

## “The Fact of a Doorframe”:

Adolescents Finding Pleasure in Transgender-themed YAL

**D**uring a cold, Midwestern morning in January of 2015, the two of us met the students in the LGBTQ-themed<sup>1</sup> literature class for the first time and excitedly gave them copies of the first young adult literature (YAL) text we read together, Kuklin’s *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* (2014), a nonfiction text comprised of interviews with and photographs of trans-identifying youth. We picked this book because we wanted them to like it; we wanted them to get pleasure out of it. The cover features a picture of Cameron, a white gender queer youth with short brown hair, smiling and wearing a pink button-up shirt with a Black bow-tie, jeans, and a rainbow belt. As the students passed the books around, they immediately started talking; a few saw Cameron and immediately described them as cute.

After we read the chapter featuring Cameron’s interview, Mollie invited students to share moments they would like to discuss with the class. Riley immediately jumped in, saying the chapter is “so cute!” Jayla agreed and wondered aloud, “Where has this person been my whole life?” Riley’s and Jayla’s comments suggest that they experienced pleasure in reading *Beyond Magenta* and wanted to share their enjoyment with other readers. While these moments might appear to be small, to us they are also significant, and they are one reason we undertook co-researching and co-teaching the course. We believe that youth need to have opportunities to read, write about, and discuss diverse LGBTQ-themed literature in classrooms for a variety of purposes, including learning, fostering political alliance, and experiencing *pleasure*.

We understand pleasure through two related definitions. The Oxford Dictionary’s definition of the noun as “a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment” is the most common, but we recognize that this word often holds a sexual connotation, particularly when defined as a verb—that is, to “give sexual enjoyment or satisfaction to” (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/pleasure>). It is important to consider both of these definitions when conceptualizing pleasure in the realm of the queer. Ahmed (2015) reminds us that “Queer pleasures are not just about the coming together of bodies in sexual intimacy. Queer bodies ‘gather’ in spaces, through the pleasure of opening up to other queer bodies. These queer gatherings involve forms of activism” (p. 165). In the opening vignette, students seem to get pleasure, defined as a noun, from the book. We can also imagine an interpretation of this vignette as students experiencing sexual attraction, perhaps the initial stirrings of sexual pleasure. More important, we see evidence of Ahmed’s understanding of pleasure, that is, students “opening up to other bodies” in ways that motion toward activism.

Classroom moments like these, along with discussions in the fields of young adult literature and education, prompted us to wonder about the pleasure adolescents experience in and through reading YAL texts that represent people both different from and similar to themselves, conjuring the oft-referenced metaphors of sliding glass doors, windows, and mirrors. We wondered about the consequences of adolescents finding pleasure in YAL, whether they serve as sliding glass doors, windows, or mirrors. We believed these

consequences were not trivial, but we wanted to look more closely at what they were.

In an effort to do so, we begin by discussing previous scholarship on sliding glass doors, windows, and mirrors. We then conceptualize doorframes as a metaphorical addition to help us understand how and when readers experience pleasure. Using the concept of doorframes, we return to the LGBTQ-themed literature course and explore instances when pleasure was voyeuristic and compassionate and consider what this means in terms of the text, the recognizability of lives, and, thus, activism.

### **Unfolding Perspectives on Sliding Glass Doors as Windows, Mirrors, and More**

It was almost three decades ago when Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) articulated the incredibly generative

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metaphor of literature as sliding glass doors that can function as windows or mirrors for readers, particularly African American readers of children’s literature. In this foundational article, she explains how books are sliding glass doors in that “readers only have to walk through in imagination to become a part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author” (p. ix). Sometimes, she explains,

books are windows “offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange” (p. ix). But what really seems to ignite her passion is when the “lighting conditions are just right” and the sliding glass door can be a mirror, offering reflection and affirmation to readers. Sims Bishop (2012) asserts, “All children need both” windows and mirrors (p. 9), but as articulated in this early article, these windows and mirrors are always also sliding glass doors.

Sims Bishop’s metaphor has been taken up over and over across the decades, and, in the process, it has been complicated. Some scholars have narrowed the focus on African American characters and

readers specifically to Black girls (Toliver, 2018). Other scholars have shifted the focus from texts with African American themes to those with Latinx themes (Rhodes, 2018) and even queer themes (Bittner, 2018). Scholars have also broadened the focus from African American characters and communities to people of color (Durand & Jiménez-García, 2018), multicultural representations (Botelho & Rudman, 2009), and “underrepresented” characters and communities (Halko & Dahlen, 2018). Still others have challenged the metaphor to attend to multiple and variable identities (Bittner, 2018; Durand & Jiménez-García, 2018; Halko & Dahlen, 2018; Toliver, 2018), a challenge we discuss further below. For now, though, we note that our taking up of Sims Bishop’s metaphor includes a shifting to queer people, specifically trans people, in this case. This constitutes a broadening, in racial terms, that is most aligned with Botelho and Rudman’s (2009) focus on multicultural literature, but it also constitutes a complicating of the concept, given our efforts to honor multiple and variable identities. We understand such adaptations of Sims Bishop’s metaphor to come with both gains and losses. With focus, breadth is lost; with broadening, depth is lost. We work to navigate this tricky terrain, and for this particular project, we find value in this approach.

The application of the metaphor has also shifted in terms of genre. Whereas Sims Bishop looked at children’s literature, with particular attention to contemporary realistic fiction, more recent scholarship has applied the metaphor to different genres. Toliver (2018), for example, explicitly analyzes the genre choices of Black girls, including contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, and urban fiction. Durand and Jiménez-García (2018) consider the ways in which speculative fiction offers windows that serve restorative purposes for readers of color. We also add to this effort by focusing here on nonfiction—specifically on photo essay, thus acknowledging the importance of the visual, as Sims (1982) emphasizes in her praise of “image makers.”

Beyond changes in focus and genre, aspects of the metaphor get dropped, troubled, and added in some scholarship. Oftentimes the door part of the metaphor gets dropped, even though Sims Bishop describes the windows and mirrors as functionalities of the sliding glass doors, particularly of the glass. Botelho and Rudman (2009) build on Sims Bishop by attending to

the functionality of the door itself, rather than that of the glass. They assert that it is the “doors that invite action” (p. 265); it is through the doors that readers can critically engage with the “ideologies of class, race, and gender imbedded in the literature” (p. 265). We find this functionality compelling, but scholars have recently troubled the functionality of the doors, windows, and mirrors.

Toliver (2018), for example, draws on Sims Bishop to point out that doors can be “locked, when there [a]re misrepresentations or omissions of specific groups” (p. 2). Similarly, Sims Bishop (2012), herself, comes to reflect on the possibility that a “window could be a barrier, allowing children to look in but not be a part of the observed experience” (p. 9). Complementary, Reese (2016) has noted the dangers of observers looking through windows but misunderstanding and misrepresenting what they have seen, resulting in what she describes as the need for curtains, particularly for Native American communities. Toliver further notes that windows can be “opaque or boarded” (p. 2). Considering mirrors, Reese (2017, as cited by Rhodes, 2018) talks about how sometimes literature functions more like “fun house mirrors, which throw back a distorted portrait of reality” (p. 1), a possibility Sims Bishop names in her 1990 piece. Similarly, Toliver references Sims Bishop’s 1990 article to write about “broken mirrors” (Toliver, 2018, p. 2). These concerns, ones that we share, are essentially about when literature represents minoritized people in inauthentic ways, fails to represent pertinent populations entirely, or represents communities fairly but these representations get corrupted by readers. These scenarios have consequences for readers’ experiences and scholars’ understandings of doors, windows, and mirrors.

Another troubling of the metaphor is related to the concern we mention above about the complexity of multiple and variable identities, or the “futility of seeking fixed or isolated representations” (Halko & Dahlen, 2018, p. 3). For instance, no reader is *only* raced or *only* gendered, so readers might see some aspect of themselves in a book but not others. Similarly, some of these aspects or identities might matter to certain readers at one time but other readers at other times. For example, Bittner (2018) writes about when his Christian identity matters more than his gay identity, and vice versa. Moreover, some aspects of

readers’ identities might shift over time, as when a reader identifies as straight in fifth grade but queer in tenth. So, scholars, ourselves included, are interested in how the metaphor might be enhanced (Toliver, 2018) such that it “acknowledge[s] youth identities as fluid, overlapping, and intersecting” (Durand & Jiménez-García, 2018, p. 1).

Durand and Jiménez-García (2018), drawing on Appleman (2000), address this desire for enhancement by adding the idea of lenses, *theoretical* lenses, such as Critical Race

Theory, Black Feminist Theory, Postcolonial and Decolonial theories. They assert, “In addition to mirrors and windows, we also need lenses through which we might more aptly perceive the nuanced and complex identities of youth of color in literature” (p. 19). We share the desire to enhance the metaphor in ways that recognize youth identities as “fluid, overlapping, and intersecting” (Durand & Jiménez-García, 2018, p. 1). As such, we followed Durand and Jiménez-García’s guidance to look

through a theoretical lens, and for the purpose of this project, we turned to queer theory. Even in doing so, though, as we considered the possibility of additions, we remembered that according to Sims Bishop, those windows and mirrors are always, first, doors. And, as it turned out, a queer lens helped us see a potential addition to the metaphor of doors that might address concerns about when literature misrepresents or oversimplifies minoritized people.

### Queer as a Lens, Frame as an Addition

Butler, a scholar foundational to queer theory, challenged us to attend to *frames*. She (2009) argues that everything has a frame, whether or not we acknowledge it. She says, “There is no life and no death

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without a relation to some frame” (p. 7). We understand frames to be comprised of ideologies, values, and practices (see also Goffman, 1974). She imagines the frame around an image, and for the sake of our argument, we understand that image as literature—as a door, a sliding glass door, that can function as a window and mirror. In other words, we understand the frame as a *doorframe*. Butler says a frame “tends to function, even in a minimalist form, as an editorial embellishment of the image” (p. 8). She argues

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that the “frame implicitly guides interpretation” (p. 8). It may complement the image—or in this case, literature—and it may not. It may even interrupt what the image or literature was created to convey. She says the frame can even be a “false accusation” (p. 8), but still, it is there. Thus, Butler challenges us to see what Rich (1984) calls “The Fact of a Doorframe” (p. iv).

In conceptualizing frames, Butler (2009) draws on Callon (1998), who argues that frames establish boundaries, they work to contain; it might be argued that they impose and maintain norms. They are not, however, either impenetrable or immutable. Indeed, Callon asserts they are “fragile” (p. 252). There is, in his words, a “proliferation of overflows” (p. 244). Overflows are, he says, “irrepressible and productive” (p. 250); they may be positive or negative or more likely some combination, but they are bound to happen, and not in a unidirectional way. That is to say, ideas from literature, which is framed, spill out over the frame into the world just as ideas from the world pour into literature. The frame is there, but it is penetrable. As a result, that which is inside of the frame does not just shrink or expand; rather, it is “continuously emerging and re-emerging” (Callon, 1998, p. 244). Further, the frame itself is vulnerable, in Butler’s (2009) words, to “reversal, to subversion, even to critical instrumentalization” (p. 10). Frames “break themselves in order

to re-install themselves” (p. 12). They are negotiated, contested, and reshaped. As frames change, understandings and experiences of that which they contain, however tenuously, also change, meaning that texts also emerge and re-emerge.

This is really the importance of frames. If frames influence the ways we, meaning readers, understand whatever it is that they contain, and if they are permeable and changeable, then they also influence the ways we understand the world beyond them. They have consequence. They can, according to Butler, “decide which lives will be recognizable as lives and which will not” (p. 12). So, we are interested in frames of sliding glass doors that function also as windows and mirrors. Such frames can create conditions of livability (Butler, 2009, p. 23), promote understandings of interdependence (Butler, 2009, p. 19), and foster “justice and even love” (Butler, 2009, p. 61). According to Rich (1984), “The Fact of a Doorframe/ means there is something to hold/ onto with both hands” (p. iv).

So, if a book is a sliding glass door that readers might walk through (Botelho & Rudman, 2009), might look through to see “others,” and might look into to see themselves (Sims Bishop, 1990), then a frame—comprised of ideologies, values, and practices—guides readers’ understandings of what they experience, see, and find in reading a book. They are like lenses in this way (Appleman, 2000), but they cannot be put on and taken off. They are always there, even though they are not always recognized and not always the same. We can imagine a frame—for Rich (1984), it is a wooden frame—constructed by people who market a book, people in a bookstore who might sell the book, parents and guardians who might buy the book, and readers who might choose to read it. For the purpose of this article, we choose to focus on a frame constructed by teachers who selected a book, administrators who purchased it, and students who read and discussed it among themselves and with their teachers. And, with the doorframe in mind, we ask, “What do adolescents find in the book?” More specifically, we ask whether they find pleasure, and if they do, so what? What are the consequences of such a finding?

While we view these questions as speaking more broadly to the fields of YAL and education, we understand them to be especially vital for the teaching and learning of LGBTQ-themed texts in secondary class-

rooms. In a review of empirical scholarship of this field, We (Blackburn & Schey, 2017) found that teachers typically framed LGBTQ-themed literature in ways that guided students to find a *lesson* about LGBTQ people, who were understood as others, rather than to find political power or pleasure in relation to LGBTQ people, whether or not students identified as such. But we know, from the LGBTQ-themed literature course that we co-taught, that alternative frames are possible. So our focus here is to analyze a frame that invited adolescent readers to find pleasure in YAL, with a goal of fostering classrooms where more readers can find enjoyment in reading about LGBTQ lives and communities.

### The LGBTQ-Themed Literature Class

We taught the LGBTQ-themed literature course at an arts-focused public charter high school in a midsized Midwestern city. The school explicitly strove to recruit and support youth who struggled in other local public and charter schools. Administrators and other school personnel communicated an expectation that students would not be homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic. They expected that students would be supportive of LGBTQ students. These expectations contributed to an environment that was relatively welcoming to queer youth and many such youth chose to attend the school. During the 2014–2015 academic year, over 300 students were enrolled at the school. Administrators approximated that 30–40% of them were queer identifying. Approximately 56% received free or reduced-price lunch, a statistic commonly used as an index of families' socioeconomic status. With regard to race and ethnicity, the school's records<sup>2</sup> indicated that 56% of students were White, 26% were African American, 10% were multiracial, 6% were Latino, 1% were Asian, and 1% were Pacific Islander.

The class was a semester-long (18-week) elective English language arts course that was offered as an elective to juniors and seniors for fulfilling their English graduation requirement. It was the first time the class was taught at the school, and a total of 14 students enrolled, 13 of whom participated in the study. All identified as white except for one, who identified as biracial—white and Asian. Five identified as both straight and cisgender, with the other youth being more fluid with respect to their sexual identities and gender expressions. We learned about these

identities in various ways. At times, students chose to reveal this information to us during classroom discussions, such as when they discussed how their personal experiences related to those represented in a text. At other times, they included these identities in written assignments, such as when they wrote memoirs or autobiographies. At still other times, they shared this information with us through informal conversations in and around class. Finally, during interviews, we also elicited information about students' identities.

The course was organized into five curricular units. In this article, we focus on the first, which explored nonfiction memoir and biographical/autobiographical reading and writing. We focus specifically on the reading, discussing, and presenting of *Beyond Magenta*, and even more specifically on the taking up of two chapters—one featuring Jessy and another featuring Luke.

We approached the project as a blending of practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) and ethnography (Heath & Street, 2008), reflecting our different roles.<sup>3</sup> Mollie worked with the high school's principal to establish the course, proposing it, designing the curriculum, and taking primary teaching responsibilities. As a result, she most frequently foregrounded a practitioner inquiry stance. She invited Ryan, who was her advisee in a university doctoral program at the time, to join her, serving as a research apprentice. He typically foregrounded an ethnographic participant-observer stance. Both of us shared experiences collaborating for over a decade in a teacher-inquiry group focused on combatting homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism in schools (see Blackburn, Clark, Kenney, & Smith, 2010; Blackburn, Clark, & Schey, 2018). We understood our collaboration to be grounded in a commitment to transforming schools to be more livable, just, and compassionate for queer people. We come to this work with different positionalities—Mollie identifies as a white queer cis woman, and Ryan identifies as a white straight cis man. We

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recognize that working for social change is complex, coalitional work that necessarily remains incomplete and partial. Understanding that we make missteps, we strive to adopt a stance of solidarity, listening to and learning from communities who experience oppression so that we may work effectively against those forces in ways that are compassionate and consequential.

Typically, both of us attended and participated in each class session. We constructed data through a variety of methods, including writing daily fieldnotes, gathering classroom documents (such as curricular materials and student writing), audio- and video-recording class sessions, and interviewing students. We started recording in the second month of the class, meaning that most of the class sessions we discuss in this article were documented via fieldnotes. We analyzed these data using a blending of coding techniques from Saldaña (2016), including structural, descriptive, and initial coding. This approach existed in a dialectic with our reading and studying of previous scholarship, which helped us consider frames of pleasure when adolescents read *Beyond Magenta*.

## Frames of Pleasure

Here, we consider frames of pleasure and focus on two different illustrative vignettes to explore the overflow, its impact on the readings of texts, and what difference these things make to the recognizability of lives, particularly trans lives. The first vignette features Stacy most prominently as she focused on Jessy's story. The second highlights Riley, as the class focused on Luke's story. Both students' actions and statements suggest that they were experiencing pleasure, as we will show below. In the first vignette, the overflow was playful but also voyeuristic. In the second, it was exuberant, passionate, and compassionate. In both cases, the texts re-emerged in the students' presentations, and the lives represented in them were more or less recognizable, in Butler's terms.

### Voyeuristic Overflow

In the memoir, autobiography, and biography unit, one assignment entailed students working in pairs to present one of the youth from *Beyond Magenta* to the rest of the class. To do so, students needed to re-read the chapter and choose key information to present.

Stacy, who was a straight, biracial (white and Asian), cisgender woman, and Tori, who was a straight, white, cisgender woman,<sup>4</sup> worked together on the assignment; they chose to present Jessy, a Thai trans man who, although he does not explicitly self-identify in terms of sexuality, only conveys desire for women. Jessy characterizes himself as being funny, loud, and happy. His chapter describes his childhood and adolescence, which included time living in Thailand and the United States. When he was younger, Jessy described himself as a tomboy and later questioned his sexuality, identifying as a lesbian, and later as a trans man. At times he encountered acceptance and support, such as when his family and neighbors complimented him as being handsome (“Prince Charming”) or he connected with people at the Callen-Lorde Community Health Center, which provides healthcare and related services to New York's LGBT communities. At other times, his experiences were less positive, occasionally being isolated from peers in school or experiencing tension with his mom when he came out to her, first as lesbian and then as trans. Stacy and Tori both expressed excitement about this chapter and appeared to be fascinated by Jessy.

Prior to the day of the presentations, students had time to work in small groups in class, and both of us circulated in the classroom during this time, offering feedback. During this work time, rather than revisiting the book for information, Stacy and Tori were online, searching social media sites in an effort to find the youths from *Beyond Magenta*. Tori had noticed in one photo essay that a featured young person, not Jessy, had on a nametag. She used the last name on the tag in order to find that person online. While Stacy and Tori were not able to find everyone featured in the book, they did find Jessy, who had many pictures posted across social media sites.

Stacy lingered over the images, especially some showing Jessy on a beach, laying down on a large beach chair and wearing sunglasses but no shirt; his bare torso was visible. She appeared to be looking for evidence of Jessy having had top surgery. In another picture, he wore a tank top, and Stacy commented on how well-defined his biceps were. In yet another photo, Stacy and Tori commented on his mustache. As they continued to view these images, Stacy commented over and over that Jessy looked “really cute.” Several other students—Jamie, Jayla, and Kimberly,

youth who all had named experiencing attraction to men, although not only men—sat nearby and joined in on the conversation. They talked with Stacy about their ages and tried to figure out how old Jessy was, combing through ages mentioned in his chapter, publication information in the book, and details they found on his social media accounts. They debated who could and could not potentially date him, considering whether or not he was too old compared to them. It seemed like they were trying out what it might be like to desire—perhaps romantically, perhaps sexually—a trans man, and they did so publicly in front of peers.

The next day, Stacy and Tori presented Jessy and his chapter to the class. However, most of their presentation was not concerned with what was in the chapter, but rather what he had done since the end of the book. They described his current life, including the fact that he had broken up with his girlfriend who was a part of his story in *Beyond Magenta*. Stacy and Tori used the classroom's digital projector to show some of his social media accounts. They clicked on the picture of Jessy on the beach without a shirt, leaving this projected as they spoke. In another image, they commented on his mustache. They also brought up a video of Jessy and his dog, explaining that they wanted to hear his voice. When the video played, they commented on how low it was. As they finished, Stacy said that the comments online from Jessy's family were mainly positive, at least those in English. She expressed surprise about this, using her own family's biculturalism and bilingualism as a reference point to gauge levels of transphobia in Southeast Asian communities.

Stacy may have experienced Jessy's story as a window, looking into the life of a trans man. She may, too, have experienced it as a mirror. She gravitated toward Jessy, the only Asian person in the book, choosing him for an assignment. She compared her Asian family members with his and considered dynamics of bilingualism across the two. In these ways, she saw aspects of herself and family reflected back to her, and she explicitly considered race, ethnicity, and language where other students failed to do so. In other ways, she experienced Jessy's story as a sliding glass door, imagining possible futures where Jessy and she dated.

All of these experiences, though, were framed with ideologies, values, and practices that invited her

to find pleasure in the reading. Certainly, with respect to pleasure as a noun, Stacy enjoyed the text. Perhaps, too, as a verb, since she conveyed her attraction to Jessy. She commented on his moustache. She praised his biceps. And she valued his deep voice. She was, in Ahmed's words, "opening up to other queer bodies" in ways that "might also bring [them] to different ways of living with others" (p. 165). Jessy said, "I was attracted to straight women. I was attracted to girls who like men" (Kuklin, 2014, p. 8). Further, he said, "I really wanted to look muscular . . . Every time I saw a guy working out, I thought, *I want that body! I want to be able to do that!*" (Kuklin, 2014, p. 21). The clear implication was that not only was he attracted to straight women, he wanted them to be attracted to him as a straight man. But Stacy was not just attracted to him, she was examining and exposing him. With Tori, she studied the skin of Jessy's torso, which we believe was an effort to examine it for surgical scars. And, then, the text re-emerged in Tori and her presentation, leaving Jessy's topless image on the screen while they talked about his masculine features.

While we believe all of these texts representing Jessy were pleasurable for Stacy, we also believe that at some point she, as a reader, became voyeuristic, knowing, of course, that the two are not mutually exclusive. Rather than relying on the intimate, nuanced, and vulnerable portrait of Jessy in *Beyond Magenta*, Stacy and Tori went beyond it and into social media to investigate other details of his life. We see this move as one beyond Jessy's consent. Jessy likely knew the chapter could be read closely by many strangers, and he did not include pictures of himself topless. He did, however, post such images on social media. Jessy likely imagined that the audience for his social media accounts was comprised of people who followed him—that is, people he knew to one degree or another. He might have been well aware that it

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was a public audience, one that could include anyone; we cannot know, but the question raises our concern regarding consent. We do not know whether Jessy

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would have been flattered or bothered by Stacy’s attention, but, still, he never had the power to decide for himself, and she did not recognize her obligation to consider his choice.

Further, when Stacy and Tori began to use Jessy’s images on social media to scrutinize and

then display his body, especially given Stacy’s comments on his body, we interpreted their readings and writing of him as objectifying, dehumanizing. We saw them reduce him to particular body parts and discuss them in relation to their own pleasure. We saw them express desire in relation to the degree to which Jessy’s body approximated hegemonic (cis)masculine norms of man-ness. In other words, the life of Jessy, as a trans man, became less recognizable, to draw on Butler. In short, the overflow was voyeuristic. We found ourselves wanting Reese’s curtains.

### **Compassionate Overflow**

During the same presentation assignment, Riley also got pleasure out of reading *Beyond Magenta*, but the overflow and re-emerging text were quite different. Riley was white and queer, with their identification with gender being multiple and layered during the semester.<sup>5</sup> They were passionate about writing and literature and had authored several pieces about LGBTQ youth in a local queer magazine. Riley worked with Jayla, who was white, straight, and cisgender. Moreover, Jayla was a spoken word poet. Riley and Jayla chose to present Luke, a white trans man who referenced having had a girlfriend and who was also a poet and performer. He describes himself as shy, feeling much more outgoing and energized on stage than off. Much of his chapter focuses on his experiences at Proud Theater, a nonprofit, volunteer organization that supports youth—LGBT youth, allies, and children of LGBT parents—in creating and performing activist art. The chapter is organized into eight “scenes,” as if it is a play or theater piece itself. Several of these de-

scribe Luke first attending Proud Theater, auditioning for parts, being mentored by a trans playwright, and eventually performing on stage in front of his friends. Other scenes describe his experiences in school (such as being bullied) or with his family (particularly navigating coming out and staying out with his mom and dad).

Riley explained that the choice to focus on Luke’s story was connected to their appreciation of the writing style and structure of the chapter. Riley was attuned to questions of writing and representation as the class discussed *Beyond Magenta*. In one conversation, Riley commented that they liked how Kuklin left in words and comments like “whatever” when she represented Cameron, for example, rather than remove them in editing. These phrases helped readers get a sense of the personalities of the people in the book. According to Riley, these choices helped readers to “see different aspects of what [trans teens’] lives are like with more details.” Riley commented that they liked Kuklin’s writing choice because it reflected Luke’s identities and interests.

When it came time to present Luke and his chapter to the class, Riley walked up to the front of the room wearing a jean jacket that they seemed to have brought just for that occasion. They were, essentially, conjuring Luke, who is shown most often in the book wearing denim and flannel and, in one blurred image, pulling on a jacket. In a spoken word style, Riley performed the poem written by Luke that Kuklin used at the start of the book chapter and from which the name of the collection came: “Said, ‘What are you?’ said, ‘you gotta choose’/ said, ‘Pink or blue?’/ and I said I’m a real nice color of/ magenta” (Kuklin, 2014, p. 150). We believe Riley enjoyed presenting Luke’s story—an enjoyment grounded not in sexual attraction or desire, but in activism. Later, Riley commented that Luke used theater and spoken word performances to share who he is with other people, which we take to show that Riley’s performance choices reflected attention to how Luke wanted to present himself to public audiences. Thus, the text that re-emerged in this presentation was one very much aligned with the one offered in the book and, it seems, aligned with Luke, himself.

As the *Beyond Magenta* presentations finished for the day’s class session, the entire class discussed the book as a whole. Riley presented a mild critique,



stating that they didn't like the lack of details about the feelings and experiences of going through surgery. These details might have been helpful for people trying to understand trans experiences or to think through their own options. However, Riley also recognized that it could be challenging to share this type of information about oneself.

As a youth who was not then participating in any type of biomedical transition, Riley appeared to approach *Beyond Magenta* as a window that could help them better understand and envision an array of possible futures, whether for themselves or other people, by considering trans youths' experiences in relation to surgery. Riley might have experienced Luke's story as a mirror, reflecting back whiteness and queerness, but also reflecting a writer. This seemed to be pleasurable for Riley as they connected with the ways in which Luke opened himself up to readers.

All of these experiences were framed with ideologies, values, and practices that invited them to find pleasure in the reading. The overflow was compassionate in nature, and the text re-emerged, this time in a presentation in which Riley worked to conjure Luke in ways aligned with his chapter and the performance documented by his chapter. They dressed like Luke and performed like Luke. They recognized the difficulty of sharing intimate details about one's life even as they were curious to know more. And their love and respect for Luke was evident. Luke's life was decidedly recognizable.

## Complicating Frames

We, as teachers, tried to frame the book in pleasure, and students contributed to that construction. However, through their reading and presentations, students introduced overflows that shaped the consequences of their pleasure. In Stacy's case, the overflow was voyeuristic, such that the text re-emerged in ways that made Jessie's life less recognizable. In Riley's case, the overflow was compassionate, and the re-emergent text helped Luke's life be recognized. Through such an analysis, these two cases offer an illustration of "The Fact of a Doorframe" (Rich, 1984, p. iv). As Butler argues, these frames become vulnerable to transformation, and such transformations have consequences that become evident in how people use them to recognize some lives as valuable while defining other lives

as disposable. So, it might be argued that Stacy used the frame of pleasure to define Jessie's life as usable, if not disposable, and Riley used that same frame to define Luke's life as valuable.

But it is not that simple. Doors, windows, and mirrors are not so reliable, nor are people's lives and experiences so singular. Thus, any consideration of frames and overflows must necessarily entail attention to youth identities as "fluid, overlapping, and intersecting" (Durand & Jiménez-García, 2018, p. 1). Butler offers a helpful insight when she explains that people must recognize how lives are always interdependent, meaning that people have obligations to one another and obligations to sustaining collectively the conditions for life to flourish. Through this perspective, we come to see more complex and layered interconnections among readers, texts, and the people who surround them, as well as to consider the nature of people's obligations.

As Ahmed reminds us, when reflecting on queer people and pleasure, we can neither ignore the sexual nor attend only to the sexual. This is tricky in schools, where sexuality is typically marked as inappropriate, as are sexual desire and behavior. Further, queer sexuality, desire, and behaviors are often entirely censored explicitly and understood in only hyper-sexual terms implicitly. It is our contention that sexuality as well as sexual desire and behaviors need to be acknowledged among adolescents in schools—for queer as much as straight—but the requirements of and explorations of the understandings of consent and mutual obligation must come along with such acknowledgments. In the case of Stacy and Tori's experiences of pleasure in relation to Jessie, we respect their embrace of their attraction to and desire for Jessie, but not their scrutiny and display of his body. In other words, their desire did not absolve their objectification and voyeurism—one did not negate the other—but these overflows

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coexisted as they spilled into and beyond the frame of pleasure.

In contrast, even though Riley honored and understood Luke as a complex, whole person, in some ways it seemed tied to race in general and whiteness in particular. Riley and Tori chose to focus on Luke, but in doing so, they also chose not to focus on the three teens of color represented in *Beyond Magenta*. Moreover, when Riley talked about Christina's and Mariah's stories—the only stories about Latina and African American trans teens represented in the book—they and other students described those stories as very “difficult” or “tough” to read. At best, such commentary might be understood as Riley's comfort with white normativity; at worst, as racism. So, while Riley recognized their obligations to empathize with white trans youth, they eschewed such obligations with trans youth of color. That is not to say that Riley's potential racism erased their deep respect for Luke; it did not. But the two overflows existed simultaneously as they permeated the frame of pleasure. In both cases, there were connections, intimate connections, between the readers and people featured in the book, but also, in both cases, those connections were flawed. Pleasure is a complicated frame, as are they all.

## Conclusion

Pleasure is valuable and too frequently an impossibility in classrooms when people read LGBTQ-themed texts (Clark & Blackburn, 2009). Yet not all pleasure, sexualized or not, is ethical, humanizing, and loving. Moreover, even when pleasure does contain such qualities, it can still have problematic and exploitative intonations. Pleasure experienced through reading needs to be combined with compassion, with an ethical consideration of the experiences, desires, choices, and values of people who are represented, whether real or fictional, in and through a text. Compassionate pleasure must recognize people's interdependency as well as their mutual responsibility to and for one another, even as it also contributes to conditions that help everyone, including trans people and people of color, flourish. This type of compassionate pleasure is hard work, though. As Stacey's and Riley's stories suggest, it takes listening and learning in sensitive ways. It takes a continued effort. Sometimes one

might experience frustration or curiosity, but this does not justify a compromise or dismissal of other people's humanity. So, when we discuss pleasure, we do not understand it to be trivial or frivolous, but rather a deep joy grounded in the possibilities of freedom and community.

One way we might have insisted on such an experience of pleasure, for example, is to ask whether their experiences of pleasure would have been pleasing to Jessy. We might have named Stacy and Tori's desire, acknowledged their sexuality, and also asked them to reflect on the role of consent. We might have challenged them to reflect on how Jessy might have felt being discussed in sexualized terms, being followed into his social media worlds, being so closely examined, and being put on display for the class. While there would be no right answer to find, we could ask them to listen and learn from Jessy's words and even his silences. In doing so, we might have asked them to consider their connections and obligations to others, including but not limited to Jessy.

Pleasure without compassion, or pleasure that only defines certain lives as worthy of compassion, is exploitative and destructive, and as such, it reproduces oppression. Such pleasure is deeply problematic, and as literacy educators and scholars, we argue that it is essential to construct alternatives where pleasure is compassionate and thus ethical, humanizing, and loving. Based on our teaching and research in the LGBTQ-themed literature course, texts such as YAL nonfiction are not enough on their own. They are important and valuable, of course, and we need stronger, more diverse, and more nuanced representations in YAL, particularly from #OwnVoices scholars (Duyvis, 2019). However, the work of authoring textual representations cannot and will not stand on its own. While texts function as sliding glass doors that might become windows and even mirrors, “The Fact of a Doorframe” remains (Rich, 1984, p. iv), and through overflows, these texts re-emerge in new and unexpected ways. Our task becomes to cultivate frames and respond to overflows in ways that help young people experience and express pleasure that is ethical and compassionate and thus radically liberatory and communal.

*Ryan Schey is Assistant Professor of English Education in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Auburn University. His research explores literacy and language*

practices and social change in schools, focusing on queer youth and those who work in solidarity with them. He is currently working on disseminating research findings from a yearlong literacy ethnography focusing on youths' queer activism across a classroom and club in a midwestern public urban high school. He recently co-authored the book *Stepping Up!: Teachers Advocating for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Schools* with Mollie Blackburn, Caroline Clark, and members of a central Ohio teacher inquiry group. He completed his doctoral degree at the Ohio State University, and previously he taught high school English and co-advised his school's GSA for seven years.

**Mollie Blackburn** is a professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the Ohio State University. Her research focuses on literacy, language, and social change, with particular attention to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth and the teachers who serve them. She is the author of *Interrupting Hate: Homophobia in Schools and what Literacy can do about it*, a co-author of *Stepping Up!: Teachers Advocating for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Schools*, and a co-editor of *Acting Out!: Combating Homophobia through Teacher Activism*.

## Notes

1. There is a necessary proliferation of terms that people, within and beyond the academy, use to discuss sexual and gender diversity. We seek to balance inclusivity and precision in our usage (on this point, see Blackburn & Schey, 2017). We use the term LGBTQ-themed literature because it was the name of the course (the curriculum featured lesbian, gay, bi, trans, and queer identities in addition to other sexualities and genders) and is a commonly recognized genre in YAL. However, we recognize that our discussion in this article mostly focuses on trans identities and gender diversity. In the title, we use the term *transgender* to be explicit about our focus on non-cisgender identities specifically and gender more broadly (as opposed to other topics, such as transnationalism or translanguaging). Within the article, we use *trans* because we see this term used most commonly within and beyond the academy during conversations about gender diversity and non-cisgender identities.
2. In naming racial and ethnic demographic percentages here, we use language supplied by the school's records with the goal of providing readers with a general description of the school. However, we recognize that these records have limitations, especially as students used a broader range of terms to self-identify.
3. For readers who have further questions about the school, the course, and our methodological approach, see Blackburn & Schey, 2018.

4. Both Stacy and Tori consistently identified as straight and cis during the semester, and they indicated to us to use she/her/hers pronouns to reference them, as we do throughout this article.
5. In the class, Riley identified as a girl and used she/her/hers pronouns at the start of the semester but used he/him/his pronouns at the end of the semester. One of Riley's friends said that Riley used he/him/his across the semester outside of class. Here we use the plural pronouns they/them/theirs to reference Riley in an effort to describe this multiplicity rather than to convey gender fluidity. For the same reasons as Stacy and Tori, we reference Jayla using she/her/hers pronouns.

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