

**Producing (In(Visible)) Girls: The Politics of Production in
Young Adult Fiction with Adolescent Lesbian Characters**

Holly Wagg

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Media Studies) at Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2004

©Holly Wagg, 2004



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 0-612-94618-5

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 0-612-94618-5

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing the Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

ABSTRACT

Producing (In(Visible)) Girls: The Politics of Production in Young Adult Fiction with Adolescent Lesbian Characters

Holly Wagg, MA

While there has been an increase in the publication of homosexuality-themed young adult (YA) literature, novels that feature adolescent lesbian characters account for fewer than one-quarter of all published titles. The politics of production in YA literature with adolescent lesbian characters is a complex and multifaceted network of power relations. Originating with the author, or the hub, a production network linking author, editor/publishing house, reviewer and vendor/purchaser nodes, maintains gatekeeping functions that determine which lesbian images are constructed for consumption. While the author creates the lesbian characters in her book and decides the lesbian experiences therein conceived, these choices - whether or not conscious - have been impacted by both her personal ideologies and her perceptions of dominant values and norms, including those inherent within the network itself, which govern and inform notions of acceptability. Based upon interviews with seven authors regarding their novels, publication dates spanning from 1978 to 2003, a socioeconomic network model is deployed to understand how the politics of production makes the adolescent lesbian an invisible/visible girl in YA literature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without my partner, Julia, this thesis would not have been possible. An editor extraordinaire, mental massager and a new young adult fiction lover, I could scribble pages of thanks and write trillions of love notes, none of which would ever be able to express my gratitude for your love and support while working towards this degree. To, with and for, you've been there from the beginning to the end. Thank you.

You kept me in grad school, created employment opportunities for me to learn more than the classroom could have ever provided and became a friend along the way. To my thesis supervisor, Dr Yasmin Jiwani, thank you for your support.

For my mother and grandmother, my biggest fans since childhood. While I may no longer want to be the first female Prime Minister of Canada nor a public relations specialist, and I still really don't know what I want to be when I grow up, this takes me one step closer to whatever that may be. From daily phone conversations to weekly emails, thank you both for your assistance in all my educational endeavors.

Gus, the pooch, thank you for being a distraction and showing me the amount of sleep that is actually required to write well. Any inconsistencies in the tone and style of this thesis can be chalked up to spending more PJ clad time on my front lawn between the hours of 1am and 6am than ever previously imaginable.

Thank you to each incredible author interviewed in this project for the generous donation of your time, your invaluable insights and the candidness with which you talked about your respective novels and professional lives. Without you, there would be no literature with adolescent lesbian characters. Thank you for making this thesis possible, but more importantly, for being the writers you are and writing the novels you do.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	
SETTING THE STAGE.....	1
Defining the Scope.....	2
((In)Visible) Lesbians: The Politics of Representation	4
((In)Visible) Lesbians: The Role of the Production Network	5
Chapter Breakdown	6
CHAPTER 1	
RESEARCH IN PROCESS.....	9
Methodology	9
What is this Novel About? Situating Authors and Their Texts	14
Tea Benduhn, <i>Gravel Queen</i> (2003).....	14
Nancy Garden, <i>Annie On My Mind</i> (1982).....	16
M.E. Kerr, <i>Deliver Us From Evie</i> (1994)	17
Julie Anne Peters, <i>Keeping You A Secret</i> (2003).....	19
Sandra Scoppettone, <i>Happy Endings Are All Alike</i> (1978).....	20
Julia Watts, <i>Finding H.F.</i> (2001).....	22
Jacqueline Woodson, <i>The House You Pass on the Way</i> (1997).....	23
CHAPTER 2	
INTERROGATING THE FIRST NODE: INDIVIDUALS AS AUTHORS.....	24
The Author: Composing the Lesbian-Themed YA Novel.....	24
Authorial Politics: Where Ideology Collides with Construction	33
Ideology and the Attribute: Politicizing Strength	36
Constructing Lesbians: To Stereotype, or, Not To Stereotype	38
Adding Lesbianism to the Mix: The Multidimensional Contemporary Novel.....	43
Mainstreaming Lesbians	47
Authors Produce Visible Lesbians.....	49
CHAPTER 3	
AUTHORS AND EDITORS: MANUSCRIPTS IN MOTION.....	50
The Editor as Catalyst: Getting a Book to Press.....	51
Doing <i>it</i> , or, Situating S-E-X	54
Changing Hands: Authorial Autonomy and Ownership.....	62

Agenda Collision: Small, Independent Presses Versus Large, Mainstream Publishing Houses	65
Packaging the Novel	70
Presumption and Assumption: Intervening Ideologies and Gatekeeping	74
CHAPTER 4	
MARKETS . MARKETING . MARKET SHARE: TAKING LESBIAN-THEMED YA LITERATURE PUBLIC	76
The Young Adult Market: Past and Present	76
Lesbian-Themed YA Literature and the Market.....	84
Making Her Marketable: Selling Adolescent Lesbians in YA Literature.....	86
Shifting Markets: YA Goes Trade	90
Mediating Access Through Reviews: When Sexism Intersects With Homophobia.....	94
Structural Barrier: Mediating Access In Schools.....	103
Gatekeeping: The Symbolic Annihilator	106
CONCLUSION	
WRAPPING IT UP	109
InVisible . Visibility.....	111
Directions for Future Research	113
REFERENCES.....	116
APPENDICES.....	121
Appendix A.....	121
Appendix B	123
Appendix C	125
Appendix D.....	126
Appendix E	127
Appendix F.....	129
Appendix G.....	130
Appendix H.....	132
Appendix I	133
Appendix J	135

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Publishing Histories at a Glance

Table 3.1 Treatment of Lesbian Content on the Jacket Copy

Table 4.1 The Number of Homosexuality-Themed Books Published by Decade with Gay
Male and Female Lesbian Characters and Teen or Adult Female Lesbian
Characters

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Illustration 3.1 Cover Image, *Happy Endings Are All Alike* by Sandra Scoppettone (1978)
- Illustration 3.2 Cover Image, *Annie On My Mind* by Nancy Garden (1982)
- Illustration 3.3 Cover Image, *Deliver Us From Evie* by M.E. Kerr (1994)
- Illustration 3.4 Cover Image, *The House You Pass on the Way* by Jacqueline Woodson (1997)
- Illustration 3.5 Cover Image, *Finding H.F.* by Julia Watts (2003)
- Illustration 3.6 Cover Image, *Gravel Queen* by Tea Bendhun (2003)
- Illustration 3.7 Cover Image, *Keeping You A Secret* by Julie Anne Peters (2003)

INTRODUCTION SETTING THE STAGE

I started this project expecting to find blatant, homophobic discrimination – the infamous smoking gun. I thought that authors were writing an abundance of edgy young adult literature featuring lesbian protagonists and that the obstacle for these writers was in actually finding publishers interested in the material. Their quest, in my mind, could be likened to finding the proverbial needle in a haystack. If authors were successful in locating an agent or editor willing to push their book through to publication, then this fiction would be subject to a battery of censorial forces predicated upon the alleged moral threat that these texts might present to a vulnerable adolescent audience. I also speculated that these discriminatory practices could possibly extend to reviewers and to the purchasing practices of schools, libraries and bookstores.

My smoking gun theory emerged from the excerpt of an interview with Lynn Hall, author of *Sticks and Stones* (1972). At that time, her editors had interfered and prescribed a tragic ending for her male homosexual characters:

I wanted Tom and Ward to love each other, to live happily ever after, and that was the way I ended it. But the publishers would not let me do this. In their words, this would be showing a homosexual relationship as a happy ending and this might be dangerous to young people teetering on the brink. One editor wanted me to kill Tom in a car accident! At least I held out for a friendship at the end, on which might or might not develop into something more, depending on the reader's imagination (quoted in Hanckel and Cunningham 1976, 534).

Even though thirty years had since passed since Hall's interview, I remained confident that publishers were still not eager to back homosexuality-themed literature, a conclusion I derived from numerous expeditions into bookstores and extensive inspections of library shelves where even the most astute gay radar could not hone in on these novels. My suspicions regarding homophobic gatekeeping were confirmed yet again by Brett

Hartinger, author of *Geography Club* (2003). In an interview with Sarah Warn (2003), Hartinger said of his experience, “This book was hard as hell to get published. It was rejected by 17 publishers. Editors told my agent again and again that there was no market for a book like this, and all my agent’s agent-friends told her she was wasting her time on a gay teen book. But she kept pushing, and finally we ended up at HarperCollins.”

Hartinger’s experiences provided me with the additional evidence that, even in 2003, publishers were reticent to print gay young adult (YA) fiction.

These two accounts fuelled my eagerness to plant a smoking gun in the production network as the symbolic annihilator¹ of lesbian protagonists in YA literature. I willed that gun to be there. I wanted to write that gun into this story. But it was not possible because that gun, and never mind a smoking gun, failed to surface in these authorial interviews. It turns out that the lack of visible lesbian characters in YA is not a direct result of blatant structural homophobia nor moral censorship; it is a product of the politics of production that plays out in a complex and multifaceted production network during the construction of adolescent lesbian characters. Grounded in authors’ experiences, this project interrogates the production network of lesbian YA literature and formulates a framework for understanding the politics of representation that makes the adolescent lesbian the invisible/visible girl.

Defining the Scope

As the fulcrum of this project, seven authors were interviewed, their novels spanning publication dates from 1978 to 2003. The following authors and corresponding YA works were selected:

¹ A term coined by Gerbner and Gross (1976) cited in Kielwasser and Wolf (1992) to “account for the most significant inequities in the spectrum of mediated representations of social groups” (355).

- Benduhn, Tea. 2003. *Gravel Queen*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Garden, Nancy. 1982. *Annie On My Mind*. New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux.
- Kerr, M.E. 1994. *Deliver Us From Evie*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Peters, Julie Anne. 2003. *Keeping You A Secret*. New York: Little Brown and Company.
- Scoppettone, Sandra. 1978. *Happy Endings Are All Alike*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Watts, Julia. 2001. *Finding H.F.*. Los Angeles: Alyson.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. 1997. *The House You Pass on the Way*. New York: Scholastic.

For the purposes of this project, YA fiction is defined as those novels marketed to an audience 12-18 years of age. Short-story collections, novellas, graphic novels and non-fiction have been excluded. Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L Donelson (2001) define YA literature as “anything that readers between the approximate ages of 12 and 18 choose to read” (3), for example, adult books authored by Stephen King that are popular with teens could be classified as fiction for young adults. However, Nielson and Donelson’s definition is problematic as it ignores a body of literature that is specifically published for teen readers with its own characteristics and conventions. According to Don Gallo (2003), the following markers identify YA fiction:

- the main characters are teenagers and the book averages 200 pages;
- point of view is usually first-person told in the voice of a teenager, rather than an adult looking back to their adolescence;
- narrator is most often the protagonist;
- commonly employs a contemporary setting;
- the language and vocabulary is typical of contemporary teenagers and the book contains characters and issues to which teens can relate; and,
- parents play a minor role in the majority of books.

Given the unique characteristics specific to YA literature marketed to an adolescent audience, any book that an adolescent may read or books with teen characters published for adult audiences do not qualify as YA and have not been considered in this study.

This study also focuses on books containing adolescent lesbian characters. As of 2003, fifty-two YA novels with lesbian characters have been published. These lesbians are either teens or mothers and, in only one instance, the lesbian character is an older sister of the straight protagonist. Of these novels, thirty-nine specifically contain adolescent lesbians 12-18 years of age, as protagonists, secondary or minor characters.

Titles containing 'lesbian' characters were identified using the following criteria:

- female character expresses a same-sex attraction or has a same-sex experience;
- female character identifies as a lesbian, homosexual, gay or queer; and,
- the presence of a female lesbian, homosexual, gay or queer event in the story.

'Lesbian' in this thesis is a term broadly employed to encapsulate the above-identified female same-sex experiences, regardless of whether the term 'lesbian' is used within a novel to identify characters, actions or events as such.

The YA novels examined in the study have been published in the English language, primarily by American authors, with a spattering of Canadian, Australian and British titles. No attempt was made to identify or include fictional YA in other languages.

((In)Visible) Lesbians: The Politics of Representation

Critiquing the array of available images and analyzing how these are read and interpreted by an audience tends to dominate discussions of lesbian representation and visibility. The process of constructing representations, particularly those of lesbians, does not often undergo scrutiny, yet, the production of images is crucial to issues of representation as it mediates which 'realities' media reflect. For the reader, the definition of a lesbian – who she is, what she does, what lesbian identity, experiences and community are – is constructed through the politics of representation that materializes in the production of these YA texts.

The politics of representation is a phrase employed to refer to the construction of adolescent lesbian characters during the production of YA literature. It highlights the competing interests and power struggles amongst key network players to define, establish and maintain a norm or value that has the potential to influence a consumer's belief and value systems. The politics of representation impacts how an image is conceived and molded, and, as Larry Gross (1991) states, "the manner of that representation will itself reflect the biases and interests of those elite who define the public agenda" (21). The credibility that representation and visibility lend is power. As adolescent lesbians do begin to achieve visibility, the competing political, social and economic interests of the nodes of the production network determine when and how they are represented in fiction.

((In)Visible) Lesbians: The Role of the Production Network

While Kirk Fuoss (1994) contends that the political in YA problem-realism novels with male homosexual characters operates on at least two levels - content and circulation/reception – this project develops an alternate network model that furthers Fuoss' preliminary work. Fuoss identifies a "complex network of power relations" (169) that includes authors, readers, editors, reviewers and library acquisition staff, however, his analysis of the power to produce gay characters is limited to the author, the child-adult ambiguity surrounding the adolescent audience and genre constraints. This negates the multiple and intersecting forces that mediate the production process in the network of YA fiction. Christine Jenkins (1993) also uses the network concept to describe the relationship between these players, but fails to delve into what this network is and how it operates.

The production network in YA literature consists of four major nodes, a node being the site of interconnection, each of which is further comprised of single or multiple players. Simultaneously, the authorial node also functions as a hub, as the author is the primary creator of the text. According to Jonkers, Donkers and Diederens (2001), socio-economic networks “are characterized by the production and exchange of value according to specific sets of rules and using specific mechanisms by actors that may have partly parallel, partly conflicting interests” (3). Each node of the production network – author, editor/publishing house, reviewer and vendor/purchaser – function as gatekeepers, whether the node’s power arises from perception, editing that impacts the lesbian content of a novel, the merchandising of a book, or the intentional execution of a censorial action. While each node is impacted by intentional choices made by the player(s) themselves during their respective production phase, these player(s) often temper their choices and actions due to the restrictions they *feel* other nodes may exert. This perception of a gatekeeping function is based more upon a player(s)’ construction of boundaries within external nodes, rather than an actual experience with, or knowledge of, limitations imposed by another node. In other words, each node modifies its own constructions of lesbian characters in adherence to perceptions of acceptability and, only then, is this tailored image susceptible to revision by another node. Incidentally, production nodes rarely directly interfere with the lesbian material produced by another node.

Chapter Breakdown

Tracing the steps taken to complete this study, chapter one outlines the methodology and method employed in conducting the authorial interviews. Moving on to the texts themselves, the second half of the chapter provides a synopsis of each novel,

addresses the reasons for including each text in this project and situates the selected works within the larger body of YA literature.

Employing the network model as a framework, chapter two examines how the author herself constructs lesbian characters within the pages of her novel. The author is posited as the hub of this network as she is the primary producer of a specific text. Delving into questions of authorial motivation, lesbian stereotypes and readership, this section addresses the writing process and how authors writing YA create adolescent lesbian characters.

In chapter three, the relationship between authors and editors is examined from an authorial perspective. Authors detail what happens to their manuscript once it is submitted to an editor at a specific publishing house and the impact that a press has on the original text. This chapter also examines, in a discussion of lesbian sex, how personal values, social morals and ideologies embedded in and maintained by network players intervene in the production of YA literature. As the manuscript becomes a novel, which coincides with diminished or lost authorial creative control, the end of chapter three illuminates how lesbians become invisible in YA fiction.

Moving into chapter four, a treatment of marketing and the market share of lesbian-themed YA literature is contextualized within the broader scope and history of YA. While a perceived limited market is hindering publishing houses' acquisition of YA fiction with adolescent lesbian characters, which is compounded by reluctance to handle "controversial" material that does not demonstrate outstanding literary material, the economic marketplace argument employed by publishing houses to limit their output of gay-themed novels is not supported by sales figures and a market shift in the early 2000s.

Further scrutinizing the ability of reviewers and school libraries to control access to these YA novels, the interconnected forces of structural sexism and homophobia have been experienced by some of these authors with respect to these nodes.

Beginning with the author's perspective and situating her work within the production network, this study explores the complex and multifaceted politics of producing lesbian characters in YA literature. While the adolescent lesbian may be visible on the pages of the YA novel, her existence is not always evident on book covers or in marketing strategies; at times, her role is minimized and, at others, her presence is erased.

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH IN PROCESS

Methodology

The design of this research project takes into consideration Sandra Harding's (1987) breakdown of the research process into three distinct, yet interrelated, components: method, methodology and epistemology. In employing a method, the techniques by which I gather evidence, I use methodology as the theoretical and analytical framework informing my research process while also framing my work epistemologically to discuss issues surrounding the production of adolescent lesbian characters in YA literature.

In undertaking this project my central concern is one of epistemology, specifically, working from a social construction framework to interrogate how lesbian images and representations are constructed on the pages of contemporary realistic YA fiction. Examining the choices made in character development and decisions about which realities to portray, this analysis of how the politics of representation play out in literary production is invaluable to developing an understanding of how lesbian identity(ies) are constituted for the reading audience. Grounded in the writing and publication experiences of authors, this project investigates how lesbian visibility and invisibility manifests on the printed page.

Not distinct from epistemology, my methodology is informed by my position to the research subject. As the researcher informs all research practices via their subjective position in the world and their subsequent interpretation of data and events through this personal experiential lens, it is impossible to engage in this project without being self-reflexive and identifying where I stand in relation to it. I chose this topic and approach

because of the invisible visibility of lesbian youth. This research stems from my acknowledgement, as a youth advocate, queer and feminist, of the disparity of work on girls, lesbians, fiction and representation, as distinct categories or in any combination. This project was also initially driven by my hypothesis that the lack of lesbians, and disparity of lesbians in comparison to their gay male counterparts, in YA fiction, was due to homophobic structures in the publishing industry; that is, an institutionalized homophobia that targeted both the authors themselves for their sexual orientations as well as their production of homosexuality-themed literature.

Furthermore, the methodology underpinning this project is feminist, identified as such through the following three tenets: firstly, I identify as feminist; secondly, my problematic is generated from the perspective of lesbian adolescent's experiences which have been ignored thus far in theory and praxis; and thirdly, I argue for the ubiquitous significance of gender and gender asymmetry in previous research (Harding 1987; Reinharz 1992). However, my methodology is not solely feminist and also includes a queer² sensibility, derived from lesbian feminist position(s). The intersection of my feminist and queer identities recognizes the gendered position of women in the social world as well as the gendered position of lesbians within queer communities. As Annamarie Jagose (1996) articulates, "Gay men and lesbians have their homosexuality - that is, their same-sex object choice - in common. But the gendering of that sexuality has produced substantial cultural differences between them" (44). As such, I developed and continued to investigate the research problematic from an identified disparity of lesbian

² The term queer is employed here as an umbrella term to refer to gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, intersexed, transgendered, emerging and questioning individuals while also acknowledging queer in a queer theory vein of the fluidity and non-static nature of identity.

characters in YA fiction in comparison to YA fiction with gay male characters as well as within the context of a body of predominately heterosexual YA fiction.

The method is based, framed by the above outlined methodology and epistemology, upon in-depth interviews conducted with authors of YA fiction containing adolescent lesbian characters. The authors included in this study were selected based upon the following criteria derived from positioning the author as a node within a larger production network:

- their texts and their experience in writing and working in YA literature;
- the characters they created in their texts as indexical to presences and absences in this body of YA fiction;
- possibility of their participation in this project;
- reviews of these texts indicated popularity and hence availability; and,
- these texts represent a sample of the major publishers involved in putting out YA fiction with lesbian characters.

Eleven authors were initially chosen to be interviewed from a total of thirty-nine works of YA fiction with adolescent lesbian characters, see appendix A for this listing. The following authors and corresponding works were selected:³

- Benduhn, Tea. 2003. *Gravel Queen*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Brett, Catherine. 1989. *S.P. Likes A.D.* Toronto: The Women's Press.
- Garden, Nancy. 1982. *Annie On My Mind*. New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux.
- Guy, Rosa. 1976. *Ruby*. New York: Viking.
- Kerr, M.E. 1994. *Deliver Us From Evie*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Peters, Julie Anne. 2003. *Keeping You a Secret*. New York: Little Brown and Company.
- Scoppettone, Sandra. 1978. *Happy Endings Are All Alike*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Trope, Zoe. 2003. *Please Don't Kill the Freshman: A Memoir*. New York: HarperTempest.
- Watts, Julia. 2001. *Finding H.F.*. Los Angeles: Alyson.

³ With the exception of Nancy Garden and Jacqueline Woodson, the authors interviewed have only published one YA work with a lesbian character as of 2003; Nancy Garden has published four titles with adolescent lesbian characters, one with lesbian parents and Jacqueline Woodson has published one title with adolescent lesbian characters and three titles with adult lesbians. M.E. Kerr has published three YA novels with gay male characters and Sandra Scoppettone one novel respectively.

- Woodson, Jacqueline. 1997. *The House You Pass on the Way*. New York: Scholastic.
- Yamanaka, Lois-Ann. 1999. *Name Me Nobody*. New York: Hyperion.

Contact information for each author was found via the internet on the author's personal website or the author's publisher was contacted and asked to forward the interview request. Benduhn, Garden, Kerr, Peters, Scoppettone, Trope and Woodson were contacted directly and after an initial introductory email all authors agreed to participate in the project. Brett, Guy, Watts and Yamanaka were contacted via their publishers. Watts responded positively to the initial interview request and agreed to participate in the project. Guy's publisher confirmed receipt of email and forwarded the request on to Guy, however, Guy never made contact. After two emails were sent to Brett's publisher, Althea Prince of Women's Press supplied the contact information of another staff member responsible for forwarding the request to Brett; Brett never contacted the researcher. Yamanaka's publisher did not confirm receipt of the interview request nor did the author contact the researcher. In total, eight interviews were conducted during March and April of 2004.

Authors were given the choice of a telephone or an email interview. Telephone interviews were approximately one hour in length and were conducted with seven authors. Only one author, Nancy Garden, chose an email interview. Garden was sent a first set of questions which were returned and followed-up by a second set of questions to clarify and expand on points made in her initial response.

Broken conceptually into two phases, the interviews consisted of semi-structured questions that varied slightly by author. The first phase of the interview process involved asking the authors why they wrote the book in question the way they did. Here, questions

were included that directly engaged the textual material and also provided a general sense of the author's relationship to her work. These questions were intended to elicit responses that provided grounding for the characters and story, a contextualized authorial vantage point and the author's ideological motivations and intentions for her work. In the second phase of the interviews, questions were posed with respect to the publication process, or rather, explored what happened once the manuscript left an author's desk. These questions focused on the author's experiences with the publication process, specifically their thoughts on the gatekeeping function of publishers, editors, reviewers and purchasers. The overall intent of the interviews was to discern how the politics of representation infiltrate the production processes from an authorial point of view. Reviewed and approved by Concordia's departmental research ethics committee, the interview questions asked of each author are contained in appendices B through H.

After telephone interviews were transcribed, the transcript was sent to each respective author for review. This stage of the research process further engaged authors with the opportunity to edit for clarity of ideas, post-interview thoughts, context and general sentence structure. Once the author returned the transcript or the author indicated she was not interested in giving further input, these final documents were used in the coding process.

Primarily a qualitative analysis, the first reading of the interview transcripts identified key ideas and central concepts put forth by the authors to establish a coding framework; in the second reading, relevant quotes from the authors were culled and coded according to the determined framework. A third reading by the researcher ensured veracity of context with respect to the ideas being put forth, investigated whether data

was coded correctly and verified that all pertinent data had been identified in a transcript. While most of the data was coded according to the framework, there were salient points made by authors that did not fit into the larger coding scheme: some of the experiences of writing a specific text were unique to a specific author. Experiences and points that were central in an authorial interview were also coded for inclusion in the analysis. The data was analyzed from which this synthesis on the production of lesbian-themed YA literature is based.

What is this Novel About? Situating Authors and Their Texts

Reviewing each text included in this project, this section identifies why particular texts and authors were selected according to the criteria identified earlier in this chapter and links these fictional works to YA publishing industry trends since the advent of homosexuality-themed literature in 1969. Since interviews with three of the eleven authors were unattainable and the fourth revealed that the text was a non-fiction title, their respective novels have subsequently been removed from this study. Appendix I briefly addresses the importance of each of these texts to lesbian-themed YA literature.

Tea Benduhn, *Gravel Queen* (2003)

As the only first time author included in this study, Tea Benduhn is also the only YA author to date to tackle the issue of an interracial lesbian romance. Additionally, Benduhn's work is indexical to the beginning of a trend in the early 2000s where gay characters are beyond coming out, beyond the traumatic threats of familial disowning or rejection by their peer group when a queer identity is revealed. Being gay just is. Some of these novels, like David Leviathan's *Boy Meets Boy* (2003), are almost works of fantastical realism with their "queer-friendly universe [set] in a time period that is never specified" (Wildman 2003, np).

Benduhn's *Gravel Queen* unfolds through the voice of Aurin and her imaginary cinematic screen pans. During this summer vacation, days are spent in the park and in ballroom dance classes with her two best friends, Kenney, the drama queen, and Fred, *the* queen. Enter the queen of gravel, Neila, aptly named due to her throaty voice, through a literal collision: her frisbee slams into Aurin's head.

Aurin and Neila first meet in the park and then again in dance class. Neila's grace in ultimate frisbee carries over to ballroom lessons where she's the only one adventurous enough to risk partnering with Aurin's uncoordinated sense of rhythm. The two begin hanging-out and a first kiss is shared over ice cream.

While a relationship between Aurin and Neila buds, Aurin's relationships with her best friends shift. Aurin's friendship with Kenney wanes due to her growing dislike of Kenney's bossy and controlling nature, and she becomes closer with Fred as they talk and share secrets never divulged during their three years of camaraderie. All the while, tensions are evident in Aurin's household with the constant fighting of her parents, Pru and Henry.

Race is absent in much of the YA fiction with lesbian characters and via this absence YA fiction perpetuates the stereotype that most gay people are white (Jenkins 1988). In the rare instances when race does factor into the identities of characters, these characters are typically black. It was not until 1997 with the publication of Nina Revoyr's *The Necessary Hunger* that the first character of colour, Japanese-American, other than African-American appeared. With four YA titles including black lesbian characters, Asians have slowly materialized in three titles published to date, however,

lesbians outside of these racial categories and those who belong to one or more visible minority groups are nowhere to be seen.

Nancy Garden, *Annie On My Mind* (1982)

When Liza Winthrop first stumbles across Annie Kenyon singing in the window at the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, she's immediately drawn to this girl who she imagines could be from colonial times. Liza, from a white, professional and upper-class area of New York City, and Annie, from a poor, immigrant part of the city, quickly become friends. The girls pass their time visiting their favourite city haunts as their relationship deepens over the background of Foster Academy's fundraising drive – the school Liza attends and of which she is also Student Council President. Annie and Liza's friendship soon becomes romantic and as they explore their feelings for one another, their identities and their sexuality.

Over the spring break, Liza is given the opportunity to cat sit for two Foster teachers. Dropping by the house every day, they make it their own and also discover that the two teachers, Ms. Widmer and Ms. Baxter, are lesbians. The day Widmer and Baxter are expected to return from vacation, Annie and Liza have 'behind the closed shades' sex. Since Liza missed a school fundraising committee meeting that same day, another teacher and student search for her, and when they arrive at the house they not only find the partially dressed Annie and Liza, but the single bed of the two teachers. Liza is reported for her 'indecent' and 'immoral' behaviour and has to go in front of the Foster Academy board of trustees who are reviewing her case for expulsion. While Liza isn't expelled, and the board finds the moral policing of the school's headmistress Mrs. Pointdexter repugnant, the two teachers are fired yet manage to keep their relationship intact.

Annie On My Mind is a core text of romantic YA fiction, a benchmark by which texts targeting gay and straight audiences is measured: reviewers often make the comparison, “this book is no *Annie On My Mind*” or “this book is the next *Annie On My Mind*.” Still in print and continually referenced, this quintessential novel represents a shift from the negative, unhappy, problem-plagued lives of young homosexuals in fiction to a frame that presents happy, loving and healthy relationships where being gay is depicted in a positive light (Cart 1997).

Although first published in 1982, in the early 1990s, Garden’s book was challenged and removed from schools by various school boards in the United States and garnered national attention with a first amendment lawsuit case in Kansas. In 1994, a group of students and parents filed a suit against the school board for pulling the novel off of its shelves and in 1995, a Federal District Court ruled that *Annie On My Mind* had been “unconstitutionally removed” from libraries in the school district and ordered it restored (Cart 1996; Garden in Gallo 2002).

With over forty books published for children, middle school and young adult readers, across a variety of genres, Garden is a well-known, well-respected and prolific YA author. Politically savvy and involved in the industry, Garden also writes short non-fiction and commentary pieces regarding the evolution and publication of gay fiction for teens and children.

M.E. Kerr, *Deliver Us From Evie* (1994)

Told from the perspective of Parr Burrman, Kerr’s text is representative of a shifting trend of homosexuality-themed YA books in the 1990s where queers were increasingly positioned as secondary characters and homosexuality was relegated to being an issue of minor relevance (Cart 1997; Jenkins 1998). While reasons for this shift

have been attributed to the mainstreaming of these novels for straight audiences where gay characters needed to more palatable (Cart 1996) or the depoliticization of gay stories for young audiences (Fuoss 1994), most of Kerr's novels for teens over the past thirty years have been told by a secondary narrator.

Set in rural farming Missouri, the story opens up with the farming Burrman family heading out to a Halloween party hosted by the rich Duffs. At this event Parr's sister Evie meets Patsy Duff. While Evie is depicted as a short-haired tomboy resembling a young Elvis Presley, Patsy is quite an elegant, well-bred and feminine young lady. Days later Patsy interviews Evie about being a farmwoman for her boarding school newspaper and no one can figure out what Patsy Duff would want with a girl like Evie; Parr has his suspicions about their relationship.

As Evie becomes increasingly secretive and spends more time with Patsy, Parr feels threatened. With his brother off at college studying to be a vet and with Evie's newfound aspirations to leave Duffton, Parr fears he will have to become a farmer and take over the family land.

One afternoon Parr and Cord, a farmhand set on making Evie his wife, post a cardboard sign on a statue in the centre of town reading, "Evie loves Patsy and vice versa." Within minutes the town is abuzz and rumours spread about this lesbian pair – which is more believable for Evie than Patsy because of her butch appearance. Already forbidden to see one another by Mr. Duff, Evie flees town and when Patsy graduates from high school months later, they meet up and run away to France.

Kerr's text is one of the few that presents a stereotypical butch lesbian and a butch/femme pairing. While Kerr published *Night Kites* in 1986, the first YA novel

linking homosexuality to AIDS, it was not until she wrote *Deliver Us From Evie* that this well-established children's and YA author decided to tackle lesbianism.

Julie Anne Peters, *Keeping You A Secret* (2003)

When Holland Jaeger first spies Cece Goddard in the school hallway, Cece is sporting an IMRU? t-shirt. Holland experiences an unfamiliar fluttering in her stomach, but it isn't until Holland sees the pink triangle that she realizes Cece is gay. Student council president, athlete and girlfriend of Seth, Holland has never thought about gays or lesbians attending her high school because they weren't there: she never saw one or knew any.

When Cece hands her an application wanting to start a lesgaybi club, which is later rejected by the students' council because it excludes straight students despite Holland's support of the club, Holland develops an awareness of homophobic incidents at school and sensitivity to discriminatory attitudes within her peer group. All the while, Holland is increasingly attracted to Cece, but isn't quite sure what these foreign feelings are. As a romance begins with Cece, Holland's relationship with Seth ends. When Holland's lesbianism is discovered by her mother, Holland is kicked out of her house and with the help of Cece and Cece's family, she finds a place to live for queer street youth and finishes high school.

Nominated for the 2003 Lambda Literary Award, the American Library Association's Best Books for Young Adults, and winner of 2004 Stonewall Honor Book amongst other recognitions, *Keeping You A Secret* is Julie Anne Peters' first YA novel to feature a lesbian character. A long time author of books for children and middle readers, Peters began publishing YA in 1998. Peters was first included in this study because of a Denver Post article (2003) in which Eric Hubler highlighted Little, Brown and Co.'s

marketing of her as a “gay lit” author. As well, Peter’s book is representative of a new shift in lesbian-themed YA literature where books are increasingly multi-dimensional and address multiple issues, including those outside of and unrelated to sexual orientation, in a text with lesbian characters. This text is also the only book published to date that has the protagonist question her sexual orientation while inside a heterosexual relationship.

Sandra Scoppettone, *Happy Endings Are All Alike* (1978)

The third YA book ever published with lesbian characters, *Happy Endings Are All Alike*, is the earliest published work of all texts included in this study. Harkening back to a time where being homosexual “was nothing but a choice” (Cart 1997) or “youthful experimentation” (Jenkins 1988), being gay was also represented in these early problem-oriented works as fated to be doomed, to live a miserable life or face an early death (Cart 1996, 1997; Hanckel and Cunningham 1976; Jenkins 1993). Scoppettone’s book picks up on some of these themes and can be read in varying and often contradictory ways.

Bianca Chambers had been trying to get her two best girl friends, Jaret Tyler and Peggy Danziger, to meet for the longest time. When Jaret and Tyler finally do meet, they recognize that the other is not the snob previously imagined, and quickly, they become close friends. One morning Jaret is comforting the tearful Peggy over the death of her mother, when Peggy’s sister storms into the bedroom and accuses them of having a ‘deviant’ and ‘perverted’ relationship. While Jaret has recognized her sexual feelings for girls for a while, she leaves because of this accusation; Peggy, who is on the cusp of acknowledging her love for Jaret, tells her sister that they are romantically involved and that it is none of her business. Shortly thereafter, Jaret and Peggy acknowledge their mutual attraction and become a couple.

Supported by Jaret's mother and Bianca, Jaret and Peggy are also conscious that they would not be accepted in their small town and decide to keep their relationship a secret. One afternoon they are spied by a local boy, Mid, who then decides to 'give it' to Jaret because she thinks she is too good for him. Mid waits until he can get Jaret alone – which happens to be after a fight with Peggy over a date she accepted with a boy – and he violently attacks and rapes her. Mid threatens to tell her parents and the newspapers about her lesbianism if she snitches on him.

Jaret is found by her family and while recovering in the hospital she is interviewed by a Sergeant who is more interested in blaming Jaret for the rape and later tries to dissuade the family from pressing charges because it will ruin her reputation. Jaret decides to press charges against Mid, but under the publicity and town gossip, her relationship with Peggy dissolves as Peggy did not want to be outed. Just before they leave for college at the end of summer, Jaret and Peggy talk again, and resume their relationship. A court date looms in the future.

As an early work of 'problem' fiction, the issues encountered here are rape and, to a lesser extent, lesbianism. Like many novels published in the late 1970s and early 1980s, lesbianism is perceived to be unnatural, perverted and deviant by many of the secondary characters. However, unlike many of the novels published in this time period, Jaret is comfortable with herself, happy in her relationship and, in the end, Peggy is, too. While the text could possibly be read as linking the rape to Jaret's lesbianism, it can also be understood as a rather progressive treatment of rape where Jaret and her family counter the assertion that it was Jaret's fault and Jaret should be ashamed.

Julia Watts, *Finding H.F.* (2001)

Having published five lesbian novels for adults, *Finding H.F.* is Watts' first foray into YA fiction. Winner of the 2001 Lambda Literary Award, this is the only original lesbian text published by Alyson and the only text published by a gay and lesbian press to be included in this study.

Following Heavenly Francis (H.F.) and her best friend Bo - two closeted queers - as they take a road trip from Morgan, Kentucky in the heart of the bible belt to Tippalula, Florida, the story introduces readers to a wide variety of homosexual characters and experiences. After H.F. musters up the courage to befriend sophisticated new girl Wendy, H.F.'s long-time crush, the three quickly become friends.

One evening H.F. sleeps over at Wendy's where an attraction that seems to be mutual at night, isn't come morning. H.F. runs home to her grandmother's where she finds an envelope in a drawer postmarked from her mother. Having birthed H.F. when she was fifteen, Sondra left both Morgan, Kentucky and her daughter behind a year later. Determined to meet her mother, H.F. convinces Bo to drive to Florida and the two hit the road, their first time out of this small dry town. Having adventures in Knoxville and Atlanta along the way, they are exposed to queer people, gay friendly religion and culture, finding themselves before returning to Morgan.

Finding H.F. is one of the rare YA novels where the lesbian protagonist encountered is sure of her sexual orientation without having explored her sexuality in a physical manner. Furthermore, this novel interrogates the place of queers in a small town Biblical community which is juxtaposed with larger cities when Bo and H.F. find themselves in a gay and lesbian church, a place where Christianity and homosexuality have been reconciled.

Jacqueline Woodson, *The House You Pass on the Way* (1997)

Living in Sweet Gum isn't easy when your grandparents are famous and you have a white Momma in a predominately black town. Biracial Evangeline Canan, who has renamed herself Staggerlee, feels lonely and isolated until the summer her cousin Trout comes to visit from Baltimore. Sent away to the Canan's to become more of a lady, both Staggerlee and Trout share a deep secret: they like girls. Together, they talk about their feelings and map possible lesbian identities.

When Trout returns home in the fall, at first they correspond regularly, but it's not long before Trout stops returning Staggerlee's phone calls and letters. In February, a letter arrives from Trout telling Staggerlee that she's been dating a boy since the fall. This makes Staggerlee question if she ever really knew Trout at all.

Since publishing her first book in 1990, Jacqueline Woodson has written over sixteen books for children, middle school and teen readers. With three other books that include adult lesbian characters, this is Woodson's only text that features adolescent lesbian characters and one of the few YA texts where sexual identity is presented as fluid and an identity that the characters explore more through mental reflection than physical experience.

Two-time winner of the Coretta Scott King Award, Woodson is well known for her body of literature, which features African-American characters and deals with race issues intersected by class, sexuality, mental illness and geography. As well, Woodson's is the only text to feature a biracial - African-American and Caucasian - lesbian character for YA audiences.

CHAPTER 2

INTERROGATING THE FIRST NODE: INDIVIDUALS AS AUTHORS

The author is the primary producer of a text. She envisions characters, imagines story lines and, in putting ink to paper, she merges the elements of tone, voice, characterization and plot to weave a tale. Like the story itself is a fabrication of the author's making, so too are the characters who propel the story forward. The author, simultaneously the hub and a node of the production network, is the primary creator of YA fiction into which she writes adolescent lesbian characters; however, the author does not act in isolation. While primary responsibility resides with the author as to what kinds of lesbian characters these books depict and the particular lesbian experiences they epitomize, these choices - whether or not conscious - are impacted by her personal ideologies, her perception of dominant values and norms and, those governing acceptability inherent in the network itself. Tracing authorial motivations for writing specific novels, this chapter charts the processes of constructing adolescent lesbian characters on the pages of YA fiction demonstrating how the politics of production are played out in the authorial hub of the production network.

The Author: Composing the Lesbian-Themed YA Novel

In making the decision to write a novel featuring adolescent lesbian characters, each author cited specific reasons for writing their text and the kind of lesbian character(s) they wanted to create. These ranged from their personal lesbian identities to wanting to write for queer teens, from filling voids in the literature to expanding notions of lesbian identity and experiences. For each of the seven authors participating in this study, the novels included here represent their first work to include an adolescent lesbian character in a YA text, see table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Publishing Histories at a Glance

	Previously published YA novel(s)	Published YA novel(s) with gay character(s) prior to the title in question	Published YA novel(s) with lesbian character(s) prior to the title in question
Tea Benduhn, 2003	-	-	-
Nancy Garden, 1982	(1971 - 2004)	-	-
M.E. Kerr, 1994	(1972 - 2004)	1977; 1986	-
Julie Anne Peters, 2003	(1992 - 2004)	-	-
Sandra Scoppettone, 1978	(1971 - 1985)	1974	-
Julia Watts, 2001	-	-	-
Jacqueline Woodson, 1997	(1990 - 2004)	-	1991; 1995; 1998

The motivations these authors identified for constructing adolescent lesbian characters in YA are often multiple and intersecting. For both M.E. Kerr, author of *Deliver Us From Evie* (1994) and Sandra Scoppettone, author of *Happy Endings Are All Alike* (1978), part of the impetus arose from having already published a YA text with male homosexual characters which clashed with their self-identification as gay women: both questioned why they had not previously written YA with lesbian characters. As a longtime and distinguished YA author, Kerr asked herself, “As a gay woman why hadn’t I written anything in the field about lesbians? That was the main thing. I had always intended to but I just never could find the focus.” Kerr’s comment demonstrates a consciousness regarding the tension between identifying as a gay woman and having never written about them.

For Scoppettone, the inclusion of Jaret and Peggy as lesbian characters was secondary to her original idea of writing a story about rape. According to her, *Happy Endings Are All Alike* is foremost about rape and proceeded by a love story between two girls, yet, one of lesbian characters is raped in the novel. Although Scoppettone articulates it was not her intention to punish a lesbian character by correlating her sexual

identity with rape, a common occurrence in homosexuality-themed YA novels in the 1970s, she indicates that this was misunderstood by some individuals at the time. Instead, she states that her motivation for creating lesbian characters was derived from her own identity position intersected by a lack of visible lesbians in YA: “Because I am [a lesbian]... Well because no one had done it for young adults. I’m the first. I had written a book in 1974 called *Trying Hard to Hear You* and that was about boys. Homosexual boys. I just felt it was time to write about girls, and as I said, there were no others and I had a particularly agreeable publisher.” By the time Scoppettone’s novel was published in 1978, two other YAs featuring adolescent lesbians had popped onto the scene: Rosa Guy’s *Ruby* (1976) and Deborah Hautzig’s *Hey, Dollface* (1978). Both Kerr and Scoppettone cite their own gay-identities and their previous work in writing YA novels with gay male characters as encouraging factors to write novels with lesbian characters.

Personal gay identity was also a factor cited by both Garden and Peters. Having authored a variety of titles in various genres for YAs and middle-school readers, Garden has written multiple YAs with teenaged lesbians since the beginning of her career in the early 1970s. She chose to write *Annie On My Mind* (1982), her first published YA with lesbian characters, because she wanted to write something for “my people” as a response to a body of literature that was nonexistent when she was growing up. Peters, on the other hand, had been writing YA since the early 1990s yet had not produced anything with lesbian content. For Peters, who had not openly acknowledged a gay identity in her writing persona (she was out in her personal and professional life, but was not inserting gay characters or issues in her novels) it took a lot of time, encouragement and support

for her to write her first gay-themed novel, *Keeping You A Secret* (2003). Conscious of her lesbian identity and its absence in her own work, Peters candidly addressed many of her apprehensions surrounding the authoring of this kind of book, concerns that could potentially and unforeseeably impact her personal life and career:

I just felt that there were so many obstacles for me in doing this. First of all, it would be such a global outing, such public exposure. It's not that I'm not out, but I live in Colorado. It's not the most tolerant environment for LGBTQ people. We have very outspoken legislators with anti-gay agendas. We have Focus on the Family headquarters just a few miles away. It felt like this personal safety issue, not only for me, but for my partner, too. Also, I have this body of children's work and I felt really protective of that. I didn't want to be accused of luring young girls to the dark side. I thought, too, that the gay market, the lesbian market in particular, was such a small niche that I would never make a living. I just spent 10 years trying to build up a readership. I didn't think this would be furthering my career. And, I had this reluctance to be categorized as a "gay lit" author, to be limited in what I could write or who I wrote for. I thought afterwards readers would have expectations of me to do more gay lit. And they would be justified in their thinking. I should be writing for my community.

Peters' ability to voice her fears in initially writing *Keeping You A Secret* possibly stems from the fact that unlike every other author included in this study, it was Peters' herself who resisted writing a YA title with lesbian characters: this book was solicited by both her editor and agent. In this reverse of events, Peters highlights a myriad of intersecting issues that elucidates the complexity of factors, extending beyond the text itself, that an author may face when deciding to write a book with adolescent lesbian characters. Aside from the impact on her own life, Peters also alluded to her personal fears of an impending accusation issued by society - whom exactly comprises this social body is unclear. In writing a lesbian book she would be exerting an undue influence on her readership's sexual orientation, or rather, she is a powerful champion able to manipulate young girls into becoming lesbians. This imagined accusation is also underwritten by a sentiment that lesbianism, hers or that of her new body of work, might somehow seep into her other

works of literature and exert an undue queer influence on 'straight' children and youth. The theme emerging from Peter's account, an author's perception of social values and the production of YA with lesbian characters, will be revisited later in this chapter.

Coincidentally, all of the novels included in this study were written as YA and were subsequently picked up by publishers as YA texts. Not all books that are categorized as YA, books marketed to an audience aged 12 - 18, are initially written or intended for this age group. Given that Peters, Woodson, Scoppettone, Kerr and Garden wrote their novels for an adolescent audience primarily because they are YA authors, and Benduhn and Watts made a conscious decision to write for this age group, all of these authors kept issues that they perceived adolescents faced foremost in their minds.

In writing *Annie On My Mind* (1982), Garden combined a perceived need – the coming out of lesbian teenagers - with her career position as a YA author: "I wanted to write *Annie* for teens because gay and lesbian teens have a tough time coming out, and also because I am primarily a YA author." Grounding her novel as a tool to assist teens in coming out is interesting because of the spin Garden puts on coming out in her novel. *Annie On My Mind* primarily focuses on the love relationship that develops between Annie and Liza, however, very little of the novel has to do with coming out to friends and family. Annie and Liza remain closeted throughout the majority of the novel and it is Liza who is outed to her family and peers by a schoolmate and headmistress in the final pages; Annie never comes out. *Annie On My Mind* is not focused on coming out nor does it feature an incredibly positive coming out story, but what it does demonstrate is that gay people can be self-accepting, happy and do experience loving relationships, all images

that affirm a gay identity to the self. In this sense, Garden is telling a different kind of coming out story to her teen audience, one that is centred on self-acceptance.

On the other hand, Kerr wrote a lesbian-themed YA because she is a YA author and felt that the gay issues her novel contained would not catch the attention of an adult audience: "That's what I do. That's where I have made my name. And I also think it's not very interesting to adults. They either like gays or they don't. But young people, it's provocative to them; they don't know how they feel about all of this. I thought I would have a better audience for my book." Again, Kerr's comment demonstrates how her novel has been constructed to meet a specific adolescent need: to challenge youth in formulating their morality regarding homosexuals. Both of these quotes begin to illustrate how YAs are ideologically positioned and how these texts are written to meet a perceived need.

Novice YA authors Benduhn and Watts both intentionally wrote their respective novels, *Gravel Queen* (2003) and *Finding H.F.* (2003) for an adolescent audience. While crafting *Finding H.F.*, Watts asked herself what kind of lesbian and gay images an adolescent in the southern United States might need to see:

I started thinking that a lesbian young adult novel might be interesting to try, and really, all of my work is set in rural Appalachia or the rural/southern U.S. where gay and lesbian culture is there, but it is fairly hidden, so you have to know where to look to find it. I was thinking about the perspective of a young adult living in that setting and trying to figure out who she is without being able to look around and see other gay and lesbian people who look well-adjusted and happy.

For Watts, the representations of lesbians needed by her readership were those that contained happy characters and would indicate places in this cultural milieu where lesbians are present. On the contrary, Benduhn, had been carrying the idea of an interracial relationship between two females in her head and it was while taking a

graduate class on YA that she was inspired to create it as a manuscript for teens. For her, writing YA had less to do with what she perceived adolescents needed in literature than what she had not personally been able to find in fiction while growing up. This sentiment harkens back to Garden, as both authors cited a need to write the book they would have wanted to read when they were adolescents, even despite the generation gap of these two novels being published twenty-one years apart.

Given that this group of authors was writing specifically for a teen audience, or for the readership of their own adolescence, all of these authors also articulated specific voids they were trying to fill when writing a YA novel with adolescent lesbian characters. Having already touched upon a few of these voids - what these authors wanted to give teens based upon their perception of a need, and, the intersection of their own gay identity with the desire to write for their community - for the most part, authors also wanted to write something into the body of literature that was not already available.

Aside from dispelling commonly held myths surrounding rape in the late 1970s, Scoppettone wanted to give her readers “an understanding about lesbianism.” This ‘understanding,’ or specific lesbian presence, is a component that each author intentionally created and integrated into their respective novel.

Writing at a time where homosexuality-themed YA novels generally ended unhappily or where protagonists were punished for their sexual orientation, Kerr and Garden consciously incorporated happy endings into this ‘understanding’ of lesbianism. The limited and negative representations of lesbians that existed in YA during the early 1980s, for Garden, was compounded by the books available to her while growing up.

Her drive to write a happy lesbian novel arose from her own experience with lesbian literature:

When I was growing up as a young lesbian in the 1950s, I looked in vain for books that might show me more about what and who I was and that would reflect my own experiences and feelings. I found mostly cheap paperbacks that ended tragically or with the lesbian character “becoming” straight. The one book that spoke to me was *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall, a novel published in England in the 1920s. Although *Well* is melodramatic and ends sadly, it also ends with a plea for justice and understanding and I vowed when I read it that one day I'd write a book for my people that ended happily. After many years, many other books, and many false starts at that one, *Annie* was that book.

Working from a deficit of literature with lesbian appeal, Garden goes on to say: “I wanted *Annie* to end happily; I wanted Annie and Liza to end up together despite the problems threatening them from the outside world. And I wanted to show that the love between the two teachers was too strong to be destroyed by the problems they faced as well.” The desire to see a lesbian YA love story end happily is a sentiment also shared by Kerr and was one of the elements she consciously incorporated into *Deliver Us From Evie*.

Interestingly, the desire for a happy ending is neither foremost nor as predominant for authors writing in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These authors – Woodson, Benduhn, Watts and Peters - tend to provide other rationales for writing lesbian-themed YA, mostly related to expanding the body of literature currently in existence by constructing new or alternate representations of adolescent lesbians. For Benduhn, writing a novel that was largely absent of identity categories and boxes, presenting love and sexuality in a lighter manner was one of her central aims: “I just wanted to present something that showed a lighter side, that I wasn’t taking everything so seriously, and not making such a big deal out of sexuality and first love and all of that.” Woodson wrote her novel, *The House You Pass on the Way* (1997) also in part to challenge conceptions

of sexual identity. For her, however, the adolescent perception of sexual identity was key in that she did not want to present lesbianism as fixed: "When I was writing that [book] what I was thinking to myself was how fluid sexuality can be for young people, you know." While the characters, cousins Staggerlee and Trout, share their internal struggle regarding their developing feelings for the same-sex over the course of their summer vacation, and Staggerlee comes to identify as a lesbian by the end of the book, the lesbian identity that Trout claims during the summer is upset when she returns home to Baltimore and begins to date a boy. The fluidity of sexual identity is something that Woodson wanted to explore on multiple levels:

I thought it would be easier for young people to look at it and see that sexuality doesn't have to be something that, it's not necessarily an issue of okay I kissed this girl now I am a lesbian or I am not a lesbian because I never did kiss her. It is this fluid thing that can happen mentally, it can happen physically, it can happen in all these ways but it's about the young person coming to it and then making the decision. I felt like that was the point where I struggled trying to figure out how I was going to structure the narrative so that...more readers could come to it and see themselves in the fiction.

Adding to this mix a differing understanding of lesbianism, Peters wanted to position lesbianism as an instinctive phenomenon: "I wanted to write about the instinct, the nature of lesbianism. That kind of sexual and spiritual and emotional attraction we have, that whole kind of sexual awakening. For me, this story if I was going to write it, I was going to write it for my audience mainly, a lesbian audience, so the love story was key. I wanted to explore the whole aspect of coming out to yourself, and also that sense of loss we have in discovering that we are outside the norm." Peters also introduces to this body of literature a heightened emotional component and refines the typical coming out story to incorporate the element of coming out to oneself. While writing *Keeping You A*

Secret, Peters' awareness of the lack of stories about and for lesbians increased, and since then, has reoriented her writing to focus on creating stories with gay characters:

After I did *Keeping You a Secret* I thought to myself, "You know there are so many stories that aren't being told. If I don't tell them, who else will?" All of a sudden it was like my writing took a whole new direction. As soon as I was done with *Keeping You a Secret* I wrote a book called *Between Mom and Jo* about this kid with lesbian moms. I didn't know if there was anything out there like that. This kid is put in the position of having to choose between his moms. I thought that would be an interesting story because it happens all the time.

In writing her first novel with gay characters and overcoming her apprehensions surrounding this authoring, Peters recognized her power to fill a literary void by creating and inserting into this body of literature what she perceives to be missing.

Authorial Politics: Where Ideology Collides with Construction

As the examples outlined earlier in this chapter begin to explore each author's motivations for writing her specific story and the perceived void she desires to fill, it is impossible to do so without an examination of the ideological motivations that factor into the lesbian characters she constructs. The author is the primary creator of a text and it is her value and belief systems that influence and shape how adolescent lesbian characters are represented in a given fictional work. According to Robert D. Sutherland (1985), authors are influenced by their personal views and assumptions when selecting what does or does not go into a given work, and thus, books consciously or unconsciously, openly or indirectly, express an author's personal ideologies. When a book is published, it becomes a physical expression of one's ideologies and, arguably, promotes specific values. It is in this public form that the author's views can be seen as the author's politics. As such, the decision to write any YA, including those with lesbian characters, is morally imbued from the beginning.

Sutherland further develops his framework to understand how authors' politics come to infiltrate children's novels through one of three modes: politics of advocacy; politics of attack; and politics of assent. The politics of advocacy are those which aim to promote a specific cause, or uphold a course of action or value system, as being valid and right. Advocacy can be witnessed in the lending of support to specific causes, a point Sutherland illustrates with examples of books that enhance the self-concepts of minority readers, such as the influx of multicultural YA literature in the early 1990s, and can range to include manifestations of indoctrination.

In juxtaposition, the politics of attack can appear in a range of emotions – amusement, rage or contempt – as the author's response to something that runs contrary to their value system, political position or personal beliefs. An example of this would be satire, as seen in *Huckleberry Finn*, a novel permeated by Mark Twain's commentary on the injustice of slavery.

The politics of assent, the final mode, is one that Sutherland considers to be the most insidious. Here, authors affirm ideologies generally prevalent in society through a passive unquestioning and unconsciously transmit it via their writing, thus, supporting and reinforcing the status quo. Examples of this can be found in Disney's Mickey Mouse cartoon shorts. During the late 1920s and 1930s, the cartoon mouse sported a blackface and today these clips would be considered rife with unacceptable racial gags and stereotypes, however at the time, these images were the norm and reflected the commonly held perceptions of blacks.

All three of these political modes are evident in YA fiction with adolescent lesbian characters to varying degrees and intermix on occasion. These modes provide a

useful way to begin to understand how, through authors, novels can operate as political entities and are by no means neutral in the representations they contain.

Authorial politics and how the author factors into the politics of representation is important because current studies of lesbian representation and visibility have a tendency to only evaluate images already available for consumption (e.g. Cart 1997; Cuseo 1992; Inness 1997; Jenkins 1988, 1993; St. Clair 1995). The challenge with situating the politics of representation at this nexus resides both with the evaluative stance and the treatment of the image as subject/object until injected with meaning by the audience or the theorist, or, if a bit more interrogative, by the singular group who created it. All of these stances negate the production processes and the diffuse, varying, polymorphous levels of power that initially shape a final image.

The purpose of this analysis is to move away from evaluation and into the realm of investigating how these images come to be constituted and mediated in the first place, before they are unveiled to a general public. The production of images is crucial to understanding which vision of social reality is disseminated via which representations. The politics of representation is rooted in the production processes, of a network, in which the YA author is the hub and major node. While these authorial interviews illuminated numerous arenas where personal ideologies collided with the images of lesbians eventually constructed, what these authors wanted to introduce into this body of YA literature via the lesbian characters themselves offers a rich place to ground this analysis.

Ideology and the Attribute: Politicizing Strength

“Lesbians in YA fiction are constructed the way any characters in any novel are constructed. There’s really no difference between building a straight character and building a gay character, a black character or a white character, an old woman or a young man. Authors approach characterization in a variety of ways, just the way authors go about writing a novel in different ways.”

Nancy Garden, interview

Working from the premise that all characters in YA fiction are constructed, and that these characters constitute a representation of an individual or groups of people, Garden’s comment begs the question: is there something specific or unique to the authorial construction of adolescent lesbian characters? When asked questions about the characters particular to a respective novel, all of the authors included in this study provided varying responses as to what they desired to achieve with their characterization(s). Answers ranged from giving a young queer readership characters to identify with and seeing themselves reflected in this literature to demystifying aspects of lesbianism for a straight or mainstream audience; all of these authors created lesbian characters with specific attributes and projected representations in mind.

The adjective ‘strong’ was a descriptor employed by three of these authors as a key trait they wanted their lesbian characters to possess. The concept of strong is subjective and manifests itself differently in all of these characters adhering to the author’s vision and her ideological position. According to Watts, the character H.F. was molded to be strong yet vulnerable: “Well I wanted to give [my readers] a strong, young lesbian character but also to show her vulnerability and to show the difficulty of coming into that identity especially in the Bible Belt.” Here, strength is hierarchally positioned as exceeding the value attributed to vulnerability.

Benduhn's conception of strength differs from Watts' and is demonstrated via the discrepancy between Aurin and Neila's personalities. Benduhn constructed her characters along the following lines: "For Aurin, I wanted to create somebody who wasn't terribly self-aware and wasn't terribly troubled by whatever she found, and for Neila, someone who is pretty sure of herself." Strength is a quality Neila possesses from the beginning of the novel and is an attribute that Aurin cultivates as the novel progresses, ending *Gravel Queen* with two strong adolescent lesbian characters. In a brief treatment of these two instances, strength is conceived and incorporated differently into the texts in such a way that these two novels represent varying accounts of how 'strong' can manifest in lesbian characters.

Examining the characters of Cece and Holland in Peters' *Keeping You A Secret*, again, 'strong' is fashioned in another manner that furthers dimensions of what this attribute can also encapsulate:

First of all, I wanted them to be strong women. I wanted them to have a positive outlook, to be healthy, to be self-confident and kind of be self-governed; at least by the end Holland was making her own choices and decisions. I didn't want them to be wimpy women. I wanted them, like all of my characters, to be familiar to readers, to be recognizable, to have this everyday background and setting, very ordinary, so they would be no more dysfunctional than any other family. Just people.

With definite descriptors of what constitutes a strong character, Peters encompasses the extraordinary and the ordinary in her understanding of strength and this weaves its way into the characters she creates. What Peters also touches upon in her statement is the ability to make her lesbian characters appeal to a broad audience and make them 'normal' people in her attempt to make 'gay' an everyday thing. The complexity of Peters' vision of strength blends into the lesbian stereotypes she initially sought to counter:

I hoped I was avoiding stereotypes, the whole butch and femme coupling kind of thing. I don't know that I was successful in that. I think there is some truth to it that maybe finds its way into the text. I think that there's a more feminine side to Cece and a more masculine side to Holland – her athleticism and style of dress and maybe her whole body image. I kind of liked it to be a surprise to readers that Cece was the one who was out and proud. That she was the stronger of the two, more self-aware and comfortable with her sexuality.

Unlike common conceptions or lesbian signifiers of a manly appearance, masculine traits and not to mention the immediate visibility of butch women, Peters strives to counter these stereotypes in her creation of characters that do not neatly fit into socially prescribed boxes. Cece, who is more feminine and dons her gay identity daily with her t-shirts and jewelry, is depicted as the tenaciously confident character while Holland, who is athletic and more masculine in appearance and sports more stereotypical lesbian traits, is not as strong. Here, Peters uses an inversion of gender presentation to reorient and create a position on lesbianism utilizing the mechanisms of an adjective like strong. As these three examples demonstrate via significant variation in how a simple attribute materializes in these texts, the role of the author, her power to construct lesbian images and her ability to utilize her personal ideologies to inform these representations becomes clearer. These images are not neutral; they are politically charged. The role of authorial politics and relationship to the politics of production becomes apparent when examining how these characters are constructed to conform to, disrupt or challenge lesbian stereotypes.

Constructing Lesbians: To Stereotype, or, Not To Stereotype

A central motivation cited by the authors in this study for writing these YA texts was to breakdown stereotypes and, in doing so, these authors often sought to diversify the body of YA literature and how lesbians were represented within it. In 1982, at the time

of publication for *Annie On My Mind*, it was Garden's prerogative to tackle stereotypes that alienated gay people from straight people: "I wanted to show that gay people aren't monsters, that we form deep love relationships, and that, aside from having to deal with bigotry, we lead lives, both personal and professional, not unlike the lives of straight people. When I wrote *Annie* in the late 70s-early 80s, gay people were more marginalized and less known about than we are now." Working to destigmatize lesbian identities and relationships, to bridge the fabricated differences between gay and straight, Garden sought to challenge stereotypes by creating a story with characters counter to popular conceptions of the gay community. While Garden sought to furnish her readers with positive gay images, these same images also served a purpose to mainstream readers of the text, as seen within the framework of Sutherland's politics of advocacy. In challenging gay stereotypes through the romantic relationship of Annie and Liza, love outweighs the anticipated marginalization of being homosexual, and in this sense, Garden's novel presents a picture of the world as it *ought to be*, showing that love is simply love, regardless of the gender of the lovers.

Another approach to breaking down stereotypes employed by Scoppettone intended to meet the dual function of challenging lesbian images for both gay and straight readerships. Focusing on the prevalent butch/femme dynamic in the 1970s, she sought to demonstrate that girlish-looking lesbians could fall for one another. Through the characters of Peggy and Jaret, Scoppettone spoke what she would characterize to be a counter message to those within the gay community, that lesbian partnerships did not need to conform to a masculine/feminine relational model. For a straight readership, she indicated that not all lesbians are masculine in appearance: "I don't think I can say

anymore than trying to break down stereotypes because people were full of them in the 1970s, certainly full of them...the butch/femme was going on and I know it is back again, unfortunately, but there's a whole period when it was on. I wanted to show that there were other kinds of girls that were attracted to each other and they didn't have to look like boys and so forth." In disrupting the gender binaries that Scoppettone perceived as governing understandings of lesbian relationships within gay communities and in altering how lesbians were perceived by the dominant heterosexual social world, *Happy Endings Are All Alike* (1978) strives to reflect the diversity of this group by breaking down stereotypes for those inside and outside of the gay community. Working from her own experiences as a gay woman, Scoppettone engaged in the politics of representation.

Kerr, on the other hand, wanted to introduce the butch/femme dynamic into YA literature and was very intentional in her construction of Evie as a butch lesbian: "I had made up my mind that Evie, my butch character, would be a very masculine young farm girl who was very good at fixing tractors, very good at working around the farm, and very content with her family. She had a boyfriend of sorts that they were sort of foisting on her, a young farm boy. She wasn't very interested in him. And then she met Pasty. A very feminine, town girl who went away to boarding school and was way above her in social status. Then I fashioned the love affair between these two accordingly." As one of the rare examples of a visible butch lesbian in YA literature, and introducing the even rarer pairing of butch/femme couple, Kerr's characterization can be considered to go against the grain. While butch/femme is a popular image in lesbian fiction and a commonly held stereotype about lesbian relationships, until Kerr's novel in 1994, it was not one perpetuated on the pages of YA literature. Revealing a tension between social

stereotypes and variations in visibility in differing media, by introducing a butch character and placing her in a butch/femme relationship Kerr contributes to increasing the visibility of butch women in popular mainstream media. As a novel intended for diverse audiences, Kerr deliberately utilized a butch character to make her point about acceptance: “I wanted to write about a very stereotypical lesbian. A butch. Because I wanted to point out how we accept people easier who are like us. How in the world the light skinned black always is favoured over the darker skinned, and so forth.” The authorial politics that Kerr incorporates into *Deliver Us From Evie* are coded to make a statement on the dominant ideologies of the social body that idealize the values of sameness, normalcy and conformity.

In confronting stereotypes it was impossible for this group of authors to separate their experiences in the world, specifically their lesbian experiences, from the fiction they were creating. As their authorial politics are informed by their gay/lesbian/queer identities or having had same-sex partnerships, so too are these novels informed by their realities. Kerr simply states, “I wrote what I thought I knew about homosexuality, not about cleaning it up for the general public.” This comment in part references her commitment to introducing a butch character and a butch/femme relationship to YA, yet highlights how *Deliver Us From Evie* was informed by her body of experiential knowledge as a gay woman. The characters she creates in Evie and Patsy are inseparable from her own experiences of the lesbian community. Benduhn and Peters also acknowledged how their personal lives percolate into the fiction they write.

Unconsciously, Benduhn’s gay male character, Fred, was fashioned after a high school friend; the problems Holland faces with her mother were astonishingly similar to those

Peters had with her own family. It is not surprising, then, that in this body of contemporary YA literature, which often adheres to the conventions of realism where an authentic voice is valued, fragments of the authors' own lives, as well as their politics, find a place - consciously or not - in the manuscript.

Working with popular stereotypes, their presence and absence in YA literature and in relation to other media, these authors possess an insider position with respect to their fictional constructions of lesbianism. Often perched on the undetectable dike separating homo and heterosexual communities, with toes dipping into the waters on either side of this barrier, how and for whom these authors choose to construct characters is impacted by their authorial politics. Whether an author supports or confronts a stereotype depends on her vantage point, her ideology and the audience for whom she writes, but stereotypes and whether representations are read as stereotypes cannot easily be reduced to a binary classification. Garden qualifies, "Lesbians, like all human beings, are individuals, more different from one another than alike. We come in all shapes and sizes, all personalities. Yes, there are lesbians who fit a stereotype - there are in any group (think of "soccer moms" and "ladies who lunch") - but more don't than do; there is no such thing as a "typical" lesbian, although many of us have had similar experiences, and although, just as in any group, on the surface there are some recognizable "types" among us on which popular stereotypes are based." Ultimately, given that these authors want to fill a void and insert something new into this body of literature, each of the characters are unique and contribute another image, another way of representing lesbians in YA.

Adding Lesbianism to the Mix: The Multidimensional Contemporary Novel

Complementing the proliferation of positive stories with happy endings, and the authorial desire to increase the diversity of lesbian representations and understandings of lesbian sexuality in YA literature, is the tendency for contemporary YA novels to be multidimensional. YA novels with lesbian characters have also been subject to the trends of the marketplace, which will be discussed further in chapter four, and since the 1990s, this fiction has shifted from the problem-themed focus of 1970s novels and the romance novels of the 1980s. Expanding a story beyond the parameters of ‘gay’ and ‘gay issues’ has allowed this group of YA authors – Benduhn, Kerr, Peters, Watts and Woodson – to increase the complexity of their lesbian characters and story lines which, in turn, increasingly politicizes the representations they construct.

Launching her career in the early 1990s at a time “when there was a boom in the literature that dealt with quote, unquote ‘multicultural literature,’ including the issue of queerness,” says Woodson, “people were hungry for the books, they were hungry for the writers who could write from experience or whatever, who they felt the books would be more authentic coming from.” As the only African-American author participating in this study, Woodson shaped her characters Trout and Staggerlee to deal with the intersections of race and sexuality as experienced in a small southern U.S. town. Woodson commonly incorporates multiple and diverse issues into her novels, striving to address these complexities absent of a moral framework, and this is one of her reasons for writing *The House You Pass on the Way*: “I think that in talking about the issues of biraciality, sexuality and family it becomes a whole lot of things at once and I wanted to see if I could tackle all those issues in the literature without being didactic.” In her construction

of Staggerlee's experience growing up inside an interracial family and in exploring how her sexual identity is developed in that context, like all of the other novels contained in this study, Woodson's story politically represents and positions adolescent lesbians.

While Woodson is able to escape writing a didactic text by not passing judgment on her characters, it inevitably cannot escape being a text reflecting her personal moral attitudes as these characters are positioned very specifically in the way she weaves a story: sexuality is fluid and shifting, but lesbianism is something that most adults frown upon and try to expunge from their youth. The politics of representation continues to play out as Woodson is cognisant of the absence of black and biracial characters in YA literature, and acknowledges that when it comes to representations of black adolescent lesbians, the number of characters dwindles further. Again, given this community's invisibility in this body of literature, Woodson tackles complex, multi-faceted issues of sexuality that are compounded by race for the following reasons:

Well the main reason is because it [homosexuality] exists in all cultures and the struggles to figure out sexuality. I don't know if other people are just not writing about it or if other people are not thinking about it. I think the fact that there is an absence extends to when you look at the ratio – in a lot of books for young adults – when you look at the number of people who are struggling with sexuality in the world in comparison to the number of books out there that deal with sexuality in a non-didactic way, that the numbers are off. For me, it's about, it is in the African-American community as much as it is in the white or Asian or any other community. I think it is important to write about issues and people who are historically underrepresented. And for me, that's the case with sexuality and the African-American community.

Employing a rationale to increase the representation of African-American lesbians in YA by writing *The House You Pass on the Way*, Woodson is able to successfully begin filling in a gap by putting these issues into print.

Race was also incorporated into Benduhn's novel, via the African-American character Neila and the interracial romance that develops between Neila and Aurin, and again, its treatment was in keeping with Benduhn's own personal value system. Here, Benduhn's self-admittedly utopic politics manifest in a novel where visible racial differences are glossed over and offer another take on interracial relationships:

I spent a lot of thinking on it and I spent a lot of talking to people about it because it's a very, very sensitive topic. I think one of the reasons I wanted to do it was because, again, I wanted it not to be a sensitive topic. Just like being a lesbian in high school, I wanted the fact of people's races not be the issue. I wanted the issue to be of friendship dynamics and for these other elements to be a part of the story but not the focal point of the story. It always seems in literature, and certainly in my first year of school, in a lot of the stories I wrote, people would always criticize me for putting elements into stories and they would say you have to make an issue out of these because this is an issue.

Juxtaposing the rationales of Woodson and Benduhn, the politics of representation is evident in these differing treatments of race, in both authors' personal reasons for incorporating race and how it is intentionally positioned for their readership. Woodson's character Staggerlee is conscious of her biraciality and of having her Momma be one of three white women in Sweet Gum - a white Momma believed by the town to be stuck up. Staggerlee feels alienated from her peers in part because of her mixed race, partially because her grandparents were famous civil rights activists killed at a protest and because she is grappling with her peers and sexuality. Race is predominant and visible in all aspects of Staggerlee's identity. Although Benduhn's novel is narrated from Aurin's perspective, Aurin gives no thought to issues of race other than recognizing that Neila is black and this is as far as Aurin addresses race in relation to her white peer group and as a love interest. Both of these authors tackle multiple issues including the intersections of

race and sexuality and this very multidimensionality, vis à vis difference, illuminates the authorial construction of lesbian characters.

Watts' novel, set in the southern Appalachian region of the United States, adds the dimensions of poverty and religion to an adolescent lesbian story. Keeping true to the rural south, and reflecting the reality she perceives of growing up as lesbian in that area, Watts incorporates a Christian element to *Finding H.F.*: "I think that, especially where I live in the Southern United States, that sexuality and religion are just banging their heads against each other all the time. All of my books at least touch on religion some way. I guess mainly because the arguments against homosexuality are so often based in religion." In writing this novel, Watts' politics manifest as she constructs the character H.F. along a continuum: at the beginning of the novel religion constricts H.F.'s ability to come out as a lesbian and to be self-accepting, and by the end of the novel, H.F. has seen more of the world and the possibilities for reconciling her faith with her sexuality. While Watts does not strive to resolve the tensions between Baptism and homosexuality, she does demonstrate a harmony between Christianity and homosexuality through Heavenly Faith's (H.F.) new experience of alternate religious denominations:

I also very intentionally did the move with making them religious, with making Dave (a character H.F. meets on her travels) a member of the Metropolitan Community Church, because H.F. has been raised in that very bible belt fundamentalist way and part of the package for her there has been that being gay is just wrong and she knows her grandma would have a very hard time with that. By taking them to church, I think she got to see that wasn't necessarily mutually exclusive, to be both gay or lesbian and religious.

This conscious choice to construct images of lesbians in the southern United States – via H.F. as the main character and the group of racially diverse lesbians living on the streets that H.F. meets while in Atlanta – presents lesbian characters that are very different from

those depicted, for example, in Kerr and Benduhn's novels. Differing authorial motivations, varying authorial politics and the way these authors envision and interweave the multiple dimensions of their respective texts, all impact the construction of lesbian characters at the production level in the authorial network node.

Mainstreaming Lesbians

Accompanying the incorporation of multiple dimensions or issues, YA fiction with adolescent lesbians characters has acquired mainstream appeal. For the most part, contemporary YA fiction with adolescent lesbian characters is published by large publishing houses and, as such, is intentionally marketed to and increasingly appeals to mainstream - read straight - audiences. The only author included in this study to publish on a smaller press was Watts and, other than Peters, none of the authors expressed a consciousness about writing for a mainstream audience. The mainstream appeal of their novels - whether that be garnered from the multiple issues included in the story itself, the narrative perspective, the prominence of the lesbian characters or from their personal reputations as YA authors - was not a factor during what these authors have deemed to be the highly organic writing process; who *they are writing for* is not foremost in these authors' minds until they are finished drafting the manuscript, yet, authors are conscious of who *they are writing about* throughout the writing process.

The entwined relationship of multiple dimensions and mainstreaming is a concept that Peters consciously acknowledged in her writing process, partially because she knew in advance of writing her manuscript that she wanted it to be accepted by her long-time publisher, Little, Brown and Co. In Peters' mind, writing for Little, Brown and Co. meant that she had to consider an audience broader than the gay community:

[T]here would be a mainstream audience. There would have to be if it were going to be published through Little, Brown and Co. I felt I would have to include a story of coming out as the general population knows it, their whole concept of it -- the public announcement to your family and friends. And I thought I would have to explore more universal issues like harassment and discrimination and alienation, the choices and the consequences, the whole area of being true to yourself.

Writing for a large, mixed-orientation audience, Peters sought to balance elements she deemed identificatory for a gay readership with mainstream conceptions of lesbian experiences, as well as issues unrelated to homosexuality. One way she mainstreamed this book was through the incorporation of multiple issues, which other nodes of the network chose to further mainstream via a marketing plan: "I think it's on the shelf as regular YA lit so kids can find it and pass it around to each other. Having the book out in the public rather than only women's bookstores, I guess that's mainstreaming it. And going with a trade publisher rather than a lesbian press." Peters' comments indicate that the mainstreaming of a text has as much to do with the story the author fabricates, as it does with how it comes to be read by a larger and presumably heterosexual audience. The effect of mainstreaming YA with adolescent lesbian characters shaped Peters' authorial politics and altered how she imagined and subsequently constructed the story. Wanting to write for this audience Peters states, "I felt I would have to balance the education of *who we are* with *who people think we are*." Working from this personal ideological position, Peters took into account and created equilibrium between these two facets in constructing her lesbian characters, Holland and Cece.

Juxtaposing Peters, Garden did not seek to balance audience perception of her lesbian characters Annie and Liza in *Annie On My Mind*, however, she did believe that her novel would meet the needs of her audience, divided on lines of sexual orientation,

differently: “I hope it gives straight readers an honest glimpse into what lesbians are like, and I hope it gives gay readers hope and empowerment. The letters I get indicate that this is the case.” Balancing the needs of all readers is something all YA authors face given the small portion of the market this body of literature holds: stories have to appeal to an audience larger than lesbian teens, hence mainstream appeal is a requirement of these texts in order to be economically viable. This facet is not something authors are necessarily conscious of while drafting the manuscript.

Authors Produce Visible Lesbians

In conclusion, this chapter traces authors’ reasons for writing texts with adolescent lesbian characters and, in doing so, demonstrates how representation begins to play out in the politics of production via authorial politics. As the primary creator of a text, an author’s ideologies, value and belief systems influence and shape how adolescent lesbian characters are represented in a given fictional work. Authorial politics are present throughout a manuscript from the initial conception of the attributes characters should possess – strength, for example – and how these are framed within the story. Furthermore, authors’ desires to fill voids they perceive in the literature, to script certain endings, to how they tackle stereotypes, mainstreaming and multidimensional issues are imbued with authorial politics. The representations an author constructs are inevitably infiltrated – consciously or not – by her personal ideologies. In engaging the politics of advocacy, and in their positioning as network hubs, authors are the most powerful producers in the production network, deliberately intervening to make the adolescent lesbian character a visible girl on the pages of YA fiction.

CHAPTER 3

AUTHORS AND EDITORS: MANUSCRIPTS IN MOTION

In the final stages of drafting her story, or once it is complete, the manuscript leaves the author's desk and is deposited into the hands of her editor. Whilst the author functions as the central hub of the production network - without her there would be no text to interrogate - during the transformation of a manuscript into a novel the influence exerted by other nodes becomes apparent: the author, as creator, has not acted in isolation. Primarily grounded in her understandings of the types of YA the other nodes want to work with, the limitations she perceives are imposed upon YA literature because of its teen readership and the moral barometer of society at large, to varying degrees and on a variety of fronts the author has tempered her writing. It is the author herself, firstly, who exerts a subtle censorial influence via her reimagining and reshaping of the characters and story to suit her own desires and those she perceives of other nodes.

In the words of Kirk Fuoss (1994, 169), "the author, of course, is the agent of power responsible for the shaping of a character," yet, the nature of power relations in the production network make the author at once in and out of control. Emphasizing the relationship between the author and their readership, Fuoss argues that in an author's decision to address a specific audience, they are no longer the sole architects of characters because the characters' shape also becomes determined by the exigencies of addressing a particular audience of readers. Expanding this model further, similar gradations of power are negotiated between each node during the production of YA literature. The effect that editors/publishers, reviewers, vendors/purchasers have upon the authors' and each other's construction of adolescent lesbian characters, based on assumptions and definable boundaries, makes the production process a network and not a

chain. Focusing on the relationship between the author and her editor, with the editor also serving as a representative of a publishing house, this chapter investigates how the editorial/publisher node shapes manuscripts during both the authorial writing and in-house production phases.

The Editor as Catalyst: Getting a Book to Press

When an author submits a manuscript to an editor, it is the editor's job to prepare and guide a work through the publication process. The author-editor relationships examined in this study were agreeable and focused primarily upon improving the manuscript through cleaning up the original submission. None of the authors encountered any challenges that could be specifically attributed to adolescent lesbian characters or the lesbian content of a given work, and for the most part, editorial notes did not address the queer aspects of the material.

According to the interviewed authors, the unwritten industry protocol governing the author-editor relationship is that the author retains ownership of her work during the editorial process. Authors write the book and editors provide feedback. Editors do not change texts; they point out weaknesses and offer suggestions for improvement. Garden comments, "Good editors don't make changes without discussing them with authors! And the best editors...simply point out to authors where changes are needed - when something in the text isn't working, for example - and let the authors make the change." Authors are consulted during every phase of the publication process and, as such, the editorial process is about providing input leaving it up to the author to act upon this constructive feedback. Of her authorial-editorial process Woodson states, "My editor doesn't do that. She wouldn't make a change and then publish the book and then I'd open the book and see a change. It doesn't happen like that at all - hopefully not for

anybody – but I know for me that would never happen. You see the book at every stage, you know. All the editorial changes are changes that I made, that the writer makes.” Throughout the publication process, for this group of authors, the author retains control over her written product.

When asked about the kinds of changes that were made to the text prior to publication, authors commented on things like character motivation, the flow of the story, language and grammar. For Watts’ text, *Finding H.F.*, part of what she described as a “light editorial process” had to do with the accessibility of the Southern slang: “I think there were a few Appalachian expressions that, of course being the language I grew up hearing and so it all makes sense to me,” but there were a few things to which her editor said, “ ‘Well, I don’t know if that expression is going to make sense to all readers, maybe you should find something equivalent and a little more obvious as to what it means,’ ” which led Watts to cut out some of slang and Southern vernacular. Watts’ experiences with her editor highlight the latter’s role is to provide comments and suggestions about what an audience may or may not understand.

Editors also smooth out story development and point out authorial oversights. Kerr, having worked with her editor for over twenty-five years, welcomes what she deems to be “his astute feedback” on her fiction. Her editorial process added a four-legged character and clarified character intent:

I remember a very good suggestion, the best suggestion, my editor Robert Warren always spots things that are incredible. For instance, I had written this whole book about a farm without a dog on it. He said, “How can there be a farm without a dog?” That’s the kind of stuff. Then Parr had done something to humiliate Evie after a little beer with a buddy, hung up a sign that suggested these girls were together. My editor didn’t feel that Parr had enough guilt and sadness that he had done that to his sister. And I made that change realizing that he was quite correct.

While Garden, Benduhn and Scoppettone depicted their editorial processes as minimal and did not mention any particular suggestions or changes, some authors dread hearing from their editors as it means spending additional months making revisions to a book where months or years of writing have already been invested. Peters is one of these authors:

With the editorial changes, first, I always have major revisions. I don't think it was unusual in *Keeping You A Secret* that I had so much to change with my editor. I had about five or six pages of millions and millions of things she wanted me to do. I think most of her comments had to do with accessibility and making this book readable for the general public - to a straight audience, and librarians and teachers who might be buying it. Her problems, too, had to do with character motivation and believability.

Peters also commented that she often has to make changes to her novels with respect to character motivation.

Before Peters shares her manuscript with her agent or editor, she takes it to her writing critique group. Predominately comprised of middle-aged, heterosexual women, this group of readers could not understand how Holland switched from being straight to 'bent' within the blink of an eye. These preliminary readers suggested that Peters write a scene where Holland compares the sex she has with Seth to the sex she has with Cece, presumably to make the sex she has with Cece appear hotter, and in turn, would provide a basis for an emergent lesbian identity. Peters' editor, Megan Tingley, was also unable to understand Holland's motivations and asked for changes to the text that would bridge the lesbian love story for homo and heterosexual audiences:

Megan really pushed for me to have more scenes between Holland and Seth to kind of develop that love relationship, and I didn't want to do that. It wasn't the object of the book; I did not want to go there. I wanted Holland to be at the end of this relationship and getting out of it, so Seth was simply an obstacle. That was his purpose in the book. It was one thing I said no on.

While Peters' editor tried to strengthen and clarify character motivation by posing the questions, "why is this happening?" or "what are you trying to do here?" and offered tips to solve these perceived textual inconstancies, this change to the text was unacceptable for Peters, and thus was not made. This tension between Peters and her editor reveals that while an author retains creative control over her manuscript after it is purchased by a publishing house, specific changes an editor asks to be made may peripherally impact the lesbian content and experiences in a given text.

In this instance, had Peters included more heterosexual scenes in the novel, the editorial suggestions would have led to changes where Holland's relationship with Seth would be privileged over the one she develops with Cece. Whether measured through the amount of space devoted to each in the text, the quality of these relationships or how this change would overwhelm the homosexual element with the heterosexual, this addition would have shifted the focus away from the lesbian love story, which was Peters' original intent. Comparatively, given that *Keeping You A Secret* already contained more representations of heterosexual sexuality - with respect to Holland and Seth, secondary characters, and, that descriptions of heterosexual sex were more numerous and graphic than the ones included between Holland and Cece - these changes would have further deemphasized the homosexual facets of the lesbian love story.

Doing *it*, or, Situating S-E-X

When deciding whether to include sexual activity in a YA novel, authors are faced with the slippery slope of taboo. Their works, as ideological texts, supposedly reflect the widely varying moralities that inform what parents, teachers, schools and society think is acceptable or unacceptable for teen readers, which is further juxtaposed with what adolescent readers want to see in their literature. In all seven novels included

in this study, romance played a central role to the plot, and as such, each author was asked questions regarding the sexual activity of their lesbian characters.

Since 1978 and until 2003, representations of lesbian foreplay and sex have remained relatively unchanged. While sex increasingly appears on the pages of YA literature and is part of the lesbian love story, the language used to describe sexual activity is primarily metaphoric and the sexual activity detailed does not typically extend beyond kissing. Where sex is a part of the lesbian relationship in four of these books, it is presumed to have happened as it is not described in detail or is something that occurs behind closed doors, leaving the specifics to the reader's imagination. It could be argued, as Garden does, that the lack of lesbian sex in YA has more to do with the conventions governing YA literature itself: "It's because it's YA, I'm pretty sure, not because it's gay. There's not a lot of overt sex in straight YA books either. There's implied sex in both, and foreplay, but sex itself is usually implied, not described." While Garden accurately observes that sex in YA is often only implied, when it comes to lesbian sexuality there is an identifiable disparity in the quantity and quality of homosexual sex in comparison to its heterosexual counterparts. Christine Jenkins (1993), in her historical study of YA novels with gay and lesbian themes, has also acknowledged this discrepancy:

Young adult novels in general tend to tread a fine line between general and specific when describing sexual activity, and details are often foggy beyond the first kiss. While this lack of sexual detail is evident throughout most young adult literature, fictional gays and lesbians seem to have *extremely* limited sex lives (47).

The limited depictions of sex in YA novels with adolescent characters can be attributed directly to the authors themselves, for a variety of reasons, but these authorial choices

have been influenced by perceived or actual experiences with the politics of production as played out in the processes of the production network.

Returning to Peters and the peripheral impact that mandatory editorial suggestions could have exerted upon her text, it is important to remember that what sexual activity Peters did include in Cece and Holland's relationship prior to editorial intervention had already been informed by her personal motivations and her position in relation to other network nodes. Writing for her audience, "a lesbian audience," Peters intentionally included lesbian sex in her work: "I wanted a lesbian love story to have sex in it. I wanted there to be a sexual relationship. I wanted it to be a loving, healthy, natural progression to the sex. I think that the time for this material is right. I think YA is a viable market and there are more and more controversial topics." Recognizing the lack of realistic same-sex sexual activity in YA and a social-industry milieu that would allow her to push the envelope of sexual expression, Peters was conscious and intentional in her construction of lesbian experiences. But even her wish to incorporate homosexual desire and action was mediated and regulated by the notions of acceptability presumed to be held by the very same social-industry climate that initially allowed her to put forth these representations.

When asked about the lesbian sex she does include, and how it is less evident, descriptive and explicit than the hetero sex in the same novel, Peters says:

I know it and I think that's just a matter of how much would be acceptable to the reading audience. My editor never said don't be explicit, don't be graphic in the sex. It was my decision. As far as the literature is concerned today, we're not quite there. I think in the book I am working on now, which will be out in a couple of years, we could be there. Graphic and explicit sex will be more acceptable. And, I think we need to go there because we need to educate readers. I think the lesbian readers deserve to see realistic sex on the pages too.

Peters picks up on important ideas that are shared by other authors. As discussed in chapter two, authors make decisions that shape the content of their work based upon their personal ideologies, thus informing and shaping a text with their value systems.

However, the lesbians authors construct in contemporary realistic novels are also shaped by the perceived social norms and values of the producers of literature for adolescents, specifically, by what is deemed acceptable for its intended audience. Whether this is a conscious or unconscious choice, as a result, authors curtail their lesbian representations.

Benduhn does not like writing explicitly about sex because it is difficult for her to do so without making it sound cheesy and, on a personal level, it makes her uncomfortable: "It makes me feel embarrassed and I just sit there blushing at my computer and I'm the only one in the room." To keep a sexual element to her novel, *Gravel Queen* (2003), Aurin and Neila kiss, and this is something that Benduhn relates metaphorically. The use of metaphoric language opposed to graphic language is a technique also employed by Garden and Woodson. In Garden's book, *Annie On My Mind* (1982), Annie and Liza are often affectionate with one another and the girls have to learn to communicate as both are afraid of the developing physical dimensions of their relationship. When Annie and Liza finally do have sex, it is something left up to the reader's imagination: shades are drawn, Liza talks about the glow on Annie's skin, and they wake up undressed hours later. Of this, Garden says, "*Annie* is a YA; graphic sex was inappropriate in YAs in the 1980s and to a large extent still is." But to whom is graphic sex inappropriate - the reader, the publisher, the purchasers or the author herself?

Woodson is clearer about for whom graphic sex was inappropriate in her novel, *The House You Pass on the Way* (1997). When she began to write the book, Woodson

was unsure how far a romantic relationship between Staggerlee and Trout would develop, if it would at all, and her choice to make Staggerlee and Trout unrelated was conscious and purposeful because of this authorial ambiguity:

When I got to that point, are they going to get together or are they not going to get together, I wrote the scene and rewrote that scene in the barn and it felt to me that it needed to be more implicit so that people could come to the...so it felt more acceptable for me. I think in my own prudishness and stuff.

For Woodson, it was a personal choice not to include graphic sex or sex at all in *The House You Pass on the Way*, and she expresses the same level of discomfort writing about sex that Benduhn does. Similar to Garden's text, the reader is again left to presume the characters had sex through their decoding of euphemistic signs.

While at a certain level it is the author's personal discomfort with writing sex that excludes it from being a part of the lesbian love story, at another level, it also has to do with what forms of sexual expression are acceptable for an adolescent readership, according to the author herself and the publishing industry. For Woodson, "the issue of actually having them be sexual was an issue for me because I was thinking about what I would have been able to tolerate in literature when I was thirteen, fourteen or twelve." Concern about the age of her readership was one reason attributed to the implicit sexual references contained in her work.

Benduhn on the other hand, as a first time author, chose not to include explicit sexual references partially because of the audience age and partially because of her own conceptions of the industry in what would be publishable for YAs: "I just didn't know what comfort levels were with publishing houses and with libraries and censorship. I just didn't want to get involved with all of that. I wanted to be able to get the story across without having to encounter too much difficulty." Wanting her manuscript to be

published more than she was concerned about the sexual dimensions of her story, Benduhn did not even attempt to discover for herself what publishers would tolerate. This is ironic in light of a later comment where she talks about her use of explicit language in the book, a consciousness she appeared to develop over the course of the interview: “Also, the funny thing is in the original text I literally sprinkled it with the f-word and I cut that out majorly. I don’t know why I was thinking it’s okay to use four letter words like nothing, but I can’t have sex in there. That makes no sense.” Perhaps sex, which was once explicitly taboo, is now an implicit industry taboo.

Scoppettone, writing in the late 1970s, was conscious that if her novel contained lesbian sex it would never get published: “At the time, even if I had have wanted to do a graphic sexual scene between the two girls that never would have been accepted. I don’t think boy and girl relationships would have been accepted in young adult literature, I’m not sure about that, but I know that two girls would never be accepted at that point.” For authors, both past and present, the issue here is one of perception or previous experiences in publishing work with sexual content. These authors are not writing sex into homosexuality-themed novels because of the general acceptable treatment of adolescent sexuality in YA, but also because of the further taboo of that sex being between characters of the same-sex. It is difficult to assess how much of this reluctance is based in perception because none of these authors submitted a manuscript with material they thought might even possibly be open to questions of revision. Perhaps these authors are astute, aware of an invisible boundary, given the resistance Watts faced with respect to the explicit sex initially depicted in *Finding H.F.*

As the only novel in this study where the editor slated specific changes to the text after its acceptance, and as the only text put out by a gay and lesbian publisher, Alyson, it is ironic that Watts was asked to tone down the sex she originally included in her book. While Watts was comfortable and willing to make these changes to her work, the reasons provided by Alyson are notable:

The one change that needed to be made, according to the editor once it was accepted for publication, was that for young adult readers apparently some of the sex scenes were a little too explicit. They weren't that explicit but apparently you just don't go there so much in young adult literature. There were some scenes that were toned down a little bit, made a little more subtle.

The editor, having articulated that sex in YA was generally inappropriate, seems to be commenting on sexual activity regardless of its heterosexual or homosexual orientation. Where the reason for this change is attributed to the conventions of YA literature, an articulated statement that is peripheral to gay content, but unlike the changes Peters was asked to make, this modification directly impacts the lesbian content.

As a smaller press, Alyson had already informed Watts that the sales for her book, a YA text, would be minimal, yet her book would end up in a lot of libraries. With a smaller market share it is plausible that Alyson would be willing to publish edgier texts, however, it is also possible and more likely that as a gay and lesbian press, specifically publishing books for an LGBTQ audience, that the contents of their YA novels would face heightened scrutiny and potential censorship by reviewers and vendors. Watts indicated that the sexual activity was not graphic, in fact, the language describing the two sexual encounters was primarily metaphoric: "it was just was a little more obvious what they were doing physically... There was the oral sex but it was described more in terms of sensation than mechanics. But it was still pretty clear that that's what they were doing."

While this instance on its own does not itself indicate an active filtering of gay content, the other change Alyson asked Watts to make, again impacted the novel's queer content and hints at editorial gatekeeping practices. Here, it seems a book can be too gay for even a gay and lesbian press.

Having sanitized the sex to meet moral standards, Watts' editor asked her to consider changing the original title of the book, *The Rainbow Sign*, to something else, something less overt and gay:

Finding H.F. was not the original title for the novel. This is actually something the publishers sort of said we might not want to go with this title. I thought this was interesting. The original title was *The Rainbow Sign*, which you know is sort of a symbol running throughout. H.F. sees the sign of the rainbow at the gay and lesbian bookstore and it comes around to the whole Noah story again. So that's what I originally had for the title and they kind of said that the whole rainbow thing might make it sound like the kind of book only gays and lesbians would read and for wider appeal maybe it should be something a little less overt. Now I didn't really think it was that overt myself and if I were a teenager picking up this book I certainly wouldn't have read that into it.

The editorial 'suggestions' offered here sought to make the text accessible to a larger audience, read mainstream, and the multiple impacts of this change stem from the fact the book was made 'less gay.' A universal symbol in the gay community, the rainbow reference in the title would make it easy for those searching for YA with gay content to pick out this book on a shelf, however, the very same gay symbolism was also positioned as a detriment for those of a closeted and mainstream readership who might not choose to read a title marked with queer indexes. Supposedly balancing the needs of a lesbian and straight readership, the lesbian story was not packaged as an identifiable gay commodity; the lesbian was shielded by the cover and rendered invisible from the exterior.

Both of the changes Watts had to make impacted the lesbian content of her text - the limited representations of lesbian sex and the masking of a gay title - yet the reasons

cited for these changes supposedly had nothing to do with the gay subject matter. The rationales supplied were the conventions governing YA and market share respectively. What does this say about the 'gayness' of YA texts published by a gay and lesbian press and the gatekeeping functions of publishing houses in general?

It is impossible to say that editors will not suggest nor ask for amendments to a text that will alter its lesbian content, directly or peripherally. Authors feel that they will face resistance and for the most part taper their manuscripts to hit as few walls as possible. If foreplay and sex are generally not contained in YA, then given the marginalized positions of gay and lesbians in North American society, lesbian sex will definitely not be permissible. Authors self-censor and determine what ideologies their works will contain and, consciously or not, do not cross the invisible ideological divide of moral acceptability when constructing lesbian characters and experiences.

Changing Hands: Authorial Autonomy and Ownership

While authors and publishers are curtailing representations of lesbian foreplay and sex, authors report that they did not face any resistance from publishers with respect to their submission of a manuscript with lesbian characters. With the exception of Garden's *Annie On My Mind* (1982), which was rejected by one publisher before Farrar, Straus Giroux picked it up, all of the texts included in this study were accepted by the first publisher to whom the manuscript was presented. When asked about the single rejection she received, Garden comments, "I really faced no resistance to publishing *Annie*. One rejection isn't at all significant! Many books go through many, many more before they find a 'home'! I often feel that interviewers wish that I had faced more resistance, but I didn't." Indeed, it is not uncommon for books to be rejected, especially early in an author's career. In fact, Garden had written two other books featuring teenage lesbians

prior to *Annie On My Mind* and contends that neither of those were good enough for publication: “I was learning my craft with the first one, and learning in the second one how to write about being gay without proselytizing.”

Authors are able to retain their autonomy by writing the book they envision and entering the editorial process only after a novel is finished. For the most part, these authors submitted a completed manuscript to their agent or editor. With the exception of Benduhn, the authors included in this study had previously published fiction, YA or adult, and had an established relationship with either an agent and/or editor. In a typical publication process, the author finds an agent and that agent becomes responsible for locating a publisher. The agent acts as an intermediary and negotiates a contract on the author’s behalf. Generally, publishing houses do not accept unsolicited submissions directly from authors.

Benduhn, eager to publish her novel, chose to forgo finding an agent and submitted a letter of inquiry directly to those publishing houses she thought might be interested in her work. Within a week, four of the six houses she targeted expressed interest in reviewing her manuscript. Since she received a response from Simon & Schuster first, she submitted her manuscript there and approximately six months later negotiated a contract. According to their website, Simon & Schuster has published under five homosexuality-themed novels as of 2003, with Benduhn’s being the first to feature lesbian characters.

Shifting from writing for adults to teens, Watts initially assumed that Naiad, the oldest American lesbian publisher, would take on her newest work; however, in the early 2000s Naiad decided to slowly shut down its presses as its owners retired. It was Watts’

track record publishing with small and lesbian presses that provided her with the impetus to submit to Alyson without the assistance of an agent. Again, Alyson was more than happy to take on her manuscript, which represents the first original YA with lesbian characters of the approximate ten titles they have published.

Of the other five authors included in this study - Garden, Kerr, Peters, Scoppettone and Woodson - all submitted their manuscripts to their agents first, who forwarded it to their respective editors at their respective publishing houses. Authors chose to continue to work with specific editors with whom they had established positive and successful relationships. "Margaret [Ferguson] is an enormously talented editor -- the best," says Garden and Peters continues to work with Megan Tingley even though it is not a contractual obligation: "I don't have an options contract that says I have to submit to her, but she's a very trusted editor, and she has grown me as a Little, Brown author."

Where experienced authors chose to submit their manuscripts has less to do with the publishing house than the editors these presses employ to represent them and work with authors. In some cases, authors have contractual obligations which require them to furnish the same publishing house the first opportunity to purchase their newest work; this was not the case with any of these authors. None of these authors pitched a book or submitted it chapter by chapter. With the exception of Woodson, whose book was three-quarters finished when purchased, editors read and purchased finished manuscripts, hence, publishing houses were aware of the lesbian content and the nature of the lesbian experiences in a given work before they took on a certain book. The ability to sell a finalized work, one that was written from the author's personal ideas and intent, also contributes to authorial autonomy in the publication process.

Agenda Collision: Small, Independent Presses Versus Large, Mainstream Publishing Houses

The inclination to publish a given text may have as much to do with the scope and size of a publishing house as it does with an open willingness to produce lesbian-themed YA. When speaking about a publishing houses' ability to take on their lesbian novel, many of the authors used adjectives like "risky" and "brave" to label the publishers actions. The other two points authors similarly addressed were the nature or climate of the publishing house – conservative or liberal – and the mainstream positioning of lesbianism within the text, as discussed in chapters two and four.

Small presses have not traditionally delved into YA given the small market share and high capital expenses and resources associated with marketing and promoting these books. According to Naiad Press' President Barbara Grier, " 'If you're a small publisher, you have no chance' in a market which relies heavily on special catalogs, library sales, reviews in professional periodicals, sales, and the like" (cited in Garden 1997, 25). Exploding the myth amongst queer writers that mainstream presses are reluctant to publish gay materials and that the small press route is the best way to see your manuscript in print, Garden (1997) articulates that the reverse is in fact true: small presses are unable to survive publishing gay-themed YA novels. Looking at the list of the thirty-nine YA titles with adolescent lesbian characters published to date, only seven titles or 18 % have been published by independent presses; it is large, mainstream publishing houses that are predominately putting out this work.

When speaking of mainstream publishing houses, authors referred to the climate within individual houses, correlating a conservative nature with a perceived hesitation to

publish lesbian-themed YA literature. Kerr felt that her decision to publish with HarperCollins endowed her with an opportunity to publish edgier material:

I know in a place like Scholastic where their only business is schools, they're a bit more careful. HarperCollins has books going all over the world about every subject for every age group. They don't have to worry about what the principal of the school is going to say, if she's going to say no more to this publishers' books. They don't have to worry like that.

Here, Kerr also connects the conservative nature of a publishing house, Scholastic, to the age of its target market.

Ultimately, the agendas of small presses and conservative mainstream houses may not differ much according to the experiences outlined by Watts with respect to *Finding H.F.* (2003) and Woodson's with another one of her books, *The Notebooks of Melanin Sun* (1995). Alyson's reluctance to publish Watt's book when it was 'too gay' has been documented earlier in this chapter; Woodson was not able to talk about the politics of lesbian representation without involving her experiences with Scholastic and *The Notebooks of Melanin Sun*, a YA novel with a lesbian mother:

These questions would probably make a lot more sense under the context of Scholastic and *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*. You know it's about a boy whose Mom is a lesbian and because Scholastic was a much more conservative house and a whole lot of other stuff went on there. *The House You Pass on the Way* was easy, *Melanin Sun* was not easy. It was Scholastic's first book in their history, at the time in their 75-year history, to deal with a queer theme.

Although this book is not part of this study nor will an in depth examination be provided, Woodson's experiences are important to document as they shed light on other ways editors/publishers may function as gatekeepers.

Firstly, Woodson addresses Scholastic's anxiety in taking this book on because as school market supplier, the bulk of its sales come from its book club flyer directly distributed to children in their respective classrooms. Not only was this Scholastic's first

brush with queer content, but it would also present children with direct access to literature with homosexual characters through the promotion of this novel as a book club item. Scholastic's apprehensions were manifested covertly:

That was more of a struggle because they had not dealt with that issue and fiction. They were nervous about it and I remember having one conversation with my editor who said, "You know, there are too many issues in this book because he is a Momma's boy, his Mom is coming out, he's caring about the environment, he's really short. Can you take some of these issues out?" And the issue I took out was the fact that he was short.

Indirectly indicating the changes they would like made, yet unable to transgress the boundaries governing the author-editor relationship, Scholastic had to 'hint' and subtly influence Woodson's authorial direction. When Woodson chose not to remove the queer element from her novel, instead of pushing this as cutting-edge or new work, Scholastic prettied up the book and pushed it from a literary vantage point:

They were really nervous about it, and as a result, what they did was they got Virginia Hamilton to write a blurb and they got the Dillons who are really well known in children's literature, an illustrating team, to do the cover. They got really beautiful endpaper. They did all the stuff to make it a really beautiful book. And then they put in their literaries, Blue Sky Press, which is their literary section which only sells...they only publish like two Blue Sky books a year.

This attempt to minimalize, disguise or sugar-coat the lesbian "controversial" content with pretty packaging and literary merit will be discussed further in this chapter and in chapter four, respectively.

By placing Woodson's work in their infant literary division, Scholastic subsequently coordinated substantially less marketing and promotion of the novel, and then, they completely restricted access to this book by removing it from their book club:

But they didn't put it in their book club. Scholastic has the biggest book club and they wouldn't put it in their book club because they thought it was too edgy. And then the book went out of print but they didn't tell us it was out of print. We found out it was out of print from some academics who were trying to get it. It

was just a nightmare and a lot of it was about them not knowing what to do with a book that was dealing with queer issues.

In the end, this further restriction of a viable market caused the book to go out of print – even though Scholastic claimed to Woodson and her agent that it did not go out of print and has since been “re-issued.” Given the conservative nature of the publishing house, and the specific child oriented school market that Scholastic serves, this mainstream publishing house was unfamiliar with and unable to successfully handle the production of a queer book. As such, mainstream presses and small presses may face similar perceived limitations which cause them to exert a gatekeeping influence that infringes upon the text itself and constrains the markets in which it is eventually placed because of its lesbian themes.

Publishing houses may also face the reverse of this situation when one of its authors decides to write a gay-themed book: it is impossible to talk about publishing YA with adolescent lesbian characters without addressing its perceived impact upon an author’s larger body of non-queer work. Michael Cart (1996) interviewed author M.E. Kerr about publishing her first gay novel, *Night Kites*, in 1986, and quotes Kerr as having stated a concern that “she was committing professional suicide when she wrote about a gay AIDS patient” (223), which was not experienced with *Deliver Us From Evie* published eight years later. Reflecting on her publication history in 2004, Kerr did not express having faced any challenges in publishing her lesbian-themed novel, nor did she deem her decision to write *Night Kites* ‘professional suicide.’ According to Kerr, lesbianism was more mainstream and her inclusion of a butch character less perilous than her treatment of AIDS was in the mid-eighties: “I don’t think this book affected them as much as *Night Kites*. Because *Night Kites*, it was the 80s, AIDS was an anathema in

people's minds. I think that they were a little worried about *Night Kites* - to put AIDS into the classroom. It hadn't been mainstreamed yet. We didn't think that it was going to be around very long." Comparatively, publishing *Deliver Us From Evie* was a less risky business decision and, given that Kerr's career did not suffer from having already published a homosexuality-themed YA in the 1980s, with the passage of time, shifting social values and having already survived one gay book, both Kerr and her publisher did not consider this novel threatening to her career.

Peters consciously identified the risks that writing a gay-themed work posed for her larger body of children's work when she finally decided to pen *Keeping You A Secret* (2003): "I have this body of children's work and I felt really protective of that. I didn't want to be accused of luring young girls to the dark side. I thought, too, that the gay market, the lesbian market in particular, was such a small niche that I would never make a living. I just spent 10 years trying to build up a readership. I didn't think this would be furthering my career." Here, 'career suicide' could occur in one of two forms: this lesbian book would not sell well and would damage future sales of future books, and/or, that it would hurt the body of literature that was already on library and bookstore shelves and the sales of this back-list fiction. Part of the fear that Peters highlights has to do with the seepage of her personal lesbian identity into her other novels, that by writing one lesbian novel somehow a new dangerously dyke-ish subtext could be inserted into her other body of work. The other portion of her anxiety has to do with the charge of indoctrination, that her novels could be accused of turning young girls into lesbians. This sense of dread and fear experienced by both Kerr and Peters, for a time, functioned as a gatekeeper, and kept them from writing their own identities into YA fiction.

Packaging the Novel

While the author retains creative control over the text itself, their input into the packaging of a fictional work varies due to contract options and their desired level of personal involvement. According to Scoppettone, authors who wrote in the 1970s and 1980s often did not have the option to shape the cover or jacket description of their books: "Of course, we always want to be involved in them and nobody ever let us." Authors publishing since the 1990s have had an increased opportunity to shape the exterior of their novels with an option to share their packaging vision with the artistic team through cover consultation rights. Watts, for example, was sent the cover copy for approval and provided feedback on the illustration she imagined: "They asked me some about colours and they asked me what were some of the images I associated with the novel. Since there is this road trip something with a road was discussed, there is also the water that shows up in the novel and that is what they ended up doing."

Peters normally does not write the jacket copy, but for this novel, was approached by her editor to take the lead when the publishing house could not get the tone right. Peters also maintains further control over the packaging of her book, holding cover consultation rights but not cover approval. For *Keeping You A Secret* she asked for real people on the cover and requested "that if they were going to put people on the cover could they actually photograph lesbians? I said I think that would be really nice. I don't know if they did or not."

Woodson, whose book changed publishing houses after it went out of print and was then re-issued, did not provide input into the cover illustration when it was first put out by Random House in 1997, but when it was re-released in 2003 by Putnam, she was actively involved in the process by choosing the model to represent Staggerlee. For both

publications, Woodson did not consult on the jacket copy. For the most part, authors are more actively involved in the selection of an illustration for the cover primarily via consultation with the art department than in writing the blurb on the jacket. However, despite their consultation rights, many of the surveyed authors felt their cover did not represent the characters they had created.

Benduhn was invited to share her ideas for the cover of *Gravel Queen* with the graphic design team, but “the graphic design team came up with the cover and the whole house really loved it and they said, “hey, let’s show you this art work we have.” I thought, “I don’t know if I thought of her [Aurin] as so blond.” And then they were like, “What! Look at the image!” ” In this instance, while the image itself in the end was aesthetically pleasing for Benduhn, the girl depicted as Aurin on the cover is not the same girl she imagined when creating the character inside the book. Kerr also had a similar experience with the cover of *Deliver Us From Evie*: “I know I didn’t like the cover, the picture, because I didn’t think she looked like Elvis Presley. In the book I said she did. I wasn’t fond of the cover.” Similarly, Scoppettone did not like the cover on her book.

Used by a readership to distinguish one book from another lined up on library or store shelves, the cover and jacket copy are important selection tools. These authors were intentional in their construction of lesbian characters and attempted to fill a void in YA fiction with their insertion of specific adolescent lesbian experiences, however, when publishing houses purchase a manuscript, the author relinquishes creative control specifically with respect to how her novel will be packaged and marketed. During the transformation of a manuscript into a book commodity, the obvious lesbian characters and content on the pages are diluted; the work that was once the sole product of an

autonomous author is malleable to the designs of the press publishing it. In packaging these novels, lesbians are rendered invisible.

Of the seven novels examined in this project, the cover copy of five texts, or 71%, contained a direct reference to its lesbian content, as detailed in table 3.1.⁴ The jacket copy either stated or alluded to a romance between two girls and, in only one instance used the word 'lesbian' to identify a character's orientation. In the two novels where the

Table 3.1 Treatment of Lesbian Content on the Jacket Copy

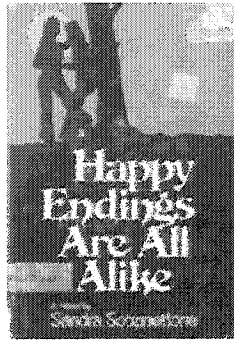
	No Mention of Lesbian Content	Direct Mention of Lesbian Content
Tea Benduhn	-	x
Nancy Garden	-	x
M.E. Kerr	x	-
Julie Anne Peters	-	x
Sandra Scoppettone	-	x
Julia Watts	-	x
Jacqueline Woodson	x	-

lesbian characters or themes were not mentioned in the copy, lesbians were the main characters and it would be impossible for a reader to identify this as a 'lesbian book' from the blurb.

Of the covers on these seven books, contained in illustrations 3.1 to 3.7, none of the images could be read as overt indicators of lesbian content. While ambiguity surrounds what constitutes lesbian signifiers, gay symbols or colours or romantic gestures between two girls, it might provide a potential reader with a clue of what resides on the pages of a book.

⁴ Initially eleven novels were selected for this study. Of the four removed novels, the lesbian content is not mentioned on the jacket copy of three titles (Guy, Trope and Yamanka) and the fourth title would require the reader to infer the sexual orientation of the characters (Brett). The cover images on all four of these titles do not indicate lesbian characters or plots.

Illustration 3.1



Sandra Scoppettone
Happy Endings Are All Alike (1978)

Illustration 3.2



Nancy Garden
Annie On My Mind (1982)

Illustration 3.3



M.E. Kerr
Deliver Us From Evie (1994)

Illustration 3.4



Jacqueline Woodson
The House You Pass on the Way (1997)

Illustration 3.5



Julia Watts
Finding H.F. (2001)

Illustration 3.6



Tea Benduhn
Gravel Queen (2003)

Illustration 3.7



Julie Anne Peters
Keeping You A Secret (2003)

Five of these covers feature photographs of individual girls – four white young women and one black, illustrations 3.3 to 3.7. The remaining two covers, illustrations 3.1 and 3.2, feature two girls, one a graphic outline of two gender ambiguous individuals leaning against a tree and the other an illustration of two white girls looking down into their hands which are interlaced. Without indexing lesbian presence through imagery, all of these covers clearly cloak the lesbian content contained within. Compounding the absence of an image sign, neither Woodson nor Kerr's novel contained a textual reference that would indicate it is a lesbian-themed YA, and thus, completely obscure the presence of an adolescent lesbian character. While the adolescent lesbian may readily be apparent on the pages of a YA text, she is diminished and rendered invisible when packaged.

Presumption and Assumption: Intervening Ideologies and Gatekeeping

In conclusion, as a manuscript is converted to a novel, pages change hands and the once autonomous author increasingly loses creative control over her work. From the beginning, the adolescent lesbian characters an author imagines have been shaped by her notions of what is permissible in YA literature, within the production network as a whole and in relation to specific nodes. Often wanting to skirt potential gatekeeping interference, authors defensively engage in the politics of production by tailoring their characters and stories to adhere to perceived boundaries mediating acceptability. In the creation of asexual characters because 'lesbians are okay but lesbian sex is not', or, as a result of her own discomfort writing sexual content for a teen readership, authors internally negotiate their politics in lieu of those circumscribed by other production nodes

and thus the resulting images and representations of lesbians are frequently less gritty or edgy in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts.

Furthermore, the climate at and the size of a publishing house influences the completed manuscript an author submits and the representations of adolescent lesbians that the final novel depicts. Large, mainstream publishing houses are currently putting out the bulk of lesbian-themed YA fiction and, as experienced by Woodson when publishing *The Notebooks of Melanin Sun* with Scholastic, with that come constraints as to what a house is willing to release and promote for a primarily adolescent audience.

Given that authors have not experienced apprehension or reluctance from their editors with respect to a publishing house's willingness to purchase their manuscripts and, for the most part, that editors do not make suggestions or mandate changes that directly alter the lesbian content of a novel, it is notable that the lesbian character who was a visible protagonist when the manuscript landed on the desk of the editor is often rendered invisible when she leaves that same editor's office. Her presence wanes on the jacket copy or cover. Deeper into the production process the manuscript goes and, as nodes engage in the politics of representation, the greater the impact the production network has on the final shape a YA book takes.

CHAPTER 4

MARKETS . MARKETING . MARKET SHARE: TAKING LESBIAN-THEMED YA LITERATURE PUBLIC

Factoring into a publishing house's decision to purchase any given title of YA fiction is the projected market slice a book is likely to capture. As part of the editorial/publishing house node, the market bridges a written text with a readership. Working alongside the editor, the acquisitions department makes a decision on behalf of a house as to whether or not the purchase of specific text is an economically viable and financially sound decision. The marketplace is positioned as a gatekeeper that is easily influenced by purchasing patterns and readership trends, effectively restricting the type of texts and the quantity of texts produced. Seemingly autonomous, the economic mechanics of the market shape how lesbians come into the fictional world of YA. Beginning with the history of YA fiction and the location of homosexuality-themed YA within this larger body and charting its relationship to the trade and school/library market and, the impact reviewers, censorship and specific markets have upon sales, this chapter investigates the role of the market, marketing and market share on the politics of representation and symbolic annihilation of adolescent lesbians in YA fiction.

The Young Adult Market: Past and Present

Like any other commodity, YA fiction is susceptible to market forces. The adult market was the first recognizable niche for books and literature for children, primarily in the form of fables, stories and more recently picture books, only emerged as a distinct market in the latter years of the 19th century when 'child' was identified as a discrete developmental life phase (Lesesne 2004). Young adult literature followed a similar

course when 'adolescent' materialized as distinct age group bridging the developmental gap between children and adults in the early 20th century.

Some of the first books published for this new teen audience, in hindsight labeled 'junior novels,' were *Sue Barton: Student Nurse* (1936) and *Let the Hurricane Roar* (1933) (Cart 2004). According to Cart, the junior novel was more of a fluke than an intentional marketing to a new audience: presses found material that was too young for adults and too mature for children, but took a chance and published it anyway.

Seventeenth Summer (1942) by Maureen Daly has been called the first YA novel; however, while this book may have been widely read by teens and inspired the publication of numerous copycats, it was not intended for an adolescent audience. It was not until 1967 that the first recognizable YA novel was marketed and published for an adolescent readership: *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton delivered an identifiable set of conventions, styles and themes residing in realism that have come to be identified with YA literature.

Early 1970s works of YA fiction formed a distinct grouping of literature labeled 'problem' novels, which tended to be didactic in nature. One dimensional, and not necessarily literary, these books dealt with a specific problem - be it pregnancy, drug addiction, divorce, incest, interracial relationships, anorexia, etc - and created a space in the world of teenage angst to let adolescents know that they were not alone. At times this fiction was edgy with its problem selection, yet it remained prescriptive and moralistic identifying the expected behaviour of "good" girls and boys, with all "issues" resolved nicely and neatly by the conclusion of the story.

One of the issues encountered by teens in these novels was the “problem” of homosexuality. To be young and gay in these early books was akin to receiving a death sentence, or, to be condemned to live a life of loneliness. Homosexuality was represented as a phase, a pathological illness, a state leading to death and/or being a member of the most abject group in society. Given that the “American Psychiatric Association continued to list homosexuality in its official Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders” until 1973 (Cart 1997, 5), these early representations of gayness as a choice or a phase, and the subsequent treatment of this identity position in these novels, is unsurprising.

While the first YA novel containing a homosexual experience was John Donovan’s *I’ll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969) which included a brief and vague encounter between Davy and his friend, the first novel featuring a lesbian experience, *Ruby* by Rosa Guy, was not published until eight years later in 1976. Only nine problem novels published in the 1970s featured homosexual characters, and of those, only three contained lesbian characters. As of 2003, fewer than 160 homosexuality-themed novels have been published, of which approximately only one-third have contained lesbian characters. Even more limited is the ratio of books with adolescent lesbian characters, which constitute approximately one-quarter of all these published titles. See table 4.1 and appendix J for a bibliography.

The 1970s YA concentration on problems, shifted in the 1980s with a revival of the romance genre, the advent of the original paperback series and chain bookstores. Series books such as *Sweet Valley High* and the *Baby-sitters Club* that were cheap to produce and had a large appeal to adolescent females dwarfed the production of

hardcover fiction from emerging literary YA authors. Recognizing the economic capital of teens, publishers shifted the market focus by producing inexpensive paperbacks sold in stores opposed to the library market where YA had historically made the majority of its sales. Somehow, this successful market expansion occurred at a time when the North American economy went into a recession, the youth demographic dipped, and YA departments at publishing houses and libraries were the first to get cut. As Marc Aronson notes, “in 1990 YAs were down to 14 percent of the population, the lowest number in 40 years” (2001, 34). Accompanying this market shift, the scope was further narrowed as publishers shifted the target of the YA audience from teens to middle school readers with a decrease in protagonists’ age from an average of sixteen to eighteen years to fourteen years of age (Cart 2001).

Table 4.1 The Number of Homosexuality-Themed Books Published by Decade with Gay Male and Female Lesbian Characters and Teen/Adult Female Lesbian Characters*

Number of homosexuality-themed books published in the 1970s			Number of homosexuality-themed books published in the 1980s			Number of homosexuality-themed books published in the 1990s			Number of homosexuality-themed books published in the 2000s		
9			48			67			31		
Male 6	Female 3		Male 31	Female 17		Male 46	Female 21		Male 20	Female 11	
	Teen 3	Adult 0		Teen 12	Adult 7		Teen 15	Adult 6		Teen 9	Adult 3

* This table excludes the one YA novel with a gay male character published in 1969. The data for the 2000s figure only covers the period 2000 to 2003. In cases where the number of teen and adult lesbian titles outnumbers the total number of titles with female character this is because some titles contained both generations of characters.

Between 1983-1992, on average, publishers were issuing five homosexuality-themed titles per year. During this time, and well into the 1990s, gay and lesbian

characters were distanced on the pages of YA: they became sidekicks and secondary characters, and, according to Jenkins (1998), this continued the shifting trend of gay-as-main-theme to gay issues in the subplot.

Even though authors with the earliest publication dates, Scoppettone (1978) and Garden (1982), did not face difficulty getting their homosexuality-themed books published, both were conscious of marketplace and social restrictions that could have potentially hampered the publication process, factors which have lessened with time. Garden and Scoppettone place the credit with their respective houses' willingness to take a risk in publishing envelope-pushing material that challenged dominant moral and marketplace barriers. Scoppettone states, "And really, it wasn't that I was so wonderful, Harper was. They were great. They were brave, very brave to do it." Of Farrar, Straus Giroux, Garden recalls, "In the 1980s, it wasn't as easy as it is now to have a GL [gay and lesbian] YA published. But FSG has always been a literary publisher and one that is not afraid to publish good books that others decline because of their subject matter." In one respect, by simply choosing to tackle material with gay and lesbian content these publishers took a risk and paved the way for the emergence of other texts, a point Scoppettone makes when talking about the openings *Happy Endings Are All Alike* created for ensuing authors: "I broke the barrier for them. It's true. I don't know if they [other authors] tell you or not. You know, this allowed other people to do it." This is a sentiment that Benduhn, Kerr and Garden echo as each paid homage to the work of earlier authors that made it easier for them to get their work published in proceeding years. Yet, many of these early homosexuality-themed novels did not end happily: in

these endings homosexuality was painted as a fatal flaw with dire or deathly consequences.

During the early years of publishing material with gay and lesbian characters, the existence of homosexual characters was further compounded by *how* their sexuality was framed. Garden points out this reluctance: “But in the late 70s/early 80s the climate was such that publishers were nervous about publishing positive GL books for kids - although homosexuality had begun to figure in YAs it was usually not on the part of teen protagonists, nor was it usually viewed favorably if it was - and I guess it took a publisher like FSG to take a chance on that.” As the first YA novel to posit homosexuality positively and to end happily, Garden’s *Annie On My Mind* challenged this two-tiered structural barrier.

While authors writing gay and lesbian material in the 1970s were working within a YA publication boom, authors in the 1980s experienced dwindling publication opportunities due to a decade-long shrinking of the YA market. The population decline and narrowing of the intended audience from YA to middle school readers led to the evaporation of YA sections with any remaining novels shelved in the children’s department (Cart 2004). By 1990, according to Connie Epstein in *Horn Book Magazine* “some editors, marketing directors, and subsidiary rights directors, [were] wondering whether the young adult novel was ready for burial and certainly most would [have] agree[d] that the genre is in turmoil” (cited in Cart 2004, 206). According to Lesesne (2004) “many experts feared that YA literature had reached its peak” (217). But just as experts were contemplating the death of YA, the early 1990s witnessed a sudden explosion in the production of YA fiction. This influx was caused by multiple

intersecting factors including another population demographic shift, an economic recovery, a repositioning of the age of YA readers and editors' increased willingness to take risks (Cart 2004).

While the funding of public institutions recovered, the target audience of YA was broadened to incorporate the "MTV demographic," or those aged 15-25. Accompanying this expanded youthful audience, fiction called cross-overs - titles written and published as YA which also intentionally capture a segment of the adult market - further target this MTV age grouping. Additionally, "in 1992 demographics did an about face. For the first time in fifteen years the teenage population showed an increase, and, in the years since, teens have become the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population and will continue to be until the year 2011" (Cart 2004, 206). Coupled with a larger audience, both in terms of age and population, YA literature has had to compete with magazines, the internet and television for its share of the market, which in turn has redirected the focus of the 1970s 'problem novel': "Between talk shows, the Web, and MTV's simulacrum of *The Real World*, every human relationship, desire, affliction, and abuse is public knowledge. No one needs a book to tell them they are alone" (Aronson 2001, 34). YA formats and genres have also expanded to include graphic novels, novels in verse, short story collections, science fiction and fantasy books in addition to the reorientation of this literary body from an emphasis on a singular problem to contemporary realism. In the 1990s, YA fiction often reflects the real world and portrays the lives of adolescents in a complicated, messy, gritty and edgy manner.

For an author like Jacqueline Woodson, breaking onto the publishing scene in the early 1990s was easier because of the nature of her work: "The thing about it is that I

started publishing when there was a boom in the literature that dealt with quote, unquote ‘multicultural literature,’ including the issue of queerness. People were hungry for the books, they were hungry for the writers who could write from experience or whatever, who they felt the books would be more authentic coming from.” Woodson’s edgier literature was the kind that prompted editors to take a risk and, according to Aronson, possessed the hot genre marquee qualities of dealing with an African-American experience and gayness. Speaking specifically to her publishing house’s reaction to the queer content of *The House You Pass on the Way*, Woodson says:

They were fine with it. It was a time when books that were dealing with quote unquote ‘issues’ were really hot. Books that were edgy and books that were talking about things that had not been historically talked about. They realized that there was a readership, they realized this was a business, so they wanted books that were going to sell. They realized that this kind of stuff could possibly sell and they were hungry for it. It was a changing time, it was the early 1990s, there was *Heather Has Two Mommies* and all that stuff was getting a lot of attention. It was a good time to be writing stuff that dealt with queer issues.

Within this burgeoning and growing market of YA, an LGBTQ readership and their purchasing power became apparent to publishers. In this case, Woodson’s comment acknowledges the diminished reluctance of publishing houses to touch queer material because of its moral threat to their adaptation of an alternate approaches that catered to a newly identified minority audience while maintaining the interest of a predominately heterosexual readership. With such a willingness to publish so-called-sizzling homosexuality-themed YA literature, what Woodson’s experiences do not account for is its stable production levels during the 1990s. Why has production output between the years of 1993 and 2003 ranged from three to eleven titles annually, with an average of eight titles per year, if such an openness to this material exists?

If the market for YA literature has increased, then it should logically follow that the number of gay titles published annually would increase to meet the heightened demand of a larger readership; however, this has not been the case. These authorial interviews indicate that the issue does not reside with a publisher's willingness to take on YA with lesbian characters, rather, it is the perceived market and sales for this body of work that have constrained a publishing house's ability to produce this literature.

Lesbian-Themed YA Literature and the Market

Two main factors figuring into a publisher's acceptance of a manuscript are the qualities and suitability of the manuscript itself and, the financial prospectus and marketability of that manuscript. Simply put, a publishing house will contract an author if the book is good and is predicted to earn a specific sales figure. Authorial interviews indicate that books with lesbian content are subjected to factors that extend beyond finances: the lesbian-themed YA must also surpass gatekeepers where heterosexism and homophobia is present.

According to Garden, the challenge facing lesbian-themed literature is not with respect to its gay content, but with respect to the ability of this material to financially thrive in the market:

Since the 90s, publishers in ever-increasing numbers have been willing and even eager to publish YA books with GL content. One of the remaining problems in publishing such books has to do with marketing, not with homophobia. The fact is that lesbian and gay books, especially for kids and YAs, are seen as having a limited market, and that's pretty true.

This is not to suggest that authors have never endured opposition regarding the publication of homosexuality-themed literature due to its potentially "controversial" content, but in Garden's experiences, part of this reluctance is shaped by the market factors that drive the book industry. Presumably, lesbian YA literature targets a gay

adolescent female audience; this is a small audience, in the already tiny niche of YA, with minute financial capital.

As discussed earlier, authors in the 1970s and 1980s reported that publishing gay and lesbian literature for YAs was regarded as risky, yet as they entered the 1990s and continued into the 2000s, authors cite market forces as having the greatest impact on the decisions of publishing houses to acquire these lesbian-themed books. Kate Pavao (2003) supports this claim in her article in industry magazine *Publishers Weekly* exploring the publication of gay YA:

The threat of controversy certainly doesn't seem to be scaring publishers from acquiring gay-themed books. When PW [*Publishers Weekly*] published an article examining the genre back in 1994, [David] Gale said he thought editors might be shying away from publishing these novels for fear that they might not sell. But he no longer thinks that's the case. "I don't think that gay- or lesbian-themed books [automatically] indicate fewer sales. I don't think that's the issue at all," Gale now says. "I think that all editors are more bottom-line conscious now because of the state of publishing, but a good book will sell. [In 1994] it was probably risky to do a gay, lesbian-themed book, whereas now I don't think it is."

Gale's comment is indicative of the shifting ideology and social positioning of homosexuals in North American society: the increased acceptance of gays has led to an heightened comfort of including lesbians in YA literature. Gay characters have become commonplace and, in this instance, publishers privilege a good story over the potential 'risk' homosexual themes may present. Another reason for this 'risk' reduction can be attributed to the positioning of gays and lesbians in these texts. Gays and lesbians have shifted from being featured as major to minor characters during the 1990s, and it is only since the early 2000s that they have returned to fill prominent protagonist roles. Accompanying the relegation of gay and lesbian issues to the subplot of these texts, the contents of these novels have diversified and tackle multi-dimensional issues which

presumably increase its appeal to a broader mainstream audience and hence, achieve greater sales. Moving into the 2000s, the increased visibility of lesbians, the literary merit and the mainstreaming of these texts can also be attributed to an increased sales market. Not only has the nature of lesbian texts shifted from being 'problem' focused to an emphasis on multiple issues appealing to a wider market, but the market for YA has opened up to include adolescents and adults of any sexual orientation.

In the publishing world, the book sales market is typically divided into adult and children, fiction and non-fiction sales. For tracking purposes, YA sales are most commonly grouped with children's. Determining the specific sales statistics of YA as a whole and of the YA lesbian texts included in this study was not possible. Each of the authors' publishing houses were contacted: four did not respond to the request and three stated that they were unable to release sales information because it was against company policy. When speaking with professional librarians on the YALSA-BK listserv to confirm if this was indeed a common industry practice, librarians confirmed that publishing houses no longer release specific figures. The sales statistics publishing houses do release are general figures relating to overall sales in the YA market. This market is not broken into trade versus library or school sales, nor does it provide information on individual titles. When specific sales information regarding a text is released, it is via top ten lists, and none of the titles included here have appeared on these charts.

Making Her Marketable: Selling Adolescent Lesbians in YA Literature

YA is a small market and the majority of its sales typically come from schools, school libraries and public libraries, as opposed to the trade market where sales are made through bookstores. When changes are made to these texts, by the author's initiative or

as per editorial suggestion, it often has to do with increasing its salability for the school/library market. As Benduhn reports, her original manuscript for *Gravel Queen* (2003) was liberally peppered with the 'f-word,' all of which were removed from the published text:

To mention one thing about the f-word, is that I don't even think I was necessarily asked or required to change it. It was recommended to me because of library sales. I said, "Sure why not, I'm not tied to the word." It was something that was mentioned it would effect. Because some school libraries just plain will not, they can't, they're probably not allowed for some reason or another to buy those books for their stacks, according to x y z, whatever things. If you can hit enough levels of clearance then that increases your circulation.

Firstly, Benduhn illuminates the nature of the author-editor relationship where the author retains ownership over her work and the editor makes suggestions to strengthen it. In this instance, the editorial comments had to do with improving the salability of her book through changes to the language and not the queer content. Here, the lesbian relationship that develops between Aurin and Neila was not considered to have an impact which would diminish sales in the school/library market. As discussed in chapter three, there was nothing incredibly sexual or intimate detailed in this lesbian relationship as Benduhn herself had consciously excluded such descriptions based on her preconceptions that schools would disallow this type of material. Secondly, and perhaps more important, Benduhn's comment illustrates the interconnected phases of the production process and the force exerted by a perceived market. The changes made to the text were intentionally incorporated to increase the market share by eliminating the additional dirty word red flags for school library purchasers. While schools and libraries are categorically grouped for market purposes, public libraries generally tend to respect anti-censorship mandates and purchase a wide range of diverse literature for YAs. Benduhn's understanding of the

market reflects this separation. Removing the 'f-word' from her text cleans it up and sanitizes it for a YA audience, a move that actually contradicts the tendency of this literature to be gritty and grounded in contemporary realism, but which is fitting given the gatekeeping functions of purchasers who are often positioned as moral guardians and defenders of material choices. The edits made to *Gravel Queen* were based upon social notions of what is ideologically acceptable for youth and should be available to them in schools in order to increase the profits earned by this book in a specific market.

Anticipated sales in the school and library market further limit conceptions of what is acceptable in a YA book, especially those containing lesbian characters. In cases where the subject material may possibly be considered controversial, the onus is on the book to prove its worthiness for publication and inclusion in a given collection based on other merits. As Garden points out, "Another thing to keep in mind is that especially when a subject is 'controversial,' publishers are more willing to publish YA books of high literary or commercial quality than to take a chance of books that, if not controversial, might be able to get away with being a little less good." Following Garden's experiences then, not only do novels featuring lesbian characters have to be good books, they have to be excellent and of exceptional quality, better than their counterparts in terms of literary value. Evidence supporting this claim can be seen in terms of award winning homosexuality-themed titles.

Since the advent of the Michael L. Printz award in 2000, the only award in YA fiction for the best book based strictly upon literary merit, five novels containing homosexual experiences have been nominated and one has won this prestigious honour of the total four winners and fourteen nominations. In addition, a slew of gay titles have

won the National Book Award, Los Angeles Times Book Prize, the Coretta Scott King Award, or have shown up on the Young Adult Library Services Association Best Books annual honours list. Furthermore, as detailed in table 4.2, of the seven authors included in this study, four have won or been nominated for mainstream book awards based on titles which include gay or lesbian characters and, five are critically acclaimed award winning authors for their other YA fiction. These correlations corroborate Garden's

Table 4.2 Award Winning Authors

	Gay or Lesbian Award Winner or Nominee for any YA with Lesbian Character(s)	Mainstream Award Winner or Nominee for any YA with Gay or Lesbian Character(s)	Award Winner or Nominee for Other YA Title(s)
Tea Benduhn	x	-	-
Nancy Garden	x	x	x
M.E. Kerr	-	x	x
Julie Anne Peters	x	x	x
Sandra Scoppettone	-	-	x
Julia Watts	x	-	-
Jacqueline Woodson	-	x	x

observations of the exceptional literary quality required by publishers to enhance marketplace sales when they do choose to publish texts with lesbian content.

Once a publisher is assured that a novel will be successful in the school/library market and is of outstanding literary value, the next hurdle the lesbian novel has to overcome is the number of YA texts a publisher will put out in one of the two annual seasons – spring or fall. Early in their careers, authors like Woodson and Peters were writing more than one YA per year, but were unable to have more than one book published with the same publishing house. According to Woodson, “publishers don’t like to publish more than one book, a hardcover young adult novel, by a writer in one season

because it will compete.” Without an option to publish two manuscripts within the same house and season, Woodson and Peters would send one manuscript to their main house and the second elsewhere. Given the overall market saturation for YA, it is unsurprising that the restrictions governing the number of YA titles with adolescent lesbian characters published in a year would additionally be limited. According to Garden, “Given the marketing considerations, publishers are unwilling to publish more than one or two GL books per list, or even per year (a year consisting to two ‘lists’). In most cases, that’s not really homophobia; it’s economics.” While the marketplace rationale provides a reason as to why there are not more gay and lesbian YA texts available, and supports the stable output of these novels from 1993 – 2003, this does not make sense in light of the annual sales figures provided by *Publishers Weekly*. In 2004 alone, sales of children’s/YA hardcover books increased 4.7% and sales of paperbacks were up 14.6% in comparison to 2003 figures.

Given that these numbers do not support the marketplace argument – an argument grounded in an assumption or projection of sales figures – what is the role of homophobia in limiting output for the trade and school markets? These publishers’ rationales only partially account for the presumed economics of the school/library market, which traditionally has accounted for the bulk of YA sales.

Shifting Markets: YA Goes Trade

Peters’ experiences with *Keeping You A Secret* contradict the commonplace market analysis of YA, as this has been her biggest selling book, aside from *Define*

Normal. What is unusual about her first lesbian YA novel is its exceptional sales in the trade market.⁵ Peters comments,

Who actually bought the book and how that was different from what was expected of the book...I think Little, Brown was surprised by it [because it sold so well] in the trade market. I think they were very, very surprised that that happened - that the biggest sales have been in the trade market outside of the library and school market.

With sales in the trade market surpassing those in the school/library, Peters' text has shattered the expectations of both the marketing and acquisitions division at Little, Brown and Co. Peters' sales statistics speak to a shift in *who* is buying the book.

Trade market sales indicate that people are purchasing books for their own personal use or collections as opposed to the institutional sales of school/library, and given that the target audience for YA is 12-18 and that the MTV demographic is 15-25, it is reasonable to assume that those buying this lesbian-themed text are within the target market or are purchasing the book for someone within this target market. For Peters, the overwhelming mail she has received from adolescents verifies that *Keeping You A Secret* is reaching youth and, additionally, Peters' reasons this market shift can be attributed to the fact that "YA fiction is just so popular now. And kids have a lot more disposable income. There's this study that shows teens have \$100.00 of disposable income to spend a week. Whoa!" Peters aptly points out this market shift, where products are increasingly being created for and sold to the previously untapped pocket books of North American teens:

Last year [2001], according to a study by Teenage Research Unlimited, American teens spent close to 172 billion, or \$104 per teen per week-- and that's not counting the other spending that is influenced by teens. With the teen population on the rise (32 million and counting), Generation Y could well outnumber baby

⁵ Peters' comment was not verified as it is against Little, Brown and Company's policy to release sales figures to the public.

boomers at their peak. No wonder that publishers and booksellers, along with clothing retailers, electronics purveyors and just about everyone else with something to sell, want to reach the teen market (Rosen 2002, 84).

The economic capital of teens has not gone unnoticed by publishers. Since the early 2000s, major publishing houses such as Scholastic's PUSH, HarperCollins' HarperTempest and Simon & Schuster's Pulse have been introducing imprints strictly to tap this YA market (Rosen 2002). Along with imprints producing catchy, edgy and controversial literature, these divisions have also developed specific marketing schemes utilizing communication tools such as the internet, postcards and café launches to reach out to teens. Even within bookstores themselves, the location of YA shelves has changed: traditionally, YA fiction was a part of the children's section, tucked away at the back of the store. This poor location choice often gave YA literature an infantilized veneer and youth wanting to be anything but children would steer clear of these collections. Rosen's interviews with booksellers indicate a change in store layout where YA is increasingly being located as far away as possible from children's books and strategically placed near café locations. All of these changes, including marketing tactics like price points and shelf talkers, are designed to get adolescents into YA fiction sections, and hence, drive up the trade sales figures. According to Carolyn Horn (2002), there has been a dramatic increase in the interest and sales in the teenage market, defined here as 12 to 16-year-olds. Book Marketing Ltd's (BML) recent study estimates that, "in 2001, 13.6 million books were bought in this age group, up from 12.8 million books in 2000" (Horn 2002, 14). Clearly, publishers are targeting and pushing sales of YA fiction in the trade market.

Unlike the other authors included in this study, Peters' book was encouraged and solicited by both her editor and agent. Peters notes that her editor was able to see a market for lesbian YA, yet she herself was initially very hesitant to write "gay lit," citing her belief "that the gay market, the lesbian market in particular, was such a small niche that [she] would never make a living." While none of the other authors commented on market breakdowns, it is important to note that with the exception of Scoppettone's book published in 1978, all of these novels are still in print. Given that the library/school market is limited in the number of copies initially purchased, and this need remains stable over time because the number of new or replacement copies a single institution will buy is unlikely to dramatically increase, sales for books in the school/library market remain relatively stable and if anything, decrease over time with market saturation. For these titles to remain in print, sales must be sufficient and combined with the limited potential of the school/library market, this suggests that YA fiction must be selling elsewhere: the trade market.

While sales trends and marketing platforms indicate that YA is shifting towards holding a stronger base in the trade market, without numerical figures it is impossible to conclude this with utmost certainty. Calling for more research on the sales and marketing of YA fiction could fully illuminate this issue. What preliminary research indicates, and authorial experience supports, is that YA generally and lesbian-themed YA fiction is selling largely in the trade market. The implications of this market shift are as follows: while authors are self-censoring lesbian experiences, and specifically sex, for fear that their books will not get published (editorial/publishing house gatekeeping), and while publishers are currently hesitant to print controversial or edgy lesbian material utilizing

the sales and the marketplace as justificatory rationale (purchasing gatekeeping), and all nodes fear transgressing the boundaries of moral acceptability for youth (author, editorial/publishing house, marketplace gatekeeping), for the most part, these gatekeeping limitations are self-imposed. The issues are not solely homophobia, economics or morality: it is the perception of limitations imposed by other nodes. As such, each node mediates their own actions before it can be exposed to the possible interventions of another.

Mediating Access Through Reviews: When Sexism Intersects With Homophobia

YA texts with adolescent lesbian characters are being written and published, facing little resistance, but the existence of these books and the queer characters they contain remain largely invisible in the world of fiction. This is due partially to the lack of marketing campaigns and merchandising currently employed by publishing houses, and, partially because familiarity with these texts is determined by reviews, which in turn, inform purchases made by schools, libraries and bookstores. For the most part, reviews function as the major marketing tool for those working with YA fiction. With six trade journals targeting librarians, bookstores and schools – *School Library Journal*, *VOYA* (*Voice of Youth Advocates*), *Horn Book Magazine*, *Kirkus*, *Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist* – reviews provide professionals with brief evaluative synopses upon which institutional purchasing decisions are made. Since there is insufficient time to read every new YA novel put out by every publishing house in every season, reviews are the industry insiders' source of information, providing insight into what will be hot or not in a given year.

According to Rothbauer and McKechnie (2000), book reviews are the traditional resource used by librarians in collection building and rank as one of the top three resources librarians employ when purchasing books published by small presses (Serebnick 1992). Furthermore, in reviewing studies investigating the relationship between reviews and library holdings, Rothbauer and McKechnie found that “the more often a book is reviewed the more likely it is to be found in libraries” (np), and, these journals tend to publish only positive reviews of children’s and YA literature, regardless of whether or not the book is actually good.

With respect to gay and lesbian YA fiction, Rothbauer and McKechnie (1999a) found that, on average, Canadian libraries held 40% of the gay titles listed in their survey, however, libraries were more likely to own early titles which portray homosexuality in a stereotypical and negative manner than more recent titles, even those which have been more favourably and frequently reviewed. Keeping in mind that YA book reviews generally tend to be positive, gay and lesbian YA literature is also often reviewed favorably, yet according to Sweetland and Christensen (1995), YA books containing gay, lesbian and bisexual characters, even award winning titles, tend to receive fewer reviews. What also varies, and has so over time, is the way that the homosexual content of the book is treated within the review itself. In their content analysis of the reviews of three landmark gay YA titles, Rothbauer and McKechnie (1999b) found that the tones used by reviewers ranged from warnings or assurances to matter-of-fact acknowledgement. Rothbauer and McKechnie (2000) also point out that words like “controversial” and notes of caution are often present in reviews of homosexuality-themed YA fiction, regardless

of publication date. Specifically then, reviews have an important impact on the sales of YA fiction in the school and library markets.

The authors in this study had a lot to say about their experiences with reviewers. Writing in the late 1970s, Scoppettone's novel *Happy Endings Are All Alike* (1978) was not widely reviewed and this subsequently contributed to low sales, eventually driving the book out of print. When asked about whom she thought read her book, Scoppettone connected a minimal readership to a lack of reviews:

But I don't think that there were a whole lot of people who read it. It wasn't promoted or reviewed or anything like the way the one about the boys [*Trying Hard to Hear You*] was. Cause it's about girl. Because isn't it always like that? But it wasn't reviewed. And *Trying Hard to Hear You* had its own separate review in the *New York Times*, the Sunday paper. It wasn't just plunked with other books as far as I remember. It wasn't a great review but because the person who reviewed it didn't seem to get that this, and for that time period now, didn't seem to get that this was a problem. I can't remember the person's name, but it was weird. It was a strange review, but nevertheless, there it was. But with *Happy Endings* it was never reviewed, and by that time I already had a name in this field, in the young adult field. It seemed very odd to me...I don't remember reading reviews anywhere and it sold much less than any of my other books.

Scoppettone's comments provide insight on two levels about the power and the function of the review process. Firstly, Scoppettone makes the connection between reviews and sales – that the *number* of times a book is reviewed is equally as important as the quality of the review to sales figures. Secondly, as an accomplished YA author who had already published a successful YA novel containing male homosexuals, *Trying Hard to Hear You* (1974), it did not make sense that her book with lesbian characters was not reviewed at all, especially in places where her other work had been acknowledged. Scoppettone attributes this to the sexist structures of the reviewing process, where novels about boys are valued more than those about girls and, for Scoppettone, this is regardless of the sexual orientations of the characters.

Structural sexism is also something that Woodson identified in her interview. Her novel, *The House You Pass on the Way* (1997), initially went out of print because of low sales, but has since been picked up by another publisher and is currently in print.

Structural sexism intersected by homophobia is evident in this situation, again, especially given that this title deals with issues of gender and lesbianism:

I think the reason it wasn't as high selling book is because it wasn't getting the awards. It wasn't getting awards and was that because it wasn't well-written – and I feel it was not as well-written as some of my other books were – or was that because of the issues that it dealt with? I don't know. Of the books that were lesser well-written, they were on all kinds of school lists and state lists and library lists. But this one wasn't. And so, as a result, it didn't sell well.

In order to be in contention for winning a literary award, a book must be well reviewed so that it can be brought to the attention of those responsible for nominating titles to awards committees. Compared to her other books, Woodson was not able to state with certainty whether it was the literary merit of the book itself or its lesbian content that kept it off the review pages and, thus, awards lists. Admittedly, Woodson does not feel that *The House You Pass on the Way* was as well-written as some of her other YA works, however, of the works she considers to be literary equals, all of those titles appeared on numerous best book lists. Her one novel, the only one with an adolescent lesbian character, did not. What Woodson indisputably knows is that this book did not sell well, generally and comparatively to her other YA novels. Together, these two instances begin to indicate that something is awry, suggesting the possible intersection of homophobia and sexism in the YA production network.

Structural sexism is a factor to be considered and perhaps can provide an explanation for the disparity of lesbians in YA literature. Accounting for only one-quarter of the adolescent characters in literature published to date, lesbians are less visible

then their male counterparts. This trend, the predominance of males in homosexuality-themed YA literature, has been well documented (Clyde and Lobbon 1992; Inness 1997; Jenkins 1988), although no premise for the lesbian absence exist. From Scoppettone's viewpoint, part of this disparity can be attributed to the fostering and pushing of male writing talent: "I really don't think that publishers treat, well I shouldn't say that - that they treat men any different from women or women from men - but that's not true. I mean it's very subtle. I think it's very subtle. I think they do push their men more than women. But there's nothing [overt]. They don't treat you in a bad way or anything." While Scoppettone may argue that there is more support and hence opportunity for male writers in publishing, in YA, female writers have dominated as authors of gay and lesbian fiction.

Despite the predominance of female authors in the industry, it is extraordinary that the majority of gay characters have remained male. Clyde and Lobbon (1992) demonstrate in their annotated bibliographic guide to homosexuality in books for young people, that "the major difference is that there are more males than females portrayed (65:33), despite the fact that 38 of the books have male authors and 77 have female" (xix). One possible reason for the prevalence of males can again be attributed to readership and sales. Kerr, who typically employs a secondary narrator to tell her stories, a narrator who almost always is male, does so because of studies which indicate that boys do not like to read stories told by girls, whereas girls have no gender preference for their narrator: "Boys don't like to read books from a girls' viewpoint. We've discovered that there was a time when boys were even beginning to feel that the books about girls, that they were effeminate if they read them." Notably, Kerr's novel *Deliver Us From Evie*,

which is about a lesbian but written from a male viewpoint, received positive and glowing reviews.

Of her reviews, Kerr says, “Mostly, this book was very well reviewed. I got half a page review in the *New York Times* Sunday edition and that’s quite a lot of space for a children’s book. And everywhere that mattered it was well reviewed...It sold well, it’s still in print.” In this instance, although the novel is about a lesbian, it could be speculated that because of the male narrator and the distance created between the reader and the lesbian character, this somehow made her text more palatable for reviewers. Elements of sexism inform the reviewers’ actions and are embedded as part of the structures within which they work

It is also plausible that lesbians remain invisible on the pages of YA because of the double marginalization females face: as women within a patriarchal society and as lesbians within a community where gay men tend to dominate. Clyde and Lobbon (1992) hypothesize that boys supplant the number of girls because of the prevalence of gay male activism and sexuality: “This increase represents, we think, the higher political profile of male homosexuals and their more aggressive approach to actively trying to change attitudes within the community towards homosexuality. Just as the female experience has lagged behind that of the male as a topic in mainstream literature, perhaps the female homosexual experience will take some years to catch up in books for young people” (xvii). For Clyde and Lobbon, the invisibility of lesbians in YA can be attributed to structural sexism that is inherent in both the gay community and in the dominant heterosexual world.

Peters, cognizant of the relationship between reviews and sales, clearly articulates how heteronormativity can inform a poor review, which in turn, mediates access to a given novel: “The one review that upset me the most was from *School Library Journal*, which is the review journal that schools get. It was a mediocre review. I thought, ‘Damn it!’ This is where this book needs to be, in schools, in school libraries... And why are straight white men reviewing my lesbian novel, anyway? That’s the thing I want to know. How fair is that?” While it could be speculated that this review reduced sales in the school market and led to the inflation of trade market sales, this review could impede the addition of this novel to a collection when functioning as a selection tool for librarians. Reviews, when not numerous nor positive, do mediate which novels youth are able to access through their school or local libraries. Furthermore, Peters identifies structural barriers in the review process, of which sexism inoculated by homophobia is an inherent part. She draws attention to this by questioning the authority of (white) (male) (heterosexual) reviewers to comment upon her book.

In an industry where the value of YA literature is often based on its contemporary realistic qualities and the ability of an author to convey an authentic teen voice, quality of reviews often have little to do with the literary merit of a text. As argued earlier in this chapter, requiring a higher literary value to get published, the majority of lesbian YA novels in this study are award-winning, including Peters’ book. If this is the case with reviewers and their reviews, something which needs to be studied further, the reviewers’ own biases – read homophobic and sexist – infiltrate their critiques of YA literature. The personal value systems or lenses through which a novel is evaluated may not be explicitly homophobic, however, the very heteronormativity of reviewers that results in

comparatively fewer and noticeably subpar reviews constitutes their actions being viewed as homophobic. As with publishing houses which feel the need to defend “controversial” material with a clearly demonstrated literary value, reviewers also know that schools and libraries may have to defend their collection choices and will employ the very reviews they write if a book is challenged. Reviewers’ inability to identify with the material and judging it on vague non-literary standards under the guise of objectivity, results in lesbian-themed YA fiction receiving far fewer favourable reviews than its counterparts, and in many cases, reviews that suffer under the weight of the “controversial material.” Consequently, schools and libraries may not purchase YA fiction with adolescent lesbian characters.

Compounding this mediating influence, reviewers may also function to limit the breadth of lesbian books available. Here, reviews posit one book as being superior to another as if to say that one text can meet the needs of all readers. This ostensibly denies the diversity of experiences within the LGBTQ community. Watts’ experiences with *Finding H.F.* fall into this category:

I’ve not really got any negative feedback about the book and the reviews in magazines have been really positive except for one in the *School Library Journal* that sort of said, “Well, if you want to read a lesbian young adult novel read *Deliver Us From Evie* by M.E. Kerr.” I love that book too, but why do you have to pick only one lesbian young adult novel out there? Is there some kind of quota?

The line in the *School Library Journal*’s lukewarm review to which Watts refers actually reads, “It’s a quick and mostly satisfying read, but for a better story about gay teens in a rural setting, try M. E. Kerr’s *Deliver Us From Evie*,” however, its function remains the same: it discounts the need for institutions to purchase yet another lesbian-themed YA. By valuing one title over the other, especially a book like *Deliver Us From Evie* which is

already widely held in Canadian libraries (Rothbauer and McKechnie 2000), this review effectively narrows the breadth of library holdings by discouraging its purchase with an either-or-situation: there is no need to purchase *Finding H.F.* if you have already have *Deliver Us From Evie*.

Reviews clearly serve a gatekeeping function in their ability to make a book known to future industry buyers and possess the ability to mediate the selection process through the quality of a review. Authors have experienced criticisms that have less to do with the literary merit or quality of their text, and more to do with reviewers' treatment of the "controversial" material. These personal commentaries where a political position on homosexuality is evident, echoes on Rothbauer and McKechnie's (1999b; 2000) findings.

Scoppettone attributes the structural sexism of reviewers and the marketplace to sexism on a larger social scale. She believes that the imbalance of lesbians in YA literature is because of this structural sexism:

Again, I just think it's because we're women. Because we're still second-class citizens. It still goes on. And for other reasons. The men have more money and they can afford to buy these books.... I think that men buy the books and women lend them. Cause women generally have less money. You can't fault them; it's just the way it is. And the way it is, it is a ripple effect. It goes back to women getting equal pay and it's just crazy. But everyone thinks it has changed enormously, but it's only changed a little bit.

Scoppettone aptly recognizes the interconnected nature of reviews and the marketplace, where she perceives men to have more purchasing power than women, and in turn, this influences which books are published because of this coveted target audience.

Scoppettone's experiences have led her to believe that sexism impacts the production of lesbians in YA fiction even more so than homophobia.

Structural Barrier: Mediating Access In Schools

The importance of the public library and school library market has been discussed throughout this project. While purchase of this YA fiction may be impeded by its very homosexual content or reviews, librarians will and do incorporate it into their collections. A 1995 study of public and college libraries conducted by *Library Journal* found that only 14% of respondents did not carry any books with gay or lesbian themes and/or characters (Bryant, 37); no similar study could be located for school libraries.

Librarians' work from a professional code of intellectual freedom derived from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. According to the Canadian Library Association, librarians have the responsibility to "guarantee and facilitate access to all expressions of knowledge and intellectual activity, including those which some elements of society may consider to be unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable. To this end, libraries shall acquire and make available the widest variety of materials" (np). Furthermore, the Canadian Library Association states that as part of their public service responsibilities, librarians must resist attempts by individuals or groups within a community to curtail access to information or freedom to read in any manner. As such, librarians not only have a professional duty to stock material with lesbian characters, but they must also work towards keeping this material in the library.

Interestingly, a 1986 study by David Jenkinson, solely focused on Manitoba, found that the greatest number of book challenges came from teachers themselves. In this study, one teacher-librarian surveyed made a positive correlation between personal biases and censorship: "I try to ensure that books which would cause controversy are never placed in the library" (Jenkinson in Brown, 29). Potential or actual challenges to YA literature with adolescent lesbians or characters can be posited, internally or

externally, publicly or privately. Most often the gatekeeping actions undertaken by schools and public libraries become public knowledge after a book has been removed from a library shelf, not during the selection process itself.

Authors such as Garden, Kerr and Peters have received praise-filled letters from librarians thanking them for writing these texts, yet, these same authors are not often aware of challenges launched against these books by individuals and groups within a community. According to the American Library Association (ALA), parents challenge material more than any other group and 71% of this material is challenged in schools or school libraries. Between 1990-2000, there were 515 reported challenges to material containing homosexuality or that were seen to “promote homosexuality.” ALA’s research has also shown that for every challenge that is reported, four or five are not. While Nancy Garden’s *Annie On My Mind* ranks 44th on the ALA’s 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990–2000, according to the selective list compiled by the *Freedom To Read* campaign, the only homosexuality-themed YA book having been challenged during the past twenty-one years in Canada is Francesca Lia Block’s *Baby Be-Bop*. However, the *Freedom to Read* list does include a number of homosexuality-themed children’s titles and those books published for an adult audience but also available to youth.

Challenges to Garden’s *Annie On My Mind* (1982) did not come to her attention until 1993 after the Kansas City school board had removed it. A group of parents and children contested this decision and launched a first amendment lawsuit against the school board in 1994. When they won in 1995, *Annie On My Mind* was returned to

school bookshelves. It was not until this time that Garden became aware of this and other challenges her book had faced.

While there are no reports or research that investigate the relationship between homosexuality-themed books, school acquisitions and challenges to this material, schools' fears of upsetting their constituency of taxpayers is evident when authors are invited to visit. Here, another level of censorship may be invoked. The only two authors to talk about school visits were Kerr and Peters, and both have been asked at times not to talk about their gay material. Of one school visit Kerr says:

Well I've gone to schools where the principal has met me in the parking lot and said, "We love your work Miss Kerr but please don't talk about *Deliver Us From Evie* or *Night Kites* - which is the book about AIDS - because our parents prefer to talk about those things themselves with children. We don't care to teach *it* in the schools or teach about it." I've come up to that a few times.

From Kerr's perception, the school's apprehension was rooted in moral protection. The 'it' here is ambiguous: is the 'it' a reference to homosexuality or is 'it' sex, with sex posited as the distinguishing factor between two differing sexual orientations?

Peters has also faced similar censorship on her school visits: "In fact, I was invited to do this school visit up in Wyoming, and they said you can come as long as you don't talk about your gay literature. You can talk about *Define Normal*, but don't go into *that*. And I thought, I've just gone beyond *that*. I am on the other side now, and I'm not going back. So I said no." In this instance, rather than talk about her other children's and YA literature at the expense of her single lesbian novel, Peters refused to attend. At other school visits Peters has felt reluctance, although not openly stated, to steer away from broaching homosexuality in her discussions:

This last school visit I did the teacher never said, "Be careful about what you talk about." But I felt it. So the first question I get from the audience is, "Have you

ever been discriminated against for being a lesbian?" I could see all the teachers sort of gasping and gulping. But kids are there, they don't care. It's so much a part of their culture. It's a much, much different world. But they have to get permission slips now to even have me to come to school.

Peters points out how this censorship can be implicit and/or explicit, but more importantly, her experiences indicate a willingness of children and youth to broach homosexual issues - it is the adults who function as gatekeepers and guardians of their pupils.

Schools, school libraries and public libraries all play a role in the accessibility of lesbian YA literature to a readership. Whether this mediating influence occurs during the purchasing phase or during the defence of challenged materials already sitting on library shelves, these individuals and groups possess the power and do function as gatekeepers.

Gatekeeping: The Symbolic Annihilator

Beginning with the history of young adult literature and mapping how it ends up on library shelves, this chapter has charted the role of the marketplace and its relationship to the production network, specifically, the reviewer and purchaser/vendor nodes. From the power of perception to the power of material gatekeeping, the tangible and intangible impact other nodes have upon authors and editors during the earliest production phases have also been highlighted.

The "it's economics, not homophobia" market rationale is often cited by network nodes as a constraint on the production of lesbian-themed YA literature; however, marketplace evidence from the early 2000s indicates that there has been a significant increase in overall sales and a shift in who buys YA literature with schools/libraries no longer making up the bulk of sales. As the trade market has exploded, along with the general boom in sales of YA, it should proportionally follow that as the production of YA

literature increases, so too should the number of YA titles with adolescent lesbian characters increase. Economics tainted by homophobic apprehensions - that there is a limited audience for these books, that these books cannot be financially successful - contributes to the erasure of lesbians and leads to their symbolic annihilation. Without access to the market, the adolescent lesbian characters that are abundant on the pages of YA fiction remain invisible to the larger public.

Reviewer and purchaser/vendor nodes further compound the visibility of lesbian-themed YA novels that *are* able to gain entry into the market by mediating readership access to these novels. Here, sexism intersected by homophobia is evident in the exertion of nodal gatekeeping. Similar to the (un)conscious transmission of the authorial politics of advocacy in a writer's fiction, a reviewer's personal ideologies also (un)consciously infiltrate how they review the very titles in question. Authors have received significantly fewer reviews, in both quality and quantity, than novels containing straight characters and experiences. Reviews of lesbian-themed YA are often based upon a reviewer's personal value systems rather than the literary merit or markers of contemporary realism that are hallmarks of YA literature and, thus, affect which titles purchasers and vendors select for their shelves. Again, what adolescent lesbians remain are further symbolically annihilated.

While bookstore purchasing practices were not addressed in this study, those of schools, school libraries and libraries were investigated. The gatekeeping force of the purchaser/vendor node, comprised of many players, is experienced during the writing of a manuscript and its transformation into a novel when authors and editors/publishing houses mold a text to meet the presumed needs of an imagined future audience. In

addition, the node itself functions to select which fictional materials are made available to adolescents, and it is here that the silent censor takes a hold of purchasing practices.

Titles that have been challenged and removed once placed upon a shelf are inconsistently recorded, never mind the inability to measure backroom censorship that determines how many lesbian-themed YA novels actually make it to the bookshelf in the first place.

Purchasing practices of the vendor/purchaser node impact lesbian visibility as much as the shelf placement and packaging of the few novels that manage to squeak through the gatekeeping forces of the production network. At times, nodes may align and at times they compete with one another, yet, in the end, it is the power of the network as a whole that makes the adolescent lesbian the invisible/visible girl on the pages of YA fiction.

CONCLUSION WRAPPING IT UP

“As in all other issues of representation, we must not leave the matter of power out of account any more than the matter of representation itself.”

Richard Dyer 1993, 4.

When images are examined from multiple standpoints, analyzed, theorized and stripped to their components to understand what and how they mean, the power initially exerted to shape an image is ignored. The meaning imparted by images is often understood by deducing a single creator’s intent, or from the reader’s comprehension, yet these two positions negate the intersection of explicit and implicit forces that shaped the image in the first place. In YA fiction, there is no sole source responsible for the construction of lesbian characters.

Situated as the hub of the production network, the author, as well as the other three production nodes – editor/publishing house, reviewer and vendor/purchaser – all function as gatekeepers. Exercising power in various forms and at varying phases, this network engages in the politics of production which governs adolescent lesbian representation. Whether politics are negotiated from personal ideologies, perceptions of dominant values and norms, through the solicitation of peripheral textual changes that impact the lesbian content of a novel or from the intentional exertion of a censorial action, each node affects the representations of adolescent lesbians in the final textual form.

This thesis initially sought to answer the following question: what are the authorial politics of representation that inform the production of YA literature with adolescent lesbian characters, and, how do those politics mediate lesbian representation

and visibility? It became evident early on in the project that the author and her role as a producer could not be understood in isolation. From the moment a story is conceived, the gatekeeping nature of the network - frequently based upon perception and assumption - manifests in such a way that each node modifies its own constructions of lesbian characters via their perception of acceptability before this construction is even susceptible to alteration by another node. Only on rare occasions are the actual contents of a novel specifically altered to make it palatable for an external audience, and in the case of these authors, it never specifically had to do with the lesbian content. While it is unsurprising that content warranting flag raising for censorial action is rarely made explicit, it is the implicit understanding of what is acceptable in literature for teens, compounded by the general acceptability of lesbianism in society at large, that compels the author to tailor her writing in the first place. Given the impact that other nodes exert upon the author, a network model was deployed to understand the function of power during the production process.

Whilst the nature of the network is fluid, the production process is a combination of set phases that, in turn, are shaped by the competing interests of other network nodes. The production of a manuscript and its transformation into a novel is affected to varying degrees and by varying mechanisms, all of which shape the final product. Given the nature of power in networks, the ability of one node to indirectly or directly influence how lesbians are constructed, it is impossible to address the politics of production without considering how the author's politics may or may not have been influenced, mediated or obstructed. Studying the politics of production from an authorial lens illuminates how representations are socially constructed and infused with the ideologies of the textual

producers and, in turn, how these representations have been mediated by the norms and values of the dominant social body. In the end, this thesis answered the following question: what are the politics of representation that inform the production of YA literature with adolescent lesbian characters, and, how do those production politics mediate lesbian representation and visibility? As it turns out, it was not possible to separate the politics of authors from those of the network, as a whole or in part(s).

InVisible . Visibility

Adolescent lesbian characters are visible girls on the pages of YA fiction; authors write them into existence. Without the author, there would be no text to interrogate, no representations to examine, no story to tell. The choice to introduce lesbian characters into their respective YA novels was intentional and deliberate on the part of authors and stemmed from a desire to fill a perceived void in this literature. The lack of tangible and relatable lesbians in fiction they read as teens or as adults, and, the absence of positive representations of certain types of lesbians and lesbian experiences led these authors to craft their texts from a political position of advocacy. Authors engage in the politics of representation while constructing adolescent lesbian characters when their decisions – what does or does not go into the story, which attributes do or do not constitute a lesbian image – reflect their personal ideologies. Even the simplest character traits, like strength, are imbued with the author's personal politics and the book-as-commodity serves to promote those politics. Yet, the author does not act in isolation when constructing characters to fill an absence. She is influenced by the conventions of YA literature, the moral barometer of society at large, economic forces of the marketplace and the covert requirements of other network nodes. Perception of and experiences with other nodes

mediate how her authorial politics inform the text, resulting in visible lesbians that are specifically slotted to meet the implicit criteria of acceptability.

Adolescent lesbian characters are (in)visible girls on the pages of YA fiction, their importance diminished when editors/publishing houses transform a manuscript into a novel. Despite the authorial autonomy of the editing process, changes are made, notably those in the packaging process, that dilute the materiality of lesbians. When editors ask for lesbian sex to be toned down or when authors attempt to avoid challenges to their material by subtracting sexual content from their novel, sexual dimensions that are inherent and mandatory for many heterosexual romances, are negated for readers of the lesbian love story. When the manuscript is transformed into a book commodity and the adolescent lesbian is written out of the jacket copy or signifiers of lesbianism do not make it into the cover imagery, again, traces are all that is left of her existence. Like a hologram, knowledge of lesbians within a given text shifts and flickers, roams between absence and presence. While the lesbian herself may be visible on the pages of a text, her sexuality and presence on the exterior of the text is regularly rendered (in)visible.

Adolescent lesbian characters are invisible girls on the pages of YA fiction because reviewers and purchasers/vendors mediate the accessibility of these works. As a central marketing tool for YA fiction, publishing houses are dependent upon reviewers to promote their books to purchasers/vendors within both the school/library and trade markets. When reviewers do not tackle the lesbian-themed YA, critique it poorly from a heterosexist worldview or suggest that another title is more suitable for collections, they effectively limit the sales and breadth of holdings. It is on these very library and store shelves that invisibility plays out: if the lesbian-themed YA novel is there, how does a

potential reader locate it? Blending in as just another YA text because it lacks a distinguishable cover or because the lesbian content is erased from the jacket copy, fictionalized adolescent lesbians and lesbian experiences are rendered invisible.

The politics of representation that play out, implicitly and explicitly, during the network production processes makes adolescent lesbian characters ((in)visible) girls. While issues of visibility and invisibility may be more prominent in certain nodes than others, the socio-economic model deployed here is an integrated network. The impact of the social realm, the norms and values of the individual players and society at large, are intersected by projected economics, which are in part predicated upon perceptions of social and moral acceptability. It is impossible to address the social elements that invade authorial politics and the politics of other nodes without consideration of the economic aspects of the book as a commodity. Having traced how the predicted actions and practices of nodes infiltrate the politics of other nodes, this development of a network model demonstrates how gatekeeping affects the construction of lesbian characters. The politics of production, here, is a complex and multifaceted network of power relations that mediates lesbian visibility.

Directions for Future Research

Moving forward, this project has introduced many questions and proposed avenues for future research. Firstly, how can issues of production be incorporated into studies of representation? Before these texts are available to any readership, choices were made in the production process as to which type of lesbians and lesbian experiences audiences should be able to read about. The emphasis on deconstructing images from an outsider's perspective negates an understanding of how the image was produced in the

first place. What happens to theories of representation when the process of constructing images is examined?

Secondly, what do the other network nodes have to say about the politics of representation and power in the construction of lesbian characters in YA fiction?

Without sufficient resources to explore the production network further, the voices of the editors, publishing houses, reviewers, librarians, purchasers and vendors themselves are absent from this project. Taking its starting point at authorial interviews, this thesis lends a solid foundation for additional exploration of other perspectives and dimensions that influence the politics of production.

Thirdly, given the focus on production in this project, it is important to question how readers - queer or straight, young or old - utilize YA fiction as a media text that reflects the 'real' world and as a source of information. Who are the readers of lesbian-themed YA fiction? Why do they read these books? Where do they find these books, and do they purchase or borrow them? And furthermore, how do authorial politics influence those of the reader?

Fourthly, what can this project contribute to network theory? Given that this theory is a tool predominately employed by sociological and mathematical disciplines to predict how networks are established and maintained, this project places a practical spin by combining sociological and economic frameworks to understand how production networks function in producing cultural artifacts. Additionally, how can power be understood to operate within networks?

Fifthly, how can the gendered-analysis here presented be understood in relation to gay men and a patriarchal society in whole? What other impacts do homophobia and sexism have upon lesbian visibility?

Lastly, the political economy of the YA literature marketplace, generally and with respect to homosexuality-themed fiction, needs to be further explored. What are the actual sales figures of YA fiction and where does YA fiction with adolescent lesbian characters fit into this larger picture? Do the sales figures reflect a market shift for YA texts from library/schools to trade, and, if so, how does this impact the acquisition of lesbian-themed YA literature? Is the economic rationale used by publishing houses a homophobic smoke screen? Where is YA literature going in the future, will it be marketed alongside other media products, and how will that impact lesbian visibility?

These questions, and others posed throughout the course of this project, deserve further exploration. It is my hope that in beginning this investigation, this study provides an insightful and useful point of departure for this research to be continued.

REFERENCES

- American Library Association*. 2004. Challenged and Banned Books.
<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/challengedbanned/challengedbanned.htm>.
- Aronson, Marc. 2001. *Exploding the Myths: The Truth About Teenagers and Reading*. Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Benduhn, Tea. 2003. *Gravel Queen*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Benduhn, Tea. 2004. Interview by Holly Wagg. Tape Recording. March 8.
- Block, Francesca Lia. 1995. *Baby Be-Bop*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Boylston, Helen D. 1936. *Sue Barton: Student Nurse*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Brett, Catherine. 1989. *S.P. Likes A.D.* Toronto: The Women's Press.
- Brown, Ron. 1992. Children's Book Challenges: The New Wave. *Canadian Children's Literature* 68: 27-32.
- Bryant, Eric. 1995. Pride & Prejudice. *Library Journal* (June): 37-39.
- Canadian Library Association*. 1985. Statement on Intellectual Freedom.
<http://www.cla.ca/about/intfreed.htm>.
- Cart, Michael. 1996. *From Romance to Realism: 50 Years of Growth and Change in Young Adult Literature*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Cart, Michael. 1997. Honoring Their Stories, Too: Literature for Gay and Lesbian Teens. *The ALAN Review* 25(1): 1-13.
- Cart, Michael. 2001. From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature. *Voices from the Middle* 9(2): 95-97.
- Cart, Michael. 2004. Young Adult Literature Comes of Age. In *Children's Literature Remembered: Issues, Trends and Favourite Books*, ed Linda M. Pavonetti, 201-210. Connecticut: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.
- Clyde, Laurel A and Marjorie Lobbon. 1992. *Out of the Closet and Into the Classroom: Homosexuality in Books for Young People*. Australia: ALIA Thorpe.
- Cuseo, Allan A. 1992. *Homosexual Characters in YA Novels: A Literary Analysis, 1969-1982*. New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Daly, Maureen. 1942. *Seventeenth Summer*. New York: Dodd Mead.

- Donovan, John. 1969. *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Dyer, Richard. 1993. *Images: Essays on Representations*. London: Routledge.
- Freedom to Read*. 2004. Freedom to Read Kit 2004 – Challenged Books List.
http://www.freedomtoread.ca/docs/challenged_books.pdf.
- Fuoss, Kirk. 1994. A Portrait of the Adolescent as a Young Gay: The Politics of Male Homosexuality in Young Adult Fiction. In *Queer Words, Queer Images: Communication and the Construction of Homosexuality*, ed. R. Jeffrey Ringer, 159-174. New York: New York University Press.
- Gallo, Don. 2002. Interview with Nancy Garden. *www.Authors4Teens.com*. Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1-33.
- Gallo, Don. 2003. E-mail to YALSA-bk listserv, February 6. Republished by Susan Blanton for the VEMA 2003 Conference,
<http://www.vema.gen.va.us/handouts03/Blanton.pdf>.
- Garden, Nancy. 1982. *Annie On My Mind*. New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux.
- Garden, Nancy. 1997. Gay Fiction for Kids: Is Anyone Out There Publishing It? *Lambda Book Report* 6(4): 25. ProQuest CD-ROM.
- Garden, Nancy. 2004. Email Interview by Holly Wagg. Electronic Recording. March 18.
- Gross, Larry. 1991. Out of the Mainstream: Sexual Minorities and the Mass Media. In *Gay People, Sex and the Media*, eds. Alfred P. Kielwasser and Michelle A. Wolf, 19-46. London: The Haworth Press, Inc.
- Guy, Rosa. 1976. *Ruby*. New York: Viking.
- Hall, Lynn. 1972. *Sticks and Stones*. Chicago: Follett.
- Hall, Radclyffe. 1928. *The Well of Loneliness*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Hanckel, Frances and John Cunningham. 1976. Can Young Gays Find Happiness in YA Books? *Wilson Library Bulletin* 50(7): 528-534.
- Harding, Sandra, ed. 1987. *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hartinger, Brett. 2003. *Geography Club*. New York: HarperTempst.
- Hinton, S.E. 1967. *The Outsiders*. New York: Viking.

- Horn, Carolyn. 2002. Teenage Market in Turnaround. *Bookseller* 5026: 14.
- Hubler, Eric. 2003. Editor prods Peters to reinvent herself as 'gay-lit' author. *Denver Post*, June 24, 2003. <http://julieannepeters.homestead.com/files/DenPost.htm>.
- Inness, Sherrie A. 1997. "Candy-Coated Cyanide:" Children's Books and Lesbian Images. In *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity and the Representation of Lesbian Life*, 101-127. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Jagose, Annamarie. 1996. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, Christine A. 1988. Heartthrobs and Heartaches: A Guide to Young Adult Books with Gay Themes. *Out/Look: National Lesbian and Gay Quarterly* (Fall): 82-92.
- Jenkins, Christine A. 1993. Young Adult Novels with Gay/Lesbian Characters and Themes 1969-1992: A Historical Reading of Content, Gender and Narrative Distance. *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* 7(1): 43-55.
- Jenkins, Christine A. 1998. From Queer to Gay and Back Again: Young Adult Novels with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969-1997. *Library Quarterly* 68(3): 298-334.
- Jonkers, H.L., H.W.J. Donkers and P.J.M. Diederren. 2001. The Knowledge Domain of Chain and Network Studies. Agri Chain Competence Centre, <http://www.kc-acc.org/pdf/CNS0901.pdf>.
- Kerr, M.E. 1986. *Night Kites*. New York: HarperTrophy.
- Kerr, M.E. 1994. *Deliver Us From Evie*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Kerr, M.E. 2004. Interview by Holly Wagg. Tape Recording. March 9.
- Kielwasser, Alfred P and Michelle A Wolf. 1992. Mainstream Television, Adolescent Homosexuality, and Significant Silence. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 9: 350-373.
- Lane, Rose Wilder. 1933. *Let the Hurricane Roar*. New York: Longmans Green.
- Lesesne, Teri S. 2004. Evolution to Revolution: Young Adult Literature Charts Its Own Course. In *Children's Literature Remembered: Issues, Trends and Favourite Books*, ed Linda M. Pavonetti, 211-224. Connecticut: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.
- Levithan, David. 2003. *Boy Meets Boy*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

- Martin, Ann M. 1986-2001. *The Baby-sitters Club Series*. New York: Scholastic.
- Nilsen, Alleen Pace and Kenneth L Donelson. 2001. *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, 6th Edition. New York: Longman.
- Pascal, Francine. 1983-2002. *Sweet Valley High Series*. New York: Random House.
- Pavao, Kate. 2003. Out of the Closet. *Publishers Weekly* 250(48): 23.
- Peters, Julie Anne. 2003. *Keeping You A Secret*. Little Brown and Company.
- Peters, Julie Anne. 2004. Interview by Holly Wagg. Tape Recording. March 16.
- Publishers Weekly*. 2004. Solid Sales in February. April 12.
- Reinharz, Shulamit. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Revoyr, Nina. 1997. *The Necessary Hunger*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rosen, Judith. 2002. Tapping the Teen Market. *Publishers Weekly* 249(29): 84-86.
- Rothbauer, Paulette M and Lynne E.F. McKechnie. 1999a. Gay and Lesbian Fiction for Young Adults: A Survey of Holdings in Canadian Public Libraries. *Collection Building* 19(1): 5-16. ProQuest CD-ROM.
- Rothbauer, Paulette M and Lynne E.F. McKechnie. 1999b. The Treatment of Gay and Lesbian Fiction for Young Adults in the Reviewing Media. In *Information Science: Where has it been, where is it going?*, 248-266. Proceedings of the 27th Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for Information Science.
- Rothbauer, Paulette M. and Lynne E.F. McKechnie. 2000. The Treatment of Gay and Lesbian Fiction for Young Adults in Selected Prominent Reviewing Media. *Collection Building* 18(1): 32-39. ProQuest CD-ROM.
- Scoppettone, Sandra. 1978. *Happy Endings Are All Alike*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Scoppettone, Sandra. 2004. Interview by Holly Wagg. Tape Recording. April 5.
- Serebnick, Judith. 1992. Selection and Holdings of Small Publishers' Books in OCLC Libraries: A Study of the Influence of Reviews, Publishers, and Vendors. *The Library Quarterly* 62(3): 259-294.
- St. Clair, Nancy. 1995. Outside Looking In: Representations of Gay and Lesbian Experiences in the Young Adult Novel. *The ALAN Review* 23(1): 1-9.

- Sumara, Dennis. 1991. Gay and Lesbian Voices in Literature: Making Room on the Shelf. *English Quarterly* 25(1): 30-34.
- Sutherland, Robert D. 1985. Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature for Children. *Children's Literature in Education* 16(3): 143-157.
- Sweetland, James H. and Peter G. Christensen. 1995. Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Titles: Their Treatment in the Review Media and Their Selection By Libraries. *Collection Building* 14(2): 32-41.
- Trope, Zoe. 2003. *Please Don't Kill the Freshman: A Memoir*. New York: HarperTempst.
- Trope, Zoe. 2004. Interview by Holly Wagg. Tape Recording. March 22.
- Warn, Sarah. 2003. Interview with Brent Hartinger of "Geography Club." *AfterEllen.com*. <http://www.afterellen.com/People/hartinger-interview.html>.
- Watts, Julia. 2001. *Finding H.F.* Los Angeles: Alyson.
- Watts, Julia. 2004. Interview by Holly Wagg. Tape Recording. April 14.
- Wildman, Sarah. 2003. Queer Lit for the Gay Teen. *Salon.com*, November 11, 2003. http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/2003/11/11/queer_lit/print.html.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. 1995. *The Notebooks of Melanin Sun*. New York: Scholastic.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. 1997. *The House You Pass on the Way*. New York: Random House.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. 2004. Interview by Holly Wagg. Tape Recording. April 9.
- YALSA-BK listserv.
<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/electronicresourcesb/websitesmailing.htm>.
- Yamanaka, Lois-Ann. 1999. *Name Me Nobody*. New York: Hyperion.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Young Adult Fiction with Adolescent Lesbian Characters

1976

Guy, Rosa. 1976. *Ruby*. New York: Viking.

1978

Hautzig, Deborah. 1978. *Hey, Dollface*. New York: Greenwillow Books.

Scoppettone, Sandra. 1978. *Happy Endings Are All Alike*. New York: Harper & Row.

1980

Reading, J.P. 1980. *Bouquets for Brimbal*. New York: Harper & Row.

Rees, David. 1980. *The Lighthouse*. New York: Dennis Dobson.

Tolan, Stephanie. 1980. *The Last of Eden*. New York: Bantam.

1981

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

Levy, Elizabeth. 1981. *Come Out Smiling*. New York: Delacorte.

1982

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

1983

Kesselman, Wendy Ann. 1983. *Flick*. New York: Harper & Row, 1983.

Singer, Marilyn. 1983. *The Course of True Love Never Did Run Smooth*. New York: Harper & Row.

1985

Klein, Norma. 1985. *Family Secrets*. New York: Dial.

1987

Klein, Norma. 1987. *My Life As a Body*. New York: Knopf.

Pausacker, Jenny. 1987. *What Are What Are Ya?* Sydney: Angus and Robertson.

1989

Brett, Catherine. 1989. *S.P. Likes A.D.* Toronto: The Women's Press.

1991

Garden, Nancy. 1991. *Lark in the Morning*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.

1993

Mullins, Hilary. 1993. *The Cat Came Back*. Florida: Naiad Press.

1994

- Donovan, Stacey. 1994. *Dive*. New York: Dutton.
Kerr, M.E. 1994. *Deliver Us From Evie*. New York: HarperCollins.

1996

- Garden, Nancy. 1996. *Good Moon Rising*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.

1997

- Revoyr, Nina. 1997. *The Necessary Hunger*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
Woodson, Jacqueline. 1997. *The House You Pass on the Way*. New York: Random House.

1998

- Dingman, Monna L. 1998. *My Bicycle Trip*. Toronto: Women's Press.
Stoehr, Shelley. 1998. *Tomorrow Wendy: A Love Story*. New York: Delacorte8.

1999

- Boock, Paula. 1999. *Dare Truth or Promise*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
Garden, Nancy. 1999. *The Year They Burned the Books*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. 1999. *Alice on the Outside*. New York: Atheneum.
Torres, Laura. 1999. *November Ever After*. New York: Holiday House.
Wittlinger, Ellen. 1999. *Hard Love*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
Yamanaka, Lois-Ann. 1999. *Name Me Nobody*. New York: Hyperion.

2000

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

2001

- Reynolds, Marilyn. 2001. *Love Rules*. Buena Park, CA: Morning Glory Press.
Ryan, Sara. 2001. *Empress of the World*. New York: Viking.
Watts, Julia. 2001. *Finding HF*. Los Angeles: Alyson.

2002

- Shimko, Bonnie. 2002. *Letters in the Attic*. Chicago: Academy Chicago.

2003

- Benduhn, Tea. 2003. *Gravel Queen*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
Hartinger, Brett. 2003. *The Geography Club*. New York: HarperTempest.
Myracle, Lauren. 2003. *Kissing Kate*. New Jersey: Dutton Books.
Peters, Julie Anne. 2003. *Keeping You A Secret*. Little Brown and Company.

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Tea Benduhn

- 1) Can you tell me about how you came to write *Gravel Queen*?
- 2) Did you write the book while you were in grad school or reframe the manuscript at that point in time or was it after?
- 3) This book was published as a young adult book, did you choose to write it as YA book or did that happen after?
- 4) In writing *Gravel Queen*, what did you want to give readers in this book?
- 5) What factors influenced your writing a book with lesbian characters?
- 6) When conjuring Aurin and Neila, what kind of lesbian characters did you set out to create?
- 7) What do you really like about the characters in this book (Kenney, Fred, Aurin, Neila, Grant)?
- 8) Aurin is white and Neila is black. Why did you create an interracial romance and what sort of things did you take into consideration in writing this?
- 9) In terms of your own race, how was it writing from another race perspective? Did you find that challenging?
- 10) Aurin and Neila fall for one another in this book, and that's one of the things that I love about it – the way you captured the falling in love feeling. But while falling in love, sexual orientation and sexual identity do not really factor into this experience. Why?
- 11) The sexual expression of Aurin and Neila's relationship takes place in the form of kissing. Did you ever want to take it further sexually? Why/why not? Why didn't you?
- 12) While writing *Gravel Queen*, were there elements you felt you had to consciously structure a certain way because you felt it would make it more publishable or is this the story you set out to write?
- 13) Who do you think reads this book and why?
- 14) How do you think that young lesbians read this text?
- 15) How do you think parents read this text?
- 16) What kind of feedback have you received on your book thus far?
- 17) Tell me about the publication process. Kind of, if you don't mind, walking me through how *Gravel Queen* went from your desk to the bookshelf/bookstore.
- 18) Can you tell me what factors played into pitching this book to a publisher or was this a solicited book?
- 19) What factors went into pitching the book?
- 20) How did the fact that the book contained lesbian characters and experiences go over with the publishers?
- 21) Do you think they were looking for a book with lesbian characters?
- 22) What kind of changes did you have to make to the text, if any? Why?
- 23) Did you ever feel pressure to change your story and characters at all?
- 24) Did you ever have to change the story to include certain things and remove others?
- 25) When looking at Simon & Schuster's website they have categorized *Gravel Queen* in a section entitled "Juvenile Fiction – Social situations – homosexuality."

Here, there is your book and three of Alex Sanchez's (*Rainbow Boys*, *Rainbow High*, and *So Hard to Say*). To your knowledge is Simon & Schuster trying to increase their production of homosexuality-themed YA lit?

- 26) When you were sending out your manuscripts and soliciting a publisher was this a risky book to publish?
- 27) So in terms of some of the changes, sales was one of the things that was mentioned?
- 28) Who wrote the blurb on the back cover of the book?
- 29) Who chose the front cover image?
- 30) How does it feel to have your book published and see it on the shelves?
- 31) Is there anything else about your experience in writing *Gravel Queen* or in the publication process that you'd like to share with me?

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Nancy Garden

- 1) Why did you write *Annie On My Mind* and why did you write this as a YA book?
- 2) What factors influenced your writing a book with lesbian characters, both primary and secondary?
- 3) *Annie On My Mind* could be read as a love story that just happens to be between two girls. What kind of relationship did you want to construct between love and sexual identity/orientation?
- 4) One of the interesting aspects of this story is the development of a sexual relationship between Liza and Annie. While you detail kissing and touches, when Liza and Annie have sex (or do they?) it's behind "pulled shades". What were your reasons for this?
- 5) The first time I read this book, I felt that there was punishment for lesbians in the novel - Annie and Liza were punished by their separation and Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer are fired. But upon a second reading, I didn't see it as so. How did you intend for the ending of *Annie On My Mind* to be read?
- 6) Why do you think *Annie On My Mind* has become a marker by which romances for adolescents are judged - both gay and straight? (I can't tell you the number of reviews I've read where it's been stated "this is no *Annie On My Mind*")
- 7) Who do you think reads this book and what do you think this book offers to its readers?
- 8) What kind of feedback have you received on this book, when it was first published in 1982 and since then?
- 9) As an experienced and published author, can you tell me what factors played into pitching this book to your publisher Farrar, Straus & Giroux or was this a solicited book?
- 10) Tell me about the publication process for this book.
- 11) How did the fact that the book contained lesbian characters and experiences go over with your publisher?
- 12) What kind of changes did you have to make to the text, if any? Why?
- 13) Were there editorial changes made to the text? Major or minor? Did your editor consult or include you in making these changes?
- 14) Did you ever feel pressure to change your story and characters? How? Why?
- 15) Did you ever have to change the story to include certain things and remove others?
- 16) Is there anything else about your experience in writing *Annie On My Mind* or in the publication process that you'd like to share with me?
- 17) Do authors censor themselves and not create books with queer content because it's too hard to get published?
- 18) Do publishers reject or mediate what is acceptable for lesbians to do in a YA novel?
- 19) Why is there not more sex in lesbian-themed YA books - is it because it's YA or because it's YA and these characters are gay?

Appendix D

Interview Questions for M.E. Kerr

- 1) Can you tell me about how you came to write *Deliver Us From Evie*?
- 2) Can you tell me why you chose to write this as a YA book?
- 3) What factors influenced your writing a book with lesbian characters? Is there anything else you want to add to that?
- 4) This story is written from the perspective of Parr even though the title and the story seems to focus on Evie. Why did you choose to do that, using Parr as your in?
- 5) I was reading on your website how you like to write novels with a male voice to appeal to readership. Was that one of the factors?
- 6) In terms of having Parr as a narrator, how did that impact the way you were able to develop a relationship between Patsy and Evie?
- 7) Evie is depicted as masculine, especially in her appearance which is reinforced through confrontations with her mother. Why did you bring this masculinity, or butchishness, to the pages of a YA book?
- 8) In terms of that, would you have anything else to add in terms of Patsy and Evie and their relationship in a butch/femme dynamic?
- 9) While writing *Deliver Us From Evie*, were there elements you felt you had to consciously structure a certain way because you felt it would make it more publishable or is this the story you set out to write?
- 10) Who do you think reads this book and why do you think they read it?
- 11) In terms of over the last 10 years, what kind of feedback have you received on this book? Because you really talked about how it was really, really positive initially, did you have any backlash with this book at all?
- 12) As an experienced and published author, can you tell me what factors played into pitching this book to a publisher or was this a solicited book?
- 13) Have all your books under the name M.E. Kerr been published by HarperCollins, Trophy?
- 14) Can you tell me a little bit about the publication process for *Deliver Us From Evie*?
- 15) I've read excerpts from your other novels that are contained on your website, and it appears as if this is the first YA novel you published with lesbian characters. Is that correct?
- 16) In terms of your publication history have you ever had any challenges with getting any of your books published because of the content? I know you expressed a little bit of hesitance around *Night Kites*, but have you had any challenges?
- 17) What kind of changes did you have to make to the text, if any?
- 18) Did you ever feel pressure to change your story and characters other than minor things? Do you think that part of that is because of your reputation as an author?
- 19) Would you say you developed your autonomy from an experience or have you always been really been autonomous?
- 20) In terms of the packaging of the book did you write the blurb on the back cover of the book?
- 21) Do you often get involved or have do you have a say in the marketing processes?
- 22) Is there anything else about your experience in writing *Deliver Us From Evie* or in the publication process that you'd like to share with me?

Appendix E

Interview Questions for Julie Anne Peters

- 1) Can you tell me about how you came to write *Keeping You A Secret*?
- 2) Why did you write this book as a YA book, because I know you do books for younger readers and middle school readers?
- 3) In writing *Keeping You A Secret*, what did you want to give readers in this book, if there's anything you want to add to what you've said already?
- 4) What factors influenced your writing a book with lesbian characters?
- 5) What did you want to give your readers with the characters of Cece and Holland?
- 6) Holland starts out the novel as being straight, or at least she's straight because she's in this relationship with Seth. Why was this important to the development of *Keeping You A Secret*?
- 7) Holland develops feelings for Cece, then falls for Cece, then begins a relationship with Cece and it isn't until that point in time that she questions her sexual orientation. Why that order of events? What kind of relationship did you want to create between romance and sexual identity?
- 8) Holland has a horrible experience with her mother and her friend Kirsten – from getting kicked out of her house, to not being able to touch Hannah, to homosexual slurs – why did you incorporate that 'hard stuff' into this novel?
- 9) This is a sex question. At the beginning of the novel Holland is with Seth and they have a sexual relationship – one that is relatively explicit. When Holland begins to date Cece some of the same sexual tensions emerge, like a place to go to be alone, but whether or not they have sex or how they have sex isn't as explicit. Why? Would you chalk that up to what you saw in the literature as being a difference between heterosexual and homosexual sexual relationships?
- 10) Cece's gay and has an older sister who is gay. Both are very different in their openness with respect to their sexuality, but two gay siblings! Why?
- 11) Cece wants to create a lesbian club at the school, which is turned down. When Holland approaches her with the discrimination excuse of the students' council, Cece isn't willing to start a gay-straight alliance. Why?
- 12) While writing *Keeping You A Secret*, were there elements you felt you had to consciously structure a certain way because you felt it would make it more publishable or is this the story you set out to write?
- 13) Who do you think reads this book and why do you think they read it? Have you been completely flooded with letters?
- 14) Have you received any other sorts of feedback on the book, negative repercussions? I know you talked earlier about how this was going to be a large outing for you.
- 15) As an experienced and published author, can you tell me what factors played into pitching this book to a publisher or was this a solicited book? But you've already covered this, so is there anything else you would like to add?
- 16) Tell me about the publication process for this book, if you wouldn't mind walking me through the step from your manuscript until it hit the bookshelves.
- 17) We've already talked about how Megan and your agent wanted you to write this book, so when that came to them in the form of a manuscript, how did that go over with them, the characters that you had created?

- 18) We already talked a little about some of the changes you had to make to the text, so were there any other ones?
- 19) When I was looking on your site at the publishers of your past books, not all of your titles have been published with Little, Brown and Co. With respect to the YA books, *Love Me, Love my Broccoli* (1998) (and *Risky Friends* 1993 Willowisp for middle readers – switch to Little, Brown and Co. in 1996) was with Harper Collins and subsequent titles have been with Little, Brown and Co. Can you tell me about this?
- 20) Before I perused your site, I actually came across the same article we already talked about in the Denver Post about your publishers marketing you as a “gay lit” author. Do you consider yourself to be a “gay lit” author now?
- 21) How would you describe your relationship and experiences in publishing with Little, Brown and Co?
- 22) Is there anything else about your experience in writing *Keeping You A Secret* or in the publication process that you’d like to share with me?

Appendix F

Interview Questions for Sandra Scoppettone

- 1) Can you tell me about how you came to write *Happy Endings Are All Alike*?
- 2) Was there any particular reason why you choose to write this as a YA book?
- 3) In writing *Happy Endings Are All Alike*, what did you want to give readers, aside from what you've already stated?
- 4) What factors influenced your writing a book with lesbian characters?
- 5) The next couple of questions are specifically about the characters and what you wanted to give your audience. In the book you have Jaret who seems to be really comfortable with her sexuality in this book, and Peggy is struggling. But one challenge they both seem to share is what the outside world will think of their relationship. Why was this part of the novel?
- 6) There are a lot of struggles surrounding or breaking down stereotypes in the novel. For example, when Bianca has to get undressed in front of Peggy she feels she has to explicitly state that she's trusting her – implying that Peggy might make a move on her – and Peggy responds with the idea, "Are you attracted to every guy you meet?" What were you trying to do with the inclusion of scenes such as this one?
- 7) The rape in the novel can and has been read many different ways. What was your intention in having Mid rape Jaret?
- 8) Following up on that, in the novel, Jaret and Peggy have a sexual relationship but it's not depicted in great detail. Conversely, Jaret's rape is pretty graphic and violent. What were your reasons for this?
- 9) In hindsight, how much of this book do you think is representative of American culture and feelings towards homosexuals when you wrote it?
- 10) While writing *Happy Endings Are All Alike*, were there elements you felt you had to consciously structure a certain way because you felt it would make it more publishable or is this the story you set out to write?
- 11) So you were reviewed well for *Trying Hard to Hear You* or it was reviewed and marketed. But your publishers didn't try to put a marketing push on this book?
- 12) Now we're going to get into that section of my questions, but that was a good preface for it. Was *Happy Endings* a book that you pitched or was it solicited?
- 13) Can you tell me about the publication process for this book?
- 14) How did the fact that the book contained lesbian characters and experiences go over with the publishers?
- 15) Given that, did you ever feel pressure to change your story and characters?
- 16) Were there editorial changes made to the text?
- 17) Did you write the blurb on the back cover of the book or did your editor do that?
- 18) Did you have a role in choosing your cover image at all?
- 19) How would you describe your relationship and experiences in publishing with Harper & Row?
- 20) Now we're at the end of the interview and I've covered all of the questions I wanted to get through, is there anything else about your experience in writing *Happy Endings Are All Alike* or in the publication process that you'd like to share with me?
- 21) Was your book controversial at all when it came out for young adults?

Appendix G

Interview Questions for Julia Watts

- 1) Can you tell me about how you came to write *Finding H.F.*?
- 2) Why did you choose to write this as a YA book?
- 3) In writing *Finding H.F.* what did you want to give readers in this book?
- 4) In the book, H.F. is really sure of her sexuality while Wendy seems to be struggling with her sexual orientation. Can you speak about this?
- 5) H.F. is visibly different from those Morgan and is depicted in a masculine manner. While H.F. for the most part seems to escape the teasing and torment that Bo, who is presumed to be gay faces, however, on their road trip everyone seems to read H.F. as a lesbian. What were your reasons for this?
- 6) The other gay people they encounter on their trip is a group of lesbian teens who have been kicked out of their house and two really rich gay men. Can you talk a little bit about your reasons for these meetings and why these were the secondary characters you created?
- 7) Given that your book is one of the few YA novels that addresses religion, can you talk a little bit about your reasons for the intersections of religion and sexual orientation here?
- 8) While writing *Finding H.F.*, were there elements you felt you had to consciously structure a certain way because you felt it would make it more publishable or is this the story you set out to write?
- 9) I'd like to talk about that a little bit more. Were the sex scenes both with Wendy and Laney that had to be toned down or were there others?
- 10) Who do you think reads this book and why?
- 11) What kind of feedback have you received on this book?
- 12) In terms of fan feedback are you getting – you're one of the few authors I've interviewed that doesn't actually have a website or a web presence – so are most of them contacting you through Alyson?
- 13) As an experienced and published author, can you tell me what factors played into pitching this book to a publisher or was this a solicited book? And this was your first publication with Alyson?
- 14) Was part of the factor that you were publishing with one lesbian press and going over to another gay and lesbian press, was that a factor in your decision?
- 15) When I was looking at the Alyson website, they've published eight YA titles and one reprint (of Jane Fitcher's *Crush* – a lesbian novel), of which yours is the only original lesbian work. Was that hard for you to get published? Or were they specifically looking for lesbian content? Or how was that with them?
- 16) Tell me about the publication process for this book. Walk me through what you remember of it.
- 17) How did the fact that the book contained lesbian characters and experiences go over with the publishers?
- 18) I know we've talked about some of the changes you made to the text. Were there anymore that you had to make?
- 19) Did you ever feel any pressure to change your story and characters?
- 20) Who wrote the blurb on the back cover of the book or the cover copy?

- 21) In terms of the cover image you said they picked an image and sent an image back and asked if you were okay with that?
- 22) You were the winner of the Lambda Lit award in 2001 for this book. Can you tell me about this experience?
- 23) Do you know anything about the sales of your book before after the Lambda award or just in general?
- 24) How would you describe your relationship and experiences in publishing with Alyson?
- 25) Is there anything else about your experience in writing *Finding H.F.* or in the publication process that you'd like to share with me?

Appendix H

Interview Questions for Jacqueline Woodson

- 1) Can you tell me about how you came to write *The House You Pass on the Way*?
- 2) Why did you write this as a YA book?
- 3) In writing *The House You Pass on the Way*, what did you want to give readers in this book?
- 4) What factors influenced your writing a book with lesbian characters, or rather, ones who are struggling with a sexual orientation?
- 5) Staggerlee is such a lonely and isolated character. What were your reasons for this?
- 6) Can you speak a little about why and how you depicted the struggle around determining sexual identity that both Trout and Staggerlee face?
- 7) Given that your book is one of the few YA novels with black or interracial characters, especially with respect to those of lesbian identity, can you talk a little bit about your reasons for the intersections of race and sexual orientation here, if you want to expand on what you've already said?
- 8) When Trout goes back to Baltimore, she begins a relationship with Matthew and does a name change, back to Tyler. Why was this important in the text?
- 9) While writing *The House You Pass on the Way*, were there elements you felt you had to consciously structure a certain way because you felt it would make it more publishable or is this the story you set out to write?
- 10) Who do you think reads this book and why?
- 11) What kind of feedback have you received on this book?
- 12) Tell me about the publication process for this book.
- 13) Can you talk a little bit about the switch between publishers then – you went from Random House to Putnam? Were you were publishing things with so many houses because you were producing so much work?
- 14) How did the fact that the book contained lesbian characters and experiences go over with the publishers, I guess I am going to speak to both Random and Putnam here?
- 15) Could you speak to, a little bit more about the challenges with Scholastic and *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*? And did the book sell more in the trade market as opposed to Scholastic's school market?
- 16) What kind of changes did you have to make to the text, if any?
- 17) Where there editorial changes made to the text?
- 18) Did you ever feel pressure to change your story and characters?
- 19) Did you ever have to change the story to include certain things and remove others?
- 20) Who chose the front cover image?
- 21) How would you describe your relationship and experiences in publishing with Random and with Putnam as well?
- 22) Do you happen to know in terms of sales figures for *The House You Pass on the Way*, do you know if it was one of your better selling books, one your lesser selling or what kind of markets it was selling in?

Appendix I

Novels Not Included in the Final Study

Catherine Brett, *S.P. Likes A.D.* (1989)

As one of the two lesbian YA books put out by a Canadian publisher, *S.P. Likes A.D.*, is about the exploration of a lesbian identity through a crush. Two attempts were made to contact Brett through her publisher, but Brett never responded to the interview request.

Rosa Guy, *Ruby* (1976)

While the first homosexuality-themed novel was published in 1969, *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* by John Donovan, it wasn't until seven years later in 1976 that the first YA novel with lesbian characters was published. Rupturing the dominance of white, gay male characters in novels published during this period, *Ruby* introduced to this budding literary body two protagonists who engage in a lesbian relationship and who also happen to be black. It wasn't until 1997, with Jacqueline Woodson's *The House You Pass on the Way* and Nina Revoyr's *The Necessary Hunger*, that another African-American adolescent lesbian appeared on the pages of a YA novel.

Guy's most recent publisher was contacted; Coffee House Press acknowledged receipt of the interview request and forwarded said request to Guy. Guy never contacted the researcher to schedule an interview time.

Zoe Trope, *Please Don't Kill the Freshman: A Memoir* (2003)

After her interview, Zoe Trope's *Please Don't Kill the Freshman: A Memoir* was removed from this study. Despite the "a memoir" portion of the title, the book had been

incorporated into fiction shelves in many Canadian bookstores⁶ and while the text is the diary of Trope's freshman and sophomore years in high school, characterization, tone and the popularity of diary formats in YA novels make it seem fictionalized. Despite its seemingly fictional qualities, the author's interview revealed that there had been a great deal of discussion between herself, her editor and the marketing team regarding whether or not to push this as a non-fiction or fiction work. According to Trope (2004) who was surprised in the first place that this was an issue, the reason *Please Don't Kill the Freshman* was even pitched as a fictional work was because the perceived market share and projected sales for fiction was deemed to be significantly greater. In the end, respecting Trope's position that this was her life on paper, that her writing was not for the most part not fictionalized, publisher HarperTempest categorized and marketed the book as YA non-fiction. As such, this text will not be examined as fiction and has been removed from this project.

Lois-Ann Yamanaka, *Name Me Nobody* (1999)

Continuing the shifting trend of gay-as-main-theme to gay issues in the subplot (Jenkins 1998), the lesbian character in *Name Me Nobody* is the protagonist's best friend, Von. Set in Hawaii and told through the voice of Louie - dealing with the multiple issues of self-esteem, body image and familial relationships - this is also one of the rare texts to deal with race through its Japanese characters. A letter was sent to Yamanaka's publisher requesting an interview with her, a request to which neither the publisher nor author responded. As such, this text has been removed from this study.

⁶ *Please Don't Kill the Freshman: A Memoir* was originally purchased at Chapters on Rideau Street in Ottawa where it was shelved as fiction. Forays into bookstores in Montreal and Newmarket also revealed the same shelving location in late 2003. Since early 2004, many bookstores have increased their holdings of YA and as such, have incorporated a YA non-fiction section to house the growing number of non-fiction and self-help books for a teen audience.

Appendix J

Young Adult Fiction with GLBTQ Characters: A Chronological Listing

1969

Donovan, John. 1969. *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*. New York: Harper & Row.

1972

Hall, Lynn. 1972. *Sticks and Stones*. Chicago: Follett.

Holland, Isabelle. 1972. *The Man Without a Face*. New York: Lippincott.

1974

Scoppettone, Sandra. 1974. *Trying Hard to Hear You*. New York: Harper & Row.

1976

Guy, Rosa. 1976. *Ruby*. New York: Viking.

Sullivan, Mary W. 1976. *What's This About Pete?* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

1977

Kerr, M.E. 1977. *I'll Love You When You're More Like Me*. New York: Harper & Row.

1978

Hautzig, Deborah. 1978. *Hey, Dollface*. New York: Greenwillow Books.

Scoppettone, Sandra. 1978. *Happy Endings Are All Alike*. New York: Harper & Row.

1979

Rees, David. 1979. *In the Tent*. London: Dobson Books.

1980

Klein, Norma. 1980. *Breaking Up*. New York: Random House.

Reading, J.P. 1980. *Bouquets for Brimbal*. New York: Harper & Row.

Rees, David. 1980. *The Lighthouse*. New York: Dennis Dobson.

Tolan, Stephanie. 1980. *The Last of Eden*. New York: Bantam.

1981

Bargar, Gary. 1981. *What Happened to Mr. Forster?* New York: Clarion-Houghton Mifflin.

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

Hanlon, Emily. 1981. *The Wing and the Flame*. New York: Bradbury.

Levy, Elizabeth. 1981. *Come Out Smiling*. New York: Delacorte.

Snyder, Ann and Louis Pelletier. 1981. *The Truth About Alex* (original title: *Counterplay*). New York: New American Library.

St. George, Judith. 1981. *Call Me Margo*. New York: G.P. Putnam.

1982

- Bunn, Scott. 1982. *Just Hold On*. New York: Delacorte.
Chambers, Aidan. 1982. *Dance on My Grave*. New York: Harper & Row.
Garden, Nancy. 1982. *Annie On My Mind*. New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux.
Hulse, Larry. 1982. *Just the Right Amount of Wrong*. New York: Harper & Row.
Rees, David. 1982. *The Milkman's On His Way*. London: Gay Men's Press.

1983

- Branfield, John. 1983. *Thin Ice*. London, Gollancz.
Ecker, B.A. 1983. *Independence Day*. New York: Avon.
Kesselman, Wendy Ann. 1983. *Flick*. New York: Harper & Row, 1983.
Mosca, Frank. 1983. *All-American Boys*. Boston: Alyson.
Singer, Marilyn. 1983. *The Course of True Love Never Did Run Smooth*. New York: Harper & Row.

1984

- Ireland, Timothy. 1984. *Who Lies Inside*. London: Gay Men's Press.
L'Engle, Madeleine. 1984. *A House Like A Lotus*. New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux.
Rees, David. 1984. *Out of the Winter Gardens*. London: Olive Press.
Ure, Jean. 1984. *You Win Some. You Lose Some*. New York: Dell.

1985

- Bess, Clayton. 1985. *Big Man and the Burn-out*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Klein, Norma. 1985. *Family Secrets*. New York: Dial.
Willmott, Frank. 1985. *Suffer Dogs*. New York: HarperCollins.

1986

- Colman, Hila. 1986. *Happily Ever After*. New York: Scholastic.
Kerr, M.E. 1986. *Night Kites*. New York: Harper & Row.
Meyer, Carolyn. 1986. *Elliott and Win*. New York: McElderry.
Park, Christine. 1986. *Joining the Grown-Ups*. New York: Heinemann.
Sakers, Don. 1986. *Act Well Your Part*. Boston: Alyson.
Ure, Jean. 1986. *The Other Side of the Fence*. New York: Delacorte.
Wersba, Barbara. 1986. *Crazy Vanilla*. New York: Harper & Row.

1987

- Klein, Norma. 1987. *My Life As a Body*. New York: Knopf.
Pausacker, Jenny. 1987. *What Are What Are Ya?* Sydney: Angus and Robertson.
Rinaldi, Ann. 1987. *The Good Side of My Heart*. New York: Holiday House.

1988

- Klein, Norma. 1988. *Now That I Know*. New York: Bantam.
Koertge, Ron. 1988. *The Arizona Kid*. Boston: Joy Street/ Little, Brown.
Wersba, Barbara. 1988. *Just Be Gorgeous*. New York: Harper & Row.

1989

- Block, Francesca Lia. 1989. *Weetzie Bat*. New York: Harper & Row.
Brett, Catherine. 1989. *S.P. Likes A.D.* Toronto: The Women's Press.
Childress, Alice. 1989. *Those Other People*. New York: Putnam.
Homes, A.M. 1989. *Jack*. New York: Macmillan.
Klein, Norma. 1989. *Learning How to Fall*. New York: Bantam.
Rees, David. 1989. *The Colour of His Hair*. Exeter, England: Third House.
Shannon, George. 1989. *Unlived Affections*. New York: Harper & Row.
Wieler, Diana. 1989. *Bad Boy*. Toronto: Groundwood.

1990

- Levy, Marilyn. 1990. *Rumors and Whispers*. New York: Fawcett.
Sweeney, Joyce. 1990. *Face the Dragon*. New York: Delacorte.
Walker, Paul Robert. 1990. *The Method*. New York: Gulliver/HBJ.

1991

- Block, Francesca Lia. 1991. *Witch Baby*. New York: Harper.
Francis, Jaye. 1991. *Rebecca*. Sydney: Penguin.
Garden, Nancy. 1991. *Lark in the Morning*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
Gleitzman, Morris. 1991. *Two Weeks with the Queen*. New York: Putnam & Grosset.
Greene, Bette. 1991. *The Drowning of Stephen Jones*. New York: Bantam.
Maguire, Jesse. 1991. *Getting It Right*. New York: Ivy/Ballantine.
Woodson, Jacqueline. 1991. *The Dear One*. New York: Delacorte.

1992

- Bell, William. 1992. *No Signature*. Toronto: Seal.
Durant, Penny Raife. 1992. *When Heroes Die*. New York: Atheneum.
Wieler, Diana. 1992. *Bad Boy*. New York: Delacorte.

1993

- Bess, Clayton. 1993. *The Mayday Rampage*. Sacramento, CA: Lookout Press.
Block, Francesca Lia. 1993. *Missing Angel Juan*. New York: Harper.
Kaye, Marilyn. 1993. *Real Heroes*. New York: Harcourt.
Murrow, Liza Ketchum. 1993. *Twelve Days in August*. New York: Holiday House.
Mullins, Hilary. 1993. *The Cat Came Back*. Florida: Naiad Press.
Salat, Cristina. 1993. *Living in Secret*. New York: Bantam.
Walker, Kate. 1993. *Peter*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

1994

- Davis, Deborah. 1994. *My Brother Has AIDS*. New York: Atheneum.
Donovan, Stacey. 1994. *Dive*. New York: Dutton.
Kerr, M.E. 1994. *Deliver Us From Evie*. New York: HarperCollins.
McClain, Ellen Jaffe. 1994. *No Big Deal*. New York: Lodestar.
Nelson, Theresa. 1994. *Earthshine*. New York: Orchard Books.
Paulsen, Cary. 1994. *The Car*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace.

1995

- Bantle, Lee F. 1995. *Driving for the Moon*. New York: Macmillan.
- Block, Francesca Lia. 1995. *Baby Be-Bop*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Crutcher, Chris. 1995. *Ironman*. New York: LaurelLeaf.
- Fox, Paula. 1995. *The Eagle Kite*. New York: Orchard Books.
- Hamilton, R.J. 1995. *Who Framed Lorenzo Garcia?* [Pride Pack #1] Boston: Alyson.
- Hamilton, R.J. 1995. *The Case of the Missing Mother*. [Pride Pack #2] Boston: Alyson.
- Springer, Nancy. 1995. *Looking for Jamie Bridger*. New York: Dial.
- Van Dijk, Lutz. 1995. *Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stephan K.* translated by Elizabeth D. Crawford. New York: Henry Holt.
- Velasquez, Gloria. 1995. *Tommy Stands Alone*. Houston: Arte Publico/Pinata Books.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. 1995. *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*. New York: Scholastic.

1996

- Block, Francesca Lia. 1996. *Girl Goddess #9*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Cart, Michael. 1996. *My Father's Scar*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Cooper, Melrose. 1996. *Life Magic*. New York: Dial.
- Garden, Nancy. 1996. *Good Moon Rising*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
- Lynch, Chris. 1996. *Dog Eat Dog*. [Blue-Eyed Son series, book 3] New York: HarperCollins.
- Maguire, Gregory. 1996. *Oasis*. New York: Clarion.
- Zalben, Jane Breskin. 1996. *Unfinished Dreams*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

1997

- Gantos, Hack. 1997. *Desire Lines*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
- Jenkins, A.M. 1997. *Breaking Boxes*. New York: Delacorte.
- Kerr, M.E. 1997. *"Hello," I Lied*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Ketchum, Liza. 1997. *Blue Coyote*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Larson, Rodger. 1997. *What I Know Now*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Mowry, Jess. 1997. *Babylon Boyz*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Revoyr, Nina. 1997. *The Necessary Hunger*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Wersba, Barbara. 1997. *Whistle Me Home*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. 1997. *The House You Pass on the Way*. New York: Random House.

1998

- Block, Francesca Lia. 1998. *I Was a Teenage Fairy*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Dingman, Monna L. 1998. *My Bicycle Trip*. Toronto: Women's Press.
- Stoehr, Shelley. 1998. *Tomorrow Wendy: A Love Story*. New York: Delacorte.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. 1998. *If You Come Softly*. New York: G.P. Putnam.

1999

- Bechard, Margaret. 1999. *If It Doesn't Kill You*. New York: Viking.
- Boock, Paula. 1999. *Dare Truth or Promise*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Chbosky, Stephen. 1999. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. New York: Pocket Books.
- Garden, Nancy. 1999. *The Year They Burned the Books*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
- Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. 1999. *Alice on the Outside*. New York: Atheneum.
- Nolan, Han. 1999. *A Face in Every Window*. New York: Harcourt.
- Taylor, William. 1999. *The Blue Lawn*. Boston: Alyson.
- Taylor, William. 1999. *Jerome*. Boston: Alyson.
- Torres, Laura. 1999. *November Ever After*. New York: Holiday House.
- Wittlinger, Ellen. 1999. *Hard Love*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Yamanaka, Lois-Ann. 1999. *Name Me Nobody*. New York: Hyperion.

2000

- Appelt, Kathi. 2000. *Kissing Tennessee*. New York: Harcourt.
- Garden, Nancy. 2000. *Holly's Secret*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
- Ferris, Jean. 2000. *Eight Seconds*. New York: Harcourt.
- Hines, Sue. 2000. *Out of the Shadows*. New York: Avon Tempest.
- Winnick, Judd. 2000. *Pedro & Me*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Wittlinger, Ellen. 2000. *What's In a Name?* New York: Simon & Schuster.

2001

- Howe, James. 2001. *The Misfits*. New York: Atheneum.
- Hrdlitschka, Shelley. 2001. *Dancing Naked*. Victoria, BC: Orca.
- Killingsworth, Monte. 2001. *Equinox*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Reynolds, Marilyn. 2001. *Love Rules*. Buena Park, CA: Morning Glory Press.
- Ryan, Sara. 2001. *Empress of the World*. New York: Viking.
- Sanchez, Alex. 2001. *Rainbow Boys*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Toten, Teresa. 2001. *The Game*. Calgary: Red Deer Press.
- Watts, Julia. 2001. *Finding HF*. Los Angeles: Alyson.
- Wittlinger, Ellen. 2001. *Razzle*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Wolff, Virginia Euwer. 2001. *True Believer*. New York: Atheneum.

2002

- Chambers, Aidan. 2002. *Postcards from the Edge*. New York: Dutton.
- Freyman-Weyr, Garret. 2002. *My Heartbeat*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Gladstone, Jim. 2002. *The Big Book of Misunderstanding*. New York: Harrington Park.
- Newbery, Linda. 2002. *The Shell House*. New York: D. Fickling Books.
- Plum-Ucci, Carol. 2002. *What Happened to Lani Garver*. San Diego: Harcourt.
- Shimko, Bonnie. 2002. *Letters in the Attic*. Chicago: Academy Chicago.
- Withrow, Sarah. 2002. *Box Girl*. Toronto: Groundwood.

2003

- Atkins, Catherine. 2003. *Alt Ed*. New Jersey: Putnam Publishers.
- Benduhn, Tea. 2003. *Gravel Queen*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Frost, Helen. 2003. *Keesha's House*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Frances Foster Books.
- Hartinger, Brett. 2003. *The Geography Club*. New York: HarperTempest.
- Levithan, David. 2003. *Boy Meets Boy*. Knopf.
- Myracle, Lauren. 2003. *Kissing Kate*. New Jersey: Dutton Books.
- Peters, Julie Anne. 2003. *Keeping You a Secret*. Little Brown and Company.
- Sanchez, Alex. 2003. *Rainbow High*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing.

2004

- Moore, Stephen R. 2004. *Dancing in the Arms of Orion*. Nebraska: iUniverse, Inc.
- Peters, Julie Anne. 2004. *Luna*. New York: Megan Tingley Books Little, Brown and Company, 2004.
- Sanchez, Alex. 2004. *So Hard to Say*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Wyeth, Sharon Dennis. 2004. *Orphea Proud*. New York: Delacorte.