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Group 2
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Bibliographic Essay

SEEING MYSELF IN THE MIRROR: LGBTQ LITERATURE WITH DIVERSE CHARACTERS

For the past few months, possible topics and ideas for this annotated bibliography had been whirling around in my mind. I had a few different ideas that I wanted to pursue, but in February I received an email that made my decision much easier. In late February I accepted a position on the 2015 Stonewall Book Award Committee, given to honor Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) literature.

Once I accepted the position I knew I wanted to know more about the books that came before this year's selection. While going over my notes from last year's Stonewall Brunch, I came across an annotation next to Keith Boykin's *For Colored Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Still Not Enough*, that said "written to fill the void and answer cries that exist." That made me wonder, if this book was written to fill a gap for adults, what was the situation like for colored boys and girls who were looking for literature that reflected themselves as teens. Thus was born this bibliography.

Before going any further, let me explain how my definition of multicultural literature tied into my selection process. Multicultural literature can be a mirror, a window, and a sliding glass door¹: it can be a reflection of the reader, it can show them another world, and it can empower them to take action. It is written from an

¹ Sims Bishop, Rudine. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*. 3rd ed. Vol. 6. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1990.

authentic perspective by a member of the subject's culture or someone who has been privy to those experiences², and is respectful and free of stereotypical depictions both in words and images. For this topic, it meant finding books where both the LGBTQ story is coming from a place of authenticity, as well as the diverse backgrounds of each of the characters in the works.

Before I could evaluate books, I had to find books. I began by first evaluating printed works, but found that while they were helpful, they weren't necessarily specific enough for what I was looking for. As a result, I turned to a series of online resources, consisting of blog posts by authors such as Malindo Lo and Cindy Pon, and ALA sponsored Booklists, such as the "Rainbow List" and past Stonewall Award Winners.

The most useful of these online sources was Malinda Lo and Cindy Pon's online blog, *Diversity in YA*, which highlights Young Adult (YA) works that are told by diverse authors, and/or have diverse characters. Every month or so they create a booklist of all sorts of topics, and I came across two LGBT lists where the main characters were of color. As the characters met the diversity criteria, I was uncertain of the authenticity of the authors, so I would need to further evaluate each work.

However, I didn't want to just take what I found from Malinda and Cindy's site. Therefore, I conducted a catalogue search at my local library using the subject terms "homosexuality", and "lesbians" and limited to the Juvenile and Young Adult collections as well. I had to conduct a subject search using lesbians, as "homosexuality" only turned up books with male characters in them. I also

² Woodson, Jacqueline. "Who Can Tell My Story." *The Horn Book Magazine* 74.Jan/Feb (1998): 34-38.

attempted to access the GLBT Library on Indiana University's campus, but the catalogue is not as user friendly as one would hope- additionally the collection does not contain nearly as many works for children and young adults as I would have liked.

Once I had compiled a list of books, I began to research the authors, settings, and any other aspects of the story, to make certain they were coming from a place of authenticity. At times, this research felt more tedious and time consuming than the actual book searching, but I am all the better for it. I learned about other countries, such as Iran, where the government covers a majority of the cost of gender reassignment surgery.

I learned that in Chinese culture, sons are expected to bring the family honor and continue on the name, while the daughters are not tasked with the same burden. In doing research for *Chulito*, I learned more about the importance of passing in urban communities and the ever-present danger of the "Down Low" to the Black community, and how it contributes to the spread of AIDS. This research reconfirmed much of the understanding that I already had, allowing me to feel more secure in my knowledge.

I also chose to limit the bibliography, by only allowing one book by each author. Many of the authors on this list, such as Alex Sanchez and Benjamin Alire Sáenz, have written multiple LGBTQ books where the main character is of a diverse background. By doing so, I was able to highlight writers, who are not as well known, such as Tama Wise, Craig Laurence Gidney, and Nina Revoyr. It is my hope that by

emphasizing smaller press authors, that readers may find more characters they can identify with.

The intended age group for this bibliography is high school students of color, though I did not initially intend for it to be. Many of the picture books and the one chapter book I found in the Juvenile Collection all told the stories of white protagonists, and while these are important stories that need to be seen and heard, they are not the stories that I wanted to highlight with my list. Therefore, my list became one for Young Adults, albeit unintentionally. It is my hope that through this list readers are able to find books that serve as much needed “mirrors”, showing teens that they are not the only teen who looks like them, lives like them, acts like them, going through what they are going through. Essentially it is almost like a bibliographic “It gets better”.

This is not say though that white teens, or straight teens of color, etc. cannot read these works. In fact, I encourage those that access this list to share it with others. These books can provide a “window” into what the lives of their peers, children, or siblings is like, and possibly create a “sliding glass door”, empowering these individuals to become much needed allies and support systems.

The topic of LGBTQ literature is a controversial one right now. States such as South Carolina are taking action against colleges and universities that have made these works required reading for incoming freshman.³ The topic remains even more controversial in communities of color, where identifying as homosexual or

³ Ashtari, Shadee. "South Carolina Legislators Use Budget Cuts To Punish Colleges Assigning LGBT Books." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 20 Feb. 2014. Web. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/20/south-carolina-colleges-lgbt-books_n_4825489.html>.

transgender goes against religious values and cultural norms. It is my hope that through a bibliography such as this, that the rainbow will eventually become enough and that LGBTQ teens of color and diverse backgrounds can see that there are others like them, and find allies.

While I can't speak about the books I am reading for consideration of the 2015 Stonewall Awards, I can say that I believe that is a growing topic. It may be a slow blossoming, not highly publicized genre of work, but it is slowly growing. I encourage all librarians, educators, and allies to promote these works, their authors, and the stories that they tell. They may just one day save a life.

A final note, this bibliography contains a grade range, rather than age range. There is no cap on the grade range,(i.e. grades 9+), as I believe that people read at different levels of ability and comfort. I would hate for someone to walk away from a book because they thought people would say it was "too easy" for them.

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**SEEING MYSELF IN THE MIRROR:
AN LGBTQ LITERATURE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY
WITH DIVERSE CHARACTERS**

Beam, Cris. *I Am J*. New York, NY: Little, Brown & Co., 2011.

J always thought that he was born in the wrong body, and that one-day he would wake up and no longer look like a girl. When he realizes this isn't going to happen, he begins to hide himself under layers and layers of clothing. Eventually, it becomes too much. The oppressive clothing, his Mom still calling him *m'ija*, and falling out with his best friend Melissa: J decides this not how he wants to live his life. So, with the idea of transitioning on his mind, and the fear that those who love him won't accept him for who he is, J leaves home to seek out a new place where he can be him. An optimistic read for anyone not sure who they are or where their place is in the world. Recommended for grades 11+.

Fu, Kim. *For Today I am a Boy*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.

Peter Huang, the only son in his Chinese family, wants nothing more than to be a girl. The first generation son of immigrant parents trying desperately to assimilate themselves in western culture, Peter feels disgusted and confused with his body. Forced by his father to epitomize masculinity, Peter eventually goes off on his own, escaping to Montreal where he begins to discover who he truly is. A poignant work for those who want to break free from the lives others have planned for them. Recommended for grades 11+.

Farizan, Sara. *If You Could Be Mine*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin, 2013.

Sahar and Nasrin have been in love since they were little girls. For years they have had to keep their relationship a secret for the safety of themselves and their loved ones. But now, at the age of 17, everything is falling apart. Nasrin is to be married off in an arranged—to a man. Faced with the reality that gender reassignment surgery is common and accepted in Iran, Sahar must decide if it is worth changing who she is in order to be with the one she loves. A gripping and heartbreaking story, this book is the perfect read for teens who would risk it all for love. Recommended for grades 9+

Gidney, Craig Laurance. *Bereft*. Philadelphia, PA: Tiny Satchel Press, 2013.

14 year-old Rafe Fannen has received a scholarship Our Lady of Woods, the all male Catholic college preparatory school, but things are not as wonderful as they seem. Rafe's mom is fighting a losing battle with mental illness, his ex-con father is trying to re-establish himself, and Rafe is coming to terms with his own sexuality. After

Rafe is accused of vandalizing the school and accused of being gay, he decides to seek help from the school's Vicar to make the bullying stop. Yet, it quickly becomes apparent that the Vicar wants to something more, and it's up to Rafe to take a stand and change not only his life, but also the life of those around him. Perfect for anyone trying to find his or her place in multiple worlds. Recommended for grades 9+

Gurba, Myriam. *Dahlia Season*. San Francisco, CA: Manic D Press, 2007.

Desiree Garcia is described as a "Chicana. Goth. Dykling." Most importantly, she's Desiree, a teenager living her life in Southern California. Her parents don't see it that way though, and decide to extinguish the weirdness Desiree is so proud of by first sending her to a Catholic High School, and then Mexico- but things aren't as easy to fix as they believe. A comically brutal look at reality, and a must read for any older teenager who feels like their parents just don't get it. Recommended for grades 10+

Lockhart, E. *Dramarama*. New York, NY: Hyperion, 2007.

Demi and Sayde go to the same high school, but until their auditions for Wildwood Summer Institute they barely acknowledged each other. Sayde is tall and awkward; Demi is black and gay a practical phenomena in their Ohio town. The two quickly form a bond and quickly become best friends. Upon their arrival at summer camp, the two are separated as boys live in one dorm, and girls another. With this, things change. Demi becomes popular- Sayde not so much, and the two struggle to find a balance between stardom and friendship. A quirky read for any teen questioning if they and their BFF will really be, best friends forever. Recommended for grades 9+.

Revoyr, Nina. *The Necessary Hunger*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

Nancy Takahiro is a star basketball player in her senior year of high school, unsure of what the future holds for her, beyond Compton and basketball. Then her father's girlfriend and daughter move in. Raina Webber is the same age as Nancy and equally as good a basketball player- maybe even better. The two young women have a intense friendship, fueled by their rivalry and an underlying passion that burns brighter than any other. A lengthy, but wonderful read for anyone who isn't defined b their passions, but driven by them. Recommended for grades 11+

Rice-González, Charles. *Chulito*. New York, NY: Magnus Books, 2011.

Growing up in the South Bronx, Chulito has always been one of the boys. He drinks Hennessy with the boys, has a girlfriend, and moves drugs for friend Kaz. Then one day, things change. Chultio's best friend Carlos, who is openly gay and has been away at his first year of college returns, and the two share a secret kiss. Now Chulito must add his crush on Carlos to his balancing act, and decide who he really is and what he really wants. A realistic read that breathes it's setting of Hunt's Point,

this book is for older teens that shows love knows no stereotypes. Recommended for grades 11+

Sáenz, Benjamin Alire. *Last Night I Sang to the Monster*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2009.

Zach is a senior in high school. This is a year that should be filled with parties, friends, and college applications- but, its not. Zach is in rehab, and won't allow himself to remember the incidents that led to his being there. Through the help of his roommate, Rafael, Zach finds the courage to remember again and share what is buried deep inside. A powerful read that will leave you reaching for a tissue, this book is for teens that are searching for both encouragement, and their voice. Recommended for grades 10+.

Sanchez, Alex. *Boyfriends with Girlfriends*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2011.

Lance thinks he's found the boy of his dreams, the problem is Sergio is bisexual and Lance doesn't believe in bisexuality; you're either gay or straight. Sergio can't believe he's found someone like Lance, but he's nervous- he's never dated a guy before, though he's fooled around with one before. Luckily, each boy has their best friend to help them navigate the tumultuous waters of high school relationship. That is until the girls begin to develop feelings for one another too. A read that will leave you grinning, this book is perfect for teens that have ever had a crush on someone. Recommended for grades 9+.

Wise, Tama. *Street Dreams*. Valley Falls, NY: Bold Strokes Books, 2012.

Tyson has big dreams, and big responsibilities. Striving to become a local graffiti artist and living life on the edges of the local hip-hop scene, Tyson works a night job to support his mom and two younger brothers, and is a confidant for his friend Rawiri. Soon Tyson falls in love, and he realizes that if he wants to get the man of his dreams or the recognition he deserves, then he has to give it his all. A tale that shows no matter who you are, who you love, or what you are passionate about, anything is possible. Recommended for grades 10+.

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

For Melanin Sun, it has also been him and Mama, Mama and him; they have an unbreakable bond. Then Mama begins to hide things from Melanin, and he begins to question her. Torn between his love for his Mama and the shame he feels for her being labeled as a lesbian, Melanin must learn to set aside his pride and hate if he ever wants to rebuild his relationship with her. A beautiful tale told through Melanin's journals, a read for any child trying to come to terms with the reality that parents aren't always who we think they are. Recommended for grades 9+.

Yee, Paul. *Money Boy*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood, 2011.

Ray Liu is a young Chinese immigrant who struggles at school and at home. No matter how hard he tries, Ray can never seem to do well in his classes, and anything less than perfection is unacceptable to his militant father. At least, in Ray's eyes, life is predictable. Until one day, Ray's father finds gay porn on his computer and kicks Ray out of the house for dishonoring the family. Now, Ray's life is anything but predictable, as he must find a way to survive on the streets of Toronto. Illustrative of what it's like to find acceptance within yourself, others, and tradition, this book is perfect for all those searching for their own identity. Recommended for grades 9+