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Young-Adult Gay Literature: Coming of Age for LGBTQ Teenagers

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Young-Adult Gay Literature:
Coming of Age for LGBTQ Teenagers

By

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October 10, 2012

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts of the City College Of the City University of New York
# Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................... 3

Introduction......................................................................................................................................... 4

Chapter 1: Holden Caulfield: Gay Protagonist................................................................................. 14

Chapter 2: YA Gay Literature from 1969-1979.............................................................................. 24

Chapter 3: YA Gay Literature from 1980-1989.............................................................................. 42

Chapter 4: YA Gay Literature from 1990-2000.............................................................................. 53

Chapter 5: YA Gay Literature from 2001-2010.............................................................................. 68

Chapter 6: 2011 and Beyond: The Future of YA Gay Literature.................................................. 85

General Statistics and Conclusion..................................................................................................... 92

Bibliography...................................................................................................................................... 100
Abstract

My Master's Thesis is an analysis and overview that will explore the evolution of Young Adult (YA) Gay literature from 1969 to the present. It will also explore the impact this genre has had on the LGBTQ community, the gradual societal shifts in attitudes towards homosexuals, the reciprocal influence within the scope of Queer Theory, and the importance as a relevant literary genre.

YA gay literature has influenced many segments of American mainstream society through heartrending stories dealing with themes about coming out, acceptance, bullying, violence, isolation, guilt, shame, and countless other negative experiences gay people have lived through on a daily basis.

Fortunately there has been a gradual shift over the last four decades towards more acceptance and the inclusion of the gay community into mainstream America. Numerous gay rights groups, individual gay advocates, and the genre of YA Gay literature have slowly educated people to be more empathetic and tolerant. YA gay literature has been instrumental in helping LGBTQ teenagers to realize they are not alone on their journey; that they are normal people with the same hopes and dreams as their heterosexual counterparts.
Introduction

"I discovered gay young adult (YA) literature in my senior year in high school. A classmate lent me a copy of Alex Sanchez's *Rainbow Boys* and assured me that it would forever change the way I viewed life. He was right: The novel not only helped me come to terms with my inhibited sexuality, but it also granted me the opportunity, for the first time in my life, to fully identify with characters and issues in a literary text." (Caro, par 1, October 10, 2010).

This quote by Angel D. Matos, a graduate student in English education at the University of Puerto Rico, is a testament to the powerful emotions many gay teenagers have experienced by reading young adult (YA) gay literature. Matos finally felt like he belonged and no longer had to hide his sexuality. "I realized that the genre of gay YA literature granted me a sense of emancipation and inclusion as a gay male man" (par 2)

This new genre of literature came into existence in 1969 during the height of the Civil Rights, Hippie, and Feminist movements. The turbulent landscape of The United States during the 1960s opened the door for gay authors to write about the lives of gay teenagers trying to come to terms with their sexuality, as well as learning how to survive the negativity encountered by a homophobic American culture. The first major YA gay novel was John Donavan's *I'll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip* (Dell Pub.). It was published in the summer of 1969. Even though it had only modest success, it created a new genre of young adult literature that finally brought to light what approximately ten percent of the U.S. population (Kinsey) goes through during their teen years.
America was a very different place in the 1960s when compared to present day. Even though society was starting to embrace ethnic diversity, the gay community was still looked upon as a collection of outcasts, perverted, evil, and mentally ill. I know this for a fact because I was a thirteen-year-old gay teenager in 1969 trying to navigate my way through the pressures of pretending to be straight. I had no one to talk to and nowhere to turn as I heard cruel comments about gay people like myself. I learned early on that the basic requirement for a gay teen was to live a double life or risk being branded as a queer and social misfit. I was as deep inside the closet as a person could get, which resulted in some very painful and lonely years. Whenever my friends or family talked about gay people, they always used derogatory words like homo, queer, fairy, lesbo, as well as others to describe people like me. I couldn't tell anyone I was gay because my friends would never have understood, and I believed my parents would have hated me for what I was and send me away to get cured.

I knew I was gay by the age of ten, and by thirteen had accepted this fact, which forced me to pretend to be straight, which I did for many years. Looking back on my teen years, I wish there would have been someone to talk to, someone who could have given me words of encouragement to help me through a very rough period of my life. Gay teens today are fortunate to have so many advocates and resources available to them to help them cope and live normal lives as openly gay individuals.

YA gay literature has been an important resource for the LGBTQ community. Alex Sanchez, the author of eight YA gay novels, says it best: "The pressures on gay teens can be overwhelming --- to keep secrets, tell lies, deny who you are, and try to be who you're not.
Remember: you are special and worth being cared about, loved, and accepted just the way you are. Never, ever let anyone convince you otherwise." (Sanchez 21).

These words would have made all the difference for me back in 1969.

As a closeted gay teen, I wanted to meet other gay people and have gay role models so I would know I wasn't alone, but there were none to be found in the real world or in Young Adult Literature. If anyone was gay at my school or in my neighborhood, I didn't have a clue. The many fictional gay characters in adult books were cleverly masked or way too sophisticated for my reading level. An example of adult literature is James Baldwin's *Another Country* (1962).

Sadly to say, I didn't know about Donovan's book. It wasn't until 1972 that musician David Bowie became my first gay role model. Being a musician myself, I instantly gravitated to his androgynous appearance and his announcement that he was bisexual. After Bowie "came out" I knew I could eventually come out as well. In Melody Maker magazine, David Bowie said: "It's true, I am bisexual."

As the author of the YA gay novel, *Miguel's Secret Journal* (2011), I realize how important it is to have gay characters the LGBTQ community can relate to. Compelling literature is the story of ordinary people and their everyday lives; all the idiosyncrasies, the wounds, the relationships, and the variety of emotions that come with being a human being. "One of the most important aspects of literature is its relationship to human experience. Reading is an act of engagement and participation. It is also, simultaneously, an act of clarification and discovery. Literary characters offer us immediate access to a wide range of human experiences we otherwise might never know" (Stankey).
To have openly gay characters in YA literature who are realistic is important for all readers, gay or straight, teen or adult, because these fictional creations become windows for people to see another side of humanity. Many gay and straight adults who have read my novel have been able to relate to my characters in some way. The emails I get from adults say they wished they had books like this when they were young. Teenagers who have written me connect to the main protagonists on a personal level.

One recent seventeen-year-old gay male reader wrote me the following email:

I love *Miguel's Secret Journal* so much you have no idea!! There are a few things that make the book special to me. One is that I have been bullied, never beaten up, but verbally bullied. I actually helped my school board come up with a new bullying policy. Another is that Miguel understands that being different is ok, and I fully agree with that!

The last thing I can relate to is Gabriel, because like myself, he has secrets that not everyone can know, and I feel like that is something found in every human being. Thanks for replying to my message, it means a lot to me.

Blake (July 9, 2012)

This heartfelt letter is a testament to the power of YA gay literature. I write within this genre with the hope that it will let gay teenagers know that it is ok to be themselves without feeling guilt or shame, that they will survive if they are strong. T.S. Eliot once said the reason we read is for "[t]he pleasure or entertainment, the enjoyment of art, and the acquisition of wisdom" (Cart, par 4). The acquisition of wisdom has been an important foundation of YA gay literature.
The power and complexity of many YA gay novels are just as sophisticated as adult literature. Emails like Blake's are a testament to the impact this genre has on a disenfranchised segment of American society.

I also write gay literature with the hope that I might educate people in positions of power: government and religious institutions in particular. Dr. Roberta Seelinger Trites, Professor of English, Illinois State University, quotes Michel Foucault in her essay, *Repression and Power in Gay Male Adolescent Literature*:

"Western discourses about sex are repressed because any number of institutions from the Catholic Church to Freudian analysis has gone to ingenious lengths to create monumental rhetorical systems such a confession as sacrament or psychoanalysis." She continues, "Foucault thinks of human sexuality in terms of two things: Discourse and power. He asserts that in western culture, sexuality depends on a power/repression dynamic: sex is so powerful that it must be, but cannot be controlled" (Seelinger 143). YA gay literature has inadvertently been challenging this "power/repression" dynamic as it has become a voice of reason and clarity for gay rights.

Even though many literary critics think of YA literature as a minor literature, its popularity has challenged literary theorists to finally take a serious academic look.

"Many people have argued that YA literature, which is often grouped as a sub-division of Children's Literature, isn't worth much attention because it doesn't offer enough substance to be included in the literary canon" (Daniels 1). In my opinion, this criticism is nothing more than snobbery in all its glory. Books like *The Outsiders* (1967), *I'll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip* (1969), *Annie on my Mind* (1982), the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), and countless
others, are just as important to the literary canon as adult literature. In fact, many adults read YA literature, which demonstrates this genre's ability to cross the age barrier. Again, I know this to be a fact because many of the emails I receive for my book are from adults.

In her essay *Disdain or Ignorance? Literary Theory and the Absence of Children's Literature,* Deborah Thacker writes:

> The transformation of critical theory over the last few decades has meant that theory needs YA literature. As theorists move from a textual emphasis toward interplay between reader and text and social and political forces that mediate those interactions, so the part played by texts written primarily for children, within a web of discourses that both encourage and control interactions with fictional texts, need to be included and examined. Thus, we, as specialists, must contribute to a broader picture of the social constructedness of readers and the implication of the discourses surrounding fiction in the development of response (1).

In short, theorists need to take YA adult literature seriously, especially the gay sub genre, and apply the same theories used when analyzing other literatures of substance.

> Chapters one through six of my thesis are an overview of groundbreaking YA gay novels that have had an immense impact on the evolution of gay literature over the past forty years. I have separated these chapters by the decades in which these books were published. In doing so, I have been able to show progressive steps YA gay literature has taken, the influence it has had on American society, the importance of it as an academic tool to help educate LGBTQ teenagers.
"Literature is where I go to explore the highest and lowest places
in human society and in the human spirit, where I hope to find not
absolute truth but truth of the tale, of the imagination and of the heart."

Salman Rushdie

Good literature has the ability to alter and influence the human experience because it is
often a reflection of who we are and what is happening in the world. YA gay literature has done
just that over the last four decades. These works have given gay teenagers positive role models as
they have fought to change the hearts and minds of heterosexual societies.
Statistics

“Gallup's longer-term question measuring U.S. attitudes about gays asks whether gay or lesbian relations should or should not be legal. The 63% now saying gay relations should be legal nearly matches the record-high 64% of a year ago, which came after a long-term increase in support for legality from 32% in 1986.”

Legality of Gay/Lesbian Relations -- 1977-2012
Do you think gay or lesbian relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?^

^ 1977-2008 wording: Do you think homosexual relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?

GALLUP

“Across all three questions, women, adults aged 18 to 34, and Democrats are more supportive of gay rights than their counterparts. Nonreligious Americans are much more supportive than Christians. Among Christians, Catholics are more supportive than Protestants. Residents of the South are far less supportive than those in the East, Midwest, and West.”
Nature or Nurture -- 1977-2012

In your view, is being gay or lesbian -- [something a person is born with, (or) due to factors such as upbringing and environment]?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Born with</th>
<th>% Upbringing/Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1977-2008 wording: In your view, is homosexuality -- [something a person is born with, (or) due to factors such as upbringing and environment]?

GALLUP

Bottom Line

“Americans' acceptance of gays and lesbians as equal members of society has increased steadily in the past decade to the point that half or more now agree that being gay is morally acceptable, that gay relations ought to be legal, and that gay or lesbian couples should have the right to legally marry. While public support has been trending upward, support on all three measures was slightly higher in 2011 than in the new 2012 poll, suggesting attitudes may be leveling off -- at least for the time being. However, they are stabilizing at a point that makes President Obama's decision to publicly support gay marriage much less controversial than it would have been even four years ago. Significant pockets of resistance remain -- namely Republicans, those 55 and older, Protestants, residents of the South, and, in some respects, men -- but majorities of other groups have grown comfortable with gay rights.”
**Summary of Gay Rights Views, by Subgroup**
May 3-6, 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gay/lesbian relations should be legal</th>
<th>Gay/lesbian relations are morally acceptable</th>
<th>Same-sex marriages should be legal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National adults</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 34</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 54</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and older</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Christian</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"In response to another long-term trend question, Gallup finds a close division between those who believe being gay or lesbian is a trait a person is born with (40%) and those saying it is due to upbringing and other environmental factors (35%). Americans' views on the "nature vs. nurture" question have been largely steady over the past decade, but prior to 2001, significantly more Americans believed that homosexuality was a product of upbringing."
Chapter 1:

Holden Caulfield: Gay Protagonist
*The Catcher in the Rye* as seen through the lens of Queer Theory and YA gay literature

One of the most popular and influential books of the twentieth century is *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J.D. Salinger. It is a coming of age novel originally published with the adult reader in mind. It quickly became a cult classic among teenage readers because they could relate to the alienation, confusion, and rebellion one goes through during their adolescent years as the transition to adulthood takes place. Over the past six decades there have been many interpretations of Holden Caulfield, the sixteen-year-old narrator. The 1950s were a time of transition for teenagers as they rebelled against the status quo. The character of Holden was "[a]nother perfect example of the sensitive, outcast character vouchsafes a superior insight by a touch of mental disturbance." (Shaw 1).

The psychological approach to *The Catcher in the Rye* interpretation became a popular lens with which to analyze Holden.

Holden's disturbance was taken as both his unique, personal gift and the fault of a hypocritical society, one particularly indifferent to its more sensitive souls. Holden's insight into the adult world's hypocrisies moreover, appeared to derive precisely from his being its casualty. Given the deplorable world in which he lived, if by the end of his adventures Holden seemed ready to effect some kind of accommodation with society, this struck readers as inevitable, if regrettable (Shaw 1).
This interpretation is reflection of the complexities many teenagers are engaged in as the pressures of growing up and becoming member of a flawed society becomes the focal point. The philosophical journey Salinger takes his readers on is filled with questions that make us look at society and ourselves a little closer. The question becomes, what is reality? Holden, after all, is writing his story from a mental institution.

Continuing within the literary psychological analysis, Holden mentions many times throughout the novel that he is crazy, depressed, and wants to die. "One can add that Holden's disturbed condition is also evoked by a pattern of verbal slips, double entendres, errors, forgetting, accidents, and falling downs" (Shaw 2-3). Holden is deeply disturbed by his brother Allie's death from leukemia, and the death of a classmate who had jumped from a third story window to get away from students who were physically abusing him. He is trying to put many confusing personal issues into some sort of perspective, which he is unable to do.

Other interpretations of the novel focus on aspects of Salinger's writing style and how he represents the character of Holden. "The Catcher in the Rye redefines the focus of the literary text. Instead of focusing primarily on plot development like most novels, The Catcher in the Rye focuses more on character development. In fact, most of the plot is mundane and uneventful. Salinger makes the character of Holden and the perspective through which Holden narrates the story interesting" (Bennet 2).

Salinger taps into the realities of the American teenage mind through this unreliable narrator, and this is what makes the character of Holden so compelling. Many critics over the years have described Holden as a whiny, negative, and cynical character with no redeeming
qualities, while others describe him as sensitive, creative, intelligent with a unique perspective on life. "Critic John Baumbach, like other critics, notes that Holden acts like a saint or savior of the innocent. It is this sensitive, innocent, and childlike side of Holden that makes him a complex and endearing character in spite of his vulgarity and immaturity" (2). This particular analysis in my view shows that Holden appears to be a normal teenager who is just trying to find his way in the world. According to most of the critical analyses and interpretations, this story describes the painful emotions of having to grow up and face certain harsh realities.

*The Catcher in the Rye* is a bildungsroman, "[a] novel about a young character's growth into maturity. Holden fears change and is overwhelmed by complexity. He wants everything understandable and easily fixed" (3). Holden is also afraid of change. The Natural History Museum, the carousel, and the ducks in the pond, etc. are all valid symbols seen throughout the novel. Most critics also consider Holden immature when it comes to fascination with sex. There are numerous references and conversations about sex. But most critics view his sexuality as that of a hormone driven heterosexual teen. I feel there is more than meets the eye as far as Holden's sexuality is concerned.

I consider *The Catcher in the Rye* to be the first YA gay novel because it becomes apparent, when looking through the lens of Queer Theory, that sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield is dealing with repressed homosexual desire as he writes his story from a mental hospital. The story is a flashback of a crazy weekend after he leaves school early because he is being expelled, because he is depressed about his brother Allie's death two years prior, and because he is frustrated with his roommates and the adult world. He hangs out in the seedier parts of New York City so he won't be seen by family and friends. He doesn't want to face his parents' anger
and frustration about his being kicked out of another school, but the underlying theme that becomes apparent is his repressed homosexual desire. During his weekend of hiding out, he has many homosexual thoughts even though he tries to have sexual intercourse with numerous women.

He is unable to lose his virginity with a female, and finally ends up having a nervous breakdown.

The correlation between his repressed homosexual desire and being placed in a mental hospital is a not so subtle reference to what happened to many gay people during this period in American history.

Salinger's novel was published in 1951, eighteen years prior to John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip*. This novel helped to shape what would soon become the genre known as Young Adult gay literature. YA authors like Stephen Chbosky, (*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 1999), Brian James, (*Dirty Liar*, 2006), Adam Rapp, (*Under the Wolf, Under the Dog*, 2007), and many others have been influenced by *The Catcher in the Rye*. This novel has sold over sixty-five million copies world-wide, and continues to sell thousands of copies per year. Salinger gives us incredible insight into the life of a troubled teenager coming to terms with the realities of his life as he negotiates a myriad of emotions and the extreme negativism in which he views the adult world. Again, it was originally published for adults, but quickly became popular with American teenagers because they could relate to Holden's rebelliousness, alienation, and sexual confusion. What is most apparent is the loss of innocence Holden feels as he experiences the seedier side of adulthood and his own sexual confusion. I believe *The Catcher in the Rye* should be considered the first YA gay novel because Salinger gives the reader a front row seat
into the thoughts and hidden sexual desire Holden experiences as a gay or bisexual teen. Holden feels frustrated because he doesn't know how to put his sexuality into any kind of perspective.

Although his adolescent struggles can be attributed to various sources, one such source is the burgeoning realization of his homosexuality.

Holden's behaviors and thoughts in respect to this aspect of his personality can be classified as unrealized homosexual conduct, closeted homophobia, or as acquisitions of the possibility of him being gay. While sexual curiosity is normal during adolescence, Holden demonstrates a high degree of confusion and guilt about his personal desires and tendencies. Holden is internally wrestling with his own homosexuality (Edwards 560).

The first reference of Holden's repressed homosexual desire is revealed as he observes his roommate Stradlater walking around their dorm room without a shirt on. "He always walked around in his bare torso because he thought he had a damn good build. He did, too. I have to admit it." (26). Holden likes what he sees, but uses sarcasm to mask his feelings.

Stradlater is getting ready to go on a date with a girl named Jane, who just happens to be a girl from Holden's past whom he still likes. Holden is frustrated and jealous at the thought of a guy he's sexually attracted to going out with a girl he still has feelings for. He tells Stradlater that he and Jane would play checkers, and she would keep all of her kings in the back row because she liked how they looked. Holden has an idealized view of Jane with this comment. He wants their friendship to be sexual in nature, but it never quite happens. This has him frustrated and he doesn't know why.
He continues to make other comments about how good looking Stradlater is by saying that "[h]e was combing his gorgeous locks" (34), and what a handsome and charming guy he is. Holden is fighting his homosexual feelings at the same time being jealous that the guy he finds attractive is going out with a girl he also finds attractive, but could never have a heterosexual relationship with. The fact that Stradlater wears Holden's hounds-tooth jacket on his date with Jane is also symbolic of the inner turmoil Holden is wrestling with. The jacket symbolically represents Holden hugging Stradlater's body instead of Jane's.

The idea of hiding in the closet becomes important when he states that he is "traveling incognito" because he is hiding from his parents. The reality is that Holden is hiding from his true sexual feelings. He decides to hide at seedy hotel and ends up looking out of his window only to see an older man in his underwear. He watches with excitement as the man puts on women's clothing and walks around his room pretending he is a woman. Holden enjoys watching. He states, "I'm not kidding, the hotel was lousy with perverts. I was probably the only normal bastard in the whole place, and that isn't saying much" (62). He is aware that he's extremely turned on by this scene, and continues to watch the cross dresser and other people engage in sexually explicit behaviors. Holden derives homosexual gratification from his voyeuristic tendencies as he watches a variety of sexual encounters from his window. He doesn't consider himself gay because he doesn't participate, but as he says, "The trouble was, that kind of stuff is sort of fascinating to watch, even if you don't want it to be." (pp, 62).

Holden tries to explain the complexities of his relationship with Jane, how he was never able to actually kiss her on the lips or ask her to be his girlfriend. He is petrified with the idea of being intimate with girls, especially Jane. There is a scene where they are on Jane's porch and
she is upset and crying. Holden tries to comfort her by kissing her all over her face, but when he tries to kiss her lips, she won't let him. He wants her to be his girlfriend, but she rejects him. He seems satisfied when he says, "I don't want you to get the wrong idea she was a goddam icicle or something, just because we never necked or horsed around much. She wasn't. I held hands with her all the time, for instance. That doesn't sound like much, I realize, but she was great to hold hands with" (79). He is satisfied by just being her friend, which takes the pressure off of him to have a meaningful heterosexual relationship.

After a night on the town, Holden returns to his seedy hotel and is asked by the bellhop if he's interested in getting laid. Holden is embarrassed by the offer but can't turn it down because he would look like a flit (queer) if he did. The bellhop tells him he'll send up a girl in fifteen minutes, and this makes Holden nervous. "I was starting to feel pretty sexy and all, but I was a little nervous anyway. If you want to know the truth, I'm a virgin. I really am. I've had quite a few opportunities to lose my virginity and all, but I haven't got around to it yet. Something always happens" (92). What happens to Holden is that he finds an excuse not to have sexual intercourse because he is not attracted to women. He lives a double life unconsciously, pretending to be straight, when in fact he is most likely gay. As he fights this reality, he vows to have sex with the prostitute to prove to himself that he is straight, and as a way of getting some practice in for when he gets married. But once again he decides not to have sex. He tells her, "I don't feel very much like myself tonight. I've had a rough night. Honest to God. I'll pay you and all, but do you mind if we don't do it?" (96). His repressed sexual desires make him feel depressed and lonely.
Salinger uses a conversation Holden has with two nuns to examine the moral implications of his homosexual desires, and he uses Mercutio, a supposedly gay Shakespearian character in *Romeo and Juliet*, as a way of letting the nuns know he is gay. "Some literary critics and actors interpret Mercutio's hostility toward women and heterosexual love as an indication of his homosexuality, or bisexuality. For these actors, Mercutio's blatant homoerotic jokes (they're all over the play) and Tybalt's accusation that Mercutio 'consortest with Romeo' (3.1.3) are further evidence that Mercutio is gay" (Shmoop). Using this minor Shakespearian character is Salinger's way of discussing Homosexuality in an honest and intellectual way. Like Mercutio, Holden is also hostile toward many women in his life. There are only two exceptions: Jane and his little sister Phoebe. Holden says, "I'm not too crazy about Romeo and Juliet. I mean I like them, but I don't know. They get pretty annoying sometimes. I mean I felt much sorrier when old Mercutio got killed than when Romeo and Juliet did" (111). As a person struggling with his sexuality, Holden obviously relates more to Mercutio because this character has the same repressed homosexual issues. In many ways Holden feels guilty and ashamed, so having the nuns accept him without judgment is significant. He actually feels better about himself because he momentarily comes out of the closet through this conversation.

Holden's homosexual curiosity continues when he meets up with an old school friend named Luce. As he waits in the bar, Holden reminisces about how "[o]ld Luce knew every flit and lesbian in the United States" (143). Luce was an expert on the issue of gay people, and this excited Holden because it was a way of dealing with his own sexuality. Luce even tells the guys at school that a person could turn into a flit at any time. "He used to scare the hell out of us. I kept waiting to turn into a flit or something" (143). Holden tries to put his sexuality into some
kind of context through conversations such as this one. It is a way to measure what he feels about others around him. He even suspects that Luce is gay as well. "The funny thing about old Luce, I used to think he was sort of flitty himself, in a way. He was always saying, 'Try this on for size,' and then goose the hell out of you while you were going down the corridor. And whenever he went to the can, he always left the goddam door open. I've known quite a few flits, at school and all, and they're always doing stuff like that" (143). Holden is aware of how many people his age are in the closet, including himself, and the type of situations he remembers are ways in which the gay community communicated during this time period. The meeting with Luce becomes one big discussion about heterosexual and homosexual sex, which is further evidence of Holden's sexual confusion. The problem he is having is to simply accept his homosexuality and then move on.

During this weekend of hiding out, Holden has tried to have heterosexual sex and failed. He has asked Sally, an old girlfriend, to marry him, and she has refused. His main thoughts during this lost weekend have been about straight and gay sex. When his former teacher, Mr. Antolini makes a pass at him by caressing his head while Holden sleeps, he flips out and leaves his teacher's house because he has come face to face with a reality he can't deal with: being gay. Other gay people suspect Holden is gay and he cannot deal with this. As he thinks about what Mr. Antolini might have been trying to do, he says, "When something pervertly like that happens, I start sweating like a bastard. That kind of stuff's happened to me about twenty times since I was a kid" (193).

Holden lives in a world where he desperately wants to be straight, but knows he probably isn't. It becomes evident through his reflective writing that he is in the closet. This is a major
reason why Holden is so lonely and depressed. Negotiating the closet is a difficult endeavor because the person in this situation does it alone and cannot be honest with himself. He is constantly living a lie, and this is an incredibly large burden for any individual to carry around. From the lens of Queer Theory, Salinger has written a story about a teenager who is confused and depressed because he is gay. This story fits the classic trope of the homosexual who ends up mentally ill and isolated from mainstream society.
Chapter 2: The Dawning of a New Era:
YA Gay Literature: 1969-1979

When trying to understand why there was no YA gay literature until 1969, it is important to understand the historical developments in relation to gay rights up to this time period, and of each decade from the 1960s to present day. This historical perspective and timeline will help explain the evolution of YA gay literature and the eventual increase in the number of published books.

In 1969, the state of Connecticut repealed its sodomy law. The only other state to have done this was Illinois, which had repealed its sodomy law in 1961. Every other state ignored the idea of repealing its sodomy laws, so these states continued to classify gay consensual sex as a felony which resulted in extensive prison sentences, some up to twenty years. The Stonewall Riots in 1969 became the spark that began the intense struggle for gay and lesbian rights in America. This incident took place on June 27, 1969 in a little bar in New York's Greenwich Village. The Stonewall Bar was a mafia-run establishment that catered to the gay community for years. Plain-clothes detectives and New York City police would regularly raid the bar and arrest people for engaging in homosexual behavior. On this particular night, gay people started fighting back and thus began a three-day riot between two-thousand LGBTQ supporters and the police. A year later the gay community decided to hold a parade to commemorate the incident. This has resulted in what is now known as the Pride Parade. It has now become an annual NYC event that takes place in late June as a way to remember the initial and ongoing struggles of the gay community.
In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official list of mental disorders. This was very important because gay people were often placed in mental hospitals for years at a time, and many were used as experiments to see if they could be cured of their homosexual tendencies.

In 1976 the first openly gay city commissioner was Harvey Milk in San Francisco. After being appointed to this position, Milk decided to run for the California State Assembly but lost by over four thousand votes. In 1978 Milk was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors by more than thirty percent of the vote. Sadly, he was assassinated along with Mayer George Moscone by another San Francisco supervisor named Dan White. White received a controversial seven year sentence for manslaughter. This light sentence caused the gay community to riot because of the favorable bias towards this heterosexual murderer.

Finally, in 1979 the LGBT community held a march in Washington D.C. where more than 75,000 people marched in support of gay rights.

The first eleven years of the Gay Rights Movement were defining moments for many segments of American Society. YA adult literature played an important part at the beginning of this movement because it gave teenagers gay characters they could relate to. It also helped parents cope with having a gay child. Sadly there were only nine YA gay novels published from 1969-1979. All but two are now out of print. As with any new genre, it takes time to develop a following or to gain credible recognition from an established writing community. This was the case for gay literature in general. During the late 60s and 70s, if anything was written about a gay or lesbian character, that character either faced some sort of destructive end resulting in death, or lived a life of loneliness and isolation.
The three books I have chosen for this decade are: *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth The Trip* (1969) by John Donovan, *The Basketball Diaries* (1978) by Jim Carroll, and *Happy Endings Are All Alike* (1978) by Sandra Scoppettone. I believe these stories represent a viable cross section of late 60's and 70's gay literature that opened up a much needed avenue of discussion.

**I'll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip**

John Donovan's ground breaking novel, *I'll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip* is considered the first book of the YA gay literature genre. It was published in September of 1969, just two months after the Stonewall riots in Greenwich Village, New York. This was a time when gay rights were nonexistent and homosexuality was classified as a psychological disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. It was illegal to have a sexual relationship with a member of the same sex in the United States at this time. Many people were actually placed in mental institutions just for being gay. It wasn't until 2003 that all state laws banning homosexuals from engaging in sexual relations were invalidated by the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Lawrence v. Texas*.

Donovan tells the story about a thirteen-year-old teenager named Davy Ross and the changes he faces when his grandmother dies, he's forced to go and live with his alcoholic mother, and he develops a sexual attraction to a male friend at the new school he attends in New York City.
Having a teenage character struggling with the issue of homosexuality was a daring and groundbreaking event for young adult literature. Even though Davy's sexuality is not the main emphasis of the story, the confusion and the denial he feels after he kisses his best friend highlighted what most LGBTQ youth go through as they figure out their sexual orientation. This minor subplot became a crucial turning point for teen literature and the emerging gay rights movement.

No longer was YA adult literature an idealized forum for innocent teenage angst that had the typical happy ending; instead, the story of Davy show real life vulnerabilities and the self-doubt most teenagers experience as they go from adolescence to adulthood.

This novel gives the reader realistic gay fiction with an ending that is not resolved; it is open for interpretation because we never really find out if Davy is gay or not. Donovan dared to honestly and openly address the issue of homosexuality by depicting the guilt and isolation gay teenagers encounter. I believe books like this one, as well as the feminist movement, were instrumental in opening the door of further inquiry by future queer theorists like Eve Sedgwick. In the 1970s and 80s, these scholars began to question and analyze what sexual norms were, and how they should be defined.

*I'll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip* is told from Davy's point of view. This is important because he lets the reader see his world from a teenager's perspective. The story opens up within the aftermath of his grandmother's funeral. Davy has lived with her since the age of five because his parents were not emotionally capable of supplying him with any kind of stable lifestyle. They both live in New York City and are divorced. Davy's mother is an alcoholic socialite, and his father, who has remarried, is a well-known wealthy designer of high-end
furniture. Davy has lived most of his life in a small town in Massachusetts with his strong-willed and loving grandmother.

The story opens up with Davy listening to the adults talk about where he is now going to live. He listens secretly by the door with Fred, the dog he loves more than anything. It was a gift from his grandmother, and they are inseparable. Davy gives the reader a clear picture of the situation when he walks in and tells everyone that he wants to continue to live in his grandmother's house: "They all looked at me as though I had taken a shot at them. 'It's my house now, isn't it? I'd like to take care of it. Grandmother would want it taken care of.' Mother laughs. She's always laughing. She has a big laugh. It's fake. It's a cover for the fact that she wants to say something sarcastic---not that she's shy about being sarcastic" (160).

This scene is important because we see how perceptive Davy is. It also cleverly reveals what kind of life he is going to have once he begins living with his mother in New York City.

The major plot of this story is not Davy's homosexuality, even though this fact plays an important part later; instead, the story focuses on the profound changes and instability a teenager goes through when his life is turned upside down by the death of someone close to him. This is true for both Davy and his new friend Douglas Altschuler.

Brent Hartinger writes in an essay titled, *We Got There. It Was Worth It*:

Death isn't really about endings; it's about change. As the saying goes, the fire comes ripping through the trees, wreaking havoc, but also transforming the forest into something new, and planting the seeds for more changes yet to come. Davy's life changes dramatically, just as the life of almost every gay boy or girl changes in his or her teen years.
Almost every person spends his or her teen years navigating the treacherous
waters of identity formation, but unlike gay kids, most heterosexuals
don't do it completely alone (1724-1818).

When the subplot of Davy's sexual attraction to his new friend unfolds, he tries to put it into
some kind of definable context so he can understand what he is feeling. He is lying on the floor
with his friend Altschuler playing around with the dog. The dog is going back and forth to each
of them licking their faces. All three are very close together when Davy starts feeling something
weird come over him and decides to kiss Altschuler. His friend doesn't back up or try to get up,
He lets Davy kiss him. but then reality sets in quickly. "Both of them seem embarrassed and don't
know how to react. 'Boy I say. What was that all about?"
'I don't know,' Altschuler answers" (1311).

They are both in denial over their sexual attraction to each other and end up acting like
athletic tough guys. They do this because they can't put their feelings into any kind of socially
acceptable perspective. They end up avoiding each other for a while, but end up kissing again at
Davy's apartment a few days later as they drink his mother's whiskey and get drunk.
Davy's mother finds them sleeping on the floor together and panics at the thought of having a gay
son. She yells at him and wants to know the truth. He is in denial and just wants her to stop
accusing him of being gay. He feels totally trapped until his father comes over to talk with him.
His father's reaction to the incident is calm and empathetic. According to Davy, it is the first real
father/son conversation they've ever had.
"I guess you have a crush on your friend, is that it?"
"A crush?" I ask. I get red in the face. "I don't know." I can't think of another word. "I'm not queer or anything, if that's what you think" I say.

Davy's father has handled the situation with love and care because he knows his son is trying to work out his feelings. This father/son conversation has given Davy time and space to work things out in his mind. It also lets him know that what he is feeling is okay. This is what love and acceptance is all about.

Hundreds of negative thoughts and self-doubts go through a person's mind as he comes to terms with being gay. Once a person accepts his sexuality, then he has to negotiate how he deals with it in a society that largely deems homosexuality as a misguided lifestyle choice.

"A study of young adults (ages fourteen to twenty) who self-identified as gay, reported that they 'are not confused about their sexual identities, but they are confused about what to do with them,' and they must often deal with the dilemma in isolation because they feel hindered from approaching parents, friends, and teachers whom they fear will disapprove of or dismiss their feelings, or worse" (Whitley 2). (Herdt & Boxer xvi).

This inner turmoil is just one aspect of Davy's life. Fortunately his father understands what he was going through and let's Davy know that he doesn't have to hide his feelings or go through the coming out process alone. Donovan is trying to teach adult readers to be more accepting and empathetic, and letting LGBTQ teens know that being gay is not the end of the world for them.

This book also raises important questions about what normal sexuality is supposed to look like. Eve Sedgwick (1950-2009) was one academic scholar who took on the idea of the homo/heterosexual binary that has been prevalent in Western society since the late 1800s. She helped create the field of Queer Studies in the mid 1980s arguing that in order to understand modern
western culture, one would have to critically analyze the "[m]odern homo/heterosexual definition." Any understanding of our present-day society would be incomplete and flawed without an understanding of the sexual binary. Sedgwick analyzes the beginnings of this binary in her book: 

*The Epistemology of the Closet*, which proposes that "[m]any of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured -- indeed, fractured by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating to the end of the nineteenth century" (Sedgwick, Intro, I). She continues, "The contradictions that seem most active are the ones internal to all the important twentieth-century understandings of homo/heterosexual definition" (Sedgwick, Intro).

Contemporary critics say this book did not go far enough to challenge societal norms because Davy never comes out and says he is gay. Donovan was trying to show his reading audience the uncertainty and confusion many questioning teens go through. It is realistic writing not meant to scream the mantra "I'm here, I'm queer, Get used to it." This book opened the door to the reality of the coming out process.

Davy still has no clue that he is gay, even if the reader realizes that he most likely is. in 1969, this was totally understandable. At the age of thirteen, again, this is totally understandable. Actually, it's still understandable today, at any age and in any place. Davy is on a journey, and by the end of the novel he has grown and matured in countless ways. But he's still a kid. He has a ways to go. I mean, look at the title of the book. He'll get there one day--whatever 'there' is (Wilson sec. 1885).
Donovan's novel tried to help young gay readers and their parents navigate these waters with love and understanding. *I'll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip* "[w]as relevant to the lives of actual teenagers, speaking to them not in a preachy, instructional way, but in a personal, intimate one" (Hartinger 1733).

**The Basketball Diaries**

Jim Carroll's *The Basketball Diaries* (1978) is a biography about his life as a teenager in New York City during the 1960s. It's a novel written in journal form. Each journal entry is written in real time, and takes the reader through his life as a young and gifted basketball player, a heroin addict, and a teenage male prostitute so he can feed his drug habit. He also reveals his true sexual preferences that support the fact he is bisexual.

This book was an important addition to YA gay literature because it was a real account of a teenager going through the process of coming out. The journal entries are written from the age of twelve to sixteen.

Carroll is exposed to his first homosexual encounter with a Biddy League basketball coach. He writes about it in the first journal entry. "Lefty is a great guy; he picks us up for games in his station wagon and always buys us tons of food. I'm too young to know about homosexuals but I think Lefty is one. He likes to do funny things to you like put his hand between your legs and pick you up. When he did this I got keenly suspicious. I guess I better not tell my mother
about it" (3). Carroll is being sexually molested by a coach, admitting that he knows what the coach is doing, but refusing to tell his mother about it. This kind of molestation has significant psychological ramifications that can scar a person for life, which may be the case for Carroll. His emerging bisexuality becomes a complicated situation because of what is happening to him by a sexual predator, and his own fascination with homosexual sex. This is what makes the book different from the rest of the YA gay books of the 1970s.

Like any teenager, Carroll is fascinated by sex, voyeurism, female and male anatomy, and in particular, the male genitals. He describes a person named Freddie C. who exposes himself in large public crowds, and how he enjoys watching this. "There he is with his zipper and button wide open slinging his cock around like a lasso. He used to whip that thing out everywhere. One thing I forgot to mention is that it is a worth-while show, even if you ain't the least queer...he's more like a side show: that pecker must be a near foot limp" (32). Carroll enjoys watching this guy expose himself because he is becoming sexually aware at the age of twelve. He likes the male anatomy, but doesn't know how to put it in any kind of proper perspective at this point in his life.

A few journal entries later he discovers the pleasures of masturbation. He writes about going up onto the roof of his apartment building at night and lying down naked, "Stare into the star machine and jerk myself off. Is it strange? Maybe, but it’s certainly the most beautiful way of masturbatıng I've experienced" (42). He then writes about noticing an 18-year-old girl who masturbates in her bedroom with the curtains open, so his voyeurism comes into play for a few days until he gets bored. "Now she and I have fallen apart. you might say I got tired of her. I
mean I hardly throw a glance at her window anymore...it's just better under the big ceiling" (43).

Carroll is subtly revealing that he might not be interested in women with this journal entry. His sexual fantasies do not exclusively include females anymore. By the age of thirteen his sexual preferences are becoming blurred and confusing.

At the age of fourteen he is now going to a good Catholic school because of his basketball skills. He gets hooked on heroin and then becomes sexually active with both females and males. He skips school to go see a movie and unknowingly picks up a cross-dresser on the way. He is surprised to find out it is a guy he is kissing after discovering what is between the cross-dresser's legs. This is his first gay experience and he doesn't know how to react to what is happening.

Carroll says he is repulsed by the incident, but it is not really the case because this encounter is one of many gay experiences he has from this point on. He tells the reader that it's his drug habit that makes him have sex with men, but it becomes obvious through these journal entries that he also enjoys it. He writes, "The fag hunting scene gets hairier and hairier all the time. I mean what happened to the old fashioned homo who just wanted to take you home and suck your dick?" (104). His gay sex experiences are taking on a sadistic quality at a certain point in his book. He lets them play out their sexual fantasies with his body. The reader understands that Carroll is also getting sexual satisfaction as well as money from these encounters. He simply enjoys having sex with both men and women.

He has a girlfriend at school and enjoys having sex with her, but it is obviously not enough to satisfy his sexual urges. It also becomes apparent that he has a fetish for the male genitals. During a secret love encounter with his girlfriend Lisa, all he can think about is how hard she gets him, instead of some emotional connection he might have with her. "I had a hard-on like a
crow bar and that's not all 'cause I forgot my jock today and didn't even wear any underwear or shit so like I was balls naked under my sweats and my prick was sticking out of them like I was shoplifting bananas. She was in stitches" (130).

At the age of sixteen, Carroll is still on drugs and still having sex with both men and women, which is clearly an indication that he is definitely bisexual. His current basketball coach is gay and tries to have sex with him, and he has an ongoing sexual liaison with an older woman who has certain sexual fantasies that he also enjoys. "I dress up in drag (and I mean she does it complete) and now mother and son are mother and daughter. But it gets more interesting than that still. In her games, I wind up being the mother and she's the daughter...so after a while I don't know if I'm a goddamn male or female. What the fuck...at least I make one fine looking woman in those glowing originals she drapes me in" (168). This encounter illustrates his bisexuality and maybe even his gender confusion because he throughly enjoys being a part of these fantasies.

Fully immersed in the pleasures of gay sex and the gay lifestyle, Carroll becomes very specific with his bisexual pleasures. "I'll admit it, I have to, that today I had an experience hustling fags that, for once, turned me on. Quite a bit in fact" (187). He writes about going to an X-rated movie house where the gay men hang around the bathroom and lounge area and have sex. Carroll knows he is attractive to these men, and being a voyeur himself, decides to let one of the guys give him a blow-job in front of everyone else. "Now I must tear from my soul's depths, out of faithfulness to the muse of truth, and admit the strange pleasure cast on me by this naughty act of perversion for profit...But, bullshit aside, some weird sensation did shoot a blood rocket up my zone as an incredible rush of power shook me with all those faces staring at me at my body fucking a mouth on its knees" (188). He admits that he enjoys these encounters for money and
power, but in this particular journal entry, Carroll tells us how much he enjoys having sex with "fags" as he calls them. Even though he is having all sorts of gay sex, he never admits that he is gay or bisexual, so he remains in the closet, which ultimately causes him to continue to hide his sexual orientation. It becomes apparent that his biological make up as well as the traumatizing experience of ongoing attempts of child molestation by two coaches, and his sex-for-drugs lifestyle, have psychologically scarred Carroll. I believe *The Basketball Diaries* was an important addition to the YA gay literature movement in the 1970s.

*Happy Endings Are All Alike*

*Happy Endings Are All Alike* (1978) by Sandra Scoppettone is a story about two teenage lesbians who have to keep their relationship a secret because of the intense social stigma attached to homosexuality in Gardener's Point, New York, a small, conservative rural town. The story takes place during the 1970s. There are several important ground breaking themes that highlight the societal realities of homosexuality, rape, and the difficulty of coming out to family and friends. This YA gay book reflects the influence of the feminist movement during this time period; it was instrumental in helping the Gay Rights movement to grow and prosper.

In an era when the "queerness leads to death" trope was the only way to get gay books published, Scoppettone's novel has her lesbian characters fighting back and ultimately surviving the physical and mental torment they endure after Jaret's, the main protagonist's brutal rape by a homophobic fifteen-year-old boy named Mid Summers.
Through the characters of Jaret Tyler and Peggy Danzlger, Scoppettone analyzes small town conservative views on homosexuality, the hatred and alienation each family endures as they are shunned because of having a homosexual in their family, and how rape as seen through the lens of the male hierarchical heteronormative power structure, is often looked at as the victim's fault when that person is a female. The Rape of Jaret exposes her lesbian relationship with Peggy to the whole town, and this results in their families being shunned. This is a complex story that made further inroads into evolutionary process of the Gay Rights Movement.

The juxtaposition between Jaret and Peggy reveal two different worlds of homosexuality during this time period. Jaret is very comfortable being lesbian and Peggy is not. Jaret's mother finds out her daughter is gay and tries to understand what Jaret is going through. Peggy's mother has recently died, but her overbearing sister Claire finds out Peggy is a lesbian when she catches the two of them in bed. The reactions from these family members reflect the old and new viewpoints about homosexuality. Jaret's mother says, "Okay. Are you happy in this. . . this relationship? God, I hate that word. I mean, it's a perfectly good word but Lord, what they've done to it. Anyway, I don't have a substitute. So, are you? I mean really happy, Jare?"

"I really am Mom" (Scoppettone 13). This conversation is more in line with the feminist philosophy that women need to be control of their own destinies. Kay's understanding of her daughter's sexual preference reflects the emerging acceptance of gay people as normal and loving human beings.

Clare's reaction to her sister Peggy being a lesbian reflects the pre-feminist viewpoint. "Claire stood in the doorway, her face turning pink, eyes narrowing behind her glasses. 'Well, I . . . you . . . Just what I thought. Disgusting. I knew it . . . .I knew it.'
'Knew what?' Peggy asked, trembling. 'I knew that this was a deviant relationship, that's what" (31). Claire goes on to tell them they are "perverts" (32). The old world view is that love between the same sex is perverted and evil. The tension between the old and new remains a central theme throughout the story. Scoppettone analyzes the typical reaction of rural America view towards homosexuality and its consequences. She does this in a clever way by using rape as a justification for violence against women. The use of rape is significant because it challenges the male authority dynamic so prevalent in American society. Feminist views of rape can be understood as arrayed on a continuum from the liberal to radical. Liberal views tend to regard rape as a gender-neutral assault on individual autonomy, likening it to other forms of assault and/or illegitimate appropriation, and focusing primarily on the harm that rape does to individual victims. More radical views, in contrast, contend that rape must be recognized and understood as an important pillar of patriarchy. Johnson defines patriarchy as a social system in which men disproportionately occupy positions of power and authority, central norms and values are associated with manhood and masculinity which in turn are defined in terms of dominance and control. Radical feminists see rape as arising from patriarchal constructions of gender and sexuality within the context of broader systems of male power, and emphasize the harm that rape does to women as a group (Whisnant, 3).
This viewpoint is shown through the characters of Sergeant Jack Leden and the teenage male rapist. This patriarchal social system is the core of American society. This power dynamic gives these two characters the justification and power to try and brush the rape of Jaret under the table.

Mid Summers, the accused rapist, claim the victim's unnatural relationship was responsible for his raping and brutally beating her as he left her to die in the woods. The truth of the matter is that he had been following Jaret and Peggy because Jaret was not interested in him as a boyfriend. He finds them at their secret hiding place being intimate with each other.

"After a while Peggy put her hand inside Jaret's blouse and before I knew it, before I could believe it, They were doing IT to each other. That's right, IT. And they really acted like they dug it. I could hardly believe it--Jaret Tyler and Peggy Danziger. . . two queers" (85). The rape becomes a hate crime against gay people meant to take away any autonomy and dignity Jaret has. He says to himself, "I'll plan it real careful, and before the summer is over, I'll do it. Nothing can stop me now. I'm gonna get Jaret Tyler" (85). His hatred for gay people is evident with his plan. This rapist has ingrained within his psyche that women are nothing more than objects that men control. He is fulfilling sexual fantasies through the act of rape. This is an important aspect of male patriarchal power from the "radical feminist viewpoint." Mid can't stand the thought that a lesbian does not find him desirable, so he takes what he wants with no regard to her autonomy as an individual.

After Mid has raped and brutally beaten Jaret, he tells her, "Now listen. If you tell anybody I'm gonna tell about you and Peggy Danzinger, understand? I'm gonna tell your mother and father and everybody. Get it? I know everything you do. Got it? Just to make sure you do. The punch got her right on the point of her chin. She went out" (117).
This teenage rapist is using blackmail to keep his victim quiet because he realizes that society considers homosexuality to be perverted and shameful. It doesn't work because she stands up for herself regardless of the social consequences. Jaret tells her brother who did it, and he then tells his parents.

This is an important turning point for YA gay literature because a gay person stands up to her community as she fights the "male patriarchal power constructions of gender and sexuality." The characters who represent this power base are Chief Edward Foster and Sergeant Leden, two detectives assigned to the case. The first thing Foster wants to know is if Jaret has a boyfriend, because he would become a suspect in what they initially think is a sex crime. Jaret's mother tells them, "This is a crime of violence, not a sexual one. Foster cackled, 'Well, if rape ain't sexual then I don't know what is" (128). This conversation is important because Foster's analysis of the crime is deeply rooted within the male perspective of women as objects of sexual desire.

Once the detectives find out that Jaret and Peggy are lesbians, they try to get Jaret and her parents not to press any charges because their daughter's homosexuality is scandalous and would have negative repercussions. "Foster shrugged his shoulders. 'The Summers kid is gonna say that seeing them. . .you know, intimate and all. . .made him crazy.' 'That's absurd,' Bert said. 'You may think so, Mr. Tyler, bit I guarantee you that this sort of deviant stuff doesn't go over too big in a nice little place like Gardener's Point.' He sniffed. 'And rape does,' Bert Said" (160-161). The advice Foster gives the Tyler's comes from the viewpoint that homosexuality is the most horrible act a person can engage in. The detective's viewpoint, and that of the community, is a
well thought out aspect of the story that Scoppetone uses to show how society is being
dominated by government and religious institutions where men are in control.

*Happy Endings Are All Alike* is a groundbreaking piece of YA gay literature that deserves a
critical academic analysis by literary theorists because it challenges the status quo. This is the
essence of the Feminist Movement and Queer Theory. This story reflects the philosophies of
queer theorists like Michel Foucault and Eve Sedgwick at a time when it wasn't popular to be
gay or to challenge the hierarchies of power.
Chapter 3:
YA Adult Gay Literature from 1980-1989

The 1980s saw both positive and negative shifts in attitudes toward the gay community. This decade was a politically conservative time in America as society was reestablishing what is known as 'traditional values.' The liberal movement was trying to reestablish a foothold on the political landscape with only modest success having lost most of its influence in the 1970s. Ronald Reagan became the President of the United States from 1981-1989, which resulted in a strong conservative trend in moral values. This allowed many people and religious institutions to assert their anti-gay sentiments across the nation. Some people even said that the HIV/AIDS epidemic was God's way of getting back at the gay community because of their immoral behavior.

Rock Hudson, a famous actor, was the first celebrity to come out of the closet after being diagnosed with AIDS in 1984. He passed away from an AIDS-related disease in 1985. Hudson was able to bring a human face to a disease that was devastating the emerging gay community in America. Other important milestones of this decade were as follows: In 1980 the Democratic National convention, which was held in New York City, decided to support gay rights in its platform. "All groups must be protected from discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex or sexual orientation" (Infoplease 2).

In 1982, the state of Wisconsin became the first state to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. In 1984, the city of Berkley became the first city to offer employees in gay
relationships domestic-partnership benefits. In 1987 the AIDS advocacy group ACT-UP (The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was formed. This group tried to get the drug companies to lower their prices so more people stricken with this virus could afford the complex cocktail of drugs required to keep people alive. Even though the 1980s was a turbulent, divisive decade, the social impact of AIDS helped many segments of society to become more understanding to the plight of LGBTQ people.

This decade again saw only on average one YA gay novel per year. But what becomes significant in a couple of these stories is that optimistic themes regarding gay people are starting to finally emerge. No longer is there just the typical tragic ending of the gay protagonist. What starts to emerge in YA gay fiction is the potentially positive outcomes in the face of adversity. The gay protagonist starts fighting back to be accepted even though the outcome may still seem troubling. *Annie on My Mind* is one such book. The other book I have chosen to critique for this decade are *What Happened to Mr. Forster*. These two stories are period pieces set in the 1950s at a time of extreme homophobia.

The trope of the classic tragic end for the gay protagonist is still prevalent during in the 1980s. "Often, Especially in older works (to the extent that they are found in older works, of course) gay characters just aren't allowed happy endings. Even if they do end up having some kind of relationship, at least one of half the couple, often the one who was more aggressive in pursuing the relationship, thus 'perverting' the other one, has to die at the end" (tv tropes).

A recent example can be found in the 2011 novel *The Art of Fielding* by Chad Harbach. Guert Affenlight, the president of Westin College is having a homosexual relationship with an undergraduate student named Owen. Several high ranking administrators confront Affenlight and
give him an ultimatum of either resigning quietly or have the affair exposed. He dies of a heart
attack a couple of days later. This scenario fits the classic homosexual trope because the
relationship is considered vulgar and wrong even though both people are consenting adults.
The two novels I have chosen for this decade are fighting to overcome this trope.
*A Boy's Own Story* (1982) was another important novel that came out during the 1980s. This
story was geared toward college level students.

**Annie on My Mind**

When asked in a recent interview about what inspired Nancy Garden to write *Annie on My
own high school years. My desire to tell that truth about gay people---that we're not sick or evil;
that we can and do fall in love and lead happy, healthy, productive lives" (Garden 247).
This YA gay novel about two high school girls who fall in love with each other was
groundbreaking because it had a happy outcome. This was unheard of prior to this book because
of the negative stigmas associated with being gay. Gay protagonists and gay secondary
characters either died violently, or lived isolated and lonely lives.

Garden draws from her own experiences as a lesbian growing up in a world where gay
people were not accepted. She decided to change this perception by writing a story where people
of the same sex could fall in love, overcome gay stereotypes and flourish as individuals.

"I was a teen in the fifties, when most gay people were deep in the closet."
Coming out was very risky; one could be expelled if one was in school or college; parents disowned their gay children or sent them to psychiatrists to be "Cured"; gay adults could be fired from their jobs if they were found out or even suspected of being gay. At best, homosexuality was seen as a mental illness; at worst, as something evil, immoral, or criminal. Any kid who was thought to be gay was of course given a hard time by other kids. No one knew the special meaning for the word gay, really, except gay people or people in the arts. Fairy for boys, lezze for girls, and queer for both were the words I heard most often when I was growing up (Garden 241).

YA gay literature has been at the forefront of the gay movement as a way for gay authors to educate the heterosexual society, and to connect with LGBTQ teenagers so they would know they weren't alone.

*Annie on My Mind* is told from Liza's viewpoint. The story opens up with her sitting in her dorm room at M.I.T. writing one of many letters she never mails to her girlfriend Annie, who attends college at Berkley. She is reflecting on the aftermath of the previous year in high school, the consequences of them getting caught together, and finally coming out to her parents. The story is then told in flashbacks, giving a full account of what happened during her senior year as she fell in love with another female.

Garden gives the reader an accurate account of what it was like to be a lesbian in the early 1980s. Liza and Annie have to hide their relationship. They get caught by a faculty member of Foster Academy, a conservative private school Liz attends, and then must face the repercussions that follow after being found out. At the beginning of the story Liza has no idea that she might be
a lesbian. Like many teenagers, she knows she has different feelings towards boys, but she just can't put her finger on it until she meets Annie. There is a spark of desire in her that marks the beginning of her sexual awareness. "She put her hand on mine, barely touching it. It was like a war inside me; I couldn't even recognize all the sides. There was one that said, 'No, this is wrong; you know it's wrong and bad and sinful,' and there was another side that said, 'Nothing has ever felt so right and natural and true and good" (93).

Liza's inner turmoil is partly rooted in her biological makeup and in her upbringing. Although it hasn't been scientifically proven, I believe genetics plays the major role in a person's sexual preference. I also believe social pressures and family upbringing are driving forces of guilt, shame, and repressing one's feelings over being sexually different. Michel Foucault's Repressive Hypothesis states as much: "The effect of all rational discourse about sex was the increasing encroachment of state law into the realm of private desire. One had to speak of [sex] as of a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all" (1.24). Liza's guilty feelings about liking Annie stem from the repression of all forms of sex by governments and religious institutions. It is witnessed when Liza and Annie get caught together.

Liza is taking care of a cat for two of her teachers, Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer, who live together. Liza and Annie find out their teachers are lesbians because of the books in their library and in their bedroom. On the last day of their cat sitting, Liza and Annie decide to make love. They get caught by Ms. Baxter, who is a teacher at their school, and a fellow student:

"I should have realized right away," she shook her head sharply, as if ridding it of something unpleasant, and then spoke more firmly. "I
almost wish I had found young men," she said. "Sodom and Gomorrah are all around us, Sally." She looked with growing disgust at me. "We must face the truth. There is ugliness and sin and self-indulgence in this house---as I have long feared" (167).

Centuries of religious repression and the authority of her conservative school is present within this accusation. Besides finding out a student is a lesbian, Ms. Baxter also realizes two teachers who have been teaching at the academy for fifteen years are lesbians as well. This scene is an important pivotal point in the story because it shows how people and institutions have absolute power over the rights of the individual. Mrs. Poindexter, the head mistress of the school, calls Liza in to her office and threatens her with expulsion and writing on her transcript that she is a lesbian. "There will be a trustees' hearing about your expulsion and about what notations will appear on your record---for fairness to the students and teachers at MIT, your--proclivities" (184). Garden is showing the reader how deeply ingrained homophobia is in American society during the 1980s.

The difference with this story, which was a first for YA gay literature, is the issue of one's sexual preference finally wins an important battle against homophobia. When Liza tells her parents she is a lesbian, they are surprisingly supportive to a certain point. They are going through the process of shock and the other steps parents go through when a child comes out. Her father tells her, "I told you I'd support you and I will. And right now I can see we're all too upset to discuss this very much more, so in a minute or two I'm going to take you and your mother and me out to lunch" (191). Rational thought has won the day instead of
chastisement and anger. Liza's parents are showing that love and understanding is the only way to support a gay child.

The hearing at Foster Academy pits individual rights against a conservative power base. There is a political and religious agenda apparent as Ms. Baxter exaggerates the 'lurid' account. Liza sits there silently taking it all in as she thinks, "It made us sound like monsters, not like two people in love. It was as if everyone was assuming that love had nothing to do with any of this, that is was just an 'indulgence of carnal appetites'---I think Ms. Baxter actually used those words" (201). Liza and her parents think the hearing is fixed until a trustee, "[t]he red-haired woman spoke up. 'I think this is all perfectly absurd, she said. Not to mention very, very cruel, and downright twisted! What this woman does on her own time with her own friends is her business and her parents' business, not ours. Frankly, Mrs. Poindexter, this near-vendetta reminds me of another incident a few years back involving a boy and girl in senior class" (209). For the first time in YA gay literature the gay protagonist has won the right to be gay without interference from a repressive hierarchy. Liza receives a letter a few days later stating that there will be "[n]o cause for action in her case" (214).

*Annie on My Mind* was an important milestone for gay literature, and an important part the gay rights movement.

What Happened to Mr. Forster?

In the 1950s gay people did not have rights or advocates in positions of power. It was a very conservative and traditional time in American society. The effects of World War II, the
threat of communism, the Cold War, and conservative Christian values had shaped America society during this time period. It was an idyllic life for traditional middle-class families if you were of white European heritage. People of color and homosexuals were not included; they were viewed as second-class citizens. During the 1950s, homosexuality was not seen as a choice or part of an individual's genetic makeup; it was seen as a mental illness and a deviant life choice. Since the American Psychiatric Association listed homosexuality as a mental illness, many people had to hide their sexual preference, so the saying of 'being in the closet' was born.

Dr. Evelyn Hooker first used the term "coming out" to the academic community in the 1950s. The phrase "coming out of the closet did not become a mainstream phrase until the 1970s. The simple fact was that gay people had to hide their sexual identities or face horrible repercussions.

Gay people were never seen on television, in films, or in books. American society was worried about homosexuality because it went against the Christian belief system. Powerful elected officials felt this deviant lifestyle was an element of communism that was trying to infiltrate and undermine the freedoms enjoyed by Americans. In 1953 President Eisenhower gave orders to fire any federal employee from his or her job if he were found to be homosexual.

The YA gay novel *What Happened to Mr. Forster?* (1981) by Gary W. Barger is a story that takes place in 1958. It deals with the paranoia of homosexuality in America during this time period. This story was significant to the evolution of YA gay literature because it gave teenagers an honest historical context about the indignity and isolation gay people have had to endure. The story is about a sixth-grade boy named Louis Lamb and his teacher Mr. Forster. Louis is sensitive boy who is teased by his fellow classmates. The call him is Billy Lou and make fun of his non-existent athletic skills. He is considered prissy by other boys his age.
He vows to make a change and try to be more masculine and less emotional as he enters the sixth grade. Mr. Forster is a new educator who becomes Louis's teacher. Mr. Forster is the only male teacher at this particular elementary school. He is single and lives with a male roommate, which immediately causes concerns for Louis's religious aunt whom he lives with, as well as a few other mothers who start gossiping within the first few weeks of the school year.

Louis starts to bond with Mr. Forster right from the start. Barger does an excellent job of 'show, don't tell' in this story. The insightful teen reader can easily pick up on the clues that Louis is probably gay but doesn't quite know it yet. There are subtle clues that Mr. Forster is gay as well. The first piece of evidence about Louis's homosexuality comes from an assignment Mr. Forster gives the students. They have to write something about themselves on the first day of school, so he writes about one of his favorite playthings. "I have a china unicorn that traps light in its horn. This unicorn knows the secret of a magic dance" (Barger 10). Louis plays with unicorns and other class figurines while the other boys his age play baseball and dodge ball.

The rumor mill heats up about Mr. Forster at the school open house for parents. The first clue the reader gets is when a Reverend speaks to the parents at the beginning of the open house. "Reverend Hardcastle said that enemies of American Liberty were everywhere. Even in the public schools. He said that only last year a teacher in Kansas City was fired for being a member of the Communist Party" (70). Having religious leaders preaching to parents in a public school was encouraged in the 1950s and helped reinforce the political and religious climate of the time period. The reader can see from this passage how conservative the community is, and that it foreshadows Forster's pending downfall.
The next thing that happens is Mr. Forster's male roommate comes a little too early to pick him up, which causes many of the mothers to start gossiping.

Aunt Zona was reading through some papers on my desk. As I was walking towards her, the inside door of the classroom opened and a man started to come in. He got just past the threshold and said, 'Jack--'

Then he stopped short. He looked like he was counting the people in the room. 'Oh, I'm early,' he said, turning red. 'I didn't mean to--I'm--sorry.' He spun around and disappeared out the door. Miss Siegel noticed right away. 'Anything wrong Mr. Forster?' Then Mrs. Hardcastle poked Mrs. Blake in the elbow. They began to amble toward the outside door (76-77).

This was the typical reaction for bachelors in the 1950s. It was automatically thought that a man who was not married must be a homosexual. Barger correctly shows how the rumor mill begins the downfall of a teacher just because of his sexuality.

From this point on the story become a homosexual witch-hunt that ultimately gets Mr. Forster fired. Louis is devastated by this and can't understand what Mr. Forster did that was so terrible. A classmate named Veronica tells Louis, "Mr. Forster's a queer." Mickey Blake let out a laugh that sounded like a bark. I glanced at Paul. He had a sheepish grin on his face. I wanted to ask him what a queer was, but I couldn't. I could tell I was supposed to know already" (152). Louis has a heated conversation with his religious aunt. She is totally intolerant about homosexuality and was part of the group of women demanding that Mr. Forster be fired.
"You knew about it didn't you?" It wasn't a question. I just stared at Aunt Zona. For a minute, I think I hated her. 'Mr. Forster is the best teacher I ever had. He didn't do anything wrong.' Billy Lou. Mr. Forster is--he's not fit to be around young people. When you're older, you'll understand. People who are that way are an abomination in the sight of the Lord. You read your bible. People like that Mr. Forster are headed straight to hell. First Corinthians 6:9." "If Mr. Forster's going to hell, then I never want to go to heaven!" (156).

Little does Aunt Zona know that her nephew is probably gay. Barger wants the reader to think about this fact and how she is going to react once it becomes apparent to her.

There is no classic Hollywood ending for this story; there is just the realization that Louis is going to have to fight for what he believes, even if it goes against societal norms. Louis remembers something important that Mr. Forster once told him. "Nothing is a waste. Not if you know how to make it mean something. Nothing is ever really lost" (169).

This story ends on a typically tragic note; this was a normal ending for the gay people in the 1950s and 60s.

*What Happened to Mr. Forster?* was a timely piece of literature because it was reminding mainstream society how paranoid it once was, and still is about homosexuals, and how this antiquated mindset could easily repeat itself.
Chapter 4: 1990-2000

The trend towards acceptance of the gay community by mainstream society starts to take a

dramatic turn in the 1990s. The ravages of HIV/AIDS are affecting many people as the blood
supply in the U.S. becomes one of several conduits for attaining the virus.

"On August 18, 1990, President George Bush signs the Ryan White Care Act, a federally funded
program for people with AIDS. Ryan White, an Indiana teenager, contracted AIDS in 1984
through a tainted hemophilia treatment. After being barred from attending school because of his
HIV-positive status, Ryan White became a well-known activist for AIDS research and anti-
discrimination" (pbsorg 5). This devastating disease was now affecting straight people, especially
children, so mainstream attitudes started to become more empathetic by demanding more be
done by the medical community. This decade was also a time where people with the virus were
no longer looked at as lepers to be locked away from society.

A small number of celebrities started coming out of the closet in the 90s to support
additional AIDS research, anti-discrimination laws, and against the bullying and physical
violence many gay people experience on a daily basis. Ellen DeGeneres is one prominent
celebrity who came out in the 1990s. The acknowledgment of being lesbians affected her career
for a number of years. Magic Johnson, a famous basketball player, announced that he had the
HIV virus. This initially caused concern for many NBA players because they might come in
contact with his blood.
Also during this decade more gay support organizations start appearing all over the United States to advocate for new anti-discrimination laws and equal rights. Society was becoming more tolerant and understanding.

In 1993 the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy was signed into law by President Clinton. "The original intention to revoke the prohibition against gays in the military was met with stiff opposition; this compromise, which led to the discharge of thousands of men and women in the armed forces, was the result" (pbs.org 6). President Clinton understood that acceptance takes time, so this law was a small step in the evolution of the eventual societal shift that would take place in the 21st century.

In 2000, Vermont became the first state to recognize civil unions between gay or lesbian couples. The law states, "Couples would be entitled to the same benefits, privileges, and responsibilities as spouses." It did not say that these civil unions were actually marriages because the state at that time defined marriage as a heterosexual union.

YA gay novels made further inroads into American culture during this decade. On average there were seven gay novels released per year from 1990-2000. Even though this average is minuscule compared to young adult fiction in general, it was still a significant increase from the prior decade. The basic themes about sexual self-awareness and coming out to friends and family were still the main themes, but the outcomes for the gay/lesbian protagonists is much more positive. There is hope that these characters will be accepted for whom they are. The books I have chosen for this chapter are The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky, Peter by Kate Walker, and an anthology called Am I Blue? Coming Out From the Silence, a collection of
short stories edited by Marion Dane Bauer. These three books show that positive outcomes can be a reality for LGBTQ youth.

_The Perks of Being a Wallflower_

_The Perks of Being a Wallflower_ (1999) by Stephen Chbosky is a story about a fourteen-year-old boy named Charlie who is trying to work out a number of personal issues as he tries to fit in and participate at school. He is somewhat of a loner who has been affected by the death of his aunt and the suicide of a close friend. Charlie is also struggling with his sexuality, which would place this book under the questioning category of the LGBTQ genre. Chbosky weaves an intricate storyline that includes the following themes: friendship, intelligence, sexual orientation, sexual molestation, domestic violence, isolation, suicide, and death.

A few of the 1990s teen novels had openly gay characters and storylines, but many still had concealed gay subplots to disguise conflicting sexual desires so the story could fit neatly into the non-gay teen novel genre. Authors’ writing about LGBTQ teens was still an issue in the 1990s for mainstream publishers. This is the case with _The Perks of Being a Wallflower_. This novel is written entirely in letter form to an unknown recipient. For many teenagers, coming to terms with their sexuality is a time of intense emotions filled with doubt, guilt and shame. For others, it is who they are and it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks.

The main protagonist in this novel is Charlie, a high school freshman. He is trying to find out who he is as an individual, and much of this story centers around his apparent bisexuality.
Charlie has semi-intimate relationships with both male and female friends who just happen to be stepbrother and sister. Their names are Patrick and Sam. This particular storyline reinforces Sedgwick's theory that when looking throughout the lens of sexual orientation, there are actually triangular desires in many novels, rather than just a binary sexual system. This is the case with this story. Charlie is trying to find out who he is through the complex sexual maze that has him confused about his sexuality. He states in one of his letters, "I used to kiss a boy in the neighborhood a lot when I was very little, and even though the psychiatrist said it was very natural for little boys and girls to explore things like that, I think my father was afraid anyway. I guess that's natural, but I'm not sure why" (124). Charlie has a girlfriend at this point in the story, and his father is very happy about this because he has doubts about his son's sexual orientation.

Charlie's recollection of kissing a boy years ago is the first of several clues that a homo-erotic subplot lies just below the surface of the main storyline. Sedgwick argues that an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture would be incomplete or damaged if it failed to incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition. Something as innocent as Charlie kissing another boy has him seeing a psychiatrist, and a parent who thinks there is something terribly wrong with his son. What Charlie is doing is something Sedgwick defines as forging normal social bonds between people of the same sex. She calls this bond "homsocial."

"The affective or social force is the glue that shapes an important relationship. Men are encouraged to develop intimate homosocial bonds with each other, but at the same time they are not to allow these relationships to cross over into feelings of homosexual desire" (21). Charlie does cross over into feelings of homosexual desire with Patrick, his gay friend.
Chbosky uses a homoerotic subplot to show the bonds of male/male friendship and the sexual desire Charlie feels for Patrick. The reader assumes that Charlie is straight throughout most of the story because of his huge crush on Patrick's sister Sam. He even has a girlfriend for a few weeks. This particular relationship doesn't work out because Charlie feels the intimacy he shares with her is boring for him, and he doesn't understand why. On the other hand, his friendship with Patrick is very special because they are totally honest with each other and can share feelings easily. Charlie is immediately attracted to him when he first sees him in shop class. Patrick is funny and outgoing. He's the class clown, a person who is self-assured and comfortable in his own skin, qualities Charlie wishes he had. He writes, "There is this guy in shop class named 'Nothing'. I'm not kidding. His name is 'Nothing' and he is hilarious. 'Nothing got his name when kids used to tease him in middle school. I think he's a senior now. The kids started calling him Patty when his real name is Patrick.. And Nothing told these kids, 'Listen, you either call me Patrick, or call me nothing" (36). It is obvious by this observation that the students knew Patrick was gay, that's why they called him Patty.

Charlie finally gets the nerve to talk to him at a football game where Patrick is watching Brad, the star quarterback and his secret boyfriend. He is there with his sister Sam. So begins the homoerotic subplot as Charlie forges a special bond with Patrick at the same time he crushes on Sam. After he reveals his crush to her, Sam tells him that he is too young for her. At this point in the story Charlie has a crush on both Patrick and Sam.

Chbosky uses the film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* as a homoerotic device to analyze how the three of them have a special attraction towards each other that goes far beyond just being friends. This film was released in 1975 and went on to become a cult classic for the
LGBTQ community because of its heavily gay themes. It becomes an important plot line because it makes the reader aware of Charlie's confusion about his sexual orientation and sexual desire, issues that were still considered controversial in the 90s. Sexuality is complicated and hard to put into any one category. Charlie watches Patrick and Sam perform along with *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* live, and he is fascinated by it because he feels like he now belongs. Charlie's sexuality mirrors the film in many ways because his sexual confusion is similar to the main characters.

Charlie's homosocial bond with Patrick crosses over into something intimate after Patrick's boyfriend breaks up with him. "So I climbed in the car and he showed me all the places he and Brad would meet. He didn't say much about them. He just stared" (157). They spend the whole evening together. "He drove me home and pulled up in the driveway. We hugged goodnight, and when I was just about to let go, he held me a little tighter. And he moved his face to mine. And he kissed me. A real kiss. Then, he pulled away real slow.

'I'm sorry.'

No. That's okay.

'Really. I'm sorry.'

No. Really. It was okay. So he said thanks and hugged me again. And moved into kiss me again. And I just let him. I don't know why. We stayed in his car for a long time" (160). Charlie has homosexual feelings for Patrick but doesn't really analyze what he feels. He just thinks he's being a good friend. This is part of the denial process many gay teens go through as they come out.

Patrick and Charlie are intimate with each other for many weeks as their relationship enters new territory.
Chbosky uses this relationship to show how complicated sexuality is, and that it is okay for the male/male homosocial bond to cross over into a homosexual relationship, even though Western culture has tried to repress these desires for centuries. In an essay titled *Queer Theory and the Young Adult Novel*, Professor Roberta Seelinger writes, "Homosexuality seems at once enunciated and repressed. Readers must learn to identify the mixed messages in books about gay male adolescents. They will learn how to identify the complexities inherent in social constructions of sexuality in general, and of homosexuality specifically" (143).

When looked at closely, the homosexual plot line in *Perks* is a philosophical idea along the lines of Foucault that challenges the rigid and repressed viewpoint of the Western religious and political power structure.

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* has become of a cult classic in YA literature, especially in the gay genre because the storyline is a complicated mix about sexuality, sexual molestation, death, suicide, depression, mental illness, and not fitting in. Gay and straight teenagers can empathize with Charlie because his issues are the same as millions of real life teens.

**Peter**

*Peter* (1994) by Kate Walker is a story about a fifteen-year-old teenager who is in denial about being gay, but eventually accepts his sexual orientation with the help of his older brother's gay friend David. The story takes place in a working class city in Australia in the early 1990s. David is a law student who is openly gay. Peter is going through the self-recognition stage wondering if he is gay or not. Part of this process involves denial, repressed sexual desire,
confusion, anxiety and bouts of depression. He is definitely in the closet early on in the story as he goes through these typical stages.

Peter is not effeminate in any stereotypical way: he is a rough and tumble macho guy who rides dirt bikes and also works on them. He is the typical alpha male. The story also reveals he is a gifted photographer, which brings David and him together. Peter is captivated by David and yet has the typical anti-gay mindset when he asks his brother why he hangs out with a 'poof.'

Peter is attracted to David and is trying to figure out why.

He wasn't what you'd call super good-looking. Well maybe he was;

I don't know, I can't tell with blokes. but the face wasn't perfect. Maybe it was the smile. He smiled lots. Or the eyes! He had honey-colored eyes. I'd noticed them when we were getting intimate over the tomatoes, and in the car too. He had a habit of looking you right in the eye when he talked. And of course the hair was immaculate. Every strand cut just right, so that it swept up from the back of his neck until it was really long and soft on top. And the clothes! Well, there was no way I could compete with the clothes (53).

Peter has a crush on David as he admires his good looks and positive self-identification. David doesn't fit the stereotypical image a "creepy" perverted "poof" (a gay person) that Peter and his friends have always made fun of; this infatuation has him confused because he is in denial. This attraction causes him to repress his true feelings as he ultimately digresses into self-destructive behavior.
Walker is empathizing with her teen readers as Peter negotiates the minefield of coming out, and how traumatic it can be. At this point in the story he is homophonic.

People who fear homosexuality the most are actually likely to have experienced an attraction to a member of the same sex. Homophobes develop anti-gay attitudes after repressing their same-sex desires. Individuals who identify as straight but in psychological tests show a strong attraction to the same sex may be threatened by gays and lesbians because homosexuals remind them of similar tendencies within themselves (Murray, par 1).

This is exactly the dilemma Peter experiences as he negotiates his own sexual maze.

The fact that he might be a homosexual has him so upset that he decides to give himself a 'poof' test by buying a gay X-rated magazine.

My arms felt weak turning the pages and my knees shivered. I looked at the next and the next and the next. And yeah, I was interested. Not to the point where it got me horny. The state I was in, I don't think anything could have done that. But I got stirrings, perving on naked men. One of the blokes reminded me of David. He was lean and athletic looking. So now you know.

So now I knew. And I wished I didn't (193).

Peter knows he is gay but still can't accept this reality yet. He's afraid that his friends and family are going to find out, and he's afraid of getting AIDS. Many people were still dying from AIDS in the 1990s.
Peter decides to call a *Youth Community Services Hot-Line* because he is depressed and confused. The counselor tries to help him through his confusion, which helps to put his sexual feelings into perspective. Peter is also getting pressure from his friends to have sex with a girl who likes him, but he declines, so his friends start calling him a "faggot" and a "poof."

He gets in a fight with a hardcore guy named Rats and gets beat up pretty bad. David is hanging out with Peter's brother when he sees Peter bloody and crying. David holds him in his arms to calm him down, but a housekeeper sees this and thinks David is molesting Peter. His father gets angry because he thinks David is going to turn his sons into "faggots."

The truth about Peter comes out as his father denies and threatens to disown both of his sons. Walker is educating her readers about the stages gay teens and parents go through as they come to terms with a life-altering situation like this.

There is a misunderstanding about David that Peter is responsible for. David is hurt and angry, so Peter goes to his house to apologize and tell him that he is gay. He also tells David that he likes him as more than just a friend.

This is a big step for Peter because he is now accepting the fact that he is gay. David realizes how delicate the situation is. "He stroked my hair the way he did in the darkroom, letting his fingers rest along the back of my neck now and then."

'What don't you know? he asked.

'Nothing," I said. 'I don't know anything anymore.'

'Do you think you might be gay?" as if it was a question.

'I dunno,' I said again" (223).
David realizes that Peter has a crush on him, but the obvious age difference is the reason why they can't like each other that way. He gently explains things to Peter as he puts their relationship into context. "Look Peter, I'm sorry if I gave the impression I was cruising you. I'm sorry. I like you a lot! I think you're exceptionally cute. I just never expected you'd notice. but to be totally honest with you, I think you're too young" (225). David continues to console Peter by telling him first loves are always special, and that he has nothing to lose by giving himself more time by not rushing into anything.

The story of Peter was important for the time period it was written because it helped LGBTQ teenagers realize what they were going through emotionally was normal. This was also a time when more gay and lesbian books were being published, and the negative viewpoints towards homosexuality started declining. Books like Peter are partially responsible for the changes in attitudes about gay people. YA gay literature in the 1990s had many more positive outcomes instead of the misery and death trope so prevalent in adult gay literature during the early and mid-twentieth century.

Am I Blue? Coming Out of the Silence

Am I Blue? Coming Out of the Silence (1994) was the first anthology of YA fiction exclusively dealing with gay and lesbian themes. This collection of short stories was an important step in YA gay literature because it showed the publishing world that gay-themed short stories were important to the literary canon, and it brought an eclectic group of authors: gay,
straight, male, and female together to make an important statement about gay rights. The ALA Booklist review said the following:

Stories by a stellar group of YA writers---some gay, some straight---not all of whom have something meaningful to say about gay awareness and want to present readers with positive, credible gay role models. Wonderfully diverse in tone and setting . . . with stories that go beyond struggle and stereotype to show individuality, pride, and affection.

(Starred review) ---ALA Booklist

This collection of short stories resonates with both gay and straight readers because they tell stories everyone can relate to. There are stories about violence, bullying, isolation, acceptance, and looking back fondly on a past lover, boyfriend, or girlfriend. These incredible stories give insight on what it is like growing up as a homosexual.

Bauer states that her dream is to see that someday in the near future an anthology won't be needed to get gay and lesbian characters integrated into YA literature, just as real life LGBTQ teenagers should be in life. She stated this in 1994 at a time when it was still not fashionable to be out of the closet.

Statistics for teenage suicides during the mid-1990's were as follows:

"One out of every ten teenagers attempts suicide. One out of three of those do so because of a concern about being homosexual. That means that in every statistical classroom across the country there is one young person in danger of dying for lack of information and support concerning his or her sexuality" (Bauer, Intro. ix).
This anthology became an important part of the YA gay literary movement by giving LGBTQ teens stories they could relate to, and to give them hope for the future. A large percentage of the profits from this collection still goes to organizations that support gay youth.

*Am I Blue?* is the title of the first short story in this anthology. It takes a metaphysical approach as it deals with the issues of bullying, violence, murder, and questioning one's sexuality. The story starts out with a male teenager getting beat up by a bully named Butch Carrigan. "You little fruit," he said. "I'll teach you to look at me" (Coville 3). The kid gets beat up and is lying in a mud puddle. A nicely dressed man walks up and asks if he's all right. The man helps the teen get up, and then tells him he is his fairy godfather.

Coville uses the fairy tale genre to get his message about gay bashing and accepting one's sexuality across. A fairy tale is a short story that features fantasy characters. Examples are fairies, elves, trolls, and giants. The author uses this style of storytelling because of its tradition of teaching some form of moral lesson, and because of the connotation involved. Gay people have always been called fairies by homophobic people for decades.

This story has an innocent teenager who might be gay, a gay fairy god father named Melvin, and a "troll" or "giant" named Butch. Trolls and giants are evil beings in fairy tales. As with any good fairy tale, the innocent teenager learns some valuable lessons.

The teen is worried about being seen with Melvin because he acts gay. "With Butch and his crowd already calling me 'faggot' and 'fruit', walking with a guy who moved the way Melvin did wasn't going to do anything to improve the situation" (5).

He then asks Melvin why he walks that way. "Honey, I gave my life to be able to walk like this. Don't you dare try to stop me now" (5). Melvin goes on to tell the teen about how he died at the
hand of homophobes because he had the guts to be himself. "We'll teach you, faggot!" They never did explain exactly what it was they were going to teach me. Last thing I remember from life on earth was coming face to face with a tire iron" (7). This fairy godfather is showing the realities of how bullying starts with verbal slurs, and then escalates to physical violence and often times to murder. This is a reality of being LGBTQ in America and around the world. There were over two hundred fifty reports of gay bashing incidents reported in New York City in 2011. The numbers are thought to be three times that in reality because many of these acts of violence go unreported.

The fairy godfather tells the teen statistics about how many gay people there are in the world. He then gives the teen the ability to see the many increments there are when dealing with one's sexuality. 'It must be lonely,' I muttered more to myself than to him."

"It doesn't have to be," he replied sharply. "If gay people hadn't been forced to hide for so long, if we could just openly be ourselves, there would be plenty people you knew that you could ask for advice. Everyone knows gay people; they just don't think they don't" (9). Coville shows how lonely it can be for teenagers who are struggling with coming out.

The fairy godfather gives this teen a special ability called gaydar, and turns everyone who has a percentage of homosexual traits blue for one day. The teen learns about all the different shades of sexuality, that it isn't just a binary sexual system. He also learns what many psychologists have said about homophobic people being anti-gay because gay people remind them of their own homosexual feelings. This is the case with the teen's bully. Butch is as blue as the sky.

Each of the sixteen authors in this book give insights and life lessons to teenagers who are struggling with their sexuality through their gift of writing. This anthology of gay and lesbian
stories should be read by parents and guardians of LGBTQ teens, as well as those who work for
government or religious institutions. It is an important addition to the YA gay literary canon.
Chapter 5: Young Adult Gay Literature from 2001-2009

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw massive strides in the acceptance of the gay community. Gay culture was finally becoming accepted in mainstream society. Television, literature and other media were an important catalysts for this change in attitudes. Television shows like Will and Grace (1998-2006 NBC), Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (2003-2008 Bravo), and the Ellen DeGeneres Show (2003-present CBS), have given a human face to gay issues that affect all Americans in one way or another.

On the political front, many laws were being challenged and changed during the 2000s. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2003 that sodomy laws in the United States were unconstitutional in Lawrence V. Texas. "Liberty presumes an autonomy of self that includes freedom of thought, belief, expression, and certain intimate conduct" (infoplease.com 2).

In 2004 same sex marriage became legal in the state of Massachusetts. In 2005-2006 civil unions become legal in Connecticut and New Jersey. In 2007 the House of Representatives approved a bill "[e]nsuring equal rights in the workplace for gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals" (3).

In 2008, same sex marriages began to be performed in Connecticut. Finally, in 2010, the U.S. Senate voted 65 to 31 in favor of repealing the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law. This decade was an exciting time for the LGBTQ community.

YA gay literature came its own during this first decade as well. More than half of the American public now supported gay rights in one form or another, and the YA gay literature being written during this decade was reflecting the positive attitudes society now had towards LGBTQ teenagers.
On average, more than twenty gay teen novels were released each year from 2001-2010. This is a significant increase. The books I have chosen as an overview of this decade reflect the immense changes that took place. Those books are Geography Club, Rainbow Boys, and Boy Meets Boy.

**Geography Club**

*Geography Club* (2003) by Brent Hartinger, is a story about two middle-class high school jocks trying to come to terms with being gay. The main themes in this novel deal with coming out or staying in the closet, the importance of friendship, and the difficulty of having a romantic relationship as a gay teen. Russel and Kevin are the main protagonists. They are on the same high school baseball team and have discovered that each is gay when they meet in a chat room on line. They both decide to keep this a secret, and this secret ends up having consequences. The story is told from Russel's point of view. He reveals early on that he has always known he was gay, and feels like he's alone in the world because he can't even tell his best friends the truth. He also has a crush on Kevin and can't help discreetly looking at his body whenever they are naked in the locker room. Kevin is the popular, good-looking jock that all the girls are crazy about. Kevin makes fun of Russel by accusing him of being a fag. Kevin's homophobia is a shield for his own homosexual desires as well as being part of the macho jock world that he lives in. Evidence of his sexual frustration is revealed in a locker room scene just a few days before they find out the truth about each other.

"Hey Middlebrook!" Kevin said to me. "Nice ass!" Leon and Brad and Jarred and Ramone all laughed. Big joke, not exactly at my expense, but
in my general vicinity. Some part of me wondered, Do I have a nice ass?
Hell, I didn't know. But a much bigger part of me tensed, because I knew 
this was a test, the kind enemy soldiers in movies give to the hero who 
they suspect isn't one of them. Everything depended on my reaction. 
I bent over halfway, sticking my rear out in his direction. "You really 
think so?" I said, squirming back and forth. "Middlebrook!" Kevin said, 
all teeth and whiskers and dimples. "You are such a fag!" (4).

In order for Russel to prove he isn't gay, he has to act like he is to show that he is straight, and 
Kevin has to act like he's straight by accusing another guy that he's a fag so he can conceal his 
own homosexuality. Hartinger shows the reader how far a person must go to hide the fact they 
are gay. Negotiating the closet is a complex situation that requires LGBTQ teenagers to 
constantly be on guard in order to survive.

Russel and Kevin live dual lives because they have a hard time accepting their true nature, 
and because of the peer pressure teenagers must endure. Russel dates girls as a cover, and Kevin 
is a popular good looking jock who will do anything to stay in the closet. Their secret gay world 
becomes cyberspace where Russel and Kevin find each other and then meet up at night so they 
can talk about their situations. They also form an after school club called Geography Club, which 
is actually a GSA club in disguise. Russel finds out that there are more gay people around him 
than he ever thought. When he finally gets the courage to tell his best friend Min that he is gay, 
she tells him that she has been having a secret lesbian affair another girl at school for the past
three years, and that she's always known he was gay. This opens up a whole new reality for him as he slowly gets more comfortable with the idea of coming out of the closet.

Hartinger gives us realistic situations with realistic results, and in turn, Russel and Kevin end up taking different paths. The ending is not the typical happy ending with the denouement all wrapped up with a pretty bow. Rather, it is an honest assessment of what actually happens on a daily basis to thousands of LGBTQ teens. Russel ends up coming out of the closet knowing that it is going to alter his high school years in a negative way. He realizes that he has to be true to himself, his friends, and others who have the courage to stand up to peer pressure and bullying. Kevin has decided to take the opposite path by staying in the closet, which assures that his popularity will stay intact. His romantic relationship with Russel obviously fizzles, as does their friendship, but it has become a learning experience for both boys.

This book was published in 2003 at a time when many YA gay books dealt with the theme of the Midwest popular jock coming to terms with being bisexual or gay, and the consequences of that truth. Coming out of the closet is a very intricate maneuver for most young people.

GLBT people of all ages must make what is often a terrifying and gut-wrenching decision to either reveal their sexual identities or keep them secret. However, the dilemma of whether or not to come out of the closet cannot be resolved through a simple one-time decision. It is resolved through a recursive process, wherein the choice must be made over and over repeatedly in different situations, which tragically makes its effect on the person even more insidious, dehumanizing, and destructive. At any moment, a person could "[d]eliberately choose to remain in or reenter the closet in some or all segments of their life" (Sedwick 65)
Those who do decide to reveal their sexual identities by coming out of the closet
do so, each and every time, at the risk of physical violence, verbal harassment,
or potential loss of family, friends, employment, parental rights, and other
unpredictable consequences (Whitley 1-2).

*Geography Club* analyzed the idea of the closet as it gave the reader two characters who took
different paths in dealing with it. Another important theme in this book was the idea of using a
support group to help teens with the issue of sexual orientation. Even though the use of a secret
gay "Geography" club is symbolic of the closet, at least they weren't alone. This book was
published at a time when clubs like The Gay Straight Alliance were just beginning to make
inroads into public schools across the United States.

Even though gay YA novels were gaining more popularity and acceptance, authors still had
a difficult time getting published. Hartinger said, "Editors told my agent again and again that
there was no market for a book like this, and all my agent's agent friends told her she was
wasting her time on a gay teen book. Publishers often seem motivated by the desire to maximize
their profits, and librarians are often restricted by limited acquisitions budgets. Neither of these
work to support, much less create an environment in which much literature will be produced that
explores homosexuality for adolescents in any meaningful way." (Hartinger par 2).

*Geography Club* was rejected seventeen times before it was finally accepted for publication.
This novel became an important addition to the evolution of YA gay literature because it helped
many gay teens to see that they were not alone in their journey.
*Rainbow Boys*

*The Rainbow Boys* (2003) by Alex Sanchez is a story about three high school seniors, Nelson, Kyle, and Jason, who are at different stages of homosexual awareness and self-acceptance. The story is written from the viewpoint of all three characters. Each character takes turns telling their stories about coming out and the pain it involves. Sanchez touches on many important emotions one goes through as his characters accept their homosexuality, and then seek acceptance from friends, family, and society. This was an important book for YA gay literature because it was written at a time when society started supporting the LGBTQ community. The story is told over the course of three books.

Jason is the first character we meet as he tells the story of his struggles with his sexual feelings. He is confused about certain homosexual thoughts at the same time he thinks he's in love with his girlfriend. In the very first chapter he lets the reader know about the confusion he feels as he talks about having sex with Debra. "Excitement won out. That night he made it with her--a girl. Homos couldn't do that. Ergo, he couldn't be a homo. So why did he continue to have those dreams of naked men, dreams so intense they woke him in a sweat and left him terrified his dad might find out?" (3). This passage instantly creates tension within Jason's confused feelings, and this confusion introduces a situation from his past where his father had caught him experimenting with another boy named Tommy when he was ten years old. This is juxtaposed to Jason being the typical good-looking heterosexual star basketball player who gets all the attention. Jason is facing his situation as any typical teenager would. He is in the closet, he is in denial, he leads a double life, and he wants to figure out if he is really gay or bisexual. Jason
finally gets the nerve to call the "Rainbow Youth Hot Line" because he is honestly trying to figure out his sexual orientation. When Jason attends the meeting he sees two other students, Kyle and Nelson, from his high school. They try and make him feel welcome, but Jason eventually panics and leaves hoping they won't tell anyone that he was there.

Kyle is the next character we meet in chapter two. He has always known he's gay. "Since Kyle was little, he'd known he was different, though he couldn't explain exactly how. When other boys began to talk about girls, he never felt interested. But it was another story when they bragged about their erections and first ejaculations. And while he laughed with classmates at fag and AIDS jokes, on the inside he felt ashamed and frightened" (12). Even now, as a senior in high school he is still in the closest because he can't bear to tell his parents or his friends. The only person who knows he's gay is his best friend Nelson. The narrator tells the story about how they met in eighth grade, and how Kyle felt so ugly and alone because he wore braces, glasses, and was in the closet. "From the moment he first saw him in art class, Kyle knew Nelson was different. But when Ms. MacTrough paired them up to draw each other's portraits, Kyle panicked and asked to be sent to the infirmary. After school Nelson tracked him down. 'Let's get this out. You know I'm queer, I know your queer, Get over it.' Kyle felt a rush, like he'd burst from the water after a high dive. He was no longer alone" (13). This is the start of his acceptance as a gay person, which continues to evolve as the story unfolds.

Nelson is the last character to be fully introduced in chapter three. At first he might seem to be the stereotypical flaming homosexual who refers to himself as "Queen," but he is very comfortable in his own skin. He is the comic relief and a voice of truth as he helps Kyle and Jason come out.
"Nelson seemed to know everything about being gay. He told Kyle about Alexander the Great, Oscar Wilde, and Michelangelo. He explained the Stonewall Riots and defined words like *cruising* and *drag*. The most amazing thing was how Nelson talked all about this stuff in front of his own mom" (14). Kyle looks up to Nelson because he has the courage to come out and just be himself.

Through each character, Sanchez shows the different stages LGBTQ teenagers go through as they come to terms with their sexual orientation. According to Dr. Eli Colman, professor at the University of Minnesota, there are roughly five stages to coming out:

**Self-Recognition as Gay:**
More than just an awareness of attraction to members of the same sex, it involves confusion. Some attempt at denial and repression of feelings, anxiety, trying to "pass," counseling, and often religious commitment to "overcome" sexuality. Eventually, acknowledgment and acceptance of one's sexual orientation develops.

**Disclosure to Others:**
Sharing one's sexual orientation with a close friend or family member is the first step in this stage. Rejection may cause a return to the self-recognition stage, but positive acceptance can lead to better feelings of self-esteem. Usually disclosure is a slow process.

**Socialization with Other Gay People:**
Socializing with other gays and lesbians provides the experience that the person is not alone in the world, and there are other people like him or her. A positive sense of self, indeed pride develops and is strengthened by acceptance, validation and support.

**Positive Self-Identification:**
This stage entails feelings about oneself, seeking out positive relationships with other gays or lesbians, and feeling satisfied and fulfilled.

**Integration and Acceptance:**
Defensiveness about one's sexual orientation. One may be quietly open, not announcing their sexual orientation, but available for support to others nonetheless. Couples live a comfortable life together and generally seek out other couples. (Colemen 14-16).
Jason represents the first three stages. He is frustrated because he is attracted to other males, which causes tension with his girlfriend. Jason feels so guilty about this, he represses his homosexuality to the point where he has nightmares about his father catching him with another boy. He finally attends a gay self-help group to try and figure out his feelings. His sexual confusion is intensified when he realizes that Kyle and Nelson are also in attendance at this meeting. They keep Jason's secret until he is ready to deal with it on his own terms.

Kyle represents the first four stages. His self-recognition came at an early age. His disclosure to others is opposite of the normal coming out process; Nelson lets Kyle know he is gay, and that he knows Kyle is gay, too. From that point on, a great weight has been lifted from Kyle's shoulders. He becomes comfortable socializing with other gay people. Both of them decide to form a GSA club at their high school. The fourth step of positive identification comes when Kyle finally comes out to his mother and father after getting beat up by a couple of homophobic jocks. They even spray paint the word 'queer' on his locker door. The very next day he brings his own spray paint can and sprays, "And Proud" underneath queer. At this point he has finally come out and let the world know he is gay.

Nelson represents all five stages of the coming out process because he has lived his life fully in the open regardless of the peer pressure, ignorance and hatred that surrounds him. His mother accepts him and is even a high ranking member of PFLAG, a parent support group. Nelson has been out most of his life and is looking for a real relationship with a another boy. He is instrumental in helping Kyle and Nelson through the coming out process.

Through the parents of these gay teenagers, Sanchez shows the steps they may go through as they come to terms with having a gay or lesbian child. "Parents mourn the loss of the
heterosexual identity of their child and their hopes, dreams, and expectations for a traditional life for their gay or lesbian child" (Savin 24-25). A few of the following steps are shock, denial and isolation, parental grieving process, and finally to accept or not to accept.

**Shock:**
Shock is not considered to be a stage of development but an initial parental reaction to the disclosure by a child that he or she is gay/lesbian.

**Denial and Isolation:**
In stage one, parents collect themselves sufficiently after initial shock to realize the severity of their new knowledge, and then deny the reality of their child's homosexuality. Fear and self-blame are also aspects of the denial process. Did either parent do something to make their child gay/lesbian?

**Parental Grieving Process:**
Many parents experience feelings of profound loss. Dreams of weddings and grandchildren hinge on heterosexuality.

**Acceptance or not:**
When young adults are coming out to family members, they are in a very vulnerable space.

(Dr. Charlotte J. Patterson, Professor of Psychology, University of Virginia)

Jason's father has always suspected he was gay because he caught Jason fooling around with his friend Tommy when he was ten years old. Jason's father is an an abusive alcoholic who constantly ridicules his son every chance he gets. Jason finally comes out to his father after his father tells Jason, "Don't bring them here again. Hear me? I don't 'wan' any faggots in my house" (198).

Jason response is, "Well" -- he took a deep breath -- "you've got one" (198). His drunken father tries to slam his fists at Jason as he tries to move away.
Without warning, his dad swung his fist toward him. Unable to restrain himself any longer, Jason jabbed his fist into his father's jaw. Jason stared at his fist, disbelieving what he had done. He immediately glanced up, expecting to ward off a new pummeling from his father, but instead he saw a pathetic, insecure man gaping back at him. In that image, all the events of the past few months connected for Jason: going to the Rainbow Youth meeting, coming out to Debra; finding confidence to tell Kyle about Tommy (199).

Jason's father does not fit any of the steps empathetic parents should go through. This scenario is juxtaposed with the normal parental reactions of acceptance Kyle's parents eventually go through. The reaction from Jason's father after he comes out is often the typical response gay teenagers experience. Sanchez wisely shows this important aspect of the coming out process because this is often the unwanted reality.

Kyle's parents do fit the typical parental reaction when they find out he is gay. Sanchez again gives us a real life scenario about the process. After Kyle's mother finds a gay magazine he knows the truth is going to come out. Nelson helps him to deal with the situation in an honest way. After Kyle's disclosure to his mother, she is shocked as she tries to collect herself in a rational manner. There is a sense of denial as she asked if his father had done anything that might have made him gay. This is a typical response for many parents because they think something traumatic has caused their child to become gay.
His father is shocked and hurt as he initially distances himself from Kyle. It took Kyle years to deal with his sexuality, and Sanchez correctly shows that parents need time to adjust to a life changing event like coming out.

Nelson's mother always knew Nelson was gay, so when he came out, she became his biggest advocate. His father, on the other hand, has always been distant with Nelson, so we never get a sense of what he really thinks or has gone through as a parent of a gay child.

Overall, *Rainbow Boys* explores many of the important aspects of self-acceptance and advocacy for the LGBTQ community. This first book in the trilogy gave a voice to gay teenagers at a time when many gay teens had no role models. This book is an important part of YA gay literature.

*Boy Meets Boy*

Imagine a world where the LGBTQ lifestyle is fully embraced and supported. In the novel *Boy Meets Boy* (2003) by David Levithan, this is exactly the world where a gay sophomore named Paul lives. Levithan has taken "Integration and Acceptance," the last stage of coming out, and made it the centerpiece of this story. *Boy Meets Boy* is a story about acceptance, friendship, and romantic relationships. Through this story, Levithan shows how all the trials and tribulations of romantic relationships are not exclusive to the heterosexual community; they are just as complicated for gay teenagers as well.
This book introduces one of the first transgender characters with a major role in a YA gay book. The term "transgender" is complicated because it can be applied to a variety of people and behaviors that vary from heterosexual norms. "Transgender people may identify as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, polysexual, or asexual. In addition to the larger categories, there is a wide range of gender expressions and identities which are contrary to the mainstream male-female binary. These include cross dressers, drag queens, drag kings, transvestites, genderqueer, etc" (Prince 441-444). In Boy Meets Boy, the transgender character is named Infinite Darlene. He is a gay male cross dresser who's also happens to be the star quarterback of the high school football team. He is a transgender individual who is fully accepted by his teammates and the community in which he lives. Levithan has created an idealized world where sexual identity is not important in the grand scheme of things.

Paul is the narrator of the story. He is openly gay and has known his sexual identity since he was five years old. "I've always known I was gay, but it wasn't confirmed until I was in kindergarten. It was my teacher who said so. It was right there on my kindergarten report card: PAUL IS DEFINITELY GAY AND HAS VERY GOOD SENSE OF SELF" (Levithan 8). This memory seems humorous, but it is also too idealistic, even for this gay friendly world the story is set in. Teachers are not trained to make that kind of judgment call about a five-year-old child. It is an uneducated assessment that Paul's teacher has made, even though she is right about his sexuality. Levithan seems to have created a world where sexuality can be properly assessed just by observing children. This is the only part of the story I have an issue with. I feel it is important for the person who is questioning their sexuality to be the one to come out when they are ready. It is a personal decision that should never be usurped by someone else.
The main story is the love relationship Paul has with a new boy in town named Noah. Unlike earlier gay novels like *I'll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip*, and *Annie on my Mind*, this gay relationship is out in the open without any homophobic repercussions.

Both Paul and Noah have recently broken up with their boyfriends, so they are vulnerable and not sure about starting new relationships. Their physical attraction towards each other gets the best of them as they start talking. Just like heterosexuals, Paul and Noah go through the emotions when first getting to know someone they really like. Noah is an artist and his life revolves around looking at the world through an artistic lens. He feels comfortable enough with Paul to invite him to his house. This is an important first step in their relationship because Noah is comfortable enough to let his emotional shield down and show Paul who he really is. This gesture also gives Noah some indication that they might be compatible as boyfriends. It is exactly the same scenario many heterosexual people engage in. When Paul walks into Noah's bedroom he can't believe what he is seeing:

I don't know where to begin. The ceiling is a swirl of just about any color you'd care to imagine. But it doesn't look like it was painted with different colors---it looks like it appeared at once, as a whole. One wall is covered with matchbox cars glued in different directions, with a town and roads drawn in the background. His music collection hangs on a swing from the ceiling; his stereo is elevated on a pedestal of post cards from absurd places---Botswana, the Kansas City International Airport, an Elvis convention. His books are kept on freestanding shelves hung at different angles on a sea-green wall. They defy gravity, as good books should. His bed is in the middle of
the room, but can be rolled effortlessly into any corner. His window shades
are made from old bubblegum wrappers, arranged into a design (Levithan 46).
Noah has shown Paul an important part of his world, and through this gesture he is revealing
what kind of person he is: strong, artistic, innocent, vulnerable, imaginative, etc.
Noah knows what he is doing by showing Paul the world in which he lives, and Paul understands
there is much more happening between them than just physical attraction. Paul tells Noah how
cool his bedroom is, and even comments that his room isn't nearly as interesting, which Noah
says he doesn't believe. "By showing me his room, he's giving me a glimpse of his soul" (47).
They both realize that they need to get to know each other because they are more than physically
attracted to each other.

Levithan uses the concept of the closet in a clever way. It’s not a place where gay people
hide, but as a place where they can be themselves until they are ready to come out to the world.
Again, there isn't a negative connotation to the idea of the closet. Noah has a secret place in his
house where he paints, but he has to go through a closet in his bedroom to get there. For both
Paul and Noah, the closet represents a place of wonder and excitement, not a place to hide. Paul
even asks, "Are we going to Narnia?" (47). Noah is showing Paul more of his soul by taking him
to his most treasured place in the world; the place where he creates.
Noah teaches Paul how to paint by closing your eyes and painting the music they listen to.
Levithan uses this world as a romantic place where a loving relationship between two gay people
can thrive. This is a place where Noah and Paul can be completely honest. "Noah surprises me
by speaking. 'Have you always known?' he asks. I know immediately what he is talking about.
'Pretty much so, yeah,' I answer. 'You?'

He nods, eyes still on the canvas, his brush a mark of blue. 'Has it been easy for you?'

'Yes,' I tell him, because it's the truth.

'It hasn't always been easy for me,' He says, then says no more.

Through this conversation Levithan shows how some gay teenagers have a difficult time coming to terms with their sexuality, even though those around them are accepting and supportive. Noah is revealing the truth about who he is and how he thinks. This is at the core of any lasting and meaningful relationship.

As with any teenage relationships, gay or straight, they are often filled with misunderstandings. This is the case after Noah and Paul start dating. Paul's old boyfriend is trying to get back together with him, and does everything he can to achieve his goal. They end up kissing in the school closet and Paul ends up feeling terrible because he has cheated on Noah. At the same time this is happening, Paul's good friend Tony is having a hard time coming out to his religious parents, and he ends up kissing him as well. Levithan uses the closet in a much different way to show that it can still be a place where people hide, cheat, and lie to themselves and others. This scene is juxtaposed to Noah's artistic world of truth. Noah eventually finds out what Paul has done as Paul tries to explain things. "It was Just a kiss!" Noah shakes his head. 'It's never just a kiss. You know that. So just go home" (120). Paul realizes that Noah has always been honest and he has been deceitful. "All he wanted was for me to be careful. And I was so careless. So careless" (120). This is a common scenario for heterosexual couples as well as homosexual couples.
Paul and Noah do get back together after Paul shows him how much he cares for him by giving him things that are meaningful to both of them. This happens over the course of seven days. "On the seventh day I give him me. I do this by going over and saying hi. I do this by dissolving the distance between us. I do this not knowing how he'll react. Perhaps this will be the one thing that I give him that he returns" (169). They both talk as Noah thanks him for all of the items he has given over the past week. Noah pulls out an envelope and hands it to Paul. Inside are the photographs of words that he has taken all over town, and in his bedroom. The words read, wish you were here. "I look at these images and it’s like they're the only thing I've ever wanted. How could he know that? 'Serendipity,' he says. 'I was up all night developing. I took photos of a hundred words, and these were the ones I wanted. That's what my instinct told me" (170).

Noah ends up asking Paul to the dance and he says yes. "I can't leave it at that. I have to add, "I'm sorry about everything." And he looks at me and says, "I know" (170).

Boy Meets Boy is a world where gay relationships are as normal as heterosexual relationships. Mutual attraction and forging loving bonds between two people regardless of their sexual preference can become complicated when people are not honest with each other. Gay teenagers have it much worse because they are looked at as outcasts because of their sexuality, which makes it extremely hard for them to have a loving relationship with member of the same sex. Levithan has taken the reader into a world where it is okay for gay people to be in love.
Chapter 6: The Future of YA Gay Literature: 2011 and Beyond

"Literature offers the reader knowledge in the form of information. . .information that at the time is all the more fascinating because it is part of the author's recreated world. Literature read this way serves as a social document, giving us insight into the laws, customs, institutions, attitudes, and values of the age in which it was written or in which it is set" (Pickering 1-7).

YA gay literature reveals major truths about who we are and what kind of society we live in. It is also about human interaction and compassion for our fellow human beings regardless of their race, gender or sexual preference. This genre allows its gay readers to have gay role models they can relate to on many levels. It also shows gay teenagers that they are not alone in the world. This is the main reason why I write gay literature.

YA gay literature has come a long way from its humble beginnings back in 1969. Some critics even think it’s time may have past, that it is no longer cutting edge or even relevant. This is completely untrue. Now that the gay community is receiving a greater percentage of acceptance as part of mainstream society, YA gay literature is able to move in a number of important and creative directions. No longer are the stories just about coming out or being accepted, these stories are now beginning to take a serious look at society as a whole. In David Bergman's 2010 essay, Do We Need Gay Literature?, he takes the viewpoint that gay literature should still be looked at as a minor literature. "For quite some time, the second generation of queer theorists have wanted to shed the 'minoritizing' stance they associate with 'old' gay culture and assert a 'universalizing' attitude that is young and trendy (Sedgwick, 1990). My belief is to
look at gay literature from as many viewpoints as possible because as Deleuze and Guattari state, "A minor literature is not the literature of a minor language or the literature of minor importance; rather it is the literature a minority makes in a major language" (Bergman, par 2).

Gay literature can communicate across geographical and cultural boundaries precisely because it is a minor literature, and one feature of a minor literature is its deterritorialization. Such works are not bordered by linguistic or national boundaries, because they are not comfortably located within such boundaries.

Minor literatures are never at home, but they can be not-at-home anywhere.

(Par 21).

Bergman also discusses the fact that many gay writers do not like having their work seen as gay literature. I think this is disappointing. I am a gay writer who is proud to be part of the YA gay literature genre. I believe younger people thrive on pushing the barriers of conformity out of the way so they can make their own judgments about the world in which they live.

My book, *Miguel's Secret Journal* (2011), and the six others to follow in this series, takes on important issues like urban culture and its negative views on homosexuality, the concept of individualism, negotiating the closet, homosexuality within the context of government and religious institutions, the philosophies of good and evil, guilt and shame, and the power structures that have molded the human race.

The two main protagonists in my story are gay emo teenagers named Miguel and Gabriel. Miguel is Hispanic, Gabriel is white, and they are in love with each other. As the story unfolds, it is revealed that they are the archangel's Michael and Gabriel. By making my characters gay, emo (emotional) and archangels, I have challenged my readers to take another look at all religions.
from a homosexual perspective. My story is a religious allegory, a metaphysical journey, a philosophical conversation along the lines of Socrates, Descartes, Locke, Jefferson, Emerson, Nietzsche, and Foucault. It is also a story about two gay teenagers who love each other just as much as any heterosexual couple. I have written this story in a way to hopefully forge new territory within YA gay literature. According to the publishing world, my book is one of the very first books in a new sub-genre called Gay Emo Teen Literature. A recent book review said the following:

A.V. Zeppa's entry into contemporary literature could not be better timed as various countries are opening previously condemned realms of gay history and important contributions in both literature and music by gay artists of the past. In this very touching first novel Zeppa proves he has not only done his homework, but he has also found a manner to introduce a gay character by means of a book focused on journal entries of a young Hispanic lad from the Bronx who struggles with fear of discovery, both his own recognition and acceptance, and that of a generally homophobic Latino culture. Zeppa has written a book that combines the harshness of reality with the introduction of fantasy and magic that promises to create an ongoing series of stories that explore territory heretofore unexplored.

(Grady Harp, July 15, 2011)

The aspect of fantasy and magic that Harp writes about is important to the future of YA gay literature because the LGBTQ community needs heroes they can relate to. Gay archangels who
are in love with each other, have divine powers, and reveal that there is hope for gay teens, is something I am very proud to bring to the reading public.

As I stated earlier, many adults have read Miguel's Secret Journal and have commented on it through personal emails and in many online forums. Karen Whitley, a recent graduate student at Texas Tech University, wrote a major paper about my book. This paper has now been published. It is titled, *Coming Out of the Closet: A Gay-Themed Young Adult Diary-Novel as Alternative Rhetoric*. In this paper she quotes David L. Wallace: "Alternative rhetoric calls for 'an expanded range of discourse practices that allow for writers to be more personally present in their texts...an embodied rhetoric' (Wallace 11). I believe whether we know it or not, writers do interject themselves on many levels into the stories. Whitley starts her main discussion with the first page of my book. It begins with a poem by Miguel:

*OK. I'm not gunna give you cute phrases*
*or insightful teenage bullshit philosophy.*
*I'm not gunna pretend*
*that I'm one up on those around me*
*insinuating that I can see past the*
*Fakers*
*Liar*
*Lairs*
*Laters*
*Gay Bashers*
*Pretenders*
*Dream Killers*
*Insane Wannabes*
*Manipulators*
*High School Assholes*
*Parents as good as DEAD*
*and eyes that look the other way.*
Whitley's analyzes the first section of the Poem:

Miguel begins simply by stating that he is not going to engage in "cute phrases" and "teenage bullshit philosophy," which I believe are synonyms for traditional rhetoric. These opening words echo the basic principles of alternative rhetoric that seeks to be "an alternative to rhetoric that sees its main job as persuading the other to one's own position" (Wallace 6). In the next two lines, he writes that "I'm not gunna pretend that I'm one up on those around me." This statement is rooted in another principle of alternative rhetoric: the concept of opacity. The idea of opacity "comes from queer theorist Judith Butler's 2005 Giving An Account of Oneself in which she explores the moral implications of the fact that complete self-knowledge or self-definition is not possible because we are all reliant on social norms beyond our control. In the lines that follow, Miguel moves toward the concept of "embodiment," which Wallace defines as bringing the "operation of culture" and the "interlocutors" into immediate context (12). (Whitley 9-10).

The poem continues:

I really only know what's in my Heart  
Mind  
Soul  
And Body.  
Simply knowing  
that I'm trying to be me
makes the human static that overwhelms my life tolerable.

Gnothi Seauton.
(Zeppa 1).

When Miguel says that he only knows what's in his heart, mind, soul, and body, he is engaging in alternative rhetoric. According to Wallace, "[r]hetoric becomes alternative when it engages the individual's subjectivity rather than attempting to erase it and accounts for the positioning of that subjectivity within the discourse of power that enfranchise and marginalize others" (5). Miguel continues to answer Butler's call to give an account of oneself while also accounting for the "human static" or discourse of power that marginalize him (Whitley 10-12).

This paper has taken a theoretical approach to analyzing YA gay literature with an academic perspective that correctly identifies many concepts of queer theory. I have consciously and subconsciously inserted these theories into my story. I believe this "Minor Literature" deserves this kind of scrutiny and scholarly analysis because of its influence on society and its readers. Hopefully, this will continue to be the trend in the future.

I am currently writing the second book in this series. It will be published in June 2013. This book is titled Miguel's Secret Journal: The Four Corners of Earth. Philosophy again plays an important role within Miguel's journey. The following excerpt is written in journal entry forty-seven. At this point in the story he is halfway between being human and an angel. knowledge and wisdom are slowly seeping into his mind as his metamorphosis is almost complete:

I wonder if it will ever stop. you know, the centuries of brutality at the
hands of the so-called chosen ones. The consumption of countless souls
The indifference of self-anointed conduits to a higher authority who
have said time and time again that our worthless lives on earth are only
meant to be a stepping stone to some greater nirvana; the carrot on a stick
scenario :/ I wonder about love so meaningful that it makes people do
anything to find it and then hold on to it with all their might. Or being
able to trust the friends closest to you and know things are understood
without ever saying a word. Or finding the wisdom to let go of things that
have weighed you down as you realize it's time to say goodbye.
(Zeppa).
Miguel is looking at the world and his own life from a philosophical perspective as he
contemplates the changes that are about to alter his existence. Through this gay teenage angel, I
am hoping to forge new ground within the emo gay sub-genre that I am proud to be a part of.
General Statistics For Young Adult Gay Books:

in 1969, the publication of *I'll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip* by John Donovan announced the arrival of gay and lesbian literature as a new genre within young adult fiction.

On average only one gay YA book per year was published from 1969-1980 where the main protagonist was either gay or lesbian.

Less than 1% of all YA novels have LGBTQ characters.

50% of LGBTQ YA books are about boys and 25% are about girls. This is an interesting statistic because the majority of readers of YA literature are female.

Only 4% of gay YA books are about transgender characters.

In the years 1969 through 1992, approximately sixty young adult novels with gay/lesbian characters or themes appeared in the United States. The rate of production of this body of literature has roughly doubled over the years, with approximately half (thirty-one) of the books published in the sixteen years from 1969 through 1984, and the rest (twenty-nine) published in the following eight years, from 1985 through 1992.

Of the 4,000 YA titles published in 2010, only eleven LGBTQ titles were published.

There has been an increase to twenty-five LGBTQ titles in 2011 per 4,000 titles published. This calculates into a 0.6% market share.

The current trend in publishing is through internet sales of e-books and the use of independent publishers. iBook, iPad, Google books, the Amazon Kindle, and Barnes & Noble nook are just a few of the popular web sites and technology being used as of 2012.

There have been approximately 370 gay YA titles published from 1969-2011, which averages out to nine published titles per year.

One title was published in 1969. from 2006-2011 an average of thirty titles have been published.

Who are the major publishers of LGBTQ Young Adult Literature?
Data showed that from 1969 to 2011, the number of LGBT YA novels has risen somewhat steadily, with a few dips in various years.

The most notable recent dip occurred in 2010, in which only 11 LGBT YA titles were published, compared to 36 in 2009 and 25 in 2011. This might be a reflection of the economy, which crashed in 2008, and most publishers shrank their lists in 2009. It’s nice to see, however, that the trend continues upward once again this year.
A closer look at LGBT YA literature published from 2000 to 2011, first splitting it up by publisher.
When the number of books published from 2000-2011 are added up, this is the distribution of LGBT YA among American publishers:
I was also interested in seeing the proportion of LGBT YA books that focused on boys, girls, and trans characters. The common wisdom is that books about gay boys vastly outnumber those about gay girls, and the numbers prove this.

I also discovered that a number of LGBT YA books weren’t actually about an LGBT teen, but rather were about a straight teen and his LGBT parents or adult guardians.

Adding the 2000-2011 YA titles together and splitting it out by gender brings us this handy pie chart: This shows us that 50% of LGBT YA books are about boys, with only 25% about girls.
Conclusion

It has been a long journey to get to a point where the LGBTQ community is finally being accepted as normal members of American society. I believe YA gay literature has played an important role in that journey. Sadly, this is not true in many other countries around the globe.

Statistics about laws and social attitudes towards Homosexuals in other countries:

“Homosexual acts between consenting adults are known to be illegal in about 70 out of 195 countries of the world.”

“Studies (mainly conducted in the United States) have found that heterosexuals with positive attitudes towards homosexuality are more likely to be female, white, young, non-religious, well-educated, politically liberal or moderate, and have close personal contact with homosexuals.”

“The Pew Research Center's 2007 Global Attitudes Survey found that people in Africa and the Middle East strongly object to societal acceptance of homosexuality. Acceptance for homosexuality and bisexuality however is much higher in Europe, Canada, the Philippines, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.”


“Gay people have been the target of violence for their sexuality in various cultures throughout history. Violence against gay people reached its height during the Holocaust, when at least 15,000 homosexuals were killed and many more imprisoned and institutionalized as insane. Violence against homosexuals continues to occur today, fueled by anti-gay rhetoric” (Stotzer, par 1).
Application of Islamic Laws:

“Several countries impose the death penalty for homosexual acts, per application of some interpretations of Shari'a law. As of 2006, these include Mauritania, Sudan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Pakistan, the Parts of Chechnya under Sharia, and some Islamist dominated regions within Nigeria and Somalia.”

“In Saudi Arabia, the maximum punishment for homosexuality is public execution. However, the government will use other punishments-- e.g. fines, jail time, and whipping as alternatives, unless it feels that homosexuals are challenging state authority by engaging in LGBT social movements.”

“Iran is perhaps the nation to execute the largest number of its citizens for homosexuality. Since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, the Iranian government has executed more than 4,000 people charged with homosexual acts” (Pew Research, par 2-3).

Conservative attitudes in the United States:

“While conservativism includes people of many viewpoints, it has a significant proportion of adherents who consider homosexuals, and especially the efforts of homosexuals to achieve equal right and recognition, to be a threat to valued traditions, institutions and freedom. Such attitudes are generally tied in with opposition to what some conservatives call the "homosexual agenda" (Sears/Osten, par 1).

YA gay literature has evolved into a sophisticated and powerful genre that has given countless LGBTQ teens to gay role models they can relate to. It has been instrumental in shaping the discourse in America over the past four decades about the issue of gay rights at the state and federal level. It has been a long journey with still a long ways to go, but YA gay literature will
eventually be given its due by literary critics with same scrutiny and academic insight as
mainstream adult literature. I believe YA gay literature will continue to evolve, entertain, and
educate future generations of gay and straight teenagers for years to come.
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