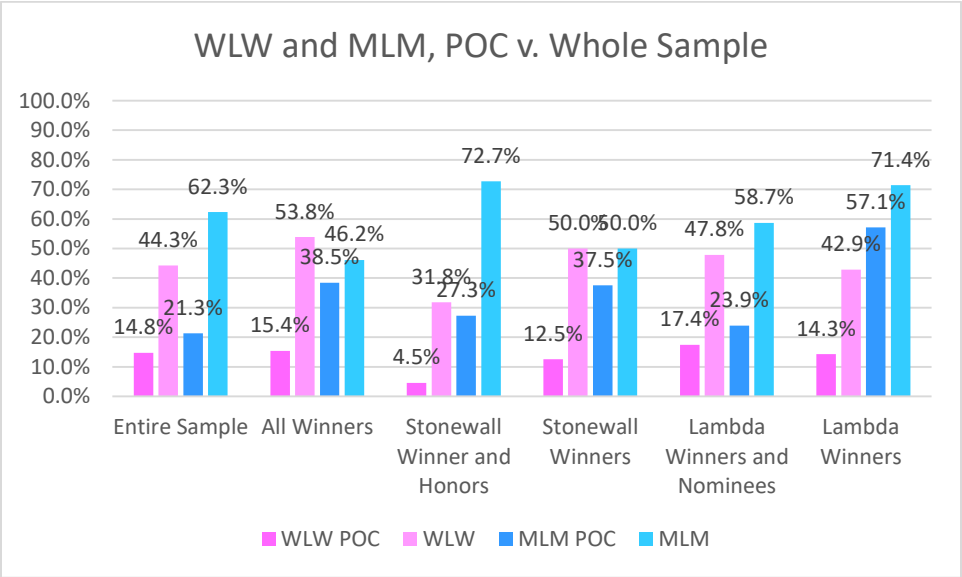

Figure 5. WLW and MLM,

POC v. Whole Sample

that the awarding committees see the need for diversity by awarding people of color without seeing the implicit sexism occurring through the awarded texts. Additionally, Angel Matos discusses how, when LGBTQ people of color are represented in texts, they are "projected . . . as tormented, broken, and unyielding" (97). Therefore, throughout this chapter and study I keep a watchful eye toward not only the number of people of color who are not heterosexual, but also be examining *how* these characters are represented.

Texts with both MLM and WLW represent primarily binary and often homonormative views of sexuality, that frequently also interact with homonationalism. As conceptualized by Jasbir K. Puar homonationalism "operates as a regulatory script not

only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also as the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects. . . . The fleeting sanctioning of a [US] national homosexual subject is possible, through the simultaneous engendering and disavowel of *populations* of sexual-racial others who need not apply" (2). Because the novels that have been awarded by Lambda and Stonewall often look very similar to each other, they serve as part of the national script that makes certain forms of LGBTQ lives acceptable, while ways of life that are absent are still othered and, indeed, considered outside of society, as defined by engaging in capitalism and production. While these overarching ideas apply to both MLM and WLW, their individual stereotypes differ. As such, I will discuss each individually, to show some of the best and worst that award winning representation offers.

Tropes and Trends of MLM Novels

Of the entire sample 38 or 63.3% of the texts feature MLM characters (Appendix B). When looking at the various breakdowns of the sample, MLM characters are consistently the highest represented sexuality. They make up 72.7% of Stonewall Winners and Honors (16 books), and 58.7% (27 books) of Lambda Winners and Nominees. The only categories where are they are not the majority is looking at all winners, where they make up 46.2% (6 books), and Stonewall winners where they are 50% (4 books, split evenly with WLW). While it could make sense that this overrepresentation would lead to a diversity of stories featuring MLM, many of the novels are still buttressed on problematic tropes and stereotypes. In this section, I will address two major trends that occur in the sample: the "problems" of sexuality and

masculinity being the driving conflict of the book and the gender presentation of MLM characters, including Thomas Crisp's "tragic closet jock." Many of the books awarded by Lambda and Stonewall interact with these tropes—some being more closely aligned than with them than others.

Plot Structure and Masculinity

Crisp discusses how many books appear to be "'affirmative' and give voice and representation to gay males, but because they so heavily rely on heteronormative constructions of romance, sex, sexuality, and the world more broadly, they often actually work to continue the invisibility of gay males by filtering queer existence and distancing readers" ("From Romance to Realism" 345). The goals of the books seem to be an integration into heteronormative culture; despite this assimilationist goal, the awarded novels still separate characters by centering issues of sexuality. These narratives feature a predictable pattern of coming out (to self and/or others), strife due to sexuality, and an eventual resolution that either ends with acceptance, usually harnessed through a monogamous relationship, or trauma or death. Crisp continues that these representations "may help [heterosexual] readers feel they have a better understanding of what gay people may be like, but when the images are distorted by normative depictions and publishing restrictions, such titles can simply reinscribe the stereotypes they seek to confront" ("From Romance to Realism" 345). Additionally, the strife that characters must endure "reinforce a view of gay people as outcasts subject to being the targets of physical abuse and verbal harassment" ("From Romance to Realism" 336).

This story line itself is not regressive as it is one that can provide visibility and promote empathy; however, its prevalence among the awarded MLM books places it in the realm of stereotype and MLM characters as figures who require sympathy. 20 books or 52.6% of all MLM novels feature these predicable storylines (Appendix C). To discuss this, I utilize three novels with Latino MLM characters to highlight comparisons across the texts in multiple identity categories. This also has the added benefit of seeing the interplay of machismo and MLM identity. This should not be interpreted as Latinx LGBQ-themed texts being more problematic than their white counterparts, but rather that they also interact with my model of paired progression and regression. Additionally, as Matos has mentioned, Latinx LGBTQ-themed YA fiction is "area that has remained virtually unexplored from a literary, cultural, and academic stance" (93). By exploring the use of intersections of these identities, I aim to assist in the filling of that gap.

Adam Silvera's debut novel *More Happy Than Not* (2016 Lambda Nominee) positions the protagonist's sexuality as the driving conflict of the novel. This speculative fiction text follows Puerto Rican Aaron Soto, a sixteen year old living in a multi-ethnic community in the Bronx. Drama begins as Aaron meets and begins to fall in love with Thomas, a boy from the next block, while dating a girl from his own neighborhood. As he comes to terms with his feelings, and discovers that Thomas does not feel the same way, Aaron turns to the Leteo Institute to have his MLM instincts erased from his brain. However, he discovers that he has previously had this procedure in an attempt to become straight. The series of events that led to this initial Leteo procedure include dating Collin (a white boy he knows from school), coming out to his parents, his father's suicide

shortly after Aaron comes out, Collin's girlfriend becoming pregnant prompting him to break up with Aaron, and Aaron's own suicide attempt. These elements highlight the problematic and regressive representation of MLM lives present within the text. While Aaron's mom insists throughout the entire novel that his father's "many chemical imbalances caught up with him," leading to his death, the fact that it occurs so shortly after Aaron's coming out combined with his father's negative reaction to the news, clearly places it as relating to, if not caused by, Aaron's sexuality (196). His father's suicide is so closely related to Aaron's coming out that it positions sexual difference as so unacceptable that death is the only way to separate oneself from a gay son.

Many places in the text, both in Aaron's narration and statements from Collin, show masculinity as antithetical with MLM desires. Aaron states that, when dating, they would flip each other off a lot "because it's how we remain guys, you know" (182). Additionally, when Collin ends their relationship, he says "Nicole's pregnant . . . so I gotta be a man again" (196). The implication that masculinity and gayness cannot coexist is demeaning to MLM and reinforces patriarchal understandings of sexuality. The book also supports ideologies that link Latinx communities with homophobia. Throughout the entire text Aaron, Thomas, and his group of friends will say "no homo" to any comment or contact that might be understood as having any intimacy behind it. Readers see Aaron physically assaulted due to his sexuality not once, but twice. As the book closes, a friend tells Aaron "your boys will take care of you" but is unable to confirm that this statement is true when Aaron returns "[e]ven if I'm gay?" (275). Throughout the entire text, Aaron

struggles with finding a way to be himself and MLM, as he is unsure how the world around will accept him.

Perhaps most disturbing, however, is the text's handling of Aaron's sexuality after the reveal of the Leteo Procedure. While one could read Leteo as a dystopian element that warns readers about the dangers of hiding yourself, there also is a message in this plot device that one cannot deny their nature and that only accepting yourself will lead to happiness. A good message, perhaps, but one shown only after Aaron must endure extreme pain and suffering. First, he goes through the traumatic experience of having his procedure "unwound," which leaves him in the hospital for a few days, with horrible headaches and flashbacks. Next, he ends the text single. Thomas is straight, Collin is determined to stay with Nicole to "be a man" and "do the right thing," and no other romantic interests are presented. While being single is not inherently a negative state, it goes against the conventions of YA literature. According to Karen Coats "the story conventions of contemporary teen books and films . . . almost inevitably feature a romance plot or subplot that presents the making of a couple as a necessary accomplishment" (221). Similarly, Beth Younger remarks that even when texts do not push romance, the "subtext in these novels lets readers know that society seems to dictate that having a partner is better than not having one at all" (101). Therefore, Aaron's seemingly perpetual single status as the book ends subverts the trends of YA novels, positioning him as outside, atypical, or other. Finally, following Aaron's "unwinding," he develops anterograde amnesia which prevents him from making new short-term memories. However, he is accepting of himself and "more happy than not" (293). The

plot leaves readers with the understanding that accepting and owning one's sexuality is necessary for happiness, but for Aaron this self-acceptance can only come in the shadow of losing the future. Aaron's narrative is not only full of internalized homophobia and painful self-actualization, but external strife and a final punishment that seems not much different from the car-accident-death trope of early YA.

Silvera's novel, from Aaron's unwillingness to be gay to the prevalence of "no homo" language, intersects with discussions of Latino men, homophobia, and machismo. Estrada, et al. define machismo as "the socially approved way of being a Latino man" (358). Not only does machismo define the role of masculinity in Latinos lives, but discusses the ways in which one's masculinity is questioned. Evoking the work of Octavio Paz, Torres et al. state "the macho ethos dictates that one must never show weakness or emotion because such blunders could crack the machismo mask, an opening that enemies would exploit. To the extent that a man opens up and shows emotions or weakness, he becomes less of a man" (166). They additionally note that while machismo is a specifically Latino definition of masculinity, the "concepts of manhood often associated with machismo are found in most cultures of the world and are nearly, but not totally, universal" (164). As such, I carefully parse what elements of machismo are utilized in the texts, especially considering that machismo is often flattened to being hypermasculinity serving only to assert dominance and a false gender binary (Estrada et al.; Torres et al.). It is important to trace how machismo and homophobia coexist due to the fact that, within some Latino communities, "the belief exists that being gay is the worst thing a man can do (Mirandé, 1997) and where the usage of epithets such as

maricón (sissy) and *joto* (fag) runs rampant, gay men are tormented with doubt about their masculinity" and these experiences are linked to internalized homophobia which in turn is "linked to risky behavioral patterns like promiscuity and unsafe sex" (Estrada et al. 359).

Estrada et al. study Mexican American gay men and their rates of internalized homophobia and machismo. The study utilizes a machismo scale that includes two forms: traditional machismo, which is "encompassed by hypermasculine traits such as dominance," and caballeroismo, which "tap[s] into elements of nurturance and family centeredness" (359). Their results found that while Mexican American gay men's overall machismo is at a similar level as their heterosexual counterparts, they "aligned themselves more with caballeroismo and less with traditional machismo" (362). However, where traditional machismo exists, it "was positively associated with internalized homophobia" as part of that masculinity associated with machismo is viewed as antithetical to homosexuality (364). Similarly, Hirai et al. found, using the same measurement with both traditional machismo and caballeroismo, that "[m]achismo was the strongest unique contributor to levels of prejudiced attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, independent from effects of gender or personality variables. Higher machismo predicted stronger negative attitude toward them" (107).

These findings correlate to the world Silvera builds in *More Happy Than Not*. Aaron is surrounded by Latino young men who exhibit traditional machismo through their tough talk and violent game play. As such, Aaron feels the pressure to achieve this same level of traditional machismo and therefore feels a high level of internalized

homophobia. Similar outcomes are seen for other Latino MLM characters. Nick Burd's *The Vast Fields of Ordinary* (2010 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Nominee) features Pablo (also discussed later in this chapter), a closeted Mexican American MLM who eventually dies from a possible suicide. Not much of Pablo's home life is shown throughout the text; however, as an athlete who becomes violently angry when anyone suggests he might not be straight, the presumption that traditional machismo and internalized homophobia as part of his life feels appropriate. Both of these texts, then, represent a single, mostly regressive story of Latino MLM and machismo; one that is full of hardships, internalized homophobia, pain, and follows the traditional storyline of MLM narratives.

A more nuanced and progressive version of how machismo effects attitudes toward a character's own sexuality and how MLM narratives can be constructed is seen in Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2013 Lambda and Stonewall Winner). Both protagonists, Ari and Dante, are Mexican American. However, only Ari showcases what can be read as internalized homophobia. His reluctance to accept (or even recognize) his attraction to Dante can be read in conjunction with certain aspects of his narration to see a link between this hesitancy and machismo. For instance, he has a history of fighting, is stoic, does not discuss his feelings often, and wants a big old truck to drive around in. In contrast, Dante accepts his own sexuality fairly openly. He reveals to Ari "I like boys" and that someday he "want[s] to marry a boy" (227). In many ways, Dante fully embraces caballoerismo; he is kind and attentive to his family. While Ari also embodies these traits, Dante does so without

exhibiting many trappings of traditional machismo, going so far as to admit openly that he doesn't feel that Mexican. While *Aristotle and Dante* still adheres to some of the stereotypes of machismo, these tropes are tempered by presenting another form of masculinity that does not include self-hatred. Dante questions his latinidad, but never his masculinity. Because of this, Dante's character allows for a portrayal of male sexuality that is not interrelated with masculinity; this is presented as a good thing, as Ari often comments on Dante being comfortable in his own skin, rather than fighting with internalized homophobia and a rigid system of masculinity.

Dante's story, however, fully adheres to the predicable MLM storyline: after he comes out to himself and Ari, he is beaten up for kissing a boy, and spends several days in the hospital. After this experience, Dante "was different. Sadder. . . . They cracked more than his ribs" (325). In fact, sometime after he gets home from the hospital, Dante tells his parents "I never, ever [want] to kiss another guy for the rest of my life" (354). After being attacked, Dante seems defeated, and only comes back to himself and has hope for a happy future once Ari admits his love and they, presumably, begin a romantic relationship. Because of the ways in which Dante's story unfolds in relation to Ari's, the novel still seems to suggest that MLM must have some strife in relation to their sexuality. For Ari, internalized homophobia and struggling to be comfortable with himself is his conflict. For Dante, this struggle is adhering to the more stereotyped plot line, including the violence faced for being gay. In this way, *Aristotle and Dante* is regressive due to some of the stereotypes it fulfills on a micro-level; however, the text is progressive in its handling of machismo and MLM by offering a variety of ways these traits are embodied.

These three narratives featuring Latino MLM characters mirror the larger sample by being texts that follow typical plot structures while still providing much needed representation of MLM characters as complex humans who live in diverse communities and whose intersectional oppressions and privileges are not erased into a vacuum of "normalcy." The communities in which the characters live are not only diverse in racial and ethnic lines, but they present characters as having their own personalities, interests, and world-views. Rather than showing the neighborhood as a homogenous group that reinforces racial and class stereotypes, Silvera and Sáenz highlight that any group of people have a mix of opinions and ideas (not just the white, middle-class, cisgender, heterosexual characters that who are always allowed to be complex). E. Sybil Durand, in discussing Paul Yee's *Money Boy* (2012 Stonewall Honor), states that for the protagonist, a Chinese immigrant to Canada, "questioning his sexuality is a transgressive act that challenges constructions of sexuality at multiple community levels" (79). This also occurs in the Latino fiction in the sample. For each of the Latino MLM characters discussed here, their relationship to their sexuality also is a relationship with the machismo that has be ingrained into them. This culturally specific form of heterosexism is important to be represented. However, novels and scholarship (including my own above) exist that parse out minoritized cultures as relevant to understanding characters' embodiment of their sexuality, but the same level of care is not presented for white Westerners. This is not to say that this type of cultural close-reading is unimportant. Indeed, it goes a long way to identify social oppressions. However, the fact that white Western societal norms are understood as neutral and "normal" further white supremacy.

While little writing has been done on how MLM teens of color are represented in YA literature, even less has been done explicitly naming the ways that toxic masculinity effects white MLM teenagers.

How MLM exhibit their Sexuality

While many texts in the sample follow the same narrative structure that centers the problems that come with sexuality, as a whole, the award winning texts that feature MLM characters subvert many expectations of how they present their gender. Crisp notes that many representations of MLM characters "depict gay males as characters in ways that may on some levels be 'positive" still often rely on heteronormative or heterosexist assumptions" with stereotypes like "characteriz[ing] gay partners as a 'masculine' and 'feminine' pair" (335). Several of the awarded novels feature young men with potential love interests who, to some degree, fit within this dichotomy: one will be athletic, popular, and/or often the center of attention (read: masculine). His romantic interest will be quiet, artistic, and/or emotional (read: feminine). However, within the contemporary books of my sample, this stereotype is not as prevalent as Crisp found, instead with gender presentation often being more complex and progressive. When this heteronormative pairing does appear, it's generally combined with a variation of Crisp's trope of the "Tragic Closet Jock" who is not the primary love interest of the protagonist. Defined as a "'masculine' young man whose status as an attractive star athlete permits him to discover his sexuality," this Tragic Closet Jock has freedom that comes at the expense of both his girlfriend and the gay protagonist (226). Within the entire sample there are 5 books (8.2%) that contain characters who have some combination of these

traits: tragic, closeted, and/or jocks (Appendix D). This number is not high, but where this trope does appear, it is particularly insidious. Both Dale Peck's *Sprout* (2010 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor) and *The Vast Fields of Ordinary* (2010 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Nominee) feature jock characters (Ian and Pablo, respectively) who are able to fool around with another boy, protected by their masculinity and the presence of girlfriends who are happy to discuss their sexual exploits. Additionally, rather than utilizing the stereotype of the closeted athlete as a way to expose and deconstruct homophobia and heterosexism, the texts position Ian and Pablo as abusive. Instead of being full, actualized MLM characters themselves, the novels utilize Ian and Pablo as foils to show the protagonists (and readers) that happiness comes from being true to yourself. After they serve this purpose, these Tragic Closet Jocks are removed from the narrative. The messages of accepting yourself and rejecting homophobic abuse are good ones, but, just as in Silvera's *More Happy Than Not*, they come at the expense of MLM characters. It is particularly disturbing in the case of *The Vast Fields of Ordinary*, where Mexican American Pablo dies after being turned away by the protagonist. This representation calls back to early YA novels where characters "paid" for their sexualities by dying. Despite the fact that MLM are overrepresented within LGBTQ-themed YA novels, the way that they are presented still reinforces damaging, regressive stereotypes.

Part of the reason why the books in the sample do not support Crisp's pairing of "masculine" and "feminine" young MLM is due to a lack of "feminine" MLM in the sample as a whole. Only 5 texts of the entire sample (8.2% of entire sample, 13.2% of MLM novels) feature a young man whose character is flattened into a stereotypical gay

man (Appendix E): fey, loves showtunes and make up, speaks with a lisp, and is limp-wristed. When these stereotypical representations of MLM appear, they support regressive narratives. For instance, when MLM break with a masculine conventions, they frequently are left without romantic interests, or are single at the end of the novel. As discussed around Aaron in *More Happy Than Not*, this inherently is not negative, but goes against the conventions of YA literature.

Bil Wright's *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy* won both the Lambda and the Stonewall awards in 2012. The novel follows Latino high schooler Carlos as he works toward his dream of becoming a famous makeup artist. Carlos feels secure in his masculinity, however; at one point, a friend yells at him for trying on women's boots and Carlos dismissively replies "[w]ho is separating men's from women's clothes anymore? . . . They're boots for crapsake! Black, fabulous boots that fit me and make my legs look incredible and make me look like a star, and that's all that matters!" (28-29). Not only does Carlos push back against the ideology of clothing and gender being linked, but he feels confident when he presents his gender as more feminine. Wright heavily avoids labels—Carlos does make several references to having crushes on boys, and wanting a boyfriend, but does not label himself as "gay" or "queer" throughout the text. Still, Carlos suffers for his perceived sexuality at the hands of others. He gets bullied, both verbally and physically, for his gender expression, which includes the typically feminine heels, makeup, and designer purses. Other Latino men often make fun of his way of talking, mocking with a squeaky voice and calling him "*Mariquita, maricón*" (35, emphasis

original).[3] While the majority of Carlos' bullies are Latinx, he also experiences love and support from within his Latinx community. Just as in *More Happy Than Not*, Wright highlights the homophobia often paired with the ideals of machismo. However, the novel also allows for a diversity of opinion within the communities with which Carlos interacts. Both his ma and older sister are supportive of Carlos, and he has a network of friends around whom he can be himself.

Each of the 5 books that feature a stereotypical MLM characterization also includes violence against the character. This rate of 100% is notably higher than the entire sample, at 62.3% (see Chapter 5 for more on bullying and violence). When taken in isolation, the representation of stereotypical MLM is not bad—there are, of course, men for whom this stereotype rings true. However, the fact that books featuring this embodied version of MLM have this rate of violence and isolation furthers heterosexism. It is hopeful to see that relatively few books rely on the stereotypes of fey men or Tragic Closet Jocks. In fact, the vast majority of the sample books containing MLM character feature a more nuanced take on sexuality. For instance, in Becky Albertalli's *Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda,* protagonist Simon is obsessed with *Harry Potter* and is involved in theatre (neither of which are the most traditionally masculine). However, he also likes video games and is never suspected of being gay at school (effectively "passing" as straight). On the flip side, his love interest, Bram, is a quiet soccer player who is not abusive, nor tragic (though he is in the closet for much of the novel). In fact, he is eloquent and loves superheroes. Neither of these characters fully align with a

[3] "ladybug, faggot."

"masculine" or "feminine" tropes, rather allowing for a single character to exhibit traits that fit all along the spectrum, as opposed to being pigeonholed into one type of personality.

Overall, while novels with MLM characters are in the majority within Lambda and Stonewall's canons they include a surprising lack of diversity of stories. As previously discussed, only 21.3% of MLM narratives feature men of color as MLM. Additionally, the centering of sexuality as the main problem of books with MLM reinforces otherness, despite the consistent attempt at assimilation. The oversimplification of fey and jock characters in these award-winning texts only further stereotypes; absent are effeminate boys who are given complex and nuanced narratives. Additionally, there is a lack of novels which feature incredibly masculine/jock MLM who are comfortable with their sexuality.

Furthermore, most of these narratives with MLM characters have happy endings featuring the young men feeling comfortable and secure in their sexuality, and, often, finding romantic love. The prevalence of happiness works to dismantle previous stereotypes of MLM characters, and toward establishing that these characters can have a future. However, if looking at these texts through the lens of homonationalism, the happy ending also works to promote US exceptionalism. As "[t]he rhetoric of freedom" is one "a foundational tenant of American exceptionalism," when queer subjects are allowed freedom without it being transgressive, their presence formulates a norm that continues to include largely white, middle-class, and cis-gender while still placing others as deviants (Puar 23). While the "deviant" populations are still being discriminated against, the US is

able to feel open and accepting since we do not take offense to the "proper" queer subjects.

Tropes and Trends of WLW Novels

Within the full sample, 27 or 44.3% of the novels feature WLW characters (Appendix F). Novels with WLW characters are consistently one of the highest represented populations across the awards. WLW are represented in the most of Stonewall and Lambda winners, making up 53.8% (7 books). When looking at Stonewall Winners, they are 50% (4 books, split evenly with MLM). In the other categories, they come second to MLM: Stonewall Winners and Honors, 31.8% (7 books); Lambda Winners and Nominees, 47.8% (22 books). In this section, I will be examining three stereotypes and trends present within these novels with WLW representation: strong women within a rigid binary, historical fiction, and gender presentation. As with MLM stories, these trends serve to provide needed representation that, when taken in isolation, is rarely harmful. However, the consistency through which these traits are in these novels mean that regressive stereotypes about WLW lives are cemented into readers' imaginations.

Strong W[omen]LW

Rather than positioning the WLW elements as the main conflict, the majority of texts work to assimilate WLW characters by having their sexuality as secondary to a character's womanhood. This differs from the assimilation focus seen in books with MLM, which focus on showing the ways that MLM are "just like" straight people. In contrast, WLW characters have their gender-based struggles positioned as more dire than

their sexuality struggles. Caroline Jones labels these books as progressive lesbian novels, with there being several key traits that define this type of novel: characters having lack of strife regarding her orientation, being an erotic human, and affirming the lesbian character's sexuality and agency (80). In particular, Jones notes that within progressive lesbian novels "sexual orientation is a dominant motif and self-acceptance an ongoing theme throughout these novels, the plots do not center on the anguish or confusion (or even delight) of coming out, or the anxiety of questioning one's sexuality—these elements may be components of the novels, but they are simply part of these characters' stories" (81). Vanessa Wayne Lee agrees with this call stating that lesbian characters within these texts "do not always find empowerment in labeling themselves as gay or even in love; they avoid fitting themselves into prescribed roles and argue that the labels of sexuality must be flexible, if they are to be useful at all" (172). Jones links sexual self-acceptance and agency as being part of a feminist message, because if one is able to embrace her (socially restricted) sexuality, she also has the strength to be an agent of other facets of her life. This need for WLW in YA texts to be strong and agentive makes sense, seeing that "[g]irls who defy mainstream norms of heterosexual love and romance are doubly marginalized: girls who choose girls have no predetermined place in the social order" (77). As such, for young women to be successful in life and love, despite this marginalization, they must be able to take control over their lives and desires. Just as sexuality as plot is prevalent in books with MLM, this foregrounding of woman-focused problems is seen in the majority of texts featuring WLW with 18 or 66.7% of all 27 texts

featuring women who are striving for independence or self-fulfillment that is not solely linked to their sexuality (Appendix G).

However, the lack of sexuality as problem does not mean that these books come without problems. Indeed, as Lee notes, these girls "find that they have 'always' had these feelings for females instead of males" (172). Rather than allowing for a less rigid and homonormative understanding of desire and sexuality, the texts support a regressive, binary, and homonormative journey narrative that posit one's sexuality is fixed and definite. Several of the books in the sample follow this format: Julia Watts' *Secret City* (2014 Lambda Nominee) which follows Ruby as she meets and falls in love with a young mother. Elissa Janine Hoole's *Kiss the Morning Star* (2013 Lambda Nominee) similarly follows two best friends, Anna and Kat, as they go on a road trip; while traveling, the two find the joy of independence as Anna discovers her feelings for Kat and her WLW identity. This side-lining of sexuality behind patriarchal concerns is, itself, both progressive and regressive. On the one hand, these texts' refusal to place WLW desires as the main conflict of the plot allows for WLW characters to showcase intersectional struggles and needs. However, because these novels place their protagonists' WLW conflicts or identities as secondary behind their need to be strong women, it sometimes appears that being WLW is easy or at least easier that it is being a MLM. Within the novels this comes from an implication that WLW are not a danger to femininity, while MLM are a dire threat to masculinity that must be stamped out.

Certainly not all the novels that Lambda and Stonewall recognize follow this storyline Jones views as progressive. For instance, in *Unbecoming* by Jenny Downham

(2017 Lambda Nominee and Stonewall Honor) protagonist Katie spends much of the novel trying to "discover" her own sexuality. While she knows that she is attracted to girls, she actively tries to hide it and even begins dating a boy in order to appear more normative. By the end of the novel Katie has accepted her sexuality and is drawing rainbows on sidewalks. Her narrative follows the stereotypical homonormative expectation of plot—realization, shame/bullying, acceptance—which is more commonly seen in MLM award-winning novels.

That being said, the majority of the WLW within my sample foreground not the problems that come with having a non-normative sexuality, but, if any problems are highlighted it is the marginalization that comes with being a woman. In Jane Eagland's Victorian *Wildthorn* (2011 Lambda Winner), the protagonist Louisa is institutionalized, not for her same-sex desires, but because she wants to become a doctor. Louisa's attraction and eventual relationship with asylum employee Eliza is not glossed over, but it is neither the main conflict nor the main driver of the text. While texts such present readers the possibilities and joy that comes with accepting WLW feelings, it also oddly sets up the reverse of what MLM experience in YA novels. Rather than simply retelling a stereotypical coming-out narrative that features inner turmoil, external strife, before eventual acceptance by self and others, WLW in these texts are often positioned as strong from the outset, often already comfortable in their sexuality, or taking it easily in stride. The conversations about sexuality tend to be more about specific desires than generalized angst that said desires exist.

Interestingly, *Wildthorn* is part of trend of WLW historical fiction that emerged from my sample. Of the 61 books of this sample, 9 feature a historical fiction aspect that includes an LGBTQ character (Appendix H).[4] Six of these historical fiction novels contain plots involving WLW (66.7% of historical fiction, 22.2% of books with WLW). All six (Appendix I) are Lambda recognized texts (though Eagland's novel is the only winner). These six books, therefore, equal 27.3% of Lambda's canon of books about WLW, and *Wildthorn's* win means that 14.3% of Lambda winners and 33.3% of the winners about WLW take place in historical contexts. Historical fiction is a useful tool to teach readers about the past and that sexual oppression is not a modern phenomenon; however, the high proportion of texts that feature WLW characters in historical settings is concerning, as it can give the impression that WLW were more prevalent in the past, taking away meaningful connections that today's teens could develop between contemporary protagonists. All six books have characters who hide, to varying extents, their WLW feelings because of their setting. In *Lies We Tell Ourselves* (Talley, 2015 Lambda Nominee), two high schoolers in the 1950s hide their relationship not only because of their genders, but due to it being interracial. In both *Silhouette of a Sparrow* (1920s) (Griffin, 2013 Lambda Nominee) and *Secret City* (WWII) the characters hide their WLW desires not only due to the social and familiar stigma that will follow, but due to fears about the legal repercussions. Both *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (Danforth, 2013 Lambda Nominee) and *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* (Stetz-

[4] Jenny Downham's *Unbecoming* includes historical fiction via the stories of three generations of women. However, the only LGBTQ character is a young lesbian who exists in the present.

Waters, 2015 Lambda Nominee) are set in the late 1980s and early 1990s and interact with the political climate around LGBTQ legal battles of the time and conversion therapy. Because only 1 of the 8 WLW protagonists in these books is a WOC, it sets up the understanding that in the past, only white women were WLW. Though progressive in showing readers that LGBQ people have always existed, and by having emotional resonances that could speak to today's teens, the novels also have a regressive take away of exceptionalism—look at how much better things are today. We're not *that* brutal to our WLW.

Heteronormative Couples

While MLM characters in the sample often subvert heteronormative couplings, books with WLW characters actually adhere more closely to the regressive trend that Crisp notes, with the pair having both a "masculine" and "feminine" partner. Darla Linville's asserts that representations of "lesbian or queer-identified young women" are often "normatively gendered and conventionally beautiful" which "creates a perception for young people coming out that queer women are White, and possibly wealthy, and that people like them (including people of color or poor girls) do not have a place in the queer community" (125). Conversely, within queer communities, there can be an expectation that lesbian or queer-identified women need "to prove oneself . . . by wearing men's clothes, liking or playing sports, or adopting masculine interpersonal interaction gestures and characteristics" (126). These two versions of lesbian homonormativity send paradoxical mixed messages on the correct way to be WLW. In M-E Giard's *Girl Mans Up* (2017 Lambda Winner), protagonist Pen fulfills expectations from within queer

communities by dressing in men's clothes and being more masculine. She states that "sometimes I sort of look more like some Portuguese dude with long hair than some Portuguese girl" (6). She says when she started "swiping clothes from" her brother's closet, "people just figured I was a tomboy, but now it's like it goes beyond that . . . I don't really know what people think I am, or what they think I'm not" (7). While Pen's sexuality is accepted by those around her, it's her gender expression that causes her strife. However, unlike Linville's discussion, this presentation does not seem to be imposed upon Pen by a queer community as she has embraced this style of dress prior to the start of the text when she is the only WLW in her immediate surroundings. Throughout the entire novel, Pen's mom is aghast by Pen's fashion choices. She calls Pen "*princesa*" and wants her to wear dresses. When she finds out that Pen shaved her head she screams "What you do? What you do, stupid girl? . . . Why you do that? You no like me. You no like you *mãe.* You break my heart. So many times, you break heart" (36). Even when she discovers Pen kissing a girl, her reaction is to make sure Pen's love interest, Blake, is aware that Pen is not a boy. At the end of the novel, Pen's mom has accepted her sexuality, but she still does not understand or condone her gender expression, stating "You kiss the girls? That's okay. That's okay. You don't need the boy clothes. You don't need cut you beautiful hair. You can kiss the girl and be a nice girl. It's okay" (352). Despite Pen's consistent disruption of gender norms, Blake falls squarely into feminine standards, with long blonde hair, consistent make up use, and alternative, but unmistakably feminine, fashion choices, like boots "lace up all the way to her knees" and "black nail polish," and silver rings on each finger (57). While Pen and Blake share a

love of shooter video games (something not traditionally considered a girl's hobby), their gender expression fall on opposite ends of the spectrum, with Blake being considered hot by all of Pen's (male) friends, and Pen often being mistaken for a boy. A similar pairing occurs in Juliann Rich's *Gravity* (2017 Lambda Nominee), which features Ellie and Kate. While both are Olympic level ski-jumpers, the masculinity associated with athleticism only attaches itself to Ellie. This divide seems to be in respect to their skill level—Ellie is talented but has to work incredibly hard for her high scores. Kate, on the other hand, has a natural ability and is not seen putting in as much work to her sport. The book, then, implies that Ellie's masculine turns are linked to working hard, while Kate's femininity is allowed due to the apparent ease with which she jumps.

Interestingly, only one WLW character in the sample overtly breaks Linville's expectation of being either conventional feminine attractiveness or a more masculine gender expression. And it is important to note that this break is only allowed for one half of the romantic pair. In e.E. Charlton-Trujillo's *Fat Angie* (2014 Stonewall Winner), readers know from before the first page that Angie does not embody idealized femininity, namely through weight. Not only do the title and cover give this away, but the epigraph of book reads "There was a girl. Her name was Angie. She was fat" (np). While the narration is from third person, rather than Angie's point of view, Charlton-Trujillo often focuses on Angie's physical flaws in ways that seem like free indirect discourse of Angie's own perception of her body.[5] For instance, the book consistently refers to her not

[5] *The Living Narratology Handbook* defines free indirect discourse as "one of the hallmarks of fiction writing, [that] is a linguistic form of combining the narrator's deictic position and the character's idiom and semantics" (Margolin). In this way, the narrator speaks as an intermediate, giving "unspoken internal thoughts" of a character (McHale).

as Angie, but "Fat Angie." Many statements about her weight and unattractiveness are tinged with self-loathing: "Fat Angie had had the same underwear since eighth grade—the elastic *stretching* to its edges . . . and her stomach hung over it" (3, emphasis original). Others also torment Angie because of her weight. The book provides a list of things her schoolmates do to her on a daily basis:

> Short List
>
> They pants her.
>
> They egged her.
>
> They rolled her down a hill at lunch. They mooed at her.
>
> Longer List
>
> They spit on her food.
>
> They spit on her.
>
> They spit spitballs at her.
>
> They yelled obscenities.
>
> They stole her pens, pencils, and/or highlighters. (7)

By emphasizing the ways that Angie is perpetually bullied due to her weight, the book positions it as the biggest issue/problem within Angie's life. Angie's mother also causes Angie stress relating to her weight. She tells Angie "No one is going to love you if you stay fat" (43) and vows "that she would not buy her daughter another pair of pants until she lost twenty-nine pounds" (8). In fact, when her mom discovers that Angie has been kissing another girl, she drags Angie in front of a mirror and forces her to look at herself,

snapping, “Look . . . Look at you! . . . You *are* sick . . . [a]nd you’re fat” (166). Throughout the vast majority of the text, it is Angie’s weight that is foregrounded as her single defining feature. Despite the fact that Angie is dealing with grief and PTSD due to her MIA (and later confirmed to be KIA) sister, coming out, and falling in love, it is her perceived obesity that is discussed most in the text. Unlike many other LGBQ-themed texts (and particularly MLM books), Angie’s narrative is not a problem novel centered solely on her sexuality but rather a narrative that examines the intersections of weight, trauma, *and* sexuality.

In contrast, Angie’s love interest is presented as beautiful and feminine. KC Romance is attractive and even her name screams that she is eligible to be seen as a sexual and romantic partner. When Angie first sees KC, she describes her as “199 percent *wow*!” (9). KC wears a

> pair of eighteen-eyehole black combat boots. Skull-and-crossbones fishnets swirled up on her legs and disappeared at the hem of her red plaid skirt . . . Her tattered white button-down with custom-cut sleeves revealed slender arms masked by a soft gray shirt for layering. While it was much too hot for layering, the girl did not drip a bead of sweat. (9-10)

She additionally has a “curvy, unbelievably intriguing purple heart tattoo” on her neck (19). While KC might not inhabit perfectly traditional femininity, her fashion choices of skirts and fishnets are unmistakably feminine and her lack of sweating also reads as someone who cannot be mistaken as masculine.

Despite the book initial positioning KC and Angie as love interests, the text also makes a link between Angie's physical attraction and ability to be loved. While Angie and KC first state their romantic interest for each other around page 100, they do not begin to actually be romantically involved until almost sixty pages later. In the intervening time, Angie comes to accept the loss of her sister a bit more; however, her largest character development is working out to try out for the varsity basketball team. When she goes to the tryouts, Angie is pleased that "her gym shorts were not as tight. Her biceps were chiseled into a shape that popped when she flexed. Her chin failed to double so easily when she looked forward. . . . [Her body] was heathier, stronger, and quite honestly, ready-to-kick-ass-and-take-names" (134). It is only after Angie gains confidence in herself, which only comes once she finds an "appropriate" way to use her body, does she make a move to kiss KC, allowing them to move from friendship to romance. *Fat Angie* breaks expectations by allowing for a couple to not consist of only of a combination of traditionally beautiful, feminine, and/or butch women, but includes the possibility for over-weight women to not only be loved, but viewed as beautiful. On one hand, Angie's confidence boost through basketball that leads to her and KC's first kiss can be seen as Angie requiring self-love before being able to love other. On the other hand, this also can be seen as Angie being *too* fat for love, and needing to lose at least *some* weight and gain *some* muscle in order to be viable for romance. While Angie does make the varsity team and continue to improve her body, the book ends with her still large and in a relationship with KC. The change in Angie is internal, as she seems happier and more confident. Though, like the ending of *More Happy Than Not*, this is a good

message, it is also tainted by the messaging about Angie's relationship to her physical size. In recent years, a movement of Fat Acceptance has begun to be discussed in widely distributed markets. Best-selling books by feminists like Roxanne Gay and Lindy West, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, and an *Independent* headline that declares "fat acceptance is good for our health" all showcase the ways that Western views of bodies might be shifting (Hayden). Angie's narrative is important as the only text in the sample that represents a deviation in embodiment. Unfortunately the text does just as much regressively as it does to progress the ways that WLW, and indeed, "fat" women in general, are shown in pop culture. While YA novels featuring WLW characters make up 44.3% of all Stonewall and Lambda texts, they regressively highlight the ways that only certain women are allowed to be happy, sexual, and fulfilled WLW.

MLM and WLW Within Homonationalism

Award-winning MLM and WLW YA texts have many surface similarities as they both feature binary, monosexualities that take up a lot of space on bookshelves. In many aspects, however, their representation often has opposite concerns. MLM books tend to feature nuanced characters who are trapped within plots that are focused on sexuality. These characters are usually not effeminate, nor hypermasculine. However, when effeminate men do exist, they have a higher likelihood of violence. In contrast, WLW novels are more likely to include plots not entirely centered on the character's sexuality. But, the characters themselves adhere to the stereotype of either conventional femininity or a masculine gender presentation. Their plots are also more likely to take place in historical time periods.

These trends are particularly interesting to compare when examining the way that gender presentation is treated in the sample. Unlike many other MLM protagonists, Carlos from *Putting Make Up on the Fat Boy* has an open and fulfilled life, even if he is still bullied. Both Pen (*Girl Mans Up)* and Ellie's (*Gravity*) stories are ones of love and, in Pen's case, finding at least some acceptance for her way of life. Carlos, however, faces violence and ostracization due to his gender expression and perceived sexuality—rather than the book ending with resolution of his tormenters and him finding love, he gets justice against his attackers (notably not the same as acceptance), and rather than love, he gets a dream job working in makeup. While both Carlos and Pen come from immigrant families and push back against authoritarian views of gender, only one of the two have positive outcomes in most facets of life. This highlights a disparity between expectations of femininity and masculinity. Though girls and women who present as more masculine might be bothered for not embracing standard femininity, they are still viewed as being acceptable. Men and boys, however, who reject normative masculinity are shunned and hurt, being viewed as abominations.

This difference in the treatment of Carlos and Pen, and indeed many MLM versus WLW, reveals a larger issue revealed through the sample in regards to gender. MLM narratives are generally focused on the ways that young men come into sexual maturity and become agents of their own desires. These journeys often include men overcoming internalized homophobia and fighting back the cultural expectation of masculinity being antithetical with being MLM. Novels with WLW, on the other hand, are predicated on pushing back on the oppressive nature of society. They show that women have to take on

the whole of society in order to achieve the same level of agency as their MLM counterparts. It is ironic that WLW's strength and fighting spirit is so often highlighted while, at the same time, WLW desires by itself is not presented as a threat. While both MLM and WLW characters have struggles to overcome, the level at which they must fight is different. Young men generally fight an interior battle to overcome the masculine norms they have internalized. For instance, Aaron in *More Happy Than Not* works to understand himself as gay, Puerto Rican, and a man. On the other hand, young women in the sample tend to have a solid base of understanding themselves but must fight for the world at large to take them seriously. Rather than internally, this battle takes place externally. In *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, WLW Cameron is full of desire and spunk, but has to fight her conservative family and a conversion camp to remain true to herself. While the level at which characters come into the sexualities and selves differs along gendered lines, both serve to continue patriarchy in US society. This, then, might be the most regressive piece of all the novels with MLM and WLW characters. The way these books work to normalize same-sex desires, while simultaneously normalizing structures that led to the demonization of homosexuality in the first place interacts with homonationalist goals of forming an alliance between "acceptable" forms homosexuality and the white supremacy of US empire (Puar 2). Puar notes that this type the "liberal discourses of multicultural tolerance and diversity" often bring about temporary "measure of benevolence" to LGBTQ subjects, but, this benevolence is precipitated on engagement with "white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity" (xii). Indeed, MLM and WLW characters, through their same-sex

desires, disrupt heteronormativity by representing minoritized sexualities in positive lights. However, the books also continue heterosexism through gender dynamics, namely rigid masculinity and women who are only permitted agency when they are strong enough to win it over in a culture that does not respect women as humans.

Plural Desires

Within all of the award-recognized texts, 21.3% (13 books) feature a character with plural desires (fig. 2.4). However, when looking only at the winners of each award, this number drops to 7.7% (1 book), contributing to the erasure of bisexuality and other non-monosexualitites (fig. 2.5). Drawing on Anzaldúa's conception of borderlands and border-crossers, April Callis notes that while the sexual binary is "becoming less hegemonic," it still holds power of society (64). She therefore sees plural desires (such as bisexuality, pansexuality, and queerness) as being a sexual borderland where

> identities can change, multiply, and/or dissolve. For heterosexual and homosexual-identified people living on either side of the border, the borderland serves multiple purposes. It can become a boundary not to be crossed, or a pathway to a new identity. Because the borderlands are emerging from within the current binary system of sexuality, they interface with individuals of all sexual identities. (64)

Individuals who exist in the borderlands are "both not accepted and invisible" as they are rejected "both from the straight population for being too queer and from the queer

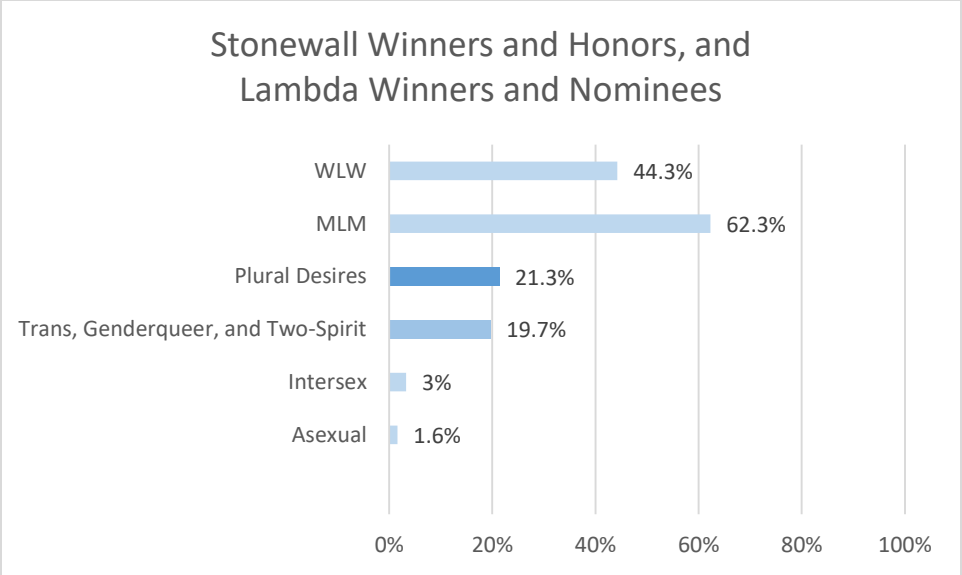

Figure 6. Stonewall Winners and Honors, and

Lambda Winners and Nominees Highlighting PD

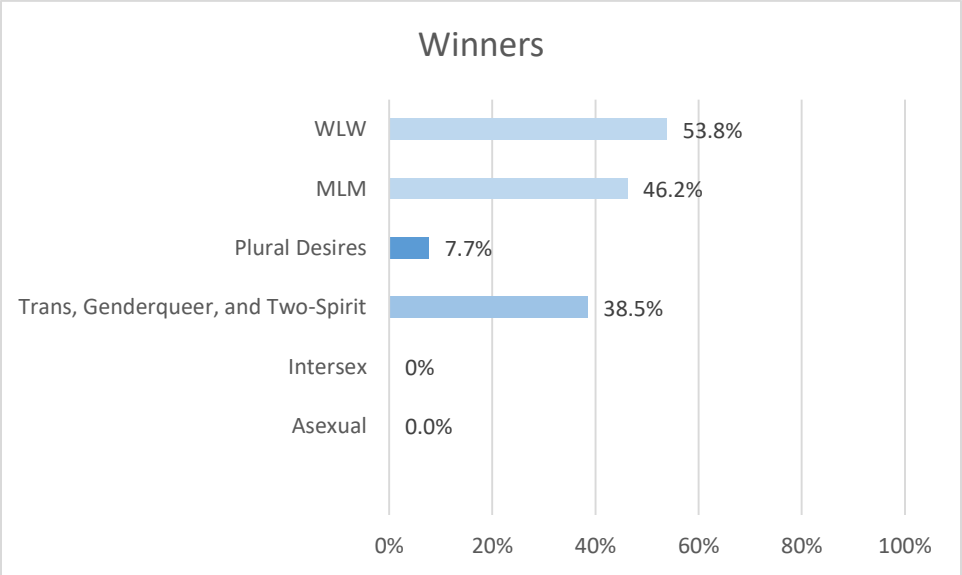

Figure 7. Winners of Stonewall and

Lambda Highlighting PD

population for being too straight" (70). For instance, at a GSA Pride Prom in Kentucky, Callis discusses how teenagers with plural desires where mocked with comments such as

"Who let the straight couples in" and "they have their own prom, why would they come to ours?" (76). Similar silencing occurs within YA literature; as Epstein has stated, "bisexuality is unfortunately still missing or, if it does appear, it is portrayed in such a way as to imply that it is less acceptable than being heterosexual or homosexual" making the 21.3% figure surprising (111). However, of the two awards, Lambda tends to be more inclusive of non-monosexualities, with 23.9% (11 books) of their recognized books fitting into this category (fig. 2.6). Stonewall has just over half of this amount with 18.2% (4 books) (fig. 2.7). Despite much conversation about the erasure of plural desires (Weiss; Kneen; Epstein; Cart and Jenkins) LGBTQ awards honor YA texts that feature many bi- and plural-sexual characters. However, there is still a dearth of *winning* texts that feature these characters. So while books featuring characters with plural desires are valued enough to be recognized as needed, this lack of winning showcases that these

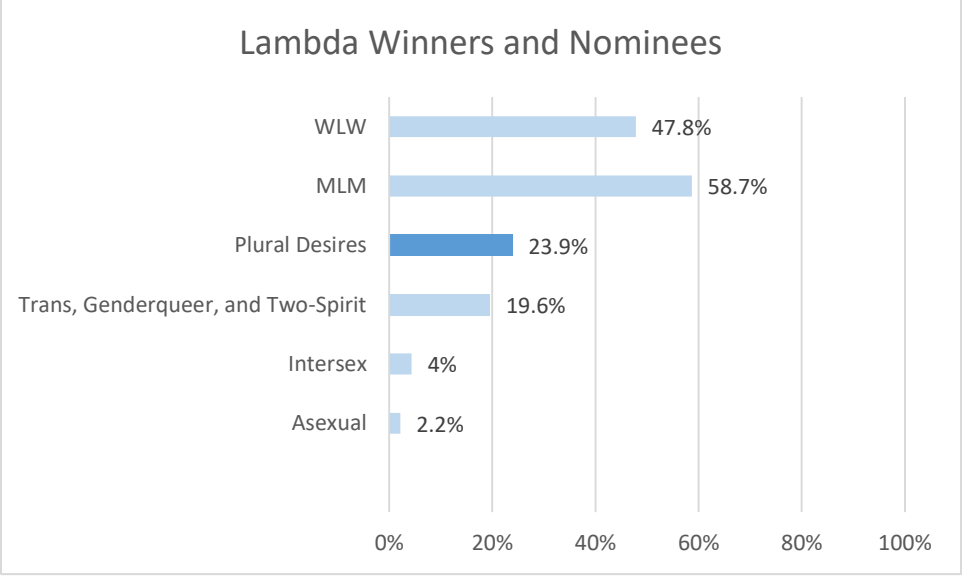

Figure 8. Lambda Winners and Nominees

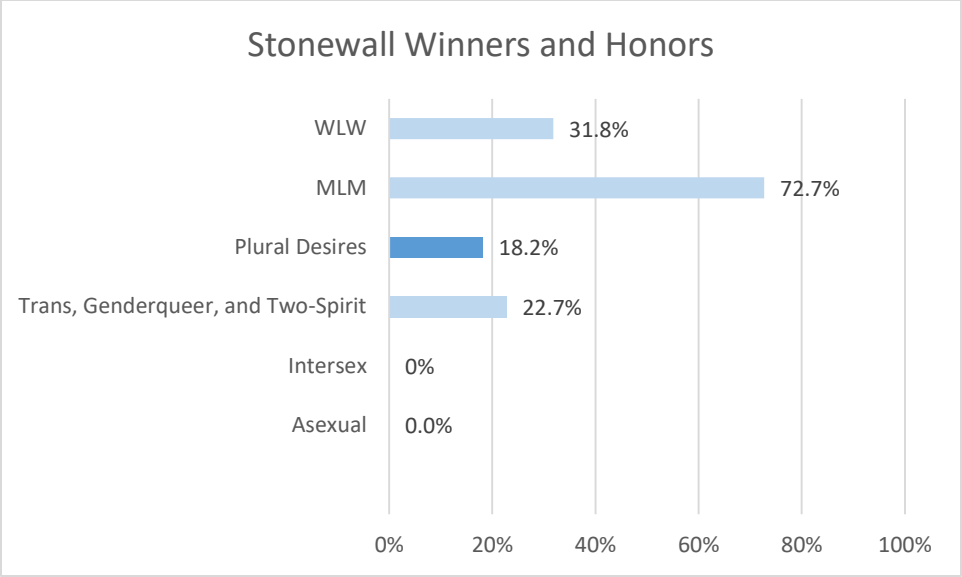

Figure 9. Stonewall Winners and Honors

Highlighting PD

identities are not acknowledged as needing further promotion (as seems to be the case with recent numbers regarding trans and genderqueer characters, see chapter 3). Additionally, 10 of the 13 books (76.9%) featuring characters with PD are young women; not only does this confirm societal stereotypes about who identifies as non-monosexual, but also leaves a distinct gap with respects to boy and gender non-conforming characters who also have plural desires.

Even more lacking is the representation of characters of color with plural desires (fig. 2.8). Only 4 books in the entire sample (6.6%) feature this population, and all four of them are Lambda Nominees (8.7% of Lambda Winners and Nominees) (Appendix J). The absence of these representations contributes to both bi-erasure and white supremacy. The lack, however, is not surprising; considering the erasure plural desires as a whole, it makes sense that POC with PD would be more absent. This problem is not limited to

literature or youth culture. There is also a lack of literature about race and ethnicity and how it applies to bisexuality, plural desires, or queerness in the social sciences (Collins). This needs to change as "bisexuals of color are caught in the margin between identities, living in crisis; and, many experience a sense of invisibility and marginality" (105). Models of sexuality "were developed on white gay men [they] do not accommodate the realities of ethnic and cultural differences," (Dworkin 96) and "non-binary identities are understood differently across racial/ethnic communities, which can be seen in the phenomenon of African-American men identifying as heterosexual MSM [men who have sex with men], rather than 'bisexual' or 'queer'" (Callis 71). Academics and authors should be working to widen understandings of sexuality that vary from majoritarian understandings. For instance, Henderson suggests "that although whom people have sex with is related to bisexual identity, the connection between sexual practice and bisexual identity is not as straightforward as one might imagine" and that Black members of LGBTQ communities face layers of discrimination "based on their race, sexual identity, and other socially subjugated statuses they may occupy" (264-6). Overall, Stonewall has better representation of POC who are sexual minorities (see Interlude). So the fact that they do not award any novel with POC with plural desires is striking. This layering of identities itself represents my model of paired regression and progression. Lambda might be more regressive for having POC represented in 41.3% of its novels; however, their attention to POC with PD, though still a small amount, positions them as more progressive that Stonewall. On the other hand, Stonewall's consistent awarding of sexual minorities who are POC represented a commitment to inclusion and social justice. This

progressive tilt, however, does not erase the fact that the vast majority of the Stonewall recognized books that feature POC are MLM or WLW not allowing other LGBTQ identified POC to have space in Stonewall's canon.

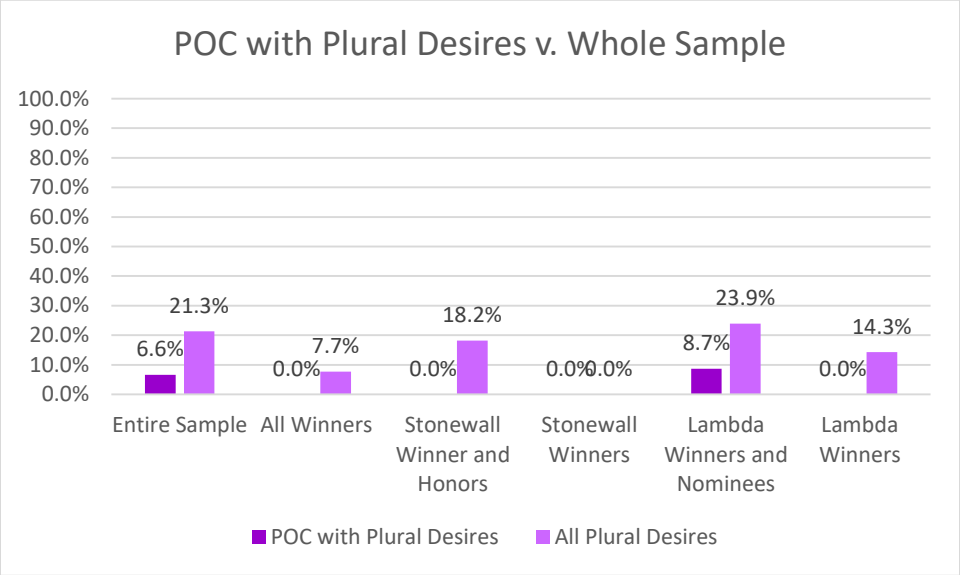

Figure 10. POC with Plural Desires v. Whole Sample

Within the representation of plural desires that do exist, there are two trends: first, novels that do not name the plural desires. In these novels, the characters exhibit feelings for or have consensual sexual encounters with people of all genders, but their plural desires are not named as such. Thus, these texts not only contribute to bi-erasure, but can further cement binary ideas of sexuality as a journey where one comes into their "true" self. Second are novels that name the plural desires, allowing the characters to own their sexualities and for possibility of non-binary sexualities to exist for readers. These novels are important because "bisexuals are thought to be lesbians or gays who are afraid to come out . . . [and] bisexuality is thought to be a 'transitional' phase between straight and gay" (Callis 67).

Novels that Are Implicit About Plural Desires

Over half (8 books or 61.5%) of novels featuring characters with plural desires do not discuss or name the sexual desires (Appendix K). Many of them, such as in Juliann Rich's 2017 Lambda nominee *Gravity*, feature characters whose sexualities are suggested through their dating lives. Rich's text introduces readers to Blair, and it is clear that she legitimately had feelings for both ex-girlfriend Ellie and does for her current boyfriend as well. However, as a secondary character, Blair is not given the agency to discuss her preferences to readers, nor talks about it within the plot of the book, therefore leaving her open to the possibility of being pulled into the binary—rather than reading her as bi or queer, readers could easily presume a heteronormative understanding of sexuality that would mean Blair's dating of a girl (prior to that of her current boyfriend) was on her "journey" to understanding her "true" heterosexuality. While this path is the typical coming out narrative in reverse, the narrative leaves open the possibility that Blair is straight, and was experimenting with her ex-girlfriend, which could contribute to bi-erasure.

Perhaps the best example of the ways in which silence can lead to erasure is Lili Wilkinson's *Pink.* This Stonewall Honor and Lambda Nominee follows narrator Ava as she transfers schools. Ava has a girlfriend, Chloe, and supportive, loving parents. Being a lesbian is part of her identity, but she voluntarily changes schools to allow some space from Chloe and explore if she might like boys. Despite Ava's plot focalized around being open to possibilities beyond the hetero- and homosexual binary, the novel remains fixed within this false duality. Upon switching schools, Ava turns in her Doc Martens for pink

cardigans, and reminds herself that she's "exploring the possibility of maybe thinking about perhaps sort of Liking Boys" and hopes that no one at this new school can tell that she is "really a quasi-goth emo lesbian" (16). This willingness to explore and try new versions of herself allows for the possibilities of queerness, but Ava's own admission that she is "really" a lesbian further entrenches her perceived identity as "true." Ava's cardigans and more feminine clothing makes her feel like a fraud in a conflation of gender expression and sexuality that she feels several times throughout the book. When thinking about the possibility of having sex with a boy, she realizes

> I hadn't really thought about that side of things. I mean, I thought I *wanted* a boyfriend. I was almost sure I did. I wanted to be normal and go to the school formals and wear a dress and for him to wear a tux and give me a corsage. But I hadn't actually considered that I would *kiss* a boy, let alone have *sex* with one. (36, ellipsis and emphases original)

It does not cross Ava's mind that she is able to be a lesbian *and* traditionally feminine. Rather, she seems to believe that breaking with heterosexuality also involves breaking with these trappings of "womanhood." This is the type of thinking that Judith Butler finds limiting in feminist theory as "it tends to reinforce . . . [the] heterosexist framework that carves genders into masculine and feminine and forecloses an adequate description of the kinds of subversive and parodic convergences that characterize gay and lesbian cultures" (90).

By the end of the text, Ava has not come to any conclusions about her sexuality. Her mother confronts her about her sudden wardrobe change, encouraging her to not feel

pressured to "fit into some kind of *box*[.] . . . You should be challenging *any* universal definition of femininity" (115, emphases original). However, Ava, internally, pushes back: "I *wanted* to fit into a box. I just didn't know which box was mine. Being boxless was too confusing and lonely" (115, emphasis original). While Ava is willing to experiment and explore, she does so while hoping to find an established, accepted identity to fit into. Butler discusses that identity politics posits that "an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken" (194-5). Rather than embracing queerness by recognizing the lack of as Butler calls it a "doer," Ava remains fixated on binary identities which can allow her to find a place within heterosexist society formations.

Ava spends much of the novel pondering which path is correct—for instance, when contemplating kissing a boy versus kissing Chloe, she decides that "I wasn't sure if it was *better*. I had to do it again, to kiss him again. I needed to be sure" (136, emphasis original). Rather than accepting both desires and enjoyment, Ava has to rank them and pick a winner to determine her sexuality; the idea that the person she is kissing affects how it feels does not cross her mind. This normative push to be one or the other erases bisexuality, demisexuality, and queerness. Ava also wonders how she could be attracted to Chloe and a boy at the same time (130). In fact, the word "bisexual" (nor any similar descriptor) is never mentioned throughout the book. Bonnie Kneen discusses the ways in which bisexuality is portrayed in YA literature, stating that, "[b]ooks with bisexual protagonists are even more likely to be the only representations of bisexuals that readers come across than books about gay boys or lesbian girls are to be the only representations

of gays or lesbians that readers come across" (361). This "bisexual invisibility" therefore "follows (and reinforces) a broader invisibility that is likely to shape most teenagers' lived experience of bisexuality . . . since it reduces the conceivability and plausibility of bisexuality as an explanation of their plural desires" (363).

Despite this erasure, *Pink* does end on a note that allows for the potential of bisexuality or queerness. In having a conversation with her new love interest, Sam, when she states "I don't know whether . . . I'm straight or gay, or gay with a twist of straight or what," Sam replies, "I hear it's okay to be both," and says that not choosing at all is ok as well (308-309, ellipses original). Ava finds relief in this conversation. The potential for a non-binary life is the conclusion to her struggles and the novel. While hopeful, this conversation takes up the last three pages of a 310 novel, leaving the main message of the novel rooted in Ava's inability to grasp the concept of the spectrum of identities. Additionally, her narration does not leave much room for readers to understand her binary-driven drama as anything other than credible, as she is positioned as a reliable narrator.

All of this is not to say that characters cannot experiment. Characters should be able to experiment with all genders while coming to self-actualization of their own sexuality. However, the problem remains when no one explicitly exists outside of hetero- and homonormative binaries, effectively rendering the experiences of these teens silent and unimportant. Ava, Blair, and all the other characters with unnamed plural desires each have the potential to break homonormativity by representing queer or plural desires. By leaving their desires unnamed, the books make the characters' experimentation seem

as if it is part of a normative coming-out narrative—one where a character starts as one sexuality and struggles until they find their "true" sexuality. Rather than these unnamed desires being an embrace of queer desires, they continue binary understandings of sexuality.

Novels that Are Explicit about Plural Desires

Of the novels that feature characters with plural desires, 5 (or 38.5%) are explicit about these forms of sexuality (Appendix L). However, the ways that these novels name these sexualities varies. For instance, in P.E. Ryan's *Gemini Bites* (2012 Lambda Nominee), twins Judy and Kyle both fall for Garrett, a potential vampire who recently moved into their attic. While Kyle's MLM sexuality is accepted by his family, Garrett never claims his own identity. He flirts openly with both siblings, and does not correct Judy when she calls him bi; however, he does not claim the label himself. Ryan's novel is representative of the larger sample in many ways—first of all, Garrett is white, mirroring the large amount of whitewashing of characters with plural desires. Additionally, though the idea of bisexuality is mentioned in relation to Garrett, he does not use this term. This is often the case in the texts awarded by Lambda and Stonewall. Even characters who admit to their own plural desires still do not name it as bisexuality or any other queer-aligned identity. In contrast, 2013's Stonewall Honor *Sparks: The Epic, Completely True Blue, (Almost) Holy Quest of Debbie* (S.J. Adams), a minor character Moria likes "girls and guys who act like Clark Gable. . . . But there aren't any of those kind of guys in town who aren't gay, so she sticks to girls" (127). On the one hand, this lack of naming their sexualities can be identified as a participating in the tradition of bi-erasure and adhering

to the heteronormative binary. On the other hand, however, characters like Moria who discuss their desires without claiming a named identity also open up possibilities for queerness. Moria provides more specificity—she is sexually attracted to women and a particular type of man. Rather than simply stating herself as "bisexual," which comes with pre-determined assumptions, Moria lays out specifics of who she would want to date or have sexual relations with, breaking out of identity politics and embracing queerness. However, considering that there are books where characters explicitly name their plural desires, such as Adam Silvera's *History is All You Left Me*, I find myself wondering why so few of the books recognized by these awards feature explicit plural desires. Considering Silvera's bisexual characters are people of color make it, and others like it, even more important to be promoted.[6]

It is also ironic that characters like Ava in books that are implicit about plural desires are searching for an identity or community, but that the novels avoid giving them the solution of an identity. As previously discussed, Ava wants a label (or box) to call her own as "Being boxless was too confusing and lonely" (115). If Wilkinson had allowed Ava to understand the potential of being bi-, pan-, demisexual, or queer, perhaps her narrative would have come to a more satisfying ending. More books are needed that give a face to non-monosexualitites. Even some of the texts I categorize as "explicit" could be debated into the other category because, as I note with Garret, the character themselves do not name their own sexuality.

[6] *History is All You Left Me* was released in 2017, so, at the time of this writing, has not been eligible for either Stonewall or Lambda.

Those of us invested in LGBTQ-themed YA literature often advocate for plotlines that go beyond coming-out and the typical MLM narrative arch. While this is needed within that population, with PD narratives, traditional coming out narratives are in short supply, with few texts allowing for PD characters to be present, open, and easily identifiable. These characters are needed for real teens like Ava who might want a box, but feel pressured by homonationalism to fit into one side of the rigid binary. Additionally, helping society as a whole understand the spectrum of sexualities might allow for heterosexism to be dismantled. One novel that does this well, despite not being an award-winner is Courtney C. Stevens' *Dress Codes for Small Towns*. In it, protagonist Elizabeth (Billie) is struggling with romantic feelings for two of her friends, Janie Lee and Davey. As Billie navigates these emotions, she eventually comes to the conclusion that she doesn't need to decide what she is right now. The novel also features a (admittedly, minor) character who is comfortably demisexual. Unlike Ava, Billie's boxless status is comfortable, allowing for the potential of queerness. However, by introducing demisexuality as a viable option, the novel does not erase this potential into an assumption of a binary journey.

Out with the Homophobia, In with the Assimilation: Progression with Limited Regression

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, Lio in *Gone, Gone, Gone* showcases the ways that Lambda and Stonewall novels can allow a character to have an out and happy life where he has both a love interest and a gay community around him. Moskowitz's novel illustrates some the best that Lambda and Stonewall can offer in representations of sexuality, as it utilizes progressive plot elements with minimal regression. *Gone, Gone,*

Gone follows Lio and Craig as they get to know each other and eventually start dating in the wake of 9/11 and the 2002 D.C. sniper attacks. The book combines many elements that are often portrayed stereotypically, such as coming out, race, mental illness, grief, and gender norms. However, Moskowitz portrays them in complex, nuanced ways that challenge single-story representations.

Lio's co-narrator, Craig, is Black, struggles with undiagnosed PTSD and obsessive behavior following 9/11. His ex-boyfriend, Cody, now lives in a rehabilitation home after a breakdown when his father died in the terrorist attacks. Craig's cyclical thought process involves his menagerie of animals who escape at the start of the book. Lio also deals with grief. Both he and his twin brother had leukemia, and while Lio survived, his brother did not. This leaves Lio with survivor's guilt, and a need to move past being a cancer kid. One of Lio's main concerns throughout the text is how to keep himself and Craig safe during the sniper attacks that are occurring in the metropolitan area. All three of these characters are MLM and each deals with their own mental health issues.

Additionally, as love interests, both Craig and Lio manage to inhabit more feminine characteristics without being effeminized. Craig is a caring soul who is nurturing to his animals and is unafraid to express his feelings—including often crying. Lio also expresses his emotions fairly freely, is a singer, and is openly scared of going outside during the attacks. These traits, while traditionally associated with women, are not a source of torment or strife for either character, but just considered natural parts of their unquestionably male identity.

Also, the book subverts expectations of YA novels with LGBTQ characters being centered on coming out and strife. Craig is already out to his parents at the novel's start and they do not provide any drama for him related to his sexuality. However, this lack of coming out is tempered by Lio who has not told his family that he's gay, but states that his dad has "probably figured it out. If he hasn't, I don't think it's going to be a big deal to him, as long as I assure him we can still watch football" (56). Lio discovers partway through the book that his sisters know he is gay. When he has a date with a girl they become excited and tell him not "to act so uptight just because you're gay" and "[j]ust don't kiss her at the end, that would be cruel. Unless you like her! Don't limit yourself, Lio!" (117). In this way, Moskowitz represents some of the anxieties of being in the closet, without the drama that comes from unsupportive families.

Gone, Gone, Gone is a novel that allows MLM people to exist in the world as who they are—people. They do not have to adhere to arbitrary bodily expectations; they do not have to experience drama for being gay; they do not have to be neurotypical; they do not have to be white; they do not have to limit or name their desires. To my mind, the book only contains one regressive trait: its handling of race. As I mentioned, Craig is Black; while this inclusion is needed, the representation itself is assimilationist. The only reason readers can identify Craig's racial background is because they are told; nothing else about Craig's life speaks to a Black American's life. This is not to say that there are not Black families living in the D.C. suburbs who mirror Craig's family, but rather that the book's white author feels obvious. Moskowitz discusses her belief that increasing diversity in novels is important, which is why she includes Jewish, gay, and Black

characters in her books. However, as half Jewish, Moskowitz can claim some ownership over a Jewish narrative, but, as she states in a blog post "I'm not gay, and I'm not black, so why were these things easier for me to write about than a true halfie [her term for someone, like herself, who comes from two cultures]?" ("We Need You"). She continues that there are too many books with Black, gay characters that are "still ABOUT being black and being gay" ("We Need You"). While Moskowitz's statements here in some respects mirror the trend I argue against in earlier in this chapter, I am uncomfortable with a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman deciding to take it upon herself to fill a gap in representation with a character who is Black only in description. In fact, it interacts with one way Puar sees homonationalism engaging in sexual exceptionalism:

> Sexual exceptionalism also works by glossing over its own policing of the boundaries of acceptable gender, racial, and class formations. That is, homosexual sexual exceptionalism does not necessarily contradict or undermine heteronormativity and the class, racial, and citizenship privileges they require. (9)

By having Craig's family as acceptable in elements of kinship and class, they are subsumed into suburbia where their race and, in Craig's case, their sexuality, is allowed to be considered normative.

As a whole, *Gone, Gone, Gone's* representation of MLM lives is strong because it pushes back against the stereotypes of monosexualities. I do not mean to underplay the problems that come with the assimilation seen through Craig's story. However, the book as a whole does still provides a more nuanced and balanced portrayal of MLM lives that resists many of the obvious heterosexism, racism, and ableism, therefore allowing for the

canon of award-winning LGBQ-themed YA texts to become, as a whole, a bit more progressive.

Stonewall and Lambda, as a whole, present a unified and simplified version of what constitutes sexual minority. On the one hand, many of these texts are progressive, as they expand the canon of LGBQ-themed YA literature by having characters for whom their sexualities are not the only conflict in their lives, and for whom coming out is not a traumatic or isolating experience. On the other hand, however, the majority of novels regressively follow homonormative stereotypes about LGBQ identities that are left largely unchallenged, therefore furthering racism, heterosexism, and patriarchy. By fitting within these societal oppressions, LGBQ-themed YA literature further homonationalism by effectively passing judgement on what versions of LGBQ lives are proper. Rather than allow for LGBQ lives that run counter to heterosexist norms and expectations, the books awarded by Lambda and Stonewall include a somewhat diverse set of stories and tends linked to the sexualities portrayed in them; despite the variation of narratives, as a whole, they support the societal oppressions that are antithetical to queer existence.

What is missing from Stonewall and Lambda books, then, is a strong showcase of books that blur the lines between straight and LGBQ. As Blackburn and Clark state in their conclusion to *Beyond Borders*, "queering adolescent literature invites young people to embrace and embody multiple and variable ways of being sexual and gendered, among their many identities. Moreover queering adolescent literature provides adults who work with young people insights to facilitate their readings of the word and the world" (220).

Through embracing more queer and non-binary plotlines, the canon of texts could be more inclusive and allow for more experiences to be represented and fewer voices to be silenced.

Chapter 3.“There Are Only Two Choices: Pink or Blue”: Trans and Genderqueer Characters as Binary Crossers

In Anna-Marie McLemore’s *When the Moon Was Ours* (2017 Stonewall Honor), a transboy struggles to find his place in his small town. The narrator states “God knew what words, or worse, this town would have for a boy who’d been born female. They would wrap their contempt and their cruelty in the lie that they wouldn’t have cared, if only he’d told them” (117). This passage showcases how trans and genderqueer characters are often discussed within Lambda and Stonewall recognized young adult (YA) literature. While often family, friends, and communities eventually accept—and indeed, the narratives presume that trans characters need acceptance—the differently gendered person in their midst, this only occurs after a period of adjustment. During this time, not only are trans and genderqueer teens ostracized and often physically assaulted, but, as the quotation suggests, the character is often further ridiculed for keeping their gender a “secret” and “tricking” those around them.

In recent years, US society has taken steps toward being more progressive and accepting in regards to gender. Genderqueer and trans communities are becoming more recognizable with well-known names such as Caitlyn Jenner and Chelsea Manning, and award-winning television shows like *Transparent* and *Orange is the New Black* being household names. A greater number of books for young readers featuring trans and genderqueer characters have been released during this same period. Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins’ 2006 study counts 7 texts in their study that feature trans characters,

with 4 of those being short story collections. This means that in their exhaustive survey, only 3.7% of all books included any trans representation, with only 1.6% of the novels. This number has greatly increased since the time of Cart and Jenkins' study. Malinda Lo, YA author and *DiversityInYA* co-founder, performed a series of studies on her blog where she discusses the number of LGBTQ YA novels that came out in the United States for a number of years. Her first post in 2011—shortly after the start date of my sample—builds from Cart and Jenkins' data. She found that from 2000-2011, only 4% of all YA novels featured trans characters ("I have numbers"). In 2012, this improved slightly to 6% ("YA Pride"). In 2013, trans representation dropped to 3% with only one book ("2013 YA"). In 2014, the number rose slightly to 5% ("2014 YA"). For 2015 and 2016, Lo's categorization became more complex with categories like non-binary and intersex being incorporated; additionally, for the first time she captured gender and sexuality separately, recognizing how she was furthering the conflation of these identities in her previous studies. In 2015, Lo found 2 texts with non-binary main characters, but none with a trans protagonist ("LGBTQ YA by the Numbers: 2015-16"). 2016 was a landmark year for trans and genderqueer YA literature by her stats, with a combined 9% being trans and genderqueer ("LGBTQ YA by the Numbers: 2015-16").

This trend of increased numbers is reflected through Lambda and Stonewall novels. 19.7% (12 books) of the entire sample feature trans or genderqueer characters (fig. 3.1)(Appendix M).[7] As my sample only includes novels, the jump in the amount of

[7] As in Chapter 2, I include the full statistics of identity groups that tallied, including sexualities that are not discussed in this chapter. I include them to allow for comparison across identities.

representation from 1.6% (3 books) to 19.7% (12 books) is large. This number increases to 38.5% or 5 books when looking at the winners (fig. 3.2) (Appendix N). Considering

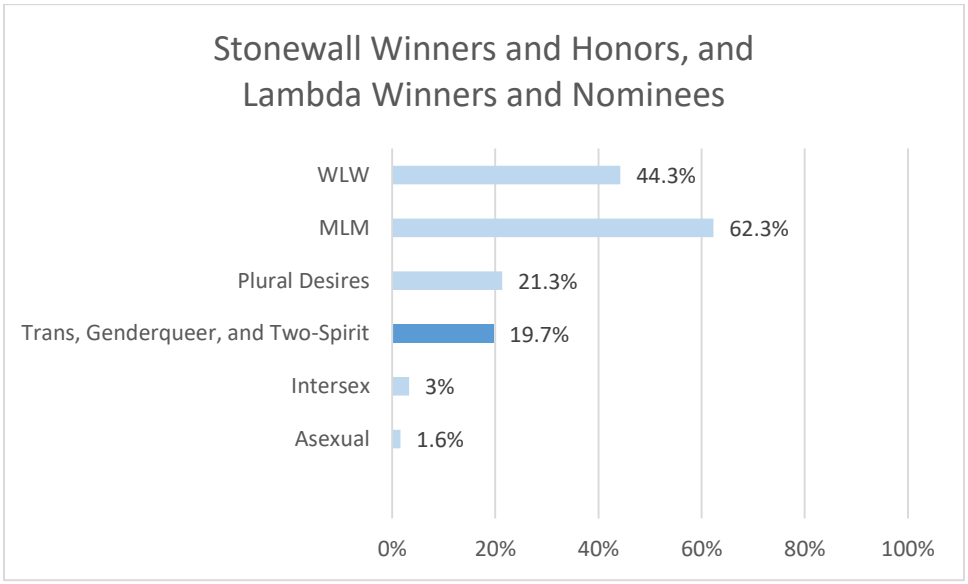

Figure 11. Stonewall Winners and Honors,

and Lambda Winners and Nominees

Highlighting Trans, Genderqueer, and Two-Spirit

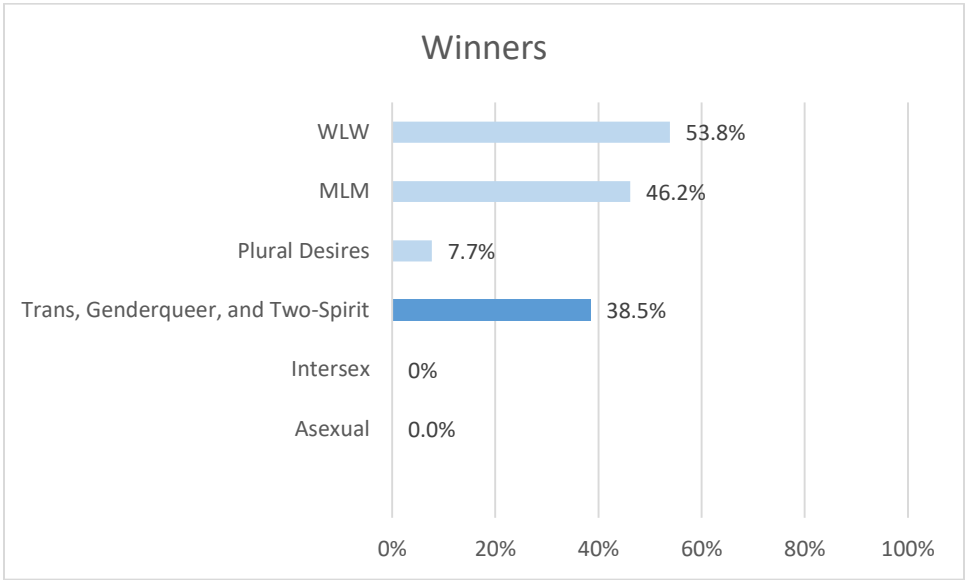

Figure 12. Winners Highlighting Trans, Genderqueer, and Two-Spirit

the small numbers of trans YA narratives published in the past, the 38.5% of award-winning texts is significant. This number suggests that prizing committees are actively working to recognize books featuring trans stories. Stonewall and Lambda have similar numbers, coming in at 22.7% (5 books) and 19.6% (9 books), respectively featuring or genderqueer characters (fig. 3.3 and fig. 3.4).

The rise in awarding of trans narratives not only mirrors the pop cultural phenomena discussed above, but also reflects cultural conversations about the legality and placement of trans persons. Around the same time that Meredith Russo's *If I Was Your Girl* won the 2017 Stonewall Award, Target faced a 6% drop in sales from boycotts after they embraced trans-inclusive bathroom policies (Peterson). Other attacks on trans rights have come from within LGBTQ communities; in 2015 a group formed advocating for GLAAD, Lambda, Human Rights Campaign, and others to "Drop the T" from LGBT

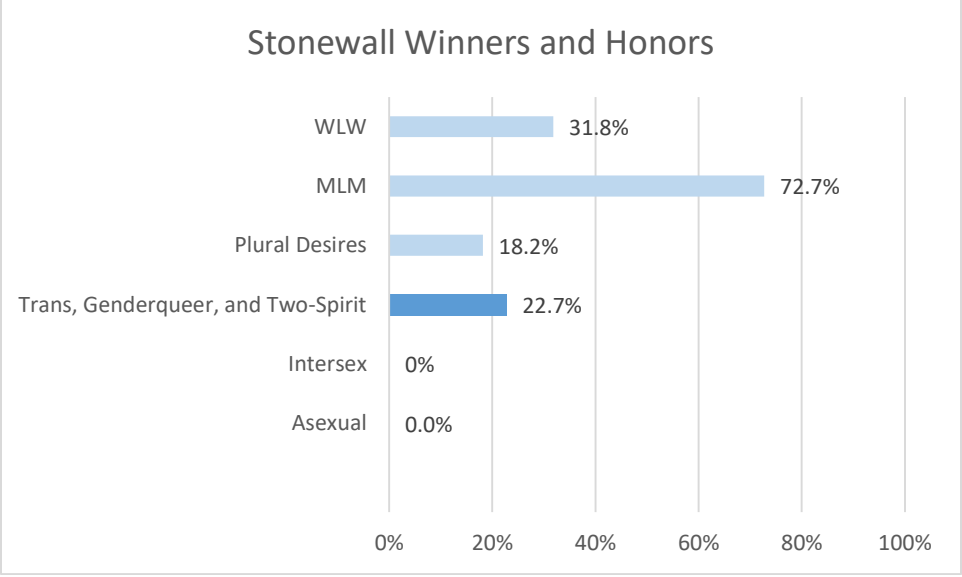

Figure 13. Stonewall Winners and Honors Highlighting Trans, Genderqueer, and Two-Spirit

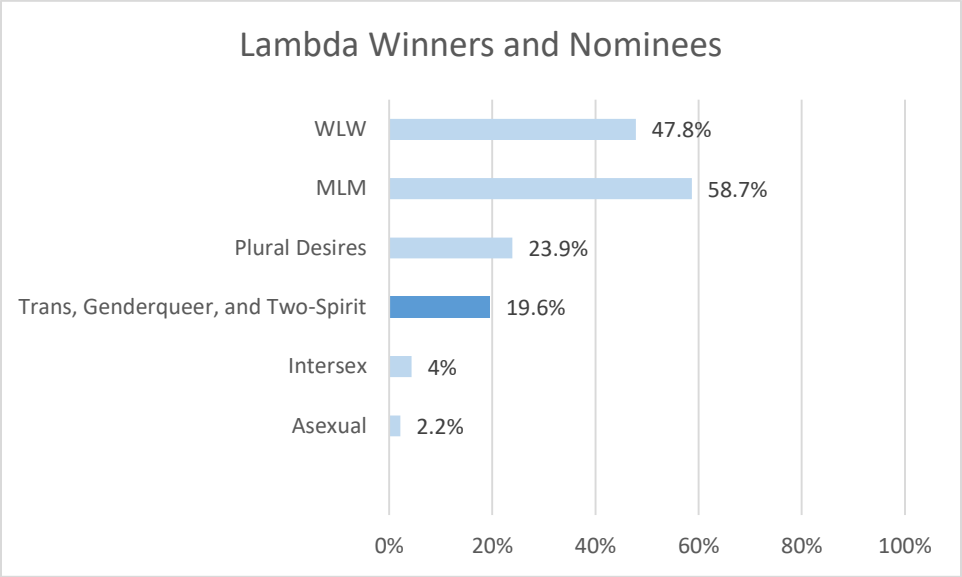

Figure 14. Lambda Winners and Nominees

Highlighting Trans, Genderqueer, and Two-Spirit

because "we feel their ideology is not only completely different from that promoted by the LGB community (LGB is about sexual orientation, trans is about gender identity), but is ultimately regressive and actually hostile to the goals of women and gay men." ("Drop the T"). While the petition only gathered 3230 signatures, its existence showcases even within LGBTQ communities trans-exclusionary behavior exists. Similarly, there are people within trans communities who do not like to associate with LGBQ communities out of anxiety that they will be labeled as gay (Herman). The ways that these separate but linked identities fear association might come from mutual misunderstandings, showing the need for both trans- and LGB-themed texts and characters to be spotlighted and put in to more readers' hands.

The regressive sentiment of trans-exclusion can also be seen within YA literature in US contexts. B.J. Epstein, in discussing Alex Sanchez's *Rainbow Road*, states "there is

an unspoken implication that even in the queer community, transpeople are somewhat beyond the norm" (149). In fact, the only book in the sample that strongly pushes back against this notion, is also the only book in the sample that does not take place in a Western country. Sara Farizan's *If You Could Be Mine* (2014 Lambda Winner) is set in Iran. Rather than the trans population being excluded and persecuted, Farizan tells readers that for "the Islamic Republic of Iran, there is nothing in the Koran that says it is immoral to change one's gender" (104). While homosexuality is punishable by death, trans identity as seen as a fixable illness which the government pays to correct by providing hormones and surgery. This is not to say that trans people are fully accepted: transwoman Pavreen has cigarette burns on her arms from an ex-boyfriend who became enraged when she disclosed; others in a support group talk about discrimination they face and how hard it is to find a spouse. However, there are also moments of hope. Pavreen's family accepts her, and another in the support group, Jamshid discusses how, after a period of adjustment, his sister is "getting better about calling him Jamshid instead of Niloufar" (141). The importance of this book within the larger sample is two-fold. First, it shows some universality in trans narratives—some families and acquaintances might struggle and be abusive, but others will accept you. Second, it shows an acceptance of trans bodies in a way that is not present in current US discourse, in books or in current politics. Iran's policy of "fixing" what the government views as an illness is not ideal as it limits people to identify within the gender binary and furthers pathologizing views of trans and creatively gendered people. Interestingly, while narratives that are centered on sexuality have, in recent years, pushed toward a greater diversity of narratives that, in

some instances, goes from homonormativity to homonationalism, trans narratives remain focused on trying to assimilate trans bodies in to "normal" society. However, the one book that highlights homonationalism for trans characters is also the one that does not take place in the United States. While Jasbir K. Puar's definition of homonationalism is tied to the US, he discusses how "[r]ace, ethnicity, nation, gender, class, and sexuality disaggregate gay, homosexual, and queer national subjects who align themselves with U.S. imperial interests from forms of illegitimate queerness that name and ultimately propel populations into extinction" (xi-xii). Farizan's book, despite taking place in different contexts, follows this model. Trans subjects are able to be fixed and support the interests of the country while sexual minorities are discriminated against for their "unnaturalness."

With its Lambda win, *If You Could Be Mine* disrupts exceptionalism of the United States. In US discourse, Iran is often a villain—Ishaan Tharoor writes in an op-ed for *The Washington Post* that "Iran has long been a kind of bogeyman. It's the land of hostage crises and headscarves." These stereotypes of Iran and the Middle East in general have "hardened and served to bolster the West's own sense of racial and moral superiority" (Tharoor). In fact, a Gallup poll in February 2017 found that 86% of Americans had an unfavorable view of Iran ("Iran"). Despite the negativity that is often associated with Iran, they are able to be, at least a policy level, more open and accepting of trans people.

The rate of violence against trans people, particularly trans women of color, is potentially the most dire. Human Rights Campaign tracks reported violent deaths of trans persons in the United States and notes that in 2016 there were at least 22 deaths, and in

2017 at least 28 trans people were killed, making it the most violent year on record. (Human Rights Campaign). Given that United States policy still views trans individuals as not meriting equal rights or protections, the use of trans centric YA literature can serve not only to promote more empathy and understanding. Judith Halberstam notes that "[g]ender discomfort can be alleviated by narratives that locate the oddly gendered subject in the world and relation to others" (52). Jody Norton similarly discusses texts for young readers, stating "for the sake of our other children's education toward joyful acceptance and compassionate inclusion of their trans sisters and brothers that we must both create and acknowledge their presence in children's literature" (295). She continues that the reeducation of society on gender issues "must be fostered within the field of children's literature, simply because stories, whether literary, oral, or audiovisual, are the cultural medium through which the largest number of people are molded, moved, and inspired to value and accept the diverse ways of being human" (298). By examining the ways that these award-winning YA novels include trans and genderqueer characters, I parse the ways that these awards develop a canon that serves trans, genderqueer, and cis teen readers. I do this, in part, by continuing my discussion of the pairing of progressive and regressive tropes and traits of the novels.

Throughout this chapter, I first discuss the Stonewall and Lambda novels that feature trans characters who fit into trans narratives featuring journeys where they cross (or aim to cross) the gender spectrum. In this section, I break down what the percentage of different genders presented in these narratives in order to discuss the ways in which certain trans ways of being are more visible. I discuss both Kirsten Cronn-Mills'

Beautiful Music for Ugly Children as a text that is supported primarily this crossing narrative. Next, I examine genderqueer characters who break binary understandings of gender and the ways these narratives are progressive simply because of their existence and the problems that this assumed progressiveness applies. This section includes a discussion of Jeff Garvin's *Symptoms of Being Human,* the only book in the sample with a named non-binary gender character. I close by returning to view how *When the Moon Was Ours* positions itself as progressive.

Binary Journeys: Trans Teenagers and Narratives of Changing Bodies

Within Stonewall and Lambda awarded novels, the vast majority of texts about gender nonconforming teens contain a narrative structure

> focusing on characters who wish for eventual gender confirmation surgery and who go through a comparable process, including a coming-out moment, a series of traumatic or violent episodes, and an eventual learning opportunity for a cisgender character (primary or secondary) so the trans individual can be accepted into a given community. (Bittner, Ingrey, and Stamper 948)

As revealed in the statistics below, representations of trans bodies in award winning YA literature has, on the whole, equal representation of transmen and transwomen, allowing for an equitable view of gender. However, the statistic of trans POC is shockingly low, perpetuating the disenfranchisement of trans people of color. Following this discussion of statistics, I examine the ways that the binary journeys seen in these award winners include a combination of progressive and regressive elements, discussing how these plot points effect cultural ideas of trans lives.

Within the sample, 12 novels or 19.7% of all the books contain trans narratives. 11.5% or 7 novels in the entire sample are transmen, while 8.2% (5 novels) are transwomen (fig. 3.5). I recognize the problematic nature of categorizing characters as transwomen or transmen as it perpetuates binary understandings of gender. However, as with the lack of "queer" as a label in Chapter 2, this binarian version of gender is directed by the books themselves, which foreground trans narratives that involve a journey from one end of the gender binary to the other.

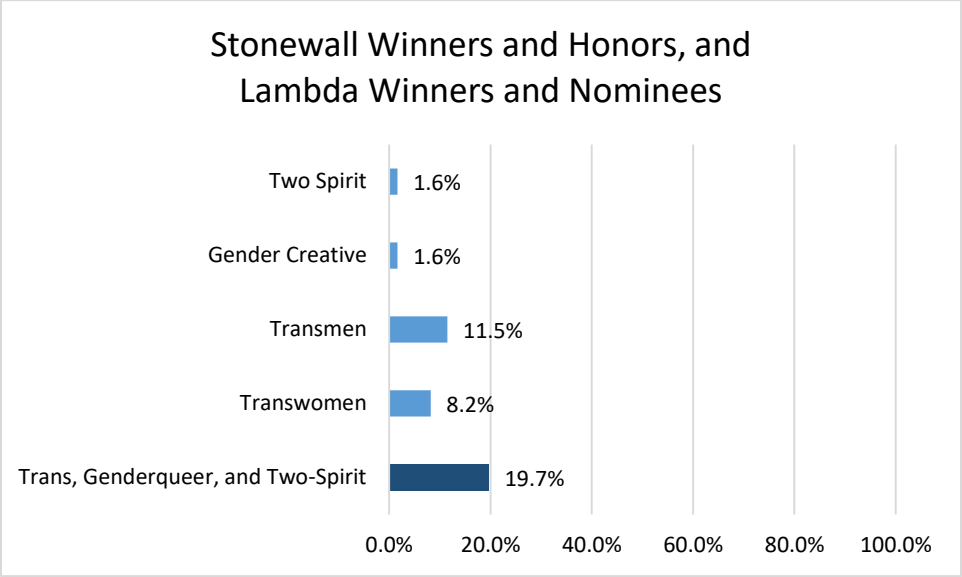

Figure 15. Breakdown of Two Spirit,
Gender Creative, Transmen, and Transwomen
within Stonewall Winners and Honors,
and Lambda Winners and Nominees

When discussing the 38.5% of winners about gender nonconforming teens, the gender ratio is evenly split with 23.1% (3 books) each featuring a single transwoman or transman (fig. 3.6). Stonewall books feature trans characters 22.7% of the time (5 books). The

equal gender divide carries over with 13.6% (3 books) featuring transmen and 13.6% (3 books) featuring transwomen (fig. 3.7). Lambda's figure is even lower with 19.6% of their winners and nominees featuring trans characters (9 books). Lambda has one

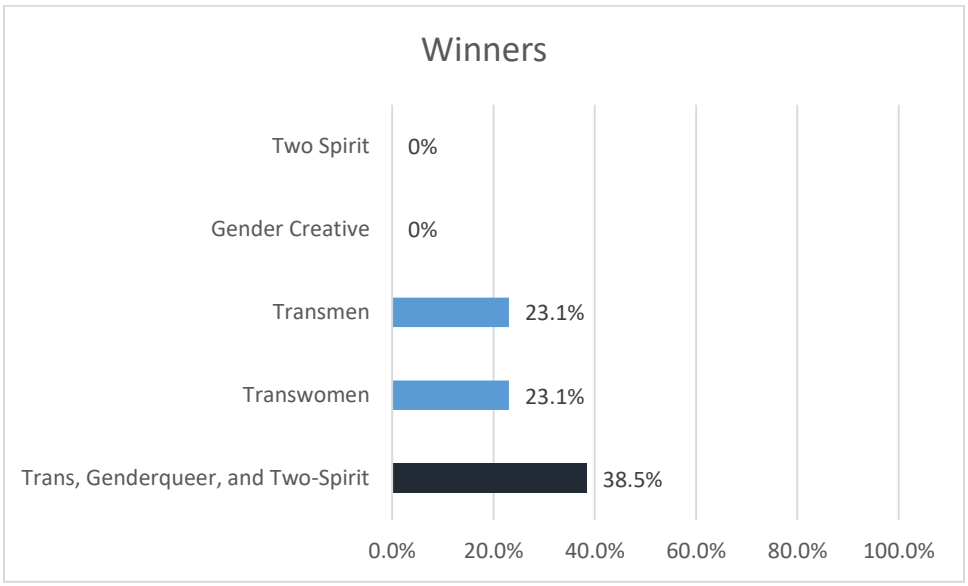

Figure 16. Breakdown of Two Spirit, Gender Creative, Transmen, and Transwomen within Winners

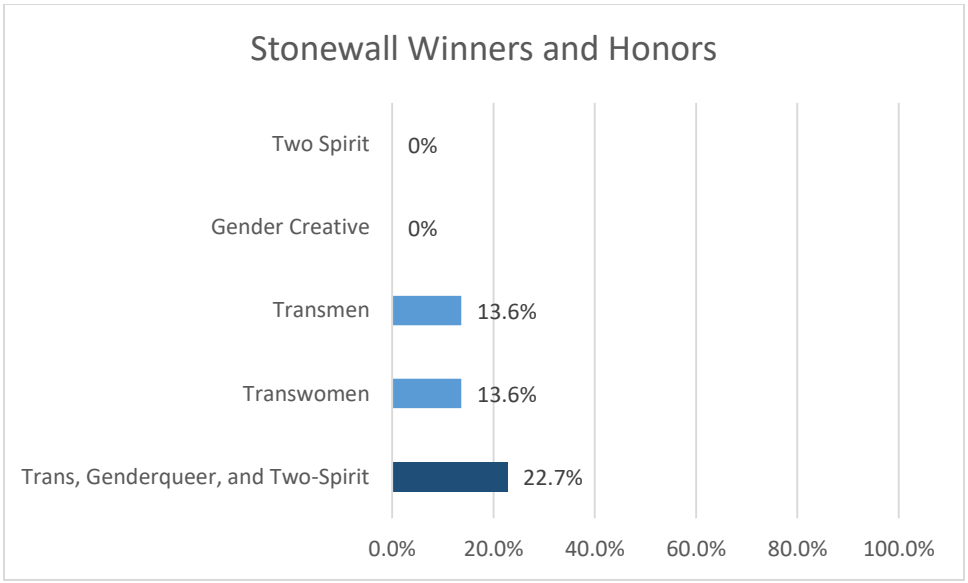

Figure 17. Breakdown of Two Spirit,
Gender Creative, Transmen, and Transwomen
within Stonewall Winners and Honors

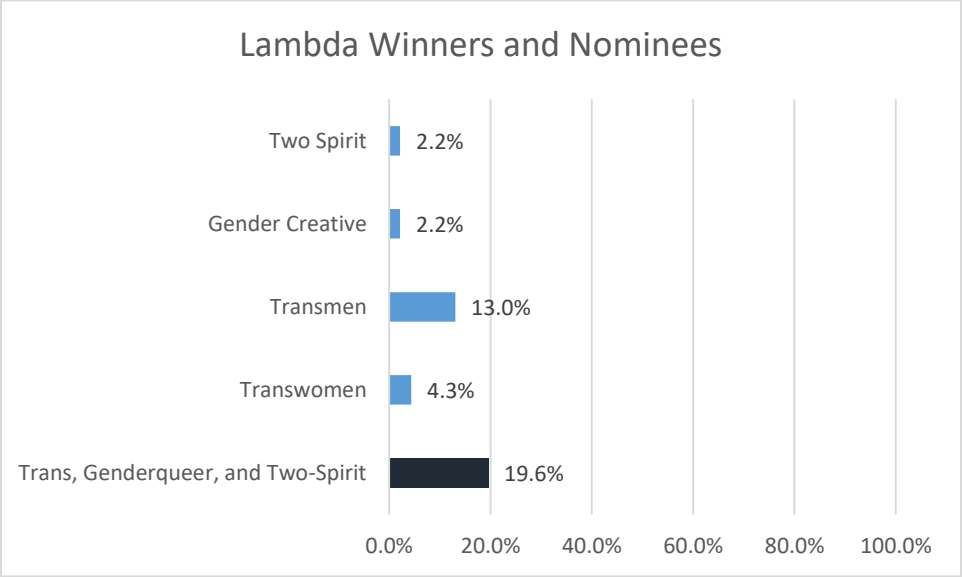

Figure 18. Breakdown of Two Spirit,
Gender Creative, Transmen, and Transwomen
within Lambda Winners and Nominees

text, *If You Could Be Mine*, which features both transwomen and transmen characters. Their gender representation is uneven, with 13.0% of the sample having transmen characters (6 books), and only 4.3% featuring transwomen (2 books) (fig. 3.8). These numbers highlight that the two awards often recognize different texts featuring trans characters, and potentially value different types of representations. The majority of these gender numbers are surprisingly progressive, allowing for both transwomen and transmen to be represented on the page equally. However, Lambda's over-representation of transmen is worrisome, because when combined with MLM number Lambda represents men over 70% of the time (33 books).

Only 3 books in the sample that have characters who are people of color and trans or genderqueer. This equates to 4.9%. In fact, the highest percentage of trans or genderqueer character of color in the sample is Lambda winners at 14.3%, which is only 1 novel. Upon comparing the numbers of gender nonconforming characters of color to other LGBTQ POC (fig. 3.9) it becomes clear that there is a severe lack of characters of color who are trans. In *I am J* by Cris Beam (2012 Lambda Nominee) protagonist J is half Puerto Rican. Sara Farizan's *If You Could Be Mine* (2014 Lambda Winner) includes trans characters in Iran and how, as mentioned above, they receive legal recognition and assistance, while still facing discrimination. Anna-Marie McLemore's *When the Moon Was Ours* (2017 Stonewall Honor) features two trans characters of color—protagonist Sam who is Pakistani-American, and secondary character Aracely who is of Mexican decent.

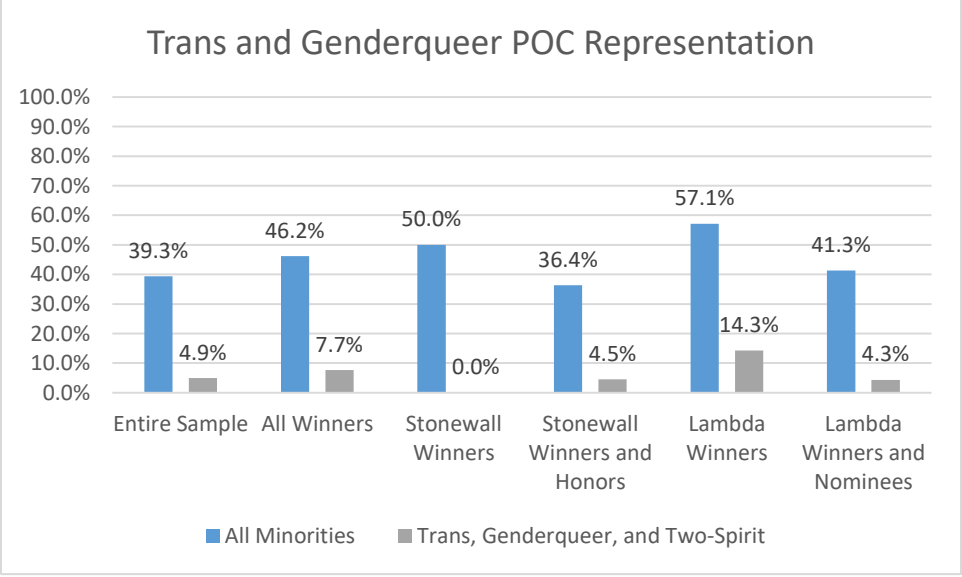

Figure 19. Trans and Genderqueer POC Representation

Flores, Brown, and Herman found that 45% of the trans population of the United States identifies as POC, while 55% of the population identifies as white and not Hispanic/Latino. The fact that Lambda and Stonewall novels portray trans experiences as overwhelmingly white continues the marginalization of trans POC, that leads to their increased vulnerability due to the intersections of transphobia, racism, and other social prejudices that means this population is more likely to face violence and death (Human Rights Campaign).

Because most trans-themed YA fiction is supported by a narrative of transition, there is often violence in these novels that comes from visibility of a person's trans status. Halberstam notes trans visibility

> may be equated with jeopardy, danger, and exposure, and it often becomes necessary for the transgender character to disappear in order to remain viable. The transgender gaze becomes difficult to track because it depends on complex relations in time and space between seeing and not seeing, appearing and disappearing, knowing and not knowing. (78)

Within YA fiction, the trouble of visibility generally comes from the period of transitioning that is seen in most novels. For instance, prior to coming out and still presenting as their assigned gender, many characters are miserable, but safe, as they are not marked as "different" by their peers. Additionally, one fully transitioned, most trans characters in YA novels fully "pass" as their gender, and again are safe unless outed. However, during the time period when transitioning, their visibility endangers characters.

As such, this is the period where the vast majority of YA narratives take place in this period.

The relative safety of characters who "pass" interacts with a paradox that Halberstam recognizes in trans films which "powerfully" confront "visibility and temporality: whenever the transgender character is seen to be transgendered, then he/she is both failing to pass and threatening to expose a rupture between the distinct temporal registers of past, present, and future" for once a trans character is seen as being trans, they are no longer able to pass (77). However, passing in and of itself can be dangerous to those who are eventually outed and they are called "[e]ccentric, double, duplicitous, deceptive, odd, self-hating; all of these judgements swirl around the passing women; the cross-dresser, the nonoperative transsexual, the self-defined transgender person, as if other lives—gender-normative lives—were not odd, not duplicitous, not doubled, and contradictory at every turn" (57-8). The idea is that those who appear normatively gendered are safe as the fit within the binary, and those who do not "pass" do not challenge heterosexist comfort because they are able to be dismissed as abnormal. This vision of trans bodies is clearly regressive. However, its existence in literature is complicated. On the one hand, the danger of visibility mirrors that of the real world, as seen through the large number of trans people who face violence; this type of representation could help trans reader assure that they are not alone in this experience. However, the way this narrative is prevalent in so many novels also perpetuates ideologies of trans bodies as wrong and normalizes violence against them.

Kirsten Cronn-Mills' *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* (2014 Stonewall Winner and 2013 Lambda Nominee) is a good example of the way that binary trans narratives often are portrayed, and include possibly regressive representation. The plot follows aspiring DJ Gabe as he begins to present as a boy full time. The novel includes many binarian tropes. Early in the novel, Gabe discusses his gender with readers, stating:

> My birth name is Elizabeth, but I'm a guy. Gabe. My parents think I've gone crazy, and the rest of the world is happy to agree with them, but I know I'm right. I've been a boy my whole life. I wish I'd been born a vampire or a werewolf instead, or with a big red clown nose permanently stuck to my face, because that stuff would be easy. Having a brain that doesn't agree with your body is a much bigger pain in the ass. (8)

With this explanation of his gender, Gabe establishes himself as fitting within the trans narrative of the "wrong-body." Talia Mae Bettcher says that this model defines trans as "a misalignment between gender identity and the sexed body" (383) Rather than previous models that saw trans individuals as having a psychological problem, "in the wrong-body model proper, transsexuality is viewed as a problem of the body by transsexuals themselves" (383). The narrative is distilled to be about "one is effectively a man or woman 'trapped in the wrong body'" (383). Bettcher, who is trans herself, states that she has always "felt deeply suspicious of the wrong-body account. For one thing, I disliked its pathologizing aspects" (384). Blogger Talia Johnson similarly calls the wrong-body model "one of the most over-used narratives to explain being transgender and requiring medical transition." She notes that there are trans people who identify with it, but also

states that it is overused because it's an "easy concept" for cisgender people to understand and "that it is part of the 'acceptable' narrative that transgender people are often required to use when seeking medical transition. . . . We know that it is something we have to say in order for our experience and feelings to be trusted by those we are interacting with. It has become an almost automatic response." Not only does Gabe fully identify with this often regressive narrative, but his story also aligns with the expected trans narrative of hormones and surgery. This story arc presumes a journey from one end of the gender binary to the other is the only "correct" way to be trans. In fact, when his best friend asks Gabe "[h]aven't you been in between long enough?" he internally concedes "I know she's right," implying that existing at one side of the binary is the only proper place to be (18). This need to transition to the other side of the binary is also shown when Gabe comes out to his neighbor and mentor, saying "I'm trans. Transsexual. Hormones, operations, all that" (36). The fact that Gabe feels like he needs hormones and surgery to truly be Gabe, perpetuates the concept of gender and embodiment being inextricably linked. Rather than allowing for a progressive trans existence that can be fluid, non-binary, or existing within the body you have, Gabe's desire to follow the binary journey suggests that only by having a body that "matches" ones gender is one properly gendered.

About half way through the novel, after presenting as Gabe more and more, both of his parents change, starting to accept, and make a greater effort to support him. His dad's shift is subtle and unspoken. His mom's change, however, occurs following an emotional conversation where she admits "[i]t's just . . . hard. You have this sweet little

baby girl, and then, all of a sudden, she tells you it's a mistake. We created a mistake" (156, ellipsis original). Positioning Gabe's gender as a "mistake"—even though Gabe refutes this language—makes the journey to transition seem natural. If Gabe's body is a mistake, then "fixing" it via hormones and surgery makes sense as a pathway to "normalcy." A transitioning body from one end of the binary to the other—though showing a trans character at all is inclusive within YA literature—furthers cisnormativity, as it presumes that only being a fully embodied man or woman is acceptable. While Gabe's story does good work in forwarding trans visibility and educating readers about the issues and emotions that face transteens, it does so primarily through a regressive lens that forwards a single model of trans identity.

Cris Beam's novel *I Am J* (2012 Lambda Nominee) follows a similar trajectory; in the novel, seventeen-year-old transboy J spends the book trying to transition. He makes his own chest binder and attempts to get hormones without his parents' permission. He dreads coming out to his parents and runs away rather than face the disgust that he feels is inevitable. His overall arc is one of internalized fear that progresses to internalized acceptance with external issues as his parents express the negative reactions he assumes from them. However, the novel ends on a hopeful note—not only does J get his first hormone injection, but he begins having weekend visits with his parents who are working toward accepting him as their son. At the very end, J's Puerto Rican mother refers to him as "m'ijo" or "my son" for the very first time, signaling a progression toward accepting him.

Neither of these texts are bad representations of trans narratives; however, because these type of texts take up the majority of the sample novels, they position binary crossing transitions and wrong body narratives as being normative and the "proper" or "correct" way of being trans. This push towards binary existence as correct squarely fits within homonormativity, as it upholds the institutional assumptions that fluid or non-binary lives are abnormal. Neither character has any discussions or thoughts about *not* changing their bodies as part of their trans experience. This in and of itself is not a regressive trait, but as a body of work, trans YA literature awarded by Stonewall and Lambda is sorely missing multiplicity of trans experience. The needs of Gabe and J might be common, but by this type of representation as almost the only gender diverse narrative means that the experiences of many others are erased. Interestingly, while the overarching arc of J and Gabe are similar, one progressive trait *I Am J* has over *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* is that J finds a community of other LGBTQ teenagers, helping him feel less alone. In contrast, Gabe is the sole LGBTQ character.

Throughout all of the trans books in the sample, the pairing of regression with progression is visible. Some elements, such as the use of surgery and hormones, match the experience of many trans people and allow for their lives to be fully represented on the page. However, because the vast majority of the texts are supported by these same narratives, other versions of trans lives are lost. That being said, progressive elements that do exist in these novels, such as J finding an LGBTQ community to help him through disclosing and finding the best path for him. The inclusion of these features do not erase

the regression seen within the same texts, but they do work toward shifting cultural ideologies that repress trans people.

Struggling for Visibility Outside the Binary: Genderqueer Teens

Only one novel in the sample, or 1.6%, features a character whose gender does not fall into "male" or "female" categories. Sadly, because of the lack of representation of genderqueer teens, this one book is progressive simply because of its existence. In Jeff Garvin's *Symptoms of Being Human* (2017 Lambda Nominee) the main character and narrator never reveals their gender. Riley identifies as gender fluid, and presents their gender differently from day to day.[8] Riley tells readers that "[i]t's like I have a compass in my chest, but instead of north and south, the needle moves between masculine and feminine. I know it's not like that for all gender fluid people—but that's the best way I can describe how it is for me" (29). Throughout the course of the book, Riley spends some days in "male" mode, stomping around school in boots and taking up lots of physical space. Other days, they are in "girl" mode, and sit with crossed legs and walk with swaying hips. Riley has daily internal grief at choosing clothes that will both match their internal compass and not raise too many eyebrows at school. In addition to embodying a non-binary way of being, *Symptoms of Being Human* is progressive as Riley explicitly pushes back against binary gender expressions, saying "[w]'re all taught from a young age that there are only two choices: pink or blue, Bratz or Power Rangers, cheerleading or football. We see gender in two dimensions because that's what society

[8] Throughout the text, Garvin purposefully avoids pronouns to assure that Riley does not "commit" to one gender identification. I use they/their throughout this passage as single, gender-neutral pronouns for Riley.

has taught us from birth. But . . . SOCIETY NEEDS TO CHANGE" (59). Not only does Riley's proclamation open up the possibility for non-binary genders, but also introduces the concept of social constructs and that, as citizens of the world, readers can actively work to push back against ideologies that they find oppressive. Though implicit, Riley's refusal to bow to society's demands and their activism through a blog can serve as a call to action for readers to start making changes in the world around them.

The book is progressive for its explicit view of a genderqueer teen. However, the novel still does not escape including regressive elements. Throughout the book Riley, at the suggestion of their therapist, writes a blog as a way to be open and honest without coming out to their family. At moments, this blog serves to drive the plot forward, but at other times, it is a tool to inform the reader of Riley's inner thoughts. Riley, aware that their gender is non-normative, begins their first blog post and the book writing, "The first thing you're going to want to know about me is: Am I a boy, or am I a girl?" (1). Riley is not only aware of and used to the questions about their gender, but also the discomfort and cruelty that it can prompt in other people. On the first day at Riley's new high school, they are called "it" by peers in the hall. Riley's narration tells readers "I've been called worse—much worse—but somehow this comment stings more than the rest. I haven't been there five minutes, and the harassment has already started. . . . My *differentness* is impossible to conceal" (6). This type of bullying continues through the rest of the book with Riley being called a "tranny" (21) and "that androgynous chick-dude" (130). Riley's genitals are also a point of interest for their peers—a girl directly points at their crotch and asks "is there, like, a dick in there? Or a vag?" (87). Riley also recounts a story from

their old school where students in their gym class wanted to know "what" they are, and "pinned me against the lockers, while the other one pulled down my gym shorts so everyone could see" (294). All of these struggles that Riley undergoes clearly states that for gender nonconforming people, their right to bodily agency and privacy is negated.

In recent years, much of the discussion surrounding the legality of trans bodies has centered around the constitutional right of privacy. People on both sides of debates around bathrooms, locker rooms, and changing rooms posit that their right to privacy should sway policies and laws their way (Skinner-Thompson; Farlas). Further, many people have discussed trans bodies as sites where "private parts" are anything but private, and elicit a series of assertive statements that infer others have a right to know about the trans person's embodiment (McConnell; "Tips"; Milloy). Not only do these peers harass Riley, but they feel entitled to know what genitals Riley has. As discussed with the rate of trans violence in YA novels, this rate of bullying and mean-spirited confusion might be real to the experiences of genderqueer young people; however I worry that its strong voice in the novel perpetuates this abuse. Would novels of this kind be more progressive if they resisted showcasing bullying and invasions of privacy? Or would the simply be shielding young readers from the realities of this experience in our heterosexist world?

Garvin's entire book has an overlay of didacticism that is also regressive. Like any text that breaks ground for an identity group, the text spends a lot of time teaching readers about the issues and definitions of gender fluidity. Not only does Riley discuss how gender fluidity works for them, but they also talk about ways they learned who they were and issues that other genderqueer teens face. For instance, Riley showcases the

ways that mirrors in the world are helpful for minoritized children (Sims Bishop). They state that they first understood themself upon reading a blog post about a trans girl's struggle to use the proper bathroom. Riley states, "I came across the term 'gender fluid.' Reading those words was a revelation. It was like someone tore a layer of gauze off the mirror, and I could see myself clearly for the first time. There was a name for what I was. It was a thing. Gender fluid" (40). For Riley, finding the existence of a term with which to define their identity is liberatory as it allows them to know they are not alone in the world. Riley themself becomes a mirror within the world for other trans and genderqueer teens as well. Not only does their blog become popular and well-read, but near the end of the text, a student at Riley's school also comes out as trans, and credits Riley giving him the bravery to disclose.

Riley informs readers that, "[a]ccording to one site, over three hundred acts of violence have been committed against trans and genderqueer people in this year in the US alone—and thirty of the victims were children and teenagers. . . . That is, . . . the thirty that were actually reported" (283). While this fact comes across as rote and solely educational, it also serves as a somber reminder that Riley's struggles are not rare. In fact, despite being verbally bullied at school (and physically assaulted in the past), Riley has a larger queer community than many trans and genderqueer characters: they quickly find friends at their new school who accept them, including one who begins taking Riley to an LGBTQ support group where they meet other trans and genderqueer people, such as an activist who goes by Mike/Michelle. Overall, Riley's story is relatively drama-free when

compared to many trans books. They are not out to their parents at the novel's start, but after a brief period of shock, their parents quickly become Riley's biggest supporters.

However, despite Riley's happy-ending narrative, the novel still shows the stereotypical and regressive stories expected in trans novels. One of Riley's new friends, Bec, had a sibling who committed suicide after coming out as trans. Additionally, through the blog, Riley interacts with Andi, a trans girl who just came out to her parents, was kicked out of the house, and is now suicidal. Riley responds to Andi, saying

> you have to know that there is NOTHING wrong with you. Your parents' reactions have zero to do with you, and everything to do with them. For you, coming out is about finally understanding who you are, and then admitting it to the people who are most important to you. But for your parents, maybe they see it as this big, shocking change. (116-117)

Through this blog reply, not only is Riley positioned as mature and wise, but it also highlights them as being "lucky" for having parents who do not react in that way. Crisp discusses the way that narratives of "luck" are structured for gay protagonists, and his analysis can translate to Riley's narrative as well: lucky protagonists are those "who are not rejected by family, friends, or society more generally automatically" ("Trouble with Rainbow Boys" 342). The implication of this narrative is "that these characters do not deserve (they are not worthy) or do not earn (they might be lazy) the regard they receive . . . essentially remov[ing] agency from the character and suggest[ing] to readers that gay people do not deserve respect, they cannot earn it, they are bestowed a boon (they are 'lucky') by those with authorial privilege" ("Trouble with Rainbow Boys" 342). While

Riley never explicitly uses the language of luck, it is implicit in the contrast between Andi's parents and Riley's. Riley spends much of the book dreading the way their parents might react to their gender; however, their parents' quick acceptance and support positions Riley in the tradition Crisp discusses of having luck, rather than the same innate rights as the cis teens around them, allow for the love of their parents.

Symptoms of Being Human provides a much needed, different take on genderqueer teens by providing readers with a gender fluid character who is surrounded by a queer community, and is accepted by those they love. This representation can progressively combat misunderstandings of what gender creativity is and giving a face to differently gendered populations. That being said, Riley's narrative also regressively foregrounds how ostracized and afraid they feel. While true to life, it might work to normalize the bullying and violence experienced by trans and genderqueer teens. Additionally, the fact that it is viewed as progressive based on it being the *only* text that features a non-binary, gender fluid, or genderqueer character in the sample highlights a larger problem. Stonewall and Lambda, and perhaps LGBTQ-themed YA fiction as a whole, is missing representation of the most vulnerable and misunderstood. The discussion of *Symptoms of Being Human* also exposes a problem in privileging texts for foregrounding a diversity of narratives, as it means that sometimes existence of content becomes more important than the representation in that content.

Striving for Multiplicity: Acceptance of Trans and Genderqueer Bodies

McLemore's *When the Moon Was Ours* started this chapter showcasing the ways that communities around trans and genderqueer characters wrap their confusion and

negativity in the guise of acceptance. The text is typical in how it includes that narrative; however, when it comes to its representation of trans characters, it is, arguably, the most progressive Lambda and Stonewall text. This is, in part, due to the way the text incorporates people of color. Additionally, the novel does not conform as strictly to the gender binary as texts such as Cronn-Mill's text. The book is full of magical realist elements; one of the protagonists, Miel, grows roses from her wrist and Sam places moons around town that might have mystic abilities. These two teenagers spend the book falling in love, and trying to figure out their lives as both citizens of their small town and unique individuals who do not quite fit in.

The book incorporates diverse elements from Miel and Sam's lives in ways that do not allow them to fit into assumed whiteness (Smith; Lalami; Gilbert). Miel recalls seeing "the brown of her hand against the brown of [Sam's] when they were children," and her household is filled with traditions that allow her Mexican heritage to remain clear to readers (6). Sam's gender is also connected to his Pakistani heritage. Sam grew up hearing his grandmother discussing the tradition of "bacha posh" or "[g]irls whose parents decided that, until they were grown, they would be sons" (35). Sam recalls

> [when he] heard these stories, he felt a clawing envy as strong as if he knew these girls by name. He had been four, his grandmother only a few months gone, when he decided he could—he would—be one of these girls. He would be a bacha posh. He would be the same kind of boy as those girls who lived as sons. But when those girls grew up, they became women. And maybe their lives as wives and mothers at first felt cramped, narrow after the wide, cleared roads of being boys.

> But whatever freedom they missed was not because they wanted to be boys again. It was because they wanted to be both women and unhindered. That was his problem. Sam was sure of it. He couldn't be a girl. But maybe if he waited out these years in boys' clothes and short hair, he would grow up enough to want to be a woman. He would wake up and this part of him would be gone, like rain and wind wearing down a hillside. (36)

The tradition of bacha posh gives Sam a "reason" and "background" for being a boy, and positions gender non-conformation as existing not just within US or Western contexts. By showcasing the intersections of being trans and Pakistani, the novel expands the ways that queerness exists worldwide. However, this gender role is a temporary one. For Sam, while bacha posh links him to his cultural heritage, it also traps him into a future where his masculinity is expected to end. Sam's adherence to the tradition of bacha posh can be viewed in several ways. First, it allows Sam to understand his own gender in a protected, gradual way. It also gives him, and readers, a connection to his cultural background. And, like *If You Could Be Mine,* its inclusion allows for Western readers to understand the complicated nature of gender in other cultural traditions. However, unsympathetic readers could read bacha posh as the "reasoning" for his trans-ness, rather than something that allowed him to come into himself.

Refreshingly, Sam does not come out to Miel and his gender is never a problem for her. She first discovered that he was trans when they were eight and "she walked in on him changing" (33). She had questions, but accepted him easily. As they grow older, Miel's insider knowledge of Sam's body allows her to slip "him tampons at school

because he couldn't risk carrying them in his bag" (33). Rather than being disgusted or driven away by Sam's trans body, as often is seen in YA trans narratives, Sam's gender is simple fact, showcasing one way the text is progressive. Indeed, "[s]he had seen him naked. Almost naked. And she understood that with his clothes off, he was the same as he was with them on" (13). Additionally, Sam and Miel have several intimate and sexual encounters throughout the text. Not only does this novel allow Sam to love and be love, but the physical elements of that relationship is not off limit simply because of his so-called wrong body.

While Miel does not cause drama about Sam's gender, this is not to say that he does not face problems for being trans. In fact, he experience many of the same bullying problems as other gender nonconforming teens. For instance, he does not attend gym classes at their high school, but rather gains the credit by working at a local farm because "[h]e couldn't meet it any other way, not if it meant changing for class or team practice in a locker room" (10). The narration, however, leaves the reasoning behind this inability vague—it is not clear if this is Sam's preference, that of the school, or because he has been bullied. While McLemore does not write specific moments of bullying, she does provide narration that shows how Sam is always outside normative gendered social relations:

> His face was softer than the other boys in their class, but his work on the Bonners' farm had added enough muscle to his back and shoulders that he looked a little broader than before. Boys at school had almost stopped calling him a girl, a thing

they meant as something else, a thing they said without knowing what they were saying. (60)

While Sam's gender does not provoke acute moments of harassment, it still raises comments. Because Sam does not conform to the expected tenets of masculinity, the other boys at his school pick on him and assault his masculinity, highlighting the ways that trans bodies threaten traditional gender assumptions. Halberstam, drawing on Posser, discusses how "Butler implied that it was the transgender subject in particular who symbolized the 'gender trouble' to which every subject is heir; in other words, the split between sex and gender, which is so readable within the transgender or transsexual body, reveals the constructedness of all sex and gender" (50). Sam's perceived gender presentation, then, queers him—while the boys at school are unaware of his trans body, he does expose a breakdown of gender construction; he is a boy, but he does not embody expected forms of masculinity. While the harassment itself is not progressive, the fact that the vast majority of it occurs irrespective of Sam's trans identity, is forward facing, and showcases the way in which Sam's non-normative gender is not the entirety of his existence.

On the other hand, the text does have some regressive elements in the form of typical trans plot for Miel's sister, Aracely. Born Leandro, Aracely "always" wanted to be a girl, but "my mother always told me how handsome I was, how happy she was to have a son. So there was no space for" Leandro to become Aracely (104). However, eventually, his mother died and "the water took Leandro, folded him into its current, brought him back as the girl he'd always wished he could grow into. Not a girl. A

woman, finished and grown" (102). Though Aracely's transformation comes from magical elements, it is similar to the binary-journey driven narratives such as Gabe's. Just as hormones are needed for Gabe to become the man he wants to be, Aracely needed the water-born transformation in order to be the woman knew she was. However, because Aracely's transition occurred through the elements of magical realism in the world, the novel places trans bodies, or at least transitioned bodies, as outside of our reality and something that only magic can achieve. Magic is also linked to Aracely through her work. She is a curandera, a native healer, who specializes in curing the broken hearts and love sickness of those in town who "alternated between gratitude and blame. At night, they came to her, asking for her help for their worn-out hearts. During the day, they whispered that she was a witch" (17-18). While Aracely's trans identity is not common knowledge throughout the population, she still faces stigmatization because of her work, which leaves her on the fringes of society. Aracely also lives a romantically solitary life. She raises Miel alone, and does not disclose her trans status to Miel and Sam until Sam needs help. This advice also follows a normative narrative, telling Sam it is good he has anger and strength because he's "gonna need it . . . [t]o live like this" (98). Aracely reinforces the need of marginalized people being strong to survive rather than insisting that the power-holders of society become inclusive. sj Miller discusses the way that this occurs, stating when "narratives are threatened by perceived social deviation from the norm, individuals are often stigmatized . . . [and become] targets of unwarranted and pervasive types of harassment" (57). Despite the world around them literally being

seeped with magic, the expectation for trans people is that they still have to fight for the same rights and respect that cisgender people receive.

Despite the places where *When the Moon Was Ours* feature stereotypical tropes, overall, the novel resists the expected trans narrative, instead being more progressive. Sam wears a binder anytime that he goes outside his house, and it appears that he has anxiety regarding it and his chest, as Miel notes it is the only place on his body she "hadn't mapped . . . with her hands" (59). However, there was a line to what Sam would do to fit in. When Miel helps him try find a way to take a gym class, "he didn't pack, didn't stuff a pair of socks into his underwear. Didn't fill a condom with dry grain or hair gel or any of the other ridiculous ideas they'd considered" (183). While Sam is a boy, he wants to be a boy within his own body. In fact, Sam's journey throughout the novel is not one of coming out, or striving to present as a man, but rather accepting himself as he is. For Aracely, water was transformative and allowed her to become herself; however, Sam states that "I still have to live like this. Nothing is gonna fix me. There's no water that's going to make me into something else" (154). Rather than seeing himself trapped in the wrong body Sam comes to understand himself as a whole and complete person, not someone who is broken or need changing. As the book ends, readers learn

> [f]or so long, talking about Samira, acknowledging her as someone who no longer lived in him, had felt dangerous as running his fingers along a sharp edge. But now he was Samir, and Samira was that friend he almost thought he imagined. And she would be a little more imaginary once he and his mother finished

changing his name. He wanted neither to forget she existed nor live inside her. (264)

By accepting his whole self, even the parts he had so long tried to forget, Sam is able to finally become comfortable with himself. In fact, after this revelation he stops wearing his binder, allowing "more of the shape of him" to be seen (266). This progressive moment of self-acceptance and comfort does not diminish his male-ness, but rather pushes back on the assumption that gender is inextricably linked to embodiment.

If The Moon Was Ours is the only novel of the 12 trans or genderqueer narratives that leave open the possibility for a trans experience that exists within the binary without binary embodiment. Sam identifies fully as a man and does not show any indication throughout the novel that he is genderqueer or any other non-binary identity. However, the final scene of the book allows for a non-normative trans narrative, one that does not hinge on hormones and surgery. This plot is progressive as it opens up possibilities for multiple ways to be trans. However, rather than pushing this form of trans identity as the only way as all the other novels in the sample (implicitly making it the right way), McLemore balances Sam's choices with those of Aracely to show multiple ways of being trans. The fact that this variety of trans narratives exists in the book with the most racial and ethnic diversity of trans protagonists allows the book to have even greater potential: not only can the novel further understandings of trans people, but it can push back against the whitewashing of trans experience.

The entire sample of Lambda and Stonewall YA novels shows a fairly consistent vision of what trans lives look like—one has often always felt that they do not match the

body they were born into, but do not realize what this means until they are in their teenage years. Then, after some experimenting with presenting as their gender (and usually facing some bullying for it), they come out to the people around them, have strife about it, and eventually have a happy resolution where they begin or are headed towards hormones and eventual surgery. Missing from most of these narratives are sustained and happy romantic relationships, despite the fact that almost all of the trans characters discuss their sexualities and romantic preferences. Only 3 of the 13 trans and genderqueer texts (23.1%) feature any a positive and lasting relationship for the adolescent trans character.[9]

This stereotypical narrative is one that is supported not only by binary understandings of gender, but by a heavy didacticism that presumes novels about trans lives need to education predominately cis readers to curb bullying and promote empathy. Rather than forwarding progressive elements that allow for more fluid, less binary, and/or a greater diversity of trans stories, the novels focus on elements (that might have once been considered progressive) which provide explanations for "why" trans characters are the way they are—this often includes long discussions of the regressive wrong-body model. Stories that help outsider audiences have a window into lives that are different from their own are part of the reason we read. However, in actuality, this accepting benevolence only furthers a biopolitical control over trans bodies that feeds into homonationalist constrictions. Puar notes "The contemporary emergence of homosexual,

[9] These three are *If I Was Your Girl, When the Moon Was Ours,* and *Two Boys Kissing. Jumpstart the World* also has a happy, lasting relationship, but it is with an adult trans character. I do not include the books *Almost Perfect,* and *Beast* in this tally because I interpret the relationships as not completely happy and potentially harmful.

gay, and queer subjects—normativized through their deviance (as it becomes surveilled, managed, studied) rather than despite it—is integral to the interplay of perversion and normativity necessary to sustain in full gear the management of life" (xii). Through texts like *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* and *I am J* trans deviance is manageable and regulated, allowing for this "correct" version of trans citizens to be incorporated into the capitalistic goals of the US. Stories positioned to educate outsiders cannot come at the sacrifice of insiders also receiving mirrors that allow them to see themselves as not alone in the world. Unfortunately, the books that have been awarded Stonewall and Lambda awards, nominees, and honors often approach trans and genderqueer identities from an outsider perspective that, while better than no representation, also does not help trans young people see themselves as equal citizens of the world.

In order for trans and genderqueer narratives to include a greater measure of progressivism, they need to be including more complex stories. Riley does some of this work by showing genderfluidity as an identity between cis and trans. However, the didactism and ongoing bullying and violence they face furthers regression in equal amount to the progression the book forwards through its existence. What is needed, then, are books that break from the stereotypical ways these characters are shown by showing trans and genderqueer characters who do not come out, do not use hormone or surgical interventions, who have sex, and are able to do all of this while still being happy within their communities of place and choice. This acceptance might work to further homonationalism—those with normative bodies might be able to congratulate themselves on accepting these "others" so thoroughly. However, if more YA narratives, especially

awarded novels, featured more trans and genderqueer teenagers will be able to have more positive, insider perspectives into their own existences, and perhaps these books can help cis young people understand that violence and fear is not the only option for interacting with those who are different.

Chapter 4. "I'm Tired of Coming Out. All I Ever Do Is Come Out": The Multiplicity of Coming Out and Disclosing Narratives

The titular protagonist of Becky Albertalli's *Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2016 Lambda Nominee), spends much of the novel not only in the closet, but actively attempting to remain there. The book opens with a classmate blackmailing Simon after he forgets to log out of a school computer, leaving emails where he discusses his sexuality with an anonymous crush, Blue, public. Simon's hesitancy to come out seems two-fold: he knows "deep down that my family would be fine with it," (55) but wants to avoid the big deal that they would make of it: "It's like I can't change my socks without someone mentioning it" (248). Additionally, he resists the hypocrisy of coming out, stating "don't you think everyone should have to come out? Why is straight the default? Everyone should have to declare one way or another, and it should be this big awkward thing whether you're straight, gay, bi, or whatever. I'm just saying" (146). In fact, this appears to be his biggest reason for attempting to remain in the closet, as he pushes back on the concept of coming out multiple times throughout the novel, making comments such as "coming out isn't something that straight kids generally worry about" (55) and "I'm tired of coming out. All I ever do is come out. I try not to change, but I keep changing, in all these tiny ways. I get a girlfriend. I have a beer. And every freaking time, I have to reintroduce myself to the universe all over again" (56). On one hand, Simon's assertion that every change in his life is tantamount to coming out is dismissive of the power and importance of that action; however, at the same time, it brings up an important point in

how LGBT teenagers are often portrayed in young adult novels. For teens who are minoritized because of their gender or sexuality, YA literature tends to assume that this identity is centered and takes up the majority of their time, emotional energy, and social interactions. Simon resists his sexuality being the most important part of his life, allowing Albertalli's novel to highlight the ways in which LGBTQ lives are flattened to be about only one facet of their identity.

Coming out narratives have long been a hallmark of LGBTQ-themed texts. Ken Plummer in *Telling Sexual Stories* posits that in coming-out stories "a secret is more usually seen to be damaging, and it signposts a relative powerlessness" (57). In particular, texts that surround coming out for adolescents are "frequently shown as causing stress and depression, with the implication being that it is close to impossible to be an out queer who is happy and healthy" and the focus on this stressful time of coming out "encourages readers to believe that for queer people, coming out is difficult and upsetting, and also is one of the main issues that they will face, and that it is a defining feature of LGBTQ lives and personalities" (Epstein 63-75). The heterosexist need for LGBTQ populations to come out regressively places marginalized genders and sexualities as outside acceptable forms of personhood. However, this also is part of what it means to be LGBTQ within the contemporary US. Should novels be promoting part of what perpetuates hegemonic oppression? Or should they be showcasing a better version of the future?

In an editorial, YA author E.M. Kokie argues for continued engagement with coming out narratives, stating that YA literature needs to include many of the topics and themes that have been considered stereotypical. She writes that the calls for LGBTQ-

themed YA to cease being just coming-out stories and struggles with sexuality and gender are coming from an adult perspective. When she hears these calls for less problem-driven LGBTQ-themed YA,

> I bristle every time. Because here's the thing, it may feel to the adult creators of queer books, or the adult teachers or librarians, or maybe even to the queer readers who have seen themselves in queer stories, that there are "enough" coming out stories and struggle narratives out there. That coming out and struggle stories have been "done" to death. I even get that some young readers are personally tired of the coming out and struggle stories. . . . But not all young queer teens live in comfortable and supportive communities. Until queer kids and teens don't have to come out, until they are safe everywhere, we will still need stories about struggles and coming out. . . .
>
> So when someone says we need to move beyond coming out stories or struggle stories, I always want to jump up and say, well, maybe *you* are ready to move on because your experiences feel well-represented, but there are too many queer teen identities who are barely represented in young adult literature. . . .[I]t comes from a place of privilege to say that "we" don't "need" any more of any kind of queer book when there is so very much unexplored territory in YA. "We" not only still have room for stories that reflect the tough realities many queer teens still face, but many queer teens still have a very real need for fresh and modern versions of these stories. (Kokie)

In sum, the ways in which adult versus adolescent positioning effects views of the coming out and disclosing comes from adults having a mature understanding of their gender and sexuality. While LGBTQ authors, librarians, and scholars might have a grasp on their sexuality be independent, no longer struggling with schoolyard bullies, or the fear of being kicked out of their homes, teenagers who might still be questioning or struggling with internalized homophobia or fear of familial rejection still need a representation of young people like them who struggle, who are kicked out, who are bullied, and come-out and survive in order to give them the hope and understanding that they're not alone.

In this chapter, I examine the ways coming out and disclosing is written, considering how different types of coming out narratives promote both progressive ideals and regressive stereotypes. Coming out narratives are featured in 35 texts in the sample; within these novels, I identify three ways in which coming out occurs in Lambda and Stonewall texts: (1) the character tells a friend or family member their gender or sexuality voluntarily, (2) the character's sexuality or gender is in some way "forced" into the open, or (3) someone in the character's social circle "just knows" about the character's gender or sexuality and this intuition leads to a conversation. Because these categories are so salient in the sample, from here I proceed to discuss of how each of these modes of coming out is represented within the novels. Because many of the books feature multiple instances of coming out or disclosing the statistics laid out in the sections below do add up to over 100%. Appendix O lists the novels, what awards each novel received, and the characters that fall into each subcategory.

Of the 61 books in the entire sample, 35 or 54.1% of them feature some form of coming out. To be included in this category, at least one LGBT character must come out or disclose their gender or sexuality within the narrative of the book, either voluntarily or forced. This does *not* include characters who are already out at the start of the book and/or those who disclose solely to readers; however, it can include characters whose coming out is seen in flashback. Basically, readers need to *see* the act of coming out or disclosing and the reaction to it. I recognize that the specifics and difficulties of coming out or disclosing is different for MLM, WLW, PD, or queer persons from those who are trans, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming. By including both within this chapter, I do not mean to conflate them; rather this combination follows the way that coming out is discussed throughout the novels, which generally have little narrative differences, no matter what a character is disclosing.

Coming out narratives dominate awarded texts within the sample (fig. 4.1). When looking at all the winners, 76.9% (9 books) have a coming out story line. Within this category are 7 Stonewall winners (87.5%); in fact the only Stonewall winner to *not* include coming out is Bil Wright's *Putting Make Up on the Fat Boy* (2012 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Winner). This number goes down slightly when looking at all Stonewall books to 72.7% (17 books). Winners of Lambda is around the same number with 5 books (71.4%) featuring coming out in the plot. Within all Lambda recognized novels, however, this number is much lower with 54.3% (25 books) featuring coming out and disclosure narratives.

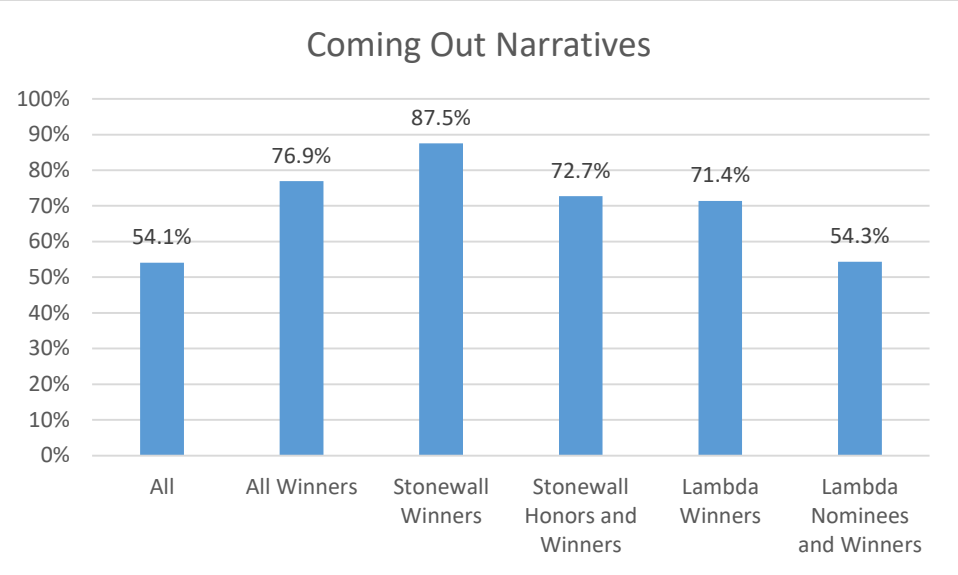

Figure 20. Coming Out Narratives Across Awards

Interestingly, the number of LGBTQ-themed texts that include both coming out and people of color happens at a much lower ratio than that of the entire sample. Both identities are seen in 11 books (31.4% of coming out books).[10] Angel Matos has discussed the lack of coming out narratives featuring LGBTQ POC, stating that the coming out plot occurs in "novels that present the 'typical' White gay teenager living in middle-to-upper class contexts," and asks "how can gay literature with minority characters (e.g., Latinos) evolve and 'come of age' when the characters can't even come out of the closet, and continue to pay retribution for their sexual identity?" (98). Matos views the lack of coming out narrative as a regressive point that keeps minoritized racial and ethnic populations further outside the norm. This is a fair assessment, and one that needs further scrutiny. That being said, I also wonder to what extent that the lack of coming out for characters of color is progressive; rather than insisting that characters

[10] These 11 books also are 47.8% of books featuring LGBTQ POC.

must go through the heterosexist procedure of confirming the "normalcy" of being straight and cisgender by coming out as something other than that norm, some of the POC refuse to be bound by the heterosexist or homonormative. For instance, in Sarah McCarry's *About A Girl* (2016 Lambda Nominee), protagonist Tally is has brown skin, and throughout the course of the novel, she has sex with another young woman, and falls in love with her boy best friend. She additionally has a non-normative family life; Tally has never met either of her parents, and instead is raised in a "household of two gay not-dads and a sometimesgay not-mom" (8). Tally's adoptive dads are additionally a Navajo and Senegalese man, making her house a multiracial and queer-inclusive space. Throughout the novel, as Tally works through her feelings of each of her love interests, she is able to talk openly to each of her parents about her feelings and actions. Instead of coming out and reconciling with family, as occurs within many YA novels, Tally lives in an environment where the fluidity of gender and sexuality is accepted as normal.

In fact, 6 of the novels featuring characters of color (25.0% of all novels with LGBT POC in the sample) subvert heterosexist expectations by not including any coming out. In contrast, there are only 2 novels (5.1% of books without POC representation) featuring white LGBTQ characters who similarly subvert the coming out trend. In some ways, the books that allow for a fluidity in ways that to not require coming out are the closest the sample gets to embracing a queer existence. Indeed, because more books with LGBTQ characters of color embrace this step toward queerness and thus showcases the ways in which these intersecting identities are able to be more progressive in their renderings than narratives for the majority of white protagonists. (See Interlude 1 for

more on race in the sample). Interestingly, each of the books that allows for the potential of queerness only subverts coming out of sexuality, not gender. For example, *About a Girl* also features a secondary trans character who is not accepted by his parents, and whose plot seems to adhere to the typical coming out narrative of strife, eventual acceptance; though within the confines of the text, readers are only shown the middle stage.

Coming out being a major plot point in LGBTQ-themed YA is not new. In their survey of YA books with GLBTQ content from 1969-2004, Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins place the majority of novels in their category of homosexual visibility or narratives in which "a character who has not previously been considered gay/lesbian comes out either voluntarily or involuntarily" with the major drama of the narrative (or for the LGBT character in question) stemming from the social response to their coming out (xx). The reliance of these books on coming out asserts that LGBTQ characters face a journey from sexual and gender naiveté or denial to acceptance. Amanda Haertling Thein and Kate Kedley link coming out narratives to the common YA theme of coming-of-age, stating that the connection is

> particularly problematic because it assumes that becoming a complete person requires unambiguously resolving one's sexual identity as either gay or lesbian, leaving little room for bisexual, transgender, or questioning sexual and gender identities. . . . [W]hen coupled with coming-of-age, coming-out is reduced to a single moment, rather than (or in addition to) a potentially life-long process. (3)

Additionally, this correlation between coming-of-age and coming out means that teenagers are expected to settle on their gender and sexuality in order to progress properly into adulthood as "coming out" often serves as a pivotal rite of passage that signifies that a character has indeed "come of age" (3). With this correlation that unsettled sexuality is juvenile, the linking of coming-of-age with coming out narratives becomes a dangerous pair that furthers heteronormative binaries. By associating coming out narratives with a one-way journey to adulthood, bi-, pan-, and other plural sexualities are erased into an assumption of either hetero- or homosexuality. Rather than allowing for a multiplicity of stories that expose the variety of LGBTQ lives, the vast majority of Lambda and Stonewall awarded YA texts reduce coming out as a one-way journey that characters must navigate on their way to maturity. Just as one cannot revert to childhood once they become an adult, these characters cannot change their sexuality or gender once they have disclosed or come out, regressively trapping them into the false binary.

Comes Out Through Voluntarily Telling

Of the 35 novels, 30 (85.7% of coming out texts) feature voluntary coming out,[11] making it the most prevalent in the sample. When looking at this same category, 9 books (30.0% of voluntary coming out) feature people of color who come out.[12] Just as with the lower rate of LGBT POC in coming out narratives as a whole, this statistic could suggest that novels featuring the intersections of these marginalized identities have space to progressively allow for more queer and accepting representations. Voluntary coming outs

[11] This additionally means that 49.2% of all books in the sample include voluntary coming out.
[12] These 9 books are also 25.7% of all coming out narratives, and 39.1% of all books with LGBTQ POC representation.

have varying outcomes, with some receiving more positive reactions than others. Despite the overall progressive representations of characters of color in coming out or disclosing narratives, not all follow this narrative. *I am J* by Cris Beam (2012 Lambda Nominee) features Puerto Rican and Jewish J who initially discloses to Mami in an attempt to get her permission for gender confirmation treatments. J tells her "I'm a boy," and hands her information about testosterone injections (124). Mami reacts poorly, calling him selfish and asking why he is doing this. J explodes in response "I'm transgender! . . . God, open your eyes!" (126). Mami calms down some after a neighbor hears the commotion and comes over, talking about a former neighbor who was also a transboy. However, Mami does not quickly accept J, asking "can't you just be a regular lesbian?" and "[w]hy do you want to be a boy?" (129). For J, this initial conversation serves as an omen of the relationship to come. He goes to live with the family of a friend while Mami tells J's father and helps him come to an understanding. After several months of silence, J goes to confront his father, only to discover that Mami has not told him, having been too embarrassed. For J, coming out is stressful and has negative consequences, but eventually leads to a life where he is able to live as himself full time, and eventually receive the hormone treatments he desires.

In contrast, Avery's disclosure in *Two Boys Kissing* (Levithan, 2014 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor) has a different outcome. Avery is on a first date with Ryan and chooses to explain his gender before they become any closer. Avery waits until they are alone in a canoe, then simply begins, "I was born a boy in a girl's body," and then "takes in Ryan's reaction" (55). Ryan acts surprised and for a moment Avery feels

scrutinized before Ryan prompts him to continue. Avery proceeds to tell his life story, including talking about "hormones and the surgeries that have happened and the surgeries that are going to happen, and all along pretty much the only thing that's filling his head is the question of whether Ryan is seeing him as a girl or a boy" (55). Ryan responds to the outpouring with "I like whatever it is that makes you the person you are" and then asks a question about Avery's family, showing that he understands Avery is more than his gender (56).

In both of these novels, the way people receive the disclosure of gender foreshadows their future relationship—Ryan easily accepts Avery and the two go on to have a happy relationship throughout the rest of the novel. On the other hand, J and Mami's relationship is fraught following his initial coming out. However, for J at least, there are other instances of coming out that provide a more positive experience. For instance, he meets Chanelle, a transgirl, at his new high school and she helps J be more accepting of himself and to understand the medical interventions he wants. For virtually all the characters in the sample who voluntarily come out as LGBT, the event is frightening and stressful, but for most of them, having control over the conversation, including timing, location, and who is told grants them power to shape the way the news is received.

Indeed, though the outcome of voluntary coming out is not uniform, the majority of characters are expecting the outcome they receive (positive or negative) and are able to set up a scenario where they feel supported and comfortable, or at least have an escape plan if the worst happens. This mode of telling, then, not only emphasizes the power of

coming out, but also allows for progress by giving the LGBT character some influence over their own identity and narrative. Despite these characters having the power over their own story, the mere fact that they are still expected to disclose or come out in order be accepted within their communities. Only by bowing to regressive homonormativity are characters able to become full members of society.

Forced into Disclosure/Coming Out

While less prevalent than voluntarily coming out, characters who are forced into coming out is also common within the sample with 19 novels or 54.3% of coming out texts. Forced coming out and POC characters are seen in 6 books (31.6% of this category),[13] again emphasizing that books with LGBT characters of color resist coming out trends. I categorize a novel as forced disclosure or coming out if the character's sexuality or gender is in some way disclosed or discovered without their consent. There are several ways in which this outing occurs throughout the sample. It is reasonable to assume that being forced out of the closet would have negative outcomes for the LGBT character in question, opposing the progression discussed for voluntarily coming out. However, as shown below, there are often no lasting negative effects for characters who lost control over their coming out.

The prevailing way of forced disclosure is through forms of bullying or violence. 8 books (42.1% of this category) feature these characters who are tormented, exposed, and outed through the cruel-spirited intentions of their peers.[14] Two texts featuring LGBT

[13] 6 novels featuring LGBTQ POC who are forced into coming out also is 17.1% of all coming out narratives, and 26.1% of all novels with LGBTQ POC in the sample.
[14] 22.9% of all novels with coming out narratives.

people of color also fit into this category (*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* [Sáenz 2013 Lambda and Stonewall Winner] and *When the Moon Was Ours* [McLemore 2017 Stonewall Honor]), suggesting that, despite the violence often faced by LGBTQ POC, this violence is usually not linked to the ways that they come out or disclose. Many of these texts overlap with the other previously discussed forced categories. For instance, in *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* (2014 Stonewall Winner and 2013 Lambda Nominee), Gabe is tormented by a group of boys who are violent toward him and then expose his trans identity on Facebook for the larger community to discover. In Russo's *If I Was Your Girl* (2017 Stonewall Winner) the transgirl protagonist, Amanda, has previously disclosed to a friend, Bee, but not to the rest of her friends and school. During a school dance, after Amanda is crowned homecoming queen, a drunk and romantically spurned Bee begins shouting out the secrets of people at the school. Eventually, she turns her sights on Amanda yelling "Look at our homecoming queen. Ain't she sweet? Ain't she beautiful? She's livin' the dream, right? I bet a lot of you guys've thought about her in the shower. Smart, pretty, but not pushy or intimidating…she's everything this fucked-up place wants a girl to be. . . . But guys, guess what: She's a *he*!" (222). Not only does Bee force Amanda's gender to be public knowledge, but she does it in a way that invites further ridicule; because Amanda has been seen as an attractive girl in the school, the revelation of her identity positions the boys in the school as defensive of their masculinity in the face of her perceived boyhood. Following the dance, Amanda is beaten up by a boy from her school and her boyfriend angrily dumps her (though they do tenuously reconcile at the end of the book).

Similarly, in Bridget Birdsall's *Double Exposure* (2015 Lambda Nominee), intersex character Alyx previously was gendered as a boy by her parents, but transfers schools to begin life as a girl. She is forced out by Pepper, her basketball rival, at a party. Pepper discovered that Alyx used to be known as a boy through a contact at Alyx's old school and utilizes a game of truth or dare as an opportunity to spread this knowledge. She asks Alyx if her dad is the author of their biology textbook, and when Alyx confirms, Pepper responds "So, you're his only *son*?" (181). As with Amanda, this public revelation causes problems; Alyx is a varsity basketball player and her team is slated to play at state finals. Because of the questions surrounding Alyx's gender, the state regulatory committee threatens to ban her from playing, further placing her gender into public eye and discussion.

However, within both *Double Exposure* and *If I Was Your Girl*, characters do not face wide-spread social ostracization despite having their genders disclosed by force. Both girls have family and a group of friends who support them. While their friends are shocked by the disclosure of their genders, they are supportive and fight for Alyx and Amanda. For Amanda, her friends are the ones that stop the beating she receives and they encourage her to stay in their town. In Alyx's case, her teammates make the decision to stand in solidarity with her: if Alyx cannot play, the whole team will not play. While the intent of forced and cruel coming out and disclosure is to shame and hurt the gender and sexual non-conforming characters, the result is actually a united front to help the characters through the bullying.

7 books (36.8% of books in this category) feature a forced disclosure that comes from being discovered during sexual activities.[15] Only one of these, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe,* has this type of forced coming out featured with a person of color. This category is most commonly is a parent walking in on kissing or other sexual behavior. David Levithan's *Two Boys Kissing* (2014 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor) follows multiple gay teenagers as they navigate various concerns of their sexuality, including two boys who are trying to break the world record for longest kiss. One of these titular kissing boys, Craig, has not come out to his family, and the world record attempt is discovered by his mother. This scene is told mostly through narration, as Craig cannot break the kiss to explain to his mom; however, Levithan's narration exposes the pain that Craig experiences by having this unexpected, public outing:

> This was not the way she was supposed to find out. Craig feels the tears starting in his eyes. He tries to stop them. But it's too much. They leak down his cheeks. . . . This was not how it was supposed to be. He'd imagined telling them after. Somehow, he believed it could be kept a secret until it was over. He'd have this big accomplishment, and then he could tell them . . . and whatever happened, they wouldn't be able to take anything away from him, they wouldn't be able to erase anything he'd done. (81)

Craig is overwhelmed by his mother discovering him kissing Harry because he has lost control over how he comes out. In her discovering the kiss, Craig is stripped of agency to

[15] 20.0% of all coming out narratives

choose how he tells his family. However, his pain is not only for himself. After writing a sign for his mom that says "I'm gay mom, I'm gay. . . . I can't stop now. I'm sorry" (82), the narration continues: "He is not sorry for being gay, but he is endlessly sorry that this is how she's found out" (82). Implicit in his empathetic sadness is an understanding of a certain way that coming out should occur—that is in private and with family before strangers. Not only does the kiss break with this assumption of propriety, but the apology places him in some form of blame for this non-normative coming out. Craig could have come out prior to the kiss to protect his family from this public display. Instead, the book puts Craig in an impossible position—he can either come out as he desires, after the kiss and with an accomplishment to give him comfort no matter the outcome, or through a normative coming out that protects his family, despite his wishes. In this way, Craig's coming out storyline is one that does not allow for joy or relief.

Craig is not the only character whose coming out is forced through a mother who discovers her son in a sexual or romantic situation. In Jandy Nelson's *I'll Give You the Sun* (2015 Stonewall Honor), protagonist Noah describes to readers a heated making out with his love interest, Brian, that includes hands unbuckling belts and intense eye contact. Noah narrates:

> Then, the impossible.
>
> My mother as in *my mother* bursts in, waving a magazine. I thought I'd locked the door. I could've sworn I locked it!

> "This is the best essay I've ever read on Picasso, you're going—" Her confused gaze darts from me to Brian. His hands, my hands, fumbling, shoving, zipping.
>
> "Oh," she says. "Oh. Oh."
>
> Then the door's closed and she's gone, like she was never there, like she hadn't seen a thing. (277)

For Noah, this scene causes supreme embarrassment. When his mother tries to discuss it, he yells at her "[y]ou didn't see anything . . . Guys do that. They do. Whole baseball teams do it. Circle jerks, that's what it's called, you know?" (281). He also asks that she does not tell his dad. His mom, however, is completely supportive and simply tells him "[i]t takes a lot of courage to be true to yourself, true to your heart. You always have been very brave that way and I pray you always will be. It's your responsibility, Noah. Remember that" (281). Noah, like Craig, loses the ability to control his coming out and has a strong emotional response to that loss; unlike Craig, Noah's fear and loss of power manifests in anger as he is scared of losing both the love of his father and the nascent relationship. Brian is a baseball player who is on track to obtain a college scholarship. After being discovered, he becomes afraid that if people know of their relationship, his team will find out he's gay and that information will threaten his future.

His mother's proclamation that he needs "courage" to be himself engages with discourse that it's harder to be gay than straight. Comments such as these reinforce heterosexist stereotypes such as that "it's physically dangerous to be gay (or perceived as gay), [so] homosexual teens need to toughen up and become resilient to intolerance"

(Crisp, "Trouble with Rainbow Boys" 239). For both of these young men, the loss of control over their coming out causes emotional pain and threatens their futures, confirming the power in the act of disclosing. However, this is a temporary pain. While Craig's family is never shown completely accepting that he is gay, his entire family does briefly come to support the kiss at one point in the novel. Similarly, Noah and Brian, after a long separation, eventually reconnect and begin a romantic relationship.

Another 4 books (21.1% of books in this category) include some form of forced disclosure that is centered on computers.[16] For instance, in Paul Yee's *Money Boy* (2012 Stonewall Honor, also the only POC featured in this category) and *Two Boys Kissing* the character's father discovers that their son were accessing gay websites on their computers. In *Two Boys Kissing*, the character Cooper is a loner who spends much of his time online communicating with gay people on hook-up sites and apps. Levithan's novel is narrated by a Greek Chorus of gay men who died in the AIDS crisis and they describe much of the scene where Cooper is discovered. After falling asleep at his computer one night, his father comes into his room where "[a]ll of Cooper's chat windows are still on the screen" (23). When his dad sees him computer, the narrators "look closely, hoping for concern to spread over the father's face. Concern is ok. Concern is understandable. But we, who have looked so long for signs of concern in others, see only disgust, Revulsion" that quickly turns into yelling of "*Faggot. Disgrace. Whore. Sick.*" (25-6). The yelling brings Cooper's mother in and the narrators state that they know the look on her face: "Something inside her is breaking. And in that breakage, she is giving up on us. There is

[16] 11.4% of all coming out narratives

nothing more painful than watching someone give up on you. Especially if it's your mother" (26-7). As Cooper grabs his phone and keys to run away from his parents, the narrators inform readers that "[b]esides strangers, [his parents] are now the only people in the world who know he's gay" (28). Both Ray and Cooper are placed in bad situations where they have to leave home due to their online presences, showcasing the vulnerable situation in which the internet can place young people.

Similarly, *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* and *Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda* both use social media to expose characters identities. In *Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda*, protagonist Simon has been anonymously flirting via email with a boy at his school. After forgetting to sign out of the email account at school, Simon is blackmailed by Martin; if Simon helps Martin get a date with a friend of Simon's his secret will be safe. After becoming frustrated because he feels Simon isn't making enough progress with the blackmail, Martin publishes online (while pretending to be Simon) "SIMON SPIER'S OPEN INVITATION TO ALL DUDES," which announces to the world that "I hereby declare that I am supremely gay and open for business. Interested parties may contact me directly to discuss arrangements for anal buttsex" (158-159). This public and humiliating outing forces Simon's hand—prior to this post, Simon had only been out to one friend and his anonymous online crush. Following Martin's declaration, Simon proceeds to come out to his family and the rest of his friends—while this had no lasting negative consequences in his life, Simon is stripped of the ability to control when, where, and to whom he comes out.

In today's world, the internet is often a safe space and resource for LGBTQ youth to find information and community, which is especially important when their home environments are not safe (Harper et al; Baams et al). However, for characters like Cooper and Simon, the internet is also an insecure place, where others can discover them or post information about them, forcing them into situations that are uncomfortable or dangerous. GLSEN found in 2015 "48.6% of LGBTQ students experienced electronic harassment in the past year," meaning the internet is a paradoxical space for real teens as well (xvi). The internet as a double-edged sword further perpetuates ideas of having LGBT identities as being dangerous, subversive, or other—if one of the places that allows you to be yourself is also a dangerous space, where are you supposed to go? Interestingly though, following the trend found in all forced coming out narratives, these characters also do not face lasting negative consequences—Cooper is saved from a suicide attempt and, presumably, gets the psychiatric help he needs. Gabe finds a community of teens and fellow music lovers who support him. And Simon ends up in a loving relationship.

3 texts (15.8% of this category) feature novels where the forced outing is not mean-spirited.[17] For instance, in *Jumpstart the World* (Hyde 2011 Lambda Nominee), protagonist Ellie's friends meet her neighbor, Frank. Her two gay friends (both named Bob) "just know" that Frank is trans and proceed to talk about it: "Little Bobby said, 'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?'. . . Big Bob said, 'Could be. Could just be.' . . . Little Bobby said, 'FTM.' Big Bob said, 'How sure are you?' 'Seventy percent. At least" (46).

[17] 8.6% of all book with coming out narratives

Ellie does not know what "FTM" is, and as her friends explain they effectively out Frank. Ellie is upset as she believes they are making fun of Frank, who has become a father-like figure in her life. Later, another friend tires to calm her down and discusses the good intentions behind the previous conversation: "They weren't trying to say anything bad about your friend. I know that, because I know them. They would almost, like, have *more* respect for him if he was trans" (49). This conversation shows that, while in the minority, these well-intended, but forced outings occur even in supportive and caring environments, and those who are gender and sexually minoritized are not always allowed to have control over their lives and narratives. While this sub-category still lacks negative outcomes, the kind-hearted but control-removing nature of these moments might be the most harmful or regressive, as they show a lack of awareness by allies or other LGBTQ people of the powerful and personal nature of coming out.

All the books that force their LGBT characters out of the closet remove LGBT character's agency when it comes to shaping their own identities. Interestingly though, when they are forced to disclose, the results are generally positive, such as friends and family rallying to support the characters. Even in circumstances when the initial outing is negative, attitudes shift to be open and caring. Perhaps this exists to help support LGBTQ readers. *The 2015 National School Climate Survey* from GLSEN found that 57.6% of LGBTQ students felt unsafe because of their sexuality, and 43.3% did because of their gender (xi). Further, the CDC reports that the combination of bullying, ostracization, and lack of support in schools make LGBTQ students much more likely to attempt suicide (29%, compared to 6% of straight teenagers) ("Lesbian"). While bullying, violence, and

suicide is the main topic of Chapter 5, these narrative events are also a significant part of novels that include coming out. The novels in this subsection provide examples where the nightmare scenario of being forced into the public eye occurs, but rather than this leading to strife or self-harm, they novels resolve happily. These books could allow teenagers still in the closet to recognize that even if they are not allowed to have control over the narrative of their gender or sexuality, that they still might be ok.

Others "Just Know"

Though less common than the other two forms of coming out, there are 11 books (31.4% of coming out texts) which features other characters who "just know" a character's gender or sexuality without the character disclosing themselves. This is even less prominent within books that feature POC; only 3 books (27.3% of this category) fit within this sub-category.[18] Oddly, the lower percentage of other modes of coming out can be viewed as progressive due to breaks in homonormativity and allows for diversity of narrative. For this category, however, I worry that the lack of LGBT characters of color equates to a homonormative and homonationalist erasure. Yes, more LGBT characters of color are able to live queer lives that don't conform to homonormative narrative tropes; however, when LGBT POC do have narratives with coming out or disclosing, they *must* come out in order to be known, while white LGBT characters have the potential to be recognized solely through their existence. Notably, this is the only sub-category where none of the books having this narrative is the *only* way that coming out occurs in the text,

[18] These 3 texts also are 8.6% of all novels with coming out, and 13.0% of all novels with LGBTQ POC in the sample.

perhaps suggesting that for others to be able to use their intuition, characters must be on some level out and comfortable themselves.

The vast majority of texts present some reason for why these characters "just know" the sexuality or gender of those around them. The most common of this is that the knowing character is also LGBT-identified. For instance, in Nick Burd's *The Vast Fields of Ordinary* (2010 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Nominee), protagonist Dade has not come out to anyone yet (despite having a sexual relationship with a classmate), but within minutes of meeting Lucy, a young woman spending the summer next door, she asks him "you're gay, right?" (98). Dade stammers in response, shocked that she knows. She comforts him by stating that she is a lesbian, but no explanation of why his sexuality is given. This type of insider knowledge makes it seem as if all gender and sexual minorities are part of some club or close community where everyone knows everyone else.

Additionally, having a close, familiar relationship with the LGBT character is often a way that the connection is explained. These include being the character's parents (*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*), being the character's twin (*I'll Give You the Sun*), or having a sister who was trans (*Symptoms of Being Human*, Garvin, 2017 Lambda Nominee). In *I'll Give You the Sun*, twins Noah and Jude are often described as being close, being able to read each other and feel each other's emotions using their twin "telepathy" (17). This connection explains the fact that Jude "knew what was going on between Brian and Noah even if no one else did" because she could see "his dreams outside his body" (147). Of the three ways that other characters "just know"

the sexuality and gender of LGBT characters, this explanation seems the most rational, as in each case where this type of "just knowing" exists the family members are ones who are close to the character and intimately know their life.

The remaining characters who "just know" are provided a reason for why they can tell the gender and sexuality of characters around them. In *Openly Straight* (Konigsburg 2014 Lambda Nominee), Rafe's roommate, Albie, knew that Rafe was gay because he is best friends with the only openly gay student at their school. In *Beast* (Spangler 2017 Lambda Nominee), the straight, cisgender protagonist's mom knows upon meeting his love interest, Jamie, that she is trans. She complements Dylan on being open minded and accepting, saying "she's a sweetheart. And poor thing too. She's got such a hard road ahead" (90). Later, when Dylan questions her on how she knew, she replies "I know a trans person; I work with a very sweet man in accounting. He's short and has delicate hands. . . . [Jamie] is very pretty . . . But I knew, had that sixth sense. Her voice, her feet, the intangible tangibles. I put two and two together" (149). Rather than simply having Jamie disclose to Dylan's mom, Spangler makes it so that Jamie's gender can be "discovered" or "found out" if someone has the right information ahead of time.

In *Two Boys Kissing*, the narrators note that "people like to say that being gay isn't like skin color, isn't anything physical. They tell us we always have the option of hiding. But if that's true, why do they always find us?" (36). In the text, this moment helps contextualize a moment where a boy is assaulted due to his sexuality. However, it also serves to highlight the way that some YA novels approach LGBTQ characters. The books both want these characters to be able to assimilate into culture while still being

different enough for them be recognizable by those who are straight and cisgender. While a resistance to assimilation itself can be progressive as it allows for a queer existence that does not conform to "acceptable" ways of being LGBTQ, this type of visible assimilation is a contradiction that works to continue the interests of heterosexism by assuring that LGBTQ populations stay confined within the established boundaries of homonormativity.

Perpetual Process: Coming Out and Disclosing as On-Going

While Albertalli's *Simon* pushes back on the institution of heterosexism and coming out, Simon as a narrator is also susceptible to similar issues of assumption that he resists. Near the end of the text, after he has been outed by his blackmailer and proceeds to come out to his friends and family, Simon arranges to meet with his anonymous online crush, ready to see if they can turn this digital infatuation into a real relationship. Simon is shocked to find that Blue is Bram, a friendly acquaintance who sits at his lunch table and shares close friends with him. Simon's internal thought process explains his blind spot to readers, saying, "I guess I assumed that Blue would be white. Which kind of makes me want to smack myself. White shouldn't be the default any more than straight should be" (269). Despite Simon being frustrated throughout the novel by the heterosexism that plagues society, he misses the ways he engages with white supremacy until it is forced upon him.

Simon and Bram make their relationship Facebook official the next day and are flooded with "about five million Likes" (277). They have friends, family, and classmates who are all excited and supportive of their relationship. But, despite the overall happy ending, their relationship and sexualities are still not universally known. As they leave a

school event, Simon recounts "probably a hundred people still walking toward the parking lot. . . . It's too public to hold hands. This being Georgia. So, I walk next to [Bram], leaving a space between us. Just a couple of guys hanging out on a Friday night" (298). While both young men have come out of the closet and are happily dating, they recognize this as a moment where exhibiting their sexuality could cause problems and choose not to be overt about their relationship status or sexualities. In this way, the novel highlights the complexities of coming out and disclosing that is common throughout all of the books that feature these narratives.

Throughout of all the award winning novels that feature coming out, there are few that position the event as singular, but rather as a process that continues throughout a character's whole life. Of the 35 texts that feature coming out, less than half (14 books or 40.0%) feature only one type of coming out. The fact that coming out is showcased not as a singular event pushes back against cultural understandings that LGBTQ people are only in or out, with no shades of gray in between. Rather than coming out or disclosure occurring once in the lives of these young people which then magically transforms them into comfortable, proud, and out LGBTQ ambassadors, the body of award-winning LGBTQ-themed YA literature accurately and progressively represents coming out and disclosure as a process that goes through the entirety of LGBTQ people's lives. Because of the continual progression of coming out that occurs throughout these novels, Thein and Kedley's view of "tidy resolutions" that link coming out and coming of age only holds true for some of the texts (4).

Despite the fact that most of the novels contain multiple instances of coming out, there is still an element of coming out that is treated as a singular event. Coming out or disclosing is one event on a discourse level—for instance, in *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* Blue/Bram considers himself "out" once he's told his parents, even though he has not told friends, and, as seen in the quotation above, he still has moments when he will selectively choose to not be seen as gay. Though narratives that feature coming out or disclosing have multiple instances of it occurring, they also apply power and meaning to only one instance, usually the first. Certainly, the first time a character or person comes out is an important milestone, but asserting that it is the *only* time that coming out holds power, regressively diminishes the life-long cycle of coming out and disclosing. It, indeed, privileges heterosexism and homonationalism; if an LGBTQ person is out, then they are just like those around them and are able to be productive members of US empire.

The fact that over half of sampled books feature coming out/coming into sexual or gender identity as the emphasis of the book suggests that, for LGBTQ characters, sexual and gender understanding is at the forefront of their lives in ways that is not necessarily the case for their straight peers. Kate Kedley discusses how sexuality not only shapes how students read texts, but "because language use is inherent to ELA classrooms, reading and writing have the potential to disrupt dominant discourses and can offer students opportunities to explore sexual identities" (367). However, this need to explore sexuality is not viewed equally, as "[s]tudents who are presumed to be heterosexual are not assumed to need reading and writing spaces in which to explore their own sexuality and gender[,] . . . [but] queer students explore their sexual identity in the journey of

coming out" (367). Discovery and exploration is only assumed to be needed by students who do not fit into heteronormative views of gender and sexuality. Only by shifting narratives away from these regressive narratives that reinforce heterosexist assumptions will the body of work be able to enact change in how society views coming out. One progressive narrative that could be promoted are LGBTQ characters who are uncertain and searching; rather than continuing to retell stories that perpetuate the false in/out binary of coming out and disclosure, these stories hold the potential to show LGBTQ desires and identities while embracing fluidity.

If young people are presumed to be straight, they need representation of those who are any and all identities and types of LGBTQ people to help them see the potential and possibilities for queer lives. For instance, in one study, Amy Vetter discusses a student was "hesitate to claim an identity as lesbian until" after several conversations with the researcher and doing independent research on LGBTQ issues, showing Vetter "how power, solidarity, and status shaped how [the student] situated herself as a lesbian within this context" (105). This student needed to see how she fit into communities of LGBTQ people in order to understand and find an appropriate identity label. Rather than being able to act solely on her own desires, she needed to see how she fit into the greater hierarchy of society; she required to see herself within the homonational vision of acceptability. For young people seeing the possibilities their lives can hold, having representation to show various options for being can be the difference between living a fulfilled life or one plagued with internalized homophobia. This is just one reason why YA novels need to explore various times in young LGBTQ characters' lives. While I

agree with the sentiment from Kokie's editorial at the start of this chapter, which states that insisting coming out novels are no longer needed privileges an adult perspective, I also believe that YA literature needs more texts that occur after a character comes out. If coming out narratives remain the primary mode of telling about LGBTQ teenage lives, YA literature will continue to be a tool for perpetuating regressive assimilationist ideas of gender and sexuality.

Chapter 5. "The Blood Was Pooling In My Nostrils": Further Ostracization though Bullying, Violence, Self-Harm, and Suicide

In David Levithan's *Two Boys Kissing* (2014 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor), the titular event of Craig and Harry attempting to break the world record for the longest kiss occurs because their fellow MLM classmate, Tariq, was assaulted. Though the event occurred three months before the start of the novel, the event haunts Tariq, who feels that it was "yesterday and today and three months ago and any period of time in between" (33). He was waiting for his father to pick him up after seeing a movie and five drunk men approached him, called him a "faggot," taunted him, and "made fun of the color of his pants" (34). As they started attacking him, they were "thrilled by it. He couldn't even yell for help, because the only sounds he could make were ones he'd never heard before, a wailing, guttural acknowledgment of the sudden, intense pain as they punched and they kicked, laughing their *faggots* at him as they broke his ribs" (34-5). While "Craig and Harry hadn't really been friends with Tariq, not before he was assaulted," they visited him shortly after and, felt "raw outrage" at the attack (57). Craig sought to show "the world that he was a human being, an equal human being. He thought about protests. About gestures. About making the world watch. Then he thought about world records, and came up with the idea of the kiss" (59).

For Tariq, the assault was life changing, but he does "not let it stop him from going into the city, from dancing. But still, the fear remains. The bruises" (36). It

additionally brought him together with Craig and Harry—effectively breaking down walls between social groups, and allowing for a greater sense of MLM community within their school. This violent attack, then, is used as a catalyst for change.

Violence, bullying, suicide, and self-harm are concepts that are often seen in award winning LGBTQ-themed YA fiction. The tradition of books for young readers that feature harm or death for those minoritized for their gender and sexuality goes back to the inception of LGBTQ characters existing for adolescent readers. Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins find many early novels included consequences for non-normative existences that often included pain and death (21-2). Contemporary YA fiction relies less on car accidents as a way to punish LGBTQ characters than its twentieth-century predecessors, but instances of bullying and violence are still often portrayed. Similarly, a noticeable number of books feature characters who attempt or die by suicide, self-harmed, or have suicidal ideation. Thomas Crisp notes that "the worlds within novels rely up on homophobia or homophobic discourse as a reactive contrast in order to create a 'realistic' feel, [therefore] they affirm such problems as inevitable" (345). Crisp also states it may be satisfying to see the increase of LGBTQ characters, "but it is important to remain cognizant of the ways in which authors or publishers work to create—and readers attempt to confront, embrace, or reject—depictions that feel 'affirmatively' queer" (346).

In this chapter, I take up that call by examining how homophobia, both internal and external, cause harm for LGBTQ characters. I begin by showing the numbers of books that feature all forms of bullying, violence, self-harm, and suicide. Then, I examine novels that include bullying and violence, with a focus on *When Everything Feels Like*

the Movies. Next, I discuss texts that feature suicide (*The Vast Fields of Ordinary*) or self-harm (*Beast*). The chapter then concludes by returning to *Two Boys Kissing* and the overwhelmingly regressive nature of narratives of abuse. Appendix Q features all of the books counted in this chapter with the character(s) who experience violence or suicide.

Stories of abuse against LGBTQ bodies are in a majority of award-winning YA novels (fig. 5.1). 39 of all books (63.9 %) feature some form of violence, bullying, self-harm, or suicide. Winners feature abuse 76.9% of the time (11 books), and, perhaps most disturbingly, Lambda winners feature them *100%* of the time (7 books).

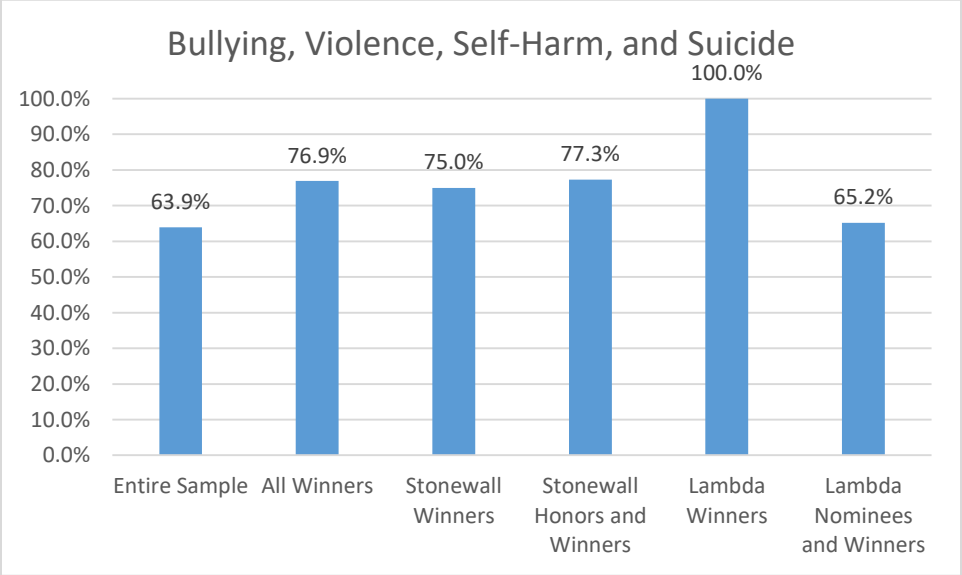

Figure 21. Bullying, Violence, Self-Harm,
and Suicide Across Awards

When looking at the representation of LGBTQ characters of color, these numbers overall go down. 45.8% (11 books) of all novels featuring LGBTQ character of color include these types of abuse, and the highest percentages are 75% for both Lambda Winners (3 books) and Stonewall Winners (3 books) (fig. 5.2). Just as discussed in

Chapter 4, the lower portion of problematic and potentially harmful tropes within narratives featuring people of color balances progression with regression: the lower occurrence of violence against LGBTQ bodies is progressive as it allows greater visibility of happiness and bodily security. However, it also places LGBTQ people of color further outside of the normative life structures. Certainly, not being assaulted for your gender or sexuality is a good thing, but it does not match the violence that currently face LGBTQ communities of color. The Anti-Violence Project (AVP) found in 2016 that 79% of violent LGBTQ homicides and 60% of LGBTQ survivors of attack were of people of color ("National Report"). Comparing this fact alone to the sample is mutli-faceted. The lower rate of violence could be seen as a reparative or a form of authorial counter-storytelling. Coming out of Critical Race Theory, Suriyan Panlay defines counter-storytelling as a culturally powerful tool that has long been utilized by various minority groups to de/reconstruct their own reality and shape their own identity" (161). In this way, these texts can be seen as opportunities for minoritized authors to present the way that lives could be if violence did not impact their lives. However, it also can perpetuate ideas that LGBTQ POC are doing fine, and not needing further protections and rights. That LGBTQ characters in YA novels face violence and self-harm is discussed throughout much of the extant scholarship, but not been much attention paid to the ways in which this violence perpetuates ideologies of LGBTQ as second-class citizens or that this violence is a normal part of their lives. Mollie Blackburn and Caroline Clark wrote one of the few articles discussing these scenes in YA novels; they found novels balance

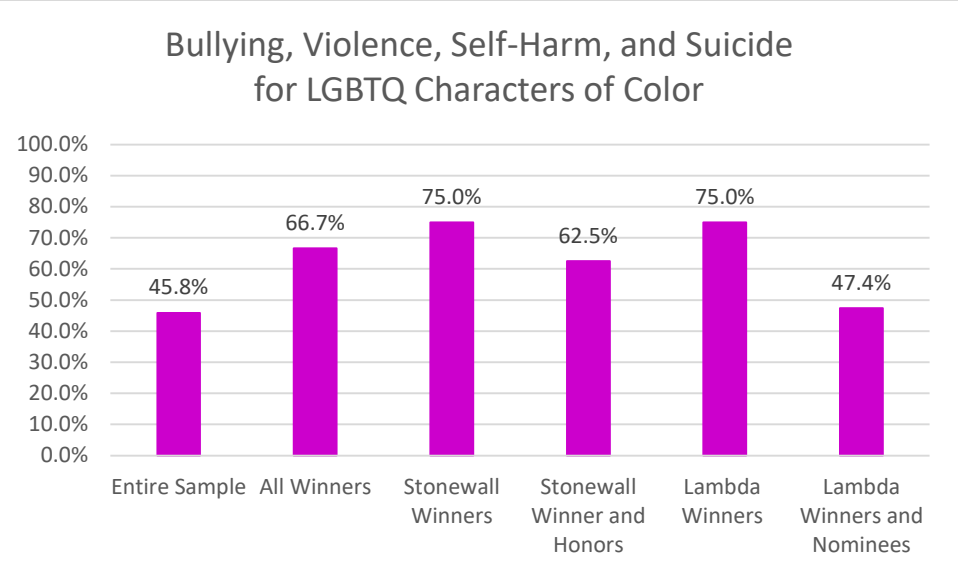

Figure 22. Bullying, Violence, Self-Harm, and Suicide for LGBTQ Characters of Color

combating homophobia and reinforcing heteronormativity through "scenes of violence" (868). They stress these scenes are fueled by trans- and homophobia which can be traumatic to "readers, and only more so for readers who are vulnerable to such violence" (873). Furthermore, internalized homophobia leads to self-harm or suicide because "instead of receiving love, support, and acceptance" characters are "met with extreme homophobia" meaning the self-harm "cannot be blamed only on the person experiencing it but also on the friends and family who teach them that heteronormativity is the only acceptable expression of gender and sexuality" (876). Because of the prevalence of violent scenes in these novels, "the message that they offer readers is that LGBT people . . . are either the victims of violence-fueled hatred and fear . . . [or] victims of their own internalized hatred and fear" (877).

Blackburn and Clark continue, discussing the ideological implications of these scenes, stating that they "ignore the truth that LGBTQQ people can make friends and create families who love and respect them . . . [and YA readers] they may come to understand that to be LGBTQQ is a lonely life, devoid of sex and love but full of violence" (883). Just as how the high percentage of coming out narratives stifles the ability for a greater diversity of stories, the amount of Lambda and Stonewall recognized texts what include issues of violence and assault means the canon they build prioritizes one way of navigating LGBTQ life, and that way is by surviving internal and external homo- and transphobia that seeks to oppress, silence, and harm.

Assault and Bullying

Throughout the entire sample, assault and bullying is seen in 62.3% of the novels (38 books) (fig. 5.3). All the winners include scenes of this abuse 84.6% (11 books), with Lambda winners having these elements the most at 100% (7 books). The high percentages across categories furthers what Blackburn and Clark find and suggests that lives of LGBTQ characters, and therefore LGBTQ people, are only able to exist when regularly threatened. This regressive nature mirrors experiences of living teenagers, but also furthers oppression by telling readers that hard experiences are normative.

Perhaps the most regressive book in the sample when looking at bullying and violence is Raziel Reid's *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* (2015 Lambda Nominee). This controversial book is best known for the outcry it received upon winning Canada's Governor's General Award for Children's Literature; spawning editorials and petitions crying for it to be stripped of the award. The novel follows protagonist Jude, a

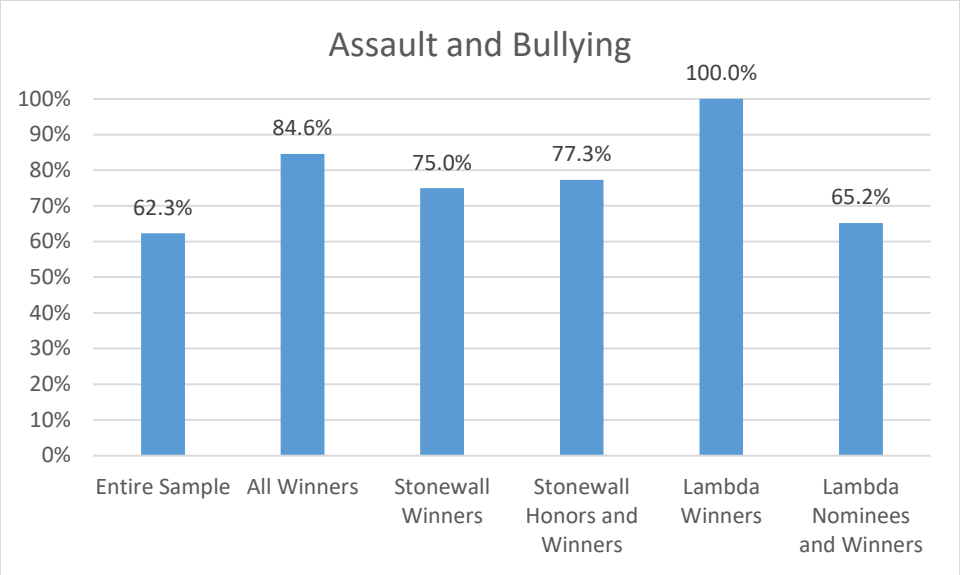

Figure 23. Assault and Bullying Across Awards

gay boy in his last year of junior high (presumably 14-15, based on Canadian schooling norms). Jude is the embodiment of stereotypical gayness that I discuss as lacking in Chapter 2—he is obsessed with women's fashion, celebrities, and having his picture taken. However, rather than the book being a nuanced version that allows for these stereotypes to become a fully-fledged character, the book leans into the stereotypes of feminine, fey gay men. He stole the costume for Glinda the Good Witch from his school's production of *Wizard of Oz*, borrows heels from his mother, and wears heavy amounts of make-up. He has a bad relationship with his stepfather who won't let Jude share a room with his younger half-brother. Jude and his friend, Angela, are desensitized to drugs, sex, violence, and death; throughout the course of the novel, they take drugs, smoke, have sex, and generally have no regard for the consequences of their actions.

One of the reasons the book has been challenged is Jude's crude and often flippant narration. He enjoys his long hair that gets him misgendered as a girl because "tranny chasers are so hot" (17); he fantasizes about his teacher saying "I had this weird thing for him. I wanted him to be my father, and I wanted to blow him" (23); he fantasizes about his own dad because their hands look similar, "especially when they were around my dick" (130); and has other maladjusted sexual fantasies, as becomes evident when he describes a fight his parents had when he was five years old saying "he tied her up in a chair with a rope! It was Sean Penn and Madonna, I had my first erection" (33).

Jude's effeminized persona and unapologetic flamboyance causes him to be the subject of bullying and assault by his peers, especially the boys. His classmates call him "Judy" and do not let him forget that they think less of him throughout the entire book. A peer comments randomly on a Facebook picture "'faggot!!!!!' with five exclamation marks" (16). He overhears girls in the lunch line sound disappointed when they say "I thought he killed himself?" (144). He is told several times he's not wanted, would be better off dead, can "suck my dick," and has his head forced into a backed up toilet (11).

Throughout the book, Reid utilizes fantasy and the absurd in Jude's narration, especially references to film, in order for him to escape the torture he goes through. For instance, when a group of boys attack him at the start of the novel, Jude narrates,

> Blood streaked down my face like I'd been punctured by my crown of thorns as I lay upon a spoke of asphodels. At least that's how I chose to remember it. Cinematography is so crucial. When I came to, the park was empty, and the blood

> was pooling in my nostrils. I told myself it was a performance, and I was up for an award—I was up for all of them. I tried to stand to make my acceptance speech but got dizzy and feel back down. (12)

Often, Jude's fantasies revolve around him being famous and the "hate" that exists in celebrity culture. For instance, he gets called "It" in the hallway and he promptly says It is "another one of my stage names. It was my JLo. . . . I found It empowering" (24). When discussing crude and sexually explicit graffiti about himself, Jude remarks "they were my graffiti tabloids. I was totally famous. I'd imagine that the drawing in the handicap stall of my alleged crotch with 'Hermafrodite Jude/Judy' scribbled next to it was on the cover of *National Enquirer*. Misspelled headline included. I was addicted to them" (19). Alarmingly, when Jude tells Angela he doesn't want to go to a party because "I'm going to end up the next Matthew Shepard!" and Angela retorts "You *wish* you were that famous" (76). On the one hand, Reid's use of these unrealities show the ways that imagination can be a strong coping technique to allow oppressed populations an escape from their violent realities. In this way, Jude himself shows counter-storytelling in action. Sandra Hughes-Hassell discusses how allows for counter-storytelling empowers marginalized teens

> to take action in their own lives and in the world around them. It does this not by denying the hardship and prejudice that many of them face but by showing that, despite the disadvantages that correlate with their skin color, culture, and/or social class, they can overcome the constraints placed on them by the dominant culture. (217)

Rather than assuming that LGBTQ people must suffer in silence, *When Everything Feels Like the Movies*, models ways to reinvent their narrative. On the other hand, however, Jude's comments often seem glib and dismissive, as if the abuse and violence he faces is not important and just a simple fact of life. The way that Jude's internal thoughts sensationalize and even fetishize his abuse diminishes the power it has and pain it induces.

The most violent moment in the book occurs as a culmination of the entire plot. After Jude's assault early in the book, one of the bullies, Luke, comes back to help Jude to the hospital. Following that exchange, Jude starts making sexual comments about and to Luke in his signature crude and over-the-top manner. Luke becomes progressively more annoyed by this behavior. As the book draws to a close, Jude asks Luke to be his Valentine in front of a whole class of their peers. Luke looks terrified, and those around assume he's joking, but Jude doubles-down stating "you know you love me. . . . Why don't you just admit it already?" and then tells the room that Luke helped him after the assault (147). Luke becomes enraged, but class starts, breaking up the discussion. Within minutes, however, another in the group of bullies started to trend the hashtag "#LuJu" and Luke's girlfriend physically separates her desk from him (148); in this moment, simply making sure the gay outcast doesn't die at their hands implicates Luke as gay and other. That night, at the Valentine's Day dance, Luke brings a gun and shoots Jude twice in the head at point-blank range. Jude continues narrating the events that include his signature crude tone, saying things like "Red wasn't my colour. As we drove out of the school parking lot, my fans ran after me. Some chased the ambulance with their camera

phones, snapping pictures. Vultures, all of them" (166). As the book ends, Jude overhears news about the attack on TV. His narration continues his disconcerting tone, but also includes important commentary about the beneficial treatment white, cis, middle class men receive even when they violently attack someone:

> The newscaster said I was on life support and that Luke Morris had been arrested. I imagined his mug shot. My only regret was that it couldn't be the last thing I ever jerked off too. The news talked more about Luke than about me. He was a typical "boy next door" . . . He was just trying to evade my shocking advances. They alleged that I was sexually harassing him, that I had been grinding on him at the dance. . . . His lawyers were going to use the "homo panic" defence in court because I'd been hitting on him in the change room. Because I'd asked him to be my Valentine. Go ahead, blame the victim! The villain is my favorite role to play. (169-170)

The book ends with Jude being taken off life support and "the credits rolled" (171).

The text is difficult to analyze and decide its merits and problems. Reid states he was inspired to write the book following the violent death of Larry King, a fifteen-year-old boy who asked his crush, Brandon McInerney, to be his Valentine ("Smells Like Teen Dispirit"). While the real-life incidents such as King's death are worth shedding light on, the way Reid portrays his protagonist as self-centered, sexually maladjusted, and continuing to make advances on Luke, despite no indication Luke has reciprocal feelings, make Jude unsympathetic. Certainly, this does not justify his death, but it likewise does not allow readers to root for him, even as Luke escalates to fatal violence. I admit,

shamefully, the first time I read the book, I was grateful the shooting happened, because it meant I would not have to live in Jude's head much longer. I am a sympathetic reader to LGBTQ characters and believe that they should be able to be heroes, anti-heroes, lovable, unlikable, villains, and any other natures while simultaneously still having equal rights to life and happiness. I understand Reid's attempt to make Jude unapologetic but still not deserving bullying and death. Simultaneously, I sympathize with the outcry that occurred following the book's Governor's General Award win. Young readers are sophisticated and able to process complex and contradictory themes and concepts. However, seeing that, as an LGBTQ-identified adult who analyzes texts as a career, I am unable to find much redemptive or positive in the text, I worry that this book can only cause harm. It can damage LGBTQ teens who see stereotypes pushed to the extreme and only violence and death as their end point. Also, it can harm straight teens who can see Jude as a confirmation of their biases against LGBTQ people, and also see that people are not punished for their violent behavior against them, implying that these actions are ok, or at least sustainable.

My hesitancy to label *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* as anything but regressive also raises a larger point about the field of children's and young adult literature at large. In my introduction to this project, I discuss the ways that children's literature is defined, in part, by the role of adults in its authorship, production, and marketing. I further say that, because of the increased popularity of YA literature for adult readers, the genre has been appropriated into a space for all cultural consumers to be entertained, rather than for adolescents to explore identities by proxy. Implicit in this conversation is

the fact that adult gatekeepers of YA literature hold back teens and adolescents by allowing only the content that they deem acceptable for teen audiences. In every other instance when the adult gatekeeping becomes visible, I have stood on the side of young readers, advocating for their maturity and right to learn through fiction. For this novel, however, I find myself wondering where the restrictive gatekeeping went. Who allowed this book to be marketed and awarded as an adolescent novel? Where were the restrictions on discussions of sex and violence? Where did the Puritanical standards go? I am uncomfortable with my own internal need to get this book away from young readers, but also is the only reaction I can justify.

While Jude's story is the most regressive of the sample, what makes it different is the amount of abuse and violence he encounters, not the individual instances themselves. For example, in Catherine Ryan Hyde's *Jumpstart the World* (2011 Lambda Nominee) protagonist Elle befriends MLM Wilbur who, on the surface, has many similarities to Jude. He is relatively feminine, wears make up at school, and has a bad relationship with his step-father. Their representations differ in that Wilbur is shown to be vulnerable and caring to other people—in fact, he is the friend that most helps Elle accept that her neighbor Frank is trans. Wilbur has a hard life though; he tells Elle that the thing missing from his life is "feeling like I'm safe" (100). After getting into fights with his stepfather, he starts staying with Elle sometimes, by the end of the book being with her "about three nights out of five" (183). Though Elle never sees signs of physical abuse, Wilbur's home life is not secure. Additionally, Wilbur tells a story of being molested when he was eleven by the brother of his mom's boyfriend. What differs between the representation of

Jude and Wilbur's stories are the way the narratives position this abuse. For Jude, his bullying and assault is seen as normal and, in some respects, deserved. For Wilbur, however, the actions of his stepfather and abuser are seen and treated as wrong, with those around him hoping to help him get out of the situation. In this way, the book still regressively positions the bulk of his story line around abuse, but Wilbur still has some progress in his story as those around him care enough to help.

Because most books recognized by Lambda or Stonewall feature some form of violence, bullying, or abuse, the cannon of award-winning LGBTQ-themed YA novels perpetuates ideologies that LGBTQ lives are predicated on these horrible events. While some, like *Jumpstart the World* do push back on the concept of these abuses being normalized, the continued inclusion of bullying and violence in fiction means that, for many teens, this is the only vision of LGBTQ realities that they know.

Self-Harm and Suicide

Issues of self-harm and suicide occur in fewer novels than bullying and assault, with 21.3% of the entire sample (13 books) featuring these narratives. However, it is shocking to see the ratio between winners and honors/nominees. Compare, for instance, the 21.3% of all books to the 46.2% (6 books) of all winners. Stonewall winners and honors feature suicide and self-harm 18.2% (4 book), but 37.5% (3 books) of Stonewalls winners do. Similarly, Lambda winners and nominees include these plot points 21.7% (10 books), while Lambda winners do 42.9% (10 books). On average, the rate of self-harm and suicide raises 21.8% from winners and nominees/honors to just winners (fig. 5.4). In this section, I do not mean to imply that suicide and self-harm (such as cutting)

are parallel actions, or even on a spectrum. However, because both are self-inflicted, discussing them together allows for an analysis of how societal pressures and oppressions drive LGBTQ characters to harm.

In the sample, 4 books feature death by suicide, and 3 of those 4 are of background characters. In fact, the only character who readers know well who dies through self-harm is Pablo in Nick Burd's *The Vast Fields of Ordinary* (2010 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Nominee). As discussed in Chapter 2, Pablo is a Tragic Closet Jock

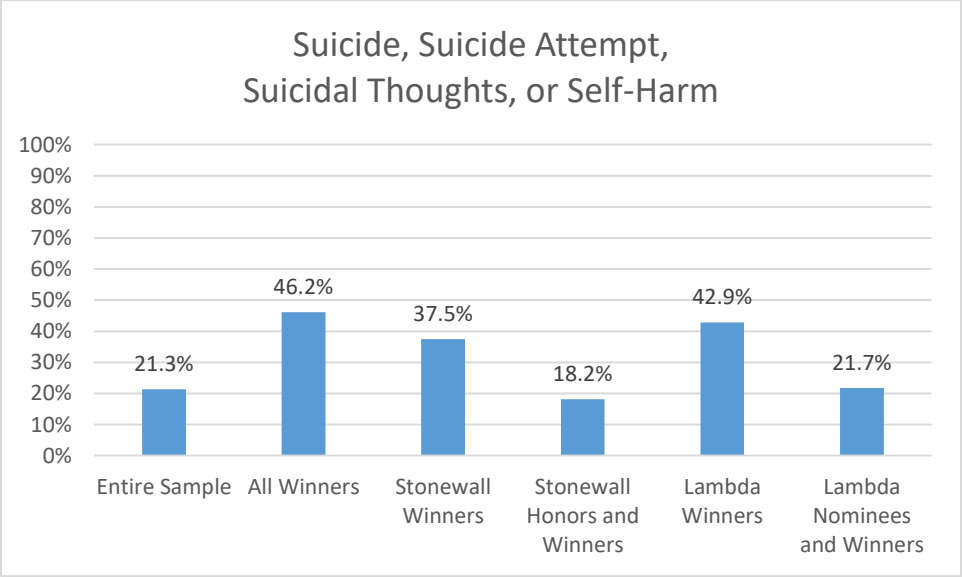

Figure 24. Suicide, Suicide Attempt,
Suicidal Thoughts, or Self-Harm Across Awards

who previously had a sexual relationship with protagonist Dade. However, after their first sexual encounter (which was initiated by Pablo), he tells Dade "we don't tell anyone about this" (16). Pablo's internalized homophobia is established early in the text; when some of his athlete friends tease Dade for being "a faggot," Dade turns to Pablo for

assistance, prompting one of the tormenters, Bert, to immediately turn on Pablo, saying "What, Soto? Is this little faggot your bitch?" (19). Someone laughs and

> The sound triggered something in Pablo, and suddenly he lunged across the table and grabbed Bert's face with his left hand and punched him in the temple with his right. The sound was sick and fleshy. The lunchroom erupted with yelling and cheering as Pablo made his way over the table, bringing Bert to the ground on the other side. (19)

Blackburn and Clark state "it is noteworthy that [Pablo] is not moved to act until Bert's accusations are cast upon him, at which point he springs into physical violence, evidence that what he may really be fighting for is his need to be identified as straight, prompted by his internalized homophobia" (874). Similarly, when Dade says he loves Pablo, who starts hitting Dade, telling him to take it back, and "Get your faggot ass out of my house" (22). Pablo's self-hatred is internalized so deeply that, despite him having sex with another young man, he is unable to bear any verbal connections between himself and MLM desires.

After this incident, Dade backs away from Pablo, unwilling to accept the closeted, abusive relationship. The next school year, Pablo approaches Dade saying that he "really, really missed" him over the summer and that he wanted a normal life, but now he is not sure if that's what he wants. Dade, having started dating another boy, shoots him down (210). Pablo spends the next month attempting to win Dade back, while also taking no steps to distance himself his violent impulses or his girlfriend. The morning after a particularly heated argument between Dade and Pablo, Dade learns "Pablo Soto died at

9:49 a.m. at Cedarville Memorial Hospital after losing control of his truck on Maple Creek Road and driving headfirst into a tree. He wasn't wearing a seat belt, and his truck was from the days before airbags. The police said his vehicle reeked of booze and there were no skid marks" (302). Pablo's probable suicide is regressive for several reasons. First, it continues the trope of LGBTQ characters, particularly MLM, to die in car accidents. Next, because it comes after several attempts to reconcile with Dade, the implication is that being dead is better than being without MLM sexual release. True, Dade was the only person Pablo felt that he was able to be even remotely open about that side of him, so theoretically, the loss of Dade means Pablo feels trapped into compulsory heterosexuality. However, because the book is narrated from Dade's perspective, Pablo is not given the voice to express these internal thoughts or feelings; rather, readers only see his anger. Finally, Burd uses Pablo, and his death, as a way to progress Dade's storyline. For instance, the first time Dade rejects Pablo's plea to come back, Dade tells him "I finally met someone who wants to be with me and doesn't make me feel ashamed of who I am" (210-211). Dade's narration continues "I didn't realize how fast my heart was beating until I was finished speaking. I finally felt bigger than our situation, bigger than his confusion" (211). In this way, the book positions Pablo's downfall as Dade's success. True, after Pablo dies, Dade breaks up with his boyfriend, but he does so to get a fresh start as he begins college, which he is able to do unashamed of who he loves because of the lessons Pablo taught him about living life afraid.

Indeed, the fact that the other narratives featuring death by suicide are all minor characters highlights suicide is used as a convenient plot point for bettering others',

especially other LGBT, lives. Each character who dies at their own hand is connected to an LGBT protagonist who uses their death as a reminder of the joy in their own life and inspires them to go on. Considering LGBTQ teens are 23% more likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers, promoting the idea that adolescents can unburden those around them through suicide is not only regressive, but dangerous ("Lesbian").

Some novels feature those who attempt or contemplate suicide. For instance, Aaron, in *More Happy Than Not* (2016 Lambda Nominee, also discussed in chapter 2) attempted suicide before the start of the novel and his Leteo procedure. In fact, it is why he qualifies for the memory erasure as Leteo "turns away potential clients who only want a procedure to forget spoilers of *Game of Thrones* or someone who broke their heart. . . . Leteo helps people who hurt themselves because of harmful memories—you won't die from heartbreak but you'll die from, well, killing yourself' (201). Aaron's attempt came from unhappiness following his father's suicide after Aaron came out to him; he believed he caused his father's death and fell into depression. As he tells Thomas, "my mom swore he [his dad] killed himself because he was unhappy, and it just got me thinking I might be happier dead, too" (49). Additionally, he narrates "I can't believe I was once that guy who carved a smile into his wrist because he couldn't find happiness, that guy who thought he would find it in death. . . . I trace the smiling scar, left to right and right to left, happy to have it as a reminder not to be such a dumbass again" (8). While these moments come before Aaron's "unwinding" (that is, before he remembers what he lost in the Leteo procedure), it is still clear that Aaron's attempt was trying to escape from the pain caused by his sexuality, via his father's death. Aaron's story complicates the ways

that self-harm is portrayed throughout the sample. Pablo's death is used to better others' lives; those who cut, like Jamie, use it as a form of self-release that is never fully shown to be bad. However, Aaron's suicide attempt is represented as a poor choice, and one that will not be made again. A similar message is given to Andi in *Symptoms of Being Human.* Andi is a transwoman who messages protagonist Riley's blog considering suicide; Riley talks her out of it and she sees the error of her ways. Strangely, while Pablo's suicide resolves with positive consequences for Dade, suicide *attempts* throughout the sample are not glorified, but shown as negative. Rather than continuing the cycle of violence shown through abuse toward LGBTQ characters, this subsect of novels whose characters consider suicide show better and happy lives after characters choose life.

Other novels utilize narratives of self-harm, highlighting a difference between suicide and cutting. Brie Spangler's *Beast* (2017 Lambda Nominee), for instance, features transwoman Jamie who meets protagonist and love interest Dylan at a support group for self-harmers. Dylan sees "raised thin scars . . . like razor-edged spiderwebs" across her arms and Jamie says, "I thought about going all the way down" but "I didn't want to be dead; I just didn't want what life was offering at the time" (235). Jamie needs some form of release, and uses cutting as a way to feel in control of her life. It is noteworthy that three characters self-harm (or consider self-harm) in ways similar to Jamie, and all three are young women; while this does align with statistics on who cuts, the lack of male characters who engage in self-harm silences these struggles (Gluck). While suicide and suicide attempts and cutting are not directly related, Jamie, Aaron, and Pablo each take

these measures because of feeling not accepted and the pain that this societal rejection causes them.

Walking Backward: Regression in Narratives of Violence

In *Two Boys Kissing,* one of Levithan's focal characters, Cooper, is discovered to be MLM by his parents and he runs out of his house as they scream at him for being disgusting. After a couple days of living out of his car and meeting men from dating apps, Cooper drives to a bridge where he plans to jump to his death. The Greek Chorus of gay men who narrate the novel not only set the scene, but they also emote as readers do as they realize what Cooper is planning:

> We yell at him, yell after him. Even though we no longer have voices, we scream at the top of our lungs. . . . We try to block him, and he walks right through us. We try to pound on his car, raise an alarm, but we can't do anything. Cars pass by. He is, to them, just another teenage boy. Out for a walk. Crossing a bridge. They see him throw something into the river. They don't realize it's his phone. . . . He feels the railing under his hands. No. The railing is under his hands, but he doesn't really feel it. He walks toward the center of the bridge. . . . He watches the dark water undulating far below." (187).

Cooper eventually climbs the railing, ready to jump, when a traffic cop tackles him to the ground, saving his life, though at that moment Cooper cries out and resists the help.

Cooper and Tariq are not the only characters in the novel who face forms of violence, bullying, and self-harm. In fact, of the 8 main characters of the book, only one does not have some struggles throughout. During the kiss, Harry and Craig, are called

faggots and hit by eggs (112). Avery and Ryan go on a date and are intimidated by a group of boys who mock them and smash bottles in their direction (162). Neil's parents won't acknowledge his sexuality or name his relationship with Peter as "dating" or "boyfriends" (131). Peter is the only who is presented as having a solely positive relationship with his sexuality and the world around him. *Two Boys Kissing* is only progressive because of the multiplicity of stories that it represents. It allows for MLM of color to be in loving relationships, interracial MLM relationships, and different levels of support and happiness that MLM face. Of course, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the book is still only about MLM, with minimal mention of the existence of WLW. Furthermore, that 7 of 8 of the protagonists (87.5%) feature some form of violence, bullying, or self-harm only furthers these harmful conceptions of LGBTQ lives.

Indeed, the sample at large has a strong emphasis toward including narratives of abuse and harm. While this can be mirroring the real lives of LBTQ youth, it also allows the perpetuation of ideologies that other those who are minoritized for their gender or sexuality. Blackburn and Clark similarly found this, saying "[t]o get to the surpassing of violence, though, LGBT-themed YA literature must offer more than messages about violence. Readers deserve more" (877). By continuing to award novels that foreground these types of stories, Lambda and Stonewall also bolster homonationalism; the books themselves often lament the fact that this violence exists, hoping for a better future. However, they do little, if anything, to actually help that future become a reality. In this way, they show LGBTQ populations as able to be part of the capitalism goals of the nation, but also separate and easy to discredit if they become to "different" from the

accepted norms. In this way, the portrayal of violence and abuse on LGBTQ bodies might showcase homonationalism more than the other chapters in this text. While the books in the sample often explicitly state that life gets better for LGBTQ teens, this is also shown along the quiet acceptance of the abuse that apparently has to be part of all LGBTQ lives. Puar notes that homonationalism serves as a "regulatory script" of what constitutes "normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality" (2). LGBTQ-themed YA books, on the whole, show a script that includes bullying and abuse as a normative piece of life that cannot be escaped.

Stories of bullying, violence, self-harm, and suicide break away from my model of regression and progression. Rather than slowly inching representation toward queerness and inclusivity, these books continually include these themes and plot points, pushing the canon of LGBTQ-theme YA literature backward, with little progression forward. What is needed is not only a greater diversity of stories, but novels that challenge the assumption that LGBTQ lives are hard. Instead, books are needed that show life as hard for those who are homophobic. Karelina Stetz-Waters' *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* (2015 Lambda Nominee) features Triinu who is tormented throughout her schooling by a peer who is an evangelical and believes she is a perverse sinner who taints their community. This bullying is not progressive, but it ends up being a strong representation because it turns a major LGBTQ-themed literature trope on its head when the *bully* is killed in a car crash and Triinu's story ends with her parents standing up for her to the school administration that has let her be bullied. If LGBTQ adolescents are always shown as the victims of abuse, this position in society will continue. Therefore, if

Lambda and Stonewall want to improve the lives of the gender and sexually minoritized, they need to also be centering experiences of LGBTQ teenagers whose lives are not defined by violence.

Interlude 2. Questions of Authorship

In the author's note to her novel *If I Was Your Girl* (2017 Stonewall Winner), Meredith Russo states she is "nervous about what you [the reader] might think of this book, though maybe not in the way you might think. I am, of course, anxious that people might not like it, but even more than that I'm worried that you might take Amanda's story as gospel, especially since it comes from a trans women" (275). In this way, Russo is well aware that because she is a trans author writing about the trans experience, her novel will most likely be understood as more "authentic."

Throughout this entire project, one important facet of the novels that I have not discussed is the authors who produce LGBTQ-themed YA. As briefly discussed in Chapter One, for a period between 2009-2012, the Lambda Literary Awards required authors to self-identify as LGBT. Due to controversy that surrounded this decision, upon revoking the rule the Lambda Literary Foundation dedicated (or rededicated) three awards specifically for LGBT authors (the Betty Berzon Debut Fiction Award, the Jim Duggins Outstanding Mid-Career Novelist Prize, and the Pioneer Award). They also begin the requirement that all of the judges should be self-identified as LGBT (Edit Team).

Thomas Crisp defended Lambda's decision to restrict the authorship, saying the debate

> is not really about the books themselves, nor is it about who can or cannot write 'authentic' stories. This is about the people that the award represents. . . . [I]t's a categorical decision based entirely on 'insider' or 'outsider' status: as a marginalized person, I don't want anyone else owning my marginalization. ("It's Not the Book" 97)

He further states that the requirement linked the Lambda Award with other awards that "privilege 'insider' voices" such as the Coretta Scott King and Pura Belpré awards, which do not have controversy surrounding their authorship rules ("It's Not the Book" 94). Because neither Lambda nor Stonewall have authorship requirements as well as the recent conversations around publishing, assigning, and reading more #OwnVoices novels (Gómez), I turn to the sample to see how many of these award-winning novels were written by LGBTQ authors, and to consider how this might be influencing the way progress and regression are seen in these canons.

Of the 61 novels within the sample, there are 56 authors. When looking at books that deal with sexuality (MLM, WLW, and/or PD), 57.4% (27 books) have authors that are also LGBQ. One book (7.7%) features trans or genderqueer characters and has a trans or genderqueer author. For 11 authors (18.0%), I was unable to find information regarding their gender and sexuality. However, 24.6% of the sample (15 books) are written by authors who are straight and cis (fig. 6.1).

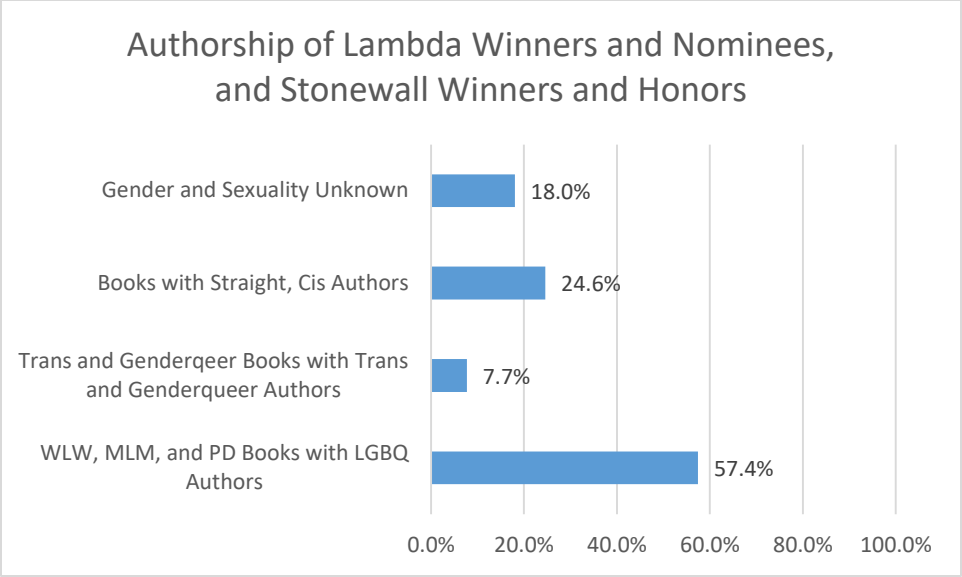

Figure 25. Authorship of Lambda Winners and Nominees, and Stonewall Winners and Honors

In order to closely analyze authorship within the sample, I've chosen to look in detail at trans and genderqueer novels. The reason behind this is twofold; first, there are only 12 such novels and I was able to find information on the gender and sexuality of each meaning that I am able to capture the full picture of the authored novels. Additionally, because the percentage of authors who are trans or genderqueer is so low, this is a place where insider authorship needs to grow. Only one of these books is authored by someone who is not cisgender. This outsider authorship with respect to books about trans and genderqueer youth seems to be prevalent in YA fiction. Epstein, writing in 2013, stated that none of the trans books she analyzes have authors who have "been labelled or has chosen the label of transgender, so perhaps the transgendered are not yet speaking for themselves in children's literature" (143).

Of these twelve authors, six do not mention anything about the issue of writing a trans character when they themselves are cis (Emily M. Danforth, Sara Farizan, Catherine Ryan Hyde, David Levithan, Sarah McCarry, and Brie Spangler). For some, such as Danforth (*The Miseducation of Cameron Post*), this makes some sense, as the trans characters are minor. However, others, such as Farizan (*If You Could Be Mine*) and Spangler (*Beast*) whose trans characters play a pivotal role in the plot, this seems like a large omission. For instance, in Levithan's author's note to *Two Boys Kissing* he talks extensively about the issues and needs of gay men without mention the oppressions facing transboy Avery will be different and more complex. Nor does Levithan discuss that ways that he researched or prepared to write such a character. Perhaps authors like Levithan and Farizan, who are respectively openly a gay man and a lesbian, feel that being part of LGBTQ communities means they have the ability to speak for others with different identities from their own.

Five authors (Cris Beam, Kirsten Cronn-Mills, Jeff Garvin, Chris Katcher, and Anna-Marie McLemore) interact with their outsider voices in authors' notes where they discuss the ways they approached writing their trans and genderqueer characters. Three of these authors, Cronn-Mills (*Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*), Garvin (*Symptoms of Being Human*), and Katcher (*Almost Perfect*), wrote their characters after researching trans populations. In the author's note for *Almost Perfect*, Katcher states that he talked to many trans people to help make his book accurate. He states that "while researching this novel, I found that one common feeling among transgender teens was that of being completely alone. Well, you're not. There are others like you, and there are people out

there who can help you make sense of your feelings" (n.p.) While the sentiment that people aren't alone is a good one, this blanket statement of "you're not" feels dismissive to the real feelings of real teens. GLSEN's 2015 National School Climate survey found that 85.7% of LGBTQ student heard transphobic comments as school, and 50.9% of trans and gender non-conforming students were prevented from using their preferred pronouns and/or name (xvii). While Gavin's statement that gender minorities are not alone comes from a place of caring, it also regressively erases everyday discrimination and challenges that trans and genderqueer young people face in schools.

In the author's note to *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* Cronn-Mills discusses that as a cisgender woman she is "not an expert in the transgender community—the experts are the individuals who are transgender" (263). In fact, she updated the note in the 2014 edition of the novel to reflect the feedback she received from trans readers to make the note more inclusive and accurate. She gives an expansive overview that includes how some trans people choose to have hormones or surgery, while others are genderqueer or genderfluid. She does not, however, discuss that one can be trans (not genderqueer or genderfluid) and opt not to have surgeries or hormones. In fact, in discussing the novel's protagonist, she states "Gabe has a strong need to take testosterone and have surgery to alter his body so it's more like a man's body, which only makes sense" (264). Her assertion that this "only makes sense" positions Gabe's choice as obvious or the only proper way to be trans, further enforcing views of trans bodies that are driven by the binary and medical interventions. Additionally, in *Symptoms of Being Human,* though I admire Garvin for not including Riley's birth gender, I worry that it

might be seen as more of an interesting plot trick than an actual needed representation. Garvin's own author's note contributes to this, as he says "I didn't think I could write more than fifty pages before the question of pronouns forced me into a corner" but after writing a while he realized "maybe I didn't need to reveal—or even to know—Riley's birth-assigned gender to tell the story" (334). It appears that this facet of the story serves as something that the heterosexual cisgender author felt the need to brag about his ability to write Riley's character.[19] Additionally, by placing a character who is not explicitly gendered as such an accomplishment to write, Riley's genderfluidity is placed as even more "other." It is so unusual that writing about them is an achievement to be praised. This is not to say that Garvin's intentions for writing the book were bad. He discusses that the idea for Riley was born out of a conversation with a friend who commented that trans bathroom rights were probably coming from "a pervy boy trying to see some boobs" (333). Following this conversation, he knew he needed to write something to help others understand gender non-conforming people better. Additionally, when his writing group first read the start of the novel, "they enthusiastically urged me to continue—but first, they wanted to know if being gender fluid was 'a real thing.' That's when I knew I *had* to write this book" (334). Garvin's heart might have been in the right place in trying to promote understanding. However, he also places his accomplishments as just as important, if not more, than the diversity he is saying he foregrounds.

[19] In a blog post, Garvin states that he is "a white, heterosexual cisgender male" ("What Can a White Liberal Man Do?")

The remaining two authors who address writing about as an outsider to trans audiences are Cris Beam (*I Am J*) and Anna-Marie McLemore (*If the Moon Was Ours*). Both of these authors address their outsider status while also showing their connections to trans communities. Beam discusses how "J is an amalgamation of some aspects of several transboys" she met while doing research a non-fiction book (n.p.). She wanted to write *I Am J* after seeing how few accounts of trans lives exist. However, she goes further stating that while "it's scary to take an imaginative leap and write a character who is not you" that her experiences "by proxy" with a trans foster daughter and gender variant partner means her "deepest ties are trans in nature (or nurture!)" (n.p.). McLemore makes similar statements about her writing. In her acknowledgements at the start of the book she thanks "[m]y husband, for his grace and patience in all things and, in particular, with all my questions about his life as a transgender boy" (viii). Additionally, her entire author's note at the end of the novel speaks to the love story of her and her husband: how they grew up together as friends, and struggled to find the word for his gender together. In the end, "[t]he boy I married became the man he'd never thought he was allowed to be" (272). The note, like the entire book, is beautifully written and, like Beam's note, serves to explain how the experience of having a loved one who is trans allowed her the insight to write an authentic novel. Both of these authors seem to believe that their close relation to trans people gives them a form of insider voice. These statements of proxy identification serves as a way for these cis authors to claim an insider voice, despite being outsiders. This in and of itself is not a judgement on their texts—in fact, I find both of their books to be productive texts about trans lives. However, trying to claim an insider status while

being cis leaves less room for trans writers to be allowed to speak about their own experiences and lives.

Meredith Russo's *If I Was Your Girl* (2017 Stonewall Winner) created buzz upon its release by being a book about a transwoman, by a transwoman, with a transwoman cover model,[20] and with an audiobook version narrated by a transwoman. As mentioned previously, it is the only book about a trans character of the 61 in the sample that is authored by a trans person. Through texts like Russo's and Alex Gino's middle grade novel *George*, trans voices are finally telling some of their own stories for young readers. *If I Was Your Girl* best exemplifies the trend of many trans narratives, and indeed many of the stories about LGBTQ people more generally, which presents the trans or genderqueer teens as assimilated into their communities, but still having to fear backlash and violence. The duality of this representation illustrates the pairing of progressive and regressive traits that Lambda and Stonewall novels often are awarding.

Readers meet protagonist Amanda as she moves to a small town in Georgia to live with her estranged dad after being assaulted in Atlanta. From the start, Amanda is not a typical trans protagonist. Rather than struggling with coming out to her family and those around her, she has already been on hormones for over a year, and has had gender confirmation surgery. Amanda passes as a "normal" young woman easily. In fact, her beauty is commented on frequently in the text, mirroring what Halberstam finds as a narrative norm within movies with trans characters: "the transgender character surprises

[20] The original hardcover of the novel featured the trans model. The paperback edition of the novel features a graphic instead.

audiences with his/her ability to remain attractive, appealing, and gendered while simultaneously presenting a gender at odds with sex, a sense of self not derived from the boy, and an identity that operates within the heterosexual matrix without confirming the inevitability of that system" (76). Because Amanda is beautiful, she can conform to the heterosexual boundaries around her. However, it also shows her as "fully being" trans, almost as if saying that a trans woman is a "real" woman, but only if she is beautiful. The novel itself also seems to suggest that her beauty makes life easier for Amanda. In one stark example, after being outed, a friend tries to calm her by saying "you're my friend, Amanda. You're one of the most beautiful girls I've ever known, inside and out" (325). In this moment, her beauty is part of what makes her a good girl and a good friend.

Contrary to most trans narratives, Amanda does not struggle with her identity internally; she knows she is a girl and always has been. Rather, her worries come from external traumas, such as the assault that led her to move in with her father. For the vast majority of the text, Amanda lives as a "typical" straight girl at her new school. She befriends a group of girls, and begins dating an attractive boy, Grant. Rather than the book focusing solely on her transition or journey to "realizing" her "true" self, Amanda's story allows her to be precisely what she is, a girl. The book even resists the didacticism that generally comes with such narratives. Rather than explaining to readers about how hormones, surgery, and transitioning work, the narration places them in context, with little explanation, effectively normalizing them. For instance, in one flashback scene to shortly after her surgery, Amanda mentions in passing taking pain killers "when I was done dilating" (185). While other texts might take this opportunity to explain how and

why Amanda dilates as a place for learning, Russo does not explain it at all, but moves on with the scene. This provides a moment for insider audience to have a moment of recognition that is not explained. Unlike many of the trans narratives in the sample, Amanda is not alone as a trans person. Back in Atlanta she was a member of a support group, and she has a close friend, Virginia, who is also a transwoman who serves as a mentor and support system for Amanda throughout the text.

At the same time, Amanda's story also conforms to many of the expected and problematic tropes of trans narratives. Through flashback, readers see excerpts of her childhood, including being bullying at school for not conforming to masculinity, and her father being disappointed in her gender performance. Readers also learn following her coming out she attempted suicide. In this way, the majority of the text almost serves as an "after" to the coming out and struggle narratives typically seen in YA literature. The final third of the text, however, still contains many of the stereotypical plot points. After being crowned homecoming queen, Amanda is outed in front of the whole school by a frustrated and drunk friend. As she walks home, she is assaulted and almost raped by a boy she romantically rebuffed earlier in the school year. The scene serves as a reminder that trans lives are ones filled with strife and pain. Even Amanda, who passes as a woman and has obtained the surgery that other trans YA protagonists dream of, at the end of the day, her life is still full of fear and worry. Unlike cis characters, she is not afforded rights of bodily security.

Interestingly, despite the incorporation of this violence and misunderstanding near the end of the book, Amanda's journey still ends on a hopeful note. After spending

thanksgiving back in Atlanta with her mother, Amanda chooses to return to living with her dad, and is quickly reunited with her friends, who are understanding and loving. The text ends with her discussing her life story with Grant, her boyfriend, who wishes to make their relationship work. Many other YA novels which have trans characters being romantically alone, and definitely not the attention of sexual attraction. Epstein notes that because the novels focus "mostly on other aspects of identity . . . perhaps [engaging in sexual activities] is thought to be too titillating or too shocking" (217). This type of sexual erasure is seen in *Beautiful Music*'s Gabe. While his narrative interacts with the concepts of crushes and dates, he is unable to cultivate even a steady relationship throughout the novel. It is as if being trans takes up too much time to leave room for romance as well. However, in Grant, Amanda has a sweet, caring boy who loves and desires her. By leaving their relationship unclear at the end of the novel, it can leave hope in readers' minds that they will remain a couple. However, this vagueness also leaves a gap that could have made the book much more progressive—if an attractive, popular, and straight young man like Grant accepts and lusts for Amanda, it could go a long way to dismantle false assumptions about those in relationships with trans and genderqueer people.

The mix of oppressive and progressive elements in the *If I Was Your Girl* is something of which Russo is aware. In her author's note she expresses anxiety that her novel will be taken as *the* trans-narrative because it is written by a transwomen. She states that she has "taken liberties with what I know reality to be" (275). This has included using stereotypes "to make Amanda's trans-ness as unchallenging to normative

assumptions as possible . . . because I wanted you to have no possible barrier to understanding Amanda as a teenage girl with a different medical history from most other girls" (275-6). While her author's note then goes on to also address trans readers of the text, its message is not as striking as what she tells her cis readers. While the idea of having a palatable narrative for majority readers can definitely allow the book to reach greater audiences and potentially enacts change in cis readers, it also continues many of the same traditions that allowed for our current sociopolitical climate wherein trans people are the butt of jokes, are targeted for violence, and are legally not allowed to use the correct bathroom. Maybe if trans narratives did not try to appeal to the majority, but rather allow for showcase of trans lives that are not "unchallenging." Americans need to be challenged.

Part of the reason this narrative is so important is the fact that it places Amanda not mid-transition and that is not the main conflict of the book, which something that is sorely needed in order for trans YA to become more inclusive. This is not to say that *If I Was Your Girl* is the first trans or genderqueer award-winning narrative to introduce their character post-transitioning—both Brie Spangler's *Beast* (2017 Lambda Nominee) and Brian Katcher's *Almost Perfect* (2011 Stonewall Award) also fit into this category. However, both *Beast* and *Almost Perfect* are narrated by the cisboys who struggle with falling in love with transgirls, leaving the trans narratives mediated through outside and sometimes transphobic voices. Interestingly, all three of these texts feature already transitioned young *women*, perhaps forwarding an idea that trans women pass or find love more easily than trans men. While here I focus on trans-themed novels and the issues that

occur through the erasure of trans voices in literature, these same issues can be seen in all LGBTQ-themed novels. Yes, more LGBQ-identified authors are recognized with Stonewall and Lambda awards, but there are still many authors (at least 15, but as many as 26) are straight, cis, writing about LGBTQ populations, and being awarded for their novels.

Prior to conducting this study, I believed that the openness of Stonewall and Lambda's awards was a good thing that promoted authors to be allies that brought more stories of LGBTQ communities to life. I scoffed when reading about Lambda's ill-fated attempt to only allow LGBTQ-identified authors to win the award; though I could not articulate the reasons why I felt so strongly about this. I have always been an advocate of #OwnVoices and make sure my syllabi are full of authors of color and people discussing their own lived experiences. Why would I feel differently about a minoritized community that I belong too? I think, in part, it has to do with some books that I truly love and relate to that are written by straight authors, such as *Gone, Gone, Gone, I'll Give You the Sun,* and *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda.* I don't want these books to no longer exist. By switching the awards to only allowing LGBTQ authors, would these books have missed the opportunity to get publicity and become well known? Maybe. But what other astounding works by LGBTQ authors are left undiscovered because of the lack of critical attention that is looking for them.

Lambda's change to having all members of prizing committees identify as LGBTQ is a good start, and one that Stonewall should similarly adapt. After all, do not people who have experienced LGBTQ lives know what best represent those lives? In

fact, I find that Stonewall's lack of judging requirements combined with any public discussion about the identity of authors for Stonewall shocking. Other American Library Association (ALA) Youth Media Awards include the Coretta Scott King Award, and the Pura Belpré Award, both of which are focused to ensure that Black and Latinx voices are validated. Why should these identity awards have an authorship requirement while Stonewall (and the Schneider Family Award for disability in youth fiction) does not? Does the ALA view the societal oppressions that have effected minoritized races and ethnicities as stronger, or worse than those that have faced gender or sexuality marginalization? If the ALA wants to truly promote equity, they should have similar requirements for all identity-based awards.

In his discussion of Lambda's attempt to regulate authorship, Crisp notes that LGBT-identified authors "have their work indelibly linked to their identities" while straight authors "have the privilege of playing in the sandbox and, if things get uncomfortable, walking away, falling safely back into their position as heterosexual members of the dominant culture" ("It's Not the Book" 98). This point is fair; the way that straight authors are able to take up oppressions in fiction while still conforming to heterosexist expectations of what people "should be." Crisp's argument for strategic essentialism is a way to ensure that LGBTQ literature is by and about LGBTQ authors. I agree with his sentiment, but his article misses a key point in the reasons why having LGBTQ awards restricted to LGBTQ authors is important; the capitalist marketplace. As laid out in the introduction to this project, when a book, particularly books for young readers, receive awards, they, and other books by the same author, are more likely to end

up in the hands of young people. By prizing LGBTQ authors at a higher rate, Lambda and Stonewall would not, necessarily, be supporting better fiction, rather, they would be supporting that LGBTQ authors have a better chance at making a living with their art, and help publishers and booksellers see books by LGBTQ authors as good investments. By ensuring that authors are awarded for telling their own stories, Lambda and Stonewall could be progressive and be in-line with activist movements like #OwnVoices.

Chapter 6. Into the Light: Awarding, Reading, and Teaching Progressive Texts

In this concluding chapter, I begin with a brief summary of the findings and argument with particular emphasis on how the sample of books assist in the assimilation of LGBTQ subjects. Finally, I move to providing suggestions for future research, before closing with implications and what I hope for the future of this canon of novels.

Progress Over Regression

The progressive elements from award winning LGBTQ YA novels include resisting stereotypes of MLM as limp-wristed and dramatic, WLW as fitting into femme/butch dynamics, and people with PD being "confused" (Chapter 2). The texts throughout the sample show these stereotypes alongside with more progressive characters, but allowing both to be seen. For trans and genderqueer characters, progression is seen through embracing narratives and lives that do not conform to a binary driven "wrong body" story (Chapter 3). The vast majority of these texts conform to these regressive stereotypes, perpetuation didactic outsider narratives which do now allow for lives outside male and female. While coming out and disclosure narratives are still needed for young readers, YA texts place the power of coming out in the first instance (Chapter 4). Despite progressively *showing* that coming out is on-going, the novels position this act within yet another false binary of "in or out" that presumes LGBTQ subjects only disclose once. Finally, violence is positioned as a normal part of

LGBTQ teens' lives (Chapter 5). While fewer characters die horrible deaths as consequences for their gender or sexuality than in the past, too many characters have abuse normalized in these texts. Overall, then, what is missing from these award winning canons is a multiplicity of story that tips the scale from a balance of progress and regression to mostly progress. YA literature as a whole should still highlight trans characters that are binary crossers. But since that story has been well told so often, push *more* texts featuring teens who don't want hormones or who are genderqueer. Include MLM characters who are bullied for being effeminate, but have *more* MLM characters with strong social and familiar relationships who love him *for* his effeminacy. Or who successfully fight back against abuse. Keep awarding coming out stories, but also award stories of WLW who have been out since she was 7 and find power in the on-going process of claiming her sexuality. In order for Stonewall and Lambda to enact change, they need to not only show the stories that media as a whole have accepted as "gay" stories," but push beyond them to show more of what LGBTQ lives actually are.

Homonationalism Stabilizing the Canon

The mix of progressive and regressive traits discussed above interact with homonationalism and prevent LGBTQ lives and rights from becoming more equitable. In each of the proceeding chapters, I frame my discussion with novels that interact with the topic or identities examined in the most progressive ways. Each of these framing novels center the experiences of men, highlighting the disparity of gender representation throughout the entire sample. Men, especially white men, are allowed to be complex and have a diversity of stories that are not allowed for genderfluid, non-binary, and, to a

lesser extent, women characters. Not only are these characters in fewer novels, but when they do appear, their narratives, by and large, promote the same regressive ideals time and time again. The framing novels, then, are not only useful to establish the focal point of each chapter, but also showcase the ways in which progress and regression act throughout the entire sample. While these progressive framing texts might contain more nuanced and progressive traits than problematic regression, they do so while embracing homonationalism and sexism that allows men, specifically MLM, to have more nuanced narratives.

The ways that Stonewall and Lambda novels continue to award many of the same stories again and again fit within the boundaries of homonationalism. As a force that desires to continue the legacy of the US as an exceptional world power, the homonationalist traits of these canons utilize assimilation to show the ways in which the US is "tolerant" and "forward-thinking," while also ensuring LGBTQ subjects stay within expected boundaries. WLW can be out and coupled, but they have to fit within approved gender and beauty standards. Trans people can find community and happiness, but only if they have surgical or hormonal intervention to "pass." We accept you, we care for you, but be as close to us (white, cis, straight, middle class) as possible. Fit into these boxes. Be on the ends of binaries. Don't "flaunt" your agender embodiment. Don't talk about your open relationship. Don't be polyamorous. Don't be *too* different.

The boundaries that exist within Stonewall and Lambda recognized novels serve as just that—boundaries. These awarding bodies exist to further representation of LGBTQ lives in order to help LGBTQ people. While the books they recognize make

progress toward this goal, they do so while contain within homonationalism, heterosexism, white supremacy, and other societal oppressions. For better or worse, rather than promoting radical queerness, these texts continue to operate within the systems that once criminalized homosexual acts.

While the specter of homonationalism looms over much of my writing throughout this project as another system that marginalizes and excludes, its position becomes more complicated when considering the impact that Trump's administration has had, and will continue to have, on LGBTQ policies. The current administration has reinstated a ban on trans personnel serving in the military ("Trump's Ban"), named judges who have consistently ruled against LGBTQ rights benches around the nation (Wheeler), rescinded protections of trans people in schools and work places ("Trump Just Made It Official"; Diamond), and supported "religious freedom" guidance that allows for discrimination of minoritized populations (Moreau). Additionally, the 2020 census announced in March 2018, after outcry that same-sex couples would not be counted, that it will track the numbers of same-sex co-habituating couples (married and unmarried), but separates them out from heterosexual couples (Wang). While homonationalism insists that subjects conform to heteronormative norms in order to receive the benefit of citizenship, how does this critique of the US shift when queer bodies are again regulated and criminalized out of full and equal rights? The insistence that LGBTQ citizens must fit within hetero- and homonormative expectations might still be problematic and harmful during times when LGBTQ rights are under attack, they also seem to become a lower priority. Rather than critiquing the restrictive criteria that equals citizenship, LGBTQ populations revert to

fighting *for* citizenship and the rights it affords. In this way, it can be argued that those minoritized for their sexuality and gender become regressive themselves; instead of embracing fluid gender identities, for instance, they begin the fight for trans soldiers to be considered equal as their cis colleagues. Given the reversion to pre-Obama-era restrictions and fights, it will be interesting to see if and how Lambda and Stonewall respond and shift their recognition.

Future Research

Within the sample that I have identified and examined, there are other themes and trends that could be productively analyzed in ways similar to what I conducted in throughout this project. For instance, the role of families, both of place and choice, in the lives of LGBT teenagers. The role of parents, in particular, has been shifting within YA fiction, from absent relationships that allow teenagers to they can have their own adventures (such as in *The Outsiders*) to contemporary relationships which are close that show how teens navigate becoming agentive without losing that familiar connection (Rickard Rebellino). How does this compare to the ways in which LGBT teens interact with their parents? Are more families supportive? Or are more disappointed or abusive? Studying this facet of LGBTQ lives could further deconstruct how ideologies struggle and pain that are assumed to exist for LGBTQ populations. Similarly, there has been a lack of work done looking at how other intersecting identities beyond race and ethnicity impact LGBTQ characters, such as religion, class, disability, nation of origin, and immigration status. Most likely this absence has, in part, to do with the lack of novels that

interact with these topics. However, there are books which deal with each of these, meaning that there is work to do be done to understand their implications.

Additionally, because my sample only looks at Lambda and Stonewall recognized books, the findings might not track when looking at the whole canon of LGBTQ YA literature. The field has probably grown, thankfully, to be too big for a comprehensive study like Cart and Jenkins'. However, comparing a sample of award-winners to those that are not recognized, could allow for a richer understanding of how LGBTQ teenagers are being represented across the field of YA literature.

Implications and Hope for the Future

Unfortunately, within some secondary classrooms, the inclusion of YA literature is still controversial, with the traditional Western canon still dominating. Therefore, the chances of teens reading LGBTQ-themed YA novels is low, unless a teacher makes a concentrated effort to include it into already busy curricula. However, as the work in this dissertation shows, bringing one book into a classroom would only go so far to breakdown the assumptions and stereotypes of LGBTQ populations. Because there is no perfect text, teachers must be willing to bring in multiple works with LGBTQ characters and/or encourage students to deconstruct the stereotypes and other regressive traits to understand the multifaceted nature of LGBTQ people. Through the incorporation of multiple works, students will allow students to combat single story representations that plague not only LGBTQ characters, but minoritized populations at large (Achidie). These readings, therefore, not only help students become more empathetic and open humans,

but also cultivate the critical reading and thinking skills that will help them in their academic lives, as well as become more engaged members of US democracy.

Even within the tight requirements of Common Core, there can be room to include YA texts that break down barriers. Teachers can include mini-units following canonical texts that include YA novels which examine some of the same themes. For instance, after reading Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*, teachers could discuss *Lies We Tell Ourselves* by Robin Talley, which features a WLW interracial relationship during school desegregation in the 1960s. Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* could be paired with Albertalli's *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* to think about the way society forces people to fear being revealed. McLemore's *When the Moon Was Ours* could easily be included in a magical realism unit featuring texts by Márquez (such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* or *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*). Using these texts in conjunction can give students a break from texts that linguistically challenge them, while still encouraging higher thinking and syntheses between multiple books.

Thinking beyond the classroom, if Stonewall and Lambda advocate for and aware more texts that push the boundaries of marginalization, not only will the books be placed into the hands of more young readers, but publishers will understand a market exists for texts beyond the homonational. Looking at the sample I examine in this project, there are several years where simply shifting the winners from the nominees and honors would show a stronger commitment to more progressive and less assimilationist representation. For instance, in 2014 Stonewall co-awarded *Fat Angie* and *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*. Both as strong books, but only one show cases a progressive story—as

discussed in Chapter 2, *Fat Angie* showcases a protagonist who subverts bodily expectations for WLW, while *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*, as I unpack in Chapter 3, is of the most stereotypical of trans narratives. Rather that stating that both are the "best" of the year, Stonewall could have made a conscious decision to only award the one novel that went beyond stereotypical understandings. Similar privileging of typical stories occurred in 2015 when the Lambda Award went to Tim Federle's (middle grade) *Five, Six, Seven, Nate!* which is about a young MLM boy who is in a Broadway musical. That same year, Lambda nominated Karelia Stetz-Waters' *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before*; this text progressively has a WLW protagonist who is involved in LGBTQ rights advocacy, and who fights back against both bullies and homophobic school administrators. I am a fan of Federle's work, but Stetz-Waters' novel does more to "affirm that that LGBTQ stories are part of the literature of the world" than *Nate* ("About"). In the current 2018 award cycling, I am seeing this type of privileging of similar novels occurring again. Courtney C. Stevens' 2017 novel *Dress Codes for Small Towns* (therefore eligible for both awards during 2018) is incredibly progressive in its renderings of LGBTQ life. Its protagonist is romantically and physically attracted to two of her friends, one a young man, the other a young women. However, rather than struggling with this, or feeling that she needs to define herself, she decides that she simply isn't ready, and that she does not need to label herself at all. The book embraces the undefined of Billie's sexuality, but also does not shun those who chose to label themselves (in fact, the book holds a rare instance of a named demisexual character!). The novel also interacts with being queer in a small-rural town, religion, in ways that are

unique and needed. Despite all of this, *Dress Codes* was not a Stonewall winner or honor for 2018, nor is it on the published submissions list for Lambda ("Current Submissions"). Lambda and Stonewall should reaffirm their commitment to equity through avoiding these same stories. This is, perhaps, where Kirk Fuoss' concept of political over artistic begins to be needed. Federle's *Nate* is a tighter, cleaner novel, due in no small part to the publisher resources available at Simon and Schuster (*Nate*'s publisher). Stetz-Water's novel, in contrast, is published by the independent Ooligan Press. Stonewall does not list literary merit as a criteria for the award, but Lambda does. Both awards need to make and publicly discuss their criteria and aims more clearly—prizing artistic merit over the political is understandable, as the reverse, but having a clear policy in place would allow readers, educators, and librarians looking for texts to know the award's positioning. Additionally, a political-first award holds the potential to further the existence of radical LGBTQ-themed YA literature.

Despite the focus I often take throughout this dissertation on the regressive nature of these stereotyped themes and narratives I do not mean to fall solely into a paranoid reading of the sample. As defined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, paranoid readings come out of a self-protective impulse to prepare oneself for the inevitability of homophobia. Though this type of reading can and does occur within most critical theories, Sedgwick notes that "queer studies in particularly has had a distinctive history of intimacy with the paranoid imperative" due to the long criminalization of queer acts (126). Many of my individual analyses of texts lean toward paranoid readings; however, I also advocate for reparative readings of the texts themselves and the direction of LGBTQ-themed YA as a

whole. Reparative readings call on readers "to surrender" and approach texts with an open mind to see them "*as new*" as "there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones" (146). Heather Love further states that reparative reading "prefers acts of noticing, being affected, taking joy, and making whole" (238). One way that I see the potential for reparative views of Stonewall and Lambda texts is through counter-storytelling. Suriyan Panlay discusses that counter-storytelling "provides an alternative or becomes a tool for the minority to analyse, deconstruct, challenge or even 'mock' the majoritarian story," and further "gives the marginalized a means to (re)construct their own stories (162). The novels within the sample provide ample opportunities for LGBTQ readers to push back against the hegemony that oppresses them. There are overt instances, such as Simon asking "don't you think everyone should have to come out? Why is straight the default?" (Albertalli 146). Or Triinu's bully who flips the script by dying in a car accident (Stetz-Waters). However, implicit spaces for counter-storytelling exist as well. Like when Sam decides to accept his body without a binder (McLemore). Or Moria liking "girls and guys who act like Clark Gable" (Adams 127). Even if the texts that seem the most regressive, counter-storytelling can allow readers to read against the grain of the text to see positive representation and ways to fight heterosexism.

Similarly, the more progressive texts have openings for encouraging teen readers to take up the mantle of activism: Riley's blog teaches about gender nonconforming, and mirrors how to speak up for your rights and support others (Garvin). Harry and Craig's record-breaking kiss not only serves to give visibility for LGBTQ lives, but the book itself discusses getting permission to use the school grounds, using teachers as witnesses,

and having a police presence which could be a guide for teens wanting to make their own stands. These moments of teaching activism are what is the most hopeful; if YA literature can be guiding readers to understanding how to make change in the world around them, these texts can help bring about a more equitable world.

LGBTQ populations, by and large, are no longer hidden in the shadows of US culture, but by keeping the emphasis on the same stories Lambda and Stonewall novels bow to heterosexist and homonationalist pressure that presume LGBTQ people live in a specific way. Kidd states in "Not Censorship, but Selection," censorship does not suppress a book, "the only way to really kill a book is not to censor but rather to ignore it, to let it go quietly into the night" (214). By prizing the same stories over and over again, what novels, stories, mirrors, and windows are Lambda and Stonewall allowing to quietly fade away from our cultural memory?

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Appendix A. Stonewall Winners and Honors, and Lambda Winners and Nominees, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)
Sprout	Dale Peck	2010 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor
The Vast Fields of Ordinary	Nick Burd	2010 Stonewall Award and Lambda Nominee
In Mike We Trust	P. E. Ryan	2010 Lambda Nominee
Ash	Malinda Lo	2010 Lambda Nominee
Wildthorn	Jane Eagland	2011 Lambda Winner
Almost Perfect	Brian Katcher	2011 Stonewall Award
Jumpstart the World	Catherine Ryan Hyde	2011 Lambda Nominee
Love Drugged	James Klise	2011 Stonewall Honor
Freaks and Revelations	Davida Wills Hurwin	2011 Stonewall Honor
Will Grayson, Will Grayson	David Levithan and John Green	2011 Stonewall Honor
Putting Make Up on the Fat Boy	Bil Wright	2012 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Winner
a + e 4ever	Ilike Merey	2012 Stonewall Honor
With or Without You	Brian Farrey	2012 Stonewall Honor
Pink	Lili Wilkinson	2012 Stonewall Honor and Lambda Nominee
Money Boy	Paul Yee	2012 Stonewall Honor
I Am J	Cris Beam	2012 Lambda Nominee
Huntress	Malinda Lo	2012 Lambda Nominee
Gemini Bites	P. E. Ryan	2012 Lambda Nominee
Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe	Benjamin Alire Sáenz	2013 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Winner
Beautiful Music for Ugly Children	Kirsten Cronn-Mills	2013 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor
Sparks: The Epic, Completely True Blue, (Almost) Holy Quest of Debbie	S. J. Adams	2013 Stonewall Honor

Gone, Gone, Gone	Hannah Moskowitz	2013 Stonewall Honor
Silhouette of a Sparrow	Molly Beth Griffin	2013 Lambda Nominee
Personal Effects	E.M. Kokie	2013 Lambda Nominee
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Emily M. Danforth	2013 Lambda Nominee
Kiss the Morning Star	Elissa Janine Hoole	2013 Lambda Nominee
Every Day	David Levithan	2013 Lambda Nominee
Ask the Passengers	A.S. King	2013 Lambda Nominee
Adaptation	Malinda Lo	2013 Lambda Nominee
Two Boys Kissing	David Levithan	2014 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor
Fat Angie	e.E. Charlton-Trujillo	2014 Stonewall Award
If You Could Be Mine	Sara Farizan	2014 Lambda Winner
The Summer Prince	Alaya Dawn Johnson	2014 Lambda Nominee
The Secret Ingredient	Stewart Lewis	2014 Lambda Nominee
Secret City	Julia Watts	2014 Lambda Nominee
Openly Straight	Bill Konigsberg	2014 Lambda Nominee
Girls I've Run Away With	Rhiannon Argo	2014 Lambda Nominee
Boy in Box	Christopher R. Michael	2014 Lambda Nominee
When Everything Feels Like the Movies	Raziel Reid	2015 Lambda Nominee
This is Not a Love Story	Suki Fleek	2015 Lambda Nominee
Pukawiss the Outcast	Jay Jordan	2015 Lambda Nominee
Lies We Tell Ourselves	Robin Talley	2015 Lambda Nominee
Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before	Karelia Stetz-Waters	2015 Lambda Nominee
Double Exposure	Bridget Birdsall	2015 Lambda Nominee
I'll Give You the Sun	Jandy Nelson	2015 Stonewall Honor
The Porcupine of Truth	Bill Konigsberg	2015 Stonewall Honor – YA
Wonders of the Invisible World	Christopher Barzak	2016 Stonewall Honor
About a Girl	Sarah McCarry	2016 Lambda Nominee
None of the Above	IW Gregorio	2016 Lambda Nominee
Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda	Becky Albertalli	2016 Lambda Nominee
More Happy Than Not	Adam Silvera	2016 Lambda Nominee
Anything Could Happen	Will Walton	2016 Lambda Nominee
If I Was Your Girl	Meredith Russo	2017 Stonewall Winner
Girl Mans Up	M-E Girard	2017 Lambda Winner
When the Moon Was Ours	Anna-Marie McLemore	2017 Stonewall Honor
Unbecoming	Jenny Downham	2017 Lambda Nominee and Stonewall Honor

Our Chemical Hearts	Krystal Sutherland	2017 Lambda Nominee
Symptoms of Being Human	Jeff Garvin	2017 Lambda Nominee
Highly Illogical Behavior	John Corey Whaley	2017 Lambda Nominee
Beast	Brie Spangler	2017 Lambda Nominee
Gravity	Juliann Rich	2017 Lambda Nominee

Appendix B. LGBTQ People of Color in All Award-Winning Texts, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)	LGBTQ POC Character
The Vast Fields of Ordinary	Nick Burd	2010 Stonewall Award and Lambda Nominee	Pablo
Ash	Malinda Lo	2010 Lambda Nominee	Ash, Kaisa
Jumpstart the World	Catherine Ryan Hyde	2011 Lambda Nominee	Wilbur
I Am J	Cris Beam	2011 Lambda Nominee	J
Putting Make Up on the Fat Boy	Bil Wright	2012 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Winner	Carlos
Money Boy	Paul Yee	2012 Stonewall Honor	Ray
Huntress	Malinda Lo	2012 Lambda Nominee	Kaede, Taisin
Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe	Benjamin Alire Sáenz	2013 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Winner	Ari, Dante
Gone, Gone, Gone	Hannah Moskowitz	2013 Stonewall Honor	Craig
If You Could Be Mine	Sara Farizan	2013 Lambda Winner	Nasrin, Sahar, Ali, Pavreen
Personal Effects	E.M. Kokie	2013 Lambda Nominee	Curtis
Everyday	David Levithan	2013 Lambda Nominee	A?
Adaptation	Malinda Lo	2013 Lambda Nominee	
Two Boys Kissing	David Levithan	2014 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor	Neil, Tariq

The Summer Prince	Alaya Dawn Johnson	2014 Lambda Nominee	Enki, Gil
The Secret Ingredient	Stewart Lewis	2014 Lambda Nominee	Enrique
Pukawiss the Outcast	Jay Jordan	2015 Lambda Nominee	Joshua
Lies We Tell Ourselves	Robin Talley	2015 Lambda Nominee	Sarah
The Porcupine of Truth	Bill Koningsberg	2016 Stonewall Winner	Aisha
About a Girl	Sarah McCarry	2016 Lambda Nominee	Tally, Henri, Raoul
Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda	Becky Albertalli	2016 Lambda Nominee	Blue/Bram
More Happy Than Not	Adam Silvera	2016 Lambda Nominee	Aaron,
When the Moon Was Ours	Anna-Marie McLemore	2017 Stonewall Honor	Sam, Aracely
Our Chemical Hearts	Krystal Sutherland	2017 Lambda Nominee	Lola

Appendix C. MLM in All Award-Winning Texts, by year

Title	Author	Award	Character(s) that Fit into the Category
The Vast Fields of Ordinary	Nick Burd	2010 Stonewall Award and Lambda Nominne	Dade, Alex, possible Pablo (secondary character)
In Mike We Trust	P. E. Ryan	2010 Lambda Nominee	Gareth
Sprout	Dale Peck	2010 Stonewall Honor and Lambda Nominee	Sprout, Ty, Ian
Jumpstart the World	Catherine Ryan Hyde	2011 Lambda Nominee	Wilbur (secondary character), Bob (secondary character), and Bob (secondary character)
Will Grayson, Will Grayson	David Levithan and John Green	2011 Stonewall Honor	Will Grayson, Tiny Cooper
Freaks and Revelations	Davida Wills Hurwin	2011 Stonewall Honor	Doug
Love Drugged	James Klise	2011 Stonewall Honor	Jaime
Putting Make Up on the Fat Boy	Bil Wright	2012 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Winner	Carlos
Money Boy	Paul Yee	2012 Stonewall Honor	Ray
With our Without You	Brian Farrey	2012 Stonewall Honor	Evan, Davis, Erick (secondary)
a + e 4ever	Ilike Merey	2012 Stonewall Honor	Asher
Pink	Lili Wilkinson	2012 Stonewall Honor and Lambda Nominee	Jules (secondary character)

Gemini Bites	P. E. Ryan	2012 Lambda Nominee	Kyle
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Emily M. Danforth	2012 Lambda Nominee	Secondary characters at conversion camp
Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe	Benjamin Alire Sáenz	2013 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Winner	Ari, Dante
Personal Effects	E.M. Kokie	2013 Lambda Nominee	Curtis, TJ
Every Day	David Levithan	2013 Lambda Nominee	A, possibly
Ask the Passengers	A.S. King	2013 Lambda Nominee	Justin (secondary character)
Adaptation	Malinda Lo	2013 Lambda Nominee	David (secondary character)
Gone, Gone, Gone	Hannah Moskowitz	2013 Stonewall Honor	Lio, Craig, Cody (secondary character)
Two Boys Kissing	David Levithan	2014 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor	Neil, Peter, Ryan, Avery, Cooper, Narrators, Tariq (secondary)
The Summer Prince	Alaya Dawn Johnson	2014 Lambda Nominee	Gil
The Secret Ingredient	Stewart Lewis	2014 Lambda Nominee	Enrique, Bell
Openly Straight	Bill Konigsberg	2014 Lambda Nominee	Rafe, Ben, Toby (secondary character)
Girls I've Run Away With	Rhiannon Argo	2014 Lambda Nominee	Marco
Boy in Box	Christopher R. Michael	2014 Lambda Nominee	Luther
If You Could Be Mine	Sarah Farizan	2014 Lambda Winner	Ali
When Everything Feels like the Movies	Raziel Reid	2015 Lambda Nominee	Jude
This is Not a Love Story	Suki Fleek	2015 Lambda Nominee	Julian, Romeo
Pukawiss the Outcast	Jay Jordan	2015 Lambda Nominee	Joshua

I'll Give You the Sun	Jandy Nelson	2015 Stonewall Honor	Noah, Brian
Wonders of the Invisible World	Christopher Barzak	2016 Stonewall Honor	Aiden, Jarrod
The Porcupine of Truth	Bill Konigsberg	2016 Stonewall Honor	Turk (secondary character)
Anything Could Happen	Will Walton	2016 Lambda Nominee	Tretch, secondary MLM dads
Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda	Becky Albertalli	2016 Lambda Nominee	Simon, "Blue"/Bram
More Happy Than Not	Adam Silvera	2016 Lambda Nominee	Aaron, Collin
Highly Illogical Behavior	John Corey Whaley	2017 Lambda Nominee	Solomon

Appendix D. MLM in All Award-Winning Texts with Predicable Storylines, by year

Title	Author	Award
The Vast Field of Ordinary	Nick Burd	2010 Stonewall Award and Lambda Nominee
Sprout	Dale Peck	2010 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor
In Mike We Trust	P. E. Ryan	2010 Lambda Nominee
Jumpstart the World	Catherine Ryan Hyde	2011 Lambda Nominee
Will Grayson, Will Grayson	David Levithan and John Green	2011 Stonewall Honor
Freaks and Revelations	Davida Wills Hurwin	2011 Stonewall Honor
Love Drugged	James Klise	2011 Stonewall Honor
Money Boy	Paul Yee	2012 Stonewall Honor
With or Without You	Brian Farrey	2012 Stonewall Honor
Personal Effects	E.M. Kokie	2013 Lambda Nominee
Openly Straight	Bill Konigsberg	2014 Lambda Nominee
Girls I've Run Away With	Rhiannon Argo	2014 Lambda Nominee
Boy In Box	Christopher R. Michael	2014 Lambda Nominee
When Everything Feels Like the Movies	Raziel Reid	2015 Lambda Nominee
Pukawiss the Outcast	Jay Jordan	2015 Lambda Nominee
The Porcupine of Truth	Bill Konigsberg	2015 Stonewall Honor
Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda	Becky Albertalli	2016 Lambda Nominee
More Happy Than Not	Adam Silvera	2016 Lambda Nominee
Anything Could Happen	Will Walton	2016 Lambda Nominee

Appendix E. MLM Novels with Tragic, Closeted, and/or Jock Characters, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)	Character(s)
Sprout	Dale Peck	2010 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor	Ian
The Vast Field of Ordinary	Nick Burd	2010 Stonewall Award and Lambda Nominee	Pablo
Personal Effects	E.M. Kokie	2013 Lambda Nominee	TJ
Openly Straight	Bill Konigsberg	2014 Lambda Nominee	Rafe, Ben
More Happy Than Not	Adam Silvera	2016 Lambda Nominee	Collin

Appendix F. Stereotypically MLM Characters, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)	Character(s)
Will Grayson, Will Grayson	David Levithan and John Green	2011 Stonewall Honor	Tiny Cooper
Jumpstart the World	Catherine Ryan Hyde	2011 Lambda Nominee	Wilbur
Putting Make Up On the Fat Boy	Bil Wright	2012 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Winner	Carlos
I'll Give You The Sun	Jandy Nelson	2015 Stonewall Honor	Noah
When Everything Feels Like the Movies	Raziel Reid	2015 Lambda Nominee	Jude

Appendix G. WLW Characters in All Award-Winners, by year

Title	Author	Award	Character(s) that Fit into the Category
The Vast Fields of Ordinary	Nick Burd	2010 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Nominee	Lucy (secondary character)
Ash	Malinda Lo	2010 Lambda Nominee	Kaisa
Wildthorn	Jane Eagland	2011 Lambda Winner	Louisa, Eliza
a + e 4ever	Ilike Merey	2012 Stonewall Honor	Eu
Pink	Lili Wilkinson	2012 Stonewall Honor	Chloe, Jen
Huntress	Malinda Lo	2012 Lambda Nominee	Kaede, Taisin
Sparks: The Epic, Completely, True Blue, (Almost) Holy Quest of Debbie	S. J. Adams	2013 Stonewall Honor	Debbie
Silhouette of a Sparrow	Molly Beth Griffin	2013 Lambda Nominee	Garnet, Isabella
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Emily M. Danforth	2013 Lambda Nominee	Cameron, Secondary Characters with whom Cameron has relationships
Kiss the Morning Star	Elissa Janine Hoole	2013 Lambda Nominee	Kat
Every Day	David Levithan	2013 Lambda Nominee	A?
Ask the Passengers	A.S. King	2013 Lambda Nominee	Astrid, Dee, Kristina (secondary character)
Adaptation	Malinda Lo	2013 Lambda Nominee	Amber

Fat Angie	e.E. Charlton-Trujillo	2014 Stonewall Winner	Angie, KC
If You Could Be Mine	Sara Farizan	2014 Lambda Winner	Sahar, Nasrin
The Summer Prince	Alaya Dawn Johnson	2014 Lambda Nominee	Gil
Secret City	Julia Watts	2014 Lambda Nominee	Ruby, Iris
Girls I've Run Away With	Rhiannon Argo	2014 Lambda Nominee	Lo
Lies We Tell Ourselves	Robin Talley	2015 Lambda Nominee	Sarah, Linda
Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before	Karelia Stetz-Waters	2015 Lambda Nominee	Triinu, Ursula, Deidre
The Porcupine of Truth	Bill Konigsberg	2016 Stonewall Winner	Aisha
About a Girl	Sarah McCarry	2016 Lambda Nominee	Maddy
If I Was Your Girl	Meredith Russo	2017 Stonewall Winner	Chloe (secondary character)
Girl Mans Up	M-E Girard	2017 Lambda Winner	Pen
Unbecoming	Jenny Downham	2017 Lambda Nominee	Katie
Our Chemical Hearts	Krystal Sutherland	2017 Lambda Nominee	Lol (secondary character)
Gravity	Juliann Rich	2017 Lambda Nominee	Elle, Kate

Appendix H. WLW Novels with Feminist Goals, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)
The Vast Fields of Ordinary	Nick Burd	2010 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Nominee
Ash	Malinda Lo	2010 Lambda Nominee
Wildthorn	Jane Eagland	2011 Lambda Winner
Sparks: The Epic, Completely, True Blue, (Almost) Holy Quest of Debbie	S. J. Adams	2013 Stonewall Honor
Silhouette of a Sparrow	Molly Beth Griffin	2013 Lambda Nominee
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Emily M. Danforth	2013 Lambda Nominee
Kiss the Morning Star	Elissa Janine Hoole	2013 Lambda Nominee
Ask the Passengers	A.S. King	2013 Lambda Nominee
Fat Angie	e.E. Charlton-Trujillo	2014 Stonewall Winner
If You Could Be Mine	Sara Farizan	2014 Lambda Winner
Secret City	Julia Watts	2014 Lambda Nominee
Girls I've Run Away With	Rhiannon Argo	2014 Lambda Nominee
Lies We Tell Ourselves	Robin Talley	2015 Lambda Nominee
If I Was Your Girl	Meredith Russo	2017 Stonewall Winner
Girl Mans Up	M-E Girard	2017 Lambda Winner
Unbecoming	Jenny Downham	2017 Lambda Nominee
Gravity	Juliann Rich	2017 Lambda Nominee

Appendix I. Historical Fiction Novels, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)
Wildthorn	Jane Eagland	2011 Lambda Winner
Freaks and Revelations	Davida Wills Hurwin	2011 Stonewall Honor
Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe	Benjamie Alire Sáenz	2013 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Winner
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Emily M. Danforth	2013 Lambda Nominee
Silhouette of a Sparrow	Molly Beth Griffin	2013 Lambda Nominee
Gone, Gone, Gone	Hanna Moskowitz	2013 Stonewall Honor
Secret City	Julia Watts	2014 Lambda Nominee
Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before	Karelia Stetz-Watters	2015 Lambda Nominee

Appendix J. Historical Fiction Novels with WLW, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)
Wildthorn	Jane Eagland	2011 Lambda Winner
Silhouette of a Sparrow	Molly Beth Griffin	2013 Lambda Nominee
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Emily M. Danforth	2013 Lambda Nominee
Secret City	Julia Watts	2014 Lambda Nominee
Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before	Karelia Stetz-Waters	2015 Lambda Nominee
Lies We Tell Ourselves	Robin Talley	2015 Lambda Nominee

Appendix K. Novels Featuring People of Color with Plural Desires, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)	Character(s)
Ash	Malinda Lo	2010 Lambda Nominee	Ash
Every Day	David Levithan	2013 Lambda Nominee	A?
The Summer Prince	Alaya Dawn Johnson	2014 Lambda Nominee	Enki
About A Girl	Sarah McCarry	2016 Lambda Nominee	Tally

Appendix L. Novels That Are Implicit about Plural Desires, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)	Character(s)
a + e 4ever	Ilike Merey	2012 Stonewall Honor	Eu
Pink	Lil Wilkinson	2012 Stonewall Honor	Ava
Kiss the Morning Star	Elissa Janine Hoole	2013 Lambda Nominee	Anna
Every Day	David Levithan	2013 Lambda Nominee	A?
Girls I've Run Away With	Rhiannon Argo	2014 Lambda Nominee	Savvy
About a Girl	Sarah McCarry	2016 Lambda Nominee	Tally
Girl Mans Up	M-E Girard	2017 Lambda Winner	Blake
Gravity	Juliann Rich	2017 Lambda Nominee	Blair

Appendix M. Novels That Are Explicit about Plural Desires, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)	Character(s)
Ash	Malinda Lo	2010 Lambda Nominee	Ash
Gemini Bites	P. E. Ryan	2012 Lambda Nominee	Garret
Adaptation	Malinda Lo	2013 Lambda Nominee	Reese
The Summer Prince	Alaya Dawn Johnson	2014 Lambda Nominee	Enki
Sparks: The Epic, Completely True Blue, (Almost) Holy Quest of Debbie	S. J. Adams	2013 Stonewall Honor	Moria

Appendix N. Trans, Genderqueer, and Two Spirit Characters in All Award-Winning Texts, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)	Character(s)
Almost Perfect	Brian Katcher	2011 Stonewall Winner	Sage
Jumpstart the World	Catherine Ryan Hyde	2011 Lambda Nominee	Frank (adult character)
I Am J	Cris Beam	2012 Lambda Nominee	J, secondary characters
Two Boys Kissing	David Levithan	2013 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor	Avery
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Emily M. Danforth	2013 Lambda Nominee	Adam
Beautiful Music for Ugly Children	Kirsten Cronn-Mills	2014 Stonewall Winner and 2013 Lambda Nominee	Gabe
If You Could Be Mine	Sara Farizan	2014 Lambda Winner	Pavreen (secondary character)
About a Girl	Sarah McCarry	2016 Lambda Nominee	Shane
If I Was Your Girl	Meredith Russo	2017 Stonewall Winner	Amanda, Virgina (secondary character)
When the Moon Was Ours	Anna-Marie McLemore	2017 Stonewall Honor	Sam, Aracely
Symptoms of Being Human	Jeff Garvin	2017 Lambda Nominee	Riley
Beast	Brie Spangler	2017 Lambda Nominee	Jamie

Appendix O. Award-Winning Trans Narratives within the Gender Binary, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)
Almost Perfect	Brian Katcher	2011 Stonewall Winner
Jumpstart the World	Catherine Ryan Hyde	2011 Lambda Nominee
I Am J	Cris Beam	2012 Lambda Nominee
Two Boys Kissing	David Levithan	2013 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Emily M. Danforth	2013 Lambda Nominee
Beautiful Music for Ugly Children	Kirsten Cronn-Mills	2014 Stonewall Winner and 2013 Lambda Nominee
If You Could Be Mine	Sara Farizan	2014 Lambda Winner
About a Girl	Sarah McCarry	2016 Lambda Nominee
If I Was Your Girl	Meredith Russo	2017 Stonewall Winner
When The Moon Was Ours	Anna-Marie McLemore	2017 Stonewall Honor
Beast	Brie Spangler	2017 Lambda Nominee

Appendix P. Coming Out Narratives and Categories in All Award-Winning Texts, by year

Title	Author	Award(s)	Voluntarily Comes Out	Forced into Disclosing/Coming Out	Others "Just Know"
Sprout	Dale Peck	2010 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Winner	Sprout		
The Vast Fields of Ordinary	Nick Burd	2010 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Nominee	Alex, Dade		Dade (Lucy knows)
In Mike We Trust	P. E. Ryan	2010 Lambda Nominee	Gareth		
Almost Perfect	Brian Katcher	2012 Stonewall Winner	Sage		
Jumpstart the World	Catherine Ryan Hyde	2011 Lambda Nominee	Big Bob and Little Bobby	Frank (Big Bob and Little Bobby tell)	Frank (Big Bob and Little Bobby know)
Love Drugged	James Klise	2011 Stonewall Honor	Jamie		Jamie (Celia's Dad knows)
Freaks and Revelations	Davida Wills Hurwin	2011 Stonewall Honor	Jason		
Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe	Benjamin Alire Sáenz	2012 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Winner	Dante	Dante (assaulted when kissing boy)	Ari (his parents)
I Am J	Cris Beam	2012 Lambda Nominee	J		

Money Boy	Paul Yee	2012 Stonewall Honor		Ray (computer)	
Pink	Lili Wilkinson	2012 Lambda Honor and Stonewall Honor	Chloe, Jules, Jen		Ava (new friend group knew)
Beautiful Music for Ugly Children	Kirsten Cronn-Mills	2012 Lambda Winner and 2013 Stonewall Honor	Gabe	Gabe (internet)	
Personal Effects	E.M. Kokie	2013 Lambda Nominee		Curtis, TJ (TJ's brother after his death)	
Ask the Passengers	A.S. King	2013 Lambda Nominee	Astrid, Justin, Kristina	Astrid, Justin, Dee, Kristina (get detained by cops at a gay club)	
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Emily M. Danforth	2013 Lambda Nominee	Lindsey, Adam, others at the conversion camp	Cameron	Cameron (Friend Jamie knows)
Sparks: The Epic, Completely True Blue, (Almost) Holy Quest of Debbie	S. J. Adams	2013 Stonewall Honor	Moria, Debbie	Debbie (Emma tells)	Debbie (Emma and Lisa know)
Fat Angie	e.E. Charlton-Trujillo	2014 Stonewall Winner	Angie, KC	Angie, KC (Angie's mom sees them kissing)	
Two Boys Kissing	David Levithan	2014 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor	Avery	Cooper (computer)	
Openly Straight	Bill Konigsburg	2014 Lambda Nominee	Toby, Rafe	Rafe (Mom informs GSA adviser),	Rafe (Roommate Albie knows)

				Robinson (Toby confesses their hooking up)	
Boy in Box	Christopher R. Michael	2014 Lambda Nominee	Luther	Luther's neighbors (murdered and then talked about on the news), Luther (Virginia read his secrets he kept in a box)	
Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before	Karelia Stetz-Waters	2015 Lambda Nominee	Ursula, Ava, Triinu		Triinu (bullies and Isabel know)
When Everything Feels Like the Movies	Raziel Reid	2015 Lambda Nominee	Jude		
Double Exposure	Bridget Birdsall	2015 Lambda Nominee		Alyx (by bully)	
I'll Give You the Sun	Jandy Nelson	2015 Stonewall Honor	x (NO—take out)	Noah, Brian (walked in on by mother) (Noah also outs Brian to a girl he's kissing)	Noah (Jude, his twin, knows)
The Porcupine of Truth	Bill Konigsburg	2016 Stonewall Winner	Aisha		
Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda	Becky Albertalli	2016 Lambda Nominee	Simon, Blue/Bram	Simon (internet)	
More Happy Than Not	Adam Silvera	2016 Lambda Nominee	Aaron		
Anything Could Happen	Will Walton	2016 Lambda Nominee	Tretch		

If I Was Your Girl	Meredith Russo	2017 Stonewall Winner	Bee, Amanda	Amanda, Chloe	
Girl Mans Up	M-E Girard	2017 Lambda Winner		Pen, Blake (mom walks in on kissing)	
Unbecoming	Jenny Downham	2017 Stonewall Honor and Lambda Nominee	Katie	Simona, Katie (rumors and gossip)	
When the Moon Was Ours	Anna-Marie McLemore	2017 Stonewall Honor	Aracely	Sam	
Symptoms of Being Human	Jeff Garvin	2017 Lambda Nominee	Riley		Riley (Bec knows)
Highly Illogical Behavior	John Corey Whaley	2017 Lambda Nominee	Solomon		
Beast	Brie Spangler	2017 Lambda Nominee	Jamie		Jamie (JP and Dylan's mom know)

Appendix Q. Bullying, Violence, Self-Harm, and Suicide in All Award-Winning Texts, by year

Book	Author	Award(s)	Bullying/Violence	Suicide/Self-Harm
Sprout	Dale Peck	2010 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor	Ty	
The Vast Field of Ordinary	Nick Burd	2010 Stonewall Winner and Lambda Nominee	Dade	Pablo
Almost Perfect	Brian Katcher	2011 Stonewall Winner		Sage (attempt)
Wildthorn	Jane Eagland	2011 Lambda Nominee	Louisa	Louisa (considers self-harm)
Jumpstart the World	Catherine Ryan Hyde	2011 Lambda Nominee	Wilbur (secondary character)	
Freaks and Revelations	Davida Wills Hurwin	2011 Stonewall Honor	Doug	
Will Grayson, Will Grayson	David Levithan and John Green	2011 Stonewall Honor	Will Grayson 2	Will Grayson 2 (suicidal ideation)
Putting Make Up on the Fat Boy	Bil Wright	2012 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Winner	Carlos	

Pink	Lili Wilkinson	2012 Stonewall Honor and Lambda Nominee	Ava, Jules	
I Am J	Cris Beam	2012 Lambda Nominee	J	
Money Boy	Paul Yee	2012 Stonewall Honor	Ray	
With or Without You	Brian Farrey	2012 Stonewall Honor	Evan, Davis	
a + e 4ever	Ilike Merey	2012 Stonewall Honor	Asher, Eu	
Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe	Benjamin Alire Sáenz	2013 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Winner	Dante	
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Emily M. Danforth	2013 Lambda Nominee	Cameron, Lindsey (secondary character)	Mark (self-harm)(secondary character)
Ask the Passengers	A.S. King	2013 Lambda Nominee	Astrid, Kristina, Justin	
Two Boys Kissing	David Levithan	2014 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honor	Tariq, Craig, Harry, Ryan, Avery	Cooper (attempt)
Fat Angie	e.E. Charlton-Trujillo	2014 Stonewall Winner	Angie	Angie (self-harm)
If You Could Be Mine	Sara Farizan	2014 Lambda Winner	Ali, Pavreen	

Openly Straight	Bill Konigsberg	2014 Lambda Nominee	Rafe, Toby	
Girls I've Run Away With	Rhiannon Argo	2014 Lambda Nominee	Lo	Marco (attempt, then suicide)(secondary character)
When Everything Feels Like the Movies	Raziel Reid	2015 Lambda Nominee	Jude	
This is Not a Love Story	Suki Fleet	2015 Lambda Nominee	Romeo	
Pukawiss the Outcast	Jay Jordan	2015 Lambda Nominee	Joshua	
Lies We Tell Ourselves	Robin Talley	2015 Lambda Nominee	Sarah	
Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before	Karelia Stetz-Waters	2015 Lambda Nominee	Triinu	
Double Exposure	Bridget Birdsall	2015 Lambda Nominee	Alyx	
I'll Give You the Sun	Jandy Nelson	2015 Stonewall Honor	Noah	
About a Girl	Sarah McCarry	2016 Lambda Nominee	Shane (secondary character)	
None of the Above	IW Gregorio	2015 Lambda Nominee	Kristin	
Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda	Becky Albertalli	2016 Lambda Nominee	Simon	
More Happy Than Not	Adam Silvera	2016 Lambda Nominee	Aaron	Aaron (attempt)
Anything Could Happen	Will Walton	2016 Lambda Nominee	Tretch	Uncle Dennis (suicide)(background character)

Girl Mans Up	M-E Girard	2017 Lambda Winner	Pen	
If I Was Your Girl	Meredith Russo	2017 Stonewall Winner	Amanda	Rhonda (suicide)(background character)
When the Moon Was Ours	Anna-Marie McLemore	2017 Stonewall Honor	Sam	
Unbecoming	Jenny Downham	2017 Lambda Nominee and Stonewall Honor	Katie	
Symptoms of Being Human	Jeff Garvin	2017 Lambda Nominee	Riley	Andi (almost attempts)(secondary character)
Beast	Brie Spangler	2017 Lambda Nominee	Jamie	Jamie (self-harm)