



8-2016

“Do I Want to Die on That Hill?”: Perceptions of Rural Appalachian English Teachers about Using Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning Young Adult Literature in the Secondary English Classroom

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Recommended Citation

Reece, Stacey Rochelle, ““Do I Want to Die on That Hill?”: Perceptions of Rural Appalachian English Teachers about Using Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning Young Adult Literature in the Secondary English Classroom.” PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2016.
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Stacey Rochelle Reece entitled "'Do I Want to Die on That Hill?': Perceptions of Rural Appalachian English Teachers about Using Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning Young Adult Literature in the Secondary English Classroom." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Susan L. Groenke, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

“Do I Want to Die on That Hill?”: Perceptions of Rural Appalachian Secondary English
Teachers about Using Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning
Young Adult Literature in the Secondary English Classroom

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Stacey Rochelle Reece

August 2016

Dedication

To all the LGBTQ students across the nation who have never seen themselves reflected in their school's curriculum. You matter. This one's for you all.

Acknowledgements

Writing this dissertation is easily one of the most challenging things I've ever done in my life. It certainly was not an individual process; several people helped me in more ways than they know.

First, my doctoral committee is definitely the dream team! Dr. Barbara Thayer-Bacon – thank you for helping me be self-reflective, to figure out how all those experiences I've had in my life have shaped my thinking. Dr. Colleen Gilrane – thank you for helping me to get out of my own head, for reminding me just as we don't want to label our students, we don't need to worry about labeling a dissertation. Thank you for being a model of speaking up for students, for being vocal in doing what's right for them, even if I'm standing alone. Dr. Judson Laughter – 'sup? Thank you for helping me keep a sense of humor throughout this whole process and being a huge supporter of what I'm doing. You have never failed to encourage me. I truly enjoy every conversation we have. Also, thanks for those Doolittle Wednesdays and reminding me to fight the Matrix! Last but certainly not least, Dr. Susan Groenke – you have practically held my hand through this whole thing. Your support and caring has made all the difference in the final product of this dissertation as well as in me as an educator. You were the first one to support my idea for a study about LGBTQ topics. After a lifetime of hearing “no” it sure was life-changing to hear “yes” emphatically. Through it all you have been my cheerleader, my sounding board, my mentor, and my friend. You are my Yoda! Again, to each of you, thank you, thank you, thank you!

To Christina Perkins, you read every draft of this and were always telling me how proud you are of me and how important the study is. You are my number one fan and biggest cheerleader, and I love you for that and so much more. We did it Girlz!

To all of my interns and students, you have taught me so much more than I've taught you! I hope your careers are filled with joy. Best of luck to each of you.

To all of my friends in the Johnson County School System, thank you. My career started there when I was a 23 year-old kid who knew practically nothing and spanned 20 years. You all have helped shape me into the educator I am today, and I'm indebted to you for that. I'll never forget my time there. Hook 'em Horns!

Abstract

Research from GLSEN has shown that rural, Southern schools are some of the most dangerous places to be for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning students. These students hear more disparaging language, face more bullying, have less resources for information, and are less likely to see positive representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) people in their school's curriculum. Based on this research, I wanted to understand the perceptions of secondary English teachers in a small, Southern rural school district of using LGBTQ young adult literature (YAL) in the classroom.

Drawing on parts of Paulo Freire's dialogic method of research, I interviewed four secondary English teachers who were employed by the same small rural school system. My findings confirmed previous research by Thein (2013) and Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) that stated teachers did not teach LGBTQ texts because of fear of administration and others. The discussion includes implications for the non-inclusion of LGBTQ YAL in perpetuating a system of oppressive, tacit homophobia and recommendations for how teacher educators can use these texts in their classrooms as well as how administrators can support teachers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*“You can be anything you want, but when you go against who you are inside, it doesn’t feel good.” - Bill Konigsberg, *Openly Straight**

I was a middle school English teacher for eight years and a high school English teacher for twelve years, all with the same rural Tennessee school system. As a high school teacher, one of the service organizations I agreed to sponsor was the Beta Club. Our club was committed to community service in various forms, and one of our projects in the spring of 2005 was reading to first graders at local elementary schools. The club members decided that they wanted to carry out the project on Read Across America Day, which is the school day closest to Dr. Seuss’s birthday on March 2. One of our after-school club meetings was devoted to making Cat in the Hat hats, designing templates for door hangings, making plans to face paint whiskers, and deciding which books to read. The students even talked me into wearing the whole Cat in the Hat outfit.

When Read Across America Day arrived, the Beta Club students and I spent the day visiting each of our county’s five elementary schools’ first grade classes, reading books, coloring, and generally having a good time. One of the books I chose to read that day was *It’s Okay to Be Different* by Todd Parr. This book has brightly colored figures outlined in black and says things like “It’s okay to eat macaroni and cheese in the bathtub,” “It’s okay to have a different nose,” “It’s okay to be adopted,” “It’s okay to be a different color,” and “It’s okay to need some help,” among others. I chose this book because of Parr’s focus on acceptance of people in general and how individual differences are, in his words, “okay” and should be celebrated, not ridiculed. I believed it was a book that encouraged empathy and caring; I never imagined it would be a problem,

especially with adults who are supposed to be promoting the afore-mentioned traits in our students.

I have always believed in the words of Chinua Achebe (2000) who said, “Once you allow yourself to identify with the people in a story, then you might begin to see yourself in that story even if on the surface it’s far removed from your situation...this is one great thing that literature can do – it can make us identify with situations and people far away” (para. 7). In a place where there is homogeneity of race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation, students need books to show them that there are a plethora of people and places in the world. In Parr’s book, one page I read says, “It’s okay to have two moms” and “It’s okay to have two dads.” Again, I never imagined reading this would create controversy; many of the kids in our county have stepparents, some are biracial, some are adopted, and there was one same-sex couple with school-age children. I truly felt I was following the words of Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) who claims that books offer an opportunity for children to meet people who are unlike themselves.

However, the very next morning, I was called into my principal’s office. The director of schools was on the phone and wanted to talk to me. When I picked up the phone, the first thing she asked was if I read a book that said it was okay to have two moms and two dads. I answered that yes, I had read that book. She proceeded to explain to me how that was not okay and our kids did not need to be exposed to “those kinds of things.” The more I was reprimanded, the angrier I became. All students in my classroom were valued, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. So why wasn’t it okay to say so? What kind of message were we sending to kids who had family members

who identify as LGBTQ or were struggling with their own orientation? What about the other types of “different” kids depicted in the story? Were they not “okay” either?

The Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA), in title 49, chapter 5, part 10, states, “An educator shall strive to help each student realize the student’s potential as a worthy and effective member of society. An educator therefore works to stimulate the spirit of inquiry, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the thoughtful formulation of worthy goals.” I was an educator; was I not trying to help students acquire knowledge of people different than they?

In this same section, the TCA further states, “In fulfillment of this obligation to the student, an educator shall: (1) Not unreasonably restrain the student from independent action in the pursuit of learning; (2) Not unreasonably deny the student access to varying points of view; (3) Not deliberately suppress or distort subject matter relevant to the student’s progress.” Was I not giving them access to varying points of view by reading Parr’s book?

According to this section of Tennessee state law, teachers have an ethical obligation to expose students to varying points of view. If students are to progress to become “worthy and effective members of society,” then shouldn’t they have exposure to various cultures and points of view? Shouldn’t they be encouraged to have understanding of people who are different than they? Furthermore, the first two standards for English/Language Arts, published jointly by the International Literacy Association (ILA) and the National Council of the Teachers of English (NCTE), both of which I am a member, are:

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United

States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience. (NCTE 2012)

Students need exposure to different cultures so that they can develop an understanding of them. In fact, schools who do not include Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) literature in their curriculum are condoning, although silently, homophobia (Curwood, Schliesman, & Horning, 2009). The director's statement indicating that an entire group of people was deviant, less-than, not as important, was a defining moment for me. It was the moment I realized the status quo was not okay, and by doing nothing and remaining silent on these topics, I was allowing harm to occur.

Statement of the Problem

Dominant groups hold power in society and heterosexuals comprise the dominant group as far as sexual orientation is concerned. Schools are often microcosms of a society (Elia, 1993) where students who do not identify as heterosexual are relegated to the status of Other and topics relating to them are frequently omitted from public school curriculum. Rudine Sims Bishop (1990), an African American woman speaking of the absence of African American characters in books, tells us that children who cannot find themselves reflected in texts or find negative, distorted images of themselves come to realize that they are devalued in a society that they initially believed they were a part of. Bishop's statement, although specifically geared toward racial diversity, fits LGBTQ students as well. Whereas students of color have family members who share their identity and struggles and understand their experiences, LGBTQ students are more likely to not

have family members who can understand what they are experiencing; in fact, they may fear rejection from their family based on their sexual orientation (Castro & Sujak, 2014). LGBTQ teens are at a greater risk of experiencing a myriad of negative outcomes when they find nothing at school that helps them feel included.

Schools that have an active Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) are often safer spaces for LGBTQ teens. A 2007 report by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that students in schools with GSAs were less likely to hear homophobic remarks, less likely to report feeling unsafe, more likely to hear supportive statements from teachers, more likely to have a greater sense of belonging to their school, and are less likely to miss school. Furthermore, the 2013 National School Climate Report found that students who were enrolled in a school with LGBTQ inclusive curriculum heard homophobic and negative remarks about gender expression less frequently, felt safer, reported less victimization, and missed school less often (Kosciw, et al., 2014).

Unfortunately, though, students in the South are “less likely than students in all other regions to have access to each of the LGBT-related resources and supports: a GSA, an inclusive curriculum, Internet access to LGBT-related information, supportive school staff, a supportive administration, and a comprehensive bullying/harassment policy” (Kosciw, et al., 2014, p. 101). Furthermore, students in small towns and rural areas reported feeling the least safe, experiencing the “highest levels of anti-LGBT language and victimization based on sexual orientation and gender expression” and are least likely to have access to supports in their schools (Kosciw, et al., 2014, p. 104-105).

The benefits of including LGBTQ literature in the classroom are not only for

students who identify as such; it can have benefits for those students who don't identify as LGBTQ as well. Including LGBTQ literature in a school's curriculum would go a long way in showing those who don't identify as such that LGBTQ teens are like them, "preoccupied with dreams, questions, and anxieties" (Letcher, 2009). Powerful works of fiction can help students find empathy, put themselves in the place of others, identify and connect with all kinds of characters, and be a first step toward overcoming oppression and gaining acceptance. Terry Norton and Jonatha Vare (2004) state:

While literature may not eliminate homophobia nor alleviate the risks stemming from it, well-written books may help subvert the culture of silence still current in many school environments and offer a supportive framework for self-understanding by gay and lesbian teens. Moreover, books...may help heterosexual students who are homophobic question their traditional assumptions in order to lead lives not bound and threatened by prejudices and fears. (p. 69)

In addition to this, including LGBTQ issues in school curriculum can "destigmatize non-heterosexual identities and can deconstruct gender role stereotypes that limit all students" (MacGillivray, 2000). Bishop (1990) contends that it is dangerous to give students in dominant groups texts with characters that reflect only people like themselves, that in doing so we are allowing these students to have an exaggerated sense of their own self-importance and value in the world. It becomes an ethical obligation, then, to introduce students to the plethora of cultures that constitute the citizenry of our nation as well as the world.

Purpose of the Study

Much has been written about the transformative power of literature concerning race (Barry, 1998; Bishop, 1990; Calhoun, 1987; Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Hurley, 2005; Nilsson, 2005), how seeing oneself in literature is validation of the reader's existence, a form of inclusion in the world. However, less has been written about this transformative power where LGBTQ students are concerned. As will be discussed in chapter 2, research of the past decade suggests that the curriculum of public high schools in the United States has a history of exclusionary practices for marginalized groups, including those students who identify as LGBTQ (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Castro & Sujak, 2014; Fredman, Schultz, & Hoffman, 2015; Oltmann, 2015; Vare & Norton, 2014). The teachers studied who did use LGBTQ literature in the classroom did not use young adult literature (YAL) titles; instead, they used short stories, non-fiction, and drama (Athaneses, 1996; Hoffman, 1993; Webb, 2001).

Furthermore, according to GLSEN's School Climate Survey (Kosciw, et al., 2014), students in Southern schools are less likely to see LGBTQ topics included in their curriculum, as people who reside in Southern regions of the country report less tolerant attitudes toward LGBTQ people than those in other regions (Herek, 2002; Sullivan, 2003). In addition, people in the South are also more likely to hold more traditional attitudes/beliefs about gender roles and norms (Powers, et al., 2003; Sutor & Carter, 1999). Some factors that may contribute to homophobia in the rural South are lack of diversity in general in rural communities, larger masses of individuals holding values considered traditionally conservative regarding sexuality and gender roles, and religious beliefs that condemn and stigmatize homosexuality and gender non-conformity (Herek,

2002; Preston, et al., 2007; Snively, 2004). Regional demographics are important because the social and economic comfort and security of young people are “significantly influenced by where they live and the services and systems of support available to them” (Brann-Barrett, 2015).

Of equal importance is the perception of teachers themselves of what constitutes multicultural literature and reasons they have for including or not including it in their curriculum. Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) surveyed 142 teachers in Alabama, asking for titles of book-length works they taught and responses for two questions concerning using or not using multicultural literature in their classrooms. Only one work not written by or about white people, *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, appeared in the list of top ten titles given by the teachers. The answers teachers gave for not including multicultural literature were real or imagined censorship concerns (from parents, administration, community), lack of resources, lack of knowledge about multicultural literature, time constraints, and no support from administration.

If educators cite these concerns about texts that deal with race, then what about texts that deal with other multicultural topics such as the LGBTQ experience? The purpose of this study is to discern how secondary English teachers who work in the same rural school system define multicultural YAL and to hear their rationale for including or not including texts with LGBTQ topics and characters in their classrooms.

Research Question

In light of GLSEN’s research on school climate, my research questions are:

- How do secondary English educators in a small rural school define multicultural YAL and how do they use it in their classrooms?

- What rationale do they give for including or not including LGBTQ YAL in their curriculum?
- Furthermore, under what circumstances would/did these teachers use LGBTQ YAL in their classrooms?

To address this question, I interviewed secondary English teachers working in the same rural school system.

Theoretical Framework

I have always been an enthusiast of Louise Rosenblatt's (1986) reader response theory. Rosenblatt separates reading into the two categories of efferent and aesthetic. Efferent reading is what is usually imagined when one thinks of an English class. The teacher is in the front of the room and all discussion of a text focuses on literary criticism, figurative language, summary, and other formal analyses (Rosenblatt, 1986). This type of teaching is focused on the teacher. And while this is necessary at times, it should not be the only way to discuss a text in the classroom.

As a high school English teacher, I consistently encouraged my students to read aesthetically, a process Rosenblatt (1982) explains below:

In aesthetic reading, we respond to the very story or poem that we are evoking during the transaction with the text. In order to shape the work, we draw on our reservoir of past experience with people and the world, our past inner linkage of words and things, our past encounters with spoken or written texts. We listen to the sound of the words in the inner ear; we lend our sensations, our emotions, our sense of being alive, to the new experience which, we feel, corresponds to the

text. We participate in the story, we identify with the characters, we share their conflicts and their feelings. (p. 270)

Aesthetic reading is an individual activity, for readers bring their own experiences, values, and beliefs to the text. It is very rare for two students in the same class, the same school even, to have had the same experiences and share the same beliefs. This was a point of emphasis in my class; no one could claim that another's viewpoint was "wrong." Disagreements happened, debates occurred, but students were instructed to maintain a respectful tone even in disagreement, to critically address a student's statement and not attack a student's character. When students share their responses to a text, they are sharing a part of themselves.

Hearing students explain their thoughts on a text gives teachers an opportunity to get a glimpse of the students' belief systems. Rosenblatt (1995) herself viewed reader response as a critical theory, stating, "Reading can be influenced. If we think that the individual or the society might benefit from the individual's command of a broader range of alternative stances, we can attempt, through educational means, to expand his or her repertory" (p. 353). Teachers can influence what their students read and should open avenues for students to see experiences different than theirs. Literature has the potential to aid in understanding "ourselves and others, for widening our horizons to include temperaments and cultures different from our own, for helping us to clarify our conflicts in values, for illuminating our world" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 276).

Not only should teachers use reader response theory in their classes, but they must also help students develop a critical reader response. Yes, students should be able to articulate and explain what a text means to them; in addition to this, though, teachers

should also challenge students to question where their own responses come from, what their responses tell others about them as readers as well as human beings, especially as they differ in race, class, gender, and age (Park, 2012). The question then becomes how can teachers help students develop a critical consciousness that they bring to reading?

I agree with Park's (2012) assertion that communal reading, defined by Sumara (1996) as a process when readers both participate in reading and discussing a common text and share their interpretations, can foster development of critical consciousness. Park (2012) explains the importance of communal reading below:

It is naive to assume that the act of reading itself will lead to different or deeper understandings of texts, prompting the question: How can they become more aware of the assumptions that shape their response to literature? One answer might be that readers must be part of a community in which readers engage in dialog between and after the acts of reading...Reading alone, a reader may not have access to different perspectives. Reading communally, however, a reader is likely to encounter multiple or even conflicting perspectives, thereby becoming more aware of the assumptions she is bringing to the text...In reading together, individuals' literary interpretations as well as their worldviews and interpretive lenses become public and, therefore, open to reexamination. (p. 194)

When students see others who have read the same text and come to different interpretations, then they can be prompted to think about what it is in their own lives that have caused them to respond differently (Park, 2012). Furthermore, when students address issues of social power, oppression, class, race, and/or gender, when they search for meaning and question ideologies in the fictional texts they read, they have the

opportunity to become critically conscious people who see issues of diversity and social justice and can opt for making change in outdated systems that marginalize the experiences and lives of those outside of the perceived norm (Kalogirou & Malafantis, 2012).

Teaching about sensitive topics such as race, sexual orientation, and economic status, among others, can be uncomfortable, and some argue that the classroom is not the place for such personal and political arguments. To these people I echo the words of Rosenblatt (2005), “To claim absence of any political orientation in the classroom only serves confusion. Students should be actively helped to develop criteria based on democratic assumptions about the freedom and well-being of individual human beings” (p. 19). Teaching is a political act. Teachers impart information daily about their own beliefs and value systems by what they include or do not include in the curriculum.

Young Adult Literature

My love affair with young adult literature (YAL) began when I was in middle school and discovered *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* by Judy Blume. After reading that book, I tore through *Forever*, *Tiger Eyes*, and *Deenie*. Judy Blume hooked me, and I still am a voracious reader of YAL. As a middle school teacher, I frequently used YAL with my students; they especially loved *The Giver* by Lois Lowry and *The Devil's Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen. When I moved to the high school, the seniors I taught could not get enough of Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jennifer Brown's *Hate List*. When we read YAL, there was no doubt that aesthetic reading was occurring; students were quick to identify with characters and participate in the story.

The first golden age of YAL began with the publication of *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton and *The Contenders* by Robert Lipsyte, both in 1967 (Cart, 2001). In the decades that followed, YAL took up social realism with paperback series such as Francine Pascal's *Sweet Valley High* and R.L. Stine's *Fear Street* and then an "expansion of the audience, which freed authors to tackle more serious subjects and to introduce more complex characters and considerations of ambiguity" (Cart, 2001, p. 96). Then in 1997 J.K. Rowling introduced the world to a boy wizard named Harry Potter, which quickly became a worldwide phenomenon, and all of a sudden more people than ever, young and old alike, became enamored with YAL.

Complexity and Rigor

One of the appeals of YAL to adolescents is its ability to connect with the adolescent world. The vocabulary, situations, themes, etc., which are all part of a state's standards of learning, are all things they can relate to in some form or fashion. When much of the country adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to take the place of their own state standards, schools were given a list of what the authors of CCSS considered "exemplar texts" for each grade level. These lists include very few, if any, current YA texts. Furthermore, the titles chosen are usually far removed from the lives of today's teens. The texts *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1869), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain (1876), "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost (1915), *The Dark Is Rising* by Susan Cooper (1973), *Dragonwings* by Laurence Yep (1975), and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor (1976) are considered exemplar texts for grades 6-8 (Common Core, 2016). Interestingly, 1915 is the median year of publication for these texts (Glaus, 2014). For grades 9-10, the most recent publication in the

exemplar texts is *The Killer Angels* by Michael Shaara (1975) and *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri (2003) for grades 10-11 (Common Core, 2016). Is it any wonder that students are not excited about reading these texts? Even 2003 is far removed from the lives of today's teens.

Canonical literature that is taught in most secondary schools is overwhelmingly written by heterosexual white males, most of whom are deceased, who wrote for an adult audience. Indeed, there is a noticeable absence of YAL in the exemplar text lists. This is not to say that there is no value in teaching the canon, for of course there is; I remember being fascinated with *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Great Gatsby*, and there are most definitely lessons that can be learned from those books that apply to young people today. However, when we insist that adolescents leave YAL, graphic novels, and other texts behind in favor of traditional, canonical literature, it devalues not only those texts adolescents are drawn to but also the adolescents themselves (Connors, 2015). If one of education's goals is to create life-long readers, then it is imperative that educators not limit the curriculum to canonical texts only and include YAL (Johnson, et.al., 2013).

Detractors of YAL often point to the quantitative text-complexity measurements like Lexile levels, sentence length, and word frequency. In doing this they minimize the value of qualitative measures. Lexile levels are helpful, but they are not the end-all-be-all when it comes to placing books in the hands of adolescents. Kekla Magoon's (2014) novel *How It Went Down*, if taken on Lexile level alone, would fall into the 2-3 grade band; however, this book is typically assigned somewhere in the 7-10 grade band (TeachingBooks, 2016). This makes sense, as sophisticated themes such as racism, violence, and classism can only be considered using qualitative means. Multiple narrators

encourage critical thinking, as the narrators all seem to tell a different story of Tariq, an African American male who was shot outside of a store by a white man. Readers find themselves asking who is telling the truth, what even is the truth, which side is “right,” and which narrators can be trusted.

Furthermore, it is the educator’s job to consider reader and task, to decide what s/he wants students to do with the book. High Lexile levels, complex sentence structure, and high-level vocabulary do not always indicate complexity; it is what educators ask students to do with that text that really matters (Connors, 2015). Educators can challenge students with YAL by asking questions, designing high-interest activities, and giving students opportunities to engage in authentic discussions about the texts with others (Connors, 2015).

As previously stated, most educators want students to become life-long readers, to develop the habits of reading as a pleasurable and meaningful activity. The benefits of using YAL in the classroom cannot be sacrificed on the altar of such a narrow and constrained definition of rigor. It cannot be undermined as less valuable, non-serious, pedestrian, or unremarkable. As Connors (2015) muses:

I cannot help but wonder how, as educators, we can hope to promote an appreciation for literature and reading when we allow ourselves, knowingly or otherwise, to be co-opted by a standards-based education reform movement that privileges rigor at the expense of aesthetic pleasure, and which, by conceptualizing text complexity as an aspirational staircase students must climb, devalues YAL. (p. 93)

Educators must not dismiss an entire field of literature just because of the protagonists' age and the label of YA (Johnson, et.al., 2013). Often it is the low Lexile level that makes YAL easier for adolescents to read than canonical literature, as the main characters are themselves adolescents and speak in the adolescent vernacular. If a student can read the book and comprehend it, then they are more likely to engage in conversation about it. If students do not understand what they are reading, how can educators expect critical, thoughtful discussions?

Value

The value of YAL cannot be underestimated. The stories and characters found within its pages can be timely, relevant, and complex, and unlike the traditional literary canon, include voices from all races, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, and others (Dyer, 2014). Indeed, one of the primary values of YAL is that teen readers have an opportunity to explore real issues, things that are happening in the world that they currently experiencing, sometimes actively (Dyer, 2014). The previously mentioned text *How It Went Down* tells the story of Tariq, a young black adolescent male shot by an adult white man. The story is told from the voices of multiple narrators who have different "facts" about what really happened that day.

The relevancy of a novel such as this cannot be denied, as we are living in an age of Trayvon Martin, Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, and Tamir Rice. Magoon herself states that while her story is a fictional one, it "is similar in some ways to real incidents of violence that have occurred around the country in recent years...you may very well recognize some of the issues and discussions that come up between the characters in my

novel...it might add a new perspective to the important conversations about such incidents” (Kekla Magoon, 2016).

Additionally, the Harry Potter phenomenon has led to more than theme parks and merchandising. A quick search on the Internet will amass hundreds of scholarly papers in several different languages on varying aspects of Rowling’s popular series. One of the most interesting findings concerning the Harry Potter phenomenon examines empathy levels of students who read the series. Research supported the hypothesis that reading these novels is associated with “improved attitudes toward a stigmatized group such as homosexuals among a sample of high school students” (Vezzali, et al., 2015, p. 112). This phenomenon is not relegated to Harry Potter only; quality time spent with any text may help readers refine their ability to understand and empathize with others and their experiences (Alsup, 2015).

It is not only through reading that these empathetic characteristics arise; as previously stated, it is what students *do* with the text that matters. Careful, intentional planning of writing, speaking, and listening activities by educators around YAL novels affords students the opportunity to “not only enrich their theory of mind, but also, resultantly, treat those around them with increased kindness and understanding” (Alsup, 2015, p. 4). America has long been known as “a melting pot,” a land where people of all races, cultures, sexual orientations, gender expressions, and ethnicities converge. Compulsory education at all levels should prepare students to be part of a larger, diverse, global society. Consistently focusing on canonical literature, with its “white, masculine, heteronormative, Western perspective” as all that is “worthwhile to learn” works against

education's goal of helping students become more caring and more empathetic (Dyer, 2014, p. 35).

Queer Theory

Queer theory is not relegated to queer people only; it is much more than that. Britzman (1995) explains that queer theory “offers methods of critique to mark the repetitions of normalcy as a structure and as a pedagogy. Whether defining normalcy as an approximation of limits and mastery, or as renunciations, as the refusal of difference itself, Queer Theory insists on posing the production of normalization as a problem of culture and of thought” (p. 154). As previously mentioned, schools usually function under a white, middle class, heteronormative assumption; that is to say that these things are taken for granted as being the norm. But who said that they are normal? How did they get to be the norm? What practices perpetuate them as normal? These are the questions that queer theory strives to answer. When LGBTQ topics and issues arise in school settings, the focus is on the people who identify as LGBTQ, the “Other.” Queer theory turns the examination away from the individuals and toward society at large. As Britzman (1997) tells us, “The study of why gay rights are so difficult to achieve requires not a look into the lives of gays and lesbians but into the questions and conditions of why sexuality must be regulated, outlawed, and fought for” (p. 36).

Dilley (1999) describes the three tenets of queer theory as examinations of non-heterosexual lives/experiences, juxtaposition of these lives/experiences with those considered “normal,” and examination of why these lives/experiences are regarded as being outside of the societal norm. Just like LGBTQ YAL, Queer theory doesn't benefit only those who identify as queer. Alexander (2005) explains:

If queer pedagogy ... is foremost concerned with a radical practice of deconstructing normalcy, then it is obviously not confined to teaching as, for, or about queer subject(s). As such, the call to “work” or think queerness in the classroom should not focus solely on introducing our many straight students to queer lives and stories; rather, working queerness in the writing classroom should be an invitation to all students – gay and straight – to think of the “constructedness” of their lives in a heteronormative society. (p. 375)

Queer theory invites all students to think critically about society’s power structures. Who holds power? How did they come to be in positions of power? How do we help those who are not part of the societal norm resist and overturn oppression? These questions can inspire critical thinking in students as well as educators. To truly teach with a social justice mindset, teachers must first analyze their own privilege and how they benefit from being a part of a power group. It is only through analysis and reflection of ourselves that we can begin to help others analyze themselves.

Positionality Statement

My interest in this research topic is both a professional and a personal one. I realized when I was in third grade that something about me was different from my friends. It wasn’t until I was in high school that I developed the understanding that I am a lesbian. I attended a small rural school in an extremely rural, conservative Appalachian town in the 1980s; there were no representations of anyone who identified as LGBT in any aspect of school. When it was brought up, it was with disparaging and hurtful remarks. I do not think I have ever felt as alone as I did during this time.

As a secondary teacher in the same small rural school, I strove to make my classroom inclusive for all, a judgment-free zone where all students knew they were cared for and welcomed. As stated in my introduction, I was reprimanded when I made the public effort to celebrate the differences that make us unique. After this, my efforts became more clandestine; I subtly wove LGBTQ issues, topics, and characters into my lessons.

As this study focused on inclusivity and support in secondary classrooms, I used Critical theory as an interpretive, analytic framework. The critical paradigm argues that the structures in place in the world have an impact on individuals, that these structures lead to deferential treatment among people based on things that are often out of their control, that all knowledge is political, and that the purpose of research is to help those marginalized individuals improve their life chances (Hatch, 2002). Using critical theory to address this research topic will hopefully challenge this existing power structure present in schools, promote resistance to it, and bring about change that will benefit all students (Hatch, 2002).

Theory alone cannot transform oppressive structures; Freire (2005) says “Revolution is achieved...with praxis, that is with *reflection* and *action* directed at the structures to be transformed” (p. 126). While reflection is a necessary component of transformation, it is not enough to simply reflect on unfair and oppressive acts; the next step is taking action (practice) in transforming an oppressive reality into a humanizing one.

Society has been shaped by a myriad of factors (social, political, ethnic, gender, etc.) that over time have been taken as natural (Lincoln and Guba, 2011). Heterosexuality

is one such example as something being taken as “normal.” Education systems impose heterosexuality on students daily; one needs to look no further than curriculum to see this. Heteronormative ideas are in everything from social studies to science to literature; rarely, if ever, are homosexual inventors, writers, and social change agents mentioned. If they are mentioned, it is in light of their achievements only. Indeed, school administrators and others who maintain the power structures prefer that the status quo not be questioned. As Fiske (1993) explains, “power is a systematic set of operations upon people that works to ensure the maintenance of the social order...and ensure its smooth running.” Maintaining social order means that no one is questioning the power structure. If no one questions it, there are no complications. When it is questioned, as evidenced in my introduction, there are repercussions.

Building administrators have power in a school building; district administrators have power in a school system. Both types of administrators determine rules, policies, and curriculum studies for schools, often without input from teachers, and in doing so fall into what Freire (2005) calls the myth of “absolutizing to ignorance.” He explains:

The one who is doing the decreeing defines himself and the class to which he belongs as those who know or were born to know; he thereby defines others as alien entities. The words of his own class come to be the “true” words, which he imposes or attempts to impose on the others: the oppressed, whose words have been stolen from them. Those who steal the words of others develop a deep doubt in the abilities of the others and consider them incompetent. Each time they say their word without hearing the word of those whom they have forbidden to speak,

they grow more accustomed to power and acquire a taste for guiding, ordering, and commanding. (p. 134)

Not including teachers in policy-making and curriculum structuring is, in effect, stealing their words. The more administrators steal words from teachers, the more they perceive that teachers will do nothing about it. True transformation takes place when teachers take back their words by reflecting on practices that have kept them silent and developing a plan of action to change those practices.

There is no doubt that schools shape the behaviors and actions of their students to fit the accepted norm. But on what assumptions are the schools basing their norms?

Gerald Walton (2009) maintains:

In schools across the country, it is taken for granted that students will form heterosexual relationships and demonstrate them in schools through such behavior as holding hands. It is never questioned that parents may come to the school as a couple on parent-teacher interview days. It never sparks controversy when heterosexual couples dance together at school dances. Books that depict straight couples are never banned for that reason alone. (p. 218)

Walton brings up many thought-provoking ideas here, all of which are based on assumptions that many administrators and teachers hold, possibly that they aren't even aware of. Books with heterosexual couples that appear on the banned books list are not banned simply for having an opposite-sex couple in it. On the other hand, books that have same-sex couples, even if no sexual situations are present, have been banned based solely on that fact.

A perfect example of this is the children's book *And Tango Makes Three*, by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell. This book, a story about two male penguins in New York's Central Park Zoo who display behaviors of opposite sex penguins and are given an egg to hatch and raise, has been on the American Library Association's banned book list seven times since 2006, taking the number one spot for three years in a row ("Frequently challenged," 2015). As a matter of fact, books with "homosexual themes" have occupied the number one spot on the ALA's banned book list for five of the past ten years ("Frequently challenged," 2015).

Freire (2005) tells us "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition" (p. 79). Critical thinking is the key for transformative educational practices, for both teachers and students. Learning is a process that they undertake together. As a high-school educator, I tried to employ what Freire (2005) calls "problem-posing" education. In this type of education, teachers do not own the knowledge; they present it to students so that they can consider it and express their own thoughts. It is upon student thoughts that teachers reconsider their own, reflecting on what they have learned from students. I had faith that "Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge" (Freire, 2005, p. 81). The more a lesson or text relates to students' lives, the more they can see themselves in a lesson or text, the more they will interact with it. I had confidence that students would rise to the challenges posed to them in my class.

It is easy for educators to make the assumption that all students in their classrooms are heterosexual; this, however, is hardly ever the case. Elizabeth Meyer (2009) explains it best:

Sexual diversity is all around us, although it is often invisible and silenced.

Schools cannot make the controversies surrounding sexual diversity disappear by ignoring them...As educators who are responsible for supporting and teaching the next generation, it is our responsibility to create schools and classrooms that value and teach about the diversity that is already present in our communities. Teachers and administrators also have the legal obligation to create safe learning environments that are equitable and free of discrimination. (p. 188)

I dare say that none of my high school teachers ever knew my sexual orientation, as I was struggling to come to terms with it myself. Students like me, who identify as LGBTQ, are easy to overlook; they are not easily identifiable by skin color, accent, or physical characteristics. This assumption, though, does not mask the fact that they do exist.

One study reported that LGBTQ children recounted being as young as ten when they discovered their sexual orientation, and yet another study reported that LGBTQ youth said the first time they had a “distinct feeling” of being different was between the ages of five and seven (Meyer, 2009). More than likely, LGBTQ students will be present in the classroom. The safest thing for an educator to do is to enter a classroom with no assumptions and work to make the room an inclusive, safe environment for any student who enters, regardless of background.

Delimitations

The amount of research that can be done on this topic is vast; for this reason, I am delimiting this research to only one rural school system in one Appalachian county. I chose this county because of the conservative nature of the citizens and because I believe it is typical of a small, conservative, rural community. There is only one high school and

one middle school in the county, and neither school has a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA). I am well aware that teachers from other disciplines may have alternative views, but as I am a former secondary English teacher and am familiar with the curriculum and the myriad of diverse texts where multicultural young adult literature is concerned, I am delimiting my research by choosing to interview only secondary English teachers in this system. Each of them varies in age, experiences, and years of teaching, and I am confident that interviewing these teachers will satisfy the demands of the present study.

Limitations

This study relates to one school system only; definitive conclusions as to the experiences of teachers in other schools will be limited. Even though interviews will help me deeply understand the experiences of my participants, their experiences may not be the same as those of teachers in other rural schools. Another limitation is not observing them in the classroom. Interviews are rich and descriptive, but I will not have an opportunity to be a participant observer (Merriam, 2009) in their classrooms and watch them teach.

Definitions of Terms

Before concluding this chapter with the organization of the study, definitions of terms used throughout the study are given below:

- *Heteronormativity* –practices that position heterosexuality as normal and that validate, privilege, and prioritize heterosexuality as a result of this positioning (Fredman, Schultz, & Hoffman, 2015).

- *Hidden Curriculum* – school dynamics that are “unofficial” (such as rules, structures, routines, etc.) and that shape beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors of students (Ritzer, 2007).
- *LGBTQ* – a community of people whose sexual orientations or gender identities can create shared political and social concerns.
- *Multicultural* – works “that reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world” (Bishop, 1997, p. 3).
- *Oppression* – the result of dehumanization, an unjust social order in which violence engendered in the oppressors results in the oppressed being dehumanized (Freire, 2005).

Organization of Study

In this chapter I have explained how I became interested in this topic, discussed its purpose, and introduced the research questions. I also included a positionality statement where I described my own thoughts about the inclusion of LGBTQ YAL in the classroom. In chapter two, I will present a literature review of YAL in general, education and LGBTQ YAL, LGBTQ YAL as both mirrors and windows, disrupting the victim narrative of LGBTQ texts, and how some educators are including LGBTQ texts in their classrooms. Chapter three will describe the methodology used to conduct this study. Chapter four will discuss the findings from the data. Chapter five, the final chapter, is where I will discuss implications and areas for further research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

*“I felt like I needed something official to show me how all of this should feel, how I should be acting, what I should be saying.” –Emily M. Danforth, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post**

Bob Dylan’s song “The Times They Are A-Changin’” grew out of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, but those same lyrics can be applied to the civil rights battles of LGBTQ citizens today. In June of 2015, the Supreme Court made marriage equality the law of the land. Turn on the television and there will be shows with LGBTQ characters. More celebrities and athletes are living openly with same-sex partners. More same-sex parents are raising children. More of America’s youth are initiating the coming out process during their teenage years.

Yet in light of all this, LGBTQ YAL is surprisingly sparse in many of our nation’s schools. Paolo Freire (2005) wrote, “To glorify democracy and to silence the people is a farce; to discourse on humanism and to negate people is a lie” (p. 91). Moreover, Dorothy Hurley (2005) tells us that in order for children to develop a positive self-image, they need to see themselves and/or their images in the texts their schools use. School libraries, high schools in particular, need to be more conscientious in building multicultural, diverse collections. Denying access to diverse texts is informing those students who are already marginalized that they, or their families, are not worthy of being included in “normal” texts, that they are somehow less than.

The dearth of diverse texts led to the formation of We Need Diverse Books, “a grassroots organization of children’s book lovers that advocates essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people” that envisions “a world in which all children can see themselves in the

pages of a book” (We Need Diverse Books, n.d.). Young adult literature is experiencing a renaissance of sorts, with titles consistently on bestseller lists and also with crossover appeal into the adult world. With the immense popularity of YAL today, it seems common sense to use these books in classrooms across the nation.

Teachers, Education, and LGBTQ Topics

Many school districts are reticent to talk about LGBTQ issues; this further reinforces the heteronormative school environment and the belief that heterosexuality is the norm (Fredman, Schultz, & Hoffman, 2015). Ritzer (2007) states that schools have a “hidden curriculum,” defined as those structures, routines, and rules that are unofficial but influence attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors of students anyway and reinforce the message that white middle-class values are the standard. Those who adhere to these standards are rewarded; those who do not – whether because of race, economic status, or sexual orientation – are inhibited from reaching their full potential, both as academics and humans. Conformity is obligatory.

The power structure of schools is enforced by a school district’s administration. Those in positions of power can, and do at times, dictate what is to be taught in schools; furthermore, administrations reserve the right to impose discipline on teachers who are perceived as defying a district mandate of what is deemed acceptable curriculum. Fredman, Schultz, and Hoffman (2015) found that many teachers were fearful of “rocking the boat,” perceiving that their administration and communities would marginalize them. Because of this perceived threat, some teachers choose to remain silent about LGBTQ issues, and inclusion of these topics in academic curriculum is rare (Castro & Sujak, 2014).

Blackburn and Buckley (2005) gathered replies from those responsible for developing English-Language Arts (ELA) curriculum in 212 public schools in response to the question of whether their curriculum addressed same-sex desire or not, and if so, what materials were used. Of the 212 schools that responded, only 18 (8.94%) stated that they used materials that addressed same-sex desire in the curriculum. Only 6 of the responding schools used materials that put same-sex desire in the foreground, using material such as *Gay Youth* or *The Laramie Project*. Seven responding schools used materials such as *The Sun Also Rises* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which touch on LGBTQ topics. Three of the responding schools only touched on these topics when discussing authors such as Tennessee Williams, Kate Chopin, Shakespeare, and J.D. Salinger, while others equate LGBTQ authors with LGBTQ texts.

For example, Truman Capote, a gay man, wrote *In Cold Blood*, but the text itself has absolutely no LGBT content. The most troubling responses, though, are the 194 schools who adamantly claim they would “absolutely not” teach LGBTQ materials “under any circumstance” and cited religion, community values, lack of resources, school policies, and having better things to do with their time as reasons. What messages are these 194 schools sending to their LGBTQ students and families? Moreover, the message that administration and curriculum developers are sending to classroom teachers is one of warning; if they teach texts with these topics they will face consequences.

Amanda Thein (2013) conducted a study with 20 master’s students of varying ages and teaching experience levels in her online K-12 multicultural literature course. She found that the students, even though they professed to have a neutral or positive stance toward LGBTQ people and issues, concluded that texts with LGBTQ characters

and issues should not be used in a classroom; they justified their answers by claiming “teaching such issues would not be appropriate because it’s not part of their job” (p. 172). Furthermore, Their reports that the “participants often referred to ambiguous, unnamed ‘others’ who would oppose such classroom content, typically based on religious, political, or moral grounds” (p. 173). Although disappointing, one explanation for this might be that preservice teachers would not want to do anything to thwart their chances of gaining employment.

Teenagers, if we are to believe the stereotypes, are lazy, concerned with social status, unable to make rational decisions, and uninterested in the world around them. At times, teenagers are not given much credit for deep, critical thinking and reasoning. This is another reason teachers may choose to shy away from topics that are considered controversial; they underestimate the maturity level of their students (Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009). In order to challenge the preconceived stereotypes teenagers have of a certain group, educators must challenge their own preconceived stereotypes of teenagers. The more educators have controversial discussions with their students, the more they emphasize that the classroom is a safe place, one where students can be comfortable engaging in dialogue on tough issues without fear of repercussion or judgment from peers (Schieble, 2012).

In a 2008 study on the beliefs of heterosexual students regarding their gay and lesbian peers, Horn found that what students are learning in schools is how to treat others, not how to form a belief system.

Messages students receive in the school environment from teachers, administrators, and other students regarding the legitimacy of intergroup

behaviors (such as exclusion and teasing) that may be harmful or discriminatory are critical to how young people construct an understanding of the fair treatment and rights of individuals... school practices are related to adolescents' judgments regarding the rights of gay and lesbian peers. Interestingly, there is not strong evidence that school practices are related to adolescents' beliefs about homosexuality. In contrast to previous arguments, schools can uphold the rights of lesbian and gay youth to be protected from harm while also upholding the rights of others to hold certain beliefs about homosexuality... Adolescents recognize that personal value systems regarding homosexuality are distinct from issues of how to treat other persons. This distinction is critical in providing evidence that by engaging in practices that protect students from harassment and discrimination related to sexual orientation and gender identity, schools are not endorsing a particular set of beliefs regarding the acceptability of one type of sexual orientation over another. (p. 808-809)

The conclusive argument here is there is no "homosexual agenda." There is only an ethical and moral obligation to model for students how to treat those who are different than they.

As far as the idea of "agendas" is concerned, teaching is not an agenda-free profession; our "agendas" are evident in the curriculum we choose to teach. If the classroom does not include LGBTQ texts and content, then that absence is in effect representing the "heterosexual agenda" and upholding traditional norms (Mason, 2008). If we expect students to rise to our expectations of non-judgment and open-mindedness and model that process, they will meet our expectations. They must be trusted to do so.

Another reason administrators cite for the exclusion of LGBTQ topics in school curriculum is that students' sexual orientation has no bearing on their academic progress, whereas the academic progress of students in racial minorities has been affected because of differences from the dominant culture (Preston Agiro, et al., 2015). In terms of race, this statement can be true; when teachers do not practice a culturally relevant pedagogy, then cultural differences may account for impeding students' academic progress through no fault of their own. There are, though, fallacies in this statement as well.

Heterosexuality is part of society's dominant culture; therefore, students who identify as LGBTQ are not a part of the cultural majority. Also, GLSEN's 2013 school climate report tells us that sexual orientation does have an effect on a student's progress, as LGBTQ students are more likely to miss school because of harassment (verbal or physical), have lower GPAs, and are twice as likely not to pursue post-secondary education (Kosciw, et al., 2014). All administrators and educators will agree that missing school can negatively affect academic progress. It becomes imperative, then, for educators to insure that all students are welcome, validated, and free from harassment.

Sometimes it is the educators who protest the loudest who have never read an LGBTQ-themed YA novel; this leads to misconceptions about its content. Some equate LGBTQ YA novels with discussions about sex, but do YA novels with heterosexual relationships focus on their sex lives (Mason, 2008)? Like it or not, adolescents are exploring their sexuality. If we have made our classrooms safe spaces, adolescents should be able to come to us with questions and we should be prepared to answer them compassionately. Furthermore, there are many LGBTQ-themed books with heterosexual

narrators who are navigating their lives with LGBTQ friends or family members.

Including these books only means that all people are represented.

Educators have an obligation to help their students become citizens of the global community, ready to encounter people and issues that are different with an open mind. Some educators may say that going against the status quo is a difficult thing to do, maybe too difficult. To these educators I echo the sentiments of Clark and Blackburn (2009), who say, “We empathize but cannot fully console. This work is risky, and as long as heterosexism and homophobia are institutionally supported forms of oppression, it will continue to be so. But this risky work has the potential to dismantle such oppression, and this makes it worth doing” (p. 31). Furthermore, Cochran-Smith (1991) tells us, “teachers have a responsibility to reform, not just replicate, standard school practices” (p. 280). Revolution and reform must start from the ground up; that means those in the classroom, teachers, have a responsibility to begin the reformation of an oppressive hidden curriculum.

Mirrors and Windows

Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) says that classrooms need to be places where all students can find their mirrors. Students using books as windows are exposed to new cultures, beliefs, and perspectives that differ from their own, whereas using books as mirrors affords readers an opportunity to relate personally to what is read, to see a self-image in characters, especially when the books focus on culture, geography, sexual orientation, stages of development, and gender expressions that are similar to the adolescent (Logan, et al., 2014).

Michael Cart (2008), writing for the Young Adult Library Services Associations (YALSA), offers one of the best explanations of the immense value of young adult literature as it pertains to mirrors and windows:

YALSA finds another of the chief values of young adult literature in its capacity to offer readers an opportunity to see themselves reflected in its pages... Thus, to see oneself in the pages of a young adult book is to receive the reassurance that one is not alone after all, not other, not alien but, instead, a viable part of a larger community of beings who share a common humanity. Another value of young adult literature is its capacity for fostering understanding, empathy, and compassion by offering vividly realized portraits of the lives – exterior and interior – of individuals who are *unlike* the reader. In this way young adult literature invites its readership to embrace the humanity it shares with those who – if not for the encounter in reading – might forever remain strangers or – worse — irredeemably “other.” (para. 11)

Identity is formed based on interaction with others. In order to have a positive identity, one needs others to confirm the validity and importance of it. When that interaction with others is negative, though, repercussions occur. When one’s identity is perceived as deviant by peers, then all other identities are negated (Hewitt, 1991). This is where books have an opportunity to show adolescents that they are not alone.

Before Ladson-Billings (1995) wrote about the importance of having a culturally relevant pedagogy, it was often the case that students only heard about the achievements of Martin Luther King, Harriet Tubman, Cesar Chavez and a select few, well-known other people of color. Slavery was glossed over for the larger story of the Civil War;

certainly little, if any, attention was given to the African American regiments who fought in it. The Mexican American War may be taught, but only in pieces.

Educational statistics twenty years ago were also unnerving; the total percentage of Black and Hispanic high school dropouts was 42.6%, these two groups made up only 33% of the enrollment in higher education, and they had much lower literacy rates than their White counterparts (“Mini-digest,” 1995). Schools were doing a disservice to students of color. All of these things prompted Gloria Ladson-Billings to coin the term “culturally relevant pedagogy.” This pedagogy rests on the propositions of academic success, cultural competence, and development of a critical consciousness in which the status quo can be challenged (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It becomes an ethical and moral obligation for teachers to help marginalized students realize the power structures that surround them and develop the skills to challenge the dominant group.

Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) asserts that literature has the power to transform the human experience, to reflect it back to us, and allow us to see our own lives and experiences in that reflection that show us as a part of the larger overall human experience. White children have no problem seeing themselves in the texts they read; however, children of color are not as fortunate. The message being sent to those children is one of unimportance. Bishop (1990) claims,

When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part. Our classrooms need to be places where all the children from all the cultures that make up the salad bowl of American society can find their mirrors. (par. 4)

Even though Bishop's article focuses on race, these same tenets hold true for LGBTQ students. Although not as well researched as race, students who identify as LGBTQ can benefit from seeing themselves in the literature and curriculum of their schools.

In any culture, the dominant group is the one who has the most power in society. As schools are considered to be microcosms of society (Elia, 1993), the same dominant groups found in society can also be found in schools, namely White middle/upper class students. In some schools, especially in small rural Southern areas of the country, there is hardly any racial or ethnic diversity to be found in the population. Students in these schools may base their knowledge of Others on stereotypes and media portrayals.

The need to teach about the existence of Others is not only to fill a knowledge gap; rather, the partial knowledge that they already have, which may be inaccurate and harmful, needs to be disrupted. Kumashiro (2000) says:

Lessons about the Other should not aim to tell students the truth about the Other. Rather, lessons about the Other should be treated as both catalysts and resources for students to use as they learn more. Disruptive knowledge, in other words, is not an end in itself, but a means toward the always-shifting end/goal of learning more. (p. 34)

It would be arrogant for teachers to propose that they know the entire truth about a historically marginalized group, even if they are members of one, because no culture is monolithic (Goldenberg, 2014). The struggles of one Black family may not be indicative of the struggles of another; likewise, the struggle of LGBTQ people in one area/era may not be representative of those from another.

People of color have increasingly seen themselves in literature, reflected in characters they can relate to and the language used in their classrooms. Much literature exists that draws a correlation between the importance of seeing oneself in book pages, in library book shelves, and the school's overall curriculum. Bishop's argument that students need windows as well as mirrors fits just as well with LGBTQ students as it does students of color.

LGBTQ YAL as Mirror

In 1965, Nancy Larrick quoted a young Black girl who asks, "Why are they always *white* children?" This question prompted the entire article. Larrick says, "Across the country, 6,340,000 nonwhite children are learning to read and to understand the American way of life in books which either omit them entirely or scarcely mention them" (p. 63). Larrick's article brought attention to the publishing industry in America during the 1960s. For even though the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision handed down in 1954 made desegregation the law of the land, the publishing industry lagged far behind. Thankfully, today there is an abundance of books with Black characters in schools across the nation. I dare say that practically each public school in the U.S. has books with Black characters and by Black authors available to students, either in classrooms or libraries. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for books with LGBTQ characters and issues.

Crisp and Knezek (2010) recount what one young man in their children's literature class said in response to the question of whether having access to LGBTQ literature when he was younger would have made things any easier or different for him. The young man responded:

I don't think so... You've got to understand. I'm betting almost everything available featuring gay characters in books for kids and teens is here – and they fit on these two tabletops. You'd need all the rooms in this building, and more, to fit the books that feature heterosexual kids and their families. They have a much better chance of finding themselves or what they're interested in. It's really great that you're trying, but I just don't see myself here. (p. 76).

Crisp and Knezek go on to say that for years teachers and students have questioned issues of race, gender, and culture in texts but exclude sexual identity. To echo the young girl's quote from Larrick, why are they always *heterosexual* children?

Schools are microcosms of society and often “devalue the sexual orientation of gay and lesbian teens in their curriculum, extracurricular activities, and student services” (Vare and Norton, 2004, p. 190). Almost every school in the country is heteronormative, legitimizing and privileging heterosexuality as normal (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). It is easy for teachers to assume that students in their classes are heterosexual, but Katherine Mason (2008) makes a good point when she says, “Imagine what it must feel like for a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning student to see only heterosexual relationships represented in classroom texts and discussions. Imagine, too, what it must feel like for a student who is questioning his/her gender identity to see only traditional gender roles/expressions represented in those same texts and discussions” (p. 59). Because not every LGBTQ student has a family member or close friend in whom to confide in and ask questions, these students need to see themselves reflected in their school's literature and curriculum to help them realize they are not alone.

Martin and Murdock (2007) tell us, “Queer and questioning teens are looking for portrayals of what it means to be queer – a way to describe what they feel, to affirm that it is normal, and to know that they are not alone” (p. 17). Books can offer huge benefits. For LGBTQ teens, who may feel disconnected from their peers, family, and society, books can offer them characters to identify with and a chance to feel less alienated, characters they can relate to so to help them understand the person they will become (Rauch, 2011). Even more than that, these books give LGBTQ students a glimpse of who they actually are in the present moment. An added bonus is that there is no risk of a book rejecting them; reading is sometimes much easier for LGBTQ students than talking to an actual person.

Many teens who identify as LGBTQ feel silenced at school. They are reticent to discuss their sexual orientation or seek answers to their questioning. One way educators can help these adolescents is to introduce them to literature with LGBTQ characters and topics. Knowing students and providing relevant texts to them “may promote healthy exploration and movement toward resolution of gay and lesbian identity orientation crisis within the broader context of young adult development and help them feel that their identities are affirmed rather than silenced” (Vare & Norton, 2004, p. 193). When adolescents, or anyone for that matter, see themselves in the pages of a book, they have knowledge that they are not alone (Cart & Jenkins, 2006).

LGBTQ students are just like their heterosexual peers in that they need to see positive images to “help guide them through the often painful and confusing terrain of childhood and adolescence, to glimpse a world in which they’re not bad or shameful but in which they’re part of the good world” (Sanchez, 2005, p. 47). Like it or not, some

students will enter the classroom knowing that they are LGBTQ, some will enter the classroom questioning their sexuality, and teachers may never know this. In order to make the classroom a safe, welcoming space for all students, to insure that all types of stories and people are valued, it is imperative to include LGBTQ YAL in the curriculum.

LGBTQ YAL as Window

Using LGBTQ YAL in the classroom creates opportunities for those adolescent readers who identify as such to see themselves, to know that there are others like them, to have their existence validated. The benefits are not relegated to LGBTQ students alone; there are advantages for heterosexual students as well. Students should learn about all types of diversity in order to be prepared for what they will encounter in life after compulsory schooling. The fact of the matter is that LGBTQ people are part of our country's, our world's, population; therefore, reading texts with LGBTQ topics and characters should be required readings rather than optional (Castro & Sujak, 2014).

Indeed, teaching LGBTQ topics in isolation reinforces the notion that there is a certain time and place to study them, that they can only be taught within the confines of a certain day or week (Sieben, 2010). This is the kind of thinking that educators must push back against. Students need to know that the stereotypical images of LGBTQ citizens only reinforce the harassment; exposure to LGBTQ characters with similar beliefs, values, problems, etc. could be a big step forward to eliminate ignorance and fear (Gallo, 2004). Making LGBTQ characters and topics a regular part of the curriculum takes away the "taboo." Acceptance of all people must be one of education's chief goals; doing so makes schools better places for LGBTQ and heterosexual students.

Children are inquisitive by nature; it is both unfair and unethical to deny them the chance to question their world and the people in it. Powerful works of fiction can help students find empathy, put themselves in the place of others, and identify and connect with all kinds of characters. Furthermore, including LGBTQ works of YAL reinforces the reality that teens who identify as such are no different than their heterosexual peers, “preoccupied with dreams, questions, and anxieties” (Letcher, 2009). Books with LGBTQ characters and topics address the human condition and show that no matter one’s sexual orientation, adolescent problems are universal. Who doesn’t remember their first love, or their first betrayal, or the day they realized their beliefs were different than their parents? The humanness of these stories demands to be told, the mystery taken away.

If it is true that the unknown is what is scary, then teachers should strive to make sure that no group of people goes unknown. Heteronormativity can be disrupted by using these texts, for they, like other multicultural texts, have the ability to place “those generally *outside* in and those who are generally *inside* on the outside” and spur conversations in the classroom about the reality of the world’s diverse population (Crisp & Knezek, 2010, p. 77). The world is not a homogeneous place; students need to realize that before they leave schools. Even as far back as 1976, Shepherd and Iles were telling educators that works of fiction have the power to change emotions, behaviors, society, and political consciousness, both individual and national. The same holds true today.

In addition to being a tool to combat heteronormativity and homophobia in individuals, incorporating LGBTQ issues in curriculum also has an impact on the school environment as a whole. California in particular has seen positive results. Approximately 83% of California’s schools include LGBTQ issues in their tolerance curriculum; as a

result, there has been a 10-22% increase in these districts of students, both hetero- and homosexual, reporting that they felt safe and a 25% decrease in the number of students who reported harassment for being or being assumed to be LGBTQ (Brimberry, 2011). GLSEN concurs with the California findings. The 2013 National School Climate Report found that students who were enrolled in a school with LGBTQ inclusive curriculum heard homophobic and negative remarks about gender expression less frequently, felt safer, reported less victimization, and missed school less often (Kosciw, et al., 2014).

Lipkin (1999) notes the following positive outcomes of having an inclusive school curriculum that represents the diversity of sexual orientation: life preparation, being cognizant of student interests, having a more honest, complete curricula, and help for LGBTQ as well as heterosexual youth. As McCarthy and Moje (2002) remind us, “Reading a wide variety of fiction that represents diverse groups of people with different backgrounds and experiences is one way to engage students in explicit discussions about identity, subjectivity, positionality, and power” (p. 237). Critical thinking has become quite the buzzword in education. Having honest discussions about power, subjectivity and identity definitely falls into the critical thinking category. Moreover, students who are taught to think critically about the world around them have a better chance of becoming adults who think critically about the world around them.

Homophobia may not be completely eradicated by introducing LGBTQ YAL into the curriculum, but ignorance and fear can be challenged and addressed. Books that are carefully selected by educators to meet the needs of their students have an opportunity to change belief systems, values, and minds of the reader. Indeed, in small, rural, homogeneous communities, books may be the only avenue to meet people who are

different, whether it is race, religion, ethnicity, culture, ability, or sexual orientation. As Michael Cart (1997) so eloquently and passionately implores:

We need more good novels that give faces to gay and lesbian young people...that offer them the shock of recognition, the knowledge that they are not alone; more good novels that 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. Not to have such books is an invitation to ignorance, which leads to fear, which leads to demonizing instead of humanizing, which leads to violence against not only the body but the spirit. (p. 45)

Educators have a moral obligation to combat hateful, hurtful, demonizing, and discriminatory actions and be willing to fight for the dignity and worth of all of their students, especially those who are marginalized.

Garcia (2015) claims, “If we remain passive in the face of individual, collective, or systemic prejudice, our inaction is a form of discrimination” (p. 315). What we do not say as teachers speaks as loudly as what we do say. Our moral and ethical obligation is to ensure the well being of ALL students. Using LGBTQ YAL in the classroom is a positive first step to achieving a truly equal educational society.

Disrupting the Victim Narrative

When introducing LGBTQ YAL into the curriculum, it is important to have many voices being represented; one novel could never be indicative of an entire group of people. Chimamanda Adichie, in her 2009 TED talk, explains, “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (12:56). Just as teens of color

must navigate through a world where assumptions are made about their identity because of their skin color (Hughes-Hassell, et al., 2013), LGBTQ teens must navigate through a world that often sees them, if they are seen at all, as deviant. Many of them find themselves in danger daily, whether social, emotional, or physical (Vare & Norton, 2004). The story they hear about themselves is usually a negative one.

Indeed, this victim narrative was the dominant theme in LGBTQ texts published in the 1970s and 1980s. Cart and Jenkins (2006) classify this era of LGBTQ texts as “homosexual visibility,” stories that depict LGBTQ characters who come out either voluntarily or involuntarily and face repercussions based on that decision. These stories are important to have, for there are LGBTQ individuals who have faced dire consequences as a result of others finding out about their sexual orientation. They have been kicked out of their homes, shunned by their family and friends, physically beaten – all because of something that is out of their control.

However, no one story is indicative of the experiences of all groups of people; there are also LGBTQ people who have not had experiences such as these. Furthermore, using stories that show LGBTQ characters who face negative consequences, contract AIDS, or are bullied to the point of suicide further emphasizes the single story. Jennings (2015) says, “If LGBTQ youth are primarily framed as at risk, they deserve our pity and protection but do not threaten the privileges associated with being non-LGBTQ—much less do they have anything remarkable to contribute that might transform schools and society for the better” (p. 456). It is not enough to tell LGBTQ students that “it gets better” and then give them only stories that frame LGBTQ characters as victims.

The second era of LGBTQ literature, after homosexual visibility, is one that Cart and Jenkins (2006) have coined “gay assimilation.” These stories have characters who just happen to be gay, much as one just happens to be tall or just happens to have blue eyes. The message in these texts is that LGBTQ individuals are just like everybody else. This message is partly true; as previously mentioned, LGBTQ adolescents usually have the same hopes, dreams, and anxieties as their heterosexual peers. However, they are not just like their heterosexual peers. Their sexual orientation sets them apart from the dominant mainstream culture.

The era that LGBTQ YAL seems to be in now is one that Cart and Jenkins (2006) have dubbed “queer consciousness/community.” These texts show LGBTQ youth in communities that support them, who are valued members of either biological families or families of choice. It is these stories that can disrupt the victim narrative the most, for they show just how diverse LGBTQ characters are and upend the myth that those who identify as LGBTQ are destined to be alone (Clark & Blackburn, 2009). The adolescents in Clark and Blackburn’s (2009) book club, the Pink TIGers, were attracted most to books that showed queer community.

Texts that show queer community and include “complex characters experiencing romance and committed relationships, productive work lives and artistic expression, family and community...work in concert to allow lesbians and gays to see themselves as empowered members of a larger community rather than victims constrained by their own isolation” (Linne, 2003, p. 672). It is imperative for young people to see that the closet is not a safe space to stay, that it does, in fact, get better, that there are LGBTQ people all over the world who are members of families and communities.

Educators have an obligation to expose students to this truth, for if this truth, the truth that LGBTQ people can and do make friends and create families who love and respect them, is ignored, then we as adults cannot assist LGBTQ youth in accessing support networks or even imagining ways that their lives will get better and how they can work with others to make it happen (Clark & Blackburn, 2014). It is not enough to show a single story.

Classrooms Using LGBTQ Texts

More research needs to be done on exactly how teachers are including LGBTQ texts in their regular curriculum. There are some teachers, though, who have used LGBTQ texts successfully in their classrooms. Steven Athanases (1996) documents how Reiko Liu taught multicultural literature to her multi-ethnic class of tenth graders. Reiko chose to use “Dear Anita: Late Night Thoughts of an Irish Catholic Homosexual” because when her students read Marguerite’s story in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* they remarked that being lesbian or gay was not normal, and people who are gay choose to be that way. Liu stated that she wanted her students to understand how it feels to be different, how it feels to hear only negative things about oneself. She wanted her ethnic students to understand that for them to denigrate LGBTQ people for their sexual orientation was the same as someone else denigrating them for their ethnicity.

When Athanases (1996) surveyed the class at the end of the year about what they believed to be the most memorable lesson of the year, a third of them said the “Dear Anita” lesson was most memorable. Furthermore, many of them reported that their feelings and opinions about the LGBTQ community had changed. Students explained their transformations in many ways – from loving your neighbor as yourself to the course

being an eye-opener to having their old prejudices and stereotypes melt away. Clearly, Liu's lesson was successful. Before Liu taught this lesson, she had given her students many opportunities to explore their opinions about diversity, and they felt like her room was a safe space to talk about these subjects. Also, Liu knew her students. She chose a text that would speak to them and interest them. Both of these are vital for introducing LGBTQ materials into a class.

Webb (2001) documents a lesson taught by Tisha Pankop to her low-track sophomores in an ethnically mixed inner-city high school. Pankop greeted her students at the door as they entered, something she did daily, handing out blue triangles with a circle of tape to over half of them. They then had a discussion as to what it felt like not to get a blue triangle. After the discussion, Pankop distributed the short story "Am I Blue" in which a fairy godfather comes to the rescue of a gay adolescent and grants him three wishes, one of which is that all gay/lesbian people should turn blue. Once students realized what the blue triangle they received meant, many threw them in the center of the reading circle. This prompted a discussion of why they threw their triangles and navigated them to the topic of the unit, fear.

Students then talked about the fear of homosexuality and the fears that homosexual adolescents may face. The final conclusion was that the students felt like the adolescent in the story did not deserve to be treated badly, and Pankop observed that students listened more carefully that day and respected the perspectives of others. In addition, students in other classes heard about the story she used and asked her to borrow copies of the story to read. Again, it must be noted that Pankop knew her students,

selected a text based on that knowledge, and provided a safe space to air differences in opinions.

Hoffman (1993) writes of teaching Harvey Fierstein's *Torch Song Trilogy* to his creative writing class in a Houston high school. The main character in the play is Arnold, a drag queen, and the play chronicles his life as a gay man. While the students read the play, Hoffman had them keep journals. Many of his students wrote in their journals about their perceptions being changed. One student opined, "I came away with a better understanding of homosexual relationships; I'm even a little bit more accepting," while another stated, "I see now that their relationships are very similar to ours; they feel everything that we do, maybe even more in some cases," and another student with a gay best friend professed, "I've always listened to and stood by R, but now that I've read this play, I feel like I can relate to him more since I've been through experiences similar to his in a symbolic sense of reading" (p. 58). If their journals are any indication, Hoffman's students seem to have developed empathy as they read the play. This is the very definition of bibliotherapy.

Jose Garcia (2015), now a professor at Weber State but formerly a high school English teacher, experienced success using Critical Race Theory (CRT) in his classroom to address other forms of oppression such as homophobia. Critical Race theory is defined as "a set of legal scholarship theories about racial inequality and how race functions in the society" that emerged from "critical legal studies (CLS) in the mid-1980s after legal scholars were dissatisfied with the way the law continued to foster social inequality" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 88). The five tenets that have emerged from CRT are that racism is the norm and White is the standard by which other races are measured, racism

is socially constructed and expanded, perspective and storytelling of people of color as victims of oppression is a legitimate way to impart knowledge, interdisciplinary discourse is needed to analyze the relationships between races, and racism is systemic and that many current policies/laws and laws situated to privilege Whites and marginalize minority groups (Khalifa, et.al., 2013).

Garcia, who taught in a large urban high school, took it upon himself to use Critical Race Theory (CRT) to help his students understand racial oppression with the hope of helping them understand other forms of oppression that they may not be aware of. His students, many of whom were members of historically racial minority groups, both understood and recognized what things constituted racial injuries, but they were not at all aware about things that constituted homophobia and misogyny. He explains, “Without examining our marginalization, we could not understand how we also oppress and privilege ourselves at the cost of others” (p. 315).

The first step of applying CRT in his classroom consisted of giving background and history of racism in the U.S. This was an important step in building background knowledge and filling in gaps. After providing students with the necessary background about race, students discussed and wrote about their own experiences of how they had been personally injured by racism. In these discussions and writings, students created responses to the injuries.

The second step of Garcia’s implementation was to begin a resolution, creating a response and enacting change. Garcia’s students brainstormed a “do” and “don’t” list, including words and phrases that were unacceptable in the class, and students monitored each other by calling out other students when racist dialogue was used. Discussion

ensued, and apologies were administered. It must be noted here that Garcia created a safe space in his classroom, one where students realized that others respected their opinions and that they were valued members of the class. If students become accustomed to critically analyzing the speech and behavior of others in this safe space, then it may become second nature and easier to do so in spaces that seem less safe.

Steps three and four occurred in concert with each other. These steps encouraged students to first turn the critical lens on themselves and then recommend actions that could be taken in order to facilitate change on multiple levels. They had already established background knowledge in recognizing, talking about, and calling out racist statements in others; now they focused on their own status in privileged groups, often something they had not recognized. Garcia (2015) explains:

As people of color, both my students and I *get* racism. We understand the injury when we experience both micro and macro aggressions. However, injuries stemming from misogyny and homophobia are not as easily nor as frequently experienced by us. Therefore, we are in a privileged position and must account for it. Here is where calling out misogyny and homophobia becomes the vehicle that traverses the discomfort of acknowledging our complicity and privilege. When it is public, when we see it in others, and others see it in us, we can together bridge a solution and begin to change our classroom discourse. Once our classroom discourse changes, we raise our agency to change how we think, speak, and finally act as a classroom and as individuals. (p. 318)

Using race has already been modeled; they know how to think critically on this social justice issue. Now, instead of using media dealing with race, media depicting LGBTQ people and issues can be used.

Garcia (2015) began step four, recommending actions to facilitate change, on an individual level:

We begin with a personal question: What can I do and who do I have to become to make my life and my surroundings better for others and for myself? Each student comes up with an individualized plan of action. In it, they address the racial injury they sustained, the resolution to said injury, the injury they may have caused, and the action they will take to correct, prevent, or inform about racism, misogyny, and homophobia. (p. 318)

It is important to note that Garcia began on an individual level. Taking action to fight against social injustices can be a daunting task; thinking about it on a large level can seem intimidating. He believes that planning ways to fight it on an individual level can inspire more confidence. Writing the action plans for a real world audience – readers of the local newspaper, the school newspaper, the school board – can inspire even more confidence and make it seem worthwhile.

One classroom technique Garcia uses to help students reflect on race, gender, and sexual orientation is poetry reflections. He reads Audre Lorde's 1978 poem "A Litany for Survival" without telling his students who the author is, and they reflect on what it is the author is trying to express. He then tells them the author is a woman, reads the poem again, and has them reflect again. He repeats the process twice more, revealing that the author is a Black woman and then a lesbian Black woman. Examining their experiences

with racism and then recognizing their own status in privileged groups led them to have understanding rather than empathy. Understanding is a vehicle that can lead to action.

Perhaps one of the most promising stories of using LGBTQ literature in the classroom is contained in Helmer's (2015) research of a Gay and Lesbian Literature course (an elective English course) for juniors and seniors attending a public regional high school in western New England. Sara, the main teacher of the course, designed the entire curriculum and has taught the course since its inception in 2002. Depending on the scheduling system in place, as many as 150 students can take the class during the course of a year. During Helmer's research in the spring trimester in 2013, 24 students were enrolled in Sara's course; 17 of these students identified as heterosexual.

In organizing her course, Sara selected four novels used as focus texts as well as texts from different historical periods that each "marked significant changes in how lesbian and gay lives were understood and represented in literature" (p. 410). Using these various texts allowed students to embark on a literary journey that told the stories, experiences, cultures, histories, and politics of LGBTQ people from the early 1900s to the 1990s.

In addition to the texts, Sara also consistently integrated current and historical LGBTQ topics into the curriculum in the form of mini-lectures, films, and documentaries, among others. Helmer concluded,

Students began to look more critically and develop a deeper understanding of the social processes in their world. Their comments indicate that they experienced significant shifts in thinking as they encountered different perspectives, which allowed them to see LGBTQ people and their experiences through new lenses.

More importantly, these shifts in thinking had a transformational effect on students' personal interactions. Students felt they were able to be more supportive to someone who identified as LGBTQ; they began to take action when confronted with homophobia and heterosexism; and they acknowledged how taking this course positively impacted the school climate. (p. 416)

One student noted that Sara's course is one of the most sought-after courses taught in the school. Another student remarked, "I feel like this class should be required for everyone to take because ... it makes you view someone's full identity other than just looking at someone just for their sexuality" (p. 415).

Athanases (1996), Webb (1993), and Hoffman (2015) all document how teachers are using LGBTQ texts in their classrooms. And while the research shows that these teachers were effective, they were only using these texts during a specific day or week. Garcia and Sara, however, are using LGBTQ texts to drive the curriculum in their courses. This, I believe, is the direction that classroom curriculum needs to take. Garcia begins with CRT to engage his students before having them turn the lens on themselves, and Sara applies CRT's tenets to LGBTQ topics. If radical change is to happen in our country's classrooms, we need more teachers like Sara and Garcia.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a review of young adult literature, specifically its value in the classroom and its complexity and rigor. Next was a discussion of education and LGBTQ topics and the rationale administrators and teachers give for its exclusion in schools' curriculum. I then explained how LGBTQ YAL can be used as both mirrors and windows and how the single story of LGBTQ people as victims needs to be disrupted. I

finished the chapter by showcasing examples of teachers who are successfully using LGBTQ texts in their own classrooms, thus proving the point that it can be done and be done well, having a positive impact on LGBTQ students and heterosexual students alike.

Chapter 3: Methods

“I want love to conquer all. But love can’t conquer anything. It can’t do anything on its own. It relies on us to do the conquering on its behalf.” – David Levithan, Every Day

In this chapter, I will outline the methods I used to conduct the study and give the reader the context of the county as well as the schools in order to develop a better understanding about the climate the teachers I interviewed are working in. I will also introduce the teachers themselves and disclose my own reflexivity statement.

Research Context

Because schools in Southern states are identified as less likely to have access to LGBTQ resources and supports (Kosciw, et al., 2014), I chose to interview secondary (grades 7-12) English teachers who work in a small, rural, Appalachian county school system. In organizing this study, I want to introduce the context of both the county and the school so that readers may better understand the experiences of the participants who were teaching English there.

Redd County

Redd County (RC) is a picturesque county, with rolling hills and lush green farmland comprising its approximately 300 square miles. Main Street in RC, which runs through the center of the county seat, looks as if it is right out of the 1950s, with small, individually, locally-owned businesses dotting each side and the Appalachian Mountains providing the backdrop. For one week in the summer, Main Street is closed off for a weekend festival that showcases arts and crafts; it is shut down again for the high school’s football homecoming parade as well as the Christmas parade. During October scarecrows are decorated to look like Elvis, Harley-Davidson riders, and local businessmen and adorn both sides of Main Street.

The school system is the county's largest employer, and like in other rural school districts, the high school serves as the center of social activities (Schafft & Jackson, 2010). Much of the county's citizens can be found cheering on Redd County High School's (RCHS) football team on Friday nights in the fall and basketball team in the winter. Graduation is a huge event in the spring, taking place in the gymnasium of RCHS; it is so popular that administrators had to begin giving each graduating senior a certain number of tickets so that the number of people inside the gymnasium would not exceed the maximum number for the fire code.

The population of RC is 96% white; the remaining 4% is comprised of Black and Hispanic people¹. The per capita income is around \$13,800; approximately 24% of Redd County citizens fall below the poverty level. Around 70% of the county's residents have a high school diploma; however, only 10% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Even as late as 2013, RCHS graduated students who were the first in their families to complete high school. Concerning political attitudes of the county, a Democrat has not represented the county in its state legislature for over a century. Furthermore, no Republican presidential candidate has ever received fewer than 55% of the county's votes. The county commissioners recently sent a resolution to the state government urging them to oppose the Supreme Court's ruling on same-sex marriage. Redd County is staunchly conservative.

Along those traditionally conservative lines, religion is also a major institution of RC. Even though there are only approximately 18,000 citizens and 300 square miles, Redd County is home to over 80 churches. Religious activities are a staple of RC. Many

¹ The numbers for Redd County are obtained from the state and county websites. Specific citations are not

RCHS students are active youth group members of their churches, and churches also form their own type of communities within the larger context of Redd County.

Redd County High School

Redd County High School, the only high school in the county, sits on a hill not far from main street and serves students in grades 9-12. Upgrades have recently been made to the wireless infrastructure of the school, to the gymnasium floor, to the library, and to the locker areas for students. There are many clubs available for RCHS students to join, but the clubs with the largest number of participants are the Future Farmers of America, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Prayer and Bible Club. There is no Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) at RCHS.² Enrollment in RCHS is just under 700, and 96% of the students are white³. The other 4% of students are Latino or Hispanic. Around 79% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged (ED). The school operates on a four-by-four block schedule with students taking four 90-minute classes each semester. Each classroom is equipped with a SmartBoard and a projector, and RCHS distributed iPads to the ninth grade class last year, hoping to continue the trend for future ninth grade classes in order to become a one-to-one technology integrated school.

The state's report card declares that around 68% of RCHS students received scores of proficient or advanced on English I benchmark tests, around 50% on the English II benchmark, and only 22% on English III. As for ED students, 43% scored proficient or advanced on the English II benchmark tests and only 15% scored proficient

² Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are school-based clubs led by students and open to all members of the student body regardless of sexual orientation. GSAs often advocate for improved school climate, educate the larger school community about LGBT issues, and support LGBT students and their allies. Studies have shown that the presence of GSAs in schools help improve the school experiences of LGBTQ students.

³ The information for schools described here were rounded and obtained from the state department of education's website and the district's website. Specific citations are not given in order to limit the amount of identifying information.

or advanced on the English III benchmark tests. The current gap size in English II and III between ED students and non-ED students is 31%, with a target rate of 24%. Both the attendance rate and graduation rate are well above 90%.

The school does not collect school climate data, but I did gain access to a survey given to the students in 2014 on the topic of bullying (Appendix E). Among RCHS's students, 31% reported that bullying happened mainly in the hallways, 37% think rules about bullying should be enforced, 34% believe there should be more supervision, and 60% reported that bullying happens each day.

I emailed the teachers who participated in the study to see if they would be interested in giving a revised version of the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) school climate survey (Appendix F) to their classes. Answers to this survey, given nationally by GLSEN to high school students across the country in both public and private schools, are compiled in a report available for download on GLSEN's website that indicates LGBTQ students' experiences in schools with hearing biased language, availability of resources, harassment, and discrimination, just to name a few. The national report is broken down into state reports as well. Only one emailed me back saying she would try. A few days later, I received an email stating that the principal "was not comfortable" with the survey and would not let the teacher administer it to her students. In the email, the teacher responded by saying, "I guess their reluctance to give the survey is illuminating, too."

Redd County Middle School

Redd County Middle School (RCMS) is adjacent to RCHS and serves students in grades 7-8; it is the only middle school in the county and operates on a six-period

schedule. RCMS built a new wing on the school around 5 years ago instead of building an entirely new building, and upgraded the lockers and the gym floor. RCMS shares the football field with RCHS. Like RCHS, RCMS has no GSA. The enrollment is approximately 300, with white students making up the majority and other races/ethnicities making up <1%. Of these students, 76% are classified as ED.

The report card indicates that RCMS received a grade of 'F' in reading/language for not showing enough growth in their standardized state tests. Those students classified as ED made gains when compared to their non-ED peers, but it was not enough of an improvement; the gap size is still 36%, with a target rate of 11%. Promotion from 8th grade is 100%, and the attendance rate is well above 90%. Unlike RCHS, RCMS did not have any data available pertaining to school climate.

Redd County Board of Education Policy

Redd County's Board of Education's (BOE) policy states that all people will have equal access to both educational and employment opportunities regardless of their race, color, creed, ethnic origin, disability, sex, religion, gender or nationality. The BOE does have a non-bullying policy that states, "Acts of bullying, cyber-bullying, discrimination, harassment, hazing or any other victimization of students, based on any actual or perceived traits or characteristics, are prohibited. Bullying, intimidation, or harassment may also be unwelcome conduct based on a protected class (race, nationality, origin, color, gender, age, disability, religion) that is severe, pervasive, or persistent and creates a hostile environment."

Regarding staff members employed by the BOE, each staff member is to regard students as individuals and give them the respect and rights that are due to them, be

tolerant of others' viewpoints and not discriminate for religious views or lack of religious views, exercise "good judgment" in selecting issues for discussion and take maturity level of students into consideration, and to adhere to the state education association's code of ethics. The work environment of Redd County's educators is to be free of any discrimination or harassment, from both employees and students, that is sexual, religious, ethnic, or racial.

Participants

My entire career teaching English was spent in a small, rural, Appalachian county; I had constraints placed on me concerning what I could and could not teach. I was called into the principal's office several times because of things I had said or taught. I know what it is like to be frustrated and feel like there is no support from those who should be supportive. I know what I went through to do what I believed was my moral and ethical obligation for all students. This is why I wanted to interview teachers who were in a similar district as the one I taught in; I wanted to know what their perceptions were and how they were acting upon them.

I initially sent a recruitment email (Appendix B) to all eight secondary English teachers in the Redd County school district, but only four responded. Each of the four participants is female, white, and married. Three had been employed by Redd County for more than ten years, and one has been a teacher for several years, but it is her first year in Redd County. Two have Master's degrees.

When I met the participants for the interview, I brought a consent form (Appendix C) that they could sign then or take with them and think about it. I told them I would not use any of their interviews as a data source until they gave me permission by signing the

consent form; all four of them signed the day of the interview. I explained to them that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The names listed below are pseudonyms for the participants; they are listed in alphabetical order.

Cindy

Cindy is the first English teacher I interviewed and is not a Redd County native. She has been teaching for 11 years; the first year was in a small county in an adjacent state, and the last 10 years have been in Redd County. She teaches 11th grade at Redd County High School. As an undergraduate she double-majored in anthropology and English, then she pursued a Master's degree in education. She ultimately chose to teach English because according to her, "they don't hire anthropology teachers in high school."

Cindy has the state standards laminated and displayed in poster-size on her walls, and has a bulletin board with strategies to become a close reader. The back wall of Cindy's room has student work displayed. There is one bookshelf in Cindy's room that has books students can choose from; only two shelves are filled and none of the books are YA. Cindy says she takes her students to the library to choose books for silent sustained reading (SSR), which she employs in her classroom daily.

Loretta

Loretta is in her early thirties and is not a native of Redd County. She has been teaching 7th grade ELA at RCMS for twelve years; before this, she taught one year in another state. Loretta "fell in love" with English in high school because of her senior English teacher. She says, "I just wanted to be her. That's what I wanted to do." Her room is in the new wing of RCMS, with large windows letting in plenty of natural light. Loretta has one bookshelf in the back of her room with only the bottom shelf lined with

YAL. She also has several cabinets lining an entire wall in her room; these store class sets of novels, such as *The Book Thief*, *Pictures of Hollis Woods*, *Fever 1793*, *A Long Way from Chicago*, and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*.

Louise

Louise is in her mid-thirties and is not a native of Redd County. She has been teaching 8th grade English/Language Arts (ELA) at Redd County Middle School for ten years; before this, she taught high school English for three years in another state. Even though she majored in English because that was the only thing she felt like she was “good at,” Louise initially wanted to go to law school. She changed her mind, though, after having an undergraduate Shakespeare class with a professor who could “teach Shakespeare with his eyes closed.” She says she remembers thinking that she would like to be that happy in her job when she grew up, and the thought that followed that one was that she could be a teacher. She immediately called her mother, who was a kindergarten teacher, to tell her of the change in plans. She received teaching certification in graduate school.

Her room is also located in the new wing of RCMS. One huge bulletin board in Louise’s room has posters of memes as well as phases of research and research topics that students have chosen. Another bulletin board has copies of YA book jackets, with blurbs about the content of each one. The lights are low, as there are four large windows that let sunlight into the room. Louise’s room has two bookcases in the back, which are filled with YAL and labeled according to content (fantasy, romance, realism, etc.).

Sally

Sally is a Redd County native in her mid-forties and has been teaching for 10 years; however, this is her first year teaching in Redd County. Previously, she taught in another county in the state as well as in a neighboring state before moving back to Redd County. Sally teaches 9th grade and says, “No one seems to want 9th graders but me” with a smile and a laugh. After an internship right out of college and one year with 3rd grade, Sally changed careers for a little while, becoming a graduation coach at a high school in a neighboring state for several years. She says this is where she realized she loved high school students. When the position was cut, the district wanted to move her to 4th grade, but she asked them not to, as she loved high school students.

She took the state’s certification test, became certified in English, and taught 9th grade English in two different districts in that state, one of which is demographically similar to Redd County. Sally’s room has inspirational quotes along the tops of the whiteboards, and her whiteboards are filled with agendas, goals, objectives, and expectations. Sally has two bookshelves in her room; one has several titles on it, over half of which are YA titles, and the other has classroom sets of novels and textbooks.

Overview of Qualitative Research

When speaking of qualitative research, the four most widely accepted research paradigms are positivist, post-positivist, constructivist, and critical (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The positivist and post-positivist approaches seem to work best with quantitative data. These researchers believe in order and rationality, they experiment in controlled environments and manipulate variables, and they look for facts and predictions (Hatch, 2002). Some advantages to this type of research are values/biases do not necessarily

influence outcomes, cause-effect generalizations can be made, experiments can be easily duplicated, and things are viewed in an “either-or” category (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Some disadvantages to this type of research, though, are that researchers only see one reality constructed, think they can effectively separate themselves from the research, see logic as flowing from general to specific, and write their findings in a rather cold and detached style (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). People who perform this type of research are usually associated with hard sciences. Their techniques are very disciplined in order to make the data the point of emphasis rather than their own speculation or interpretation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

My research topic does not fit this mold. I am not forming a hypothesis, relying on existing literature to help me form a prediction, or doing an experiment to see if the outcome I obtain disproves the hypothesis I formed; I am more concerned with how educators think about the subject of LGBTQ young adult literature and how those thoughts relate to either transformative action or inaction.

The constructivist paradigm has two approaches; one approach focuses on individual (personal) constructions and the other on shared (social) meanings (Williamson, 2006). Both approaches suggest that multiple realities exist and are constructed by how individuals view the world around them. Further, these tenets hold that researchers work closely with participants to construct the reality of the participants (Hatch, 2002). One thing that can be seen as both an advantage as well as a disadvantage is the close, personal relationship that is required for this type of research.

On one hand, a strong rapport is built between the researcher and participants so that the participants feel safe in being completely honest with the researcher. On the other

hand, if the relationship is too close, then potential problems with anonymity and confidentiality could arise (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Another positive aspect of constructivism is that there is no deception; the researcher is honest with the participants about the aim of the inquiry. One disadvantage is that sample sizes must remain small, as techniques for gathering data are time-consuming. This smallness of sample may raise questions about how representative the findings are to a population (Williamson, 2006). I agree with Williamson (2006) in that a major advantage of this kind of research is that a researcher may be exposed to ideas and issues that s/he had not previously thought about. Ethnographies, case studies, and narrative inquiries fit neatly into this paradigm. At first I believed that my research fit into the constructivist mold; however, the more I learned, the more I realized that the critical paradigm, an even more specific form of constructivism, was a better fit for me as a researcher and my research study.

Creswell (2007) states that Critical research should contain an agenda for reform based on actions that have the opportunity to change the lives of participants, institutions in which they live/work, or even the lives of the researchers themselves and have an aim of creating dialogue and debate so that change can and will occur. In conducting this research study, I drew upon Freire's dialogical method of research and used dialogical interviews as the data source. Denzin (2009), like Freire, believes that research should empower people with language and practices that turn oppression, despair, hatred, and doubt into their opposites. If the aim of critical research is to change lives, then the researcher needs to know about the participants' lives.

It seems that the will of the majority, whether right or wrong, is imposed on those who are marginalized. Humans have constraints placed on them daily, whether it is class, race, gender, or sexual orientation. The critical paradigm argues that the structures in place in the world have an impact on individuals, that these structures lead to differential treatment among people based on things that are often out of their control, that all knowledge is political, and that the purpose of research is to help those being oppressed, for individuals who find themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy to have improved life chances (Hatch, 2002).

Any product of critical research should expose how those in power remain in power, reveal the extent and kinds of oppression that participants experience, and call for transformation through awareness, resistance, and solidarity (Hatch, 2002). Even though this type of research gives a voice to disenfranchised and marginalized populations, one disadvantage that some see is that the researcher has authority over all aspects of the data (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013). Yet another criticism is that the researchers do not separate their own values from the research itself. However, researchers acknowledge their own biases in the reflexivity statement and make them known.

Reflexivity Statement

My own reflexivity statement comes from personal experience as a member of the LGBTQ community. As a teenager, I was the LGBTQ student who perceived there was nothing in school for me. In all of my years in secondary school, there was never a time where I found myself reflected in my school's curriculum. I was not exposed to an LGBTQ-themed book until after college. I was sad and ecstatic all at the same time. I was ecstatic because I finally saw myself in print after feeling invisible for so long. Being a

lesbian in a small rural town in an even smaller school was suffocating. I felt alone, confused, and depressed during these years. I was sad after reading the book because I envisioned how much more reassured, how empowered I would have been if I had the opportunity during my teenage years to read something, anything, that had a character like me in it.

As a teacher, I wanted my students to experience other and different cultures, societies, and experiences. I believed then, and still do now, that literature has the ability to change attitudes and beliefs. I believe that we all bring our own experiences to a text when we read it, and sometimes that text can transform us. I believe through literature you know you are not alone; you realize there are others who have experienced the same things you have, whether they be in Tennessee or Afghanistan, Black or White, LGBTQ or heterosexual, or Baptist or Muslim.

In order to expand the worldview of my students, I taught books such as *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *A Lesson Before Dying*, *The Color Purple*, and *Miracle in the Andes*. When I became a teacher, I knew that there would be students in my room who identified as LGBTQ, and I did not want them to have the same experiences that I had. I wanted them to feel valued, cared for, and to be part of an inclusive classroom environment that helped them grow academically as well as personally. Even though I never formally came out to my students, identifying as LGBTQ gave me an insight into which students I thought were struggling with sexual identity.

I know what I was like as an LGBTQ teenager in a small school, and I saw the same characteristics I had in several of my students during my career. I listened to their silence in conversations when their friends talked about dates. I could see how their

spirits were just weighed down by the burden of keeping a part of themselves hidden from their peers. I knew exactly how that felt, and I hoped and prayed that they felt safe enough to come out to me, that they knew I would never judge them for something beyond their control, that they realized they would have a strong ally in me. Some students did come out to me; some did not while they were in high school but did later in life.

Another experience came later in life, when I was a high school teacher. As previously mentioned, the day after reading a book titled *It's Okay to Be Different* by Todd Parr to 5 and 6 year old children on Dr. Seuss day, I was called into the principal's office to take a phone call from the director of schools. After asking me if I read the book to the children, in particular a page that said "It's okay to have two moms or two dads," and me replying that I had, I was told, in no uncertain terms, that our county's children didn't need to be exposed to "those kinds of things" and that we didn't have "people like that" in our county. The more I was reprimanded, the angrier I became. The director was telling me that an entire group of people, of which I was a part, was deviant, less-than, not as important. Why wasn't it okay? What kind of message would that statement send to kids who had homosexual family members or were struggling with their own orientation? This was a defining moment for me. It was the moment I realized that I had to do something. I refused to let any of my students go through their high school years feeling invisible, less-than, or unimportant.

I believe that society has been shaped by innumerable factors (social, political, ethnicity, gender, etc.) and that over time these have been taken as natural (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I also agree with Giroux's (1983) idea of a hidden curriculum, which he

defines as “those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life.” Heteronormative assumptions and curriculum are bountiful in schools all across the country.

Take, for example, the Shakespeare classic *Romeo and Juliet*. When reading about any type of partnering, marriage, dating, or romance, texts used in classrooms are inundated with heterosexual relationships. Few teachers include LGBTQ-themed literature in their class curriculum (Thein, 2013). Students who identify as LGBTQ are receiving a strong message; by not seeing themselves represented in their school curriculum, they are being told that they are aberrant, deviant, an abnormality. There are a myriad of reasons teachers and administrators give for non-inclusion of LGBTQ literature, from not having administrative support, to parent backlash, to just not knowing what texts and tools are out there to help them teach this issue. I believe that none of these reasons, though, is valid enough to keep LGBTQ-themed literature out of the classroom.

Freire’s Dialogic Method

Freire (2005) emphatically states that real transformation cannot occur without dialogue with those who are oppressed; it is impossible to instigate change if one is not aware of the perceptions and views of those who are oppressed. If social change is to occur, it must do so “from the bottom up and grounded in the day to day experiences of the people for whom change is necessary” (Padilla, 1992, p. 176). I interviewed teachers in order to ascertain what their day-to-day experiences were; in discovering this, I was learning *from* and *with* them, an important part of Freire’s method.

The dialogic method is not about one person having the “right” answer and imparting that to the subject. This would result in what Freire (2005) calls the “banking” system of education, in which someone deemed an authority deposits information into a subject. Such a method dehumanizes people into objects. The researcher carries out the dialogic method *with* the subject; it is a joint effort. The participants’ view of the world is their reality. In order to transform thinking, the researcher must learn what the participants think. It is from dialogue that the researcher can discern contradictions, which in turn develops into a generative theme. In what follows, I provide brief definitions of some of these major tenets of Freire’s dialogical method.

Dialogue

Dialogue is the basis of the dialogic method; without it, contradictions and generative themes do not exist. Freire (2005) says that dialogue is “an existential necessity...this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing’ ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussants (p. 88-89). True dialogue is transformative and liberating. It does not imply domination of one person over another; rather, it presupposes equality. According to Freire (2005), dialogue cannot exist without love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking. It is impossible to enter into dialogue if researchers do not love people, arrogantly think they are correct in their assumptions, have no faith in people to transform their realities, have a feeling of hopelessness, or separate their thinking from action.

Contradictions

Padilla (1992) defines contradictions as “asymmetrical social relationships of an invidious sort or environmentally oppressive conditions that have their roots in social relationships” (p. 177). Dialogue helps to uncover these contradictions, a problem Freire (2005) calls “the duality of the oppressed; they are contradictory, divided beings” (p. 55). Thus, there may be cognitive dissonance between the practice of the participants and their own principles. In the dialogic method of research, the researcher uncovers these contradictions in the data and the generative themes that are a result.

Generative Themes

Generative themes, defined by Freire (2005) as “the concrete representation of many of the ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede the people’s full humanization,” are usually the result of the dialogic method of research (p. 101). Padilla (1992) defines generative themes as “indicative of an individual’s stance in the world as it is experienced in daily life” (p. 176). Generative themes allow the researcher to see the reality of the world as the participants view it; these perceptions of reality more than likely will dictate the actions participants take, moving from the general to the specific. After uncovering generative themes, Freire’s method requires taking the themes, along with the contradictions, back to the participants in order to engage in critical dialogue, “striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness” and critical thinking about how oppressive social structures can be changed (Freire, 2005, p. 107).

Freire’s dialogical method traditionally involves two stages. In the first stage, the researcher analyzes the research setting to identify the salient social contradictions that

are experienced by participants in that setting. Afterwards, the contradictions are presented through dialogs to the subjects who are cooperating with the investigation. Through dialogs about researcher-witness contradictions, generative themes emerge.

Traditionally in Freire's dialogical method, the identification of generative themes involves the researcher in dialogue with the group (and there must be dialog within the group) "because such dialogs, when carefully analyzed, can reveal the group's generative themes for a given historical moment" (Padilla, 1992, p. 176). Usually these dialogs occur in focus group settings. Freire (1970) describes the dialogical, or psycho-social method, in general terms in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Once I analyzed for perceptions and actions, I looked for contradictions between teachers' perceptions and actions, and then analyzed the interview data for emerging generative themes.

Data Collection Method: The Dialogic Interview

Drawing upon parts of Freire's dialogic method, the type of interview I employed in this study is the dialogic interview. Freire (2005) states that dialogical methodology affords "the opportunity both to discover generative themes and to stimulate people's awareness in regard to these themes" (p. 96-97). Way, Zwier, and Tracy (2015) concur with Freire, describing the dialogic interview as one that gives the interviewers an opportunity to go further than just interaction with participants; rather, researchers engage with participants, realizing that they have complicated views of the world and accessing, through dialogue, how these beliefs are shaped. Using a dialogic approach allowed me, the researcher, to engage in dialogue with the participants.

The importance of dialogue cannot be underestimated; it is the foundation on which change takes place. Before dialogue can begin, though, the researcher must

sincerely listen to participants. Freire (1998) says that we “must become acquainted with their way of being in the world” (p. 123). In conveying kindness and acceptance for the worldview of the participants, I allowed the participants to feel accepted rather than defensive and really talk about their own worldview and how it influences their instruction. Furthermore, this approach allows participants to “suspend assumptions about the world, open themselves to new viewpoints, and abandon a win–lose perspective...enabling them to let down their defenses and listen to *themselves*. This self-talk and self-questioning, in turn, can lead to transformations in sedimented scripts or beliefs” (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015, p. 3). The beauty of this method is that participants transform their own beliefs rather than feeling like researchers are trying to change them. It is genuine dialogue that leads to this transformation of beliefs. And as Singh (2002) tells us, the purpose of dialogue “is not necessarily to achieve consent but to achieve social justice for everyone” (p. 218).

Mirroring, one characteristic of dialogic interviews, was used when participants answered open-ended questions. Two of the questions I included were, “Can you talk about a time you used multicultural literature in your classroom?” and “How familiar are you with LGBTQ young adult literature?” Two sub-questions that I sought to answer from the interviews were “What rationale do educators give for using or not using LGBTQ young adult literature?” and “Under what circumstances would/did these educators use LGBTQ young adult literature?” When the participants answered these questions, I repeated their answers to them, giving them an opportunity to both hear their own thoughts and revise them if desired (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015). If participants hesitated in answers or left blanks in their explanations, I used the technique of calling

out. In doing this, participants were asked to fill in the blanks or continue with their original line of thought, with the expectation that doing so will enable them to articulate their own assumptions that they may be unaware of (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015).

Open-ended questions are essential to the dialogic interview. These types of questions encouraged informants to explain their perspectives on the research topic and generated other questions as the participants responded to the initial questions (Hatch, 2002). Probing questions were generated from the answers to the initial open-ended questions. Two distinct advantages of using probing questions are that the participants have an opportunity to reflect on, explain, and/or modify their initial answers and participants give the researcher an inside look of how they make sense of a topic by verbalizing their beliefs (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015).

Reflection is an important part of the dialogic process, as dialogue gives people moments to reflect of their reality (Shor & Freire, 1987). Probing questions are also an important part of the dialogic interview; these questions ask participants to define and explain their beliefs and assumptions. It may be that participants have never had to talk about why they think as they do, or they may not even realize the assumptions they have. Probing questions have the power to allow the participants themselves to bring these to light.

Another characteristic of the dialogic interview I employed was prompting the participants to view the world and imagine it from a different perspective. The strategies that assisted in this were imagining the opposite, magic wand questions, and empathic consideration (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015). An example of an imagining-the-opposite question I used is “What if the school system mandated that each ELA teacher uses

LGBTQ young adult novels?” Answers to this question created probing questions to explore the idea deeper.

Magic-wand questions prompted the participants to discuss what they would do if they had a magic wand that could make all of the policies they disagree with go away. Empathic consideration invited participants to see the same dilemma from another’s perspective, to identify with and relate to the other. One such question that I asked participants was to put themselves in the shoes of an LGBTQ student in their school who is surrounded by heteronormative curriculum. How would they feel? How might they react? What could some consequences be?

Each of these strategies allowed the participants to look at and give credence to another perspective without having to abandon their own perspective. Way, Zwier, and Tracy (2015) assert that “Often, just by talking through another way of being in the world, participants become sympathetic to a new perspective or, at the very least, develop a greater understanding of it.”

I chose to use semi-structured interviews to draw out my perceptions of their own reality of using or not using LGBTQ YAL as part of their curriculum. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to bring guiding questions to the interview, but give the researcher the freedom to follow up participants’ answers with probing or clarifying questions (Hatch, 2002). The interview protocol (Appendix D) included the following questions:

- What led you to become an English teacher (why English over other subjects)?
- Talk about what you think the role of literature is in the secondary classroom.

- What is your understanding of Young Adult Literature (YAL)? Do you read it? Do you use it? Why or why not?
- What comes to your mind when I say “multicultural literature”?
- Tell me about a time you used multicultural literature in your classroom.
- Imagine you have a magic wand and can teach anything you want without repercussions. What would you choose and why?
- How familiar are you with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) young adult literature?

I felt it was important to ask teachers about their decision in choosing English over other subjects, and I also felt it necessary to gauge their thoughts on YAL in general before specifying multicultural YAL.

Also of importance to this study is the definitions the teachers give of what constitutes multicultural YAL to see if they included LGBTQ in that category. I recorded each interview in the location and at the time of the participant’s choosing. Member checking, the process of sending transcriptions to the participants, was used in order to establish both credibility and validity and to insure a sound understanding of the interview data (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). I also used a reflective journal while researching to keep track of my own ideas and reflections.

Data Analysis

Each interview was recorded using my own personal password-protected iPhone and then uploaded to my own personal password-protected computer. Once the file was safely uploaded to the computer, allowing me to listen to it numerous times, it was saved

on the desktop as well as in Dropbox and deleted permanently from the iPhone, unless the participant indicated to me that she would like to have it.

Listening

I listened to each recording as I completed transcription. After the initial transcribing process, I then listened to the interviews again while reading what I had transcribed in order to insure that I had correctly typed what I heard. I also listened to the recordings several times as I completed the analysis.

Transcript Preparation

After being uploaded to the password-protected computer, each of the interviews was uploaded into Inqscribe, a transcription program that allows the transcriptionist the opportunity to slow down the recording if needed and insert time stamps, which are hyperlinked to the audio file. This program also has a “snippet” setting that allows the transcriptionist to set shortcuts for each speaker in the file, enabling me to make pseudonyms for the participants as I transcribed the interviews; this was an asset to me in keeping the anonymity of the participants protected.

As I was transcribing the interviews, I stayed true to what the participants said; therefore, I used words such as “gonna” and “wanna.” I did not put in utterances such as “um” or “uh”; however, if there was a pause in answering a question, I noted that in parentheses. I then read through the data, using color codes for teachers’ perceptions and actions in the categories of reading/English, YAL, multicultural, and LGBTQ, with each category having its own color.

First-Level Coding: Typological Analysis

Freire (2005) defines critical praxis as reflection on a perceived reality and then acting on the reflection. Only when participants understand their situation through critical thinking and inquiry can they engage in behavior that can transform that reality, thereby enabling them to commit to change. When researchers engage in dialogue with participants, showing them the contradictions and generative themes, then through critical thinking and inquiry participants can “emerge from their submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled” and move toward “conscientização,” which is “the deepening of the attitude of awareness” (Freire, 2005, p. 109). Once awareness of reality has been deepened, then comes knowledge that reality can be changed. None of this humanizing action occurs, though, without first knowing the perceptions and actions of the participants.

Drawing on Freire’s work, I interviewed teachers to understand what their perceptions about using LGBTQ YAL in the classroom were and the actions that were a result of these perceptions. To ascertain teachers’ perceptions and actions, I used Hatch’s typological analysis method. Typological analysis, as defined by LeCompte and Preissle (1993), is “dividing everything observed into groups or categories on the basis for some canon for disaggregating the whole phenomenon under study” (p. 257). After transcribing, rereading the transcribed interviews for accuracy, and then reading again to color code, I then read the interviews and divided each of them into elements that I based on predetermined categories, or typologies; this is the first strategy used in typological analysis (Hatch, 2002).

I decided on using this approach for two main reasons. First, I already had a good idea of what I wanted to find out from the interviews; I wanted to know what secondary teachers think about when they hear the term “multicultural literature” and if they included LGBTQ in that category. Second, this approach is especially useful in analyzing data from interviews.

After reading the interviews several times, I saw that teachers were explaining to me what their perceptions were of using LGBTQ YAL in the classroom as well as describing actions that they were taking in teaching texts. Based on these responses, the typologies I divided the data into were “Perceptions of Teacher” and “Actions of Teacher.” After identifying these typologies, I read through each interview searching for perceptions only; when I found something that I believed indicated a way of thinking, I marked it in the transcript and put it on a summary sheet that I made for each teacher.

After I read the interviews for perceptions, I then read them again searching for participants’ actions. I placed these in the summary sheets as well. For example, when I asked Cindy about teaching an LGBTQ YA text to the whole class, she replied, “I think we would get more pushback from their parents.” I coded this statement as a perception. Cindy’s perception is that parents will complain if she decided to teach a whole-class LGBTQ YA text. When Cindy told me that she chose things for the slavery and abolition unit “based on different perspectives,” I coded this as an action.

Once the summary sheets were made for each teacher, I next looked for contradictions, cognitive dissonance between practice and principles, using participants’ voices and quotes as powerful examples that could make my own generalizations “come

alive” for the reader (Hatch, 2002, p. 159). Both the summary sheets and the color-coded interviews provided the material needed for this step.

Second-Level Coding: Contradictions

According to Freire (2005), contradictions are the discrepancies between the objective reality of the participants and their awareness of that reality. These contradictions are necessary to show the participants that they are living a dual reality, to help them become aware of the “various levels of perception of themselves and of the world in which and with which they exist” (Freire, 2005, p. 95). Finding these contradictions is an important step in developing generative themes. As I analyzed the interviews, I began to see contradictions between what the participants were saying and what they were doing. The contradictions I found were between the participants’ perceptions of their reality and their actions. There were also contradictions within the perceptions themselves. These contradictions, which are discussed further in Chapter 4, formed the basis for generative themes.

Third-Level Coding: Generative Themes

Freire (2005) describes generative themes as coming from investigating “people’s thinking about reality and people’s action upon reality” (p. 106). In reading and rereading the interviews and noting the contradictions present in the perceptions and actions of the participants, generative themes began to emerge. These themes allowed to me to see the world the way the participants saw it, giving me a glimpse into their perceived reality.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discussed the methodology used to guide this study. I first gave the context of the county, both schools, and the board of education. I described each

participant as well. I then gave an overview of qualitative research in general, which narrowed to why critical theory is the best fit for this study. I also included my reflexivity statement. I then detailed the characteristics of both Freire's dialogic method, including dialogue, contradictions, and generative themes, and the dialogic interview that I employed as I gathered and analyzed data. Last, I explained the procedures I used to collect, transcribe, and analyze data.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

“What’s unnatural is homophobia. Homosapiens is the only species in all of nature that responds with hate to homosexuality.” –Alex Sanchez, The God Box

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2005) defines the pedagogy of liberation and describes how transformation can occur. According to Freire, transformation cannot and will not occur without dialogue with those who are oppressed; “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world” (p. 96). Freire’s words paint a picture of this study’s findings; the perceptions of the teachers I interviewed reflected what they believed to be their very limited situation as far as their willingness and opportunity to teach LGBTQ YAL in the Redd County School System.

Ultimately, while all of the teachers interviewed for this study believed that literature should be read by young people to broaden their worldviews, explore others’ realities, and encourage their tolerance of others, LGBTQ students’ lives – as presented in LGBTQ YAL – were not to be included in this exploration. LGBTQ students were invisible in the literature taught at Redd County and invisible in the classroom. In addition, teachers overwhelmingly described states of fear experienced around teaching LGBTQ literature or addressing LGBTQ issues in the classroom. The sections that follow are organized around the steps taken in data analysis.

Teacher Perceptions and Actions

As described in Chapter 3, after reading the interviews several times, I organized them into what I believed to be the perceptions and actions of the teachers, centered on

the value of literature, young adult literature, multicultural literature, and LGBTQ YAL.

These typology sheets and discussions are organized alphabetically by teacher.

Cindy's Typology Sheet

After analyzing Cindy's interview, I used a typology sheet (Hatch, 2002) to separate her perceptions of the value of literature, YAL, multicultural literature, and LGBTQ YAL from her actions. This sheet can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Typology sheet for Cindy

Cindy – Typology Sheet

Perceptions of Teacher	Actions of Teacher
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. About literature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live other people's stories • Experience things you wouldn't get to • Connect to other people • Should stretch students out of their academic comfort zone (#2) • Pressed for time; can't do as much literature as they might want • Time constraints = teaching canonical works for exposure; feels like she's doing a disservice to them if she doesn't (she teaches <i>The Great Gatsby</i>) • Too many tests; 4 days of EOC plus ACT, ASVAB, Writing, and all test prep days • Teaches mostly nonfiction; fiction is barely on the tests they take – only short excerpts 2. YAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't like it much 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uses independent reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student choice • Student book talks 2. MC literature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Says she teaches <i>Odyssey</i>, <i>Antigone</i>, <i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i> • Abolition/slavery unit – different perspectives (uses primary sources) – uses a curriculum designed by TN Core and sent as a model (doesn't have to go looking for things herself to make the unit) 3. Media club sponsor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After school group • Don't all read the same book • Use state's book award list • Do book recommendations; hang on bulletin board between 2 rooms

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not hard enough • Doesn't increase vocabulary • Not on high school reading level • Students showed no academic improvement <p>3. MCYAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race • Culture • Different parts of the world • Not different than American writers <p>4. LGBTQ YAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not familiar with it • Knows some kids in media club (she's a sponsor) have read some • Likes that they're included on the Volunteer State Book Award list • Would teach it, but not to all classes; doesn't want to put up with the kids' "crap" • "Normal" students would probably read them • Parents/community might push back against it • Administration would back parents and not her • Kids would like it because it's "different" • Librarian (she feels) is very censoring 	
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Using this chart helped me to keep Cindy's perceptions separate and distinct from her actions. Thus, I could ascertain what Cindy's perceived reality was and how this shaped her decisions on curriculum.

Cindy's Perceptions of the Value of Literature

When asked about the value of literature, Cindy responded that literature allowed readers to live other people's stories, experience new things, and connect with other

people. According to Cindy, it's a chance to find commonalities with other people. She sees reading as an important skill that students need to develop. She wants her students to be able to read other things "even more than literature." Cindy's perception is that RCHS's students are not as well prepared for first-year college courses as students from other schools. She perceives that not reading canonical work will be a detriment to them.

Cindy's Actions Based on Value of Literature Perceptions

Because Cindy views reading as a certain skill her students need to acquire to be successful, she relies mainly on informational texts in her class. Concerning reading in her class, she states, "We do lots of speeches and newspapers, and, I mean we read literature too, but it's not the focus of the class, at least the in-class reading anyway."

Cindy chose *The Great Gatsby* as the whole class read for her 11th grade students, as she believes exposure to the canon is one way to prepare students for college course. In explaining this she says:

I feel like it's, because people have read it, you know, and I don't want them to be like, feel left out... And I don't feel like we do a very good job of preparing our students in basic English or standard English or whatever you want to call it. I feel like it is if they end up in a college classroom where everyone else is like oh yeah, I've read that, you know.

Familiarity with canonical works equals college success in Cindy's mind. She does not want her students to be left behind when they enter a college classroom, nor does she want them to be embarrassed or feel "left out" because of non-exposure to canonical works.

Cindy's Perception of YAL

Cindy is not a fan of YAL. She has taught it in the past, mentioning titles like *Holes* and *Hatchet*, but admits that she didn't use it "very effectively" and that she "didn't like teaching those books." The main reason she gave for not liking to teach YAL is based on her perception of what makes a text rigorous:

I feel like there's the whole idea of like stretching them, right, so they have like a comfort zone and so I'm trying to like what I choose, I guess, the things that I choose to spend the class time on, they, put them outside of their comfort zone academically. So like either vocabulary or sentence structure, sometimes theme... Stuff that has something that's too challenging for them to kind of tackle on their own I guess.

Her perception of rigor is one that is based on more of a formulaic, Lexile pattern, things like types of sentences and grade-level vocabulary more than content.

Cindy's Actions Based on YAL Perceptions

Independent reading is a daily activity in Cindy's room. She allows the students to engage in self-selected texts, and she says that "for the most part" her students read YAL. One of the actions Cindy has taken is to read YAL herself to become more familiar with the genre and to be able to talk to her student about it.

Cindy's Perceptions of Multicultural Literature

For the most part, Cindy identified country with the word "multicultural." However, most of her largest unit revolves around race. Her perception is that the background knowledge they learn about slavery and abolition in American history (also taken in 11th grade in this state) helps them engage with the topic. She feels that racism is

an important topic to talk about in Redd County because of racist attitudes present, but admits it can be “uncomfortable at times.” She says the topic itself is “kind of an engaging topic. Because they're learning about the Civil War in history class, so they're interested in it.”

Cindy’s Actions based on Multicultural Literature Perceptions

Because Cindy’s definition of multicultural was mainly based on country, she stated that she has taught *Antigone* (“it’s Greek”) and *Things Fall Apart* (“it’s African”). The most detailed example she gave, though, of using multicultural literature in her class was in her description of an abolition/slavery unit that she teaches to her 11th grade students. During this unit, the students read speeches by Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and John Calhoun, each showing a different perspective of slavery, some for it and some against.

Cindy’s Perceptions of LGBTQ YAL

Cindy stated that she was not very familiar with LGBTQ YAL, but that she had seen titles on a book award list distributed by the state. She told me that two girls in the media club had read *Ask the Passengers* by A.S. King, a YA novel with a lesbian protagonist that appeared on the list. She did not know if the title was in the library or if the girls had bought the book on their own⁴. Cindy admitted that she would be “hesitant” to teach an LGBTQ whole-class novel, stating:

The only reason I'd be hesitant to want to teach it is not because of it, it's because of the kids' reactions and having to deal with their crap. Like, I feel like it could, and that's one of the things about the slavery unit too that I've experienced, it can

⁴ A list of fiction titles available in the library was obtained; *Ask the Passengers* is not on the list.

become a good conversation, but it can also become a really negative conversation about them spewing hatred. And giving them another opportunity to do that is not necessarily something I would want to do.

Cindy's perception of her students is that they will push back against an LGBTQ YA text and have negative attitudes, even harboring hatred. She has experienced parent backlash in teaching *The Crucible* and perceives that it would be even stronger if she were to teach books with LGBTQ content and issues.

Furthermore, Cindy also perceives that neither the building nor district administration would support her, saying, "I can't see them standing up for that." As the conversation progressed and she talked more of censorship and non-support, she became more adamant about her perception that district administration specifically would just "roll over" to parent complaints and pacify the community rather than support her. Cindy says, "I'm almost positive they would. Like they do on everything."

She does say that she would be willing to put LGBTQ YAL on her classroom shelves for individual students to check out, and she would also be willing to ask the librarian to order titles for the school's library; however, even though the librarian does take suggestions on what to order, Cindy does not know if the librarian follows through and orders them because, in Cindy's words, the librarian "is very censoring of YA." She does not agree with this, perceiving that students will not want to read at all. She says, "If we start censoring our students' selections, like their personal selections, because we don't think it's appropriate for them to be reading about whatever, then that's going to ruin the whole thing and they're not going to want to read anything at all."

Cindy's Actions Based on LGBTQ YAL Perceptions

The way Cindy has been previously treated by administration shapes her perception that she is not supported in everything she has her students read in her classroom; therefore, the resulting action of this perception is actually inaction; Cindy does not teach LGBTQ YA texts. However, Cindy is aware that the state's book award list that she distributes to the members of the media club, an after-school club for students interested in books that she sponsors with another teacher, contains LGBTQ YAL.

Loretta's Typology Sheet

After analyzing Loretta's interview, I repeated the procedure I used with Cindy and created a typology sheet (Hatch, 2002) to separate her perceptions of the value of literature, YAL, multicultural literature, and LGBTQ YAL from her actions. This sheet can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Typology sheet for Loretta

Perceptions of teacher	Actions of teacher
<p>1. Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Critical thinking • Believes librarians are taking it upon themselves to determine what kids are reading and watching <p>2. YAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reads it • Kids can recognize themselves in these novels • Connection with it (for students) • Kids love it <p>3. Multicultural</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnicity • Culture • Thinks kids are used to hearing older generation use N word, but not cruelly (more like a descriptor); shocked at treatment of Little Rock 9 because they were teenagers • If she could teach anything, she would teach stories that fall all across the multicultural spectrum • Believes Native American stories are missing too <p>4. LGBTQ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not familiar with it • Doesn't know if any kids are LGBTQ "for sure," but suspects that some are • Has had open LGBTQ kids in previous years • "You can't look and see" • Teaching texts with LGBTQ subject matter and characters "would be hard"; wouldn't be 	<p>1. YAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just finished 5 books • Have students read book of their choice (from 3 or 4 titles that she gives them) <p>2. Multicultural</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taught "Amigo Brothers" (short story) • Taught Esperanza Rising • Taught Clay Marble (Cambodia) • Taught Watsons Go to Birmingham • Civil Rights background • MLK "I Have a Dream" speech • Disney movie (clips) on Little Rock 9 <p>3. LGBTQ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hasn't taught anything with these issues/characters

<p>able to teach whole class novel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Would get lots of phone calls from parents• Would be talked about in the community• Attitudes of students have changed “a lot” in the time she’s been in RC (for the better)• Some students would give backlash• Positive that building administration wouldn’t approve• Thinks central office would cave to community uproar and not support her• Doesn’t think she could use LGBTQ texts in small group lit circles; still would be her “pushing it on them”• Would put titles on her shelf and book talk them; that would be them choosing and not her• If they wanted to read it on her own, she wouldn’t tell them not to• Librarian is very censoring; wouldn’t order LGBTQ books even if she was asked• Even if kids don’t have terminology or vocabulary for their sexual orientation, they know they’re different	
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As they did with Cindy, these typologies assisted me in determining Loretta's actions based on perceptions.

Loretta's Perception of the Value of Literature

Loretta believes the English classroom provides an opportunity for students to develop reading and writing skills, which she says are "basic." She also perceives that being a reader will help students be better communicators and develop their critical thinking skills, to "think on your own."

Loretta's Actions Based on the Value of Literature Perceptions

Loretta does not use independent reading per se as part of her daily classroom routine; instead, she gives her students "a list of 3 or so" YA texts and lets them choose as a class which one they want to read as a class. The students then read the books at home. During the spring semester's first nine-week period, each of her classes chose a different title. She has used small group literature circles in the past, but she has not used them this year. Because she perceives reading helps students become better critical thinkers and communicators, she has them read approximately 5 novels per year.

Loretta's Perception of YAL

Loretta says that she both uses and reads YAL. All of the titles she showed me that her classes are reading are YA titles. She also said that her students "love it." When asked about the appeal of YAL, she replied:

I think that it's just for these kids to be able to recognize themselves. Everybody wants to connect to something that they're reading. I know myself personally, when I had to read Moby Dick in high school, or not in high school it was in college, I hated it. I can't see myself in it. And I think with some of these stories

they can see themselves, even if it is fantasy or whatever. They're still entertained, but they also can connect with something or someone in it. I think that that's the appeal of YAL.

The perception Loretta has of YAL is that its popularity rests on its ability to connect to the reader. This seems to be important to Loretta, as she recalled difficulty in school connecting to canonical texts.

Loretta's Actions Based on YAL Perceptions

Loretta uses YAL in her classes on a regular basis, based on her perception of how much the students love it and their ability to connect and see themselves in it. Some of the titles Loretta uses in her classes are *The Book Thief*, *The Pictures of Hollis Woods*, *A Long Way from Chicago*, *A Year Down Yonder*, and *Fever 1793*. She does not have difficulty in getting students to read YAL, as she says they like it much more than canonical literature.

Loretta's Perceptions of Multicultural Literature

Loretta's definition of multicultural literature revolved around ethnicity and culture. The largest multicultural unit she teaches is based on the Civil Rights era. One of her perceptions in particular on this unit in particular is that the age of the Little Rock Nine has an effect on the 7th grade students she teaches, as the age of 16 is not far off for them. In addition to the age factor, she believes that seeing the hatred "spewed" at children on the screen is powerful for her students; her perception is that her students have become accustomed to hearing the N-word but not in such a hateful manner.

Loretta's Actions based on Multicultural Literature Perceptions

The multicultural unit that Loretta teaches centers on the Black experience during the Civil Rights era; she said her classes had just finished *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*. In addition to reading the novel, they talked about the Civil Rights movement, read and watched Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, and watched excerpts from *The Ernest Green Story*, a movie based on a boy who was part of the Little Rock Nine. Loretta spoke of the kids being "shocked" at how these nine African-American students were treated, which initiated a discussion about how things really were not that long ago:

We count how many years ago that's been. We're not talking about hundreds of years ago. We're talking about their grandparents' generation. I just show that little clip on that movie of them passing around the cards that say "one down eight to go" when the girl gets kicked out, the first one. Then we talk, because it has the N word in it a lot, but we talk about that that's cultural at that time. That's what they were saying as these kids were trying to walk to school. That's what they were getting called. I don't know, I think because today it's not accepted even though, you know where we live, I mean, they hear it. There's no use to act like they don't, but still I think just to see it used so cruelly, I mean I think they're used to hearing grandpa say, "That blank down the road," but to see it spewed at a kid. That's why they said, "They're like they're 16." I'm like, "Yeah."

Her perception of Redd County is that racism is still widespread even in the 21st century.

In order to combat these attitudes, she teaches the Civil Rights unit.

Loretta's Perceptions of LGBTQ YAL

When asked about her familiarity with LGBTQ YAL, Loretta answered that she was really not that familiar with it. When I asked her about the possibility of teaching a whole-class novel with LGBTQ content, her perception was that neither the parents nor the community would support her. She answered, "I think it would be hard here. I think that I would get lots of phone calls from parents," and "I think our administration would not approve. Building for sure, district, I'm really not sure. Probably not. I think they probably wouldn't approve because of the parent backlash that I think they would receive." I then asked if maybe using one of these titles would work better with small group literature circles. Her reply was:

I think it would work better if you could say this is what the student chose. Even after I gave them a summary of what the book was about, this is what they chose. I think it would work better, but I still think there would be some backlash, just our area, and the strict, strict conservative values. I think you would be talked bad about in the community, have people approach you. I still think it would be hard. I think it would be a little easier if you could say this is the book they chose. I still don't think I would receive support from administration.

Even in small group literature circles, with the group of students choosing it on their own, Loretta still perceives that the community would object vociferously, even approach her.

I went even further and asked Loretta about having LGBTQ YAL on her bookshelf in her room so that kids could take them and read them if they so desired. This was something that Loretta would be comfortable with because she would tell them up front what the book was about, and they could read it if they wanted to. She explains, "I

think where the backlash would come from is you *have* to read this. I'm pushing it on you, you know.” As far as the librarian buying the titles to have in the school’s library, Loretta replied, “I know she wouldn't. She's pulled books off the shelf before that just have one cuss word in it.” She seemed very convinced of this perception, telling me the story of the librarian pulling every copy of every book by John Green because they had “cuss words” in them.

Loretta’s Actions Based on LGBTQ YAL Perceptions

The perceptions Loretta has about how the community, parents, and administration would act results in her not teaching any LGBTQ YA texts. Furthermore, the perceptions she has of the librarian, based on the librarian’s actions with John Greene’s books, keep her from asking the librarian to order LGBTQ YAL.

Louise’s Typology Sheet

The procedure used with Cindy and Loretta was also used with Louise; a typology sheet (Hatch, 2002) was created to separate her perceptions of the value of literature, YAL, multicultural literature, and LGBTQ YAL from her actions. This sheet can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Typology sheet for Louise

Louise

Perceptions of Teacher	Actions of Teacher
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything falls under reading • Learn about experiences of people in other countries or eras • Good readers = good writers • Readers are “good in everything” • Opens doors 2. YAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loves it, reads it 3. Multicultural <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not white • Not white boys • Slavery • Not white farmland • Thought that giving Alexie’s book to parents to give to kids was a “safer” way to get the books in the kids’ hands 4. LGBTQ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not familiar with it • “Embarrassed” that she’s not familiar with it • “Googled it” • Hasn’t seen an LGBTQ YA book until looking at on the web • No problem with reading them • Would put them on her shelves in her room • Parents would throw a fit • Principal would not allow it • Central office wouldn’t side with her either • Has had LGBTQ kids in the past, has one this year that she thinks may be struggling with 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Choosing books for class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picks something that they won’t “hate” • Takes reading level into account • Teaches 5 or 6 novels per year • Sends home novels for “snow work” • Doesn’t force classics just because they’re classics • Book talks books from her bookshelves (6 or so at a time – not every day) • Gave Sherman Alexie book to teachers in the building who are also parents, and they gave the book to their kids 2. In-class reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No SSR • Whole class reads – calls on volunteers to read as much as they want aloud • Has students read chapters with “sensitive subject matters” on their own (ex. Euthanasia of baby in The Giver) • Uses YAL (Graveyard Book, Coraline, The Giver) • Has a permission form that parents sign for books that are “too advanced” for 8th grade (ex. Night) 3. Multicultural <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slavery unit • Uses specific years, counts back to generations • Nightjohn • Holocaust/Diary of Anne Frank

<p>identity; has “a few”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I wish it [bullying and intolerance] wasn’t a thing” • Never thought about it in her classroom • Says that people believe that “it’s okay” to hate LGBTQ people • Could not teach it as a class novel • Would put titles on shelves and book talk them <p>5. Library</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Librarians are “frighteningly” religious • Doesn’t think there is any LGBTQ books in there 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japanese Internment Camps • Spanish poetry <p>4. LGBTQ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has argued over gay marriage (proponent)
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Just as they did with the previous two interviews, these typologies assisted me in determining Louise’s actions based on her perceptions.

Louise’s Perceptions of the Value of Literature

Louise perceives that reading can help students learn about people in other countries and time periods. The goal Louise sets for herself each year is to show her students that reading is fun. She also expresses that she does not care what they are reading as long as they are reading something, saying, “At this age it doesn't matter what they're reading. If they're reading for enjoyment, that's all that matters to me at this point.” Reading is definitely the main focus of Louise’s classroom, and she feels that if

she can get middle-school age students to read for pleasure, a whole new world of possibilities will open to them, saying, “If I can get them to read one book that they don't hate by the end of the year, then to me, I've opened a whole new door.”

Louise’s Actions Based on Value of Literature Perceptions

Louise does not use independent reading time in her class; she reads whole-class novels to and with her students. The students, on a volunteer basis, take turns with Louise reading chapters aloud. The students decide how much they want to read aloud. The students read chapters containing what Louise perceives to be “sensitive subject areas” silently. She claims that as soon as she tells her students that a chapter is “tough” and they are going to read it silently to themselves, “you can hear a pin drop in the room because they’re going to figure out why.” She also explains, “If somebody dies, if something really bad happens, I want them to experience it all on their own.” She wants her kids to make sense of the “tough” and “sensitive” subject matter in their own ways. Because she feels so strongly that reading opens new possibilities for her students, she book talks “6 books at a time,” though not every day, and has her classes read “5 or 6 novels a year.”

Louise’s Perceptions of YAL

Louise admits that she reads YAL “all the time” and that she “loves it.” She says she brings in classics such as *The Time Machine* to her advanced classes, but she admits that just because she’s “supposed” to teach it “doesn't mean it's going to happen at all.” Her reasoning behind using YAL with her students is twofold. One, some of her students “are on a 4th or 5th grade reading level,” and YAL has vocabulary they can understand and process. Second, Louise had a bad experience with a classic when she was in 7th

grade, recalling, “I remember in 7th grade, because I was in an advanced class, we had to read *A Tale of Two Cities*. I cried at night reading that book. I didn't know what it was.” Her perception is that if students comprehend and enjoy a book, they are more likely to see reading as something fun to do.

Louise’s Actions Based on YAL Perceptions

Over 90% of the novels Louise teaches in her class are YAL; that number rises to 100% in her regular classes. She does not force canonical works on her classes. She would rather use YAL because it has vocabulary and experiences they can relate to and understand. Relating to a book, in Louise’s mind, leads to comprehension; comprehension leads to seeing reading as a positive leisure activity. She believes the best chance she can give students to see reading as a positive leisure activity is to use YAL.

Louise’s Perceptions of Multicultural Literature

Louise’s response to what defines a text as multicultural was “not white, not white boys, anything to do with slavery.” She wants her students to “step out of the little bitty circle that they’re in” and uses texts that “get them out of this little white farmland.” She perceives that there is “a lot of racism” in Redd County and feels that teaching the African American experience is important. Her perception is that many of her students should develop empathy and perspective. She read Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian* and loved it, thought it was “amazing,” but perceived that she would face backlash from parents and administration if she tried to teach it to the whole class.

Louise's Actions Based on Multicultural Literature Perceptions

Based on her perception of the students having an all-white world, the largest unit Louise teaches is devoted to slavery, where her students read primary source documents, watch videos, and read *Nightjohn*. She encourages talk in her classroom and asks questions that encourage her students to put themselves in the place of others:

We talk about that and then we look at how many generations ago actually, and we realize that maybe technically if somebody lived a long time, could somebody's great-great-grandmother right now have been a slave? And we look at the numbers, and we look at the years, because you get a lot of kids that say they should get over it. So I say, "Let's look at this. If you knew somebody hurt your grandmother. How many of you all love your grandmother?" And they raise their hand. "If you knew somebody hurt her bad bad, would you be over it right now?" And they say no. And I'm like they're not over it. They're not over it. It's going to take some time.

She wants her students to develop empathy and perspective and be sensitive to what others have gone through and are going through and chooses a unit on slavery to assist this development. Even though she loved Alexie's book, she did not feel that she could give it to students. The resulting action was that she gave the book to other teachers in the building who had teenage children of their own. She said these parents "loved it and gave it to their kids. They didn't mind."

Louise's Perceptions of LGBTQ YAL

Louise said she was not familiar with LGBTQ YAL until she "Googled it" the week before our interview. She admits she does not think she has "ever even seen an

LGBTQ YA book” until she looked at the site. When I asked Louise what she thought would happen if she taught a book with LGBTQ content and characters to the whole class, she immediately said, without any hesitation at all, “I think the parents would throw a fit and the principal would say no, we're not doing it.”

She was adamant in saying that the principal would “absolutely side with the parents,” explaining this perception with the following story about the principal, who was at the time a classroom teacher:

I remember one conversation years and years ago at lunch with who is now our principal. So I'm sitting there and I'm eating lunch, and on the cover of the paper it said these people are running for president. It was before the primary, so there's 8 pictures. Hillary Clinton was on there maybe, or some chickadoo, who knows. Then I remember seeing Barack Obama's face there, and I just said randomly, “Aren't we living in a great time where women and black dudes can run for president. I am proud of our country.” And her answer was, “You would vote for a black man? Are you serious?” And I said, “Yeah. I said I don't really care what color somebody's skin is.” And she was like (huffs), and that was the end of that conversation, but that has stuck with me forever.

Louise’s perception is that if the principal feels that way about race, then sexual orientation would be the same kind of conversation, if not worse.

She perceives that the community’s attitudes, while maybe shifting somewhat on race, are still malicious toward the LGBTQ community. Louise explains, “In this small town, at least they're going to be quiet about racism. They're getting enough sense to where they realize that's wrong, and they realize they might ought to keep it quiet. But at

this point, in this small town, it's perfectly okay for me to hate those people, I think. It's okay.”

Louise said she was actually embarrassed that she did not have any LGBTQ YAL on her shelves for students to read. When I asked her if she would make the titles available in her classroom for students, she responded:

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Sure would. It's one of those absolute ignorant, I just never thought of it. Absolutely never thought of it. And I can't believe I didn't. Because I've argued, I've gotten in fights over that stuff before, argued with people over the whole gay marriage situation and all that stuff. But that, I mean just, I feel like how much I've supported it, either in my family or whatever it is, that I never ever thought about it in here.

She would “definitely” book talk them if she had them and make them available for whoever wanted to read them. Her perception was that even an action as small as a book talk would have repercussions, but Louise seemed to not care about that. She declared, “Yeah. I would do that. And if I had repercussions I'd just take them like I've had all my other ones. I'd just say, ‘I've got kids in the classroom this pertains to.’ So I would definitely show them if I had them.”

She describes the school’s librarians as “frighteningly religious” and does not believe that they would be helpful in locating LGBTQ YAL. This perception is based on how the librarians responded to a science teacher bringing in a local paleontologist to discuss fossils. To counteract the paleontologist, the librarians ordered videos on creationism with no teacher input and sent out an email to use them.

Louise's perception of district administration is the same as her perception of building administration; they would be totally unsupportive. Her perceptions are based on two occasions when district administration used their position of authority to, in effect, bully teachers, one of which was Louise. The first occasion was when the science teacher invited the paleontologist to discuss fossils and the age of the earth. One of the students in the science class has a father who works at the district office; after the paleontologist was in the classroom, he came to the science teacher's room. Louise explains what happened:

Then the dad from central office came down here to talk to the science teacher and said, "Can you show me that on the standards?" And she said, "Yeah," and she showed him. And he said, "Well, as long as you and I both know that it's not true and you're just doing it because you have to." And she said, "No, that's not how I feel." He goes, "Well, I hate we disagree on this."

The second occasion was when the Director of Schools and the K-6 Director of Curriculum and Instruction reprimanded Louise over one of her personal Facebook posts. Louise said she posted regularly as a proponent of gay marriage, democratic ideals, and she also reposted interesting facts from the website "I F**king Love Science." None of her friends on Facebook are students, not even high school students. She claims she has "never used a bad word" in her status.

When she posted a status about disagreeing with not vaccinating children, a former student, now in her 20s and with a child who is not vaccinated, took offense. She took screenshots of Louise's homepage and things she had posted and went directly to the Director of Schools. The Director then came to RCMS to talk to Louise without

informing the principal she was doing so. Louise was told her posts were “inappropriate,” especially the ones that had “homosexual stuff in nature.” Louise says the word “inappropriate” was used “at least 10 times.” After these two experiences with district administration, Louise said, “I mean, they don’t believe in dinosaurs. So, you know, bringing in a book full of lesbians is probably not going to fly.”

Louise’s Actions Based on LGBTQ YAL Perceptions

Louise admits to being a voracious reader. She told me that she has read “a lot of books” and did an Internet search to see if she recognized any of the LGBTQ YAL titles she found on the Google search. When she saw the list of books on the website (she could not remember which one), she told me she had not read any of them. Of the four teachers I interviewed, Louise had the most concrete anecdotes to support her perceptions. These perceptions she formed of administration, the librarian, and the community at large led to her choice of not teaching LGBTQ YA texts.

Sally’s Typology Sheet

To separate Sally’s perceptions of the value of literature, YAL, multicultural literature, and LGBTQ YAL from her actions, again I created a typology sheet (Hatch, 2002). This sheet can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Typology sheet for Sally

Sally

Perceptions of Teacher	Actions of Teacher
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Literature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to things they may not get to see • Human experience 2. YAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Kind of” enjoy it • Reads popular titles (i.e. Hunger Games) because she thinks kids may be reading them • Would be “overwhelmed” if principal let her choose anything; doesn’t feel “competent” 3. MC Literature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Anything but us” • Any culture • First thing that popped into her mind was a “little girl from Africa” (Chimamanda Adichie) 4. LGBTQ YAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching “sympathetic themes would lead to student backlash • Teaching LGBTQ YAL would expose LGBTQ students to the whole class • “Opinions are narrow” • Hasn’t “come across it” • Thinks gay males get more ridicule and abuse than lesbians • Some teachers may have a “do I want to die on that hill” attitude when it comes to teaching controversial topics • Can change attitudes to ones of acceptance 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No Independent/Sustained Silent Reading because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative past experiences • So much to do that there’s no time to “sit there with your book” • Urgency in instruction (caused by testing – EOC in particular) • When they do sit and read, they’re “reading with a purpose” 2. Writer’s Workshop class for Tier 3 kids (in GA) – said is was a “fun” class – no test pressure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups of 2-5 • Chose a novel to read • Lit circles • Book talk (selling book to others) 3. MC literature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taught TKAM • Mentions teaching Odyssey 4. LGTBQ YAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has only looked for books in RCHS’s book room (another teacher’s closet) and the RCHS library • Would have it on the shelf in her room, but would have to read them first

Again, separating Sally's typologies into perceptions and actions assisted me in determining them both.

Sally's Perception of the Value of Literature

Sally believes that seeing the human experience is important in an English classroom, especially for rural students. She believes that reading can "expose them to things they may never get to see, at least in their childhood," perceiving that the geographical isolation of Redd County's students can sometimes be a hindrance. Sally also perceives that independent reading does not serve a purpose in a 21st-century test-driven classroom. Her perception is that because there is so much material to cover, it is not in her students' best interest to "sit there" with their self-selected books.

Sally's Actions Based on Value of Literature Perceptions

Sally chose to meet for the interview in her classroom at RCHS. When I entered her classroom, she pointed out the standard she was currently teaching that was listed on the whiteboard. That standard was "point of view or cultural reference reflected in a work of literature." Because of the perceived lack of time and importance of standardized testing, Sally does not use independent reading in her class, stating that when her classes read, they are "reading for a purpose." In Sally's previous experience in another state, she let her students choose YAL to book talk to others in the school. She described the class as "fun" because there was no test pressure, and the kids "really enjoyed it."

Sally's Perceptions of YAL

Sally says she "kind of" enjoys YAL. Her first exposure to the genre was when she was teaching 6th grade during her internship and R.L. Stine was popular among her

students. The word she used to describe these books was “rinky-dink,” indicating that these books did not carry as much literary weight and merit as traditional canonical works. When she began teaching 9th grade, *The Hunger Games* was wildly popular; she believed that her students might choose to read it as well as other YAL. Even though she feels that she does not know enough titles to teach it thoroughly, Sally’s perception is that teenagers are reading it.

Sally’s Actions Based on YAL Perceptions

She did not and still does not want students to read something she is unaware of, saying she was “scared” that they would. In order to increase her awareness of R.L. Stine’s books, she says she “would go home and consume one or two of those rinky-dink books a night.” Again, the summer before she began teaching 9th graders, Sally read popular YAL, saying, “When I knew that I was going to teach 9th graders, the summer before I started in [state] I read the *Hunger Games*...so I'd be familiar because I thought that was something they might be reading...So I try to read it.” In order to connect with the students she teaches, the action she takes based on this perception is reading as much as she can, trying to keep up with what interests her students.

Sally’s Perceptions of Multicultural Literature

As far as multicultural literature is concerned, Sally perception is that it is “anything but us,” meaning anything but white Southern Americans. She said the first thing that came to her mind when I mentioned the word “multicultural” was “a little girl that lived in Africa.”

Sally's Actions Based on Multicultural Literature Perceptions

The only thing Sally says she teaches now that she would consider to be multicultural is *The Odyssey*, a staple of many 9th grade textbooks. She has taught *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the previous state where she taught, but she has yet to teach it in Redd County, choosing to teach *Of Mice and Men* instead.

Sally's Perceptions of LGBTQ YAL

Sally is not familiar with LGBTQ YAL herself. As for using LGBTQ YAL in her classroom, Sally has many perceptions. First, she believes the students would exhibit prejudicial, hateful behavior, stating that choosing literature with “sympathetic themes toward gay, lesbian, and transgender would frighten me somewhat because of some of the backlash.” Second, she perceives that in teaching LGBTQ YAL she would be “singling out” those students who may be struggling with orientation, which in her mind would lead to bullying behavior from other the students that she perceives as homophobic. Last, she perceives that the community would not support her because of the “narrow opinions” of the residents. She was not sure about support from the building’s or district’s administration because she felt like she has not been at Redd County High School long enough to know.

She believes that having LGBTQ YAL in the school’s library “might be a starting place.” Even though she might not teach an LGBTQ novel to the whole class, Sally says she would have them available on her bookshelf. Her reasoning for this is that they would be able to help students recognize they are not alone:

But when you see students struggling, you know, I just never would want to cause harm and make them feel alone. Sometimes in books you realize, you know,

whether it be I'm being abused at home or I have an abusive relationship, that I'm the only one that must be experiencing this. You know as well as I do, through books you know you're not alone. It's just a great thing, and of course I'd be open to have them on the shelf.

Sally discussed teacher reticence in teaching these novels as “choosing which hill you want to die on.” She explains, “I mean, it’s a do-you-want-to-die-on-this-hill kind of attitude, and you start thinking that way. Do I want to die on this hill?”

Sally’s Actions Based on LGBTQ YAL Perceptions

When Sally was teaching in another state, she taught a lesson about Bernhard Goetz, the New York City “Subway Vigilante,” to students in a county with similar demographics to Redd County. The students she was teaching were white, and she says she heard “hurtful comments” and was thankful that there “were no black students in the room.” These actions shaped her perceptions of students exhibiting hateful, hurtful speech. Because of this, she chooses not to teach LGBTQ YAL. In explanation she said:

So in wanting to be protective of some of my students who I know may be struggling with, you know, is this me, can I relate to this, you know, I just wouldn't want to expose them to the whole class. To some opinions that probably aren't even really their own, but that they've heard and don't realize how damaging they are. Because we get some really ugly stuff...So it frightens me. I would never want to hurt a child or have them hurt, you know, and you may not even know it. So when you're in a rural environment, as you well know, opinions are narrow. And so you struggle with how you change that.

All of these perceptions lead Sally to not teach any LGBTQ texts. She wants to stay abreast of the available YA titles; however, the only two places mentioned where she looked for books were “in the book room,” which is the closet in another teacher’s classroom, and in RCHS’s library. She has yet to find a book that has “addressed that topic.” Her choice of words in saying “do I want to die on this hill” indicates sacrifice – of her career, reputation, and community standing. In Sally’s mind, the sacrifice is too great; she chooses not to teach LGBTQ YAL.

Contradictions

Contradictions, according to Freire’s dialogic method, are dissonance between practice and principles, rendering the oppressed “contradictory, divided beings” (Freire, 2005, p. 55). After initially interviewing the participants and transcribing those interviews, I began to notice that what the participants were telling me and what they were doing in class were contradictory. The two main contradictions were with the value of literature and the positioning of students.

The Value of Literature Contradiction

I agree with Michael Cart (2008), who explains the value of literature, specifically YAL, is “in its capacity to offer readers an opportunity to see themselves reflected in its pages...its capacity for fostering understanding, empathy, and compassion...invites its readership to embrace the humanity it shares.” Each of the teachers I interviewed in Redd County agree with Cart; the actions of these participants, though, contradicted what they said. The first contradiction concerns the value of literature and can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Contradictions relating to literature

Table 5: The “Value of Literature” Contradiction
1.1 Connects people to people
1.2 Enables people to see the human experience, to realize they are not alone
1.3 Provides an opportunity to develop perspective and empathy
1.4 Provides an opportunity for students to see themselves

Cindy told me that reading literature is “a good way to connect with other people,” and Sally said that literature shows “the human experience” and that “through books you know you’re not alone.” Sally also extolled the power of literature and talking about it to change attitudes and behaviors. Louise believes that reading helps get her students “to step out of the little bitty circle that they’re in” and gets them out of the “little white farmland,” while Loretta stated that it is “important for the kids to recognize themselves.”

It appears that these four women, much like me, agree with Rosenblatt’s reader response theory. Rosenblatt (1946) tells us,

For literature, which permits us to enter emotionally into other lives, can be viewed always as the expression of human beings who, in no matter how different the ways, are, like us, seeking the basic human satisfactions, experiencing the beauties and rigors of the natural world, meeting or resisting the demands of the society about them, and striving to live by their vision of what is important and desirable in life. (p. 460)

Reading fiction acts as both mirrors and windows, allowing readers to see and experience things that are unlike them but also giving them insight to what we all have in common. The contradiction in the perceptions and actions of these teachers is that they are not giving a full picture of the human experience, not letting all students recognize themselves. Redd County's LGBTQ students may endure their entire public school career without ever seeing someone like them in their curriculum.

None of these teachers use any type of text that contains LGBTQ themes or issues, even though each of these teachers said they either have students who identify as LGBTQ now or have had them in the past. Cindy stated that the LGBTQ students far outnumber other marginalized groups at RCHS. If teachers are not including LGBTQ texts in their classrooms, then not all of their students are recognizing themselves in what they read. Furthermore, Redd County's heterosexual students are not seeing how LGBTQ people are, in Rosenblatt's words, like them – looking for acceptance, finding a way to fit in the world, and living life according to what they consider important.

Freire (2005) would go so far as to say that these teachers are engaging in violent behavior, that “any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (p. 85). This behavior is not only violent towards LGBTQ students; it is violent towards heterosexual students as well, as they are not granted an opportunity to be exposed to texts with LGBTQ people and themes that may confound their perceived stereotypes.

Castro and Sujak (2014) assert that texts with LGBTQ characters and issues should be required reading. Reading these texts not only reduces alienation that LGBTQ

students can feel, but also “makes all students more aware of a greater diversity of human experience” (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2003, p. 55). So yes, it is important for our LGBTQ students to see themselves reflected in their school’s curriculum. But arguably even more important than this is the opportunity these texts have of shattering stereotypes held by some heterosexual people. These texts should be introduced into classes as texts that show what it is like to be to fall in love for the first time, to suffer the consequences of a betrayal, to show that family is sometimes the people you choose, that inner strength is something you may not even realize you have.

All of these are characteristics of the human condition, the “human experience” that Sally states is so important to see in reading. Texts have the unique ability to help readers find common ground with others who may not be like them. Even though the students in Redd County may live in what they perceive to be a homogeneous community, the world outside of Redd County is not at all like this.

Additionally, Freire (2005) would argue that these teachers are participating in the “banking” concept of education, one where teachers bestow their knowledge upon those who are considered to know nothing. One of the practices of the banking concept of education is “the teacher chooses the content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it” (Freire, 2005, p. 73). Teachers who use the banking concept of education do not encourage students to become critical thinkers; students will not develop a critical consciousness and will passively adapt to the world as it is (Freire, 2005).

If the value of literature is to develop “critical thinking” as Loretta says, then teachers and students must be considered as fellow learners. Freire (2005) suggests that there are well-intentioned teachers who unknowingly are using the banking method of

education and do not perceive the contradictions that lie therein. RCHS teachers, in my opinion, fall into this category. I do not believe they are intentionally trying to harm students; however, their silence on LGBTQ topics, issues, and characters speaks volumes.

The Positionality Contradiction

Another contradiction that emerged from the interviews was how these teachers positioned the students in their classrooms. Studies have shown that rural Southern places are more likely to be homophobic and espouse traditionally conservative values, and as schools are microcosms of society (Elia, 1993), it stands to reason that schools in rural Southern places take on the identity of the community wherein they lie. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 2, many teachers position students as heterosexual and homophobic; Redd County's teachers were no exception. However, the more the participants talked, the more they revealed that this is not the case for the majority of their students. The contradictions in the positioning of their students can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. Contradictions relating to students.

Table 6: The "Positionality" Contradiction
2.1 Students are vocal in their hatred of those who are not like them
2.2 It is okay to hate people like that
2.3 Opinions are narrow in a rural environment
2.4 Students will "spew hatred"

One of the reasons for the reticence teachers had in teaching LGBTQ texts was pushback from students. At the middle school level, Loretta told me about students in her class who are “very vocal” about their hatred of anyone who is not like they are – white, heterosexual, Southern Christians. It was Louise, though, who gave perhaps the most distressing quote when she said that the community believes that “it’s perfectly okay to hate those people here.” There is no arguing with the perceptions of these teachers; rural Southern communities are more likely to espouse traditionally conservative values (Herek, 2002; Powers, et al., 2003; Sutor & Carter, 1999; Sullivan, 2003).

However, these teachers are making an assumption about all of their students based on the actions of a select few. Clark and Blackburn (2009) found in their research that “teachers, texts, and/or institutions invariably presumed student readers to be straight and often aggressively homophobic” (p. 27). Even though their initial comments about hesitancy in teaching LGBTQ texts included student backlash, each teacher also talked about noticing the students’ attitudes changing into acceptance.

Loretta, who spoke of students being “very vocal” about their hatred of anyone different than they, also had this to say about her students: “It’s surprising because some students are very open about it and very accepting, and they’ll tell you.” She also said there were students in her room who “shut down” the students who spewed hatred “very quickly.” She finished by saying that she had seen student attitudes “change a lot” from when she first began teaching at RCMS.

Louise tells a similar story of acceptance at RCMS. Last year, the quarterback of the football team was voted homecoming queen by the student body; she also identifies as a lesbian. This young girl had several friends, who, as Louise put it, “had her back no

matter what. If somebody made a comment to her, you better watch out. And those girls weren't lesbians.” These teachers are telling two different stories; on one hand, they perceive that their students would be resistant to LGBTQ YAL. But on the other hand, they tell a story of acceptance and allies, proving there are students whose attitudes are changing with the times, even in small, rural, Southern counties such as Redd County.

Things were no different at the high school level. After claiming that teaching these texts would give her students another opportunity to “spew hatred” and that that is not necessarily something she would want to do, Cindy claimed that “normal” students would “easily” read a book with LGBTQ topics because they like things “that are different.” Of the students in RCHS, Cindy says, “I feel like our kids are more and more comfortable with sexuality and different sexualities in the high school. I think they're more comfortable than they were when I first started working here” and describes high school students as being “some of the most empathetic people.” Sally, perceiving that students would respond negatively based on receiving some “really ugly stuff” and “hurtful comments” on texts concerning racism and not wanting to “expose them [LGBTQ students] to the whole class,” then spoke specifically of a young girl in her class who was in a relationship with another girl. Sally commented that both the girls seem “very comfortable” in their relationship and that “they don’t seem to be harassed by anyone.”

Like the RCMS teachers, the RCHS teachers are telling a story that just does not add up. Furthermore, none of these teachers seems to be aware of the benefit of reading LGBTQ YAL for all students, not only the ones who identify as LGBTQ. There are students at RCHS who are choosing to read LGBTQ YAL. In Cindy’s media club, two

girls chose *Ask the Passengers* by A.S. King from the state's book award list to read and talk about it. Cindy did not tell me if the girls identified as LGBTQ, but she told me "they really liked" the book. They did not participate in hateful, hurtful speech, nor did they "spew hatred."

When teachers refuse to teach controversial topics because they assume comments will be hurtful or disparaging or because they assume students are homophobic and will "spew" hatred, they are underestimating students. As Sieben and Wallowitz (2009) tell us, "Sometimes high school students are not given enough credit; we underestimate their maturity levels" (p. 48). Furthermore, most adolescents realize that how they treat other people is distinct from their personal values (Horn, et al., 2008). Most adolescents are curious and willing to learn about new concepts. Educators should trust them.

Even more importantly, adolescents are looking to teachers to model how to treat marginalized groups. When teachers engage in what Clark (2010) calls "anti-work," which she defines as being limited to interrupting homophobic language, they are only taking a neutral stance. The goal is to engage in "ally-work," which aims to accomplish systemic and/or institutional change. Ally-work can become the norm when teachers, in Redd County and all others, stop positioning homophobia as the norm for their students (Clark & Blackburn, 2009). The teachers in Redd County will not be alone in ally-work; they are telling stories of students who already are allies to their LGBTQ peers. Not sharing LGBTQ texts with their classes is denying students the chance to engage in ally-work.

In addition, wanting to “protect” LGBTQ students from hurtful comments is noble but misguided. Alex Sanchez (2005), an author of YAL with LGBTQ characters and themes, says, “The reality is that teens are far more harmed by these misguided attempts at ‘protection’ than they are by having full access to honest information and guided adult discussions about gay-straight themes” (p. 47). Leaving out LGBTQ-themed texts from curriculum does not protect LGBTQ students; it reinforces the idea that they are alone, unimportant, and undeserving of class time.

Generative Theme

Generative themes (Padilla, 1992), which rise from contradictions and are defined as “indicative of an individual’s stance in the world as it is experienced in daily life” (p. 176), allow the researcher to view reality as participants see it. Knowing their reality enables the researcher to realize what participants based their actions on. After analyzing the interviews for perceptions, actions, and contradictions, I realized that the perceptions that guided these teachers’ actions were based on fear, which became the main generative theme.

Overwhelmingly, all of the teachers described experiencing fear of backlash from both parents and community members if they taught or shared LGBTQ literature in their classrooms, as well as fear of backlash from an unsupportive administration. As Puchner and Klein (2011) explain, “Teachers have power over students, but many actors in a school community have power over teachers, and those actors can challenge teachers’ attempts to do anything other than cite and repeat stereotypical heteronormative messages” (p. 244).

Fear of Parent/Community Backlash

Cindy received parent backlash from teaching *The Crucible*, with the parent arguing that Cindy was promoting “witchcraft,” and she believed she would receive “more pushback from their parents” if she tried to teach an LGBTQ text. Sally described Redd County as “a rural environment” where “opinions are narrow,” and also received parent backlash on an assignment where she asked her students to create an original origin myth; the parent complained that Sally was trying to get her child to “prove evolution.”

Louise believed that in their “small town” the parents would “throw a fit” if LGBTQ texts were sanctioned. Louise said, “Bringing in a book full of lesbians probably isn’t going to fly.” Loretta stated that if she taught an LGBTQ text in her class, she would “get lots of phone calls from parents,” that in her area with “strict, strict conservative values” she would be “talked bad about in the community” because she would be perceived as “pushing” the text on the students.

As discussed in Chapter 1, none of the reasons given by these teachers is surprising, as research has shown that people in Southern regions of the country have less tolerant attitudes toward LGBTQ people than those in other regions and are more likely to hold more traditional attitudes/beliefs about gender roles and norms (Herek, 2002; Powers, et al., 2003; Sutor & Carter, 1999; Sullivan, 2003). The contributing factors to homophobia – lack of diversity in general in rural communities, traditionally conservative values regarding sexuality and gender roles, and religious beliefs that condemn and stigmatize homosexuality and gender non-conformity (Herek, 2002; Preston, et al. 2007; Snively, 2004) – were all mentioned by the teachers in Redd County.

Louise wants desperately to take her students out of the “small, white farmland” that they are in, suggesting a lack of diversity. Loretta speaks of the “strict, strict conservative values” the county espouses. Both Louise and Sally speak of the religious backdrop that envelops many things related to school, both of them having stories related to evolution. Going back to Sally’s creation myth assignment, the student whose parent complained wrote a myth that Sally says was “an exact creation myth of the Bible.” These quotes indicate that just like people, a region can hold power as well. It is apparent that these Redd County educators feel powerless when it comes to community attitudes concerning LGBTQ people.

However, the teachers of Redd County do have experience in battling the dominant attitudes and stereotypes of the county. Cindy recounted a story of the slavery unit she teaches that is based on the state’s model, which gives opposing perspectives on slavery from three different people – Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and John Calhoun:

So with the racial issue in Redd County it can be uncomfortable at times...and I remember when they [state] did it [put out the slavery unit] that some of the teachers were saying like, “I don’t know if this is going to fly at Redd County, really.” But I think it really has...as far as the topic itself, it’s actually kind of an engaging topic. They’re learning about the Civil War in history class, so they’re interested in it. Even if some of them are kind of racist.

This unit pushed teachers out of their comfort zone, but they still considered the topic of racism one that was important to teach regardless of the backlash they received. In

teaching the topic, Cindy found that her students were engaged and held interesting discussions, even if they were “racists.”

Loretta and Louise also feel that teaching about race is important for their students in Redd County. Loretta’s unit consists of materials related to the Civil Rights Movement, including *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*, Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, and *The Ernest Green Story*, a movie based on one of the Little Rock Nine. Louise teaches a slavery unit, using *Nightjohn* as the base and adding other supplemental texts, both fiction and nonfiction. Showing a picture of the “African American experience” is important in a county that still has “a lot of racism.”

According to Louise, the racism prevalent in Redd County seems to have abated somewhat. She says, “They’re getting enough sense to where they realize that that’s wrong, and if they feel like they’re racist they realize they might ought to keep it a little bit quiet.” The LGBTQ community in Redd County is larger than the Black community, but teaching about race is something teachers no longer fear to do. The same drive, endurance, and initiative teachers were willing to use to confront their discomfort in teaching racism can also be done with homophobia.

Fear of Administration Backlash

Probably the most disheartening part of these interviews was to hear how these teachers adamantly, without doubt or hesitation, believed that they had no support from administration, neither building nor district level. Sally was the only teacher who felt she could not come to a definite conclusion because she had not been in Redd County for a full year. The other three, though, did not hesitate in saying they would have zero support from their building and district administration. Louise, before I even finished asking the

question, asserted that her principal would say, “No, we’re not doing it” and that district administration would do the same, that she did not think anybody would be on her side or support her.

Loretta concurred with Louise, saying the building administration “for sure” would not approve, and the district administration would not approve either because of the parent backlash that she perceived they would receive. Even if she used LGBTQ texts in small group literature circles, she still believed the administration would not support her. Cindy, though, made the most damning statement of the three when she said, “I can’t see them standing up for that” and that she was positive they would “roll over” on that issue “like they do on everything.” She concluded her statement by saying, “Why would that be any different. And that would be the easiest thing to roll over on, you know. Because you know the community is going to be behind them, not behind me.” These examples clearly show the power structure that is present in secondary schools.

Both Cindy and Louise had specific stories of decisions being overridden and questioned by administration. A parent of one of Cindy’s students made a complaint about *The Crucible*, saying it promoted witchcraft. This parent called the principal to make the complaint. Instead of asking the parent if she had talked to Cindy first or even giving Cindy a chance to explain the value of the play, the principal told Cindy to let the student read something else in another teacher’s room.

Likewise, Louise was confronted by administration over her own personal Facebook posts. A former student, who is now in her 20’s and has a child of her own, bypassed the principal and made a complaint to the director of schools. Louise explains:

They said there was absolutely nothing that they could do. That none of the posts were made during school hours. That as long as it's not done on school time the school board policy is that our social media is our business, but they just wanted me to know that we live in a small town in a small community and people hold teachers to a very high standard, and they didn't feel that those posts were along that standard.

The posts in question were related to not vaccinating children, supporting marriage equality, supporting democratic candidates and ideals, and reposting interesting articles from the site "I F***ing Love Science."

Again, the director did not ask the student if she had spoken to Louise, nor did she ask if the student had contacted the principal; in fact, the director did not even contact the principal. She went right to Louise's classroom with the Director of K-6 Curriculum and Instruction, who has nothing to do with grades 7-12, and told Louise that her posts were "inappropriate," especially the ones that had "homosexual stuff in nature." Louise says, "She must have said the word 'inappropriate' at least 10 times." Louise says she is not ashamed to say this hurt her feelings. "It's kind of like if you're telling me my Facebook is inappropriate when I'm really honest as to who I am on there, you're also telling me that my humanity is inappropriate and it hurt my feelings." Not only did Louise feel unsupported as a teacher, she also felt unsupported as a person.

When I asked Sally if she thought some teachers might shy away from teaching controversial topics because it was easier than facing administration, she replied:

Yes. I can see where you'd get beaten into that. I can totally see that. I mean, do you want to die on this hill kind of attitude, and you start thinking that way. Do I

want to die on this hill? Is it really important they write that myth? You know? And when you get to that point it's sad, but I guess not terribly sad, because it's good to think of other people's opinions, but when they're so irrational it's hard. This is an interesting choice of words for Sally to use. When asking the question “Do I want to die on this hill,” teachers are asking themselves if damage to their careers, reputations, and community status is more important than addressing the needs of their students.

Sally says that teachers can get “beaten into that.” It is hard to listen to irrational thoughts; when those thoughts belong to an administrator who is in a position of power, some teachers have to face a difficult decision. Do they address the irrationality in thinking, or do they continue with the status quo? More often than not, the status quo is continued. When teachers do not confront administrators, then they become what Freire (2005) calls sub-oppressors, oppressed people who become oppressors because their thoughts have been shaped into what the oppressors want. Redd County’s administrators do not want teachers to teach LGBTQ texts and topics; Redd County’s teachers feel powerless to resist. Excluding LGBTQ texts and topics from the classroom alienates those students who identify as LGBTQ; thus, the oppressed (teachers) become the oppressors.

A school’s administration not only governs the behavior of its students; it governs the behavior of its teachers as well. In recent years, teachers all across the country have been vilified, had their bargaining power taken away, had tenure stripped from them, and been blamed for many, if not all, of society’s ills. In my home state of Tennessee, because the tenure law has been disposed of, teachers who began their career after this

law went into effect can be dismissed from their jobs without being given a reason (Holloway, 2015). In today's educational climate, administrators hold much power over teachers, and many times the prevailing atmosphere is one of fear.

The argument can be made that administrators manipulate their teachers into teaching what is considered to be culturally "normal." Many teachers face retribution if they do not adhere to the ideas and values of administrators and feel powerless in deciding what should be included in their curriculum. Freire (2005) warns, "When the power of decision is located outside rather than within the one who should decide, the latter has only the illusion of deciding" (p. 160). Redd County's teachers "decide" what to include in their class curriculum; however, it is the administration that has the final say, so the teachers' decision making is merely an illusion, one that they are keenly aware of.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discussed the perceptions and actions of each teacher as they related to the value of literature, YAL, multicultural literature, and LGBTQ YAL. I then discussed the contradictions relating to the value of literature and teachers' positioning of students that were present in the participants' interviews. Last, I discussed the generative theme of fear that emerged from the contradictions, fear of community/parent backlash and fear of administration backlash.

Chapter 5: Implications

*“We all make mistakes...but it’s also a step in the right direction. If nothing else it’s a step away from the wrong one.” –Adam Silvera, *More Happy Than Not**

In interviewing four of Redd County’s English teachers, I gained insight into their perceptions of using LGBTQ YAL in the classroom as well as actions they were taking. After conducting the typological analysis to determine teachers’ perceptions and actions and careful analysis, contradictions began to appear between teachers’ perceptions and their actions. These contradictions led to the main generative theme of fear of “backlash” from parents and the school community-at-large, as well as “assumed, un-named” students who might “spew hatred.” Implications for these contradictions I observed, as well as the generative theme of fear for teachers and administrators, are discussed below.

Implications of the “Value of Literature” Contradiction for Teachers

All four of the English teachers agreed that the value of literature lies in its ability to experience new and novel ideas and cultures, to show the connectedness between humans, and describe the human experience. The teachers I interviewed all seemed to be making an effort to show their classes the human experience, especially around the issue of race. Loretta stated specifically that the value of literature was in its ability to allow students to “be able to recognize themselves.” However, the teachers were all excluding the human experience of LGBTQ people. LGBTQ students exist, and they see nothing that looks like them in the texts used in their English classes.

Moje and MuQaribu (2003) tell us that omission of themes in curriculum is a message of denial; readers who do not see themselves and their stories reflected in novels feel that they are invisible in society. Students know what teachers think is valuable and important by the curriculum they teach. Educators must make their top priority assuring

each student that they are, in fact, visible and welcome. The advantages of showing the entire spectrum of human experience are not only for students who identify as LGBTQ; heterosexual students can reap the benefits from reading these novels as well, showing them that LGBTQ teens' experiences are not unlike their own, that they all are preoccupied with many of the same dreams, hopes, and fears (Letcher, 2009).

The teachers I interviewed admitted that they were not familiar with LGBTQ YAL at all. This indicates that the undergraduate courses they took did not expose them to texts with LGBTQ content, nor did it prepare them for having LGBTQ students in their classes. Sally completed her undergrad the earliest, carrying out her internship year in 1994. The other three teachers completed undergraduate courses in the early 2000s. Even Louise, the self-proclaimed Democrat who embraces and fights for all kinds of diversity, was "embarrassed" to admit that she did not know of a single LGBTQ YA title. This is an issue that must be addressed in teacher preparation.

Teachers cannot be expected to teach LGBTQ texts if they have no knowledge that they exist. Burroughs (1999) says that teacher educators, specifically English teacher educators, must expose their preservice and inservice teachers to literature that falls across the entire diverse spectrum as well as provide them with strategies to implement it successfully in their own classrooms. When teachers bring materials with LGBTQ characters, issues, and themes to the classroom, they are not bringing in something that is not already there. Using these texts "provides affirmation for the student who already knows he or she is sexually different" (Swartz, 2003, p. 55-56). Teachers who are already in the classroom can look for quality texts with LGBTQ characters and issues on the Lambda Award list, the Stonewall Award list, the Rainbow list, and the website

Goodreads, just to name a few. In the information age that we live in, with a seemingly infinite amount of information readily available at the click of a mouse, there is no reason to be unfamiliar with LGBTQ YAL titles.

All of these teachers seem to agree with Rosenblatt (1982) when she says that reading widens “our horizons to include temperaments and cultures different from our own” (p. 276). They want their students to visit different cultures and experiences via reading. This is no less true for the teachers themselves; if teachers truly believe Rosenblatt’s words, then it is imperative that when they find these LGBTQ YA texts from the sites listed previously, they read these texts in order to expand their own knowledge.

Reading these texts can be a reflective experience for teachers, for as Rosenblatt (1982) says, when we read a text, “We draw on our reservoir of past experience with people and the world” (p. 270). Like students, teachers will bring their own experiences and values to a text. Reading LGBTQ texts provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect on and confront their own biases and stereotypes pertaining to LGBTQ people. When teachers understand their own assumptions, values, and privilege, they can assist students in seeing their own.

Strategies for Teachers

Hermann-Wilmarth (2010) offers three strategies teachers can undertake when teaching controversial topics such as LGBTQ issues that encourage both dialogue and critical thinking. First, using explicit, open-ended questions encourages students to make ties between themselves and people in their lives to characters in the literature. Furthermore, these open-ended questions can be stated in such a way that students find

similarities between their own life experiences and those of the characters in LGBTQ YAL and question how heterosexuality came to be considered the norm and how groups who do not fit this norm become marginalized, which are basic tenets of queer theory. Why are LGBTQ people considered to be outside the norm? What ideas do the students base their own beliefs on? Next, students can be arranged into small groups, generate a list of perspectives about the text being read, and then bring those perspectives to a whole-group discussion. This strategy gives students a chance to first think as individuals, then with a small group, and then as a whole class.

Another strategy teachers in rural areas can employ is to adapt Garcia's (2015) work as a framework for students to think critically about and reflect on their own biases. Garcia's students were mostly students of color; therefore, he provided background for them about the history of racism in the United States. Rural teachers can use this as a framework for discussing how people from the South are marginalized. They can show clips from "The Beverly Hillbillies," "Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo," and "The Andy Griffith Show," among others, to show how people from the South are stereotyped. They can discuss the history of "rednecks" and "hillbillies" and why it is still okay to poke fun at people based on where they live.

As a person who is from a small rural Southern town and whose accent exposes that, I can attest to the microaggressions people face because of things like accents. Personally, I have been asked if my family had indoor plumbing, if I wore shoes at all in the summer, and what kind of farm I lived on. Rural students in Redd County have more than likely had similar experiences. Some people believe that a Southern accent is a sign of low intelligence. Students can then discuss ways they have been marginalized and

create responses to them, creating a list of words and phrases that are unacceptable to use in the class.

The next step would be for students to realize how they marginalize others and recognize their own privileged status. When they see how they are personally affected by stereotypes, it is easier to see how the stereotypes they have may be harmful and inaccurate. This could begin by asking questions such as, “Have you ever been the only person of your sexual orientation in the room?” or “Do you feel like you can hold your boyfriend’s/girlfriend’s hand in the hallway and not be made fun of?” Discussions can ensue on who decided that heterosexual is normal, where their own beliefs come from, and how it would feel to be in a minority group because of things that are uncontrollable. Students can then discuss how they may have believed stereotypes and oppressed others, how they can use their own privilege to help those in marginalized groups, and make a plan for action to change their own behaviors.

Having LGBTQ YAL available in small group literature circles is another strategy teachers can use. Even though dialogue is a critical tenet of Freire’s problem-posing method of education, some students will not participate in a whole-class discussion if they feel they will be ridiculed for what they are going to say. Small groups of four or five students provide opportunities for students to express their opinions to a select few peers rather than the entire class. Reading the same text together and talking about it exposes each student’s worldview. Small groups can have spirited conversation before they bring what they have decided to the larger whole-class group.

Teachers can also use book talks and have LGBTQ novels on their shelves for students to check out individually. Cindy has found that her students are eager to talk to

her about what they are reading during daily independent reading. “They don't wait until their book talk to tell me about it after they've read something. They'll be like, ‘Guess what happens today,’ and so they give me daily or weekly updates.” Students who read LGBTQ titles during their independent reading time can talk with their teacher about the book in a one-on-one setting. All four teachers said they were willing to put LGBTQ YAL on their classroom shelves for students, with Louise stating she would be willing to take the repercussions for that just like she has taken “all the other ones.” These teachers all stated they would never keep a student from reading something they chose on their own.

Implications of the “Positionality” Contradiction for Teachers

Schools all across the country embrace heteronormativity. Prom and homecoming kings and queens are crowned. Heterosexual couples can hold hands and attend dances together. Bathrooms are labeled male and female. Canonical literature, used in many of our nation's schools, depict heterosexual relationships and what is seen as traditional families. Ritzer (2007) defines this as the “hidden curriculum,” those unofficial structures that further position the heterosexual norm as the standard, as most students are assumed to be heterosexual. For students who identify as LGBTQ, heteronormativity is just another form of oppression.

The first step for classroom teachers, even before searching for LGBTQ YA texts, is admitting that there are LGBTQ students in the classroom. Cianciotto and Cahill (2003) state that there are “approximately 689,000 students who may identify as homosexual or bisexual, have same-sex attractions, or have same-sex sexual experiences” (p. 11). This number is more than likely conservative, though, as the authors remind us

that many young people may be afraid to report sexual orientation or may still be questioning it. As Loretta reminds us, “You can look but not see.” Students who identify as LGBTQ cannot be identified by skin color, accent, or physical characteristics.

It is unwise and dangerous for teachers to assume that all students in their classes are heterosexual, for that is more than likely untrue. Even in a place as isolated and conservative as Redd County, there are students who identify as LGBTQ. Cindy stated that she “can’t even count them all” when asked about how many LGBTQ students RCHS has. Sally spoke of one girl in particular in her class who is open about her relationship with another girl. At RCMS, both Loretta and Louise spoke of students they had in the past who identified as LGBTQ and were open about it as well as students they have this year that they believe might be struggling with their sexual orientation.

Another perception of the teachers that made them hesitant to teach LGBTQ YAL in their classes was the positioning of their students as homophobic. Cindy perceived that her students would “spew hatred,” Sally’s perception was that her students would make “hurtful comments,” and Loretta talked about students who hated “anybody who wasn’t like them.” It is arguably these students who live in a small, homogeneous community who need to read LGBTQ YAL more than any others. These books have the ability to, as Sally says, bring people together and change behaviors and attitudes, to disrupt the stereotypes and the single story that some students may have of the LGBTQ community.

Educators have a moral and ethical obligation to combat ignorance in all of its forms. Much to Louise’s dismay, she felt that the community’s attitude toward the LGBTQ community was “it’s perfectly okay for me to hate those people.” Sally said that she was “saddened” and “fearful” about the treatment of LGBTQ individuals. The words

of these teachers paint a picture of solidarity; their actions, however, are contradictory. Their inaction to do anything to combat erroneous and hateful stereotypes their students may have is an act of discrimination (Garcia, 2015). If they believe that their students are homophobic, they are obligated to challenge that belief, as students are going out into a world is much more heterogeneous than their own small town.

Even though one of the teachers' perceptions of teaching LGBTQ YA texts was that their students would spew hateful, hurtful speech, they also told stories of students who were allies, of students who would have no problem reading an LGBTQ YA novel because they "like different." The middle school teachers told me stories of students who "had the backs" of LGBTQ students and who "completely shut down" hateful homophobic speech of other students. Cindy described high school students as "some of the most empathetic people" and that "almost all of them...would read a book with homosexual characters."

It looks as if Redd County already has students who are allies to the LGBTQ community. Indeed, many times it is the students who are less fearful and more willing to talk about controversial topics than the adults who teach them. One thing that teachers can do to show they are allies to their LGBTQ students is to speak up when derogatory remarks are made and insist on a climate of respect for all people in their classroom. Another way for teachers to be allies is to sponsor a GSA; the mere presence of a GSA in schools can serve as a reminder that there are allies.

Teachers can also take GLSEN's National School Climate Report to administration, showing them the alarming statistics for LGBTQ students in the South. A PDF is available from the Colorado Education Initiative on "How to Create an Allies in

Diversity Program” in which they outline the steps one middle school took to create a culture of allies; this is a wonderful model for other schools to adapt. And, of course, teachers can structure their curriculum so that it has positive representations of LGBTQ people and show students a variety of human experiences. Teachers cannot and should not base their curriculum on their perceptions of how a few of the students will react. Inclusion of LGBTQ texts may be difficult, but it is a necessity.

Implications of Fear for Teachers

As the contradictions emerged from the interviews, a theme of fear developed clearly as the primary theme. The perceptions that these four teachers in Redd County have of teaching LGBTQ YAL in their classrooms – backlash from students, community, parents, and administration – all revolve around fear. All of the teachers I interviewed used language that indicated they perceived they would be unsupported by everyone, that they would be totally alone in trying to do what is best for all of their students.

Cindy told me that no one would be behind her, neither the administration nor the community. Sally described the “rural environment” as having opinions that are “narrow.” Loretta said she would be “talked bad about in the community,” and Louise said, “I don’t think anybody would side with me on that.” With the exception of Sally, they all told stories of being reprimanded by administration, and these stories have definitely shaped their perceptions of support.

Support systems are available to assist teachers who want to teach with a social justice mindset and include the entire spectrum of human experience, which includes the experiences of the LGBTQ community. The Southern Poverty Law Center’s website and journal titled “Teaching Tolerance” has many links to help create an inclusive

environment as well as a section of classroom resources. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has a tremendous website that has an entire section with both resources for professional development and including LGBTQ topics in the curriculum.

The National Council of Teachers of English has passed a resolution on strengthening teacher knowledge of LGBTQ issues. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has a section on their website dedicated to LGBTQ students and the rights they have at school. Any educator who teaches LGBTQ content can and will be defended by the ACLU. Furthermore, the state's code of ethics, which the Redd County BOE policy says teachers must adhere to, states that educators should not deny access to varying points of view, and shall not deny benefits to students based on sexual orientation. Access to texts that lift the cloak of invisibility from LGBTQ people and issues is a definite benefit to the emotional and mental health of LGBTQ students in rural schools. These resources, though, are just the tip of the iceberg.

Freire (2005) would say that Redd County's teachers, as an oppressed population, are exhibiting "prescribed" behaviors. He defines "prescription" as "the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness" (p. 47). That is to say, Redd County's administration is imposing their own curricular choices on their teachers. In order to overcome the prescriptive behavior, Redd County's teachers must replace the prescriber's (administration) consciousness with their own.

This may be dismaying to these teachers, because coming to their own critical consciousness means making a choice to go against the oppressor. Freire (2005) says,

“Although they desire authentic existence, they fear it...The conflict lies in the choice between...following prescriptions or having choices...between acting or having the illusion of acting through the actions of the oppressors...between speaking out or being silent” (p. 48). Teachers in rural communities have choices to make that will probably oppose the existing power structure, which is in place to structure others’ field of action (Foucault, 1982), but it is a necessary risk, and one that will be backed by the power of the United States legal system.

Fear cannot be the rationale that keeps teachers from doing what is right for all of their students; teachers must be courageous advocates for those students who are marginalized. Real courage does not mean that fear does not exist; rather, real courage is deciding that things do exist that are far more important than fear. The value of welcoming, inclusive, supportive classroom environments will always outweigh fear.

Even if the want to is there, though, these teachers still feel constrained by power structures, especially where school and district administration is concerned. But just as there are steps teachers can take to have an inclusive curriculum, there are also steps administrators can take to support teachers and not wield the power they have in dictatorial fashion.

Implications of Fear for Administrators

There is a definite disconnect between the perceptions of teachers and perceptions of administrators in Redd County. In an educator survey given by the state in 2015, 38% of the teachers in Redd County reported that they were uncomfortable raising issues important to them with school leaders, 55% reported they did not like being at the school

where they taught and were not satisfied, and 45% stated that the school leadership did not consistently support the staff.

When administrators in the state were surveyed, however, Redd County's administrators painted an entirely different picture than that of Redd County's teachers.

All of Redd County's administrators agreed 100% with the following statements:

- Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.
- There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within this school.
- The staff at this school likes being here; I would describe us as a satisfied group.
- Teachers believe that they are collaborative stakeholders in major school decisions.

There seems to be no communication or dialogue taking place between teachers and administrators in Redd County. Freire (2005) considers this oppressive behavior, saying, "To impede communication is to reduce men to the status of 'things' – and this is a job for oppressors" (p. 128).

True dialogue cannot exist without love, humility, faith, and hope (Freire, 2005). School administrators at both the building and district level should support, encourage, and recognize teachers as professionals rather than being offended by and closed off to their ideas (Stipek, 2012). They should have faith in teachers that they know what is best for the students that enter their classrooms each day. This alone can help teachers feel empowered, give them confidence, and make them feel more like authorities in their own classrooms.

Additionally, administrators can and should involve teachers in decision-making, give them opportunities to comfortably voice their own concerns without fear of retaliation or reprisal, recognize their good work, and have direct discussions with them to find out what teachers need to feel validated and supported (Stipek, 2012). Each of these will paint a picture to teachers of administrators who care, who are tuned in to what happens in the classroom, who see teachers as professionals, who want to support and validate all the good things happening in the school each day. Any of these is better than siding against teachers, making them feel like objects of scorn because they dared to go against the status quo. When teachers feel validated and supported, great things happen in classrooms.

One of the reasons lack of administrative support is so disheartening is because most, if not all, administrators were once classroom teachers. Job satisfaction among teachers and their intent to stay in the profession is more closely tied to administrative support than to salary, student behavior, or teaching experience (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Liu & Meyer, 2005; Loeb et al., 2005; Perie et al., 1997; Shann, 1998; Tickle et al., 2011; Weiss, 1999; Worthy, 2005). Even when teachers have confidence in their own abilities, this is not the only factor related to their self-efficacy; support also plays an important factor (Stipek, 2012).

Supporting teachers in helping students develop critical thinking skills and acceptance of diversity should be more important to administrators than ensuring that the day-to-day operations of a school run smoothly. Administrators need to remember to have humility, to be aware that it is the teacher who sees the students each day. It is the

teacher who knows what students need and do not need. Administrators should trust teachers to do what is best and inclusive for all students.

In the stories the teachers told me, just one action from the administrators when confronted by an angry parent would go along way in gaining the trust of their teachers. When the mother of Cindy's student went to the principal with her concern that Cindy was promoting witchcraft in teaching *The Crucible*, the principal's first course of action should have been to ask the teacher if she had talked to Cindy first. If the answer was no, then she could have told that parent that Cindy was the first point of contact.

Likewise, the director of schools should have asked the angry parent with screenshots of Louise's Facebook posts if she had spoken to Louise about it. If the answer was no, then Louise was the first contact. If the answer was yes, then the director should have asked if the parent had spoken to Louise's principal. Neither of these administrators positioned their teachers as an authority in the classroom; they both confirmed to members of the community that they did not view teachers as professionals who were doing what was in the best interest of their students. Acknowledging and appreciating teachers as professionals and supporting what they do in their classrooms is one of the most satisfying things administrators can do for their teachers.

Just as teachers should be aware of the vast array of sexual identities present in their classrooms, so should administrators be cognizant of this fact as it relates to their schools. Administrators should schedule professional development for teachers that provide strategies for assembling a curriculum that is truly inclusive of all and exclusive of none as well as building the cultural competence of their teachers. The administrators of the Roseville Area School District, just outside Minneapolis and St. Paul, engaged

their workshop participants in a simulation that requiring them to choose which parts of their identity – race, ethnicity, language, values, vocation, or religion – they would hide or give up in order to survive in a hostile environment (Howard, 2007). Exercises such as these place teachers in the position that some LGBTQ students find themselves in, as many choose to hide or deny a part of themselves from their classmates and teachers.

Furthermore, administrators should also strive to make the school environment inclusive and welcoming by implementing policies that are ensure all students are treated equitably and following through on reports of discrimination and bias in a swift and decisive manner. These steps will increase trust among faculty, staff, and students and lead to a more inclusive, welcoming environment for all.

Other Contradictions and Themes

As discussed above and in Chapter 4, the two main contradictions were with the value of literature and the way teachers positioned their students in the classroom, and the main generative theme was fear. However, there were some smaller contradictions and another theme, none of which were predominant enough in the data to be considered main contradictions and themes, that will be discussed here.

Theme of Constraints

Teachers spoke of constraints placed on them by the state department of education. They felt they were already pressed for time because of the state’s demanding standardized testing schedule, so they could not really teach all that they might want to teach. Cindy says the only novel she teaches in her 11th grade English class is *The Great Gatsby*. The reason for this is because they have “squished semesters with snow days”

and they have to be sure to get all the “Common Core standard things” taught. She says that if they had more time, they could teach more novels and would “get more diverse.” Sally does not have independent reading in her class because of the sense of “urgency” and “pressure” that the state’s End of Course (EOC) exams put on her. Louise wants to teach Neil Gaiman’s *The Graveyard Book*, but has to wait until “after this whole state testing thing.”

When the 2015-2016 school year is completed, Redd County’s high school and middle school students will have taken 14 tests that are required by the state and federal government, not to mention the tests that individual schools require. Fourteen days of testing may not seem like much, but along with the day given for the test there are countless days used for test preparation. The testing culture in Redd County is high stakes; for the teachers I interviewed, 50% of their evaluation scores are comprised from student achievement data. Of this 50%, 35% comes from standardized test scores and the remaining 15% comes from other approved achievement measures.

The “Multicultural” Contradiction

Rudine Sims Bishop (1997) defines multicultural literature as works “that reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world” (p. 3). This includes race, culture, ability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and economic status. When I asked Redd County’s teachers what they thought of when I said the words “multicultural literature,” they all talked about race but not much else. Cindy and Louise both teach slavery units, and Loretta teaches Civil Rights. Sally told me the only thing she teaches that could be considered multicultural is *The Odyssey*.

The “multicultural” contradiction goes hand in hand with the “value of literature” contradiction. As previously discussed, these teachers see literature as a way to get students to step out of their own culture and experience the human connectedness of all people. They want their students to develop empathy for others, but the only “others” they see are Black people. Both middle school teachers spoke about other stories and poems they taught, but they did not go into depth with culture the way they did with race. They also are ignoring the social diversity present in our country.

The definition of multicultural needs to be expanded so that it includes the full spectrum of diversity. Furthermore, the only story the students are receiving about Black people is the story of Civil Rights and slavery. They are not introduced to any other facet of Black culture. Empathizing with a particular race is an important characteristic to develop, but it should not be the only one to develop. When the single story of violence is all that students are exposed to, they learn that a group of people is to be pitied instead of valued.

The “Young Adult Literature” Contradiction

In Chapter 2, the value and relevance of YAL in today’s classroom was discussed. The middle school teachers I interviewed in Redd County embraced YAL and used it consistently in their classes as well as read it on their own for pleasure. The high school teachers’ perceptions of YAL were contradictory to the middle school teachers’ perceptions; neither of them used YAL in their classrooms even though their students chose it to read on their own.

Sally did not set aside time for independent reading during her class time because she said that when her students sit and read in class, they are reading “with a purpose.”

She said she “kind of” enjoyed YAL and referred to R.L. Stine books as “rinky-dink.” Her perception of YAL was that it interfered with purposeful reading, that it was used only for pleasure. Her contradictory statement came when she spoke of a class she had in another state in which she employed independent reading. She gave the class a choice of YA books for small group literature circles, and it was a huge success:

I don't think I had a bigger group than 5, and they chose a novel, and they had their little lit review groups. They met and they talked about it and they planned how they were going to sell their book to the population once they got it read.

How are we going to convince our student body that this is an awesome book and they should read it, too...it was fun...you know you just sneak skills in.

The school had grouped these students by ability level; the students Sally had were those who had low test scores. According to Sally, they thrived in the class and loved reading what they chose. They created quality projects and Sally was even able to “sneak skills in.” Success in using YAL is not confined to students with low test scores; this same strategy would also work with Sally’s other classes if her perception of YAL’s value would change.

Cindy told me she did not really like YAL personally nor did she teach it, saying, “I didn't feel like it was worth our time to spend that much time in class on them, I guess. Because they weren't hard enough.” She said she couldn't see an improvement in things that could be quantified, like vocabulary and sentence structure, when students read YAL. During independent reading time in Cindy’s class, she admits that most of her students read YAL. Not only do they read it, they also want to talk about it with Cindy. She says, “Some of the kids really...want to talk about what they read with me. They

don't wait until their book talk to tell me about it after they've read something. They'll be like, 'Guess what happens today,' and so they give me daily or weekly updates."

Cindy's students are excited about YAL and want to talk about it; that does not happen when she teaches *The Great Gatsby*. Her perception, though, may be changing. When I interviewed Cindy, she was reading *Carry On* by Rainbow Rowell so that she could familiarize herself with texts that her students were reading. I asked her if she liked it, and she said she did. When I asked her what resonated with her, she replied:

The point of *Carry On* is that there is a lot more under the surface than you realize with most people I guess. And that we're, all of us kind of have this torment of like, you know, like his is very specific, like this kind of Romeo and Juliet hatred thing of the family, right, because his family has all this hatred towards the establishment magic or whatever. But he likes Simon, and also Simon has feelings that he doesn't understand too, so there's more under that than you think.

Initially, Cindy stated that YAL was not "hard enough" to teach to her 11th grade students. In the above quote she is comparing *Carry On* to *Romeo and Juliet*, a Shakespeare play that is generally taught in 9th grade. In this comparison, she is disproving her own statement concerning rigor and proving that YAL, which has language that is accessible to and is widely enjoyed by adolescents, can be used as a complement to the canon.

The Rural Community

When I began thinking about the study I wanted to complete, I knew that it had to be within a rural school system; Redd County is defined by the National Center for

Educational Statistics as a rural county. Anti-LGBTQ sentiment is prevalent in rural counties for many reasons:

Adults in rural areas are more likely to have unfavorable opinions of gay men and lesbians and be more uncomfortable around them, and also more likely to oppose same-sex marriage, compared to residents of other parts of the US. In addition, evangelical Christianity, lower income, and lower adult education levels, all of which are more prevalent in rural areas, tend to be associated with more conservative social beliefs, including opposition to same-sex marriage.

Unsurprisingly, and perhaps as a result, rural areas are less likely to have LGBT institutional protections, as seen in the lower prevalence of inclusive sexual orientation and gender expression non-discrimination ordinances in rural areas than in suburban or urban areas. (Palmer, et al., 2012, p. 1)

Each of these characteristics is present in Redd County. Churches are practically ubiquitous, the average per capita income level is lower than both the state and national level, roughly 30% of the population does not have a high school diploma, and conservative beliefs dominate the county. In addition to this, the county commission sent a resolution to the state capital urging them not to follow the Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* guaranteeing the right of marriage to all. All of these characteristics lead to discriminatory practices.

As previously mentioned, schools are microcosms of society (Elia, 1993); in this rural community, anti-LGBTQ sentiment is prevalent. Just as the county has no non-discrimination laws protecting LGBTQ people, neither do the schools. Redd County's BOE policy leaves out sexual orientation in both its anti-bullying policy and its hiring

policy. It is extremely difficult in rural locales such as Redd County to list sexual orientation as part of the non-discrimination policy.

As a member of my local school district, which is similar to Redd County's, I served as chief negotiator for employee contracts with the BOE. Over the course of three years, we tried to get sexual orientation added to the non-discrimination list with hiring practices and anti-bullying language. Each year we were met with resistance and were told that when the state puts it in their policy, then the school district would follow suit. Until that happened it would be left out.

Having no language in BOE policy that protects LGBTQ students is very troublesome, as LGBTQ students, especially in rural areas, face more discrimination and harassment than their peers in other areas of the country. One study found that LGBTQ people with religious affiliations in childhood reported lower family acceptance when compared with those who reported no childhood religious affiliation (Ryan, et al., 2010). Furthermore, when compared to their urban and suburban peers, LGBTQ adolescents in rural communities are more likely to binge drink, LGBTQ males are more likely to attempt suicide, and LGBTQ females are more likely to face physical assaults at school (Poon & Saewyc, 2009).

Students who attend rural schools participated in a survey distributed by GLSEN in 2012, and the results were disheartening. They were more likely to report that their schools had discriminatory practices and limited their ability to even discuss LGBTQ issues. The statistics are truly startling; only 11% of rural LGBTQ students reported that their curriculum was inclusive about positive contributions and portraits of LGBTQ people, only 39% had the ability to find LGBTQ topics on school computers, only 44%

said their library included LGBTQ-related resources, only 27% reported having a GSA, and only 5% reported that their school had a comprehensive bullying/harassment policy that included both sexual orientation and gender expression (Palmer, et al., 2012).

It is heartbreaking to know that certain school districts are explicitly disregarding the physical and emotional health and well being of a distinct group of students. Rural communities are the places where both LGBTQ students and teachers need the most help. Redd County's English teachers' perception is that they are powerless to change things; however, Redd County's LGBTQ students are even more powerless.

I was truly hoping that I would hear at least one story of inclusion of LGBTQ issues and characters in one classroom; however, GLSEN's (Kosciw, et al., 2014) research on school climate proved true in this instance. There were no stories of inclusion. The purpose of this chapter is not to denigrate the educators who responded to my invitation to be part of the study, as they had no knowledge of the vast existing body of LGBTQ YAL. The purpose is to understand the stories of these educators. Only when we understand the stories and perceptions of educators, when we learn about reality as they see it, can we begin the necessary ally-work to make a positive change for all students.

Suggestions for Further Research

Taking the findings back to the teachers would enable them to see the contradictions they made in their interviews and discuss power structures and how to address them. As Freire (2005) explains:

People, as beings 'in a situation,' find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect

on their own ‘situationality’ to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. Human beings *are* because they *are in* a situation. And they *will be more* the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it. (p. 109).

Ideally, the teachers would include LGBTQ YAL in their classes, which is another study in itself. In addition to this, Redd County’s administrators could also be interviewed to note what their perceptions of reality are concerning LGBTQ topics in school.

More research needs to be done in other rural Southern schools, both within Redd County’s state as well as in other Southern states, to see if the perceptions of their teachers are similar. Comparative studies with schools that are including LGBTQ as part of their curriculum can also be studied; it would be interesting to see if the administration of these schools is seen as more supportive than the administrators in Redd County.

Conclusion

Our nation’s small, rural Southern schools are doing a disservice to both our nation’s LGBTQ students and heterosexual students. LGBTQ students in these schools need to see positive representations more than their LGBTQ peers in any other region, and heterosexual students need these stories to lift the veil of mystery from their LGBTQ peers and disrupt the stereotypes. GLSEN’s school climate report tells us:

Students attending schools in the South were less likely than students in all other regions to have access to each of the LGBT-related resources and supports: a GSA, an inclusive curriculum, Internet access to LGBT-related information, supportive school staff, a supportive administration, and a comprehensive bullying/harassment policy. (Kosciw, et al., 2014, p. 101).

Having one educator can make a positive difference for LGBTQ students, sometimes even making the difference between life and death. When teachers support their LGBTQ students, these students indicate a greater sense of belonging (Murdoch & Bolch, 2005).

One way to support these students is to introduce LGBTQ YAL into the English curriculum. Literature is only one facet of a secondary English class; however, “it is at the heart of everything English language arts teachers do in the classroom”(Stallworth, et al, 2006, p. 478). As Norton and Vare (2004) remind us, “well-written books may subvert the culture of silence” (p. 69). The only silence that should surround LGBTQ students is GLSEN’s National Day of Silence; silence of LGBTQ topics in the curriculum is no longer sensible. No one is asking any teacher to completely stop teaching traditionally classic texts. People who are advocates for multicultural texts merely want teachers to realize that the world consists of more than “old white men,” that the texts students read should be a reflection of the diversity and uniqueness of our country’s population.

Using LGBTQ YAL in the classroom is not only beneficial for LGBTQ students; it is just as important for their heterosexual peers in combating homophobia and hateful stereotypes. When LGBTQ issues are included in school curriculum, non-heterosexual identities are destigmatized, gender role stereotypes are deconstructed, and students are no longer limited by their preconceived notions and stereotypes (MacGillivray, 2000). I believe Redd County’s English teachers do want to expand the experiences of their geographically isolated students and expose them to cultures that are unlike their own, using texts as windows. If they did not believe this, they would not spend time teaching units focusing on race. Now they just need to focus on how texts can be mirrors for their

LGBTQ students, and how these same texts can also be windows for their students who do not identify as such.

In her interview, Sally told me that some teachers ask themselves “do I want to die on this hill?” The answer to this question is unequivocally yes. Education cannot continue to marginalize and render invisible its LGBTQ students. Dr. Brene Brown (2015) says, “We can choose courage or we can choose comfort, but we can’t have both” (p. 4). Integrating LGBTQ texts in rural Southern schools will not be an easy or comfortable task, but it is imperative that it is done. Sally tells us, “I don’t know if you’ll ever get people to that point, but that doesn’t mean you stop trying.” It is possible to uphold the rights of LGBTQ while upholding the rights of heterosexual students; it need not be an “either-or.” We need to enable educators with the tools to do what is right for all students and make the classroom inclusive and welcoming for all forms of diversity, even those you cannot see.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Teachers' Definitions of the Term "Multicultural"

How do secondary English educators in a small rural school define the term "multicultural"?

1. Cindy
 - a. Race (does slavery/abolition unit) – R
 - b. Culture - Cu
 - c. Different parts of the world - W
 - d. Country of origin - W

2. Sally
 - a. Any culture but ours - Cu
 - b. A "little girl from Africa" was first thing that popped in her mind - R
 - c. Could be foreign or American - W

3. Louise
 - a. Not white - R
 - b. Not white boys - R
 - c. Anything to do with slavery - R
 - d. Anything that's not "little white farmland" - Cu

4. Loretta
 - a. Ethnicity - R
 - b. Culture - Cu
 - c. Civil Rights - R

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

You are invited to participate in a research study of secondary English teachers' thoughts on using multicultural young adult literature (YAL), including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) YAL, in the secondary English classroom. I am conducting this research for my dissertation at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Research will consist of a 30-45 minutes interview, at the location of your choice, with follow up as needed. Pseudonyms will appear in the interview transcripts and all identifying information will be removed, such as references to specific individuals, places, cities, and so on. You will be given an opportunity to review the final transcript of your interview(s) before they are used as a data source. If you are interested in being a part of this research study, or if you want to find out more about the study, please contact me at sreece4@vols.utk.edu or 423-957-1441. Please respond using your personal email account or phone (text or call), in order to protect your privacy.

Appendix C: Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Perceptions of English Teachers about Multicultural Young Adult Literature in the Secondary Classroom

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study of secondary English teachers' thoughts on using multicultural young adult literature (YAL), including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) YAL, in the secondary English classroom. I am conducting this research for my dissertation at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

If you decide to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in at least one 30-45 minute informal, audio-recorded interview, about your opinions, thoughts, and experiences concerning the use of multicultural YAL in the secondary classroom. After the interview, I will transcribe the recording and share the transcript with you; you can let me know if I have represented accurately what you have to say. I may ask to meet with you again if I have follow up questions.

RISKS

Risks for participating in this study should not exceed those encountered in everyday life. One possible risk is loss of confidentiality, but measures are being taken to prevent this (see confidentiality statement below) with respect to the study data. I am also working to protect your privacy by asking that you use non-school communication methods to contact me if you are willing to be interviewed, and by holding the interviews off campus, unless you wish to do otherwise. I will not share the names of those who choose to participate and those who do not with anyone in the school district.

BENEFITS

While there are no direct benefits to you associated with participation in this study, benefits to education and educational research may include contributions to the body of knowledge surrounding using multicultural YAL literature in the secondary English classroom, teaching methods, secondary literature instruction, and the preparation of English teachers.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information in the study records will be kept confidential, using pseudonyms instead of real names. Data will be stored securely on a password-protected computer and made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link participants to the study. Audio recordings will be deleted once we agree that the transcripts are accurate records of our conversations. Signed consent forms and any other written records will be stored in a secure location at the University of Tennessee until three years following the conclusion of the study.

_____ Participant's initials

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Stacey Reece, at sreece4@vols.utk.edu or 423-957-1441. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Susan Groenke, at sgroenke@utk.edu or 865-974-4242. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the UT Office of Research IRB Compliance Officer at (865) 974-7697.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed, whichever you prefer.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to record the interview so the study can be as accurate as possible. You may request that the recorder be turned off at any point of the interview.

Questions that the participants will be asked include the following. The interview will be semi-structured, with the interviewer following the lead of the teacher so that questions may not be asked in this order, and may not need to be asked if teachers share the information without the question's being posed.

1. What led you to become an English teacher (why English over other subjects)?
2. Talk about what you think the role of literature is in the secondary classroom.
3. What is your understanding of Young Adult Literature (YAL)? Do you read it? Do you use it? Why or why not?
4. What comes to your mind when I say “multicultural literature”?
5. Tell me about a time you used multicultural literature in your classroom.
6. Imagine you have a magic wand and can teach anything you want without repercussions. What would you choose and why?
7. How familiar are you with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) young adult literature?
8. How would you feel if the district mandated the teaching of LGBTQ young adult novels?
9. Do your students engage in self-selected reading? If so, what do they read?
10. (Share list of LGBTQ lit with teacher) Are you familiar with any of these books? Have you read them? What do you think?
11. Is there anything else you want to tell me that I didn't ask?

Appendix E: RCHS 2014 Bullying Survey

What's Happening?

1. *I get bullied at school by being pushed, kicked or hit:*
 - a. Never 85%
 - b. Once in a while (twice a semester) 11%
 - c. A lot (once a week) 1%
 - d. Every day 3%

2. *I get bullied at school by name-calling, put-downs, teasing, or being left out.*
 - a. Never 61%
 - b. Once in a while (twice a semester) 25%
 - c. A lot (once a week) 7%
 - d. Every day 7%

3. *I bully others at school.*
 - a. Never 81%
 - b. Once in a while (twice a semester) 14%
 - c. A lot (once a week) 2%
 - d. Every day 3%

4. *I think that most of the bullying that happens at our school happens:*
 - a. In classrooms 12%
 - b. In hallways 31%
 - c. On the school grounds 20%
 - d. In the bathrooms 12%
 - e. In the cafeteria 11%
 - f. On the school bus 13%
 - Internet 1%

5. *I get bullied on my way to and from school.*
 - a. Never 89%
 - b. Once in a while (twice a semester) 6%
 - c. A lot (once a week) 2%
 - d. Every day 3%

6. *When I am in school, I worry about being bullied.*
 - a. Never 72%
 - b. Once in a while (twice a semester) 13%
 - c. A lot (once a week) 6%
 - d. Every day 9%

7. *If someone bullies me, I usually*
- Fight back 22%
 - Tell the person bullying me to stop 11%
 - Don't do anything 13%
 - Tell my parents 6%
 - Get revenge 10%
 - Tell another student 6%
 - Tell an adult at school 4%
 - I don't get bullied 28%
8. *If I see someone getting bullied, I usually*
- Help the victim 49%
 - Tell an adult at school 13%
 - Tell my parents 4%
 - Join in the bullying 2%
 - Tell another student 8%
 - Don't do anything 24%
9. *To help me feel safe at our school, I think adults should*
- Make rules about bullying 15%
 - Enforce rules about bullying 37%
 - Teach more lessons about how to get along better 14%
 - Have better supervision of: 34%
 - School bus 14%
 - School grounds 19%
 - Cafeteria 13%
 - Bathrooms 18%
 - Hallways 22%
 - Classrooms 13%
- Feel safe enough 1%
10. *I think bullying happens*
- Never 6%
 - Once in a while (twice a semester) 14%
 - A lot (once a week) 20%
 - Every day 60%

Appendix F: Revised GLSEN School Climate Survey

Section A

This first set of questions is about homophobic remarks you may have heard at your school. Please circle the answer that best describes your experience at your school.

1. How often do you hear the expression “That’s so gay,” or “You’re so gay” in school?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

2. How often have you heard other homophobic remarks used in school (such as “faggot,” “dyke,” “queer,” etc.)?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

3. How often do you hear these homophobic remarks from other students?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

4. Would you say that homophobic remarks are made by:
 Most students Some students A few students

5. How often do you hear these homophobic remarks from teachers or school staff?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

6. How often do you hear homophobic remarks in:

a) Classes	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
b) Hallways	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
c) Bathrooms	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
d) Locker Rooms	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
e) Buses	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
f) Athletic Field/Gym	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
g) School Grounds/Yard	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
h) Cafeteria	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never

7. When you hear homophobic remarks, how often has a teacher or other school staff person been present?

Always Most of the Time Some of the Time Never

8. When homophobic remarks are made and a teacher or other school staff person is present, how often does the teacher or staff person intervene?

Always Most of the Time Some of the Time Never

9. When you hear homophobic remarks, how often does another student intervene?

Always Most of the Time Some of the Time Never

Section B

This set of questions is about harassment or fights that you may have encountered at your school. For each question, please circle or check the answer that best describes your experience at your school.

1. In the past month, how many times have you skipped a class because you felt uncomfortable or unsafe in that class?

0 times 1 time 2 or 3 times 4 or 5 times 6 or more times

2. In the past month, how many days did you not go to school because you felt unsafe at school or on your way to school?

0 times 1 day 2 or 3 days 4 or 5 days 6 or more days

3. Do you feel unsafe at your school because of... (check all that apply)

your sexual orientation your race or ethnicity your gender
 how you express your gender (how traditionally “masculine” or “feminine” you are in your appearance or in how you act) your religion
 because of a disability or because people think you have a disability

4. In the past year, how often have you been verbally harassed (name calling, threats, etc.) at your school because of...

- a) your sexual orientation?

Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

- b) your gender?

Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

- c) how you express your gender?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never
- d) your race or ethnicity?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never
- e) your religion?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never
- f) because of a disability or because people think you have a disability?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

5. In the past year, how often have you been physically harassed (shoved, pushed, etc.) at your school because of...

- a) your sexual orientation?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never
- b) your gender?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never
- c) how you express your gender?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never
- d) your race or ethnicity?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never
- e) your religion?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never
- f) because of a disability or because people think you have a disability?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

6. In the past year, how often have you been physically assaulted (punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) at your school because of...

- a. your sexual orientation?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never
- b. your gender?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never
- c. how you express your gender?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never
- d. your race or ethnicity?
 Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

6. Circle the lowest grade that your school has:

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

7. Circle the highest grade that your school has:

6 7 8 9 10 11 12

8. Are there books or other resources in your school library that contain information about LGBT people, history or events?

Yes No Don't Know

9. Are you able to use school computers to access websites about LGBT people, history or events?

Yes No Don't Know No Internet Access

10. Does your school have a Gay/Straight Alliance or another type of club that addresses LGBT student issues?

Yes No

11. Is there any individual teacher or other school staff person who is supportive of LGBT students at your school?

Yes No Don't Know

12. Is there any teacher or other school staff person at your school who is open about being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender?

Yes No Don't Know

13. How many LGBT students are there in your school?

None One 2-5 6-10 More than 10

Section D

This last section is about some of your personal characteristics.

1. Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their sexuality or sexual orientation. Please check all those terms that apply to you.

Gay Lesbian Bisexual Straight/ Heterosexual Questioning

If none of these terms apply to you, please tell us how you describe your sexuality or

sexual orientation: _____

2. Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their gender. Please check all those terms that apply to you.

Male Female Transgender Transgender Female-to-Male Transgender Male-to-Female

If none of these terms apply to you, please tell us how you describe your gender:

3. What is your race or ethnicity? Please check all those terms that apply to you.

White or European-American African American or Black Hispanic or Latino/Latina Asian or Pacific Islander Native American Other (please tell us what is your race/ethnicity) _____

4. How old are you? _____

5. What grade are you in? _____

Thank you for completing the survey!

Vita

Stacey Rochelle Reece was born in the Philippine Islands in 1970 to Tom and Belinda Reece. She received her public education in the Johnson County, Tennessee, School District, graduating from Johnson County High School in 1988. Stacey attended Milligan College in Milligan College, Tennessee, and earned a Bachelor's Degree in 1993 with a major in English. That same year, she was hired by the Johnson County School District to teach 7th and 8th grade ELA at Johnson County Middle School. In 2001, Stacey moved to Johnson County High School, where she taught primarily 12th grade English with a few classes of 9th and 11th grade mixed in. She also returned back to school this year at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee, and earned a Master's Degree in English in 2003. Stacey left the Johnson County School District in 2013 to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy in Education at The University of Tennessee. Upon completion of this dissertation, she will have met all the requirements necessary for the degree.