

THE IMAGE OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN RECENT NOVELS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

by

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Abstract

This study examines the image of homosexuality in novels published for young adults between 1998 and 2003, the extent to which authors have left behind two dimensional-one issue characters in novels dealing with homosexuality, and whether societal stereotypes of homosexuality are still perpetuated in young adult fiction. Twenty-six books that met the sampling criteria were selected and analysed using a content analysis approach. The findings show that the image of homosexuality in young adult fiction is more positive in this sample than in earlier books on this topic. The majority of books centre around the issue of homosexuality, but the characters are better developed and more well rounded, with issues other than their sexuality to cope with. Stereotypes regarding homosexuality are mostly refuted with the exception of some, such as retribution for being homosexual or the concept that homosexuality is a phase.

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CHAPTER I:

The Image of Homosexuality in Recent Novels for Young Adults

While gay and lesbian characters exist in a body of fiction for young people, they tend to be harder to find than other 'issue' novels published and marketed to young adults. Almost every other issue seems to be at the forefront of the most talked about new fiction; murder, suicide, physical and sexual abuse, but not homosexuality. Where are these books and what do they say? How is this issue being treated by writers for young people?

Rationale

Homosexuality is a significant issue for young adults, both gay and straight. Even though in some urban centres it is slowly becoming more acceptable to mainstream society, middle and high schools are still tough places for an adolescent struggling to find his/her sexual identity. This begs the question as to whether available literature being written and printed for young adults is an accurate reflection of North American society in general and if it is keeping pace with the most pertinent issues related to homosexuality. The adolescent years are often ones of struggling to find oneself and the desperate desire to fit into one's peer group. "Through reading nondiscursive works, the adolescent, or for that matter any reader, meets himself/herself and notices the similarities and differences in his/her own life through fictional experiences" (Cuseo, 1987, p. 23). If we are "increasingly recognizing the role of children's literature in shaping attitudes" (Norton, 1985 in McLean, 1997, p. 78), the availability and quality of books on this topic is an area of great concern. On its website, PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), indicates the following;

97% report regularly hearing homophobic remarks from their peers, the typical high

school student hears anti-gay slurs 25.5 times a day, and studies on youth suicide consistently find that lesbian and gay youth are 2 - 6 times more likely to attempt suicide than other youth and may account for 30% of all completed suicides among teens (2004).

The advent of a "new realism" (Jenkins, 1997, p. 299) in young adult fiction is recognized in those books published between 1967 and 1969. It is "characterized by candor, unidealized characters and settings, colloquial language, and plots that portray realistic problems that do not necessarily find resolution in a happy ending" (Nilsen, 1993, p. 104-5). Other terms describing this 'new realism' are 'problem novels' or 'contemporary realism,' (Jenkins, 1997). The advent of the 'problem novel' in young adult fiction, began with books such as S.E. Hinton's The Outsiders or Paul Zindel's The Pigman. Societal issues such as the break up of the family, death from cancer, physical and sexual abuse, neglect, violence, abandonment, and racism are popular topics for this genre. However, there are significantly fewer titles which relate to the issue of homosexuality (approximately 100 from 1969-1997).

With so few books available to choose from, gay and lesbian youth may have less of an opportunity to find accurate reflections of themselves in novels, thus placing a responsibility of sorts on writers and publishers to provide realistic, rich stories on the topic of homosexuality. Many teenagers read fiction for information and a validation of themselves (St. Clair, 1995). Jacqueline Woodson, a black lesbian writer says,

I do not feel as though I have a responsibility to only these two communities but a responsibility to write, beyond the systems of oppression in all communities. As people who exist on the margins, we do have a different view of the world, and it is our responsibility to refocus. In the course of refocusing we may help a child who is coming out

. . . to acquire a clearer vision of the world and thereby grow up stronger (Woodson, 1995, p. 711).

The lack of titles is problematic for another reason which is that of not being able to find a mirror of one's own experiences in literature. This problem is discussed by Schweickart (1986). Her argument outlines the problem of not being able to read her own experiences (that of being a woman) in literature because most of the literary world is male dominated. Thus, the female identity is overshadowed by the male identity and creates powerlessness in the female reader. McLean makes a connection between what Schweickart says about being a woman interacting with text and being a homosexual interacting with text; "The response of the gay and lesbian reader to the predominance of texts by and about heterosexuals is no different" (McLean, 1997, p. 181). They too will feel the same sense of powerlessness. Jenkins, in her study of gay and lesbian content published from 1969 to 1992 finds, "the majority of the titles reinforce social stereotypes of the generic gay person as an urban middle class white male who is educated, involved in the arts, and likely to encounter hardships directly related to anti-gay prejudice" (1997, p. 300). She also finds that the ratio of gay to lesbian characters is "roughly three to one" (1997, p. 301). Since her latest work, there seems to have been a small boom in gay/lesbian fiction for teens. The question remains, however, if the image of the homosexual and his/her experience in society has changed to incorporate multidimensional gay/lesbian characters in the context of a plotline that offers more to its readership than its predecessors.

Objective

The objective of this study is to determine if current fiction on the topic of homosexuality for young adults is more realistic, more honest and less stereotypical than books published prior to 1998. The point of view of the narrator will also be important to examine to determine who is telling the stories of gay and lesbian youth.

Research Questions

1. What is the image of homosexuality in novels published for young adults between 1998 and 2003?
2. To what extent have authors left behind two dimensional-one issue characters in novels dealing with homosexuality issues in the last five years?
3. Are societal stereotypes of the homosexual still being perpetuated in young adult fiction published between 1998 and 2003?

Definition of Terms

Bisexual: A man or a woman who is sexually attracted to both men and women.

Gay: Males who are sexually attracted to the same sex. Term is sometimes also applied to women.

Homosexual: A person sexually attracted to members of the same sex.

Homophobia: A fear of homosexuality, and/or a dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals.

Lesbian: Females who are sexually attracted to the same sex.

Queer: A synonym for 'odd' used as a derogatory term for gay men and lesbians to denote the unnaturalness of homosexuality. Has also been reclaimed as a more positive word encompassing all those who are not strictly heterosexual.

Questioning: A person who is not yet sure of their sexual orientation.

Transsexual: A person whose sexual identification is entirely with the opposite sex. A transsexual wishes to be and acts upon being the opposite sex.

Transvestite: A person who often or occasionally dresses like the opposite sex, but has no desire to become the opposite sex.

CHAPTER II:

The Image of Homosexuality in Young Adult fiction 1969-1997: Review of Literature

‘I have never met a bigot who was a reader as a child,’ and it is something I believe as well. The power of fiction is that it gives us, as readers, the opportunity to move inside another human being, to look out through that person’s eyes, hear with her ears, think with his thoughts, feel with her feelings. It is the only form of art which can accomplish that fact so deeply, so completely. And thus it is the perfect bridge for helping us come to know the other - the other inside as well as outside ourselves (Bauer, 1994, p. ix).

This is why it is so import to have readily available, well written books for young adults on the topic of homosexuality. Bauer’s words illustrate the importance of books with homosexual content, for not only the homosexual adolescent, but also for all adolescents to read and help develop understandings of tolerance and acceptance.

An examination of the research and literature on the image of homosexuality in fiction for young adults from 1969 to 1997 reveals two major points. The first is that there are not enough such books for the 10-15% of youth who are likely to be gay or lesbian, and the second is that nearly all the available fiction is generally flawed by perpetuating negative stereotypes and offering flat characters with one major problem, their homosexuality.

All young people (and adults too) need opportunities to read about homosexual characters that act positively in the world to combat homophobia (Wolf, 1989 and Sumara, 1993). In order to bridge understandings and promote tolerance, it is of utmost importance that the books in this canon do not promote negative stereotypes with two dimensional characters. If the reader is only allowed to know about the characters’ sexuality then the reader does not get the opportunity to truly know the depth of their character and how they respond to the world

(Wolf, 1989, Sumara, 1993 and Athanases, 1996) When given the opportunity to be exposed to and think about literature with homosexual content, “students reported having myths of homosexuality dispelled, an emerging empathy for gays and lesbians, and a clear sense of the rights of gays and lesbians to be who they are without fearing the loss of their jobs, or harm” (Athanases, 1996, p. 244).

That the opinions and beliefs of a culture can be traced through its literature, is a point that is emphasized in Clyde and Lobban’s introduction to Out of the Closet and Into the Classroom: Homosexuality in Books for Young People (1992), where they state that by compiling a bibliography of this literature they also “record the social attitudes” (p. viii) of a culture. They reflect on the impact of young people’s books “as powerful in the formation of attitudes, values and ways of understanding the world,” (p. vii). Michael Cart reiterates this point when interviewed for a USA Today article, saying that if more straight teens read gay themed young adult fiction, they “might think twice about casually uttering slurs, spreading gossip, hazing and physically abusing gay teens” (Donahue, 2001). Thus, the mirror of culture that literature provides can also have a positive impact on the behaviour of a culture.

Clyde and Lobban allude to the debate over whether children's literature should mirror reality and therefore earn credibility, or whether it should provide “an optimistic world-view, in which traditional values are shown to be effective in ensuring happiness” (1992, p. vii). They do not provide a clear answer to these questions, but do note that the books on this topic are becoming more a reflection of reality than a neat and tidy package with all the answers tied to how the world should be. The usefulness of realistic voices portraying alternate sexualities is reflected by M.E. Kerr, who grew up in the 1930’s and 40’s. She feels that books such as Hearing Us Out: Voices From the Gay and Lesbian Community (1994), might have been incredibly helpful to her growing up gay. They also, she notes, would have been helpful to her

mother; "if only she had some confirmation that this blight on our family was not as rare and terrible as she believed it was" (p. ix).

Another important aspect of these books is that they help young people find their community. "Adolescents need opportunities to recognize that they are not alone, no matter how different they may feel" (Reid and Stringer, 1997, p. 16). For young adults literature can help "reduce their isolation, by telling a story they can relate to, that sounds familiar enough to reassure them of their normality" (ibid., p. 16). The scope of community is defined by Roger Sutton; it is "bigger than where I live. It includes gay and lesbian people I know around the world, but it also includes people I've never met, such as gay writers or pop stars or politicians. It even includes people I've never heard of, like the fifteen year old lesbian who's afraid to check this book out of her school library" (1994, p. xii). He goes on to describe community as including ideas as well as shared beliefs and disagreements. "For most adolescents, feeling different is not so much feeling special as feeling out of touch and marginalized from a communal culture" (Reid and Stringer, 1997, p. 17).

Both fiction and nonfiction/information materials help young readers who are trying to find themselves, also find their community. They need to know there are people with similar experiences who exist in the world around them. That is one of the reasons Sutton put photographs in his book to help readers, "when you feel like you're 'the only one', as so many gay kids do, it helps to see the faces of others 'like you'" (1994, p. xiv). Wolf (1989) relates the need of gay and lesbian youth to find positive reflections of themselves in literature, in the same way as all minority children. "They need to know that being different from the majority does not make them bad or worthless, but rather special and valuable in their own way" (ibid., p. 52). Thus, the place of this literature within the collection of fiction for young adults is an extremely important one (Wolf, 1989 and Sutton, 1994). Young adults look to fiction to help them find

themselves and their community. Therefore, they need to be finding accurate portrayals there.

In a review of the literature available on this topic between 1969 and 1997 several researchers (Clyde and Lobban, 1992; Cuseo, 1987; Jenkins, 1998; McLean, 1997; St. Clair, 1995) find a degree of dissatisfaction with the majority of titles that deal with the issue of homosexuality for young adults. Over thirty flaws are identified in these works, and of those, nineteen are identified by two or more of the researchers. Such flaws can be divided into two categories; flaws relating to the writer's characterization and depiction of the gay or lesbian character, and stereotypical flaws in which societal stereotypes of homosexuality are perpetuated.

Flaws in depicting the homosexual character

There are a few very specific flaws that are important to note but which do not necessarily fit into the categories discussed below. Jenkins (1998), in her quantitative study, notes that in the novels published prior to 1997 characters are either gay or lesbian. There are no novels that have both a gay and lesbian character. Gay characters are equally likely to be single or partnered, but nearly all lesbians are part of a couple. She also reports that all characters seem to be middle class and Jenkins (1998), Goodman (1983) and Cart (1999) note the absence of minorities with one or two exceptions. Jacqueline Woodson, a black lesbian author, reiterates the importance of finding oneself reflected in books written for her, "this is how I began to read; searching the pages of the books available to me for people like my people, reading the books where I found tiny pieces of myself over and over again. I didn't grow tired of reading these books because I couldn't afford to. What else was there?" (1995, p. 711). That experience helped her to understand at a very early age that she was marginal. Woodson uses her marginalized status to work against norms and work for social change through her writing. The majority of marginalized youth do not feel such empowerment, perhaps accounting, in part, for the high

suicide rate among gay teens.

Books that address the issue of homosexuality are often categorized as problem or issue novels, therefore it is important to consider some criteria for well written novels in this genre. Books where the issue drives the plot are usually not very successful in accomplishing their goal. "Whenever the issue takes over, no matter what it is, it tends to seem a problem rather than just the way things are" (Wolf, 1989, p. 53). Novels and stories are much better when the "consciousness raising is done indirectly and incidentally" (ibid.). Well crafted problem novels should contain the following elements;

- A realistic problem and believable plot.
- The power to transport the reader into the characters' thoughts and feelings.
- The characters are complex with both positive and negative qualities.
- The setting enhances the story and is well described.
- The theme is worthwhile and leaves the reader with something to think about.
- The style is smooth and carries the reader along.
- The theme has a universal appeal so it speaks to more than one group of people.
- The problems are dealt with in a way that leaves the reader with insights into themselves, society or both (Donelson and Nilsen, 1997).

These are the criteria that some of the earlier novels have been lacking and, wholly or in part, are central to the flaws apparent in books with homosexual content prior to 1997.

Two Dimensionality

A problem with gay/lesbian fiction written between 1969 and 1997 is the characterization of the gay or lesbian character. These characters are frequently flat stereotypes who exist as the problem in the story (Bauer, 1994; Cuseo, 1987; Jenkins, 1998). Their sexual orientation is their

only reason for inclusion in the story and all events revolve around that. Jenkins uses the word “generic” (1998, p. 300) to describe these characters.

Characterization is “another hallmark of fine writing” (Huck and Hepler, 2000, p. 16). A topic such as homosexuality is about characters, therefore the characterization should be strong in novels on this topic. Characters should be convincing, real and lifelike with strengths and weaknesses (ibid.). When a character is revealed bit by bit and grows with actions and emotion in the story then they become more real and authentic to the reader (ibid.). “If a single dimension of character is presented, or one trait overemphasized, the result is likely to be stereotyped and wooden” (ibid., p. 16). Thus, gay and lesbian characters need to have their homosexual identities portrayed “as only one of a number of significant social groups with which they identify” (Day, 2000, p. xxiv). Homosexual characters also need to be shown coping adequately with the homophobia they will realistically encounter and also should appear as secondary characters in a wide range of roles in society (ibid.). Another important aspect of characterization is consistency. “Everything characters do, think and say should seem natural and inevitable” (Huck and Hepler, 2000, p. 17). Characters should also grow and change as they are touched by events in the story and not remain static despite the action taking place around them (ibid.).

Gay and lesbian characters need to be as “integrated into juvenile fiction as they are in life, [to] appear in stories without their sexuality necessarily providing the story’s problem, [to] be villains as well as heroes, funny as well as tragic and concerned with all kinds of matters beyond their sexuality” (Bauer, 1994, p. 29). No stories were found where a character’s homosexuality was merely incidental to the plot, rather than the focus of it in Cuseo’ (1987) research. He finds that minor homosexual characters in a novel are “primarily used as setting” (ibid., p. 393) and are flat and oversimplified. Both major and minor characters are without genuine emotions, strengths and weaknesses (ibid.). In this way, the novels do not reflect reality.

When people are portrayed as one problem they become problematic for readers looking to find reflections of themselves. "Homosexuality is not a problem. The problem is society's response to it, which is often based on fear, lack of knowledge and lack of understanding" (Walker, 1994, p. 27).

Retribution

A predominant stereotype found in novels written between 1969 and 1997 is that if you choose to be homosexual, expect to pay for it (Cart, 1999; Clyde and Lobban, 1992; Cuseo, 1987; Goodman, 1993; Jenkins, 1998; McLean, 1997; Wilson, 1984). This flaw could be construed as a stereotype that is upheld by the majority of society, but it is also a literary flaw as it is often "used as a deus ex machina resolving the homosexual problem for the author and the character" (Cuseo, 1987, p. 399). The gay or lesbian character "usually suffers from some sort of retribution for their orientation, often based on society's homophobia" (Cuseo, 1987, p. x), and "in several, reconciliation comes only with the imminent or actual death of the homosexual character" (Jenkins, 1998, p. 313). Cuseo identifies violent retribution (such as death) in 42 of the titles he reviewed between 1969 and 1982 and to lesser degrees in other titles. He says that "these patterns of retribution imply the disposability of the homosexual character" (p. 399). Rather than a literary flaw, McLean believes the theme of retribution is based in the prevailing Judeo-Christian ethic in American society, in that those who engage in homoerotic acts will be punished for their sin. She sees the message inherent in these books as "if you're gay or lesbian (but especially if you're gay), you'll die [or] if you're gay or lesbian, you can get badly hurt" (1997, p. 188). This kind of message is damaging to adolescents who are gay or straight. It does nothing to affirm the worth of the gay individual who is trying to find some positive message to reflect his or her experience. It also does nothing to deter homophobic actions and reactions,

because the underlying message is that any harm that comes to a homosexual individual is expected and deserved.

Secondary Characters and Heterosexual Point of View

Between 1985 and 1992 the gay or lesbian character becomes a secondary rather than main character in the story (Jenkins, 1998; Garden, 2001; and St. Clair, 1995). This is a change from the books published between 1969 and 1985 where the characters are more central to the story. One of the flaws is that gay characters and gay issues are depicted sympathetically and that although positive presentation of homosexual characters is progressive, it only takes place with characters that are off center, making them of secondary concern (St. Clair, 1995). These characters are often parents, aunts, uncles or friends who deal with their issues of homosexuality (often AIDS) in the background of the story (ibid.). Two problems with the characters who are "off center stage" (ibid., p. 43), is that readers learn about the problem from a heterosexual perspective and they see the issues and concerns of the homosexual as secondary in importance. The distance of the homosexual character from the protagonist "may limit teen reader response" (Jenkins, 1993, p. 50) which diminishes the importance to the reader. A further limitation with secondary gay and lesbian characters is that the reader cannot get inside their minds and relate to their thoughts and feelings and find reflections of their own feelings there. As mentioned previously, it is more important for readers to be able to see, hear, and feel as the character sees, hears and feels (Bauer, 1994).

Description of Sex

The description of sex in these novels is "tenaciously conservative" (Jenkins, 1998, p. 305) despite their topic. A rather restrained description of sex exists in these young adult books

(Clyde and Lobban, 1992; Cuseo, 1987 and McLean, 1997), however the inclusion of sexual acts may have kept them off the shelves of bookstores and libraries, thus defeating their purpose altogether.

When sex is described, symbolic language is used, while heterosexual sex in the same novel can be described in quite a lot of detail (Cuseo, 1987; McLean, 1997). Sexual intimacy is only "hinted at, arousal is never mentioned" (McLean, 1997, p. 189), and it often takes place outside the pages of the novel. "There are vague allusions to 'something' that happened the night before that leaves the characters frightened and awkward the next morning" (Goodman, 1983, p. 14). While there is very little description of sex, it is also important to remember that most young adult novels are restrained in this area anyway (Clyde and Lobban, 1992).

Two social stereotypes surrounding homosexuality and sex are outlined by Jenkins (1993). One is that gay people are very promiscuous and always think about sex. This stereotype is still perpetuated in modern day television. For example the character, Jack, on "Will and Grace" who is often engaging in one night stands or shortlived relationships based around sex. The other stereotype is that since same sex couples are physically similar there is not a lot to do together sexually. This myth is often applied to females. However, when it comes to the books, "fictional gays and lesbians seem to have *extremely* limited sex lives" (Jenkins, 1993, p. 47), thus not giving the reader any real information about what might be 'normal' sexual exploration and "trivializ[ing] or mystify[ing]" gay sexuality (ibid., p. 48).

Flaws in Perpetuating Stereotypes and Myths

It is evident in books containing homosexual characters in the period between 1969 and 1997, that there are a number of societal stereotypes about homosexuality. Unfortunately, stereotypes perpetuate myths about what it means to be gay or lesbian in a predominately

heterosexual society. They do not provide a clear picture of reality for the reader trying to find him or herself reflected in literature, or for the reader trying to open his or her mind to difference. "They deprive the reader, both homosexual and heterosexual, of an important insight: After the adolescent's struggle for self acceptance, a happy and well adjusted lesbian or gay adult usually emerges (McLean, 1997, p. 186). Readers do not necessarily want a happy, tidy, fairy tale ending as that would somehow negate the reality of the struggle to find one's identity, rather it is important that "the authors continually tie the protagonists' experiences back to the moments of self revelation and the steps that followed" (Nobles, 1998).

Optimistic endings are still important, however and can take three forms; the ideally optimistic . . . in which everything works out for the best. . . . The optimistic ending in which the character gains a self understanding that will lead to a positive step, but the book stops prior to this step being taken. . . . and the optimistic ending in which the character takes the step and the reader sees the positive consequences of making this decision" (Nobles, 1998).

The latter is the most powerful because it reflects both the inner optimism of the character and the exterior results of their actions (ibid.). Because this kind of optimism helps guide us to find the right actions, it is the type of optimism young people should have exposure to (ibid.).

Stereotypes do not promote an optimistic outlook and they put the characters in boxes that do not allow them to find their way through to an optimistic ending or outlook. Also, if part of the benefit of these books is to work for social change then readers need to be "challenged to consider alternatives to heterosexuality," (Blackburn, 2002, p. 314) with writing that portrays gay and lesbian characters as beautiful, strong and empowered in their own right (ibid.).

Homosexuality Is a Phase

The concept that homosexual attractions or 'crushes' are a normal part of growing up and becoming a heterosexual adult is a myth that prevails in many novels, is noted by many researchers (Clyde and Lobban, 1992; Cuseo, 1987; Goodman, 1993; Jenkins, 1998; McLean, 1997; St. Clair, 1995; Wilson, 1984). They conclude that while there is truth in the fact that many heterosexual adults have had homosexual attractions, the homosexual attraction is not a pause on the path to heterosexuality. Sometimes it is part of discovering one's homosexuality. Because many authors of these novels have included the suggestion that homosexuality is a phase, implicitly the author is "negating the validity of a homosexual sensibility" (Cuseo, 1987, p. 408) because the superior orientation must therefore be heterosexuality. The perpetuation of the myth that homosexual attraction is merely "youthful experimentation" (Jenkins, 1998, p. 308) is not a fair assessment of the truth of being gay or lesbian. One's true sexuality emerges, grows and changes over time. This stereotype is reflected in society fairly frequently, "it's just a phase of rebellion they're going through" (Rofes, 1989, p. 445), is a common means to try to explain what may be hard for others to accept.

Being "horrified" (Goodman, 1983) with what has happened is a common emotion after a homosexual experience in the earlier novels. Sometimes a same sex encounter is experimentation, sometimes it is a true expression of sexuality. It is not necessarily cut and dried, but the earlier novels do not allow for the exploration of degrees of sexuality that are more true to real life experiences.

Homosexuals Can Be Identified By Their Appearance

Another stereotype often prevalent in books prior to 1997 is the physical and stylistic appearance of the homosexual, or "recognizability" as Cuseo (1987, p. 392) terms it.

Recognizability means the image of the “gay effette weaklings and assertive, aggressive and masculine lesbians” (ibid., p. 392). This image feeds into homosexuality being presented as a “tragic flaw” (St. Clair, 1995, p. 40) that is so blatant as a flaw that it manifests itself physically. The tragic nature is perpetuated through the use of physical stereotypes that lead the reader to pity, rather than celebrate the homosexual character. Jenkins terms characters who are easy to recognize “queer gay” as opposed to “straight gay” (1998, p. 323). A ‘straight gay’ character is only different from a ‘straight’ character in sexual orientation, nothing else. When a character’s sexuality can be identified by their appearance or behaviour, then their identity is often dealt with in a negative tone by the author, and the characters become the backdrop or problem to which other characters react.

These stereotypes make the characters less memorable as individuals with real problems (Cart, 1999). They also spill over into a seemingly true reality for both straight and gay adolescents. When Mollie Blackburn studied literacy performances and identity work with queer youth in 2002, she found it hard to find acceptance in a youth centre in part due to her appearance as being a “relatively older, white, middle class woman who appeared to be straight . . . I learned I did not fit physical lesbian stereotypes held by many members of the group” (Blackburn, 2002 p. 312). Those stereotypes come, in part, from popular culture which includes literature.

In her first study, Jenkins (1993) noticed some interesting correlations between appearance and character. The exceptionally beautiful lesbian is usually associated with pain either for herself or those around them. Sometimes the beauty is tragic, marking them for a violent attack or disease, or they are evilly seductive. Handsome gay men are “neither evil nor doomed, and whatever pain they might cause others is unintentional” (p. 47). Sometimes these attractive young men are the object of a girls’ affection and the notion that good looks are wasted on a

homosexual person becomes the unquestioned message. She notes too that while women fall for gay men in the books, the opposite never happens.

Homosexuals Lead an Isolated Life

One of the inaccuracies and stereotypes that is common in many of the young adult novels is that homosexuals can expect an "isolated adulthood full of unhappy relationships" (Goodman, 1983, p.13). This is a common recurring stereotype that is found all too often in the novels (Cart, 1999; Cuseo, 1987; Jenkins, 1998; McLean, 1997; St. Clair, 1995; Wilson, 1984). There is rarely the depiction of a wider homosexual community within which characters can find happiness and acceptance (Cuseo, 1987). Furthermore, homosexual characters do not often find long term and stable relationships (Cuseo, 1987; McLean, 1997) and most of the characters suffer rejection from their peers and family (Cuseo, 1987) in these earlier novels. For the young adult reader trying to find some hope for a happy adulthood, the books from 1969-1997 provide a rather grim outlook. When writing about the 1980's books on this topic "today's reader is bound to walk away unaffirmed and perhaps even more sure than before that gays do not love and are not happy" (Wilson, 1984, p. 61). "Even the happiest of couples appear destined to make their homes together in semi-solitary confinement" (Goodman, 1983, p. 13). There is a "great deal of attention focused on the difficulties of being a member of a minority group, with little attention paid to the strategies and skills minority group members develop in order to survive" (Jenkins, 1993, p. 49).

Identity and authoring oneself into the world in a way so as not to be characterized as a victim of homophobia, or to be positioned by someone else's heterosexism is very important (Blackburn, 2002). The support of the community is vital as individuals use their own writing to create their identities as positive, strong and beautiful, such as "author[ing] [one]self into the

world as a lesbian supported by a larger LGBTQ community and creat[ing] a new world in which [one] works against hegemonic heterosexism and homophobia with the support of her community rather than alone" (ibid., p. 316). The importance of identity, but with the backing of a supportive group of openminded and often likeminded people is the focus of Blackburn's study. When one reads a novel in which the gay/lesbian community is omitted, the reader, who places themselves within the text [as Donelson and Nilsen (1997) suggest all good realistic novels allow for] finds themselves as alone as they were before reading the book.

Homosexuality Has a Cause

A dysfunctional family or traumatic event (such as rape or child abuse) is often cited as the 'cause' of homosexual behaviour (Goodman, 1993; McLean, 1997; St. Clair, 1995; Wilson, 1984). Although a dysfunctional family or actions of a family member may be cited as the cause of the homosexuality, the parents of the gay or lesbian character are often absent entirely (Cuseo, 1987) as active characters in these novels. Parents, when they do exist, tend to be cast as negative caricatures (ibid., 1987) who do nothing to support their son or daughter. When describing Independence Day by B.A. Ecker, Wilson discusses how "it is all too easy to ascribe the boy's homosexuality to his parents' divorce, his father's overbearing manner, his mother's insecure possessiveness and the predominance of female role models at home" (1984, p. 61). Gay and lesbian characters are often guilt ridden (Cart, 1999; Cuseo, 1992; McLean, 1997) about their emerging sexuality, and are often left with little constructive family or peer support to nurture them through their journey of emerging sexuality.

Although Goodman relates dysfunctional family arrangements such as divorce, death, lovelessness, overbearing mothers and neglect to homosexuality, that subtle message or implication may not work so well in the more recent novels. Dysfunctionality in families is much

more common and 'mainstream' in society now. It would be difficult to ascribe homosexual behaviour to a dysfunctional family with any kind of credibility.

Homosexuals Have Older Role Models

In some books, while there is an absence of peer and family support, there is an older gay or lesbian mentor or role model. Unfortunately, in several earlier novels the mentor character is problematic. Sometimes this gay male mentor walks or even crosses the fine line from friend to seducer, and this again perpetuates another myth that gay men like to seduce young boys (Cuseo, 1987; Goodman, 1983; McLean, 1997; St. Clair, 1995; Walker, 1994). This is a particularly dangerous stereotype because it creates the image of homosexuals as predatory and people to be avoided at all costs. A few of the role models are positive, but they must be carefully constructed as this passage by Walker indicates;

I was presenting one of the first gay role models in children's literature and I wanted to do him justice. He had to be a practicing homosexual and a person who operates successfully in society. He had to be happy and be loved. He had to be attractive and have high expectations of a fulfilling life for himself. Yet at the same time he couldn't be too wonderful - whiter than white - and his coming to grips with his sexuality had to be shown as effective, yet at the same time a personal quest not without its wounds and sorrows (1994, p. 27).

While the role model may not be 'predatory' per se, the distinct message is that they are influencing the impressionable adolescent with their homosexuality and tempt or encourage the adolescent to try it for themselves. In the older books something unfortunate often happens to the older role models, such as the firing of the teachers in Annie on My Mind (Garden, 1982) and What Happened to Mr Forster (Barger, 1981). What's more troubling, however, is that the older

intended role models accept their fate with relative passivity as if they deserve to be punished (Goodman, 1983).

Homosexuals are Artistic

Social stereotypes of the gay male in artistic fields such as hairdressing, fashion design or theatre acting exist in society and the homosexual as the artistic, sensitive type is all too often part of the novels (Cuseo, 1987; Jenkins, 1998; McLean, 1997). Artistic sensitivity is used many times to explain or excuse homosexuality in a friend or family member (McLean, 1997). This is a stereotype that seems to make homosexuality more tolerable or understandable if the person has an artistic bent, because as a society we are already more apt to accept the artist as being 'just that way' (ibid.). It seems to be more difficult for society to accept that homosexuals are also lawyers, doctors and schoolteachers, so authors tend to choose stereotypical interests and occupations for their gay characters, which does nothing to tear down barriers created by stereotypes. Homosexual characters who are cast as teachers, for example, often find themselves without a teaching job by the end of the novel (Goodman, 1983).

Homosexual and Straight Youth Can Expect to Hear Homophobic Language

Homophobic language is prominent in nearly all the novels (Cuseo, 1987; Jenkins, 1998). In 45 of the novels published between 1969 and 1982 and studied by Cuseo (1987), verbal harassment and homophobic language exists. On the one hand the popularity of an issue novel depends on the author painting a realistic picture of how young adults talk and act, but on the other hand "the problem with novels reflecting the offensive language is that adolescents become accustomed to the discourse" (Cuseo, 1987, p. 400). The books should not promote homophobic language as acceptable and mainstream. Homophobic language reinforces the negative self

perceptions and sometimes suicidal tendencies of the characters in these books, perpetuating the myth that homosexual youth are “bitter and guilt ridden” (McLean, 1997, p. 183).

Summary

In this genre of fiction, prior to 1997, there are too many inaccurate myths and stereotypes about homosexuality, and the characterization of the gay or lesbian character leaves much to be desired. As homosexuality is becoming more acceptable to societal norms in North America, perhaps novels written since 1997 will have strong gay and lesbian characters that belie the myths and stereotypes that shroud homosexuality. Perhaps there will be fewer characters that appear effeminate or butch, and fewer who face punishment or retribution for their homosexuality. The myth of isolated adulthoods and unhappy relationships will hopefully be refuted in the newer collection of novels. It is hoped that well rounded, interesting, complex characters that just happen to be gay, lesbian or even bisexual or transsexual exist in the latest phase of homosexual themed literature for young adults, and that many of them tell their own story. This will be investigated further in this study.

CHAPTER III:

Methodology

Introduction

To achieve the objective of this study and determine if similar problems with recent fiction are still common as compared to the earlier novels, a sample of novels published from 1998-2003 that are identified as having homosexual content will be analysed. A content analysis approach will be used to guide the inquiry.

The Sample

The sample comprises those titles which contain homosexual characters. A purposive sampling strategy combined with a convenience sampling strategy was used in this study. A purposive sampling strategy was employed because it necessitates previous knowledge of a population and a specific purpose of the research which is used to select a sample that will be representative of a population (Wallen and Fraenkel, 2001). The purposive criteria used to select books for this sample were; the books must contain characters who are homosexual, must be written for young adults, and must be published between 1998 and 2003. A convenience sampling is "a sample that is easily accessible" (ibid., p. 516). The convenience criteria for the sample was the books must be available in a large Canadian urban city.

A search was undertaken to locate the sample of books that would meet both the purposive and convenience sampling criteria. All books that could be identified by searching with the subject search keywords 'homosexuality,' 'gay' or 'lesbian' published between 1998 and 2003 were searched for using library catalogues from the University of British Columbia, the Vancouver Public Library, the Fraser Valley Regional Library, as well as online search engines

provided by Amazon.ca and Chapters/Indigo.ca. Researcher Christine Jenkins was contacted personally for an up to date bibliography. Just over 50 such books were identified (see Appendix I). Of these, 26 were available for this study. These books are available at the libraries listed above, and at local bookstores such as Vancouver Kidsbooks and Chapters.

Content Analysis Approach

The books are studied using a content analysis approach. As previously noted, researchers who have examined the same types of novels published prior to 1997 have observed significant flaws, most notably in characterization and perpetuation of myths about homosexuality. As many (such as Jenkins, 1993 and 1998; Cuseo, 1987) employed a content analysis approach, it seems logical to apply similar methods to the works published in the most recent phase of this genre. This is not a replication of one particular study, but rather a pulling together of common threads found in the works of Bauer, 1994; Cart, 1999; Clyde and Lobban, 1992; Cuseo, 1987; Garden, 2001; Goodman, 1993; Jenkins, 1998; McLean, 1997; St. Clair, 1995; Wilson, 1984 and Walker, 1994 to see if the inherent messages of the genre have changed.

The content analysis method used will be based on the work of Wallen and Fraenkel in Educational Research: A Guide to the Process, 2nd ed. (2001). As content analysis is “an analysis of the written or visual contents of a document, the conscious and unconscious beliefs, attitudes, values and ideas of people or groups are often revealed in the things they write” (Wallen and Fraenkel, 2001, p. 408). In 1998, Melissa Gross’s study of what young adult novels say about HIV/AIDS used a content analysis approach. She drew on the definitions provided by Holsti (1969). This model for content analysis, similar to that of Wallen and Fraenkel is relevant to this study;

Content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically

identifying specified characteristics of messages. It is an analysis of a communication, which takes into account the various aspects of a communication process that involves a sender and a receiver, an encoding and a decoding process, a message, and a channel of transmission. The focus of content analysis is often on the message but may also involve inferences about the other parts of the communication process. The classic questions of content analysis are, 'who says what, to whom, how, with what effect?' and also 'Why?' (Gross, 1998, p. 6).

These definitions of content analysis are particularly relevant for this study because the beliefs, attitudes, values and ideas regarding homosexuality will become explicit for examining the message in the story as portrayed through characterization and use of stereotypes and myths. For this study the focus is on analysing the current works of fiction with homosexual content for strengths in characterization and for some of the same stereotypes and myths that have been identified by researchers in the past. This analysis will then provide some insight into the changes that have evolved in the attitudes and beliefs surrounding homosexuality in society and the current image of homosexuality in books for young adults.

Formulation of Coding Categories

The books will be read and coded to analyse their content. The coding categories have been developed based on the categories of flaws that were identified in the previous body of young adult literature from 1969-1997 (see Appendix III for a short list of some of these titles read by this researcher prior to the start of this study). The purpose is to look for information relating to characterization of homosexual characters and references to stereotypes and myths surrounding the homosexual. Some categories, such as details related to characterization, have been taken from Huck and Hepler (2000) and from the studies of Cuseo (1987) and Jenkins

(1993 and 1998). The categories relating to myths are a compendium of categories from all the research articles and studies read thus far. Every attempt has been made to make "the categories so explicit that another analyst could use them to examine the same material and obtain substantially the same results - that is find the same frequencies in each category" (Wallen and Fraenkel, 2001, p. 413).

After the initial coding sheets were developed they were applied to two novels to see if the categories were adequate to obtain the required information. Some changes were made to the coding sheets at this point (see Appendix II for coding sheets). The point of the study is to take an objective view of the messages communicated in young adult fiction with homosexual characters, without making statements about the intent of authors or analysing their effect on young adult readers.

Inter-Rater Reliability

As this study is being completed by only one person, attempts were made to make the coding categories as concrete as possible, allowing for easy replication and similar results if anyone else were to seek to interpret data for the same categories of information. However, it is always possible that some information, although explicit, could be overlooked due to coder reliability issues. Therefore, two novels were read and coded by another colleague before the full study was engaged in to determine if there is a high level of consistency. The two novels used were Keeping You A Secret (Peters, 2003) and Geography Club (Hartinger, 2003). In the objective categories there was 100% reliability, for example, the interests, hobbies, appearances and ethnicities of the characters. In the subjective categories, such as the relative strengths and weaknesses of a character, there was one discrepancy over the character Holland and how she ended up standing up to her mother, and the credibility of the secondary character, Ike, in

Geography Club. This discrepancy highlighted the difficulty of subjective categories for coding in general. In the quantitative and objective categories such as the occurrence of intimacy and frequency of homophobic language, there was 100% concurrence. Thus, overall, there was a very high degree of consistency.

Analysis of Data

Once the books were read and coded, the results were analysed for trends in picturing the image of the homosexual in young adult literature. "The most common way to interpret content - analysis data is through the use of frequencies (i.e., the number of specific incidents found in the data) and the percentage and/or proportion of particular occurrences" (Wallen and Fraenkel, 2001, p. 417). Data relating to characterization was collated and analysed, as was data relating to myths and stereotypes. The results were compared to the findings of the aforementioned studies to determine the similarities and differences in the last five years of this genre compared to books published prior to 1998, and to answer the three research questions.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that not all books published between 1998 and 2003 with homosexual content were obtained as they were not available in local libraries or bookstores. Consequently, recommendations and conclusions of this study are limited to the results from this sample.

A second limitation is that there is not a recent comprehensive list of novels on this topic beside the work of Day (2000) and a forthcoming annotated bibliography by Anne Clyde. Experts in the field, such as Roger Sutton, Mark McCleod and Christine Jenkins were contacted personally for their bibliographies on this topic and library and book retailer databases were used.

However, it is possible that titles have been inadvertently omitted from this list.

A third limitation of this study is that although employing inter-rater reliability measures, the majority of the books were read and coded by one person.

Summary

At the end of this study a picture of the image of homosexuality in young adult fiction written between 1998 and 2003 emerged. Which stereotypes will still be commonly written about, which ones will have disappeared? Will the image of the modern homosexual teenager or adult be more promising and optimistic than the predecessors? Will authors have developed rich, well rounded interesting characters that just happen to be homosexual, rather than being just homosexual? A thorough content analysis of these books will shed light on these questions and provide many opportunities for further discussion.

CHAPTER IV:

Findings and Discussion

Findings that address Research Question 1: What is the image of homosexuality in novels published for young adults between 1998 and 2003?

Table 1: Occurrence of an older role model

	Number of titles	Percentage
Yes	4	15%
No	22	85%

In this sample four (15%) of the titles portray older gay or lesbian role models. The young gay or lesbian character finds help defining their sexuality through the presence of these role models. In two of the books, Kissing Kate (Myracle, 2003) and Finding H.F. (Watts, 2001) the role models are barely present. In Kissing Kate the older role models appear near the very end of the book and do not give any advice, only the promise that it is there if Lissa needs it. These characters, Taylor and Jessica, are a stable lesbian couple. Taylor and Jessica meet for tea with Lissa and her best friend Ariel, but the extent of any kind of conversation about sexuality is limited to, "Ariel told me a little about what you're going through - just a little - and if you ever need someone to talk to . . ." (Myracle, 2003, p. 191). Similarly, in Finding H.F. Bo finds a role model in Dave, the gay preacher. Bo opens up to Dave and tells him "things [he's] never told another living soul" (Watts, 2001, p. 131) and that he should be proud of who he is. They keep up their friendship by letter and Bo finds a great deal of comfort in the relationship as Dave is the

first person with whom he is able to freely discuss his sexuality. Dave's appearance in the novel is brief but positive, especially as a gay male role model.

Kit, on the other hand, plays a bigger part as a role model to John in Eight Seconds (Ferris, 2000). He's two years older, openly gay at college and a member of LAMBDA. They meet at rodeo camp where Kit, like John, proves to be a 'good' person and John likes him so much that he becomes confused over his own sexuality. While the book ends before John overcomes his confusion, he reminisces about his friendship with Kit. He knows that they will never see each other again, but that life continues on with both positive and negative experiences and how on Tuesday he might have a great bull ride, but on Wednesday he might be picking himself up off the dirt. He acknowledges the importance of Kit, "who taught [him] just how much he wanted more Tuesdays and Wednesdays" (ibid., p. 186). In Out of the Shadows (Hines, 1998) Deb, a lesbian and Rowanna's guardian since her mother passed away, immediately recognizes the attraction Jodie feels for Rowanna and takes her aside to talk. Her offer of support comes from a place of genuine concern and kinship as she says, "Well, I know how hard it is sometimes, and how much you need to talk about things with someone who understands. You know where to find me, okay?" (Hines, 1998, p.53). Jodie takes her up on her offer and Deb proves to be a solid and calm presence not only for Jodie, but also for her friends, Mark and Rowanna.

Deb's characterization as a role model is perhaps the strongest of the four in this sample. "She's one of those people who's just so overflowing with love and energy you can almost see the air crackling around them, and feel the warmth that surrounds them" (ibid., p. 47). She has many friends, a successful career in an artistic field and is bright, loving and cheerful despite the underlying pain of losing her partner only a year ago. She is older and experienced, clearly the 'adult', but she is 'cool' enough that the advice she gives to the teens is believable and accepted

by them. She seems to know when to back off and when to step in to give assistance.

While only 15% of the books offer an older role model as a character, these role models are positive and show no evidence of crossing the line between friendship and inappropriate seduction, as was the tendency prior to 1997. Kit certainly awakens feelings in John that John did not realize he had before, but the reader does not get the feeling that Kit has ulterior motives or that there is anything sinister about their friendship.

Earlier role models often suffer unfortunate events that they accept with relative passivity as if they deserve to be punished (Goodman, 1983). The two role models in this sample that play a significant role do suffer heartbreaking tragedies; Kit falls off a bull and is injured to the point where he may never ride again, and Deb loses her partner in a drunk driving accident before the beginning of the book. Thus, authors are still choosing to use the device of tragedy for the homosexual role model. Although, it does not seem fair to argue that the authors have used tragedy to suggest these two characters deserve to be punished. Rather, the tragic event tends to endear the reader to them, as if tragedy brings the reader closer to the heart of the character.

Table 2: Depiction of a Wider Homosexual Community

	Number of Titles	Percentage
Yes	10	38%
No	16	62%

One of the major criticisms of the earlier novels is that there is no depiction of a wider

homosexual community and the characters often face a lonely and isolated life. In ten (38%) of the 26 books in this sample there is mention or inclusion of a supportive community. In five of the books the inclusion of a community is more of a fleeting reference, but it is there nonetheless. In What Happened to Lani Garver (Plum-Ucci, 2002), Claire, a straight character, is introduced to Lani's friends in the city, some of whom are gay, and joins a band comprised mostly of homosexual AIDS patients. In The Year they Burned the Books (Garden, 1999) Jamie and Terry briefly mention their awareness of a support group in the nearby larger town, although they do not ever go to it, and in Hard Love (Wittlinger, 1999), Marisol seems well connected in the gay and lesbian community in Boston and meets several lesbians at the 'Zine conference she attends with Gio. In Name Me Nobody (Yamanaka, 1999) there are a few references to all the "butchies" as if there is a fairly established lesbian community in this Hawaiian town, however, the characters do not ever really seem to take the reader inside that community. The "Lesbian Collective" is how the group of lesbian girls in Cary's (Tomorrow Wendy, Stoeher, 1998) high school are referred to, and although they are on the outskirts of the mainstream popular culture, they do have a tight knit group that helps each other stand up to the inevitable tortures of being gay in high school.

It is in Keeping You a Secret (Peters, 2003) where the support of the gay and lesbian community and its network of affiliations plays a much larger role for the main character, Holland. Near the beginning of the book Cece refers to the Rainbow Alley youth group which she is a member of and tries to start a lesbigay club at her school. When her girlfriend Holland gets kicked out of her house, Cece's knowledge of the resources available to the gay/lesbian community proves to be very helpful. They help her find affordable housing, and near the end of the novel Holland appears to be going to access the college fund available to needy homosexual

youth to further her education. Cece's activism in the gay/lesbian community inspires Holland and helps her negotiate through the hard place she finds herself in after coming out to her mother, "It might not be so bad if I could be like her. Out. Proud. With a new place of belonging in the gay community" (ibid., p. 210).

The opening scene of Rainbow Boys (Sanchez, 2001) is Jason Carillo standing outside the Rainbow Youth building deciding if he will go into the support group and recounting the number of times he has called the Rainbow Youth Support Hot Line. Going to the group meeting allows Jason to realize there are other gay/lesbian youth that go to his school, and although he is terrified they will reveal his sexuality to the student body, he is also somewhat comforted knowing that there are other people just like him, and not just the ones who are obviously homosexual, like Nelson. Nelson is out and proud, makes regular use of the support group and his mother is a member of PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). Nelson suggests to Kyle's mother that she become a member to find support for herself as well. At the end of the novel, Nelson and Kyle have finally managed to form a Gay-Straight Alliance at their school despite opposition from fellow classmates and the principal. Even Jason, who throughout struggles with whether to be out or not finally decides, "he wouldn't lie. Not anymore" (ibid., p. 233), and forges on into the meeting.

The refreshing utopian acceptance in the fictional community of Boy Meets Boy (Levithan, 2003) also allows for the depiction of a well connected community for all degrees of sexuality. In this town "membership in the gay-straight alliance soon surpassed that of the football team (which isn't to say there wasn't overlap)" (ibid., p. 12) and "P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is as big a draw as the PTA" (ibid., p. 115). Here characters enjoy being themselves, whatever their sexual orientation, and their acceptance of themselves and each other within a well supported community is contrasted to Tony, Paul's best friend. He lives in

the next town over, faces homophobia and fears coming out to his religious parents.

In Geography Club (Hartinger, 2003) the gay, lesbian and bisexual characters find each other by chance, Russel decides to come out to his friend Min, who also reveals she is bisexual and has a girlfriend. Russel ends up meeting Kevin, a classmate, online and all four of them form a support group themselves with one other friend who joins them. In this novel there is no wider community outside of the school, but the characters do have each other and the forum to discuss issues related to their sexuality.

Bo and H.F. (Finding H.F., Watts, 2001) find a wider homosexual community when they leave their small Kentucky town to find H.F.'s mother. In Atlanta, Georgia they meet three other lesbian street youth who introduce them to the local preacher and his partner who are part of a congregation that openly accepts people of all sexualities. While there is not much hope of them finding a gay and lesbian community in their rural home town, there is the promise at the end of the book that they will find such a community as they move off to college and into the wider community.

With 38% of the novels depicting a wider homosexual community this is an improvement over the older novels where the prospect of an isolated adulthood was prominent (Goodman, 1983). A criticism of earlier novels is that there is much attention focused on being a member of a minority group and not so much attention focused on survival skills within that minority (Jenkins, 1993). This is starting to shift with the inclusion of formal support groups as depicted in books such as Rainbow Boys (Sanchez, 2001) Boy Meets Boys (Levithan, 2003) and Keeping You A Secret (Peters, 2003) and informal support groups as in Geography Club (Hartinger, 2003) and Tomorrow Wendy (Stoehr, 1998).

Table 3: Appearance

	Number of homosexual characters	Percentage of total
Overly effeminate	5	6%
Overly 'butch'	4	5%
'Regular' appearance	68	89%
<hr/>		
Total	77	

Very few of the homosexual characters, whether primary or secondary to the story's plot, are cast as physically appearing gay or lesbian. Often the characters are attractive young men or women, but only nine of the 77 homosexual characters in this sample are effeminate or 'butch' in their appearance. When Jason goes to the Rainbow youth meeting for the first time, his descriptions of the other people at the meeting address some of the stereotypes head on. He describes Shea as "pretty, not his idea of a dyke" (Sanchez, 2001, p. 6) and Kyle who "looks so normal" (ibid., p. 6). This is in contrast to Nelson who wears a million earrings, has snapping fingers and weird haircuts (ibid., p. 2).

Many surface descriptions are used to describe the characters but nothing that overtly gives away their sexuality. The most common descriptors are hair and eye colour and hair style. The exceptions are the ones that the author tries to make stand out, such as Lissa who is a big dark clod, who doesn't like to wear eyeliner and prefers baggy clothes (Myracle, 2003), or Therese who is athletic with cropped blond hair (Hartinger, 2003). H.F. is boyish in appearance and describes herself as such, "whoever my daddy was, he must have been a plain looking, blue-eyed skinny boy, since that's what I look like, right down to the 'boy' part" (Watts, 2001, p. 6).

Her best friend, Bo, on the other hand is “almost too pretty for his own good” (ibid., p. 10).

In many of the older books, gay men especially were cast as effeminate weaklings whose appearance and homosexuality read as a “tragic flaw” (St. Clair, 1995, p. 40). There are two characters in this sample who could be interpreted in such a way. They are both androgynous in appearance; Griffin in I Was a Teenage Fairy (Block, 1998) and Lani in What Happened to Lani Garver (Plum-Ucci, 2002). Griffin is a victim of abuse, and reads as a tragic character throughout the novel. Lani also reads as a martyr or angelic figure who stoically takes the abuse thrown his way. Most of the characters in this sample, however, read as “straight gay” (Jenkins, 1998, p. 323) in that their appearance resembles that of any other teenager.

Age of Characters

All the homosexual or questioning characters in this sample are high school students between their sophomore and senior years with the exception of seven characters. Kit (Eight Seconds, Ferris, 2000) and Blake (Rainbow Boys, Sanchez, 2001) are college students. Mr LaBlanc (Desire Lines, Gantos, 1998), Alison’s father (Alison Who Went Away Vande Velde, 2001) and Deb (Out of the Shadows, Hines, 1998) are adults. Asher (Words Like Weeds, Weinstein, 2003) is the youngest character being in the seventh grade.

Employment

The teenage characters are all students and six of them have part time jobs ranging from working in a donut shop, burger joint, daycare centre and rodeo riding. Among the adult characters presented in the sample there is a teacher, a lawyer, a nurse, a fashion model, a fabric designer, a real estate agent, two soldiers and one of unknown employ.

Religion

In 19 (73%) of the titles, there is no reference to religion. It is a central issue in Desire Lines (Gantos, 1998), Dare, Truth or Promise, (Boock, 1999) and Words Like Weeds (Weinstein, 2003). Where religion plays a major role, it plays a negative one, citing the sin of being a homosexual. In Dare, Truth or Promise (Boock, 1999) there is a liberal and hopeful reading of the Bible as Louie seeks advice from her Catholic priest. He says, "how lucky you are, to love and to be loved in return" (ibid., p. 147). Later in the conversation he continues, "you see, I think love comes from God. And so, to turn away from love, real love, it could be argued, is to turn away from God" (ibid., p. 149). In the same book Cathy, a Catholic, almost kills herself for her perceived sin of having a sexual relationship with Willa, which creates a sharp contrast to Louie's conversations with her priest. It also happens in Watt's Finding H.F. when Bo questions the fact that there could be a church that accepts homosexuals. Dave's reply is,

Well think about it. What did Jesus say in the Bible about homosexuality? Not one word. Now, sure, homosexuality is prohibited in the Old Testament, but so is wearing mixed-knit fabric and eating shellfish. And I don't know about you, but I've seen plenty of supposedly devout straight Christians wearing polyester and chowing down at the Red Lobster (2001, p. 122).

Then, there's the preacher boy in Desire Lines who says, "I'm lookin' for ho-mo-sexuals, for those who are destined to burn in a lake of everlasting fire" (Gantos, 1998, p. 49), or Asher's father who says of homosexuals: "they've been tempted towards an evil lifestyle. It goes against nature, against God" (Weinstein, 2003, p. 149). H.F. and Bo also come from a very religious small town that believes homosexuality is a sin. Consequently, these two characters try to survive by keeping a low profile. Garden's The Year They Burned the Books (Garden, 1999) has

religious undercurrents when the Families for Traditional Values group tries to censor reading material that deals with sexuality.

Table 4: Character Interests

	Number of homosexual characters who express an interest	Percentage of total
The Arts	21	43%
Sports	16	33%
Academics	8	16%
Other	4	8%
Total	49	

Many of the characters prior to 1997 were characterized as artsy, with a variety of interests in the artistic fields. Their artistic natures were used to explain or excuse their homosexuality (McLean, 1997). There is a passage spoken by Link's father in My Heartbeat (Freymann-Weyr, 2002) in which he attempts to rationalize the stereotype that gay people are artistic; "It's that by virtue of being different from the majority, gay people find themselves outside. In life's' margins, if you will. From there, they are able to make unique observations. Most art - dance, music, poetry, what have you - is an expressed observation" (p. 124). However, unlike the earlier books, artistic sensitivity or an interest in the arts does not seem to be used to excuse or explain homosexuality, rather their interests seem to be included in order to round out the character and add some dimension to them.

Upon examination of the most recent character interests, when such an interest or hobby

is expressed, the majority (43%) of these interests are still in the artistic fields. These characters enjoy modeling, acting, painting, writing, fabric design, photography and filmmaking. The second most popular category of interests (33%) is a wide variety of sports. Sometimes it seems that the authors deliberately choose a particularly unexpected interest for their characters. For example, Ferris' Eight Seconds (Ferris, 2000) is about the very macho world of rodeo sports where you might not traditionally expect to find a gay character. There are also basketball, baseball and soccer players, as well as a number of swimmers in the group. Both gay and lesbian characters find solace in the activity of swimming, a perhaps traditionally non-gendered sport. Baseball, however is the interest of the lesbian characters in Name Me Nobody (Yamanaka, 1999) which is a bit of a popular stereotype about women's baseball teams.

Additionally, many of the characters express interest in academics (16%) - mostly math, but also social sciences such as archaeology, and there are a handful of activists to round out the interests of these characters.

Table 5: Ethnicity

	Number of homosexual characters	Percentage
Caucasian	64	84%
Latino	3	4%
African American	3	4%
Japanese Hawaiian	2	3%
Chinese American	1	1%

Unknown	3	4%
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Total	77
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It is evident that many of the characters (84% of the sample) are still of caucasian origin, with very little representation from other ethnic cultures. One main character is Latino, (Jason in Rainbow Boys). The other non-caucasian characters are secondary characters.

Findings that address Research Question 2: To what extent have authors left behind two dimensional-one issue characters in novels dealing with homosexuality issues in the last five years?

Table 6: Do the books centre around the issue of homosexuality?

	Number of titles	Percentage
Yes	18	69%
No	8	31%

One of the criticisms of earlier novels is that they are only about the homosexuality of the characters and that the homosexual characters are flat because they only have one issue to deal with. In 18 (69%) of the titles in this sample this is still true. Kate of Kissing Kate (Myracle, 2003) is struggling with the kiss that destroyed her best friendship, and her growing knowledge that she is a lesbian. In the other 17 books it is much the same story. There is a character or characters that are struggling with identifying their sexuality, or their sexuality is the main issue in the book, such as in Desire Lines (Gantos, 1998) and What Happened to Lani Garver (Plum-

Ucci, 2002) where the sexuality of the characters is what the other characters react to.

However in eight books (31%) in this sample, the issue of homosexuality, while present in the book, runs alongside or is secondary to other issues in the novel. In Alison, Who Went Away (Vande Velde, 2001) the book is mostly about Sibyl trying to live up to the perfect image of her sister, and the knowledge that Alison has possibly been killed by a serial killer. It is much later in the novel that we find out her father is gay, and perhaps the cause of Alison's wild ways. Wittlinger's Hard Love (1999) is as much about writing and discovering friendships as it is about Marisol's lesbianism. Her lesbianism is only an issue because Gio, the main character, is in love with her, and of course, can't have her. The opposite case is relayed in True Believer (Wolff, 2001) but this time LaVaughn is in love with a gay boy, Jody. Jody's sexuality is not central to the story because it is not until near the end of the book that LaVaughn finds Jody kissing another boy. My Heartbeat (Freyman-Weyr, 2002) explores first love, friendship and fitting in as well as the blurry lines of sexuality, as both James and Link are not sure how to define their sexuality. Boy Meets Boy (Levithan, 2003) throws away notions of homophobia and stereotypes and creates a rainbow of characters who can be themselves and find happy relationships, which is the focus of the novel. I Was a Teenage Fairy (Block, 1998) is about abuse and Flip Side (Matthews, 2001), while it briefly explores cross dressing and homosexuality, is also about friendships and first relationships. Chbosky (The Perks of Being a Wallflower, 1999) also tries to create a group of friends in which two characters, Patrick and Brad, just happen to be gay. While there is some description of how their relationship evolved, and one time when Patrick tries to kiss Charlie, there is little if any reaction to their sexuality. It is merely accepted as normal in this group of friends.

Table 7: Number of Homosexual Characters in Major and Minor Roles

	Number of Characters	Percentage of total number of characters
Major Role Gay	6	8%
Major Role Lesbian	9	12%
Minor Role Gay	28	36%
Minor Role Lesbian	20	26%
Major Role Questioning	3	4%
Minor Role Questioning	5	6%
Minor Role Bisexual	3	4%
Minor Role Transvestite	2	3%
Minor Role Other	1	1%
Total	77	

In this study, a major role is defined as the novel being narrated all or in part by the gay or lesbian character. Upon analysing the significance of the role of the homosexual characters in the novels, there are still far fewer characters playing major roles as opposed to minor roles. Of the gay characters playing major roles, three are contained in Rainbow Boys, (Sanchez, 2001) leaving only three other books with major gay protagonists; Boy Meets Boy (Levithan, 2003), Geography Club (Hartinger, 2003), and Words Like Weeds (Weinstein, 2003). Prior to 1997 there were more gay characters than lesbian. In total there are more gay characters, but slightly more lesbian characters in a major role (12%) as opposed to gay characters in a major role (8%). Of the major lesbian characters, Willa and Louie are both in Dare, Truth or Promise (Boock,

1999) with the others in Keeping You a Secret (Peters, 2003), The Year they Burned the Books (Garden, 1999), Gravel Queen (Benduhn, 2003), Tomorrow Wendy (Stoeher, 1998), Out of the Shadows (Hines, 1998), Finding H.F. (Watts, 2001), and Kissing Kate (Myracle, 2003).

Out of 77 homosexual, bisexual or questioning characters contained in this sample of 26 books only 15 characters (19%) tell their own story. There are three other books where the main protagonist is seriously questioning their sexuality. Two of them are young men in Eight Seconds (Ferris, 2000) and Shell House (Newbery, 2002) and one young woman in Empress of the World (Ryan, 2001). This brings the total to 18 (23%) characters with an alternate or questioned sexuality whose stories are told from their own points of view.

Of the secondary gay or lesbian characters 28 (36%) are gay and 20 (26%) are lesbian. While there are very few characters who do not fit the definition of gay, straight or lesbian, there are a few, which is an important step. Three secondary characters are bisexual, and four are questioning their sexuality. There are two transvestite characters one each in the Flip Side (Matthews, 2001) and Boy Meets Boy (Levithan, 2003), and there is Lani, the androgynous mystery character of What Happened to Lani Garver (Plum-Ucci, 2002) whose true sexuality and one could argue, his true gender, is never revealed.

When characters are "off center stage" (St. Clair, 1995, p. 28), their issues and concerns regarding sexuality can be diminished because the reader learns about their issues through the point of view of a heterosexual narrator. This is true in several of the books in this sample. In Wolff's True Believer (1999) for example, LaVaughn is in love with Jody, a boy who lives in her building. The novel is more about her and her determination to go to college and her difficulties with old friends than the revelation near the end of the novel that Jody is actually gay and LaVaughn will never be able to have a relationship with him. The reader is never allowed into the

mind of Jody. Similarly in Chbosky's The Perks of Being a Wallflower (1999) Freymann-Weyr's My Heartbeat (2002) and Yamanaka's Name Me Nobody (1999) the reader learns about the gay and lesbian characters who are friends of the protagonists through the protagonists, and they seem very much on the fringe of the novel and hard to get close to. This distance makes it difficult for the reader to relate strongly to their experiences.

Findings that address Research Question 3: Are societal stereotypes of the homosexual still being perpetuated in young adult fiction published between 1998 and 2003?

Table 8: Homosexual Relationships

	Number of Characters	Percentage of total
Single gay characters;	17	22%
Single lesbian characters;	10	13%
Characters in Short term gay relationships;	11	14%
Characters in Short term lesbian relationships;	9	12%
Characters in Long term gay relationships;	13	17%
Characters in Long term lesbian relationships;	17	22%
Total	77	

In the books published prior to 1997, there are almost no single lesbian characters and many of the homosexual male relationships are short lived. In this sample long term relationships are counted as ones that start early or later on in the novel and continue on after the novels' end

and characters that stay together for the whole novel.

In this sample there are still fewer single lesbian characters (13%) as compared to the single gay characters (22%). The shorter term relationships, however, are closer in number with 11 (14%) gay and nine (12%) lesbian characters in relationships that do not last the length of the novel. The gap between characters in long term gay relationships versus characters in long term lesbian relationships is starting to close, as there are 13 (17%) observed characters in long term, positive gay relationships that form in these novels, and 17 (22%) in lesbian ones.

Table 9: Books where there is mention that homosexuality is caused by an outside event, or chosen by an individual

	Number of titles	Percentage
No	20	77%
Yes	6	23%

Of all the books in this sample, six make reference to a cause or choice to be homosexual: Three of those books make reference to the Bible and the belief that homosexuality is a sin that the sinner has chosen to commit because of temptation to do so. Asher asks his father near the end of Words Like Weeds, “what makes a man?” (Weinstein, 2003, p. 148) and “is a gay man a man?” (ibid., p. 149). In his response Asher’s father replies, after a brief sermon about how homosexuals have been tempted into sin, “You can take a gay man, show him his wrongdoing, and lead him to a happy, normal life. It is possible” (ibid., p. 149). When Asher probes further and asks what if he can’t help being gay, his father replies, “No such thing! Unless the guy’s got some kind of mental problem, he can be straight.” (ibid., p. 150). He then goes on to equate

homosexuality with the same temptation to steal or do drugs.

Desire Lines (Gantos, 1998) is also about a religious fanatic who sets up near the local high school to sniff out the sinners, and there are several references to “lifestyle choices based on an alternative morality” (ibid., p. 26). In The Year They Burned The Books (Garden, 1999) there is also reference to homosexuality being a sin that people make a choice to commit.

In two of the books, it is the character’s mother who makes reference to homosexuality being a choice in an effort to show that perhaps there is a chance her son or daughter will change. After Kyle comes out to his parents in Rainbow Boys (Sanchez, 2001) his mother wonders if he can consider the views of the “ex-gay groups that claim homosexuals can be straight” (ibid., p. 103), although that is quickly refuted as a false notion by Kyle. In Keeping You A Secret (Peters, 2003) Holland’s mother absolutely cannot handle the truth that her daughter is a lesbian. She screams at her daughter, “I didn’t raise you to be a lesbian! . . . It’s sick. Perverted. *You’re* perverted” (ibid., p. 180), implying that there is something in Holland’s upbringing, or a choice Holland has made to be anything other than heterosexual.

Only one of the novels alludes to a traumatic event as the cause of homosexual behaviour. Griffin, in I Was a Teenage Fairy (Block, 1998) is the victim of sexual molestation as a young child by a photographer. He is a tragic, beautiful and troubled character who the reader can assume is gay because of what happened to him. However, Barbie the female protagonist, is also molested by the same photographer and grows up to be heterosexual, albeit with her own set of problems. Just before he attempts suicide Griffin says to himself, “You’re afraid, because you think that if you tell what he did they’ll all know about you. . . . Maybe it was your fault he did what he did. Maybe you encouraged him to do it because you like men” (ibid., p. 156).

While almost one quarter (23%) of the sample makes reference to homosexuality being

chosen by the individual or caused by an event in the characters' life, more than three quarters (77%) of the sample does not make this reference. In the larger portion of the sample, gay and lesbian characters are described as being born this way and that it cannot be changed or helped in any way.

Two of the six books that make reference to homosexuality being a choice also provide the alternative viewpoint. Although Holland's mother thinks that Holland has chosen to be a lesbian, Cece's parents do not. They have come to accept Cece as who she is. Similarly, in Rainbow Boys (Sanchez, 2001) Kyle's mother hopes that he has made a choice, and can therefore change his mind, but Nelson's mother is the complete opposite, proudly accepting her son for who he is.

Thus, the sample provides relatively few books that discuss the possibility that homosexuality is a choice. The reality that homosexuality is a real and valid sexuality is more prominent in the majority of this sample of books.

Table 10: Reference to homosexuality being a phase

	Number of Titles	Percentage
Books that do not make this reference	17	65%
Books that do make this reference	9	35%

Sixty-five percent (17 books) contained in this sample do not make any reference to homosexuality being a phase that is part of growing up. In most of the books this idea does not take on a central focus, but the characters, usually the parents, still make reference to the

possibility, usually as if they need to give their son or daughter every opportunity to change their mind. Both Nicola in Empress of the World (Ryan, 2001) and Jason in Rainbow Boys (Sanchez, 2001) think to themselves that this might be a phase, as a way of reconciling their homosexual attractions. Nicola keeps telling herself that she's probably bisexual, rather than fully embracing her homosexual feelings for Battle. Jason tries telling himself he's probably just confused and toys with the idea of using a girl to help get himself sorted out.

Holland's mother, when she finally will speak to Holland again says, "I suppose it's some kind of phase you're going through, or an identity crisis. I don't know. It never happened to me" (Peters, 2003, p. 243). Holland refutes this point strongly. In only two of the books, those mentioned above, do the characters themselves think that their homosexual attractions and feelings are phases. In the other seven books, it is an outside person, parent, friend and one doctor that says this. In Dare, Truth or Promise (Boock, 1999) Louie's doctor tries to use medical expertise to explain Louie's attraction to Willa;

At your age there are so many hormones being released into your system that the body almost dictates that you fall in love. Your primary relationships are with your friends. Sometimes those hormones just kick in and turn it into something much more intense. It's not your fault, and there's nothing wrong with you. It'll sort itself out with a bit of time (ibid., p. 119).

The fathers in My Heartbeat (Freyman-Weyr, 2002), Words Like Weeds (Weinstein, 2003), Shell House (Newbery, 2002), and Rainbow Boys (Sanchez, 2001) all make reference to homosexuality being a phase. Both Fred's mother in Gravel Queen (Benduhn, 2003) and Holland's mother in Keeping You a Secret (Peters, 2003) do the same. In The Flip Side (Matthews, 2001) it is Kevin's best friend, Rob who says, "You can't be sure about something

like that! Plenty of guys our age go through a phase where . . .” (p. 97). When reference is made to homosexuality being a phase it is like saying that the character’s feelings are invalid, that in the end they will see that the superior orientation is heterosexuality (Cuseo, 1987). Characters who are truly struggling with their sexuality feel patronized at being told their feelings are ‘just a phase’ or part of the rebellion of growing up (Rofes, 1989). Also important to note here is that more fathers than mothers express their hope that these homosexual attractions are phases.

Table 11: Use of Homophobic Language

	Number of titles	Percentage
Books that have none	3	12%
Books that use homophobic language	23	88%

Specific use of language:

Word	Number of times used in the sample	Percentage of all occurrences
fag/faggot	132	36%
dyke	80	22%
queer	51	14%
homo	27	7%
les/lesbo	13	3.5%
lezzie	13	3.5%
queen/queenie	11	3%
faggy	8	2%

fairy	7	1.9%
butchie	7	1.9%
poof/poofter	6	1.6%
pansy	3	Less than 1%
fag lover	3	Less than 1%
gayboy	2	Less than 1%
flamer	2	Less than 1%
closet case	1	Less than 1%
fruit loop	1	Less than 1%
queerbait	1	Less than 1%
bum bandit	1	Less than 1%
fruit	1	Less than 1%
<hr/>		
Total	370	

Upon examination of the use of homophobic language in the sample of novels, the use of the word 'fag' or 'faggot' is by far the most common. Some of the slurs occur only once in one book in the whole sample, but are included in the reporting of the occurrences to give a picture of the frequency of homophobic language and the variety of terms used. Many of the less occurring terms such as fruit, bum bandit, flamer, poof and queerbait are found in books that were originally published in the UK or Australia, such as Shell House (Newbery, 2002).

Words Like Weeds (Weinstein, 2003) stands out as a novel that uses fag or faggot the most, but with the topic of the story being about hatred towards homosexuals, this is not surprising. Indeed, the books that deal with hatred use the most homophobic language. Sometimes it is a prejudiced father or mother such as Holland's mother in Keeping You a Secret (Peters, 2003) or Bo's father in Finding H.F. (Watts, 2001) Mostly, however, it is a group of

peers who are extremely intolerant of anyone whose sexuality is in question. Lani's (What Happened to Lani Garver, Plum-Ucci, 2002) peers almost kill him, Jodie's (Out of the Shadows Hines, 1999) peers sneer all kinds of bad language her way, as do Angel's (How I Fell in Love and Learned to Shoot Free Throws, Ripslinger, 2003) even though Angel is not a lesbian herself, but her mother is.

In Empress of the World (Ryan, 2001) for example, there is very little occurrence of homophobic language as it does not fit in the context of the story and the openmindedness of the camp setting populated mostly by youth. In only three books (12%) in this sample is homophobic language absent entirely. They are, Alison, Who Went Away (Van de Velde, 2001), True Believer (Wolff, 2001) and The Flip Side (Matthews, 2001). In none of these three books is the homosexual character the main character. In fact, with the exception of The Flip Side, the homosexual characters are removed from the main line of the plot, although the authors could have woven this language into the plot had they wanted to.

Although the word 'dyke' has the second highest frequency of use it is used almost half the time that homophobic language towards males is used. Overall there is more variety and more frequency of homophobic language describing and used towards males who are, or who are suspected of being, homosexual than there is towards girls and women.

The PFLAG website cites that "97% [of youth] report regularly hearing homophobic remarks from their peers, the typical high school student hears anti-gay slurs 25.5 times a day," thus the books appear to reflect reality. The use of homophobic language has also not changed from the books prior to 1997 where both Cuseo (1987) and Jenkins (1998) reported that homophobic language is prominent in nearly all of the novels.

Table 12: Retribution

	Number of titles	Percentage
Books with None	13	50%
Books with Retribution playing a part	13	50%

Types of Retribution		
	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage of total occurrences
Suicide Attempt	7	30%
Other	5	21%
Accident	4	17%
Death	4	17%
Physical Violence	3	13%
Illness	1	2%
Total	24	

Prior to 1997 retribution was a major crisis faced by homosexual characters. In this sample half of the books have no occurrence of any event that could be construed as retribution for being homosexual. Where there is such occurrence suicide is the most frequent. Seven characters try to commit suicide, although none are successful. While it is not reaffirming or uplifting to read that so many of the characters try suicide as a way out of their misery, it is a rather accurate reflection of the reality that many homosexual youth do commit suicide every year. Approximately 30% of all youth suicides are committed by homosexual teens (PFLAG, 2004). In this sample the attempt at suicide usually helps them to realize that they will be able to

cope with their life after all. Five of the seven characters that do attempt suicide are boys and two are girls.

Two of the books, What Happened to Lani Garver (Plum-Ucci, 2002) and The Year They Burned the Books (Garden, 1999) contain scenes of severe physical violence in which the gay, or suspected gay, and one lesbian character are attacked by classmates. Lani is tied up in a fishing net and repeatedly dunked into the freezing cold Atlantic Ocean until the net becomes tangled and he supposedly drowns. Prior to that there are lesser scenes of violence where on two occasions he is beaten physically by other boys and severely taunted and harassed by a group of girls and boys. There is some speculation in the end that perhaps Lani set up the final act of violence and escaped, since his body is never actually found. Nevertheless he endures much violence, hatred and humiliation on the speculation that he is gay, and the knowledge that he is different.

Jamie, Terry and Ernie, the gay and lesbian characters in The Year they Burned the Books (Garden, 1999) are viciously attacked in a cafeteria brawl. All three characters are grabbed by the school bullies and comments such as "we need to fix both fag butts" (ibid., p. 201) and to Jamie, "you might as well come along, too. See what real men can do" (ibid., p. 201) are made leaving Jamie to feel that if the principal had not stopped the fight she would have been dragged somewhere and raped while the two boys would have been beaten badly or possibly raped as well (ibid.). It is this incident that leads Ernie to attempt to kill himself, but luckily he has a last minute change of heart when he realizes he has something to live for after all.

There are four deaths in this sample; one each in four of the titles. Three are definitely linked to the homosexuality of the characters and the fourth could be interpreted that way. In Alison, Who Went Away (Vande Velde, 2001), Alison's father is gay and moved away some years ago. Because Alison did not want anyone to think she was gay too, she began being very promiscuous and engaged in dangerous behaviour that eventually lead to her running away and

disappearing, possibly killed by a serial killer. Both the father moving away to live with a boyfriend, and the disappearance of Alison, negatively impact the lives of those left behind; her sister Sibyl, and her mother and stepfather.

In Desire Lines (Gantos, 1998) Karen shoots Jennifer in a murder-suicide attempt, but is unsuccessful in killing herself. Instead she has to live with the consequences of her actions, and her enormous grief. She almost loses her mind in the process. The murder suicide attempt occurs because the girls cannot handle the public hazing they receive at the hands of a religious fanatic that has recently moved into the Florida town. Once they are outed they can think of no other alternative but to end their lives.

In Out of the Shadows (Hines, 1998) Rowanna's mother dies before the book begins, but the details of the events that lead up to her death are revealed as the story progresses. When Rowanna realizes that her mother is a lesbian and the woman, Deb, who lives with them is her partner, she begins behaving in ways that she hopes will make Deb leave. When that does not work Rowanna runs away to live with her father. He doesn't really want her so she ends up on the streets and eventually makes her way back home because she is very sick and in real danger of dying. As she begins to recover she asks her mother to get her some ice cream and it is on the walk back from the store that her mother is hit and killed by a drunk driver. One could definitely link the chain of events back to the root cause of it all; her homosexuality.

The final death is that of Alex in Shell House (Newbery, 2002). He is killed at war and it is set up by the author as a tragic ending to a tragic relationship, as there was not much chance of Alex and Edmund continuing their relationship amongst Edmund's aristocratic family once the war ends. The book is written recently, but the use of telling a tale set in the early 1900's seems to give the author license to use old themes in telling Edmund and Alex's story. The modern day equivalent in the same book, Jordan and Greg, do not meet such a bad end, but they are blamed

for an accident that causes another boy to be paralysed.

There are four accidents that could possibly be construed as retribution, and only one of them is a car accident, car accidents being common ways of ending the lives of gay characters in the earlier novels. Louie drives her car off the side of the cliff near the end of Dare, Truth or Promise (Boock, 1999) but the accident turns out to help heal the relationship between Louie and Willa. Kit, the larger than life gay role model to John in Eight Seconds (Ferris, 2000) ends up falling off a bull during a rodeo ride and becomes seriously injured. It is implied that the accident is due to Kit's attraction to John;

Just as the eight-second buzzer went off, he saw me, and I could tell his concentration faltered.

At that moment, the bull came down lock-kneed on his two front legs, and the jolt sent Kit flying off his back. I'll always wonder if the surprise of seeing me didn't cause him to momentarily loosen his hold on the bull rope. And I'll always feel responsible for what happened next (ibid., p. 162).

Among some of the other calamities that befall these homosexual characters are one teacher who loses his job before the novel begins (Mr LaBlanc in Desire Lines), Holland is thrown out of her mother's house for being a lesbian, Kit and John lose their friendship over the bullriding accident, and Edmund burns down his family home knowing that his homosexuality will never be accepted.

Events that can be construed as retribution for being gay or lesbian are reduced in this sample compared to the books prior to 1997. Half of this sample contains no retribution whatsoever. In the titles where there are suicide attempts, not one character is successful in their attempt. They either change their mind, knowing that they will be able to continue on and find a place in the world, or they are stopped by their friends.

Prior to 1997 the occurrence of homosexuals paying for their sexuality through retribution often resolved the problem of homosexuality for the author and the character (Cuseo, 1987). The character often died, therefore they could no longer be part of a homosexual relationship. It is really only in Alison, Who Went Away (Vande Velde, 2001) that the homosexuality of a character is overtly blamed for the behaviour (and death) of another. There are other instances, What Happened to Lani Garver, (Plum-Ucci, 2002) and The Year They Burned the Books (Garden, 1999) where the homosexual characters themselves suffer physical violence, but if anything, it makes them stronger characters who are more ready to face head on the struggles of the outside world.

Table 13: Depiction of parents

	Number of titles	Percentage
Books with no mention of parents	7	27%
Books where parents are present in the novel	19	73%

Table 14: Roles of parents in their relationships with their homosexual child

	Number of characters (in books with parents playing a role)	Percentage
Characters with supportive parents	15	39%
Characters with non supportive parents	12	32%
Characters with parents that are indifferent or ineffectual to the plot	11	29%
Total	38	

In seven (27%) of the titles parents are absent entirely from the novel. Of the 38 characters who do have parents present in the novels, eleven (29%) of those characters have parents that are mentioned so briefly or are so much on the sidelines that they do not have any effect on the outcome of the novel or the character's development. This is a change, however, from the earlier books in which most of the time parents were absent or ineffectual in the novel.

The ratio of characters with supportive parents to characters with unsupportive parents is close to half; 15:12. In some of the books, such as Boy Meets Boy (Levithan, 2003) Rainbow Boys (Sanchez, 2001), Dare, Truth or Promise (Boock, 1999), and Keeping You a Secret (Peters, 2003), some characters have parents who support their child's sexuality wholeheartedly, some of the characters have parents who are not thrilled but are supportive of their child regardless, and some characters have parents whose homophobia and failure to accept their child for who they are is blatant and damaging. Parents who do not accept their child's homosexuality exhibit a variety of behaviours. Holland's mother throws her out of the house and essentially disowns her, Nelson's father will barely speak to him, Louie's mother forbids her from seeing Willa again, and Jason's father calls him names and threatens him with physical violence. Where the homosexual characters are parents, Out of the Shadows (Hines, 1998) and How I Fell in Love and Learned to Shoot Free Throws (Ripslinger, 2003) they are both lesbian and both initially despised by their daughters. Their daughters come around eventually but not after much heartbreak and near or actual life and death situations.

H.F. never actually tells her 'memaw' about being a lesbian before the story ends but she does think about it;

Memaw don't suspect a thing, and right now I want to protect her from what she can't understand . . . I like to think that someday, when I'm grown and out of her house, I can make her understand about the way I am, but I don't know if I can. The only person

Memaw loves more than me is God, and since she don't go to the Metropolitan Community Church, the God she worships says all gay people are going to hell (Watts, 2001, p. 162).

There is also a wide range among the accepting parents. Nelson's mother is a proud member of PFLAG, while Jamie and Terry's mothers say they always knew but were waiting for their children to tell them themselves. Kyle's parents are not so thrilled at first, but realize they love their son no matter what before the novel ends. In My Heartbeat (Freyman-Weyr, 2003) when Ellen asks her mother if she cares if Link and James are gay, her mother replies, "No. I care that Link's happy. Your father, on the other hand, cares very much. It's one of the many reasons that I have never broached the subject with Link" (ibid., p. 36). One of the interesting behaviours of Link's father is that when Link decides to date a girl, his father suddenly starts giving him more money. He says it's for the expenses of dating, but the implied message is that he wants to encourage any kind of relationship with a girl. In Finding H.E. (Watts, 2001) Wendy's liberal minded parents suspect before she ever tells them, leaving out a copy of a well known classic lesbian novel for her to read and suddenly mentioning all the gay friends they know back in the city. There are also parents who eventually come around to accepting their son or daughter before the novels end. Two examples are Louie's father (Dare, Truth or Promise, Boock, 1999) and Kyle's father (Rainbow Boys, Sanchez, 2001).

In the sample, the parents range from devoted and loving to alcoholic and abusive. Some are close to their children, others are distant or self absorbed. Some are activists while others worry about their own image in the community. Some are wholly accepting, others keep hoping their son or daughter will change their mind. The wide range is probably helpful to the young adult reader, especially where the gay and lesbian characters find love and acceptance from their parents, even if there is a bit of a struggle to get to that point.

Table 15: Description of Intimacy

	Number of titles	Percentage
Books with no intimacy described	13	50%
Books with one or more intimate moments	13	50%
	Occurrence of intimate moments	Percentage of total
kissing	12	33%
holding hands	5	14%
touching	9	25%
other	10	30%

In half of the sample there is no description of homosexual intimacy at all. In nine of the 13 books where there is no description of homosexual intimacy, there is also no homosexual relationship that takes place in the novel. The intimate moments that are described are generally tender, poignant and central to the characters' finding themselves and their sexuality. There are a few exceptions to this, however. One is when Cary and Wendy (Tomorrow Wendy, Stoehr, 1998) have sex at a party and Wendy is too stoned and drunk to fully realize what is happening. Another is when Laney and H.F. (Finding H.F., Watts, 2001) have sex that almost seems to take H.F. by surprise and she never does see Laney again. The third is between Nelson and Brick (Rainbow Boys, Sanchez, 2001), again where things seem to be happening too fast for Nelson to

really stop and think about what is happening.

There are more descriptions of kisses between girls than boys; nine books to four. However, the descriptions of the kiss, especially the first kiss, are similarly described. It seems that if the author is going to go into detail it does not matter if the characters are male or female, whereas prior to 1997, gay sex was more explicit than lesbian sex (Clyde and Lobban, 1992). Holland describes her kiss with Cece as if she is "falling, falling, with nowhere to land" (Peters, 2003, p. 143). Aurin feels that Neila is "releasing the butterflies in my stomach out into the sky" (Benduhn, 2003, p. 107) during their first kiss together. When Willa and Louie kiss for the first time; "she'd never, ever felt as if she were falling off a cliff. She'd never before felt as if her body were being turned to water from the inside out, or as if they were both whirling through space into an airless black vortex" (Boock, 1999, p. 57). When Russel and Kevin kiss, Russel feels like "I had stepped right up into the stars themselves - like I had become one with the sky, and that together we were as clean and pure and wide as the universe itself" (Hartinger, 2003, p. 125). A more detailed kiss is that between Jason and Noah, "Jason's lips softly touched his. A thousand nerve cells tingled and spiraled through skin and sinew, blazed through his blood and soared into his heart. His tongue gently slipped between his teeth and for a moment explored the wet warmth of Jason's mouth" (Levithan, 2003, p. 137).

Sexual acts beyond kissing and hand holding do occur in a few of these novels with varying degrees of explicitness. One of the most explicit scenes takes place between Nelson and Brick, the man he meets online. The reference to "letting him inside" (Sanchez, 2001, p. 149) and the "tube of lubricant" (ibid., p. 149) are about as detailed as any of the books get, however, one must remember the intended audience is young adults, not adults. Later in the book, when Kyle and Jason "make love" (ibid., p. 212), it is described as follows, "he moved his hands down his back and felt how hard his body was. Their movements hastened as they groped and bumped.

Kyle's excitement mounted, till he feared he couldn't contain it" (ibid., p. 211). After they exchange 'I love you's' the scene skips to afterward and Kyle waking up in the dark. Chbosky is also fairly graphic when Charlie narrates, "I will say that Brad assumed the role of the girl in terms of where you put things" (1999, p. 44). Stoehr also describes how Wendy reaches between Cary's legs (p. 143) in the scene where Cary takes advantage of Wendy's drunken state.

The scenes in which Battle and Nicola consummate their affections for each other are rather reserved. Nicola makes reference to "things" happening between them (Ryan, 2001, p. 126). Later, they sneak off to the woods with a bottle of wine. "The wine makes it easier. Everything we've been awkward about, all those steps we haven't taken yet, all of it gets blurry and soft until all that's left is sensations; cool night air on skin, hands and mouths moving over each other" (ibid., p. 131). In the scenes where Holland and Cece have sex the reader only knows because of statements such as, "it ended the way it always did" (Peters, 2003, p. 165), or when they are setting up Holland's new apartment and they collapse onto the bed, Holland says, "you want to try it out?" and Cece replies, "I thought you'd never ask" (ibid., p. 203). The most explicit scene is when they are in the school shower together and Cece "[does] things to [Holland] with a bar of soap that make it impossible to carry on a conversation" (ibid., p. 175). Willa and Louie's lovemaking is a little more explicit, "they wrapped around each other, discarded clothes, fingered, kissed and discovered the other and themselves" (Boock, 1999, p. 67). "Louie threw off her tee shirt and wound herself around Willa. . . . there seemed to be a layer of electricity between them. . . . A tide rose within them and in the darkness Willa saw shadowy angles of arm, shoulder, hip, knee. Their love-making was wild and silent . . ." (ibid., p. 94). In Desire Lines (Gantos, 1998) the intimate moments between Jennifer and Karen are described only to the point where they take off their clothes and kiss.

Thus, the intimacy described in this sample of novels is equally explicit or non explicit

regardless of whether the characters engaging in the intimate moment are gay or lesbian. The scenes do not go into graphic detail, but are described with passion and wonderful imagery and/or metaphor to convey the depth of emotion and happiness that the characters are experiencing.

Summary:

The findings show that overall some significant steps have been taken to counter myths and stereotypes regarding homosexuality, most particularly in regards to physical appearance and the depiction of positive, fulfilling relationships. While there are still a number of two dimensional one issue characters, a change towards deeper characterization is beginning, but not enough characters narrate their own story. The image of homosexuality as evidenced by these findings shows a trend towards the optimistic, as the role models reported are positive, retribution, while present, is reduced, and there is a balance of views among characters in parental roles.

Discussion

The image of homosexuality

The findings show that the image of homosexuality in this sample of novels published from 1998-2003 has changed from the novels that precede them. The image is more positive and shows homosexual teens and adults leading normal, healthy lives. That is not to say they do not have their problems and that there is not room for improvement, but a change for the better has occurred. One image that has improved is that of the older role model. It is good to see that when a role model is used by an author they are not cast as a predatory character. Deb is a very powerful lesbian role model in Hines' Out of the Shadows (1998). She gives just the right amount of advice and disappears from the centre of the story when it is time for the teens to figure things out for themselves. The success of her character centres on the fact that she is described for her vibrant and magnetic personality, not her lesbianism. She is a character that many young adults could relate to regardless of sexuality and she is an intriguing character in her own right.

Gay male role models have been traditionally hard to write as positive characters. Both Kit in Ferris' Eight Seconds and Dave in Watts' Finding H.F. are positive characters, although both do have their disappointments. At the end of Eight Seconds one can't help but feel disappointed that Kit cannot forgive John. It seems that his final actions do not match the gentle and loving character that he is earlier in the book. He is responsible for awakening homosexual feelings in John and then turns his back on him when John faces an inner struggle that manifests itself as physical violence towards Kit. John's actions are indeed terrible, but not, it seems, unforgivable.

Preacher Dave who Bo and H.F. meet quite by chance, turns out to be an invaluable resource for Bo, who up until meeting Dave does not admit his true sexuality to anyone. Unfortunately, Dave does not play a bigger role in the novel. Dave's kindness and willingness to

continue the friendship through letters gives Bo both hope and strength that he is and that he will be okay. The advice Dave gives Bo in letters is never revealed to the reader. Dave would have been a stronger role model if this had been the case because one gets the sense that his advice, if written within the text of the book would be helpful and important for the readers because one could get an insight into how a successful gay male adult survived the difficulties of adolescence.

The inclusion of the few role models is positive overall and promotes a positive image of homosexual adults in this sample of novels. Although Kit, Dave and Deb are all well adjusted and successful adults who have good careers and a network of friends, there are not enough such characters. One of the criticisms of earlier novels is that homosexuals are often portrayed as leading isolated adult lives. In this sample there are not enough homosexual adults to get any idea of what kind of a lifestyle a homosexual adult can expect. Hopefully, this is a future direction that books on this topic will take.

As noted, in novels written prior to 1997 there was an absence of references to the wider homosexual community. A similar finding was expected in this sample. The fact that 38% of the books included the mention of a supportive community and in a few the wider gay and lesbian community plays quite a large part in the book was unexpected. It was hoped, however, that a few more of the novels may have included students trying to start gay-straight alliances in their schools, since that has been a big issue in the media in the last five years or so, but school clubs are only part of four of the novels.

Where the support of the Rainbow Youth group and its larger network of services seems to fit right into the plotline and characterization in Keeping You a Secret (Peters, 2003), one cannot quite believe that Jason of Rainbow Boys (Sanchez, 2001) would go to the Rainbow Youth meetings because he is a popular, athletic student who hangs with a crowd that on the surface one wouldn't expect to be accepting of homosexuality. I think though that what the

author does here is send the message that even the most unexpected kid can be gay too. Which is a good message for all readers, gay or straight. So while at the beginning of the book one is skeptical that a person like Jason would ever go to a meeting of gay and lesbian kids, in the end the reader sees how it has benefitted him, and that one should not just expect the kids who fit the stereotypes to be gay.

While many of the characters in the 38% of the books that do depict a wider homosexual community find friendship and belonging with the group, it is in Peters' Keeping You a Secret where the true value of the availability of such community groups is made known. Kids who find themselves on the street because of unaccepting parents, or suicidal because of peer pressure, need to know that there are places available to them. Sometimes fiction is a great avenue for providing such information, as accessing gay youth centres or picking up pamphlets from the counseling centre can be too obvious for some teens who are trying to keep their sexuality a secret. This trend towards including the wider homosexual community helps promote an image of supportiveness and inclusiveness, which provides an optimistic outlook for homosexual kids and helps further a positive image of the homosexual community. This moves us away from the image of loneliness and isolation as was previously the case (Goodman, 1983).

Gay and lesbian characters that are portrayed in this sample do not fit the popular stereotype of what gay and lesbian people look like. This does much to help debunk stereotypes regarding homosexual appearance since there is little real truth to such stereotypes. Unfortunately characters who do fit the stereotypes suffer for their looks; two examples are Lani (What Happened to Lani Garver, Plum-Ucci, 2002) and Bo (Finding H.F., Watts, 2001).

Most of the characters are normal and/or extremely good looking. One wonders if authors do this on purpose to help shed the stereotypes that gay or lesbian people look a certain way; overly feminine for men and overly masculine for women. When the characters are not

stereotyped for their looks they cannot be pitied by the adolescent reader. Homosexuality has nothing to do with physical appearance, so young and older readers need to learn that those stereotypes are incorrect. It also helps when there are attractive and popular homosexual characters because they are less likely to be pitied by the reader or seen as tragic and therefore, not really real. If anything, in this sample, the characters are almost too attractive without some of the normal angst regarding appearance that teenagers experience.

It is surprising and encouraging to see a Catholic priest encourage Louie to pursue her love for Willa (Dare, Truth or Promise, Boock, 1999). Much of the source of homophobia in North American society comes from various interpretations of the Bible, so it is refreshing to see the Bible being read liberally in an inclusive direction. Two such liberal interpretations of Christian beliefs written in books for teens is indeed progress. Unfortunately as progressive as it is to see the quest for religious progress sought after in Watts', and Boock's novels, the opposing views are also represented. Narrowminded and damaging religious views are presented in titles such as Desire Lines (Gantos, 1998). The Year They Burned the Books (Garden, 1999) and Words Like Weeds (Weinstein, 2003) where homosexual people are actually sought out by the church for harassment and ridicule. But there is a need for such a viewpoint to be addressed head on. Because they are so ridiculously blatant in these novels, they raise awareness that homophobia is a volatile issue and can be dangerous when taken to the extreme. When one lives in a big city it is sometimes easy to forget that these kind of fanatical viewpoints do still exist in our society, especially smaller towns, certain cultural groups, or small high schools where one is less likely to find an accepting group. This can cause people to live in hiding. So being able to see a negative reality reflected, even though we may wish it did not exist, is as important as seeing the opposite viewpoint begin to emerge in the literature to help promote acceptance and a positive image of homosexuality.

Homosexual people are involved in all the same kinds of things that straight people are, and this is the image that is portrayed through this sample of novels. Although there are some characters who are a bit stereotypical in their appearance, their interests cannot be construed as such. There are not, for example gay males interested in fashion design or hair dressing and no lesbian females interested in construction or cars. Whether deliberate or not, it is important to see a wide variety of characters with an equally wide variety of interests. The ones who especially break the boundaries of what is traditionally stereotypical are the most intriguing. Kit, for example is a tough bull rider and he is gay. Jason is an excellent basketball player and he is gay too. Deb is a successful fabric designer and she is a lesbian.

Surprisingly, eighty-four percent of the gay and lesbian characters in this sample are caucasian. One might have expected to see more variety in the ethnicity of the characters, as equality has been a focus of North American society for several years now. Even when the characters are not caucasian, the cover of the book is sometimes deceiving. For example, Jason Carillo in Rainbow Boys is Latino, but the cover of the book shows a photo of three white teenage boys. One must read carefully to realize that his heritage is not caucasian. Sometimes the characters' ethnicity is stated, but there is no further addition of information regarding their culture. For example Min, the Chinese American bisexual character in Geography Club is also very academic (a little stereotypical) but besides mentioning her race, her Chinese heritage does not play any more of a factor in her characterization. It is similar with other African American and Latino characters in this sample. The only book where the ethnicity of the characters really dominates the story is Yamanaka's Name Me Nobody. This is because the story is written in dialect and the lifestyle and culture of the Japanese Hawaiian people, and what it's like to be a lesbian in that culture is dominant in the story. Perhaps the lack of diversity in ethnicity is due to the fact that there are not authors from these races writing about them, or it is not as significant

because it appears not to be acceptable in specific cultural groups.

Two Dimensional, one-issue characters

It is good to see that thirty-one percent of the books in this sample have homosexual characters but are not about the issue of homosexuality as a beginning towards having homosexual characters exist with other issues in the story. This still leaves many of the books still dealing mostly with sexuality and the tendency to create two dimensional one issue characters. However, it is difficult to create a story that is about the issue of sexuality and then not deal with the issue of sexuality. The issue itself almost dictates that it be central to the story. It may be that we are not yet in a place in our society where there can be a wide selection of books that just happen to have gay and lesbian characters without addressing their sexuality at all. It is simply not mainstream or acceptable enough yet.

Even though 69% of the books deal with sexuality as the central issue, many of the characters are not flat stereotypes. Edmund and Alex of Shell House (Newbery, 2002), Lissa of Kissing Kate (Myracle, 2003), or Infinite Darlene, the transvestite in Boy Meets Boys (Levithan, 2003) are a few examples of characters who are flat stereotypes, but there are many more who are not. Nelson (Rainbow Boys, Sanchez, 2001) is a good example of a character who, when he first appears in the novel, reads as your typical run of the mill flamboyantly gay stereotype. However, Sanchez has written him to be much more than his outrageous looks and mannerisms. His need for acceptance and love, his difficulties with first love, his first sexual experience and his low self esteem make him much more like a typical teenager than just a gay teenager.

There are honest struggles in these books, but the message that prevails is all teens struggle through adolescence. Gay or straight, there are all kinds of challenges to be faced, and

these characters face almost all of them, including their sexuality. Sometimes the challenges of adolescence are complicated by sexuality but not always. Boy Meets Boy is a good example of this. What is reaffirming about this sample is that more often than not the message is that it is okay to question your sexuality and explore it, it is okay to be attracted to the same sex, and it is okay to emerge from the period of questioning as either homosexual, heterosexual or somewhere in between.

Maybe it is not that surprising that homosexuality is a central issue when homosexuals are present in the novel. This has not changed from the pre-1997 collection. However, in terms of the characters being better written with more dimensions, I think that this has changed. It does not matter so much that these books treat homosexuality as the central theme because these books are needed, and many of them are well written.

What is very disappointing however, is that only 20% of the homosexual characters are major characters in the stories. The other 80% are secondary characters in the story. There need to be more books written from the point of view of homosexual youth in order to directly address the issues that these teens face. Undoubtedly the best books in this sample are the ones written from the gay or lesbian point of view. This allows the reader to really get inside the head of and understand how this character thinks and how their sexuality plays a part in their life. Sometimes the character is struggling deeply with the knowledge that they are probably homosexual. But sometimes the main character who is homosexual is not struggling, has already accepted who they are, and is happy and proud to be themselves. Both points of view are incredibly important, but authors have not yet provided enough of them.

Most of the books that do have one or more main characters that are gay or lesbian have been in the most recent years of this sample, with most published in 2003. Perhaps this is a sign of a trend towards more such books. It is also hopeful to see that there are a few characters

whose sexuality is not determined before the book ends. This is important because sometimes, for some people, sexuality is not cut and dried and it is not always something one realizes overnight. For readers who are not sure, or who know people who are not sure, the presence of these characters is important to gain a better understanding.

A positive trend that emerges shows a few transvestite (Flip Side, Matthews, 2001 and Boy Meets Boy, Levithan, 2003) and bisexual characters (Geography Club, Hartinger, 2003; Empress of the World, Ryan, 2001 and My Heartbeat, Freymann-Weyr, 2002) come into play in this sample also. Their sexualities are valid too and there hopefully will be more characters like them in the future as their experiences are generally deeply misunderstood in society in general. There are no transsexual characters in this sample. With our growing awareness of people who are transsexual in our society, popular fiction should begin to reflect their stories as well. These stories would be beneficial to the young adults who face the reality of being bisexual, transvestites or transsexual, and also to their peers who tend to mock what they do not understand.

Unfortunately, some of the gay and lesbian characters are very far removed from the center of the story, even though there are some minor gay and lesbian characters with whom the reader can make a connection and develop an understanding of their experiences. Characters such as Jody (True Believer, Wolff, 2001), Von and Babs (Name Me Nobody, Yamanaka, 1999) or Patrick and Brad (The Perks of Being a Wallflower, Chbosky, 1999) fade into the background of the story. Their voices are rarely heard in dialogue or through narration by the main character. These are the flat characters, even though they may not be stereotypes. They are hard to understand and appreciate as well rounded and complex characters because they are not written as such. Day (2000) would argue that it does not matter, secondary homosexual characters are

important in order to promote a sensitivity to homosexual people in our society, however, more main characters would still be useful. Other secondary characters like Kit (*Eight Seconds*, Ferris, 2000), Jordan (*Shell House*, Newbery, 2002), or Cece (*Keeping You a Secret*, Peters, 2003) are much more central to the plot and are rounded out with dimension. These characters are made known to the reader through dialogue, action and description so although we do not learn about them through their own eyes, they are still capable of being understood for who they are.

Perpetuation of Stereotypes

It is positive that only 23% of the novels suggest that homosexuality is caused by a trauma or is some kind of choice on the part of the young adult. This is important progress for teens who are struggling to discover their sexual identity to know that they are born the way they are and that they will be normal and healthy too. Societal understanding of homosexuality being something one is born with, is becoming better understood by people in general. It is also important that books on this topic provide a balance. It is likely that young adults facing the challenge of coming out to friends and family members will encounter at least one person who thinks that something happened to make them this way or that they are simply choosing to be gay. It would be too unrealistic if these situations were not reflected in the fiction on this topic.

It is disappointing that while 23% make reference to homosexuality being a choice, more (35%) of the books in the sample, make reference to it being a phase. This is another way that friends and family members help rationalize the behaviour of the homosexual character to themselves and each other. Again, this is probably also an accurate reflection of reality in terms of how people may react, but it is a myth about homosexuality nonetheless. Thus, it is very hopeful that the majority of the sample does not suggest that homosexuality is a phase one goes through. The reality is most of the time this is not the case and young adults who are

experiencing same sex attractions need to see characters that perhaps question what is happening to themselves, but who do not pass it off as a phase. Overall, it is fair to have characters in the novels express the sentiment that their friend or child's sexuality may be a phase, but it is not fair if they try to push it on them and insist that it is a phase. Even though there are characters who present this point of view, there are no gay or lesbian characters in the novel who decide to be straight just because someone has told them they are going through a phase.

When characters are told that their emerging sexuality is a phase, there is also the underlying message that they are a disappointment. It is denying the young adults' sense of self by saying their feelings are not valid or true, or that they are temporary. The inherent message is that it is not okay to be homosexual.

With all the progress that has been made in North American society towards acceptance of difference, homosexuals are still one of the largest targeted groups in society. Thus, the amount of homophobic language in this sample should not be surprising. One could argue, in fact, that the books would be ignoring reality if they did not include homophobic attitudes and language in their pages. One argument has been made that hearing and seeing such language frequently desensitizes the audience into accepting homophobic language as common (Cuseo, 1987). On the one hand this is a valid and important point as the more one sees or hears any shocking phenomena the more one can desensitize themselves to it. However, the language can also be taken back and owned by the group towards whom it is directed. For example, when the gay men in Watts' Finding H.F. call themselves a bunch of old queens, or the teens in Levithan's Boy Meets Boy affectionately refer to each other as gayboy, it is a way of owning what was once derogatory language in a positive way. Nevertheless, it would be naive to think that we are well on our way in this society to say that gays and lesbians are fully owning the homophobic language that plagues our culture and that it is no longer a problem. It is still a huge problem. Just walking

through the halls of the elementary school where I work, I hear homophobic slurs used very frequently, such as “that’s so gay,” or “you’re gay,” and, one assumes, the slurs only get worse in high school or outside of the confines of the school grounds. When the books use the language it does not encourage readers to use it. Rather the use of the language gives readers an opportunity to hear what it really sounds like, especially when voiced in hate, and gain an understanding of how it feels to have it directed at you through the eyes of the character

Conversely, hearing the language and seeing characters deal with it can be empowering. What we see in these books are models of strong characters who learn to handle homophobia in positive ways, and characters who use homophobic language and exhibit homophobic behaviour because they fear what they do not understand. Some, like Jason and Kyle (Rainbow Boys, Sanchez, 2001) face it head on and start a gay-straight alliance at their school, bravely facing the slurs that are thrown at them. Others, like Greg (Shell House, Newbery, 2000) react violently to the person who hurls the words at him, causing the insults to increase and cause an accident. The events of the book show us that reacting in a retaliatory way is perhaps the worst thing one can do, but silence is not a solution either. There are a few characters such as Cece (Keeping You a Secret, Peters, 2003) who are proud of their sexuality and face the homophobia directly.

Words Like Weeds (Weinstein, 2003) and What Happened to Lani Garver (Plum-Ucci, 2002) are good examples of how young adults who are gay themselves, but so frightened of who they are, use homophobic language to lash out at others and turn the spotlight away from themselves. These kinds of characters are the most violent and most hate filled in the sample because they seem to have no boundaries for their behaviour. They hate themselves so much that they take it out on others. The most unsettling books were the ones where hate mixed with religion and turned against homosexuality.

There are more homophobic slurs used towards gay characters than lesbian, which was expected, as being gay has traditionally been linked more to sin than lesbianism. In fact when religion is put into the mix, homophobia soars in these novels.

It was not expected that there would be much, if any, retribution for being homosexual in the pages of these novels. However, a surprising 50% of the sample did contain retributive acts. There was some expectation that suicide attempts would be written about since gay and lesbian teenagers are more likely to commit suicide than any other group. It is interesting that of the seven suicide attempts in this sample, none of them are successful. This is an important step in this body of literature because the reader is allowed to see the despair of the character who wants to commit suicide, but can also see their recovery and realize that it is not a solution to anything. Some of the suicidal characters are a little too far removed from the center of the story for us to fully understand their despair. Sometimes this can work well because the more central characters also don't realize that their friend is suicidal, for example Ernie in The Year They Burned the Books (Garden, 1999) but other times the suicide attempt seems too unrealistic like Karen and Jen in Desire Lines (Gantos, 1998).

When the scenes of violence towards Lani in What Happened to Lani Garver (Plum-Ucci, 2002) and Ernie, Jamie and Terry in The Year They Burned the Books (Garden, 1999) occur it is almost unbelievable. We hear about these kinds of things happening all the time in the news, and even some of the books make reference to some of the gay kids getting beat up, (such as Bo in Finding H.F., Watts, 2001) but it is not described on the pages of the novel. To see it played out in front of you on the page is shocking, disgusting and heartbreaking. It is unfathomable that the characters who commit the violence could be full of so much hate, and it incites a lot of anger in the reader. Although it is important to have books that show everyone getting along and being

accepted, it is also important to show the opposite, and in some cases the more realistic, as well. When you are lead to see the violence first hand, and experience it through the eyes of the narrator, it makes you understand more than ever that this kind of hate has to be stopped in our society.

There are instances of retribution that are also a little suspect too. Alison's death is too directly linked to her father being gay, and Alison wanting to prove herself to be heterosexual by being promiscuous. It's too neat and tidy, as one would also assume that there is more to Alison's behaving in such a way than just her father's sexuality. When Louie leaves the party as upset as she is, you know that she is going to get into a car accident the minute she runs out the door, it is so predictable. Although the car accident becomes the incident that reunites Willa and Louie, it is still a mundane way to end the story, and is reminiscent of the earlier books. There is no denying that many street youth get thrown out of their houses for being homosexual, but when it happens to Holland it doesn't seem quite right. Her mother is not a well enough developed character to expect that she would do such a thing and Holland's stepfather and stepsister who are liberal, accepting people, just let it happen without stepping in. Although Holland's having to survive on her own and make use of available community services makes for a good story, the events that lead up to her being in that circumstance in the first place do not ring true.

The wide variety of parental figures in this sample portray a varied picture for today's young adult reader. In this sample there is at least one parent of every description. This combination in one book can be helpful for a reader who is likely to find something of their own home situation mirrored in the many options presented. The parents who engage in intense conversations with their children about sexuality are the most important and useful in this sample. Some of the parents still fit the stereotypical unaccepting role of parents of homosexual

kids. Others are written to flaunt those stereotypes such as Nelson's mother (Rainbow Boys) and Paul's parents (Boy Meets Boy). These parents join PFLAG and proudly stand by their sons. The most real parents, and the ones that also debunk some of the stereotypes, are the ones who struggle initially with the knowledge their child is gay and then eventually come around to it. There are also parents who instinctually seem to know already that their child is not heterosexual and they are waiting for their child to tell them for themselves. These are positive and hopeful portrayals of parents of homosexual youth. It is realistic to expect some resistance or even disapproval at first, as the parent generation in these novels is still part of a time where homosexuality is less accepted than now, but when the parent realizes that their child is still the same bright promising person, then the most hopeful promises for future acceptance are realized. Traditionally, fathers have had the most difficulty accepting a gay son, as they perceive it as an attack on their own sexuality, so to see a few fathers who accept their homosexual children is very hopeful.

A surprising half of the books in this sample do not describe any intimacy between characters. A societal stereotype about homosexuals is that they are only interested in sex and that loving relationships are not necessarily what is sought after by the homosexual. Almost every book refutes this stereotype. The descriptions of love and intimate feelings are very well written using all the metaphors one would expect for describing first kisses, and touches. If the names and pronouns were removed, one would be unable to discern the genders of the two people involved in many of the intimate scenes, which shows that the deepness of feeling one can have for another is not limited to attractions to the opposite gender. The books are not overtly explicit, but they do not need to be. The importance of fiction is to express feelings and emotions and events without becoming a 'how-to' manual. It is vastly important that with one or two exceptions every book shows homosexual relationships that are caring and loving and not ridden

with guilt as some of the earlier novels showed. In most cases when the characters kiss or make love they feel 'right' and it is an affirmation of what they have known about themselves all along.

One exception to this is Nelson's encounters with Blake and then Brick (Rainbow Boys, Sanchez, 2001), someone he meets online. Nelson is looking for love and acceptance in all parts of his life and naively thinks that first Blake and then Brick is someone who wants to start a relationship with him. Unfortunately for Nelson this is not the case and his first sexual experience ends up being one void of any love or affection. He also then has to deal with the reality that he may have contracted AIDS. This is the only book in the sample that brings up the topic of AIDS. Perhaps this trend demonstrates that we are moving away from the early paranoia about the disease and how it is a gay disease (which it is not). Safe sex, however, is not a topic that comes up in any of the books except Rainbow Boys (Sanchez, 2001) and only after Nelson has already made the mistake. This is a surprising finding for a set of books that deal with sexuality.

Summary

Overall, the image of homosexuality in these novels is a positive and hopeful one. The characters within these novels deal with real problems related not just to homosexuality but to coming of age in general. Some of the characters exhibit stereotypical behaviours or appearances, but not most of them. While it is good to see many of the stereotypes and myths being refuted, it is also important that some of those old relics stay around to remind us of past prejudices and to paint a picture of reality, not utopia. There are not enough homosexual characters that tell their own story yet and there is a need for more varieties of sexuality, not just gay and lesbian. With the progress that has been made in the last five years, perhaps this is not that far behind.

CHAPTER V:

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions:

This study was undertaken to determine if any changes have been noted in the image of homosexuality in young adult fiction published since 1997. An analysis of the sample revealed the following conclusions in regards to the image of homosexuality, the depth of characterization and the perpetuation of stereotypes.

A major conclusion of this study is that the sample shows the image of homosexuality has changed in the last five years; no longer does the fiction on this topic depict only an image of an isolated and unhappy adulthood, or typically 'gay' looking characters who are interested in the arts. What emerges from this sample are characters who show a wide range of interests that include not only the arts, but also sports and academics. With a few exceptions, characters appear to look like any other young adults and do not stand out physically for their homosexuality. Furthermore, the portrayal of homosexual adults is hopeful, although there is a need for more positive homosexual adult role models.

Before 1997, two dimensional one-issue characters were the norm. Today it is still difficult to get away from homosexuality being central to the story's plot, but this study indicates this is not fully the case anymore. The issue of sexuality still dominates the books in this sample, however there are many characters that are well rounded and complex. These three dimensional characters help to promote the image of homosexuality because readers get to know homosexual characters in more detail, and begin to gain a better understanding of the reality of being gay or lesbian in North American society.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is that there is a paucity of characters who narrate their own story. Often the point of view is that of a heterosexual character telling a story that

includes homosexual characters. Therefore, while there is more depth to the homosexual characters, readers do not have very many opportunities to get a better insight of the reality of being homosexual from the point of view of someone who is homosexual.

From this study it is determined that most of the myths and stereotypes regarding homosexuality have disappeared with the exception of the occurrences of retribution, and the notion of homosexuality being a phase of adolescence or a conscious choice one makes. Homosexual characters in the last five years have emerged as individuals who, for the most part, resemble other young adults in that they struggle with self image and budding relationships. Gay and lesbian characters no longer 'look' homosexual, their romances are similar to heterosexual romances and their parents are becoming more accepting of their homosexual children. Generally, the books in this sample do much to tear down the stereotypes that society holds towards homosexuality.

Although there is still room for improvement before the image of homosexuality is truly a positive one, and before myths and stereotypes are fully refuted, the image portrayed in this sample of novels is generally optimistic.

Implications:

The findings of this study show many positive directions that books on this topic have taken in the last five years. There are, however, a few implications for authors, publishers and educators as a result of this study.

There is still a need for more well rounded homosexual main characters in young adult novels dealing with homosexual themes. It is important to hear the story of a homosexual character and experience their emotions from their own point of view, not through the eyes of a compassionate narrator. Authors need to create, and editors need to encourage, strong central characters who are also homosexual.

A need also exists for more books that have characters that are not heterosexual but who are not gay or lesbian either. While a very few examples appear in this sample, there is a need for more bisexual, transvestite, and transsexual characters who play a bigger part in, or are the main characters of, novels for young adults.

With the known fact that 10-15% of the population is homosexual, the approximately 50 books published in the last five years with homosexual themes is not enough. There is a need for more books that touch on this issue with main characters and secondary characters that help to solidify the image of homosexual people as happy, healthy and well connected in a community.

Homosexual adults are few and far between in this sample. That may be a counter to the previous generation of novels in which there were more adult characters. Perhaps in the next phase there could be more of a balance. Teens want to read about other teens, but they also should see that after their own struggle with sexuality that there are models of adults who are successful and comfortable with their sexuality.

Most of these books were not found in libraries. Many were found in retail locations and private collections. Not all young adults can afford to buy books and so it is important that

school and public librarians make available this literature to help both the homosexual youth find their experiences mirrored in literature, but also for heterosexual youth to find reading material that promotes tolerance and respect for all types of people.

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- Block, Francesca Lia (1998). *I Was a Teenage Fairy*. New York: Joanna Cotler Books/HarperCollins.
- Boock, Paula (1999). *Dare Truth or Promise*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Chbosky, Stephen (1999). *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Ferris, Jean (2000). *Eight Seconds*. San Diego: Harcourt.
- Freyman-Weyr, Garret (2002). *My Heartbeat*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Gantos, Jack (1997). *Desire Lines*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Garden, Nancy (1999). *The Year They Burned the Books*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Hartinger, Brent (2003). *Geography Club*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Hines, Sue (1998). *Out of the Shadows*. Milson Point: Random House.
- Levithan, David (2003). *Boy Meets Boy*. New York: Alfred Knopf.
- Matthews, Andrew (2001). *The Flip Side*. London: Mammoth.
- Myracle, Lauren (2003). *Kissing Kate*. New York: Dutton.
- Newbery, Linda (2002). *The Shell House*. Oxford: David Fickling.
- Peters, Julie Ann (2003). *Keeping You A Secret*. New York: Little, Brown.
- Plum-Ucci, Carol (2002). *What Happened to Lani Garver*. New York: Harcourt.
- Ripslinger, Jon (2003). *How I Fell in Love and Learned to Shoot Free Throws*. Brookfield: Millbrook.
- Ryan, Sara (2001). *Empress of the World*. New York: Penguin.
- Sanchez, Alex (2001). *Rainbow Boys*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Stoebr, Shelly (1998). *Tomorrow Wendy, A Love Story*. New York: Dellacorte.

Vande Velde, Vivian (2001). *Alison, Who Went Away*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Watts, Julia (2001). *Finding H.F.* Los Angeles: Alyson.

Wittlinger, Ellen (1999). *Hard Love*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Weinstein, Anya (2003). *Words Like Weeds, Book One, Ring Around the Moon*. New York:
iUniverse.

Wolff, Virginia Euwer (2001). *True Believer*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Yamanaka, Lois-Ann (1999). *Name Me Nobody*. New York: Hyperion.

Appendix I: Chronological List of Titles with Homosexual Content, 1998-2003:

(Titles in Bold are included in this sample)

1998

Block, Francesca Lia (1998). *I Was a Teenage Fairy*. New York: HarperCollins.

Gantos, Jack (1998). *Desire Lines*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Revoyr, Nina (1998). *The Necessary Hunger*. New York: St. Martins Press.

Stoehr, Shelley (1998). *Tomorrow Wendy: A Love Story*. New York: Delacorte.

Yamanaka, Lois-Ann (1999). *Name Me Nobody*. New York: Hyperion.

1999

Atkins, Catherine (1999). *When Jeff Came Home*. New York: Harcourt.

Bechard, Margaret (1999). *If It Doesn't Kill You*. New York: Viking.

Boock, Paula (1999). *Dare Truth or Promise*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Chbosky, Stephen (1999). *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. New York: Pocket Books.

Garden, Nancy (1999). *The Year They Burned the Books*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.

Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds (1999). *Alice on the Outside*. New York: Atheneum.

Nolan, Han (1999). *A Face in Every Window*. New York: Harcourt.

Taylor, William (1999). *Jerome*. Boston: Alyson.

Torres, Laura (1999). *November Ever After*. New York: Holiday House.

Wittlinger, Ellen (1999). *Hard Love*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

2000

Appelt, Kathi (2000). *Kissing Tennessee*. New York: Harcourt.

Ferris, Jean (2000). *Eight Seconds*. New York: Harcourt.

Hines, Sue (2000). *Out of the Shadows*. New York: Avon Tempest.

Wittlinger, Ellen (2000). *What's In a Name?* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

2001

Cart, Michael, ed (2001). *Love and Sex: Ten Stories of Truth*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Howe, James (2001). *The Misfits*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Killingsworth, Monte (2001). *Equinox*. New York: Holt.

Reynolds, Marilyn (2001). *Love Rules*. Buena Park, CA: Morning Glory Press.

Ryan, Sara (2001). *Empress of the World*. New York: Viking.

Sanchez, Alex (2001). *Rainbow Boys*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Shyer, Marlene Fanta (2001). *Rainbow Kite*. New York: Marshall Cavendish.

Taylor, Kim (2001). *Cissy Funk*. New York: HarperCollins.

Vande Velde, Vivian (2001). *Alison, Who Went Away*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Watts, Julia (2001). *Finding H.F.* Los Angeles: Alyson.

Withrow, Sarah (2001). *Box Girl*. Toronto: Groundwood / Douglas & McIntyre.

Wolff, Virginia Euwer (2001). *True Believer*. New York: Atheneum.

2002

Chambers, Aidan (2002). *Postcards from No Man's Land*. New York: Dutton.

Cohn, Rachel (2002). *Gingerbread*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Freyman-Weyr, Garret (2002). *My Heartbeat*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Newbery, Linda (2002). *The Shell House*. New York: Random House.

Plum-Ucci, Carol (2002). *What Happened to Lani Garver*. New York: Harcourt.

Shimko, Bonnie (2002). *Letters in the Attic*. Chicago: Academy Chicago Press.

2003

Atkins, Catherine (2003). *Alt Ed*. New York: Dutton.

Benduhn, Tea (2003). *Gravel Queen*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Brennan, Herbie (2003). *Faerie Wars*. London: Bloomsbury.

Cart, Michael, ed (2003). *Necessary Noise*. New York: Cotler/HarperCollins

Davis, Rebecca Fjelland (2003). *Jake Riley: Irreparably Damaged*. New York: Harper
Tempest.

Hartinger, Brent (2003). *Geography Club*. New York: Harper Tempest.

Huser, Glen (2003). *Stitches*. Toronto:: Groundwood Books.

Levithan, David (2003). *Boy Meets Boy*. New York: Knopf.

Matthews, Andrew (2003). *The Flip Side*. New York: Delacorte.

Myracle, Lauren (2003). *Kissing Kate*. New York: Dutton.

Peters, Julie Anne (2003). *Keeping You a Secret*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Rapp, Adam (2003). *33 Snowfish*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick.

Ripslinger, Jon (2003). *How I Fell in Love and Learned to Shoot Free Throws*. New York:
Simon & Schuster.

Sanchez, Alex (2003). *Rainbow High*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Taylor, William (2003). *Pebble in a Pool*. Los Angeles: Alyson.

Wallace, Rich (2003). *Losing Is Not an Option*. New York: Knopf.

Weinstein, Anya (2003). *Words Like Weeds, Book One, Ring Around the Moon*. New York:
iUniverse.

Appendix II: Coding Sheets

Characterization of the Homosexual Character				
Author:				
Title:		Name:		
Main Character Δ		Secondary Character Δ		
Gender and Orientation:		When is sexuality revealed (pg):		
Age:	Employment:	Religion:	Ethnicity:	Socioeconomic Status:
	Known (Page Numbers)			Not Known
Appearance				
Partnered				
Single				
Emotions				
Interests/Hobbies				
Other Stereotyping				
Strengths				
Weaknesses				
Is the character convincing/ credible? Δ yes Δ no				

Author:

Title:

How is the Character Revealed? (from Huck and Hepler, 2000)	
Page Numbers	
Through narration	
In conversation	
By thoughts of others	
By thoughts of the character	
Through action	
Does the character grow/change	

Depiction of a Wider Homosexual Community	Δ yes	Δ no
Page(s) and details		

Author:

Title:

Retribution	Δ yes	Δ no
	Page(s)	
Death		
Illness		
Physical Violence		
Accident		
Other (Describe)		

Use of Homophobic Language	Δ yes	Δ no
	Page(s)	
homo		
dyke		
fag/faggot		
les/lesbo		
queer		
Other		

Author:

Title:

Occurrence of Homosexual Relationship	Δ yes	Δ no
	Page(s)	
Short term		
Long term		
Descriptors		

Description of Intimacy	Δ yes	Δ no
	Page(s)	Descriptive Language
Kissing		
Holding hands		
Touching		
Other Homoerotic Acts		

Author:

Title:

Older Role Model	Δ yes	Δ no
	Page(s)	
Male		
Female		
Occupation		
Relationship to Character		
Description of interactions with Character		

Character is told their homosexuality is a phase	Δ yes	Δ no
	Page(s)	
Person who says this		
Friend		
Mother		
Father		
Other Relative		
Other		

Author:

Title:

Reference to homosexuality being caused by something or chosen	Δ yes	Δ no
	Page(s)	
Dysfunctional Family		
Traumatic Event		
Choice to be this way		
Other		

Appendix III: Young Adult Fiction 1969-1997 (read as background material for this study)

Bauer, Marion Dane (Ed.) (1994). *Am I Blue? Coming Out From the Silence*. New York:

HarperCollins.

Childress, Alice (1989). *Those Other People*. New York: Putnam.

Fox, Paula (1995). *The Eagle Kite*. New York: Orchard.

Futcher, Jane (1981). *Crush*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Garden, Nancy (1982). *Annie On My Mind*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Greene, Bette (1991). *The Drowning of Stephan Jones*. New York: Bantam.

Homes, A. M. (1989). *Jack*. New York: Macmillan.

Kaye, Marilyn (1993). *Real Heroes*. San Diego: Gulliver/Harcourt.

Kerr, M.E. (1997). *"Hello," I Lied*. New York: HarperCollins.

Kerr, M.E. (1995). *Deliver us from Evie*. New York: HarperCollins.

Kerr, M.E. (1986). *Night Kites*. New York: Charlotte Zolotow/HarperCollins.

Klein, Norma (1988). *Now That I Know*. Toronto: Bantam.

Taylor, William (1994). *The Blue Lawn*. Los Angeles: Alyson.

Walker, Kate (1991). *Peter*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Wersba, Barbara (1997). *Whistle Me Home*. New York: Holt.

Woodson, Jacqueline (1995). *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*. New York: Blue Sky

Press/Scholastic.

Woodson, Jacqueline (1997). *The House You Pass on the Way*. New York: Delacorte.

Woodson, Jacqueline (1991). *The Dear One*. New York: Dell.