

Reviewing to Exclude?:

Critical Discourse Analysis of YA LGBTQ Book Reviews for School Librarians

When the junior high school where I work established a GSA (gay straight alliance), I began working with its student members to both build our LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and/or questioning) school library collection and make it visible. As is my practice (and that of many other school librarians), I turned to professional publications like *School Library Journal* and *Library Media Connection* to read LGBTQ literature reviews. However, as a practicing school librarian and literacy researcher, I became frustrated by the lack of published books recommended for a junior high audience.

In my closer examination, patterns emerged in the book reviews I read in these professional publications. The reviews typically recommended LGBTQ-themed texts for an older, high school audience. The reviews were also regularly written in a cautionary tone that implied that school librarians ought to be wary when thinking about purchasing these books, or they recommended LGBTQ-themed books only if the school library was serving LGBTQ students. This language implies both that not all schools serve LGBTQ students and that non-LGBTQ students would not benefit from or enjoy reading about the experiences of LGBTQ characters. I began to wonder how these book reviews might be influencing school librarians' decisions about purchasing books. Might book reviews be working to restrict access to ideas and information that our students are entitled to and that school librarians are responsible to provide (American Library Association, 2006)? The study I detail in this article explores these questions.

School librarians make important decisions about materials to include in school library collections when they purchase literature for their libraries. They often consult book review sources and selection aides, such as those I mentioned above, to make decisions (Bishop, 2012). In the absence of the time or capacity to read every book that is purchased for a school library, these reviews guide librarians who are attempting to find the books that students need and will enjoy. These book reviews offer short critiques (5–10 sentences) of the books and often alert librarians to any content that could be perceived as controversial, including violence, profanity, and sexuality (American Library Association [ALA], 2015).

Sexual orientation continues to be viewed as a controversial theme for librarians who question the boundaries of acceptable content of their public school collections and worry about book challenges from parents and communities (ALA, 2015). Despite the American Library Association's plea in "The Freedom to Read Statement" (2006) to uphold students' First Amendment rights and make materials available in libraries as well as the publication of collection development manuals that spell out best practices for selecting a wide range of materials for school library collections (Bishop, 2012), pervasive questions still circulate about what is appropriate for certain age groups with regard to "controversial" content related to gender and sexuality (e.g., Scales, 2015a; Scales, 2015b).

Other scholarship has suggested that there is a need for more attention to materials that include sexuality and LGBTQ themes in classrooms (e.g., Ashcraft,

2012; Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Curwood, Schliesman, & Horning, 2009). In fact, studies have shown that there is a disproportionately low representation of LGBTQ characters and themes in school library collections (e.g., Garry, 2014; Hughes-

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Hassell, Overberg, & Harris, 2013; Whelan, 2007) and that self-censorship (the practice of excluding books from the collection for fear of challenge from parents or the community) might be a determining factor in this underrepresentation (Coley, 2002; Hill, 2010; Hughes-Hassell et al., 2013; Whelan, 2009). However, very little research has been done that examines the factors that may be influencing these collection develop-

ment decisions. This kind of examination is important for librarians as they define the boundaries of acceptable content in their collections in an effort to meet the needs of diverse groups of students (Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013).

In this study, I address this problem by looking at one of the key resources that librarians use to make selection decisions—book reviews. Using several tools from Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2015; Gee, 2014), I examine the language of book reviews and the ways in which language may inhibit access to LGBTQ young adult literature (YAL). As a practicing school librarian, a literacy researcher, and someone who currently identifies as a straight ally, my work falls at the intersection of theory and praxis. Using a critical pedagogy framework (Freire, 2000; hooks, 1994), I examine the ways in which ideology is working in book reviews in order to inform the important work of school library collection development.

These research questions guided my analyses:

1. How does the language of book reviews of LGBTQ texts intended for school librarians position and frame LGBTQ themes and characters?
2. How does the language of book reviews of LGBTQ texts intended for school librarians frame and posi-

tion school librarians and the youth readers they serve?

Theoretical and Methodological Grounding

Theorists like Paulo Freire (2000) and bell hooks (1994) see educational spaces as having the potential to be subversive and transgressive. In such environments, students and teachers can challenge the dominant and normative practices that shape and define their lives. However, institutions like schools are at risk of naturalizing language in an effort to control the behavior of large groups of students: “The educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is better ‘fit’ for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited for the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it” (Freire, 2000, p. 76). Furthermore, bell hooks is concerned with “what forces keep us from moving forward, from having a ‘revolution of values’ that would enable us to live differently” (1994, p. 28). I will suggest that this idea of a “revolution of values” is useful as I consider how the discourses of book reviews could be an important site for resisting naturalized discourses about LGBTQ YAL.

In library and information science, scholars have made the important connection between critical pedagogy and critical library instruction (e.g., Accardi, Drabinski, & Kumbier, 2010) by taking up ideas about anti-oppressive pedagogy and access and applying them to library instruction. My work follows the work of library scholars like James Elmborg (2006) who have challenged librarians to disrupt and question traditional practices: “Librarians need to develop a critical consciousness about libraries, by learning to ‘problematize’ the library” (p. 198). Others, like Emily Drabinski (2013), have specifically targeted library practices like classification and organization systems through the lens of queer theory in order to challenge the fixed and stable categories that determine patrons’ access to materials.

These theorists and others have made the important connection between critical pedagogy and library practice, but their work has focused on academic libraries and higher education. In this article, I aim to make a connection between critical pedagogy and

school library practice because it is crucial that school librarians see their positions as transformational and political. Libraries and school librarians are important forces inside of the school building. When school librarians make decisions about what is appropriate or “normal” content in school library collections, they are working to either uphold normative and common sense understandings of youth or to subvert them. Here, I draw on critical pedagogy and critical librarianship as a theoretical grounding for understanding the role of school librarians as they select materials for students.

The Study

Methods

In this study, I used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2015; Gee, 2014) to examine book reviews for LGBTQ texts. I chose to use CDA as a method of analysis because the language used in book reviews is created and used for a specific purpose—to evaluate the critical merits of a book. Furthermore, I looked specifically at book reviews that are intended for school librarians in order to examine the ways in which these reviews position texts, characters, and the school librarians who read them as they select the books for students to access.

Data Sources

Each year, the American Library Association puts out a list of LGBTQ books for YA library collections called “The Rainbow List” (ALA, n.d.) Books appearing on this list have “significant and authentic” LGBTQ content and are chosen by members of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table. This is a group of individuals working in the profession who are assembled to make recommendations to different kinds of libraries (public, academic, school, etc.) with regard to LGBTQ patrons. Data for this study come from reviews for books on the 2015 list, specifically those that were reviewed by the *School Library Journal* and the *Library Media Connection*. I chose these publications because they have been identified as important resources for school librarians (Bishop, 2012), and their reviews have been crafted specifically for school librarians and authored by librarians or other individuals working in the field of literacy education. I analyzed every review to locate the titles on The Rain-

bow List. Often the books were either not reviewed by these publications or reviewed only once. Reviews of 13 books appeared in one or both of these publications (although there were 19 YA books on the list in total); I located 21 relevant book reviews (including in other publications) for this data set.

Book reviews written in these publications are often 5–10 sentences in length. In both publications, the reviewer typically summarizes the plot of the book; makes a short, evaluative statement about the literary quality; and ends with a recommendation statement that gives school librarians an idea about whether the book should be added and for what sort of audience (Bishop, 2012). Both publications ask the reviewer to make a judgment about the appropriate age range for the book and also the book’s position within the collection (e.g., Who is the reader for the book? Is it similar to any other popular titles?). The recommendation statements in these reviews proved to be especially useful in my analysis, and I will be referring to them in subsequent sections.

Analysis

In my analysis, I focused on the ways that language is used to construct the world and “speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, institutional, social, or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world” (Gee, 2014, p. 9). CDA was useful for my project in that these brief reviews are crafted for a deliberate and specific purpose—to present the information necessary for a librarian to make a selection decision (*School Library Journal*, n.d.). Their focus is narrow and, in that way, the perspective of both the reviewer and, more important, the publication is clear.

Fairclough (2015) discusses the idea of “reproduction” and the way in which discourses are reproduced through the conventions of a particular discourse type. In other words, the reviewer draws on the conventions of review writing for YAL and is therefore limited by the way in which LGBTQ issues have been addressed in past reviews. Because Fairclough sees discourse as a tool for conveying ideology, reviews about LGBTQ YAL become political and mediate larger societal conversations. In this way, the language of book reviews is actively working to distribute social goods (Gee, 2014). Below, I detail the specific tools and concepts from CDA that guided my analysis.

RELATIONAL VALUES

Fairclough is interested in how language can be used to convey connections and relationships between the writer and the audience, or “how a text’s choice of wordings depends on, and helps create, social rela-

tionships between participants” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 134). In book reviews, these relational values often position the characters and relationships in relation to heteronormative structures and, thus, are “assuming commonality of values with the readers” (p. 134). I looked for cues in the language of the reviews that convey a sense of common ideological ground between the reviewer and the audience. In other words, I watched for how the reviews could be working to “other” (Hall, 1997) certain books and readers who do not experience this common ground.

I looked for ideological creativity by identifying moments when the discourse of book reviews seems to have “gone wrong”—when book reviewers push boundaries and talk back to discourses that may limit the audience for LGBTQ books in school libraries.

PRACTICES AND SOCIAL GOODS

Gee (2014) asks scholars to consider how language is used to enact certain types of practices. In the context of book reviews, language is the basis for making a recommendation about the book’s position within a school library collection, the book’s audience, and the book’s literary merit. However, through this practice of recommending and discouraging the purchase of books, language is also used to distribute social goods; in this case, the social good is access to ideas, identities, and cultural contexts. Gee asks us to consider the question, “What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating?” (p. 34). I was especially interested in the practices enacted in the recommendation statement at the end of reviews. The authors of the book reviews not only make statements about the ideal age range for intended readers, but they also attempt to create an audience for the book so that school librarians will know if their patrons will

read them. Statements like, “This compelling story is good for young adults who are quietly struggling with their own sexual identity and need to know they are not alone” (Whipple, 2014) not only identify an audience but also limit the potential audience for the book.

TEXTUAL SYNONYMY

Fairclough (2015) asks scholars to examine the experiential values that words have and how “ideological differences between texts in their representations of the world are coded in their vocabulary” (p. 131). In my analysis, I was particularly interested in how the features of experiential values, like textual synonymy, function within the language of book reviews. Textual synonymy refers to the way in which words are listed as equal attributes within a sentence and assume the same level of significance, regardless of how unrelated they may be in other discursive practices (Fairclough, 2015). I looked for cautionary language that linked sexual orientation to other controversial issues in an effort to demonstrate how reviews may be working to maintain and reproduce the controversial nature of LGBTQ themes. I identified several instances where the reviews attempt to alert school librarians to controversial content (“This book contains . . .”) by linking homosexuality to controversial behaviors and content like profanity or violence. These instances are important in that they convey a naturalized understanding among librarians about what types of content should be considered controversial and the degree to which a topic can be deemed controversial.

IDEOLOGICAL CREATIVITY

Fairclough discusses the concept of “creativity” (2015, p. 179) and how different discourse types can be restructured, combined, and used to create new ways of producing discourses; “Common-sense elements of discourse are brought out into the open when things go wrong in discourse [. . . and] people attempt to ‘repair’ their discourse, as a way of highlighting and foregrounding discursive common sense” (p. 125). I looked for ideological creativity by identifying moments when the discourse of book reviews seems to have “gone wrong”—when book reviewers push boundaries and talk back to discourses that may limit the audience for LGBTQ books in school libraries. In other words, if controversy is explicitly addressed, school librarians might (re)evaluate their own reluc-

tance to include materials. Within the language of book reviews, I located instances where the reviewer directly addresses potential controversy or book challenges. These instances illustrate how the reviewer can speak back to normative assumptions and work to disrupt some of the forces inhibiting LGBTQ YAL as it makes its way into school library collections.

I began my analysis by examining each review with these four tools and concepts in mind. I then grouped elements from each review based on themes that emerged related to my research questions. (Table 1 shows the frequency with which the themes presented themselves in the reviews.) In the following section, I detail my findings through representative reviews from my analysis.

Findings

Shared Heteronormative Values

The language used in book reviews often positions the characters and relationships in relation to heteronormative structures, thus “assuming commonality of values with the readers” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 134). The reviewer assumes that the reader shares an understanding about LGBTQ youth and their struggles. This idea is demonstrated in a review for *The Book of David* (Anonymous, 2014), a story of a teenage boy who struggles with coming out in his small community:

Gr 9 Up—Growing up in the Midwest where football is king six days a week and church reigns on the seventh, *David has it all* [emphasis added in italicized quotations throughout

Table 1. Frequency of themes in book reviews

Themes	Exemplar Reviews (out of the 21 reviews analyzed, these were coded for each theme): Title/Author/Publication of Review (Titles in bold are the source of the quote in column 3.)	Additional exemplar quote for each theme
Relational values (Fairclough, 2015) and shared heteronormative values	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The Book of David</i>/ Anonymous/ SLJ 2. <i>The Book of David</i>/ Anonymous/ LMC 3. <i>I'll Give You the Sun</i>/ Jandy Nelson/ LMC 4. <i>One Man Guy</i>/ Michael Barakiva/ LMC 5. <i>Rethinking Normal</i>/ Katie Rain Hill/ SLJ 6. <i>Screaming Divas</i>/ Suzanne Kamata/ SLJ 7. <i>Some Assembly Required</i>/ Arin Andrews/ SLJ 8. <i>Tomboy: A Graphic Memoir</i>/ Liz Prince/ LMC 	“Harumi is a violin prodigy with overbearing Japanese parents, and Esther is a confused teen struggling with her sexuality” (Pruitt-Goddard, 2014, p. 100).
Practices/social goods (Gee, 2014) and limiting the audience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Beyond Magenta</i>/ Susan Kuklin/ SLJ 2. <i>Beyond Magenta</i>/ Susan Kuklin/ LMC 3. <i>The Book of David</i>/ Anonymous/ SLJ 4. <i>Grasshopper Jungle</i>/ Andrew Smith/ LMC 5. <i>One Man Guy</i>/ Michael Barakiva/ LMC 6. <i>Rethinking Normal</i>/ Katie Rain Hill/ SLJ 7. <i>Tell Me Again How a Crush Should Feel</i>/ Sara Farizan/ SLJ 8. <i>Tomboy: A Graphic Memoir</i>/ Liz Prince/ LMC 9. <i>Tomboy: A Graphic Novel</i>/ Liz Prince/ SLJ 	“As one of very few YA titles featuring both LGBT and Armenian characters, this book allows readers to learn about these two groups. Readers belonging to one or both of these groups will appreciate seeing their lives reflected in literature” (Morrissey & Glantz, 2014, p. 57).
Textual synonymy (Fairclough, 2015) and naming controversial content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Beyond Magenta</i>/ Susan Kuklin/ LMC 2. <i>The Book of David</i>/ Anonymous/ LMC 3. <i>Grasshopper Jungle</i>/ Andrew Smith/ LMC 4. <i>I'll Give You the Sun</i>/ Jandy Nelson/ SLJ 	“The book contains scenes with underage drinking as well as some sexual content” (Torres & Glantz, 2014, p. 82).
Ideological creativity (Fairclough, 2015) and disrupting the narrative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Afterworlds</i>/ Scott Westerfeld/ SLJ 2. <i>Everything Leads to You</i>/ Nina LaCour/ SLJ 3. <i>Far from You</i>/ Tess Sharpe/ SLJ 4. <i>Grasshopper Jungle</i>/ Andrew Smith/ SLJ 5. <i>One Man Guy</i>/ Michael Barakiva/ SLJ 6. <i>Tell Me Again How a Crush Should Feel</i>/ Sara Farizan/ SLJ 	“Their relationship proves to be a slow build, but teens will root for its success and relate to the novel’s universal themes of love and loss” (Mastrull, 2014, p. 133).

this article] as a star quarterback. He has a pretty cheerleader girlfriend and a best friend, Tyler, who also plays football. Life is sweet for David, until he meets the new kid at school, Jon, and Tyler gets seriously injured, putting him out for the season. David's stardom rises with a streak of winning games that attracts the attention of college scouts and media. Tyler becomes bitter, and David forms a friendship with Jon. Through his senior English class journal, *David struggles with feelings for his new friend that he doesn't know how to interpret*. Jon evokes something in him like no one else has before, including his girlfriend. The narrative gives readers realistic insight into the often heartbreaking and confusing world of sexual identity and acceptance. David knows that by accepting that he is in love with Jon, he will seriously damage his relationship with friends, family, and the greater

community. A list of resources for LGBTQ youth is included. This compelling story is good for young adults who are quietly struggling with their own sexual identity and need to know they are not alone. (Whipple, 2014; reproduced with permission from School Library Journal. © Copyright Library Journals, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc.)

Although the plot of this book involves a teen who is quietly struggling with sexual orientation, the reviewer does not challenge the idea that David

is experiencing this struggle because he is different, thereby naturalizing (Fairclough, 2015) a discourse about gay teens as "others" (Hall, 1997, p. 330). Fairclough explains naturalization: "If a discourse type so dominates an institution that dominated types are more or less entirely suppressed or contained, then it will cease to be seen as arbitrary and will come to be seen as natural" (p. 113). The reviewer emphasizes that before David started having feelings for Jon, "life was sweet" and "he had it all." Once David begins to struggle, he is given sole responsibility for disrupting his relationships with "friends, family, and the greater community." The reviewer states that "he will seriously damage" those relationships by acting on his desire for Jon. By giving David all of the agency in this situation and not problematizing the narrative in the story, the reviewer naturalizes the idea that David's attraction to Jon will disrupt the heteronormative way of life in his Midwestern town. David's struggle,

therefore, is constructed as an internal problem that he must address alone; in other words, the reviewer places responsibility on him rather than on the greater community. In constructing this review, the reviewer is writing for an imagined heteronormative audience of school librarians rather than challenging the naturalized ideas embedded within it.

In the review for *One Man Guy*, Michael Barakiva's (2014) bildungsroman about Alek, an Armenian American boy who develops feelings for his friend Ethan, the reviewer reproduces a naturalized narrative about parents and their reaction to learning that their child is gay:

First time novelist Michael Barakiva offers readers the story of a traditional Armenian-American family. Alek Khederian learns that he will be excluded from a family vacation and forced to attend summer school. Things look up when handsome Ethan appears in Algebra class. The two strike up a friendship, and soon a romance blossoms. Just when things are going well, Alek's parents return home early to a messy house, truancy notices, and Ethan and Alek together. *Alek's parents are relatively unfazed to learn that he is gay, but are very upset about the absences from school*. As one of very few YA titles featuring both LGBT and Armenian characters, this book allows readers to learn about these two groups. Readers belonging to one or both of these groups will appreciate seeing their lives reflected in literature. (Morissey & Glantz, 2014; reprinted by permission of the publisher.)

By using the phrase "relatively unfazed," the reviewer is working to uphold the unchallenged understanding that when children reveal their sexuality, there is cause for distress, and parents require a period of adjustment and acceptance.

Limiting the Audience

In the recommendation statements of book reviews, the authors attempt to name an audience that would likely read and appreciate the book. In order to demonstrate the way in which this practice leverages social goods, I will discuss a book review for *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* (Kuklin, 2014), a nonfiction book that examines the personal stories of several young adults.

Gr 9 Up—Extended interviews with six very different transgender, genderqueer, and intersex young adults allow these youth to tell their stories in their own words. Author-interviewer-photographer Kuklin interjects only briefly with questions or explanations, so that the voices of these youth—alternately proud and fearful, defiant and subdued, thoughtful and exuberant—shine through. While

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the interview subjects do occasionally ramble or become vague, the power of these 12-to-40 page interviews is that readers become immersed in these young adults' voices and experiences. The youth interviewed here do not uniformly share It Gets Better-style happy endings, but their strength is nonetheless inspirational as they face ongoing challenges with families, sexual and romantic relationships, bullies, schools, transitions, mental health, and more. The level of detail about their lives, and the diversity of their identities—including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and geography—provide a powerful antidote to the isolation and stigma that some transgender youth experience. Photographs of four of the subjects, including some before-and-after transition pictures from childhood and adolescence, help tell their stories and bring their transitions to life. Extensive back matter includes an interview with the clinical director of a health program for LGBTQI [the “I” indicates Intersex] youth, a glossary, and books, media, websites, and organizations of interest to transgender youth. *While this book's format and subject matter are probably never going to attract a broad audience, there is much here that will resonate with and hearten the kids who need it and will foster understanding and support among those who live and work with transgender teens.* (Stone, 2014; reproduced with permission from School Library Journal. © Copyright Library Journals, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc.)

The practice enacted at the end of this review is one that limits the audience for this book. The reviewer writes that the book is “probably never going to attract a broad audience.” This statement does two things. First, it assumes that a broad audience would not read a book about LGBTQ teens and, second, it signals to librarians that if they purchase the book, it may not have an audience. The social goods presented in this review are the experiences of LGBTQ teens, and the book reviewer assumes that the readers and receivers of that social good will be LGBTQ teens and those who “live and work with” them. By limiting the audience in this way, the reviewer is communicating a perspective about this social good by denying that it might be important for *all* teens to read.

In another example from the book review of *The Book of David*, the reviewer limits the audience in a similar way: “This compelling story is good for young adults who are quietly struggling with their own sexual identity and need to know they are not alone” (Whipple, 2014).

In this case, the book is for young people who struggle with their sexual identity but not for young adults who are not engaged in that struggle. Furthermore, it assumes that students who do not identify as

LGBTQ would not struggle with their sexual identities. This statement is problematic because not only does it limit the audience for the book, but it advances a narrow view about young people and sexual identity.

Naming Content as Controversial

The warning statements found at the end of the following two reviews reveal the ways that textual synonymy is used (Fairclough, 2015). The reviewers alert the school librarian to controversial material, but the naming of content as controversial conveys ideology that is both embedded in and guiding collection development practices. Words take on an ideological character when they are collocated within language or are positioned as textual synonyms. The first book review I discuss was written in response to Andrew Smith's (2014) *Grasshopper Jungle*. In this science fiction novel, the main character, Austin, narrates the end of the world as his fictional Iowa town is overtaken by giant praying mantises.

Ealing, Iowa is the home to Austin and Robby who like to skateboard and smoke cigarettes behind Grasshopper Jungle, a failing strip mall. Austin and Robby see high school bullies steal a glass globe containing a toxin. When the globe breaks, the toxin releases and combines with Robby's blood: the resulting combination infects several people. Several days later, giant praying mantises hatch from every infected person. The two boys determine that Robby's blood can be used to kill the insects. Andrew Smith has written a book that will appeal to teenage boys. Written in quirky prose, it contains a vast backstory and lots of action. Characters are complex and well-developed. *The book contains sexual scenes, homosexuality, underage drinking, violence, extreme profanity, and tobacco and drug use.* Readers looking for a humorous science fiction horror novel will enjoy *Grasshopper Jungle*. (Thompson, 2014; reprinted by permission of the publisher.)

With the italicized warning statement, the reviewer places homosexuality in a list of controversial themes in the book, including violence and profanity. By connecting the words in this proximal way, they function as synonyms and carry the same depth of meaning. In this case, homosexuality is controversial in the same ways as violence and profanity.

In a more subtle example from a book review for *Beyond Magenta* (Kuklin, 2014), we can see the experiential value that words have:

Six teenagers share their positive and negative experiences after discovering they are transgender or gender neutral. They describe their initial confusion, gradual recognition

of being different, the coming out process and transitioning, and finally acceptance of their sexuality. This book examines a sensitive issue and explains the spectrum and diversity within the transgender community as well as defines the distinction between transgenders and individuals identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. Medications such as hormones, including their potential side effects, and surgical procedures are explained. This book is a valuable resource for students desiring information on gender identity

and the LGBTQ community. *It contains frank discussion of sexual activity and profanity, and includes photographs of the teens sharing their stories* as well as notes, movies, and organizations. (Schulz, 2014; reprinted by permission of the publisher.)

Here, textual synonymy connects “frank discussions of sexual activity and profanity” to “photographs

of teens sharing their stories.” Within other forms of discourse, there would be no connection between these two elements. However, by placing them together, we see that the reviewer believes that a school librarian needs to be aware of both of these elements, and photographs become controversial. Certainly, photographs considered independently would not be considered controversial or worth a warning for a school librarian, but positioning the content next to sexual activity and profanity suggests that the photographs would contribute to that content.

Disrupting the Narrative

While I found many examples of troubling themes throughout the reviews I analyzed, there were also examples of reviewers disrupting these discourses in an attempt to alert the reader to problematic discourses that could be working against these LGBTQ texts. Fairclough (2015) calls this ideological creativity, and by identifying these moments in the discourse of book reviews, it is possible to see the ways in which book reviewers are able to push boundaries and talk back to discourses that may be limiting the audience for LGBTQ books and tightening the boundaries of the collection. In order to demonstrate this, I present another book review for *Grasshopper Jungle* (Smith, 2014):

It used to be that the only interesting events to occur in crumbling Ealing, Iowa happened between the pages of 16-year-old Austin Szerba’s “history” journals. Austin’s journals are elaborate and uncensored records about sex; his love for his girlfriend, Shann; his growing attraction for his best friend, Robby; his unique Polish ancestors; even Ealing’s decrepit mini-mall where he and Robby hang out. Shann tells Austin, “I love how, whenever you tell a story, you go backwards and forwards and tell me everything else that could possibly be happening in every direction, like an explosion.” And that’s exactly how Austin narrates the end of the world when a twist of fate sparks the birth of mutant, people-eating praying mantises. Austin not only records the hilarious and bizarre tale of giant, copulating bugs but his own sexual confusion and his fear about hurting the people he loves. Award-winning author Smith has cleverly used a B movie science fiction plot to explore the intricacies of teenage sexuality, love, and friendship. *Austin’s desires might garner buzz and controversy among adults but not among the teenage boys who can identify with his internal struggles.* This novel is proof that when an author creates solely for himself—as Smith notes in the acknowledgments section—the result is an original, honest, and extraordinary work that speaks directly to teens as it pushes the boundaries of young adult literature. (Giarratano, 2014; reproduced with permission from School Library Journal. © Copyright Library Journals, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc.)

In this review, the book reviewer speaks directly to other reviewers, school librarians, and adults who may be positioning this book and its content as controversial. Rather than hiding the potentially controversial content behind some of the experiential or relational values that Fairclough describes, the book reviewer addresses that content explicitly, demonstrating an effective strategy for pushing against the boundaries of acceptable content in school library collections. This review can serve as a model for ideological creativity that pushes boundaries in book reviews in order to “speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, institutional, social, or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world” (Gee, 2014, p. 9). While book reviews can inhibit collection development, they can also function as important and radical sites for resistance.

Discussion

School librarians engage in critical library practice through the process of selecting materials for their collections. They have a responsibility to provide students with uninhibited access to ideas and identities

While book reviews can inhibit collection development, they can also function as important and radical sites for resistance.

through the literature and materials that are put on library shelves (American Library Association, 2006). A main function of the language of book reviews is to define an audience for a given book. However, this study illustrates some of the ways in which the audience for LGBTQ literature is narrowly presented through that language. The stories of LGBTQ youth deserve space in library collections, particularly because books published with these stories are rare (Greenblatt, 2010). While it is true that LGBTQ teenagers should have access to these materials, there is also a need for all students to have access to these materials as schools attempt to encourage the development of students as allies in an effort to combat homophobia (Blackburn, 2012).

School librarians are always working within the constraints of their schools' budgets. That makes it all the more likely that they will respond to book reviews like the ones I have presented by choosing not to purchase these titles, fearing that the books will not be read by a sufficiently broad audience. Contributing to their reluctance are reviewers who speak to their audiences and assume common ground and shared heteronormative values; however inadvertently, these reviewers are upholding and reinforcing oppressive structures.

School librarians have the opportunity to collaborate with teachers across curricular areas (Everhart, 2013) and are uniquely positioned to provide and suggest materials to support student learning (Hughes-Hassell, 2005). However, if the books do not find their way onto library shelves, there is no chance that they will be read by students and utilized in classrooms. By naming homosexuality as controversial, the language of book reviews works to exclude LGBTQ materials from many school library collections. However, this study suggests that not only should reviewers consider their language, but school librarians should critically examine what is being named as controversial in these reviews. Given society's rapidly evolving ideas about sexuality and sexual orientation (Thein, 2013), the controversial "nature" of LGBTQ materials has become outdated and should be challenged.

Finally, there is opportunity for subversion of some of these oppressive structures within the language of book reviews. Rather than passively accepting and reproducing assumptions about LGBTQ content, book reviewers have opportunities to disrupt

them. For example, the language of book reviews can be used to challenge some of these normative assumptions about what is controversial content in school library collections by calling librarians' attention to limiting discourses. When reviewers speak directly to fears about book challenges, they are asking school librarians to more carefully consider their position on including LGBTQ materials for the students they serve.

Implications

For Practice

The assumptions about audience and constructions of controversial content revealed in this study need to be challenged in order to ensure a wide readership of critically acclaimed and

important novels. When we fail to make texts available to all readers, we withhold social goods (Gee, 2014) and naturalize ideas about what young adults should read. Educating school librarians to recognize these discursive practices could position them to challenge these practices. Within school library courses for young adult literature or collec-

tion development, students might practice critically reading, analyzing, and writing book reviews. They might also discuss how these reviews can be written in ideologically creative and disruptive ways.

Furthermore, because many of these reviews are written by practicing librarians, they as authors are in a position to interrogate and modify their own reviewing practices when they encounter LGBTQ literature. School librarians might also modify their collection development practices by consulting diverse reviewing sources and promoting these materials to a broad audience within their schools. Teachers, librarians, and administrators must advocate for fair and honest book reviews in order to support the inclusion of LGBTQ materials in collections. Access to information and ideas is an important component of social justice (Gregory & Higgins, 2013), and school librarians are

When we fail to make texts available to all readers, we withhold social goods (Gee, 2014) and naturalize ideas about what young adults should read.

uniquely poised to engage in this kind of social justice work.

For Research

Findings from this study suggest many possible avenues for future research. Book reviews often discuss sex and sexuality if it is present in young adult literature, but it would be illuminating to compare book review language describing sexual content in books that feature LGBTQ relationships with the sexual content in books that feature heterosexual relationships.

Any work done to challenge and disrupt assumptions about youth that are hidden in language will ultimately work to ensure access to ideas and information that accurately reflect the embodied experiences of young adults.

In her book, Lydia Kokkola (2013) examines how queer sexualities are dismissed and delegitimized by adults. Does queer sexuality in YA titles receive more attention in recommendations and warning statements than heterosexuality does? Parallel to that study, it might also be revealing to conduct a content analysis of sexuality and its function within a book alongside the reviews for the title.

The study reported here could also be expanded to consider the book reviews written for titles that are not a part of ALA's "Rainbow List." The books on this list have received some type of critical acclaim and therefore receive attention in many publications, but scholars have yet to consider the books that fall in the more liminal spaces in the young adult publishing world that do not find their way into review publications. Along those lines, this article only considers reviews from two specific journals, but reviews and critical attention for many of these books can be found in other publications (e.g., *The New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Booklist*) and in blogs, websites, and even more informal reviewing outlets (e.g., Amazon customer reviews or Common Sense Media parent reviews). It would be useful to compare the ways in which different review sources approach LGBTQ YAL.

Last, with theories from Critical Youth Studies (Lesko, 2012) in mind, it would be useful to examine

the age ranges that reviewers assign to LGBTQ books based on the type of content and characters featured in the texts. Any work done to challenge and disrupt assumptions about youth that are hidden in language will ultimately work to ensure access to ideas and information that accurately reflect the embodied experiences of young adults.

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