

**Re-writing the Script:  
Representations of LGB Creativity  
in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction, Film and  
Television**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Until the mid-1990s, there were few gay or lesbian-themed novels and films for young adults. The majority of those which did thematise teen gay or lesbian subjectivity continued to reproduce negative schemas and scripts about the gay or lesbian character.

Since 1997, the schemas and scripts enacted by LGB characters have begun to change and many characters are no longer represented as victims of social prejudice and homophobic discrimination. Instead, they are able to be 'out and proud', to enjoy their sexuality, fall in love and find a place within society. There are variations to the revised script, but it now frequently asserts the LGB character's creative and positive sense of self. Within the last few years, the script has been further modified to include bisexual male and bisexual female teen protagonists.

My analysis centres on an examination of the script in contemporary LGB-themed novels for young adults published in Australia, New Zealand and the United States. These novels offer lesbian writers and gay athletes who ultimately enact a positive and creative sense of self. I also include two chapters that analyse the new script in relation to lesbian dancers and gay singers in English-language film and in two popular television series. Two subsequent chapters consider the script in representations of creative teen lesbian and gay subjectivities in Asian films. I situate my analysis of these novels, films and television series within a framework that draws on recent developments in cognitive and affective theory, psychology and creativity.

Throughout the thesis I consider how texts position adolescent readers and viewers to align themselves with the LGB character. First, audiences are encouraged to view creative, athletic or highly academic characters as positive and worthy of interest. Second, audiences are positioned to empathise with characters who may have experienced trauma as an integral part of the coming-of-age process but who always model recovery from that trauma. Third, humour is frequently used as a way of gaining reader and viewer approval and acceptance. My analysis of LGB-themed young adult fiction, film and television suggests that this new positive script is influencing attitudinal change amongst teen audiences and readers.



## STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled:

**“Re-writing the Script: LGB Creativity in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction, Film and Television”**

has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me.

I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis and appropriately acknowledged.

Signature

Katherine Macushla Norbury (41249712)





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## INTRODUCTION

### Revising the Script: From *Romeo and Juliet* to *As You Like It*

Children in post-war children's literature were typically characterised as asexual (Reynolds, 2007: 115). Even in the late 1960s and early 1970s, an era at least in the West generally regarded as one of sexual liberation, the children's section of most public libraries contained few novels of interest to sexually curious teenagers (Reynolds, 2007: 115). Understandably then, lesbian, gay and bisexual characters in post-war children's literature were also absent or invisible. A shift in social attitudes towards non-normative sexuality or homosexuality is commonly understood to have begun with the Stonewall riots in 1969. The riots took place in New York and are widely regarded as one of the catalysts for the formation of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)<sup>1</sup> civil rights movement in the United States. In Britain, a parallel history saw the Sexual Offences Act passed in 1967, which partially decriminalised homosexuality. The riots in New York inspired LGBT people throughout the country to organise groups in support of gay rights and within two years, gay rights groups had been established in nearly every major city in the United States. The first young adult novel with gay content, that is, John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*, was also published in 1969. Donovan's title was followed by Rosa Guy's *Ruby* (1976), one of the earliest young adult novels with a lesbian character.

The subject of non-normative sexualities is potentially a sensitive and controversial one within the context of children's and young adult fiction. Yet the novels, films and television series under consideration in this thesis are undoubtedly aimed at young adults. Scholars such as Allan Cuseo (1992) began the process of examining and analysing young

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I concentrate on LGB subjectivities in fiction, film and television for young adults. When referring to the work of others, I frequently refer to LGBT because that is the initialism used by others in their own work.

adult gay-themed fiction. His survey covered sixty-nine young adult gay-themed novels published originally in the United States between 1969 and 1982. Michael Cart (1996, 197-198; 222-223; 263-264) continued the work of Cuseo and has offered extensive analysis of issues in young adult novels such as homosexuality, AIDS, sexuality and mental illness. Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins (2004) have taken a historical approach to their comprehensive survey and divide LGBT-themed young adult novels into three categories, 'homosexual visibility', 'gay assimilation' and 'queer consciousness/community'. Their joint work has covered every gay, lesbian and queer young adult novel published between 1969 and 2004. My primary corpus consists of novels published since 2004, with one exception, that is, Paula Boock's *Dare Truth or Promise*, originally published in New Zealand in 1997.

As Kenneth Kidd suggests in his seminal essay 'Introduction: Lesbian/Gay Literature for Children and Young Adults', 'Lesbian and gay children's literature seems largely a post-1969 phenomenon, much like modern lesbian/gay identity itself; both are shaped by the social movements of the 1960s and the 1970s' (1998: 114). I draw attention to Kidd's essay because it is one of the earliest studies that I have been able to locate that concentrates on young adult lesbian and gay-themed fiction and that is published within a children's literature journal. Indeed, that entire issue of *Children's Literature Education Quarterly* is dedicated to gay and lesbian themes in children's and young adult literature. The young adult novel as a genre emerged alongside and as a response to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and it 'offers a particularly useful index to changing attitudes toward homosexuality' (Kidd, 1998: 114). As Kidd also points out, 'The young adult genre has been extraordinarily receptive to lesbian and gay themes, largely because coming out is often described in the idiom of adolescence as an intense period of sexual attraction, social rebellion, and personal growth' (1998: 114).

In his essay, Kidd draws readers' attention specifically to picture books and young adult novels, which, at the time he was writing, were among the most visible forms of lesbian/gay literature for children and adolescents. But given that I concentrate on texts in which the protagonist overtly enacts non-normative sexuality, the focus in this thesis is on young adult novels, not picture books. I examine texts that directly represent alternative sexualities, that is, the central characters are not 'coded' as gay or lesbian but actively acknowledge or express same-sex desire within the text. For this reason, the novels, films and television series that form the primary corpus usually have realistic and contemporary settings. The focus on non-normative sexualities also has implications for young adult readers (and viewers) who are no longer compelled to 'read' (or 'watch') against the grain.<sup>2</sup> I make this point not to suggest that all readers and viewers respond to texts in the same way but to clarify that the texts I examine in this thesis represent alternative sexualities and therefore are already not 'normative'. Gay, lesbian and bisexual readers may very well read differently from heterosexual readers but there is also likely to be an overlap in those readings. I extend my discussion to include a selection of films and television series aimed at young adult audiences and I would contend that television series currently are one of the most visible forms of LGB texts for adolescents. The youngest protagonist considered here is thirteen years old, although he does not enact same-sex desire on screen, and the majority are seventeen or eighteen years old.<sup>3</sup>

It quickly became apparent during my research that some of the most progressive and innovative representations of LGB young adults are to be found on television, for

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<sup>2</sup> Tison Pugh's study, *Innocence, Heterosexuality and the Queerness of Children's Literature* (2011), centres on queer readings which deliberately read against the grain. I am grateful to Lydia Kokkola for the reference to Pugh's study.

<sup>3</sup> I vary my terms throughout this thesis to avoid repetition, and consequently, the terms 'young adult' (and its abbreviation YA), 'adolescent', 'youth', 'teenage' and 'teen', are all approximately synonymous.

instance, *Pretty Little Liars* (2010 - ). And the most progressive of these have been produced by private sector companies rather than public service broadcasters, suggesting that texts are changing and evolving ahead of mainstream public opinion, that is, ideas, attitudes or opinions shared by most people and regarded as normal or conventional. Public service broadcasters are more accountable to the general mainstream public and therefore more likely to reflect mainstream public opinion. The one exception in this thesis is a television text, *Beautiful People*, which was broadcast by BBC Television and which I consider in Chapter Six.

### **Traditional Scripts in LGBT Young Adult Fiction**

In the young adult fiction of the 1970s and 1980s, the adolescent gay or lesbian character (who was usually not the protagonist) was frequently represented as struggling with the discovery of his or her sexuality. In Judy Blume's *Forever* (1975), the narrative is centred on heterosexual couple Katherine and Michael. But a secondary narrative involves a character called Artie who struggles to have sex with his girlfriend Erica. Erica even wonders out loud to him whether he might be 'queer' (64), and, as Michael Cart points out, there is textual evidence to suggest that he well might be (1996: 197). When Artie fails to perform the sex act with Erica, he tries to commit suicide, and, as a result, his parents institutionalise him and Artie disappears from the narrative. Cart points out that, frequently, the gay character dies in a car crash (1996: 225) in young adult novels such as Isabelle Holland's *The Man Without a Face* (1972), Sandra Scoppettone's *Trying Hard to Hear You* (1974) and Lynn Hall's *Sticks and Stones* (1977). Even twenty years later, the gay character was frequently dead before the end of the novel, as in Bette Greene's *The Drowning of Stephan Jones* (1991). In Cart's chapter, 'Sex and Other Shibboleths' (1996),

the two sub-headings, 'Silence = Death' (212), and 'Still Trying to Get There' (222), suggest the typical experience of the gay or lesbian character in young adult fiction published prior to 1996.

The adolescent character's discovery of gay or lesbian sexuality was almost always a source of guilt and shame and a discovery that was usually a negative and even traumatic experience.<sup>4</sup> The adolescent character instantiated a script of struggle that he or she endured on his or her own, usually isolated from the peer group and from the family. I define 'script' as a structured sequence of events in the narrative which can be matched with similar sequences of events in other narratives (Daintith, 2004). I shall return to the central concept of scripts later in this Introduction. If the gay or lesbian character was able to form a romantic couple, that couple was not usually intact at the close of the novel. One member of the couple might have reverted to heterosexuality, or one member of the couple might be dead. The traditional script of struggle for gay and lesbian teen characters has not entirely disappeared, even today.

Many gay-themed novels in the late 1980s were published in a socio-cultural context which was shaped by AIDS and an increase in homophobia. In the 1990s, many young adult novels continued to represent gay or lesbian sexuality as a problem to be resolved. These 'problem' novels frequently evoke negative themes such as silence, shame, illness, death, sin and crime and, as Roberta Trites argues, rhetorical choices that link same-sex desire with the language of pathology, effectively undermine the attempt to affirm homosexuality to readers (2000: 109). In her discussion of Aidan Chambers' *Dance on My Grave* (1982), Trites sees it as 'unfortunate that despite Chambers's affirmative rhetoric about being gay, he still focuses more on Hal's pain than on his pleasure' (2000:

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<sup>4</sup> I have discussed themes of guilt and shame in 'On some precipice in a dream': Representations of Guilt in Contemporary Young Adult Gay and Lesbian Fiction', *IRCL* 5.2 (2012): 184-194.



107). Thirteen years later, the protagonist in Francesca Lia Block's *Baby Be-Bop* (1995), Dirk, still 'feels far more pain than pleasure in this novel, although he never denies his knowledge of the pleasure he takes in his orientation' (Trites, 2000: 107). Similarly, in her analysis of two lesbian-themed novels, M.E. Kerr's *Deliver Us From Evie* (1994) and Nancy Garden's *Good Moon Rising* (1996), Trites points out that the genre's 'largely negative rhetoric still denies the validation one might wish to find in YA novels about being gay' (2000: 115). In 2000, therefore, young adults novels with gay or lesbian characters who might now be central to the narrative, might even be the novel's protagonist, were still predominantly negatively represented.

### **Negative Understandings of LGBT Teens**

The negative script of struggle associated with gay or lesbian characters in the young adult novels discussed by Cuseo, Cart, Cart and Jenkins and Trites reflects society's traditionally negative view of the gay or lesbian subject. This negative view was inadvertently reinforced by a set of influential research findings, which were used on behalf of LGBT youth in schools to argue for inclusion, educational equity and social justice (Talbert, 2004). In 1989, the US Department of Health and Human Services published a document entitled 'Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide', which revealed that gay and lesbian youth at that time committed approximately thirty per cent of all teen suicides. With the interests of gay youth in mind, a number of writers then responded to this alarming statistic and took up the subject of LGBT youth at risk, as Susan Talbert (2004) has convincingly argued. Ritch Savin-Williams also points out that gay adolescents in the 1980s and 1990s are 'characterised with a 'suffering suicidal' script' (2005: 50).

The dominant image of LGBT youth since that report and the one most frequently referenced by researchers and educators has been that of a ‘suffering, isolated, and suicidal young person’ (Talburt, 2004: 118). Researchers such as Gerald Unks (1995), Andi O’Conor (1995), Virginia Uribe and Karen Harbeck (1995) and Kevin Jennings (1999) who have campaigned on behalf of LGBT youth for equal opportunities in education, have ‘offered statistics and narratives related to suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, homelessness, dropping out, depression, verbal and physical assaults’ (Talburt, 2004: 118). Andi O’Conor identified gay and lesbian teenagers as one of the most significant ‘at-risk’ groups in North American high schools today: ‘At risk of failure, of underachieving, yes. But these teenagers also face a higher risk of harassment, violence and suicide than other teens’ (O’Conor, 1995: 13). These statistics and narratives are used to argue that victimised gay and lesbian students are denied equal access to learning opportunities (Talburt, 2004: 118). But these statistics and narratives also, as Talburt makes clear, inadvertently reinforce the dominant negative and depressing image of LGBT youth as at risk and suicidal.

Many LGBT teens continue to face homophobic bullying and physical assault. If adolescence is generally characterised as a period of turmoil or what Lydia Kokkola refers to as a ‘period of *sturm und drang*’ (2013: 2), then LGBT young adults or even those teens questioning their sexual orientation, potentially face a more difficult and unsettling adolescence, especially at school. Statistics gathered in the United States by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2007) and in Canada by the Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE, 2011), suggest that LGBT students continue to report ‘high levels of homophobic bullying in schools’ (Kitchen and Bellini, 2012: 210). LGBT students are believed to be ‘at higher risk of dropping out of school, using illegal drugs to cope, suffering from depression and anxiety, and attempting suicide’ (Centre for

Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, 2011). But at least since 2004, some of these statistics and negative narratives have begun to be questioned, modified and overturned by researchers such as Eric Rofes (2004), Susan Talburt (2004) and Ritch Savin-Williams (2005).

### **Affirmative Understandings of LGBT Teens**

The previously dominant negative image of the depressed, isolated and drug-dependent gay teenager has undoubtedly begun to change. Ritch Savin-Williams argues that this standard image of gay youth may have been exaggerated even twenty years ago. In *The New Gay Teenager* (2005), Savin-Williams argues that ‘same-sex-attracted young people are more diverse than they are similar and more resilient than suicidal’ (2005: 3). More significantly, he suggests that although teenagers may think a great deal about sex, LGBT teenagers do not believe that sexual orientation is the most defining or even the most important aspect of their identity. According to Savin-Williams’ research, he or she is now frequently able to develop a positive identity. This positive identity development trajectory or what Savin-Williams terms ‘differential developmental trajectories’ (2005: 82-92) revises and updates earlier models of homosexual identity development delineated by Cass (1984, 1996) and Troiden (1989), which included significant periods of denial and of confusion. This is not to suggest that the lesbian, gay or bisexual teenager never experiences denial or confusion. Savin-Williams also begins to counter the male bias in these two earlier models and incorporates recent research on the sexual identity development of adolescent and young adult women. Female experience of sexuality may be more ‘relational and fluid’ (Diamond, 2000) than male experience. In these more recent models of identity development, the lesbian, gay or bisexual teen may also integrate a non-

normative sexuality into a positive and stable sense of self in a very similar way to the heterosexual teen. It is perhaps worth making the point here that the transgender teen may be heterosexual or he or she may experience same-sex desire. 'A shift to positive development is no small intervention within a history of pathology and deviance' (Talbert, 2004: 4).

In other words, the script of struggle experienced by many LGBT teens has started to be replaced by a script of achievement, particularly a script of creative achievement. This new affirmative script is evident in young adult fiction, film and television published, released or broadcast since 2004. In turn, these positive representations of lesbian, gay and bisexual teens in contemporary fiction, film and television are also partly driving changing social attitudes (Reynolds, 2007: 130). These fictional representations may even shape the way that LGBT teens may be perceived and the way in which LGBT teens may perceive themselves.

### **Creative Achievement**

If the positive concept of creativity is introduced into the conversation, that is, if LGBT teens in real-world interactions are linked to discussion of creativity, another entirely different perspective emerges. In its most general sense, creativity is highly valued by society. Creativity, which has been defined as something both novel and relevant, continues to remain an ideal to strive for in many schools (Moran, 2010) and cultures (Lubart, 1999). Seana Moran (2010) suggests that individual creative contributions may change or even transform a culture and therefore the creative person whose purpose may be change may also be unusually morally gifted. He or she may be dedicated to influencing or modifying mainstream public opinion. Cross-cultural comparisons (Lubart, 1990) and

anthropological case studies (Silver, 1981) have ‘demonstrated cultural variability in the expression of creativity’ (Sternberg and Lubart, 1996: 682). Moreover, ‘cultures differ simply in the amount that they value the creative enterprise’ (Sternberg and Lubart, 1996: 682). Nevertheless, creativity is generally cross-culturally valued. Transgender characters in English-language young adult fiction instantiate a script of creative achievement but are not yet textually represented as falling in love, which is the second component of the new script. Therefore my discussion in this thesis concentrates on lesbian, gay and bisexual teen characters only.

I shall argue here that when I consider LGB teen characters in relation to the socially desirable and positive attributes of creativity, another strikingly different conversation takes place. LGB narratives in this thesis centre on creative and romantically successful teen characters. I link LGB characters to creativity and foreground common ground and interests shared with other creative members of the peer group, not sexual difference which self-evidently puts the emphasis on difference. The LGB teen character, and his or her counterpart in real-world situations, is then included in the context of a positive subject, surrounded by his or her peer group such as a cheerleading team or a show choir and no longer represented as an isolated and suffering individual.

The primary goal of this thesis is to argue that the change in script for the lesbian, gay and bisexual character from one of struggle or suicide and romantic tragedy to one of creative achievement and romantic fulfilment represents a major paradigm shift for LGB teen characters and a new way of considering LGB narratives in fiction and film. It is important to note that in each of the twelve novels discussed in this thesis, the lesbian, bisexual female or gay character is the protagonist. In each of the eleven films discussed in this thesis, she or he is also the protagonist or central character. In the two television series in this thesis, the gay or lesbian character is one of the central characters. The central

location occupied by the LGB character positions young adult audiences to align themselves with that character and to empathise with him or her. I shall map this historical shift from romantic tragedy to romantic comedy or 'dramedy' beginning in independent teen film in 1995, in lesbian-themed young adult fiction in 1997, and in gay-themed young adult fiction in 2001. I shall also argue that the rate of change has accelerated since *Glee* (2009 - ) which has been viewed by mainstream audiences in their millions. Since 2009, an increasing number of English-language LGB-inclusive texts have been aimed at mainstream audiences.

### **Contemporary LGBT Representations in Young Adult Fiction**

The number of LGBT novels for young adults which function to engender understanding and promote acceptance of the LGBT character has been on the increase since 1997 in lesbian-themed fiction and in gay-themed fiction since 2001. Kimberley Reynolds suggests that many LGBT novels now have a 'reforming agenda' (2007: 115) and work to influence attitudinal change. In her discussion of LGBT novels, Reynolds analyses four particular texts (2007: 127-130): Tom Lennon's *When Love Comes to Town* (1993), David Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy* (2003), Julie Burchill's *Sugar Rush* (2004) and Julie Anne Peters' *Luna* (2004), which is perhaps the first YA novel to include a central transgender character although not a transgender protagonist. Reynolds suggests that these novels are 'participating in changes taking place in social attitudes to sexuality by moving beyond heteronormative stereotypes' (2007: 115). She argues that three of the four authors (Burchill is the exception) work towards social transformation by encouraging readers to think of all kinds of sex and gender behaviours as equally legitimate and important (2007: 115).

In her discussion of Julie Burchill's novel, Reynolds possibly underestimated its cultural impact, as it was also turned into a highly successful Channel Four television series (2005-2006) and was followed by a sequel, *Sweet* (2007). Burchill is a high-profile media personality in Britain, as Reynolds would know, and Burchill's pair of novels in tandem with the successful television series are arguably some of the earliest British texts for young adults to include a positive representation of a teenage lesbian couple. Reynolds concludes that 'it is important to recognise that these changes are happening in dialogue with changes in culture, both responding to changes and helping to adjust the way readers think and behave' (2007: 130). *Sugar Rush* paved the way for other television representations of adolescent lesbian couples, notably Emily and Naomi in the British series *Skins* (Seasons 3 and 4, 2009-2010).

## **Creativity and Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Representations in Young Adult**

### **Literature, Film and Television**

All of the protagonists or central characters in the twenty-five texts examined in this thesis are, broadly speaking, 'creative'. My aim is to offer an analysis of representations of creativity and creative LGB protagonists in fiction, film and television series aimed at young adults. I draw on script and schema theory – which is itself an integral part of cognitive poetics (Stockwell, 2002: 75-89) – as my principal method of enquiry and I use this theory to analyse three scripts frequently found in contemporary texts for young adults. The first script that I discuss is the 'falling in love' or romance script. The second is what I have termed the 'creative achievement' script. The third script is the lesbian or gay 'coming-out' script. I shall expand on the concept of scripts and on these three particular scripts in Chapter One. My method of enquiry is underpinned by Gilles Fauconnier and

Mark Turner's notion of 'conceptual blending' (2002) which suggests that similarities between concepts enable the mind to incorporate new information and knowledge more readily. Their cognitive approach foregrounds similarities (as well as differences) between lesbian creative writer characters and female creative writer characters, or gay athletes and heterosexual male athlete characters. Finally, I argue that a reader or viewer's emotional or affective response to a text may override and update any previous schema stored in the mind. As a consequence of reading the novels under discussion or watching the films examined in this thesis, the reader or viewer may learn to anticipate a positive ending and associate the LGB character with comedy and creativity.

I use this cognitive approach to demonstrate the ways in which these texts revise the traditional and mostly negative script of struggle and replace it with the script of achievement. Gay and lesbian romance no longer instantiates a *Romeo and Juliet* script of romance which ends in tragedy and the premature death of both lovers, but is more similar to what I identify as an *As You Like It* script, with its comic or dramatic ending and its affirmation of the romantic couple. The two central characters in *Romeo and Juliet* are clearly heterosexual, but I draw the analogy between *Romeo and Juliet* and the traditional LGBT script to suggest that Romeo and Juliet's romantic union did not have the support of the Montagues and the Capulets, that is, of their families and close friends. In contrast, in *As You Like It*, Rosalind and Orlando do have the support of their respective families at the close of the play, and so do Celia and Oliver. The romantic unions are endorsed by family and friends, as are the majority of the same-sex romantic unions discussed in Chapters Two to Seven of this thesis. While I use the concept of the *As You Like It* script to communicate the feel-good aspect of many of the texts discussed here, I am not suggesting that the texts are in any way adaptations or imitations of the plot of *As You Like It*; to make



this clear I shall refer to the new narrative as the ‘As You Like It’ script. I shall define the concept of ‘script’ more closely in Chapter One.

Marilyn Fryer, in her examination of creativity, challenges the ‘very British practice’ of using ‘creative’ as an adjective to describe only the arts and, in so doing, implying that all the arts are necessarily creative and that they are more worthy of the descriptor ‘creative’ than any other field (2012: 22). I follow Fryer’s lead and use a more broadly defined understanding of ‘creativity’: thus I use the descriptor ‘creative’ as an adjective to characterise a range of endeavours, from creative writing to dancing, sport and athleticism, singing and academic intelligence.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the purpose of this thesis is to go beyond political correctness and ‘tolerance’, now an outmoded term in LGBT studies. Lawrence Blum, in his discussion of the gay and lesbian subject, argues for acceptance and ‘positive regard’ (2010). I argue that reading the young adult novels and viewing the films and television series under discussion enable us to empathise directly and closely with the LGB protagonist or central character, effectively influencing attitudinal change on the part of the young adult reader or audience member. My discussion of reader and viewer empathy is supported by reference to ‘mirror neuron’ research and the work of Marco Iacoboni (2008), Suzanne Keen (2008) and Blakey Vermeule (2010), among others. Collectively, the selected texts reflect fundamental changes in social attitudes towards LGB subjects and may have a significant impact on young adult readers and audiences. They may also partly contribute towards genuine and long-lasting social change in the way that LGB young adults in real-world

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<sup>5</sup> I vary my use of ‘creative’ with several other terms, including ‘talented’ and ‘gifted’. The term ‘creative’ may overlap with terms such as ‘talented’ and ‘gifted’, but all terms may be subsumed under the ‘creative’ category’.

interactions are regarded by their peers and by the wider society. The texts may enable LGB readers and audience members to see themselves more positively and to recognise the significant social contribution made by LGB characters in these narratives.

The analysis that follows centres on a selection of twenty-five texts for young adults which have been published, released or broadcast between 1997 and 2013. The texts mainly thematise lesbian and gay subjectivities and the majority (seventeen out of twenty-five) enact the new positive 'As You Like It' script for lesbian and gay teen characters. There is discussion of three bisexual characters, two female and one male. For the main part, the same-sex romantic relationship is accepted by the couple's respective families and their close friends. The remaining eight texts continue to affirm the creative lesbian or gay subjectivity of the individual protagonist of central character. Chapters Four and Seven concentrate exclusively on Asian teen films, whilst the remaining chapters are concerned with English-language texts. The texts were selected because of the central character's creativity. I shall, however, also include brief discussion of non-Anglophone films where possible and where relevant. The key criterion will be the gay or lesbian character's creativity and creative domain. Although I have selected twenty-five texts as my primary corpus, my sample consisted of approximately one hundred titles. The vast majority of these texts which were published, released or broadcast up until the close of 2013 focus on teen lesbian or teen gay subjectivities. There are far fewer texts focalised from the perspective of a bisexual male or bisexual female character and fewer again that are focalised by a transgender character. I select only two texts that concentrate on bisexual female subjectivities. I include one bisexual male protagonist, as I have found only one text with a bisexual male protagonist that enacts the specific forms of creativity that I concentrate on.

I have separated lesbian and gay texts for the sake of clarity, and I have also separated fiction from film and television. Implicit within this separation is an understanding that, for instance, lesbian creative writers have points in common with female creative writers (as well as with gay creative writers). The reader might expect lesbian and gay texts to be discussed together, as for instance in Kerry Mallan's *Gender Dilemmas in Children's Fiction* (2009), where anything touching on same-sex desire or a queer subject is in a separate chapter of its own, 'Queer Spaces in a Straight World: The Dilemma of Sexual Identity' (125-155). But I have deliberately not organised the material in this way. As Roberta Trites points out, 'novels about gay males and lesbians are often more different than they are alike' (2000: 102). As Letitia Peplau and Linda Garnets argue (2000), female sexuality and sexual orientation does not necessarily follow an identical trajectory to male sexuality and sexual orientation. Peplau and Garnets observe that male experience cannot be taken as the 'norm' for human experience: 'Women's sexuality tends to be fluid, malleable, and capable of change over time... in comparison to men, whose sexuality and sexual orientation are viewed as less flexible and more automatic' (2000: 332). Most significantly from my point of view, I found in my research that gender did seem to influence the type of creativity enacted, for instance, I located lesbian swimmers but found more gay surfers. (There is a gay central character who swims in Alex Sanchez's *Rainbow Boys* (2001), to which I shall return in Chapter Five. Carter swims in *Watercolors* (2008) but he also commits suicide before the close of the film). I located lesbian photographers but found more gay artists, particularly in film (*The Graffiti Artist* (2004) and *Shelter* (2008)). In other words, gender did seem to influence the type of creativity enacted on the page or on screen.

Chapter One explores established heterosexual schemas and the blended script in US teen film, usually Hollywood teen film aimed at mainstream audiences. The focus is on

the script that blends the ‘falling-in-love’ script with the ‘creative-achievement’ script, so that teen protagonists are both romantically and creatively successful at the close of the film. I argue that this blended script has been established for three decades in relation to heterosexual protagonists. When further blended with the LGB ‘coming-out’ script or a variant of this script, lesbian, gay and bisexual protagonists are also romantically and creatively successful at the close of the film, television series or novel. In Chapters Two to Seven, I concentrate on texts which enact this newly-emerging script for teen LGB characters.

My research in Chapters Two to Seven examines a wide range of fictional and filmic texts that offer new positive schemas and scripts for the lesbian, gay and bisexual character. These novels, films and television series offer new versions of LGB subjectivities. At the outset of this research, there did not seem to be a single mainstream teen film or television series with a gay or lesbian protagonist that had an upbeat ending. In 2014, two central gay characters in *Glee*, Kurt and Blaine, are engaged to be married. *Glee* is a reflection of genuine social change.

Chapter Two examines six lesbian-themed English-language novels for young adults published between 1997 and 2012, with one or two examples of a bisexual female character but only one example of a bisexual female protagonist. I define ‘lesbian’ as a female character who expresses desire for a second female character. I define ‘bisexual female’ as a female character who experiences desire for a second female character and a male character within the same text. I foreground the new lesbian creative writer schema and the newly-blended ‘As You Like It’ script and draw attention to the ways in which the contemporary teen lesbian character is made desirable. I use cognitive theory as a critical tool to suggest how young adult readers are positioned to engage, understand and empathise with the lesbian character. But I reference David Miall’s study on affect (1989)

and point out the reader's affective response to the novels goes beyond the cognitive schema. Her creative writing ability and her academic excellence render her an attractive character both to her peer group and to readers. I suggest ways in which young adults' empathy for and alignment with the character is secured and maintained. The teen lesbian character frequently experiences many of the same challenging issues faced by other teens, such as parental divorce or the death of a parent or a close friend. In this way, the text establishes common ground and similarities of experience between young adult readers and the teen lesbian protagonist.

Chapter Three focuses on a small group of lesbian characters who appear in a highly popular teen television series broadcast from 2009 and in an independent teen film released in 2010. I concentrate on two principal schemas, the schema for 'lesbian cheerleader/dancer' and the schema for 'lesbian ballroom dancer'. These two new lesbian character types have become increasingly popular over the last five years. The young women are usually physically attractive, intelligent and athletic and, again, they embody many of the interests shared with heterosexual female teens in young adult audiences. I make reference to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's study on embodiment (1945) and foreground the relevance of the body in viewers' relationship with a character on screen. In the first text, *Glee* (2009- ), the lesbian cheerleader/dancer character falls in love with another female cheerleader. Both characters also excel at dancing and, more generally, performing. The romance script is modified when the lesbian cheerleader enacts the sexual adventure script with a second female cheerleader. In the second text, *Leading Ladies* (2010), the lesbian ballroom dancer falls in love with another ballroom dancer and they dance together as a couple.

In Chapter Four, I extend the discussion of new schemas and the newly-emerging script to incorporate a group of Asian teen films and to demonstrate that Asian film

directors are using similar strategies to offer positive and affirming representations of Asian lesbian subjectivities. The term 'Asia' is used as shorthand for South, East and Southeast Asia, 'exclusive of the white colonial cultures that dominated certain regions' (Blackwood and Wieringa, 2007: 3). I examine four Asian films produced variously in Japan, Taiwan and Thailand and released from 2007 to 2012. The four films share similar themes with US teen films and demonstrate both similarity with and difference from US teen film. In other words, the script of creative achievement is an international or global one and used in films for young adults in the very different socio-cultural context of Asia. The lesbian protagonist's creativity is a deliberate strategy used to secure audience approval for the lesbian central characters. In this group of films, she is also frequently initially represented as the 'underdog' or she has had an early experience of trauma and, in this way, the films also position audiences to empathise with her personal and challenging set of circumstances. I offer an analysis of this very different group of films in which young adult protagonists discover and enact their non-normative sexualities within a range of local environments. Together the films suggest a shift in social attitudes towards non-normative sexuality in specific parts of Asia and they also partly shape those changes in social attitudes.

Chapter Five foregrounds new schemas and scripts in relation to gay male character types in fiction for young adult readers. I define 'gay' as a male character who expresses desire for another male character within the text. I turn to fictional representations of teen gay male characters, particularly gay 'jocks' — and 'jock' is used here to refer to the athlete type and to invoke common ground with heterosexual 'jocks'. The gay athlete is an increasingly popular schema in contemporary young adult fiction. In one recent gay-themed novel, the gay athlete schema is further blended with the male creative writer schema. I draw on Melanie Green's research (2004) to argue that the reader is emotionally

transported into the novel. Reader transportation into the narrative is linked to real-world belief change and an improved capacity to empathise with groups who may be marginalised.

Chapter Six explores singing in relation to self-expression and as a vehicle for self-realisation, agency and personal transformation. It considers teen gay characters who sing in two contemporary teen television series, that is, *Beautiful People* (2008-2009) and *Glee* (2009- ). The teen male singer schema is transformed into the teen gay singer schema and is represented on screen as romantically and creatively successful. I make reference to the work of Iain McGilchrist (2009) to foreground the embodied nature of singing and song. Both series are largely comic and therefore clearly revise earlier angst-ridden LGBT coming-out films.

Chapter Seven analyses a group of gay jocks, gay singers and performers in teen films produced in Thailand, Taiwan and the Philippines to show how similar schemas and scripts are being used in Asian teen film. I discuss Thai films using the available secondary sources but Taiwanese and Filipino films have been under-theorised. There is material relating to Filipino gay films for adults but no secondary material relating to young adult gay-themed film that I have been able to locate. One of the male characters in the Taiwanese film *Eternal Summer* could also be bisexual. I define bisexual male as a male character who expresses desire for both a male character and a female character within the same text. I also make brief reference to films produced in other parts of Asia and, briefly, to two films produced in the United States. I extend my argument to include a selection of Asian teen films to demonstrate that all the texts under discussion are linked by generic themes of adolescence, increasing maturity, the development of creative talent, romance, the development of sexuality and coming-of-age. More specifically, several of the films are

in dialogue with each other, as well as with Western teen films, and with specific gay-themed English-language novels for young adults.

My argument throughout this thesis is that the ‘As You Like It’ script combines or blends new elements with old or familiar structures to enact more progressive and optimistic forms of teen lesbian, gay and bisexual male and female subjectivities. I conclude with a discussion of how recent novels for young adults, teen television series and films produced in the West and in Asia are contributing towards a newly-transformed set of social attitudes towards LGB teen characters and their counterparts in real life.

This thesis aims to demonstrate the shift from the LGB character who enacts a script of struggle to the LGB character who performs a script of creative and interpersonal achievement. It is a significant paradigm shift that this thesis demonstrates through a range of texts for young adults. The emphasis in the thesis is therefore on creativity, which foregrounds similarities and common ground shared between the reader or viewer who may or may not be heterosexual and the LGB character, thereby enabling new schemas and scripts to be mentally accommodated and more readily accepted. This approach emphasises fundamental similarities between, for instance, lesbian writers and heterosexual female writers and readers.

Nevertheless, I frequently comment on the representation of same-sex love and desire as, until 2001, the literary representation of that desire was largely ‘interstitial’, to use Trites’ word (2000), that is, ‘occurring in the spaces in between’. In mainstream film and television for young adults, the representation of adolescent same-sex love and desire has, until 2004, also typically been ignored. In contrast, these more recent texts potentially encourage an ‘increased rationality and creativity’, helping to open the ‘closed minds’ of young adult readers and audiences (Djikic, Oatley, Moldoveanu, 2013: 149). It is my hope



that young adult readers and audience members, as a result of their exposure to the texts discussed throughout this thesis, as well as other texts, that for reasons to do with space have not been discussed here, will open their hearts and minds to encounters and relationships with LGBT teens in real-world interactions.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Heterosexual Schemas and the Blended Script in Contemporary Hollywood Teen Film**

Cognitive theory over the past three decades has suggested new concepts for the ways in which people respond to and interpret social reality, as well as the ways in which readers and audiences respond to and interpret fictional texts and films. Of particular pertinence to my approach here is a point made by John Stephens, who suggests that ‘processes whereby the cognitive instruments of schema and script are textually modified have played a central function in positive representations of cultural diversity’, as such modifications within story worlds express a wider transformation of social mentalities (2011: 12). Social attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) teens or young adults are also in the process of being transformed, and positive fictional or filmic representations of non-normative sexualities are partly a result of those new schemas and scripts, or what Stephens refers to as ‘the transformative potential of schemas and scripts’ (2011: 13). Positive fictional or filmic representations may therefore not only reflect new ways of thinking, but they may also modify ways of thinking (for example on the part of readers and audiences) with a view to influencing and even driving attitudinal change.

Several scripts — that is, common narrative sequences which are a synthesis of stereotypical events and key motifs — are examined here in relation to a group of six highly popular and contemporary teen films. First, I consider the ‘falling-in-love’ script, which has been established in teen film since at least *West Side Story* (1961). I briefly

explore this highly familiar script in relation to heterosexual teen protagonists. Second, I discuss the ‘creative-achievement’ script, which was established in relation to teen male protagonists by the mid-1980s, for instance, ‘athlete’ Andrew Clark and ‘brainiac’ Brian Johnson in *The Breakfast Club* (1985). It was introduced with teen female protagonists in films such as *Dirty Dancing* (1987), a coming-of-age film in which Baby both learns how to dance and falls in love with her dance instructor. These two scripts have been blended together in popular teen film for nearly thirty years and I refer to the blended script as the ‘romantic-and creatively-successful’ script. The less familiar one is the LGBT ‘coming-out’ script, in which the protagonist falls in love with someone of the same sex and enacts same-sex desire. The ‘coming-out’ script is integrated with the previous script automatically and unconsciously as a ‘conceptual blend’ (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002), a central idea in this thesis to which I shall return towards the close of this chapter. In this, Chapter One, I consider six contemporary teen films with heterosexual protagonists as a backdrop to the emerging LGB script, which I shall examine in Chapters Two to Seven.

## **Introducing Schemas**

The cognitive instrument of schemas can be defined as core ‘knowledge structures’; these enable the rapid understanding and processing of basic concepts and categories, ‘from the very small to the very large, from the material to the abstract’ (Stephens, 2011: 13).

Schemas can also be understood as static entities, in contrast to story or narrative scripts which have a more dynamic function and usually move through a series of individual stages or separate sequence of stages. In his discussion of cultural diversity in children’s literature, John Stephens uses the example of a ‘team’ to illustrate how a schema can be varied or modified. The concept of the team evokes its own schema and is stored in our

memories. When we read a novel or watch a film, schemas for different types of team may be activated, ‘especially by what is normal and typical about that network’ (Stephens, 2011: 14).

Stephens’ discussion of the schema for team is centred on one particular story, ‘The Jackpot’, from a collection of stories published by Janet and Allan Ahlberg in 1987. As Stephens points out, ‘the team schema has some constant components: it consists of a group linked in a common purpose, and its members have complementary skills and co-ordinate their efforts’ (2011: 16). But the team schema also has variable components; there are different kinds of teams and team members may vary. In Janet Ahlberg’s illustration of the team, for instance, her image ‘demonstrates variables of ethnicity, class, age and dress preferences’ (Stephens, 2011: 16). I use Stephens’ example of the team schema here in the context of Hollywood teen film. It is worth considering who is allowed to be part of the team, such as who is allowed to cheer in the cheerleading squad in *Bring It On* (2000), who is part of the lacrosse team in *American Pie* (1999). As the thesis progresses, I look at who is part of the team in any particular social group. If a Hollywood film were to include LGBT characters on the team, it would modify the team schema and potentially transform audience attitudes towards LGBT characters and their counterparts in real-world interactions.

### **Introducing Scripts**

The cognitive instrument of ‘script’ can be understood as a sequence of events or a dynamic pattern of ‘small spatial stories’ (Turner, 1996: 13) that unfold in time. Turner suggests that we recognise objects, events and stories partly as a consequence of ‘image schemas’, which he defines as ‘skeletal patterns that recur in our sensory and motor

experience' (1996: 16). We recognise small spatial stories on the basis of partial or incomplete information because we are already so familiar with those stories. One of Turner's examples is the action of reaching out to pick up a glass, the different conditions in which that event takes place and how the event varies in its exact details each time it occurs (1996: 17). Turner points out that each time the glass may be slightly nearer or further away; it may sit on a slightly different surface, or it may have a slightly different shape or weight or texture. However, 'we recognise all of the individual events of picking up a glass as belonging to one category in part because they all share a skeletal complex image schema of dynamic interaction' (Turner, 1996: 17). We make sense of the event or experience as consisting of a repertoire of small spatial stories, repeated again and again, to the point that much of this knowledge is stereotypic and automatic in nature. We have the knowledge without realising consciously that we have it.

More broadly speaking, we are also highly familiar with the concept of the script that has a 'happy ending'. We recognise a sequence of events that is likely to lead towards a happy ending, such as boy meets girl, boy and girl fall in love, they encounter resistance to the relationship from their families, eventually their families approve of the relationship and boy and girl end up happily together. We can predict the ending from countless different stories on the theme, even if we are given only a few events at the beginning of the narrative. The script of a female cheerleader who falls in love with a male football player is one that is highly familiar. It could even be considered stereotypical. But if a female cheerleader falls in love, not with a male football player, but a male musician, as in *Bring It On*, then a component of the script has been modified. Equally, if the male lacrosse player falls in love not with the cheerleader but with a choir girl, as in *American Pie*, then the script has been modified in a slightly different way. The modified script varies the expected pattern and final outcome. Stephens discusses how scripts which

explore multicultural themes operate in children's literature. He suggests, 'the logic of a created story does not follow a stereotypic script, and the process of connecting apparently deviant or merely unexpected events may involve readers in unfamiliar insights and perceptions, or may even transform the script into another way of understanding the world' (2011: 14). As an example, in a further modification of the 'happy-ending' script, girl meets girl, girl and girl fall in love, they may encounter resistance to the relationship from their families, but eventually their families accept the relationship and girl and girl end up happily together.

Subtle modifications of the cognitive instruments of schema and script can therefore create new versions of the schemas and scripts that teen audiences already recognise automatically. The newly-modified component of the schema or script can transform not only the text's meaning and significance, it can drive attitudinal change in the audience or influence the reader. A central concept in the modification of schemas and scripts is that of 'conceptual blending', which Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner explain as the mind's 'search for sameness' (2002). They argue in *The Way We Think* that 'conceptual blending is an invisible, unconscious activity involved in every aspect of human life' (2002: 18). In *Bring It On*, the female cheerleader schema is developed when the protagonist proves that she is hard-working and organises a fund-raising carwash to pay for a choreographer, independently-minded when she recruits new girl Missy to the squad, ethical when she refuses to perform 'stolen' routines and, most importantly, creative and original when she leads the squad to choreograph a new routine. Similarly, when one of the male protagonists in *American Pie* prioritises his girlfriend above the interests of the lacrosse team, the schema for male athlete or insensitive 'jock' is modified. The athlete or 'jock' schema is further modified when the lacrosse player sings gospel on stage with his girlfriend.

Young adult audiences are already highly familiar with the scripts for ‘falling-in-love’ and ‘creative achievement’, as I shall demonstrate below. They understand a ‘blend’ of these two scripts automatically and process them immediately. The less familiar script, or ‘new structure’, is the ‘coming-out’ script, which will be examined more closely in this thesis. As Fauconnier and Turner maintain, the search for sameness is an automatic cognitive process which we use to understand and make sense of the world. They suggest that the mind is made up of a network of conceptual spaces, or ‘input spaces’, which are connected by similar elements (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 40). The mind readily integrates conceptual spaces that are connected by similarities, not differences, a fundamental cognitive operation that is expressed in the term ‘conceptual blending’ (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 37). These new mental spaces or structures are referred to as ‘blended spaces’ (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 42-43), and new meanings arise from these new spaces or ‘emergent structures’, which in turn are made possible by the intersection of similar elements and the recruitment of these elements into the ‘blended space’, thus:

Building an integration network involves setting up mental spaces, matching across spaces, projecting selectively to a blend, locating shared structures, projecting backward to inputs, recruiting new structure to the inputs or the blend, and running various operations in the blend itself ... It is crucial to keep in mind that any of them can run at any time and that they can run simultaneously. The integration network is trying to achieve equilibrium. In a manner of speaking, there is a place where the network is ‘happy’ (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 44).

In a further example of conceptual blending, Fauconnier and Turner suggest that blending may lead to a permanent category change, or category metamorphosis, as in the phrase ‘same-sex marriage’ (2002: 269-270).

The phrase ‘same-sex marriage’ involves inputs from the traditional and established scenario of marriage and inputs from an alternative domestic scenario which involves two people of the same sex (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 269). The cross-space mapping or intersection of similarities between the two spaces may link typical elements common to both such as ‘partners, common dwellings, commitment, love, sex’ (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 269). Selective projection recruits additional structure from each input; for instance, marriage brings with it legal status and a socially positive status. These two properties are also now automatically and unconsciously integrated into the new blend, ‘same-sex marriage’. Stigmatised identity is lost in the creation of ‘same-sex marriage’. The new meaning is reflected at the grammatical level in which a noun, ‘marriage’, from one conceptual space is changed by an adjective, ‘same-sex’, from a different conceptual space (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 269). Procreation and children may also be omitted from the new category, although this point is also subject to change. The LGB protagonists discussed in Chapters Two to Seven of this thesis are too young to be married, but the category metamorphosis can also work at the level of schema and script.

### **The Transformative Potential of New Schemas and Scripts**

Recent cognitive research on the experience of watching films or, for that matter, reading novels, suggests that brain regions involved in watching film or other visual media are some of the same brain regions involved in performing or seeing similar actions when they take place in the real world. As Michele Guerra suggests, the ‘relationship we build with the characters, with the objects and the landscape which appear on the screen is very similar to the relationship we build in our daily life with people we interact with, objects we use and environments we inhabit’ (2012). When viewers watch a film, various cortices



in the brain increase in activity during the scenes which show, for instance, close-ups of features such as hands and faces (Hasson et al., 2004: 1639). In other words, the viewer experiences a sensory-motor engagement with the image when watching a film. Similarly, the reader experiences a sensory-motor engagement with a fictional text. This sensory-motor engagement allows the viewer or reader to experience events in the film or novel from the central character's point of view and has implications for the viewer or reader's ability to empathise with the central character or protagonist.

The brain regions involved in perceiving and later recalling auditory and visual information show similar correspondences. Nicole Speer et al. suggest that 'the use of sensory and motor representations during story comprehension may reflect a more general neural mechanism for grounding cognition in real-world experiences' (2008: 998). They surmise that 'language may have adopted this general mechanism over the course of human evolution to allow individuals to communicate experiences efficiently and vividly' (2008: 998).

The 'vivid' communication of experience is further elaborated by Michele Guerra, who suggests that there are at least three different forms of embodiment which are implied by a film and which relate to the discussion here. The first is linked to acting as embodiment and is closely connected to the study of the actor in the neuroscience era, that is, an era when it is possible to record the activation of mirror neurons in the brain. The second is tied to 'film style as embodiment' (Guerra, 2012) and is based on the premise that a director's film style involves a more or less strong embodied relationship with the viewer. The third is tied to viewers' responses and is mostly interested in establishing what exactly happens in viewers' brains and bodies when we watch a particular film scene or film shot (and Guerra suggests that this third form of embodiment is implied by the other two) (Guerra, 2012). In his discussion of Embodied Simulation (or ES) in the same work,

Vittorio Gallese describes Embodied Simulation as a ‘common underlying function mechanism that mediates our capacity to share the meaning of actions, intentions, feelings and emotions with others, thus grounding our identification with and connectedness to others’ (Guerra, 2012).

When young adults watch a film or television series or read a novel, their brains and bodies are engaged in ways that closely resemble the ways they would be engaged in real world interactions. As young adults build relationships with the central characters on screen or in novels, they are potentially changed by the experience, which causes them to feel emotions and see events from particular characters’ points of view. Guerra’s research defines more closely ways in which the viewer is emotionally and cognitively engaged with, in particular, the central character. He suggests that the boundaries between viewer and character (or self and other) are blurred because the viewer may feel emotions that are activated by the on-screen character’s emotions.

New scripts, which necessarily entail new schemas in the way that doing entails being, or, to put it another way, an act must have an agent, have the potential to modify, change or even transform attitudes subscribed to by young adults. As Stephens writes in relation to multiculturalism and children’s literature, ‘Children’s literature has sought to intervene in culture to affirm multicultural models of human rights and human equality, and it has done this by striving to transform the schemas and scripts that were common in Western cultures up until the mid-twentieth century and are still quite pervasive today’ (2011: 13). He continues, ‘To effect such a transformation, children’s texts have primarily attempted to transform the central components of schemas, and hence the story scripts into which they are drawn’ (Stephens, 2011: 13). He concludes that script and schema function as ‘transformative instruments, enhancing understanding of relationships between selfhood and otherness and informing social action designed to foster equity and social justice’

(Stephens, 2011: 34). The new scripts and schemas discussed throughout this thesis in relation to LGB characters (and their counterparts in real-world interactions) do exactly that; they enable an enhanced understanding of the relationship between selfhood and otherness. The new scripts discussed in relation to LGB characters do indeed realise Stephens' belief that they enable understanding and may also inform social action.

After reviewing the existing scholarship on LGBT representations in Hollywood film for young adults, I shall go on to analyse six contemporary teen films which function as a backdrop to the emerging and closely related script for LGB protagonists. As a base for comparison, all the protagonists discussed in this chapter are heterosexual and enact a 'blend' or combination of the 'creative-achievement' and the 'falling-in-love' script. In the chapters that follow, I argue that writers, directors and producers deliberately combine this established and familiar script together with the LGB 'coming-out' script, to engage and align young adult readers and audiences with LGB characters. I argue that the mind more readily integrates and accepts new and unfamiliar concepts when they are able to be combined with established concepts and when they are connected in the mind or in mental spaces by similarities (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 17-38). This new positive script reflects audiences' changing perceptions of LGB teen characters and teens in real-world interactions and may also positively influence those changing perceptions in mainstream audiences.

### **Existing Scholarship on LGBT Representations in Hollywood and Independent Teen Film**

Hollywood and North American films aimed at teen audiences have, historically, rarely represented LGBT teen characters in positive ways and consequently there is very limited

scholarship on the subject. Timothy Shary's discussion of homosexuality in teen film in *Generation Multiplex* (2002: 238-246) is one notable exception. Traditionally, as Shary points out, one way of erasing homosexuality was to include a gay or lesbian character who reverted to a heterosexual relationship before the close of the film, as in *Tea and Sympathy* (1956). A second way, as Shary elaborates (2002: 239), was to have the gay character commit suicide before the close of the film, as in *Ode to Billy Joe* (1976) and, I would add, the lesbian character in *Lost and Delirious* (2002). When gay characters were not completely erased, they were still frequently represented negatively, as in *Abuse* (1982), which focuses on a gay boy who is brutalised by his parents, or *The Boys Next Door* (1986), in which a teen gay character becomes homicidal (Shary, 2002: 239). In his discussion of homosexuality in teen film, Timothy Shary suggests that 'teenage homosexuality (and bisexuality) in American cinema up to the 1990s was handled in often vague if not symbolic terms, and when it was handled, the characters in question were almost always troubled and trying to deny their non-heterosexual impulses, lest they face the consequence of ridicule, condemnation or even death' (2002: 238). Shary's synopsis of the treatment of LGBT characters in North American teen film may, at first glance, appear melodramatic. However, his discussion of a selection of films from 1956 to 2002 suggests that he makes an accurate point.

Beginning in 1995, several independent films offered more positive representations of teen lesbian and gay characters and some even instantiated positive scripts, as Mary Celeste Kearney (2002: 125-142) argues of Maria Maggenti's *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995) and Alexandra Sichel's *All Over Me* (1997). *The Incredibly True Adventure*, as the title suggests, depicts a love relationship between two teenage girls, Randy and Evie, who fall in love and are still together at the close of the film. At the time, it was a ground-breaking film and one of the earliest to feature a teenage

lesbian couple. *All Over Me*, having established a relationship between teen protagonist Claude and creative character Lucy, a rock guitarist, moves towards closure by foreshadowing a future ‘coming-out’ script when, symbolically, Claude is willing to kiss Lucy in the street. While neither film has received substantial critical attention, Anat Pick does note the ‘broad appeal’ of a group of lesbian comedies from the 1990s and makes brief reference to *The Incredibly True Adventure* (2004: 107). The majority of Pick’s comments relate to adult lesbian films, such as Lisa Cholodenko’s *High Art* (1998), as well as the work of alternative film-makers such as Sadie Benning and Monika Treut. Pick argues that ‘screening lesbianism is not simply a matter of making the invisible visible, but of negotiating different *regimes of visibility*’ (2004: 115). The questions she raises in relation to films such as *High Art* are also pertinent to Maggenti’s and Sichel’s films.<sup>6</sup> Crucially, the films place female desire of another female character centre stage and ‘draw the two themes of female sexuality and creativity intimately together’ (Pick, 2004: 114).

Several North American and British films since 1995 have also included positive representations of teen gay male characters, such as Hettie Macdonald’s *Beautiful Thing* (1996), Simon Shore’s *Get Real* (1999) and David Moreton’s *Edge of Seventeen* (1998).<sup>7</sup> A dramatic new trend of ‘queer’ films appeared in the late 1990s and Chris Holmlund (2005) is able to identify nine<sup>8</sup> such feature films, three of which have historical settings. These films were made by independent production companies rather than Hollywood and were aimed at minority rather than mainstream audiences (I define the mainstream as

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<sup>6</sup> See also Patricia White’s ‘Lesbian minor cinema,’ *Screen*. 49.4 (2008), in which White contrasts feature films such as *The Incredibly True Story*, *All Over Me* and *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999) with more experimental lesbian films.

<sup>7</sup> See Kate Norbury and John Stephens (2011). ‘Staging the Self: Performance/performativity as affirmation of subjectivity in teen gay film’. *Groniek*, 190, 44: 521-531.

<sup>8</sup> Her nine films include *The Incredibly True Adventure*, *All Over Me*, *But I’m a Cheerleader*, *Election* (1999), which has a lesbian secondary character, *The Delta* (1995), *The Toilers and the Wayfarers* (1996) and *Edge of Seventeen* (1998), *Happiness* (1998), and the experimental fiction/documentary mix *Hide and Seek* (1996). The last two include LGBT pre-teens, and therefore lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

ideas, attitudes or activities which are shared by most people and regarded as normal or conventional, specifically audiences that are a mix of heterosexual and LGBT members).

Many independent films from this period generally conform to the ‘coming-out’ script or the narrative in which the central character moves towards a point where he realises that he is gay or she acknowledges and accepts that she is lesbian. The films usually focus, at least in part, on the ‘coming-out’ process rather than life as a gay or lesbian teenager, with the consequence that the films all seem to have a ‘singular narrative’ and with only one possible ending, which is that the gay or lesbian central character is ‘out and proud’ by the close of the narrative.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, there is only limited scholarship that directly addresses positive LGBT characters in television series aimed at young adult audiences. Although I do not consider television in this particular chapter, I shall make reference to two series in Chapters Three and Six and therefore it seems logical to highlight the existing scholarship here. There are a number of scholars who comment on one specific television series at a time or a particular same-sex relationship within a series. Deborah Hunn, for instance, has concentrated on the ‘coming-out’ story of two teenaged characters, Emily and Naomi, in the British series *Skins* (2009- ). *Skins*’ third and fourth seasons were initially centred on a heterosexual love triangle involving a female character, Effy and two male characters, Cook and Freddie, but audience interest in the developing romance between Naomi and Emily influenced the direction of the series and the lesbian relationship was given more on-screen time. Hunn’s analysis focuses on the creative interaction between the *Skins*’ writing team and fans of ‘Naomily’ who were anxious to communicate their perspectives of the relationship via fan texts (2012: 92). Although Hunn’s focus is specifically on the inter-relationship between

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Bronski (2002). ‘Positive Images and the Coming out Film: The Art and Politics of Gay and Lesbian Cinema’. *Cineaste*, 20-45.

fan texts and the writing team, she suggests that the interest of fans in the on-screen lesbian relationship influenced the writing team and changed the direction of the series so that the lesbian relationship was ultimately given equal importance to the heterosexual love triangle.

Finally, several relatively recent collections of essays, such as Kim Akass and Janet McCabe's *Reading The L Word* (2006), James R. Keller and Leslie Stratyner's *The New Queer Aesthetic in Television* (2006), Rebecca Beirne's *Televising Queer Women* (2008) and Glyn Davis and Gary Needham's *Queer TV* (2009), all subject individual television series to analysis from a variety of perspectives. That said, the vast majority concentrate on television series that are specifically aimed at adult audiences. Beirne's collection of essays, *Televising Queer Women* (2008), includes a piece by Allison Burgess, who analyses the introduction of a lesbian story line into the second season of the teen drama series, *The O. C.* (Orange County, 2005). Burgess suggests that the first five episodes of the eight-episode plotline which involved a lesbian relationship, were something 'new and exciting' (2008: 211) and depicted a story line that was potentially innovative and progressive. But, as Burgess concludes, the central female character, who for a while is in a relationship with another female character, chooses to return to her boyfriend and heteronormativity is restored by the conclusion of that plotline.

I will include discussion of television series later in the thesis; at this point my focus is on Hollywood teen film and on two dominant scripts and six established schemas in those films that are aimed at mainstream audiences.

My research in Chapters Two to Seven examines twenty-five fictional and filmic texts that offer new positive schemas and scripts for the LGB character. These novels, films and television series offer new versions of LGB subjectivities. At the outset of this

research there did not seem to be a single mainstream teen film with a gay or lesbian protagonist that had a positive ending. In November 2013, *The Geography Club* was released, itself an adaptation of Brent Hartinger's novel, *Geography Club* (2003), in which Russel Middlebrook establishes a club at school where LGBT students can meet, naming it a geography club in anticipation that no-one will be interested in joining. It has a teen gay protagonist and several other characters who enact non-normative sexualities, such as Min and Terese who are a lesbian couple, and Ike, who is gay. *The Geography Club* is a reflection of genuine social change.

### **The 'Falling-in-Love' Script**

The first script that I will discuss and which is frequently enacted in Hollywood teen film is associated with falling in love, a quest for love or a script of romance that is highly familiar in every culture. While this is known implicitly, fiction and film can make implicit or unconscious knowledge explicit and conscious (Oatley, 2004: 324). A novel or a film is a permanent narrative that has been externalised and given structure and shape and is therefore open to detailed discussion by others who are thereby able to understand processes that might otherwise remain opaque or hidden. In his analysis of *Romeo and Juliet*, Keith Oatley outlines five prototypical stages in the script of falling in love (Oatley, 2004: 324). I quote Oatley's stages in full, as the script frequently underpins, structures and informs many of the fictional texts, films and television series for young adults discussed throughout this thesis. Oatley identifies each stage's constituent parts in the following terms: elements, attributes and relationships.

1. Two people (elements) who are young (attribute) must be open to (relationship) the experience of falling in love (element).



2. Each approaches (relationship) the other (element), who is a stranger (attribute).

Each experiences an attraction to the other (relationship).

3. Some words (elements) are exchanged, though there may just be looks.
4. An interval of separation (relationship) occurs during which fantasies (elements) about the other (attribute) are elaborated.

There is a meeting (relationship) at which an action occurs of verbal confirmation (element) of reciprocity of the fantasies (attribute). The action of confirmation may be non-verbal, such as a meeting of the eyes.

Outcome: The occurrence of an emotion, that is, falling in love.

Emergent property: The experience of being in love is so compelling that it seems all-sufficient and may annul existing social commitments. (Oatley, 2004: 324)

When scripts are also scenes or episodes within individual narratives, there is usually a focus on the obstacles to or difficulties of ‘falling in love’ and maintaining that romantic relationship and therefore a focus on ways in which these obstacles can be overcome or resolved. ‘Narrative, then, has a wave-like structure of problems and solutions that tends to continue until a steady state is reached at the end of the story’ (Oatley, 2004: 325). A steady and stable emotional state is commonly referred to as a resolution or conclusion.

Literary and filmic narratives or plays, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, can deepen our understanding of the basic human experience of falling in love. De Sousa (1987) has called sequences of emotions, such as that of falling in love, ‘paradigm scenarios’, and has argued that these scenarios or frames provide the basis of human experience. In any love story, audiences quickly understand and follow the action or plot because they are already highly familiar with the script of falling in love. Audiences can also accommodate individual variations and modifications of the script, while still maintaining the script itself as a form

of ‘benchmark’ or constancy across variation. The main variation to the script in *Romeo and Juliet*, or what Oatley refers to as a paradox or ‘bug’ (Oatley, 2004: 325), is that being in love does not shield the two lovers from each family’s rejection of the relationship. Nor does it protect them from the social rejection of their relationship. ‘Despite the way it can feel, being in love is not self-sufficient: If there is to be a happy outcome, the social situation must be conducive’ (Oatley, 2004: 325-326). In seventeen of the twenty-five texts examined in this thesis, there is a happy outcome and the social situation is ‘conducive’.

Here I note that the *Romeo and Juliet* version of the ‘falling- in-love’ script is relevant to the traditional and conservative script for gay and lesbian teens, even though the relationship in Shakespeare’s text was evidently heterosexual. In the traditional script, the gay or lesbian romantic relationship was likely to fail, or to result in the death of one or both members of the couple. Like Romeo and Juliet, teen gay and lesbian characters have conventionally been depicted in literature and films for young adults as alienated from their families and rejected by their peer groups. In other words, even if it has been possible for the gay or lesbian teen character to find love with a same-sex partner, that love and romance has been at the cost of his or her other interpersonal or intersubjective relationships. I will argue that the traditional approach has been revised, updated and, to a significant degree, replaced by a new and progressive ‘falling-in-love’ script, which has more in common with drama and comedy than with tragedy. In recent LGB narratives, the quest for love may be more light-hearted and the lovers are frequently together at the close of the novel or film.

## The 'Creative-Achievement' Script

The second script frequently enacted in Hollywood teen film is the individual drive towards creative fulfilment and academic or athletic achievement. I refer to this script as the 'creative-achievement' script and use this shorthand throughout the thesis to refer to protagonists who demonstrate a high level of creativity in the performing arts, or who are musically gifted or artistic. The creative achievement script is also extended to encompass other talents and skills that may not typically be seen as 'creative', for instance, academic or athletic excellence. Many of the films centre on a protagonist or central character who excels in an athletic domain; for instance, female protagonists appear as cheerleaders or dancers and male protagonists are basketball players or runners. Equally, the protagonist may be academically high-achieving, to the extent that he or she wins a scholarship to a prestigious institution. The script usually incorporates problem-solving motifs, so that the individual protagonist has to overcome a series of obstacles that temporarily prevent the realisation or fulfilment of his or her talents. He or she has usually demonstrated both creative talent and hard work in overcoming these obstacles before or at the film's conclusion.

The 'creative-achievement' script is highly popular and well-established with young adult audiences and I give two very brief examples of it here to clarify what I mean by the 'creative-achievement' script. Both protagonists are heterosexual, but the script is relevant in the way it shapes each character's drive for personal fulfilment. In addition, both characters in the two films, *Ice Princess* (2005) and *Step Up* (2006), come of age. When viewers recognise the beginning of a script, we anticipate the narrative that will unfold and we derive pleasure from the ways in which the text develops the script and varies the expected pattern. If the script were to be totally predictable, then it would not engage or move viewers or audience members to any great degree.

The ‘creative-achievement’ script is activated in *Ice Princess* when female protagonist Casey Carlyle is represented as gifted in two divergent fields: physics and ice-skating. The protagonist accidentally discovers a preference for her minor field, ice-skating, but also encounters opposition to that preference from several authority figures. Her single mother, who is both a feminist and a teacher, expects Casey to pursue an academic career in a ‘man’s field’. Casey’s female ice-skating coach also offers resistance to Casey’s aspirations and even attempts to sabotage them. But when the protagonist demonstrates her creative talent, she gains approval from her mother and the relationship is simultaneously restored. That this is an international script is perhaps indicated by its close reproduction in the Japanese film, *Hula Girls* (2006).

Similarly, the ‘creative-achievement’ script can be seen in the hip-hop dance film, *Step Up*. At the outset, the script is dormant because the film’s male protagonist Tyler Gage does not seem particularly gifted or motivated in any field. Nor is his school-work of any interest to him. However, he does dance hip-hop at a local Baltimore night-club. Tyler is assigned two hundred hours of community service at the Maryland School of the Arts for his role in the vandalising of the school’s theatre, and while he carries that out, he meets a performing arts student, Nora Clark who becomes a catalyst for change. Tyler activates the ‘creative-achievement’ script when he begins to dance more seriously with Nora and when he obtains permission from the school’s director to dance with her at a formal performance. At this point, viewers can imagine how the narrative might develop in spite of the opposition that Tyler encounters. Mark Turner suggests that ‘narrative imagining’ is our fundamental cognitive instrument for predicting, evaluating, planning and explanation (1996: 20). There are several ‘bugs’ in the script which hinder its smooth unfolding but shortly before the close of the film, Tyler performs with Nora on stage and the school’s director admits him as a transfer student to the Maryland School of the Arts.

## **The ‘Coming-out’ Script**

The third and final relevant script here is the ‘coming-out’ script, which invokes the metaphor of ‘coming out of the closet’, itself a figure of speech which relates to the individual’s self-disclosure of his or her sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The ‘coming-out’ process is frequently experienced as a journey or a rite of passage that allows an individual to live openly and no longer feel compelled to conceal his or her sexual orientation. Once he or she has ‘come out’ or is ‘out’, he or she can be open as to his or her sexual orientation. When a gay or lesbian character falls in love or has a sexual encounter, he or she usually also performs the ‘coming-out’ script, that is, the two scripts are unconsciously blended to form a new single script. However, there is not always an immediate blend, as there are variations in the specific details of the ‘coming-out’ script. For instance, a LGB person may be ‘outed’ without his or her consent, deliberately or accidentally, by another person. And a LGB person can accidentally ‘out’ him or herself, which means that there is unintentional self-disclosure as to his or her sexual orientation. On some occasions, a LGB character may be ‘out’ to the peer group but not, for instance, to the family of origin. I shall specify the details of the ‘coming-out’ script in my discussion of each text.

A number of models have been created to delineate the coming-out process as one for positive LGB identity development. Vivienne Cass’ (1984, 1996) and Richard Troiden’s (1989) models for positive identity development are very similar and, currently, among the most established and widely accepted for LGB individuals. Cass outlines six stages in the process, which can be summarised as follows: ‘identity confusion’, ‘identity comparison’, ‘identity tolerance’, ‘identity acceptance’, ‘identity pride’ and ‘identity synthesis’ (1984: 147-153). However, increasingly, as noted in my Introduction, LGBT identity development models are themselves being revised and more recent research

carried out by psychologists such as Ritch Savin-Williams (2005) and Lisa Diamond (2000, 2003) suggests that some LGBT teens now become aware of their sexuality in ways similar to heterosexual teens.

### **Blending Two Scripts in Mainstream Young Adult Film**

Of the thirty top-grossing teen films that have been released over the last fifteen years, several embody a combination or a blend of the ‘falling-in-love’ and the ‘creative-achievement’ scripts. I have selected six Hollywood teen films for discussion so as to demonstrate the degree to which these two scripts are firmly blended and established in contemporary teen film and are highly familiar to young adult audiences. All of the films have a contemporary setting and the main filmic space is the North American high school. They share a sense of energy and confidence and, as Robin Wood suggests, this is popular culture writ large. However, he also asks:

Do they *reflect* dominant trends in our culture? Is this what high school students today are like, is this how they behave, are these their values? Or do the films offer seductive fantasies of how young people would *like* things to be? (Wood, 2002: 4)

If the films are ‘seductive fantasies’, they are fantasies only for certain sections of the mainstream population. As Wood points out, ‘the changing social attitude to gays and lesbians has been one of the most striking (and one of the very few encouraging) features of the last decade: nowadays, one scarcely encounters an adult comedy without at least one gay character. But where did they all go to school?’ (2002: 8). In his list of North American high school films, only two (*Clueless*<sup>10</sup> and *Can’t Hardly Wait*) raise the issue of

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<sup>10</sup> *Clueless* is based on the romance script found in Jane Austen’s *Emma*, but in contrast to the original novel, *Clueless* introduces a gay character.

gayness and, as Wood puts it, the ‘former marginally, the latter very confusingly’ (Wood, 2002: 8). In general, this group of films almost entirely excludes non-normative sexualities and Wood suggests that at the time these films were made, it was still difficult to raise the issue of gayness in high schools (partly because of the teen gay suicide statistics) ‘without destroying the general sense of euphoric comedy’ (2002: 8).

During the course of each film discussed in this chapter, the protagonist finds his or her own creative voice and is successful in his or her creative field; above all the protagonist functions to secure heteronormativity. The film’s narrative arguably always starts and finishes with a set of heterosexual assumptions. There are fleeting moments when it seems as if heterosexuality may be called into question and I shall examine these moments in each of the six films under discussion. In all of them, however, heterosexuality is ultimately ensured, with teen lesbian or gay subjectivity and desire made unsustainable on the screen. Hollywood teen protagonists must traditionally, it seems, be straight. Heterosexual identities are performed in ways that maintain their privileged position, and all other sexualities are then positioned as less attractive than heterosexuality.

### **Mainstream Teen Film**

The six Hollywood teen films are samples from a larger possible corpus. All are ‘feel-good’ romantic comedies, coming-of-age films concerned with questions of maturity and rites of passage. They frequently include scenes set in North American high schools, that is, scenes in the school cafeteria or the school corridors, at sporting events, in classrooms and at assemblies. I have chosen three films with female and three with male protagonists. Each central character’s creativity, athleticism or intelligence is enacted during the course of the film and playing out of the ‘creative’ script is an integral part of the character’s

individual subjectivity and her or his way of gaining agency. The film's conclusion always affirms her or his creative, academic or athletic talent and this creative success is always combined with romantic success. The film's concluding scenes invariably unite the female protagonist with her male love interest, or vice versa, and the romantic union or re-union frequently takes place at the high school prom. The union or re-union is mostly symbolised by a sustained kiss and a pull-back shot which moves from the couple to an increasingly wide shot which situates the couple within the centre of the film's universe.

Hugh Davis identifies a common romance script in Hollywood teen films: 'When stripped down, the setup for these teenaged classics sounds, overall, very familiar: boy-meets-girl, boy-makes-a-bet-he-can-win-girl, boy-falls-for-girl-in-bet, girl-finds-out-about-deal, boy-and-girl-find-their-true-love-together' (2006: 53). This script is often only one strand, however, and it is very frequently blended with the 'creative-achievement' script. In my research of films which enact the 'creative-achievement' script, I could not isolate this script as it almost always seems to be automatically blended with the romance script. Even Casey, in *Ice Princess*, falls in love with the son of her skating coach, and Tyler, in *Step Up*, falls in love with Nora, his dancing partner.

The three selected mainstream films with female protagonists are Gil Junger's *Ten Things I Hate About You* (1999), Peyton Reed's *Bring It On* (2000) and Mark Waters' *Mean Girls* (2004). The protagonists are, respectively, Katarina or Kat, who excels at English literature and who writes and performs her own sonnet; Torrance, who is captain of her cheerleading squad, and Cady, who excels in mathematics and answers the question that finally wins the maths championship trophy for her school. I selected these three films from the larger corpus because the female creative writer and female cheerleader schemas will be discussed in relation to lesbian and bisexual female characters in Chapters Two and



Three of this thesis. I include discussion of *Mean Girls* because of its overt influence on the television series *Glee*, as well as its influence on two novels discussed in Chapter Two.

Viewers already familiar with Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* will recognise aspects or components of the narrative in *10 Things*. The original source material is updated and the new version is set in a contemporary high school, but there are abundant intertextual references both to Shakespeare and the play. As Roz Kaveney suggests, the 'establishment of a dialogue with 'higher' forms is part of the process whereby the canon is expanded' and also involves 'the 'low' audience being brought to a higher status as a part of the audience for what has become canon art' (2006: 109).

The film's structure reflects both the 'creative-achievement' and 'romance' scripts. A number of early scenes establish that Kat is creative: she is gifted at English Literature, sketches at home and plays the guitar. As it is her senior year, she has applied to study English at a prestigious college on the opposite side of the country. The offer of a place (Scene Three) triggers the motif of opposition from an authority figure (the 'bug' in the script identified by Oatley), namely, her choice of college creates conflict with her father, Walter, who would like her to attend a local college, his alma mater, the University of Washington.

There are also several bugs in the romance script which have to be overcome. Kat and Bianca Stratford's overly protective father must be persuaded to allow the girls to go out on a date. Kat's date, Patrick, must be persuaded to court Kat in what amounts to a 'bet', whereby he is paid a sum of money to go out with her. Boy falls for girl in this romance script, but once Kat discovers the 'bet', she must be persuaded of Patrick's genuine feelings. Interestingly, the possibility of lesbian desire is raised by Bianca's date Cameron in a comic scene entitled 'The Inner Workings of Kat', in which Cameron

tentatively asks Bianca if her sister's resistance to the potential boyfriend, Patrick, might have something to do with her sexual orientation. In an attempt to explain Kat's general hostility towards others, he wonders 'if she might be...':

Cameron: She's not a –

Bianca: K.D. Lang<sup>11</sup> fan? No. I found a picture of Jared Leto<sup>12</sup> in her drawer once, so I'm pretty sure she's not harbouring same sex tendencies.

Cameron: OK. So, she likes pretty boys then.

*10 Things* at least gestures towards the possibility of lesbian desire, even if the word 'lesbian' is represented only by coded allusion and the film does not develop the theme. Instead, it suggests that Kat's hostility towards boys in particular stems from a single previous negative sexual experience, which occurred shortly after the girls' mother left the family home. Kat, vulnerable immediately after her mother's departure, is depicted in retrospect as seeking affection and conforming to the peer group in an act which she later regrets. If Kat is to demonstrate creative and romantic fulfilment and success, she must overcome the negative impact on herself of that experience.

The film's concluding scene resolves both the 'creative-achievement' and the 'falling-in-love' scripts, although not simultaneously. Kat's father informs her that he has sent the deposit to her college of choice, and now clearly gives his approval for her choice. Kat presents her modern-day sonnet to class and then discovers that Patrick has bought her a guitar by way of apology for his part in 'the bet'. They kiss and are reconciled and the film ends with a pull back from them to the vast school and the ocean beyond it. 'There is

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<sup>11</sup> K.D. Lang (Kathryn Dawn) is an androgynous looking singer-songwriter who has championed gay rights and is a lesbian icon.

<sup>12</sup> Jared Leto had an iconic role as a male object of desire in the teen television series *My So-Called Life*.

nothing more to say and they disappear into the world, like all happy couples' (Kaveney, 2006: 128).

*Bring It On* centres on cheerleader Torrance Shipman and her cheerleading squad, the Toros, who are juxtaposed in competition against the urban and mostly African-American squad, the Clovers. The film embraces the 'competitiveness, rivalry, sexuality, sexiness, hysteria and exhaustion which vibrate the world of the cheerleader' (Brophy, 2001: 17). At its outset, Torrance is made new captain of the squad, and thus demonstrates her creative achievement. There are several challenges to Torrance's leadership, for instance, she discovers that the routines are stolen from another squad and, as captain, she feels responsible for arranging a new set of routines. Torrance becomes increasingly involved creatively and finally choreographs the squad's new routine for the National Cheerleading Championships. In the climactic finale, the Toros are delighted to win second place with their original performance.

The romance script is ultimately enacted by Torrance with her best friend's brother Cliff. At the outset of *Bring It On*, Torrance already has a boyfriend, but she discovers his disloyalty and his sexual infidelity or a 'bug' in the script, which leads her to end the romance. Once she is single, she is free to fall in love with Cliff, who has been romantically interested in Torrance since first meeting her.

The possibility of lesbian subjectivity is raised, but this time in relation to Torrance's best friend Missy, only to be ignored again by the film's narrative development. Torrance recruits Missy to the team, although members of the squad, Courtney and Whitney, call her 'uber-dyke' and 'big dykey loser' and attempt to use the possibility of her lesbian subjectivity as a reason to exclude her from the squad. In a later scene, Missy, in turn, asks two male cheerleaders if Courtney and Whitney might themselves be

‘dykeadelic’. One confirms Courtney’s heterosexuality, thereby denying the possibility that the two girls are a romantic couple. In any case, the film sidesteps Missy’s romantic interests and instead, concentrates on Torrance’s journey towards creative achievement and a genuine experience of falling in love, which finally takes place with Cliff. At the National Championships Cliff walks onto the podium to congratulate his sister Missy and Torrance on the squad’s success. And finally, Torrance shares her first sustained kiss with Cliff, as the camera pulls out and up into an aerial shot of the entire scene with the ocean briefly in the background.

Female high school social groups or cliques are at the heart of *Mean Girls* and *Mean Girls 2* (2011), which were based on Rosalind Wiseman’s best-selling guidance manual for parents of teenage daughters, *Queen Bees and Wannabes* (2002). *Mean Girls* is a highly influential film and often used in high schools as a teaching aid to address issues of social cliques and female bullying.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps unintentionally, one of the film’s underlying messages seems to deny the possibility of being a lesbian. Central character Cady Heron, played by Lindsay Lohan, attends school for the first time at the age of sixteen. She has been home-schooled by her zoologist parents, who have spent the previous twelve years in Africa, which explains Cady’s ignorance of the rules of American high school. On her first day at school, she meets Janis and Damien, who are characterised as alternative to the mainstream and whose outsider perspective allows them to offer Cady an analysis or dissection of the school hierarchy, its norms for girls and its culture of female competitiveness. They warn her not to trust the ‘plastics’, the equivalent of ‘teen royalty’, but Cady is nevertheless ensnared in their antics when she expresses romantic interest in Aaron Samuels, former boyfriend of the plastics’ leader Regina George.

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<sup>13</sup> See ‘[http://www.filmclipsonline.com/downloads/EP4\\_STUDYGUIDE.pdf](http://www.filmclipsonline.com/downloads/EP4_STUDYGUIDE.pdf)’

The two scripts of creativity and romance are overtly linked in *Mean Girls*, as Cady sits immediately behind Aaron Samuels in her advanced calculus classes. He provides a literal obstacle between Cady and the development of her maths knowledge, as his head frequently obscures Cady's view of the blackboard and of her maths teacher, Ms. Norbury. Even his new haircut proves a distraction. At a less literal level, he also interrupts her concentration on the subject, and the soundtrack suggests that Cady frequently has romantic daydreams during her maths lessons rather than focusing on her work. At this point, her quest for love overrides her quest for academic achievement and the romance script itself functions as a 'bug' in the creative script. Cady's exceptional ability in maths does not return until a scene entitled 'Suck out the Poison', towards the close of the film. When Aaron sees her high marks on one of her papers, he greets her positively with 'Welcome back, nerd!'

Rumours circulate around secondary character Janis, who is artistic, creative and dresses in black clothes. The primary rumour used to exclude her from certain social groups is that Janis is a lesbian. This rumour is referred to throughout the film, although it seems as if the word 'lesbian' is too horrible to mention. However, in direct contradiction of the rumour, one of Cady's fellow 'mathletes', Kevin Gnapoor, expresses interest in Janis which she responds to at the school's Spring Fling. In the film's closing scene, Kevin and Janis are a romantic couple and, as Janis is clearly heterosexual, the rumour is humorously explained as a misunderstanding of Janis' Lebanese origins. But *Mean Girls* does not directly address whether it is reasonable to exclude someone from a group for being a lesbian and there is no lesbian character within the film.<sup>14</sup> The film's penultimate

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<sup>14</sup> The television series, *Glee*, which will be discussed comprehensively in Chapters Three and Six, makes intertextual reference to *Mean Girls* through one of its lesbian characters, affirming the continuing relevance of *Mean Girls* to the world of high school and teenage girls.

scene brings together both scripts when Cady wins the maths championship trophy for the school, is made Spring Fling Queen wearing her mathletes' jacket and is romantically reconciled with Aaron.

The second group of Hollywood films selected for discussion also blend the 'creative-achievement' and 'falling-in-love' scripts, but this time the protagonists are male and the romantic comedies can be seen as 'homme-coms' rather than 'rom-coms' (McDonald, 2007). I have deliberately chosen these three films on the basis of the male protagonist's creative talent, that is, the protagonist embodies the athlete or 'jock' schema and/or he excels at singing. In the first two films, he is both athletic and sings. These character schemas are blended with teen gay schemas in Chapters Five to Seven, which concentrate on gay central characters who either excel at sport, at singing or who may be academically talented. The selected films are Paul Weitz's *American Pie* (1999), Kenny Ortega's *High School Musical* (2006) and Scott Anderson's *The Jerk Theory* (2009). The male central character who excels at singing can also be found in other contemporary teen mainstream films, for instance, Mia's boyfriend Michael Moscovitz in *The Princess Diaries* (2001), Charlotte's former boyfriend Ben in *Bandslam* (2009), and Beca's boyfriend Jesse in *Pitch Perfect* (2012).

The narrative in *American Pie* centres on adolescent male sexuality in relation to four central characters, Jim, Oz, Kevin and Paul, each of whom embodies diverse schemas but there are no teen gay characters in the film. *American Pie* has been followed by three equally successful sequels, *American Pie 2* (2001), *American Wedding* (2003) and *American Reunion* (2012); it is only in the first film that the central characters are teenagers. The boys vary the 'falling-in-love' script and instead make a pact to lose their virginity by the end of prom night; that is, they agree on a sexual script rather than a

romantic one. As Sharyn Pearce points out, while many films have typically been concerned with a teenage girl's loss of virginity as a central rite of passage, '*American Pie* presents us instead with sexually inexperienced boys, who like their female counterparts, spend all their available time wondering what sex must be like' (2003: 71).

One of the central characters, Chris 'Oz' Ostreicher, embodies the 'jock' schema and is an outstanding lacrosse player who expects to secure a sports scholarship to university. However, he is also shy and softly spoken and as the narrative develops, there are scenes which demonstrate his strong work ethic and the more sensitive or other-regarding side to his personality. The jock schema is modified when Oz joins the jazz choir, apparently with the cynical intention of meeting a girl whom he can take to the prom and have sex with. In spite of himself, he has an obvious talent for singing and begins to develop an interest in music, which secures the attention of choir girl Heather. At first she is doubtful as to his intentions but she later begins to respond to his overtures. Oz brings together the two previously separate schemas when he sings jazz gospel in the gym and locker rooms and rehearses his vocal part during training sessions. In a pivotal scene, Oz abandons his team in the middle of a significant lacrosse match to perform a duet with Heather on stage at the Annual Michigan Choral Fest. Heather asks if he has made the sacrifice for the choir, but he confirms that he has left the lacrosse match for her, suggesting he prioritises his romantic relationship and new-found singing talent above his own athletic achievement. *American Pie*'s concluding scene does not reveal whether Oz and Heather have had sex, but they are romantically involved with each other and Oz makes it clear to his friends that the pact is now irrelevant as he believes that he and Heather are falling in love. *American Pie* certainly privileges this relationship as it is the only one that is intact at the close of the film.

Similarly, Disney's *High School Musical* blends the 'creative achievement' and 'falling-in-love' scripts from the outset when Troy Bolton, who is a basketball star and the school's basketball team captain or leader, becomes romantically interested in 'brainiac' Gabriella Montez and simultaneously discovers a passion for singing. *High School Musical* is without doubt the 'clean' side of adolescence and is almost entirely set within the school's drama department. Troy and Gabriella meet for the first time at a ski lodge on New Year's Eve. They are literally put under the spotlight and encouraged to sing karaoke on stage together at a party for young adults organised by the ski resort managers. Their first singing performance, 'The Start of Something New', is given in its entirety and it is made clear that both discover something significant about themselves while on stage.

Alternative sexualities do not seem to exist in the world of *High School Musical*, but one musical number, 'Stick to the Status Quo', suggests that many have secret desires which they need to reveal to others. One of the basketball jocks, Zeke, cooks crème brûlée and another female brainiac likes to dance hip-hop. The lyrics of this song suggest that there are different tastes and inclinations, but they stop short of including same-sex sexuality although it is possible to read the song's embrace of revelation of difference as an endorsement of a fuller expression of identity and desire. As the number progresses, the social divisions between jocks, cheerleaders, brainiacs and drama geeks 'fall apart vocally and choreographically' (Cohan, 2010: 8).

The obstacles that block the smooth unfolding of the romance script are initially provided by Troy and Gabriella's school friends, particularly Troy's teammates, who need to see him as a 'hoops dude' and not as a singer. Troy encounters opposition to his romance with Gabriella from his father, Bolton, who is also the school's basketball coach. Further obstacles or 'bugs' in the script are provided by Gabriella's singing rival, Sharpay, who schemes to persuade Troy that his future is with her and her socially powerful family.



Two entire films later, at the close of *High School Musical 3: Senior Year* (2008), Troy accepts a place at Berkeley so that he can remain romantically involved with Gabriella, who will attend Stanford. He will continue to play basketball and to sing. Troy successfully performs the ‘creative-achievement’ script in two divergent creative domains and also successfully enacts the ‘falling-in-love’ script, sustaining both over a series of three films.

Finally, the blended script is performed in *The Jerk Theory* (2009), when teen male protagonist Adam Dynes, who excels at singing and is lead singer and plays keyboards in a band, uses his voice and singing talent to reclaim his romantic interest, Molly Taylor. His aim at the outset of the film is for the band to secure a recording contract with an agent. The film includes several full musical performances, and charts the range of Adam’s creative talent. However, the agent refuses to offer the band a contract, which forms the ‘bug’ in the script of creative achievement, because he feels that the music lacks ‘soul’.

At the outset of the film, Adam uses the masquerade motif common to romantic comedy and pretends to be a ‘jerk’. Within the context of a Catholic high school, he explains why he changed his script from that of the ‘nice’ guy to that of the ‘jerk’. The ‘jerk’ is usually a male character who is portrayed as insensitive to others but who paradoxically is also highly attractive to some females. His opposite is the ‘nice guy’ or future ‘family man’.<sup>15</sup> Molly, however, sees beyond Adam’s ‘jerk’ performance and audiences are similarly positioned to understand his behaviour as an act. One of the ways in which audiences are aligned with Adam is the on-screen conversation that takes place between Adam’s former girlfriend and Molly in which the former girlfriend explains to Molly that she was too immature to appreciate his wonderfully romantic treatment of her and she also explains that his ‘jerk’ persona is merely a persona. There are at least two ‘bugs’ in the script, particularly Adam’s former girlfriend who becomes romantically

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<sup>15</sup> See Andrea Bartz, ‘Why She Wants a Jerk’, *Men’s Health*. 28.3 (2013): 114-119; 139.

interested in Adam again and Molly's former boyfriend. However, in the film's final scene, Adam sings on stage at the prom, is re-united with Molly and, once he is backstage, is offered a recording contract. By the close of the film, Adam has fulfilled the creatively and romantically successful script.

*The Jerk Theory* includes an adult transgender character who works in the spa showroom where Adam has part-time work. Additionally, Adam's cousin, Clinton, who is also in the band, is briefly read as gay when he dresses up; gay sexuality is not otherwise represented in the film.

All six Hollywood teen films enact the creative and romantically successful scripts. They also blend established schemas, so that Kat, who excels at English literature and writes creatively, also falls in love. *Bring It On* modifies the cheerleader schema when Torrance demonstrates depth, perseverance and originality in her choreography for the squad's performance at the National Championships. *Mean Girls* transforms the maths genius schema when Cady secures the championship trophy and is also made Spring Fling Queen. Equally, *American Pie* modifies or adjusts the male 'jock' schema to show that athletes can be talented singers. *High School Musical* and its sequels offer a more sustained embodiment of that blended schema in Troy Bolton, who discovers, maintains and develops his talent for singing as well as for basketball. Adam Dynes, in *The Jerk Theory*, is lead singer and plays keyboards in a different kind of rock band and, again, the schema for rock star is modified because he is also Catholic.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced and discussed the central cognitive concepts of schema and script or cognitive processes that we use to understand the world and to understand

narratives. I have identified two scripts, that is, the creative achievement and the falling in love script, which are frequently blended in contemporary mainstream teen film. The ‘combined’ or blended script discussed here, which I have termed the ‘romantic and creatively successful’ script, has been examined in relation to six mainstream teen films, three with heterosexual female protagonists and three with heterosexual male protagonists. Young adult audiences are already highly familiar with the script of heterosexual or straight female teens who are academic or who excel at athletics and who are also romantically successful. Equally, audiences are already highly familiar with the script of heterosexual male protagonists who excel at athletics or singing and who are romantically successful.

The new and progressive script for LGB teens blends the highly familiar script discussed in this chapter with the new structure of the ‘coming-out’ script, a blended script which I have termed the ‘As You Like It’ script and which is the main focus in Chapters Two to Seven. It revises or re-writes the earlier gay or lesbian ‘falling-in-love’ script, and depicts a young couple in love. Both members of the couple also maintain a strong and creative sense of self. The ‘As You Like It’ script engenders feelings of empathy rather than of pity. Teen characters are likely to maintain a same-sex relationship without experiencing social rejection of that relationship. Crucially, they usually retain the approval and support of close family members and friends. LGB characters in the new script do not ask for acceptance, or position themselves as significantly different from their peer groups. There is no longer a gay-straight divide. Nor do the texts directly argue for gay rights. Instead, in this new script with its optimistic ending, gay and lesbian characters lead with their creativity, athleticism or academic intelligence, which enables them to connect with other similarly creative characters in the text as well as with members of the audience.

The new script may incorporate many humorous or comic elements, a contrast to the traditionally angst-ridden coming-out film. I argue that this is a deliberate narrative strategy which gains reader and audience approval for the LGB protagonist. Texts foreground similarities between LGB characters and audience members, and between LGB characters and readers, without ignoring sexual difference; audience members and readers may or may not be heterosexual. There is a strong positive association between similarity and interpersonal attraction, as has been documented in the interpersonal research literature (Duck and Barnes, 1992; Tan and Singh, 1995). In a film or television context, viewers tend to feel similar to characters who are like themselves in terms of demographic classifications such as age, gender and race. Significantly, however, viewers frequently also want to be like others whom they perceive as more successful or more talented than themselves. The new script usually ends with the creative or athletic protagonist in a positive romantic relationship, or at least open to the possibility of a romantic relationship, with someone of the same sex. In this sense, the text has an upbeat and affirming ending.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Changing the Story:**

#### **Lesbian Creative Writers in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction**

Female writers in the context of their writing frequently communicate a consciousness of their identity as distinctively female. Judith Gardiner envisages female subjectivity as ‘typically less fixed, less unitary, and more flexible than male individuality, both in its primary core and in the entire maturational complex developed from this core’ (Gardiner, 1981: 353). Female qualities or characteristics such as the desire for interdependence have far-reaching implications for the distinctive nature of female writing both in its content and form (Gardiner, 1981: 353). Female writers convey elements of sameness and difference in their writing – sameness and difference ‘from other women, especially their mothers, from men; and from social injunctions for what women should be, including those inscribed in the literary canon’ (Gardiner, 1981: 354). They may write using a cyclical structure rather than a linear one or they may blur the boundaries between diverse genres. In brief, female writers produce writing with a female aesthetic, that is, ‘female-authored narratives which centre on female characters and assume a female reader’ (Tauchert, 2002: 49). Female writers who are also lesbian or emerging lesbian subjects communicate an additional layer of sameness and difference, which may differentiate them from heterosexual females (such as Kat in *10 Things*) as well as from their mothers and from men. Judy Long suggests that a ‘subject-positioning that defines women by links to men is especially inadequate for understanding lesbian lives’ (1999: 10).

These concepts of sameness and difference or continuity and change are relevant to schemas which blend female creative writer and lesbian schemas. The blend is also reflected at the level of grammar. The new schema is an adjective-noun compound (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 353-356) which blends two input spaces, that is, the lesbian schema input and the female creative writer schema input to form the lesbian creative writer schema. In other words, emergent lesbian creative writer schemas exhibit both similar properties to and differences from heterosexual female writer schemas.

Female subjects who live primarily outside 'linkages to men' are 'frequently invisible to the male eye' (Long, 1999: 10). Long suggests that lesbian coming-out stories affirm an identity which resists the heterosexual order: 'These constitute a self-referential canon that is almost entirely neglected by scholars writing on autobiography' (1999: 10). When the fictional creative writers in the six novels discussed here write about their lives, their sexual or emerging sexual orientation is a central aspect of their subjectivities and is reflected in their creative writing, which may be largely autobiographical in nature. One protagonist, Louie, writes and performs comedy sketches in Paula Boock's *Dare, Truth or Promise* (1997). A second protagonist, Marisol, writes the majority of her first novel in Ellen Wittlinger's *Love and Lies* (2008), while Anna in Joanne Horniman's *About a Girl* (2010) also writes her first novel. Josephine Jenkins or JJ writes verse in *The Trouble with Emily Dickinson* (2012) and her first work of fiction in *The Education of Queenie McBride* (2012). Finally, in Elissa Janine Hoole's *Kiss the Morning Star* (2012), Anna experiments with different forms of narrative, including poems, lists and a journal.

The intersection between young adult fiction and lesbian sexuality potentially offers a 'subversive cultural and literary moment' (Jones, 2013: 76). Traditionally, adolescents have not been regarded as inherently sexual beings and lesbian adolescents have been virtually invisible in young adult fiction. Lesbian sexuality in the context of

young adult fiction has only recently emerged into the mainstream and, as Caroline Jones points out, both young adult fiction and lesbian sexuality ‘require active resistance to dominant ideologies to maintain integrity of identity’ (2013: 76). Young adult novels that centre on female protagonists who are sexually active as well as romantically inclined and, in particular, those who desire another female character, ‘claim a relatively new space for young women’ (Jones, 2013: 76). All the focus novels offer counternarratives that claim that new space as lesbian protagonists enact romantic and sexual relationships with other female characters, and the adolescents’ sex acts are no longer ‘alluded to only interstitially’ (Trites, 2000: 106).

Young adult female readers are positioned to empathise with protagonists who are creative writers, who share many experiences with other female writers and who also understand that they are lesbian. In all but one of the novels discussed here (Paula Boock’s *Dare Truth or Promise*, the earliest novel discussed in detail in this thesis), the fictional creative writer is aware of her sexual orientation at the outset of the novel. In other words, the novel does not simply instantiate the lesbian creative writer schema and her creative and romantic fulfilment. Each novel moves beyond the initial schema and script in ways first identified by Rand Spiro (1982) and David Miall (1989). As far back as 1982, Spiro argued that although a schema-based approach could explain relatively simple narratives such as folk tales or elementary stories for children, the approach could never succeed with complex literary narratives, as the comprehension of such texts goes beyond the schema to include ‘affective’ and ‘qualitative’ aspects of understanding (Spiro, 1982: 77). Moreover, Spiro and Miall have argued that the central agent in the reading and comprehension process is affect or emotion rather than cognition and that from the opening paragraph of the novel, the young adult reader is actively involved in creating new schemata or schemas



in her comprehension and interpretation of the text as it unfolds (Spiro, 1982: 77; Miall, 1989: 56).

The indeterminate character of complex literary texts, that is, a text's 'shifting and continually developing meanings' (Miall, 1989: 56) points to affect or emotion as the primary process which guides comprehension (Miall, 1989: 58). The reader's emotions play a 'determining role in cognitive processing (perception, memory and reasoning) when this is performed in the service of the self' (Miall, 1989: 57). Miall suggests that readers have an initial schema response to interpret and understand a narrative, in this instance the lesbian creative writer schema, but that the story itself '*defamiliarises*' the schema (1989: 60) and compels the reader to 'interpret the unfolding sentences of the story for clues to a more adequate schema' (1989: 60). The reader's emotions play a 'top-down' role in the comprehension process as she continues to read the novel and her emotions are not the 'after-effect' of the reading experience. In effect, as Miall makes clear, 'affect plays the primary role in directing the reading of literary narratives' (1989: 61). Cognitive schemas and scripts enable the reader to form an initial understanding of the text, but the reader's long-term interpretation of the novel will be determined by affect or emotion.

There are three main properties of affect or emotion that make it suitable for understanding literary narratives. As Miall argues, '... affect is self-referential, cross-domain and anticipatory' (1989: 56). First, the reader brings her self-concept into the understanding of a narrative or the 'task of comprehension' (Miall, 1989: 56). Every reader will have her individual responses to schemas, depending on her past experiences and her particular concerns. Miall suggests that 'schema relationships ... may provide certain building blocks of narrative structure that are independent of any reader, but each reader then colours the structure according to their own emotions, and produces a higher level structure for the whole story that is more or less unique' (1989: 74). Second, the reader's

affective response to the text enables ‘cross-domain categorisation of text elements’ (Miall, 1989: 56), so that an emotional response to a metaphor, dream or fantasy sequence can transfer to another aspect of the narrative. In the six focus novels, for instance, the reader’s emotional response to the fictional character’s own creative writing (not the author’s creative writing) can transfer to other aspects of the narrative. Third, affect is anticipatory, that is, it pre-structures ‘the reader’s understanding of the meaning of a text early in the reading process’ (Miall, 1989: 56), guiding the reader towards the likely outcome or ending of the novel.

The reader or viewer engages emotionally with the text (which may be a novel, film, television series or play) but that emotional engagement or involvement does not render her vulnerable within the story world and therefore leaves her free to engage fully and closely with the protagonist and the narrative. As Oatley suggests, ‘we experience ‘fiction’ in a place of safety away from the ordinary world, so that the prompting of emotions is more voluntary than in ordinary life’ (2002: 63). Thus, the reader’s involvement with the fictional character is more complete than it would be in her everyday real-world interactions with others. This closer involvement may change or even transform the reader who experiences the fictional world alongside the lesbian character.

Each of the six novels includes at least one romantic relationship and the production of at least one significant piece of creative writing. The positive ‘As You Like It’ script, which is now modified and developed in a number of diverse directions, may be one of trauma and recovery, of struggle and recovery or of closure and moving on.

The lesbian creative writer schema was arguably introduced in young adult fiction as early as 1982 with Nancy Garden’s *Annie On My Mind*. It was developed in *Dare*, *Truth*

or *Promise* and became established in 1999 with Ellen Wittlinger's *Hard Love*.<sup>16</sup> Kerry Mallan, in *Gender Dilemmas in Children's Fiction*, discusses *Hard Love* in relation to the theme of 'falling in love with the wrong person' (2009: 146). She uses queer theory to suggest that desire is not fixed and 'can take multiple paths' (Mallan, 2009: 150). However, as Mallan herself points out, the theory is at odds with these fictional characters' understanding of their own identities. The fictional character Marisol in *Hard Love* clearly self-identifies as lesbian. The first-person narrator Gio (whose real name is John) falls in love with her, even though she is an out and proud lesbian, making romantic love between them impossible. However, they do share a common interest in creative writing and remain friends. Gio and Marisol continue to discuss their creative writing in *Love and Lies*.

The fictional creative writer is now an increasingly familiar character type or schema in young adult lesbian-themed fiction, although by no means a stereotype. Her appearance in young adult fiction is innovative and progressive. This may be seen particularly if contrasted with a recent film, *Ruby Sparks* (2012), in which the young male creative writer creates a female character and then controls her through his writing for the majority of the film. For instance, if he writes that Ruby can speak fluent French, then the character Ruby immediately begins to speak in French. In contrast, the female protagonist in each of the six novels mostly writes about other female characters, creativity, romance, friendship and female intimacy. She may write comic sketches, novels, poetry, journal entries, letters or lists, but she writes creatively, which I differentiate here from historical, scientific or academic writing.

This chapter is divided into six sections, and each of the following four sections examines the representation of at least one fictional lesbian creative writer. The first

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<sup>16</sup> Kerry Mallan analyses *Hard Love* in relation to queer theory in *Gender Dilemmas in Children's Fiction* (2009: 148-151), so aside from the brief summary above, I concentrate here on its sequel, *Love and Lies: Marisol's Story*.

concentrates on the collaborative or intersubjective nature of creative writing, the social exchange of meaning and the ‘creative triangle’ script. I begin with this script because it is otherwise easy to assume that the writer is a solitary and socially isolated character; to the contrary, the lesbian creative writer as represented in these six novels is never completely on her own. The second section focuses on comedy writing and Paula Boock’s *Dare, Truth or Promise*. Its protagonist, Louisa or Louie Angelo, is president of her school’s comedy club and writes and performs her own comedy sketches. I focus on her creative writing ability, as I shall concentrate on the concepts of performance and performativity in Chapter Four. The third section examines the concept of flow or absorption as an aspect of the ‘creative achievement’ script, which can be characterised as a form of optimal experience for the writer and is frequently linked textually to an experience of sexual fulfilment. I also touch briefly on the opposite of flow, ‘writer’s block’, examining the flow experience in relation to Ellen Wittlinger’s *Love and Lies: Marisol’s Story* (a sequel to *Hard Love*) and Lyndsey D’Arcangelo’s pair of novels, *The Trouble with Emily Dickinson* and its sequel, *The Education of Queenie McBride*. The fourth section concentrates on writing as a therapeutic process in relation to two novels, Joanne Horniman’s *About a Girl* and Elissa Janine Hoole’s *Kiss the Morning Star*. In both novels, the teen protagonist enacts a script of struggle and recovery; she has experienced a trauma, which she partly comes to terms with through her creative writing. In *About a Girl*, Anna writes her own novel, which narrates the impact of her parents’ divorce on her developing subjectivity. In *Kiss the Morning Star*, the protagonist, who is also called Anna, enacts a script of recovery and moving on when she overcomes the death of her mother and writes haiku poems, lists and journal entries which she assembles as a ‘collection’ in the closing pages of *Kiss the Morning Star*. The final section concludes that the reader’s interpretation of each novel will be guided by both affective and cognitive processes (Spiro, 1977; Miall, 1989).

## **Creative Writing as a Collaborative Act**

Here I foreground the ‘creative triangle’ script, as well as the frequently collaborative or intersubjective nature of creative writing and the creative process. The six focus novels portray positive lesbian protagonists who write collaboratively and intersubjectively. Instead of concentrating exclusively on the internal psychological processes involved in the production of creative writing, I also foreground the social and interpersonal aspects of creative writing. I draw on R. Keith Sawyer’s ‘Writing as a Collaborative Act’ (2009) to argue that creative writing, which on the surface appears to be a highly solitary activity, may be a deeply collaborative process.<sup>17</sup> The concept of the ‘creative triangle’ script was first formulated by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) and Howard Gardner (1993). In their research they identified a ‘creative triangle’ script which indicates and connects three dimensions to the creative act, that is, the ‘individual’ who is creative, the ‘domain’ and the ‘field’ (Gauntlett, 2007: 21). To explain further, the ‘creative triangle’ script communicates the intersubjective nature of creativity, which is not the product of a unique mind working in social isolation but the result of a dynamic interaction between the individual, the creative system in which the individual works and those working in the same field (Gauntlett, 2007: 21). Creativity is not meaningful unless it is socially recognised and accepted as ‘creativity’ by others. In each of the focus novels, the fictional lesbian creative writer has a knowledge of the domain, is also aware of her potential readers and, in Louie’s case, her audience.

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<sup>17</sup> In the majority of chapters in this thesis, the texts under consideration are self-evidently the result of a collaborative creative process. Films are produced by teams of writers, a director, producer and groups of actors. Similarly, television series are joint co-operative activities of teams of creative individuals, such as writers, producers and editors. Within the discussion of each film and television text, I also make reference to music and the soundtrack’s role in the text’s overall impact on young adult audiences. There is a further layer of collaborative creativity which occurs at the level of musical creativity.

In his discussion of writing as a collaborative act, Sawyer suggests that the general paradigm which underpins the majority of psychological and cognitive research into creativity and creative writing leads others to ‘focus on the inner mental processes of the solitary writer and to neglect the social and collaborative processes of creative writing’ (2009: 167). He also points out the irony of there being such an emphasis on the individual and individualistic conceptions of creativity, because creativity in the United States is a ‘collective, institutional activity’ (Sawyer, 2009: 168). I acknowledge the individual psychological and cognitive processes that self-evidently form a crucial role in the production of creative writing and I shall return to these ‘mental’ processes throughout this chapter. But first I wish to counter-balance individualistic psychological paradigms by highlighting the collaborative dimensions of creative writing and how those collaborations are represented within each text. I differentiate here between ‘collaborative’, which suggests two characters who work together on a piece of creative writing, and ‘intersubjective’, which suggests that a piece of creative writing is shared by more than one conscious mind.

The solitary writer in the real world does not sit down and write a complete novel guided by inner inspiration, with only minor revisions made during a second draft. Sawyer develops his argument to suggest in relation to, for example, C. S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, that the creative writing even of novels and poetry is frequently a collaborative process (Sawyer, 2009: 172-176). A further example would be female writers, such as Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, who worked together and with others in the Bloomsbury group. Authors may be in regular communication with an editor, or, in Sawyer’s example, other writers and academics. In the early 1930s, Tolkien and Lewis, together with several others at the University of Oxford, formed an informal literary discussion group called The Inklings. They met on a weekly basis to ‘discuss Nordic myths

and epics and read aloud from their own works in progress' (Sawyer, 2009: 173). Members of the group commented on each other's work and listened to critical feedback. Sawyer suggests that significant works of fiction evolved partly within the context of these meetings: '*The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* were not solo works, authored by lone geniuses; they unfolded in a collaborative circle' (Sawyer, 2009: 174).

Even if the fictional creative writer is not a member of a writing group along the lines of The Inklings, she frequently has informal readers with whom she will work to ensure that the novel is comprehensible and meaningful to others. In sum, she is represented as writing creatively with feedback from other readers and within a socio-historical context which currently includes the Internet, blogs and different forms of online writing, as well as the possibility of self-publishing.

The fictional writers discussed, with the exception of Louie in *Dare, Truth or Promise*, write directly about a central rite of passage that is their first lesbian love and its sexual consummation. The rite of passage can be seen as a human universal but the individual performance of this rite of passage or script may in its own way be unique. Two of the writers, namely JJ in *The Trouble with Emily Dickinson* and Anna in *Kiss The Morning Star*, ask their girlfriends to read their writing in what can be characterised as an intersubjective process that brings together the character's creative ability, her writing about her first love and her girlfriend. The fictional creative writer may write together with a writing group, as does Marisol in *Love and Lies*, she may share her work with a creative writing class at school, as does JJ in *The Trouble with Emily Dickinson* or at university with a professor of creative writing, as does JJ in *The Education of Queenie McBride*. JJ reflects on her editing skills when she receives a B-plus for the manuscript of her first novel (*The Education of Queenie McBride*: 219). When Marisol discovers that her creative writing tutor has herself never published a novel, she is compelled to re-consider the

‘effusive praise’ she received from Olivia in relation to her writing assignments (*Love and Lies*: 231). Nevertheless, she still has the feedback from other members of the writing class and her best friend Gio, whom she trusts, also reads and comments on her work.

The key central processes, both conscious and unconscious, that take place in the creative writer’s mind and therefore are internal have been identified and studied by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi who interviewed five creative writers at length (1996). His research suggests that there is no single ‘Aha!’ or ‘Eureka!’ moment which the creative writer experiences as a flash of insight and which enable her to produce a creative work of fiction in one sitting. Rather, there are a series of smaller overlapping insights which arise from both conscious and unconscious cognitive processes. First, all five writers interviewed by Csikszentmihalyi were completely immersed in the field of writing and literature: ‘They knew more about literature and the history of writing than non-writers’ (Sawyer, 2009: 175), which suggests that writers are already highly familiar with their domain. Second, all five writers noted the significance of both conscious editing and unconscious ideas or inspiration (Sawyer, 2009: 175). The process of creative writing, in common with many other creative processes, involves a ‘high degree of idea generation, followed by a period of selection’ (Ward, Finke and Smith, 1995). As Sawyer points out, ‘the real work starts when many mini-insights are analysed, re-worked, and connected to each other, and, as with every other type of creativity, many ideas that sound good at first end up in the trash’ (2009: 176).

In my six novels, the fictional adolescent creative writer is textually represented as already ‘immersed’ in the domain of literature and writing. As an example, Louie, in *Dare, Truth or Promise*, quotes apposite lines of poetry, which fit the immediate situation in front of her, off the top of her head (3, 5, 23). Marisol, in *Love and Lies*, is accepted to read English Literature at Stanford University, but suddenly ‘the idea of taking Freshman



Composition, Literature in Translation, and Existential Philosophy seemed like the most stultifying way I could imagine to spend the next year' (5). Instead, she enrolls in a part-time creative writing class and finds work at a cafe called the Mug, which is associated with T.S. Eliot. In *About a Girl*, Anna's favourite novel at the age of sixteen is *Finnegan's Wake* because the 'language makes sense in a rhythmic, nonsensical way, and this matter of making sense and yet not at the same time has me hooked' (60). Later, during her period of depression, she discovers nineteenth-century Russian novelists. The one idea that holds any interest for the protagonist of *Kiss the Morning Star* is a road trip inspired by the writer Jack Kerouac and *The Dharma Bums* (1958), which the girls take with them wherever they travel. JJ, in *The Trouble with Emily Dickinson*, is a school tutor who helps others to understand and interpret the work of female poets such as Emily Dickinson and Anne Finch. Thus, literature and writing in each of these novels is a central part of the protagonist's way of being in the world and a way in which they all take pleasure in being in the world.

### **The Representation of a Fictional Lesbian Comedy Writer**

The schema for the fictional lesbian creative writer is modified when she is represented as writing comedy. A young adult lesbian protagonist who writes comedy can be seen as somewhat rebellious and assertive, but when her comedy sketches generate empathy for others, she clearly makes a positive contribution to society through her writing. *Dare*, *Truth or Promise* suggests that the fictional lesbian creative writer has much in common with heterosexual female protagonists who are also comedy writers and performers. The text places an emphasis on common ground and similarities that Louie shares with other female comedy writers at school. Comedy writing can take many diverse forms, for

instance, political satire, comedy screen-writing and humorous literary fiction. The pertinent form here, however, is comedy sketch-writing, the particular talent of Louie Angelo in *Dare, Truth or Promise*. Louie excels in a number of interrelated fields. She is an academically outstanding student at her high school, has at least a working knowledge of two foreign languages and excels at acting. She also writes and performs comedy sketches for the school's comedy club and collaborates closely with her best friend Mo.

The link between creativity and humour is very close, as humour is generally considered a 'subset of creativity' (Kaufman and Kozbelt, 2009: 85). Both share features such as 'playfulness, risk taking and exploiting loose but meaningful associations and relations between concepts' (Kaufman and Kozbelt, 2009: 85). The ability to write and deliver high-quality humour suggests a certain level of intellectual and verbal intelligence as well as a sense of timing. Kaufman and Kozbelt have characterised 'flavours of humour' into four general categories used in everyday life (2009: 81). One recent study has attempted to distinguish between these four dominant styles, which I shall consider briefly so as to convey Louie's dominant humour style. Rod Martin and his colleagues, cited by Kaufman and Kozbelt, developed the Humour Style Questionnaire (HSQ) to analyse the function of different types of humour (2003). They broadly identified two healthy (affiliative and self-enhancing) dimensions and two potentially 'unhealthy' or detrimental (aggressive and self-defeating) dimensions. I draw on Scott Barry Kaufman and Aaron Kozbelt's 'The Tears of a Clown' (2009) to argue that Louie uses a psychologically healthy form of humour that is ultimately assertive, affiliative and self-enhancing.

The first stage in the creative-achievement script is activated when Louie invites the school to a comedy club performance. The second stage in the script in *Dare, Truth or Promise* is the comedy sketch written by Louie and performed with Mo, and is self-reflexively concerned with the nature of humour and comedy. As the clown, Louie initially

uses aggressive humour that by the end of the sketch turns out to be affiliative and self-enhancing. The sketch encourages its female teenaged audience to question the sexist and racist values underlying many jokes, and the seeming harmlessness of, for instance, racist jokes or jokes which centre on someone's sexual orientation. The entire scene is focalised from the perspective of Willa, who has recently moved to the high school and who has never seen a comedy club performance before. Louie's jokes, which she performs with Mo, begin fairly mildly, but deliberately become ever more extreme as she seeks to make her point, that is, that humour which is at the expense of others, especially others who are socially marginalised or disadvantaged, is not funny.

The creative achievement script is introduced when Louie, dressed as a clown, urges her audience to tear up their politically correct card and apparently dismisses the concept of politics with a swear word analogy: 'From now on you don't have to worry about it. Politics is a four-letter word in the Comedy Club vocabulary' (17). Louie begins to draw in her audience with a run of jokes in quick succession: 'I hate all this political correctness. Don't you? It's so phony. I mean, since when, to get into a government department did you have to be a black, crippled lesbian? Woops! I should say a physically challenged, alternatively sexually oriented, woman of colour?' (18). But the clown draws in her audience and encourages them to relax by pretending to be something that she is not. Her humour initially seems aggressive as she apparently makes fun of categories of identity such as race, disability and sexual orientation. Ultimately, however, her humour is affiliative and empathetic as it encourages her audience to consider diverse categories of exclusion and to question whether those exclusions are justifiable.

At the beginning of the performance the reader is aligned with Willa, who slowly but steadily becomes so alienated by the sexist and racist jokes that she stands up and leaves the auditorium before the end of the sketch. At this early point in the novel, Willa

(and the reader) do not know Louie very well and Louie herself does not even know that she is lesbian, a lack of awareness that is more typical of lesbian-themed novels from the 1990s. After the performance, Willa discovers that Louie's sketch developed in her absence and came full circle. First, the teenage audience was shown disturbing images of the 'bodies of dead Jews at Auschwitz and stuff' (20) and second, as Louie repeated 'a joke's a joke, right?' (20), she played a soundtrack of the audience's laughter to accompany the on-screen images. Two of the girls comment on the power of Louie's writing; Vika thought she was going to be sick (20) and Geena thought it was 'brilliant, just brilliant' (20). And Willa realises that Louie was not endorsing those jokes but suggesting the dangerous thinking behind them: 'Willa smiled down at her page. The maths equations smiled back' (20). The repetition of 'smile' and its unusual usage here conveys Willa's mood and in that mood, even her most challenging subject becomes agreeable. Before the close of the chapter, the reader is closely aligned with both Willa and Louie and shortly afterwards Louie and Willa have their first date (55-59).

The creative ability to write and perform comedy is represented as a core aspect of Louie's subjectivity. Equally, her emerging romantic relationship with Willa is represented as a fundamental aspect of her subjectivity. Initially, the girls' friendship develops in the context of each other's interests. The two girls take an active interest in the other's activities; Louie attends one of Willa's fencing matches and Willa joins the drama club. The romance script is introduced when Louie and Willa's relationship moves from friendship to include physical intimacy. On one occasion, Willa stays the night after having dinner with Louie's family. The novel depicts their first sexual encounter without shying away from the topic and without fading to black. For different reasons, Willa and Louie are both 'hesitant at first', but then they 'wrapped around each other, discarded clothes, fingered, kissed and discovered the other and themselves' (67). The two are textually

represented as completely in unison and because both girls are grammatically the subject of each verb, it is as if they both experience everything simultaneously and as one.

When the 'falling in love' component of the 'As You Like It' script does not run smoothly, Louie's ability to write comedy is also inhibited and here the two scripts are closely interlinked. Louie's Catholic mother, in particular, objects to Louie's relationship with Willa and Louie's own religious beliefs are also initially at odds with her same-sex desire. She temporarily ends the relationship but becomes unhappy and unwell (104-144), a narrative episode that functions as a serious 'bug' in the script and that is more typical of a lesbian-themed young adult novel published in 1997. However, Louie begins to re-build her sense of self after a conversation with her parish priest, who suggests she should keep the focus on love. Although she is not immediately reconciled with Willa, her renewed participation in the comedy club both enables her to re-centre herself and signals to the reader that she is on the road to recovery. Louie's renewed involvement with the club functions as the third stage in the sequence of events which form the script and the script affirms Louie's creative talent. 'Each joke Louie devised and acted felt like a little piece of herself re-claimed. Each ta-daa! on stage felt like a stamping of the jigsaw back in place. It was the only time Louie felt happy, and real' (152). Louie's increasing sense of agency is conveyed through the number of active verbs in quick succession ('devised' 'acted' and 're-claimed'), the triumphant 'ta-daa!' and the emphatic 'stamping' which resonates in conjunction with other consonants in the sentence ('stage', 'jigsaw', 'back' and 'place'). The repetition of 'each' suggests that the writing and performance of comedy are equally important to her. It is striking that her writing and performances, which are essentially fictional sketches that she has constructed, paradoxically enable her to feel content and real.

The creative process of writing and performing comedy crosses domains and positively changes her mood and outlook. Her creative writing functions as a form of individual resilience and allows her to feel calm, confident and secure. Paula Boock centres her text on a creative lesbian protagonist who demonstrates optimal personal development even in the face of life challenges. Louie encounters at least temporary opposition to her relationship with Willa (a ‘bug’ in the script) from one or two authority figures, particularly her mother and the local doctor. However, by the close of the narrative, Louie’s parents have accepted the girls’ relationship and Louie has resumed her comedy writing. The novel’s conclusion therefore offers its own particular version of the ‘As You Like It’ script with its upbeat ending and the lesbian couple intact.

### **Writing in Flow**

The creative achievement script usually involves episodes in which the protagonist or central character experiences the feeling of creative ‘flow’. Flow is one of the vital processes in any creative act and can be understood as a form of optimal experience which occurs during the creative activity itself, here creative writing. For a creative person, being ‘in flow’ is one of the most positive ways of experiencing the self. The concept of flow is related to similar concepts such as absorption, ‘altered states’ and psychologist Abraham Maslow’s ‘peak experiences’ (1964). It can be characterised as a mental state when time seems to become irrelevant and the writing ‘flows’ through the writer with little or no anxiety. It conveys an altered state of consciousness which may feel close to euphoria: ‘Many writers seek out the positive feelings unleashed by flow, when intense absorption overtakes consciousness of self’ (Perry, 2009: 214). Susan Perry has argued that flow is usually associated with intrinsic motivation and that would be the case for this group of

fictional creative writers as they are not required to write and are not paid for doing so. Remaining 'in flow' necessitates a form of feedback (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) and, for the most part, creative writers learn to provide that feedback for themselves, even though many of the writers Perry interviewed could not describe exactly how they accomplish this task (2009: 215). This is also where informal readers, creative writing tutors and others with whom the creative writer works may have a vital contribution to make in terms of the feedback they provide to the young adult writer.

In the six focused novels, the flow experience is connected to the individual fictional character's unique sensibility and is therefore a 'force for expansion' both in relation to her goals as well as to the growth of personal qualities (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 92). The pleasures associated with flow are highly desirable but also intense, so much so that a writer cannot stay in flow for the majority of any day. In an altered state, both mind and body are 'lost to conscious awareness' (Perry, 2009: 220), as in the example that follows. Teen protagonist Marisol uses different words for the state of flow throughout *Hard Love* and *Love and Lies*. In one informal writing session with her creative writing teacher Olivia, Marisol uses descriptors such as 'cocoon' and 'zone', as exemplified by 'the buzz of the place surrounded me, and I went into my cocoon, just me and my Mac' (115). Her choice of words such as 'zone' to describe being in flow suggests that she enters a state or a place in which she is not aware of her surroundings. She carves out a separate space in the middle of a Starbucks cafe in which she is able to concentrate deeply.

Fictional writers in the six focus novels who are absorbed by the activity of creative writing tend to lose track of time, forget where they are, sometimes they miss meals or they may experience increased thirst. Some writers in the real world breathe through the mouth or gaze as though watching a film (Perry, 2009: 220). When exiting flow, a number of

creative writers interviewed by Perry reported physiological after-effects such as hunger and fatigue, while others concentrated on the psychological differences in the way they feel. They may be 'drained' and exhausted or they may experience the opposite, such as the reduction of anxiety and a sense of calm and purpose achieved (Perry, 2009: 220).

Marisol in *Love and Lies* is usually excited after she has completed an assignment or even a stretch of writing. In Starbucks with her creative writing teacher, she completes what is both the assignment for that week's class and the second chapter of her novel. The scene that she writes centres on her protagonist, Christina, and Christina's first meeting with Natalie, who works in a second-hand bookshop and is initially based on Marisol's creative writing teacher. There follow four pages of Marisol's own creative writing, which is differentiated from the narrative of *Love and Lies* by being printed in a different font and with an indented margin.

The reader's affective or emotional response to each of Marisol's creative writing assignments alters the way the reader interprets the novel and 'keeps subsequent processing of the story on-line' (Miall, 1989: 66). There is not sufficient space to consider each of the assignments which she undertakes, but the first one centres on a dialogue between two characters. She bases one character on her adoptive mother (she was adopted as a baby) and the second on her biological mother. She has minimal factual information about her biological mother except that she was from Puerto Rico, which leads her to search through a list of Hispanic names, finally selecting 'Carmen' (37). The tone of Marisol's creative writing is quite different from the discourse that surrounds it. Marisol, herself a character within a novel, undertakes a writing exercise which asks her to consider physical setting. As Miall suggests, affect is cross-domain; that is, affect can 'transfer from schemata in one domain (such as those concerned with a story's setting) to those in another (such as the relationship between two characters)' (1989: 61). Marisol writes that Christina



was looking for a book of short stories in Steuben's Used Books in Harvard Square. As Christina enters the building, she is faced with a sign that announces 'THIS BUILDING SOON TO BE AN OFF-PRICE MEGASTORE' (116), which prompts Christina to question why things have to change. She dislikes change and regrets finding the bookshop if it is only to be demolished; as Marisol writes through the voice of Christina, 'There could be no future for her here' (116).

The reader of Marisol's creative writing experiences emotions or affect that transfer across specific domains, so that the future of Marisol's romantic relationship with her creative writing teacher Olivia seems already tinged with regret and the possibility that it will have no future. At this point, Marisol and Olivia have not yet had sex, but the passage also suggests that change is in the air. Marisol had intended to base her character Natalie on Olivia, but instead she writes that Natalie 'pulled' her along in a different direction: 'It was almost two hours before I came up for air' (119). Afterwards, in a brief conversation with Olivia, who has supposedly been working on her own novel, Marisol explains 'how the writing had flowed' and 'how the characters had seemed to grow as I wrote them' (119). When Marisol looks at her watch, she realises that she has forgotten to eat lunch, Olivia suggests dinner instead and the combination of alcohol and enchiladas leaves Marisol 'more or less out of control' (125). From the restaurant they return to Olivia's apartment, where Marisol has her first sexual experience.

The production of creative writing and the expression of lesbian sexuality are frequently textually linked as a form of optimal experience in the novels under discussion. Passages in which Marisol writes creatively are frequently juxtaposed with passages that represent the expression of her sexuality, as I shall amplify in the following paragraph. Other novels in the group considered here also link creative expression and the expression and fulfilment of sexuality. In more traditional young adult lesbian-themed novels, there is

little passion in the description of lesbian romance. B. J. Epstein suggests that literary descriptions of teenage lesbian sex frequently rely on words such as ‘gentle’, ‘slow’ and ‘soft’ (in contrast to scenes involving teenage gay male sex) (2012: 23). She also discusses a frequently used narrative strategy of ‘fading to black’ so that a sex scene between teenage lesbians is set up but then not followed through. Readers cannot be clear what is actually happening, because the language is either too vague or euphemistic to communicate the sexual encounter vividly. If there are descriptions of physical intimacy, then, Epstein suggests, the sexual interactions are described in very hesitant terms (2012: 24).

In contrast, in *Love and Lies*, the creative achievement and romance scripts are again interlinked as Marisol begins a creative writing course and also falls in love with her creative writing teacher, Olivia. Marisol is strongly attracted to Olivia, both as a creative writer and as someone who is physically striking. Although Marisol has virtually no previous romantic relationship experience and certainly no sexual experience, she is more than willing to return after dinner to Olivia’s apartment. She even believes at this point that she may have fallen in love with Olivia. Olivia kisses her ‘hard’ before the end of the meal and ‘every other thought went out of my head except *Olivia*’ (126). But it does not end there, as the text quickly moves back to Olivia’s apartment where they remove each other’s clothes and then Marisol has her first experience of oral sex: ‘I seemed to be waiting an excruciatingly long time to feel her mouth again. And, in the meantime there was a moaning noise coming from my own mouth and a tremendous feeling of happiness or nervousness or a combination of both making my limbs tremble uncontrollably’ (127). Marisol’s first sexual experience, an embodied action, suggests a loss of control but also an intensely pleasurable experience that takes over her sense of her own body. The lesbian body is no longer ‘apparitional’, to use Terry Castle’s (1993) phrase. The repetition of ‘m’

(‘meantime’, ‘moaning’ and ‘mouth’) and the repetition of the word ‘mouth’ draw attention to Marisol’s physical pleasure. She can hear a ‘moaning noise’ from her mouth and feel her limbs ‘tremble’, almost as if her own physiological responses take her by surprise. Wittlinger succinctly conveys the experience in ways which suggest that Olivia has directed this scene but in the sexual encounters between Marisol and Olivia that follow, Marisol becomes increasingly sexually assertive.

Teenage lesbian sex in young adult novels, according to Epstein, rarely culminates in satisfaction or jouissance in contrast to gay male sex in young adult novels, in which ‘boys often have multiple partners and engage in a range of sexual activities... which generally end with an orgasm’ (2012: 21). Her point is not that every encounter should end this way, but that it seems ‘worth pondering’ what gay males do and gay females seem not to. In *Love and Lies*, Marisol clearly reaches orgasm and a number of the other selected novels also include sex scenes in which the teenage protagonist is fully able to enjoy her same-sex desire, always within the context of novels aimed at young adult readers. When Marisol and Olivia meet the week after Marisol’s first sexual encounter, Olivia again asks Marisol to return to her apartment: ‘... as she unlocked the apartment door, I was already lightheaded by then. But still managed to unbutton her blouse and hold her breasts in my hands so I could take a long look at them in the light of day...’ (150). Again, there is explicit reference to erotic parts of the body such as ‘breasts’ and the repetition of the letter ‘b’ (‘b’ in ‘unbutton’ and ‘blouse’) emphasises the ‘b’ of ‘breasts’. As Marisol becomes more confident, she is also willing to act on her own feelings and become more agentic: ‘I was beginning to know what excited her, and what excited me, too. And we were delighted to take each other to those places’ (150). There is one further sexual encounter between Marisol and Olivia (207), but as Marisol begins to know Olivia better, she also starts to feel controlled. Towards the close of the novel, Marisol also discovers that she has been

misled; Olivia did not graduate from Harvard, nor has she ever published a novel and she also dates men. In this way, the text does not offer an affirmation of this particular romantic relationship, but it does affirm Marisol's lesbian subjectivity, her ability as a creative writer and her commitment to her writing as facets of identity independent of a specific romantic relationship.

The lesbian creative writer schema is modified in Lyndsey D'Arcangelo's pair of novels because JJ embodies a blend of the schema for lesbian creative writer and the schema for female athlete. In a further twist to the script, she does not cover up her sexual orientation but does hide her poetry. *The Trouble with Emily Dickinson* is set in Richmond, Virginia and focalised from the perspective of JJ. She is 'out and proud' in terms of her sexual orientation but in the closet as regards her creative writing. Although she attends poetry readings every Friday night at a local cafe called The Spot, presumably a humorous reference to the female G-spot, she is terrified by the thought of reading her own poetry out loud. Again, the affect created by JJ's fear of public speaking transfers to other domains, such as her past fear of 'coming out' and informing her parents of her sexual orientation. *The Trouble with Emily Dickinson* modifies the 'As You Like It' script, since JJ's creativity is private or in the closet until she falls in love with a cheerleader, Kendal McCarthy. In this novel, the romance script directly activates and enables the script of creative achievement for both girls.

A number of JJ's poems, one expressing her fear of public speaking and another expressing the 'coming-out' script, are included in their entirety within the text, so her poetry is shared with the novel's readers. I include a brief extract below to give an impression of JJ's poetry:

*Release.*

*Relief from my shoulders.*

*This boulder that I was able to push aside,*

*Leaving me stable, with the sensation*

*That I have nothing to hide.*

*Freedom.*

*Free at last.*

*Looking past the fear in my eyes,*

*I see clear skies... (The Trouble with Emily Dickinson: 117-118)*

JJ, herself a character within a novel, writes poems that affirm her personal lived experience. She writes of personal liberation and freedom, and uses poetic language such as alliteration, ‘release’ and ‘relief’, ‘freedom’ and ‘free’, to convey her experience. She is hired as a tutor in women’s literature by Kendal McCarthy, who is anxious about her grades, and JJ and Kendal fall in love over poetry discussions, particularly the poetry of Emily Dickinson. The poetry discussions between the two girls give historical perspective, depth and range to the subject of lesbian love poetry.

The optimal experience for a creative writer of being in flow is represented slightly differently in D’Arcangelo’s pair of novels. In *The Trouble with Emily Dickinson*, JJ carries a journal with her at all times and writes whenever she is inspired, usually producing an entire poem in one sitting (7). She also keeps a journal under her pillow and may write a poem last thing at night (20-21). She follows a precise set of rituals before entering the flow state, such as deep breathing, which ‘clears the clouds in her head until nothing remains but a clear white space’ (20). She also on occasion becomes aware of the urge to write ‘with the words now flowing through her mind’ (50, 90). In *The Education of*

*Queenie McBride*, JJ's romantic relationship with Kendal does not progress smoothly and the text suggests that when JJ is unhappy, she is unable to write fluently and suffers from the opposite of 'flow', that is, writer's block. She still persists with her writing, but her university grades or marks reflect her temporary inability to write creatively and effectively. In *The Education of Queenie McBride*, the cognitive processes involved in structuring language and writing a literary novel give form and significance to what otherwise would be her experience of first love and the end of that romance. As a young writer (and this applies to all five fictional creative writers here) she naturally has limited life experience and is therefore more dependent on autobiographical material. But it may also be that her writing and her subjectivity criss-cross and overlap in ways foregrounded by Judith Kegan Gardiner (1981). JJ's writing plays a central role in the construction of her lesbian subjectivity. As she writes, she engages in the act of self-creation and develops a meaningful structure for separate events in her own life while creating an external structure for her writing.

The writing process in *The Education of Queenie McBride* is frequently represented as highly stimulating and rewarding in and of itself: 'I've been writing practically all night and all day. It just hit me out of nowhere. I can't stop.' (101). The writing process also enables JJ to become aware of her own priorities as distinct from those of her girlfriend Kendal or her best friend Queenie. As JJ writes, she defines herself more closely and becomes aware of the common ground that she shares with Queenie and Kendal, but also, paradoxically, she becomes aware of the differences between them all. The novel instantiates a script of relationship closure and moving on as JJ's more clearly-defined sense of self and her self-understanding lead her to apply to transfer to Smith College in Northampton. By the close of *The Education of Queenie McBride*, JJ has moved out of Boston and is single once more.

In the last few paragraphs of the novel, JJ also mentions her plan to write Queenie's memoirs and JJ and Queenie discuss possible titles for JJ's second novel. Queenie promises to give her 'plenty of juicy material for the forthcoming sequel' (220). Again, JJ is disappointed that her romantic relationship with Kendal has ended, but her focus is on a new beginning at Smith College and a second novel and she continues to enact an optimistic sense of self through her creative writing. Similarly, at the close of *Love and Lies*, Marisol is, romantically speaking, on her own. Her relationship with her creative writing tutor is over, and her attempt at repairing the relationship with another female character Lee has not been successful. Nevertheless, she actively directs her energy towards her creative writing and completing her first novel. Writing is the way that Marisol and JJ create a sense of belonging, self-confidence and security within their social worlds, a sense of subjective agency. Their writing creates a feeling of synchrony within themselves. They are both disappointed in their first experience of romantic love, but they do not give in to feelings of self-pity. Instead, Marisol 'jumped off the bed and opened my computer' (245) and immediately starts writing. Writing is their way of enacting a positive and resilient sense of self. These two novels do not enact the 'As You Like It' romance script but they do affirm the creative lesbian subjectivities of both protagonists.

### **Writing About Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process**

The four novels already discussed represent lesbian creative writers who write, at least in part, to express a sense of individual self. Similarly, both novels discussed in this section use a first-person narrator who writes, again at least in part, to express and enact a sense of individual self but she also writes to repair the self and to recover from trauma. The narrator's creative writing functions as a therapeutic process for her, which she may not

even overtly recognise. However, readers do recognise the relevant script of struggle and recovery and accommodate schemas and scripts to fit the different situations in these two novels. This particular script of struggle and recovery can be understood as consisting of a sequence of three fundamental stages, that is, establishing a place of safety, which for both narrators is away from their respective families of origin, reconstructing the trauma, which both narrators achieve through their writing, and finally, regaining a sense of community (Herman, 1992: 51). Miall suggests that the reader must 'develop some representation of the outcome of the narrative to keep the comprehension process on-line' (1989: 62). He points out that the central character's causes and goals cannot reliably serve to indicate the outcome, so the reader must construct a possible outcome instead from the 'affective implications of the narrative' (Miall, 1989: 62). In both the focus novels, the reader constructs a positive outcome in spite of lengthy narrative episodes in which the protagonist endures a challenging period.

In this section, both teen protagonists have experienced at least one trauma and the traumatic experience seems to have delayed each protagonist's personal development, her emerging sexuality and coming of age. The narrator's personal crisis is caused by an external event rather than the discovery of her sexual orientation. Nevertheless, the theme of trauma can frequently be found in young adult lesbian and gay fiction, indirectly suggesting that the discovery of non-normative sexuality may in itself be experienced as a breach or potentially traumatic rupture with social norms.

In Joanne Horniman's *About a Girl* and Elissa Janine Hoole's *Kiss The Morning Star*, both narrators struggle to overcome traumatic experiences and they succeed, partly through creative writing. Both are also positively changed through the experience of travel and a new environment. Anna, the narrator of *About a Girl*, pinpoints the beginning of a difficult phase which lasts for approximately two years to her father's announcement that



he is divorcing her mother and starting a new life with another woman. There follows a time of upheaval and Anna's relationships with all her family members undergo a period of adjustment. During the novel, she enacts the 'falling in love' script with Flynn, although Anna ends the relationship shortly before the close of the novel. In *Kiss the Morning Star*, Anna's mother has died in a house fire twelve months prior to the novel's beginning and Anna's grief-stricken father has been unable to function or even to continue his work as a preacher since. The narrative is centred on a road trip that Anna makes with her best friend, Katy (Kat), during which they fall in love and they are together at the close of the novel. *Kiss the Morning Star* therefore enacts the positive 'As You Like It' script with its hopeful ending and the lesbian couple together. Both these teen fictions are, therefore, grounded in social experience whereby lesbian teen characters encounter a set of problems similar to those faced by many other teens, whatever their sexual orientation. The novels reflect some of the traumatic experiences faced by many adolescents in contemporary life, and the strategy of exploring such events builds reader empathy and understanding for the protagonists who are responsible and caring characters.

The positive 'As You Like It' script with its optimistic ending is further modified when fictional lesbian creative writers write about traumatic events. Creative writing can have a therapeutic effect on challenging and painful life experiences in at least two ways. First, the writer is able to release thoughts and images and the process of turning these experiences into words identifies individual emotions and validates them (MacCurdy, 2007: 2). Second, the act of writing connects the emotional with the cognitive, which results in 'a sense of control over that which we cannot control: the past' (MacCurdy, 2007: 2). MacCurdy suggests that the experience of trauma disempowers the individual subject, but that the person writing about trauma is not exactly the same person who experienced the trauma: 'Writing requires construction of a persona - and a point of view -

that is different from that of the protagonist' (2007: 2). The act of writing about traumatic experience connects the past and the present and re-integrates that past trauma with the present self, enabling the writer to gain agency in the process and, ultimately, allowing the writer to move on. In Janel Sexton and James Pennebaker's research, the improved well-being of creative writers in actual world situations was positively contrasted with a control group and reflected in fewer visits to medical professionals over a three-month period, less depression and blood tests that suggested a notably stronger immune system (2009: 264-271).

Several possible explanations as to why creative and expressive writing heals have been put forward by Sexton and Pennebaker, among others. These include the link between writing and self-regulation, which is defined as the 'ability to recognise and manage one's emotions' (Sexton and Pennebaker, 2009: 268) and is closely linked to the sense of a safe and predictable environment (Sexton and Pennebaker, 2009: 268). Perhaps one of the most interesting explanations that they document is the concept of 'cognitive restructuring/adaptation' (Sexton and Pennebaker, 2009: 268). This theory suggests that the creative writer in real-world interactions makes cognitive changes in herself when she writes, including 'labelling, structuring, and organising traumatic events' (Sexton and Pennebaker, 2009: 268), all of which help her to make sense out of a life-altering experience, or what has also been termed 'auto-therapy'. In the case of creative writers, participants in one extended research project benefited from writing not about a trauma that they had actually experienced, but about an imaginary trauma supplied by the experimenters (Greenberg, Wortman and Stone, 1996).

The fictional creative writer in both novels also recovers from trauma partly through her first lesbian relationship, which is represented as a central rite of passage. At the heart of both novels is each narrator's experience of first love and her enactment of the

romance script. Writing in 2000, Roberta Seelinger Trites argued that lesbian sexuality in young adult novels was frequently textually constructed as either transitory or pathological (2000: 111). In sharp contrast, *About a Girl* and *Kiss the Morning Star* demonstrate the shift that has taken place in young adult novels that now represent lesbian love, sexuality and desire as long-lasting and positive. Anna's desire for Flynn in *About a Girl*, set in Canberra and Lismore, New South Wales, is reciprocated and represented as pleasurable for both. Flynn is first to touch Anna, when she asks her permission to stroke Anna's red hair. Flynn also initiates their first kiss and their first sexual encounter, which takes place at Anna's flat after a long day at the beach. 'I loved the salty flavour of her. She'd not had a shower since coming back from the beach... and she still had sand in the creases of her buttocks and her fanny. The saltiness of her must have been emphasised by the sea' (35). The diction used is matter of fact in its construction of an oral sex scene and the writing includes explicit references to body parts such as 'buttocks' and 'fanny'. Flynn is textually associated with sand and the salt of the sea in ways that specifically link the lesbian character with nature as well as conveying the natural progression of the day. The two girls move from the beach to the flat and bed and the day culminates in the girls' sensual and sexual encounter, which continues through the night and is in harmony with nature.

The relationship moves through several phases over a period of six months, but the physical connection between them is always constructed as compelling and intense. The relationship comes under pressure not because of disapproval from family or friends, but because Anna makes two discoveries that change the way she thinks about Flynn. The first is that she finds a photograph of a young male that she believes could be Flynn's boyfriend, but who turns out to be Flynn's dead brother. When Anna makes her discovery, Flynn has never even mentioned a brother and her lack of emotional honesty creates barriers between the two. But even when the relationship is under pressure, the two girls

are still strongly drawn to each other. One evening, Flynn, who is musically creative and composes and performs songs, lets herself into Anna's apartment at night and joins her in bed: 'I felt her fingers play across the corrugations of my ribs; I imagined them white and bleached, like ghostly piano keys. And then the weight of her on top of me, the pressure of her lips on my mouth, so familiar and welcome' (168). Here Flynn's creativity is directly linked to the lesbian body and their mutual desire is also textually linked to creativity. Anna constructs her lesbian subjectivity as the very opposite of 'transitory'. The second discovery is that Flynn's former boyfriend, Rocco, who has been overseas for a year, is about to return to Lismore. Flynn cannot decide who she wants to be with, so Anna makes the decision on her behalf (175). She ends the relationship because she firmly believes that Flynn will always choose ultimately to have a relationship with a male rather than with her. Anna makes a hard decision, but one that protects her sense of self and is anything but 'pathological'.

Through her writing, Anna negotiates her experience of growing up, the consequences of her parents' divorce, her sense of responsibility for a non-fatal car accident which involves her much younger and brain-impaired sister, a period of depression and understanding her experience of first love and the end of that relationship. Her writing allows her to integrate different experiences and gain insight into the ways that these experiences have had an impact on her sense of self. Other narrators might confide in a close friend or family member, but Anna comes to terms with her experience by constructing her story through language. The novel self-consciously represents 'a way of making sense of and coming to terms with events' (Niederhoffer and Pennebaker, 2002) with what persists in memory in Anna's explanation for her novel in the Epilogue. As MacCurdy suggests, trauma narratives usually begin with images and are driven by a central image and sensations (2007: 36). Judith Herman also suggests that specific

memories are ‘imprinted in the brain in the form of vivid images and sensations’ (1992: 38):

‘I write about my life, not because I think it is important, but because there are images I can’t forget. I remember what Flynn said about how she wrote a song – how she started with an image .... And so I began with the night when I went to the gig and felt the music she made - and my heart opened up. And now I have something that resembles some sort of story, although perhaps it is only about a girl’ (195).

Anna writes clearly and simply, without great embellishment, and links her sequence of thoughts together with the simple conjunction ‘and’. The aggregative syntax (‘and...and...’) is a reflection of implied causality, suggesting that one event in the sequence has led to another. Her final phrase of ‘about a girl’ recalls the pop group Nirvana’s song of the same title (1994) and the popular British romantic comedy film *About a Boy* (2002), itself an adaptation of a novel with the same name by Nick Hornby. However, the title also suggests Anna’s own search for identity, her personal growth and her maturation. Her novel covers the years from sixteen to nineteen and narrates key rites of passage such as graduation from high school, her first full-time job, her first home, her first love and the end of that romantic relationship. Although she is not with Flynn at the close of the novel, she does not lapse into a depression again. She returns to Canberra, comes out to her mother, resumes her English Literature degree at university and renews her friendship with her childhood best friend, Michael. In short, Anna has recovered, regained her sense of community and come of age.

The writing paradigm as a therapeutic process is also incorporated into the representation of a fictional bisexual creative writer in *Kiss the Morning Star*. Teen protagonist Anna’s creative writing takes a slightly different form from the previous representations and has aspects in common with the characteristics of female writing

outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Much of Anna's writing is autobiographical but, as discussed earlier, it does not fall neatly into the description of autobiography, poetry or even a novel. She compulsively writes lists and notes in her journal and notebook and twelve of her lists are included in *Kiss the Morning Star*. They are visually differentiated from the novel's narrative by being placed on a separate page at the end of most chapters, often as a reflection of the chapter's events. Anna's creative lists consist of bullet points, but they condense and distil central questions or issues for her. At the start of each chapter there is a section of text, again in italics, which reflects on a central sensory image or sensation from the past. These include memories of her relationship with her mother, her mother's scarf, traumatic memories of the night of the fire – the smell and colour of the fire, thoughts of her father, meditations on his religious faith, her own gradual loss of faith and thoughts on her changing relationship with Kat, which develops from a close friendship into a romantic relationship.

The impetus for the girls' road-trip, which takes place at the end of high school, is prompted by a school project in which both girls must research 'catalysts of social change' (2). The road-trip self-consciously re-scripts the literary road-trips travelled by male creative writers such as Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady and epitomised by Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). Anna and Kat revise the road-trip narrative and the 'male buddy genre' along the lines of *Thelma and Louise* (1991), except that Anna and Kat do not drive off the road and die at the end of their journey. Anna and Kat's journey is represented instead as liberatory and conducive to the discovery of the self. Jessica Enevold suggests that gender must not be neglected or treated cursorily by the cultural critic in commentary on travel writing, as the female mobile subject is radically new (2004: 77). She argues that the road genre was traditionally masculine and centred on male escape from societal constraints represented by women, domesticity and wedlock (2004: 77). In contrast, in *Thelma and*

*Louise*, the escape was ‘transformed into an escape from patriarchal values and boundaries. Some critics emphasise the escape from heterosexuality; that is, they stress the friendship between Thelma and Louise as an evolving lesbian relationship’ (2004: 77). Enevold contends that the daughters of Thelma and Louise have ‘promoted themselves from the relatively hidden position of assisting script-girl to that of woman-director’ (2004: 83). Anna intertextually makes reference to their Thelma and Louise moment.

In the opening page of *Kiss the Morning Star*, Anna admits that it is the ‘first time in forever I’m actually interested in what comes next – or even in what happens now’ (1). Like JJ in *The Trouble with Emily Dickinson*, she closely engages with a real-world creative writer, in this instance Kerouac, and seems to draw strength from Kerouac’s creative writing as well as his autobiography. At the beginning of each chapter is a haiku written by Kerouac, and the girls also take a physical copy of Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums* on their journey and use it to guide some of their decisions about where to travel to next. Intertextual references to Kerouac’s poetry from *Desolation Angels* (1965), *Some of the Dharma* (1997) and *Book of Haikus* (2003) are interwoven into Anna’s travel narrative as she re-writes the original script of the road.

The schema for the lesbian creative writer is nuanced in this novel as Anna also meets and initiates a sexual encounter with male character Seth. Anna resists labels, but her enactment of desire within the text suggests that she is bisexual, and her more fluid desire makes this novel highly innovative both in content and in form. There are other young adult novels with bisexual female protagonists, but this is one of the few novels that I have found with a young adult protagonist who enacts desire towards both a female and a male character within the one text.<sup>18</sup> Anna and Kat’s friendship has been established for years,

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<sup>18</sup> Maureen Johnson’s *The Bermudez Triangle* (2004), which centres on three teen girls, has a creative bisexual central character in Avery Dekker. Avery has a brief relationship with her

whereas Anna's relationship with Seth is more immediate and in the present. When the girls' car breaks down, the two girls hitch-hike a lift with four college-age males who are on their way to a music festival. Anna is immediately drawn to Seth's 'springy blond curls and magnetic smile' (130), but she also feels at ease with him and can talk to him about her mother's death and her writing, in which he expresses an interest. Seth, for his part, also feels that he has 'known her all his life' (128). They meet up again at the music festival and, when Anna accidentally leaves *The Dharma Bums* behind at a restaurant, the two of them return to retrieve it. He knows that she is in a romantic relationship with Kat, but at this point Anna initiates oral sex with him. She pulls him into the shadows, he is the one who 'smiles, kind and sincere' (171), 'puts his hand on my chin, lifting my face up to look at him' (171), and hesitates, 'I... I'm not sure about this' (172). But if he is not sure, she expresses her desire although simultaneously regrets hurting both Seth and Kat with this act.

If Anna experiences a connection with and desire towards Seth, she also recognises a deeper love and desire for Kat. *Kiss the Morning Star* has already affirmed the romantic and sexual relationship between Anna and Kat (146-147), their desire for and commitment to each other. Anna begins to understand that she must be more open emotionally if she is to have an intimate relationship and, as she realises this, she also admits and accepts her love and desire for Kat. In the closing pages of the novel, she is finally able to share what she has 'guarded so close all this time' (225): 'Taking a deep breath, I tear them out, each list, paging through the journal until I come to the very last one – What I Cannot Say. This one I place on top before handing them to Katy.' (225). The 'list' was at the front of the

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girlfriend Mel, then reverts to a heterosexual relationship with fellow musician Gaz. Alexandra Diaz' *Of All the Stupid Things* (2010) also has a bisexual teen protagonist, Tara. But Tara falls in love with Riley only after Tara has discovered that her boyfriend is having sex with a male cheerleader.



final chapter, so readers already understand Anna's quest, in the absence of maternal love, for certainty, security and unconditional love.

## Conclusion

The six novels discussed offer at least two new schemas for young adult lesbian protagonists. The first is an important counterbalance to more culturally established and negative stereotypes of the 'butch' lesbian. In other words, the new schema centres on a physically attractive lesbian character who shares many personal qualities, interests and talents in common with her heterosexual female peers. Readers recognise many aspects of the protagonist and she is, broadly speaking, familiar. The aspect that sets her apart is her same-sex desire and lesbian sexuality, which the novels consistently foreground but only after the texts have established her creative writing ability. As Stephens observes, 'changes made within a cluster allow other [social categories] to be conceptualised in fresh and non-threatening ways' (2011: 13). He also suggests that, 'The recurrence or addition of further components enables the schema to be modified for socially transformative purposes' (2011: 15). In addition, the reader's affective engagement with the central character and her creative writing facilitates a closer and deeper engagement with her way of being in the world. Potentially, the group of novels discussed here may transform reader attitudes towards lesbian characters and their counterparts in real-world situations.

The second schema, which is embodied by JJ in *The Trouble with Emily Dickinson* and *The Education of Queenie McBride*, conceptually blends the schema for a lesbian creative writer with the schema for a female athlete. The lesbian athlete is an established type in fiction for adult readers. JJ is more 'butch', but she also excels in creative writing and English literature. She is the first protagonist I have found who overtly blends these

two divergent talents and can be compared and contrasted with gay character Rafe, also an athlete and creative writer, in Chapter Five. The third schema, which is embodied by Anna in *Kiss the Morning Star*, is the bisexual female creative writer schema. Anna briefly struggles with this label, which has a ‘whole different set of connotations’ (169), but she does not struggle with her experience of her own sexuality. Ultimately, even if she has experienced desire for Seth, she concludes that she is in love with Kat.

The six novels for young adults considered in this chapter re-write the traditional ‘Romeo and Juliet’ romance script with its tragic ending. The first significant revision is that the female protagonist falls in love with another female character. In three of the six novels, that is, *Dare, Truth or Promise*, *The Trouble with Emily Dickinson* and *Kiss the Morning Star*, the teenage lesbian couple is together at the close of the novel. Even if the particular relationship ends, as in *Love and Lies*, *The Education of Queenie McBride*, and *About a Girl*, the protagonist’s same-sex love and desire is textually constructed as an ongoing constant. The second significant revision is that the lesbian romance no longer ends in the death of one or both of the lesbian characters. They do not go bad, mad or fall in love with men. At the same time, the protagonists enact a specific version of the ‘creative achievement’ script when they are represented as creative writers. The narrative trajectory affirms and validates the lesbian creative writer schema and suggests that creative writing acts as a powerful buffer against adversity; that it is a transforming and enabling form of self-expression. Creativity functions here as a form of resilience against traumatic experiences. It also positions readers closely alongside the creative character. Louie in *Dare, Truth or Promise* uses her comedy writing to communicate pro-social concepts of acceptance. Her comedy is not at the expense of other women. JJ writes poems that condense the central emotional experiences in her life. She also processes the end of her first romantic relationship by writing a novel based on that love affair. Anna in *About a*

*Girl* and Anna in *Kiss the Morning Star* both write creatively as a way of coming to terms with trauma and enacting a script of recovery and ‘moving on’. Similarly, Marisol uses creative writing to work through thoughts on her adoption as well as the end of her first romantic and sexual relationship.

All five fictional creative writers (in the six novels) contradict the notion of male primacy in matters of comedy writing, literary creativity and travel writing. All five counter silence and withdrawal and instead gain voice, visibility and agency through their creative writing. They also build interpersonal and social relationships in the process. They refute the model of the ‘pen-penis writing on the virgin page’ (Gubar, 1981: 247), with the female as the passive creation who is denied intentionality and purpose. They also indirectly reject popular portrayals of male creative writers, such as Calvin in *Ruby Sparks*, in which Calvin controls the female character, Ruby, through his writing.

In contrast, the fictional female writers represented here are themselves the creators, defining who they are and who they want to be. Lesbian desire and sexuality is an integral part of their developmental experience and consciousness and, equally, a central part of each protagonist’s textual production. Lesbian love and sexuality are associated with nature and conveyed as natural experiences particularly in passages that represent the couple’s experience of sexuality. The lesbian character may have her first sexual experience in nature, for instance, in *Kiss the Morning Star*, Anna and Kat camp in the middle of woods in the North West. However, the lesbian couple is also embraced and accepted within a small town such as Dunedin (*Dare, Truth or Promise*) or Lismore (*About a Girl*) or a large city such as Richmond, Virginia (*The Trouble*) or Boston (*Love and Lies, The Education*).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Transformative Lesbian Cheerleaders and Dancers in Contemporary Teen Television and Film**

An ideal embodiment of normative girlhood and adolescent femininity in North American popular culture has traditionally been the white cheerleader. She stands for ideas of conventional femininity because she literally cheers with her body in a performance intended both to support and generate support for the male football team (Miles, 2005: 224). She can be thought of as a figure of ‘feminine purity, innocence and youthfulness’ (Miles, 2005: 228); on the other hand, with her skin-tight lycra outfits, short skirts and athletic moves, she can also be considered a figure of desirable feminine ‘sexuality and temptation’ (Miles, 2005: 228). As La'Tonya Rease Miles points out, the cheerleader is an ideal heroine in several conservative television series and films (2005: 224-232). However, she is also a ninja warrior in *Cheerleader Ninjas* (2002) and *Ninja Cheerleaders* (2008), an antagonist in *The Hot Chick* (2002) and in several<sup>19</sup> contemporary young adult films and television series, notably *Glee* (2009- ), she is also a lesbian. The lesbian and bisexual female cheerleader characters in *Glee* are also versatile and talented dancers who are able to dance in the ballroom style.

Similarly, the ballroom dancer can be thought of as an ideal embodiment of traditional femininity. She has appeared in a range of dance films, some aimed at young

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<sup>19</sup> *South of Nowhere* (2005-2008); *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, Seasons 5 and 6 (2005-2006); *Skins* (US version) 2011.

adult audiences and many at more general audiences. I include discussion of a film with two ballroom dancers because the lesbian dancer shares many attributes with the heterosexual female dancer and the lesbian ballroom dancer's love of dancing connects her with other dancers and the female peer group. The ballroom dance couple typically consists of a male dancer, who wears 'debonair tuxedos designed to convey economic success and physical prowess' (Leib and Bulman, 2009: 603), and the female dancer who wears 'delicate, sexually alluring evening gowns designed to convey physical beauty and emotional fragility' (Leib and Bulman, 2009: 603). In *Saving Face* (2004), one central lesbian character is both a ballet dancer and an expressive modern dancer and the lesbian couple first meet at a dance club in Flushing Meadow, New York. In *Red Doors* (2005), which was aimed at adults, two central young lesbian characters also dance together. Here, however, I consider the first dance film that I have been able to find that is both aimed at young adults and centres on a same-sex female ballroom dance couple.<sup>20</sup> If films have typically portrayed ballroom dancing as a haven for traditional gender relationships, this more recent film, *Leading Ladies* (2010), retains the generic conventions of the story whilst re-working the nature of the female ballroom dancer and the ballroom dance couple.

### **The New Lesbian Cheerleader and Dancer Schemas**

Jamie Babbit's *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999) was a turning-point in independent film for young adults in its depiction of a physically attractive teen protagonist, Megan, whose emerging subjectivity is lesbian but who shares many attributes and talents with heterosexual girls. Babbit has said that she made a conscious choice to frame the narrative

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<sup>20</sup> Judith Lynne Hanna (1988). *Dance, sex, and gender: Signs of identity, dominance, defiance, and desire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Hanna points out the cultural association in the United States between male dancers and homosexuality.

from a 'femme' perspective, as a counterpoint to two earlier young adult films which depicted the 'butch' perspective<sup>21</sup> (Dixon, 2004: 153). *But I'm a Cheerleader* revises the schema for young adult lesbian identity in its representation of a Christian lesbian teen who is at the same time a physically attractive cheerleader who likes to wear pink cashmere cardigans and pearl earrings. It also revises the schema for cheerleader because Megan's emerging sexuality is lesbian. Somewhat ironically, cheerleader Megan is sent away to a rehabilitation camp that is supposed to set her on the straight and narrow, but where girls sleep in one dormitory and boys in another. Nevertheless, Babbit's film is an independent film aimed at minority audiences in contrast to *Glee* and *Leading Ladies*, both of which have a broader appeal.

The schema for a Latina dancer has been established in mainstream film since at least the late 1990s and it is noteworthy here that the use of the terms 'Latina/o' and 'Latinidad' is gaining scholarly currency. Latina/o refers to any person currently living in the United States who is of Spanish-speaking heritage and originally from one of more than thirty Caribbean and Latin American countries. Latinidad is a concept based on the notion of pan-Latina/o solidarity and the understanding that Latinos or Hispanics share a common identity. The United States has, since 2000, witnessed a demographic shift in US society that has been popularly dubbed the 'browning of America' (Guzman and Valdivia, 2010: 309). As an example, Salma Hayek, who was born in Mexico, dances to music in such films as *54* (1998), *Dogma* (1999) and *Wild Wild West* (1999). The schema for a Latina dancer is already established in young adult television such as *High School Musical*, which was discussed in Chapter One. The Latina protagonist, Gabriella Montez, who excels at singing and dancing, is played by Vanessa Hudgens, who was born in California but whose mother's ethnicity is part Filipino, part Chinese and part Latina. The Latina

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<sup>21</sup> *The Incredibly True Story of Two Girls in Love* (1995) and *All Over Me* (1997).

ballroom dancer schema is already established in mainstream films for general audiences. Jennifer Lopez is a ballroom dance instructor in *Shall We Dance?* (2006). In *Glee*, Santana Lopez is a cheerleader and a dancer, but she only occasionally dances ballroom. In *Leading Ladies*, the central character is from an Italian-American family, not Latina, but nevertheless from a culturally Catholic family.

It is out of the schemas discussed above, which are already established and familiar to young adult audiences, that the two new schemas for young adult lesbian girls evolve. I consider lesbian cheerleaders and lesbian dancers, particularly ballroom dancers, as both schemas seem popular when adolescent lesbian characters are depicted on screen or when television series or films are produced with young adult audiences in mind. If our perceptions and understanding of the social world are shaped by schemas, that is, if we already hold a set of beliefs about people, events and situations, then new or newly revised schemas have the potential to influence attitudinal change and to update many of the assumed attributes about lesbian characters on screen, as well as their counterparts in real life. The first commonly held view is that lesbians exhibit gender atypical attributes, behaviours and physical characteristics (and gay males, equally, are believed to exhibit gender atypical attributes). The second commonly-held view is that lesbian subjectivity is exclusively shaped by lesbian desire and sexuality. Both these aspects of the lesbian schema are revised in the light of more recent films and television series, which suggest that, in contrast, lesbian characters may share many of the same attributes as heterosexual female characters, that is, lesbians are not inherently ‘masculine’ and gender non-conforming. More importantly, lesbian characters, as well as their real-world counterparts, experience subjectivity and intersubjectivity differently from heterosexual female characters because of their social positioning, which combines gender and sexuality, and, in these two texts, ethnicity.

The heterosexual view of lesbians or the lesbian stereotype is that they have ‘abusive fathers, have never had a steady boyfriend, never date men, and are rather unattractive’ (Viss and Burn, 1992: 171). In the representations considered here, the lesbian central characters and their individual girlfriends resist the negative stereotype in diverse ways.

### **Variations to the ‘romance’ and ‘coming-out’ Components of the ‘As You Like It’ Script**

The three most frequently occurring lesbian courtship scripts in lesbian fiction have been termed the ‘friendship’ script, the ‘romance’ script and the ‘sexual adventure’ script (Rose, Zand and Cini, 1993). The first, the friendship script, seems to be the most common script for lesbians in which the romance usually evolves out of a close emotionally intimate friendship between two females. The second distinct courtship script is the ‘romance’ script which ‘intertwines emotional intimacy and sexual attraction’ and in which initiation in the romance is ‘much more direct than in the friendship script’ (Rose, Zand and Cini, 1993: 75). Rose, Zand and Cini suggest that the romance may also progress ‘very quickly toward commitment’ (1993: 75), which is one of the ways in which fictional lesbian romances tend to differ from heterosexual ones. The third script ‘celebrates the pursuit of sexual pleasure’ (Rose, Zand and Cini, 1993: 78). Love and romance may be a part of the sexual encounter, but it is usually represented as ‘casual sex’ or ‘lust at first sight’ (Rose, Zand and Cini, 1993: 78). In *Glee*, Santana enacts the ‘romance’ script in her relationship with Brittany, and the ‘sexual adventure’ script in her brief encounter with Quinn. I shall return to her scripts later in this chapter. The romance script is modified when Santana enacts a script of sexual adventure and experimentation with Quinn, who at the outset of



*Glee*, is head cheerleader of the Cheerios and president of the celibacy club. Both of the courtship scripts performed by Santana are progressive, as the most frequently occurring lesbian courtship script is the ‘friendship’ script, that is, a romantic relationship which evolves out of a deep friendship between two females (Peplau, 1982).

*Glee* also varies the positive ‘coming-out’ script through the character of Santana Lopez. First, Santana does not voluntarily ‘come out’ to her family, but is warned that she is about to be ‘outed’; this prompts her to reveal her sexual orientation to her parents before they learn of it on television. This version of the ‘coming-out’ script suggests that Santana does not entirely control the disclosure of her sexual orientation to others. Second, Santana’s girlfriend, Brittany, is not characterised as a lesbian but as a bisexual, which adds a further dimension to the enactment of the ‘coming-out’ script. Bisexual characters on television are frequently negatively represented and are usually subjects of colour (Meyer, 2010: 372<sup>22</sup>); here the lesbian character is Latina and the bisexual character is from the dominant white culture. Brittany is positively represented and therefore does not conform to the bisexual stereotype. In *Leading Ladies*, Toni follows a more typical trajectory when she falls in love with Mona and comes out to her family and close friend.

### **The Lesbian Cheerleader and Ballroom Dancer as Agents of Social Change**

The cheerleader and ballroom dancing characters in these two texts enact a version of femininity that incorporates many aspects of what traditionally might be considered masculinity. They define themselves as athletes and dancers and have their own reasons for performing. Santana Lopez, in *Glee*, is highly active and competitive; at the outset of the

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<sup>22</sup> Michaela Meyer suggests that the bisexual female character is usually there to ‘support’ the white heterosexual female character. Meyer’s findings are in contrast to Kokkola’s study of young adult fiction (2013) which found that subjects of colour were usually ‘victims of sexual violence’.

series she would like to be head cheerleader of the Cheerios and later achieves that position. She is a member of the glee club, New Directions and, in the first season, a member of the celibacy club. In *Glee*'s second season, she nominates herself for prom queen. She studies conscientiously and after graduation is offered a place at university. Toni Campari, who is also highly active in *Leading Ladies*, incorporates the desire to lead into her version of femininity. She is perfectly able to dance the female role in the couple but prefers to lead and in her fantasies which are visualised on screen she wears the masculine ballroom dance costume. Towards the close of the film, Toni, with a new short haircut and dressed in black tuxedo, presents herself at a ballroom dance competition together with her female dance partner. Both Santana and Toni are creative in the ways that they cheer or dance and gain agency, recognition and personal empowerment through their creative talents.

When they enact lesbian desire and same-sex romantic relationships, the cheerleader/dancer and the ballroom dancer may be agents of social change. The representation of a lesbian cheerleader or ballroom dancer perspective is a recent development and suggests changes in social attitudes towards non-normative sexuality and an increasing social acceptance of lesbian sexuality. The representation of 'transgressive or alienated states of being has up until quite recently usually had a conservative social function' (McCallum, 1999: 128). McCallum suggests that actions that are counter to social norms are not in themselves transgressive or conformist in a trans-historical way, but are labelled as such in relation to 'existing social codes and structures, these codes being subject to social and historical change' (1999: 128). McCallum's writing dates from 1999 and, as she points out at the time, more recent texts that included transgressive representations were already beginning to have a progressive social function. The cheerleader and the dancer's lesbian desire is still depicted as a breach or rupture of

established social norms and therefore transgressive, but the texts enact positive ways of being and, rather than reinforcing a conservative status quo, make it possible for audiences to be aligned with the experience and point of view of the lesbian cheerleader, dancer and lesbian ballroom dancer.

### **The Changing Face of Cheerleading and Ballroom Dancing**

Cheerleading in North American high schools remains one of the highest status activities for girls and, arguably, one of the most prominently visible spaces that they are able to occupy with general social approval. This section briefly considers the changing history of cheerleading by way of providing a background context to this aspect of North American culture. In contemporary culture, cheerleading is seen as an almost exclusively female activity and there are nearly four million cheerleaders in North American schools and colleges (Adams and Bettis, 2003: 76). Mary Ellen Hanson argues that the contemporary cheerleader symbolises ‘youthful prestige, wholesome attractiveness, peer leadership and popularity’ while simultaneously conveying an opposite set of messages such as ‘mindless enthusiasm, shallow boosterism, objectified sexuality, and promiscuous availability’ (1995: 2). Cheerleaders are frequently perceived as ‘brides of the football heroes’ because their heterosexuality is assumed and in the process they come to symbolise at least one ideal normative adolescent femininity. Furthermore, the cheerleader as the eternally optimistic and all-American girl is perceived to embody the essence of traditional American patriotism.

Until recently, the cheerleader has, as Adams and Bettis point out (2003) , received very little scholarly attention. When discussed at all in academic research, cheerleading has typically been presented as an activity that sidelines or even ignores young girls. Natalie

Adams and Pamela Bettis have argued that cheerleading for some girls represents a ‘liberating shift in normative femininity while simultaneously perpetuating a norm that does not threaten dominant social values’ (2003: 74). More recently, Laura Grindstaff and Emily West (2010) have argued that cheerleading has become an athletic and a competitive activity and is consequently now more gender-mixed. Amy Moritz (2011) suggests that cheerleaders have made cheerleading a sport ‘on their own terms’.

When cheerleading began in the late 1880s, it was an all-male activity and continued to be so until the 1930s (Adams and Bettis, 2003: 76). Male cheerleaders displayed the masculine characteristics of strong leadership and athleticism and in the process came to represent desirable masculinity (Adams and Bettis, 2003: 76). During the Second World War, girls began to enter a number of cheerleading squads, although after 1945 several colleges banned women from cheerleading in an attempt to keep squads male (Adams and Bettis, 2003: 77). According to Hanson’s cultural history of cheerleading (1995), the University of Tennessee banned women from cheerleading as late as 1955, and Harvard University did not allow female cheerleaders into their squads until 1971. Nevertheless, cheerleading as an activity was changing, and in the 1950s the important attributes or characteristics for cheerleaders were now ‘manners, cheerfulness, and good disposition’ (Kutz, 1955: 310) – traits at the time associated with young girls. The nature of the cheerleader continued to change as a consequence of second-wave feminist activism in the late 1960s and 1970s. At this point, the cheerleader became more athletic and jumps and pyramid-building were introduced into the performance. A further shift in the nature of cheerleading took place in the early 1980s when state and national cheerleading competitions were introduced in the United States (Adams and Bettis, 2003: 77). The first national high school cheerleading competition was in 1981 and in 1983 ESPN first televised the event (Adams and Bettis, 2003: 115). By the 1990s, competitive and athletic

cheerleading squads were being formed which cheered and competed in their own right (Adams and Bettis, 2003: 78). The discourse of girl as the cheerful, biddable and polite supporter of the male football team had been replaced by a physically active, athletic and competitive girl who competes against other girls, as in *Bring It On*.

Equally, the female ballroom dancer has been a conservative figure symbolic of traditional and desirable femininity. She is the follower in the ballroom dance couple, with the man typically keeping his sword arm 'free' to protect her from any threat to her safety. The term 'ballroom dancing' evokes dancing for the socially privileged, with formal ballrooms, black tie and evening dress, in contrast to folk dancing, which was originally performed by the masses for the masses. Contemporary ballroom dance has its roots in the 1920s and in its modern form is particularly associated with the emergence of new forms of music that developed in the 1930s and 1940s. There are ten partnered dances which come under the umbrella of ballroom dancing, including the tango, the waltz, the foxtrot, West Coast swing, salsa, rumba and the mambo. In competition ballroom, as opposed to social ballroom, dancers are judged by a panel of experts and awarded marks for their poise, the hold or frame, musicality and expression, timing, body alignment, foot and leg action and presentation. The combination of steps, music, costume and setting provide a traditional rather than a contemporary experience of dance.

Ballroom historians initially described the early 1960s as the end of the ballroom age and rock and roll as the new music which ushered in a new dance for the era (Buckman 1979; Malnig 1995, 2009). Many men and women in the United States and Britain rebelled against the norms of traditional masculinity and femininity and viewed ballroom dancing as unfashionable and out of step with contemporary attitudes towards gender roles for men and women. In spite of these challenges, ballroom dancing underwent a revival or renaissance in the early 1980s (Malnig, 1993: 138) and current membership of the United

States Amateur Ballroom Dance Association has multiplied approximately five-fold since 1990 (Leib and Bulman, 2009: 603). Leib and Bulman argue that in spite of appearances that might suggest conformity to traditional femininity, 'many female ballroom dancers today are progressive egalitarians who incorporate an array of feminine and masculine characteristics into their daily gender identities' (2009: 605). Female dancers combine elements of traditional and progressive femininities. They may be economically independent, successful in their chosen career, lesbian and also willing to follow the lead dancer. Thus Leib and Bulman argue that ballroom dancers should not necessarily be viewed as traditionalists.

In Leib and Bulman's interviews of female ballroom dancers in the progressive San Francisco Bay area, twenty-three per cent were 'less bound by traditional ballroom conventions' (2009: 607). In one of their examples, two women danced with men, then partnered with each other. One woman assumed the role of leader while the other assumed the role of follower: 'The female leader assumed the traditional mannerisms of a male leader including confident gaze and erect posture' (Leib and Bulman, 2009: 607). But after ten minutes in the role, they 'abruptly traded places' (Leib and Bulman, 2009: 607). The former follower now became the leader and took on all the mannerisms, moves and steps associated with the more traditionally masculine role in the dance (Leib and Bulman, 2009: 607). In an interview of a lesbian ballroom dance couple, both dancers wore men's black shoes and colourful flowing skirts to create a visually hybrid representation of both 'assertiveness and passivity' (Leib and Bulman, 2009: 608). Moves and steps that have traditionally been regarded as decorative or passive, such as spins, turns and flourishes, are now actively re-interpreted and regarded as agentic, demonstrating technical skill, strength, timing, co-ordination and control of the body. These moves are performed by the female who wishes to express herself, not to gain admiration and attention from a male. The

female ballroom dancer uses her own version of the dance as an avenue of self-expression and individuality, expanding herself through her creative talent and through the talent of another dancer (Leib and Bulman, 2009: 609).

As Leib and Bulman's (2009) research attests, the ballroom dancer choreographs her own gender identity and combines her own complex versions of femininity and masculinity both on and off the dance floor. Similarly, male ballroom dancers incorporate aspects of alternative or progressive masculinity into their interpretations of ballroom dance, such as creativity, emotional expression and artistry (Leib and Bulman, 2009: 615). They perform a softer, more inclusive version of masculinity. Almost every college campus in the United States now has a ballroom dancing club and some colleges, for instance, Brigham Young University, a conservative Mormon university, offer degrees in ballroom dancing (Leib and Bulman, 2009: 603). Many public schools also offer ballroom dancing as part of their physical education curriculum. In other words, young adults are not only watching other ballroom dancers, they are also dancing themselves and actively re-interpreting the traditional roles of the ballroom dance couple.

The presence of cheerleaders, ballroom dancers and dancers in general in the audiences of the two focus texts, *Glee* and *Leading Ladies*, makes it more likely that audience members will engage with the cheerleaders, dancers and performances that they see on screen. When on-screen dances are performed by lesbian cheerleaders and lesbian ballroom dancers, the dancers potentially become agents of social change, as the next section will argue.

## **The Visible and Kinetic Female Body in Television and Film**

When Santana Lopez and her girlfriend Brittany S. Pierce perform a cheer or a dance in *Glee*, or when protagonist Toni and her girlfriend Mona perform a dance in *Leading Ladies*, the audience registers those particular movements in their own brains and bodies. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty foregrounds, our understanding of the world is always the ‘experience of a being with a body caught up in a finite and limited situation’ (Moran, 2000: 418). We cannot perceive the world from any other position other than the one that we physically embody. Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of experience is in contrast to previous accounts which on the one hand either prioritised rationalism and idealism, or on the other hand emphasised empiricism and behavioural science (Moran, 2000: 391-434). Each character on screen is, self-evidently, embodied, as is each audience member. The particular embodiment of a character may have a significant impact on a teen audience.

The actions that viewers see on screen are ‘mirrored’ in the brain by mirror neurons, or ‘brain cells that activate when a primate does an action but also when a primate observes an action’ (Landay, 2012: 130). It is highly engaging and even energising to watch performances of cheerleading, dance, ballroom dance and movement – whether they are on the screen or live – and those same performances are even more engaging for those who have performed the same action themselves: ‘Your mirror neuron system becomes more active the more expert you are at an observed skill ... and the actions you mirror most strongly are the ones you know best’ (Blakeslee and Blakeslee, 2008: 169).

Therefore female cheerleaders and dancers in the audience will have a particularly strong, engaged and energising response when they watch Santana and Brittany, or Toni and Mona dance on screen. Those who excel at these creative activities will have the most intense ‘mirror neuron’ response and that response will be partly shaped by gender. For



example, research has demonstrated that ballerinas have a stronger physiological or embodied response to other ballerinas and that male ballet dancers respond most actively to other male ballet dancers (Blakeslee and Blakeslee, 2008: 169). Blakeslee and Blakeslee's research directly suggests that identification is based on similarity of experience and of brain and body response. Even if you are not a cheerleader or dancer, mirror neurons in the brain still fire, but in a more general way and 'related to your experience of balance, or running and jumping' (Landay, 2012: 30), that is, in a less intense and less engaged way than the mirror neurons of an expert cheerleader or dancer or even an average one. This finding has significant implications for the effect that these performances potentially have on young adult audiences and the possibility of influencing attitudinal and hence social change.

In her analysis of the silent flapper film *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928), Landay argues that this film created a new aesthetic of the visual body, which was reinscribed through movement and dance (2012: 129-136). The flapper spectator 'dances' along with the film's heroine, Diana, and with Joan Crawford, who plays Diana (2012: 131). The spectator's 'dance' is an interior and neurological one and hence, even though it is not physical, it is nevertheless embodied. The spectator stays seated in the audience but is 'moved' and this movement is deeply connected to her emotions and sense of empathy: 'The flapper spectator's mirrored kinobody - that interior, neurological, not physical but still embodied reaction, so connected to emotions and empathy - dances along with Diana, with Joan Crawford' (Landay, 2012: 131).

Similarly, Landay suggests that the female dancing body as a 'site of kinaesthetic femininity' that runs counter to tradition is not limited to Jazz Age silent-film flappers. She makes reference to Lucille Ball's comedic performance of the Charleston in the middle of an episode entitled 'The Ballet' from *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951-1957). Ball's dance

performance extended the flapper's aesthetic performance onto the television screen and into the home. Ball's use of her body in *I Love Lucy* introduced a female performer who disrupted 1950s ideals of femininity and domesticity into a domestic context (Landay, 2012: 132). She defied a number of taboos, including dancing as a pregnant woman at a time when to say the word 'pregnant' in public was still not socially sanctioned. Correspondingly, Naya Rivera's embodiment of Santana Lopez in *Glee* and Laurel Vail's embodiment of Toni Campari in *Leading Ladies* incorporate a new aesthetic based on the lesbian body that equally disrupts dominant hegemonic ideals of normative femininity. This is because, although Santana and Toni are attractive to male viewers, their characters are not romantically interested in males but experience desire for another female subject and express that desire on screen.

The mirror neuron response that takes place in the brain during a dance or any athletic performance also involves a set of mirror neurons that are deeply connected to the viewer's emotions and sense of empathy. In his discussion of empathy in relation to fictional characters, Blakey Vermeule makes a similar point and cites Gallese and his discussion of mirror neurons in humans (2010: 40). A mirror neuron response in empathy reflects 'an experience-based, pre-reflective and automatic form of understanding of other minds ... The interdependence between self and other that mirror neurons allow shapes the social interactions between people, where the concrete encounter between self and other becomes the shared existential meaning that connects them deeply' (Iacoboni, 2008: 265). This type of empathy which blurs the boundaries between self and other differs markedly from a conscious attempt to perceive and understand another person's point of view or take another person's perspective. If cheerleaders and dancers typically perform a powerful and influential form of adolescent femininity, then the strategy of making a popular cheerleader

or dancer also lesbian again blends and combines two schemas and, as suggested earlier, changes made within a cluster are usually ‘non-threatening’.

Each text introduces the female character and establishes her creative talent with viewers before she herself realises that she is lesbian and before she enacts the ‘falling in love’ component of the romance script. Viewers are therefore directed to align themselves closely and pre-consciously with the female character, who leads not with her sexual orientation but with her creative talent. The inclusion of lesbian characters who are successful cheerleaders, dancers and, in the case of Santana and Brittany, also successful singers, creates the potential for emotional and cognitive change in the audience. Those girls who typically might be the most hostile and prejudiced towards lesbian girls are also the very girls who are most likely to influence others. Here they are confronted with two texts that will direct them to re-consider their negative and stereotyped view of lesbian girls as they identify positively with Santana and Brittany’s performances as cheerleaders and dancers, or with Toni and Mona as ballroom dancers. They are more likely to engage and respond to Santana and Toni’s performances in spite of themselves as their brains and bodies automatically and pre-reflexively respond to the movement, athleticism, dance and technical skills that they see on screen. Aspects of the performances are communicated using a range of techniques such as overhead shots and close-ups of faces, feet and legs.

### **An Intersectional Approach to *Glee* and *Leading Ladies***

I therefore concentrate on two texts, *Glee* and *Leading Ladies*, in both of which female central characters self-identify as emerging lesbian subjects. I draw upon the concept of ‘intersectionality’ as a critical tool to analyse how lesbian subjectivities are represented and made visible filmically. The term ‘intersectionality’ was first coined in 1989 by legal

scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who focused on the intersection between race and gender in relation to the law's 'purported colour-blindness, neutrality, and objectivity' (Nash, 2008: 2). Crenshaw argued that black women who have been victims of sexual assault or domestic violence, for example, have to assert either race-based or gender-based discrimination claims; the female claimant can choose only one of these. As Crenshaw pointed out at the time, 'The existing legal apparatus does not allow the court to see that black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men' (Crenshaw, 1989: 149). Her theoretical contribution draws attention to the ways that social categories such as race and gender interact or 'intersect' in particular ways. Crenshaw's analysis has enabled others to examine the subjectivity of intersectional subjects and to develop intersectional instruments to deal with discrimination and disadvantage. Intersectional theory therefore refuses the single-axis approach employed by many feminist and anti-racist scholars and instead analyses 'the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's.... experiences' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1244).

The awareness that subjectivity is shaped by interrelated vectors of gender, race/ethnicity and class, or what Floya Anthias has termed the 'big three' (2013: 4), has influenced black feminist scholarship for at least two decades. Within the last five years, however, intersectionality has been employed more widely and now addresses such social categories as sexuality (see Taylor et al., 2011), disability (see Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009) and faith.<sup>23</sup> Researchers' decisions to focus on categories beyond the 'big three' reflect changing priorities within specific socio-historical contexts. Anthias suggests that intersectional framing highlights 'divisions amongst women' (2013: 4). She draws

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<sup>23</sup> Meekosha, H. And Shuttleworth, R. 'What's so critical about critical disability studies?' *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 15.1 (2009): 47-76. Taylor, Yvette. 'Sexualities and Class', *Sexualities*, 14: 3 (2011). Anthias, F. 'The Intersectional Turn in Feminist Theory', *European Journal of Women's Studies*. 20 (2013): 233-248.

attention to the ‘pitfalls associated with intersectionality’, which include the listing of multiple differences, and also points out that it is as yet unclear how many differences should be incorporated into an intersectional analysis (Anthias, 2013: 5). The Equality and Human Rights Commission in the United Kingdom currently considers a maximum of nine differences (Anthias, 2013: 16), beyond which it is difficult to speak about ‘groups’ of subjects who share commonalities. More often, differences and inequalities are limited to three.

In my specific use of the concept in relation to two on-screen protagonists, I limit the differences to three, that is, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. I would also underline here that these social categories and divisions should not be treated as fixed elements or universals, but are constructed within social practice that takes place within particular spatial and temporal contexts. This is not to deny that these categories are ‘part of the social landscape’ (Anthias, 2013: 8).

The two central intersectional subjects under consideration are multiply marginalised, that is, their gender intersects with other social categories such as sexuality and ethnicity to disadvantage them in multiple ways. The concept of intersectionality enables an analysis of sexual and ethnic differences in the two very different on-screen representations without turning it into a listing of differences. It should be noted, however, that being able to analyse a Latina lesbian cheerleader/dancer and an Italian-American lesbian ballroom dancer in itself indicates a recent and significant social shift. The sustained visible presence of these young adult characters within the context of television and film for young adults also suggests a recent shift towards including voices and perspectives that have traditionally been silent or absent.

Several questions arise from an intersectional approach and I draw on Floya Anthias' summary of the processes of identity formation to formulate these questions. In representations of intersectional subjects, such as Latina lesbian cheerleader/dancers and Italian-American lesbian dancers, do the depicted subjects use their multiple identities to interpret the world around them? What is it that determines which aspect of identity is to the fore in any particular moment, or are all categories (gender, sexuality and ethnicity) always engaged simultaneously (Nash, 2008: 11)? What is the relationship between the different forms of power that are imposed on the processes of identity? I argue that when the two subjects express their same-sex sexuality, other aspects or facets of their individual multiple identities also emerge.

Intersectionality invites researchers to re-valorise those subjects who are multiply-marginalised, as they have highly individual and distinctive perspectives to offer. Intersectional theorists or those using an intersectional framework can draw on the atypical or non-normative position of multiply-marginalised subjects to fashion new points of view and understanding and even an empathic vision of justice and equality. A number of scholars, including Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams and Adrien Wing, have argued that these 'multiple consciousness' perspectives should be considered, if not prioritised, when 'crafting a normative vision of a just society' (Nash, 2008: 3). I follow Anthias' suggestion to focus on feminist and anti-racist concerns, but given the central topic of my thesis, which examines representations of non-normative sexuality, much of the discussion centres on the female subject's lesbian sexuality and the representation of that sexuality on screen. In my analysis of both texts, I argue that creativity, specifically the ability to cheer and to dance, enables the lesbian character to overcome a potentially negative narrative and to achieve an agentic subjectivity. The two texts under consideration value at least four

female voices, the two central lesbian characters and their girlfriends, all of whom have traditionally been positioned in inferior relation to dominant social norms.

The figures of the female cheerleader/dancer and female ballroom dancer are always subject to change. Cheerleaders and cheerleading squads have typically been regarded as secondary to the main interest of football, which has traditionally been performed by males. In the post-feminist *Bring It On*, however, the football team is only there in the opening sequence and then ignored and the female protagonist falls in love not with a male footballer but with a male musician. In *Glee*, the football team is again secondary to the choir, New Directions, which produces the central performances. The cheerleader Santana Lopez, who is Latina and not from the mainstream culture, falls in love with another female cheerleader and, as the series progresses, she also develops her talent for dancing. In *Leading Ladies*, the female ballroom dancer falls in love with another female dancer. Her gender and sexuality combine to create what might potentially be a multiply-marginalised position, but dance enables the central lesbian characters in *Glee* and *Leading Ladies* to overcome that position. Their particular bodily-kinaesthetic talent, in combination with that of their respective girlfriends as well as other dancers, enables them to express their individual sense of self and lesbian subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

### **The Latina Lesbian Cheerleader/Dancer in *Glee***

*Glee* is a multi award-winning television series predominantly produced for young adults and watched by mainstream global audiences worldwide. All the glee club members sing and dance, and therefore all the principal characters are creative. It is almost impossible to separate dance from music, but I concentrate in this chapter on dance. *Glee* also features the school's football team, the Titans, its cheerleading squad, the Cheerios, led by coach,

Sue Sylvester, and the school counsellor, Emma Pillsbury. There are three teen characters who are initially introduced as cheerleaders on the Cheerios, namely, Quinn Fabray, who is captain, and her sidekicks, Santana Lopez and Brittany Pierce. In my discussion of *Glee*, I shall focus on Santana and her developing romantic relationship with Brittany, in which she ultimately enacts lesbian subjectivity and romance. Santana's name is symbolic; it is unisex and means 'holy'. Her surname links her with perhaps one of the best-known Latina performers in the United States, Jennifer Lopez. Santana and Brittany are the best female dancers in the glee club, a point acknowledged by other club members, and in their relationship, they enact both lesbian subjectivity and intersubjectivity. I shall look again at *Glee* in Chapter Six in the context of gay male characters who sing.

The scripting of what George Butte terms the 'stagings of *eros*' is particularly progressive in *Glee*, as adolescent lesbian characters are still only infrequently represented in mainstream television and, when they are visible, they rarely direct and shape their own scripts in the deliberate way that Santana does. Each season of *Glee* contains multiple episodes, and each episode is forty-five minutes long, so there is clearly not space here to consider the details of the television narrative. Briefly however, Santana Lopez is introduced in *Glee* in 2009 and her subjectivity develops and evolves over three seasons of the series until she graduates in 2012 from the fictional William McKinley High School in Lima, Ohio. After graduation, Santana initially accepts a full cheerleading scholarship to study at the University of Louisville, but leaves university before completing her degree and moves to New York to live with two other former glee club members, Rachel and Kurt. As *Glee* has positioned Rachel and Kurt at the top of the social and creative hierarchy since early in the first season, Santana's move to New York and the series' alignment of Santana with Kurt and Rachel suggests her equivalent move to the top of the



hierarchy. Santana's stated intention at the close of 2013 is to study dance with a view to pursuing a career in the performing arts.

At the outset of *Glee*, Santana is sixteen years old and her script is that of the popular and desirable cheerleader. The cheerleading squad, the Cheerios, is introduced in the opening sequence of the first episode of the series ('Pilot', 2 September, 2009) and its cheerleading performances continue to feature throughout each season. In the sequence analysed here, one that lasts for twenty-five seconds, there are at least eight different shots of the squad as it trains outside on the school's football pitch. The camera begins with a close-up of a female African-American face, suggesting that this is a progressive cheerleading squad. It cuts rapidly to another shot in which cheerleaders perform backward flips, followed by a brief shot which shows the squad of eighteen cheerleaders in a triangular formation. The camera moves lower and pans horizontally as the male cheerleaders perform twisting cartwheels and tumble turns. Then there is a vertical pan of a girl being thrown up into the air and turning a full somersault as she descends. Another rapid cut then shows a different formation and the camera following lines of female cheerleaders moving towards the camera, while the male cheerleaders tumble and turn away from it. (The Cheerios usually is made up of female cheerleaders only.) The camera's next angle is higher and includes three girls standing on the shoulders of male cheerleaders with each girl holding her ankle in a sustained high leg pose. The final cut moves from cartwheels and tumble turns to a pyramid formation, from which one girl falls off. The music, which is contemporary hip-hop, is a rapidly speaking male voice repeating 'you can do it'. The average shot length in this sequence is 3.5 seconds and the entire scene is cut at a rapid pace.

From *Glee*'s second episode, 'Showmance' (9 September, 2009), it becomes apparent that Santana is not only an excellent cheerleader but that she can also sing and

dance. The glee club performance in the school assembly encourages the trio of cheerleaders, Quinn, Santana and Brittany, to try out for the glee club. They choose to audition with a cover version of Dionne Warwick's 1960s 'I Say a Little Prayer'. As new choir director Will Schuester says to them, 'Well, let's see what you got', he switches on the CD player which sits on top of the grand piano and provides realistic background music for the girls' performance. As the introductory music begins, they break into a formation of Santana and Brittany as a pair either side of Quinn, the lead. Each girl stands with her hands on her hips and moves her hips in time to the music in a conventional performance of teenage femininity. The camera moves smoothly between the girls' dance moves and cut-aways of Will Schuester's reaction shots. He clearly enjoys their performance. Quinn, Santana and Brittany use hand gestures to synchronise with the song's lyrics, so that 'the moment I wake up' is accompanied by the girls flicking their hands up on the word 'up' and 'before I put on my make-up' is accompanied by the gestures which suggest using a mirror and a brush on the word 'make-up'. When the girls sing 'I say a little prayer for you', they extend their arms and point towards Will Schuester on 'you'. At this point, the girls sing as if he is the object of their affections, a gesture that he is happy to receive. This scene is echoed when the three visit McKinley after graduation and perform a similar number in formation, the Supremes' 'Come See About Me' (1964), to the glee club ('Thanksgiving': 29 November, 2012). In this musical number, the three girls perform three very diverse ways of being female.

Like Cady Heron, who infiltrates 'The Plastics' in *Mean Girls*, discussed in Chapter One, the three cheerleaders or the 'unholy trinity' are ordered to infiltrate the glee club, spy on it from the inside and report back to Sue Sylvester, whose intention is to destroy Will Schuester, her rival, and even the glee club itself. In other words, Santana and Brittany are in Quinn's shadow here and Quinn herself is compromised by the

cheerleading coach. They all lack agency and self-determination at this early point in the series. But, as the intertextual reference to *Mean Girls* makes clear, the girls are involved in a form of relational aggression or bullying, even as it takes place between adults, here between Sue Sylvester and Will Schuester.

The split-screen telephone call filmic technique, employed in *Mean Girls* to suggest how rumours begin, are distorted and circulated, is used again in *Glee*. In the opening few minutes of 'Sectionals' (9 December, 2009), the split screen illustrates a conversation between members of the glee club as to how Rachel must not discover the true identity of the father of Quinn's baby. The screen is split into four sections (one of the mobile phone conversations in *Mean Girls* splits the screen in five), but there are six separate glee club members involved in the conversation, including Santana and Brittany. A throwaway remark by Santana that sex is not to be confused with 'dating' leads Brittany to add that if sex were to be confused with 'dating', then she would be dating Santana. In other words, Brittany reveals that the two have a sexual relationship. Nobody directly responds to Brittany's revelation at this point because they are preoccupied with keeping a secret from Rachel.

The romance develops a 'bug' in the script when Brittany would like their romantic relationship to become public. In Season Two, Santana is not yet willing to enact the 'coming out' script and her public denial of the relationship means that the romance does not develop smoothly. 'Duets' (12 October, 2010) literally embodies and enacts the concept of deep intersubjectivity between two people. It was originally broadcast a full year after *Glee* first introduced Santana and Brittany. Will Schuester's assignment is for glee club members to perform a duet with another classmate and he offers a prize for the best performance which will be vouchers for dinner at a local restaurant called Breadstix. He suggests a duet should resemble a good marriage, in which two voices 'come together

and become one, complement each other and push each other to be better'. But Santana refuses to sing publically with Brittany in 'Duets', as this would function metonymically as a version of the 'coming out' script.

At the beginning of the same episode, however, there is a scene that enacts same-sex desire on screen as the opening credits appear. The scene unfolds in Brittany's bedroom, which looks like a typical teenage girl's room. In a single-shot sequence, the camera pans from right to left along a series of framed photographs of Brittany as a young child, an older child, a cheerleading tween and a young teen. It then briefly pauses on four feet, which are in white ankle socks and entwined. As the camera continues to move up the bed, it becomes clear that Santana, who is in her cheerleading costume, is lying across Brittany and kissing her neck.



Figure 1. Brittany and Santana in Brittany's bedroom.

As she lies on her bed, Brittany refers to 'sweet lady kisses' and 'a nice change from all that scissoring' (lesbian non-penetrative sex) and the music in the background is the

distinctive piano refrain or leitmotif used whenever something significant and genuine is being said or taking place. It indirectly links the relationship at this point to the sincere and long-lasting relationship between Rachel and Finn and the relationship between gay couple Kurt and Blaine. Brittany, who is also in her cheerleading costume, is focused on the glee club's assignment, but Santana rejects her suggestion that they perform a Melissa Etheridge number, insisting that she 'doesn't want to sing about making lady babies' with Brittany. The scene suggests that Santana at this point is only willing to enact same-sex desire in the private space of Brittany's bedroom.

The tragic 'falling-in-love' script is not revisited here, but neither does *Glee* simplify the narrative script of Santana and Brittany's relationship. In 'Duets', viewers recognise how one emotion is transformed into another and how different emotions can trigger a change in the direction of the script (Oatley, 2004). Rejected by Santana, who refuses to perform with her, Brittany asks Artie if he would like to perform a duet with her. Artie, who is disabled and moves around in a wheelchair, loses his virginity to Brittany in 'Duets', which creates a significant and long-lasting bond between them. In a much later episode, Santana does seem willing for her relationship with Brittany to become public, but Santana re-writes and re-directs the script again when she persuades closet gay 'jock' Dave Karovsky to be her 'beard' and for them to stand as a couple for school prom queen and king.<sup>24</sup> Santana is represented as a confused teen but her ultimate intention at this point in the series is to win the prom queen title and, in the process, secure social popularity. She also wants to win back Brittany from Artie and believes that this will be easier if she is prom queen. However, her plan fails; Karovsky wins the prom king title but she is not named queen. Her failure to secure the title suggests that she has made a mistake by

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<sup>24</sup> I shall return to Dave Karovsky in Chapter Six, as he bullies gay character Kurt, and is responsible for Kurt transferring to another school.

remaining in the closet, as at the close of Season Two, she is neither prom queen nor with Brittany.

The 'coming out' component of the positive 'As You Like It' script is varied when *Glee* demonstrates some of the negative consequences of being 'outed', that is, the lesbian subject does not choose when and how she comes out of the closet, but her sexuality is disclosed to others by a third person. A full two years after they were first introduced in *Glee*, Santana and Brittany are a romantic couple at school in 'Pot O' Gold' (1 November, 2011) but Santana has not yet told her parents that she is in a lesbian relationship. Cheerleading coach Sue Sylvester apologises to Santana as she warns her that she will be 'outed' on television by one of Sue's political opponents. Santana, clearly distressed, decides to come out to her parents before they see her being 'outed' on television. She also comes out to her grandmother in a scene that takes place at her grandmother's home ('I Kissed a Girl', 29 November 2011). *Glee* does not simply splice a few words of Spanish into the English conversation; the entire conversation between Santana and her grandmother or 'abuela' takes place in Spanish and is subtitled for viewers. Viewers are positioned to empathise with Santana as she is immediately and harshly disowned by her more traditional Latin grandmother, who insists that Santana should never have spoken directly to her about the subject even if she intended to enact a lesbian relationship. Their relationship, which up until that moment had always been close, is not yet repaired.

Until 2009, the Latina or Hispanic female character on screen in North American films and television was frequently a domestic maid. As an adolescent Latina character, Santana is genuinely ground-breaking and progressive. If one of the most frequent Latin or Hispanic female characters in North American film and television is the domestic maid who services the affluent white, middle-class family (Valdivia, 2010: 92), then Santana is a genuinely innovative and progressive character. Valdivia suggests that the Latina domestic

maid follows in the footsteps of the African-American ‘mammy’ figure (2010: 921), who was established in North American film in the 1930s and persists even more recently, for instance, in *Forrest Gump* (1994). The Latina maid also appears in teen films such as *Clueless*. Ramirez Berg identifies three further Latina types in Hollywood film: the ‘harlot’, the ‘female clown’, and the ‘dark lady’ (2002: 70, 73, 76). As with male types, these diverse character schemas may overlap with one another.

Latina girls, stereotypically, have been represented as poorly educated, of low socio-economic status and they are often represented as lazy. Even contemporary filmic representations, such as Eden in *Blue Crush* (2002), or Carmen in *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants* (2005), are not as progressive as *Glee*’s representation of Santana. Her role is more central, primary, more active and transgressive; she has talent and her own quest, she drives her own scripts (albeit not always successfully) and, simultaneously, she expands the ethnic register represented on screen.

As her lesbian sexuality begins to emerge publically in Season Three, so too does her Latin subjectivity. Naya Rivera, the actor who plays Santana, has described her ethnic background as half Puerto Rican, a quarter African-American and a quarter German. Her ethnicity is immediately apparent on screen through the colour of her skin, but in the third season, it also becomes foregrounded through her use of the Spanish language, as well as through Santana’s dance styles and musical preferences. Santana’s girlfriend, Brittany S. Pierce, is aligned with her namesake, Britney Spears, early in the series, while Santana is frequently associated with the music and dance of Madonna, another Catholic performer, if not a Latin American one. The relationship between Santana and Brittany, which is connected through music to Madonna and Britney Spears respectively, may also make indirect reference to the kiss exchanged between Madonna and Britney on stage in concert

at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2003. Madonna and Britney are also celebrated for their dancing and Madonna was a professional dancer before she became a singer.

Latina ethnicity and Santana's cultural knowledge are thematically developed in several episodes, particularly 'The First Time' (8 November, 2011), which concentrates on the production of the school musical *West Side Story* and 'The Spanish Teacher' (7 February, 2012). *West Side Story* (1961), which can be described as a teenage-oriented film, is a significant text for both focus texts in this chapter, as well as both texts in Chapter Six.<sup>25</sup> Santana plays Puerto Rican character Anita in the school musical and in the pro-American musical number, 'America', she dances and sings in a Hispanic style. On stage, Santana, as Anita, wears a red halter-neck dress with full petticoats, red lipstick and high heels. She twirls, rustles her skirts, clicks her fingers, does high kicks and claps as she dances solo and with the rest of the Puerto Rican girls in the 'Sharks'. Stacy Wolf suggests that the dance here expands and defines the meaning of femininity (2012: 218). The musical number certainly performs femininity, nuanced by Santana's lesbian subjectivity.

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<sup>25</sup> Teens in real world situations are likely to encounter *West Side Story* in high school English lessons, class discussions of Shakespeare, drama classes and possibly through discussion of contemporary films that intertextually reference *West Side Story*.





Figure 2. Santana as Anita in the school production of *West Side Story*.

Glee club director, William Schuester, is also the school's Spanish teacher, but Santana, who is far more knowledgeable about Hispanic language and culture than he is, effectively encourages him to re-think his position during 'The Spanish Teacher'. Schuester's two muddled performances during this episode are 'failed' performances and cause him to feel shame in the eyes of others while also being comic to viewers. His first performance is a clichéd musical rendition of 'La Cucaracha', complete with maracas and sombrero hats. In his second performance, he is dressed as a Spanish matador, two members of the glee club dance with him dressed as bulls and he is accompanied by a Mexican mariachi band. In other words, he fails to differentiate between diverse Hispanic cultures. Throughout the episode, Santana foregrounds the need to consider Hispanic culture and the Spanish language from the standpoint of knowledge. She shows that she takes her education seriously, is hard-working and informed. Will Schuester, on the other hand, takes night school lessons in Spanish to improve his command of the language and attempt to stay at least one step ahead of his students. Whenever the conversation takes

place in Spanish, English subtitles appear on screen. He makes basic grammatical errors, fails to understand relatively simple phrases and cannot recall elementary Spanish vocabulary, such as the Spanish word for ‘conversation’ (‘conversacion’). Santana attempts to correct him on at least two occasions, but he persists in repeating his error. Very good is ‘mas bueno’ and the subtitle on screen translates his Spanish as ‘more good, more good’ instead of ‘very good’.

In sharp contrast, Santana astutely harnesses the popularity and appeal of night-school Spanish teacher David Martinez, played by gay-identified Ricky Martin, when she invites him to perform a Latin American dance duet with her to Madonna’s ‘La Isla Bonita’. The duet has a lesbian girl and a gay man dressed in fashionable black clothes dancing a romantic partnered piece together. The performance is highly stylised and is lit by blue strobe lighting originating from overhead lights on the stage. The two dancers dance rapidly, flick their heads, use precise footwork and move smoothly between different steps. Angharad Valdivia suggests that the tropical narrative has been identified as the ‘ascending paradigm for representing Latina/os in popular culture’ (2010: 106). Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman first proposed the term ‘tropicalisation’ to refer to the themes of ‘island elements, salsa-driven and dynamic movement narratives that characterise hot bodies and cultures from the tropics’ (1997: 106). The ‘tropical narrative’ locates Latinas/Latinos within a narrative of modernity in contrast to the ‘narrative of stasis’ which positions them outside of contemporary urbanism and progress. Unlike Will Schuester, Santana speaks a set of complex Spanish lyrics confidently and competently. In this performance, Santana and David Martinez reiterate the tropical narrative, which re-works and updates the traditional Mexican ‘narrative of stasis’.

And to conclude, Brittany and Santana dance together as a couple in their cover version of Whitney Houston’s ‘Dance with Somebody’ (24 April, 2012).



Figure 3. Santana and Brittany dance together.

In the dance, the two leave the choir room and perform in a white space, surrounded by other cheerleaders. The dance is performed at a rapid speed, and the camera cuts between them both as they sing, as they embrace each other, and also as they dance as part of the chorus, who are all dressed in cheerleading costumes. The pronouns in the lyrics are transformed from ‘he’ to ‘she’ and the nouns from ‘man’ to ‘woman’. Brittany clearly dances and sings for her girlfriend, and with the full approval and admiration of the glee club. Santana and Brittany both perform a way of being in the world which is both visible and kinetic, or, to use Lori Landay’s phrase,<sup>26</sup> Santana embodies a ‘modern kinetic aesthetic - a kinaesthetic - of an active ludic femininity’ (Landay, 2012: 129).

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<sup>26</sup> She employs the phrase in relation to Joan Crawford’s dancer in *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928).

## **The Female Ballroom Dance Couple in *Leading Ladies***

*Leading Ladies* is an independent romantic comedy film produced for young adults by Daniel and Erika Randall Beahm and more likely to be seen by those with an interest in the world of dance and ballroom dance. It focuses on two sisters, their stage mother, their gay best friend and the changing family dynamics when one sister becomes pregnant with twins and the other sister announces that she is lesbian. The mother's exuberant personality, her interests and her relationship with her two daughters intertextually references the musical film *Gypsy Rose* (1962), in which show business mother Rose has two daughters who dance and ultimately the mother has a closer relationship with the older daughter Louise who becomes a star as a young woman. Toni's personal transformation from wallflower to leading lady intertextually references *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) and its emphasis on Latin dancing. The central significance of swing dance echoes Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers' dance performances in *Swing Dance* (1936) and Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron's swing dances by the river Seine in *An American in Paris* (1951). *Leading Ladies* includes two well-known figures from the dance world, Melanie LaPatin and Benji Schwimmer. The girls' mother is played by Melanie LaPatin,<sup>27</sup> and there is a complete dance performance by Benji Schwimmer, who won the second season of *So You Think You Can Dance* (2006). *Leading Ladies* has been marketed as an independent version of *Glee* or *High School Musical* and gently engages issues of gender, sexuality, class and, indirectly, ethnicity. But the focus here is lesbian sexuality.

As a title, *Leading Ladies* points in two directions; the ladies who take the lead or the initiative, specifically those who lead the dance, and those who are primary actors. At the heart of the film's title is assertive 'ladies' who have agency, self-determination and,

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<sup>27</sup> Sheri Campari is played by professional ballroom dance champion and choreographer, Melanie LaPatin, who has won more than one hundred championship titles with her husband and professional dance partner, Tony Meredith.

ultimately, independence. In the first instance, the 'ladies' are Toni, her younger sister, Tasi, and their single mother Sheri Campari. At the outset of the film, Toni is definitely not a 'leading' lady, but seems rather to play second fiddle to her younger sister and her dancing talent. The entire family seems focused on Tasi and her dance partner Cedric's ballroom dancing with the ultimate goal of winning first place at the Midwest Regional Ballroom Dance Competition. In an early scene, the 'Toothbrush Tango', the two sisters are sent to bed with a clap of the hands by their over-bearing mother and reminded to clean their teeth. They brush their teeth in unison, but it is Toni who puts toothpaste on Tasi's toothbrush, Toni who tears off a piece of dental floss for Tasi, Toni who offers her the bin for the dental floss and Toni who pours mouth rinse into a cap for Tasi. The camera pans from right to left and left to right, views them from above, and then from the side, and the combination of synchronised moves in time with the tango accordion music, composed by Uruguayan singer-songwriter Malena Muryala, creates a comic effect. The particular track is called 'Pasos' or 'Steps' and its title and the Latin rhythm of the music suggests that even something as mundane as brushing your teeth can be experienced as a creative and joyful sequence of dance steps or moves.

In the first half of the film, Toni implicitly embodies the 'repressed lesbian' schema, as, in her own words, she has 'never kissed a girl or even a boy'. This type could also be referred to as the 'asexual lesbian' or the 'lesbian prude'. However, what is clear is that Toni's sexuality has been completely dormant or invisible up until the moment she meets Mona Saunders. Her own creativity and talent is also ignored in favour of her sister's dancing ability. Toni blends in with the background, her pale T-shirt the same colour as the dance studio wall she stands against while she watches her sister and Cedric rehearse together. However, a long dolly shot frames Toni as the subject of interest for the camera as well as for viewers. Even if she is silent as Cedric and Tasi dance and even if

she functions as Cedric's stand-in, the camera concentrates on her and slowly moves in to focus close-up on her face. Cedric and Tasi dance in the foreground but the frame only includes snippets of elbows and feet, suggesting that Toni is the primary focus of the film narrative. When she is on her own at the studio, it is clear to viewers that Toni is an equally talented ballroom dancer, but she prefers to dance socially, not to compete.

At least two critics have suggested that Italian-American women in 'off-white Hollywood' (Negra, 2001) typically function as 'standard bearers of traditional society' (Golden, 1980: 83) and as 'repositories for the seriousness of Italian culture' (Gambino, 1983: 148). Toni certainly does not fit these aspects of the Italian-American cinematic stereotype. Her name (together with the scene when Toni first meets Mona on the dance floor) links her to Tony in *West Side Story*. Her Italian background is indirectly referred to in relation to the family's obsession with Italian food and alluded to by Toni's boss, Tony, at the pizza restaurant where she works to support her family. But Toni does not look like the traditional Italian bimbo, nor is she romantically interested in Italian-American males, who, with the exception of her boss, do not make an appearance in *Leading Ladies*. The only young male character with any on-screen time is Cedric, who is openly gay.

*Leading Ladies* does not function to re-iterate traditional Catholic values and conservative culture, but in its emphasis on the importance of family and family acceptance, it does perhaps make reference to the traditional importance of the family in Italian-American culture. The kitchen is at the heart of the Campari household and Sheri Campari is a larger-than-life mother figure who, at the outset of the film, rules her two girls as well as the home. The traditionally male role of breadwinner in the family is played by Toni, although her earnings as a pizza cook and waitress mean that the family live on modest means. Far from being overly serious in carrying out her family responsibilities, Toni incorporates dance moves into everything she does, including organising the

condiments for the tables, pairing salt and chilli pots and pairs of salt pots, all choreographed in time to the music on the soundtrack, foregrounded because there is minimal dialogue. She wraps a fork and a spoon in a paper napkin and, in case viewers have missed her earlier facial expression when putting two salt pots together, she gives another smile as she puts two spoons in one napkin, which metonymically suggests two people of the same sex in the one pair. This brief gesture suggests an awareness of her own lesbian desire, but she has certainly never acted on this desire, nor has she ever enacted the 'coming out' script at this point in the narrative.

A version of the 'coming-out' script is enacted when Toni meets Mona on the dance floor at Cedric's dance club. She becomes overtly aware of her own desire immediately after she has danced with Mona for the first time. At first, Toni slips into her customary observer role and watches couples as they dance on the dance floor. Then she is in amongst the audience who watch Cedric and his boyfriend dance on stage with the band Danny Leisure and the Suites on the left-hand side of the stage. Toni clearly enjoys the fast-tempo and virtuoso performance which is given in its entirety and re-configures the heterosexual dance couple as a gay male couple ('By the Bye'). Shortly afterwards, Toni and Mona literally bump into each other, a reference to the first time Tony and Maria meet in *West Side Story*. Before they have introduced themselves, Toni offers to show Mona how to swing dance and they dance as a couple for the duration of Crytzer's Blue Rhythm Band's big band number 'Chasin' the Blues'. The camera cuts between their dance moves, their faces, their feet and Mona's swirling dress. In the image below, they dance side-by-side.



Figure 4. Mona and Toni side by side on the dance floor.

When the music shifts tempo into something slower and more romantic, Toni and Mona continue to dance together, but the camera moves to a position high above the dance floor and the dancing is in slow motion. In a lengthy overhead shot in the style of Busby Berkeley, the fixed camera looks down at the kaleidoscopic patterns and shifting configurations of dancing couples, but the female couple, Toni and Mona, always remain central in the image on screen.



Figure 5. Overhead shot of dancers with Mona and Toni at the centre of the image.



There is no dialogue only dancing for the duration of 'By the Bye' and 'Toni Meets Mona', two scenes which last for nearly ten minutes, and the second scene functions as a compressed version of an entire evening together.

The following scene, 'Mona's Apartment', is an inversion of 'Toni Meets Mona'. This time it is Mona who takes the lead and this time there is only one couple in the dance of romance, which is filmed in blush tones and shadow. Dance is represented in this scene as the catalyst for personal transformation and as the moment of Toni's sexual awakening, which enables her to come of age, yet in the film's only love scene, Toni and Mona both keep most of their clothes on. In more traditional lesbian romance scripts, the more assertive role would usually have been given to the 'butch' character, but here it is Mona who initiates the more intimate end to the evening. She sits astride Toni on the velvet chaise longue and kisses Toni on her face and neck while the camera moves behind Mona. The image on screen for the most part is the back of Mona's 1950s satin dress and her pointed foot as she bends her leg and then extends it behind her in what looks like another dance move.



Figure 6. Mona and Toni in Mona's apartment.

Toni, for her part, acknowledges her lack of relationship experience, but she is secure in what she says and does with Mona as ‘it feels entirely natural’. Both girls sit closely together on the chaise longue and Mona undoes her halter neck tie, with Toni stroking her décolletage. At one point the two girls stand up again and Mona unzips the remainder of her dress so that she is now wearing only a strapless bra and petticoats. Toni slowly spins Mona around so that she almost ‘unwraps’ Mona out of her dress, in itself an ethereal and dance-like movement which makes them laugh gently together.

There is never a drama, a personal crisis, a period of denial or self-loathing in this scene or as a consequence of this scene. The romance between Toni and Mona takes place in an atmosphere of calm, the very opposite of melodramatic, and Toni’s immediate and low-key acceptance of her sexuality enables the relationship to progress rapidly. It is a significant moment in the development of Toni’s subjectivity because it is the first time she has experienced desire of any kind and the object of her desire, Mona, is equally desirous of her.

From an intersectional perspective, Toni’s gender and her sexuality inflect her individual subjectivity and could be in conflict with her upbringing. However, in *Leading Ladies*, Toni’s sexual orientation is immediately integrated and she completely accepts her lesbian sexuality, as does her mother before the close of the film.

The act of naming and re-naming is as fundamental a component for understanding character in *Leading Ladies* as it is in *Glee*, particularly in relation to *Leading Ladies*’ protagonist Toni. Toni is both a male and a female name and means ‘praiseworthy’, which suggests that Toni is positioned as worthy of viewers’ admiration. Mona also has a significant name; it is overtly sexual and links her, perhaps, to the flamboyant lesbian character Mona Ramsay in *Tales of the City* (1993) and *More Tales of the City* (1998). It is

also close to the name Maria, who is Tony's love interest in *West Side Story*. In his discussion of film comedy, George Butte suggests that naming is important because it enables the actors (in life and in the film) to imagine a 'new kind of script and gaze' (2002: 137). As already suggested, Toni meets Mona for the first time at a dance club where she takes the lead and encourages Mona to 'follow her'. But at the end of the evening, Mona offers Toni a lift home and the camera cuts to Mona's apartment, a private space where Mona has the lead. As Mona and Toni dance together, they comment on their own performance and enact their own script. When Mona asks what Toni is short for (which Maria asks Tony in *West Side Story*), she tells her 'Antoinette' and Mona replies, 'I like it. It lasts longer'. (Tony's name in *West Side Story* is short for Anton.) The name Antoinette also links Toni to Marie-Antoinette who is believed to have engaged in sexual relationships with her maids of honour. Mona's comment has an obvious double meaning in that Mona also suggests that women are able to enjoy slower foreplay and that a sexual encounter between women is likely to be more prolonged than heterosexual sex, but this process of re-naming 'Toni' to 'Antoinette' does change the way she is seen by Mona and the audience; it also changes her self-image. In a later scene, when Toni decides to enact the 'coming out' script to her mother, she asks her mother to use her full name. As Toni becomes 'Antoinette', she becomes simultaneously more feminine, more adult and more differentiated from her family of origin.

Subjectivity and truth are comically questioned in scenes which include a series of mirrors reflecting other mirrors. The potential for misunderstanding and misreading is always present in *Leading Ladies*, but in 'The Dance of Deception', viewers also watch the two sisters deliberately conceal the truth from their mother. As Sheri is overly theatrical and prone to act out, audiences fully understand why the two girls would decide to wait a while before telling her that Tasi is pregnant with twins and that Toni has a girlfriend. But

‘The Dance of Deception’ enacts several highly comic moments which verge on farce, particularly where the sisters and Cedric try to hide the size and shape of Tasi’s slowly expanding stomach and the existence of Mona. The vast studio space where the sisters and Cedric rehearse has a wall of mirrors along one side that are put to great visual effect. Opposite the mirrors is a wall of windows, which convey an entirely different set of effects and the wall of windows is used mostly to backlight Toni and Mona as they rehearse.

The dance couple in *Leading Ladies* embodies and enacts the concept of intersubjectivity in ways similar to the inclusion of musical duets in *Glee*. The two-person dance, as well as the two-shot, recurs throughout the film and there is rarely a moment when a character is alone. The couple dance is foregrounded here in contrast to several contemporary young adult dance films that focus on an ensemble cast (*Centre Stage* (2000), *Honey* (2004), *Streetdance* (2010), *Step Up 4/Step Up Revolution* (2012)). In conventional ballroom dancing, one dancer is male and the other female, so Tasi and Cedric look like the traditional ballroom couple. Because heterosexuality is assumed, they are frequently thought to be a romantic couple, but Cedric is not the biological father of Tasi’s twins. Tasi’s pregnancy means that she is unable temporarily to perform and compete and this is where Toni is asked to step in. In a climactic scene towards the close of the film, Toni, in male costume, and Mona, in female costume, enter the competition hall together and face the judges. Toni’s mother defends their right to compete and it seems as if the lesbian couple will participate in the competition, a scene which recalls the competition dance scene in *Strictly Ballroom*. When Tasi goes into labour, however, they abandon the competition and the family relocates to the delivery ward at the local hospital.

In the film’s concluding scene, the characters self-consciously perform a Hollywood happy ending, in ‘Happily Ever After’. Toni has come out, Tasi has had her twins and their mother is fully reconciled to the new directions the girls’ lives are taking.

The extended family, which now includes Cedric and Mona, is filmed outside for the first time in the film, taking a walk in the park and enjoying a peaceful picnic together. There is no dialogue, only music and dancing; Toni dances with Mona, Tasi dances with Cedric and Sheri plays the role of new grandmother and looks after the newborn twins. One of the most popular dances in the film is the tango, which used to be performed by two males (Miller, 2014). Here, it is performed by two female characters and for the most part, the two dancers enact scripts that have been enacted in recent dance-themed films aimed at young adults. The difference is that the two dancers together enact a lesbian relationship. In all other respects, they both perform a blend of the ‘creative achievement’ and the ‘falling in love’ script or the ‘As You Like It’ script, surrounded by accepting family and friends.

## **Conclusion**

Mirror neuron research sheds light on how subjectivity and intersubjectivity can be created through spectatorship of performance, especially of movement. Mirror neurons, or the ‘smart cells’ in our brains, effectively blur the distinction between self and other and create a bridge between the self and the other, which Marco Iacoboni suggests is central to the development of culture and society. Merleau-Ponty argues, in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/2002), that the body is a permanent condition of experience, that we perceive the world through our bodies and that we are always embodied subjects. Performance may create an intersubjective relationship that connects the viewer and performer. As Merleau-Ponty suggests: ‘Between my consciousness and my body as I

experience it, between this phenomenal body of mine and that of another as I see it from the outside, there exists an internal relation which causes the other to appear as the completion of the system. The other can be evident to me because I am not transparent for myself, and because my subjectivity draws its body in its wake.’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 410).

Viewers who cheerlead or dance can pre-reflexively and automatically understand and emotionally connect with Santana and her enactment of the lesbian cheerleader and lesbian dancer schema. Given *Glee*’s significant viewing figures, which are in the millions, *Glee* potentially influences attitudinal change in its audience. Santana’s relationship with Brittany goes through several different stages, but is represented as intersubjective and significant to them both. The adolescent lesbian romance is a central part of the television narrative over a period of four years. Although Santana and Brittany are not together at the close of 2013, that is a choice they both have made, rather than one imposed on them by family or society. They also continue to dance and are both empowered through their dancing. Viewers of *Glee* and *Leading Ladies* respond emotionally and positively to the dance performances within both texts. In *Leading Ladies*, Toni initially embodies the ‘repressed lesbian’ schema but when she meets Mona she enacts a more conventional ‘coming-out’ script. She accepts that she is lesbian and the romantic relationship is affirmed at the close of the film. The viewer’s mind blends the ‘creative achievement’ and ‘falling in love’ script with the ‘coming out’ script to form an imaginative combination of sameness and difference or continuity and change which reflects what Fauconnier and Turner refer to as the mind’s capacity for ‘conceptual blending’ (2002).

Both lesbian characters are at the centre of their individual narratives. They defy lesbian stereotypes, as do their girlfriends. Santana also resists Latina stereotypes, while Toni ignores Italian-American stereotypes. Intersectionality, or an intersectional

framework, enables a more nuanced analysis of the complex intertwining of multiple aspects of identity or subjectivity. It foregrounds the ways in which each social category, for instance, sexuality, is also characterised by diversity and difference, or what has been referred to as 'within-group diversity'. Ultimately, it is Santana and Toni's creative dancing talent that renders them visible, empowers them and enables them to express themselves. Both are physically active, attractive, hard-working and compassionate. They have a positive contribution to make to society. Dance enables them to be agentic and powerful and to move audiences both on and off-screen.

## **Chapter Four ('chapter suppressed')**



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Changing the Game: Representing Gay Athletes in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction**

The six focus novels discussed in this chapter introduce a new positive gay schema, the gay athlete or gay ‘jock’ schema which blends the teen gay schema with the athlete schema and which yields a schema for an athlete with socially positive status who experiences love and desire towards another male character. I treat the athlete similarly to the cheerleader and dancer, and regard sport as a creative endeavour. The gay athlete schema is further blended with three more generic gay schemas and these three schemas instantiate scripts that are frequently associated with gay-themed young adult novels: the ‘confused teen’, ‘closeted teen’ and the ‘out and proud’ teen. All three follow a trajectory with its own structured sequence of actions, but all three culminate in being ‘out and proud’ (the teen who is out and proud at the outset of the novel may fall in love). I draw on Melanie Green’s research (2004) on reader transportation into narrative worlds and subsequent change of reader’s real-world beliefs regarding, for instance, a character’s sexual orientation. Reader transportation or psychological immersion into narrative worlds may override current or previous schemas and experiences (Green and Brock, 2000: 702). Even if a reader has a previously negative schema of a gay character, the reader’s immersion in a specific narrative world may override that negative schema and replace it with a positive one. Oatley, in ‘Emotions and the Story Worlds of Fiction’, (2002) suggest that transformational language, such as metaphor, prompts ‘partial dissolution of aspects of a

schema, followed by insightful resolution, which occurs when the schema achieves a new accommodation and readers start to think about the issues in a new way' (2002: 55).

Green (2004) suggests that a reader's perceived shared connection with a character may increase reader immersion in the narrative and the reader's high degree of transportation may have a significant impact on readers' real-world beliefs. The social context for this recent group of novels modifies the traditional 'macho' masculinity dominant in the 1980s and at least the first half of the 1990s and includes a softer, more inclusive and flexible form of masculinity (Anderson, 2009). If the reader experiences transportation into the narratives, his or her real-world beliefs are likely to change (Green, 2004: 247). In light of reading these novels, he may arrive at a greater understanding of his own emerging gay subjectivity.

Most of the young adult novels considered here are recent in that they have been written and published since 2001. In young adult gay-themed texts published since 2001, many writers now indirectly advocate the wider acceptance of gay teens and recognition of the positive contribution they make to society. The six texts selected for detailed commentary in this chapter have been published since 2008, originally in the United States, and concentrate on young adult gay characters who are masculine-identified, excel in at least one sport and who are comfortable and at ease in what can be regarded as the traditionally patriarchal and mostly conservative institution of sport. I draw on Eric Anderson (2014) and Mark McCormack's (2012) research to argue that in this era of more inclusive masculinities, it is possible and plausible for teen gay athlete characters to be out of the sporting closet and accepted by the team for who they are, both on and off the field. These novels challenge the traditional portrayals of gay teens as likely to live isolated lives on the margins of society. In contrast, they are represented at the centre of a male sporting environment. Texts written since 2001 could also be regarded as stemming from a basic

impulse for social change. As YA writer David Levithan points out, ‘A story doesn’t have to always reflect reality; it can create reality as well’ (2006).

The adolescent readers of this group of novels may or may not be already gay and they may or may not be out and proud. But the novels would have most relevance to readers with an interest in sport and to those who are also questioning their sexuality. Thomas Crisp suggests that ‘when gay males pick up a piece of literature, they are looking for representations of themselves within the pages: who they could and should be now and what they can be like as adults’ (2008: 258). The emerging gay athletic protagonist in the six focused novels is no longer at the bottom of the social hierarchy and that previously rigid vertical hierarchy itself may have changed. Homophobia may be marginalised or stigmatised and there may be no overt homophobic discourse used against gay characters. The six novels enact variants of the positive ‘As You Like It’ script that was first introduced in Alex Sanchez’ *Rainbow* trilogy (*Rainbow Boys*, 2001; *Rainbow High*, 2003, *Rainbow Road*, 2005). Sanchez’ trilogy established three new gay schemas and scripts, which are further developed and modified in the six focused novels. I shall return to the *Rainbow* trilogy later in this chapter. I examine representations of teen gay jocks in Bill Konigsberg’s *Out of the Pocket* (2008), Martin Wilson’s *What They Always Tell Us* (2008), Lee Bantle’s *David Inside Out* (2009), Scott William Carter’s *President Jock*, *Vice President Geek* (2011), Jeff Adams’ *Hat Trick* (2013) and Bill Konigsberg’s *Openly Straight* (2013). There are other titles that could have been discussed, for instance, Mark A. Roeder’s *The Nudo Twins* (2013), but I have selected these texts in order to include a combination of individual sport and team sport athletes. The sporting domains covered are American football, cross-country running, track and field running, basketball, ice-hockey and soccer.

The suggestion that ‘we adjust our research agenda to include homosexual youth as gifted children’ (Herek in a personal communication to Kielwasser and Wolf, 1994: 59) has significant application to young adult literature. The gay characters in this group of six novels all excel at sport. At least two of the protagonists in the two novels written by Bill Konigsberg also excel at English literature. The adolescent reader who has an interest in sport may have an immediate affinity or link with the gay athlete who plays sport and also thinks, talks, dreams and fantasises about sport and his sporting achievements. In one of the novels, *Openly Straight*, the gay character’s interest in sport seems to be driven by his wish to be part of the team. In further elaborating Herek’s observation, Gerald Unks argues, ‘Most teens who feel deficient in one area of development will compensate by being even better in others. And there are few areas of life that are as subject to compensation as sexuality. Indeed, it would be very useful to examine the ‘outstanding students’ in every field’ (1995: 8). If it were possible to establish that an unusually large number of outstanding students were gay, then that would certainly shift public attention away from an assumed connection between homosexual teens and suicide (Unks, 1995: 8).

Kielwasser and Wolf continue, ‘This historic emphasis on the psychosocial problems faced by lesbian and gay youth has frequently obscured any systematic consideration of their particular talents. Certainly, most lesbian and gay youth *do* survive adolescence. They move wilfully into adulthood by virtue of an extraordinarily powerful and creative resilience’ (1994: 59). Forms of that individual ‘creative resilience’ are further explored here, particularly sport and athletic competition.

## **Reader Transportation and Transformation**

Individual readers who become transported into or immersed in a work of fiction may allow the ‘implications of the narrative to become part of the reader’s real-life beliefs’ (Green, 2004: 247). Transportation has been defined as an ‘integrative melding of attention, imagery and feelings, focused on story event’ (Green and Brock, 2000: 701). Green’s study<sup>28</sup> involved a group of undergraduate participants who were asked to read a short story told in the first person by a gay protagonist who returns to his college fraternity reunion, where none of his former fraternity brothers know that he is gay (2004: 253). Green’s research concentrated primarily on two main questions. The first was whether prior awareness or familiarity with story themes such as sexual orientation would intensify individuals’ tendency to become transported into the narrative (Green, 2004: 248). The second question was whether transportation would ‘increase perceptions of realism’ (Green, 2004: 248) and if so, whether these perceptions would have an impact on real-world beliefs (Green, 2004: 248). Previous research carried out by Green and Brock has demonstrated that individual readers who are ‘transported’ into a narrative world are ‘likely to change their real-world beliefs and attitudes in response to information, claims, or events in a story’ (2000: 248). Transportation has also been associated with more positive attitudes toward sympathetic central characters and a reduction in any scepticism or negative thoughts about story content (Green, 2004: 248).

Transportation, which is psychologically similar to Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow or Maslow’s concept of absorption, is a form of observed reader response to narratives, particularly fictional narratives. ‘A transported reader temporarily suspends normal assumptions and considers the narrative as the frame of reference’ (Strange, 2002).

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<sup>28</sup> Melanie Green’s study is relevant across all core chapters of this thesis, and reader transportation may deepen the reader or viewer’s sense of empathy with the central character or characters.

Transportation into a narrative can lead to genuine belief change, so it is worth exploring the factors that influence when individuals will become transported into a narrative, as well as the means by which transportation may lead to real-world belief change. If the reader is transported into a narrative that represents a gay teen who is also a successful team athlete and accepted by his team, that reader's beliefs may be positively influenced in favour of the teen gay character. If the gay character (the team athlete) is also successful in his romantic relationship with another teen male character, then the reader's attitudes towards gay relationships may also be changed. In reading about three different gay schemas and scripts, the reader may arrive at an increasing degree of self-awareness in relation to his own emerging sexuality and consideration for the other.

A narrative world must be created if readers are to be transported into the narrative: 'characters and settings must be evoked, not merely emotions' (Green and Brock, 2002: 248), and I shall make specific reference to characters and settings in the six novels. Literature may be more likely than non-fiction or narratives created for experimental purposes to lead to transformations of the self. One of the reasons for this is that the recognition of 'identifiably shared experiences' between reader and central character may be pivotal in the emergence of transportation and central in its degree of intensity (Green, 2004: 262). The study reported here suggests that having some kind of similarity or link with a character in a novel, film or television series can aid this crucial process of building empathy or increasing understanding of others (Green, 2004: 262). Without that shared similarity or connection, the reader has to work harder to be fully absorbed and transported into the narrative and is less likely to believe in the information or social knowledge represented in the narrative world.

In Green's research, transportation was positively related to the credibility and the endorsement of beliefs implied by the narrative, that is, 'individuals who were more

immersed in the story also showed more story-consistent beliefs and beliefs that the story was more realistic' (Green, 2004: 262). Green points out that in her study readers were asked to read a particular narrative, whereas in real-world situations, readers choose a novel from among their own favourite authors and genres. 'Readers may be especially drawn to texts where they have some pre-existing link with the characters' (Green, 2004: 263). This mental link between reader and central character is therefore crucial to the reader's close emotional and cognitive engagement with the text. Vivid mental imagery is another central component of reader transportation into the narrative. The six novels in this chapter are likely to draw readers with a strong interest in the particular form of sport featured in the novel and with a likely interest in (emerging) gay subjectivity.

### **Representing Sport and Masculinity**

Research which concentrates on the relationship between sport and masculinity highlights that boys are generally educated to value and reproduce orthodox or 'macho' notions of masculinity in competitive team sports (Brackenridge et al., 2008). A male athlete is usually regarded as embodying at least one ideal of what it means to be a man – 'a definition that is predicated in opposition to what it means to be feminine and/or gay' (Connell 1995). Connell's influential concept of hegemonic masculinity (1995) has been characterised as the most dominant, although not necessarily the most common, form of masculinity. This concept of hegemonic masculinity suggests that all men benefit from patriarchy, but also offers an explanation as to how an intramasculine hierarchy is created, made legitimate and sustained. Connell has argued that, regardless of their sporting accomplishments, gay men are usually at the bottom of this vertical masculine hierarchy (Connell, 1995: 190). At the top of the hierarchy are heterosexual males who excel at

competitive team sports; in the United States, it is usually football players at the top of the social hierarchy.

A number of studies on masculinity from the 1990s have found high schools to be sites where male competitive team sport players monopolise and dominate school space (Messner and Sabo 1990; Pronger 1990; Connell 1995). Other male athletes who participate in individual sports (for instance, swimming and running) are also towards the top of the social hierarchy. The most powerful males, however, are predominantly football players, who typically distribute power to suit themselves. Messner and Sabo (1990), Pronger (1990) and Connell (1995) have shown that sport – particularly team sports – traditionally associates boys and men with masculine dominance by ‘constructing their identities and sculpting their bodies to align with hegemonic perspectives of masculinist embodiment and expression’ (Anderson 2011: 250).

In his analysis of masculinities and sexualities in sport over the last three decades, Eric Anderson (2011a) points out that the discipline of masculinities studies established itself during the 1990s in research carried out in what was arguably the West’s most ‘homo-hysterical’ decade. Anderson defines homo-hysteria as a particularly homophobic period of history. ‘In periods of high homo-hysteria, boys and men are compelled to act aggressively, to maintain homophobic attitudes, and they are socially encouraged to raise their masculine capital through sport and muscularity’ (Anderson, 2011a: 568). Pronger, Messner, Sabo, Connell and others were writing at a particular time in history, namely the late 1980s and early 1990s. More recently, the social climate towards gay men has begun to change (Anderson 2011a: 569). Anderson suggests that hegemonic masculinity theory permits only one form of masculinity to reside atop a social hierarchy and cannot explain the social processes in a local environment in which there is more than one version of masculinity that has equal appeal or value (Anderson, 2005: 348). Hegemonic masculinity



theory cannot explain empirical research that records at least two forms of masculinity of equal cultural value (Anderson, 2005; McCormack, 2010, 2012). Anderson offers an alternative theoretical framework for considering masculinities, a theory of ‘inclusive masculinity’ (Anderson, 2009). This concept, he argues, is better able to communicate the co-existence and complexity of multiple masculinities that are similarly regarded.

In the six novels discussed here, the gay character exists in an environment that includes a range of masculinities and in which the gay character is mostly accepted. That does not mean that homophobia no longer exists; there are still minor homophobic characters within the novels discussed. The gay athlete also may not always consider himself to be a ‘real jock’ because he is gay, as is the case with Rafe in *Openly Straight*. However, by the close of the novel, Rafe’s attitude has changed and he now thinks gay subjectivity needs not just to be accepted but celebrated.

In a recent study of gay high school and university athletes, Anderson (2011b) suggests that in less homo-hysterical cultures, whether these are local or macro cultures, athletes or jocks may co-exist with scholars, artists, music types and others. They may also construct or enact a normative form of masculinity that no longer tolerates overtly homophobic remarks and behaviours; equally this form of masculinity is less sexist and therefore more popular with females. The corpus of six gay sports novels suggests an era of more inclusive masculinity or at the very least, local cultures characterised by more inclusive or accepting masculinities.

### **Gay Fictional Athletes**

Gay athletes first began to appear in gay-themed adult fiction in 1974, when Patricia Nell Warren’s *The Front Runner* portrayed a crossover story of a gay running track star, Billy

and his war-veteran coach, Harlan. Towards the close of the novel, Billy is shot dead by a member of the crowd during his Olympic running performance (280). In its outcome, *The Front Runner* is tragic, in that one member of the gay couple dies before the close of the novel. However, Warren's evocation of a gay relationship is powerful and the relationship has almost three hundred pages in which to develop. I mention Warren's best-selling title, which was followed by *Harlan's Race* (1994) and *Billy's Boy* (1997), all of which are still in print, because the trilogy's influence can be discerned in young adult novels with gay protagonists who excel at running. Warren's trilogy paved the way for further literary exploration of gay athletes.

One of the first gay sports novels for young adults was *Counter Play* (1981), written by Anne Snyder, in which star quarterback Brad discovers that his teammate and friend Alex is gay. A second was B. A. Ecker's *Independence Day* (1983), in which the protagonist plays soccer. Both these novels treat the subject of homosexuality positively and *Counter Play* was adapted for North American television as *The Truth about Alex* (2000). Diana Wiener's *Bad Boy* (1992) was also specifically targeted at young adult readers. However, in *Bad Boy* the young adult protagonist and principal focaliser was still heterosexual and was represented as struggling to come to terms with the discovery that his hockey teammate and friend was gay. All these early novels featuring gay athlete characters were written by women and tend towards a sensitive and understanding exploration of teen gay subjectivity.

In contrast, the focus novels in this chapter are written by male authors who thematise gay masculinity very differently from female authors. At times, male authors seem to offer gay subjects who tend towards being hyper-masculine. They write more linear forms of narrative and centre on male characters and more male concerns, for instance, there are multiple conversations about food, alcohol and restaurants,

conversations that take place at urinals, and more detailed descriptions of parties. These aspects of the novels are in contrast to the female-centred novels discussed in Chapter Two.

### **Representing Gay Athletes in Young Adult Fiction**

The athletic or sporty protagonists in these six novels no longer stand out or are simply different because of their sexual orientation. Instead, it is the gay character's exceptional sporting ability, which may be coupled with creative talent or academic intelligence, that marks him within his peer group in positive ways and thereby generates and sustains reader approval for him throughout each novel. In contemporary gay-themed sports fiction, writers position readers to accept the protagonist, who may have characteristics or attributes that are out of the ordinary for teen boys, but who also has much in common with heterosexual teen boys, crucially, a keen interest in sport and a sporting talent. These gay characters are not gender-atypical but reflect many of the interests of heterosexual male characters. These shared sporting interests and performances enable gay and heterosexual athletes to connect with each other, to co-operate and even to bond with each other. The texts frequently suggest that the character's sexuality is not the most important aspect of his emerging subjectivity; in other words, the texts deliberately foreground and emphasise similarities rather than differences between the gay athlete and heterosexual male athletes.

All of the texts here depict gay teens as narrators or principal focalisers in contrast to what Jenkins and Cart identify as the gay or lesbian character who is 'consistently at a remove from the protagonist' (2006: 91). This narrative strategy keeps the gay teen perspective central and ensures as far as possible reader alignment with and empathy for the gay character. The texts re-write the more traditional and negative 'Romeo and Juliet'

script delineated in my Introduction and instead affirm the protagonist's gay and athletic subjectivity, emphasising that subjectivity is as much what we do as what we are. The novels also communicate the message that the gay character has developed a positive and secure sense of self before the conclusion of each novel. In three of the novels, the gay couple is still a couple at the close of the text. In the other three novels, the gay protagonist has increased his self-understanding which means that by the close of the novel he is now in a position to embark on a new romantic relationship. In this sense, the optimistic narratives enact a 'happy ending' or a 'positive ending' script, which I have named, in this thesis, the 'As You Like It' script. Many recent texts provide affirmations of gay teens and also indirectly argue for social justice and social transformation, particularly in the way that gay teens are treated by others in the community and in society at large.

The gay athlete character is no longer represented as socially stigmatised. Instead, in these more recent texts, it is the expression of homophobic attitudes that is the problem to be resisted or overcome. Homophobia is frequently associated with only one or two very minor characters except in *Hat Trick* where the protagonist's father and older brother are dealt with by the police. The novels closely link creative sporting ability (a particular version of the 'creative-achievement' script) to the expression of emerging gay subjectivity (the 'falling-in-love' script) and then blend these two fundamental aspects of the self. The two aspects of the teen self are represented in tandem and as interdependent. In five of the six texts, the gay protagonist has a relationship with another sports-oriented male character, which keeps the theme of sport central in the narrative. In Scott William Carter's *President Jock, Vice-President Geek*, although the gay character Josh does not fall in love, he is publically 'outed' at school but the novel's conclusion nonetheless confirms his election as school president and his continuing membership of the school's basketball team - being outed does not translate into social exclusion or an enactment of the negative script.

## Teen Gay Masculinity Schemas

Alex Sanchez's *Rainbow* trilogy has been highly influential in teen LGBT fiction because it has won several fiction awards, including the American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults.<sup>29</sup> It has also been produced as a film, *Right By Me* (2005), by Thai director Thanyatorn Siwanukrow and marketed under the title *Rainbow Boys: The Movie*, which shall be discussed in Chapter Seven. *Rainbow* trilogy centres on three teen boys who attend Whitman High School in Minneapolis, and who enact variants of teen gay masculinities and exemplify positive gay schemas and scripts. I consider the trilogy briefly before looking at other texts because it offers three very different ways of being a gay teen and at least three gay character schemas and scripts that appear over and again in contemporary teen gay fiction. Those three character schemas can broadly be characterised as the 'confused-teen' schema, the 'closeted-teen' schema and the 'out-and-proud-teen' schema. Moreover, each of the gay characters in the *Rainbow* series interacts with a wider gay community beyond school, thereby introducing readers to a broader range of gay subjectivities, including a teen who is HIV-positive.<sup>30</sup>

Two of the three principal characters in the *Rainbow* trilogy excel at sport and can be characterised as gay jocks, although at the outset they are simply jocks. The first, Jason Carrillo, is one of the school's star athletes. The second, Kyle Meeks, excels at competitive swimming and is on the school's swimming team. The third, Nelson Glassman, is not an

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<sup>29</sup> *Rainbow Boys* and its sequels have joined what are only a select number of GLBTQ pieces of literature to have found their way into classrooms and school libraries' (Crisp, 2008: 237-238). Alex Sanchez's trilogy is read by students, critics and scholars alike.

<sup>30</sup> Other texts by Sanchez also have main characters that enact 'new' versions of gay subjectivity. For instance, Manuel is gay and a devout Christian in *The God Box* (2007), and *So Hard To Say* (2004) features thirteen-year-old gay focaliser Frederick, one of the youngest gay narrators I have found. Jamie, the narrator of Peter Wells's *Boy Overboard* (1996) is eleven.

athlete, but is relevant in this context as initially he is in love with Kyle. Nelson exemplifies the out-and-proud character schema who typically falls in love with the gay athlete or the masculine-identified gay character. By the close of the trilogy, Nelson has fallen in love with another basketball player, Manny. The first two schemas, that is, the confused teen and the closeted teen, embodied by Jason and Kyle, are particularly pertinent here. Both are jocks and both have different understandings of their sexualities at the outset of *Rainbow Boys*.

The three schemas in *Rainbow Boys* instantiate three separate scripts in ways that 'being' always entails 'doing'. These scripts also occur frequently in contemporary gay-themed young adult fiction. In *Rainbow Boys*, the use of multiple focalising characters means that no one gay schema or script is privileged over the other two – although ultimately all three gay characters share a similar end point, that is, they are 'out and proud'. The confused teen follows a trajectory where he must recognise his sexual confusion, clarify it to himself, end a heterosexual romantic relationship if he is in one and then move towards a point where he is willing to enact a gay relationship and 'come out'. The closeted teen follows a similar trajectory but already recognises that he experiences same-sex desire even if he does not act upon it. He usually moves towards a point where he is willing to perform the 'coming-out' script and fall in love. Jason and Kyle follow each of these particular trajectories, use their sporting ability and talent as a form of masculine capital and creative resilience and ultimately move to a point where they are out and proud.

Each novel is narrated or focalised in turn from the perspective of each of the three protagonists. *Rainbow Boys* opens and closes with chapters focalised from Jason Carrillo's perspective, *Rainbow High* with chapters focalised from Kyle Meek's perspective and *Rainbow Road* with chapters focalised from Nelson Glassman's point of view. All their names are at the top of every chapter and each chapter's focaliser is printed in bold at the

top and along the bottom of each page. The novels' structure makes it clear that readers are intended to consider these three gay teens as a group and take interest in the group's changing dynamics as well as in the individual characters. The narrative strategy of multiple focalising characters also suggests that gay subjectivity is constructed in relation to others as well as being constructed by a variety of social and political discourses (Flanagan, 2010: 32).

The *Rainbow* trilogy clearly does not re-iterate negative stereotypes found in the first thirty years of gay-themed young adult literature. The setting also differs from those typically found in gay-themed young adult fiction, such as New York or California, thus suggesting the wider social acceptance of gay subjectivities beyond more liberal and progressive social environments. The 'out-and-proud-teen' schema usually moves to a point where the gay character falls in love or where he finally has an actual gay experience. This schema usually applies to boys who would not be able to 'pass' as straight even if they wanted to. This may seem an obvious point to make, but the 'out-and-proud' teen has not always had a gay relationship, or he may have had gay sex but not fallen in love. All three scripts in the *Rainbow* world follow diverse trajectories but effectively conclude at the same point, that of being 'out and proud'.

My analysis of these three schemas and scripts builds on discussion of the *Rainbow Boys* trilogy by Thomas Crisp (2008), which Lydia Kokkola develops in *Fictions of Adolescent Carnality* (2013: 113-116). Kokkola states that 'the trilogy's popularity, commercial success and public endorsement bears testimony to the ways in which GLBTQ literature has developed in recent years' (2013: 114). She also comments on Crisp's point that 'the series' success is dependent on Sanchez' deployment of easily recognised stereotypes' (2013: 114). Kokkola comments on Crisp's identification of two key problems in the trilogy. The first is the implicit suggestion that 'if Mr. Carrillo were a better parent

Jason might not be gay' (Kokkola, 2013: 115). The second is the problematic pairing of closet jock Jason with Kyle along hetero-normative lines ('where Jason is the 'man' and Kyle the 'woman') (Kokkola, 2013: 115). Kokkola concurs with Crisp on both points, but I would also note that although Jason's father is the opposite of a nurturing parental figure, Kyle's father is contrastively represented as an effective and supportive parent. As regards Kokkola's second point, I would add that the novels reflect earlier publication dates, that is, 2001-2005. Both Jason and Kyle are successful athletes and therefore masculine-identified, which I argue is in itself progressive and innovative within the context of young adult literature.

### **Gay Athletes in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction**

A number of recent young adult gay-themed novels develop the three positive schemas and scripts that can be discerned in Sanchez' *Rainbow* trilogy and take place within a sport-focused environment. These texts modify well-established gay stereotypes that imply that gay masculinity is comparable with an effete or 'feminised' masculinity. Sport functions within these texts as a form of individual creative resilience and personal empowerment for the protagonist. The six gay athletic protagonists share many points in common with heterosexual male athletes and may share many points in common with readers who may or may not be gay but do have an interest in sport. In all these texts, protagonists seem comfortable in and even to prefer what is overwhelmingly a male-dominated environment. As already stated, sport provides a space in which each character can perform his subjectivity and be part of a team. This marks a major shift from earlier teen texts, which have tended to depict gay characters in isolation from the peer group and, in particular, from heterosexual or straight male characters. The protagonists here mostly embody one of



two schemas, that of the ‘confused teen’ or the ‘closeted teen’, as enacted by Jason Carrillo or Kyle Meeks in *Rainbow Boys*.<sup>31</sup> Only the protagonist, Rafe, in *Openly Straight* is out and proud at the outset of the novel, but when he chooses to move to an all-boys boarding-school, Natick, Massachusetts, he goes beyond the closet and does not disclose his gay subjectivity to his new group of friends. Rafe thereby introduces a new schema and script, that of attempting to live a label-free life, but by the close of the novel, he has performed the ‘coming-out’ script once again and is out and proud at Natick.

### **Confused Teens in Young Adult Gay Sports Fiction**

In contemporary gay-themed sports fiction, a female character is often included to demonstrate the protagonist’s sexual confusion, and confusion is a stage delineated by both Cass (1984, 1996) and Troiden (1989) in their gay identity development models. The female character typically foregrounds the desirability of the gay jock character, but also his inability to experience intense heterosexual desire. In other words, the female character frequently functions as a hetero-normative foil. She is not always well treated in these texts and the reader may empathise with the female character’s experience of the gay character for reasons I demonstrate later in this chapter. In their analysis of masculinities in Norwegian and Australian young adult fiction, Romoren and Stephens suggest that traditional fictional representations of teen male characters have rested on the exclusion of female characters, but that in more recent novels about boys, females ‘very often play a crucial part’ (2002: 221). The novels they discuss do not include teen gay characters (there were very few Australian novels at that time with gay protagonists) and therefore their

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<sup>31</sup> Kate Walker’s *Peter* (1991), Robin Reardon’s *A Secret Edge* (2007) and Dale Peck’s *Sprout* (2009) also have masculine-identified gay teen protagonists.

comments do not apply to novels focalised by gay characters. However, a number of Romoren and Stephens' comments influence the direction of my textual analysis here.

In contemporary young adult gay sports fiction, heterosexual or straight female characters are frequently 'catalysts in the processes' (Romoren and Stephens, 2002: 221) that put teen masculinity under pressure. As Romoren and Stephens suggest, masculinity under pressure does not necessarily mean a crisis; it may instead suggest potential change or a 'state of potentiality' (Romoren and Stephens, 2002: 223). Female characters may be romantically interested in the protagonist, or they may misread friendship and intimacy of certain kinds as a precursor to a romantic relationship. In three of the six focus novels, the male protagonist has a close relationship with a female character who considers herself to be the protagonist's girlfriend. However, the protagonist's lack of desire for the female character is represented slightly differently each time. Each of the three novels about to be discussed contains an early scene that foregrounds the protagonist's interactions with a female character. In Lee Bantle's *David Inside Out*, David is in an incipient relationship with Kick (Katherine). In Scott William Carter's *President Jock, Vice President Geek*, the central jock character Josh has had a girlfriend, Trish, for more than a year. In Jeff Adams' *Hat Trick*, the confused teen protagonist Simon Roberts is in a romantic relationship with Tricia.

The subject of sex is problematic for confused teen David in *David Inside Out*. David's sexual confusion is clarified in stages over a period of approximately four months. Two early dinner scenes evoke this confusion. The first takes place at Rudolph's, where David meets his gay best friend Eddie and his own potential girlfriend Kick. When David arrives at the restaurant, Eddie reveals that 'Kick wants to know why you're so slow' (2). Eddie himself is interested, 'Why are you so slow? No, really, I want to know' (2). When Kick returns from the bathroom, she asks David why he took so long to get to the

restaurant. David's reply, 'I got lost' (2), suggests at this early point in the novel that he is generally 'lost' and confused. In the second dinner scene, David sits down next to his running team-mate Sean and can feel 'the heat radiating from Sean's body under the folds of the green-checked tablecloth' (26). Although David identifies 'heat' from Sean's body, he wonders if he is misreading Sean. His sexual confusion is such that later that same evening at Kick's house, David feels a 'wonderful, hopeful tingling down there where it counts, where you can't fake it, even if you really, really want to' (28). And here is where the reader is also aligned with Kick, who responds to David's desire because she cannot possibly realise at this early stage in the novel that David is sexually 'confused'.

The theme of sexual confusion intensifies as the novel develops. The representation of David and Kick's sexual encounter, which takes place much later in the novel, creates reader alignment with both characters who suffer as a consequence of David's confusion. After David has come out to Kick and after he has had sex with Sean, he does experience desire for her. The two have spent the day together and then eat dinner by a log fire. Kick makes it clear that she has already lost her virginity and she is enthusiastic about 'experimenting' with David. But in the middle of the sexual act, David seems to detach himself from the experience and observe it from a distance: 'I imagined looking down from the ceiling upon our strange gyrations. Kick's fingernails dug into me, then she raised her hips as I kept pumping. There was friction. Which did its job. I came' (130). The language used, specifically the word 'gyrations', is clinical and cold and the moment of intimacy almost immediately becomes uncomfortable for David. Her fingernails unintentionally hurt him and she is anything but desired when she 'raise[s] her hips', which sounds mechanical, especially with his 'pumping'. Immediately after sex with Kick, David goes to the bathroom and then the reader begins to be re-aligned with both characters. He has participated in an act counter to his own sense of self and been persuaded to do

something not in his own interests. 'Inside the john, I closed the door, glad to be alone for a minute. The light hurt my eyes. Looking in the mirror, I mouthed: 'Now you know' (130). It is a pivotal moment for David who becomes aware that his desire is not heterosexual.

The subject of sex is equally problematic for the central gay character Josh in *President Jock, Vice President Geek*. A number of recent gay-themed novels, including Carter's, use postmodern narrative strategies such as multiple focalising characters to represent gay teens in a wider social context and to suggest diverse social constructions of gender. This novel is narrated in chapters which are alternately focalised by Becky and gay character Josh. The trend towards representing gay teens in their social context reflects the increased social visibility and wider social acceptance of gay characters and their counterparts in the actual world. Josh enacts the 'confused teen' schema for the majority of the novel, but he also has other secrets about himself that he feels compelled to hide, such as his family's low socio-economic status and where exactly he lives, which is in the grounds of the large white house he passes off as belonging to his family. He is the school's star basketball player, but not very academic and particularly poor at algebra which threatens his chances of going to university.

The first female character to put Josh under pressure is his girlfriend, Trish, who embodies the traditional cheerleader schema at West Rexton High in small-town Oregon. She is the school's queen bee and dresses as if she is on a photo shoot for a teen magazine every day. Her first words in the novel are 'Miss me?' (30), which irritates Josh, who wonders at her self-centredness and why she is unable to say hello or even ask after him. Her concern with her physical appearance, clothes and accessories also seems to bother him, but not enough for him to end the relationship. They have been a romantic couple for a year (31), but Trish would like the relationship to develop a closer physical intimacy. She

reminds Josh that she had a sexual relationship with her previous boyfriend and she repeatedly initiates conversations on the topic of sex. These elicit derogatory and occasionally sexist remarks from Josh, as in the following exchange: ““Most guys would jump at the chance””, and Josh’s reply, ““Most guys have,” I said, and then regretted it” (36). But if the female character is unflatteringly represented, Josh’s exploitative attitude towards her is also undermined: ‘I kept waiting for her to break up with me. I knew I should probably break up with her, but I could never bring myself to do it. There were a lot of things I could never bring myself to do’ (37). Josh is self-critical about his inability to act and the repetition of the phrase ‘I could never bring myself to do’ suggests his frustration at his own lack of action at this point in the narrative. His passivity and inaction is further illustrated when he allows a second female character, Becky, to believe that he is falling in love with her. The reader’s empathy alternates back and forth between the female and gay character, depending on who is focalising that particular chapter and narrative passage.

The sexual tension and confusion between Josh and Trish escalates one afternoon when she drives him home from school, climbs on top of him in the car passenger seat and he is forced to take hold of her arms. She seems to calm down and he lets go of her arms, but then she ‘took a big swallow, lunged forward again and started unbuckling my pants’ (35). When she offers to perform oral sex, he declines and even Josh can see how this situation might look from a normative perspective: ‘I actually had to struggle with her. It was the type of thing that if I told the guys later, nobody’d ever believe me ... She was really strong too. She almost had my pants down before I stopped her’ (35). In contrast to the two other novels in this group, there is little reader empathy created for Trish at this stage as she is, at the outset of the novel at least, unsympathetically represented. Later in the novel, Becky opens up a more sympathetic side to Trish, and retrospectively creates

reader understanding for some of Trish's behaviour. Josh's sexual confusion is very slowly clarified and separated from his need to remain on the basketball team. The school principal assures Josh that his position on the team is guaranteed and his sexuality is made irrelevant to his athletic performance.

In the third example, *Hat Trick* protagonist Simon Roberts briefly enacts the 'confused teen' schema at the beginning of the novel. His confusion is more rapidly clarified as he has been aware of his desire for hockey team member Alex for at least a season. In a tiny hotel room immediately after the first ice hockey game of the new season, he admits to himself that he dreams about Alex. Simon has a girlfriend called Tricia, but he is not drawn to her in the way that he is attracted to Alex. Or, in his own words, he is not 'excited' by her. Shortly after this moment, Simon and Alex share their first kiss, but Simon still waits several days before ending his relationship with Tricia, as she does provide a 'good cover' (20). This treatment of the female character suggests a mildly misogynistic or exploitative attitude towards her, which Simon justifies by saying to himself that he needs to work out what exactly is happening with Alex. Shortly afterwards, Simon fully accepts his feelings for Alex, cleanly ends his relationship with Tricia (although they remain friends) and begins to accept his own gay sexuality. Simon and Alex perform the 'coming-out' script together to their ice-hockey team.

In each of the three novels, female characters justifiably experience desire in relation to the gay protagonist; each one is, after all, the protagonist's girlfriend. Her role in the novel is significant, as her desire puts the protagonist under pressure and compels him to confront his own lack of heterosexual desire or to realise that his desire for a female character is less intense than his same-sex desire. Reader empathy for the female character is frequently created, mainly by using focalisation techniques that enable the reader to understand and empathise with her point of view. In the three textual examples discussed,

reader empathy is also elicited for the gay protagonist who may genuinely not realise or understand that he is gay or who may be struggling to accept his gay sexuality in his wish to be 'normal'. In fairness to him, he usually does ultimately accept and respect female desire and agency, but his lack of self-awareness and occasional lack of decisiveness lead him into situations where his interactions with female characters may be less than sincere and less than fully open. All three novels indirectly suggest that the gay character should explain his same-sex sexuality to any female character with whom he is closely involved.

### **Closeted Teens in Gay Sports Fiction**

In their discussion of masculinities, Romoren and Stephens suggest that modern young adult fiction discloses a very relevant 'staging' of 'masculinity under pressure' (2002: 219). Similarly, young adult gay-themed sports fiction is likely to disclose a 'staging' of 'masculinity under pressure', mostly when the gay character is represented as a 'closeted' teen. Once he has enacted the 'coming-out' script, the pressure experienced by the gay character is usually alleviated or released and he is positively affirmed and included within the peer group.

Recent gay-themed sports novels are likely to include heterosexual male characters, particularly male characters from within the protagonist's peer group. The inclusion of positive heterosexual male characters is in stark contrast to more traditional gay-themed fiction, which tended to exclude straight male characters or de-value them in some way, frequently by representing them as the homophobic bully. In traditional texts with gay protagonists, the straight teen male was also frequently marginalised, as in Francesca Lia Block's *Weetzie Bat* (1989) or William Taylor's *The Blue Lawn* (1999). In *Weetzie Bat*, the central female character Weetzie Bat's best friend is Dirk, who is in love with a male

surfer called Duck. The heterosexual male character is very secondary to the central narrative. Similarly, *The Blue Lawn* centres on teen protagonist David who is strongly drawn to Theo, who lives with his grandmother. Once again, the heterosexual male character is sidelined in this novel. The straight male character was egocentric or insensitive in relation to others, or exploitative of female characters. Occasionally, his intolerance would spill over into displays of verbal or physical aggression. While homophobic characters do still exist in recent gay-themed fiction, they are mostly in the minority and marginalised in the background.

The gay character in the following two novels also initially embodies the ‘closeted-teen’ schema. He looks and acts like a heterosexual male and can therefore ‘pass’ as straight but he knows that he is gay and therefore is not represented in a romantic relationship with a female character. In *Out of the Pocket* and *What They Always Tell Us*, the heterosexual male character is also there in his own right. He is usually a part of the protagonist’s sports team, for instance, the football team in *Out of the Pocket* and the cross-country running team in *What They Always Tell Us*. But he may also be a father, a sports coach, a male teacher, a college scout or a brother, as in *What They Always Tell Us*. Again, the inclusion of other heterosexual male characters across the generations functions to construct gender as relational and possibly also works to engage heterosexual male readers.

The coming-out script is performed by Bobby in *Out of the Pocket* in multiple stages and not always successfully. He enacts the script very cautiously, seemingly to one person at a time. He feels as if he is hiding something by not ‘coming out’ and also has the sense that he is ‘letting the team down’. Early on, he tells his closest friend and team member Austin (38), who seems to accept Bobby’s emerging sexuality without hesitation. But Bobby still feels compelled to inform others on the team. Bobby is also anxious to tell



his football coach, Coach Castle, but that conversation, which he attempts on a number of different occasions, does not proceed according to plan.

The traditional, sports-oriented male coach is initially uncomfortable with Bobby's revelation that he has been 'having dreams about men' (108). Castle 'adjusts' himself twice, suggesting his lack of ease with the topic of conversation. He uses football terms and analogies such as 'line of scrimmage' and 'backfield', asks after one of Bobby's friends, Carrie, distracts him with a series of questions and finally advises Bobby not to act on dreams that involve men. Coach Castle's inappropriate suggestion to 'call an audible' (that is, to change his tactics) foregrounds the coach's priorities, which have always centred on sport. His recommendation to Bobby is to 'just ignore those thoughts and get some new ones' (109). At the close of the conversation, Bobby wishes he could re-wind the clock to the second before he entered the coach's office and 'call an audible there' (109), that is, he wishes in hindsight he had chosen to knock on someone else's door. At this point in the novel, although he reaches out to his coach, the coach is unable to be supportive. Shortly afterwards, Bobby is publically 'outed' by student journalist Finch in the school newspaper, which is then reported on by the local media, which is then further reported by national media. Bobby is inundated by male sports journalists and loses control of the 'coming-out' process and script. He finally regains control of the process when he writes a letter to the local newspaper by way of a response to Finch's article. Bobby himself writes using the discourse of sport (233-235).

In Martin Wilson's *What They Always Tell Us*, set in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Alex is also a closeted teen. The novel is focalised in the third person by Alex and his brother James in twelve alternating chapters. The text constructs a close juxtaposition between gay character Alex and straight male teen character James, inviting comparisons and contrasts

without privileging one voice over the other.<sup>32</sup> James is exactly one year older than Alex and they are similar in temperament, although James is initially depicted as more confident and socially popular. The brothers, whose performance of masculinity is constructed as relational, are both athletic and intelligent, but James initially performs the hegemonic masculinity schema. James is on the school tennis team, set to attend an Ivy League university and has a girlfriend, Alice, as well as a close group of male friends. Alex, in contrast, has been socially ostracised since drinking disinfectant at a recent annual end of summer party just prior to the novel's opening. As he much later recounts to his boyfriend Nathen, Alex was momentarily overwhelmed at the party by an isolating sense of difference from his peer group; they had all moved on over the summer and were now treating him like a stranger (169). At the end of summer, Alex is made miserable with the 'ache of emptiness. Something was missing. Something that other people seemed to have without even realising they had it (170)'. The disinfectant incident represents a traumatic mini-crisis but is also an opportunity for change and growth. Alex discovers who his friends are and is liberated from 'putting on an act ... worrying about saying the right or wrong things (102)'. His explanation for why he drank the disinfectant aligns the reader with the gay character who has endured hardship but who has also worked his way back from trauma and constructed a more rounded and stronger sense of self.

### **Out and Proud Teens in Gay Sports Fiction**

The out and proud teen schema is enacted by teen gay protagonist Rafe in *Openly Straight*. At the outset of *Openly Straight*, Rafe chooses to move from his liberal and progressive family home in Boulder, Colorado, to a conservative all-boys boarding school. He

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<sup>32</sup> Brian Sloan's *Tale of Two Summers* (2006) similarly juxtaposes straight teen Chuck and gay teen Hal. Cf. also Tom Dolby's *The Sixth Form* (2008).

performed the 'coming out' script to his family in eighth grade and he came out at school shortly afterwards, to his soccer team and then to the wider community. He is one of the few jock characters who is openly out at the beginning of a novel. But when he looks in the mirror, all he sees is 'GAY' (3). 'Where had Rafe gone? Where was I? The image I saw was so two-dimensional that I couldn't recognise myself in it. I was as invisible in the mirror as I was in the headline the Boulder *Daily Camera* had run a month earlier: Gay High School Student Speaks Out' (3). Rafe articulates the feeling that he has become 'invisible' in spite of having come out. It is an innovative twist on the politics of gay visibility. Here Rafe has disappeared behind the label of being 'gay' and feels that he is not able to proceed with 'normal' life. Rafe's experience is in contrast to the real-life teenagers interviewed in Savin-Williams' *The Gay Teenager*.

The wish to transcend sexual identity labels or any label and begin afresh in a new environment is explored by Rafe in his writing. He fantasies about a site or location where he is not defined by his gay sexuality and where he is, in theory at least, free to shape and define his own masculinity. Rafe is surrounded by heterosexual male characters such as his room-mate, Alfie, and one gay character, Toby, who is in a closeted relationship with athlete Richardson. The presence of other gay characters at school complicates Rafe's situation, as when he is with them he cannot let on that he is 'in the know'. Even the other male characters with whom Rafe enjoys being are a little different from the average 'jock'. They are intelligent, have a particular sense of humour or enjoy different activities. For instance, in a conversation over whether another athlete, Steve, is really as 'nice' and accepting of gays as he seems, Rafe has to monitor his responses. As he puts it: '... if I'd been publically gay, I might have been free to talk about it. But since I was supposedly straight, I had to watch what I said so that I wasn't A) too knowledgeable about gay things or B) insulting to gays. It was exhausting. Don't try this at home' (156). At this stage, the

novel suggests the humour in the situation as well as its awkwardness, but as the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly less comic and more awkward.

Complications to Rafe's enactment of the 'label-free' script arise unsurprisingly when he begins to fall in love with fellow soccer athlete, Ben, who, although heterosexual, begins to respond to him. Rafe invites Ben to spend the Thanksgiving weekend at his family home in Boulder, which Ben agrees to do. But Rafe's parents have planned a surprise party and invited close family and friends, who all naturally assume that Ben is Rafe's new boyfriend. At the party, Rafe begins to feel seriously uncomfortable with the situation that he has maintained for the majority of the novel. 'I died a little inside. For the first time, I truly felt like I was playing a joke on Ben' (236). Here the gay character does not feel 'dirty' because he has had gay sex or 'fake' because he has had sex with a girl, but 'dirty' because he has misled a heterosexual male character. And to support his pretence of not being gay, Rafe asks his parents and best friend, Claire Olivia, to act as if he is heterosexual. Claire Olivia, who has never been mistreated as closeted teens frequently mistreat a female character, nevertheless finds herself playing the role of his ex-girlfriend. In this novel, the gay character inadvertently causes pain to the heterosexual male character and has misled him. 'How could I get back to myself without any major damage – not to Ben, and not to me?' (236-237). Although he repeatedly asks himself how best not to cause pain, he causes it nonetheless.

The intimacy that arises between Rafe and Ben understandably confuses Ben. They discuss Ben's girlfriend and Claire Olivia as if she was Rafe's girlfriend (and then his former girlfriend). Ben wishes his family were like Rafe's family, open, liberal and accepting. Ben wants to be close to Rafe: 'I swear to God, I wish I really was gay. I'd totally marry you.' (242). 'Ben took a deep breath and closed his eyes. 'I can't figure out any way to get closer to you, and I feel it. Like I want to get closer. It's not sex I want, it's

just ...” (242). The ellipsis suggests Ben’s confusion and his inability to define and understand his feelings; the repeated negatives ‘I can’t’, ‘it’s not ...’ also convey his refusal to accept what appears to be same-sex desire for Rafe. They have already discussed endlessly the philosophical differences between ‘*agape*’ (brotherly love) and ‘*eros*’ (sexual love). But at this point, Rafe, who has been romantically interested in Ben since the beginning of the school year in September, kisses him, ‘keeping my lips there until he kissed back. And he did, he kissed back, and we opened our lips slightly and then wider, and our mouths were two Os pressing together, and I could taste his tongue because it was so close to mine’ (242). The kiss and the awakening of gay desire between Rafe and Ben intensifies the awkwardness between them, as Ben attempts to reassure Rafe, whereas Rafe has already known for a long time that he is gay.

It is challenging for the reader to predict at this point how the script will develop and how it will conclude. The ‘bromance’, as Ben terms it, must stop because his family would never accept it. However, back at Natick after Thanksgiving weekend, the two do have sex together. Through the creative writing assignments that Rafe works on with his English teacher, Rafe gradually arrives at the conclusion that he has to come out again at Natick. Rafe wants to say ‘*I love you, I’m in love with you, let’s stay in love no matter what after this conversation*. But that isn’t how it works, maybe. I guessed I was about to find out’ (284). Ben admits that he loves him, that Rafe is the closest friend he has ever had and that he cannot bear the thought of Rafe being annoyed with him, but he also says that he has to be straight. ‘Here we were, two jocks, crying together’ (285). Readers at this point hope that the ‘bug’ in the script will be overcome and that both will commit to a romantic relationship. However, the novel’s outcome is somewhat different.

The novel concludes with Rafe performing the ‘out-and-proud’ script at Natick and remaining a member of the soccer team, even though relationships with a number of other

soccer athletes have undoubtedly shifted. *Openly Straight* explores several new trajectories for the teen gay character/narrator and turns many of the gay character's typical relationships on their head. However, for the gay character to live fully and honestly, he seemingly has to come out. The gay character then embraces his 'out-and-proud' status, which enables him to have intersubjective relationships.

### **Representing Gay Sexuality in Young Adult Fiction**

This chapter's final section concentrates on gay sexuality in young adult fiction and demonstrates how the fiction has changed since 2000, when Roberta Trites argued that most sexual episodes in fiction for young adults were either non-existent or 'interstitial'. There is not sufficient space to consider each of the six novels in this particular section, but I have selected three which represent a range within the novels. In *David Inside Out*, the protagonist's first boyfriend Sean is a runner on the cross-country team. David is aware that he is drawn to Sean, but initially he averts his eyes in the showers and locker rooms and never acts on his same-sex desire. Instead, in the middle of the most important race of the year, he runs alongside Sean. 'I found his breath and meditated on it. We ran and ran. That's when it came over me - runner's bliss. I didn't have to work anymore' (24). In this brief passage, David suggests that he was able literally to draw strength from aligning and synchronising his breathing with that of Sean. On another level, the passage prefigures the two boys' sexual encounter in which David performs oral sex on Sean. The emphasis on 'breathing' and 'bliss', reinforced by the alliteration and the effort expended, followed by a climax and then rest, all indicate the rhythm of the sexual act. Here the development of David's athletic talent occurs alongside his growing awareness of his desire for Sean, which is later fulfilled.

Closeted gay character Sean is the one who initiates physical contact with David and the physically intimate side of their relationship develops quickly, even if mostly on Sean's terms. Sean is most definitely in the closet at the outset of the narrative and remains there for the duration of the novel. Both Sean and David enjoy their sexual encounters together, which are clearly not interstitial. The first time they have an encounter, the 'sight of him made me go off too. Unbelievable!' (62). A few days later, Sean asks David to his home when his parents are out and David arrives on his doorstep 'drenched and soaking' from the rain outside. Sean quickly suggests a beer and a warm soak in his parents' jacuzzi. His attitude towards David is characterised by his commands such as 'chug it' and 'catch up' in relation to the beer he has given David and then, once he has filled the jacuzzi with water, 'get in'. He says very little as he touches David and then 'he let out a little moan and rose up out of the water' (71). David is equally strongly drawn to Sean and, at this stage in the narrative, he is happy to follow Sean's wishes: 'I knew what he wanted and sat forward, opening my lips... Sean let out a cry and flooded me' (71). But shortly afterwards, although both have clearly enjoyed the encounter, Sean is quick to let him know that 'I don't put it in my mouth' (73). Sean's exploitative attitude towards David serves to position readers alongside the protagonist. As David becomes more aware of his own agency and begins to define what he would like in a relationship, he realises that his relationship with Sean will never be fulfilling. Over the course of the narrative, he moves from being a confused teen to someone who is clear about his own sexuality, has accepted it in himself and taken responsibility for it. In contrast, Sean continues to deny his gay sexuality and refuses to be seen in public with David. Shortly before New Year's Eve, David ends the relationship.

The narrative conclusion affirms David's gay subjectivity, his running ability and future potential, as well as his newly-acquired sense of subjective agency. David has

decided against any future contact with Sean. By the close of the novel, David and his gay friend Eddie, who have always enjoyed a friendship outside school, are now friends at school. David's willingness to dance with Eddie and Kick as friends at the end-of-year school celebrations, and his public association with Eddie in front of more traditional jocks such as John and Parker, indicates how much he has changed and suggests his willingness to enact an out-and-proud gay subjectivity. This represents a significantly positive change from his confusion at the outset of the novel even if he is not in a romantic couple.

In *Hat Trick*, gay sexuality is fully integrated into Simon and Alex's sense of themselves. Simon and Alex eat pizza together after the first ice-hockey match of the season. When the team plays an away match, they are usually accommodated in two-bedroom dormitory rooms. On this occasion, Simon looks over at Alex who has melted cheese on his chin. The description of this physical interaction, which is not sexual, is definitely not 'interstitial' either, but evokes a representation of an explicit sexual encounter. 'I reached over and scooped the cheese off with a finger. My arm quivered as the excitement of touching him flooded over me ... He slowly sucked the cheese off my finger. My heart rate quickened ... My body shuddered, overwhelmed by the sensations. I felt everything - his hand around my wrist, his soft lips around my finger, and his tongue licking the cheese off' (10-11). Simon's description borders on the pornographic, as his physical sensations and pleasure build from his finger to his arm, his heart and then his body. Words such as 'quiver' are typically associated with desire and stand out in this context. Again, there is the word 'flooded', which was also used in the description of gay sex in *David Inside Out*. The textual connection between food and sex is not an original one but they are frequently linked in gay fiction for young adult readers. The scene is an early indication of the strength of Simon's desire for Alex and the sexual fulfilment that, later, the two enjoy together.



The central gay relationship in *What They Always Tell Us* develops within the context of Alex's training and running sessions. One of James' friends, Nathen Rao, who is half British and half Indian and therefore doubly 'othered' from norms of masculinity, suggests that he and Alex should train or run together several times a week. They run both outside and at an indoor racetrack at the local university. When an opening comes up in the cross-country team, Nathen quickly arranges for Alex to be seen and assessed by the coach. Alex's psychological recovery from the incident where he drank disinfectant is textually linked to training and his running performances and blended, simultaneously, with the relationship that slowly unfolds between him and Nathen. Alex first begins to notice Nathen's body in the locker rooms after training sessions. After a few weeks, Nathen nudges him into the cascading water of the shower and steps into the same shower cubicle as well. 'Nathen's not grinning, but he is looking at Alex, giving him the same look he gives when he so earnestly talks about jogging' (121). From here, Nathen squeezes shower gel onto Alex's chest and then kisses him, 'on his cheek, nose, then his lips. Then Nathen's tongue in his mouth, which Alex accepts and then returns with sloppy eagerness' (122). When Alex later considers the nature of this kiss, he contrasts it with previous kisses with girls. He realises: 'This is different. It's not mechanical. It's not a joke. It feels right. He'd do it forever, if he could. He realises it is how a kiss is *supposed* to feel' (122). The short simple sentences suggest a moment of obvious clarity for Alex. The repetition of what this kiss is *not* mimics the process by which Alex comes to realise what this kiss positively is, while the italicised word '*supposed*', combined with its penultimate position in the sentence, suggests Alex's sense of relief that he is finally able to enjoy the experience of kissing someone.

The two boys' increasingly successful cross-country running performances are represented in tandem with the development of their romantic relationship. 'Each morning

when he wakes now, Alex still can't believe he is a full-fledged member of the cross-country team - it's all real, not some hazy fantasy he has dreamed up. For the first time in his life, he's on an *actual team*' (151). The relationship becomes deeper, with Alex staying overnight at Nathen's house while his parents are away. Alex contrasts his previous experience with girls with what he experiences now with Nathen: 'Before, with girls, Alex got nervous about the idea of sex and messing around, so he never pursued it. It didn't really light his fire anyway, so he figured he'd be bad at it. But this, with Nathen, doesn't feel weird – it feels so natural, like he's picked up a skill he didn't know he had' (167). The relationship continues to develop smoothly and even though Nathen will move to New York University at the end of the year, the couple are still intact at the close of the novel. The upbeat conclusion suggests that the romance is firmly established and will be able to overcome (temporary) geographical distance.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has considered and explored young adult gay-themed literature published since 2001. It began with the suggestion that novels do not always have to reflect reality but may create reality as well (Levithan, 2006). Much traditional and conservative gay-themed young adult fiction followed a negative script whereby the teen gay character was socially isolated, or the text concentrated on the individual's painful coming-out process. Recent gay-themed novels focus on gay teens who may experience a temporary period of confusion or adversity, but who have overcome those phases and have developed a positive sense of self, which is usually enacted, maintained and expressed in conjunction with their sporting talent. Readers are positioned to empathise with gay protagonists who excel at

sport and who share many points in common both with heterosexual male characters and with adolescent male readers, be they heterosexual, bisexual or gay.

The *Rainbow* trilogy introduced three new positive gay schemas and scripts, that is, the 'confused-teen' schema, the 'closeted-teen' schema and the 'out-and-proud teen' schema. Each schema instantiates its own script, with all three protagonists in the *Rainbow* trilogy moving to a point of being 'out and proud'. Two of the three principal characters excel at sport: Jason Carrillo at the team sport of basketball and Kyle Meeks at the individual sport of swimming. All the other teen gay protagonists in the six focus novels also excel at sport. Their sporting talent or masculine capital enables them to develop a positive sense of self and functions as a form of creative, psychological and physical resilience. Most of the gay athlete protagonists fall in love with another teen character who also excels at sport, a narrative strategy which keeps sport, training, competition, matches and the discussion of sport central.

Several common themes, such as sport, masculinity, romance, sexuality, the existence of heterosexuality and homophobia, run through the six novels. Most importantly, this group of texts affirms diverse versions of young adult gay masculinities and the gay athlete schema is varied with each fictional representation. Confused teens may be confused at the outset of the novel but are usually clear and out of the closet before its conclusion. Occasionally, the protagonist has been 'outed' ahead of his decision to perform the 'coming-out' script. Closeted teens are also 'out of the closet' before the close of the novel. There is only one teen protagonist, Rafe, in the group of novels considered here who begins the narrative as an 'out-and-proud' teen and he attempts, briefly and unsuccessfully, to live a label-free life but ultimately instantiates the 'coming-out' script again.

Reader transportation into a narrative is intensified by a link between the reader and the central character or protagonist (Green, 2004). Green also suggests that the reader's real-world beliefs are more likely to lead to transformation of the self when the reader becomes fully immersed in the narrative. Many of the gay characters in this group of novels do not identify with or relate to flamboyant gay characters. They are more likely to position themselves alongside heterosexual males or masculine-identified characters, even if they still enact gay sexuality.

In their thought-provoking chapter, Laura Renzi, Mark Letcher and Kristen Miraglia suggest that LGBTQ young adult literature has 'progressed rapidly in its relatively short history' and also that it 'represents some of the most daring and well-written literature within adolescent literature' (2012: 122). They emphasise the significance of some of these recent literary trends by drawing attention to the establishment in 2010 of a Children and Young Adult Literature Area of the American Library Association's Stonewall Awards, given annually to the best LGBTQ publications of the previous year. More recent gay-themed young adult fiction is becoming ever more well-written and progressive, particularly as it questions, revises and updates normative constructs and understandings of gender and sexual expression.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Finding Their Voice: Gay Singers in Contemporary Teen Television**

The majority of the teen gay characters in *Beautiful People* and *Glee* excel at singing. Whether out or emerging, the teen gay character sings for his own pleasure in ways that make him audible and visible to others, using his voice to create a sense of belonging and community, with other singers and with audiences both on and off-screen. His songs range from musical theatre anthems to classical and contemporary popular songs. He re-shapes and fashions his reality through his singing, his choice of song, his reference to musicals or specific characters from musicals and his multiple references to other iconic or popular singers. The two central gay characters discussed in this chapter, Simon Doonan in *Beautiful People* and Kurt Hummel in *Glee*, introduce a new positive gay singer schema and instantiate the positive ‘As You Like It’ script. Both television series develop the gay character over multiple episodes and introduce teen audiences (and more general audiences) to a range of additional gay or emerging gay characters. In *The Sound of Musicals*, Steven Cohan suggests that the ‘projection of musical theatre as a progressive and liberating space of heterosocial nonconformity was fundamental ... to *High School Musical*’s success in engaging its main ‘femme’ demographic of ‘tween to college-age women’ (2010: 12). Cohan argues that ‘*Glee* is following the ground paved by *High School Musical* in addressing that same demographic of ‘fangirls’ – and some fanboys too, it appears – while making much more visible the cohort of gay and lesbian fans that have always supported the genre’ (2010: 12).

A secondary gay character, Christian, makes an appearance in *Clueless* and, shortly after that, central gay characters begin to appear in a small number of independent films such as *Beautiful Thing* (1996) and *Get Real* (1999). Both of these British films, which were briefly discussed in my Introduction, feature central teen characters whose emerging subjectivity is gay. Since 2004, teen gay characters have also begun to appear on television in series such as *Degrassi* and *Skins*. I concentrate, however, on *Beautiful People* and *Glee* as they bring many of the issues relevant to teen gay characters and their counterparts in real world situations to the attention of a much wider audience. Both have been watched by mainstream audiences and therefore have the potential to be much more influential than independent art-house films. The first series, *Beautiful People*, was broadcast by BBC Television and based on the best-selling memoirs of celebrity window dresser, Simon Doonan. The second series, *Glee*, is produced by Fox Network in the United States and is still on air. Although I have already discussed *Glee* in relation to young adult lesbian cheerleaders/dancers in Chapter Three, both this series and *Beautiful People*, albeit very different, offer particular gay character schemas that seem to have wide currency. The decision to concentrate on two series only has been taken so as to explore aspects of each in more detail.<sup>33</sup>

The earliest gay film produced for young adults that I have been able to locate is Hettie MacDonald's *Beautiful Thing*, based on a screenplay written by Jonathan Harvey and filmed on a south-east London council estate. Many of the themes introduced in *Beautiful Thing* are developed further in *Beautiful People* and it is no coincidence that Jonathan Harvey also wrote the screenplay for *Beautiful People*, adapting it from Simon Doonan's memoirs. *Beautiful Thing* is a classic teen 'coming-of-age' as well as a 'coming-out' narrative; the two genres seem to be highly compatible. Although protagonist Jamie

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<sup>33</sup> There are also a number of contemporary teen films with teen gay singers including *Camp* (2003), *Tru Loved* (2008), *Were the World Mine* (2008), *Dirty Girl* (2010).

does not himself actually sing or dance until the closing moments of the film, his strong interest in old-fashioned musical films and popular gay icon Lucille Ball suggest a latent musical creativity. *Beautiful Thing* was originally intended for television broadcast only but was critically well-received and subsequently released in cinemas throughout Britain. Jamie's intense interest in musicals can be seen as a way of avoiding problematic aspects of his everyday life, including his alienation from the peer group at school. As Richard Dyer suggests, 'Musicals are discourses of happiness ... These happinesses can readily be categorised – love, yearning, fun and so on – but such terms do not catch the forms of the feelings of happiness, constructed from the rhythms, colours, shapes, movements and harmonies of music, body movement and film itself' (2011: 101). Dyer's comments make it clear that a chapter which centres on singing and which makes reference to a number of musicals will be concerned with affect or emotion as well as with cognitive schemas and scripts.

While *Beautiful People* is a comedy drama series and *Glee* a musical comedy drama, both series can be seen as 'dramedies' rooted in the tradition of the musical genre. Gay men have been some of the biggest devotees of the musical and their fascination with the musical form is extensively documented in musical theatre history and criticism (Wolf, 2002: 20). It may well be that many producers and creators of musicals, for instance, Arthur Laurents, Cole Porter, Jerome Robbins and Stephen Sondheim, were gay.<sup>34</sup> As Stacy Wolf suggests, '... in popular culture, the character of the musical theatre aficionado is a staple in representations of gay men' (2002: 20). Her examples at the time included the priest in the off-Broadway play *Party* (1995) and Buzz in Terrance McNally's *Love! Valor! Compassion!* (play 1994; film 1997). As Wolf continues, these two roles are flamboyant and traditionally associated with gay male sexuality. In this instance, musicals

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<sup>34</sup> See John M. Clum's *Something for the Boys: Musical Theater and Gay Culture* (1999).

offer locations that are both materially ‘constitutive of character and a site for the performance of camp’ (Wolf, 2002: 20-21). In *Clueless* and *Beautiful Thing*, the teen male character’s knowledge of female singers, musicals and particularly his interest in black and white films, signifies his gayness to the audience, although female protagonist Cher in *Clueless* is unaware of this coding and initially oblivious or clueless as to Christian’s sexuality.

The gay singer schema has been established in films for adults for almost two decades. Gay protagonist Billy in *Billy’s Hollywood Screen Kiss* (1999), which is a film firmly in the adult tradition, ironically suggests that gay males may have a ‘show tune gene’, implying that because so many gay characters are interested in show tunes, gay sexuality and an interest in musicals frequently seem to go hand-in-hand. Gabe, in Jim Fall’s *Trick* (1999), writes musicals and sings songs for a living. In gay-themed film *Dorian Blues* (2006), singer and go-go girl Tiffany suggests to teen gay protagonist Dorian that we all deserve an MGM moment and we all deserve to be happy, at least for the duration of a song. Dorian’s older brother has paid for him to have his first sexual experience with a girl, but instead Tiffany and Dorian spend the night dancing to classic show tunes. Aspiring actors Paul and Eddie, in *The Big Gay Musical* (2010), take leading roles in the off-Broadway musical comedy, *Adam & Steve*. *Beautiful People* and *Glee* introduce and establish the young adult gay singer schema in television aimed both at young adults and mainstream audiences.

In *Beautiful People* and *Glee*, the central gay characters perform a range of songs from musicals as well as contemporary numbers and more classical popular music. Although they can dance, they particularly seem to enjoy singing. Simon Doonan, in *Beautiful People*, is thirteen years old in the first series and fourteen in the second. His gay subjectivity is represented as in the process of emerging and, towards the close of the



series, he performs the ‘coming-out’ script to his mother Debbie. As a teen, he does not enact gay sexuality on screen but the series affirms his adult gay relationship first with Sacha and then with Mickey and thereby affirms that Simon is, as a twenty-something adult, romantically successful. Kurt Hummel, in *Glee*, is sixteen years old at the outset of the series and eighteen years old by the end of Season Three. He is initially closeted but slowly comes out to female character Mercedes in the glee club and then to his father in ‘Preggers’ (8 October, 2009), his mother having died of cancer several years previously. Neither character comes of age in metropolitan cities such as London or New York. Simon lives on Melody Crescent in suburban Reading, south-east England, while Kurt lives in a small town called Lima in West Ohio. *Beautiful People* is set in the late 1990s, while *Glee* is set in the year in which each season is first broadcast, that is, 2009-2013. Again, the specific geographical setting and the timeframe have a bearing on the ways in which Simon (*Beautiful People*) and Kurt (*Glee*) enact gay subjectivities.

The contemporary gay-themed musical dramedy series aimed at young adult audiences embodies a paradox in that it is simultaneously mainstream in terms of its music and transgressive in terms of its central performance of non-normative sexualities. In its original form, the musical and the musical film is a highly conservative and old-fashioned genre; its golden age was the cultural context of the late 1940s through to the early 1960s. Stacy Wolf suggests that the heterosexual couple is the figure that fundamentally organises most musicals, although the form of the musical as a genre connotes femininity and gayness (2011: 221). She cites D. A. Miller’s autobiographical essay on the musical, *Place for Us*, in which he writes that the dominance of women in the musical encourages a feminine, empowering identification for gay men (Miller, 1998: 90). Here, conceptualisation of the musical film is re-envisioned, revised and brought up to date by including lead characters and singers who are also gay. The comic tone of both series,

which has been referred to as ‘dramedy’, also revises and modifies the previously angst-ridden LGBT ‘coming-out’ film. The wide popularity of *Beautiful People* and *Glee* suggests that the musical genre has been successfully re-envisaged and brought up to date.

There is now an increasing number of positive teen gay characters visible on television and, more significantly, an increasing number of positive gay character schemas and scripts. As has already been argued in my previous chapter in relation to young adult fiction, many of these more recent portrayals position the gay character centre stage and privilege his individual point of view. He no longer enacts the traditionally negative ‘Romeo and Juliet’ script, but is able to fall in love and to express an empowered and creative sense of self. He is usually creative in diverse areas, particularly the performing arts, and his emerging gay subjectivity is affirmed by the development of the narrative and the conclusion of each series or each season in *Glee*. At the close of *Beautiful People*, Simon, now an adult, has returned to Reading and is about to marry his boyfriend from school, Mickey. In *Glee*, at the close of 2013, Kurt has graduated from high school and is studying performing arts at the New York Academy of Dramatic Arts. He sustains a long-term romantic relationship with Blaine, also a talented singer and performer, who has recently proposed to him.

This chapter is broadly divided into six sections. The following considers Keith Oatley’s theory of identification and how viewers of both *Beautiful People* and *Glee* are positioned to align themselves with the teen gay perspective. The next examines teen gay characters who like to sing, as demonstrated by the many similar themes that *Beautiful People* and *Glee* share. These include the gay character’s sense of invisibility, his fundamental and alienating sense of difference from his peer group and the fear of social rejection. This section also examines the ways in which the gay character can overcome those feelings through singing, be accepted as part of the group or choir and develop a

positive and strong sense of self. The fourth section considers the use in both productions of pre-existing songs as background music in the soundtrack. I argue that although these songs are not necessarily performed by the gay character, they nevertheless develop the gay character and situate him within a wider LGBT community, recognised at least by those ‘in the know’. The fifth section examines how gay characters are textually linked to particular songs or to individual characters from musicals and how the texts repeatedly invoke an intertextual web of other musicals. I suggest ways in which empathic responses are elicited from audiences and how audience members are positioned to align themselves primarily, but not exclusively, with the teen gay character.

### **A Theory of Identification**

When audiences encounter a television text, just as when readers confront a fictional text, they respond to it in one of two main ways, as Keith Oatley delineates (1994). At the top level of the taxonomic tree, as Oatley puts it, ‘one may distinguish between a person remaining outside a work of art or entering into it’ (Oatley, 1994: 54). The image in the first instance is of a person and an object, such as a person and a television screen (Oatley, 1994: 54). The image in the second is of a viewer entering the world created by the director, ‘as Alice enters the world through the looking glass’ (Oatley, 1994: 54). The boundary between the outside and the inside of the text has been characterised as a ‘semi-permeable membrane’ (Goffman, 1961). Audiences interact with directors and they interact with central characters in a television series. As Oatley points out, ‘The membranes that surround social interactions are semi-permeable because one imports some but not all of one’s own characteristics into the world within. We experience ourselves differently in each microworld’ (Oatley, 1994: 55). That is, when we enter the microworld

of a television series, we experience another character's world, as well as that character's emotional or affective experience of that world, namely, Simon's microworld in *Beautiful People* and Kurt's experience in *Glee*. Emotions are potentially transformative for us, the audience, and if we can respond creatively, that response can also produce cognitive change in us (Oatley, 1994: 61). Oatley's theory of identification provides more detail to reader transportation and transformation of attitudes.

Deep or profound emotions that occur in everyday life, such as falling in love, can change us if we allow ourselves to respond to the experience (Oatley, 1994: 60-61). If we respond emotionally to the text rather than give a 'stock' or 'habitual' response, then we are much more likely to be transformed by it. Thus, a television series can prompt audiences to 'go beyond the schema' and be changed by the experience, as David Miall has demonstrated (1989) and as was discussed in Chapter Two. Oatley suggests that audiences' responses are much more likely to be creative when a writer or director aims for the 'accommodation' of schemas (1994: 58-59). If the ordinary is presented in unusual ways or made strange or unfamiliar so that the viewer does not slip into habitual responses, then the world may be 'seen afresh, not passed over, not taken for granted' (Oatley, 1994: 58). Scenes from a television series that promote 'assimilation', that is, audiences assimilate new elements to the schema until completion and relief occur, have different effects on audiences from those that promote 'accommodation', that is, audiences must work to accommodate their schemas to what is presented in the story world (Oatley, 1994: 57-58). 'Accommodative' processes involve subjects and audiences actively making more links and connections (Oatley, 1994: 59) and viewers of *Beautiful People* and *Glee* may have to work actively to accommodate their schemas of the gay character as each series progresses.

When audiences enter or are psychologically transported into the microworld of the television series or are inside the membrane of the literary world, emotions are generally

elicited in three main ways, namely ‘sympathy, memories and emotions of identification’ (Oatley, 1994: 61). Although these three kinds of elicitation are distinct psychological processes, they are never entirely separate. First, when we sympathise with a television character, ‘those aspects of the self that are imported through the membrane are enlarged by understandings of people in the imagined world’ (Oatley, 1994: 61). Our understanding of the other is extended or expanded by our understandings of characters such as Simon in *Beautiful People* and Kurt in *Glee*, ‘and then, perhaps, also of people in the ordinary world’ (Oatley, 1994: 61). If some emotionally significant event happens, for instance, when a character in the microworld is kissed, audiences are again likely to feel a powerful and sympathetic response. Because we are ‘inviolable’ in the imagined world, our emotional response is mainly one of ‘sympathy with the characters to whom the events are happening’ (Oatley, 1994: 62); our responses are not clouded by our own potential vulnerability in a situation or by an emotional investment in events (Oatley, 1994: 62). Second, ‘emotion memories’ are triggered and recalled by events taking place in the story microworld. Each viewer will obviously have his or her own set of memories and therefore the individual response will vary from person to person. ‘Emotion memories are not simply recalled, they are ‘relived’, brought forward in time and applied to new contexts, a process of analogy that can be highly productive in creating new concepts and emotions’ (Oatley, 1994: 63). Third, identification entails both recognition of an action and imitation of that same action, as was delineated in Chapter Three. This response enables audiences to identify closely with the central character (Oatley, 1994: 63).

Oatley further elaborates a theory of identification and I summarise his findings briefly here, because they offer insights into the ways in which audiences respond to texts and thereby the potential for texts to facilitate cognitive change in their audiences. First, each spectator in the audience runs the action of the central characters on his or her own

planning processes, takes on the character's goals and experiences emotions as these plans meet obstacles or 'bugs' in the script. 'Literary simulations run on minds of audiences or readers, just as computer simulations run on computers' (Oatley, 1994: 66). The concept of simulations and the related concepts of abstraction, simplification and selection (Mar and Oatley, 2008) were discussed in Chapter Four. In everyday life, we have purposes and intentions and use our planning processors to prioritise our actions. When watching a drama, we are able to take on a character's goals and priorities; thus when a character such as Simon (*Beautiful People*) or Kurt (*Glee*) meets with obstacles to his plans, we experience genuine emotion that is our own emotion, not just the mirroring of the character's emotions, as was discussed previously in Chapter Three (Blakeslee and Blakeslee, 2008; Iacoboni, 2008; Vermeule, 2010). Plans that are successful, such as the character finding friends, falling in love or achieving creative success, tend to elicit genuine happiness in the audience as well as in the character.

Oatley outlines four further cognitive elements, 'without which the reader or spectator will not be able to run the simulation successfully' (1994: 69). Audiences need to 'adopt the goals of a protagonist' (Oatley, 1994: 69) and follow a plot-based story. They need to form mental models of imagined worlds which are equivalent to 'simulations' of imagined worlds which were discussed in Chapter Four. Audiences should receive and process speech acts addressed to them by producers/directors and writers (Oatley, 1994: 70). And I would add that songs in *Beautiful People* and *Glee* function similarly to 'speech acts'. The use of Simon's adult voice in voice-over (*Beautiful People*) also speaks directly to audience members. Finally, audiences need to integrate 'different streams of information' (Oatley, 1994: 71) to create a unified experience: 'The act of integrative construction makes this witnessing unlike what happens to an observer in real life' (Oatley, 1994: 71).

If audiences are able to respond emotionally to the texts and fulfil each of these five cognitive elements, they are likely to empathise closely with the protagonist or central character and to experience cognitive change as a result of having mentally accommodated new schemas. When they finish watching the television series or film, spectators will be (slightly) different people from the ones they were before because they will have genuinely expanded their understanding of another character's experience, in this case that of the adolescent gay character.

### **The Teen Gay Singer Schema in Contemporary Television Series**

*Beautiful People* has been described as a sort of 'camp, working-class British *Arrested Development*' (2003-2006). Both series centre on eccentric families perceived through the eyes of the adolescent son. It has also been compared with Sue Townsend's *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* (1982), which was a series of comic novels written in diary form in the voice of an adolescent male. In the first novel, Adrian Mole is thirteen-and-three-quarter years old. In *Beautiful People*, the first series' present-day scenes, which bookend each episode, are set in contemporary Manhattan in one of the famous windows of the department store Barneys. Each episode is centred on a particular prop, such as a vase, hair tongs or a set of beads, that celebrity window dresser Simon incorporates in his displays and he recounts to his boyfriend Sacha how he came to own it. These objects are not only story catalysts and memory triggers; they also have a metonymic function and serve to represent an entire scene, such as the London snow globe that recalls Simon's adolescence in Reading and his interest in Mary Poppins. In the second series, Simon's adult relationship with Sacha has ended and he has returned home to Reading, where he recounts significant episodes from his teen years directly to the audience.

Viewers of *Beautiful People* are mainly positioned to experience events from Simon's point of view and to align with his perspective — it is his voice in the voice-over and his perspective that is prioritised within the series. His commentaries reveal the gap between how he would like his life to be and the reality of his early adolescence in Reading. The voice-over sequences function as speech acts to the audience; so do many of the songs. It is mostly Simon's dreams and fantasies that are visualised or imagined on screen. Those dreams and fantasies are usually more colourful and exuberant than everyday reality; for instance, when he walks down Melody Crescent and the street is transformed into the yellow brick road from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). The camera primarily focuses on Simon's interactions with his family at home, with friends at school and with his best friend, Kyle (known as Kylie). Simon and Kylie are friends rather than boyfriends, underscored by their habit of addressing one another as 'girlfriend'. Simon and Kylie may frequently feel different to other boys their age, but together they share many interests and Simon has a close and loving, if eccentric, family. Both boys have vivid imaginations and their constant desire to break into song and dance anticipates their future creative abilities and enhances their experience of their worlds. Their imaginations also sustain them; for instance, when Simon looks inside the domestic fridge, what he sees makes him burst into song.

Viewers are positioned to experience events in *Glee* from multiple teen perspectives, including that of Kurt Hummel. *Glee* features a group of fictional teens who attend William McKinley High School in the town of Lima, Ohio, and focuses on the members of the glee club or show choir, New Directions, who are coded as 'different' from the social norm. Every member of the glee club has a reason for feeling different. Rachel Berry, for instance, is adopted and has two gay fathers. Each forty-five minute episode contains a minimum of four musical performances and the musical standard is



sufficiently high that many of the tracks have been released as audio and have become commercially successful in their own right. Kurt Hummel is one of the original glee club members and he auditions for the glee club, New Directions, in the first episode<sup>35</sup>. He can be regarded as both conforming to a popular gay male schema and inflecting the type with more nuanced and subtle characterisation.

The notion of performance may influence viewers' responses to Simon in *Beautiful People* and Kurt in *Glee*. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity (1993) is not the main focus in this discussion. Rather, the teen gay character sings to express his emotions and his authentic sense of self. Anthony Storr points out that there is a difference between musical emotion and genuine feeling as musical structure – for instance, timing, key, and the end of the song – contains within it a 'reassuring orderliness' (1992). The possible effect of this musical structure on a viewer or audience member can be compared to readers who 'experience fiction in a place of safety away from the ordinary world, so that the prompting of emotions is more voluntary than in ordinary life...' (Oatley, 2002: 63). Emotions are also more readily resolved at the conclusion of a song or performance. In my discussion of both series, I concentrate on the literal performance of singing rather than Butler's concept of gender performativity (1993).

In an issue of *Entertainment Weekly* that was dedicated to the representation of gay teens on television, the magazine argues that a 'bold new class of young gay characters on shows like *Glee* is changing hearts, minds and Hollywood' (January 2011). It charts a trajectory from 'marginalised outcasts and goofy sidekicks to some of the highest profile – and most beloved – characters.' Heterosexual or straight teens are no longer privileged in series such as *Glee*, which highlights some of the socio-cultural shifts towards greater

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<sup>35</sup> *Glee* was first broadcast in 2009, and, at the time of writing, has broadcast its fifth season. The series will conclude in 2015.

acceptance of LGB subjects. Many of the teen dramas currently on television present homophobic attitudes as the major problem to be overcome, while simultaneously seeking to normalise gay identities. While in this chapter I mainly concentrate on the gay character's creative singing talent, that talent does not exist entirely separately from other themes; both Simon and Kurt are shown to endure homophobic bullying and there are several scenes in both series that represent the gay character as the target of verbal and physical abuse by other males in the peer group. Nevertheless, neither series reiterates the victim or martyr narratives.

## **Visibility**

The themes of invisibility and visibility permeate both texts discussed in this chapter. Simon Doonan and Kurt Hummel both feel 'invisible' at school. They are neither particularly athletic, academic nor socially popular, although both *Beautiful People* and *Glee* contain comic scenes in which the gay character is, briefly, athletically successful. Simon's interest in singing and dancing enables him to express himself, but he is never really able to develop those interests at school and his parents cannot afford the fees for him to attend the local theatre school. Kylie feels similarly invisible and when towards the close of the series Simon begins to show interest in Mickey, a new boy at school, Kylie sings the lyrics cited below in a closet under the stairs at Simon's house ('How I Got My Gash': 18 December, 2009 ). The scene is comic, but the lyrics suggest that underneath the comedy Kylie experiences a form of claustrophobia ('nobody could breathe'). The repetition of 'see' and 'me' and the position of both words at the end of the musical phrase further emphasise Kylie's need or wish to be seen and to be accepted ('who love me for me').

Stuck in the dark and the confines  
Of a place where nobody could breathe  
I'll suffer the fools with their closed minds  
To the day when the world can see me  
There'll be a world that is longing to see  
One day  
Beautiful people who love me for me  
One day  
Some day  
One day  
I'll find a place I can breathe  
When the world will see me.

The song's final line puts the emphasis on Kylie's need to be seen not just by close family and friends but by 'the world'.

One of the most direct expressions of those feelings of invisibility is Kurt's audition performance for New Directions at the outset of *Glee* in 'Pilot' (19 July, 2009). He selects the show tune 'Mr. Cellophane' from the musical *Chicago* (2002), the lyrics of which convey his feelings of insignificance and vulnerability in relation to others:

Cellophane,  
Mister Cellophane,  
Should have been my name,  
Mister Cellophane,  
'Cause you can look right through me,

Walk right by me,

And never know I'm there.

Never even know I'm there!

Kurt's rendition of this edgy song is accompanied on stage by the school's pianist and the on-screen audience is choir director Will Schuester, who responds to Kurt's song selection with interest. Kurt's sense of invisibility is conveyed by the single sentence that elaborates on Mr. Cellophane's name. The lyrics emphasise and repeat 'never know I'm there' and the music slows for the delivery of the final line, drawing out the sound of each word and particularly the word 'know', which is extremely high even for a tenor voice.

However, contradicting the projected fragile sense of self, Kurt holds one particularly high note a little longer than necessary and smoothes his hair down in an exaggerated gesture, which suggests that he may have a stronger sense of self than he is choosing to present here. One of the reasons for Kurt's sense of invisibility is that at this very early point in the series he performs the 'closeted-teen' schema. Paradoxically, singing a song about invisibility makes the gay character more visible. Both songs suggest that the teen gay character who is in the closet and who feels compelled to hide his sexuality or to 'pass' as straight suffers from not being fully seen and understood by others. Viewers who respond emotionally or affectively to these songs are likely to form a mental link or connection to the character and begin to identify with that character's particular experience.

In the two focus texts, the gay character's performance or rendition of a song frequently creates an atmosphere of collaboration, community and hope. In *Beautiful People*, the creative act of singing enables Simon to overcome his sense of difference, feel part of his family and reach out to his friend Kylie. Simon and Kylie form a boy band

called 'E-male' in 'How I Got My Plumes' (31 March, 2010) and practise their song and dance routines at school only to be upstaged by Simon's pregnant sister and her girl group. They discuss their plans for the band with their music teacher Mr. Carr who agrees to be their manager. They confidently expect 'a record deal, international celebrity, and the all-important pop video', and the camera moves from the classroom discussion to their imaginary psychedelic pop video which is immediately visualised on screen. However, the lyrics are slightly repetitive, 'Body pop don't stop, body pop until you drop', as is the melody, and, unsurprisingly, they fail to secure a recording contract. Simon wishes his family was a 'singing family' along the lines of the Von Trapp family. He even imagines them as Abba, and again, the camera cuts from school to a pop video of an Abba performance with the four singers' heads replaced by Simon's head and the heads of his family.

In *Glee*, Kurt's singing ability and his membership of two group choirs allow him to collaborate with others, create community and communicate with an audience both on and off-screen.

Singers, whether they are gay or straight, share a talent for singing and take pleasure in rehearsing together and performing together. Group singing has been shown to fulfil basic needs for vocal and social connectedness and intersubjectivity. Because characters in New Directions have to co-operate with each other by selecting which songs to sing, who will have which part and which voice has the melodic line, Kurt's membership of this group and, later, The Warblers at the Dalton Academy, allows him to form social bonds. When the choirs perform, the gay character also has the opportunity to form social relationships with wider audiences within the series and with television audiences worldwide. The act of performance is believed to promote feelings of pride and positive self-esteem, which are linked to social contribution and personal recognition. Pearl

Wormhoudt discusses the development of positive self-esteem in the adolescent singer as growing from ‘achievement, supportive praise and belonging to a group’ (2001: 90). *Glee* club director Will Schuester frequently sets an assignment for the group to work on independently and the club is frequently divided into any number of different configurations. The characters compete against each other, but also take turns to listen to each other; the vocal interrelationships are metonymic of the social relationships that form between different members of New Directions.

In addition, each character brings a different singing style to the group and in this way each character has a direct influence on others that can be discerned in the group’s singing performances. The blending that occurs between different voices and musical styles also involves diverse characters accommodating their schemas of the others, as well as the audience accommodating diverse schemas for those characters. The different combinations of voices and musical styles create a contrasting range of performances, which are likely to appeal to diverse teen audiences (rhythm and blues, jazz, soul, rock). Through singing, otherwise marginalised characters can develop a relationship with each other and demonstrate that they are much more than their physical appearance or surface image might suggest. Diversity can then be celebrated as positive, rather than something just to be tolerated.

The long-term dream of fame for both Simon (*Beautiful People*) and Kurt (*Glee*) can be understood more broadly as a desire for social acceptance. Alan Downs suggests that an early awareness of difference, perhaps starting as young as four to six years old, leads young boys who are likely to grow up gay to do everything within their power to retain the attention and love of parents (2012: 10). Downs suggests that the early fear of abandonment or rejection becomes a significant part of the gay subject’s personality, so that he will be driven to an unusual degree by a desire to fit in, be accepted and feel that he

belongs. The sense of being accepted may be elusive, but the dream of personal fame is a recurring theme in both focus texts. There is also a shared interest in fame, celebrity and individual female stars who are presumed to be adored by males in the audience. In *Beautiful People*, Simon and Kylie are fascinated by celebrity, although they are unclear as to how they might become famous themselves. Simon's mother imagines that he will become a star in a West End show. At the age of thirteen, Simon and Kylie's icons include the singers Kylie Minogue and Madonna, and, for her fashion style, Victoria Beckham. *Glee* announces from the outset of the series that fame and social acceptance are two of its main thematic preoccupations and several principal characters are constructed as preoccupied with achieving fame and celebrity. Rachel Berry places gold star stickers after her name and explains the metaphor to viewers who may not yet have picked up on the point. 'Fame is the most important thing in our culture now. And if there's one thing I've learnt, it's that no-one's just going to hand it to you.'

In his history of fame, Leo Braudy (1997) characterises the desire for celebrity as based on and stemming from a 'dream of acceptance'. The concept of fame, according to Braudy, holds the (often illusory) promise that once a person achieves fame, he or she will be embraced, accepted, desired and sought after by others for the rest of his or her life. Fame may well represent the pinnacle of social acceptance and success, confirming social visibility, recognition and inclusion as the ultimate social reward. The opposite, social exclusion, or the deprivation of social contact, has historically been used as powerful social punishment and still is today.<sup>36</sup> It is also worth differentiating 'acceptance' from 'tolerance', which can be characterised as partial acceptance and inclusion. Kurt's desire for visibility and fame is constructed as a pattern that is paralleled with lead female character Rachel Berry's quest for fame and suggests that the need to belong and the need

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<sup>36</sup> D. M. Buss (1990): 'The evolution of anxiety and social exclusion'. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 9, 196-210.

for acceptance extends to many teens, not just LGB teens. Kurt does not desire fame at any cost and his lack of ruthlessness makes him an even more positive character for the audience.

The gay character frequently elicits empathy from the audience through his use of song and, on occasion, he also elicits empathy from other members of the glee club. In *Glee*, a musical mash-up is ‘when you take two songs and mash it together to make an even richer explosion of musical expression’ (‘Vitamin D’, 7 October, 2009). The mash-up resists ‘the typical social and symbolic pairings associated with dominant cultural ideology, particularly ideologies associated with gender and sexual norms’ (Hunting and McQueen, 2014: 292). The musical mash-up is exemplified in ‘Duets’ (12 October, 2010) in which Kurt overcomes his sense of loneliness through song. As Hunting and McQueen point out, songs typically performed by women are, in *Glee*, frequently performed by gay characters Kurt and Blaine, who show that their singing voices are capable of producing the higher notes and sounds usually associated with female voices. In so doing, the teen gay singer indirectly suggests that gender should not be used as a reason to restrict creativity and creative song choices.

At the outset of the episode, Kurt suggests performing a duet to new student and glee club member, Sam. Sam agrees, but Kurt is advised not to perform a duet with him, as it will cause difficulties for the newcomer to the school. On reflection, Kurt decides to perform a solo number, announcing to the glee club that ‘when you’re different, when you’re ... special, sometimes you have to get used to being alone’. He performs ‘Victor/Victoria’ as part of the competition set by Will Schuester. His solo performance elicits audience empathy for the gay character off-screen and, more significantly, also elicits empathy from Rachel. She suggests that they perform an alternative song after the



competition is over and the episode concludes with Rachel and Kurt's slow mash-up of 'Happy Days are Here Again'/'Get Happy'.<sup>37</sup>

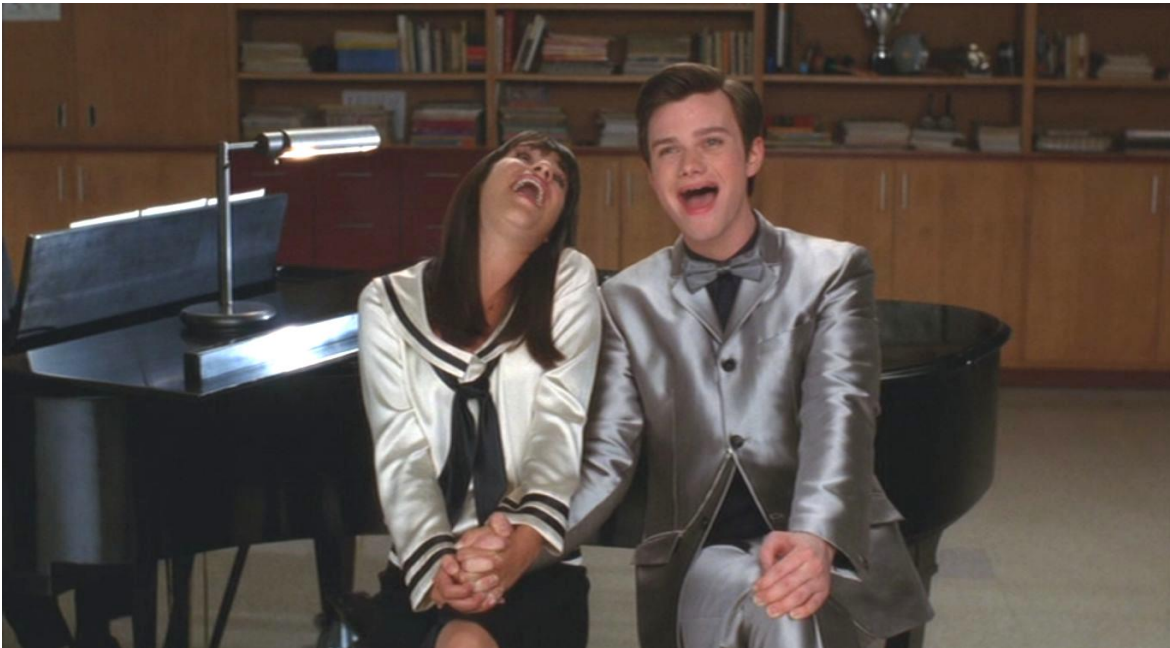


Figure 1. Rachel and Kurt sing a duet.

Rachel is dressed in an outfit similar to the one Barbra Streisand wore when she performed 'Happy Days'.<sup>38</sup> Streisand also performed this song on 'The Judy Garland Show' with Garland's counter-melody of 'Get Happy':

Kurt: Forget your troubles. (Rachel: Happy days)

Come on get happy. (Rachel: Are here again)

You better chase all your cares away. (Rachel: The skies above are clear again.)

Shout hallelujah. (Rachel: So let's sing a song)

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<sup>37</sup> 'Get Happy' is a song closely associated with Judy Garland, who first performed the number in the musical film *Summer Stock* (1950).

'Happy Days are Here Again' was first copyrighted in 1929, and was the concluding number in *Chasing Rainbows* (1930). Film historian Edwin Bradley has described the song as a 'pull-out-all-the stops' technicolour finale, against a 'Great War Armistice show-within-a-show backdrop.' The song was also used as the campaign song for Franklin Delano Roosevelt's successful 1932 presidential campaign. After Roosevelt's campaign, the song became the unofficial theme of the Democratic Party. Wikipedia/[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy\\_Days\\_Are\\_Here\\_Again](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy_Days_Are_Here_Again).

Come on get happy. (Rachel: Of cheer again)

Kurt: Get ready for the judgement day. (Rachel: Happy days are here again.)

Hunting and McQueen suggest that *Glee*'s mash-up aesthetic is made apparent in the visual style employed during the musical numbers, in particular '... its editing patterns and the specific ways it blends together elements from film musicals and music videos' (2014: 295). In earlier duets in the episode, the editing style is very rapid and, at times, frenetic, with the average single shot length approximately two to three seconds.

The soundtrack of Rachel and Kurt's musical mash-up begins at the restaurant Breadstix where Quinn and Sam, who have won the duet competition, eat dinner together. When Rachel and Kurt sing their lyrical duet, they are seated on stools next to the grand piano and the camera moves smoothly between the choir room, Breadstix and other spaces at school. Quinn puts the free vouchers back in her bag and insists that Sam pay for their meal, as a 'gentleman always pays on the first date'. The camera then pans from Sam and Quinn's booth to the next booth, where Brittany eats her spaghetti and meatballs alone, pushing the meatball around the plate with her nose, in a way that she wanted to do with Santana, but Santana has instead performed a duet with Mercedes. The song integrates a number of diverse storylines and, without verbally addressing each character's particular situation, is used to highlight a new romance, disappointment and loneliness. The music builds in pitch and intensity and the two singers, Rachel and Kurt, both harmonise their vocals and draw strength from each other in the way that they deliver the final few notes, seeming to sustain them forever.

If fame and social acceptance are important to Kurt, they are not pursued at any cost. The episode 'Wheels' (11 November, 2009) challenges the assumption that certain songs can be performed only by girls and others only by boys; it indirectly suggests that

the range of behaviours deemed appropriate for one or the other gender is similarly falsely limited. The camera intercuts between Kurt and Rachel's renditions of 'Defying Gravity', a solo from the musical *Wicked*, inviting comparisons between the two versions and again constructing them as equally talented singers. 'Defying Gravity'<sup>39</sup> is usually performed by female singers, but Kurt believes he can perform the solo as well as any girl. Will Schuester finally agrees to hold a 'diva-off': Rachel and Kurt will perform individually and the glee club will vote for the best performance. The winning performer will then sing the solo in front of a much larger, general, audience. Kurt deliberately 'blows' the high F note to spare his father the awkward situation of attending a concert where his son sings a solo typically performed by a female singer. Ironically, the note he deliberately fails to reach occurs towards the very end of a solo that otherwise is original and moving. Although he loses the competition, his willingness to protect his father is represented positively. In case the audience misses the point, Kurt explains: 'You were so hurt, and so upset. It just killed me ... I'm just saying that I love you more than I love being a star.' The episode affirms Kurt's singing talent, while giving him the space to show that he is sensitive to others, again eliciting empathic responses from the audience.

The gay character's realisation that he is different from the majority of other boys is represented as leading to his sense of social isolation, although his sense of difference can be overcome, at least temporarily, through music, dance and his ability to sing. Simon's imagination enables him to envisage an environment that is more vivid and alive than the one he inhabits. Singing also allows him to connect with others in his community, such as Kylie, as well as with real-world singers who have imagined solutions to problems and

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<sup>39</sup> 'Defying Gravity' was used as the anthem at the 2007 Gay Pride Parade and Festival in Los Angeles, and was originally performed by Idina Menzel and Kristin Chenoweth in 2003. Both singers also have secondary roles in *Glee*. *Wicked* is another text frequently linked to the LGBT community. Stacy Wolf discusses the text as a love story between two women ('Defying Gravity': Queer Conventions in the Musical *Wicked*', *Theatre Journal*, 60.1 (2008): 1-21.

better ways of living. In 'How I Got My Plumes', Simon and Kylie's music teacher, Mr. Carr, takes the two boys to a dress rehearsal for the Eurovision Song contest. Although they do not secure a recording contract for their band 'E-male', they do end up locked in a disabled toilet with Eurovision Song contest singer, Dana International. And Simon does manage to take one of the plumes from her costume. Musical numbers can provide an agreeable distraction or offer at least temporary escape from the routines of everyday life. Singing enables individual singers to form cohesive groups with others with whom they sing or with the audience on-screen or off-screen. Singing therefore may facilitate the social integration of the individual gay character.

In 'Original Song' (15 March, 2011), Kurt's first solo singing performance changes the way other characters at his new school see him and particularly transforms the way he is seen by Blaine Anderson, the choir leader of The Warblers. Kurt performs *Blackbird*, a song that has political associations with the civil rights movement and is associated with several teen LGBT coming-of-age texts, such as Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999). Kurt is initially in awe of the lead singer of his new school choir, but the tables are turned when Kurt performs his version of *Blackbird* to mark the death of the Warblers' canary Pavarotti. The association with The Beatles, the song's political undertones and Kurt's solemn and pure musical interpretation of the solo as a tribute to the dead canary all foreground the way songs are used to develop and express character. Kurt's performance also transforms the way lead singer Blaine sees him, as is made clear. The camera cuts between Kurt's solo, the faces of those accompanying him a cappella and, in particular, Blaine's responses to the performance, which are registered in increasingly softer facial expressions.

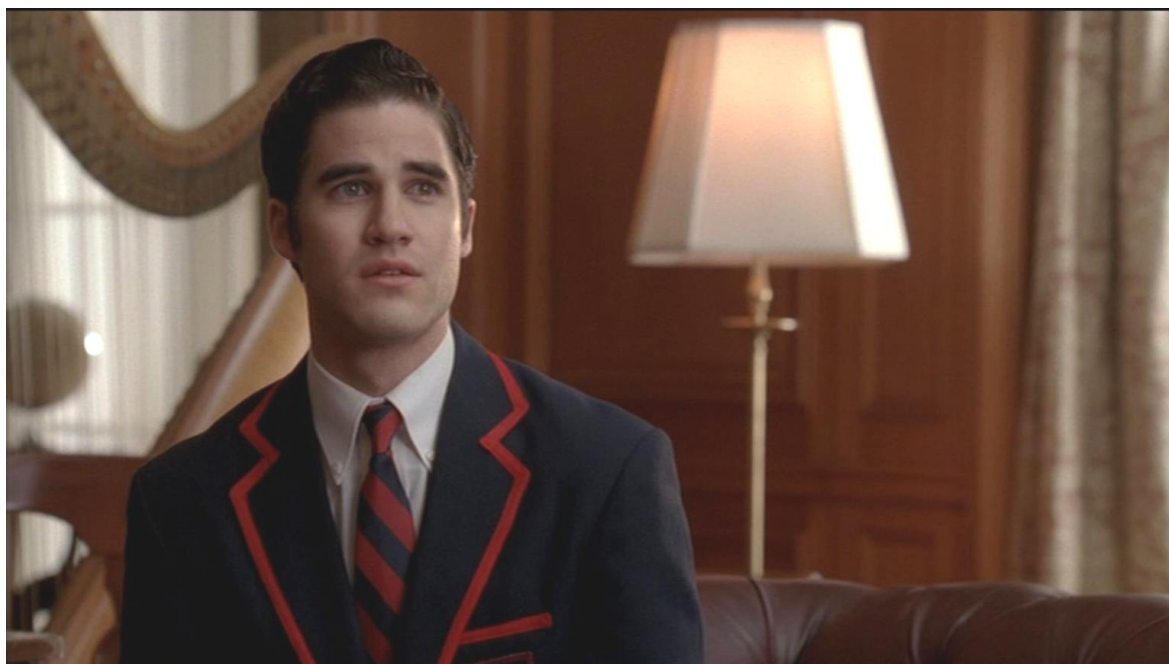


Figure 2. Blaine is moved by Kurt's performance.

The on-screen audience is shown implementing schema accommodation; in other words, Kurt is no longer the victim of a homophobic bully, but someone who is creative and talented in his own right, transformed by music and transforming others' views of him. Kurt's creative expression and the expression of his same-sex desire are represented on screen very closely, as shortly after Kurt's first solo performance, Kurt and Blaine exchange an on-screen kiss that marks the beginning of their romantic relationship.

### **The Use of Pre-Existing Music and Songs on the Soundtrack**

Those viewers who are already familiar with a pre-existing song, show tune or theme from a film or television series will have prior inter-textual associations with it; this can be an informing feature (but crucially not the only one) of the viewer's understanding of the songs' performances (Garwood, 2006: 108). The soundtrack of *Beautiful People* includes pre-existing songs and theme tunes that are not performed by an on-screen character but

nevertheless work to denote a particular time period, to comment on a character or perhaps to enable a character to express himself indirectly by association. Production numbers, show tunes and pop songs can evoke a particular network of associations for informed and ‘insider’ audiences, especially the LGBT community. Pauline Reay suggests that the songs’ extra-textual meanings are often related to the lyrics as well as ‘conveying a sense of the social and historical context’ (2004: 40). Reay’s suggestions are supported by the two texts under consideration here.

Towards the end of the episode in *Beautiful People* ‘How I Got My Globe’ (6 November, 2008), the English teacher Miss Prentice returns to London to be with her ‘bohemian’ lover, Francois. The boys’ dreams of a glamorous life are crushed when her planned school ski trip is cancelled and they are disappointed that she has to leave, but she gives them a card and suggests they write to her. In turn, they (briefly) run away and are surprised to locate her home on a West London council estate, with a middle-aged, overweight and decidedly unglamorous Francois. Miss Prentice is even more taken aback, insisting they leave immediately and never return. As the boys walk away from her front door, their dreams crushed for the second time, the soundtrack is taken from the Pet Shop Boys’ performance of ‘Somewhere’ from *West Side Story*, which has been performed by Julie Andrews, Barbra Streisand and Tom Waits, all of whom are well-known gay icons (Streisand, for example, has played cross-dressing characters, for instance, in *Yentl*, where she plays a girl who has to pass as a boy).<sup>40</sup>

One of the singers in The Pet Shop Boys is gay-identified and the band’s songs are closely associated with the gay community. The Pet Shop Boys’ identity and sense of self

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<sup>40</sup> *West Side Story*, itself a revised version of the ‘Romeo and Juliet’ script, is the first major Broadway musical about teens, and occurs repeatedly in LGBT teen film and television (cf. *Tru Loved*, *Glee*). (‘There’s a place for us, a time and a place for us, Peace and quiet and open air, Hold my hand and I’ll take you there, somehow, some day, somewhere’)

is expressed in relation to their interpretation of the musical number, but the particular piece of music they choose to perform also situates and produces the singers. Although Simon and Kylie do not sing 'Somewhere', the soundtrack implicitly links them with the Pet Shop Boys and their fan base. It also connects them to other gay icons and, ultimately to *West Side Story*, which has been adopted by the LGBT community for its inclusion of a teenage love that is rejected by both the couple's friends because they belong to communities or gangs in conflict with each other (here, the Jets and the Sharks). Simon Frith suggests that we can make sense of a musical experience only by taking on 'both a subjective and a collective identity' (1996: 294). It means experiencing ourselves in a different way and perhaps in a more collective, collaborative and inter-subjective way. 'Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics. Music may be a metaphor for identity, but then the self is always an imagined self' (1996: 294).

*West Side Story* also appears in at least three episodes of *Glee*. In 'The First Time' (8 November, 2011), numbers from the school's musical in which on-screen characters perform on a stage are juxtaposed alongside the soundtrack of, for example, Roxy Music's 'Love is a Drug' (1975). Rachel and Blaine's rendition of 'One Hand, One Heart' is also used in the soundtrack to accompany images of the gay couple and their first sexual experience. In the school's production of *West Side Story*, Maria is played by the character Rachel Berry and Tony by the character Blaine Anderson. Rachel is in a romantic relationship with Finn and Blaine in a romantic relationship with Kurt. After the final performance, both couples are represented on screen as having sex for the first time. Rachel and Blaine's rendition of 'One Hand, One Heart' unifies the heterosexual couple on stage at the same time as it unifies the gay couple on screen. In the decision to depict a teen

rite of passage in this way, the series positions gay teens alongside straight teens without conflating them; both gay and heterosexual romantic relationships share equal screen time.

The camera, which is situated above the double bed, begins at the boys' feet in socks and moves along their clothed bodies and comes to a pause on their faces which are turned towards each other. The camera moves in a way that echoes the representation of Santana and Brittany's same-sex desire in 'Duets'.



Figure 3. Blaine and Kurt in bed.

*Entertainment Weekly* has described the representation of the sex scene between the teen gay couple of Kurt and Blaine as 'handled very delicately and incredibly moving' (2011). As far as I have been able to establish, Kurt and Blaine's expression of same-sex desire within the context of a North American television series for young adults is groundbreaking and progressive. Creatively, gay and straight characters (here Blaine and Rachel respectively) are represented on stage and within the school musical as equals, metonymically suggesting the equal value given both to Rachel and Finn's heterosexual romance and to Blaine and Kurt's gay romance. The use of the song from *West Side Story*



links adolescent gay love to a heterosexual love that triumphs ‘against all odds’. In *West Side Story*, Tony is shot dead towards the close of the film and therefore the romantic relationship between Maria and Tony ends tragically. But here, the gay and the straight couple are affirmed, and the atmosphere is one of peace and calm.

### **Attachments between Character and Musical and between Character and Song**

In this final section, I shall argue that the teen gay character in both these series is frequently associated with a particular character from a musical or a particular singer. He may not necessarily sing songs from the musical but there is no doubt that the gay character is creatively inspired by the fictional character. Simon in *Beautiful People* is inspired by the fictional British nanny Mary Poppins while Kurt seems inspired by Beyonce’s pop song, ‘Single Ladies’. These specific types of performances in *Beautiful People* and *Glee* directly link the gay character and the musical or gay character and pop song.

In episode six, entitled ‘How I Got My Globe’ (6 November, 2008), Simon recounts how he came to own a London snow globe. The episode is intertextually structured around well-known scenes and lines of dialogue from the musical film *Mary Poppins* (1964), which centres on a magical British nanny and is set in London. London is also where the ‘beautiful people’ of the series title are supposed to live. P. L. Travers’ series of books for children was produced as a Walt Disney film, starring Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke. *Mary Poppins* (1964) was also adapted for the stage and opened in London’s West End in 2004 and on Broadway in 2006, where in 2014 it is still running. The enduring appeal of *Mary Poppins* can be discerned in the recent production of another feature film, *Saving Mr. Banks* (2013), which develops a secondary character, Mr. Banks,

from the original film. Both the film and stage versions of *Mary Poppins* have been hugely popular with a range of audiences, including children and families: ‘Whether we see them nostalgically, critically, or as camp, they seem to have a timeless quality. *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music* continue to hold central places in American [and British] culture’ (Wolf, 2002: 132).

There are layers upon layers of cultural associations around the character of Mary Poppins. The majority of thirteen-year-old schoolboys would probably not give Mary Poppins a second thought. They certainly would not dream about Mary Poppins, or be interested in her to the degree that Simon and Kylie are. Even Simon’s mother Debbie struggles to understand why they are so interested in the nanny. She reminds her son, ‘You’re too old to have a nanny’. But the idea of someone floating down from the clouds to make everyday life less disagreeable and less dull is highly appealing, to Simon in particular. The episode thus suggests the way in which the creative character adjusts his environment to render it more interesting to him. As suggested earlier, Simon and Kylie do not sing musical numbers from *Mary Poppins* in this episode, but they do obsess about the character and Simon decorates his bedroom window with hand-made cut-outs which evoke a scene from the film.



Figure 4. Simon's bedroom window during this episode.

There is a comic mismatch between the character of Mary Poppins and that of Simon and Kylie's English teacher Miss Prentice. Mary Poppins is typically upper-class, proper and no-nonsense and she definitely has no time for romance; Miss Prentice, however, is dressed exotically and seems to spend most of her time in a fantasy world. The episode also blurs a number of different eras (the original film of *Mary Poppins* was set in the 1910s and produced in 1964, while *Beautiful People* is set in 1997-1998). When new English teacher Miss Prentice arrives one rainy afternoon holding an umbrella, it is clear that Simon and his best friend Kylie immediately turn her into Mary Poppins.



Figure 5. New English teacher, Miss Prentice, arrives at school.



Figure 6. Debbie, Simon and Kylie's reaction to Miss Prentice.

Miss Prentice breaks into song a number of times during the episode to express her sense of dissatisfaction with where she finds herself, a dissatisfaction she shares with Simon and Kylie, even though hers seems to be more of a mid-life crisis. Miss Prentice performs a

musical number from *Sweet Charity* (1966) with the two boys in their school uniform, but her choice of songs has nothing to do with Mary Poppins, suggesting she does not self-identify with the British nanny. In any case, the two boys definitely find her ‘glamorous’ and she is their closest link to the world of the ‘beautiful people’.

All three strike up a musical number when they break into ‘There’s Got To Be Something Better than This’,<sup>41</sup> which was originally performed by Shirley MacLaine in *Sweet Charity*. The backdrop to the first part of this quick-paced number is the grey school corridor, but when they sing and dance their way out of school, they enter an even more dismal grey pedestrian shopping area. They ignore their drab surroundings and continue to sing and dance with full background orchestral accompaniment, ending up at the public house where Simon’s mother works as a barmaid. At this point, reality briefly imposes itself when Simon’s mother discovers that the two boys, at thirteen, have been served alcohol and are drinking with one of their teachers. The dispute is too dull for the boys to witness and Simon and Kylie, who earlier in the episode have been watching the television series *Dynasty*, re-conceive Debbie’s argument as a brawl between Alexis and Krystal on a 1980s set from *Dynasty*. The boys’ imaginations turn the grey urban view outside the pub into a sun-lit garden, and the scene evokes the carnivalesque mode, which is reinforced by the sight of the two boys’ faces and the *Dynasty*-like scene they watch with delight, to the theme tune from the series. The boys gaze out of the window and visualise two society ladies in the middle of a physical fight, throwing each other into a lily pond.

The concept of spectacle is at the heart of *Beautiful People*. Extra-textual associations and meanings construct an added dimension and depth to the characters as well as to the narrative plot. Both Jeff Smith and Claudia Gorbman suggest that songs

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<sup>41</sup> The chorus is as follows: ‘And when I find me some kind of life I can live/I’m gonna get up.../I’m gonna get out.../La la la la la la/How wow how wow/And when I find me some kind of life I can live/I’m gonna get up.../I’m gonna get up...I’m gonna get up, get out and live it!’

‘require narrative to cede to spectacle’ and that ‘lyrics and action compete for attention’ (Gorbman, 1987; Smith, 1998). But *Beautiful People* is more interested in spectacle than narrative and more interested in songs, lyrics and dancing than in action. Lauren Anderson suggests that the lyrics usually give referential meaning to music and that, unlike ‘classical film music’s subordination to dialogue, popular music’s lyrics can replace or substitute for dialogue’ (2003: 169). Anderson’s observations are supported by the use of pre-existing songs in *Beautiful People*.

The attachment between gay character and song is equally strong in several episodes of *Glee*. Here I examine only a small part of one episode, ‘Preggers’ (23 September, 2009), which is driven by the theme of pregnancy. The surface theme has, clearly, very little to do with a teen gay character, but indirectly the theme does speak to the gay character’s situation, although differences are also touched on. The teen gay character is here textually linked with comedy and performance, particularly the highly popular number, ‘Single Ladies’; this time, however, the gay character dances a sequence of set steps to the track rather than singing it.

Teen pregnancy has long been a source of secrecy, fear and shame and the episode deftly parallels Quinn’s pregnancy with a second ‘hysterical’ adult pregnancy experienced by Terri, the wife of glee club director Will Schuester. Quinn, who has inadvertently become pregnant by Puck, is contrasted with Terri, who would like to be pregnant and lies to her husband that she is. On one level, the narrative action is played out between these two strands, but they also function as commentary on Kurt’s situation, suggesting that the closeted gay character is compelled to lie. The scenes in which the two female characters lie are contrasted with the gay character’s need to withhold information from others; they thus work to create audience empathy and understanding for the gay character, even if at the expense of the female character. All the negative emotions associated with lying,



shame and hypocrisy are experienced and expressed here by heterosexual female characters, Quinn and Terri. In terms of responsibility, both female characters are in the wrong; they really do lie to those closest to them. Quinn and Terri's lies are represented as being of a very different order to Kurt's 'lie', which is presented in 'Preggers' more as a hesitation to reveal the complete truth.

In contrast to Quinn and Terri, Kurt is associated with much of the episode's positive humour. Although he does not perform a singing solo in this episode, he does make reference to a highly popular pre-existing pop song and music video. The scenes in which Kurt appears are linked with comedy, especially the series of set moves to Beyoncé's *Single Ladies*.<sup>42</sup> Kurt takes his performance of *Single Ladies* out of the home and onto the football pitch in ways that are metonymic of his coming-out process. He performs to the music in front of the football team, he rehearses the moves with the football team in the choir room and, in the middle of a key football match, he dances to the music in front of the crowd before scoring the winning goal. Kurt's new-found confidence as a result of his important position as kicker on the team and scoring a winning goal gives him the courage to come out to his father. His father's low-key acceptance of Kurt's gay sexuality – 'I know. I've known since you were three ... If that's who you are, there's nothing I can do about it, and I love you just as much' – enables Kurt to feel more fully seen and understood. Unlike Quinn and Terri, he tells the truth to the person closest to him.

The majority of the songs in *Glee* already have a history behind them, unlike the specially-composed score or the inclusion of a classical music score. These songs have enjoyed an existence in their own right before being musically re-arranged and incorporated into the series. As Ian Garwood suggests in his study of pop-music in film,

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<sup>42</sup> ([http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x74puc\\_beyonce-single-ladies-official-musi\\_music](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x74puc_beyonce-single-ladies-official-musi_music))

the pre-existing quality of these songs does not lead to a simple importation of meanings into the films in which they are used. 'The choices made by film-makers as to the relative weight given to both the song's purely musical and culturally resonant qualities in relation to a particular dramatic situation are decisive in shaping the viewer's understanding of the role the music plays' (Garwood, 2001: 92). The same or similar musical material can generate different meanings or have different significance or weight, according to its particular positioning within a filmed fictional world, as was demonstrated in the discussion of 'Somewhere' (in *Beautiful People*) and 'Somewhere' (in *Glee*). Both songs from *West Side Story* link the gay character and his experience to a tragic heterosexual romance that is ended prematurely. Songs also connect the teen gay character to a wider network of LGBT texts. Some of the songs have a narrative function in that the lyrics of the song may comment indirectly on the character's feelings or his or her situation, as in Simon's performance of 'Where is love?' or Kurt's performance of 'Mr. Cellophane'. Certain songs may also connect the character with other singers and performers and other moments in time, as in Kurt's performance of 'Defying Gravity' or 'Blackbird'.

## **Conclusion**

The most significant recent change in the representation of teen gay characters on television is that of genre. The quiet and depressing angst of the well-established and well-meaning teen coming-out film has been replaced by a comic, upbeat and frequently musical representation of teen gay issues that translates into a very different feel. 'Welcome to the glamorous, glitterball, high camp world of Simon Doonan', as British newspaper *The Independent* put it. Gay characters, while still enduring a sense of difference and an element of homophobic bullying, are now more confident and self-



expressive and more willing to be seen in their entirety. Simon in *Beautiful People* is not afraid to be self-deprecating or ironic about his younger self and his lack of self-pity renders him more sympathetic and likeable in every way. Each episode, bookended by brief scenes from his adult life, reiterates his significant creative success as an adult. His best friend Kylie is similarly talented and attractive. *Beautiful People* and *Glee*, although targeted at different audiences, have been watched and followed by significant numbers of viewers within the general population whose schemas for the gay character are likely to have been modified by their experience of watching both these series.

Oatley suggests in his theory of identification (1994) that viewers must be able to receive and process speech acts addressed to them by producers/directors and/or writers. Viewers receive a range of song numbers that are performed on screen by the teen characters, gay or otherwise. Songs also frequently enable viewers to integrate diverse storylines and a range of information without leaving the mood of the song. Viewers may integrate their enjoyment of music and song together with a deeper understanding of the gay character's experience and that experience may in turn lead to attitudinal change on the part of the heterosexual spectator.

The teen gay character in *Beautiful People* and *Glee* frequently takes delight in his ability to sing. Singing, whether on his own or in a group, enables him to overcome the difficulties of his environment and focus outside of himself. It offers the gay character a more fulfilling type of experience than the one offered by everyday life. Gino Stefani suggests that 'pleasure is intrinsic to singing, because of what is physiologically involved in both producing and hearing song' (1987: 23).

Oral melody is the voice of pleasure: nature teaches us from childhood ... Singing is an easier message for the brain to decode than is speaking. Just as the line of speech, filled with articulations by consonants, is similar to the movement of

walking, so the line of vocal melody, being continuous, flowing, relaxing and free from resistance, is similar to the movement of flying. Flying and dreaming: the longing to escape, the pleasure of escape from harsh reality; movement in slow motion, wide and fluid; power without obstacles (Stefani, 1987: 23-24).

McGilchrist points out that ‘ultimately music is the communication of emotion, the most fundamental form of communication, which...came and comes first. Neurological research strongly supports the assumption that our love of music reflects the ancestral ability of our mammalian brain to transmit and receive basic emotional sounds’ (2009: 103). Richard Dyer suggests that song is close, ‘perhaps closer than most other aspects of music or most other arts, to the pre-semiotic: to breath and the unpremeditated sounds of crying, yelping, whimpering, and to such not-quite-spontaneous (or not always, perhaps not often) vocalisations as keening, laughter and orgasmic yells and the special registers of whispering, hissing, calling and shouting, as well as to mumbling and stuttering’ (2011: 2). John Potter suggests that song may well be, or be felt to be, one of humanity’s first means of communication; it may take both the singer and the audience back to the first voice we ever hear, with its coos and teases as well as its lullabies (1998: 198).

All of the gay characters considered here overcome their personal situation through singing. They perform songs for their own benefit, entertainment and interest. They also take pleasure in performing at school and Kurt and Blaine in *Glee* perform with school choirs. Songs by a particular singer or performer give episodes and films structural coherence and unity. Songs on the soundtrack are also used to evoke time and place. One of the most common functions of song is to link it to character. Songs may create a feeling in the listening character, characters or audience; they may enable characters to express their own feelings or they may change the mood or pace. As has already been suggested, the performance of songs frequently slows down the narrative and communicates with the audience more directly.

In singing, there is a sense of oneness or unity between mind, brain and body, will and action, through the exploration of physical sensations and talents that may previously have been hidden. For teen gay characters who may feel uncomfortable in bodies that experience non-normative desire, it seems that singing provides the ultimate relief and hope.



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Athletic and Creative Transformations**

### **In Contemporary Teen Asian Gay Film**

## **CONCLUSION**

### Happy Endings

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the traditionally negative and stigmatising schemas and scripts for young adult lesbian and gay (or LGB) characters have, since 1995, begun to be revised. Before this time, the traditional LGB romance resembled the ‘Romeo and Juliet’ script, that is, two young people (who in the original text were not of the same sex) met and fell in love, but because there was no social support or acceptance of the gay or lesbian relationship, it usually ended in tragedy, with one or both of the lesbian or gay characters dead by the conclusion of the text. In the traditional ‘Romeo and Juliet’ version of lesbian and gay romance, the lack of family approval and the lack of social support for the same-sex relationship ultimately meant that the relationship could not survive.

Young adult audiences are already highly familiar with the ‘falling-in-love’ and ‘creative-achievement’ scripts, as I argued in Chapter One. The protagonists in the six contemporary Hollywood films discussed can be regarded as typically both creatively and romantically successful. The less familiar narratives or ‘new structures’, are the ‘coming-out’ or the ‘out-and-proud’ script, both of which are incorporated into the metanarrative script. The search for sameness is an automatic cognitive process that we use to understand and make sense of the world (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002). A fundamental cognitive operation, ‘conceptual blending’, enables the mind to integrate immediately and unconsciously spaces that are connected by similarities (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002). These new spaces or structures are referred to as ‘blended spaces’ (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 42-43) and new meanings arise from them, made possible by the intersection of similar elements and the recruitment of these elements into the ‘blended space’. Here a

new blended space is created through the recruitment of a number of attributes from the script of ‘creative-achievement’, the ‘falling-in-love’ narrative and the LGB ‘coming-out’ script. These diverse scripts are blended together to produce a LGB romantic comedy or drama; affirmative and anything but a tragedy. Even if the same-sex relationship is not intact at the close of the novel, film or television series, each individual lesbian or gay character affirms a strong and positive sense of self. Where the relationship is not intact, each character has come to terms with the end of a romantic relationship and instantiates a script of moving on.

This new version of the romance resembles the ‘As You Like It’ script in which the romantic couple enjoys the support of family and friends, and can be considered as a metanarrative script that has been running implicitly for centuries. In Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, there are several obstacles that prevent pairs of lovers from being together. The couples are heteronormative, but the strength of my comparison rests in the optimistic ending which affirms the enduring love of each of the romantic couples. The play’s conclusion celebrates the harmonious marriages of Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, Phoebe and Silvius, Touchstone and Audrey, and order (in the original version the order is heteronormative, whilst in the contemporary version it is non-normative) is restored. In other words, despite ‘bugs’ that inhibit the smooth unfolding of romantic relationships, those obstacles are resolved and the romantic couples, who in *As You Like It* are heteronormative, are able to be together. In the contemporary version of the script discussed in Chapters Two to Seven of this thesis, two young adult lesbian or gay characters fall in love and maintain that romantic relationship with social acceptance and, indeed, approval.

New schemas are created by the act of conceptual blending in which the mind combines or blends positive schemas already established in relation to heterosexual

characters, for instance, they are successful cheerleaders and dancers, with schemas for LGB characters. Similarly, new scripts are created by the act of conceptual blending in which the mind blends positive scripts or sequences of events already established in relation to heterosexual characters with the LGB coming-out script, the out and proud script or a similar version of that script. In other words, narratives with LGB protagonists or central characters can and do have a happy ending. Fauconnier and Turner argue that the mind's search for sameness is a way that we make sense of the world (2002). They explain that the mind is a network of conceptual spaces which are connected to each other through similar elements. These very similarities enable the unconscious integration of new spaces through a cognitive process they name 'conceptual blending' (2002).

Building an integration network involves setting up mental spaces, matching across spaces, projecting selectively to a blend, locating shared structures, projecting backward to inputs, recruiting new structure to the inputs or the blend, and running various operations in the blend itself. ... [I]t is crucial to keep in mind that any of them can run at any time and that they can run simultaneously. The integration network is trying to achieve equilibrium. In a manner of speaking, there is a place where the network is 'happy' (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 44).

The inputs for 'lesbian cheerleader' are, on the one hand, the 'traditional female cheerleader' and, on the other, the 'lesbian character' or 'lesbian athlete'. The cross-space mapping involves linking typical elements common to both scenarios, for instance, a physically attractive and young female body, athleticism, agility, rhythm and co-ordination. Selective projection would then recruit additional structure from each input, so that the lesbian cheerleader, while having some similarities with the input space of 'traditional female cheerleader' (socially positive status, visibility, member of a team, athletically successful) and some similarities with the input space of 'lesbian athlete'



(same-sex love and desire, team membership), also has a revised set of attributes (physically attractive, athletic, co-ordinated, socially positive status, romantically interested in other female characters).

In a further example of conceptual blending, Fauconnier and Turner suggest that blending may lead to a permanent category change or category metamorphosis, as in the phrase ‘same-sex marriage’ (2002: 269-270). The protagonists discussed throughout this thesis are too young to be married, but the category metamorphosis can also work at the level of schema and script. The inputs for ‘same-sex marriage’ are the traditional scenario of marriage on the one hand and an alternative domestic scenario involving two people of the same sex on the other (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 271). The cross-space mapping involves linking typical elements common to both scenarios, such as partners (or a romantic couple), common dwellings, commitment, love and sex (2002: 269). Once again, selective projection would then recruit additional structure from each input. A category metamorphosis can change the structure of the category permanently so that same-sex marriage, while having some similarities with the input space of ‘traditional marriage’ (legal status, financial advantages, socially positive status, religious sacrament) and some similarities with the input space of ‘same-sex partnership’ (live together, love, sex), also has a revised set of attributes (2002: 270-271) that may or may not include children, family and kinship structures.

The shift towards more positive and progressive depictions of young adult lesbian and gay romance began in film in 1995, when a new script began to emerge. This new script has more in common with drama or comedy or even ‘dramedy’, as opposed to tragedy. Maria Maggenti’s *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* introduced positive lesbian schemas and scripts in young adult film for the first time. The central characters, Randy and Evie, enact both the ‘falling-in-love’ and the ‘coming-out’ scripts

and creativity as a positive symbiosis, such that they are still in love and together at the close of the film. A year later, in 1996, *Beautiful Thing* introduced similarly positive teen gay schemas and scripts. Again, at the close of the film, Jamie and Ste are together and supported by a group of friends and Jamie's mother. The new script began to emerge in young adult fiction in 1997 with Paula Boock's *Dare, Truth or Promise*, discussed in Chapter Two, and in young adult gay-themed fiction in 2001, with the first title in Alex Sanchez' *Rainbow* trilogy, which I discussed in Chapter Five.

The six young adult novels considered in Chapter Two revise the 'Romeo and Juliet' version of falling in love; they offer two female protagonists who fall in love with each other and affirm their same-sex desire and sexuality, even if the particular relationship ends before the novel's conclusion. The individual lesbian character is no longer socially stigmatised; instead she now embodies a positive and creative schema: she is able to write creatively, she is usually highly intelligent and she is academically successful. Readers of the novels who are also creative writers will have a particularly engaged response to these novels. Young adult readers who have experienced traumas similar to the ones experienced by several of the fictional creative writers, such as parental divorce or the death of a parent will additionally experience an increased empathy towards lesbian protagonists who write to recover from trauma. New positive lesbian schemas and scripts have also been introduced in young adult television and film and in Chapter Three I focused on the lesbian cheerleader/dancer schema in the television series *Glee* and the lesbian ballroom dancer schema in the independent film *Leading Ladies*. I considered the representation of Hispanic lesbian Santana Lopez, who falls in love with bisexual cheerleader/dancer Brittany Pierce. Santana, who initially embodies the 'confused-teen' schema, has two brief sexual encounters with male characters, but as the television narrative develops, she accepts that she is lesbian and is out and proud at school.

As I discussed in Chapter Two in relation to creative writers and in Chapter Three in relation to cheerleading and dancing, recent cognitive research suggests that audience members who excel at cheerleading and dancing, for instance, will have the most intense response, and the most intense ‘mirror neuron’ response, to those who are cheerleaders or dancers on screen. The same point evidently applies to other types of movement and sport represented on screen (or in fiction). Audiences who may previously have been negatively disposed towards lesbian characters are likely to be changed by watching *Glee* and *Leading Ladies*, as viewers automatically and pre-reflexively identify with talented cheerleaders and dancers who happen to be lesbian, or basketball players who happen to be gay. That positive identification will override any possible negativity toward these characters caused by their being lesbian or gay. Similarly, male audience members who dance or cheer will have an intense mirror neuron response to male dancers and cheerleaders irrespective of whether they are gay or straight. For male members of the audience watching *Glee*, this would mean that they would have the strongest response to Mike Chang, who is Asian and straight and, for those watching *Leading Ladies*, to Cedric, who is gay.

The schemas and scripts introduced in Chapters Two and Three are international, as Chapter Four demonstrates. In *Love My Life*, the two lesbian characters write creatively and one of them learns during the film how to translate a work of fiction. The lead character in *Spider Lilies* is a webcam girl who sings and dances for her online viewers; her girlfriend is a tattoo artist. In *Drifting Flowers*, the lead character plays the accordion and sings and her girlfriend is also a singer in Taipei nightclubs. Finally, the lead character Kim, who plays the ukulele in *Yes or No*, is academically successful in her chosen field of agriculture. Her girlfriend, Pie, a marine biologist, is equally academic. As a group, the four films introduce original ways of being, an optimistic script and a new genre in Asian

film. In all four films, the four central lesbian characters and their girlfriends emerge from a specific 'blend' of local and global influences. New meaning and new subjectivities are created in the blend (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 20). All the characters are creatively and romantically successful and instantiate those scripts within environments that are being transformed as a result of globalisation, and they simultaneously maintain a subjectivity that is specifically local, that is, Japanese, Taiwanese or Thai.

I have explored the representation of gay athletes or 'jocks' in a selection of six novels for young adults published since 2008. Gay jocks share many similarities with heterosexual jocks and given the mind's search for sameness, these similarities and points of connection are crucial if readers are to align themselves with teen gay jock protagonists. I have argued that these novels introduce new and positive schemas that blend gay schemas and heterosexual male athlete schemas to yield the gay athlete who is talented at sport and who has socially positive status, overturning the stereotype of the flamboyant gay subject. These six novels also introduce new scripts in relation to teen gay protagonists. As in the lesbian-themed novels and films, there are two schemas and accompanying scripts that are very frequently enacted in the texts: the 'confused-teen' where the protagonist moves to a point of clarity before the close of the text and the 'closeted-teen' where the protagonist comes out before the close of the novel. There are also teen protagonists, although fewer of them excel at sport, who are 'out-and-proud' before the close of the novel. Again, the conceptual blend combines falling-in-love with creative-achievement and blends both with the 'coming out' narrative.

Chapter Six examined two television representations of teen gay protagonists who excel at singing. These more recent texts have drawn much wider global audiences, particularly *Glee*, which was also discussed in Chapter Three. The teen gay singer also appears in a number of independent teen films which have not been discussed here for

reasons to do with space. The angst-filled coming-out narrative has been replaced by a lively and comic narrative with an optimistic ending. The gay singer character is a part of a show choir or forms his own band, singing with and alongside others in his peer group. In his own way, he is now a part of a team, even if the team takes the shape of a show choir, 'New Directions'.

Social attitudes towards LGB characters have begun to change more rapidly since *Glee* was first broadcast. This accelerated rate of change is reflected in the increasing number of positive LGB representations, for instance, *Geography Club* (2013), *Date and Switch* (2013), and *GBF* (2013), the latter of which is marketed as the new *Clueless*. *Date and Switch*, with its narrative of a gay character and a heterosexual male character who wish to lose their virginity by prom, updates *American Pie*. The number of positive LGB representations on the television screen is increasing even more rapidly, and the wide popularity of series such as *Beautiful People* and *Glee* indicates the changing perception of lesbian and gay characters by audience members.

In ways similar to Chapter Four, the six feature films in Chapter Seven extend the analysis. In *Formula 17*, the Asian central character excels academically. Two films feature Asian gay central characters who excel at basketball (*Right By Me* and *Eternal Summer*) and three feature gay protagonists who perform. Of these latter, one sings in *Love of Siam*, one in *Go Go G-Boys*, and one writes and performs his own poetry in *Boy*. This chapter again demonstrates that the revised 'As You Like It' script in which gay characters fashion a positive and strong sense of self is an international one. In my penultimate chapter, the conceptual blends recruit a range of local and global influences (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 17-38), and the films as a group create new meaning which both reflects and enacts a shift towards 'glocal' negotiations.

These blended schemas and scripts resonate with audiences in the real world who may engage closely with the lesbian or gay protagonist and central character. Collectively, the texts suggest the changing landscape for young adult LGB fiction, film and television and reflect broader changes in society and attitudinal change in the individual reader or audience member. Nor are these social changes limited to specific cities, such as Sydney, San Francisco and New York. Rather, they are simultaneously global and universally local.

The fictional representation of teen gay male protagonists is considerably more abundant and I could have written many different chapters, each with a group of talented, creative, or academically successful teen gay protagonists. Previous versions of Chapter Three centred on lesbian rock musicians and lesbian swimmers, whilst earlier versions of Chapter Six concentrated on gay artists and surfers in teen film. There could be a future project which examines LGBT-themed fiction for readers aged between nine and twelve. A number of novels, such as Tim Federle's *Better Nate Than Ever* (2013), have already been published for this age group. A future project might examine more closely representations of young adult bisexual and transgender subjectivities in fiction, television and film, an area of young adult literature and film which is still evolving. At the time of writing, the number of relevant young adult texts is fairly limited and, crucially, bisexual female, bisexual male and transgender characters are not usually the protagonists.<sup>43</sup> The existing texts have not been discussed here as there are very few bisexual male protagonists who are also represented as 'creative' in the fields I have examined. The transgender characters in the novels that I have been able to locate do not fall in love and they therefore lie

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<sup>43</sup> There are several notable exceptions, including teen transgender protagonist Grady in Ellen Wittlinger's *Parrotfish*, the f2m protagonist in Cris Beam's *I Am J* (2011), the f2m protagonist in Kristin Cronn-Mills' *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* (2012), the m2f protagonist in Rachel Gold's *Being Emily* (2012) and the intersex m2f protagonist in Alyssa Brugman's *Alex As Well* (2013). All the above instantiate the 'creative achievement' script but are not represented as falling in love. I have also discussed the bisexual female protagonist Anna in Elissa Janine Hoole's *Kiss the Morning Star* in Chapter 2 and the bisexual male character Sergio in Alex Sanchez' *Boyfriends with Girlfriends* in Chapter 5.

beyond the thematic frame of this thesis. The character Unique, who becomes a central character in *Glee* (Season Four, 2012-2013) is transgender, that is, biologically male but presents as female when on stage. Predictably, her appearance in the series was initially highly controversial. I hope that scholars in the very near future will be in a position to look in detail at a wider and more comprehensive range of these radical and progressive texts, most of which are yet to be published.

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