

Unproud feelings; negative affects and their unruly pedagogies in 1960s to 1980s LGBT
YA Novels

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I explore negative affects including shame and betrayal in gay themed young adult novels published between 1969-1982 in North America and the United Kingdom. I suggest that these early novels illustrate a darker and more realistic version of what life was and still is like for some LGBTQ youth. In contrast to modern campaigns such as the “It Gets Better Project,” which promise eventual acceptance and success for unhappy young queers, these early novels do not offer messages of hope and futurity. Instead, novels such as Isabelle Holland’s *The Man Without a Face* (1979) and Jane Fitcher’s *Crush* (1982) narrate the ways in which same-sex sexuality has historically been associated with negative outcomes such as shame, betrayal, social isolation, and death. I suggest that these novels have pedagogical value in that they remind us that denying the significance of negative feelings and experiences only tells queer youth that happiness and pride are the only acceptable emotions to feel.

I begin by offering a brief history of homosexuality in the Western world and look particularly at the influence of religion and medicine on homosexuality to better understand the ways in which homosexuality has historically been tied to negativity. I review the work of several historians who offer ways of approaching negativity in queer history in order to think through how negative emotions and experiences, that are narrated in these novels and that are often imagined as belonging to the queer past, may serve as a resource for understanding present queer cultures. Turning to literary criticism of gay themed YA literature, I consider the ways in which early YA novels are often dismissed as outmoded representations of gay and lesbian life. I suggest that the aggression that these novels inspire in critics also illustrates that these novels continue to effect us. The negative feelings and experiences that these novels narrate constitute a disavowed part of the historical experience of being queer that has not left us and must be recognized. In the final chapters of this thesis, I offer an in-depth investigation of shame and betrayal and argue that gay and lesbian life, past and present, is not free of these negative emotions and experiences. Part of the project of cultivating a supportive world for queer youth is to make room for and value the bad feelings and experiences that are part of living a queer life. Further, by recognizing the negative inheritances of our past, youth and those of us who teach these youth can work together to live through the complicated narratives that are, and story making that is, intrinsic to everyday life.

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Introduction: The Unhappy Gay: Negativity in Early YA Novels

In the winter of 2011, I happened upon a copy of Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins' (2006) *The heart has its reasons: Young adult literature with gay/lesbian/queer content, 1969-2004*. In it, Jenkins and Cart chronologically review and critically evaluate the body of fiction published for young adults containing gay and lesbian themes and characters. The goal of the book, as Cart and Jenkins explain it, is "to chart the evolution of the field and to identify titles that are remarkable either for their excellence or for their failures" (p. xvii). Although I did not know it at the time, finding Cart and Jenkins' book shaped the direction of my doctoral research by offering a detailed overview of the field of literature that I had been reading and by helping me to identify that I was interested in studying the first gay themed young adult (YA) novels published in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s in North America and the United Kingdom. Their work called attention to the fact that these early novels are among the most widely hated and condemned titles within the genre of gay themed YA fiction.

It is easy to see why early novels are widely disliked. Characters are punished for their sexualities by losing their careers, as in Nancy Garden's *Annie On My Mind* (1981), getting kicked out of boarding school as in Jane Fatcher's *Crush* (1981), becoming socially ostracized, as in Ann Rinaldi's *The Good Side of My Heart* (1987), and Judith St. George's *Just Call Me Margo* (1972), and relegated as targets for sexual violence, as in Sandra Scoppettone's *Happy Endings Are All Alike* (1978). Negative outcomes and experiences are tied to characters' identifications as gay and lesbian. Many novels demonstrate what Cart and Jenkins call "plots centered on the inherent misery of gay

people's lives," (p. 17) including Isabelle Holland's (1972) *The Man Without a Face*, featuring a disfigured and predatory gay man, Lynn Hall's (1972) *Sticks and Stones*, illustrating the dramatic fall from social grace that bestows a teenager who associates with a man who is rumoured to be gay, and Sandra Scoppettone's (1974) *Trying Hard to Hear You*, in which lovers Phil and Jeff's are verbally ass Gay Shame and Friendly Betrayal aulted and violently attacked by their classmates. Given that these early novels are rife with negative themes such as emotional damage, loneliness, betrayal, shame, violence and death, it is not surprising that literary critics tend not to endorse this fiction and express skepticism that lonely, sad and dark representations can offer education or care to queer youth. These novels push us to the limits of what we might want to imagine for gay and lesbian youth. Meeting characters for whom the future looks bleak, or worse, encountering characters for whom there is no future, is difficult because it challenges what many people prefer to associate with youth, including futurity, vitality and hope.¹

In this dissertation, I argue that the ways in which the representation of negativity in the first gay themed young adult novels continue to unsettle us is the reason to engage with and reimagine these texts. Critical attention must be paid to early YA novels that contain negative themes because these novels have something to tell us about the historic experience of same-sex desire. While I appreciate the importance of more contemporary

¹ In Western contexts, adolescence is a developmental category that is intimately bound up in ideas about the future and in notions of progress. For a discussion of the sorts of investments that Western culture makes in the idea of childhood innocence and the ways that young people feature in developmental narratives of progress as an incentive for striving to make the world a better and more equitable place, see Bruhm, S., & Hurley, N. (2004). *Curiouser: On the queerness of children*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press and Lee Edelman's (2004) *No future: Queer theory and the death drive*. Durham: Duke University Press.

representations that explore positive and affirming aspects of gay and lesbian life, I argue that insisting on positive images of gay and lesbian people that embrace pride may risk overlooking the way in which our unproud past has gotten us to our proud present and that without respecting the negative histories many LGBTQ people have written about, a fantasy of pride emerges, reducing lived histories to moments not to be spoken about for fear the glitter of pride will fade away. I linger on the idea that part of the project of cultivating a supportive world for queer youth involves making room for and valuing the bad feelings and experiences that are part of living a queer life. We know that life is not easy for some queer youth. Statistics about the high instance of homeless and suicidal queer youth haunt those of us who want to help make life better for this marginalized group of young people (Linne, 1996). Early YA novels that illustrate negative experiences, feelings and outcomes for young gay and lesbian characters may be difficult for us to read precisely because the world is still not a very welcoming place for some young queers. Yet, denying the significance of negative feelings and experiences only tells queer youth that happiness and pride are the only acceptable emotions to feel. This leaves youth with the message that life can't and should never be sad.

I suggest that the pain and suffering evidenced throughout queer history that is astutely visible in early novels can be a resource for understanding the difficulties that many queer youth still face. I turn to several early novels and argue that they have pedagogical value in that they illustrate a darker and more realistic version of what life was and still is like for some LGBTQ youth. I pay particular attention to two negative experiences, gay shame and betrayal, that emerge from my readings of several early

novels and the two novels that I analyze in most depth, Isabelle Holland's (1972) *The Man Without a Face* and Jane Fatcher's (1981)'s *Crush*. I ask: What can the representation of shame and betrayal that is found in early gay-themed YA novels tell us about the experience of bearing a stigmatized identity? How has the desire to construct positive images of gay and lesbian youth possibly limited our ability to grapple with the negative side of the historic experience of being queer? How do contemporary, affirmative YA fiction obscure this stigmatization to negative effects?

Gay Shame and Friendly Betrayal

I focus on gay shame and betrayal for several reasons. Shame is largely considered to be an outmoded affect in contemporary Western queer culture. The Western queer community's claiming of gay pride today is directly related to the shame that was once simultaneous with gay and lesbian identities. The gay liberation movement in North America in the late 1960s sought to overthrow gay shame and embrace pride by fighting for rights and freedoms for sexual minorities. I argue that this movement, from shame to pride, also characterizes a shift in the representation of same-sex desire in YA novels. Whereas characters in early novels were once shamed figures, condemned to the margins of society, characters in novels that were beginning to be published in the 1990s tend to exhibit pride about their sexualities.² I argue that it is worth studying shame in early novels because gay pride emerges from the historic experience of shame such that

² For examples of prideful novels see: Hartinger, B. (2004) *Geography Club*, New York: Harper Teen; Fanta S'hyer (2002). *The Rainbow Kite*. New York: Marshall Cavendish; Wright, B. (2011). *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy*. New York: Simon & Schuster; Ryan, P.E. (2011). *Gemini Bites*. New York: Scholastic Press. Wilkinson, L. (2009). *Pink*. New York: Harper Teen.

shame is an inescapable part of our present politics and drive for change. Friendship and community are antidotes to the isolating sting of shame. I study betrayal in friendship because friendship is such an important social form in queer culture. Friendship glues people together as friends offer care, support and shared understanding. Yet, queer friendships are not devoid of negativity, including the potential for betrayal and conflict. Betrayal is a reoccurring theme in several lesbian themed early YA novels and I argue that because friendship is so idealized and valued within queer culture we must also consider the way in which betrayal lies within friendships and within communities of friends. I argue that in order to be able to come to an understanding of friendship as that which sustains pride and builds community, we need to recognize the ways in which queer friendships necessarily contain negativity.

Chapter Outlines:

In chapter one, “Setting the Stage: A Brief History of Homosexuality,” I offer a glimpse into the history of homosexuality in the Western world, and I look particularly at the influence of religion and medicine on homosexuality to understand the way in which homosexuality has historically been tied to negativity, including shame and stigma.

In chapter two, “It Gets ‘Bitter:’ Affective History and Gay Shame,” I examine two bodies of scholarship that offer insight into approaching difficult queer emotions and experiences such as shame, loneliness and betrayal, which are represented in early YA fiction. I label the first body of literature “queering history,” and review the work of several historians who offer ways of approaching the negative affective registers of queer history through a lens for youth. This scholarship positions the study of the queer past as

a resource for understanding present queer cultures. The second body of work that I review here is scholarship that explores queer negativity, particularly recent work on gay shame.

In chapter three, I offer an overview of literary criticism of gay themed YA novels and demonstrate the polarizing way in which novels are classified as either representing “positive” or “negative” stories about gay and lesbian lives. Critics tend to denigrate negative representations of early novels and privilege positive representations in more contemporary novels, positioning these books as useful pedagogical resources for educating youth to become tolerant of difference. I trace the ways in which critics tend to respond negatively to the dark themes and sad figures in early YA novels and dismiss these texts by labeling them too shameful and homophobic to be relevant or useful. I argue that the discomfort and aggression that early novels provoke in critics suggests the importance of engaging with the difficult feelings that these early novels inspire. Privileging affirmative novels serves to prove the claim that literary narratives about gay life and by association the social conditions for gay and lesbians, have steadily improved over time. While this belief may be comforting, it fails to take into account the intimate ways in which shame and betrayal continue to structure queer identities and experiences today.

In chapter four, “Shame on You, Man Without a Face,” I explore Eve Sedgwick’s theorization of shame as a foundational, yet disavowed, aspect of gay and lesbian identity formation. I review the ways in which critics tend to dismiss the parallels that Isabelle Holland’s *The Man Without a Face* (1972) draws between gayness, intergenerational

relationships, social marginalization, and death as emphasizing homophobic and shameful conceptions about members of the gay and lesbian community. In contrast, Mel Gibson's (1993) film adaptation of the novel is celebrated by critics because it rewrites the story and erases shameful themes. I bring Sedgwick's theory of shame to a reading of the film and the novel in order to challenge the dominant narrative that gay shame is a destructive and backward affect that has been overthrown with the accomplishment of gay pride. I read the rejection of negativity and the insistence on positive representations in scholarship about YA novels as evidence of the emotional difficulty of encountering a text that narrates the painful legacy of gay shame.

In chapter five, "Friendly Betrayal: Lexie and Jinx's Failed Friendship," I examine the negative representation of friendship that is repeated across several early lesbian themed YA novels. Focusing in particular on Jane Fatcher's *Crush* (1981), I consider the ways in which the friendship between Jinx and Lexie involves positive behaviours and attributes commonly associated with friendship based on loyalty, honesty, and affection, but also extremely negative experiences and emotions including sadness, loss, and betrayal. I examine the status of friendship in philosophical, feminist and queer scholarship in order to explore the significance of friendship as a highly idealized social form in the queer community. While friendship is commonly understood as a relation that sustains gay pride and builds queer community, I argue that we need to acknowledge the underlying history of loss that has made such communities of friends so crucial for the survival of queer people. I argue that because friendship has enjoyed such a privileged status within the gay community, it is important to consider friendship's negative side.

In my conclusion chapter, I look at a recent online LGBTQ themed feature about children's books, published by *The Guardian* as an example of the kinds of conversations about gay-themed YA novels that circulate and where growing up and finding pride are offered as the ideal trajectory for queer youth. I gesture to places for future exploration that may be extended from this project.

A Note on Methodology

Before I continue, I want to take a moment to situate the terms of reference I deploy when discussing “gay-themed” novels of the late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969) is widely considered to be the first “gay-themed” young adult novel to portray adolescent same-sex desire (Jenkins, 1988; Brogan; 1994; Norton & Vare, 2004; Cart and Jenkins, 2006). However, a minority of scholars, including Corrine Wickens (2007) and Laurel Clyde and Marjorie Lobban (2001) disagree and instead posit Rosemary Mannings' (1962) *The Chinese Garden*, as the first gay themed YA novel. Alan Cuseo (1992) maintains that *I'll Get There...* is not a gay-themed novel but rather “a novel with a friendship that is misconstrued as homosexual” (p. 182). Despite this assessment, Cuseo includes Donovan's novel in his study *Homosexual Characters in YA Novels: A Literary Analysis*. Notwithstanding disagreement, I count the year 1969 as the beginning of the publication of gay themed novels in North America and the United Kingdom and I end with the year 1982, which marks the publication of Jane Fatcher's *Crush* because of a shift in the mid to late 1980s toward representing gayness more sympathetically and affirmatively.

Throughout this dissertation I engage with many titles published between 1969 and 1982; however, in my two analysis chapters, I focus primarily on two novels. The first analysis chapter, “Reading Shame in *The Man Without a Face*,” considers Isabelle Holland’s (1972) *The Man Without a Face* in relationship to Mel Gibson’s (1992) film adaptation and the second, “Friendly Betrayal: Lexie Yves and Jinx Tuckwell’s Failed Friendship,” examines Jane Fatcher’s (1981) *Crush*. It is not the aim of this study to provide a comprehensive overview of this body of fiction. A number of annotated bibliographies, books and articles have done the important work of cataloging novels both thematically and chronologically and I have drawn on this work to identify the earliest novels and to understand how these novels are positioned in relationship to their more contemporary counterparts (see for example: Cuseo, 1992; Lobban & Clyde 1996 & 2001; Day, 2000; Cart & Jenkins, 2006; Bosman and Bradford, 2008; Webber, 2010

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to young adult novels with gay and lesbian themes and characters, as “gay-themed.” I use this term to describe plots portraying characters with same-sex desires, identities and identifications. To describe these novels as exclusively containing gay or lesbian characters would be limiting since few characters in early novels claim stable gay and lesbian identities. For example, Davy, the protagonist from John Donovan’s (1969) *I’ll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*, vaguely describes a sexual encounter that took place with his friend, Altschulter as, “messing around” (p. 180). Davy does not label himself as gay and assures his father, “I’m not queer or anything, if that’s what you think” (p. 173). In recognition of the fact that characters may not identify themselves as gay or lesbian, even if they experience same-

sex desire and/or participate in same-sex sex-acts, I employ the term “gay-themed” as an inclusive term. I use this term to acknowledge the ambivalent ways in which characters choose to define and identify their desires and identities.

Genre: YA Fiction

Post WW2 gay-themed young adult novels are part of a subgenre of young adult fiction. A common narrative in this fiction is the bildungsroman or the “coming of age” tale in which the plot is driven by a character’s moral and psychological development. Often, growth and change emerge as prominent features. The coming of age plot may also function to offer readers what Karen Krasny (2011) calls “moral aporia,” an interpretive space where readers encounter characters and situations that they may identify with. For Krasny, the act of reading inspires moral imagination and consciousness because readers make sense of and evaluate the actions of characters by holding them up against their own lived experiences. The moral value of YA fiction for LGBTQ young readers may be its invitation to young people to enter sympathetically into the act of reading. It is here where many critics wonder what the impact of reading negative or affirmative characterizations of LGBTQ identities is for readers. In this thesis, I am wondering about what the insistence of happy endings in fiction may do for readers.

A traditional understanding of the term “young adult fiction” is contentious but describes novels that usually privilege narratives with teenage protagonists and have an implied teenage audience, meaning that adolescents are invited and intended to read them. Genres vary: romance, historical, science fiction, fantasy, horror and mystery

(Waller, 2009). Notwithstanding these parameters, what counts as falling under the genre of young adult fiction is not easy to define. In part, this difficulty is related to the instability of genre itself. John Frow (2006) describes genre as, “a form of symbolic action: the generic organization of language, images, gestures and sounds makes things happen by actively shaping the way we understand the world” (p. 2). Rather than describing genre as a set of fixed categories that define literature, Frow approaches genre as a concept that, on one hand, shapes our relationship to knowledge and the meaning that we create when reading literature and, on the other hand, is something that we constantly shape and redefine as we read. The latter is noticeable particularly when we encounter literature that alters our perception of what we imagine a genre is capable of expressing, evoking or containing. For Frow, the boundaries of a genre are best understood as “unstable and unpredictable” (p. 25). This is certainly true of LGBTQ YA novels, which, for example, explore romance to play safely with sex and gender identities.

Another dimension to the difficulty of defining this sub category of children’s literature is a problem inherited from the ambiguity of the designation “young adult.” Who is a young adult? What are the characteristics of the novels that count as fiction written for young adults? Young adult novels are part of a genre of fiction that began to be marketed for adolescents in the 1940s and 1950s (Jenkins, 1998; Wickens, 2007) and this literary classification is tied to a modern conception of adolescence as a population that is developmentally distinct from childhood and adulthood. The history of young adult literature is therefore intimately tied to the social recognition of adolescence, which

emerged in North America at the turn of the twentieth century.³ With the invention of adolescence also came rules governing what a normal adolescent looks like. Gender and sexual norms became policed and literature for YA was meant to guide and, in some ways, mirror and enforce heteronormative ideologies (Levine, 2002).

The committee “Best Books for Young Adults,” exemplifies the way in which changing attitudes about adolescence influence the characterization of YA literature. In 1930, a committee of adults was struck to vet a list of recommended titles for teens. Interestingly, the first book lists forwarded by the committee were not comprised of young adult titles. Instead, these early lists included selections of exemplary fiction that committee members thought would be of interest to adolescents. They struggled to articulate the intended audience of these books with the result that each year the list “flipped and flopped” between content geared for older and younger readers (Carter, 2007, p. 3). Perhaps, the title of the committee, “Best Books for Young Adults,” which announces itself as an authority that selects books *for* young adults most pointedly asserts the agenda of young adult fiction. Too often, adults select young adult fiction for young people. Further, books are banned shelves and schools if a committee of adults deems it obscene or dangerous. Very often, LGBTQ books for YA have been banned and

³ Before the industrial revolution, children were regarded as miniature adults who worked with their families to contribute to the household income until they obtained land of their own. As the economy shifted from an agrarian to an industrial society, it became important for children to remain in school longer to learn workforce skills that could not be passed down from within the family unit. Because industrialization also introduced hazardous machinery that replaced human workers, education and labour laws were introduced both to protect youth from dangerous working conditions and to safeguard increasingly scarce jobs for adults. Mandatory schooling increased the transitional period of time that young people lived at home, supported by parents. See: Humphries, J. (2010). *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge: Studies in economic history.

censored.⁴ Convinced that any definition of “young adult” must remain open, Michael Cart (2010) writes:

Whatever happens, the field is in flux; but then, it always has been, and why not? For what is adolescent but a state of continuous change—of becoming, not being. For that reason alone, I believe the best definition of ‘young adult literature’ will be the least specific one. And frankly, since it is such a function of our ever-changing ideas of and attitudes towards adolescence, I’m not sure we need a formal definition (p. 11).

Cart demonstrates that what gets classified as young adult fiction actually constitutes a reflection of adult attitudes about young people and the sorts of stories adult think this group ought to read, rather than a category with fixed criteria.

The looseness of literary categories is the basis of Jacqueline Rose’s (1984) argument that children’s literature does not exist. She argues that the very idea that a book is written for a child is flawed, claiming that children’s literature is impossible, not because it is not possible to write, but because it requires, “an impossible relation between adult and child” (p. 1). Children’s literature, Rose explains, “rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple” (p. 1). She deploys the example of Peter Pan, a character from J. M. Barrie’s (1928) *The Little White Bird*: “Peter Pan offers us the child – for ever. It gives us the

⁴ For a discussion of the ban of gay themed books and the lack of availability of books in libraries, see: Susan K. Burke (2008) Removal of Gay-Themed Materials from Public Libraries: Public Opinion Trends, 1973–2006, *Public Library Quarterly*. 27 (3) 247-264 and Howard, V. (2005). Out of the Closet... But Not On the Shelves? An Analysis of Canadian Public Libraries’ Holdings of Gay-Themed Picture Books. *Progressive Librarian: A Journal for Critical Studies and Progressive Politics in Librarianship*. 25, 62-75.

child, but it does not speak (to) the child” (p. 1). Rose argues that children’s literature first creates the figure of the child to which books are focused and then represents this figure by inserting the child into the narrative. Peter Pan, Rose explains, “represents the child, speaks to and for children, addresses them as a group which is knowable and exists for the book, much as the book (so the claim runs) exists for them” (p. 1). Rose points out that adults, rather than children, are given prominence in this configuration. She writes, “the genre sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), but where neither of them enter into the space in between” (1-2).

Similarly, Jack Zipes (2002) scrutinizes the idea that children’s literature straightforwardly exists. His account is grounded in an economic perspective and he points out that publishing houses are organized around an interest in turning a profit such that children’s literature is fundamentally organized around finding, producing and distributing as many marketable books to young people as possible (p. 51). The publication and marketing of children’s books is therefore directed less at children and more at adults who purchase the work, including educators, scholars and parents. Rose and Zipes both argue that children’s literature is more a reflection of adult’s wishes and desires for stories about and for children than it is an indication of what children might actually enjoy reading. In other words, because children’s literature is written by adults for young people, it does and can not actually represent children. Rather, children’s

literature represents adult conceptions and fantasies about childhood and children that are disseminated through fiction.⁵

One place where adult desires surface is in the repetition of happy endings in children's literature.⁶ Despite the fact that we know that life did not always end well for our gay and lesbian ancestors, we are drawn to stories of survival and resistance, particularly in novels about youth. This desire for happy endings may well be a symptom of the fact that life still is not easy for some gay and lesbian youth. Why must we as readers, parents, teachers and mentors see happy narratives for gay and lesbian youth? I approach this question in chapter two, where I examine the trope of "It Gets Better" and consider how the idea that life must get better LGBTQ youth is narrated as the erasure of queer suffering and sadness over time. While the lure of this narrative may be obvious, I consider how this story is repeated in the recounting and retelling of queer history and consider the impact that this has on our understanding of queerness in the present. In the next chapter, I look particularly at the history of homosexuality and consider the strong ties between homosexuality and negativity, which structure queer history.

⁵ The same can be said for young adult fiction; although, there are a few exceptional examples of adolescent authors, such as S.E. Hinton who wrote *The Outsiders* (1967) when she was a teenager.

⁶ For a discussion of adults' desire for happy endings in YA literature, see Krasny, K. (2012). Between art and testimony: Transforming oral histories of holocaust survivors into young adult fiction and creative non-fiction," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale*. Special Issue: Making Educational Oral Histories in the 21st Century. 32, 1-17.

Chapter One: Setting the Stage: A Dark History of Homosexuality

In this chapter, I offer a brief overview of the forces that have shaped attitudes, and understandings of homosexuality in Western culture and look particularly at religious, medical and psychological historic ties between homosexuality, sinfulness, and illness. I do so in order to understand the ways in which homosexuality has historically been tied to negativity, which lays the groundwork for understanding how homosexuality in early YA novels focused on shameful, sad and menacing LGBTQ identities. I also explore the history of homosexuality to evidence the different treatment of gay men and lesbian women and how their depictions influenced YA novels. While no means the end of a discussion, this history provides a background and framework for understanding the negative social stigma that led to Stonewall and helps to contextualize why early young adult novels so often contain negative representations of gay and lesbian life.⁷ Further, this historical chapter offers a context for making sense of the difficulty that contemporary critics have had with these dark representations of LGBTQ youth, explored in depth in a literature review in chapter three.⁸

⁷ The Stonewall Riots were a series of impromptu riots by members of the gay community in response to a police raid that happened in June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village in New York City. The riots are widely regarded as marking the beginning of the contemporary gay and lesbian human rights movement in North America. Although Stonewall is widely recognized as the first collective resistance to police harassment, another riot occurred in the summer of 1966 in the Tenderloin, a neighbourhood popular with drag queens, trans people and sex workers in San Francisco. See Silverman, V., Stryker, S., Independent Television Service, KQED-TV (Television station: San Francisco, C., & Frameline (Firm). (2005). *Screaming Queens: The Riot At Compton's Cafeteria*. San Francisco, CA: Frameline.

⁸ The novels that I am reading in this dissertation are published in North America and the United Kingdom and because attitudes and understandings of homosexuality are culturally specific and vary across time and space, throughout this chapter I privilege Western social and cultural constructions and understandings of homosexuality.

The Priest and the Doctor

The question of what connections to make between the sexual acts and desires of pre-modern and modern cultures and societies and of Western and non-Western subjects across time is contentious to say the least.⁹ Although historians have mined historical documents and artifacts for traces of same-sex eroticism in ancient Greece and Rome and have sought to understand the different ways that same-sex attraction has been understood by people across the world, including China and Japan and among native cultures throughout North America, it is impossible to pin point the origin story of homosexuality or heterosexuality for that matter (Miller, 2006; Bullough, 1980; Duberman, Vicinus & Chauncey, 1989). Historians generally acknowledge that the ways people have conceptualized same-sex love differ greatly across cultures and times.

The relationship between homosexuality and religiosity varies greatly amongst the religious institutions that exist around the world today.¹⁰ Individual beliefs within religious organizations also vary. Some tolerate, welcome, ban or condemn gay and lesbian people and or same-sex sex acts. Still, despite the wide range of faith-based understandings of homosexuality, the doctrine of many of today's largest religions such as Catholicism, Islam, Protestant and Evangelicalism generally regard homosexuality

⁹ In *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (1990), David Halperin argues that the sexual practices of the ancient Greeks may actually bear little resemblance to the ways in which homosexuality is understood in the modern world and cautions against ascribing modern Western labels to the ancient practices of non-Western subjects. Others have given similar warnings. See for example: Love, H. (2007). *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. Doan, L. and S. Waters. (2000). "Making Up Lost Time: Contemporary Lesbian Writing and the Invention of History," in D. Alderson and L. Anderson (Eds.). *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

¹⁰ Further, gay and lesbian sexual histories have not always been similar. Gay sexuality has been criminalized while lesbian sexuality has been mostly ignored.

negatively.¹¹ In *Sexual Variance in Society and in History*, Vern Bullough offers a detailed account of the beliefs and teachings about sexual behaviour found in a range of religious dogmas. For instance, he argues that Western knowledge about homosexuality is deeply rooted in religious understandings of creation, specifically including the significance of procreation, captured by the Biblical proclamation “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28, King James Version). The problem that many Christian institutions identify with homosexuality is that same-sex sex acts are perceived not to be procreative. Reproduction is thought to be pinnacle to the survival of the human species and its denial is considered sinful or deplorable in the face of God’s design.

Bullough specifically locates the association between homosexuality and immorality and sin as stemming from Zoroastrianism, which arose in the ancient Persian Empire in and around the six century BCE and was based on the teaching of Zoroaster who stressed the belief that man should exercise control over his body in order to purify his soul. A restricted sexual life was thought compulsory for salvation. Homosexual sex acts such as anal intercourse, were condemned along with masturbation because this kind of sex was said to wastefully ejaculate sperm, or it “dissipate[ed] the life-force of humanity for the sake of a passing sensual thrill” (Spencer, 1995, p. 401). This concern focused on men and excluded female sexuality altogether. Bullough claims that this Zoroastrian equation between procreative sex and spiritual redemption greatly influenced Judaism and Christianity reinforced over time by law and eventually becoming deeply

¹¹ It is important to recognize that being religious does not imply that one is homophobic. Many people do not locate a conflict between religion and same-sex sexuality.

entrenched in Western social and cultural fabric.¹² Bullough's argument is that many religious institutions generally adopted similar beliefs about sexual morality and associated heterosexual reproduction as necessary in guaranteeing the afterlife of the soul.

In the nineteenth century, the dominance of theological discourse about homosexuality gradually lost foothold as medical, scientific and psychological discourses became popular. Michel Foucault's famous *The History of Sexuality Vol 1* (1978) offers a way of understanding this shift in the discourse about homosexuality. He explains that sodomy used to simply be labeled as a sex act that was subject to legal sanction until the nineteenth century when the sexologists began to classify it as a medical pathology. He writes that the homosexual became "...a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology" (p. 42).

"Homosexualität," the German word for "homosexuality" first appeared in 1869 in a political pamphlet written by a German psychologist, Karoly Maria Kertbeny Benkert.¹³ At the time, a new German penal code was being drafted and a heated debate arose surrounding the question of whether or not to remove a section of the Prussian criminal code, which criminalized sexual conduct between persons of the same sex

¹² Exactly what teachings about homosexuality that are contained in religious texts is a matter of sharp debate. For a critique of the link between religiosity and sexual intolerance, see John Boswell's (1980) *Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe From the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. He argues that despite the fact that Christianity values chastity over sexuality, the church should not be read as homophobic. Rather, he says that biblical passages that have been interpreted as condemning homosexuality are really primarily concerned with prostitution.

¹³ Karoly is Karl Benkert's pseudonym. See <http://rictornorton.co.uk/social14.htm>

(Mondimore, 1996). Benkert's argument for decriminalization was grounded in his belief that homosexuality was biological and not a choice. Although he viewed homosexuality as a sickness, he felt that homosexuals, like all German citizens, should be protected from state interference in private matters. The idea that homosexuality was inborn rather than a sinful choice segued into research approaching homosexuality from a medical and scientific perspective.

Medical and psychological disciplines offered a new language for homosexuality. In the late 1880s and early 1900s words such as "intermediate sex," "third sex," "inversion," "urning" and "homosexuality" were popularized by the emerging discipline of sexology. Sexology, or the study of human sexuality, is commonly associated with names such as Havelock Ellis, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Sigmund Freud and Richard von KrafftEbing. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, for example, believed that homosexuals constituted a third or intermediate sex. According to Ulrich, homosexuals, or what he called "urning" members of the "third sex," were a combination of the inversion of sexual object choice and gender characteristics (Miller, 2006, p. 16). He characterized homosexual men as having feminine qualities, widely regarded as inferior, and he viewed lesbian women as people who transcended their gender roles by becoming like men.

Sigmund Freud also subscribed to inversion theory although his understanding of homosexuality stemmed from his interest in human development and socialization. He conceptualized development as a series of stages that young people passed through as they grew up, until they eventually achieved adulthood. He argued that events that happened to a young person prior to puberty had an impact on the future sexual behavior

of young adults. For Freud, the mark of adulthood was the ability to form appropriate, intimate relationships with the opposite sex. He theorized that homosexuality was linked to a person's failure to progress forward to the next psychosexual stage of adult development. Despite his equation of maturity with heterosexuality, Freud described homosexuality in fairly neutral and compassionate terms. In "Letter to An American Mother," he comforted a distressed mother who was worried about her effeminate son, writing, "Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage but is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of sexual development" (1951, p. 787). Freud believed that homosexuality could not be cured; however, some of his followers took the term "arrested development" to mean that abnormal sexuality could be curtailed if the source of the arrestment was contained. This led to the formation and deployment of a variety of remedies and treatments for homosexuality including shock treatment and aversion therapy.¹⁴

The medicalization of homosexuality meant that some professionals regarded homosexuality as a disorder that threatened family life and evolution more generally. Some were concerned with the development of children and felt that medical intervention was necessary to prevent children from becoming homosexual. Founder of the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality, Charles Socarides cautioned people to take action: "Homosexuality is a medical disorder which has reached epidemic

¹⁴ For information about shock treatment and aversion therapy, see Edward, J. and H. Leitenberg. (1973). "Aversion Therapy for Sexual Deviation: Contingent Shock and Covert Sanitization," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. 81 (1) 60-73.

proportions; its frequency of incidence surpasses that of recognized major illness in the nation” (1970, p. 1199). Labeling homosexuality a mental illness, Socarides believed that gay men sought manliness through sex with other men: “They hope to achieve a shot of masculinity in the homosexual act.” Like the addict, he must have his fix” (p. 1201). By comparing homosexuals to drug addicts, Socarides postulated that homosexuality, like addiction, was a social ill that must eventually be successfully treated and expelled from a person. Richard von-Krafft-Ebing also believed that homosexuality was deviant behaviour. He subscribed to degeneracy theory, which offered an explanation for a host of social ills including homosexuality, mental illness, poverty, military and political defeat. In *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), he labeled homosexuality, or what he called “antipathic sexual instinct,” a degenerative sickness and a sexual aberration (Miller, 2006).¹⁵

The negative view of homosexuality held by many medical practitioners contributed to the social stigma of homosexuality. This stigma still marks gay people as different and disqualifies many from gaining full social acceptance and recognition. As contemporary scholar Erving Goffman states in 1986, during the height of the AIDS crisis:

By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human.

On this assumption, we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we

effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma

¹⁵ Although Richard von-Krafft-Ebing did not explicitly condemn homosexuality, his work was used in Germany as evidence that homosexuality must be criminalized. For a discussion on von Krafft-Ebing’s contradictory understanding of homosexuality, see <http://lgbtnation.wordpress.com/2011/12/09/how-richard-von-krafft-ebing-criminalized-homosexuality/>

theory, an ideology, to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents...(p. 5).

Part of the danger associated with gays and lesbian adults, was that they were often regarded as predators and recruiters to the “gay lifestyle.” It was this negative stereotype that made some adults reluctant to take on mentoring roles with LGBT youth, who were also not yet regarded as a group requiring support. Eventually, organizations such as the Henrick-Martin Institute, a non-profit group located in New York City, formed to provide outreach, services and advocacy for youth (Khayatt, 1992). In the 1950s and 1960s, “homophile” groups, such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis also worked to counter negative stigma by educating, unifying and providing support and leadership for gays and lesbians (ibid). In the post Stonewall decades, activists worked hard to promote positive images and associations that could counter dominant negative stigma. The newness and fragility of this early movement suggests why negative representations, such as those in early YA fiction, would be so forcefully rejected.

A significant challenge to the notion that homosexuality was a sickness came from Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy and Clyde Martin who conducted interviews with men and women about their sexual behaviours and practices and published the results in two books, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953). These interviews revealed that 37% of males and 12% of females had engaged in sexual activity leading to organism with members of the same sex. This finding prompted them to question the belief that homosexuality was pathological:

In view of the data which we now have on the incidence and frequency of the homosexual, and in particular on its co-existence with the heterosexual in the lives of a considerable portion of the male population, it is difficult to sustain the view that psychosexual relations between individuals of the same sex are rare and therefore abnormal or unnatural, or that they constitute within themselves evidence of neuroses or even psychoses (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948, p. 659).

They theorized that sexuality was less of a sexual binary and more of a continuum and constructed a seven-point scale to describe the vast range and variation of sexual orientations that they believed existed among adults.

Although Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin's approach to homosexuality was sympathetic, their claim that homosexuality was more widespread than people originally thought also fueled backlash by people who offered different explanations for the origins of homosexuality. In other words, if homosexuality was as widespread as Kinsey et al claimed, then it could also be regarded as a dangerous social threat. According to Irving Bieber, who worked for the New York Medical College, homosexuality stemmed from a problematic familial upbringing and resulted from a combination of a "detached, hostile father and a close binding, intimate, seductive mother" (Miller, 2006, p. 223). Male homosexuality was viewed as far more threatening than female homosexuality as women's sexual desire was a topic overlooked by most prominent professionals.

Female Homosexuality

The fact that women were not commonly viewed as sexual beings made the possibility of a romantic relationship between two women almost inconceivable. George Chauncey Jr. (1989) explains:

[I]n the context of female passionlessness, there was no place for lesbianism as it was currently understood: if women could not even respond with sexual enthusiasm to the advances of men, how they possibly stimulate sexual excitement between themselves? (p. 89).

Lesbian, is a word that was first recorded by the poet Sappho who lived on the Greek island of Lesbos. Once associated with women who hailed from Lesbos, in the nineteenth century, “lesbian” became the word used to identify a woman who had sexual relationships with other women. While sodomy was outlawed in the eighteenth century, tribadism, the term for sex between women, was often ridiculed as impossible and harmless. The idea that a woman having sex with another woman was threatening to heterosexuality was unthinkable in the eighteenth century, when it was common practice for women to experiment sexually with other female friends in order to better prepare themselves for the heterosexual marriage bed (Doan, 2000; Faderman, 1981). Because women’s sexuality was traditionally understood through the lens of procreation within the institution of marriage and family, sexual desire between women was ignored or trivialized (Khayatt, 1992). Because lesbianism did not fit into the popular ideology of a women’s social role, it was not regarded as something to be taken seriously.

Sexologists were primarily men and it is not surprising that their research centered on male sexuality. The view of female sexuality held by many early sexologists in the

nineteenth century was that women were either incapable of sexual desire or were only capable of responding to male sexual advances. However, a dominant belief that women were the moral guardians of society was beginning to be challenged when Radclyffe Hall was taken to trial for obscenity. The author of *The Well of Loneliness*, (1928), a novel that tells the story of a tortured lesbian youth who is masculine in her gender performance, was accused of indecency and indolence. Stephen Gordon, Halls' masculine lesbian, might be the first instance of a narrativized youth character whose lesbianism was thought threatening to heterosexuality, gender identity and reproduction. This novel added to the general way of seeing lesbians as suicidal, depressed and pathologically ill.

The belief that women are devoid of sexuality oppresses both heterosexual and homosexual women alike by limiting heterosexual women's sexual autonomy both inside and outside of the confines of family and marriage and casting lesbian sexuality as outside the realm of possibility.¹⁶ Feminist historians have pointed out that the eventual recognition of female sexuality around this time was closely related to women's rising independence from men and their adoption of stereotypical masculine gender qualities. In tandem, traditional understandings of female sexuality began to shift in the beginning of the twentieth century as "new women," members of the educated bourgeois demanded rights and privileges and challenged traditional gendered expectations (Smith-Rosenberg,

¹⁶ For a more detailed history of lesbian sexuality see Khayatt, D. (1992) *Lesbian teachers*. New York: State University Press; Doon, L. & Waters, S. (2000). "Making up lost time: Contemporary lesbian writing and the invention of history," In D. Alderson & L. Anderson (Eds.), *Territories of desire in queer culture: Reconfiguring contemporary boundaries* (pp. 12-28). Manchester: Manchester University Press; Faderman, L. (1991). *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Columbia University Press.

1989).¹⁷ However, far from the shamed lesbian from Radclyffe Halls' novel, these “new women” were stalwartly heterosexual and proud.

Women's entry into the workforce at the turn of the century made possible women's financial independence, while WW1 and WW2 necessitated that many women took over male jobs while men were at war. According to Lillian Faderman this shift impacted the way in which women's sexuality was regarded because it changed the way that two women living and making a life together were regarded. In *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*, Faderman (1981) documents friendship and love between women in Anglo-European culture from the 1500s to the 1970s and argues that romantic friendships were socially acceptable and expected until the early twentieth century, when women's financial independence and increased masculine gender performance brought into focus the sexual potential and social implications of these relationships. Women in WW1 and WW2 were doctors, ambulance drivers, carpenters and police officers but sex and gender were not monitored because of the war. According to Nancy Shalin (1979) post WW2 this threat to patriarchy brought about scrutiny to women who lived outside the norm:

Feminists, college graduates, and other independent women, however, were a real threat to the established order, and one way to control them, was to condemn their love relationships—the one aspect of their behavior which, regardless of their

¹⁷ “New woman” refers to a group of middle and upper-class educated and ambiguous American woman born between 1850-1900 who demanded rights and privileges and challenged traditional gendered expectations (see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's “Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman 1870-1936, In Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr (Eds.) *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*. New York: Penguin Books.

other social, political, or economic activities, posed a basic threat to a system where the fundamental exercise of power was that of one sex over another (p. 27).

With this newfound challenge to sexual and gender norms came other characters who bespoke the shame and fear being a lesbian or gay person felt during a historical moment where heterosexuality was revered as the way forward and as one's patriotic duty as a Western citizen and human. YA novels about LGBTQ youth began to engage with the tensions felt between heterosexual patriotism and societal feelings of contempt and hatred for anyone who didn't or couldn't conform to binary divisions between male/female, masculine and feminine heterosexual roles.

This chapter has attempted to bring into view some of the historical factors that contributed to the negative conceptualization of homosexual in Western cultures, which is a history that I keep in mind as I turn next to thinking about how historians narrate the negativity of queer history.

Chapter Two: It Gets “Bitter:” Affective History and Gay Shame

In this chapter, I review the work of several scholars, each offering alternative ways of approaching the negative affective registers of queer history. The first body of work explores queer negativity and in particular the recent work on gay shame and the second body of scholarship I collect under the heading “queering history.” I draw on this work in order to think through how negative emotions and experiences, that are narrated in early novels and that are often imagined as belonging to the queer past, may serve as a resource for understanding present queer cultures. I position the study of negativity within our queer past as a positive resource for understanding present queer life. Next, I explore a contemporary Western campaign called “It Gets Better,” (IGB) to illustrate how the idea that life must get better for LGBTQ youth is narrated as the erasure of queer suffering and sadness over time. While the lure of a narrative that promises eventual happiness and success for unhappy young queers may seem obvious, I consider how “It Gets Better” is repeated in the recounting and retelling of queer history and I consider the impact that this has on our understanding of queerness in the present.

Ashamed To Be So Proud

Since the 1969 Stonewall riots, gay pride has become a strong political rallying point for gay and lesbian people. From the moment of its inception, the gay liberation movement sought to disassociate gayness from shame and to erase the bitter memory of the history of marginalization, loss, violence and social stigma against gays and lesbians. The movement collected sexual minorities together offering the possibility of gay solidarity, friendship and a community as compensation for the history of injustice, injury

and isolation many had suffered.¹⁸ There is no doubt that gay liberation accomplished remarkable feats. Just four years after Stonewall, the American Psychological Association removed homosexuality as a form of mental illness from the DSM, a declassification that encouraged a cultural shift toward recognizing same-sex attraction as a legitimate sexual orientation and as a part of everyday life, rather than a psychiatric disorder in need of intervention and treatment (Tierney and Dilley, 1992). Other movements toward recognizing gay rights have benefited from the efforts of past gay and lesbians. After much feminist and queer struggle over three decades, today many countries including Canada have extended the right to marry to gay and lesbian couples (Kraus, 2003; Kinsman, 1995, 2000, 2010). Lively gay villages thrive in large North American cities, including Toronto's Church Street, San Francisco, Vancouver and Montreal, bolster a vibrant community center with gay friendly businesses including restaurants, coffee shops and bars.

Despite the obvious draws to gay pride, in recent years shame and other negative affects have become increasingly popular topics amongst queer academics. David Halperin and Valerie Traub's (2009) *Gay Shame*, Heather Love's (2007) *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Elspeth Probyn's (2005) *Blush: Faces of Shame*, David Eng and David Kazanjlan's (2003) *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* and Ann Cvetkovich's (2003) *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* illustrate that queer scholars are increasingly turning to negative emotions as

¹⁸ The pride movement occurred within the context of momentous social changes that began in North America in the 1950s, including the civil rights, anti-war, and women's movements. Like these movements, gay liberation sought rights and social change.

avenues for exploring queer lives past and present. Cvetkovich (2003), for example, makes a claim for the importance of examining negative feelings in lesbian cultural memory. “My book,” she writes:

is organized as an ‘archive of feelings’, an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception. Its focus on trauma serves as a point of entry into a vast archive of feelings, the many forms of love, rage, intimacy, grief, shame, and more that are part of the vibrancy of queer cultures. (p. 7).

For Cvetkovich, it is important to examine negative feelings in queer life because they are what make queer culture vibrant and alive. Rather than being a killjoy for lesbian culture, she argues that sadness, shame, and depression are part of the very foundation upon which female identified cultures are built.

This scholarship signals a turn toward the “negative” in queer studies, a shift that was largely motivated by the work of Eve Sedgwick. In an article appearing in the first issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, Eve Sedgwick (1993) initiated the turn in queer studies away from pride and toward gay shame. Boldly arguing that the performance of queer identities is inherently bound up in experiences of shame, she writes: “at least for certain (“queer”) people, shame is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity: one that has its own, powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities” (p. 14). By challenging conventional thinking about the privileged place that pride has enjoyed in activism and the academy,

Sedgwick demonstrates that despite the revolutionary accomplishments wrought by the era of gay liberation, pride cannot and should not replace shame.

In the text *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler (1993) considers the ways in which the word “queer” has been refashioned in academia. Reflecting on the ways in which the term has been repurposed to serve certain political purposes, she muses over whether queer studies should attempt to move on from the unresolved grief of its shameful past. Wondering if queers should overcome the negative stain that is etched onto the fabric of our history, she writes:

How is it that a term that signaled a degradation has been turned—“refunctioned” in the Brechtian sense—to signify a new and affirmative set of meanings? Is this a simple reversal of valuations such that ‘queer’ means either a past degradation or a present or future affirmation? Is this a reversal that retains and reiterates the abjected history of the term? (p. 223).

By considering the negative residue that is attached to queer and our impulse to turn queer into a happy positive term, Butler suggests the ongoing significance of the history of injury in queer studies. For Butler, theory must remain perpetually in motion. Queer theory is constantly glancing backwards towards its difficult past while simultaneously turning to face the future. For Butler, this “turning” is never finished. Any new version of queer is necessarily influenced by the past and cannot turn its back on its negative upbringing. Praising the continued ability of queer to refashion and affirm itself, she writes:

If the term 'queer' is to be a site of recollective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes (p. 228).

Following Sedgwick and Butler, in recent years other queer critics have begun to explore queer studies' relationship to negativity, questioning shame as a theoretical object that is part of the formation of gay culture and identity. Shame, Sarah Ahmed (2004) writes, delivers a sharp sting that is "an intense and painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about itself, a self-feeling that is felt by and on the body" (p.103). A disabling affect, shame's discomfort is captured by the word's origins. Derived from the German root *skam/skem*, meaning "sense of shame, being shamed, disgrace" (Pattison, 2000, p. 40) and the Indo-European root *kam/kem*, meaning, "to cover, to veil, to hide," (Nicoles, 1991, p. 38) shame simultaneously refers to personal ruin and public exposure. It is not enough to be ruined; one's ruin must also be made public. Elspeth Probyn (2010) claims that the shame of public exposure is closely related to personal interest:

Etymologically *shame* comes from Goth word *Scham*, which refers to covering the face. The crucial element that turns sham into shame is the level of interest and desire involved. There is no shame in being a sham if you don't care what others think or if you don't care what you think. But if you do, shame threatens (p. 72-73).

For Probyn, a person only feels shame if what he/she is interested in is exposed as shameful. In this regard, shame is a profoundly isolating experience and yet it is socially acceptable to hide one's shame from others.

Although shame is related to other negative affects such as anger, guilt and embarrassment, shame can be distinguished by understanding the way in which it operates in relation to the self. Donald Nathanson (1987) explains: "Whereas guilt refers to punishment for wrongdoing, for violation of some sort of rule or internal law, shame is about some quality of the self. Guilt implies action, while shame implies that some quality of the self has been brought into question" (p. 4). This suggests why shame is so often related to same-sex sexuality. Because gayness is deemed non-normative, in many cases a negative choice or negative quality, same-sex attraction violates the social ideal of heterosexuality. Shame confirms the failure of the queer subject to meet this social ideal and is then thought to be a domino effect for other negative feelings such as sadness and helplessness.

In the introduction to *Gay Shame*, David Halperin and Valerie Traub (2009) discuss the significance of studying gay shame by situating shame as a founding affect for the queer community:

Gay pride does not even make sense without some reference to the shame of being gay, and its very successes (to say nothing of its failures) testify to the intensity of the ongoing struggle with shame (p. 4).

They argue that pride has not, and cannot, replace shame. The collection of essays in their book presents a wide range of ways to approach shame, including studying embarrassing

bodies and desires and reading “unproud” literary figures and past events in order to point to the continued presence of shame. The book emerges from a conference hosted by the University of Michigan in 2005, called “Gay Shame,” which gathered scholars, community members and activists together to debate the usefulness of gay pride and to consider the possibilities of pride’s affective opposite, shame. *Gay Shame* demonstrates that despite the many accomplishments brought by the era of gay pride, shame has continued to be present in the LGBTQ community. Pride has, as David Halperin and Valerie Traub (2009) attest, “given rise to a surprising array of discontents,” (p. 3) leading scholars and activists to ponder and also argue about how shame might be, as George Chauncey (2009) wonders: “a problem that is good to think with” (p. 278).

A Shameful Critique

Heated debates over gay shame and what a queer theory foregrounded in a history of gay shame can do emerged among scholars at this conference. Although Judith Halberstam presented at the conference she does not author a chapter in Halperin and Traub’s edited collection.¹⁹ Instead, she outlines her critique of gay shame and recounts her negative experience of the conference in an article published in *Social Text*, entitled “Shame and While Gay Masculinity.” Her critique of gay shame, is that shame is too closely associated with white male privilege:

¹⁹ I am referencing Halberstam as Judith because the publication that I am predominantly drawing upon is under that name. However, Judith uses the name Jack and also Jude. For a description of Halberstam’s understanding of the fluidity of gender see: <http://www.jackhalberstam.com/category/transgender>

it is white gay male shame that has proposed ‘pride’ as the appropriate remedy and that focuses its libidinal and other energies on simply rebuilding the self that shame dismantled rather than taking apart the social processes that project shame onto queer subjects in the first place (p. 224).

In other words, to presume that there was gay shame in the past and now there is gay pride, the survivalist product of a shameful history, effaces the fact that today many queer subjects continue to be shamed even while a privileged few—white, wealthy, gay, able-bodied men—can celebrate themselves.

Other scholars share this critique, including Fatima Jaffer (2012) who condemns the privileged place that proud whiteness enjoys in the queer movement at the expense of otherness:

Queers are offered the opportunity of acceptance and inclusion, and we too can ‘belong’ as queers of colour—if we conform to a queer identity and a view of queer liberation that leads to the accumulation of national capital. We too can gain rights (and safety from violence) if we join this project of nationhood that centralizes whiteness as national identity (p. 47-48).

For Jaffer, gay and lesbian movements often interrogate homophobia, but not homophobia and racism simultaneously. The ways in which pride is upheld in Western countries, against a backdrop of racist disregard for the different ways that non-white “others” understand, define, and experience same-sex sexuality, is a significant critique.²⁰

²⁰ Of particular importance within this body of scholarship, which foregrounds racial practices of producing and understanding queer identities, is Jasbir Puar’s (2007) *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, which explores the ways in which homophobia is projected onto

However, unlike Halberstam, I am not prepared to throw shame out on this basis. Even Halberstam acknowledges the impossibility of dismissing shame entirely. Wondering if shame could be a resource for interrogating privilege, she writes:

my argument throughout is that we cannot completely do without shame and that shame can be a powerful tactic in the struggle to make privilege (whiteness, masculinity, wealth) visible (p. 220).

Halberstam's critique is that gay shame is a politics that is inherently self-interested and in this case, the interest lies with white male privilege.

Why Read Narratives of Queer Suffering?

The shame conference, which aimed to bring together academics, community members and activists, might be imagined as a community of colleagues and potential allies and friends who gathered together to listen, support and challenge one another. The fact that the conference caused such tension suggests that we need to rethink what it means to imagine ourselves as a queer community of friends, bound together by virtue of a common interest in pride that comes from shame.

While the benefits of promoting community and connection between queerness, pride and positivity continue to be demonstrated through projects like the It Gets Better Project, the

non-Westerners who are regarded as undeveloped, ignorant and backward. Puar argues that this binary reinforces the notion that the West, and white westerners in particular, are progressive, liberal and gay-friendly. She employs the term "homonationalism" to describe the rather strategic ways in which privileged queers are incorporated into nationalist projects, typically during war, and notably in response to Sept 11, 2001. For an explanation of homonationalism, see Robyn Brush, who describes homonationalism as, "using a nation's liberalism towards homosexuality as a means to encourage racist attitudes towards other nations, on grounds that they are less enlightened" (<http://representationandthebodyspring2012.wordpress.com/2012/02/26/judith-butler-speaks-out-against-homonationalism/>).

advantages of exploring the ties between queerness and negativity appear to be more tenuous.²¹ Why would we want to explore negative aspects of queer experience and identity, particularly in relationship to literary representations that are both for and about queer youth? Given the dark legacy of queer exclusion and violence, the importance of insisting on queer affirmation and promoting the connection between gayness and positivity, normality and inclusion is understandable. Yet, it is also prudent to attend to narratives of queer stigma and suffering, not least because queer suffering persists in the present and, as Halberstam has pointed out, some groups of queers, including some people of colour, working class, trans, and gender queer youth, are not hailed by the inspirational promise of a better pride filled future.

Queering History

Historians necessarily face the challenge of presentism in their work. Because historians stand at a distance from the past that they study, they are left to write from the vantage of the present in reflection, thoughtful about the way that present day ideas and perspectives inform their readings of the past. I suggest that there is a peculiar tendency for queer historians toward presentism, perhaps because queer history carries within it a particularly heavily weighted negativity. The history of gay and lesbian sexualities is marred by the fact that same-sex desires have often been written out in historical accounts and present identities and practices have been presented as so vulnerable and marginal that our negative histories have been deemed too sad to be useful to us and further rendered invisible. As Heather Love (2007) states, “Although many queer critics take

²¹ The It Gets Better Project is a website, started by Dan Savage and Terry Miller, which invites adults to submit personal videos aimed at offering optimism and encouragement to LGBT youth.

exception to the idea of a linear, triumphalist view of history, we are in practice deeply committed to the notion of progress; despite our reservations, we just cannot stop dreaming of a better life for queer people” (p. 3).

Some queer historians have responded to the lack of documented knowledge about queer subjects and the taboo nature of the same-sex sexuality by undertaking projects that make silenced LGBTQ subjects more visible. This goal is particularly legible in the work of feminists who write about the historical existence of female same-sex desire, such as Valerie Traub’s (2002) *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, which addresses the representation of early modern female homoeroticism and challenges the invisibility and inconceivability of medieval female same-sex sexuality. Perhaps because contemporary queers continue to face social stigma, historians such as Traub have been motivated to seek out a positive lesbian heritage.²² Throughout her work, Traub considers the desire to uncover and make connections to our lesbian ancestors. Part of Traub’s motivation is that she finds this work pleasurable and as such, she suggests approaching lesbian figures from the past as “objects of our desire,” (p. 354). She explains:

What if we approached the works of Katherine Philips (and other early modern women whose traces are waiting for us in the archives) not as subject to our identifications, but as objects *of* our desire? What if we reappropriate the tradition of homoerotic elegy and lament, and actively mourned the losses of *lesbian* history? (p. 354).

²² Although Traub uses the identity category “lesbian,” she also troubles the ways in which this is a “coarse and confining category” (p. 13).

Traub reflects on the relationship that traditional historians make to the history that they study and emphasizes that part of the work of queering lesbian history is to recognize our motivations and desires for recovering pieces of the past, particularly when this past reveals aspects of queer life that are damaging and painful. She asserts that the challenge for queer historians is to mourn the losses of lives, futures, and presents uncovered in the process of tracing this sad history. The loss to be mourned in this instance is the potential connections that might have been made between women across generations that were severed by the general lack of acknowledgement of the existence of female same-sex desire. Traub's approach to queer history acknowledges the lesbian archive working through the unresolved grief that stems from the recognition that historians have been long disengaged from the history of lesbianism. Although Traub's wish for us to unsuccessfully mourn the losses of the past, these losses may offer an important resource for moving through past injuries. To mourn, after all, is to get over loss, which is what Dan Savage's *It Gets Better* project also wants.

Others are less optimistic about this approach to loss. Judith Butler (2003) argues that mourning is never successfully completed not least because loss cannot be accurately represented. Writing about the complexity of "the loss of loss itself" she writes:

Somewhere, sometimes, something was lost, but no story can be told about it; no memory can retrieve it; a fractured horizon looms in which to make one's way as a spectral agency, one for whom a full 'recovery' is impossible, one for whom the irrecoverable becomes, paradoxically, the condition of a new political agency (p. 467).

For Butler, there is no after to the process of mourning. Instead, she explains that we continuously mourn loss and that the pieces that are recovered in the wreckage of mourning are what may become resources for building anew. The traces of loss therefore inform the act of rebuilding:

Loss becomes condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community *cannot* overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as community (p. 468).

In this sense, the negative feelings found in gay-themed YA novels may build a community of strength for LGBTQ youth.

Heather Love (2007) offers a different critique of Traub's desire to mourn and leave behind the sense of the lost of the missed opportunities for lesbian female connections across time. Summarizing Traub's argument, Love writes, "Traub suggests that contemporary critics work through psychic impasses in order to get over paralyzing and debilitating engagements with the historical past" (p. 42).²³ Love's critique of Traub's wish to break through these unconscious mental blocks is located in her belief that pieces of lesbian history may only exist through painful identifications or what Wendy Brown (2001) calls "wounded attachments," with the past.²⁴ For Love, historical accounts must not attempt to overcome or sever the present from the past, even if the connections that we make to the past are painful. Love's orientation toward queer history most closely aligns with my own project; I am interested in engaging with the ways

²³ In this example, "psychic impasses," refers to Judith Butler's work on mourning and melancholia, found in *The Psychic Life of Power* (2007). Stanford University Press.

²⁴ Brown argues that past unresolved injuries or "wounded attachments" constrain the present. See Brown, W. (2001). *Politics out of history*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

shame and betrayal move through LGBTQ YA novels, not in order to “get over” these moments and failures but to better understand how our impulse to disregard these narratives and emotions they make literal actually reveals how deeply these representations of past queer trauma continue to affect us. Exploring a method that Love calls “feeling backward,” to the study of several late nineteenth and early twentieth-century literary queer texts in which female identified characters experience social exclusion and violence in response to the historical “impossibility” of same-sex desire in the era that they lived, Love argues that we must develop a queer politics of the past in order to appreciate how the past continues to affect us in the present. She critiques critics who regard dark, sad lesbian literature as unfit for inclusion in lesbian literary genealogy. However, rather than trying to rescue literary figures such as Stephen Gordon from Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Love engages with these character’s “backwardness,” labeling these women affectionately as “modernity’s backward children” (p. 7). Love draws upon these figures to demonstrate that a turn to the past is a way of appreciating how queer suffering continues to structure queer identities today.

Given the painfulness of queer history, some people may wonder why anyone would want to seek out and touch a queer past that is marred by such profound shame and hurt, especially if this remembering is not obviously in the service of making a “better” future. Why dredge up dark aspects of queer history when that heritage has been so terribly damaging towards queer people? Why read queer YA novels when they are so sad? Historian Carla Freccero (2006) offers insight into the necessity of approaching the difficulty of the queer past. Her response to those who prefer to forget past injury is that it

does not matter whether or not we seek the past because the past is actively pursuing us. No one can escape from injury and some people are still living under the conditions that early YA novels describe. Freccero uses the metaphor of haunting to explore the affected nature of queer history, writing, “The past is in the present in the form of a haunting. This is what, among other things, doing a queer kind of history means, since it involves an openness to the possibility of being haunted, even inhabited, by ghosts” (p. 80). The past refuses to be ignored and it haunts us regardless of whether we choose to acknowledge this haunting.

Freccero theorizes this haunting by deploying the term, “spectrality,” which she borrows from Jacques Derrida, to refer to, “the way the past or the future presses upon us with a kind of insistence or demand, a demand to which we must somehow respond” (p. 70). Freccero identifies two common responses to this demand. The first is a melancholic response, which involves stubbornly refusing to recognize both the existence of the trauma itself and the ghostly reminder of the trauma that continues to surface. It is, she writes, “a response that will not acknowledge the trauma or loss and seeks instead to hush the voice” (p. 71). One opts not to hear the ghost’s message and tries to stamp it out. The other response is more distinctly colonial and “involves outright mastery or appropriation” (p. 71). This response is characterized by a wish to deal with historical trauma by turning it into knowledge that can be mobilized and used for the purposes of activism and political organizing. While this may appear to a more productive option, such productivity also masks this response’s lack of openness. Freccero describes this approach as rife with “the urge to identify, and thus stabilize, the meaning of an event and

a person” (p. 74). The trouble she locates is that the meaning of a traumatic event must be tied down in order for a cause or movement to rally around it and make use of or even benefit from the trauma. The more ethical response to the demands of queer history that Freccero favours is a reaction that remains open and even welcoming of ghostly haunting. To forge a more ethical relationship to the queer past, for Freccero, involves a willingness to attend to our ghostly inheritances. This means that one must patiently learn to live with ghosts and to listen to their haunting demands.

Valerie Traub, Judith Butler, Heather Love and Carla Freccero offer different metaphors for thinking through the affective relations that characterize our engagements with queer history, including loss, mourning, touching, feeling backward, and haunting. While these responses may not feel overly comforting, they may lead us to question what it might mean to be open to being haunted by the ghosts of early YA novels. What might these downtrodden characters have to teach us about the experience of embodying an abject subjectivity at a time when the promise of a better future may not have existed? While it is neither possible, nor is it particularly desirable, to return to a time when tales of shame, betrayal, self-destruction and death are the only available narratives about LGBTQ youth, I insist that it is also important to consider how these sad narratives of gay and lesbian existence continue to structure queer identities and communities today. For those LGBT people who lived and survived those awful years, it is also important that these experiences not be erased from queer memory, but that the queer community acknowledge that the ghosts of these experiences remain ever present as we progress.

It Gets Better

In September 2010, Dan Savage and Terry Miller launched the “It Gets Better Project” (IGBP), a website inviting adults to submit personal videos aimed at offering optimism and encouragement to young LGBTQ people living in hostile environments and struggling with social intolerance of their sexual orientations and/or gender expressions. The message that Savage and Miller offer is that “it gets better,” despite the harassment, isolation, violence, and homophobia that LGBTQ youth may be facing. The project was spurred by a number of youth suicides, including the tragic death of Tyler Clementi, an undergraduate student from New Jersey who took his life after his roommate and another classmate used a webcam to record Tyler kissing a man in his dorm room (McKinley, 2010). IGBP has gained attention worldwide and a range of celebrities and politicians including Ellen DeGeneres, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have submitted videos that have been viewed over 50 million times.²⁵ The overarching message that Savage and Miller offer is that despite the harassment, isolation, violence, and homophobia that LGBTQ youth may be facing in their current lives, “it gets better.”

The widespread reach and popularity of IGBP tells us something about the contemporary social climate for LGBTQ youth. The very need for a project like this one suggests that despite the fact that we are four decades after Stonewall and the inauguration of the gay pride movement, negativity still clusters around the experience of being young and homosexual. The project’s aim of offering messages of hope in a hopeless moment is perhaps fuelled by the difficult reality that LGBTQ youth are still

²⁵ For more information on the project, see: <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project/>

widely deemed to be at high risk for homophobia, violence, homelessness, bullying, alcohol, drug abuse and suicide (Linne, 1996). Given this context, it is not surprising that the adult authored videos of the project only speak of homophobia as child's play or in relationship to something that can be left behind, painting a rosy picture of the future and adult life.²⁶ The IGBP's focus on the future has been the subject of critique, for example, by Jasbir Puar (2010), who questions the normative message of the project. Noting that Savage's video message translate to: "Come out, move to the city, travel to Paris, adopt a kid, pay your taxes, demand representation" (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/nov/16/wake-it-gets-better-campaign>), she wonders, "how useful is it to imagine that troubled gay youth master their injury and turn blame and guilt into transgression, triumph, and all-American success?" Puar's concern is that the project engages with queer suffering only in so far that it points to a heteronormative and capitalist future where negative social factors such as homophobia are no longer present.²⁷ That is, the project advises youth to hold on and wait for happiness. The project does little to help LGBTQ youth or the people who love and abhor them change homophobic norms or societal oppression against queer youth.

The preferred narrative about queer life that is showcased by IGBP is a progressive and linear story about the erasure of suffering and sadness over time. This is a compelling story with a happy ending. It is a story to be proud of. The emphasis is on

²⁶ For a critique of the ways in which the videos normalize successful, middle class family adults, see Puar, J. (2010). *In the wake of it gets better. Comment is free*. The Guardian. November 16, 2010.

²⁷ For an account of heteronormativity see Michael Warner (1991). *Fear of a Queer Planet. Social Text*, 29, 3-17. He argues for the significance of making sexuality a category of social analysis and emphasizes the need to explore the effects of heteronormativity as an underlying structure of social power.

equating gayness with happiness and when queer injury is evoked, it is only in reference to an experience that can be gotten over. Yet, we know that queer suffering is far from being a small hurdle that can be left in the past. Even as the project imparts messages of hope and futurity, it is founded upon and driven by a rash of tragic suicides and homophobically motivated murders of LGBTQ youth that continue to happen very much in the present.²⁸ These suicides indicate that not everyone is hailed by the promise that “it gets better,” a promise that also flies in the face of the experience of many characters in early YA fiction for which life does not get better.

In Sandra Scoppettone’s *Trying Not to Hear You* (1974), life does not continue, let alone get better for Phil, a sixteen-year-old who faces his own death. Phil and his boyfriend, Jeff, are subject to verbal and physical assaults; they are taunted and violently attacked, tarred and feathered by their peers. Phil is so shaken by the abuse that he convinces himself that he can decide to be heterosexual. He sets up a date with a girl, gets drunk on their date, and subsequently kills them both in a car accident. Dying young is also a trope in Lynn Hall’s (1976) *Sticks and Stones*. Floyd, a neighbour and acquaintance of the story’s protagonist, sixteen-year-old Tom, dies in the passenger seat of Tom’s car. Tom’s irresponsible driving is narrated as a consequence of his unhappiness with his identity. Tom’s friendship with Ward, who is widely rumoured to be gay, brings Tom’s sexuality under suspicion. After Tom is rejected by his peers and forbidden from attending a school field trip because he is suspected of being gay, he

²⁸ For an account of the ways in which mainstream representations of the transgender body are highlighted by media coverage of Brandon Teena’s case, see: Halberstam, J. (2005) *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York: New York University Press.

becomes increasingly depressed and although he is a strong student, he fails his senior school year exams. Likewise, in Sandra Scoppettone's *Happy Endings Are All Alike* (1978), Jaret, a popular high-school senior suffers greatly. Jaret who is raped by Mid, a mentally unstable teenager. Mid attacks Jaret in a homophobic act of revenge when Mid discovers that Jaret is in a lesbian relationship with Peggy. Although Jaret reports the rape, the police advise her not to pursue charges because the officers believe that their small town will have little sympathy for her when they learn that she is lesbian. All three YA characters, Phil, Tom and Jaret suffer violence and even death because of society's inability to understand their sex and gender identities. I suggest that rather than simply attending to their experiences by attempting to overcome their sad legacies, we need to explore other ways of engaging with these difficult representations, seeing these books as a resource for thinking about queer issues in the present.

I have here argued that one way of acknowledging the significance of the sad narratives in early YA novels is to recognize the interdependence of the present on the past. This means that we must attend to the history of injury through which modern and proud queer identities have been made possible. This approach does not trade in the sad stories of the characters of early YA fiction for the happier ones of more contemporary novels. Instead, it refuses to turn away from the experiences of the literary figures for whom our gay pride is most embarrassed of, including the shamed, the downtrodden and the dead. I suggest that the movement towards replacing negative narratives about gay and lesbian people with more affirmative or sympathetic narratives in IGB mirrors the movement of literary critics, which I explore in chapter three, who argue that early gay

themed YA novels that narrate the ways in which same-sex sexuality has historically been associated with negative outcomes such as shame, betrayal, social isolation, and death are too dark and outmoded to be relevant.

Chapter Three: A Review of Gay Themed YA Novels: The Critics Know Best

In this literature review, I trace the ways in which scholars conceptualize, organize, label and talk about gay themed YA novels and I highlight the ways in which the earliest novels are often dismissed as damaging to teen readers. Although the tendency to dismiss early novels is often tied to concerns that these titles perpetuate hateful and damaging stereotypes about queer people, I propose that this dismissal also tells us something about the difficulty we critics and adults have with engaging with negative feelings and experiences that are embedded in the history of gay and lesbian sexuality in North America. I argue that the rejection of YA novels that feature queer suffering and sadness, coupled with the insistent celebration of happier more joyful accounts of queer life, reflects our adult preference for hopeful narratives both for ourselves and our queer youth. The desire for positive narratives reveals our adult anxieties about engaging with difficult feelings and experiences than it does about how queer youth might actually identify with or creatively use these condemned novels.

I read the literary field's rejection of the darker and sadder accounts in early YA novels as tied to larger questions about the difficulty of engaging with a negative history that serves as a reminder that the structural oppressions located within these novels that enable homophobia and trigger shame and sadness are actually still very present today, no matter how happy a story we hold onto. Therefore, these older YA novels remind us that it is our responsibility as adults to move beyond a politics of mere tolerance and toward a politics of sex and gender and sexuality equality. The negative themes in these novels speak to the historical experience of bearing a barred identity as a welcome and

necessary reminder that queer suffering and shame occur and are reinforced by heteronormative structures of oppression today. Attending to the difficult and sad history of queer subjects in fiction might allow us to better understand the importance of disqualified feelings, such as gay shame, and be more attentive to the continued presence of difficult emotions and experiences that gay and lesbian youth still face today.

Scholars, educators and librarians whose work reviewing novels (Cart and Jenkins, 2006; Wilson, 1984; Jenkins, 1988 & 1998) creating annotated bibliographies (Webber, 2010; Day, 2000; Bosman and Bradford, 2008; Lobban and Clyde 1996 & 2001) fighting censorship (Agee, 1999; Curwood, Schliesman and Horning, 2009) and documenting teaching experiences (Martino, 2009; Blackburn and Clark, 2011; Blackburn and Smith, 2010; Anthanases, 1996) has created a rich archive about often hard to locate gay themed YA novels.²⁹ Importantly, this literature also increases awareness about homophobia and issues that some queer youth face such as bullying, isolation and suicide, despite the increasing realization of the importance of rights for gays and lesbians living in North America.

Literature promoting gay themed YA novels increases the likelihood that this fiction actually finds its way into school and public library collections as well as into classroom pedagogy, and that queer or questioning adolescents who feel isolated or are targets of homophobia, bullying and/or harassment, may find some comfort from reading these novels. Further, gay themed YA novels heighten the visibility of a spectrum of

²⁹ My work is profoundly indebted to this field of inquiry. This scholarship has also helped me to find out about the earliest published novels, many of which are difficult to locate because they are out of print. I acquired out of print titles by purchasing used copies from private sellers' collections.

queer identities and range of gender expressions that are possible for LGBTQ youth. Such visibility is especially important given that although they should, schools are not always the places that enthusiastically foster difference of any kind, nor do schools necessarily offer very welcoming or inclusive social environments for those deemed different. Increased visibility of queerness in schools and in the resources young adults turn to is important, because, as Michael Warner (1999) argues, sexual autonomy “requires access to pleasures and possibilities, since people commonly do not know their desires until they find them” (p. 7). Gay themed young adult novels, therefore, hold open worlds of possibility for gay youth by narrating and introducing in many cases, the option of claiming non-normative sexualities. This is especially important for queer youth growing up in locations where queerness is not particularly visible. These resources remind queer youth that they are not alone. My critique emerges because of the privileging of affirmative titles that is a practice repeated across the research.

Beginning with John Donovan

Published the same year as New York City’s Stonewall Riots, John Donovan’s (1969) *I’ll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* is widely considered to be the first young adult novel to portray adolescent same-sex desire (Jenkins, 1988; Brogan; 1994; Norton & Vare, 2004; Cart and Jenkins, 2006). Donovan’s narrator is thirteen-year-old Davy, who reluctantly moves to New York City to live with his alcoholic mother after his grandmother dies. Davy makes friends with a classmate, Altschuler and although their relationship eventually becomes sexual, the details of their physical intimacy are mostly inferred. Davy describes their encounters as, “just something that happened. It’s not dirty,

or anything like that” (p. 128). The narrative climaxes when Fred, Davy’s dog, is run over by a car. Worried that Fred’s death is retribution for his attraction to Alschulter, Davy reacts aggressively and picks a bloody fight with Alschulter in the school locker room. Davy says, “Get your hands off me... You didn’t need to touch me... You’re a bastard... We’re going to end up a couple of queers” (p.147-148). The conflict is loosely resolved at the end of the novel. Although the boys feel that they can no longer be friends, they tentatively make peace by promising to respect each other.

The novel’s reception has been mixed. While some scholars hail the novel as a significant first that broke the taboo on the representation of gay and lesbian themes in YA fiction, it has also been the object of great scrutiny by readers who take issue with the novel’s sexual content, violence and open-ended conclusion (Lathman, 2001; Hanckel & Cunningham, 1976). For John Donovan’s critics, the novel is either sexually inappropriate or a disappointing representation that depicts gay desire as an insignificant teenage experimentation (Bacon, 1976; Weston, 1969; Hanckel & Cunningham, 1976). For example, David Rees, author of several gay themed YA novels including, *In the Tent* (1979), *The Milk Man’s On His Way* (1982), *Out of the Winter Gardens* (1984) and, *The Color of His Hair* (1989), worries that Donovan’s novel might actually send a damaging message about same-sex attraction to youth. Rees states:

[Donovan] suggests that teenage homosexuality is so totally unacceptable, socially and psychologically, that any young homosexual is likely to have his fears and worries increased rather than reduced, and the prejudice of the heterosexual reader against homosexuals is reinforced (1977, p. 86).

Rees finds the novel to be a homophobic and damaging representation of same-sex sexuality. Allan Cuseo (1992) agrees, writing: "...the underlying message is that the homosexual orientation, which has perverted the protagonist, is unnatural and less than satisfying" (p. 185). For Donovan's critics, the novel fails to deliver an uplifting message about the experience of same-sex desire to teenage readers. This "failure" leads critics to accuse the novel of reinforcing heteronormativity. Yet, YA novels like Donovan's, which allow room for degradation, guilt, fear and shame, actually point to the homophobia inherent in dominant structures of heteronormativity, such as the school where Donovan's young protagonist attend.

Other authors in the 1970s and 1980s began to publish novels featuring same-sex sexuality and like Donovan, these authors have been staunchly criticized for their novel's negative messages and themes. Critics meet representations that feel depressing, lonely, and damaging with great scrutiny. The most controversial titles are those first published in North America and the United Kingdom. At first glance, these novels seem to equate gayness with betrayal (as in Jane Fitcher's (1981) *Crush*, Wendy Ann's (1982) *Flick*, and Guy Rosa's (1977) *Ruby*) violence (as in Sandra Scoppettone's (1978) *Happy Endings Are All Alike*, and Scoppettone's (1974) *Trying Hard to Hear You*) social isolation (as in Isabelle Holland's (1972) *The Man Without a Face* and Judith St. George's (1981) *Call Me Margo*) and tragic death (as in Lynn Hall's (1977) *Sticks and Stones* and Aidan Chambers' (1982) *Dance On My Grave* and Bette Greene's (1991) *The Drowning of Stephen Jones*.) While these novels too are deemed by some critics to be outmoded representations of queer sexuality, the powerful emotionally negative responses that they

inspire from critics also indicate that the painful dimensions of these texts are very much worth revisiting.

The Affirmative Turn

While critics of YA fiction tend to condemn older novels as containing obsolete portraits of lesbian and gay life, they readily promote titles with more redemptive characters and positive representations. Looking to critics that celebrate and support gay themed titles that are labeled as affirmative may help us to better understand critics' condemnation of early novels. One strand of research arguing for the importance of affirmative novels embraces the pedagogical usefulness of these representations, believing that they can be resources for teaching tolerance to young readers. Claims about the function of positive representations bring arguments about education and equity into sharp focus and in this literature, scholars place a strong emphasis on the function of positive literary representations to teach social justice perspectives. Gay and lesbian themed young adult novels gain legitimacy in education when they are considered advocates for positive social justice initiatives.

Titles that feature characters with safe, celebrated and secure gay and lesbian identities are privileged by critics because these books promote the acceptance of queer people. For example, Corrine Wickens (2007) favours novels such as Julia Watts' *Finding H.F.* (2001), David Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy* (2003), Julie Anne Peters' *Keeping You a Secret* (2003) and Alex Sanchez's trilogy: *Rainbow Boys* (2001), *Rainbow High* (2003) and *Rainbow Road* (2005) because she argues that these titles portray "unabashedly out and proud" characters, which positively reinforce queer identities.

Other critics recommend stories with happy and well-adjusted queer characters, suggesting that these titles offer queer youth reassurance and positive images of themselves (Linne, 1996; Crisp & Knezek, 2010; Cart 2004; Banks, 2009). These types of novels are thought to be important resources for gay and lesbian youth who are struggling with their sexual identities. For example, Michael Cart (2004) describes the power of reading YA novels as “the lifesaving necessity of seeing one’s own face reflected in the pages of a good book and the corollary comfort that derives from the knowledge that one is not alone (p. 46). Similarly, William Banks (2009) asserts that gay themed young adult novels should offer “spaces for student-readers to locate themselves, as spaces for young people to see their lives reflected back to them, but also to see alternative possibilities for richer, happier, fuller lives” (p. 33). These scholars position novels that offer affirmative narratives as keys that can help queer students unlock the good about themselves. William Banks (2009) endorses Julie Ann Peter’s (2003) *Keeping You a Secret*, and Sara Ryan’s (2001) *Empress of the World* and Brent Hartinger’s (2003) *Geography Club* because, Banks argues, “our bookshelves are richer for their existence” (p. 35). These are novels that young people can easily relate to. Or can they? What makes a YA novel a good pedagogical tool for rethinking diversity and equity?

Arguments for equity begin from the humanist perspective that high school English and elementary language arts curricula can be productive sites for challenging homophobia and heterosexism in schools. Scholars advocating for either the inclusion of gay and lesbian novels in high-school English (Cart and Jenkins, 2006; Greenbaum, 1994; Reese, 1998) or elementary language arts curricula (Schall & Kauffmann, 2003)

position homophobia as a problem effectively solved by exposure to affirming stories about gay and lesbian people. As Cart (1997) asserts, “we need...more good novels that also inform the minds and hearts of non-homosexual readers, that offer them opportunities for insight and empathy by shattering stereotypes and humanizing their gay and lesbian peers” (p. 45). A powerful argument for reading gay and lesbian themed novels in schools is the claim that this fiction may inspire empathy and acceptance. Novels are positioned as resources for teaching tolerance in anti-homophobic education, a pedagogical intervention that is as much for gay and lesbian youth as it is for their heterosexual classmates. Allan Cuseo (1992) positions YA novels as capable of both informing heterosexual students and supporting and comforting their gay and lesbian peers. He writes:

We must seek novels which challenge students’ negative attitudes regarding homosexuality and demand positive and diverse examinations of the subject. This is not only essential for the homosexual adolescent who often suffers from a lack of self-awareness and needs validation of feelings but also for the heterosexual adolescent who could benefit from having his/her consciousness raised (p. 410).

The problem here however is that Cuseo envisions only two kinds of students who might benefit from reading gay themed YA lit. The first is a heterosexual student in need of an education in tolerance and the other is a gay or lesbian student who is in need of support and reassurance. While it may be accurate that some heterosexual students may be homophobic and some gay and lesbian students require extra support, this understanding of straight and gay students is also quite limiting. It leaves no room for the complicated

relationship gay and lesbian identities have nor does it question tolerance as a discourse. Instead, it favours teaching tolerance over troubling homophobia. Tolerance suggests there is something lesser that needs to be tolerated.

Another downside to the argument that affirmative LGBT YA novels may inspire tolerance is that much is at stake in the representation of gay and lesbian characters when these novels are regarded and relied on as tools for challenging homophobia and creating more equitable classroom and school environments. If the point of these novels is to teach tolerance, it is perhaps no wonder that scholars, such as Denis Sumara (1993) advocate that educators select novels that “present a healthy and constructive view of gay and lesbian issues” (p.31). Indeed, he recommends Norma Klein’s (1988) *Now That I Know*, precisely because “[it] presents gay persons who are interested in leading rather ordinary lives and who seek the same kind of loving, monogamous relationships as heterosexuals” (p.31). The overarching implication is that non-threatening gay-themed novels can counter homophobic prejudice, offer hope to queer youth, and create a more tolerant world to be proud of. Further, the pedagogical appeal of affirming normative gay themed novels is their ability to present gay and lesbian characters sympathetically. Hetero normative characters do not challenge readers to confront gay people as anything other than ordinary people. In other words, the problem is that gay characters are acceptable only in so far that they are “ordinary,” or just like heterosexual characters.

It is also suggested that literary representations may help to address social issues facing LGBTQ youth. More sympathetic, happier stories are positioned as crucial resources for queer youth because this population is widely regarded as at risk of a range

of vulnerabilities and victimization. For example, Terry Norton and Jonatha Vare (2004) review a host of harmful effects facing LGBTQ youth, including:

Depression; inadequate school performance; truancy; dropping out of school; running away from home; substance abuse; treatment by mental health professionals, including hospitalization for psychiatric disorders; suicide attempts and completion; being victims of hate and violence; and increase risk for HIV infection and AIDS (p. 66).

Their argument for the need for more positive narratives is set against this long list of risk factors. Because Norton and Vare position novels as resources that may intervene or offset these types of social problems, their plea for queer affirmative stories is linked to their concern about the future and well being of queer youth. They argue, “precisely because these societal problems have not disappeared, young adult books for this audience should possess life-affirming characteristics advocated for, but often absent from, the literature published in the ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s” (p. 66). Norton and Vare demonstrate the way in which issues related to gay and lesbian youth in schools are often framed as issues of school safety. While recognizing the devastating reality that some queer teens face harsh and oppressive social situations and that an alarming number of queer teens are homeless or commit suicide, I am curious about the link between the social issues faced by some queer youth and the marginalization of the earliest written gay themed YA novels. How has “school safety” served to condition which books are deemed “safe enough” for school and for teaching? Who are we protecting when we keep schools safe and tolerant? What freedoms and potentialities get lost in this framework?

Adolescent Nostalgia

A commonality among scholars, educators and librarians publishing articles, book reviews and annotated bibliographies about gay themed YA novels is that several identify as gay or lesbian. Perhaps this is not surprising. However, it is striking that many critics write about having experienced a difficult adolescence. Anecdotes about the painful experience of growing up gay are repeatedly featured, a curious repetition which suggests something about that the way in which scholars' histories as gay and lesbian teenagers inform their reading of the novels, including their preference for more affirmative stories.³⁰ I suggest it matters that several critics identify as having been gay or lesbian adolescents and it is significant that several critics weave personal narratives about their experiences of growing up gay or lesbian into their analysis of YA novels. In this section, I explore how nostalgia for one's adolescence informs the ways in which adults come to read gay themed YA novels. I argue, if the relationships that queer critics have to their histories as gay and lesbian youth impacts their preferences for particular kinds of stories then this also tells us something about the hopes and aspirations that critics have for contemporary queer adolescents who will become the next generation of queer adults.

It is quite commonplace for scholars to "come out" in the introductions of their works. James Sears (1999) writes about feeling like an outsider growing up in a mid-western religious farming community. For Sears, homophobia for young people is an

³⁰ It is important to point out that not all gay and lesbian adults were necessarily gay and lesbian teenagers. Queer theorists have long argued for the importance of recognizing the lived experience of sexuality as fluid, rather than static. This means that people's sexualities not only range across a spectrum of identities and desires but that queerness, when conceptualized as a verb rather than a noun, shifts and moves across time and space. Therefore, one need not have identified as a queer teenager in order to grow up to be a queer adult and vice-versa, a queer child or queer teenager may or may not become a queer adult.

experience that remains the same, despite technological innovation. He writes, “During this age of the Internet and Ellen Degeneres, queer childhood has not substantially changed since my years of playground torments and classroom disregard” (p. 4). His call for elementary teachers to queer their pedagogies is driven by his belief that there is still a lot of work to do to make schools more welcoming places for queer students. He suggests that classrooms should strive to foster difference and that one way to do this is to include diverse reading materials. He laments that it is challenging for teachers to bring even the most benign queer books into their elementary classrooms, such as Judith Vigna’s *My Two Uncles* (1995). One cannot help but hear the way in which Sear’s unfortunate childhood experience of homophobic name-calling informs his passionate writing about the need for queer pedagogical interventions in elementary classrooms.

The need for school reform is also found in William Banks’ (2009) work around pedagogical strategies for teaching gay themed YA literature. He discusses his familiarity with the isolating experience of growing up gay. He recalls taking a trip in high school to visit his older brother at college and remembers looking up books in the college library in the “sexuality section” of the card catalogue, searching for “something about myself,” in books that were not available in his small town library of Louisville, Georgia.

Unfortunately, Banks did not find in these books the kind of reassurance that he was looking for. He recalls, “I found nothing about the success of love for the young, only the opposite” (p. 33). Remembering his adolescent frustration about the lack of positivity in books for young adults, Banks argues that little has changed in queer fiction since he was a teen. He bemoans that contemporary representations of gay life in YA novels are still

quite limited, writing, “I would like to report that we have an abundance of quality LGBT literature for young adults, filled with characters complexly rendered and experiences that mirror the often difficult and often exciting lives that LGBT people live today, but I don’t think we do” (p. 35). Despite this, Banks suggests that educators should bring these novels into their classrooms and make up for what is lacking in the novels by teaching students to read empathetically and critically (p. 36). Banks’ lived experiences become a part of his pedagogy. His hope is that queer teens will not have to leave their small towns in order to access optimistic representations of gay and lesbian life and he calls on educators to use YA novels to offer young people gay visibility and a support that was missing from his adolescence.

Francis Ann Day (2000) also laments that there were not more gay-themed novels available to her as a teenager. In the foreword of *Lesbian and Gay Voices: An Annotated Bibliography and Guide to Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Day writes about her teenage experience of falling in love with her then classmate and now wife, Sandy. She recounts that in the 1950s, there were few sources for learning about same-sex attraction and so she turned to fiction as a place to explore what it might mean to love women. Unfortunately, the lesbian pulp fiction novels that she found informed her that she and Sandy were “...doomed to suicide, incarceration in mental institutions, or subject to arrest unless we were swept off our feet by wonderfully strong and forgiving men who were willing to marry us and turn us into ‘real’ women” (p. ix-x). Lamenting the lack of resources that were available to her as a teenager, she makes a claim for the importance of her book: “But back when we were kids, *Lesbian and Gay Voices*, this wonderfully

complete and helpful book, could have spared us a great deal of pain and anxiety” (p. x). This history inspired Day to create this resource for gay teenagers. Her teen experience also influences the way in which Day recommends that librarians evaluate gay themed novels for inclusion in school libraries. She recommends selecting novels “with a life affirming sense of hope” (p. xxiii) and cautions librarians to consider if novels either promote or tackle damaging stereotypes about gay people. She warns that novels should be carefully evaluated for homophobic and heterosexist messages if they are to be included in school library collections (p. xxiv).

Day’s recollection of growing up gay helps us to understand the culture of homophobia in America in the 1950s. Her retrospective narrative is inspirational because she positions herself as having once been a powerless adolescent who survived and arrived into adulthood in time to claim a stable and proud lesbian identity. Like Day, Sears and Banks also endured painful experiences and are now advocating on behalf of queer youth and calling for social change. Their readings of novels are expressed through a remembering of their lived experiences of exclusion, discrimination, homophobia and loneliness. For these scholars, the field of study of gay themed YA novels is mediated by their own nostalgic histories and, having survived their own gay or lesbian adolescence, they now write about gay themed novels from the vantage point of adulthood. These difficult experiences motivate their work in the field and their preference for affirmative novels, which, perhaps, tells us less about what teens today need or want, and more about what these scholars believe might have been helpful for them to read when they were

adolescents. Yet, the lived realities of today's teens differ from those of adult critics and getting over or looking on the bright side is not always a recourse for youth.

These are progressive narratives. Although it is impossible, nor advisable, to erase progress entirely from narratives of queer survival, I want to suggest that we also need to attend to the history of queer marginalization and loss that continues to structure queer experiences in the present. These scholars are reaching out to queer youth and offering them resources precisely because the link between gay and lesbian identities and sadness and suffering persists in the present. Rather than turning to this painful history solely as a resource to justify or remake the present, I am suggesting that there is a need to think about the painful dimensions of representations outside of frames of queer progress.

Warning: Novels Contain Negative Representations!

A popular belief in scholarship about gay themed YA novels is that the representation of gay and lesbian life has steadily evolved and progressed over time. While early novels are acclaimed as important firsts, scholars contend that these types of tragic plots are too depressing to be useful today. William Banks (2009) is candid about his disdain for the disheartening messages he finds in early novels, writing,

From 1980 to 1995, most the LGBT characters in YA fiction were secondary, often dead or killed off during the narrative, or run out of town and separated from community and/or family...The message is hard to miss: LGBT characters are most useful if they're dead or gone (p. 35).

Alternatively, Michael Cart (2010) is more playful about his disapproval for the earliest titles. Poking fun at these novels, he writes:

Suffice it to say that these early efforts perpetuated the stereotypical view of homosexual lives as unrelievedly bleak, lonely, danger filled, and –as often as not—doomed to tragically early end, usually in a car wreck, because all these books were crowded with the worst drivers this side of my grandmother (p. 155).

While Banks (2009) believes that negative themes in novels effectively communicate a lack of regard for gay and lesbian youth, Cart suggests that the lack of happy endings for gay teens also reflects a lack of creativity. ‘Killing off’ gay characters in car crashes is as much a sign of poor writing, for Cart, as it is an indication of stereotypical views about gay people.

Regardless of the tone of the critique, a common thread running throughout scholarly writing about YA novels is that narratives of gay and lesbian life have steadily become more affirmative. The dominant view is that more positive novels have replaced outmoded novels because gays and lesbians do not identify with tragic tales of death, betrayal and shame any longer, or that these tales will infect young readers and give them bad ideas. Stories about gay and lesbian life are conceptualized as progressing linearly, so that the early unproud novels that have a bad reputation for depicting queer suffering and sadness are replaced by more uplifting titles that present gay and lesbian people as happy, likeable and wholesome, proud and accepted members of society.

Among the first scholars to publish about gay themed YA novels are two librarians, Frances Hanckel and John Cunningham (1976) who review the four existing novels of their time: John Donovan’s (1969) *I’ll Get There...*, Isabelle Holland’s (1972) *The Man Without a Face*, Lynn Hall’s (1972) *Sticks and Stones*, and Sandra

Scoppettone's (1974) *Trying Hard to Hear You*. The title of their article, "Can Young Gays Find Happiness in YA Books?" (p. 528), introduces their central question; can characters be both gay and happy? Although they acknowledge that the four books are brave pioneering efforts to depict same-sex sexuality in literature written for youth, they express dissatisfaction with the negative representations, worrying that these stories may leave young readers with the impression that same-sex sexuality has little lasting significance or that it leads to dire outcomes, such as death. Expressing their concern over the lack of affirming messages in novels, they write, "Not one plot has a happy ending" (p. 532-533). They conclude their review with a call for more titles, writing, "Where is there life-affirming hope for a young person who knows or suspects he or she is homosexual?" (p. 534). They lament that the representations of their time fail to illustrate that people can be both gay and happy and they issue a plea for authors to publish more gay themed novels that depict affirmative experiences and emotions.

Writing three decades later, Terry Norton and Jonatha Vare (2004) reassure readers that Hanckel and Cunningham's call for novels to portray life affirming hope and happiness has been answered. Arguing that titles published since John Donovan's *I'll Get There...* portray gay and lesbian characters more positively, they argue, "Literature for gay and lesbian young adults has changed significantly during the intervening years to subvert unflattering images and provide more hopeful depictions for an audience still vulnerable to overt and covert homophobia" (p. 65). If early novels containing "unflattering" representations of gays and lesbians contributed to societal homophobia, then Norton and Vare assure us that representations and by association, social attitudes,

have improved over time. In doing so, they draw a direct parallel between literature and people's capacity to learn. This image is reassuring; it confirms that future generations will continue to become more open-minded of same-sex sexuality. On the other hand, reading about happy endings may not necessarily translate into niceness all around. All of these happy endings may leave people feeling like failures when they cannot apply a happy ending to their own relationships.

The idea that representations are evolving organically toward more positive representations continues with Nancy St. Clair (1995). St. Clair organizes novels into three categories. Her first category describes the earliest published novels in the YA canon. In these books, homosexuality is a "tragic flaw" or "pathological state" where homosexuals are seen as "predators" in Janice Kesselman's (1983) *Flick*, "immoral," in Judith St. George's (1981) *Call Me Margo*, "doomed to lives of isolation," in Isabelle Holland's (1972) *The Man Without a Face*, and "prone to violence," in Larry Hulce's (1982) *Just the Right Amount of Wrong*. According to St. Clair, Nancy Garden's (1982) *Annie On My Mind* is groundbreaking because it is the first title to illustrate a gay or lesbian relationship outside frames of violence, humiliation, or death. The novel captures the love and friendship between two high-school seniors, Liza and Annie, who stand up to their homophobic school administrators. Although the teens' lesbian high school teachers lose their jobs because of their sexual orientation, the story concludes with the hopeful resolution that love still has the power to conquer ignorance and hatred. St. Clair suggests that Garden enabled more books to portray "sexuality as something to be explored and come to grips with," (p. 3) which St. Clair labels as the second category of

YA novels. Her third category includes titles that depict gay characters and issues “more sympathetically,” (p. 4) such as Marion Bauer’s (1995) anthology of short stories, *Am I Blue? Coming Out From the Silence*. St. Clair regards the trend toward more positive representations as “progress of sorts,” (p. 4) yet she also asserts the need for more novels that sensitively portray gays and lesbian characters and issues. Like Terry Norton and Jonatha Vare (2004), St. Clair interprets a progressive trend in the representation of gay characters and themes and suggests that the representations have moved away from negative portrayals and towards more positive depictions of gayness for the betterment of queer youth and educators.

Alan Cuseo’s (1992) work reveals similar findings. Exploring thematic messages about same-sex sexuality in novels published between 1969 and 1982, Cuseo suggests that reprisal in the form of ostracism, violence or death is most often inflicted on gay and lesbian characters. He explains, “The majority of novels present a negative view of the homosexual’s life...it is a life rife with constant verbal harassment, physical violence, and possibly, retribution in the form of accident or death” (p. 393). Cuseo worries that these representations reinforce damaging notions about gay and lesbian people. He writes, “The novels published for the young adult reinforce society’s stereotypes and cast the homosexual as a deviant, an outcast, and as a stigmatized individual” (p. 409). For Cuseo, a central problem with early novels is the damaging impact that such dark representations may have on people’s perceptions about gay and lesbian people. The effect of reading about the sad and tragic experiences of gay and lesbian people is that the

reader, who, according to Cuseo, already believes that queer people are deviant, will only have this homophobic belief confirmed.

Carlisle Webber's (2010) expansive review of YA novels with gay and lesbian themes and characters further classifies novels through their positive or negative representations of gayness. However, Webber departs from other scholarship by arguing that the titles published in the 1980s and 1990s are not all affirming. She devotes an entire chapter to "darker" titles and collects these novels under the subheadings, "teen angst," "discrimination and outsiders," "abuse," and "dysfunctional families."³¹ Webber is rather blunt about her dislike for the sorts of representations that she finds unflattering to gays and lesbians. Cautioning librarians about the macabre contents of these books, she warns, "Think twice before suggesting these titles to a GLBTQ teen just starting to question his or her sexuality, because they may lead teens to conclude that their behaviour will somehow be punished" (p. 55). Like Cuseo, Webber argues narratives fraught with conflict are not suitable educational resources.

By recommending these novels only on the caveat that they should not be given to young people who are not secure and confident about their gay identities, Webber presents young people as necessarily vulnerable if they have not yet secured a stable sexual identity. Although Webber departs from other scholarship that captures the representation of gay themes and characters as progressing forward across time, she

³¹ Examples of these titles include: Bette Greene's (1991) *The Drowning of Stephen Jones*, in which sixteen year old Carla must choose to support her boyfriend Andy, or speak out against his part in the homophobic and murderous campaign that led to the death of a gay man; Aiden Chambers' (1982) *Dance On My Grave*, evidences the character, Hal who mourns the tragic death of his emotionally abusive boyfriend, Barry, by dancing on his grave.

echoes the sentiment that particular dark themes are not suitable for young and vulnerable readers and she reinforces the belief that young people must strive to claim stable, proud, identities.

The most comprehensive review of gay themed YA novels is Michael Cart and Christine Jenkin's (2004) *The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature With Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content 1969-2004*. Citing over two hundred gay-themed novels, Cart and Jenkins offer a useful chronological appendix of novels published from 1969-2004. They do so:

In order to provide readers and authors a critical context in which to evaluate GLBTQ literature, we believe that what is stereotypical, wrongheaded, and outdated must be noted and what is accurate, thoughtful and artful must be applauded (p. xviii).

Declaring that an important part of their project is to demonstrate a methodology for assessing titles, Cart and Jenkins organize the novels into three categories: homosexual visibility, gay assimilation, and queer consciousness/community. They label most novels published in the 1970s and early 1980s as "homosexual visibility." In these novels, a character realizes that he/she is gay and the experience of "coming out," or of "being outed" propels the plot, and suggests that the narrative conflict is located around the community's response to the character's sexuality, pointing out that in these novels, the experiences of characters that identify or are perceived by others, as gay or lesbian is bitter. Harsh retribution such as social rejection, isolation, exile, and death await them. Gayness is presented in these types of stories as "a problem" that inevitably results in

terrible punishment. Cart and Jenkins argue that these novels perpetuate damaging stereotypes about gay and lesbian people, writing:

Some are pictured as unfortunates doomed to either a premature death or a life of despair lived at the darkest margins of society. Others are portrayed as sinister predators lurking in the shadows of sinister settings, or play the role of briefly viewed ‘fags’ or ‘dykes’ who are included only to confirm a more central character’s naiveté or sophistication (p. xvi).

Novels in this category include titles where gay and lesbian characters are punished for their sexualities by getting kicked out of boarding school, as in Jane Fitcher's (1982) *Crush*, becoming socially ostracized, as in Ann Rinaldi's (1987) *The Good Side of My Heart*, and Judith St. George's (1981) *Just Call Me Margo*, or for meeting a tragic death, as in Isabelle Holland’s (1972) *The Man Without a Face*.

Cart and Jenkins position “gay assimilation” novels as those in which the characters’ sexual differences do not drive the plot. A character’s sexuality is noted, but this difference is not very significant to the story since these characters “just happen to be gay” (p. 171). Their third category of “queer consciousness/community” novels is those narratives that feature gay and lesbian characters living within a supportive community or family. These stories reverse the common trope that sees a plot from a heterosexist perspective because, rather than explicating how gay and lesbian people are viewed by others, these novels, “tell readers how gay and lesbian people view themselves” (p. 170). Cart and Jenkins describe these latter two categories as overlapping because most novels do not fall cleanly into either category. Rather, most novels offer brief, hopeful instances

where “gay assimilation” and or “queer conscious / community” is featured. For example, Euen, a gay teen in David Rees’ (1982) *The Milkman’s On His Way*, lives in a small tourist town and feels hopeless, isolated and lonely until he encounters a group of gay tourists at the beach. Seeing this group of friends, he realizes that his future will be brighter when he graduates high school, leaves his small town, and finds a supportive network of gay friends in a bigger city. Despite the fact that this novel narrates gay loneliness, Cart and Jenkins demonstrate that it is still redemptive because it offers the reassurance that Euen will one day find a supportive network of friends. This is exactly the narrative about gay life that the “It Gets Better Project” promotes. Although characters in Cart and Jenkins’ categories of stories face social consequences for their sexual orientations, these plots are redemptive because the plot finds a tidy and hopeful resolution. The gay and lesbian characters in these novels are likeable, make good role models, and teach others to be more tolerant of difference.³² For Cart and Jenkins, representations of LGBTQ youth in YA novels have progressed and become more affirmative over time as have the social conditions of everyday life for gay and lesbian people.

Like Cart and Jenkins, Thomas Crisp (2009) arranges YA novels into categories, although he asserts that there are only two distinct forms of representation. What distinguishes the two is the way in which they present homophobia. He argues that one type of novel creates homophobia as a problem that gay characters must struggle against

³²For example, in Nancy Garden’s (1996) *Good Moon Rising*, high-school seniors Jan and Kerry realize that they are in love with one another and stand up against the homophobic members of their drama club. In Ron Koertge’s (1988) *The Arizona Kid*, Billy learns to overcome his homophobia by making friends with his likeable gay uncle.

while the other type presents a fantasy world where homophobia and discrimination do not exist at all. Finding fault with both types of novels, Crisp writes:

Any book that seeks to educate readers about homophobia and intolerance by presenting a world in which homophobia and intolerance are the norm on some level, ultimately reinforces these as inevitabilities. Unfortunately, texts that seek to imagine a brighter future or a better world ultimately feed the normative social order as well. To the extent that a better world is the reward of future generations (reproductive futurism), a dichotomous heterosexual/not distinction remains central (p. 348).

Crisp's departure from the other scholarship is located in his argument that neither category of novels actually successfully challenges heteronormativity. He points out that the overarching assumption of both types of novels is that gay teenagers can find happiness only by entering into heteronormative monogamous relationships, which are presented as the way to have a productive and happy future. If, for Cart and Jenkins, the representation of gay themes and characters in YA novels has steadily become more affirming, Crisp asserts that young adult novels have evolved only in so far as they have become homo-normative.

I suggest that Crisp is calling on YA fiction to resist the pull toward homo-normalization by refusing to fit into a hetero-normative frame. Extending Crisp's argument, I add that declining the call to normalization also means refusing to erase the memory of the most shameful and damaged gay and lesbian characters that are represented in early YA fiction. It is the downtrodden experiences of the least happy

characters, those who are most excluded in the beaconing call toward queer normalization, that are central to this dissertation. Remaking gay and lesbian identities as “normal” or “homo-normal” most often means that this identity must be uncoupled from damage, humiliation and loss. Part of the project of refusing this call is to hold onto the experiences of those who came before us, even the figures who we are most ashamed of.

YA scholarship about gay themed YA novels tends to embrace the positive portrayals found in more contemporary novels as an antidote to the dark and depressing representations found in the earliest novel. Scholars celebrate the progress they see toward representing characters more affirmatively. Yet, in doing so, critics also point out that there is an important connection between the older and newer novels. If contemporary novels respond to the earliest novels, then the newer novels are also indebted to the authors who came before them. If indebtedness to characters in early novels involves recognizing them as mere building blocks to more affirmative tales, then we are skipping over the sad experiences of those who cannot easily be divorced from violence, isolation and sorrow. We risk missing the opportunity to pay homage to those who came before us by seeing and valuing their experiences as a part of the struggle for and making of gay and lesbian identities. We also endorse the denial of contemporary queer identities that are not tolerated.

Chapter Four: Shame On You, Man Without a Face.

In this chapter, I look at debates about Isabelle Holland's (1972) *The Man Without a Face* and consider how critics caution that the novel represents damaging stereotypes about gay and lesbian people. For Holland's critics, the parallels that the novel draws between gayness and intergenerational relationships, social marginalization, abjection and death are damaging because they emphasize homophobic misconceptions of members of the gay and lesbian community. While critics worry that the representation of gay shame in early YA novels may threaten to contaminate young readers and spoil the reputation of gay and lesbian identities, I argue that gay shame might also be understood in more dynamic and productive ways that challenge heteronormativity and make room for complicated holistic identities filled with both pride and at times a healthy lack thereof.

To explore alternate ways of understanding gay shame, I turn to the late Eve Sedgwick who argues that shame is an affect directly and necessarily related to queer identity, performance, and interest. While Sedgwick acknowledges the difficulty of shame in the history of gay and lesbian existence, she also considers shame to be a foundational aspect through which the possibility of gay and lesbian pride, identity and community is formed. I bring this understanding of gay shame to my reading of Holland's novel and also to Mel Gibson's film adaptation of the novel and consider how reading shame in the lives of two characters, Justin McLeod and Charles (Chuck) Norstadt, may help us to understand shame as a part of gay identities.

Isabelle Holland's *The Man Without a Face* (1972) details the summer of fourteen-year-old Chuck (Charles) Norstadt, whose holiday is spent preparing to retake an entrance exam to St. Matthews, a prep school attended by his grandfather and great uncles. Chuck is unhappily spending his summer with his mother and two half-sisters in a New England village that is mostly inhabited by wealthy cottagers. He imagines St. Matthews as an opportunity to escape his family and as a step toward his goal of joining the Air Force, a vocational choice motivated by his desire to follow in the footsteps of his absentee father. Chuck makes unlikely friends with the island recluse, Justin McLeod who is known as "the man without a face," because of his facial disfigurement. McLeod reluctantly agrees to tutor Chuck and over the summer the boundaries of their pedagogical relationship blur. Chuck's physical and emotional attraction to McLeod is depicted through contradictory identifications with the man as a teacher, friend, father figure, and lover. The story climaxes when they have an ambiguously narrated sexual encounter, which abruptly ends their unusual friendship. Afterward, Chuck passes his exam and moves away for school. Several months later he returns to reconcile with McLeod, only to discover that the man died and willed Chuck his entire estate.

Shameful Lessons

As critics have pointed out, the man without a face is an abject figure. McLeod is socially exiled and isolated and has horrifying scars on half of his body and face. He also has a criminal record for a drunk-driving accident that resulted in the death of a teenage boy. He lives in the margins of society, engages in a questionable relationship with Chuck, and dies at the end of the novel. McLeod's failure or refusal to participate in the

social life of his community may also be read as purposeful. Nicknamed “The Grouch,” (p. 17) McLeod doesn’t speak to anyone. His only companions are a huge horse and an aggressive guard dog that deter the teenagers who sometimes attempt to sneak onto his large property. Even his menacing house, positioned on the top of a cliff, back from the road and fenced off with a protective gate, operates as a symbol of his solitude. What is Holland trying to convey with her reclusive lonely and disfigured man without a face that could be beneficial to LGBTQ youth today?

When the man reluctantly agrees to tutor Chuck, Chuck’s first lesson is to learn how to respect the man’s privacy. Chuck muses, “If McLeod had made one thing clear above all others it was that he had a highly developed sense of privacy. It spread out like a moat around him” (p. 84). The man’s obvious desire to be left alone is mysterious and is met with cruel speculation by people in the community who gossip that he served time in jail, is a former member of the C.I.A., is an unstable physicist, is living falsely under a pseudonym, is an author of pornographic fiction and is gay and previously worked as a teacher (p. 27). Nothing “positive” seems to attach to the man’s character in the eyes of the heteronormative public that surround him. The rumors are partially true; the man is the author of a YA book series and writes under the pseudonym, “Terrence Blake” (p. 86). Paradoxically, the man stands at a distance to the young people who gossip incessantly about him, yet he is also the author of their favourite book series.

If the man’s writing humanize and positions him in close proximity to young people, his facial disfigurement drives them further away. Chuck describes McLeod’s face as “Glazed raw beef all over most of one side and flowing across his nose to the

other” (p. 28). Yet, the man’s decision not to seek treatment for his scars reflects a self-imposed punishment. McLeod explains the cause of his disfigurement to Chuck, recounting, “I got burned in a car accident. I was too drunk to know what I was doing, slid on some ice, and went over the side of the road down a ravine” (p. 89). McLeod went to jail for two years and blames himself for the death of the teenager who was incinerated in the car wreck. He wears shame like a mask on his face and this functions to shield himself from other people. Rather than resist his shame, the man embraces life as the shamed.

Chuck’s Shame

Chuck’s shame is inherited through his mother. She has three children with three ex-husbands and yet she remains relatively unshamed by this history. Her extraordinary beauty offers a buffer for the shame that might otherwise land on a divorced woman in the 1970s. She cleverly directs shame off herself and onto her ex-husbands, particularly Chuck’s birth father. Scoffing about her second ex-husband, she says, “Eric was so... so... square and middle class and true-blue-All-American-Boy-Scout. You know the type. They always turn out to be engineers—or pilots” (p. 11). Chuck’s mother deflects shame onto Chuck’s father and then onto Chuck, who dreams of becoming a pilot.

Despite Chuck’s recognition of his mother’s lack of regard for his father, she is also Chuck’s only source of information about the man. Chuck daydreams about talking with his mother about his birth father. In the dream he asks, “But you must have another picture of him *somewhere*. How am I ever to know what he looked like? (p. 99). She responds, “But that’s why I threw the pictures away. I didn’t want you to know what he

looked like, because then you would hate me the way he did” (p. 99). This dream mirrors Chuck’s mother’s greatest fear. Despite her erasure of her ex-husband, she worries that Chuck will inherit his father’s shame of her. This fear is confirmed when she cries, “The truth is, Chuck, you just don’t care about anybody but yourself- you don’t love me” (p. 29). Chuck internalizes his mother’s rejection of him and also her dismissal of his father, who is also a man without a face in that Chuck can’t recall what his father looked like. Chuck copes with the loss of his father by defiantly identifying with a man whom he has no memory of. That is, Chuck identifies with his father who, like Justin McLeod, is also a man without a face.

Chuck’s identification with his father and shame about his mother maps onto his relationship with McLeod. Chuck positions the man as a father figure and eventually starts to believe that the man might actually be his father. After smoking marijuana, Chuck hallucinates that his father is McLeod:

I suddenly realized I now could see my Father’s face very well. It has a red scar on one side, but it was getting smaller and smaller. It was odd, though, about his hair. I could have sworn it was yellow. I could see now it was black and grey. All of a sudden it was McLeod, minus scar (p. 99).

Although this wish is conveyed in a drugged dream, the episode signals Chuck’s growing attachment to the man as well as his emerging sense that McLeod might really be his dad. This fantasy continues a few days later when Chuck faints at church. As Chuck regains consciousness, he sees McCloud standing over him. Surprised, Chuck reaches up and

puts his hand onto the man's face. McLeod asks Chuck whose face he expected to see and curiously Chuck responds, "My father's" (p. 136).

Strangely, Chuck's increasing identification with McLeod as a substitute father also coincides with his growing attraction to the man. One afternoon, when studying, the two go swimming and then doze together on some warm rocks. Chuck reaches for the man:

There was something beating in his hand or mine, I couldn't tell which. I wanted to touch him. Moving the arm that had been across my eyes I reached over and touched his side. The hot skin was tight over his ribs. I knew then that I'd never been close to anyone in my life, not like that. And I wanted to get closer (p. 120).

Afterwards, Chuck wonders what his attraction to McLeod might mean. He asks, "Do you think that I'm a queer?" (p. 120). The man refuses to label Chuck's attraction as romantic. McLeod replies, "No. Everybody wants and needs affection and you don't get much. Also, you're a boy who badly needs a father" (p. 121). Strangely, the man locates Chuck's sexual desire as stemming from his need to have a father.

At the end of the novel, Chuck learns that his perception of his father is a sham and that he is not a hero, but a poor man who died of health complications related to alcoholism. Chuck is made to bear a shameful legacy. Devastated, Chuck runs to McLeod for comfort. Chuck's distress brings an unlikely emotion—desire. Their embrace is sexually charged. Chuck describes the intimacy that follows: "The golden cocoon had broken open and was spilling in a shower of gold" (p. 147). The next morning Chuck is overwhelmed by contradictory feelings and he runs out. Months later he returns to make

peace with McLeod and learns that the man has died. In a fatherly act, McLeod leaves his entire estate to Chuck. McLeod also leaves a message tucked inside the cover of Chuck's favourite "Terrance Blake" book:

...You gave me something I hadn't ever again expected to have: companionship, friendship, love—yours and mine... One other request: try to forgive your father. He did his best. More people do than you realize. A good way to start is by forgiving yourself.

My love to you always,

Justin (p. 154).

The letter reads as an invitation for Chuck to let go of the past. By asking Chuck to forgive his father, McLeod, as Chuck's substitute father, is also requesting forgiveness and turning his shame into pride. This need for forgiveness also reverberates in the stern critiques of *The Man Without a Face* by scholars of children's literature.

What is unforgiveable about the shame, sadness and death found in these YA novels? Can we take pride in YA novels today only by shaming the gay depictions of the past? How does a desire for affirmation, proud figures—not *The Man Without a Face*—speak to a need for hetero and homonormativity? Is it possible that by taking a cue from McLeod and Chuck and identifying with shame, we might simply learn to live with the shame that stubbornly remains despite the accomplishments wrought by gay pride? Like Chuck, we might learn to accept this painful legacy and recognize shame's reanimations in the present as an invitation to patiently attend to the past.

The Debates

In the 1970s, Isabelle Holland received recognition and praise for her novel from the American Literature Association, the Horn Book's Fanfare and The New York Times.³³ In 1993, the novel was also adapted into a film directed by Mel Gibson (Davey & Gibson, 1993). Despite these accolades, however, debates about the novel's explication of dark themes such as shame, intergenerational relationships, social isolation, exile, loneliness and death continue to circulate among scholars of queer children's literature. While the novel is hailed as one of the first gay-themed young adult (YA) novels to be published in North America or the United Kingdom, critics stalwartly debate its "negative" representation of gay sexuality.

Critiques of Holland's novel focus on the troubling associations that the story draws between gay identities and negativity. Returning briefly to Micahel Cart and Christine Jenkins (2006), they note their frustration with older novels that conclude with the tragic death of gay characters. They write, "Surely it is time for GLBTQ literature to abandon the traditional and too-easy equation of homosexuality with violent death" (p. 166). For Cart and Jenkins, these types of stories are outdated representations. Expressing their disapproval in particular with *The Man Without a Face*, they identify five grave consequences that the novel associates with being gay:

1. being hideously injured in a car wreck
2. becoming an embittered, tormented recluse
3. being rejected by a boy whom you have sought only to mentor, comfort, and reassure
4. exiling oneself to a life among strangers

³³ The American Literature Association: 1972 Best Books for Young Adults and Best of the Best Books (YA) 1970-1983. New York Times: Outstanding Children's Books of 1972. Horn Books: Best book of 1972.

5. dying prematurely of a heart attack no doubt brought on by 1,2,3, and 4 (p. 21-22).

Their concern is that these depictions of gay identities feed into homophobic assumptions about the LGBTQ community. For instance, highlighting that Justin McLeod's death at the end of the novel is particularly problematic, they write, "In death the man without a face becomes a martyred saint, with the apparent implication that the only good homosexual is a dead homosexual" (p. 21). For Cart and Jenkins, this insinuation is dangerous because it reinforces the belief that gay people are better off dead.

Isabelle Holland anticipates the type of critiques that Cart and Jenkins express about her novel. Reflecting on her intentions for writing the story, Holland defends her novel, stating it echoes the prevalent social norms about homosexuality that existed at the time when she wrote the story. She writes:

Now to understand the meaning of Charles' and Justin's story, you have to realize they had something in those days they called a taboo against any expression of love between members of the same sex. Yes, I know it's hard to believe, but without that there wouldn't even be a story to tell... (p. 143).

Her claim is that the novel actually reflects the sorts of homophobic conceptions that circulated in North America in the early 1970s and also today. While contemporary critics argue that the novel perpetuates homophobia, Holland believes that her story simply reflects dominant social beliefs about homosexuality. To be sure, the themes visited in her novel such as shame and its intergenerational love is still taboo.

Holland is not the only author to defend the portrayal of gay sexuality in her novel. Lynn Hall, author of *Sticks and Stones* (1972), candidly discusses the sorts of

pressures that she received from her publishing company to write a particular kind of story about gay sexuality. While Holland defends her choice to depict darker themes in her novel, Hall laments that she was not able to write a happier story. Originally, Hall's novel concluded with a happy ending for Tom, the protagonist, and his "best friend" Ward. However, her publisher demanded that she change the ending of the novel by killing Tom. Hall explains:

I had begun the book to show the destructive potential of gossip, but by the time I got well into it, I'm afraid I lost sight of that theme. I wanted Ward and Tom to love each other, to live happily ever after, and that was the way I ended it. But the publishers would not let me do it. In their words, this was showing a homosexual relationship as a possible happy ending and this might be dangerous to young people teetering on the brink. One editor wanted me to kill Tom in a car accident. At least I held out for a friendship at the end, one which might or might not develop into something more, depending on the reader's imagination (Hanckel & Cunningham, 1976, p. 534).

Hall highlights the fact that editors dictate the sorts of representations of gay sexuality that are published. Hall found a clever way to compromise with her publisher; she included a car crash at the end of the novel but allowed Tom to survive the accident. Hall was able to end her novel ambiguously. By keeping Tom alive and holding open the possibility that Tom and Ward could rekindle their "friendship," Hall leaves room for readers to imagine a preferred ending. Still, the original "happily ever after" ending is not the sort of story that Hall's publishers considered appropriate for teenage readers at that

time, especially teens “teetering on the brink,” that is, teens who are undecided about their sexual orientation. They feared that the novel might be perceived as glorifying homosexuality. To be sure, Hall’s experience reinforces Holland’s claim that gay-themed YA novels reflect prevalent social values. If Hall and Holland want to publish gay-themed YA novels, they have to comply with the restrictions imposed by the publishing houses.

Cart and Jenkins, however, are not convinced that authors who are restricted by the social views about same-sex sexuality should be absolved of critique. They remain critical of Holland’s novel, writing:

In reflecting the prevailing social attitudes of her time, the author [Holland] nevertheless equates homosexuality with disfigurement, despair, and death, and her novel... reinforces some of the stereotypical thinking about homosexuality that became a fixture of GLBTQ literature (p. 22).

Cart and Jenkins maintain that even if Holland is simply catering to the public’s desires, this does not negate the fact that the dark images in her novel may be detrimental. Why are novels of the 1970s and 1980s destined to be unproud, reflecting the reality of many LGBT people at that time, while later LGBTQ themes are asked to be happy and pride filled, even though this does not reflect the social climate for LGBTQ youth today? To be sure, “The It Gets Better Campaign” came about because of this type of unrest.

Other critics of *The Man Without a Face* take issue with Holland’s portrayal of an intergenerational relationship. Frances Hanckel and John Cunningham, register discomfort with this theme, writing:

Holland's novel contains one of the most destructive and fallacious stereotypes—the homosexual as child molester. Justin, whose scarred face is noted by the title, is responsible for the death of a boy under unclarified circumstances. In light of such limited coverage of the gay experience in YA fiction, the possible identification of such a major character as a corrupter of children is grossly unfair (p. 534).

They worry that the association that the novel draws between gayness and intergenerational relationships serves to perpetuate a disparaging stereotype about gay men as child molesters, which presumes that intergenerational relationships are abusive. They express reservations about this aspect of the plot, wishing instead for plots that end happily and without proving controversial to the LGBTQ community and more important, to the heterosexual community.

Asking more in-depth questions of Holland, Corinne Hirsch (1979) is also critical of the intergenerational relationship in the novel. However, Hirsch is less concerned about the fact that the novel includes this type of relationship and is more critical of Holland's lack of realistic or in-depth engagement with this topic. Hirsch writes:

Furthermore, as realistic fiction, *The Man Without a Face* owes its readers fidelity to human experience; it cannot sweep under the rug the problems it has been dealing with throughout. Having introduced themes rich with ambiguity, the exigencies of the novel demand that they be worked out more fully. How might Charles deal with the complicated emotional and sexual feelings he has

developed? What would be a realistic outcome of his relationship with McLeod?

(p. 33).

Hirsch's charge to Holland is that if she wants to depict intergenerational romantic love, she must fully flush out the implications of this sort of relationship.

The fact that *The Man Without a Face* has evoked such strong responses from critics suggests the importance of exploring the difficulty that the novel still poses today. For her critics, Holland's novel risks the repetition of stereotypical and homophobic misconceptions about gay and lesbian people. Such strong reactions to the depiction of shameful themes like "forbidden love" in Holland's novel suggest that her work continues to invoke painful feelings, images and associations and that these fears and stereotypes are still present. The ways in which representations of gay shame continue to stir up difficult feelings suggests that the effects of gay shame persist in the present. If we position gay shame as something that must remain in the LGBTQ community, but is unaddressed, then we risk subjecting young LGBTQ youth to our own shame and fears. The other side to exploring the depiction of shame in YA fiction is that it may open up a space to think differently not only about the relationship that we make to the legacy of shame but also to the traces of this history that have survived and continue to affect us in the present.

Eve Sedgwick's Shame

Delivering a stunning blow to gay pride, Eve Sedgwick's appearance in the first issue of GLQ (*Gay Lesbian Quarterly*), offered an alternative way to conceptualize gay shame. Her early writing on shame was so startling because it was published at a time

when twenty years of post-Stonewall activism had demonstrated the many virtues and necessities of what was considered gay pride. In the 1990s, as academics such as Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis were calling identity politics into question, Sedgwick posed a different kind of question about identity. She wondered what it might mean to actually consider queer identity and performance in relation to the beauty of shame. Bringing together Silvan Tomkins' theorization of shame/interest and Judith Butler's influential work on queer performativity, Sedgwick offers a model for understanding queer identity and performance in relationship to shame.

Reflecting on her decision to begin with an inglorious statement like "shame on you," Sedgwick (1993) writes:

What's the point of accentuating the negative, of beginning with stigma, and for that matter, a form of stigma—"Shame on you"—so unsanitizably redolent of that long Babylonian exile known as queer childhood? But note that this is just what the word queer itself does, too: the main reason why the self-application of "queers" by activists has proven so volatile is that there's no way that any amount of affirmative reclamation is going to succeed in detaching the word from its association with shame and with the terrifying powerlessness of gender-dissonant or otherwise stigmatized childhood. If queer is a politically potent term, which it is, that's because, far from being capable of being detached from the childhood scene of shame, it cleaves to that scene as a near-inexhaustible source of transformational energy (p. 4).

Sedgwick suggests that gay pride is only ever mobilized through its resistance to gay stigma. Shame is an essential aspect of queer identity and performance because shame is a source of power and “transformational energy” for the gay community. Gay identity is not achieved despite people’s experiences of shame; rather, gay identities are always already accomplished through shame. She writes, “...shame effaces itself; shame points and projects; shame turns itself skin outside; shame and pride, shame and self-display, shame and exhibition are different interlinings of the same glove: shame, it might finally be said, transformational shame, *is performance*” (p. 5). Tying shame squarely to the grounds of modern queer identity, she elaborates, “The forms taken by shame are not distinct ‘toxic’ parts of a group or individual identity that can be excised; they are instead integral to and residual in the process by which identity itself is *formed*” (p. 13).

Shame marks a person’s identity and is a key motivation for the self to become itself. As Sedgwick states, “shame is an experience of the self by the self. At that moment when the self feels shamed, it is felt as a sickness within the self” (p. 136). Shame is also contagious and world changing because one can experience another person’s shame. She explains, “It’s the way bad treatment of someone else, bad treatment by someone else, someone else’s embarrassment, stigma, debility, bad smell, or strange behavior, seemingly having nothing to do with me, can so readily flood me...” (2010, p. 50).³⁴

³⁴ This strange transference of shame is enacted when Sedgwick realizes that she feels shame while looking at the empty lot where the World Trade Center twin towers once stood. Wondering why she felt shame upon seeing the gaping hole that remained in place of the buildings, she realizes that her shame stemmed from her expectation to see the buildings that were no longer there. She feels shame for the empty skyline that was once blocked by the buildings. Her identification with the buildings, which once stood as a symbol of American economic power and military strength, is interrupted. Describing this interrupted identification, she writes, “one wishes to look at or commune with another person but suddenly cannot because he is strange, or one expected him to be familiar but

Similarly, reading shame in the protagonists of LGBTQ YA novels can bring shame for a reader, as exemplified by the responses of critics.

To understand the dynamics of shame, Sedgwick looks to Silvan Tomkins, whose affect theory stems from clinical studies conducted in the 1950s and 1960s. Curious about what the body does when it feels, Tomkins studied the expression of emotions on baby's faces and observed that three to seven month old infants learn to distinguish the faces of their mothers from a stranger's. When babies gaze up expectantly at their mothers, they are making their first connections to the outside world. They were ashamed of their failure to find their mothers. Although shame is an affect that interrupts connections, it also creates the grounds of possibility for the interests, attachments and connections that people make with others and to the world around them. Still, Sedgwick reminds us that shame is an affect that promotes social identification because shame "derives from and aims towards sociability" (1993, p. 5). Thus, by tying shame to our ability to take an interest and form attachments to others and the world, Sedgwick illustrates the importance of shame to the development of both the self and community.

Sedgwick's theorization of shame reminds us that gay liberation, which created the foundation through which modern gay identities were built, was born out of a collective experience of gay shame. The ability of the LGBTQ community to claim a sense of pride is directly related to the isolation, stigma and shame that were once and still are in many cases, ubiquitous with gayness. Sedgwick positions shame as a volatile

suddenly appears unfamiliar, or one started to smile but found one was smiling at a stranger" (p. 135).

affect that is part of the foundation for identities, communities and the pride that is so revered by the gay liberation movement. This theorization of shame offers a different way of reading the representation of shame in *The Man Without a Face*. While critics suggest that the novel represents gay sexuality negatively, the novel may also be read as offering us a portrait of what it is like to live a life with unrecognized gay shame. The two protagonists, Justin McLeod and Charles (Chuck) Norstadt demonstrate how to express the experience of their lived shame. Justin, quite literally, lives his shame as it is written all over his face in the form of disfigurement. This shame reminds him of the child that he blames himself for killing while driving drunk.

Mel Gibson's Shame

In contrast to the Isabelle Holland's novel, Mel Gibson's film version remakes the characters and removes shameful themes including gay sexuality, the intergenerational relationship and death from the plot. In other words, the film sanitizes shame and gayness and the story becomes heteronormative. However, even as these themes are erased shame still emerges in Gibson's reflection of his process of making the film and in his reading of the novel. He carefully shifts between admiring the contentious topics that Holland explores in the novel and also conveying disapproval about certain elements of the book, such as the intergenerational relationship. Because the film is an adaptation of the novel, the novel's "shameful" themes threaten to contaminate Gibson's reputation. This shameful book is contagious. Perhaps anticipating scrutiny for directing a movie based on a book with an intergenerational relationship, Gibson distances his film from the novel. Carefully emphasizing his praise for the film script, he says, "I read the script first and

that's what I liked. The book is just– I'm sorry, but the guy did it. And you know, like, why? I just wanted to say something a lot more positive” (Conners, 1993). By referring to the ambiguously narrated sexual encounter in the novel as “it,” Gibson avoids explicitly spelling out his interpretation of what Gibson understands as a heterosexual man and the “shameful” sexual intimacy that transpired in the novel between Chuck and McLeod. Instead, Gibson assigns blame to McLeod who did “it” and assures his fans that his film is a much more positive re-visioning of Holland’s novel.

Gibson’s approval of the film stands in sharp contrast to his critique of the novel. He draws a clear distinction between the positive and remarkably heterosexual story that he seeks to portray in the film and the negative homosexual story that he interprets in the novel. Of the book itself, Gibson calls the story “interesting” with a lot of “sadness” and “heavy issues and stuff” (“Behind the scenes feautrete,” n.d.). If by “heavy issues,” Gibson is referring to the novel’s depiction of gayness and intergenerational relationships, his admiration for Holland’s narration of these topics is not evident in the film. The film does not depict McLeod as a gay man, although members of the community gossip that he might be gay. Nor does the film portray McLeod and Chuck’s relationship as anything other than an innocent teacher/student mentorship. It is hard to imagine what Gibson liked about the novel, which clearly details Chuck’s developing physical and emotional attraction to McLeod.

Gibson carefully dissociates himself from the novels’ shameful topics. He differentiates the film, which tells a positive story about a healthy pedagogical relationship that unfolds between a boy and his teacher, turning a homosexual,

intergenerational relationship to a “father and son,” heteronormative familial relationship.

Of this, Gibson says:

It’s a perfectly natural relationship. It’s like a student mentor relationship and they formed a bond that was quite strong. It was a father and son thing. The guy didn’t have a father and the teacher was alienated from society by the disfigurement and found that he could fulfill himself through what he was, you know, what his vocation was, to teach, you know and that is what he liked doing. So that they filled that emptiness, they filled that void for one another. So it was kind of a love relationship, but in a very healthy way (“Behind the scene featurette,” n.d.).

Gibson assures us that he finds value in the kind of nurturing love that the film portrays between a man and a child and that there is no shame to be had in a “healthy” heterosexual relationship. Still, Gibson’s insistence that the film narrates an innocent friendship is challenged in the film when McLeod is eventually accused of abusing Chuck. If Gibson’s film is wholesome and uplifting, then it is also a moral panic about sexual abuse. This panic comes to light when Chuck rushes over to McLeod’s house and spends the night in tears after he finds out his father was not a hero but an alcoholic. Chuck is reported missing. The next morning a police officer arrives at McLeod’s house and finds Chuck in his underwear. The officer suspects that McLeod has sexually abused Chuck. However, the film’s portrayal of sexual abuse is cautious. By condemning child abuse, even if no abuse has taken place, Gibson casts himself as a hero who dares to direct and act in a movie that explores this shameful topic. While reclaiming pride over the novel’s shameful plot, he lands on the morally correct side of the issue. Yet, by

interpreting the novel's intergenerational relationship as a moral panic about sexual abuse, Gibson also enacts the very problem that critics of Holland's novel warn against. That is, critics caution that Holland's novel perpetuates the stereotype that gay men are child molesters. Gibson, a heterosexual man, read the novel and sees a McLeod as a potential gay man and sexual abuser. Both the critics and Gibson perpetuate the fear that novels that explore shame and homosexuality are shameful and should be left out of contemporary pedagogies for fear they will infect future generations with shameful thoughts, feelings, or in the case of Gibson, that these YA novels should be rewritten, desexualized and sanitized.

The film's depiction of Chuck as a helpless child helps to make this accusation more plausible. Chuck is eleven years old in the film and he is fourteen years old in the novel. This age discrepancy is an important difference that further removes the possibility that a consensual sexual encounter could have transpired in the film. Developmental narratives that circulate about the distinction between childhood and adolescence reiterate the fact that Chuck is a child and therefore devoid of sexual desire. The decision to lower Chuck's age in the film reflects Gibson's obvious interest to depict Chuck and McLeod's pedagogical relationship as innocent and as falling cleanly inside the boundaries of teacher and student, father and boy. The supposed innocence of this relationship is interrupted when Chuck and McLeod's friendship eventually comes under scrutiny and the man is accused of abusing the boy and barred from any future contact with him. The magnitude of this charge against McLeod is steep. The already marginalized man becomes a scapegoat for pedophilic evil and outside violence. McLeod is brought before

a panel of community members and charged with a crime that he has not committed. The man, whose reputation is already spoiled, is subject to further shame. Mel Gibson seems to take pleasure in shaming McLeod, redeeming him and saving the narrative from homosexual shame.

The committee inquires about McLeod's previous car accident and about the young boy who died in that crash. They insinuate that McLeod also abused this former student. McLeod realizes that his scarred face restricts the panel from fairly seeing him. His scars are keeping them from understanding the truth about his friendship with Chuck. He shames the committee for their lack of perception, saying, "Is this what you see? I assure you, it is human. But if it's what you see, if it's all you see, then you can't see me" (Davey & Gibson, 1993). The man responds to the committee's shaming of him by shaming them. The committee, and society at large, should be ashamed for viewing McLeod's scarred face as evidence that he is an abusive monster. The man suggests that society is corrupt for condemning his innocent friendship with Chuck. But he concedes to discretely resolve the matter with the committee because he does not want to infect Chuck with the shame that will surface if there is a trial. It is McLeod, not the committee, who has preserved Chuck's innocence and Chuck remains a pawn to be fought over and won. His agency is never permitted him.

McLeod leaves town and also leaves behind a note for Chuck explaining that this departure is not necessarily a bad thing:

I'm sorry but I'm not allowed to see you, talk to you... These are my concessions to their conditions or what I hope a teacher would call a lesson in injustice. But

strangely this is nothing to grieve over because you know the truth and I now know that you can outgrow a part, even a sad one. You taught me that. You gave me what I never expected to find again, a gift of your trust and love. And nothing can take that grace away. The best is yet to be, Norstadt, so do it well. I remain, as ever, your tutor,

Justin McLeod (Davey & Gibson, 1993).

McLeod's note indicates as though he were catering to YA literacy critics that Chuck has taught him that it is possible to progress past his shame. *It All Gets Better*. Despite McLeod's past, the man can leave his shame behind and hope for a better future just like the IGBP, filled with "healthy" friendships and pride for his worth.

In this chapter, I have looked at how shame is represented in Isabelle Holland's (1972) *The Man Without a Face* and the way in which gay shame is both reimagined and voided in the Mel Gibson's (1993) film adaptation of the novel. I have discussed that although shame is important to the LGBTQ community in that it is a foundational experience around which modern gay and lesbian identities have emerged, the essence of shame is also something that continues to be hidden as the queer community embraces pride. The trend of moving away from shame toward pride can further be seen in chapter five with my examination of the link between the desire to seek out a proud gay identity and the need to create a queer community that nurtures and supports pride. I argue that the difficult fact about queer friendship is that having close friends also necessarily open us up to the possibility of being betrayed by those we hold most dear.

Chapter Five: Friendly Betrayal: Lexie and Jinx's Failed Friendship

The development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship (Michel Foucault, 1997, p. 136).

Keep smilin', keep shinin'
Knowing you can always count on me for sure
That's what friends are for
For good times and bad times
I'll be on your side forever more
That's what friends are for
(Burt Bacharach and Carole Bayer-Sager, 1982).³⁵

When many of us hear that someone has a new friend positive associations arise. The term “friendship” itself seems to connote smiles and a sense of belonging. Being without friends is certainly frowned upon. We have even begun to use adjectives to describe the different kinds of friendships we have like “best,” “special” and “complicated.” Each speaks to the complexity of friendship as a term and as an experience. Friendship is a prominent feature in many of the earliest lesbian-themed young adult novels, including Guy Rosa’s (1976) *Ruby*, Deborah Hautzig’s (1978) *Hey, Dollface*, Sandra Scoppettone’s (1978) *Happy Endings Are All Alike*, Stephanie Tolan’s (1980) *The Last of Eden*, Jane Fatcher’s (1981) *Crush* and Wendy Ann Kesselman’s (1983) *Flick*. Each of the narratives is propelled by an intense, intimate and often destructive friendship between two young women. The characters in these novels are charming, beautiful, domineering, manipulative and cruel. In many ways, the word “friendship” hardly seems adequate to describe these passionate relationships. Still, without putting words into the characters’ mouths, or falling into the trap many scholars

³⁵ Burt Bacharach and Carole Bayer Sager’s (1982) “That’s what friends are for,” covered in 1985 as a benefit for AIDS research, signals the ways in which friendship is intimately linked to gay community and activism. (see: <http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=6261>).

have by finding lesbianism in historical texts with intimate friendships, if we are to read these relationships as friendships, then they are certainly friendships that go terribly wrong. Friendship might actually be the best way of understanding the complex bonds uniting these young women.

In this chapter, I examine the status of friendship in philosophical, feminist and queer scholarship in order to understand the significance of this highly idealized relational form. Because this literature's positive understanding of friendship contrasts with the negative representation of friendship found in many lesbian themed early YA novels, I propose that we need a more expansive approach to researching representations of friendship that can take into account the negative side of this social relation. Later, in this chapter, I will be focusing in particular on Jane Fitcher's (1981) *Crush* and I will consider the way in which Jean "Jinx" Tuckwell and Alexis Nicole Genevieve Yves "Lexie's" friendship involves positive behaviours and attributes commonly associated with friendship such as loyalty, honesty, and affection, but also extremely negative experiences and emotions including sadness, loss, and betrayal. Bringing *Crush* into conversation with philosophic and queer writing about the dark side of friendship, I argue that in order to be able to come to an understanding of friendship as that which sustains pride and builds community, we need to not only acknowledge the underlying loss of family that makes such communities of friends so important, but also to recognize that queer friendships necessarily contain negativity, including loss and betrayal.

Circle of Lesbian Friends

Several lesbian-themed early YA novels have narratives that focus on female friendships that go terribly wrong. Deborah Hautzig's (1978) *Hey, Dollface*, offers a complex portrayal of friendship. Val and Chloe's friendship involves passionate feelings of love and desire. Both feel like outsiders at school and they skip school to go thrift store shopping and have sleepovers together. Their friendship comes to a cross road when Val's mother discovers the two young women in bed together. Val and Chloe feel that they must choose to either adopt lesbian identities or end the sexual component of their friendship. Although they choose the latter, they wonder where the boundaries between friendship and love lie: "How do you separate loving as a friend and sexual love—or do they cross over sometimes?" (p. 115). Chloe and Val remain tender and caring toward one another but the novel ultimately shows the impossibility of two young women choosing each other as both friends and lovers. This is an important distinction that many YA novels blur.

In other novels, the female character's treatment of each other is much more pointedly cruel and the devastation of its loss leads to loneliness, betrayal and suicide. We have Nana, in Wendy Kesselman's (1983) *Flick*, who falls for the charming and beautiful Felicity "Flick" at summer horse riding camp. Nana is a shy young woman and she comes out of her shell at camp and gains confidence by learning to ride a horse and by making friends with Flick, whom Nana is initially afraid of. Over the summer, Flick seduces Nana and then maliciously betrays and dumps her, abruptly ending their intense friendship and destroying Nana's fragile ego. Similarly, Guy Rosa's (1976) *Ruby* also features a cruel temptress, Daphne. Ruby and Daphne become passionate friends and

Ruby falls in love with Daphne even though Daphne belittles her. Oddly, Daphne references their friendship when she breaks up with Ruby, saying, “We’ve been good friends. We enjoyed each other, learned from each other. It is over. I want to live, and there is no life in clinging, pretending” (p. 178). At the cruel end of their relationship, the loss and devastation that Ruby feels is acute:

Loneliness, like a vapor, wafted from her bowels up through her stomach, encompassed her heart where, gaining substance, it slithered along her throat, collecting, thickening, making the cords bulge out on her neck, forcing her to swallow, hold on to the thickness, prevent its erupting into screams, hysteria, torrents of tears (p.3)

Ruby’s devastation is so severe that she attempts suicide by jumping off a roof.

In Stephanie Tolen’s (1980) *The Last of Eden*, “Mike,” Michelle, narrates the novel and the lesbian friendship that unfolds is between Marty, Mike’s roommate, and a classmate, Sylva. After rumours spread about Marty and Sylva’s friendship at the boarding school, Sylvia attempts suicide and Marty transfers schools. Mike learns the difficult lesson that the school is not the safe haven or “Eden” that she initially thought it was. Gossip is also a theme in Sandra Scoppettone’s (1978) *Happy Endings Are All Alike*, which narrates a romantic and sexually intimate relationship between two high school seniors, Peggy and Jaret. Jaret is confident and secure about her sexuality but Peggy decides that she should try once more to date men. While Peggy is out on a date, a homophobic teenager rapes Jaret. The rapist threatens that if Jaret exposes him, he will tell everyone that she is a lesbian. The rapist mistakenly views her love for women as a

hatred for men and stalks her, waiting for an opportunity to “teach Jaret a lesson.”

Afterward, Peggy and Jaret’s friendship is put to the test as Jaret decides whether to report the rapist, thus betraying Peggy. And, Peggy decides whether to support Jaret and in doing so, publically “out” herself. What ties these novels together is that each involves a complicated friendship with different power dynamics; however, all of these examples provide complicated and at times troubling definitions of friendship that run counter to the idea that friendship is pride-filled and happy.

It is difficult to account for the negative narration of friendship found in these early lesbian-themed YA novels. Within the gay community, friendship is positively regarded as fostering a sense of belonging, community, pride and identity. Friendship is especially important given that gays and lesbians continue to be excluded from other socially sanctioned forms of intimacy such as family and marriage. Friends become like alternative and chosen families for gay people who look to each other for care and support. Friendship can be imagined as the glue holding the gay community together. Yet, because queer friends often consider each other to be family, it is also important to recognize that queer friendships not only inherit positive facets of family and community life, but also negative attributes. Just as families and communities are rife with conflict, betrayal and disagreement, so are queer friendships. Such negativity has been difficult to acknowledge, perhaps because the very survival of queer people sometimes depends upon our reliance on the goodness of our friends. Despite, and also because friendship has enjoyed such a privileged status within the gay community, I argue that it is important to consider friendship’s negative side. In doing so I suggest the important of

valuing both positive and negative emotions in friendship. Friendships for gay and lesbian are often hard, sad, and abusive but are also the building blocks of our identities. In very similar ways to YA novels in the 1970s and early 1980s that require sad and negative experiences to grow into a transformed canon, this reflects every day life.

The Ideal of Friendship

Friendship is a highly revered subject in philosophical writing. The Greek poets cherished friendship, celebrating lavish festivals and honouring stories of famous friend duos such as Heracles and Oolaus, Achilles and Patroclus, and Theseus and Pirithouse (Smith Pangle, 2003). Friendship is central to Aristotle's *Polis*, where he positions friendship as necessary for living a good and happy life. Explaining the significance of friendship he writes, "No one would choose to live without friends, though he had all other goods" (115a5-6). In an essay "On Friendship," Michel De Montaigne (1958) regards friendship as the most noble of human relations. Comparing the difference between friendship and love, he explains that love is:

more active, more scorching, and more intense. But it is an impetuous and fickle flame, undulating, and variable, a fever flame, subject to fits and lulls, that holds us only by one corner. In friendship it is a general and universal warmth, moderate and even, besides, a constant and settled warmth, all gentleness and smoothness, with nothing bitter and stinging about it. (p. 137).

Montaigne elevates friendship above love because he believes that friendship is everlasting. Love may be a more passionate affair but the powerful feelings that make love so pleasurable are also love's demise. Love's flame may burn brightly but it can also

burn out. If, for Montaigne, love is a burning flame, then friendship casts a warm and steady glow.

While friendship is exalted in much philosophical writing, women are often excluded from this superior social form. Both Montaigne (1958) and Jacques Derrida (2005) reserve friendship as a relation belonging exclusively to men. Montaigne concedes that friendship is possible, although unlikely, for women, writing, "...the ordinary capacity of women is inadequate for that communion and fellowship which is the nurse of this sacred bond; nor does their soul seem firm enough to endure the strain of so tight and durable a knot" (p. 138). Women are not thought to be capable of friendship because friendship is closely associated with strong masculine attributes such as loyalty, bravery and heroism. Derrida, following Friedrich Nietzsche, goes so far as to claim that friendship between women is impossible, writing, "She is at once a tyrant and a slave, and that is why she (still) remains incapable of friendship, she knows only love" (p. 282).

This male-centered notion of friendship has been countered by feminist writing. Sisterhood, the opposite of Montaigne's brotherly camaraderie, was located at the center of the lesbian feminist call for female identified politics. Recognizing the political potential of female friendship as a source of power capable of countering female oppression under patriarchy, Mary Daly (1978) suggests that a deep emotional current connects all women and she describes the political potential of this current as "the ultimate threat of female bonding" (p. 33). Adrienne Rich (1993) identifies bonds between women as "...a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power" (p. 244). Rich's conception of the "lesbian continuum," is shaped by her belief that all

women are connected and she argues that categories that differentiate women also merge into one another. Rich, however, was critiqued for downplaying the erotic dimensions of female bonding, in favour of illustrating the political potential of female friendship within the feminist movement.³⁶ In her estimation, if you are a female friend, you are a lesbian. In doing thus, Rich not only tried to blur the lines between friendship and love but also took sexual intimacy out of love.

As mentioned in chapter one, female friendship is central in Lillian Faderman's (1981) iconic book, *Surpassing the Love of Men...* Drawing from poetry, literature, private correspondence and pornography, Faderman sketches a cultural history of women's passionate friendships and argues that women's romantic friendships were socially accepted in western countries from the Renaissance until the late nineteenth century when sexologists began to define and pathologize lesbianism. Faderman argues that a shift in social perception about romantic friendships occurred when women entered the workforce. Women's economic independence aroused social anxiety that two women could actually sustain a life together. Comparing lesbian relationships to romantic friendships, Faderman writes:

Lesbian describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the friendship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. By preference

³⁶ For a summary of the critiques of Rich's work and a description of Rich's response, see Rich, A. (1993). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. In H. Ablelove, M. Barale, D. Halperin (Eds.), *The lesbian and gay studies reader*. (pp. 227-253). New York: Routledge.

the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other. 'Romantic friendship' described a similar relation (p. 18). Like Adrienne Rich, Faderman is attempting to blur lines between love and friendship, making female intimacy not necessarily sexual, but political in that it gives women strength and power forming tight bonds and community alliance. Faderman's account of the continuum between romantic friendships and lesbian relationships has also been subject to critique because of the ambiguity in her work around sexual intimacy within romantic friendships. For instance, Terry Castle (1993) wonders if Faderman puts too little emphasis on the sexual relations that may have been a significant component of these friendships. Articulating her skepticism that famous female friend duos, such as the Ladies of Llangollen, were sexually innocent, Castle wonders, "what this insufferable pair *really did* in bed," (p. 95) and further speculates, "whether it may not be time to revise the often cloying 'romantic friendship' model" (p. 95). Although Faderman's account of romantic friendship may hold little appeal for some critics, her attention to female friendships is a significant contribution to the archive of lesbian cultural history, especially given that the study of female same-sex sexuality is obscured by a lack of documentation and trivialization of the private sphere that historically defined women's lives.³⁷ While some contemporary women may no longer identify with the term

³⁷ Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian* (1993) captures the essence of this scholarly orientation. Mining the past for ghostly figures that are "hiding in plain sight," she claims: "The lesbian remains a kind of 'ghost effect' in the cinema world of modern life: elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot—even when she is there, in plain view, mortal and magnificent, at the center of the screen. Some may deny that she exists at all" (p. 2). Her argument is that lesbians are far from absent but their presence has been suppressed and excluded from historical accounts, thus rendering lesbianism culturally invisible. In this regard lesbian feminists deserve recognition for their attention to women's culture and lives, including female friendships, even as the distinction and relationship between female friendship and lesbianism remains fraught. See

“romantic friendship,” or find the lesbian feminist call for female identified politics to be a politically viable tool, feminist writers have demonstrated that female friendship was central to their understanding of politics, history and culture and that friendship was importantly tied to feminist social transformation and revolution.

Queer Friend Families

Just as friendship was located at the center of feminist writing on women’s rights, it also played an important role in the gay liberation movement. The historical exclusion of gays and lesbians from publically sanctioned institutions such as family and marriage meant that friendship became a vital social form for gay people who banded together in collective protest over injustice including the social stigma, marginalization and shaming of same-sex sexuality.³⁸ Edmund White (1980) notes the significance of friendship in New York City in the late 1970s. During a tour of New York’s gay neighbourhood, he commented, “Its greatest offerings to gays is friendship... [F]or many people it has taken the place of love. Sex is causal, romance short-lived; the real continuity in many people’s lives comes from their friends” (p. 286). White’s point is that gay friend networks are crucial support structures that continue to nurture and sustain people throughout their lives. Writing at a time when the stigma of AIDS greatly affected gay people, Ethan Mordden (1986) describes friendship as the glue linking people together after Stonewall: “What unites us, all of us, surely, is brotherhood, a sense that our friendships are historic, designed to hold Stonewall together... It is friendship that sustained us, supported our

also: Duberman, M., Vicinus, M. & Chauncey, G. (1989). *Hidden from history: Reclaiming the gay and lesbian past*. Markham: Penguin Books.

³⁸ The social movement for gay rights is not over; people in many parts of the world, including thirty seven states in America, still do not have legal access to gay marriage, adoption or reproductive rights (Wolfson, 2007). Friendship is an important part of this social movement.

survival” (p. 175). What is important to note here is that friendship is depicted as a tie that binds gay and lesbian people together, a support structure that holds us up. However, at what expense? For example, friendship is employed to describe relationships that are devoid of sexuality. In *Are We Here*, Owen Wilson, referring to heterosexual friendship, says: “See nobody believes in friendship. People talk about it. That’s the thing about friendship. It’s a lot rarer than love because there’s nothing in it for anybody” (Weiner, 2014). However, pinnacle to the gay and lesbian narrative is the blurred lines that exist between love, friendship and sexual intimacy. These distinctions are not found in many cases, no matter how much they are downplayed for cultural acceptance. Early lesbian themed YA novels provide a snap shot of these blurred lines and how our history unfolded narratively.

The point is that friendships are commonly understood and valued as an important way of connecting to other people, regardless of sexual preference or identity. The significance of these connections is amplified for people whose sexualities set them apart from their families of origin. Making friends is a way of maintaining emotional, social and physical wellbeing, especially when this support may be lacking from one’s family. Friendship is another word for connection, community, fraternity and companionship. Demonstrating the amplified importance of friendship for marginalized groups, Heather Love (2007) borrows a famous phrase from Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*:³⁹

In the queer attention to friendship, there is a natural desire of the stigmatized to draw on the energies of what remains a powerfully idealized social form. The

³⁹ In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes famously wrote that the natural state of society without a political economy would be “...solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

long philosophical tradition of friendship that sees this relation as a model of equality, reciprocity, and longevity proves almost irresponsible to the bearers of a form of love understood to be nasty, brutish and short (p. 77).

Given the positive reputation that friendship has enjoyed in the western cultural imagination, Love suggests that it is not surprising that the gay and lesbian community has closely aligned itself with this relation. Tom Roach (2012) also highlights the sheer logic of this idea: “If one’s very being and its attendant relations are deemed inferior if not pathological, why not align that self and its community with a superior relation form?” (p. 7). Roach and Love are pointing out that if friendship is socially valorized, and gayness is denigrated, then it follows that the gay community would be attracted to this idealized social bond. Friendship offers a warm respite from the marginalization that the gay community has historically experienced.

Friendship remains an important alternative to social ostracism for gay people who are rejected by their families of origin because their sexualities puts them at odds with their family’s beliefs and values. Statistics about the incidence of youth homelessness attest to the fact that some gay and lesbian youth are disowned when their families learn about their sexual identities (Wolfson, 2007). These circumstances necessitate that gay people create alternate support systems that nurture and value sexual diversity. Many gay people establish networks of gay and lesbian friends, often including ex-lovers, which function as surrogate families.⁴⁰ The title of Kate Weston’s (1991)

⁴⁰ Some queer friend-families are unconventional and look different from traditional heterosexual family structures. See <http://www.imfromdriftwood.com/were-from-new-york-ny-video-story/> for a description of two ex-partners, Shawnta and Jasmine, who live and raise children together.

Families We Choose: Lesbian and Gay Kinship, captures the essence of much queer scholarship affirming friendship as an anecdote for family.⁴¹ Weston's title positions queer kinship at an advantage to heterosexual family because, unlike their families of origin, queers get to choose the members of their kin. The way in which authors such as Mordden, Weston, Wolfson and White regard queer family represents a familiar and reassuring collection of beliefs about the positive nature of queer friendship. Friendship is loyalty, trust and affection, and within the gay community friendship is a safe haven for people seeking a group that values sexual diversity.

In exploring the negative side of queer friendship, I do not mean to suggest that reciprocity, shared understanding, and support are not attributes that characterize queer friendship. Indeed, they can be. Instead, I am interested in accounting for the less positive attributes of friendship that are illustrated in several lesbian-themed YA novels in order to suggest that the honest, complicated friendships therein speak to the importance of recognizing negative affects and experiences as part of developing a pedagogical canon of YA LGBTQ fiction that can be used to teach students about the raw and oftentimes difficult path to growing up. In doing so, it is not suggested that "It Gets Better," rather it is acknowledged that living through rough moments is not atypical. These novels do not contain warm and reassuring narratives about friendship. Instead they highlight a much darker side of intimate relationships between two young women. These novels suggest that the idealized discourse about friendship that circulates in Western society obscures

41 For other examples of queer scholarship affirming friendship as family, see Le Vay, S. & Nonas, E. (1995). *City of friends: A portrait of the gay and lesbian community in America*. Cambridge: The MIT Press; Goss, R & Squire Strongheart, A. (1997). *Our families our values: Snapshots of queer kinship*. New York: The Haworth Press, And, Nardi, P. (1999). *Gay men's friendships*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

troubling aspects of friendship in order to protect its sanctity and heterosexual normality. Friendship cannot possibly be an uncontroversial relation, especially within a community that is seeking unconventional forms of social union.

“Frienemies”

The representation of friendship in Jane Fatcher’s *Crush* (1982) is a reminder that queer friendships are not devoid of trouble. Nor are they exempt from the conflicts that necessarily lie at the heart of community and family life. *Crush*, is set in 1964 at Huntington Hill, a private dormitory school in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where Lexie and Jinx first meet and become friends. Unfortunately, the intensity of this friendship means that Jinx becomes vulnerable to the cunning and worldly Lexie, who brutally betrays Jinx, jeopardizing her high-school graduation and future admission into college. The title “*Crush*,” introduces the novel’s central theme; Jinx has a crush on Lexie, which obstructs Jinx from recognizing that Lexie is not a good choice for a best friend. The sequence of events leading to Jinx’s fall from social grace can be traced back to a crucial mistake that she makes at the start of their friendship. Jinx is first introduced to Lexie when she noisily bursts into the school art studio where Jinx is working. Upon her entry, Lexie is rude to another artist, Elizabeth Knight. Observing Lexie’s cruel remarks about Elizabeth’s work, Jinx instinctively tries to cover up her painting, fearing that an unkind remark about her art from Lexie could shatter her self-confidence. We are left to wonder if Jinx could possibly have avoided all of her coming misfortunes if she took seriously either her first visceral reaction to Lexie or heeded Elizabeth’s subsequent warning that Lexie is a “con artist,” who callously takes advantage of others. Elizabeth’s warning is

the first of several that Jinx ignores, inaugurating the sense that she is at least partially responsible for her own demise.

Jinx's mother, for instance, senses that Lexie might not be a good friend for Jinx. After meeting Lexie on parent day at the boarding school, Mrs. Tuckwell struggles to articulate the crucial difference she observes between her daughter and Lexie:

Lexie's very grown up...she's very mature for her age. She's practically...practically a *woman*.... She's not like you and Miggin... You two are schoolgirls. You act your age. You...you... Mother could not quite put words to her thoughts, an unusual occurrence (p. 79).

Like Mrs. Tuckwell, Miggin, Jinx's roommate, worries that Lexie is not good choice for a best friend. Miggin also recognizes that Jinx's perception of Lexie is skewed: "Jinx, I don't feel the way you do about Lexie... You know what I mean. You think she's wonderful. Course...if you knew her better, you probably wouldn't like her so much" (p. 84). To be sure, Jinx realizes that something about Lexie is very different from the other girls her age. This realization does not repel Jinx, rather, Lexie's maturity further attracts Jinx, who muses: "...there was something *older* about her. Her body seemed fuller and more mysterious, her dark eyes more discerning, her attitudes more sophisticated" (p. 13). But, if Lexie is beautiful, worldly and self-assured then she is also conceited, domineering and deceptive.

At first, Lexie appears to be a good friend for Jinx during their senior year of high school. Strict social norms govern the upper middle class world that Jinx and the other graduating members of the class of 1964 inhabit. The ideal trajectory for these young

women is to graduate high school, get married to suitable young men and have children who will become the next generation of wealthy citizens. Her senior year however is proving especially difficult for Jinx because she is beginning to sense that she is different from her classmates. She does not imagine herself getting married or having children. Instead, she aspires to attend art school in New York City. During this transitional year, Jinx feels alone and longs for someone that she can feel close to. Lexie is set apart from her peers because she plans to pursue an unconventional career path in musical theatre. Feeling understood by Lexie, Jinx muses, "I wanted to talk to Lexie because with Lexie I could say what I wanted. She didn't worry about the narrow band. She laughed at it. I didn't feel crazy and weird around her" (p. 91-92). At the same time that Jinx becomes attached to Lexie, she feels increasingly distant from her parents. She has outgrown her childhood place in their home and feels stifled by their "narrow band" of daunting social expectations and pressures about what her life should look like after graduation. Lexie seems perfect and wants Jinx to apply to the same schools so they can move away, cohabitate and make a life together putting on theatre performances (p. 131). Lexie's friendship offers an attractive alternative to heteronormative coupling for Jinx.

The Unease of Queer Friendship

A central tenant of Lexie and Jinx's friendship is that an uneasy feeling surrounds their close bond. Their friendship feels ill fitted, in part, because the exact currency of their relationship is never quite articulated. That is, it is unclear whether these young women are friends or lovers. Although they maintain that they are friends, they also declare their mutual love, write love notes, hold-hands, kiss and touch and, on a trip to

New York City, they share a bed together. During this trip, Lexie tries to articulate the meaning of their friendship. She shows Jinx a display window with “A weave of diamonds, each suspended by a tiny thread, cascaded down a blue velvet waterfall. On the bottom, a mirror reflected their brilliance and cast specks of light onto the velvet” (p.125). Pointing to the window, Lexie says, “That’s how I feel when I’m with you...like water sliding into a pool” (p.125). This interpretation captures their relationship at its best. They are in love and are friends. Their friendship, however, does not live up to such a warm and affectionate description. The pleasurable, yet uneasy sensation of slipping into water is a feeling, like their friendship, that was destined to fail.

Michel Foucault (1997) makes discomfort and uneasiness central to his conception of queer friendship. In a short interview originally published in 1981 in *Gai Pied*, a French magazine, Foucault briefly discusses queer friendship although he does not clarify exactly what this relation is or what it might mean for the gay community. Vaguely describing friendship as a “way of life” that fosters different forms of social intimacy for gay people, he writes:

A way of life.... can yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalized. It seems to me that a way of life can yield a culture and an ethics. To be ‘gay,’ I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual but to try to define and develop a way of life” (p. 138).

In ways similar to Adrienne Rich, Foucault conceptualizes friendship as a relation characterized by a wide-open terrain of diverse, unexpected connections. Friendship is an

unfamiliar space that queer people negotiate. Still, he does not desexualize these bonds. For instance, he explains that there is no social script for two men: “They have to invent from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless, which is friendship: that is to say, the sum of everything through which they can give each other pleasure (p.136-7).”

Uncoupled from the recognizable heterosexual landscape, these men construct a relation that is yet “still formless.” Refusing to believe that sexual intimacy is grounds for the disqualification of friendship, Foucault argues that if queer friendship is a relation that is open and malleable, then it is also shaped by pleasure. One of the benefits of queer friendship, for Foucault, is that it lacks an inherent structure. Since gay people are outside of the social norms of heterosexuality, they might also be free to construct new ways of being and this is where the potential for a new way of life comes from. Pondering what different relations homosexuality makes possible, Foucault asks:

What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?” The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but, rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships.... The development toward which the problem of sexuality tends is one of friendship (p. 135).

Foucault’s point is that because homosexuality may be less inhibited by the social confines that restrict heterosexuality, queer people may also be freer to organize their lives differently. This includes relishing and living all types of emotional experiences, including the negative ones.

Jinx and Lexie's uneasy friendship indicates that queer friendships are unsettling because the terms of these relationships must be invented and negotiated, using a different script than heterosexual friendships use. The girls are imagining and constructing new forms of relationality and ways of being. Their friendship makes possible new forms of social intimacy and opens up an in-between, uneasy space that blurs the lines between friendship and sexual desire. The trouble plaguing Jinx and Lexie's friendship, therefore, is not only that they do not know how to be in a sexual relationship—a common plight in YA novels—but also that they do not know how to simply be platonic friends.

Friendly Betrayal

The first hint of Lexie's imminent betrayal of Jinx emerges when Jinx asks Lexie to sing the song "*It Was Always, Always You,*" from the school play, "Carnival." Lexie obliges, singing sweetly to Jinx:

Always, always you.
Oh, my eyes do wander,
To and fro and yonder,
Still my heart's affection ,
Always bends in one direction.

Every beat for you my sweet
All the love my beating heart can give.
It shocks me so, you didn't know,
That it was always you (p.167).

The song declares that although the eyes will see other beauties, the heart will always remain true. The words express honesty and fidelity in a long-term relationship; however, the scene enacted on stage during the song is anything but beautiful. In the play, the love song is actually a deceptive magic trick. Marco locks Rosalie in a box and every time he says, "I love you," he is actually sticking knives into her through the box. The warm glow that Jinx feels when Lexie is singing to her is revealed to be a ruse. As their friendship begins to unravel, Jinx realizes, too late, that being close to Lexie is like stepping into a trap.

The disaster that is Lexie and Jinx's friendship reaches a breaking point when Lexie evades trouble with Mr. Nicholson, the school headmaster by attributing her missed curfew infraction to Jinx's "unnatural" affection for her. Lexie sidesteps punishment by assuring Mr. Nicholson that Jinx's feelings are not mutual and that they are not involved in a "damaging way" (p. 185). Lexie shows Mr. Nicholson the love notes that Jinx has written to her, proving that Jinx has crossed the line of socially acceptable behavior in a friendship. The consequences of this betrayal are steep for Jinx, who is put on probation, expelled, socially shamed, forbidden from attending graduation with her peers and subject to harassment during mandatory counseling sessions with the homophobic school psychiatrist. The school also threatens to put a note about her expulsion on her transcript, which will effectively bar her admission into college.

I suggest that it is not so much that Lexie and Jinx's friendship is inherently destructive but rather that negative experiences and feelings such as treachery and betrayal are part of the basic condition for friendship itself. Jacques Derrida (2005)

alludes to this when he writes that a true friend must respect and even honour the enemy that a friend might one day become. If, as Derrida claims, the friend might one day become the enemy then *Crush* illustrates just how well best friends make the best enemies. Derrida's philosophical writing on friendship begins with the assumption that friendship is a fraught relation. Repeatedly riffing on Aristotle's contradictory phrase, "O my friend, there is no friend," Derrida approaches friendship as an impossible relation that foregrounds distance between two people.⁴² He suggests that friendship actually conceals the vast distances that exist between even the closest of friends. Paraphrasing Maurice Blanchot's (1971) understanding of the distance that exists between friends, Derrida writes:

Friendship, this relation without dependence, without episode, into which, however, the utter simplicity of life enters, implies the recognition of a common strangeness...the movement of understanding in which, speaking to us, they reserve, even in the greatest familiarity, an infinite distance, this fundamental separation from out of which that which separates becomes relation (p. 328-329).

In his meditation on the relationship between the friend and the enemy, Derrida suggests that although separation between two people makes friendship possible, this distance also underscores the possibility for betrayal. Friendship, therefore, hides our separateness and difference from others for a time. This distance means that there are fundamental limits to understanding our friends. We enter into friendship with the hope that we can bridge the

⁴² Maurice Blanchot attributed this statement to Aristotle, *The ethics of Aristotle: The Nichomachean ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), book 9, 1169a23-b11. Also see: Derrida, J. (2005). *The politics of friendship*. London: Verso.

difference between us, yet a friend's inherent difference from us also brings the possibility of conflict and betrayal.

Tom Roach's (2012) theory of queer friendship also begins with the assumption that there is a distance between friends. In his study of the connection between friendship and the history of queer activism, including ACT UP and the AIDS buddy system, Roach makes physical distance and betrayal central to his understanding of friendship.⁴³ He describes friendship as "a feeling of shared estrangement," pointing out that while friendships sow people together, these relations also highlight our fundamental separateness from others. If, in the 1980s, AIDS spurred a collective social movement within the gay community, Roach argues that it also demonstrated the fragility of friendships deeply affected by death, mourning and loss. Betrayal is an important feature of Roach's conception of friendship:

...betrayal, if nothing else, works to prevent a dialectical fusion...it refuses to assimilate self to other, other to self... it provokes a productive tension between friends. In short, betrayal demands a rethinking of the traditional ethical terms of friendship (p. 7).

Here Roach is suggesting that when the most difficult and troublesome aspects of friendship are made central in our understandings of friendship then new possibilities may emerge.

Star Friendship: Friendship's End

⁴³ AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) is an advocacy group founded in 1987, which works to positively impact the lives of people living with AIDS through research, legislation, political policy, etc. The Buddy System is a group of people who volunteer to pair up, befriend and support a gay or lesbian person living with AIDS.

At the end of the novel it becomes painfully clear that Jinx's passionate friendship with Lexie is over. Jinx meditates on the meaning of friendship and arrives at the sad conclusion that friendships are neither steadfast nor secure. Friendships are not guaranteed to last forever; some friends will not move with us through life. Wishing in vain that friendships could be more permanent, Jinx ponders:

It seemed like a lot of life was saying good-bye... Getting to know someone, then saying goodbye. It would be nice... if friendships were someone guaranteed to last, to hold up whatever happened. But even the deep ones can fall apart, or you change – your feelings change, something, and what held you together can disappear (p. 232).

Even as Jinx longs for a friendship that can be stable and certain, she realizes that human relationships are never guaranteed to last. In the face of graduation and moving on, she longs for a friendship that she can depend upon. Miggin tries to console Jinx by explaining that there is also a positive side to friendship. Jinx reflects on Miggin's advice:

Miggin said maybe it was a good thing that you had to fight to keep up friendships, that you had to write and visit and care, because those things made you realize how important friends were and how they couldn't be taken for granted. 'If you really love someone,' Miggin said, 'you have to stick by them' (p. 232-233).

Miggin is pointing out that friendship's effort is actually an important reminder of friendship's worth. Part of what makes a friend so special is that people have to work to keep up their friendships with others. One is not guaranteed a permanent space in a

friend's life. This advice is meant to comfort Jinx but it also heightens her guilt over the loss of her friendship with Lexie. Jinx questions whether this loss is her fault: "Do you have to stick by friends if they ask you to risk your own safety, your own future? Do you have to stick by them when their demands are outrageous?" (p. 233). Even though Miggin believes that true friends always stick by each other, Jinx realizes that friendships have boundaries and that it is possible to exceed a friendship's limits.

At the end of the school year and at the end of their friendship, Lexie gives Jinx a graduation present. The present is a gold chain with a small gold disc. Engraved on one side of the disc is the instruction "To JT, With love, LY" and on the other side is the words "Always, always you" (p. 244). The message of this gift is ambiguous. As much as Lexie's generous gift to Jinx signifies a special time they spent together working on a song for the play, it also represents a painful scene where a man is cruelly knifing his lover. Jinx and Lexie's exchange is tense and awkward. The end of their friendship has left both girls furious. In some ways, Jinx's anger seems more justified. After all, Lexie nearly destroyed Jinx's future. But Lexie claims that Jinx also wronged her, saying, "You tried to trap me. You wanted... you wanted me to be... like you. I'm not like you" (p. 244). Lexie's implication is that their friendship was doomed because Jinx wanted to be "more than friends," which points to the beautiful and difficult ambiguity in many LGBTQ friendships.

Friedrich Nietzsche's (2006) writing on friendship offers a way of thinking about the end of Jinx and Lexie's friendship. In *Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes about the function of lost friends:

Star friendship.- We were friends and have become estranged. But that was right, and we do not want to hide and obscure it from ourselves as if we had to be ashamed of it. Let us then *believe* in our star friendship even if we must be earth enemies (p. 159 line 279).

Nietzsche is speaking of the inherent instability of friendship. Over time, friendships change and take on different meanings. Two friends may become estranged. Some friendships fade and some friends may eventually get lost along the way. But Nietzsche also points out that our past friendships also remain with us. We carry lost friends with us throughout our lives because we are changed by the time that we have spent in the company of our friends. The memory of a lost friend remains and lives on inside of us. Nietzsche's theory of the end of friendship illustrates that even though earthly friendship is impossible for Jinx and Lexie's, they will remain friends eternally by divine transcendence.

In the closing passage of the novel, Jinx reflects on the meaning of her friendship with Lexie:

For a while, I hated Lexie...Of course, even while I hated her, I thought about her a lot. I still think about her a lot. I think about the fact that one day she's probably get married and have kids. In fact, she'll probably have about ten kids and ten marriages. She'd do crazy, wild things and live in Europe and Paris and Italy. And she'll speak ten languages and have a villa on the Cote d'Azur. But the thing about Lexie is that if she doesn't slow down and try to figure things out, if she doesn't ever stop running,

then one day she'll probably do something *really* crazy, and irrevocable. I know that one day she'll drive her Jaguar off a cliff or swallow a fistful of Darvon. And that'll be it. I still have the gold disc. I never wear it. But I look at it sometimes" (p. 248).

Jinx's interior dialogue demonstrates the way in which Lexie is still a lingering presence in her life. Jinx predicts that Lexie's life will be marked by imminent failure; Lexie will never be able to take responsibility for her actions and will continue to run away from herself until she eventually self-destructs. Jinx's speculation about Lexie's future life is marked by a pointed tense change, from past to present, suggesting that Jinx realizes that she still thinks about Lexie even though their friendship is over. Jinx and Lexie may have lost each other, but they will never fully be able to let each other go.

The narration of friendship in *Crush* is a reminder that queer friendships are not free of negativity, including conflict, loss and betrayal. Friendship has and continues to be a salve for the gay community, which has historically been deeply affected by a dark legacy of shame, isolation, and marginalization. While friendship is often understood as a relation that sustains gay pride and builds queer community, in this chapter I argue that we also need to acknowledge the underlying history of loss and gay shame that has made such communities of friends so crucial for the survival of gay people. Friendship has and continues to be a significant social form, yet friendship cannot be simply understood as a benevolent relation that is free of conflict, sexual tension, sex, betrayal, loss and regret. Queer friendships necessarily contain negativity, including loss and betrayal. In fact, the strength of the gay community might very well lie in the ability of queers to expand our

sense of what counts as friendship and to recognize the negative inheritance that our preferred and ideal vision of friendship is predicated upon. YA LGBTQ fiction of the 1970s and early 1980s offers a road map of the ways in which friendship, diverted from heterosexual conceptualizations of it, can look and how complicated queer friendships offer both a critique of the over valorization of positive affects and the binary categories such as good/bad, friend/enemy, boy/girl, so admired by heteronormative identity politics. The LGBTQ novels blur these lines and unsettle this easy binary. In this way, Rich, Derrida and Foucault are right. Gay and lesbian friendship is politic and a way of life that “It Gets Better” could concentrate more on.

Conclusion: Still Searching For Pride

On May 12, 2014, during a weeklong feature in *The Guardian's* online Children's Books discussion, I came across an article about LGBTQ novels. The discussion shares recommendations and reviews of outstanding gay-themed YA novels and site members and authors are encouraged to write in and endorse books, creating a list of "the best LGBTQ books *EVER* written" (emphasis my own). My survey of this list reveals few surprises. It represents a selection of contemporary novels understood by their supporters as prideful narratives of gay and lesbian life. Benjamin Alire Saenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discourse the Secrets of the Universe* (2012) provides a coming of age story with two young gay boys that ends happily "without shame" (Lo, 2012). Similarly, Julie Ann Peters', who is often found on these type of lists, *Pretend You Love Me* (2011) follows a formulaic proud narrative where girl meets girl, unrequited love ensues, is overcome and a proud identity emerges unscathed with a new love in the wings. For some *Guardian* reviewers, the actual experience of reading a novel can bring personal pride. One reviewer recommends David Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy* (2005) because, "It's wonderful and touching and made and makes me feel so positive." Like many of the critics that I discuss in chapter three, this reviewer longs for pride and seeks it out in YA literature. Notably absent from the list are the books in this dissertation, non-contemporary YA novels from the 1970s and early 1980s in which themes of shame, betrayal, isolation and death are prominent. Instead, *The Guardian's* reviewers provide us with an example of the continued favouring of happy LGBTQ YA novels over tales of hardship and despair. Their list continues to equate positive narrative with methodologies of care and concern

for LGBTQ youth. It gestures not only to the persistent obsession with happy narratives about gay and lesbian experiences but also to the practice of ignoring sadder stories, even when they are present within these revered books as well.

In Malinda Lo's (2012) "10 LGBTQ Young Adult Novels to Make it Better," Lo explores "recent neuroscience research" that suggests reading, as an act, enables us to better "empathize with other people" (2012/07/19huffingtonpost.com). She argues that for LGBTQ teens, reading allows an escape from the "real world" and provides a "safe" place where they can "imagine different possibilities." In being asked to compile a list of ten LGBTQ YA novels for teens, Lo chooses to focus on "books with a positive outcome." Her book list also ignores any book prior to 2000, and includes such pride filled gems as Julie Ann Peters' *It's Our Prom- So Deal With It* (2012) and Madeline George's *The Difference Between You and Me* (2012) both heralded for the empowering positive depiction of LGBTQ teens and the happy endings they deserve.

"Why My Book is Gay: And I'm Proud of It," also appeared in *The Guardian* LGBTQ themed feature and it highlights the ways in which gay pride is celebrated as the universal benchmark for struggling young queers. As I have argued in chapter three, this tells us more about queer adult's desires and fantasies of rescuing their teenage selves, then it does about what queer youth today might need or even want today. YA author James Dawson's muses about his recent non-fiction book, *This Book is Gay* (2014) in which he explores the difficulty of his own teenage years, his process of coming out and his arrival to a place in life where he "could not be prouder to be gay"

<http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/sep/04/this-book-is-gay-james->

[dawson](#)). Dawson explains his process of growing up and finding pride after he'd survived teenagism: "I suppose pride kicked in. Not only personal pride that I managed to escape a small northern town to pursue a career that I love, but also community pride. The last fifteen years have seen huge steps forward in equality for LGBT people." Dawson's story about growing up reminds me of the "It Gets Better Project," and the message of future hope and happiness that is departed upon queer youth. This discourse fails to make room for negative emotions and experiences aside from suggesting that queer kids will eventually grow up and leave their bad feelings and difficult life circumstances behind. The idea that maturing means growing out of negative experiences and emotions wishes that these things are a passing phase. It also assumes that we can always move beyond negativity. What happens to the youth that are presently in a crisis and can't afford to wait until It Gets Better? What does the valuing of these happy narratives tell us about our own fear of negative emotions? In chapter two, I argue that history has taught us that the present is always already informed and made from the past. YA literary figures of the 1970s and early 1980s do have something to tell us about the experience of bearing a stigmatized and shameful queer identity that, as I have argued, is relevant not only to understanding gay and lesbian history, but also to orientate us to the type of world that we are striving to build in the future, particularly for queer youth. Too often we throw out the negative inheritance of queer history and regard it as something painful that we must leave behind and I have argued that doing so fails to see how the queer future is informed and shaped by the queer past. Further, the shaming of negative

emotions enables us to ignore the very real negative circumstances in the present for LGBTQ teens.

What I find troubling about *The Guardian's* coverage is not only that it embodies the limited type of success story that is repeated throughout our society—IGBP for instance— but also that it mentions shame only in so far that it has been productively transformed into pride. Dawson uses words such as “hiding,” “death,” “angry,” “fears” and “ashamed” to describe the misery of his adolescence; these words are pitted against descriptors of his adult life, such as “normal,” “future,” “prouder,” “successful,” and “happy.” Lo too refuses to let “shame” ruin her happy party, choosing to provide books as pedagogical tools only if they are not sad. Dawson’s retelling of his coming of age story, from adolescence to adulthood, from shame to pride, offers a narrow version of what it means to be both a gay adult and a gay youth. The emphasis in this story is on the individual who transforms his teenage shame into adult pride. What Dawson and Lo fail to mention is the fact that it is the social structures that oppress LGBTQ youth and that these need challenging. It is therefore not that queer youth need to become resilient enough to one day grow up to become proud adults. Their sadness, loneliness and sense of betrayal is accurate and should be listened to.

Western insistence on a narrative of future happiness for queer youth operates at the expense of anyone who departs from this vision of prideful life, such as the shamed, isolated and suicidal characters in early YA novels. Of course, it is possible that stories, like Dawson’s, about growing up and overcoming obstacles may help some LGBTQ adolescents but retelling a familiar story about moving to the bigger city, finding a

community of queer friends and achieving success also repeats a reassuring image of queer life that might not be all that realistic, desirable or even possible for most to achieve. As characters such as Chuck in Isabelle Holland's (1979) *The Man Without a Face* and Jinx from Jane Fitcher's (1982) *Crush* demonstrate, life does not always get better for everyone. "Getting better," the discourse of the IGBP also places a strong emphasis on the community of queer friendships that we hope to eventually meet. As I explain in chapter five, queer friendship can and should be revered. Yet, it is also important to recognize that queer friendships are not free of negativity, including conflict and betrayal. The potential for hatred, sadness and betrayal does not only come from somewhere outside the boundaries of our warmest and most precious friendships. As Jinx and Lexie's friendship demonstrates, these bad feelings reside within friends and indeed within each one of us.

Implications for Further Research

The dearth of research on the first published gay themed YA novels leaves room for further study. I have only studied shame and betrayal but there are other negative themes such as social isolation, suicide and death that need to be further explored so that we can better understand the representation of negativity and early YA novels and the relationship that these images have to our current context. Another extension of my research is to study the cover artwork of the early novels. This idea came up during my dissertation proposal defense and was an avenue that I considered exploring as part of this project. Although I did not ending up looking at the cover art of these novels,

studying the visual representations of negative themes would make for a really interesting and rich dissertation project.

I have read widely across the genre of gay themed YA novels; however, in this dissertation I do not focus on novels published in the 1990s-2010's. Another place for further study is to delve more deeply into the themes explored in more contemporary novels and to consider how the representations in the novels reflects shifts in discourse about same-sex sexuality across time in North America. I have started some of that work here by documenting the shift from shame to pride but more work could be done, particularly to trace how more contemporary representations reflect the sorts of preferred images associated with gay and lesbian people that have been, for example, promoted in relationship to claiming of rights and sexual freedoms for sexual minorities such as same-sex marriage. There are some interesting parallels to be drawn between how same-sex sexuality is represented in fiction and the way in which same-sex desire is understood and imagined in Western culture. A limitation to my study is that I do not discuss representations of trans identified youth. Trans characters begin to appear in more contemporary novels, such as Julie Ann Peters' (2004) *Luna*. I have also not discussed the representation of gender queer youth. I do not discuss these groups because they do not appear in the earliest YA novels.

Argument Recap

I began this dissertation by reviewing the history of homosexual in Western contexts and outlined that religious and medical discourses have shaped the way in which homosexuality has and in many contexts, continues to be negatively conceptualized.

Understanding the historical roots of the social norms that govern the distinction between sexualities deemed as acceptable and those deemed as deviant offers a background for understanding the negative representation of gay and lesbian themes in early young adult novels. To further understand these negative representations, I looked at the shift in discourse about homosexuality in North America in the late 1960s and explored the way in which pride and shame are intimately connected to gay and lesbian identities. Shame stubbornly clings to these identities, even as pride seeks to overcome and replace shame. I looked at different metaphors for thinking through the affective relations that characterize our engagements with this negative queer history, including loss, mourning, touching, feeling backward, and haunting and suggested that these metaphors offer ways of productively approaching negativity in queer history because they position negativity a resource for understanding present queer cultures.

I looked at the ways early novels are typically regarded by critics as outmoded representations of same-sex sexuality. Alternatively, I approached these texts as important representations that tell us about the historical experience of same-sex desire and which offer a window into understanding the kinds of negative outcomes, feelings and experiences that are historically linked to the experience of bearing a gay or lesbian identity. In my substantive chapters, I first examined the function of shame in Isabelle Holland's (1972) *The Man Without a Face* and considered the ways that shame is remade and also voided in Mel Gibson's (1992) film version of the novel. I have discussed that although shame is a foundational experience around which modern gay and lesbian identities have emerged, the essence of shame is also something that is hidden as the

modern queer community embraced pride. The trend of moving toward pride is also seen in my second substantive chapter where I discussed queer friendship. I examined betrayal as a recurring theme in several lesbian themed early novels and argued that although gay pride is sustained by the formation of queer communities of friends that queer friendships also necessarily contain betrayal. I argue that betrayal is something that the queer community must take seriously, particularly as friendships often serve as alternatives to family for queer people. In short, I argue that although the queer community may prefer to imagine negativity as coming from outside the boundaries of queer communities of friends, that negativity in the form of betrayal in friendship also resides within queer culture.

This study on shame and betrayal in early YA novels breaks new ground by insisting that negative representations can be as much a resource for queer youth as the more affirmative novels that promote pride and happiness. I have explored the argument that gay and lesbian life, past and present, is not free of negativity such as shame, loneliness and betrayal and that denying the significance of our negative feelings and experiences tells queer youth that happiness and pride are the only acceptable emotions to feel. What reminds us that these negative feelings are ongoing and important are LGBTQ youth today whose struggle and perseverance in a world that values happiness and pride at all costs is brave. Indeed, the failure of the disappearance of negative feelings might suggest a refusal to accept the world as it is, a refusal Adrienne Rich and Michel Foucault would be proud of. If our only response to the downtrodden literary figures in early YA novels is to label them as outmoded illustrations of queer life then we risk falling into the

trap of becoming comfortable with inequality, strife and hypocrisy as long as it doesn't effect us personally. Indeed, if gay pride is built from the historic experience of shame then shame is a rich part of our present politics and impetus to drive change, however uncomfortable this may make us feel.

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