MATTERING IN LAMBDA-AWARD NOMINATED SAPPHIC YOUNG ADULT FICTION PUBLISHED FROM 1990-2020

by

CARLY BENNETT

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of Masters by Research in English Literature

College of Arts and Law
University of Birmingham
January 2024

Abstract

This thesis explores the impact of mattering or not mattering on sapphic characters in young adult fiction in three key spaces in their lives: within the family, within the community, and within the wider world. Drawing from existing sociological research, including Meyer's minority stress model, and close reading of nine award-nominated sapphic young adult texts published between 1990-2020, this study looks at the ways sapphic protagonists are shown that they do or do not matter and the impact this has on their self-regard and well-being.

Chapter one looks at mattering within the family and discovers the link between not mattering and withdrawal from the family, depersonalisation, and suicidal ideation, while characters who are shown that they matter within their families are able to form deep bonds rooted in honesty and authenticity. Chapter two explores mattering within the community, focusing on the local community, the religious community, and friendships. This chapter highlights the link between not mattering and the development of internalised homophobia, while characters who are shown that they do matter to their communities are able to overcome this internalised homophobia. Chapter three examines mattering within the wider world, focusing on the impact national and statewide policies and attitudes have on spaces frequented by sapphic youth, including high school. This chapter uncovers the link between not mattering within the wider world and the sapphic protagonist's concealment of her sexuality and withdrawal from community spaces, while characters who are shown that they do matter within the wider world have the

confidence to engage in activism and fight back against injustice within their communities.

This thesis ultimately argues that sapphic teenage protagonists who are shown that they do not matter within their family, their communities, and within the wider world experience a negative impact on their identity formation as a result, whereas when characters are shown that they do matter within these spaces, they enjoy a positive impact on their self-regard.

Contents

Introduction

‘I write for the invisible reader, and so do many other writers of books for children and young adults.’[1]

- Nancy Garden

In a speech given at the 1999 NCTE Conference young adult author, Nancy Garden, spoke about writing for the ‘invisible’ reader, going on to state that she chose to centre sapphic characters in her stories because ‘as a lesbian, I understand their invisibility; I've been invisible myself, and sometimes still am’, highlighting the importance of sapphic representation in young adult literature (YA).[2] Since Garden’s speech and, indeed, the 1982 publication of her novel, *Annie on My Mind,* the first sapphic YA novel, the number of sapphic YA works has increased and so too has the scholarship surrounding queer YA. However, while numerous academic studies have been carried out to chart the changing representation of the queer community as a whole in YA, there is limited academic scholarship focusing solely on the representation of the sapphic community, the ‘invisible’ identity that Garden references in her speech.

[1] Nancy Garden, ‘Writing for the Invisible Reader’, *Virginia Tech University Libraries*, Winter 2000 <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/winter00/garden.html> [Accessed May 26 2023].

[2] Nancy Garden, ‘Writing for the Invisible Reader’, 2000; Within this research, sapphic is defined as a trans-inclusive term that includes all lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, and queer women and non-binary persons. Similarly, throughout this project queer is used as an inclusive umbrella term when referring to all LGBTQIA+ identities.

This research explores the idea of mattering in Lambda award-nominated sapphic YA published in the USA between 1990-2020, three decades that have seen changes in both cultural and legislative attitudes towards the queer community in the USA and an increase in the representation of sapphic characters in YA. This project addresses a key theme across YA - the formation of identity during teenage years - using mattering as a lens through which to examine the ways external forces impact identity formation in sapphic protagonists. This thesis draws on both literary analysis and sociological scholarship, including Meyer's concept of minority stress, to examine how key spaces in sapphic protagonists' lives shape their identity formation. Contributing to the emerging body of work that centres Garden's aforementioned 'invisible' identity this thesis argues that the formation of identity is significantly impacted by three external spaces in sapphic protagonists' lives: the family, the community, and the wider world.

Sapphic Young Adult Literature: Definitions and Scholarship

The birthdate of YA is debated amongst scholars with Cart suggesting Daly's *Seventeenth Summer*, published in 1942, as the earliest publication, while Suico et al. suggest that Salinger's 1951 *Catcher in the Rye* to be the first published work of YA.[3] Shealy, however, gestures to an earlier birthdate, asserting that Alcott's *Little Women*, published in 1868, is considered by 'many scholars…as one

[3] Michael Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism,* 4th edn (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2022), p. 8; Terri Suico and others, 'Exploring Trends in a Growing Field: A Content Analysis of Young Adult Literature Scholarly Book Publications 2000-2020', *English Education*, 55.2 (2023), 116-135 (p. 116) <https://doi.org/10.58680/ee202332216>.

of the first realistic novels for young people' and the novel shares many themes that are prevalent across early to modern-day YA, including coming of age and identity formation.[4] The disagreement amongst scholars as to when the earliest YA title was published continues when seeking a formal definition of YA as a classification of literature. The term was not coined until many years after any of the aforementioned titles argued as the first work of YA entered circulation. Cart suggests the term came to prominence in the USA in the late 1960s, referring to 'realistic fiction that was set in the real (as opposed to imagined), contemporary world and addressed problems, issues, and life circumstances of interest to young readers aged approximately 12-18'.[5] Today, YA has grown beyond this definition to encompass stories of all genres, primarily (but not always) focusing on teenage protagonists and often (again, but not always) centring coming of age narratives. According to Wickens the first queer YA title, John Donovan's *I'll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip*, was published in 1969, though it wasn't until the 1980s that audiences started to see consistent queer YA emerging. Sapphic YA did not emerge until 1982 when Garden's *Annie on My Mind* was published, with sapphic YA published more consistently from the 1990s onward.[6] Looking specifically at YA novels that feature sapphic protagonists my preliminary research that focused on traditionally published novels in the USA indicated that there were 27 sapphic

[4] Daniel Shealy, *Little Women at 150* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2022), abstract.

[5] Michael Cart, 'The Value of Young Adult Literature', *American Library Association*, 2008 <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines/whitepapers/yalit> [Accessed 22 December 2023].

[6] Corrine Wickens, 'Codes, Silences, and Homophobia: Challenging Normative Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary LGBTQ Young Adult Literature', *Children's Literature in Education*, 42 (2011), 148–164 (p. 148) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-011-9129-0>; Only nine YA novels with queer characters were published throughout the 1970s, with many of these only secondary characters who did not feature prominently in the narrative.

YA novels published in the 1990s, 47 in the 2000s, and 398 in the 2010s, a growth of over 1500% throughout the three decades. All sapphic YA novels fell into the contemporary genre until 2005 when Tamora Pierce's sapphic fantasy, *The Will of the Empress,* was published. Though contemporary remains the dominant subgenre, the number of fantasy, historical, and science fiction sapphic YA novels has grown since 2005. A full breakdown of all sapphic YA novels published between 1990 and 2020 can be found in Appendix One.

YA scholarship dates back to the 1940s, four decades before the first sapphic YA novel was published, but it was the twenty year period between 2000 and 2020 that saw scholarship begin to rapidly increase. Suico et al. identify an 'explosion of academic books written about young adult literature' during these two decades.[7] While queer YA did not begin to attract academic attention until the 1990s, which Cart and Jenkins suggest is explained by 'relatively small numbers and a recent vintage' of queer YA texts, this area of scholarship, too, saw an increase in scholarly works from the year 2000 onwards.[8] Since the early 2000s scholarship has increasingly diversified beyond examining queer identities in YA as a singular group and it is post-2010 that the majority of existing scholarship that focuses solely on sapphic YA emerged, with *Gender Role Models in Fictional Novels for*

[7] Suico and others, p. 116; see Appleyard (1990); Avery (1995); Cuseo (1992); McCallum (1999); Jan (1974); Meigs (1953); Moore (1997); Smith (1980); Thomson (1987); Wolf and Heath (1994) for more.

[8] Michael Cart and Christine A. Jenkins, *The Heart Has its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969-2004* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), p. 169.

Emerging Young Adult Lesbians from Cook et al. serving as one of the earliest available scholarly texts in 2013.[9]

An enduring focus of scholarship on YA, heterosexual or queer, is the important role these works play in teenage readers' lives, with Coats asserting that 'young adult literature exerts a powerful influence over its readers at a particularly malleable time in their identity formation'.[10] Similarly, Phillips argues that these texts help readers make sense of 'the adolescent's ritual transference from childhood to adulthood', referring to YA as a 'passage narrative'.[11] Building on Philips' suggestion of YA as passage narratives there is existing scholarship that looks at the ways queer YA texts serve as passage narratives for queer teenage readers, through exploring the representation of queer characters in YA. As well as the representation of queer characters, additional themes queer YA scholarship has explored that are of particular relevance to this project are: heteronormativity, homophobia and the formation of identity in queer characters; and family and community within queer YA.

The body of early queer YA scholarship largely concerns itself with representation, examining how and how often queer identities are represented within young adult literature. Within the three decades from which this project draws its corpus (the

---

[9] Jennifer Cook, Sharon Rostosky and Ellen Riggle, 'Gender Role Models in Fictional Novels for Emerging Adult Lesbians', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 17.2 (2013), 150-66 <doi:10.1080/10894160.2012.691416>.

[10] Karen Coats, 'Young Adult Literature: Growing Up, In Theory', in *Handbook on Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. by Shelby A. Wolf, Karen Coats, Patricia Enciso and Christine A. Jenkins, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), pp. 315-329 (pp. 315-316).

[11] Leah Phillips, *Female Heroes in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction: Reframing Myths of Adolescent Girlhood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), p. 1.

1990s, 2000s, and 2010s), three key frameworks for categorising queer representation in YA emerged. Lee created the earliest categorisation model for classifying lesbian YA in 1998, Cart and Jenkins' *The Heart Has Its Reasons*, which looks at queer YA as a whole, was published in 2006, followed by Jones' 2013 categorisation model.[12] Aligning with and expanding on the two existing models of categorisation Jones' framework focuses solely on sapphic YA, deviating from Cart and Jenkins' overview of queer YA, revisiting and building on Lee's initial lesbian YA classification model to encompass the changing and more diverse narratives published in the fifteen years that passed between these models. Each of the three models suggests three categories for organising the representation of sapphic characters in YA and a number of parallels can be drawn between the frameworks. Examining these three models and their similarities not only provides an overview of early YA scholarship but also provides an opportunity to explore a brief history of the representation of sapphic characters in YA across the time period that concerns this thesis.

Lee's first category of lesbian YA concerns lesbians positioned as a threat or problem, the most rudimentary in terms of positive representation or diversity, and this category is comprised of texts that cater to a heterosexual audience who may be 'unfamiliar or uncomfortable with lesbianism', or texts that eroticise lesbian

[12] Vanessa Wayne Lee, '"Unshelter Me": The Emerging Fictional Adolescent Lesbian.' *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 23.3 (1998), 152-159 <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.1237>; Michael Cart and Christine A. Jenkins, *The Heart Has its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969-2004* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006); Caroline E. Jones, 'From Homoplot to Progressive Novel: Lesbian Experience and Identity in Contemporary Young Adult Novels', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 37.1 (2013), 74-93 <https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.2013.0003>.

characters for the heterosexual male gaze.[13] Cart and Jenkins' category of homosexual visibility runs in parallel to Lee's lesbians positioned as a threat, comprising novels that exist solely to illustrate the existence of queer characters, whereby their coming out (or outing) upsets a 'previously homogenous society', from which we see much of the novel's drama arise.[14] Cart and Jenkins note that increased societal acceptance of queer identities in the 1990s and later did little to overturn the sole narrative of queer characters following the formula of 'discovering one's sexual identity, agonising over whether or not to come out and suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous homophobia'.[15] Similarly, Jones' first category, the traditional classification, includes novels that favour a cautionary ending, serving as a warning of the tragic future awaiting sapphic teenagers. Novels that fit into Jones' traditional category align with Saxey's suggestion of the 'homoplot', which focuses on coming out tropes where lesbian protagonists are troubled, overtly sexualised, and lesbianism as a whole is positioned as an issue to be overcome.[16] Novels that fit into the first category across all three categorisation models largely (but not exclusively) comprise novels released prior to and during the 1990s, when there was little diversity found in either the types of sapphic characters written about or in the narratives themselves. Characters that fit into these categories are either butch or femme with no identity in between, personal acceptance of their sexuality is difficult and oftentimes painful, and abuse over their identity is accepted as part of the coming out process.

---

[13] Lee, p. 152.
[14] Cart and Jenkins, p. xx.
[15] Ibid., p. 134.
[16] Esther Saxey, *Homoplot: The Coming-Out Story and Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2008).

Lee's second category of lesbian YA is made up of texts that focus on the formation of lesbian identities, features lesbian identities that 'vary in depth, endurance, and scope', and begin to look at the lesbian experience as something varied and nuanced.[17] Cart and Jenkins define their second category of queer YA as stories of gay assimilation, which move from homosexual visibility to a more inclusive world where a '"melting pot" of sexual and gender identity' is assumed in the wider society of the story, if not within the protagonist's direct community.[18] Similarly to Lee's category of the formation of lesbian identities, Cart and Jenkins' gay assimilation texts look at sexuality as another facet of a character's personality, as opposed to their sole feature, opening up the possibility for stories that look beyond the coming out journey. Jones' second category is similar but, again, pushes things in a more progressive direction due to the more modern body of work to drawn from, and she defines her second category as the mediating novel. These texts serve as something of a bridge between cautionary traditional texts and the more progressive novels that 'overtly advocate lesbian sexual agency' and begin to break down traditional lesbian stereotypes.[19] While the protagonist may still struggle to accept her sexuality and will likely suffer some abuse as a result of her identity, these mediating novels do allow lesbian characters a glimpse of a hopeful, authentic future, reflecting many of the sapphic YA novels of the 2000s.

[17] Lee. p. 152.
[18] Cart and Jenkins, p. xx.
[19] Jones, p. 78.

It is the final classifications of each of these three categorisation models that differ most, reflecting the changing publishing trends across the fifteen years that passed between Lee's model and Jones'. Lee's final category, received wisdom about lesbianism and lesbian identity, concerns itself with texts that 'show lesbianism as part of a larger cultural landscape' and are less concerned with educating heterosexual readers than they are with telling authentic lesbian experiences that extend beyond coming out stories.[20] Cart and Jenkins offer a similar idea for their final category, which centres queer consciousness and community and certainly has the most potential for positive and/or diverse representation. These novels show queer characters 'in the context of their communities…and their families of choice' and pave the way for more joyful, authentic depictions of queer life.[21] These novels are almost exclusively found in the 2000s and later, as Cart and Jenkins assert that prior to the 2000s 'if there was one [queer character], the story would be a coming out narrative. If there were two, the story would either be a young adult romance or a story that included a lesbian or gay adult couple.'[22] They note that while exceptions exist, and there are rare examples of novels in the 1990s that featured multiple queer characters or the presence of a wider queer community, they were extremely rare, so until the 2000s it was almost impossible for readers of YA fiction to discover queer communities in the pages of their stories. Jones' third category, the progressive novel, includes texts that seek to dismantle stereotypes and position lesbian characters as diverse and able to confidently assert their identity without abuse

[20] Lee, p. 152.
[21] Cart and Jenkins, p. xx.
[22] Ibid., p. 146.

and tragedy as accepted foregone conclusions. Jones goes on to cite joy as a fundamental element of progressive novels, something that is invariably absent from their traditional and mediating counterparts, and is only gestured to in Lee and Cart and Jenkins' final categories. Jones' final category illuminates queer joy as a relatively new feature of YA, as the novels that fit into this classification are predominantly published post-2010.

Reflecting on these three classification models and the trends they identify in sapphic YA helped me determine 1990-2020 as a key time period in sapphic YA that is worthy of focused research. Jones asserts the emerging nature of sapphic YA with her suggestion that 'novels of lesbian literature claim a relatively new space for young women' even in 2013, and Cummins also notes the 'absence of lesbians' in literature, stating that 'something is missing'.[23] Snyder disagrees with Cummins, suggesting in her work that examines queer characters in 2019 YA that 'female adolescents identifying as lesbian have multiple opportunities to connect with relevant characters' as sapphic characters are well-represented, reflecting the increased inclusion of sapphic characters more recently.[24] Jones agrees with Snyder to a certain extent, suggesting that while there has been a definite increase in books featuring queer protagonists in the twenty-first century, it is not simply an increasing number of books that is important but that available texts 'stimulate, challenge, and encourage young lesbian women to affirm their sexual

[23] June Cummins, Overlooked to Looking Over: Lesbians in Children's and Young Adult Literature, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 19.4 (2015), 401-405 (p. 402) <10.1080/10894160.2015.1059728>.
[24] Janelle M. Snyder, 'Representation of LGBTQ Characters in 2019 Young Adult Literature' (unpublished thesis, University of Northern Iowa, 2020) p. 22, in Database of UNI ScholarWorks https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/1531 [accessed 27 January 2022].

and personal growth'.[25] Aligning with Cart and Jenkins' identification of the lack of queer community in many queer YA texts published prior to the 2000s, Jones' assertion of the importance of novels that allow more complex depictions of sapphic stories was a driving force in my decision to research how characters are shown that they matter in stories published before, during and after this shift towards more complex, stimulating narratives.

Heteronormativity and homophobia in queer YA are two interlinked and often overlapping topics that have particularly interested scholars since 2010 and both feed into one of this thesis' central ideas of the way external forces impact self-regard and the formation of identity in sapphic characters. Crisp criticises the reinforced heteronormativity found within traditionally published gay young adult romance novels, suggesting 'queer characters are safely viewed through layers of heterosexuality'.[26] Harris, considering queer characters across media as a whole, identifies a strong trend of heteronormativity and cites it as a 'tool used to create fear of the LGBTQ+ community' that 'pervasively continues to oppress women', reinforcing the unique experience of sapphic characters (and readers) who are targeted by both homophobia and sexism.[27] Sidestepping from heteronormativity to homophobia, Norbury tackles homophobia and guilt in her work, asserting that 'many adolescent lesbian and gay characters are depicted as experiencing

[25] Jones, pp. 75-76.
[26] Thomas Crisp, 'From Romance to Magical Realism: Limits and Possibilities in Gay Adolescent Fiction', *Children's Literature in Education*, 40 (2009), 333–348 (p. 345) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-009-9089-9>.
[27] Jack Harris, 'The Power of Queer Representation in the Media', *Audre Lorde Writing Prize* (2018), p. 2 <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/wollstonecraftaward/25> [accessed 7 February 2023].

feelings of guilt', an issue I identified in my own reading of the fifty texts that make up this project's corpus.[28] Norbury goes on to cite that 'homophobia and heterosexism are concepts centrally implicated in these guilty feelings' and suggests that these are present at both 'the societal and individual level', acknowledging the existence of internalised homophobia in queer YA and the impact this has on creating guilt within queer characters.[29] Wickens agrees that homophobia is present in contemporary queer YA but writes that 'contemporary LGBTQ-themed novels generally denounce various misconceptions about gays and lesbians'.[30] This suggests that homophobia is no longer positioned as an accepted opinion, concisely highlighting the evolving point of view seen between the early sapphic YA of the 1980s and the more diverse, contemporary texts seen in more recent decades. Harris' observation of heteronormativity creating fear of and oppressing sapphic characters and Norbury's link between homophobia and guilt are two ideas that interest me greatly and are explored throughout this thesis.

Norbury identifies adolescence as a time when queer characters are 'particularly vulnerable to homophobia' due to the emergence and formation of their queer identity and Walczak agrees, reinforcing that 'issues of identity formation and power are intimately intertwined in adolescent literature'.[31] This idea of the

---

[28] Kate Norbury, ''On some precipice in a dream': Representations of Guilt in Contemporary Young Adult Gay and Lesbian Fiction', *International Research in Children's Literature*, 5.2 (2012), 184-194 (p. 184) <https://doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2012.0062>.

[29] Norbury, p. 184.

[30] Wickens, p. 149.

[31] Norbury, p. 187; Laurie Barth Walczak, 'The Ordinary Trip: Heteronormativity and Homophobia in Young Adult Literature from 1969 to 2009' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014) p. 10, in Database of UWM Digital Commons <https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/856/> [accessed 3 February 2022].

teenage years as central to identity formation is something Lewis agrees with, stating that 'teens reading these novels need that reassurance and need to realise that how they identify themselves should be exactly right for them', looking beyond the page to consider the real-world readers of queer YA.[32] Like Jones, Lewis goes on to identify the importance of stories that can be read as hopeful and uplifting, the sort of texts that can be found in Lee, Cart and Jenkins, and Jones' final classification categories that were discussed previously. The impact that homophobia has on identity is a topic I noticed in many of the texts that form this project's corpus, and the existing body of scholarship and the prevalence of the idea within the narratives themselves encouraged me to consider this during my own research.

Family and community are two popular themes explored in YA scholarship and these topics continue their intrigue in queer YA scholarship.[33] Looking specifically at queer YA scholars agree on the impact community has on positive self-regard and identity formation in sapphic characters. Norbury identifies 'the very real human need for approval from significant others', going on to stress this need for approval is greater still when it is a 'child's need for parental approval', which is demonstrated across sapphic YA and is a key theme examined throughout this thesis.[34] When looking at community Jones brings in another theme that I return to multiple times in this project: the religious community, which she recognises as

[32] Cady Lewis, 'How Far Have We Come? A Critical Look at LGBTQ Identity in Young Adult Literature', *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, 30.2 (2015), 53-57 (p. 56) <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.2072>.
[33] See Spencer and Craig (2023); Nelms and Nelms (1984); Fisher (1950); and Lukenbill (1981) for more on YA and family.
[34] Norbury, p. 185.

'integral' to adolescent identity formation within queer YA.[35] Blackburn et al. suggest that queer YA considers family and the home in a different way to stories that centre heterosexual characters, determining 'the disruption of normative notions of families' as 'characteristic' of the texts.[36] In this project I aim to contribute to the exploration of the role family and community play in identity development by looking at how these two spaces impact sapphic characters specifically. I argue that Blackburn et al.'s statement could go further to include friendship and community in the spaces that queer YA disrupts normative notions of.[37]

Mattering: Definitions and Scholarship

A key focus identified in the existing body of academic work surrounding sapphic YA is how the characters are represented within the texts, whether this representation can be considered traditionally stereotypical or progressively diverse, and how this representation has evolved throughout the decades. Within the texts themselves primary concerns of the sapphic protagonists relate directly to how they matter within their fictional world: identifying their place in the world, discovering how they do or do not matter to those around them, and seeking a

[35] Caroline Jones, ''Jesus Loves Me, This I Know': Finding a Rainbow God in Contemporary Adolescent Literature', *Children's Literature in Education*, 43 (2012), 223–241 (p. 224) <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10583-011-9148-x> [accessed 25 February 2022].
[36] Mollie V. Blackburn, Caroline T. Clark and Emily A. Nemeth, 'Examining Queer Elements and Ideologies in LGBT-Themed Literature: What Queer Literature Can Offer Young Adult Readers', *Journal of Literacy Research*, 47.1 (2015), 11-48 (p. 15) <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X15568930>.
[37] See Gillingham (2017); Goldstein and Phelan (2009); Jiménez (2015); Juhasz (1994); Thomas, Crisp and Knezek (2010); and Trites (1998) for more work on YA and queer YA.

family or community to belong to. In her work on material feminism and adolescent becoming Trites argues that adolescent characters in YA are 'empowered and disempowered by the discursive, but also by the environment, technology, embodiment, and other forms of materiality', suggesting a broad spectrum of external forces that shape adolescent identity.[38] She goes on to suggest that 'mattering is thus the process by which the material and the discursive intra-act to define one another'.[39] Therefore I have identified mattering as a helpful lens through which to explore how external forces can shape identity formation in sapphic teenage protagonists. While Trites' discussions of mattering in relation to adolescent identity formation focus on YA as a whole, there is currently little scholarship about mattering within queer YA, so this thesis seeks to further this area of study by looking specifically at how mattering or not mattering in key spaces in sapphic teens' lives impacts their self-regard and identity formation. As there is a lack of existing literary scholarship that focuses on mattering, this project draws from a number of sociological sources that examine mattering and the impact this has on teenagers and queer people, applying these real-world concepts to the texts and characters that make up the corpus of this project. The words mattering, meaning and belonging are used synonymously in the existing body of research due to their overlapping definitions, however, within the context of this project I have chosen to use the term mattering. Mattering is defined in this work as a person's perception of how they are valued within a specified space: a family, a community, or a society, for example.

[38] Roberta Seelinger Trites, 'Material Feminism, Adolescent 'Becoming,' and Libba Bray's 'Beauty Queens'', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 36.2 (2017), 379–400 (p. 380) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44785312> [accessed 14 May 2024].
[39] Ibid., p. 396.

The key sociological work that this project will draw on in its research into mattering is Meyer's model of minority stress, which looks specifically at the 'excess stress to which individuals from stigmatised social categories are exposed' and Meyer focuses primarily on lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities within many of his works on minority stress.[40] Meyer uses key phrases such as 'alienation' and 'normlessness' in his formation of the idea of minority stress, suggesting that 'dominant culture, social structures, and norms do not typically reflect those of the minority group', marking these phrases as conflicts commonly experienced by those belonging to minority groups.[41] Meyer goes on to specify dominant culture 'social institutions' that minority group members are not afforded, including heterosexual marriage as 'a sanction for family life and intimacy'.[42] There are comparable social institutions denied to teenage protagonists in the sapphic YA discussed in this thesis, including attending a high school prom with a same-sex date. Meyer asserts that queer people who experience homophobic prejudice events may engage in four types of coping behaviours in an attempt to mitigate the harmful impact of minority stress: vigilance (the expectation of rejection); concealment (hiding the queer identity to avoid prejudice events); internalised homophobia (which Meyer defines as 'internalised stigma'); or ameliorative coping behaviours, including alcohol or substance abuse.[43] When considering the impact

[40] Ilan Meyer, 'Prejudice, Social Stress, and Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: Conceptual Issues and Research Evidence', *Psychological Bulletin,* 129.5 (2003), 674-697 (p. 679) <doi:10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674>.
[41] Ibid., p. 675.
[42] Ibid., p. 675; The journal article this quote is taken from was published prior to the legalisation of equal marriage in the USA.
[43] Ibid., p. 677.

minority stress can have Meyer introduces the idea of negative valence (valence referring to 'the evaluative features of identity') as 'a good predictor of mental health problems', suggesting that negative self-regard and internalised homophobia can have a negative impact on mental health. Meanwhile, he goes on to assert that 'integration of the minority identity with the person's other identities is seen as the optimal stage related to self-acceptance', this idea linking back to Jones' idea of progressive sapphic YA that recognises sapphic characters as wholly-realised people, for whom their sexuality is only one facet of a complex and nuanced identity.[44] From Meyer's work a number of key concepts are utilised to analyse the primary texts to explore mattering in sapphic YA, how prejudice events impact sapphic protagonists' self-regard and identity formation, and what types of coping behaviours are shown in sapphic protagonists who experience prejudice events in the texts.

Elliott also looks at how the treatment of individuals impacts their self-regard, examining the family unit to explore how teenagers are made to feel as though they do or do not matter based on their treatment from other family members, specifically parents.[45] Elliott suggests that the significant others in a person's life, 'beginning with parents and other family members' are the leaders in the socialisation process that helps youth believe that they matter in life.[46] Van Bergen et al. agree that 'parents fulfil a crucial role in the psychosocial well-being of their

[44] Meyer, p. 678.
[45] Gregory Elliott, *Family Matters: The Importance of Mattering to Family in Adolescence* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
[46] Ibid., p. 138.

children' and that this role is 'particularly salient' for teenagers.[47] Similarly, Ryan et al. discuss a precedent for 'clear associations between parental rejecting behaviors during adolescence and the use of illegal drugs, depression, attempted suicide, and sexual health risk by LGB young adults', which would be considered ameliorative coping processes under Meyer's minority stress model.[48] Meyer agrees with these findings, suggesting that 'negative regard from others leads to negative self-regard'.[49] Thus, the existing body of sociological research supports the assertion that parents play a critical role and that parental acceptance of their queer teen's sexuality can have a positive impact on self-regard, while rejection can have a negative impact, linking back to Norbury's YA scholarship that identifies parental approval as key for young protagonists.[50]

There is also existing work on mattering within the field of queer theory that is relevant to this project, particularly Bradway and Freeman's exploration of mattering and queer kinship. Looking outside of the traditional family set up Bradway and Freeman explore the ways queer kinship allows individuals to disrupt the traditional family set up, in line with Blackburn et al.'s idea of non-normative family units as 'characteristic' in queer YA.[51] Bradway and Freeman argue that one of the key facets of queer kinship is 'the movement away from

[47] Diana D. van Bergen and others, 'Parental Responses to Coming out by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Pansexual, or Two-Spirited People across Three Age Cohorts', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 83 (2021), 1116-1133 (p. 1117) <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12731>.
[48] Caitlin Ryan and others, 'Family Acceptance in Adolescence and the Health of LGBT Young Adults', *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 23 (2010), 205-213 (p. 205) <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6171.2010.00246.x>.
[49] Meyer, p. 679.
[50] Norbury, 2012.
[51] Blackburn, Clark and Nemeth, p. 15.

oppressive families of origin towards alternative structures of belonging', pointing to the formation of chosen family units in situations where queer youth feel as though they do not matter to their families of origin, a commonly seen trope in sapphic YA.[52] However, Butler's work that predates Bradway and Freeman critiques the push towards 'outness' equating to mattering, calling for an examination of the ways this assertion can quickly become exclusionary to many queer people: 'Who is represented by which use of the term [outness], and who is excluded? For whom does the term present an impossible conflict between racial, ethnic, or religious affiliation and sexual politics?'[53] When considering sapphic YA there is another consideration to add to Butler's list of those groups for whom 'outness' might present an impossible conflict: age. As the sapphic protagonists this project concerns itself with are all teenagers, age is a factor that underpins many areas of their life and many of their safety concerns. While dependent on their families for housing and money, and oftentimes granted only limited autonomy, 'outness' within a homophobic family could lead to rejection, abuse, and homelessness, and is the eventuality in many of the texts explored throughout this thesis.

The existing literature that looks as aspects of mattering supports the view that external forces can shape an individual's self-regard, particularly in teenage years, and asserts the importance of mattering, the positive impact on individuals who feel as though they do matter, and the negative impact on individuals who feel as

[52] Tyler Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman, *Queer Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), p. 13.
[53] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), p. 173.

though they do not matter. However, there is a gap in the existing body of work when considering the role mattering plays in fiction. There is currently little academic work that applies the real-world sociological study of mattering to fictional sapphic characters, particularly in YA. Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to the emerging body of work on sapphic YA by looking at the impact mattering or not mattering has on sapphic youth in award-nominated YA to discover how external forces shape these characters' identity formation.

Project Overview

While sapphic YA is a relatively new area of study there are existing studies that explore the representation of sapphic characters in YA, which were discussed in further detail above. I argue that it is important for sapphic characters to be studied as a separate identity from the wider queer community (though studies that focus on the queer community as a whole are vital) as the queer community is not homogenous and each identity has its own lived experience. Cart and Jenkins highlight the need for more sapphic characters in YA and Jones agrees with the sentiment, suggesting that while sapphic novels have grown in popularity, 'this space has not, however, opened easily for them'.[54] Many sapphic stories exist at the intersection between queerness and girlhood and Jones identifies the unique, perhaps even rebellious intersection of sapphic identity and YA. Indeed, there are a number of parallels: a recent step into the mainstream, increasing acceptance after a long history of marginalisation, and, in Jones' own words, 'both require

[54] Cart and Jenkins, 2006; Jones, p. 76.

active resistance to dominant ideologies to maintain integrity of identity'.[55] A key area that is missing from the current body of work on queer YA are studies that look specifically at sapphic protagonists, how these characters are treated within YA, and what stories are being told about these characters.

As detailed above I carried out initial quantitative research to create a list of 472 texts that conformed to the initial parameters for this project (a young adult novel with a sapphic protagonist published in the USA between 1990-2020, the three decades that encompass the vast majority of sapphic YA). To create an appropriately-sized corpus of texts for close reading I first considered which parameters would provide a wide range of texts from across the three decades. I determined literary prizes as an appropriate source of texts, given their annual recurrence, which would provide a list of novels published throughout the thirty-year period and that likely had wide circulation across the USA in the wake of their prize nomination. There are, of course, limitations to examining only texts that have been nominated for prizes, as literary prizes can be self-selecting, something Kidd refers to as an 'alternative strategy of cultural management', so it must be acknowledged that many texts that fall outside the scope of this project may provide opportunities for meaningful and valuable contributions to the study of sapphic YA.[56] While there is plenty of merit in texts that do not receive wide national (and international) circulation as a consequence of prize selection, Jiménez identifies that 'book awards, for better or worse, help shape the American

[55] Jones, p. 76.
[56] Kenneth Kidd, '"Not Censorship but Selection": Censorship and/as Prizing', *Children's Literature in Education*, 40 (2009), 197-216 (p. 200) <10.1007/s10583-008-9078-4>.

literary landscape'.[57] For this initial study into mattering in sapphic YA I follow Jiménez's assertion and focus on novels that are indicative of the evolving landscape of sapphic YA and could be considered foundational sapphic YA texts.

Due to the inclusion of a specific category for queer YA (from 1992 onwards) the Lambda Literary Awards offers the most comprehensive corpus that covers the breadth of this project's time period.[58] While other prizes that were also initially considered - the Printz Awards, Carnegie Medal, and Stonewall Book Awards - do grant prizes to sapphic YA on occasion, the number of nominated and award-winning texts was too small to form a suitable corpus. Considering texts that garnered Lambda Literary Award nominations or wins resulted in 10 books from the 1990s, 12 from the 2000s and 28 from the 2010s, creating a streamlined database of 50 eligible books, which formed the corpus of this research project (a full copy of the corpus can be found in Appendix Two). These 50 texts all adhere to the final parameters put in place to determine suitability for this project: traditionally published prose novels for the young adult age range; books published in the USA between 1990-2020; books with a confirmed sapphic protagonist; and books that were nominated or won a Lambda-literary award between 1991-2021.

[57] Jiménez, p. 406.

[58] The Lambda Literary Awards, debuted by Lambda Literary in 1989, focus solely on queer literature and award prizes in multiple categories that include LGBTQ Children's/YA (from the 2021 awards onwards these categories have been split into two separate awards for Children's/Middle Grade and YA), Lesbian Fiction, and Bisexual Fiction.

After forming the corpus an initial reading was undertaken of all 50 books to carry out preliminary qualitative research into each text and to determine the most appropriate texts for close reading. During this process I noted recurring themes across the corpus that dealt with identity formation and examples of minority stress responses from Meyer's work, previously referenced above. Common themes included issues around community and friendship, struggles with negative responses in the wake of a sapphic character coming out to friends, family, or community members, and sapphic characters seeking a community of other queer people, around whom they might feel safe to express their queer selves authentically. Building on these themes, which occurred repeatedly across the thirty years of fiction that the project corpus encompasses, I determined three key spaces in sapphic characters' lives that play a pivotal role in how they perceive that they do or do not matter: the family, the community, and the wider world.

In a 2012 survey of over 10,000 LGBTQ-identified teenagers in the USA the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) found 56% of respondents were out to their immediate family, 38% were out to teachers, 25% were out to extended family, and only 5% were out to religious leaders.[59] In this project I explore this segregation of the self in more detail, looking at the three identified key areas in sapphic protagonists' lives: the family, the community, and the wider world. In each of these three spaces I look at whether sapphic protagonists are shown that they matter or do not matter, what this mattering or lack thereof looks like, and the

[59] David Deschamps and Bennett L. Singer, *LGBTQ Stats: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer People by the Numbers* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2017) p. 135.

impact mattering or not mattering in these key areas has on the sapphic characters. From the wider corpus of fifty books nine were selected for close reading that represented the most common themes identified across the corpus, with three texts being selected per chapter. To create fair representation within the study, books from a range of decades have been selected for close reading for each chapter to ensure an even spread of time periods and character experiences, allowing for findings in each chapter to be compared and contrasted. The nine texts that have been selected for close reading are, in order of publication date: *The Cat Came Back* by Hilary Mullins (1993); *Dare Truth or Promise* by Paula Boock (1999); *The Year They Burned the Books* by Nancy Garden (1999); *Rosemary and Juliet* by Judy Maclean (2004); *Keeping You a Secret* by Julie Anne Peters (2005); *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* by E. Danforth (2012); *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* by Karelia Stetz-Waters (2014); *Girl Mans Up* by M.E. Girard (2016); and *You Should See Me in a Crown* by Leah Johnson (2020).[60]

It should be acknowledged that this thesis exclusively explores how characters are shown that they do or do not matter because of their sexuality, overlooking other marginalised characteristics such as race (as in the case of Liz in *You Should See Me in a Crown)*, gender identity (as in the case of Pen in *Girl Mans Up*), and social

[60] Hilary Mullins, *The Cat Came Back* (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1993); Paula Boock, *Dare Truth or Promise* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books For Young Readers, 1999); Nancy Garden, *The Year They Burned the Books* (New York, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999); Judy Maclean, *Rosemary and Juliet* (New York, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2004); Julie Anne Peters, *Keeping You a Secret* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 2005); E. Danforth, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (New York, NY: Balzer + Bray, 2012); Karelia Stetz-Waters, *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* (Portland, OR: Ooligan Press, 2014); Girard, M.E., *Girl Mans Up* (London: HarperCollins, 2016); Leah Johnson, *You Should See Me in a Crown* (New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2020).

inequalities such as economic status (as in the case of Willa in *Dare Truth or Promise*) and both Pen and Triinu's experiences as second-generation immigrants in *Girl Mans Up* and *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before,* respectively. This singular focus on sexuality is due to the limited scope of this project; these intersecting identities provide opportunities for future research to examine the intersectionality of YA texts and how these multiple marginalised identities are impacted by mattering.

The first chapter - mattering in the family - looks at the relationship between sapphic teens and their immediate family, including parents and siblings. It examines how families show sapphic protagonists that they do or do not matter, how family members respond to teen protagonists coming out, and how these behaviours impact sapphic protagonists. The close reading texts for this chapter that were selected due to the important role familial relationships play within the text are: *Dare Truth or Promise* by Paula Boock (1999); *Keeping You a Secret* by Julie Anne Peters (2005); and *Girl Mans Up* by M.E. Girard (2016). The second chapter - mattering in the community - looks at the relationship between sapphic teens and their communities, including the local community, the religious community, high schools, and the queer community. It looks at how different community groups show sapphic protagonists that they do or do not matter and examine how this treatment impacts sapphic protagonists. The close reading texts for this chapter that were chosen because of the prominence of key and often overlapping community spaces are: *The Cat Came Back* by Hilary Mullins (1993); *Rosemary and Juliet* by Judy Maclean (2004); and *The Miseducation of Cameron*

Post by E. Danforth (2012). The final chapter - mattering in the wider world - looks at the relationship between sapphic teens and the wider world, including digital spaces and communities that are heavily impacted by wider world attitudes and legislation towards the queer community. This chapter discusses what mattering looks like within these wider world spaces, how the wider world shows sapphic protagonists that they do or do not matter, and examines what impact this has on sapphic protagonists. The three close reading texts selected for this chapter were chosen because they centre the wider world as a space that plays a prominent role in sapphic protagonists' lives, over other texts that prioritise smaller units like the family. The three close reading texts are: *The Year They Burned the Books* by Nancy Garden (1999); *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* by Karelia Stetz-Waters (2014); and *You Should See Me in a Crown* by Leah Johnson (2020).

This thesis sets out to answer the question of what mattering looks like in sapphic YA and the impact that mattering or not mattering within their family, their community, and within the wider world has on sapphic youth. Using a framework built around sociological concepts of mattering I will now discuss the findings of the close reading of nine sapphic YA texts, first discussing mattering within the family, then moving onto mattering within the community, and ending with mattering within the wider world.

Chapter One: Mattering in the Family

The previously referenced 2012 Human Rights Campaign survey, which polled experiences of queer youth in the USA, discovered that 56% of queer youth were out to their immediate family, versus 91% who were out to their closest friends (and 64% to their classmates), marking a notable difference in the number of queer young people who choose to be open about their sexuality at home.[61] 26% of youth surveyed identified 'non-acceptance by their families' as their main reason for concealment, a higher percentage than those who cited problems at school, including bullying (21%).[62] These statistics confirm the anxieties that many queer youth have around coming out to their family and the fear of rejection that leads to concealment. In this chapter I discuss the ways families show sapphic characters that they do not matter, and argue that families showing teens that they do not matter negatively impacts sapphic protagonists in the following ways: feeling forced to conceal their sexuality; withdrawing from biological family and seeking alternative family bonds; and depersonalisation and suicidal ideation. I also look at the ways families show sapphic characters that they do matter and examine the positive impact this can have on their self-regard.

Elliott specifies actions through which family members can show teens that they do matter within the home, through actions like looking at them and addressing them in speech, activities that are referred back to frequently within this chapter.[63]

---

[61] Deschamps and Singer, p. 202.
[62] Ibid., p. 202.
[63] Elliott, p. 176.

When teens are denied the security of home it can have a great impact on their perception that they matter, leading to negative thoughts about the self and self-destructive behaviour. Ryan et al. highlight a link between parents rejecting their queer teenage children and those teenagers engaging in unhealthy coping strategies, such as abusing drugs and alcohol, experiencing depressive symptoms, and attempting suicide.[64] A number of these ameliorative coping behaviours, specifically depression and suicidal ideation, are seen in the three texts discussed in this chapter.

Van Bergen et al. explore the inverse of Ryan et al.'s argument to examine the idea that a teenager's sexuality being accepted by their parents is an important factor to show them that they matter positively in the home: 'Parental validation of their children's sexual minority identity predicts greater self-acceptance, higher self-esteem, and is associated with less depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and behaviors in their children.'[65] In line with these findings is Tilsen's suggestion that parents play a particularly important role in queer teenagers' lives as 'young people can't vote and aren't income earners', making it 'incumbent on adults to champion their needs'.[66] The existing body of scholarship thus supports the assertion that parental acceptance of their queer child's sexuality can have a positive impact on health, self-esteem and social support,

[64] Ryan and others, p. 205.
[65] Van Bergen and others, p. 1117.
[66] Julie Tilsen, *Therapeutic Conversations with Queer Youth: Transcending Homonormativity and Constructing Preferred Identities* (Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), p. 98.

while parental rejection of a queer teenager's sexuality can have a negative impact in these areas.

Throughout this chapter I use three case study texts to examine the relationship between sapphic teenage protagonists and their immediate families (comprising parents, siblings, and step-siblings): *Dare Truth or Promise* by Paula Boock (1999), *Keeping You a Secret* by Julie Anne Peters (2003), and *Girl Mans Up* by M. E. Girard (2016). Within these texts there are six family units - those of the three protagonists and those of the three love interests. Each of the texts features a sapphic relationship at its core, where at least one of the sapphic characters faces opposition and abuse from her family as a result of her sexuality, while another sapphic character (in most instances, the love interest) sees acceptance, or at least tolerance, of her sexuality by her family, a trend that is prevalent across this project's wider corpus. These three texts provide an opportunity to compare and contrast the impact of mattering and not mattering within each text and associated relationship.

In Paula Boock's 1999 contemporary coming of age novel, *Dare Truth or Promise*, readers follow the blossoming relationship between two sapphic teenagers, Willa and Louie. The girls are drawn together when Willa moves to Louie's school, despite the girls coming from very different socio-economic backgrounds. Willa lives with her mother above the pub she owns and, while she dreams of becoming a chef, her main priority is to make it through to graduation. Willa is open about her sexuality at school from the beginning of the novel, having come out to her

mother prior to the story beginning. Conversely, Louie comes from a comfortably wealthy and religious family who prioritise intellect and she has aspirations of becoming a lawyer. While her family's wealth affords her a privileged lifestyle, Louie is afraid to discuss her sexuality with her family, particularly her controlling mother who is a prominent member of the local community.

At the opening of Julie Anne Peters' 2003 *Keeping You a Secret* Holland has a happy home life. She is close to her mother, stepfather and baby sister, and the main stressor in her life is her mother's overbearing attitude towards her college applications. However, when Holland falls in love with Cece, an outspoken lesbian who has recently transferred to her high school, Holland is made homeless by her mother and is forced to forge a new path forward without her family's support.

M. E. Girard's *Girl Mans Up*, published in 2016, is the most recent text examined in this chapter and the only text of the three that explores gender presentation as it intersects with sexuality. Most of the tension in Pen's Portuguese-American household comes not from her sexuality but from the masculine way she dresses and styles herself. Throughout the novel Pen's butch identity is questioned and critiqued by her parents, and she is frequently reprimanded by her mother for stealing her brother's clothes. As Pen begins her first relationship with her girlfriend, Blake, her family home becomes a place of conflict and tension, with much of the novel dedicated to Pen's fraught relationship with her mother.

I now move to discuss the three main ways families show sapphic teens that they do not matter and explore the distinct impact that each one of these three rejecting behaviours has on sapphic protagonists.

Not Mattering Within Family Units

The most common way that sapphic teens are shown that they do not matter to their family within the texts is through prejudice events, one of the five minority stress processes identified by Meyer.[67] I discuss the three main prejudice events that show sapphic protagonists that they do not matter to their families: isolating sapphic teens through the removal and banning of emotional support systems and relationships that are deemed inappropriate by parents; the removal (or threatened removal) of material items (including money and housing); and verbal and physical abuse. The events that show sapphic characters that they do not matter to their family largely centre around control and power, with the teenagers' autonomy being taken away from them when their possessions and access to the family home are removed, or their parents cut off their emotional support systems. In line with this idea of the abuse of control and power being central to teenagers being shown they do not matter to their family, the power dynamic of coming out is central to these prejudice events. It is the process of the protagonist coming out that acts as the catalyst for the majority of the prejudice events in the texts. An important note here is that none of the protagonists who experience family rejection and prejudice events reveal their sexuality to their family by way of their

[67] Meyer, 2003.

own choice and power. Instead, all of the protagonists have power taken from them through being forcibly outed by a member of the dominant culture of heterosexuality.[68] In *Keeping You a Secret* Holland is outed by her ex-boyfriend and in both *Dare Truth or Promise* and *Girl Mans Up* Louie and Pen are both outed by their mothers after they are discovered with their love interest.

I will now discuss the three main ways families show sapphic teenage characters that they do not matter and alongside each prejudice event explore the distinct impact that this has on the protagonists: isolating sapphic characters, which leads to concealment and reimagining a queer future; the removal of material items, which leads to withdrawal from and severing ties with family; and verbal and physical abuse, which leads to depersonalisation and suicidal ideation.

Isolating Sapphic Teens

Across the three texts there are examples of families isolating sapphic characters through the removal or banning of emotional support systems and sapphic relationships of which they disapprove. In *Girl Mans Up* we see Pen experience both examples - as her closest support, her brother, Johnny, is forced to leave their family home, and her mother bans her from continuing her relationship with Blake. While Pen continues to see Blake in secret, her parents' actions towards Johnny causes the siblings to lose touch, though they reconcile by the close of the novel. Pen tells her parents that evicting Johnny and thereby separating her from

[68] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

the one member of the family who showed her she mattered was '"the meanest thing you could ever do to me…"'.[69] After Johnny is forcibly evicted from the family home, Pen's relationship with her family worsens. She feels isolated and, through losing contact with her brother, who had been her sole emotional support within her immediate family, realises that she no longer matters to anybody within her family home. While Pen's separation from Johnny is outside of her control, she proceeds with her relationship with Blake without issue, choosing to conceal it from her family while continuing to connect with Blake's family, who support the relationship.

In the other two texts the protagonists' romantic relationships are far more deeply impacted when their respective families ban, or attempt to ban them from continuing their relationships. In *Dare Truth or Promise* we see Louie's family disapprove of her friendship with Willa and eventually ban the relationship completely after it is discovered to be romantic. Louie's family, particularly her mother, frequently interrupt the girls without warning when they are spending time together at Louie's house and in one instance Louie's mother's expression is described as 'something similar to but not quite the same as disappointment' when she opens Louie's bedroom door unannounced and finds the girls asleep in separate beds.[70] Eventually Louie's mother does catch the girls together romantically, after Louie's bedroom door 'bursts open' without warning (p. 143) and she aggressively ejects Willa from their home, making it explicitly clear to

[69] Girard, p. 266. Further references to this text will be given in parentheses in the text.
[70] Boock, p. 99. Further references to this text will be given in parentheses in the text.

Louie that she is no longer allowed to see or speak to Willa, as if keeping her away from Willa will erase Louie's queerness.

This idea of a parent believing that keeping their daughter away from other queer teenagers will ensure their heterosexuality is echoed in *Keeping You a Secret*, where Holland's mother disapproves of her relationship with Cece, even when it is still platonic, urging Holland to end the friendship, telling her '"I don't really want you hanging out with people like her"'.[71] Cece notices that she is unwelcome in Holland's home, particularly around Holland's baby sister, Hannah, which echoes Berlant and Warner's idea of the child seem as something to shield from queer deviancy, suggesting 'the foetus and the child have been spectacularly elevated to the place of sanctified nationality'.[72] Later in the novel, after their relationship has become romantic, the girls discuss how Holland's mother treated Cece when she visited their house as Holland's friend, with Cece saying '"She wouldn't even let me touch Hannah, like I was a child molester or something,"' (p. 259), prioritising Hannah's safety from the hypothetical threat of queer deviancy over Holland's lived reality. This choice from Holland's mother to pressure Holland into ending her friendship with another sapphic teenager shows Holland that her mattering within the family is contingent on her adhering to the heteronormative behaviour her mother is trying to enforce, including not associating with any friends who do not fit within her mother's heteronormative parameters.

[71] Peters, p. 139. Further references to this text will be given in parentheses in the text.
[72] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry,* 24.2 (1998), 547-566 (p. 550) <https://philpapers.org/rec/BERSIP> [accessed 22 September 2022].

The main impact of sapphic characters being shown that they do not matter by being isolated by their families is that they begin to conceal their queerness in a bid to be shown that they do matter within the family unit. Meyer states that queer people 'learn to anticipate - indeed, expect - negative regard from members of the dominant culture' and that 'to ward off potential negative regard, discrimination, and violence they must maintain vigilance' and in the texts the primary examples we see of this vigilance is through characters engaging in concealment behaviours.[73] Lambert et al. suggest that personal and social relationships provide people with a feeling that they matter and that these relationships indicate 'overlap between sociality and meaning', making teens more likely to engage in concealment if they think their personal relationships might be at stake if their sexuality was to be revealed.[74] Within *Dare Truth or Promise* and *Keeping You a Secret*, Louie and Holland conceal their sexuality both at home and at school, while in *Girl Mans Up* the protagonist, Pen, is open about her sexuality at school and to her brother but hides her sexuality from her parents, linking back to the findings from the 2012 HRC survey that showed queer youth are more likely to be out to their classmates than their parents.[75] It is notable that *Girl Mans Up*, published in 2016, is the text published closest to the 2012 HRC survey and the text that most closely aligns to its findings. Pen's experience of concealment at home aligns with Muñoz's reflection of being like 'a spy in the house of gender normativity, and like any spy, I was extremely careful and worried that my cover

[73] Meyer, p. 11.
[74] Nathaniel Lambert and others, 'To Belong Is to Matter: Sense of Belonging Enhances Meaning in Life', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39.11 (2013), 1418-1427 (p. 1419) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213499186>.
[75] Deschamps and Singer, p. 202.

would be blown'.[76] Although she engages in concealment until her sexuality is discovered by her mother, repressing the queer part of herself to try to please her family does little to show Pen that she matters, as she is starkly aware that she will only matter to her family, specifically her mother, as long as she never truly reveals herself.

Muñoz writes that the 'here and now is a prison house' for queer people who are unable to live authentically as themselves for fear of rejection or prejudice events, and this is particularly true for teens, who have little opportunity for financial or physical autonomy.[77] Existence as a queer teenager can feel like something of a lottery, with those raised in accepting households less likely to engage in concealment behaviours than those raised in unsupportive households. In *Dare Truth or Promise* we see both sides of this lottery; Willa lives with her mother who accepts and supports her sexuality, while Louie is forced to conceal her sexuality around her unsupportive family for fear of rejection. We see Louie's concealment manifest not only in the way she views herself as not mattering to her family, but also in the way she views her house as something oppressive, watching her every move, mimicking the way her mother surveils her movements with increasing intensity as the novel progresses. Despite the luxury of their new, larger house, Louie misses her smaller childhood home and its walls - privacy she is no longer afforded in their more modern, open-plan house. As the narrative progresses and Louie begins to lie to keep her sexuality concealed, she grows more distant from

[76] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), p. 115.
[77] Ibid., p. 27.

her family and the way she views the physical space of her home reflects this: ‘the Metal Petal was cold and unwelcoming’ (p. 139) and ‘the ceiling eye lights stared at her accusingly’ (p. 140).

In an attempt to retain her bond with her family, Louie lies to them about her sexuality, something that plays on her mind throughout the novel: ‘She’d never really lied to her family before…Now she was playing her father against her mother’ (p. 138). Louie expresses guilt at having to conceal her relationship and, by extension, her sexuality, feeling physically sick and attending church with her family ‘to regain something of a sense of family, of trust’ (p. 138). However, this does little to help and she feels ‘knotted up at church, how guilty that she was lying to everyone’ (p. 142). The concealment of her sexuality isolates her not only from her family but also from her friends, as she is afraid to be seen publicly with Willa (p. 175), though she ‘wanted to cry out how wonderful this thing was’ but that ‘the guilt at having to hide it from her family was overwhelming too.’ (p. 139). This concealment feeds into Louie’s belief that she will no longer matter to her family if her queerness is discovered (a belief that is, at least in part, proven to be true). The harder she tries to hide her relationship with Willa, the further she drifts from her family and, feeling like she will only matter if she hides her sexuality, the less she believes her true queer self matters. In this respect, concealment leading to the belief that she does not matter becomes something of a self-fulfilling prophecy for Louie.

Concealment is the primary impact of isolating sapphic teens from emotional support systems and sapphic romantic relationships but an additional impact found in *Dare Truth or Promise* is the imagining of an authentic queer future. In the midst of her anxiety about concealing her queerness and relationship from her family, Louie falls into a daydream of imagining she lives in a different home, one with Willa that would bring her comfort: 'a cabin in the mountains, drinking soup and snuggling up in front of a log fire' (p. 139). Louie's longing for a queer future with Willa can be read as a form of resistance, a quiet rebellion against being shown that she doesn't matter to her family in the here and now. Though Louie's present situation is fraught with fear and the stress of hiding who she is and she holds little control or power over her life, she finds comfort in imagining her adulthood life as something simple and free from the need to hide herself or her relationship, allowing her to endure the anxiety of the present.

The Removal of Material Items

If attempts to control sapphic characters through ending queer friendships and relationships are unsuccessful, families in the texts are shown taking further actions to show their queer children that they do not matter by taking away (or threatening to take away) material items, including clothing, money, and, in *Keeping You a Secret'*s extreme example, housing. Across all three novels the primary relationship that causes conflict and results in the removal of material items is between sapphic daughter and mother, with daughters feeling as though any deviation from the path their mothers have set out for them will result in rejection and attempts to control their actions. This links to Saxey's assertion that

one of the central tenets of girlhood in sapphic literature is rebellion against mothers.[78] The sapphic daughter's struggle to break free from the life plan her mother has laid out for her is seen across all three texts but most acutely in *Keeping You a Secret* and *Girl Mans Up*.

In *Girl Mans Up* we see Pen's parents (particularly her mother) frequently engage in behaviour that makes Pen feel as though her place in the family home is tenuous, as though it is not truly her home. Pen grows frustrated at the idea that her mother 'thinks because I look like a guy, I must be trying *not* to be a girl' (p. 20). These frustrations come to a head when she returns home from school one day to find her masculine clothing missing from her wardrobe and, instead, two T-shirts on her bed, both with Disney Princesses on them. When she confronts her mother she is told that she needs to start dressing 'like a girl' (p. 190). When Pen demands her mother return her clothes, she refuses to acknowledge Pen, a common occurrence throughout the text that shows Pen she does not matter to her family, linking back to Elliott's suggestion that listening to and acknowledging teens is a way to show that they matter.[79] When Pen refuses to wear the feminine clothes her mother has picked out for her, her mother realises that she is losing control of her daughter and threatens to force her out of the family home in a final attempt to assert control over the way Pen behaves. At the conclusion of this conflict, Pen realises 'My mom doesn't like me, that's just the reality.' (p. 201); after she is shown that she does not matter so many times she begins to accept it,

[78] Esther Saxey, 'Lesbian Bastard Heroes: The Uses of Illegitimacy for Modern Lesbian Fiction and Identity', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 16.1 (2005), 33-51 <10.1080/09574040500045797>.
[79] Elliott, p. 176.

no longer even seeing an option to feel accepted by her family. We see here that repetition can factor into a sapphic teenager feeling as though they do not matter: Pen is shown she does not matter through multiple relatively small actions (compared to, for example, one large prejudice event like being evicted from the family home, as seen in *Keeping You a Secret*) but the repetition of these small events leads to her feeling as though she does not matter, the same as sapphic characters who experience one large prejudice event. During a consequent argument, Pen's father shouts that '"This is my house!"', to which Pen realises 'it's everyone's house but mine' (p. 231), thinking back to her mother's threats to evict her.

Determined to diminish the control her parents have over her, Pen gets a job that will allow her more financial autonomy, realising that if her home is no longer guaranteed, she needs to be prepared to move out at any moment. Rather than scaring Pen into conforming to her parents' wishes, as was intended, the threat only leads her to feel less and less like she matters to the family. Through this isolation, Pen begins to prepare for life without contact with her parents and this allows her to be herself, a seemingly unintended consequence her parents had not considered. *Girl Mans Up* ends with Pen feeling a sense of clarity when she considers the way her family have repeatedly taken away her clothes and threatened to evict her from the family home throughout the novel and makes her own decision not to reconcile with her family if mattering to her parents comes with conditions. Coupled with the threat of being evicted from home if she continues to see her girlfriend and express her butch identity, Pen decides to move out of the

family home and into her brother's apartment, where she and Johnny forge a happy, supportive home environment together, built on mutual trust, respect, and acceptance of Pen's sexuality and gender expression.

Keeping You a Secret displays a more extreme example of the removal of material items, when Holland's mother ejects her daughter from the family home after discovering her sexuality: "Go," she shrieked. "Get out, get out. Get. Out!" (p. 228). Holland's eviction mirrors the experience of many queer youth in the USA, with a survey revealing that while queer youth represent 4-8% of the USA youth population, they make up 20-40% of the homeless youth population.[80] A 2012 study asserted that 68% of the homeless queer youth population surveyed had experienced rejection by their families.[81] After her eviction, Holland stays with her girlfriend Cece and her family while she waits for her mother to allow her back into her home. Here she discovers that her mother has spoken with Cece's mother, Kate, who determines that Cece's family will need to help Holland find 'a more permanent place' to live (p. 225) as Holland's mother will not allow her to return home if she continues her relationship with Cece. After being given this ultimatum Holland realises that she will only matter to her family if she denies her queerness, something she is not prepared to do. Though it causes her distress Holland makes the decision to sever ties with her mother unless she is willing to reconsider the ultimatum.

[80] Deschamps and Singer, p. 210.
[81] Ibid., p. 210.

Losing both her family and her home impacts not only Holland's mental health but other, more material areas of her life, including her financial security and hopes to attend one of the prestigious colleges she had applied to at the beginning of the novel, stating that 'college was the furthest thing from my mind. Surviving day to day took priority.' (p. 237). When Holland speaks with her mother again and asserts that she will not return home unless Cece is also welcome in their house, her mother confirms that '"You're not getting a penny of that college money. None of it.'" (p. 253). This echoes Saxey's work that identifies a repeated analogy between 'the illegitimate son and the lesbian daughter' in the coming out narrative, considering that both are 'outsiders in a patriarchal society, excluded from inheritance, able to comment on social injustice'.[82] Holland's mother's denial of her college money could be viewed as her being excluded from inheritance, rendering her an outsider and, therefore, in a position to comment on social injustice. Holland takes this step by examining the social injustice in her own life, her sorrow turning to anger as she feels 'the resentment, the anger towards her [mother] began to consume me.' (p. 238). When her mother asks her to move back into the family home Holland reflects on the sleepless nights where she had been desperate for her mother to call and ask her to come home, but when her mother confirms again that she will never accept Cece in the house Holland refuses. When her mother threatens to take away her college fund and give it to Hannah or Faith (her half-sister and step-sister, respectively), Holland realises the threat holds little power over her any more. When she leaves her family home for the last time she realises she feels sad for her mother - '"I'd made sacrifices; I'd

[82] Saxey, p. 13.

experienced loss. But she had no idea what this was costing her. Because she was losing me."' (pp. 285-286) - and that, while she does not matter to her mother, she matters to herself. This realisation gives Holland the strength to move forward into an authentic future, even though that means resisting reconciliation with her family. While Holland acknowledges the difficulties in severing ties with her family the novel ends with her forging bonds with a surrogate family who show her that she matters, and she realises that this matters more to her than repressing who she is in order to matter to her biological family. This idea of alternative familial bonds showing sapphic characters that they matter recurs throughout the texts and is explored in further detail later in this chapter.

Verbal and Physical Abuse

In the immediate aftermath of a child coming out shock is a common parental reaction, often accompanied by harsh, rejecting language that 'may forever impair the parent-child relationship', followed by movement into a 'denial stage' that minimises their child's sexuality and can result in physical abuse or rejection from the family home.[83] Elliott suggests that 'mattering is critically significant during adolescence' and that 'mattering to family helps protect us from an agonising emptiness that could soon erode our desire to continue', with *LGBT Stats* claiming that rejected teens are 8.4 times more likely to think about suicide and 5.9 times more likely to suffer depression than queer teens who do not experience prejudice

[83] Ritch C. Savin-Williams and Eric M. Dubé, 'Parental Reactions to Their Child's Disclosure of a Gay/Lesbian Identity', *Family Relations*, 47.1 (1998), 7–13 (p. 7) <https://doi.org/10.2307/584845>.

events from family.[84] Baumeister and Leary suggest that 'failing to feel accepted or included' can lead to feelings of anxiety and depression, and that these feelings are 'inversely related to the degree to which one feels included and accepted by others'.[85] We see examples of the impact of failing to matter to family at the critical time of adolescence manifest as depersonalisation and suicidal ideation in *Keeping You a Secret* and *Dare Truth or Promise*, where the sapphic characters experience feelings of anxiety and depression after being rejected and abused by their families after their sexuality is discovered. Savin-Williams and Dubé suggest the coming out process can lead to a 'period of uncertainty' in the family home, or, in more extreme cases 'chaos is often created within the family'.[86]

When Holland's mother finds out about her relationship with Cece (after she is outed by her ex-boyfriend) she reacts violently: 'A burning sensation exploded in my head before I realised Mom had slapped me. Tears sprang to my eyes — more from shock than pain' (p. 227). Next comes the denial stage: 'Mom yelled at me, "I didn't raise you to be a lesbian!" She made it sound like the filthiest word in the English language. "It's sick. Perverted."' (p. 228). In line with Savin-Williams and Dubé's findings that physical abuse and rejection from the family home can follow the parental discovery of their teenager's queer sexuality, Holland sustains multiple injuries at the hands of her mother's abuse: 'My cheek burned. My hip throbbed where the corner of the credenza had gouged me….' (p. 188).[87] After

[84] Elliott, p. 28; Ibid., p. 151; Deschamps and Singer, p. 392.
[85] Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, 'The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation', *Psychological Bulletin*, 117.3 (1995), 497-529 (p. 506) <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1995-29052-001> [accessed 2 November 2022].
[86] Savin-Williams and Dubé, p. 7.
[87] Ibid., pp. 7-13.

leaving the family home in the wake of this physical abuse, Holland experiences a panic attack: ‘I couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t see. Everything went blurry. Everything went black.’ (p. 214). Her mother’s abuse causes not only physical injuries but an ongoing impact on Holland’s mental health that is revisited multiple times throughout the novel, each time echoing back to the moment when her mother verbally and physically assaulted her. After being verbally and physically abused by her mother and losing all connection with her family, Holland experiences a deep sense of grief and loss of self, leading her to exclaim: ‘I don't know what I am, where I am, who I am’ (p. 252).

Similarly in *Dare Truth or Promise,* in the aftermath of Louie’s mother discovering, and consequently banning, her relationship with Willa, Louie becomes the target of verbal abuse from her family. She becomes distressed and retreats from reality, viewing herself as an abstract girl trapped in a mirror: ‘she was somewhere else…in a thin layer of ice and you could only see her from one angle, otherwise she disappeared’ (p. 145). This reflects the way Louie’s family, specifically her mother, will only ever view her as one thing - heterosexual - and how she experiences depersonalisation and ‘disappears’ from the family after her sexuality is discovered. The family travel to Bali for a holiday but Louie is withdrawn and stops eating as ‘food disgusted her’ (p. 164). She experiences a period of vomiting and fever after the initial break up but the nausea persists for weeks afterwards, coupled with panic attacks that she describes as feeling ‘as if she were falling from an aeroplane’ (p. 165). Louie’s panic attacks continue when the family return from Bali and by the time the new school term starts and Willa sees her for the first time

in weeks, she is surprised to see Louie looking 'thin and drawn' with 'greeny-black rings under her eyes' (p. 162). Though Louie is visibly ill it is only Willa who is concerned for her wellbeing, as their peers congratulate Louie on her weight loss. Louie's brother tells her to "'Get over it…it's only a girlfriend.'" (p. 166) and her mother shouts that Louie's depression is 'pulling this family apart!'" (p. 141). Though the protagonists of both *Dare Truth or Promise* and *Keeping You a Secret* experience similar symptoms of depersonalisation there are marked differences in the way their families react to their sexuality. Holland's mother reacts with physical violence and evicts Holland from her home, while Louie's mother lavishes attention upon Louie, trying to show her that her life can be full without Willa in it (though her family's patience does run out after Louie's low mood begins to impact their own enjoyment of their holiday, as per the examples above). What neither mother seems to realise is that both of these responses have an impact on their respective daughter that falls in line with Elliott's findings: after the 'agonising emptiness' of depersonalisation comes Holland's decision to sever ties with her family and the complete erosion of Louie's desire to continue living.[88]

Suicidal ideation is experienced by both protagonists in *Dare Truth or Promise* and shows the impact that prejudice events (and even the anticipation of such events) can have on sapphic youth. Growing increasingly depressed at losing her relationship with Willa and feeling as though she will never matter to her family after their verbal abuse, Louie experiences suicidal ideation and drives off of the road on the way back from a party, ending up in hospital. When questioned by

[88] Elliott, p. 138.

Willa, Louie reveals that she 'sort of' crashed her car deliberately, thinking of the 'desperation' she felt while driving, describing it as a 'type of madness' (p. 242). Willa, too, experiences suicidal thoughts of her own and finds herself wishing 'that she'd got some of those pills of Cathy's along with the whisky and could sit here, in the whirring grass and go to sleep, cold and numb, and never have to wake up.' (p. 202), showing the far-reaching impact that a lack of mattering has during the 'critically significant' years of adolescence.[89]

Meanwhile, in *Girl Mans Up* it is less so Pen's relationship with Blake that Pen's mother disapproves of than her butch identity. Pen's mother frequently tries to force her daughter towards a more feminine gender expression throughout the novel, resulting in verbal and emotional abuse when she does not comply. When Pen seeks to affirm her identity at the beginning of the novel by cutting her long hair she is, at first, too afraid of her mother's reaction, remembering that 'I have to leave it loose' (p. 31). However, after she is sexually assaulted by her male best friend, Colby, she cuts her hair in an attempt to reclaim some autonomy over her body. Her mother discovers Pen's haircut when she 'yanks' her hood down and becomes upset, taking Pen's haircut as a personal slight, telling Pen '"you break my heart."' (p. 33) and referring to her as a 'punk druggy', an insult that is used multiple times throughout the novel to disparage Pen's appearance. During an argument about her queerness, Pen's mother shouts that 'Girls can't decide they're not girls anymore' (p. 209), something Pen finds amusing because 'I never decided I wasn't a girl any more. That was everyone else assuming' (p. 209). It is

[89] Elliott, p. 28.

at this moment Pen decides to speak back to her parents and she tells her family that they have never respected her, a view she develops throughout the book after her parents repeatedly ignore her, refuse to speak to her, and threaten to evict her from their home.

Pen reveals that when she was a young child a group of boys in her class cornered her in a changing room at school and wouldn't let her leave '"until I proved what I was"' and that her mother's response at the time was to tell her that she '"should've tried harder to be a good girl"' (p. 212). We learn that from this moment onwards Pen has never felt as though she mattered to her family and, though she has expressed real pain and depressive symptoms at her parents' ongoing abusive language towards her in the years that have passed since, her mother shows no remorse. Instead her mother suggests that it is Pen's butch appearance that caused sexual abuse both in her childhood and, from her friend, Colby, in her teenage years, telling her that '"If you stop making hard, people stop doing bad things to you." (p. 212). In a similar moment of clarity to the one Holland experiences in *Keeping you a Secret*, Pen realises that she is never going to matter to her parents unless she conforms to their idea of how she should live her life and express her gender identity and, as is explored in further detail later on in this chapter, this is the turning point for Pen in her pursuit of finding a space where she can be free from her parents' verbal abuse, a place where she matters.

Mattering Within Family Units

Throughout the three texts there are examples (though limited) of teens being shown that they matter to their families, by respecting sapphic characters' sexuality and parental attitudes to queerness evolving over time. There are also examples of sapphic characters being shown that they matter only if certain behaviours are exhibited, or mattering with strings attached, which is often shown to be more harmful than helpful. I also explore examples of sapphic characters forming alternative parental bonds and mattering to families outside of their biological family unit; the former is shown through an example of two siblings forming a surrogate parental bond, and in the latter it is the love interest's family who acts as a foil for the protagonist's unaccepting biological family.

In *Dare Truth or Promise* we see the close relationship between Willa and her mother, Jolene, who takes an interest in her daughter's new after-school job and her new friend (and future love interest), Louie, through conversations before Willa leaves for school. This shows Willa that her life and interests are of importance, that she matters within the family unit of the two of them (Willa's father passed away before the opening of the novel). This text is a departure from the other two novels as Willa's relationship with her family does not change after Willa begins her sapphic relationship with Louie, though it is alluded to within the text that her relationship with her mother did worsen after her mother discovered her first sapphic relationship. This illustrates that it is possible for family bonds to be repaired over time, if parents are able to accept their child's sexuality and show them that they do matter. Their close mother-daughter bond continues throughout

the text and Jolene regularly shows Willa that she matters. When Willa chokes out '"What's wrong with me?"' after her break up with Louie, her mother responds supportively with '"Nothing. There's nothing bloody wrong with you."' (p. 153). Knowing that she matters to her mother leads Willa to fear rejection far less than Louie does, and Willa confides in her mother multiple times throughout the novel, choosing to tell the truth rather than conceal her relationship with Louie, an inverse of how Louie chooses to lie rather than face her family's judgement. This contrast in Willa and Louie's behaviour suggests showing teenagers they matter can lead to a more truthful relationship between daughter and parent, as evidenced by Willa feeling safe to express the truth of her relationship with Louie, knowing that that her sexuality is accepted and she matters to her mother.

In *Girl Mans Up* it is Johnny, Pen's older brother, with whom she finds respect and a sense of mattering. Johnny affirms Pen's sexuality throughout the novel, rejoicing with her when she embarks on a relationship with Blake and encouraging her to experiment with her style as she discovers her butch identity. While Pen's parents tell her she should stop 'dressing like a boy' (p. 66, p125) Johnny takes the time to talk to her about her gender expression and provides support and reassurance to reinforce how much Pen matters to him: '"People are always thinking stuff about other people. Let 'em do their thing, and - you know - in one ear, out the other. If it gets to be more than you can ignore, then you tell me and we deal with it."' (p. 59). This display of acceptance leads Pen to be honest with Johnny and confide in him about her love life, in line with Willa in *Dare Truth or*

Promise feeling as though she can trust her mother after she is shown that she matters.

Ryan et al. assert that 'acceptance and rejecting behaviours' can run in parallel as parents adjust to their child's identity and that one does not necessarily preclude the other.[90] This is an idea that is examined across all three texts and, while there are examples of parents being unwilling to change their opinions, there are examples that suggest that disrespecting a sapphic protagonist's sexuality does not necessarily dictate a fixed parental opinion.

In *Dare Truth or Promise* Willa's mother asks her outright if she's visiting Louie one evening and Willa is 'surprised into telling the truth' (p. 103). When Jolene is accepting Willa is described as being 'so excited and thankful she hugged her mother' (p. 103), suggesting that Jolene has not always been so accepting of Willa's sexuality. This idea is further explored when Jolene suggests that Louie's mother may come to accept the girls' relationship, stating: '"Mothers can grow up too, you know?...I didn't like that business with Cathy. But then, I'd never had to think about it before. I hope I'm more understanding now, love."' (p. 154). This change in Jolene's understanding and acceptance of Willa's sexuality is in line with the idea posited by Ryan et al. that it is possible for parents to adjust to their child's sexuality over time.[91] This idea is also present in *Keeping You a Secret* when examining love interest Cece's relationship with her family. While the novel's

[90] Ryan and others, p. 206.
[91] Ibid., p. 206.

protagonist, Holland, feels as though she does not matter to her family and conceals her sexuality, growing distant from her family as a result, Cece has a more casual, relaxed relationship with her family, who frequently show her that she matters through making it clear that they accept her sexuality (despite some reservations for her safety) and respect her autonomy as a teenager. Cece goes on to tell Holland that her older sister is also a lesbian and came out shortly after Cece, two years before the novel begins. Her parents' evolving support of both Cece and her sister's sexuality links back to the idea that the extent to which families, specifically parents, show sapphic teens that they matter can change over time as parents adjust to their child's identity.

The two examples above relate to the evolution of parental opinions that happen off the page before the novels begin but in *Dare Truth or Promise* there is an example of this happening during the narrative, where Louie's parents' attitude towards her sexuality evolves before the close of the novel. It is notable, however, that this rebonding comes only in the wake of Louie's attempted suicide, which appears to serve as something of a catalyst in her parents' change of behaviour, their acceptance only coming after it seems they might lose her completely. At the close of the novel Louie's father gives Willa a bottle of wine to take on her date with Louie, the first time one of Louie's parents explicitly acknowledges and even encourages their relationship. Louie's mother is less accepting, asking Willa to give Louie time for exams and other interests, asserting that the girls are free to 'form whatever relationship they decide on together' (pp. 194-195) but that she does not want to know about it. While Louie's mother's seemingly grudging

acceptance of the girls' relationship is an improvement of her behaviour earlier in the novel, it can only be considered a partial rebonding as her acceptance of Louie and Willa's relationship only extends as far as a sort of 'don't ask, don't tell' arrangement. While the novel ends before the reader is able to see how this arrangement impacts Louie's relationship with her mother, it is plausible to imagine her mother's opinions on queerness continuing to evolve in a more positive way, given the novel's repeated references to parental opinions evolving over time, creating stronger, more authentic bonds between parent and sapphic daughter.

Dare Truth or Promise shows two examples of how mattering within a family is not always a positive experience and may by conditional; for example, teens only mattering if they are heterosexual. After Louie's mother, Susi, catches the girls together and angrily dismisses Willa from their home, her demeanour towards Louie changes. Her behaviour is more warm and affectionate but she treats Louie like a much younger child, tucking her into bed and turning the light off for her. This newfound attention is a suggestion that she matters, though it is clear to both Louie and the reader that this sudden change in treatment could be retracted at any time and will only continue if Louie stays away from Willa. A further example that shows this sort of conditionality to mattering is when Louie's mother reveals that she forced Louie to end her relationship with Willa because she was afraid of the impact having an openly sapphic daughter would have on the family's reputation within their local community. Louie realises that having a good reputation in their community matters more to her mother than Louie's well-being

and happiness, asserting: '"You did it for *your* own good, Mum. You were thinking of you, of the neighbours, of the church group - anyone but me."' (p. 174). There is the suggestion here of a different type of mattering, something that leads sapphic teens to find themselves bearing the brunt of the responsibility for their family's image within their local community, suggesting they will only matter as long as their behaviour does not disrupt their family's social standing. This is an unwelcome sort of involuntary mattering that neither the teen nor their family asked for but that Louie's mother believes the community has placed upon the family, where the actions of one family member reflect upon the entire family unit, making any action that goes against the dominant culture something that matters. Unlike the previously examined ways families can show sapphic characters that they matter (through actions like accepting them as their authentic selves), which have a positive impact on sapphic characters, this conditional mattering leads to sapphic characters withdrawing from the family unit and experiencing feelings of depression. This is not unlike the impact that verbal and physical abuse has on characters and shows that not all forms of mattering have a positive impact.

All three of the novels close with the sapphic protagonists looking forward to their future, happy within a family unit that shows them that they matter. While these familial bonds are present across all three novels it is notable that these bonds do not necessarily come from biological parents. Muñoz ascertained that 'the frequent and even necessary disappointment of hope is due to an incommensurability: things do not line up; loved objects (whether persons,

theories, or social movements) let us down'.[92] While, at first, the rejected characters are unable to consider the idea that their loved ones have let them down, the protagonists of both *Keeping You a Secret* and *Girl Mans Up* go on to form new, stronger familial bonds with others who have shown them that they matter. The new bonds occur both inside and outside of their immediate family and are forged after the protagonists refuse to conceal their sapphic identity to ease their family's discomfort. There are two main ways that we see the forging of these new familial bonds: surrogate parental bonds - formed both with biological family and chosen family (chosen family is defined by Kim and Feyissa as bonds that provide queer people with 'the love and security that they did not receive from their biological families') - and the love interest's family as a foil.[93]

While this chapter focuses on biological family relationships as opposed to chosen family, the idea of chosen family as a surrogate in the wake of a family rejecting a sapphic teen is present in *Keeping You a Secret*. Bradway and Freeman suggest that 'those whose natal and affinal ties are destroyed nevertheless create compensatory psychic and social structures'.[94] We see a strong example of this queer kinship in *Keeping You a Secret* where Holland loses her bond with her biological family but, by the close of the novel, creates close surrogate parental bonds with both her queer landlord and neighbour, and her girlfriend's family, who

[92] Muñoz, p. 16.
[93] Seohyun Kim and Israel Fisseha Feyissa, 'Conceptualizing "Family" and the Role of "Chosen Family" within the LGBTQ+ Refugee Community: A Text Network Graph Analysis', *Healthcare (Basel)*, 9.4 (2021), 369 (p. 369) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8066340/> [accessed 21 September 2023].
[94] Bradway and Freeman, p. 14.

provide her with support, acceptance, and housing - three things her biological mother denied her.

We also find an example of alternative family bonds in *Girl Mans Up*. By the close of the novel Pen leaves her family home to move in with her older brother, Johnny, who happily takes on the role as a sort of surrogate parent, standing in for their estranged parents. Johnny provides Pen with a safe, supportive place to live, helps her manage her finances, and repeatedly shows her that she matters through accepting and validating her sexuality. At the novel's close Pen's mother visits Pen and Johnny's apartment, conceding that she does not have an issue with Pen's sexuality, only her gender nonconformity: '"You kiss the girls? That's okay … You don't need the boy clothes."' (p. 275). Pen tries to explain that, for her, both elements are an intrinsic part of who she is but her mother continues to talk over her without acknowledging what Pen says, showing limited change in her behaviour despite the fact she has lost her connection with her daughter because of it. Although her mother tells her the family home '"is you *casa* [house]"' (p. 275) - a reversal of the earlier assertion from her father that "This is my house!" (p. 231) - Pen confirms she wants to stay with Johnny where she is fully accepted and made to feel as though she matters. When her mother rolls her eyes and waves her away Pen thinks that her mother's behaviour 'used to make me want to cave and do what she wants. But it doesn't anymore' (p. 290). At the end of the novel Pen realises that 'it's not okay to drown in guilt and regret every day for having made decisions other people don't agree with.' (p. 276). She does not see her parents again before the narrative ends and looks forward to a more authentic,

autonomous future, living with her brother, Johnny, with whom she forms a surrogate parental bond. These examples demonstrate that, while a parental bond appears necessary for sapphic youth to feel as though they matter, this does not necessarily have to come from a biological parent in order to create a loving, supportive family unit.

Across the three texts there are examples of a rejecting behaviour from one family coupled with an acceptance from the other as the protagonist finds comfort with her love interest's parents after being rejected by members of her own, realising that she can matter within a family unit that she is not biologically part of, in keeping with Bradway and Freeman's work on queer kinship.[95]

In both *Girl Mans Up* and *Dare Truth or Promise* we see examples of how the love interest's family can provide comfort and a sense of acceptance to the sapphic protagonists who have been subject to prejudice events by their own family. In *Girl Mans Up*, Pen experiences a different type of family life while visiting Blake, whose parents are friendly to Pen from the outset, including her in family jokes. Pen is surprised to share a supportive conversation with Blake's father, in which he jokingly asks if "'I should give you the same speech I gave the other guys?"' (p. 134). Blake's family casually acknowledging the girls' relationship catches Pen off guard, though she is comforted by the idea that she can authentically express herself around Blake's family and their home becomes a place that she returns to multiple times throughout the novel, even after her own parents reject her.

[95] Bradway and Freeman, 2009.

Similarly, in *Dare Truth or Promise* Louie sees a marked difference between the way her own family treats Willa (by failing to acknowledge her and refusing to give her a lift home) and the way Willa's mother welcomes Louie into their family, showing her that she matters by attending the school play Louie stars in and greeting her with a hug, calling her 'a delight to watch' (p. 118). Louie responds to Willa's mother with 'delight' (p. 118) and feels comfortable in her presence, knowing that both her sexuality and her relationship with Willa are accepted. Though she fails to matter to her own family she takes some comfort in knowing that she matters somewhere, to Willa's mother at least.

The experience of mattering to another family, however, can also heighten the sense of loss in not mattering to one's own. In *Keeping You a Secret* Cece's family informally adopt Holland after she is rejected by her mother and evicted from her home. After Holland's relationship with her mother is severed Cece's mother, Kate, takes on the role of a maternal figure and becomes a stand-in mother for Holland, using affectionate pet names when speaking to her, making her comforting meals and talking to her about how she might forge a relationship with her mother in the future, based on her own experiences with Cece, telling her '"She'll come around. It just takes time."' (p. 221). While Holland finds solace in her relationship with Cece and her acceptance into Cece's family, none of this is enough to dull the ache of losing her home and family. Holland reflects on the price she paid for her happiness with Cece, while searching for the joy to be found in new social relationships with those who accept her for who she is: 'I'd given up a lot to be with Cece: my home, friends, family. Maybe even my future family. Plus

this sense of belonging I'd always had. The sense of fitting in, knowing where I stood. It might not be so bad if I could be like her. Out. Proud. With a new place of belonging in the gay community. With new friends. A new family.' (p. 245). We see through Holland's narrative that it is difficult for her to feel fully fulfilled and happy without her connection to her family and home. Though she is secure in her relationship with Cece, Holland is profoundly impacted by the loss of her family and worries about being loved: '"Please, God," I whispered into the night. "Let me be loved."' (p. 245). While she has a new home and something resembling a new family this does not fully replace what she lost when her relationship with her mother ended. This is a departure from the other two texts where a tangible connection to their original family unit remains - Pen through her brother, Johnny, and Louie with her parents.

Conclusion

Throughout this exploration of examples of mattering and not mattering within the three texts it is clear that prejudice events from within a sapphic character's family have a negative impact on the character's belief that they matter. Lambert et al. assert that 'impaired social relationships result in a decreased sense of meaning in life' and that those who are 'socially rejected enter a state of cognitive deconstruction'.[96] We see this trend throughout the three texts, with each rejected teen experiencing depressive symptoms after they are subjected to prejudice events, with suicidal ideation occurring for two characters in *Dare Truth or*

[96] Lambert and others, p. 1419.

Promise. Part of this 'decreased sense of meaning in life' is a loss of hope as the prejudice events continue without resolution and this is particularly strong in *Keeping You a Secret*, which ends with Holland still estranged from her mother. It must be noted that many of these rejecting behaviours run in parallel and that the impact of multiple instances of not mattering is often cumulative, with the examples of depersonalisation and suicidal ideation occurring after the teens have been isolated and subject to verbal and physical abuse, and, in Holland's case, also made homeless.

Examining individual family relationships shows that relationships between sapphic teens and mothers are difficult in all three texts, and mothers are the primary family member to perpetuate rejection behaviours and prejudice events, ranging from forcing sapphic teens to leave the family home, to forcefully ending sapphic romantic relationships that are deemed unacceptable. Fathers are not presented as perpetrating rejecting behaviours as frequently as mothers, though this is largely because they are barely present in the parent-daughter dynamic, if they feature at all.

By the close of each novel we see that once a character is shown that they matter to those they share familial bonds with, surrogate or otherwise, the weighting of mattering to their biological parents is diminished. However, the importance of mattering to biological family is diminished as long as some connection to the family remains. *Keeping You a Secret* is the only one of the texts that ends without the protagonist reconciling with biological family and this is the only text that ends

with the protagonist still uncertain about whether they matter, as evidenced by Holland praying that she might be loved at the close of the novel (p. 245). Although Pen's relationship with her family will not be the same as it was at the beginning of the novel and likely neither will Louie's, as the rebonding only came after her suicide attempt in response to her family's mistreatment of her, *Girl Mans Up* and *Dare Truth or Promise* do end with at least steps towards a partial rebonding of the original family.

Revisiting the earlier assertion from Lambert et al. that the presence of social relationships is equated with a sense of meaningfulness, the degradation of social relationships due to parents rejecting their sapphic children and an associated loss of mattering in these relationships is present in all three texts, spanning publication from 1999 to 2016.[97] While a sample size of three is not broad enough to draw definitive conclusions, the protagonists' familial relationships are largely representative of the wider corpus, and it is notable that the lengths to which sapphic teen protagonists will go to conceal their sexuality from their family diminishes through the decades. The 1999 release, *Dare Truth or Promise*, demonstrates acute concealment from both primary and secondary characters, resulting in suicidal ideation. Meanwhile, *Girl Mans Up*, the most recent release in 2016, sees a protagonist who is out at school, around her friends, and around her supportive older brother, only concealing her sexuality from her parents, and experiencing comparatively fewer depressive symptoms as a result, as she is able

[97] Lambert and others, p. 1419.

to see that she matters in other key spaces in her life outside of her relationship with her parents.

While Ryan et al. assert that 'family acceptance in adolescence is associated with young adult positive health outcomes … and is protective for negative health outcomes', it is interesting to see that this idea is inconsistent with Willa's experience in *Dare Truth or Promise*.[98] Though her mother accepts her and is supportive, knowing that she is not liked in the community because of her sexuality and realising that it is the reason why both of her relationships have failed drives Willa to have suicidal thoughts, despite the acceptance of her family. This is a clear example of how mattering to family is not always enough to ensure sapphic teens are happy and safe, as the family home is not the only space these characters exist in. For sapphic youth to truly feel as though they matter this sense of belonging and acceptance needs to extend to other spaces that are part of sapphic youth's life. I move now into exploring mattering in a further space in teens' lives: community.

[98] Ryan and others, p. 210.

Chapter Two: Mattering in the Community

'Communities are often defined as much by who they exclude as who they include.'[99]

Looking outward from the private space of family, in this chapter I turn my attention to the shared social space of community, examining the communities that sapphic protagonists belong to, how they do or do not matter within these groups and the impact that this mattering, or lack of, has on their self-regard. I have chosen community as the focal space for this chapter due to its presence in all teenagers' lives, the diversity of communities that are available to teens in different time and geographical settings, and the impact that community has on queer youth, as derived from both sociological and literary scholarship.[100] From the wider corpus of fifty texts *The Cat Came Back* by Hilary Mullins, *Rosemary and Juliet* by Judy Maclean, and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* by E. Danforth have been selected as case studies for this chapter. The three texts were chosen because of the strong presence of communities and clear examples of how mattering or not mattering to these communities can impact sapphic protagonists. In this chapter I explore both the ways communities show sapphic characters that they do not matter and the impact this has on them, and the ways communities show sapphic teens that they do matter and the impact this has. I

[99] Silvia Cristina Bettez and Kathy Hytten, 'Community Building in Social Justice Work: A Critical Approach', A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association, 49.1 (2013), 45-66 (p. 52) <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2012.749478>.

[100] See Jones (2012); and Bradway and Freeman (2022) for work on queer youth and community.

argue that the impact of communities showing sapphic teens that they do not matter is the exhibition of concealment behaviours and the creation of internalised homophobia, while sapphic characters being shown by communities that they do matter can mitigate these feelings of internalised homophobia and negate the need for concealment.

Our perception of community has shifted greatly as the understanding of human needs and behaviour has evolved, making it a particularly tricky concept to define; Cobigo et al. identify a 'lack of consensus' on the definition of community within academia.[101] MacQueen et al. posit that community is made up of a 'group of people with diverse characteristics', whilst adding the links of 'social ties' and 'common perspectives' to the idea of geographical proximity that is a unifying thread across the majority of modern definitions of community.[102] Looking at a specifically sociological definition, Stebbins suggests community is 'a social group with a common territorial base; those in the group share interests and have a sense of belonging to the group.'[103] Again, this definition speaks to both geography and interest playing a vital role and also introduces the idea of belonging as central to community. However, not all scholarship points to community as a unifying force, as Bettez and Hytten's quote in the epigraph to this chapter suggests, highlighting that community can exclude as much as it can

[101] Virginie Cobigo, Lynn Martin and Rawad Mcheiech, 'Understanding Community', *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 5.181 (2016), 181-203 (p. 183) <10.15353/cjds.v5i4.318>.
[102] K M MacQueen and others, 'What is Community? An Evidence-based Definition for Participatory Public Health', *American Journal of Public Health*, 91.12 (2001), 1929-38 (p. 1930) <doi:10.2105/ajph.91.12.1929>.
[103] Robert Stebbins*, Sociology: The Study of Society* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 534.

include. Indeed, Abowitz outlines the position that community can allude to 'homogenising, oppressive social grouping'.[104] This feeling of oppression is felt by the queer protagonists of the case study texts across their numerous communities.

When positioning community alongside the other two focuses of this project, family and the wider world, community is the outlier in that participation in many communities is voluntary, facilitated by interests or hobbies as opposed to the involuntary membership most teenagers have to both their family unit (through a lack of financial independence and legal agency) and their inescapable membership to the wider world and its laws and politics. However, particularly for teenagers, not all community membership is voluntary - specifically the local community and school community, and in many instances religious communities, as these three areas of a teenager's life are, in most cases, dictated by parents or guardians. Additionally, youth hold significantly less power within communities than adult members who retain authority and dominance and can influence the attitudes of the community far more deeply than teenage members.

Community takes on an additional layer of meaning when considering queer youth for whom 'the simple, daily routine of going to school is fraught with harassment and victimisation'.[105] Scholarship suggests that connection to communities where

[104] Kathleen Abowitz, 'Reclaiming Community', *Educational Theory*, 49 (2005), 143-159 (p. 144) <10.1111/j.1741-5446.1999.00143.x>.
[105] Stephen T. Russell and others, 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Adolescent School Victimization: Implications for Young Adult Health and Adjustment', *Journal of School Health*, 81 (2011), 223-230 (p. 228) <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2011.00583.x>.

queer youth matter is key, as belonging to an accepting community can 'protect minority members from the adverse mental health effects of minority stress'.[106] Meyer goes on to assert the importance of queer youth having access to a community where they see themselves represented, as 'members of stigmatised groups who have a strong sense of community cohesiveness evaluate themselves in comparison with others who are like them rather than with members of the dominant culture'.[107] It is key then, within the context of this chapter, to note that the queer community plays an essential role in showing queer youth that they matter, acting as something of an anchor point to help them develop a sense of self even if their other communities based around school and the local community are made up solely of members of the dominant culture. There is further importance placed on access to the queer community for queer youth living in rural environments, who are often given the message that 'they are not supposed to see their communities as viable places to live.'[108] This is of particular relevance to the three texts discussed within this chapter, all of which are set in rural environments.

Sapphic teens can face minority stress as a consequence of not mattering in voluntary or involuntary communities; this may negatively impact how teens perceive themselves and their self-worth, as 'conditions in the social environment, not only personal events, are sources of stress that may lead to mental and

[106] Meyer, p. 6.
[107] Ibid., p. 6.
[108] Mary L. Gray, Colin R. Johnson and Brian J. Gilley, *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016), p. 15.

physical ill effects'.[109] Allport suggests that 'one's reputation, whether false or true, cannot be hammered, hammered, hammered, into one's head without doing something to one's character', this repetition of 'hammered' perfectly symbolises the cumulative impact that not mattering to their communities can have on queer characters.[110] This chapter argues that the most prevalent consequence identified as a result of sapphic characters not mattering to their communities is internalised homophobia. Internalised homophobia is defined as 'the gay person's direction of negative social attitudes toward the self, leading to a devaluation of the self and resultant internal conflicts and poor self-regard'. When formed in adolescence internalised homophobia can have a far-reaching impact not only in the teenage years but beyond them, into adulthood: 'internalised homophobia remains an important factor in the gay person's psychological adjustment throughout life'.[111] This chapter applies Meyer and Dean's definition of internalised homophobia, looking specifically at the ways social attitudes from queer characters' communities create internalised homophobia.

Within the corpus texts of this project there are a number of key communities that are prevalent for sapphic youth: the local community; high school; friendship groups; religious groups; and the queer community. These groups often overlap (for example, the local community and religious groups, or high school and friendship groups) but each have their own distinct presence within the texts and

---

[109] Meyer, p. 3.

[110] Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954), p. 142.

[111] Ilan Meyer and Laura Dean, 'Internalized Homophobia, Intimacy, and Sexual Behavior Among Gay and Bisexual Men', in *Stigma and Sexual Orientation: Understanding Prejudice Against Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals* ed. by GM Herek (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), pp. 160-186 (p. 161); Meyer, p. 14.

show teens that they do or do not matter in different ways. The local and high school communities (and, in some situations, the religious community) present two involuntary communities that teens are part of, while voluntary communities - friendship groups, the queer community and, in some circumstances, the religious community - present often opposing possibilities of communities that fulfil Stebbins' suggestion of community being built around a 'sense of belonging'. The availability of these communities is an issue that forms a key part of this chapter's discussion, with a lack of accessibility to certain communities - specifically, queer community - playing an important role in how sapphic characters perceive that they do or do not matter within the communities they do have access to. Within the texts there are two types of queer community to consider: the wider world queer community and local queer community. The queer community that exists within the wider world in these narratives is a more distant, adult queer community that most often has ties to the urban. Connections to this community exist in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* through the tales Cameron's friend, Lindsey, tells her about the queer community in Seattle, and in *Rosemary and Juliet* through the knowledge Julie has about Sandy, the older lesbian who moved away from the homophobic community of Divido to find queer community in San Francisco. Despite its presence there is distance between the sapphic protagonists and the queer community in the wider world. What they are truly missing are the more intimate connections that can be found through local queer community, made up of queer friends, romantic connections, or older queer people who are tangible proof of the possibility of a happy queer future.

Hilary Mullins' coming-of-age boarding school novel, *The Cat Came Back*, published in 1993 but set in 1980, provides a glimpse of the experience of Stevie, a high school student coming to terms with her sexuality in a highly conservative educational community. A keen reader, Stevie eventually finds a reflection of herself in the pages of Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle*, and it is notable that *The Cat Came Back* is set prior to the publication of the first sapphic young adult text, *Annie on My Mind*. After ending a series of predatory assaults by a male teacher who groomed her at fourteen, Stevie struggles to come to terms both with the assault and her burgeoning feelings for fellow student, Andrea.

Rosemary and Juliet is Judy Maclean's 2004 sapphic retelling of Romeo and Juliet, where Romey is the daughter of a single mother and activist, and Julie is the daughter of the community's fundamentalist preacher. Their families clash over a measure proposed by the local school board to ban gay teachers from teaching in the district but, after crossing paths by chance, the girls begin to explore their growing feelings for each other. When their relationship is discovered Julie's family take drastic action to 'fix' her sexuality, which sparks a chain of dramatic events as the girls fight for their relationship against the odds.

Published in 2012, E. Danforth's *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* follows Cameron from her first kiss to her eventual liberation and acceptance of her sexuality years later, beginning in 1989 and ending in the mid '90s.[112] Plagued by

[112] Though this text is the most contemporary in terms of publication date, it falls between *The Cat Came Back* and *Rosemary and Juliet* in terms of the date it is set.

guilt after she becomes convinced her parents' death was caused by the kiss she shared with her female best friend, Cameron struggles to navigate her teen years in her conservative small town without a tangible queer community to confide in. After her sexuality is discovered she is sent to God's Promise conversion camp where, against the odds, she finds true belonging for the first time with the queer youth she meets at the camp, who are similarly hoping to escape the camp's homophobic confines, and eventually comes to accept both herself and the loss of her parents.

Not Mattering Within Communities

Throughout the three close reading texts the experiences of the sapphic protagonists and the communities they belong to differ but the thread that links them is that they are all shown by their communities that they do not matter. There are two ways communities show sapphic characters that they do not matter: through homophobia and through a lack of queer representation or access to queer community. Through the examples discussed throughout this chapter it becomes clear that communities wield a great deal of influence over sapphic youth's self-regard. Communities do not have to be actively homophobic for sapphic youth to feel as though they do not matter; communities that fail to include queer representation or do not allow access to queer community also cause sapphic characters to feel as though they do not matter. In the following paragraphs I argue that sapphic characters not mattering to their communities impacts their behaviour in two ways: internalised homophobia and concealment.

Rejection Through Homophobia

Where sapphic characters face rejection from their communities through homophobia they experience thoughts of internalised homophobia, regardless of whether the communities' homophobic language was directed at them specifically. Meyer's research into minority stress suggests that 'internalised homophobia represents a form of stress that is internal and insidious' and we see clear examples of this in *Rosemary and Juliet* and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, two texts where sapphic protagonists experience these insidious thoughts as a result of homophobia that is prevalent across their communities.[113] While two of the three protagonists are unaware of their sexuality at the opening of the texts (Romey, one of the protagonists in *Rosemary and Juliet* is the exception), once they become aware of their sexuality they take great steps to conceal their queerness, the homophobia in their communities showing them they will not matter if their queerness is discovered. However, Meyer suggests that queer people 'may be harmed by directing negative social values toward the self' so that even successful concealment does little to curb internalised homophobia if a sapphic character is part of homophobic communities. We see this consistently across two of the three texts in the examples below.[114]

The primary community where instances of homophobia show sapphic characters they do not matter is the religious community, featured in both *Rosemary and*

[113] Meyer, p. 14.
[114] Ibid., p. 14.

Juliet and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. Tilsen states that 'religious discourses are especially pernicious, inciting much consternation, confusion, and self-hatred for young queers and driving wedges between parents and children'.[115] This is consistent across the two texts where religion is woven throughout the key communities in the protagonists' lives.[116] Both texts highlight the religious community as a source of conflict, at odds with the protagonists' discovery of their sapphic identity. There are a number of similarities between the religious communities in both books, including the idea of both the local secular and religious communities being so closely linked they effectively become one single community: sapphic characters who have been rejected by the church are automatically rejected by the local community too.

This idea is particularly prevalent in *Rosemary and Juliet* where the high school community is also absorbed into the religious and local communities. The narrative begins shortly after members of the fundamentalist Christian Divido Bible Church organise to elect Louise Stubbs to the local school board to ensure that the teachings of the community's well-attended fundamentalist church are present in all areas of the community, including the high school. Immediately after being elected, Stubbs 'put forth a resolution to change the science curriculum for all grade levels, so the Book of Genesis creation story would get the same instruction time as evolution. The two theories would be presented as equally valid, neither able to be scientifically proven.' (p. 12). While the board votes against the

[115] Tilsen, p. 98.

[116] It is worth noting that all key religious communities featured in not only this chapter's three texts but all texts on this project's corpus are Christian, aside from one text, *If You Could Be Mine,* where the primary religion featured is Islam.

decision, Stubbs, ‘undeterred,’ (p. 12) launches a measure to ban gay teachers from teaching in the district. The board meeting to hear testimony from members of the community both for and against the measure is where the narrative begins, positioning the religious community, local community, and high school community as inextricably linked from the story’s outset.

The religious community of the Divido Bible Church is situated as homophobic from the novel’s opening pages. At the school board meeting to debate the proposed resolution to ban gay teachers from teaching at the local high school, Nick (protagonist Julie’s cousin and a popular member of the church congregation) takes to the microphone and asks: ‘“If homosexuality isn’t a sin then how come God said it was a sin in the Bible?”’ (p. 24). The religious community in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* is similar in that it facilitates the majority of the homophobia that the protagonists face. Cameron recalls Pastor Crawford, the pastor of Gates of Praise, the radical Christian church Cameron’s aunt assists she attend, suggesting that queerness is an ‘unhealthy lifestyle’ that attracts ‘those in most desperate need of Christ’s love’ (p. 106), a list that includes ‘junkies, prostitutes, the mentally ill, and teenage runaways’ (p. 106). Whether the homophobia shown comes from a place of pity or disgust, queerness is positioned in both novels as something undesirable that can be ‘fixed’ through conversion therapy, showing the sapphic characters from the outset that they will be excluded from their communities if they present as their authentic queer selves.

While both sapphic protagonists in *Rosemary and Juliet* are subjected to some of the same homophobic abuse due to the overlap between the religious community and local community, Romey's primary social interactions centre around school, while Julie's are made up completely of interactions with other members of Divido Bible Church. Both protagonists are shown that they do not matter by their communities through instances of homophobia but the type and severity of the prejudice treatment they receive and, therefore, the impact it has on them, is very different.

After Romey's friend, Elliott, dies (after his car is forced off of the road by a member of the Divido Bible Church who frequently bullied Elliott for being gay), Romey is not asked to speak at his memorial assembly at school and she assumes, because of the homophobia she has experienced throughout her high school years, '"It's probably because I'm gay."' (p. 191). Instead, Amina, Romey's heterosexual best friend who is chosen to speak at the memorial uses the opportunity to speak about Elliot's sexuality: '"Elliot was gay, and he was proud of being gay. He was one of only two openly gay people in our whole school."' (p. 194). Romey notes that it is the first time 'gay' has ever been spoken during a school assembly and thinks of her own queerness as being contagious, wondering 'how many kids, like maybe that Matt Rodriguez who ate lunch at her table every day now, were going hot in the face, fearing someone might understand the word "gay" applied to them, too.' (p. 194). Another student, Meredith, is also chosen to speak at the memorial and speaks about '"letting bygones be bygones,"' in reference to Elliott's sexuality, about not dwelling on the ways that '"he was maybe

not perfect.'" (p. 195). The intertwining of the homophobia displayed during Elliott's memorial service and the internalised homophobic thoughts Romey has during this scene show the direct link between homophobic prejudice and the creation of internalised homophobia in queer characters.

While the homophobia Romey experiences is purely verbal, the homophobia Julie experiences from her primary community - the religious community - is both verbal and physical. After the girls' relationship is discovered by Julie's parents, they, and the religious community, respond by gathering together and arranging for Julie to undergo conversion therapy with Dr Oberholzer (a member of the same denomination Julie is part of). This shows Julie that her queer self does not matter to the sole community she has ever known, that she will only matter as long as she is 'corrected' (p. 212). During her sessions with Dr Oberholzer Julie is subjected to painful electric shocks which she describes as a 'hot-metal pain' 'stabbing her palms' (p. 228). She asks Dr Oberholzer to stop hurting her but he remains 'impassive, not looking at her' (p. 228), as if she doesn't exist. He eventually acknowledges her to tell her that that '"homosexuality compromises your mental health"' and suggests that Julie must '"inoculate herself against this disease'" (p. 142). She confides in one of her close friends from the church, Virginia, who tells her '"Honey, if you're not going to do anything homosexual, this can't hurt you. And if you are, we better pray it can help you."' (p. 251), showing Julie that, because of her sexuality, she does not matter even to the few friends she is given permission to make. This leads to the creation of internalised homophobia and Julie ends up resenting her sexuality and viewing it, as her

community does, as a problem that needs to be corrected, believing that it is an obstacle that stands in the way of her mattering to her community.

During her conversion therapy sessions with Dr Oberholzer Julie's internal monologue reveals that she believes her romantic thoughts for Romey as 'homosexual temptation, luring her to give in to homosexual fantasies' but that if she 'gave in to the temptation' she would be 'a sinner' (p. 260). Julie's opinion that queerness is sin remains throughout the majority of the novel and contributes to the suicidal ideation she experiences during the narrative. While Julie's thoughts primarily concern her relationship with God and, by extension, her church community, Romey's internalised homophobic thoughts inform the way she interacts with others and how she believes they will view her behaviour. When Romey and Julie become romantically involved, Romey realises that she feels protective of Julie, wanting to keep her safe from the outside world. Upon reflection, Romey is distressed to realise 'what she needed to protect Julie from … was Romey herself. The lesbian part of her.' (p. 152). There are multiple instances where Romey views her sexuality as something predatory that she needs to shield her loved ones from, including her friends, showing that, despite her heterosexual friends and family accepting her sexuality, the homophobia from her communities and the absence of a queer community in Romey's life negatively impacts her self-regard.

Similarly to Julie's experience in *Rosemary and Juliet*, in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* Cameron is shown through repeated instances of homophobia that

she does not matter to her religious community, which significantly overlaps with her local and high school community. This homophobia leaves Cameron with negative self-regard that manifests as internalised homophobia and guilt over the death of her parents, which she blames on her sexuality.

Cameron's school community and friendship group both show her that she does not matter through the use of homophobic slurs at her expense, largely informed by the homophobia learned within Miles City's influential religious community. After Cameron's relationship with Lindsey becomes common knowledge within her summer school swim programme, Cameron experiences her first instance of overt homophobia outside of her religious community:

> "It's not like I'm gonna change out of my suit now," one of Lindsey's teammates, squawky MaryAnne Something-or-other, said to the group. "Like I want to be eye-raped again this summer."
>
> The others sniffed in agreement and looked away, as if they couldn't bear to take us in any longer, whispering loud enough for us to make out *dykes* and *sick*.' (p. 108).

While Cameron's group of heterosexual male friends are largely supportive of her sexuality initially, as they mature and spend more time in their homophobic communities, their attitudes change. During an argument, Cameron's best friend, Jamie, derides her sexuality and threatens to out her to Pastor Crawford so he

can pray for her ‘perverse disease’ (p. 177). The image of homosexuality as a disease is repeated throughout the novel, including an example where a member of Cameron’s church group shares a quote from a documentary she watched, declaring that ‘the only true cure for homosexuality was AIDS’ (p. 190).

Many of Cameron’s internalised homophobic feelings are intertwined with guilt over her sexuality and when she discovers her parents have died her initial emotion is relief that her sexuality has not been discovered: ‘Mom and Dad, my mom and dad, had died, the first thing I thought, the very first thing, was: She doesn’t know about Irene and me at all.’ (p. 34). Cameron learns that the accident happened at the exact moment she had her first kiss with her best friend, Irene, and she feels as though her sexuality is what killed her parents: ‘I felt like it could be that God had made this happen, had killed my parents, because I was living my life so wrong that I had to be punished.’ (p. 45). While Cameron tries to counter these thoughts with an alternative that ‘maybe what all this meant was that there was no God, but instead only fate’ (p. 45), it is the guilt that takes root for the majority of the narrative. She decides that her kiss with a female friend made ‘bad, bad, unthinkable things’ happen (p. 52), highlighting that internalised homophobia and concealment can, and often do, run in parallel.

Much of Cameron’s internalised homophobia is borne out of a desire to spare herself from the homophobia she is sure she will face from her communities, which again highlights the overlap between concealment and internalised homophobia. Her concern is proved correct as she is sent to God’s Promise

conversion camp, paid for with the money her parents' left in their will for her college fund, another manifestation of the 'exclusion from inheritance' that frequently befalls queer characters in literature, highlighted in Saxey's work that was referenced in the previous chapter.[117]

Isolation Through the Absence of Queer Community

While homophobic communities have been shown to cause internalised homophobia and concealment in sapphic characters through the examples above, there is another, more passive way that communities show sapphic protagonists that they do not matter and that is through the absence of local queer community, which leads to isolation and loneliness. Meyer outlines the profound impact loneliness can have on queer youth, suggesting that 'a sense of normlessness, lack of social control, and alienation can lead to suicide because basic social needs are not met,' and that 'when group-level resources are absent, even otherwise-resourceful individuals have deficient coping'.[118] In a study of gender role models in lesbian YA texts Cook et al. suggest that 'the demonstration of loneliness was not attributable to physical isolation but rather to a psychological isolation caused by the lack of contact with someone who shared or understood their lived experience.'[119] Moreover, Meyer asserts that resources such as 'group solidarity and cohesiveness' - those found within queer community - 'protect minority members from the adverse mental health effects of minority stress'.[120]

[117] Saxey, p. 13.
[118] Meyer, p. 3; p. 7.
[119] Cook, Rostosky and Riggle, p. 159.
[120] Meyer, p. 6.

Furthermore, Hatzenbuehler and Pachankis found that 'stigma and minority stressors may increase feelings of loneliness among LGBT individuals, which in turn can affect interpersonal relationships'.[121] This suggests that homophobia in local communities and the resulting stigma and minority stress can exacerbate feelings of loneliness in sapphic characters. This is consistent across the texts examined throughout this chapter: all four protagonists have social interaction with friendship groups or other close-knit communities but it is their lack of access to local connections to queer community to help mitigate the homophobia within their communities that is the driving force behind their isolation.

The queer community looms like a barely-there spectre in all three of the texts, positioned as something crucial but just out of reach in both the rural and boarding school settings of the texts. Intimate connections to queer community are something yearned for, a prize awaiting each protagonist when they reach adulthood. The adverse impact that isolation from this key community has on all four protagonists highlights the importance of queer spaces as, without them, the queer community would always be 'outnumbered and overwhelmed'.[122] Without physical spaces and meeting points there is no safe place to congregate, no place to see the existence of queer joy or for queer teens to see that they don't exist in isolation. Each protagonist does carve out an element of queer community by the close of each narrative, though a tangible connection to other queer people,

[121] Mark L. Hatzenbuehler and John E. Pachankis, 'Stigma and Minority Stress as Social Determinants of Health Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth: Research Evidence and Clinical Implications', *Pediatric Clinics of North America*, 63.6 (2016), 985-997 (p. 990) <doi:10.1016/j.pcl.2016.07.003>.
[122] Berlant and Warner, p. 563.

particularly those living joyful lives free from prejudice, is hard won, if it is won at all. Rather than belonging to the queer community it is the absence of this community that is a bigger focus in the texts. This lack of local queer companionship free from the scrutiny of other, homophobic communities runs in parallel with the characters' struggle for self-acceptance.

Examining the geographic location of the three narratives, *Rosemary and Juliet* and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* are set in rural small towns in the USA, while *The Cat Came Back* is set within a boarding school in the USA. While not a small town structure, the boarding school setting has many qualities that mimic rural small town life: a small population; a lack of privacy; and stringent rules and social codes that must be adhered to in order to be accepted within the local community. Reimer identifies the boarding school story tradition of a protagonist who 'participates in his own subjection', with the school serving as 'an important site for the exercise of such surveillance' and this is the case of Stevie in *The Cat Came Back,* who constantly evaluates and assesses her behaviour against that of her classmates.[123] Rural community values bring with them a particularly potent isolation for sapphic youth, which Gray, Johnson and Gilley suggest comes back to the 'culture of sexual conservatism that is generally assumed to be intolerant of gender and sexual diversity at best, if not overtly sexist and homophobic'.[124] Gray, Johnson and Gilley go on to discuss the idea that there is disparity between the experience of queer youth living in urban areas and those who reside in rural

[123] Mavis Reimer, 'Traditions of the School Story', in *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, ed. by M. O. Grenby and Andrea Immel (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 452-484 (p. 456).
[124] Gray, Johnson and Gilley, p. 4.

areas, with those living in rural spaces being 'told that they need to choose between being queerly out of place in the country or moving to a big city to find legitimate visibility'.[125] This is true of both *The Cat Came Back*, where Stevie repeatedly longs for the freedom of a more urban college, and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, where Cameron's lesbian friend, Lindsey, who lives in the more progressive Seattle, regales Cameron with tales of queer life and freedom in the city, with Cameron referring to her as her 'one and only connection to authentic, real-life, not-in-the-movies-lesbianism.'[126]

One impact of this isolation through a lack of local queer community is concealment, which is evident in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. When Cameron is an older teen, still living in the very rural, very conservative Miles City, she begins a sexual relationship with Coley, who belongs to many of the same communities as Cameron: school, church, and the local community. By this point of the novel Cameron has forged a distant connection to the wider world queer community through her friend Lindsey but she continues to conceal her sexuality due to the lack of connection to a local queer community with whom she could enjoy solidarity and shared experiences of being one of the only queer people within a homophobic small town. While her relationship with Coley could have provided Cameron with this solidarity, Coley is unable to accept her sexuality and tells Cameron, '"I don't want to be like that…like a couple of dykes.'" (p. 240). When Cameron reaches for her in front of their friends Coley reacts aggressively:

[125] Gray, Johnson and Gilley, p. 15.
[126] Danforth, pp. 146-147. Further references to this text will be given in parentheses within the text.

‘Coley slapped my hand away like you would an ant, or something worse, something that didn’t belong on your skin at all, ever.’ (p. 246). After Coley, unbeknownst to Cameron, outs her to their shared religious community, Cameron returns home and finds her church’s pastor waiting there with her family. When she catches sight of the God’s Promise conversion camp pamphlet she panics that her sexuality has been discovered, feeling ‘the choke of being caught, and knowing it, and the kind of shame that sidecars that choke.’ (p. 262). Brend recognises these themes of enclosure in the novel, identifying that ‘even Cameron’s last name Post conjures images of fences.’[127] The suffocation and shame that this passage describes mirrors the growing isolation that Cameron experiences as she matures as a queer young woman who feels that the only way for her to exist safely within her homophobic religious and local communities is to conceal her sexuality.

In *Rosemary and Juliet* it is clearly shown how negative self-regard caused through feelings of isolation can manifest differently in two sapphic characters who are part of the same communities. While both Romey and Julie experience shame as a result of their sexuality Julie has the more extreme thoughts, in line with the fact that her isolation is more acute. Romey enjoys friendships that are accepting of her sexuality but the only community Julie is allowed to be part of is homophobic; even her connection to the world beyond Divido Bible Church is limited (exacerbated due to the limited internet access the novel’s early 2000s

[127] Olive Brend, ‘Queering Quake Lake: Liminal and Historical Geology in The Miseducation of Cameron Post’, *Summit*, 4 (2023), 13-38 (p. 20).

setting allows), so the total sum of societal attitudes around queerness that Julie experiences are homophobic. Julie is homeschooled and has no friends her own age; the only girls her age she is allowed to mix with are girls at her church youth group but the girls find Julie 'an overzealously virtuous preacher's daughter', a judgement that turns out to be far from the truth but leaves Julie nobody to socialise with outside her family and members of the church congregation, adding to her feelings of isolation.[128] The only community Julie is allowed to access is the church and she is notably absent from all community events where the church doesn't have a presence. Her father frequently preaches about why he does not allow Julie to mix with any other community but the church, stating that he does not want to '"expose her to the filth we've heard here in this room. I didn't want to have to explain to her why some people want her to be taught by sodomites with AIDS."' (p. 31). As the novel progresses and Julie discovers the depth of the church's homophobia she realises that it is her religious community, specifically, where she does not matter, and ruminates on other churches where she might have been accepted, if she had been given a choice of where to worship:

> 'Of course, there were other churches, churches that blessed being a lesbian, churches that would welcome a new strong soprano to the choir, but Julie would never be allowed to attend one. Her parents always said the people who worshipped there were in for a rude shock on Judgment Day.' (p. 261).

[128] Maclean, p. 71. Further references to this text will be given in parentheses within the text.

This idea that Julie's church has the most pious attitude towards homosexuality is revisited multiple times throughout the novel and reinforces Julie's isolation in the present. She realises that there are churches within the wider world that would accept her as her queer self but that they are beyond her reach while she is a teenager who is still dependent on her parents.

Julie's lack of connection to a local queer community to help mitigate the negative impact her homophobic religious community has on her leaves her isolated from other queer youths and she believes that she is a sinner, concealing her sexuality for a large portion of the narrative. Conversely, Romey, who is shown repeatedly that she does not matter to her communities but has strong support from her friends and family, and (until his death at the midpoint of the story) has a connection to local queer community through her friendship with Elliott, suffers far less isolation and negative self-regard than Julie. It becomes clear from these two examples that the presence of a supportive local queer community can mitigate the negative impact of not mattering to other homophobic local communities. Towards the end of the novel, after spending her life isolated from the queer community and, therefore, feeling as though she has to conceal her sexuality, the shame causes Julie to experience suicidal ideation. She climbs atop a statue in front of Romey, her family, and a gathering of the local community, threatening to jump unless she is allowed to see Romey and is not subjected to any further conversion therapy sessions. Julie's hopelessness and suicidal ideation shows the dangerous impact that feeling isolated and as though they do not matter to their communities can have on sapphic characters.

In *The Cat Came Back* the main contributing factor to Stevie feeling as though she does not matter to her communities is their lack of queer representation. Without any connection to the queer community in the first half of the novel and without having experienced any queer representation in literature or the media, Stevie is unsure how to express her authentic self within her high school community and, even if she was able to express herself, does not believe she would ever be accepted. Stevie's situation is noteworthy and contrasts with the other two texts where the community is actively hostile towards the queer protagonists. Stevie self-isolates, deciding for herself that she does not matter, rather than the communities she is a member of rejecting or ostracising her for her sexuality. Believing that she will not matter to her communities if her sexuality is discovered as she has never (to her knowledge) seen a queer person exist within any of her communities, Stevie conceals her queerness, only revealing it in the safety of her diary entries. Meyer notes the paradox of concealment, stating that 'concealing one's stigma is often used as a coping strategy, aimed at avoiding negative consequences of stigma' but that the concealment itself can 'backfire and become stressful', and *The Cat Came Back* is a prime example of this, as Stevie's loneliness and distress increases in line with her ongoing concealment.[129]

The importance of Stevie having a space in her life where she can authentically express her queer self is evident when she writes in a diary entry that 'I've got to write or I'm gonna burst with all this!', using the diary as a way to rationalise her

[129] Meyer, p. 12.

romantic feelings for Andrea and remind herself that there is nothing wrong with her sexuality by writing 'about all the ways it doesn't feel freaky!'[130] Though her diary is the place where she feels safest she is concerned throughout the novel about her sexuality being discovered if any members of the school community find her writing: 'God, if I'm going to be writing stuff like that, I better make absolutely sure that nobody ever sees this journal.' (p. 140). She frequently self-edits her entries and reminds herself that it is not safe to be herself within her community, a perception that Stevie believes implicitly for the majority of the narrative but is proven to be untrue by the close of the novel.

As the novel progresses Stevie frequently self-censors any romantic thoughts she has about Andrea, her need to conceal her identity not even allowing herself to entertain her queerness in the safe space of her private diary: 'I stood in her doorway, looking back, wanting so bad to walk back in and curl in next to her, hold her close to me!!! … That's enough for tonight!' (p. 104). Stevie analyses her behaviour around her friends throughout the novel, concerned she might be behaving in a predatory way: 'Don't go looking to take advantage of a situation! Just because she wants some comfort doesn't mean anything more than exactly that!' (p. 107). This idea that is also seen in Romey's character in *Rosemary and Juliet*. After doubting her sexuality and wondering if 'maybe I could still feel this way with a boy sometime. Maybe I could.' (pp. 123-124), Stevie's internalised homophobia becomes so acute she experiences suicidal ideation, suggesting that 'I don't want to live if I can't feel this way' (p. 123). Stevie's thoughts of suicide

[130] Mullins, p. 124. Further references to this text will be given in parentheses within the text.

highlight the dangerous consequences of sapphic characters feeling as though they do not matter to their communities, something that could be (and, indeed, is) mitigated if she had a connection to other queer people who would help her feel less isolated and provide her with a safe space to express herself as a sapphic teenager.

Mattering Within Communities

Throughout the three texts there are many examples of how different communities show queer youth that they do not matter, which leads to loneliness, concealment, internalised homophobia, and suicidal ideation. However, by the close of each of the three narratives there are clear examples of alternative communities being established that show the sapphic characters that they do matter and, consequently, help the four protagonists overcome their internalised homophobia and need to conceal their sexuality. The two key communities that show sapphic characters they matter are the queer community and friendships.

Mattering Through Queer Community

Queer community is one of the key communities that the characters are missing at the beginning of the texts and it is only after they forge these community bonds that they are shown that they matter. For both Stevie in *The Cat Came Back* and Julie in *Rosemary and Juliet* it is specifically connections to elders within the queer community that helps show them that they matter. Both Stevie and Julie's parents are either absent or unsupportive and the connections they form with queer elders

can also be read as the formation of surrogate parental bonds, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In *The Cat Came Back* it is a sapphic teacher at her school giving Stevie access to the queer community that shows Stevie she matters, helping her overcome her internalised homophobia and need to conceal her sexuality. Stevie's first connection to the queer community comes through literary representation, after an English lesson where her teacher recommends Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973) to her, an important coming-of-age sapphic text. At first Stevie is tentative, unaware even that books with lesbian characters could exist: 'She mentioned this one writer in particular, Rita Mae Brown. Rita Mae Brown wrote a book called "Rubyfruit Jungle". It's a lesbian book! I didn't know you could write a book about being a lesbian.' (p. 96). However, after reading the book there is a notable shift in her attitude towards both literature and herself: 'This book is so fucking great! It is the best book I have ever read!' (p. 98). Stevie feels safe to reference her sexuality in her diary, writing that 'It's OK to feel that way after all I guess,' (p. 98) and stating that 'After reading Rita, there's no way I can't see those {impulses} for what they are. That's just the way it is - the way I am.' (p. 109), showing that seeing herself represented in literature helps Stevie take the first steps towards overcoming her internalised homophobia and accepting her sexuality.

Similarly, in *Rosemary and Juliet* there is the presence, albeit off page, of another queer elder who helps Julie overcome thoughts of internalised homophobia and the hopelessness of being queer in a community that is rife with prejudice.

Virginia, a devout but closeted member of the Divido Bible Church community and one of Julie's only friends, tells her about Sandy, a lesbian member of the church she used to be in love with, 'not like homosexuals. Just pure, true love' (p. 125). Virginia tells Julie that Sandy left Divido for San Francisco because 'she wanted to find a lesbian community' (p. 128). Later in the novel, when Julie decides the only way she can be herself is to escape the oppression of her rural community and run away to an urban area, she uses the information Virginia gave her to track Sandy down via the internet. She tells Romey that she has the address of someone 'I know will help us', 'a lesbian who went to Divido Bible Church a long time ago', who she plans to stay with 'at least till the electric shock man has to go back to Whittier.' (p. 270), referring to Dr Oberholzer, who adminsters her conversion therapy sessions.

Though Julie does not end up seeking Sandy out in person, by the close of the novel we learn that Julie has connected with her remotely, establishing an intimate collection to queer community that helps her accept her sexuality despite the challenges of both her parents and religious community. Aligning with Meyer's idea of group solidarity helping mitigate the impact of minority stress, Sandy helps Romey and Julie keep in contact, despite Julie's parents moving her across the country so she could 'finish growing up in a normal atmosphere' where nobody 'would support open homosexuals teaching in the schools' (p. 357).[131] We learn that 'Romey wrote every day, her letters delayed because she sent them to someone named Sandy in San Francisco, who put them in envelopes Sandy

[131] Meyer, 2003.

made on her computer herself that said “Christian Youth Clubs of America,” or something like that, and forwarded them to Julie.’ (p. 370). With Sandy’s assistance, Julie and Romey are able to continue their relationship and Julie is able to maintain a connection to queer community, even though they both remain living within homophobic communities.

Julie striking up a connection with a queer elder via the internet is the first instance so far in this thesis’ close reading texts of sapphic characters participating in queer community online. The lack of online queer community is largely due to the publication dates and time settings of the texts: *The Cat Came Back* was both published and set before internet access was widely accessible and, while *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* was published in 2012, the text’s 1980s-1990s setting is also pre-widespread internet access.

The Miseducation of Cameron Post highlights a further example of how connections to queer community can show sapphic characters that they matter, offering solidarity and support to help them overcome internalised homophobia. While *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* does not show examples of older members of the queer community helping sapphic youth as was evidenced in the previous two texts, the novel does share similarities with *Rosemary and Juliet* by showing how friendships with slightly older characters (in this example, it is an ex-student from Cameron’s high school) can help queer youth see beyond the confines of their homophobic local communities. Mona, a university student who recently graduated from Cameron’s high school, returns to Miles City and tells

Cameron that she 'dated a girl for a while this year' (p. 217), explaining that '"I was just trying to give you an example of the kind of things that can happen once you get out of Miles City."' (p. 218). When Cameron plans to run away from God's Promise with two other queer teenagers, Adam and Jane, at the novel's climax, Mona plays an integral role: 'we'd track down … Mona Harris, who I believed would be willing to, at the very least, let us crash on the floor of her dorm room for a night or two until we could figure out what came next.' (p. 432). While the novel ends before Cameron reaches Mona's campus it is entirely plausible for readers to imagine Mona, who was part of the same homophobic local community as Cameron and repeatedly encourages Cameron to leave her hometown earlier in the novel, offering Cameron a safe place to stay.

Mattering Through Friendship

Scholarship asserts that friendship groups are a key community for adolescents, offering opportunities for mattering and acceptance not only in sapphic YA but YA as a whole. Compton suggests that 'friends and peers influence a girl's self-understanding', and Waters notes that female characters rely on friendships 'as a source of comfort in times of difficulty' in YAL.[132] Friendships play an important role in all three texts, providing examples of mattering that help the sapphic protagonists overcome their concealment and feelings of internalised homophobia. Where other communities (particularly the religious and local

[132] Lacy Ann Compton, 'A Girl's Best Friend? Implications of Friendship on Female Self-identity in Young Adult Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Texas State University-San Marcos, 2008), p. 1; Martha Waters, 'Gender's Role in the Expression of Friendship in Young Adult Literature' (unpublished thesis, University of North Carolina, 2014), p. 12.

communities) create and add to sapphic protagonists' feelings that they do not matter, in *Rosemary and Juliet* it is Romey's friendships, particularly with her best friend, Amina, that help mitigate her belief that she does not matter and provide the 'sense of belonging' identified in Stebbins' definition of community.[133]

Romey is shown multiple times throughout the novel that she does not matter to her local, religious, and high school communities, however, she does have close friendships that are accepting of her sexuality. Amina, her best friend, who is heterosexual but supportive of Romey throughout the novel (unlike the rest of the town's heterosexual population), frequently defends her from homophobia in their school and, when Romey and Amina have a sleepover at Romey's house, Romey explains that most girls wouldn't want to have a sleepover with a lesbian - "'You're over here spending the night with me when most girls would be afraid they'd get *cooties*."' (p. 49). Amina remains Romey's confidante throughout the novel, even going to Romey's mother for help when she thinks Romey and Julie are in danger after their relationship is discovered. Though it is a source of stress for her, Romey is more confused than upset about not mattering within her community, puzzling 'about how all the adults could vote in favour of gay teachers, and yet their high-school children shunned the only gay kids in their midst.' (p. 198). This builds on a point first noted in the previous chapter: the idea that there might be a hierarchy to mattering, which I began to explore through discussing how Holland in *Keeping You a Secret* struggles to truly feel as though she matters due to the absence of parental acceptance in her life. As Romey feels a strong sense of

[133] Stebbins, 1987.

mattering from her mother, and her best friend Amina, the homophobia and judgement she faces at school has less of an impact on her than it does on Julie, who faces rejection from both her community and her family, and Cameron in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, who has no supportive friends or parental figures for the majority of the narrative from whom to seek acceptance.

These examples illustrate the importance of supportive communities to sapphic characters, showing the life-altering impact being shown that they matter can have. While all four protagonists experience negative self-regard and internalised homophobia as a result of homophobia and isolation within their communities, we also see how acceptance and support from both the queer community and friendship groups can help sapphic characters overcome internalised homophobia and begin to believe in the possibility of a joyful queer future.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored how communities show sapphic characters that they do or do not matter and the impact this has on the characters' self-regard. I argued that homophobia within communities leads to sapphic protagonists believing that they do not matter and, thus, developing thoughts of internalised homophobia and concealing their sexuality in an attempt to avoid homophobic abuse. The second way I found that communities show sapphic characters that they do not matter is by not allowing community to be queer in any way, leading to sapphic teenagers only feeling part of their communities if they are concealing their sexuality and, thus, experiencing feelings of isolation as a result of this, as they have no tangible

connections to other queer people around whom they can safely express their sexuality. I then explored what happens when sapphic characters are shown by communities that they do matter and discovered that supportive friendships and connections to queer community help these protagonists overcome feelings of internalised homophobia and the need to conceal their sexuality.

While the three texts were published in different decades and tell distinct stories about multiple communities, there are similarities in the way each protagonist's story ends on a hopeful note after they are shown that they do matter in selected communities. It is notable, however, that it is often a single community or community member that shows this support, as opposed to the multiple communities who show the protagonists that they do not matter, suggesting that, within the fictional worlds of the texts, homophobia is more widespread than acceptance.

Meyer suggests that communities showing queer youth they do not matter will have negative consequences, as 'the relationship between negative regard from others and harm to the minority person is self-evident', while also stressing the ability of communities building 'self-enhancing structures to counteract stigma'.[134] This is in line with examples across the three texts examined for this chapter, through which we can see that when communities show queer protagonists that they do not matter through homophobia and isolation, sapphic youth internalise these prejudice events as harmful thoughts of internalised homophobia and

[134] Meyer, p. 4; p. 7.

engage in concealment behaviours. Conversely, when communities show these same protagonists that they do matter, we see the mitigation of the harmful impact of not mattering and the growth of positive self-regard and self-acceptance. The fact that community has the power to impact the characters in such conflicting ways reinforces the complexity of community for queer youth, showing that membership to multiple communities has the potential to yield both positive and negative influences on self-regard.

Though each novel ends before the protagonists' hopes for a joyful queer future become reality, there is the suggestion that these four sapphic teens will all find acceptance and support as they connect with new communities outside of their current homophobic circumstances. At the end of *The Cat Came Back* Stevie is on the precipice of leaving her insular boarding school to attend university, reassured through queer media representation and her friendships that her sexuality is not something that needs to be hidden away. Julie in *Rosemary and Juliet* has a connection to a queer elder in San Francisco who escaped the same oppressive church she did and it is hinted that, soon enough, Julie may follow in her footsteps, while Romey has the love and support of her mother and best friend to guide her towards a more accepting future. Finally, Cameron in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* closes the novel on the way to stay with a friend to begin reforging her future, having escaped God's Promise with two other friends. Through the community she builds with other queer youth, she accepts her sexuality and lets go of the guilt she had carried with her since her parents' death at the opening of the novel.

The key events that help the sapphic characters overcome their concealment and internalised homophobia are all tangible, practical ways to show these marginalised characters that they matter: giving them books to read where they will see themselves reflected in the pages for the first time; providing them with a way to contact their romantic partner; or giving them a place to stay when they have escaped their homophobic communities. It is an interesting contrast to how intangibly communities show queer teens that they do not matter, prioritising verbal prejudice or inciting the idea of sexuality as sin within religious communities. This is also a departure from the previous chapter's findings about how families show queer teens that they do not matter, which were mostly tangible, including evicting teens from home or taking away financial support. However, that is not to say all homophobia within the texts is confined to verbal prejudice as there are still examples of tangible prejudice events, including Elliott's fatal car accident due to a homophobic attack or the conversion therapy that befalls both Julie in *Rosemary and Juliet* and Cameron in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. It may be that the prevalence of verbal rejection over physical violence or exclusion occurs because of protective legislation that (should) allow little room for more tangible discrimination. This is something that will be explored in the next chapter, which looks at wider world attitudes towards queer youth and mattering.

Chapter Three: Mattering in the Wider World

'To the courageous plaintiffs, librarians, and lawyers who saved Annie on My Mind from being permanently banned in the Olathe, Kansas, School District'.[135]

- Nancy Garden

The dedication of Nancy Garden's *The Year They Burned the Books* steps outside of the narrative world to focus on the reality of publishing queer literature in the USA. The reference to *Annie on My Mind* is fitting, as the first sapphic YA text has received negative political attention since its publication in 1982.[136] Queer literature being brought to the forefront of political debates and culture wars began well before the publication of *Annie on My Mind* and continues to the present day.[137] As real-world sapphic youth are impacted by the politicisation of issues pertaining to the queer community, so too are the lives of fictional sapphic teens within three case study texts selected for this chapter.[138]

---

[135] Garden, 1999, front matter. Further references to this text will be given in parentheses within the text.

[136] *Annie on My Mind* was one of the American Library Association's (ALA) 'most frequently challenged' books of the 1990s (ALA, 2013) and in 1993 'it was burned 11 years later on the steps of the Kansas City School District offices - doused with gasoline, dropped into a metal bucket, and set on fire' by a fundamentalist minister, which lead to a federal case in 1995 where it was ruled 'that the book had been "unconstitutionally removed" from the libraries, and ordered it returned'. Nancy Garden, 'Writing for the Invisible Reader', 2000.

[137] According to the ALA, over 50% of the most challenged books in 2022 were challenged for LGBTQIA+ content (ALA, 2023).

[138] Raifman and others identify that the 'implementation of same-sex marriage policies reduced adolescent suicide attempts' in the USA (J. Raifman and others, 'Difference-in-Differences Analysis of the Association Between State Same-Sex Marriage Policies and Adolescent Suicide Attempts', *JAMA Pediatrics,* 171:4 (2017), 350–356 (p. 355)

The examination of the wider world in this chapter completes the set of three key spaces - all of which are integral to sapphic protagonists' lives - that were outlined at the beginning of this thesis. While chapter one examined family bonds and chapter two looked at the ways communities impact sapphic youth's perception that they do or do not matter, this chapter looks specifically at the wider world and the impact homophobic political ideology has on sapphic characters' belief that they matter within society, as well as in spaces within the wider world beyond family and community that can be a source of liberation to sapphic youth, such as high school and university. While there is some overlap between the institutions examined as part of chapters two and three, namely religious groups and high schools, the specific focus of this chapter is to examine the ways homophobia in legal, social, and political movements impacts sapphic characters by filtering down to infiltrate institutions central to their daily lives - namely, school, church, and digital spaces. Throughout this chapter high school is the main location to be examined, particularly the ways this institution comes to reflect the current political climate at the time each story is set.

In all three of the texts high school becomes a microcosm of the real world, where the politicisation of the queer body is at the forefront and all three sapphic protagonists find themselves at the centre of a battle between liberation and a

<doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.4529>.), while a 2022 survey conducted by Morning Consult and The Trevor Project found that, of the 716 USA queer youth polled, 'three in ten LGBTQ youth report being cyberbullied' as a result of homophobic policies (The Trevor Project, *Issues Impacting LGBTQ Youth Polling Presentation January 2023* (West Hollywood, CA: The Trevor Project, 2023), p. 7 <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Issues-Impacting-LGBTQ-Youth-MC-Poll_Public-2.pdf> [accessed 23 June 2023].).

'return to traditional values'.[139] Nancy Garden's *The Year They Burned the Books* (published in 1999) follows an academic year in the life of Jamie, a student at Wilson High and the editor of the student newspaper, the Wilson High Telegraph. As Jamie fights an internal battle to accept her sexuality she finds herself in the midst of an external battle against a local conservative organisation that wants to rewrite the school's sex education curriculum with an abstinence-only approach and ban all sex education and queer literature from the library.

Karelia Stetz-Waters' *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* (published in 2014) is set in 1992 in a rural Oregon town during the build up and aftermath of the campaign to pass Ballot Measure 9, a real world measure brought forward by the conservative Oregon Citizens Alliance (OCA), which would 'amend the Oregon Constitution to require governments and schools to set a standard that recognized homosexuality as abnormal, and to prohibit governments from encouraging or facilitating homosexuality'.[140] The political becomes entwined with Triinu's daily life as she reckons with the impact anti-queer policies will have both on her teenage years and her future.

Leah Johnson's *You Should See Me in a Crown* (published in 2020) follows Liz's final year of high school, during which she plans to infiltrate and win the title of prom queen, which will grant her the scholarship she needs to attend the prestigious university she has been awarded a place at. The novel's back cover

---

[139] Garden, p. 36.

[140] Patricia Jean Young, 'Measure 9: Oregon's 1992 Anti-Gay Initiative' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Portland State University, 1997) in Portland State University Library, p.1 <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds/6282/> [accessed 3 July 2023].

copy highlights that Liz feels 'too poor, too black, too awkward' to have a real chance at winning, so she makes the decision to conceal her sapphic identity (which she considers another reason why she has no chance at winning), even at the cost of her burgeoning relationship with fellow candidate, Mack.[141]

Reimer imagines the school 'as a 'little world' preparing its students for other, larger spheres of action', suggesting this space can function as a mirror of the wider world. Mansfield agrees, highlighting high school as an organisation that is impossible to extricate from the 'pressures from other institutions they are dependent upon (state legislature for funding) and cultural expectations from society'.[142] Mansfield goes on to suggest that 'one could conclude that schools are trapped in patriarchy' and, furthermore, that the 'invisibility and silence of queer students' that will continue 'as long as society is bound by patriarchal values' (and the findings in this chapter suggest this also extends to religious spaces, though they have less of a presence in the three close reading texts).[143] Though all queer characters in the texts are caught in the middle of the aforementioned battle between liberation and a return to traditional values, sapphic youth face a specific type of politicisation as they fall at the intersection of sexuality and gender, viewed

[141] A note on the texts selected for this chapter, unlike the previous two chapters where a text from the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s was selected, in the chapter a text from the 1990s and two from 2010-2020 have been chosen as these are the three texts that most strongly and accurately represent the subject matter of this chapter and best assist in answering the research questions set out for this chapter at the end of this introduction. The increase in digital spaces between 2010-2020 may account for this, but looking extensively into the reasons why the later texts focus more specifically on the impact the wider world has on teens falls outside the remit of this work and is a potential further area of research.

[142] Reimer, p. 458; Katherine Mansfield, 'Queer Theory Perspectives on Schools as Organizations' in *The SAGE Handbook of School Organization* ed. by Michael Connolly, David H. Eddy-Spicer, Chris James and Sharon D. Kruse (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2019), pp. 340-358 (p. 355).

[143] Mansfield, p. 16, p. 10.

as something of a ‘‘double minority’ that presents a particularly powerful ‘threat to the patriarchal status quo of organisational America’’.[144]

Looking more deeply at the sapphic experience specifically, Bentley singles out school as ‘one of the most dangerous places for girls to be authentic’, suggesting that ‘it is where the rules for being a girl are most strongly enforced’ and there are multiple examples in the texts that reinforce this, along with Mansfield’s aforementioned suggestion that ‘schools are trapped in patriarchy’.[145] Reimer suggests that contemporary school stories ‘interrogate the disciplinary structures of these worlds’, an idea that is explored in all three of the close reading texts.[146] The presence of both homophobia and sexism impacts sapphic characters in a wholly unique way, which is consistently highlighted across all three texts. Shelton highlights that queer youth are drawn into the ‘complex relationship of living in a country in which part of who they are is considered by some to be un-American’, and that ‘homophobic messages ‘from the government, reinforced by many religions and schools … directly and indirectly tell queer people that they are second-class citizens’, suggesting that political messaging shows sapphic teenagers that they do not matter on both a national and local level.[147]

---

[144] Helen Woodruffe-Burton and Sam Bairstow, ‘Countering Heteronormativity: Exploring the Negotiation of Butch Lesbian Identity in the Organizational Setting’, *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 28.6 (2013), 359–374, (p. 362), cited in Mansfield, p. 362.
[145] Mary K. Bentley, ‘The Body of Evidence: Dangerous Intersections between Development and Culture in the Lives of Adolescent Girls’ in *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity* ed. by Sharon R. Mazzarella and Norma Odom Pecora (New York, NY: P. Lang, 1999), pp. 209-224 (p. 219); Mansfield, p. 356.
[146] Reimer, p. 480.
[147] Jama Shelton, ‘Redefining Realities through Self-Representational Performance’ in *Queer Youth Cultures* ed. by Susan Driver (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), pp. 67-91 (pp. 71-72).

A key finding explored in this chapter is the idea of sapphic teens engaging in activism and pushing back against homophobic abuse after they are shown that they matter as their queer selves and, as a positive impact of this mattering, grow in confidence. Shelton asserts that 'when queer young people begin to appreciate and feel pride in their uniqueness, they no longer accept the position of less than'.[148] In the three case study texts there certainly appears to be an agenda on the part of the respective school administrations and local political organisations to ensure queer students continue 'to accept the position of less than' and are unable to form the 'affirmative sense of identity' that is created when 'a person feels safe, nurtured and recognised.[149] It could be that the intention is to keep sapphic youth from feeling as though they matter and finding the confidence to demand better, equal treatment, with Shelton suggesting that 'when queer young people feel confident and comfortable with who they are, they are more likely to actively speak out and act against oppression and injustice'.[150] The three protagonists do all build an 'affirmative sense of identity' through being shown they matter by their friends, love interests, and families, demonstrating the importance that their close relationships have for showing sapphic characters that they matter in a political climate that suggests otherwise, mirroring findings from the two spaces previously explored in this thesis. There are also opportunities for mattering presented by the queer community and queer spaces, though, similarly as in the two previous chapters, these are scarce, if they do exist at all, and are even completely absent from some texts.

[148] Shelton, p. 72.
[149] Ibid., p. 73.
[150] Ibid., p. 73.

While sapphic youth exist as a 'marginalised group in American society, denied public language with which to articulate their experiences', it is likewise important to acknowledge that their experience of the wider world is not all negative, as reflected in Driver's suggestion that it is 'astounding' to see the 'imaginative, insightful … culture of queer youth', despite 'pervasive institutional denials'.[151] Through the chosen texts it becomes clear that there are steps like university and growing financial autonomy that present sapphic characters with the chances to relocate to areas of the country with more queer spaces and more opportunities to be shown that they matter. The reader catches glimpses of these opportunities as each of the narratives draws to a close, and these hint at a more positive future for the three protagonists.

This chapter considers three main research questions: how does the wider world impact spaces that are central to queer youth's lives; how are sapphic protagonists shown that they do or do not matter within the wider world; and what is the impact on sapphic protagonists when they are shown that they do or do not matter within these central spaces that are impacted by the wider world?

High School Reflecting Wider World Homophobic Politics

Shelton asserts that 'it is difficult to feel completely comfortable in a society where you know that a large part of the population wishes you did not exist' and this is

[151] Shelton, p. 70; Susan Driver, *Queer Youth Cultures* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), p. 3.

felt by all three protagonists within their high school society, which is considered a small-scale version of wider society within the context of this chapter, as I have outlined previously.[152] Tilsen goes on to state that high school climates 'typically reflect the social and political climates of the communities they serve,' acknowledging that 'the school experiences of youth are extremely varied'.[153] Examining the case study texts with these statements in mind it becomes clear that queer youth existing within a homophobic society will experience the effect of this prejudice, both at a societal level but also reflected in their daily experiences at school. Within the three texts there are multiple examples of wider world politics trickling down to high schools, showing queer youth that, when they don't matter to society at large, it is inevitable that they will also fail to matter within institutions at a local level that are guided by the more broad political climate.

Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before opens in Willamette Valley, Oregon, in 1989, when 'it was still okay for children to be feral' and Triinu is a young teen.[154] Having seen no queer representation in the media or in her own circles ('No one had gay friends.' (p. 9)), Triinu doesn't identify her own queerness until years later when she attends high school and develops a crush on Deidre, an older student who defends her from a bully. Triinu describes her as 'beautiful like antique photographs' (p. 43) and begins to emulate her goth style to boost her own confidence. Shelton suggests this 'self-representational performance' is key to help queer youth 'develop and utilise languages of their own' and Triinu is self-

[152] Shelton, p. 74.
[153] Tilsen, p. 98.
[154] Stetz-Waters, p. 5. Further references to this text will be given in parentheses within the text.

aware, acknowledging her new gothic style as a performance - 'it was all artifice' (p. 46).[155] She conflates her otherness as a goth with her otherness as a sapphic teen in a conservative, rural town, knowing she doesn't matter to her town, her state, her society, and wears that knowledge like armour: 'I was not a girl among girls. I was not Sassy magazine's Teen of the Month. I was a dark acolyte.' (p. 46). Triinu maintains a connection to her Lutheran church and it is here that she meets Ursula, her first love interest, who adorns her bag with buttons reading '"Keep Your Laws off My Body," and "Meat Is Murder,"' (p. 65), bringing left-wing politics to the church in her own small way.

After meeting Ursula, Triinu's teenage years and, indeed, her very existence, become deeply rooted in the politics of her state, as it is Ursula who tells her about the group 'Save the Children' (who are not, as Triinu thinks, an charity that tries 'to feed children in Africa and stuff,' (p. 70) but, instead, '"this group that fights against gays. They say gays can't reproduce so they have to recruit."' (p. 71)). Ursula explains that Save the Children tried, unsuccessfully, '"to pass a ballot measure that would have fired all the gay school teachers in California'" (p. 71) and tells Triinu that '"There's another group like that - the Oregon Citizens Alliance. They're trying to gather signatures for a ballot measure like that in Oregon."' (p. 71). Triinu, shocked, asks if they are a Lutheran group and learns that, although the group is Christian but not Lutheran, her church still plans to have 'a discussion' (p. 71) about it. With politics having successfully invaded her church Triinu begins to realise the capacity that statewide politics has to show her she does not matter in

[155] Shelton, p. 69.

more and more areas in her life, beginning with her church but moving swiftly to her school.

One of the more blatant examples of politics infiltrating Triinu's high school comes when the school Democracy Club hosts a debate on 'the homosexual issue' (p. 152), where the two speakers are Chuck Garst of the Oregon Citizens Alliance (OCA) and Mary Deljenick from the Coalition for Equal Rights, the two organisations most fiercely locked in the battle for and against Ballot Measure 9. Garst, of the OCA, tells the students '"We want to keep this country for God-fearing heterosexual Americans and not some perverts asking for special rights. Are you with me?"' (p. 154) and the crowd, partially made up of Democracy Club members and partially made up of students, like Triinu, who needed somewhere to eat their lunch, reacts by 'clapping and squealing' (p. 154). The debate closes with Deljenick asking Garst what he intends to do with '"these children you've labelled as homosexual?"', to which Garst replies that '"we've got a very successful facility in eastern Oregon … Drug therapy. Talk therapy. Shock treatment … To cure them."' (p. 156). The fact that the debate takes place during the school day in communal areas where many students are just trying to eat lunch shows it is impossible for these students to escape the political. Triinu does not witness what the general mood amongst the student body is as the debate ends as she runs from the room, fearing that 'they were going to come get me,' that she would 'disappear' with her parents watching, powerless to stop Chuck Garst and the OCA from taking her to be 'tortured' in the desert (pp. 156-157). Whether or not the students were supportive of Garst's proclamation that queer

students would be banned from attending school doesn't matter to Triinu; her assertion that the OCA won the debate was enough to show her that she doesn't matter, that the impact on her life if Ballot Measure 9 passed would be devastating.

From this point of the novel onwards we see the direct parallel between the political climate in Triinu's home state of Oregon (where Ballot Measure 9 is being fiercely debated throughout the text, before being defeated at the novel's close) and the climate within her school. An example of this is a quote from one of Triinu's teachers who hopes the passing of Ballot Measure 9 will set the precedent to allow queer students to be expelled from education, as queer adults will have been expelled from many public sector roles: "My hope is that one day soon, we won't have homosexuals in our schools at all. One strike. I say, as soon as a student is suspected of homosexual behavior, they're out." (p. 156). It is notable that Ballot Measure 9 targeted lesbians as well as gay men with its use of terms like 'homosexuality', 'sexual orientation' and 'sexual preference' as umbrella terms denoting the entirety of the queer community, unlike many previous homophobic laws that outlawed 'sodomy' specifically.[156] In Triinu's school there are no gay male students and Triinu bears the brunt of the homophobic abuse as the sole visibly queer student. This is similar to *The Year They Burned the Books*, where the gay and sapphic characters are bullied with equal severity and the Families for Traditional Values group, again, uses homosexuality as an umbrella term to refer

[156] Western States Center, '2: Ballot Measure 9', *No On 9 Remembered*, 2022 <https://noon9remembered.org/stories/ballot-measure-9/> [accessed 2 May 2023]; Richard Weinmeyer, 'The Decriminalization of Sodomy in the United States', *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 16.11 (2014), 916-922 <doi: 10.1001/virtualmentor.2014.16.11.hlaw1-1411>.

to all members of the queer community.[157] This makes both of these texts somewhat of a departure from Inness' suggestion that 'lesbians are some of the most underrepresented and misrepresented characters in children's literature', though it is worth noting that incorporating sapphic characters into general references to homosexuality is still one type of invisibility by erasing the specifics of the sapphic experience, particularly the intersection between gender and sexuality.[158]

In The Year They Burned the Books there is a similarly insidious creep of the political into high school when a newly elected member of the district school board brings her political affiliations into a culture war between her newly formed conservative organisation and the school's liberal newspaper. Protagonist Jamie explains in the novel's opening pages that she always 'felt different in some undefined way' until her friends began dating boys and she 'began to understand why' (p. 12). She takes comfort in her friendship with Terry and the two queer teens offer each other support and solidarity, with Jamie realising 'she wasn't the only person who felt cut off from just about everyone' (p. 12). This small queer community that Jamie carves out at the beginning of the novel shows Jamie that she does matter, even if the wider world, via her school, suggests that she does not.

---

[157] Families for Traditional Values (FTV) is a local Conservative organisation set up by the novel's antagonist, Lisa Buel, which she suggests will heal the 'moral fabric of our country', weakened by 'homosexuality, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, unwed mothers, and fathers who don't support their kids' (p. 58). The group's main goal is to remove all books that include LGBTQIA+ representation from the school and local library, as well as ban references to contraception and the LGBTQIA+ community from the school's sex education curriculum.

[158] Sherrie A. Inness, *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity, and the Representation of Lesbian Life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), p. 103.

While life as the only lesbian in her school isn't easy for Jamie and she is frequently referred to as 'butchie' (p. 51) by her bullies because of her masculine gender presentation, she becomes even more uncomfortably visible when an open position on Wilson High's school board is filled by Lisa Buel, a local mother who is new to the area. It is Jamie's mother, who is part of Wilson's health education curriculum committee, who first identifies the danger that Lisa Buel would pose if she successfully gained a seat on the school committee, describing her as 'very conservative' and remembering that she 'claims sex education encourages immorality' (p. 16). Jamie's mother warns that Lisa Buel is a 'stealth candidate', which she explains is 'someone who runs for office without being specific about what they stand for … Lots of politicians do that.', and says 'many stealth candidates are supported by national organisations' (p. 37). When speaking at a local rally in the lead up to the school board election Lisa Buel evokes the need 'for a return to traditional values' as it is 'children, after all, who are at stake' (p. 36) and, soon after she is elected to serve on the district's school board, the Families for Traditional Values (FTV) organisation is born. Shortly after the announcement Jamie overhears her mother voicing concerns to her father: '"Lisa Buel didn't mention starting a group about traditional values when she put her name up for that vacancy. And not being a member of 'any national fundamentalist organisation' doesn't mean she's not getting support from one.'" (p. 59), reminding both Jamie and the reader that the national political climate's presence is felt even on a local level. It isn't long before the FTV gains a foothold in the school as well as the churches, beginning with an article in the local

newspaper, the Wilson News-Courier, where Buel announces the launch of the FTV as a direct response to Jamie's editorial in the Wilson High Telegraph where she wrote that 'condoms save lives' (p. 59).

In a public meeting at Wilson High Buel takes to the stand to suggest that 'the texts used in the high school's health classes include positive material about matters that are unacceptable to a large segment of the community', stating her belief that they should be collected and reviewed by a 'book review committee', which she volunteers to form and chair, 'with an eye to choosing different ones' (p. 78). When asked to outline her objections she highlights 'the section on AIDS' and 'the section on lifestyles', which states 'gay and lesbian couples in some parts of the country can register as domestic partners and can adopt children', asserting that 'children tend to think anything they read in a book is the truth, is acceptable, and that of course is not that case. … It is illegal to be homosexual in many states; homosexuals are mentally unbalanced; they get and spread disease; they molest children.' (p. 79). This is the first instance where homosexuality is explicitly highlighted within Wilson High as a target of the school board.

As the FTV's presence within Wilson High grows Jamie's diary entries show the impact that anti-queer rhetoric from conservative figures in Wilson has on her as she writes that she is 'scared of being gay' and wonders if it will still be possible for her to get a job at a newspaper and can she 'be fired if they find out?' (p. 28). She goes on to question if it's 'evil to be gay' or if she will 'get AIDS', parroting phrases she hears from members of the Families for Traditional Values (FTV) and

reminds herself that 'I know there are laws against gay people marrying' (p. 28), showing the impact that wider world legislation has on Jamie's belief that she does not matter. However, her diary extracts also show another more positive side, as Jamie tries to pivot her focus to representation she sees in the media, particularly books and newspapers, and she begins to imagine a joyful queer future that might await her: 'I want to find someone to live with, like we were married, but is that possible? The books I've read seem to say it is.' (p. 28). Jamie's imagination of a queer future, despite the homophobic situation of her present, links back to a topic explored in chapter one where Louie in *Dare Truth or Promise* daydreamed about a happy future with her girlfriend, Willa. In both cases the characters use this idea of imagining a queer future as a way to attempt to show themselves that they matter, despite the reality of their present circumstances.

In You Should See Me in a Crown the impact of wider world politics is less obvious but still notable, with much of the culture of Liz's home town of Campbell built around conservative notions of traditional family values and heteronormative life events. These events include a high school prom and promposal season that is the biggest event in the town's calendar and earns the prom queen a $10,000 scholarship. Liz notes early in the text that the PTA has banned queer youth from taking dates to prom: 'same-sex couples aren't allowed to attend together. They can dance with each other once they get there, maybe, if no chaperones care enough to stop them, but they can't officially go as dates.'[159] However, *You Should*

[159] Johnson, p. 39. Further references to this text will be given in parentheses within the text; This ruling is in line with many real world regulations that drew much media attention, including the 2010 case of McMillen v. Itawamba County School District, after the school made a decision to

See Me in a Crown's main conflict comes not from Liz fighting her school's homophobic prejudice, though it is at the forefront, but from Liz's choice to conceal her queerness in order to compete for prom queen. Driver warns of the adverse impact 'normalisation' can have on queer youth, where there is a risk of empowerment becoming 'a sign of fitting into familiar and nonthreatening models of identity and belonging', going on to suggest that 'queer youth become valued and supported as long as they don't challenge the status quo by looking or acting too queer'.[160] This is particularly noteworthy when examining *You Should See Me in a Crown* where Liz sees assimilating into her high school's prom culture as a necessary evil that will grant her eventual freedom. Winning the $10,000 university scholarship will allow her to attend the prestigious college she has gained a place at, where she hopes she will be more free to express both her queerness and Blackness within a more politically progressive area where she matters.

Butler states that 'if violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated' and across the three texts we see examples of institutions dehumanising queer characters, leaving the sapphic protagonists believing that they do not matter, that they are unreal.[161] In *The Year They Burned the Books*, after homophobic policies are debated within her high school, Jamie is left questioning her own identity and begins to render herself 'unreal' as she asks

'forbid a lesbian student from attending prom with her girlfriend and from wearing a tuxedo to the prom'; ACLU, 'McMillen v. Itawamba County School District', *ACLU*, 2010 <https://www.aclu.org/cases/fulton-ms-prom-discrimination> [accessed 6 June 2023].

[160] Driver, p. 14.

[161] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2004), p. 33.

herself, 'Who am I? What am I?' (p. 27). In *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* after two queer men are murdered within Triinu's county, her high school principal makes it clear that his political views will be brought into the high school culture as he asserts, '"These people asked for it, and they deserved what they got … They brought their disgusting ways into our community … They're the ones lurking outside our schools … We need to send them a message."' (p. 80), homogenising the entire queer community as a 'them' that is positioned in opposition to the heterosexual population. These examples all contribute to the sapphic protagonists accepting that they matter less than their heterosexual peers, linking back to Shelton's previously highlighted point that homophobic policies and attitudes 'directly and indirectly tell queer people that they are second-class citizens'.[162] Through these quotes we see the impact that homophobia in the wider world has on sapphic characters when it filters down into their community spaces, particularly those involuntary communities that teenagers belong to, such as high school. With no way to escape these views all three teenage characters begin to believe that they do not matter and that they will never 'make sense' within these spaces because of it. In all three texts this feeling of isolation is only challenged after the protagonists come out and begin to explore the idea that they can begin to claim space within the wider world. However, this process of coming out is met with challenges as well as gains for all three characters, which will now be examined in further detail.

[162] Shelton, p. 72.

The Political Act and Impact of Coming Out

Bowles-Reyer identifies the popular post-1970 coming-of-age tale in YA as presenting 'a vision of womanhood that encourages a new kind of female identity, emphasising sexual knowledge and sexual expression'.[163] We see this in the endings of all three of the texts, where the protagonists come to accept and express their queerness while still at high school. For two of the texts - *The Year They Burned the Books*, published in 1999, and *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before*, published in 2014 but set in the early 1990s - this is at odds with the real world statistic that shows in 1991 'the average age of coming out was twenty five', dropping to sixteen by 2011.[164] De Ridder and Dhaenens identify 'a coming out story [as], essentially, a political act' and that the 'collective coming out experience' forms a community for queer youth'.[165] Although Jamie in *The Year They Burned the Books* is the only out lesbian in her school, Triinu is the self-styled 'only goth dyke' in her local area, and Liz is one of only two out queer students in her school, there is the continued idea that by coming out they are joining a much larger community, albeit one that exists in the wider world, as opposed to their school, town, or even county. Jamie finds this representation in the newspaper articles she secretly keeps in a locked box: 'she filed newspaper clippings about gay people' (p. 27), while Triinu daydreams about falling in love

---

[163] Amy Bowles-Reyer, 'Becoming a Woman in the 1970s: Female Adolescent Sexual Identity and Popular Literature' in *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity* ed. by Sharon R. Mazzarella and Norma Odom Pecora (New York, NY: P. Lang, 1999), pp. 21-48 (p. 32).

[164] Deschamps and Singer, p. 373.

[165] Sander De Ridder and Frederik Dhaenens, 'Coming Out as Popular Media Practice: The Politics of Queer Youth Coming Out on YouTube', *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 6.2 (2019), 43–60 (p. 45) <https://doi.org/10.11116/digest.6.2.3>.

with her roommate when she leaves Oregon to attend university: 'In sumptuous daydreams I imagined myself sitting on my bed in my dorm room late at night, waiting for my roommate to come back. In my dreams, she was in love with her, and I loved her too' (p. 312).

For Liz, in *You Should See Me in a Crown*, by fortune of being born in the online age this wider world community is much more easily accessible in the digital realm. Liz's attitude towards this space shifts from the negative to the positive as the novel progresses and she sees how online communities can show her that she matters. Social media is a unique digital world that exists only in *You Should See Me in a Crown*, with the other two texts either published or set before the creation of social media platforms that have come to offer the opportunity for queer youth to 'participate in their own media representations'.[166] In *You Should See Me in a Crown* Liz is initially disparaging of social media, referring to her high school's preferred social media platform as 'the gossipy, Twitter-esque app some senior created a few years ago that has become my worst nightmare' (p. 7). The social media platform in question in *You Should See Me in a Crown* is Campbell Confidential, a network created for and by the youth population of Campbell County, where every notable event, particularly those that centre around prom, is 'remixed, remastered, and retooled' (p. 12) for public consumption. This creates a localised version of the performance of the 'media spectacle' of online coming out stories that De Ridder and Dhaenens identify, showing another example of how

[166] De Ridder and Dhaenens, p. 44.

high school can be something of a mirror of the wider world.[167] Later on in the novel Liz decides to use social media to her advantage and participates in her own media representation by calling out the lack of diversity and prejudice that is rife in her high school's prom selection: 'Campbell County has built a system that benefits the privileged. Prom court shouldn't be for the same kind of people every year. A fairy tale for some, and a nightmare for the rest of us. Enough. #EffYourFairyTale.' (p. 232).

While Liz uses social media to gain attention for her prom queen campaign it is only used to discuss her sexuality after she is outed by one of her prom queen rivals, who puts up a banner up their school which reads 'LIZ LIGHTY IS ONLY QUEEN OF THE QUEERS' (p. 250). Liz's principal calls her into the office and tells her that the president of the PTA has demanded she be removed from the race for prom queen and that 'they're already circulating a petition' (p. 254), while there is no mention of pushback against the student who wrote and displayed the homophobic banner. It is only when Liz's friend, Gabi, reports that the incident has created a social media storm on Campbell Confidential - '"All your students are talking about the obstruction of justice, the blatantly homophobia, that is occurring at your institution. This could turn into a case for the American Civil Liberties Union faster than you can blink."' (p. 255) - and a female member of staff pressures the principal to let Liz remain in the competition that she is allowed to continue. However, Principal Wilson asserts that '"You two still can't go as dates to prom … Rules still matter at my school."' (p. 257), making it clear to Liz and her

[167] De Ridder and Dhaenens, p. 44.

love interest, Mack, that he has the power to strip them of their rights because of their sexuality, denying them the same prom experience as their peers and suggesting that Campbell High belongs to him, not the student body, and particularly not the queer student body.[168]

While De Ridder and Dhaenens highlight the potential for coming out to provide queer youth with a queer community where they will matter, they, along with other scholars argue that the need for queer youth to come out can be as much about finding a sense of mattering as it is about 'conforming to a societal demand for coherent gender and sexual identities'.[169] Butler, particularly, suggests the act of adhering to constructed identities through the performance of coming out should be 'subject to a critique of the exclusionary operations of their own production … Who is represented by which use of the term, and who is excluded?'.[170] Tilsen also comments on the idea that coming out is not always politically beneficial for queer youth, stating that 'social awareness of the existence of queer and LGBT youth has grown. However, this awareness has emerged to a large extent because of the threats youth face'.[171] We see an example of these ideas in *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Befor*e, which shows the stark contrast between Triinu's coming out experience within her home against her experience of coming out at her high school, presided over by staff who are outspoken about their right-wing homophobic politics.

---

[168] This is not the first time an adult in a position of authority asserts that a space belongs to them and not the queer character in question, having first been identified in *Girl Mans Up* when Pen's father reminds her that "'This is my house!"' (p. 231).
[169] De Ridder and Dhaenens, p. 46.
[170] Butler, 1993, p. 173.
[171] Tilsen, p. 98.

While Triinu is accepted by her parents at home it is a different story at school. After wearing a suit and dancing with a girl at her prom, she is removed from the celebration by Principal Pinn ("I've had enough of this filth," Principal Pinn hissed in my ear. "You're in a room with normal kids, corrupting them." (p. 335)) and her parents are called to the school, where Principal Pinn assumes they will agree with his judgement that Triinu's behaviour is sinful. However, he is surprised when Triinu's parents support her and, although Triinu defends herself throughout the novel in a bid to reduce the homophobia levelled at her at school, it is only when her parents step in and vocalise support for her that she feels safe to come out to her friends. This highlights the important role that close relationships can have in showing queer youth that they matter, even if the world at large is telling them the opposite. This exchange also illustrates the authority and power that all adults wield in comparison to teens, showing the importance for sapphic teenagers to have supportive adults in their lives who are willing to stand up for marginalised youth. While many adults in positions of authority - school being a primary example - do not take teenagers seriously, this exchange shows how much more likely adults are to listen to other adults, even those whose views differ from their own. This gestures, again, to the idea that there may be a hierarchy to mattering: while Triinu is the target of homophobia abuse at school, she is able to grow in confidence and begin to push back against this prejudice after she gains the support of her family. Without her parents supporting her after coming out, then stepping in and protecting Triinu from Principal Pinn's ongoing homophobic abuse (and, notably, supporting her decision to apply to a queer-friendly university),

Triinu is unlikely to have felt the same liberation and confidence she expresses at the close of the novel.

Mattering Through Representation in the Wider World

Throughout the three case study texts there are many examples of queer characters finding validation through queer representation in the wider world, showing how 'visibility and sayability matter' to sapphic youth and that seeing examples of 'living, working, loving queer youth and adults' shows them that they matter.[172] *The Year They Burned the Books* and *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* show examples of queer adults living happy, fulfilling lives, showing protagonists Jamie and Triinu that queer joy is possible, even within a political environment that does not believe queer people matter. There is a different example of representation in *You Should See Me in a Crown*, which provides one of the corpus' only examples of a sapphic protagonist finding representation through pop culture.

In The Year They Burned the Books we see how Jamie turns to media representation to ground her as she is shown again and again that she does not matter as a sapphic youth. The first time the reader learns about the comfort Jamie takes from queer visibility is when plans for Wilson's new health education curriculum are released, stating that 'homosexuality is to be integrated into

[172] Claudia W. Ruitenberg, 'Queer Politics in Schools: A Rancièrean Reading', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 42.5-6 (2010), 618-634 (p. 619) <10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00689.x>.

lifestyle discussions at all grade levels' (p. 26). Plans include the addition of books that feature gay families to school libraries (as well as books that show 'mixed-race and other minority families' (p. 26)) and the discussion of queer relationships in sex education classes. The press release asserts that the changes are not to 'encourage any particular lifestyle' but to 'reflect the world as it is' (p. 26). Upon hearing about the changes Jamie's initial reaction is to fight back tears, as she wonders 'where had that curriculum been back when she and Terry were in elementary school, being teased?' (p. 27). She calls the changes 'Too little, too late' and retreats to her bedroom, looking through a secret box where 'she filed newspaper clippings about gay people and issues, state laws and city ordinances, photos of events like Gay Pride Day parades' (p. 27). While Jamie does not feel safe to engage in queer community events at this stage of her life and within her current surroundings, the knowledge that these events exist is enough to show her that there are wider world spaces where queer people matter. This secret act of Jamie holding onto any references to the queer community that she can find, in lieu of connecting to the community in person, shows the impact that queer representation in the wider world has on showing sapphic characters that they do matter, as well as the powerful impact of anti-queer legislation at both a local and national level.

Although it represents prejudice and homophobia in *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before*, the wider world also represents opportunities for hope and freedom, through Triinu's plans to attend university in a more liberal area. The urban is frequently referenced as a place of freedom, with the only gay club in Triinu's

homophobic rural town being notably named 'The City'. University is heralded as the key to accessing the liberation of the wider world when Triinu's friends arrive back from college and tell her about the freedom they've enjoyed since leaving their small town: '"You can go anywhere. Just get on a train at some depot, and the next thing you know you're in Philadelphia, you're in New York, you're in Boston."' (p. 318). These examples align with Keys et al. highlighting 'the 'metro-centric' discourse underpinning imaginings of how queer lives are lived. That is, queer identities can only be asserted and sustained through migration to the urban'.[173] However, even the urban isn't a wholly safe place for queers within the novel, with Oregon as a whole tainted by the anti-queer political movements of the time, as the below example from the text that highlights anti-queer violence shows:

> 'In the most liberal part of Portland, a gay man was beaten on his way out of a bar. His glasses shattered, and his attackers jabbed the shards of glass into his eyes, screaming, "Kill the faggots!" In Salem, a black lesbian and her gay roommate were killed by a pipe bomb.'[174] (p. 282).

While the rest of the USA was fighting its own battles in the name of queer liberation, these are not explored within the novel, which suggests that it is only by

[173] Wendy Keys, Elizabeth Marshall and Barbara Pini, 'Representations of Rural Lesbian Lives in Young Adult Fiction', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 38.3 (2017), 354-364 (p. 363) <10.1080/01596306.2017.1306981>.
[174] For clarity, the cities of Portland and Salem referred to in this quote are those found in Oregon, not Maine and Massachusetts, respectively.

escaping Oregon that the queer community can find safety, making it even more important for Triinu to find a university outside of her home state.

Triinu's experience of applying to university is overlaid with these alternating ideas of the wider world as a space for both oppression and freedom. Triinu is aware of how Ballot Measure 9 may impact her future if it passes - 'I could not go to a state school. If the OCA got another measure on the ballot, and if it passed, they would ban gays from public universities. They had promised "no state funds for homosexuals."' (p. 309) - and this leads her to consider the politics of the universities she applies to, musing to herself within the narrative that university might hold the keys to freedom if she chooses right. Her friends encourage her to 'look outside Oregon' (p. 314) and this leads her to apply to Smith College, a private women's college in Massachusetts. Triinu's desire to attend Smith College intensifies after she reads an article that refers to Northampton (the city where Smith is located) as a 'promised land for lesbians' and she feels a surge of hope, saying 'There was a place where lesbians went, and it looked a lot like home.' (p. 319). For Triinu there is something of an overlaying of communities when she imagines her future life as a university student, believing that her university community will grant her access to queer community. Through this we can see that Triinu views the wider world as a place where she will find a community where she matters and a home away from home where she can begin to build her adult life, surrounded by those who will show her that she matters.

University represents a similar hope for *Liz in You Should See Me in a Crown*; she refers to it frequently throughout the novel as a 'dream' (p. 18) and her 'North Star' (p. 25). However, pop culture has an even bigger impact on Liz, specifically her favourite band, Kittredge, and their lead singer, Teela Conrad. The novel utilises the fictional queer woman-fronted band to show the positive impact media representation has on Liz. Liz idolises Kittredge, whose lead singer has remained silent about her sexuality, despite an ongoing media frenzy to try and uncover whether or not she is queer. Teela Conrad writes numerous songs about her desire for privacy, about how she doesn't owe anybody access to her private life, and this is something Liz takes comfort in throughout the novel, as she chooses to keep her own sexuality private for the majority of the narrative. Teela is referenced as a figure Liz looks up to multiple times in the narrative - 'Teela Conrad is kind of my hero.' (p. 107) - not only for her songwriting but for the way she conducts herself as a celebrity, something Liz has a glimpse at, albeit on a much more localised scale, during her time as one of Campbell County's prom queen candidates. Liz recounts the way 'tabloids are always snapping pictures of her {Teela} leaving clubs with women or on the red carpet with men, and asking super intrusive questions about her life' (p. 106), admiring Teela's assertion that 'what she chooses to do should belong to her and the people she shares it with', echoing Liz's own feelings towards coming out.

While Liz follows Teela's example when struggling to navigate life as a sapphic teenager in her conservative town, the band also play a part in lighter moments of the novel. Their music is a tool that helps Liz grow closer to her love interest,

Mack, after the two discover a mutual love for the band, which Liz describes as feeling 'sort of like kismet' (p. 116). Liz reflects on the important role the band plays in her life and thinks to herself that discovering that Mack feels the same way 'means more to me than she could know' (p. 116). In the same scene, when she and Mack discuss their 'collective crush on Teela Conrad' (p. 116), it is one of the first times in the novel where Liz allows herself to share her queerness with another person, showing how wider world representation can present sapphic characters with opportunities to build community and make connections that show them that they are not alone in their queerness and that they do matter.

Mattering and Activism

Bentley suggests that girls learn in their teenage years to 'present the "nice girl," the "perfect girl" to those from whom they need approval'.[175] This is consistent across the opening acts of each of the texts, with Jamie (*The Year They Burned the Book*s) and Triinu (*Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before*) attempting to ignore their homophobic bullies, while Liz (*You Should See Me in a Crown*) tries to assimilate into her school's prom culture in order to avoid being outed as queer in a town built on conservative values. This attempt to gain approval from authoritative figures by conforming to wider world ideals by presenting Bentley's idea of the '"nice girl"' leads protagonists to the assumption that their true selves do not matter to the wider world, having the negative impact on their wellbeing and

[175] Bentley, p. 214.

sense of self that has been explored earlier on in this chapter. However, once these characters accept that they will never gain approval from the wider world because of their queerness they discard the performance of Bentley's 'nice girl' and, instead, explore Shelton's previously referenced idea of queer youth 'no longer accept[ing] the position of less than' after they 'begin to appreciate and feel pride in their uniqueness'.[176] Shelton goes on highlight the potential for these queer teens to become 'creatively mobilised', becoming 'agents of change', which we see across the three texts when the protagonists are shown that they do matter, if not to the wider world than, at least, to other groups and individuals whose opinions they come to value more highly than wider world opinions.[177]

Jamie in *The Year They Burned the Books* draws strength from the friendship group that springs up around the school newspaper that she edits and, together, they push back against the conservative FTV group that threatens the future of free speech of their newspaper. Triinu in *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* decides to fight back against the homophobia levelled at her at school after securing a place a liberal university and garnering support from her parents. Liz in *You Should See Me in a Crown* realises she matters more to the wider world than she thought after an outpouring of support on social media after she is outed online by a high school bully. All three of these characters experience a pivotal moment towards the end of their respective narratives after being shown that they do matter (albeit to relationships more intimate than the wider world in two of the

[176] Shelton, p. 73.
[177] Ibid., p. 73.

three texts), and it is after these moments that they become Shelton's aforementioned 'agents of change'.

When Jamie, in *The Year They Burned the Books*, decides to use her position as Wilson High's newspaper editor to speak out against injustice, she draws inspiration from real-world national political activism that was prevalent in the 1990s when the novel was set, referencing the Silence=Death Project that was later used by activist group ACT UP to raise national consciousness during the AIDS crisis. After it is ruled that Jamie's newspaper is no longer allowed to share opinion pieces and must present 'all sides of any controversial issue' (p. 81), Jamie thinks back to '"that AIDS bumper sticker … Silence Is Death"' (p. 82) and it is this invocation that begins her journey into activism. Her activism grows in intensity after she is shown that she does matter to her mother, her friendship group, and through queer representation in the media she consumes, demonstrating the power of mattering in all three of the key areas explored through the project: the home, the community, and the wider world. The suggestion here is that characters who are shown that they matter feel supported to engage in activism, particularly if the support they are shown can help mitigate the potential risk of activism. For example, Jamie risks being ostracised by her local community but has the support of her friends who are willing to stand beside her, whatever the repercussions. In this vein it is much harder for characters to speak out against injustice if they stand alone and, through their isolation, feel as though they do not matter in any area of their life, as there is no support network to help mitigate any risk that comes with activism.

Jamie makes the decision to publish an editorial about the book burning held by the FTV - where they burned literature featuring positive queer representation - in the school newspaper, which garners some positive attention, however, her activism is not without negative consequence as she becomes the target of further homophobic threats: 'TO THE DYKE EDITOR OF THE SCHOOL FAG RAG' (p. 149). The FTV seek to increase their presence by hosting a public forum titled 'The Evil in Wilson', which aims to 'develop strategies for fighting the evil that has come to our community in the form of obscene books, sex education courses, support of sick, "alternative" lifestyles (homosexuality)...'" (p. 151). The conflict culminates in violence against Jamie and the two other queer students at Wilson High, Terry and Ernie, during which Jamie is physically attacked, and an attempted sexual assault against Terry and Ernie is only prevented by the arrival of three teachers, including the school principal who tells the students he does not want to 'silence them' but, likewise, does not 'want this school to be torn apart' by their activism (p. 156). *The Year They Burned the Books* ends with a three month time jump to an article published in the Renegade Telegraph - an independent newspaper set up by Jamie and her friends - which shares the news of Lisa Buel's defeat in the school committee election. While Buel is determined to 'continue working for the benefit of Wilson's young people through Families for Traditional Values' (p. 187), the newly elected member of the school committee is quoted as asserting that 'in school, especially high school, kids need access to as many ideas and cultures as possible,' and that he plans to use his new position to 'ensure that Wilson's students have access to the free marketplace of ideas.' (p.

188). This gestures towards a more hopeful and accepting future for Wilson High students, thanks, at least in part, to Jamie's activism throughout the course of the novel.

Mazzarella and Pecora identify 'the complex relationship between girls and their culture' that 'inundates girls with messages that their bodies are their voice - their identities'.[178] In *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before*, the conservative policies put forward by the political Christian organisation, the OCA, bleed into every area of Triinu's life - from her social groups, to the queer nightclub she frequents, to her school. Bombarded by messages that her queerness falls on the 'wrong' side of the culture war being fought throughout Oregon at large and that, therefore, she doesn't matter, Triinu begins to push back against this messaging by using her body as a source of activism to signpost her otherness, her identity as both a sapphic teenager and a goth, with both of these facets of her identity attracting judgement and scorn from the students at her school, as well as the OCA-supporting teaching staff.

Once Triinu begins to lean into her queerness instead of concealing it, which coincides with her high school student body and teaching staff becoming increasingly engaged with the OCA's homophobic messaging, she suffers homophobic bullying and death threats from both her peers and her teachers at school: 'The next morning, I found a note taped to my locker door, the words "Die

[178] Sharon R. Mazzarella and Norma Odom Pecora, *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity* (New York, NY: P. Lang, 1999), pp. 1-2.

you motherfucking dyke bitch' (p. 168). While she is shown repeatedly that she does not matter to the wider world she is accepted and supported by her parents and has a secure, loving home environment. This gives her some level of self-assuredness to weather the difficult year she faces at school and realise that she does matter and deserves a joyful future, free from the hostility of her present circumstances. The conflict between Triinu and the conservative culture of her high school reaches its apex at her senior year prom. This takes place just after Principal Pinn threatens to sabotage Triinu's chances at gaining at university place when he tells her, '"I could call that fancy East Coast school and tell them exactly what you are, so you just watch yourself."' (p. 321), reminding her that he, through the conservative culture he is part of, has the power to negatively impact her life even after she leaves high school to move through the wider world. Knowing she won't be able to attend prom with a female date, Triinu instead opts to attend the night as the yearbook photographer, as 'just because I didn't want a boy to put his tongue in my mouth did not mean I was immune to the power of prom.' (p. 324), showing her desire to partake in traditional high school rites of passage, even if the political culture of the school attempts to exclude her.

After Principal Pinn ejects Triinu from the prom for dancing with a female student he locks her in an empty classroom to prevent her from returning. In this moment she realises the true power that he holds over her and her dreams of a queer future, as a suspension would lead to Principal Pinn calling Smith College and destroying her chance at being accepted. This, again, reinforces the idea that the conservative values that spread throughout Oregon during the debate around

Ballot Measure 9 might follow her even when she tries to leave the state. However, it is also a powerful moment for Triinu as she imagines that queer community that exists beyond her current location, that she might become part of when she leaves Oregon, stating that 'I was sick of being bold all alone.' (p. 337). Triinu references her hopes for the future and the freedom that the wider world might afford her when she tells Principal Pinn that 'In a couple of weeks, I won't be here. I'm going somewhere far away, and I'm going to fuck whoever I want, and you're going to be stuck her chaperoning the prom for the rest of your pathetic life.'" (p. 340). This final line is something of a victory for Triinu as her parents arrive shortly afterwards and support her against the homophobic school faculty, with Triinu having the sudden realisation that 'Principal Pinn had lost' (p. 345) in that moment, showing again the importance for sapphic youth to have intimate relationships with those who will support their activism in the wider world.

It is only after the prom that Triinu understands the impact her existence as an out queer youth has on other teens, when the story of her argument with Principal Pinn becomes public knowledge and she is 'the centre of every conversation at the Beanery' (p. 346). The barista gives her free drinks and both her friends and other teens congratulating her for 'standing up to Pinn.' (p. 346), asserting her activism as a tool that ultimately leads to an increase in Triinu being shown that she matters. When a fellow queer youth approaches Triinu and acknowledges her as '"the dyke who told off the principal."' (p. 347), she embraces Triinu and, although Triinu never sees her again, she suggests that 'her visit hinted at another life' (p. 347), the type of life she hopes will await her when she leaves Oregon for

Smith College, unashamed of who she is and ready to face whatever liberation or prejudice awaits her in the wider world.

Liz, in *You Should See Me in a Crown*, takes a different route towards her own kind of activism, attempting to assimilate into the accepted heterosexual path through high school demanded by her small town's ultra-conservative culture. After spending much of the novel hiding her true self in order to fit in Liz realises that 'Campbell is never going to make a space for me to fit. I'm going to have to demand it.' (p. 235). Although Liz believes being invisible is the most effective way to become an activist within her community, as the novel progresses and she garners more attention online, she realises that she holds more power by being visible than invisible. She goes on to create space for herself after she is outed online and her popularity grows, beginning to refer to herself as 'Campbell's infamous, subversive, dangerous, queer-as-hell prom queen wannabe' (p. 267). The student body that, until this point, Liz had assumed would reject her because of her sexuality being at odds with their conservative views, support her by wearing T-shirts with a gold crown on them, a motif that Liz asserts has 'become synonymous with me' (p. 267). This highlights her as a symbol for change after she gains the support of the student body and goes on to be voted prom queen, gaining the $10,000 scholarship that she views as her ticket to a more accepting future in the wider world. While Liz never sets out to become a symbol of representation and disruption, her visibility as a Black, sapphic student in a largely

white, straight high school leaves a legacy behind for future students, showing that no student is 'too poor, too black' or, indeed, too queer to succeed.[179]

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways wider world political and social attitudes towards queerness filter down into community spaces and impact the ways sapphic youth are shown that they do or do not matter. The primary spaces explored are high school and church and I have looked specifically at how these inescapable spaces in teenagers' lives are influenced by the wider world, what the impact is on sapphic youth being shown that they do not matter in these spaces, and how sapphic characters are impacted by being shown that they do matter, particularly when it comes to activism.

Not mattering in the wider world impacts queer characters through two key behaviours: concealment and withdrawal. Jamie in *The Year They Burned the Books* and Liz in *You Should See Me in a Crow*n both choose to conceal their queerness for the majority of the texts to avoid the homophobic abuse they are sure they will receive due to the conservative politics that have infiltrated their respective high schools. While Liz's concealing is somewhat successful and she attracts little negative attention throughout the novel, Jamie's denial of her identity does not stop the homophobic bullying and threats aimed at her throughout the text, showing that concealment does not guarantee freedom from prejudice in an institution infiltrated by wider world attitudes. Triinu opts to conceal her queerness

[179] Johnson, back cover copy.

while also withdrawing from many social opportunities and instead positioning herself as an outsider, frequently othering herself throughout the narrative and lamenting her loneliness as the only lesbian (she is aware of) in her school. While none of the characters are still concealing their sexuality by the close of each text, they do spend the majority of their respective narratives attempting to evade prejudice through concealment. However, after each character comes out (whether on their own terms or by being outed) they are affirmed and shown that they matter in other areas of their life more intimate than the wider world, namely within their families and friendship groups, regardless of whether or not the wider world shows them that they do matter (as in Liz's case, on social media) or do not matter. This acceptance leads to their growing confidence and journeys towards activism that they hope will go some way (however small that might be) towards changing wider world attitudes towards queer youth.

Throughout the case study texts explored in this chapter we see that high school and church are the two spaces most impacted by wider world culture and legislation, with high school impacted far more deeply. When culture wars are being fought in the wider world of each story they are echoed in the culture and treatment of queer students within high school, with local political debates, book banning, and even state-wide policies being debated within the school walls, making it impossible for the three sapphic protagonists to escape the wider world even within localised spaces they should feel safe and accepted in. Equally, the case study texts show us many ways that sapphic youth are shown they do not matter in the wider world, and that there are very few examples of mattering. The

protagonists' identities as queer individuals are debated, deemed deviant and pathologised. In *The Year They Burned the Books* and *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before*, state-wide conservative groups deny them rights and dignity. Notably, both of these novels are based on real world culture wars that were heavily politicised - the censorship and book burning of Nancy Garden's *Annie on My Mind* and the OCA's attempts to pass Ballot Measure 9 in Oregon. In *You Should See Me in a Crown* the prejudice is less overt and more insidious; Liz has never been told that she must conceal her queerness but she understands the necessity of hiding her identity to ensure a smooth journey through her school years. This unspoken rule becomes explicit after she is outed and the PTA calls for her removal from the race for prom queen; she is only able to remain a candidate after her queerness becomes the focus of a trending topic on social media and the school would draw too much negative attention if she was removed from the running. In this instance, we see that the wider digital world of social media can have a positive influence on showing sapphic characters - and those outside of these digital spaces who reinforce homophobic attitudes and policies - that they do matter.

In all three cases it is clear to the sapphic individuals, in offline spaces at least, that they matter less than their heterosexual counterparts within heteronormative spaces the wider world and that (even in online spaces where queer youth are shown that they matter) their identities will likely continue to be politicised as they move through the world into adulthood. In two of the texts (*Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* and *You Should See Me in a Crown*) the protagonists opt to

attend universities they know are queer-friendly, which they hope will allow them to carve out connections to the queer community to weather the storm of being queer within a homophobic society.

While we see the three protagonists speak up and use their voices to enact positive change after they are shown that they matter, Bentley asserts that 'voice is not without consequence' and that 'as the world becomes an increasingly unsafe place' there is a risk in being 'an individual girl to resist those who are unjust'.[180] In all three texts the sapphic protagonists are the target of homophobic abuse, with all three of the girls receiving threatening or aggressive messages in writing or on social media. Things turn physical for Jamie in *The Year They Burned the Books* when she is attacked by her classmates, and for Triinu in *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* when she is attacked by the school principal, circling back to Bentley's assertion that fighting back against injustice. In the case of *You Should See Me in a Crown* even existing as a sapphic teenager is enough to draw negative and even violent consequences. However, in all three texts there are repercussions for those who perpetrate violence and threats against queer characters: Jamie's high school principal does eventually side with her and her queer friends after they are physically attacked; Triinu's parents defend her against Principal Pinn, and the more aggressive of her high school bullies dies in a car crash at the novel's midpoint; and Liz's high school bully who outs her on social media fails to be voted into the prom court after falling out of favour because of the stunt. These consequences are in line with Wickens'

[180] Bentley, p. 22.

suggestion that contemporary novels featuring queer characters can often be seen to position homophobic characters and prejudice as the problem, as opposed to homosexuality being framed as an issue.[181]

Finally, through the examples discussed in this chapter there is a continuation of the idea that mattering might be hierarchical and that mattering in one space can negate a lack of mattering in another prominent area of a sapphic character's life. The three sapphic protagonists in this chapter's case study texts are never expressly shown that they matter in the offline reaches of the wider world (and while Liz is shown that she matters online and this ricochets into her offline life, her mattering is acknowledged grudgingly by her high school principal, only accepted because of the negative attention it would bring the school, not because her principal truly believes she matters). However, all three still end the novel with a certain amount of hope for a more positive future, and believe, at least to some degree, that they will find connection to other queer people as they go out into the wider world to attend university, gain their first jobs, and move into adulthood. While wider world attitudes towards the queer community do not change a significant amount during the narratives (in *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* the story includes the defeat of Ballot Measure 9, followed by the immediate assertion from the OCA that a new homophobic measure will be introduced in the very near future), all three protagonists come out to their parents in the stories and find acceptance and support both from their families and close friends. Through this acceptance they realise that they matter within their families and in some

[181] Wickens, 2011.

parts of the local community, and this bring each protagonist enough comfort and stability to push back against the injustices levelled against them in the wider world. While there is no conclusive evidence to show a definitive hierarchy to mattering, this idea is something that will be expanded and discussed further in the conclusion of this thesis, as well as discussing the potential for this idea to gesture towards future research.

Conclusion

This thesis brought together literary analysis and sociological concepts to explore the concept of mattering in a defined corpus of sapphic YAL, answering the questions of what mattering looks like in these texts and what the impact is of mattering or not mattering on sapphic protagonists in three key spaces: the family, the community, and the wider world. Mattering in sapphic YA is an unexplored area of study to which this work has contributed by looking closely at what mattering looks like and the role it plays in the spaces of family, community, and the wider world, three external forces that were chosen due to the important role they play in the protagonists' lives. This research discovered that mattering is a significant part of sapphic YAL, with many examples of sapphic protagonists being shown that they do or do not matter found across each of the nine close reading texts and in the majority of the fifty novels that made up this project's corpus. Moreover, I argue that the findings of this project show that mattering and external forces play a central role in sapphic protagonists' identity formation, with mattering having a positive impact and not mattering having a negative impact on protagonists' self-regard across all three of the spaces explored. The findings in this project correlate with the results of the sociological areas of study outlined in the introduction, including the ways teenagers can be shown that they matter (aligning with Elliot's work), the harmful impact on queer teenagers if they are rejected by their family or community (aligning with Elliot, van Bergen et al., and Ryan et al.), and the ways that homophobic or anticipated homophobic events can

impact queer people's identity formation (aligning with Meyer's work).[182] This correlation indicates that teenage characters who are shown that they matter develop secure identities, while those who are shown that they do not matter suffer a negative impact on their self-regard, and that there is alignment between fictional representations of teenagers and their real-world counterparts.

In chapter one I looked at mattering within the family, examining the ways sapphic protagonists are shown that they do not matter to their families, the impact this has on their identity formation, and the ways that families show sapphic teens that they do matter and how this impacts their self-regard. I discovered that families show sapphic protagonists that they do not matter in three main ways and that each of these rejecting behaviours is coupled with a distinct impact on the sapphic teens: isolation through removing emotional support systems or banning relationships deemed inappropriate, the impact of which is characters concealing their sexuality and indulging in escapism by dreaming of a safe, queer future; removing material items or making characters (or threatening to make them) homeless, the impact of which sees teens withdrawing from or severing bonds with their family and seeking alternative family bonds elsewhere; and verbal and physical abuse from family members, which results in sapphic protagonists experiencing depersonalisation and suicidal ideation. Looking at the ways families can show sapphic characters that they matter I discovered the main way this is shown is through respecting sapphic teenagers' sexuality, which leads to the characters forming honest, authentic bonds with accepting family members. There

[182] Elliott, 2009; Van Bergen and others, 2021; Ryan and others, 2010; Meyer, 2003.

are also opportunities for family members who do not originally accept the sapphic character's sexuality to evolve over time and change their behaviour, offering the potential for forming renewed family bonds after family members show they are now willing to accept the sapphic protagonist's sexuality.

A further finding in this chapter concerns the formation of alternative family bonds with those who show them that they matter, which are sought by characters after experiencing a rejecting behaviour from their family, particularly when material items are removed or characters are made homeless after their sexuality is discovered. In the three close reading texts there are examples of sapphic characters forming alternative family bonds with their love interest's accepting family or forming bonds with accepting siblings that mimic a parental bond. This shows that familial bonds are key for sapphic characters to believe that they matter and form a positive sense of self-identity but that these bonds do not necessarily have to be formed with biological relations. Thus, when characters are shown that they do not matter to their family they suffer from negative self-regard which manifests as concealment, withdrawal, depersonalisation, and suicidal ideation, whereas when characters are shown that they do matter to family they experience a positive impact on their identity formation and are able to build meaningful, authentic family bonds with either biological or chosen family because of it.

In chapter two I explored mattering with the community and looked at the ways sapphic protagonists in YA are shown that they do not matter to their

communities, the impact this has on their identity formation, and the ways that they are shown that they do matter to their communities and the impact this has on their self-regard. Across the three close reading texts I found that there are two main ways communities shown sapphic characters that they do not matter and that, similarly to chapter one, each of these behaviours is coupled with a distinct impact on the sapphic characters' view of themselves: rejection through homophobia, which can be seen through homophobic abuse and forced conversion therapy, which creates feelings of internalised homophobia in the characters; and an absence of queer community and representation, which leads to characters feeling isolated and causes them to conceal their sexuality as they believe they will only be accepted by their communities if they appear heterosexual. Where mattering is concerned, in the texts communities show sapphic protagonists that they matter in two ways: through queer community and through friendship. Characters discover mattering through queer community by forging bonds with elder queer people who help them navigate difficult issues around their coming out experiences, including providing access to sapphic representation in literature to help them accept their sexuality and helping them sustain romantic connections. Friendship also provides opportunities for sapphic characters to be shown that they matter through bonds with sapphic youth who provide both intimate connections of friendship and a connection to the queer community more broadly, and through bonds with heterosexual friends who are supportive of sapphic characters' sexuality even when other community groups engage in homophobic behaviours. When shown that they do matter these

characters are able to overcome feelings of internalised homophobia and feel safe to express their sexuality authentically.

Therefore, the key findings from this chapter illustrate that sapphic characters experience a negative impact when they are shown that they do not matter to their communities, developing thoughts of internalised homophobia and concealing their sexuality. Conversely, when characters are shown that they do matter to their communities, through access to the queer community and through supportive, accepting bonds of friendship, these thoughts of internalised homophobia are rescinded and characters enjoy a much more positive outlook towards their sapphic identity formation. A final observation drawn from this chapter is that one of the close reading texts that centres community - *Rosemary and Juliet* - offers the first examples of technology being used to forge connections with other queer people, when Julie connects with Sandy (an elder member of the queer community who used to belong to the same homophobic church group as Julie) via email. The idea of technology allowing opportunities for connection between queer people is also present in *You Should See Me in a Crown*, one of the texts examined in chapter three.

In chapter three I explored mattering within the wider world, focusing on digital spaces and areas in sapphic characters' lives that are impacted by wider world political and social attitudes towards the queer community. I looked at the ways these spaces show sapphic characters that they do not matter, how this impacts characters' identity formation and self-regard, and at the ways these spaces show

characters that they do matter and the impact this has on them. Through examining the three selected texts that prominently featured both the wider world and areas influenced by wider world attitudes, I found that high school is the key area of sapphic protagonists' lives impacted by the political and social attitudes of the wider world. The narrative of each text was interwoven with homophobia directed towards sapphic protagonists, driven by the influence of wider world attitudes on the institution of high school. Each text either directly referenced or was set in a time period when wider world homophobic attitudes towards the queer community were rife: *The Year They Burned the Books* references the banning and burning of texts that feature queer protagonists, directly inspired by Garden's own experience of having her earlier sapphic YA texts targeted by censorship; *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* is set against the backdrop of the real life homophobic Oregon Ballot Measure 9 campaign; and *You Should See Me in a Crown* features a protagonist who is (initially) unable to attend her high school prom with a same-sex date, in line with many similar cases in the USA, including the previously referenced 2010 legal case of McMillen v. Itawamba County School District.[183] The real life inspirations behind the texts show that national political and social attitudes pervading local institutions such as high school is an issue that both sapphic characters and real life sapphic (indeed, all queer) youth face.

Two key behaviours from sapphic characters were identified as a consequence of being shown that they do not matter through homophobia in the wider world:

[183] ACLU, 2010.

concealment and withdrawal. The protagonists of both *The Year They Burned the Books* and *You Should See Me in a Crown* believe that hiding their sexuality will help them evade homophobia. While this is the case for Liz in *You Should See Me in a Crown*, at least until she is outed by a classmate, in *The Year They Burned the Books* it becomes clear that even concealment is not enough to avoid homophobic bullying in an institution infiltrated by homophobic views in the wider world, and Jamie still receives homophobic abuse at school even before she comes out. Meanwhile, in *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before*, Triinu engages in both concealment and withdrawal behaviours, taking a step back from involving herself in social activities in an attempt to avoid her sexuality being discovered. However, after the protagonists are shown that they do matter - through the queer representation Jamie finds through newspaper clippings of stories about queer people in the wider world, that Triinu finds through working with older sapphic women, applying to a university with a high population of sapphic students, and that Liz finds through her favourite band, Kittredge, and online support from social media after she is outed - they stop concealing their sexuality and enjoy a positive impact on their self-regard. The three protagonists also gain the confidence to engage in activism, using their voices as sapphic youth to push back against the homophobic attitudes that have filtered down from the wider world into their own communities and high schools.

By looking at the findings across the study as a whole this thesis concludes that external forces do play a key role in sapphic characters' identity development and that mattering is an effective lens to examine the impact of these external forces.

This research found that mattering to the predefined spaces positively impacts sapphic characters in the following ways: providing queer solidarity; the formation of alternative family bonds in instances where characters have severed bonds with homophobic family members; the confidence to push back against prejudiced treatment; and by allowing them the security to stop concealing their sexuality or experiencing thoughts of internalised homophobia. Conversely, not mattering to the predefined spaces has a negative impact on sapphic characters in the following ways: isolation; withdrawal from homophobic spaces and relationships; concealment; internalised homophobia; depersonalisation; and suicidal ideation. Continuing to look at the overall findings there are connections to be found consistently across the three spaces: that sapphic youth can be shown they matter by engaging with them directly; that mattering has a positive impact and not mattering has a negative impact on sapphic characters' self-regard; and that mattering may be hierarchical.

As mentioned in the literature review at the beginning of the project existing sociological scholarship outlines key ways queer youth can be shown that they matter, which include listening to them speak and addressing them directly in conversation.[184] The idea that mattering can be shown through these methods is consistent across the three spaces and in each of these spaces sapphic protagonists begin to feel as though they matter when they are engaged with directly, either by one member of the space or the space as a whole. For example, Liz in *You Should See Me in a Crown*, whose story was explored in the final

[184] Elliott, 2009.

chapter that focuses on mattering in the wider world, feels as though she matters after many members of her high school begin to engage with her in online spaces and wear T-shirts in support of her campaign to become prom queen. Meanwhile, in the space of community, Julie in *Rosemary and Juliet* is shown that she matters when she connects with an elder in the queer community who helps her retain communication with her girlfriend after their relationship becomes long distance. The same is true of the texts in the first chapter, which focused on mattering within the family; Pen in *Girl Mans Up* spends the majority of the novel believing the does not matter to her family until she is able to move in with her older brother, Johnny, who affirms and supports her sexuality, involves her in household decisions and gives her both the affection and autonomy that she was denied by her parents. Across each of the predefined spaces sapphic characters can be shown that they matter through acceptance, inclusion, and access to the queer community through personal relationships with other queer people and queer representation in areas of their lives such as literature and music.

Another finding that is consistent across the three spaces is that being shown that they matter has a positive impact on each character's self-regard, though this does manifest differently across the three spaces. Within the family mattering allows teens to be their authentic selves around their loved ones without concealing their sexuality. Within community it allows them to accept their sexuality and overcome feelings of internalised homophobia. Within the wider world mattering gives sapphic teens the confidence to engage in activism and push back against homophobia within the spaces they navigate in their lives, the

latter of which is in line with Shelton's existing scholarship on queer youth and activism.[185] Similarly, across all three spaces teens being shown that they do not matter has a negative impact on each character's self-regard. Sapphic characters are shown that they do not matter through prejudiced behaviour that targets their sexuality, ranging from verbal homophobia abuse to physical abuse, ejection from spaces (including private spaces, such as the family home, and public spaces, such as a high school prom), and isolation from both the queer community and romantic relationships with other sapphic characters. While the characters in each space endure distress at the discovery that they do not matter within an important space in their lives, the negative impact this has on them varies from space to space and there are examples of many of the behaviours that Meyer identified as responses to minority stress.[186] Within the family the negative impact sapphic characters experience ranges from concealment, depersonalisation and suicidal ideation, and severing ties with family. Within the space of community characters experience isolation, concealment and internalised homophobia as a result of not mattering. Meanwhile, in the wider world characters engage in concealment and withdrawal behaviours (for example, distancing themselves from others within the space and believing that they will remain an outsider because of their sexuality). This is an important consideration for not only sapphic stories but queer YA as a whole as it provides evidence of how future works can portray positive representations of mattering in hopeful texts. The importance of this is stressed in Lewis' work and these types of texts contribute to the body of literature that make

[185] Shelton, 2008.
[186] Meyer, 2003.

up Lee, Cart and Jenkins, and Jones' progressive categories of queer YA texts, which allow real world readers to explore worlds in which sapphic characters can be accepted and loved by their families, communities, and the wider world, even if their stories began with homophobia and rejection from these key spaces in their lives.[187]

An additional finding I have discovered through looking at how mattering works is that mattering could be hierarchical. It is possible that mattering in one space diminishes the negative impact of not mattering in another space, as seen with Romey in *Rosemary and Juliet* and Triinu in *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before*, who are both ostracised within their communities but suffer less of a negative impact than other characters because they are shown that they matter to their families. Additionally, not mattering to a certain space diminishes the positive impact that mattering in other spaces has, as seen in *Keeping You a Secret*, where mattering to her girlfriend's family and to her friends cannot completely diminish the loneliness and hopelessness Holland feels because she does not matter to her family. This idea of mattering as hierarchical is important to think about in future scholarship about both literature and real life as it provides opportunities to explore mattering as hierarchical in other areas of literature that centre minority groups - including race, disability, and other queer identities - as well as the ways a hierarchy to mattering might impact real world minority groups

[187] Lewis, 2015; Lee, 1998; Cart and Jenkins, 2006; and Jones, 2012.

and could be considered alongside existing sociological work - such as Meyer's - to mitigate the harm of minority stress.[188]

In addition to mattering as hierarchical there are a number of further possibilities for future research as a result of this study. There are opportunities for research into mattering in other areas of both young adult and diverse literature, with scope for mattering in literature to become a diverse area of study. Key findings from this research outline the important role the external spaces of family, community and the wider world have on sapphic characters' identity formation but there are other external forces that could become the focus of future work, including romantic relationships. Staying within the focus of mattering, applying Meyer's theory of minority stress to racially diverse narratives, novels that feature disabled protagonists, or stories that centre transgender characters are further areas for future study.

This research looks specifically at sapphic protagonists rather than all queer identities as one singular group and acknowledges intersecting identities where relevant, but prioritises sexuality over gender, race, religion, disability, or socioeconomic status due to the limited scope of the project. Additionally, even within the existing body of sapphic YAL, this project focuses on traditionally published novels published within the USA between 1990-2020, excluding other narrative formats such as short stories or poetry, self-published work, or work published outside of the USA. As well as providing a foundation for future work on

[188] Meyer, 2003.

mattering in literature, the aim is that this research will provide opportunities for further research into other facets of sapphic YAL, which the inclusion of the data in Appendix One and Two may contribute to. This database of 30 years of traditionally published sapphic YA is a springboard for both quantitative and qualitative studies and provides groundwork for the creation of a smaller corpus for further research that could build on key events in fictional sapphic teenagers' lives that were touched on but not deeply explored within this project, such as coming out or applying to university.

To conclude, the findings of this research highlight the key role mattering plays in the lives of sapphic characters and the important influence the external spaces of family, community, and the wider world has on these protagonists, aligning with Walczak's previously referenced assertion of the inextricable link between identity and power in YAL.[189] Characters who are shown they matter experience higher levels of self-regard and confidence, and form meaningful relationships both inside and outside of the queer community. Conversely, characters who are shown that they do not matter experience internalised homophobia, suicidal ideation, and withdrawal from key spaces in their lives. My findings on the impact of mattering or not mattering in literature correlate to existing sociological work on how mattering impacts real world queer youth, providing a link between sapphic characters and the real world sapphic youth who read these stories, Garden's 'invisible reader'.[190]

[189] Walczak, 2014.
[190] Garden, 2000.

Bibliography

Abowitz, Kathleen, 'Reclaiming Community', *Educational Theory*, 49 (2005), 143 – 159 <10.1111/j.1741-5446.1999.00143.x>

ACLU, 'McMillen v. Itawamba County School District', *ACLU*, 2010 <https://www.aclu.org/cases/fulton-ms-prom-discrimination> [accessed 6 June 2023]

ALA, 'The Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature', *American Library Association,* 2007 http://www.ala.org/yalsa/printz [Accessed 2 June 2022]

Allport, Gordon W., *The Nature of Prejudice* (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954)

Appleyard, J. A., *Becoming a Reader: The Experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Avery, Gillian, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621-1922* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995)

Baumeister, Roy F. and Mark R. Leary, 'The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation', *Psychological Bulletin*, 117.3 (1995), 497-529 <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1995-29052-001> [accessed 2 November 2022]

Bentley, Mary K., 'The Body of Evidence: Dangerous Intersections between Development and Culture in the Lives of Adolescent Girls' in *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity* ed. by Sharon R. Mazzarella and Norma Odom Pecora (New York City, NY: P. Lang, 1999), pp. 209-224

Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner, 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry,* 24.2 (1998), 547-566 <https://philpapers.org/rec/BERSIP> [accessed 22 September 2022]

Bettez, Silvia Cristina and Kathy Hytten, 'Community Building in Social Justice Work: A Critical Approach', *A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, 49.1 (2013), 45-66 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2012.749478>

Blackburn, Mollie V., Caroline T. Clark and Emily A. Nemeth, 'Examining Queer

Elements and Ideologies in LGBT-Themed Literature: What Queer Literature Can Offer Young Adult Readers', *Journal of Literacy Research*, 47.1 (2015), 11-48 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X15568930>

Boock, Paula, *Dare Truth or Promise* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books For Young Readers, 1999)

Bradway, Tyler and Elizabeth Freeman, *Queer Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022)

Brend, Olive, 'Queering Quake Lake: Liminal and Historical Geology in The Miseducation of Cameron Post', *Summit*, 4 (2023), 13-38

Bowles-Reyer, Amy, 'Becoming a Woman in the 1970s: Female Adolescent Sexual Identity and Popular Literature' in *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity* ed. by Sharon R. Mazzarella and Norma Odom Pecora (New York, NY: P. Lang, 1999)

Butler, Judith, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003)

Butler, Judith, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2004)

Cart, Michael, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism,* 4th edn (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2022)

—— 'The Value of Young Adult Literature', *American Library Association*, 2008 <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines/whitepapers/yalit> [Accessed 22 December 2023]

Cart, Michael and Christine A. Jenkins, *The Heart Has its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969-2004* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006)

Coats, Karen, 'Young Adult Literature: Growing Up, In Theory', in *Handbook on Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. by Shelby A. Wolf and others (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2010), pp. 315-329

Cobigo, Virginie, Lynn Martin and Rawad Mcheiech, 'Understanding Community', *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 5.181 (2016), 181-203 <10.15353/cjds.v5i4.318>

Compton, Lacy Ann, 'A Girl's Best Friend? Implications of Friendship on Female Self-identity in Young Adult Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Texas State University-San Marcos, 2008)

Cook, Jennifer, Sharon Rostosky and Ellen Riggle, 'Gender Role Models in

Fictional Novels for Emerging Adult Lesbians', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 17.2 (2013), 150-66 <doi:10.1080/10894160.2012.691416>

Crisp, Thomas, 'From Romance to Magical Realism: Limits and Possibilities in Gay Adolescent Fiction', *Children's Literature in Education*, 40 (2009), 333–348 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-009-9089-9>

Cummins, June, 'Overlooked to Looking Over: Lesbians in Children's and Young Adult Literature', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 19.4 (2015), 401-405 <10.1080/10894160.2015.1059728>

Cuseo, Allan A., *Homosexual Characters in YA Novels: A Literary Analysis, 1969-198*2 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1992)

Danforth, E., *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (New York, NY: Balzer + Bray, 2012)

De Ridder, Sander and Frederik Dhaenens, 'Coming Out as Popular Media Practice: The Politics of Queer Youth Coming Out on YouTube', *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 6.2 (2019), 43–60 <https://doi.org/10.11116/digest.6.2.3>

Deschamps, David and Bennett L. Singer, *LGBTQ Stats: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer People by the Numbers* (New York City, NY: The New Press, 2017)

Driver, Susan, *Queer Youth Cultures* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008)

Elliott, Gregory, *Family Matters: The Importance of Mattering to Family in Adolescence* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)

Fisher, Helen H., 'Family Life in Children's Literature', *The Elementary School Journal*, 50.9 (1950), 516-20 http://www.jstor.org/stable/999059 [accessed 2 October 2023]

Garden, Nancy, *The Year They Burned the Books* (New York City, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999)

—— 'Writing for the Invisible Reader', *Virginia Tech University Libraries*, Winter 2000 https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/winter00/garden.html [accessed May 26 2023]

Gillingham, Erica, 'Lesbian Love Stories in Young Adult Literature and Graphic Memoirs: Narrative Constructions of Same-Sex Relationships Between Female Characters Across Genre and Form' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Roehampton, 2017)

Girard, M.E., *Girl Mans Up* (London, UK: HarperCollins, 2016)

Goldstein, Lisa and Molly Phelan, 'Are You There God? It's Me, Manga: Manga as an Extension of Young Adult Literature', *Young Adult Library Services*, 7.4 (2009)

Gray, Mary L., Colin R. Johnson and Brian J. Gilley, *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies* (New York City, NY: New York University Press, 2016)

Harris, Jack, 'The Power of Queer Representation in the Media', *Audre Lorde Writing Prize* (2018) <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/wollstonecraftaward/25> [accessed 7 February 2023]

Hatzenbuehler, Mark L. and John E. Pachankis, 'Stigma and Minority Stress as Social Determinants of Health Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth: Research Evidence and Clinical Implications', *Pediatric Clinics of North America*, 63.6 (2016), 985-997 <doi:10.1016/j.pcl.2016.07.003>

Inness, Sherrie A., *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity, and the Representation of Lesbian Life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997)

Jan, Isabelle, *On Children's Literature* (New York City, NY: Schoken Books, 1974)

Jiménez, Laura M., 'Representations in Award-Winning LGBTQ Young Adult Literature from 2000–2013', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 19.4 (2015), 406-422 <10.1080/10894160.2015.1057795>

Johnson, Leah, *You Should See Me in a Crown* (New York City, NY: Scholastic Press, 2020)

Jones, Caroline E., 'From Homoplot to Progressive Novel: Lesbian Experience and Identity in Contemporary Young Adult Novels', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 37.1 (2013), 74-93 <https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.2013.0003>

—— ''Jesus Loves Me, This I Know': Finding a Rainbow God in Contemporary Adolescent Literature', *Children's Literature in Education*, 43 (2012), 223–241 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10583-011-9148-x> [accessed 25 February 2022]

Juhasz, Suzanne, *Reading from the Heart: Women, Literature, and the Search for True Love* (New York City, NY: Viking, 1994)

Keys, Wendy, Elizabeth Marshall and Barbara Pini, 'Representations of Rural

Lesbian Lives in Young Adult Fiction', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 38.3 (2017), 354-364 <10.1080/01596306.2017.1306981>

Kidd, Kenneth, '"Not Censorship but Selection": Censorship and/as Prizing', *Children's Literature in Education*, 40 (2009), 197-216 <10.1007/s10583-008-9078-4>

Kim, Seohyun and Israel Fisseha Feyissa, 'Conceptualizing "Family" and the Role of "Chosen Family" within the LGBTQ+ Refugee Community: A Text Network Graph Analysis', *Healthcare (Basel)*, 9.4 (2021), 369 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8066340/> [accessed 21 September 2023]

Lambert, Nathaniel and others, 'To Belong Is to Matter: Sense of Belonging Enhances Meaning in Life', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39.11 (2013), 1418-1427 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213499186>

Lee, Vanessa Wayne, '"Unshelter Me": The Emerging Fictional Adolescent Lesbian', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 23.3 (1998), 152-159 <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.1237>

Lewis, Cady, 'How Far Have We Come? A Critical Look at LGBTQ Identity in Young Adult Literature', *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, 30.2 (2015), 53-57 <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.2072>

Lukenbill, W. Bernard, 'Family Systems in Contemporary Adolescent Novels: Implications for Behavior Information Modeling', *Family Relations*, 30.2 (1981), 219-27 <https://doi.org/10.2307/584134>

Maclean, Judy, *Rosemary and Juliet* (New York City, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2004)

MacQueen, K. M., and others, 'What is Community? An Evidence-based Definition for Participatory Public Health', *American Journal of Public Health*, 91.12 (2001), 1929-38 <doi:10.2105/ajph.91.12.1929>

Mansfield, Katherine, 'Queer Theory Perspectives on Schools as Organizations' in *The SAGE Handbook of School Organization* ed. by Michael Connolly, David H. Eddy-Spicer, Chris James and Sharon D. Kruse (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2019), pp. 340-358

Mazzarella, Sharon R. and Norma Odom Pecora, *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity* (New York City, NY: P. Lang, 1999)

McCallum, Robyn, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity* (New York City, NY: Garland, 1999)

McCallum, Robyn and John Stephens, ‘Ideology and Children's Books’, in *Handbook on Research on Children’s and Young Adult Literature*, ed. by Shelby A. Wolf and others, (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2010), pp. 359-371

Meigs, Cornelia, *A Critical History of Children’s Literature* (New York City, NY: Macmillan, 1953)

Meyer, Ilan, ‘Prejudice, Social Stress, and Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: Conceptual Issues and Research Evidence’, *Psychological Bulletin,* 129.5 (2003), 674-697 <doi:10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674>

Meyer, Ilan and Laura Dean, ‘Internalized Homophobia, Intimacy, and Sexual Behavior Among Gay and Bisexual Men’, in *Stigma and Sexual Orientation: Understanding Prejudice Against Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals* ed. by GM Herek (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998)

Moore, John Noell, *Interpreting Young Adult Literature: Literary Theory in the Secondary Classroom* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1997)

Mullins, Hilary, *The Cat Came Back* (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1993)

Muñoz, José Esteban, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York City, NY: New York University Press, 2009)

Nelms, Beth and Ben Nelms, ‘Young Adult Literature: Ties That Bind: Families in YA Books’, *The English Journal*, 73.7 (1984), 98-101 <https://doi.org/10.2307/817830>

Norbury, Kate, ’’On Some Precipice in a Dream’: Representations of Guilt in Contemporary Young Adult Gay and Lesbian Fiction’, *International Research in Children's Literature*, 5.2 (2012), 184-194 <https://doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2012.0062>

Peters, Julie Anne, *Keeping You a Secret* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 2005)

Phillips, Leah, *Female Heroes in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction: Reframing Myths of Adolescent Girlhood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023)

Raifman, J., and others, ‘Difference-in-Differences Analysis of the Association Between State Same-Sex Marriage Policies and Adolescent Suicide Attempts’, *JAMA Pediatrics,* 171:4 (2017), 350–356 <doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.4529>

Reimer, Mavis, ‘Traditions of the School Story’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Children’s Literature*, ed. by M. O. Grenby and Andrea Immel (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 452-484

Russell, S. T., and others, 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Adolescent School Victimization: Implications for Young Adult Health and Adjustment', *Journal of School Health*, 81 (2011), 223-230 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2011.00583.x>

Ryan, Caitlin, and others, 'Family Acceptance in Adolescence and the Health of LGBT Young Adults', *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 23 (2010), 205-213 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6171.2010.00246.x>

Savin-Williams, Ritch C. and Eric M. Dubé, 'Parental Reactions to Their Child's Disclosure of a Gay/Lesbian Identity', *Family Relations*, 47.1 (1998), 7-13 <https://doi.org/10.2307/584845>

Saxey, Esther, *Homoplot: The Coming-Out Story and Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity* (New York City, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2008)

—— 'Lesbian Bastard Heroes: The Uses of Illegitimacy for Modern Lesbian Fiction and Identity', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 16.1 (2005), 33-51 <10.1080/09574040500045797>

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990)

Shealy, Daniel, *Little Women at 150* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2022)

Shelton, Jama, 'Redefining Realities through Self-Representational Performance' in *Queer Youth Cultures* ed. by Susan Driver (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), pp. 69-87

Smith, Elva Sophronia, *The History of Children's Literature* (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 1980)

Snyder, Janelle M., 'Representation of LGBTQ Characters in 2019 Young Adult Literature' (unpublished thesis, University of Northern Iowa, 2020), in Database of UNI ScholarWorks https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/1531 [accessed 27 January 2022]

Spencer, Eleanor and Jade Dillon Craig, *Family in Children's and Young Adult Literature* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2023)

Stebbins, Robert, *Sociology: The Study of Society* (New York city, NY: Harper and Row, 1987)

Stetz-Waters, Karelia, *Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before* (Portland, OR: Ooligan Press, 2014)

Suico, Terri, and others, ‘Exploring Trends in a Growing Field: A Content Analysis of Young Adult Literature Scholarly Book Publications 2000-2020’, *English Education*, 55.2 (2023), 116-135 <https://doi.org/10.58680/ee202332216>

The Trevor Project, *Issues Impacting LGBTQ Youth Polling Presentation January 2023* (West Hollywood, CA: The Trevor Project, 2023) <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Issues-Impacting-LGBTQ-Youth-MC-Poll_Public-2.pdf> [accessed 23 June 2023]

Thomas, P. L., Thomas Crisp and Suzanne M. Knezek, ‘"I Just Don't See Myself Here": Challenging Conversations about LGBTQ Adolescent Literature’, *The English Journal*, 99.3 (2010) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40503487> [accessed 22 November 2023]

Thomson, Jack, *Understanding Teenagers’ Reading* (Asbury, IA: Nichols Publishing Company, 1987)

Tilsen, Julie, *Therapeutic Conversations with Queer Youth: Transcending Homonormativity and Constructing Preferred Identities* (Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013)

Trites, Roberta Seelinger, ‘Material Feminism, Adolescent ‘Becoming,’ and Libba Bray’s ‘Beauty Queens’’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 36.2 (2017), 379–400 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44785312> [accessed 14 May 2024]

—— ‘Queer Discourse and the Young Adult Novel: Repression and Power in Gay Male Adolescent Literature’, *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, 23.3 (1998), 143–151 <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.1203>

Van Bergen, Diana D., and others, ‘Parental Responses to Coming out by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Pansexual, or Two-Spirited People across Three Age Cohorts’, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 83 (2021), 1116-1133 <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12731>

Walczak, Laurie Barth, ‘The Ordinary Trip: Heteronormativity and Homophobia in Young Adult Literature from 1969 to 2009’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014), in Database of UWM Digital Commons <https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/856/> [accessed 3 February 2022]

Waters, Martha, ‘Gender’s Role in the Expression of Friendship in Young Adult Literature’ (unpublished thesis, University of North Carolina, 2014)

Weinmeyer, Richard, ‘The Decriminalization of Sodomy in the United States’, *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 16.11 (2014), 916-922 <10.1001/virtualmentor.2014.16.11.hlaw1-1411>

Western States Center, ‘2: Ballot Measure 9’, *No On 9 Remembered*, 2022

<https://noon9remembered.org/stories/ballot-measure-9/> [accessed 2 May 2023]

Wickens, Corrine, 'Codes, Silences, and Homophobia: Challenging Normative Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary LGBTQ Young Adult Literature', *Children's Literature in Education*, 42 (2011), 148–164 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-011-9129-0>

Wolf, Shelby Anne and Shirley Brice Heath, 'The Braid of Literature: Children's Worlds of Reading', *Children's Literature in Education*, 25 (1994), 63–65 <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02355346>

Woodruffe-Burton, Helen and Sam Bairstow, 'Countering Heteronormativity: Exploring the Negotiation of Butch Lesbian Identity in the Organizational Setting', *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 28.6 (2013), 359–374, cited in Katherine Mansfield, 'Queer Theory Perspectives on Schools as Organizations' in *The SAGE Handbook of School Organization* ed. by Michael Connolly, David H. Eddy-Spicer, Chris James and Sharon D. Kruse (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2019), pp. 340-358

Young, Patricia Jean, 'Measure 9: Oregon's 1992 Anti-Gay Initiative' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Portland State University, 1997) in Portland State University Library <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds/6282/> [accessed 3 July 2023]

Appendix One

The below table is a comprehensive database on traditionally published sapphic YAL, published in the USA between 1990-2020 and includes the title, author, publication year, original publisher, and genre of each text.

Title	Author	Year Published	Original Publisher	Genre
Southbound	Taylor, Sheila Ortiz	1990	Naiad Press	Contemporary
Berrigan	McConnell, Vicki P.	1990	Naiad Press	Contemporary
The Dear One	Woodson, Jacqueline	1991	Delacorte	Contemporary
Lark in the Morning	Garden, Nancy	1991	Farrar Straus Giroux	Contemporary
Bastard Out of Carolina	Allison, Dorothy	1992	Dutton Books	Contemporary
We're Not Alone	Isensee, Rik	1992	Lavender Press	Contemporary
The Cat Came Back	Mullins, Hilary	1993	Naiad Press	Contemporary
Chelsea Girls	Myles, Eileen	1994	Black Sparrow Press	Contemporary
Dive	Donovan, Stacey	1994	Dutton Books	Contemporary
Deliver Us from Evie	Kerr, M.E.	1994	HarperCollins	Contemporary
Stirfry	Donoghue, Emma	1994	HarperCollins	Contemporary
Good Moon Rising	Garden, Nancy	1996	Farrar Straus Giroux	Contemporary
The House You Pass on the Way	Woodson, Jacqueline	1997	Delacorte Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Desire Lines	Gantos, Jack	1997	Farrar Straus Giroux	Contemporary

The Year of Freaking Out	Walker, Sarah	1997	Pan MacMillan	Contemporary
Hood	Donoghue, Emma	1998	Alyson Books	Contemporary
Tomorrow Wendy	Stoehr, Shelley	1998	Delacorte Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Summer Sisters	Blume, Judy	1998	Delacorte Press	Contemporary
Allison	Strelkoff, Tatiana	1998	O'Brien Press	Contemporary
Girl Walking Backwards	Williams, Bett	1998	St Martin's Griffin	Contemporary
Jerome	Taylor, William	1999	Alyson Books	Contemporary
Alice on the Outside	Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds	1999	Atheneum	Contemporary
The Year They Burned the Books	Garden, Nancy	1999	Farrar Straus Giroux	Contemporary
Dare Truth or Promise	Boock, Paula	1999	HMH Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
November Ever After	Torres, Laura	1999	Holiday House	Contemporary
Name Me Nobody	Yamanaka, Lois-Ann	1999	Hyperion	Contemporary
Hard Love	Wittlinger, Ellen	1999	Simon & Schuster	Contemporary
A Year of Full Moons	Arnold, Madelyn	2000	St Martin's Press	Contemporary
Out of the Shadows	Hines, Sue	2000	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Other Girls	Ayres, Diane	2000	Nocturnum Press	Contemporary
Empress of the World	Ryan, Sara	2001	Viking Juvenile	Contemporary
Finding H.F.	Watts, Julia	2001	Alyson Books	Contemporary
Gravel Queen	Benduhn, Tea	2003	Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing	Contemporary
I've Known Since I Was Eight	Glasser, Sophie	2003	iUniverse	Contemporary
Kissing Kate	Myracle, Lauren	2003	Dutton Juvenile	Contemporary
Sugar Rush	Burchill, Julie	2004	Macmillan	Contemporary
Good Girls Don't	Hennessy, Claire	2004	Poolbeg Press	Contemporary

The Burmudez Triangle	Johnson, Maureen	2004	Razorbill	Contemporary
Rosemary and Juliet	MacLean, Judy	2004	Harrington Park Press	Contemporary
Orphea Proud	Wyeth, Sharon Dennis	2004	Delacorte Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Head Games	Fredericks, Mariah	2004	Atheneum	Contemporary
Country Girl, City Girl	Jahn-Clough, Lisa	2004	HMH Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Realm of Possibility	Levithan, David	2004	Alfred A. Knopf	Contemporary
Keeping You a Secret	Peters, Julie Anne	2005	Little, Brown	Contemporary
Far from Xanadu	Peters, Julie Anne	2005	Megan Tingley Books	Contemporary
The Will of the Empress	Pierce, Tamora	2005	Scholastic	SFF
Punk Like Me	Glass, JD	2006	Bold Strokes Books	Contemporary
Pretty Little Liars	Shepard, Sara	2006	HarperCollins	Contemporary
Wolfcry	Atwater-Rhodes, Amelia	2006	Delacorte	SFF
Tripping to Somewhere	Reisz, Kristopher	2006	Simon Pulse	SFF
I Kiss Girls	Harris, Gina	2007	Prizm	Contemporary
Split Screen	Hartinger, Brent	2007	HarperCollins	Contemporary
The Rules for Hearts	Ryan, Sara	2007	Viking Juvenile	Contemporary
Among Other Things, I've Taken Up Smoking	Sweeney, Aoibheann	2007	Penguin	Contemporary
Touching Snow	Felin, M. Sindy	2007	Atheneum	Contemporary
Flawless	Shepard, Sara	2007	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Perfect	Shepard, Sara	2007	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Down to the Bone	Dole, Mayra Lazara	2008	HarperTeen	Contemporary
M+O 4EVR	Hegamin, Tonya Cherie	2008	Clarion Books	Contemporary

My Tiki Girl	McMahon, Jennifer	2008	Dutton	Contemporary
The Questions Within	Shaeffer, Teresa	2008	Ransom Publishing	Contemporary
Unbelievable	Shepard, Sara	2008	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Wicked	Shepard, Sara	2008	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Love & Lies: Marisol's Story	Wittlinger, Ellen	2008	Simon and Schuster	Contemporary
Ash	Lo, Malinda	2009	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	SFF
Santa Olivia	Carey, Jacqueline	2009	Grand Central Publishing	SFF
Killer	Shepard, Sara	2009	HarperTeen	Contemporary
My Invented Life	Bjorkman, Lauren	2009	Henry Holt	Contemporary
Crash Into Me	Borris, Albert	2009	Simon Pulse	Contemporary
Wildthorn	Eagland, Jane	2009	Picador	Historical
Rage: A Love Story	Peters, Julie Anne	2009	Knopf Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Pages For You	Brownrigg, Sylvia	2001	Farrar, Straus and Giroux	Contemporary
Pink	Wilkinson, Lili	2009	Allen & Unwin	Contemporary
Hidden Voices	Lowery Collins, Pat	2009	Candlewick Press	Historical
The Side Door	Donley, Jan	2010	Spinsters Ink	Contemporary
A Love Story Starring My Dead Best Friend	Horner, Emily	2010	Dial Books	Contemporary
Torn	Lehman, Amber	2010	Closet Case Press	Contemporary
Scars	Rainfield, Cheryl	2010	Westside Books	Contemporary
Very LeFreak	Cohn, Rachel	2010	Knopf Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Beauty Queens	Bray, Libba	2011	Scholastic	Contemporary
Sister Mischief	Goode, Laura	2011	Candlewick Press	Contemporary
She Loves You, She Loves You Not	Peters, Julie Anne	2011	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	Contemporary

Huntress	Lo, Malinda	2011	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	SFF
Giraffe People	Malone, Jill	2012	Bywater Books	Contemporary
Starting From Here	Bigelow, Lisa Jenn	2012	Marshall Cavendish	Contemporary
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Danforth, Emily	2012	Balzer + Bray	Contemporary
Tessa Masterson Will Go to Prom	Franklin, Emily / Halpin, Brendan	2012	Walker Childrens	Contemporary
The Difference Between You and Me	George, Madeleine	2012	Viking Children's	Contemporary
Being Emily	Gold, Rachel	2012	Bella Books	Contemporary
Ask the Passengers	King, A.S.	2012	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Green Ray of the Sun	Suarez, Reinhardt	2012	Pork Chop Productions	Contemporary
Down to the Bone	Lazara Dole, Mayra	2012	Bella Books	Contemporary
Between You and Me	Calin, Marisa	2012	Bloomsbury USA Childrens	Contemporary
37 Things I Love	Magoon, Kekla	2012	Henry Holt & Co BFYR	Contemporary
It's Our Prom	Peters, Julie Anne	2012	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Kiss the Morning Star	Hoole, Elissa Janine	2012	Marshall Cavendish	Contemporary
Silhouette of a Sparrow	Griffin, Molly Beth	2012	Milkweed Editions	Historical
Adaptation	Lo, Malinda	2012	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	SFF
When We Were Good	Sutherland, Suzanne	2013	Sumach Press	Contemporary
Leap	Egloff, Z.	2013	Bywater Books	Contemporary
Girls I've Run Away With	Argo, Rhiannon	2013	Moonshine Press	Contemporary
Fat Angie	Charlton-Trujillo, E.E.	2013	Candlewick Press	Contemporary

If You Could Be Mine	Farizan, Sara	2013	Algonquin Young Readers	Contemporary
The Gravity Between Us	Zimmer, Kristen	2013	Bookouture	Contemporary
Secret City	Watts, Julia	2013	Bella Books	Historical
The Last of Us: American Dream	Druckmann, Neil et al.	2013	Dark Horse Comics	SFF
Pantomime	Lam, Laura	2013	Strange Chemistry	SFF
Inheritance	Lo, Malinda	2013	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	SFF
Great	Benincasa, Sara	2014	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Tell Me Again How a Crush Should Feel	Farizan, Sara	2014	Algonquin Young Readers	Contemporary
Just Girls	Gold, Rachel	2014	Bella Books	Contemporary
Everything Leads to You	LaCour, Nina	2014	Dutton Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
An Unstill Life	Larkindale, Kate	2014	Musa Publishing	Contemporary
Lies My Girlfriend Told Me	Peters, Julie Anne	2014	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Far From You	Sharpe, Tess	2014	Indigo	Contemporary
The Summer I Wasn't Me	Verdi, Jessica	2014	Sourcebooks Fire	Contemporary
Because of Her	Payne, K.E.	2014	Bold Strokes Books	Contemporary
My Best Friend, Maybe	Carter, Caela	2014	Bloomsbury USA Childrens	Contemporary
No One Needs to Know	Grace, Amanda	2014	Flux	Contemporary
Frenemy of the People	Olsen, Nora	2014	Bold Strokes Books	Contemporary
Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before	Stetz-Waters, Karelia	2014	Ooligan Press	Contemporary
The Story Thief	McNally, Shari	2014	Bella Books	Contemporary
Beauty of the Broken	Waters, Tawni	2014	S&S Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Starring Kitty	Stainton, Keris	2014	Catnip Publishing	Contemporary

The Age	Lee, Nancy	2014	McClelland & Stewart	Contemporary
Bow to Me	Julien, G.C.	2014	Baico	Contemporary
Learning to Kiss Girls	Andre, Elizabeth	2014	Tulabella Ruby Press	Contemporary
Everything Chnages	Hale, Samantha	2014	Bold Strokes Books	Contemporary
A Kiss in the Dark	Clarke, Cat	2014	Quercus	Contemporary
Driving Lessons	Hesik, Annameekee	2014	Bold Strokes Boks	Contemporary
Moon at Nine	Ellis, Deborah	2014	Pajama Press	Historical
Lies We Tell Ourselves	Talley, Robin	2014	Harlequin Teen	Historical
Lumberjanes Vol. 1	Watters, Shannon et al.	2014	BOOM Box!	SFF
Serenity Rose: 10 Awkward Years	Alexovich, Aaron	2014	SLG Publishing	SFF
Otherbound	Duyvis, Corinne	2014	Amulet Books	SFF
Afterworlds	Westerfeld, Scott	2014	S&S Books for Young Readers	SFF
Ice Massacre	Warner, Tiana	2014	Rogue Cannon Publishing	SFF
Lindsay, Jo and the Tree of Forever	Frankel, J.S.	2014	Regal Crest Enterprises	SFF
Lindsay Versus the Marauders	Frankel, J.S.	2014	Regal Crest Enterprises	SFF
Under the Lights	Adler, Dahlia	2015	Spencer Hill Contemporary	Contemporary
All of the Above	Dawson, Juno	2015	Hot Key books	Contemporary
Lunaside	Douglas, J.L.	2015	Prizm Books	Contemporary
Unspeakable	Rushton, Abbie	2015	Atom	Contemporary
Crush	Silcox, S.R.	2015	Juggernaut Books Ltd	Contemporary
Trust Me, I'm Trouble	Summer, Mary Elizabeth	2015	Delacorte Press	Contemporary
What We Left Behind	Talley, Robin	2015	Harlequin Teen	Contemporary
Not Otherwise Specified	Moskowitz, Hannah	2015	Simon Pulse	Contemporary

About a Girl	McCarry, Sarah	2015	St Martin's Griffin	Contemporary
Weird Girl and What's His Name	Brothers, Maegan	2015	Three Rooms Press	Contemporary
Vanished	Cooper, E.E.	2015	Katherine Tegen Books	Contemporary
Underneath Everything	Beller Paul, Marcy	2015	Balzer + Bray	Contemporary
Read Me Like a Book	Kessler, Liz	2015	Indigo	Contemporary
The Dark Light	Bell, Julia	2015	Macmillan Children's Books	Contemporary
Femme	Bach, Mette	2015	Lorimer	Contemporary
Summer Confessions	Vroman, Lynn	2015	Untold Press	Contemporary
Clancy of the Undertow	Currie, Christopher	2015	Text Publishing	Contemporary
Unbecoming	Downham, Jenny	2015	David Fickling Books	Contemporary
Out of Order	Lawrence, Casey	2015	Harmony Ink Press	Contemporary
May Day Mine	Croker, Verity	2015	Harmony Ink Press	Contemporary
Stealing Bases	Key, Anne	2015	Harmony Ink Press	Contemporary
Honey Girl	Freeman, Lisa	2015	Sky Pony Press	Historical
Jem and the Holograms Vol 1	Thompson, Kelly	2015	IDW Publishing	SFF
The Next Together	James, Lauren	2015	Walker Books	SFF
Sound	Duncan, Alexandra	2015	Greenwillow Books	SFF
Lizard Radio	Schmatz, Pat	2015	Candlewick Press	SFF
The Big Lie	Mayhew, Julie	2015	Hot Key Books	SFF
Taijiku	Andre, Elizabeth	2015	Less Than Three Press	SFF
The First Twenty	Lavoie, Jennifer	2015	Bold Strokes Books	SFF
Dream Strider	Smith, Lindsay	2015	Roaring Brook Press	SFF

Frail Human Heart	Marriott, Zoe	2015	Walker Books	SFF
Breaking Sky	McCarthy, Cory	2015	Sourcebooks Fire	SFF
Georgia Peaches and Other Forbidden Fruit	Brown, Jaye Robin	2016	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Girl Mans Up	Girard, M.E.	2016	HarperCollins	Contemporary
My Year Zero	Gold, Rachel	2016	Bella Books	Contemporary
You Know Me Well	LaCour, Nina / Levithan, David	2016	St Martin's Griffin	Contemporary
Keeping Her Secret	Nicolas, Sarah	2016	Entangled: Crush	Contemporary
Radio Silence	Oseman, Alice	2016	HarperCollins	Contemporary
Look Both Ways	Cherry, Alison	2016	Delacorte Press	Contemporary
Gravity	Rich, Juliann	2016	Bold Strokes Books	Contemporary
Just Juliet	Reagan, Charlotte	2016	Inkitt	Contemporary
My Year Zero	Gold, Rachel	2016	Bella Books	Contemporary
This Is Where It Ends	Nijkamp, Marieke	2016	Sourcebooks Fire	Contemporary
The Space Between	Teichman, Michelle L.	2016	Ylva Publishing	Contemporary
Gena/Finn	Moskowitz, Hannah / Helgeson, Kat	2016	Chronicle Books	Contemporary
South of Sunshine	Elmendorf, Dana	2016	Albert Whitman	Contemporary
Without Annette	Mason, Jane B.	2016	Scholastic	Contemporary
Radical	Kokie, E.M.	2016	Candlewick Press	Contemporary
Prom and Other Hazards	Sullivan, Jamie	2016	Less Than Three Press	Contemporary
The Buddha of Lightning Peak	Wangmo, Yudron	2016	Sidney Skinner	Contemporary
Keeping Her Secret	Nicolas, Sarah	2016	Entangled Crush	Contemporary
Under Threat	Stevenson, Robin	2016	Orca Books	Contemporary
A Love That Disturbs	Sharif, Medeia	2016	Evernight Teen	Contemporary

Songs That Sound Like Blood	Thomas, Jared	2016	Magabala Books	Contemporary
Order in the Court	Lawrence, Casey	2016	Harmony Ink Press	Contemporary
Here's the Thing	O'Beirne, Emily	2016	Ylva Publishing	Contemporary
Before	Payne. K.E.	2016	Bold Strokes Books	Contemporary
18 Months	Boyette, Samantha	2016	Bold Strokes Books	Contemporary
Points of Departure	O'Beirne, Emily	2016	Ylva Publishing	Contemporary
Star Struck	McLachlan, Jenny	2016	Bloomsbury	Contemporary
Ask Me How I Got Here	Heppermann, Christine	2016	Greenwillow	Contemporary
Ask Me How I Got Here	Heppermann, Christine	2016	Greenwillow Books	Contemporary
Unicorn Tracks	Ember, Julia	2016	Harmony Ink Press	SFF
Marian	Lyons, Ella	2016	Harmony Ink Press	Historical
Princeless, Vol. 1	Whitley, Jeremy	2016	Action Lab Entertainment	SFF
Trish Trash, Vol. 1	Abel, Jessica	2016	Super Genius	SFF
Labyrinth Lost	Córodva, Zoraida	2016	Sourcebooks Fire	SFF
Of Fire and Stars	Coulthurst, Audrey	2016	Balzer + Bray	SFF
The Last Beginning	James, Lauren	2016	Walker Books	SFF
Not Your Sidekick	Lee, C.B.	2016	Duet Books	SFF
As I Descended	Talley, Robin	2016	HarperTeen	SFF
Bleeding Earth	Ward, Kaitlin	2016	Adaptive Books	SFF
The Abyss Surrounds Us	Skrutskie, Emily	2016	Flux	SFF
The Last Beginning	James, Lauren	2016	Walker Books	SFF
Labyrinth Lost	Cordova, Zoraida	2016	Sourcebooks Fire	SFF
The Imposter Queen	Fine, Sarah	2016	Margaret K. McElderry Books	SFF

The Iron Phoenix	Harwell, Rebecca	2016	Bold Strokes Books	SFF
A Darkly Beating Heart	Smith, Lindsay	2016	Roaring Brook Press	SFF
Avenged	Cooper, E.E.	2016	Katherine Tegen Books	SFF
Ice Crypt	Warner, Tiana	2016	Rogue Cannon Publishing	SFF
We Awaken	Lynne, Calista	2016	Harmony Ink Press	SFF
Just Kill Me	Selzer, Adam	2016	Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers	SFF
Ex Wives of Dracula	Kaplan, Georgette	2016	Ylva Publishing	SFF
My Lesbian Experience with Loneliness	Nagata, Kabi	2017	Seven Seas	Contemporary
Goldie Vance, Vol. 3	Larson, Hope	2017	BOOM! Box	Contemporary
Misfit City Vol. 1	Smith, Kirsten	2017	BOOM! Box	Contemporary
I Am Not Okay With This	Forsman, Charles	2017	Fantagraphics	Contemporary
Get It Together, Delilah	Gough, Erin	2017	Chronicle Books LLC	Contemporary
How to Make a Wish	Herring Blake, Ashley	2017	HMH Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Meg & Linus	Nowinski, Hanna	2017	Swoon Reads	Contemporary
It's Not Like It's a Secret	Sugiura, Misa	2017	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Queens of Geek	Wilde, Jen	2017	Swoon Reads	Contemporary
How to Make a Wish	Herring Blake, Ashley	2017	HMH Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Our Own Private Universe	Talley, Robin	2017	Harlequin Teen	Contemporary
10 Things I Can See from Here	Mac, Carrie	2017	Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
A Line in the Dark	Lo, Malinda	2017	Dutton Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Upside of Unrequited	Albertalli, Becky	2017	Balzer + Bray	Contemporary

We Are Okay	LaCour, Nina	2017	Dutton Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Gallery of Unfinished Girls	Karcz, Lauren	2017	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Dress Codes for Small Towns	Stevens, Courtney C.	2017	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Echo After Echo	Capetta, A.R.	2017	Candlewick Press	Contemporary
Little & Lion	Colbert, Brandy	2017	Little, Brown	Contemporary
Like Water	Podos, Rebecca	2017	Balzer + Bray	Contemporary
The Nowhere Girls	Reed, Amy	2017	Simon Pulse	Contemporary
The You I've Never Known	Hopkins, Ellen	2017	Margaret K. McElderry Books	Contemporary
Future Leaders of Nowhere	O'Beirne, Emily	2017	Ylva Publishing	Contemporary
Grrrls on the Side	Pack, Carrie	2017	Duet Books	Contemporary
Kaleidoscope Song	Benwell, Fox	2017	Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Wishbones	Macgregor, Virginia	2017	HQ Young Adult	Contemporary
Rough Patch	Markotic, Nicole	2017	Arsenal Pulp Press	Contemporary
I Hate Everyone But You	Dunn, Gaby / Raskin, Allison	2017	Wednesday Books	Contemporary
Riptide Summer	Freeman, Lisa	2017	Sky Pony Press	Contemporary
All the Ways to Here	O'Beirne, Emily	2017	Ylva Publishing	Contemporary
Top Ten	Cotugno, Katie	2017	Balzer + Bray	Contemporary
Tell it to the Moon	Curham, Siobhan	2017	Walker Books	Contemporary
Beulah Land	Stewart, Nancy	2017	Duet Books	Contemporary
Infamous	Stowe, Allison	2017	Genz Publishing	Contemporary
Girls Like Me	Packebush, Nina	2017	Bedazzled Ink Press	Contemporary
Mirror Mirror	Delevingne, Cara	2017	Trapeze	Contemporary
Little Wrecks	Miller, Meredith	2017	HarperCollins	Contemporary
Girlhood	Clarke, Cat	2017	Quercus	Contemporary
Like Other Girls	Hennessy, Claire	2017	Hot Key Books	Contemporary

The Space Between	Grehan, Meg	2017	Little Island Books	Contemporary
That Inevitable Victorian Thing	Johnston, E.K.	2017	Dutton Books for Young Readers	Historical
The Pearl Thief	Wein, Elizabeth	2017	Disney Hyperion	Historical
Things a Bright Girl Can Do	Nicholls, Sally	2017	Andersen	Historical
The Once and Future Queen	Knave, Adam P.	2017	Dark Horse Publishing	SFF
Girls Made of Snow and Glass	Bashardoust, Melissa	2017	Flatiron Books	SFF
Dreadnaught	Daniels, April	2017	Diversion Publishing	SFF
Sovereign	Daniels, April	2017	Diversion Publishing	SFF
The Edge of the Abyss	Skrutskie, Emily	2017	Flux	SFF
The Seafarer's Kiss	Ember, Julia	2017	Duet Books	SFF
Enchanters	Bradshaw, K.F.	2017	Wishbox Press	SFF
Daughter of the Burning City	Foody, Amanda	2017	Harlequin Teen	SFF
The Wishing Heart	Welker, J.C.	2017	Entangled Teen	SFF
Sovereign	Daniels, April	2017	Diversion Publishng	SFF
Girls Made of Snow and Glass	Bashardoust, Melissa	2017	Flatiron Books	SFF
Ida	Evans, Alison	2017	Bonnier Publishing	SFF
The Cursed Queen	Fine, Sarah	2017	Margaret K. McElderry Books	SFF
Monster	Grant, Michael	2017	Katherine Tegen Books	SFF
Jane, Unlimited	Cashore, Kristin	2017	Kathy Dawson Books	SFF
Spellbook of the Lost and Found	Fowley-Doyle, Moira	2017	RHCP Digital	SFF
Down Among the Sticks and Bones	McGuire, Seanan	2017	Tor.com	SFF
Island of Exiles	Cameron, Erica	2017	Entangled Teen	SFF

Sea of Strangers	Cameron, Erica	2017	Entangled Teen	SFF
Venturess	Cornwell, Betsy	2017	Clarion Books	SFF
Leah on the Offbeat	Albertalli, Becky	2018	HarperCollins	Contemporary
People Like Us	Mele, Dana	2018	G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Summer of Jordi Perez (and the Best Burger in Los Angeles)	Spalding, Amy	2018	Sky Pony Press	Contemporary
Girl Made of Stars	Herring Blake, Ashley	2018	HMH Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Let's Talk About Love	Kann, Claire	2018	Swoon Reads	Contemporary
Leah on the Offbeat	Albertalli, Leah	2018	HarperCollins	Contemporary
The Bright Siders	Wilde, Jen	2018	Swoon Reads	Contemporary
Dear Rachel Maddow	Kisner, Adrienne	2018	Feiwel & Friends	Contemporary
Pulp	Talley, Robin	2018	Harlequin Teen	Contemporary
Ship It	Lundin, Britta	2018	Disney Hyperion	Contemporary
I Was Born for This	Oseman, Alice	2018	Harper Collins Children's Books	Contemporary
The Art of Escaping	Callahan, Eric	2018	Amberjack Publishing	Contemporary
Lizzie	Ius, Dawn	2018	Simon Pulse	Contemporary
This is What it Feels Like	Barrow, Rebecca	2018	HarperTeen	Contemporary
The Last to Let Go	Smith, Amber	2018	Margaret K. McElderry Books	Contemporary
Nothing Happened	Horton Booth, Molly	2018	Disney Hyperion	Contemporary
Final Draft	Redgate, Riley	2018	Harry N. Abrams	Contemporary
Love & Other Carnivorous Plants	Gonsalves, Florence	2018	Little, Brown BFYR	Contemporary
The Last Summer of the Garrett Girls	Spotswood, Jessica	2018	Sourcebooks Fire	Contemporary
Skylarks	Gregory, Karen	2018	Bloomsbury	Contemporary

Snowsisters	Wilinsky, Tom / Sternick, Jen	2018	Duet Books	Contemporary
If I Tell You	Tuckerman, Alicia	2018	Pantera Press	Contemporary
The Handsome Girl & Her Beautiful Boy	Gottfred, B.T.	2018	Henry Holt and Co.	Contemporary
Broken Things	Oliver, Lauren	2018	HarperCollins	Contemporary
Sweethearts	Gilmore, Gemma	2018	NineStar Press	Contemporary
Odd One Out	Stone, Nic	2018	Crown Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Letting Go	Markus, Deborah	2018	Sky Pony Press	Contemporary
Cinders	Bach, Mette	2018	Lorimer	Contemporary
Jilda's Ark	Croker, Verity	2018	Harmony Ink Press	Contemporary
We Are Young	Clarke, Cat	2018	Quercus Children's Books	Contemporary
My Whole Truth	Thrace, Mischa	2018	Flux	Contemporary
Paris Syndrome	Walker, Lisa	2018	HarperCollins	Contemporary
The Pros of Cons	Cherry, Alison / Ribar, Lindsay / Schusterman, Michelle	2018	Scholastic	Contemporary
Sadie	Summers, Courtney	2018	St Martin's Press	Contemporary
Past Tense	Spider, Star	2018	HarperCollins	Contemporary
You're You	Bach, Mette	2018	Lorimer Children & Teens	Contemporary
Goldie Vance Vol. 4	Larson, Hope	2018	BOOM! Box	Historical
The Unbinding of Mary Reade	McNamara, Miriam	2018	Sky Pony Press	Historical
The Spy with the Red Balloon	Locke, Katherine	2018	AW Teen	Historical
Magic to Brew	Ellis, Grace	2018	Image Comics	SFF
Kim Reaper, Vol. 1	Graley, Sarah	2018	Oni Press	SFF
Dread Nation	Ireland, Justina	2018	Balzer + Bray	SFF
Sawkill Girls	Legrand, Claire	2018	Katherine Tegen Books	SFF

Girls of Paper and Fire	Ngan, Natasha	2018	Jimmy Patterson Books	SFF
Reign of the Fallen	Glenn Marsh, Sarah	2018	Razorbill	SFF
Inkmistress	Coulthurst, Audrey	2018	Balzer + Bray	SFF
The Apocalypse of Elena Mendoza	Hutchinson, Shaun David	2018	Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers	SFF
The Brilliant Death	Capetta, A.R.	2018	Viking	SFF
Out of the Blue	Cameron, Sophie	2018	Roaring Brook Press	SFF
Outrun the Wind	Tammi, Elizabeth	2018	Flux	SFF
Summer of Salt	Leno, Katrina	2018	HarperTeen	SFF
The True Queen	Fine, Sarah	2018	Margaret K. McElderry Books	SFF
The Navigator's Touch	Ember, Julia	2018	Duet Books	SFF
Between the Blade and the Heart	Hocking, Amanda	2018	Wednesday Books	SFF
Rule	Goodlett, Ellen	2018	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	SFF
SuperMoon	Swain, H.A.	2018	Feiwel and Friends	SFF
Come to the Rocks	Haws, Christin	2018	NineStar Press	SFF
Contagion	Bowman, Erin	2018	HarperTeen	SFF
The Deepest Roots	Asebedo, Miranda	2018	HarperTeen	SFF
Only the Ocean	Carthew, Natasha	2018	Bloomsbury Children's Books	SFF
Conduit	Bradshaw, K.F.	2018	Wishbox Press	SFF
Lunav	Polish, Jenn	2018	NineStar Press	SFF
The Dark Beneath the Ice	Bérubé, Amelinda	2018	Sourcebooks Fire	SFF
Baker Thief	Arseneault, Claudie	2018	The Kraken Collective	SFF
Pumpkin Heads	Rowell, Rainbow	2019	First Second	Contemporary

Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up with Me	Tamaki, Mariko	2019	First Second	Contemporary
Kiss Number 8	Venable, Colleen	2019	First Second	Contemporary
The Avant-Guards	Usdin, Carly	2019	BOOM! Box	Contemporary
Kings, Queens, and In-Betweens	Boteju, Tanya	2019	S&S Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Meaning of Birds	Brown, Jaye Robin	2019	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Starworld	Coulthurst, Audrey / Garner, Paula	2019	Candlewick Press	Contemporary
Hot Dog Girl	Dugan, Jennifer	2019	Putnam	Contemporary
Her Royal Highness	Hawkins, Rachel	2019	G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Love and Lies of Rukhsana Ali	Khan, Sabina	2019	Scholastic Press	Contemporary
Most Ardently	Mesler-Evans, Susan	2019	Entangled: Embrace	Contemporary
The Stars and the Blackness Between Them	Petrus, Junauda	2019	Dutton Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Princess and the Fangirl	Poston, Ashley	2019	Quirk Books	Contemporary
Tell Me How You Really Feel	Safi, Aminah Mae	2019	Feiwel & Friends	Contemporary
The Grief Keeper	Villasante, Alexandra	2019	G.P. Putnam's Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Going Off Script	Wilde, Jen	2019	Swoon Reads	Contemporary
Orpheus Girl	Rebele-Henry, Brynne	2019	Soho Teen	Contemporary
How It Feels to Float	Fox, Helena	2019	Dial Books	Contemporary
Small Town Hearts	Vale, Lillie	2019	Swoon Reads	Contemporary
The Confusion of Laurel Graham	Kisner, Adrienne	2019	Feiwel and Friends	Contemporary
Fat Angie: Rebel Girl Revolutions	Charlton-Trujillo, E.E.	2019	Candlewick Press	Contemporary

Everything Grows	Herman, Aimee	2019	Three Rooms Press	Contemporary
The Last True Poets of the Sea	Drake, Julia	2019	Disney Hyperion	Contemporary
All the Invisible Things	Collins, Orlagh	2019	Bloomsbury YA	Contemporary
The Pursuit of Miss Heartbreak Hotel	Bonneau, Moe	2019	Henry Holt and Co.	Contemporary
Practically Ever After	Bandeira, Isabel	2019	Spencer Hill Press	Contemporary
The Truth About Keeping Secrets	Brown, Savannah	2019	Penguin Books Ltd	Contemporary
The Prom	Mitchell, Saundra	2019	Viking Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Revolution of Birdie Randolph	Colbert, Brandy	2019	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
In the Silences	Gold, Rachel	2019	Bella Books	Contemporary
All Eyes On Us	Frick, Kit	2019	Margaret K. McElderry Books	Contemporary
Dear Twin	Brook Tsai, Addie	2019	Metonymy Press	Contemporary
Becoming Dinah	de Waal, Kit	2019	Orion Children's Books	Contemporary
Amelia Westlake Was Never Here	Gough, Erin	2019	Poppy	Contemporary
I Am Water	Specksgoor, Meg	2019	West 44 Books	Contemporary
An Impossible Distance to Fall	McNamara, Miriam	2019	Sky Pony Press	Historical
Kim Reaper, Vol. 2	Graley, Sarah	2019	Oni Press	SFF
The Weight of the Stars	Ancrum, K.	2019	Imprint	SFF
The Lost Coast	Capetta, A.R.	2019	Candlewick Press	SFF
Of Ice and Shadows	Coulthurst, Audrey	2019	Balzer + Bray	SFF
Pet	Emezi, Akwaeke	2019	Faber & Faber	SFF
Afterward	Johnston, E.K.	2019	Dutton Books for Young Readers	SFF

Once and Future	Mccarthy, Cori and Capetta, A. R.	2019	Rock the Boat	SFF
We Set the Dark on Fire	Mejia, Tehlor Kay	2019	Katherine Tegen Books	SFF
The Last 8	Pohl, Laura	2019	Sourcebooks Fire	SFF
Wilder Girls	Power, Rory	2019	Macmillan	SFF
Out of Salem	Schrieve, Hal	2019	Triangle Square	SFF
These Witches Don't Burn	Sterling, Isabel	2019	Razorbill	SFF
Tarnished Are the Stars	Thor, Rosiee	2019	Scholastic Press	SFF
Crier's War	Varela, Nina	2019	Quill Tree Books	SFF
Shatter the Sky	Wells, Rebecca Kim	2019	Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers	SFF
Song of the Dead	Glenn Marsh, Sarah	2019	Razorbill	SFF
Ship of Smoke and Steel	Wexler, Django	2019	Tor Teen	SFF
Beyond the Black Door	Strickland, A.M.	2019	Imprint	SFF
Other Words for Smoke	Griffin, Sarah Maria	2019	Greenwillow Books	SFF
Missing, Presumed Dead	Berquist, Emma	2019	Greenwillow Books	SFF
The Never Tilting World	Chupeco, Rin	2019	HarperTeen	SFF
Carmilla	Turrisi, Kim	2019	Kids Can Press	SFF
Nemesis	Iseult Eldredge, Genevieve	2019	Monster House Books	SFF
Girls of Paper and Fire	Ngan, Natasha	2019	Jimmy Patterson Books	SFF
The Weight of the Stars	Ancrum, K.	2019	Imprint	SFF
Goldie Vance: Larceny in La La Land	Ball, Jackie and Larson, Hope	2020	BOOM! Box	Contemporary
Heavy Vinyl: Vol 2	Usdin, Carly and Vakueva, Nina	2020	BOOM Box!	Contemporary

The Contradictions	Yanow, Sophie	2020	Drawn and Quarterly	Contemporary
The Good Girls	Ball, Jackie and Larson, Hope	2020	HarperTeen	Contemporary
I Kissed Alice	Birch, Anna	2020	Macmillan	Contemporary
The Truth About Keeping Secrets	Brown, Savannah	2020	Penguin	Contemporary
Throwaway Girls	Contos, Andrea	2020	Kids Can Press	Contemporary
Verona Comics	Dugan, Jennifer	2020	G.P. Putnam's Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Year Shakespeare Ruined My Life	Jansen, Dani	2020	Second Story Press	Contemporary
You Should See Me in a Crown	Johnson, Leah	2020	Scholastic Press	Contemporary
Six Angry Girls	Kisner, Adrienne	2020	Feiwel and Friends	Contemporary
Watch Over Me	LaCour, Nina	2020	Dutton Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Under Shifting Stars	Latos, Alexandra	2020	HMH Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Eight Pieces of Silva	Lawrence, Patrice	2020	Hodder Children's Books	Contemporary
Miss Meteor	Mejia, Tehlor Kay and McLemore, Anna-Marie	2020	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Burn Our Bodies Down	Power, Rory	2020	Delacorte Press	Contemporary
Late to the Party	Quindlen, Kelly	2020	Roaring Brook Press	Contemporary
Juliet Takes a Breath	Rivera, Gabby	2020	Riverdale Avenue Books	Contemporary
Look	Romanoff, Zan	2020	Dial Books	Contemporary
Melt My Heart	Rutter, Bethany	2020	Macmillan Children's Books	Contemporary
You're Next	Schachte, Kylie	2020	Jimmy Patterson	Contemporary
You Don't Live Here	Schneider, Robyn	2020	Katherine Tegen Books	Contemporary
The Falling in Love Montage	Smyth, Ciara	2020	HarperTeen	Contemporary

We Were Promised Spotlights	Sproul, Lindsay	2020	G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
Prom and Other Hazards	Sullivan, Jamie	2020	Less Than Three Press	Contemporary
The Love Curse of Melody McIntyre	Talley, Robin	2020	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Who I Was with Her	Tyndall, Nita	2020	HarperTeen	Contemporary
The Henna Wars	Jaigirdar, Adiba	2020	Page Street Kids	Contemporary
Clap When You Land	Acevedo, Elizabeth	2020	HarperTeen	Contemporary
Every Body Looking	Iloh, Candice	2020	Dutton Books for Young Readers	Contemporary
The Degenerates	Mann, J. Albert	2020	Antheneum Books for Young Readers	Historical
Music from Another World	Talley, Robin	2020	Inkyard Press	Historical
Camp Spirit	Lenoir, Axelle	2020	Top Shelf Productions	SFF
Faith: Taking Flight	Murphy, Julie	2020	Balzer + Bray	SFF
The Legend of Korra: Ruins of the Empire	Various	2020	Dark Horse	SFF
Queen of Coin and Whispers	Corcoran, Helen	2020	The O'Brien Press	SFF
The Ballad of Ami Miles	Alley, Kristy Dallas	2020	Swoon Reads	SFF
Grey Dawn	Bakkalian, Nyri A.	2020	Balance of Seven	SFF
Girl, Serpent, Thorn	Bashardoust, Melissa	2020	Flatiron Books	SFF
Cinderella is Dead	Bayron, Kalynn	2020	Bloomsbury YA	SFF
The Obsidian Tower	Caruso, Melissa	2020	Orbit	SFF
Super Adjacent	Cestari, Crystal	2020	Disney Hyperion	SFF
Crownchasers	Coffindaffer, Rebecca	2020	HarperTeen	SFF
Court of Lions	Daud, Somaiya	2020	Hodder	SFF

Legendborn	Deonn, Tracy	2020	Margaret K. McElderry Books	SFF
The Sound of Stars	Dow, Alechia	2020	Inkyard Press	SFF
The Art of Saving the World	Duyvis, Corinne	2020	Amulet Books	SFF
Destiny's Choice	Frost, Karen	2020	Ylva Publishing	SFF
Night Shine	Gratton, Tessa	2020	Margaret K. McElderry Books	SFF
A Beautifully Foolish Endeavour	Green, Hank	2020	Dutton	SFF
Deathless Divide	Ireland, Justina	2020	Balzer + Bray	SFF
The Dark Tide	Jasinska, Alicia	2020	Sourcebooks Fire	SFF
Seven Devils	Lam, Laura and May, Elizabeth	2020	DAW	SFF
Sword in the Stars	Mccarthy, Cori and Capetta, A. R.	2020	Rock the Boat	SFF
Ironspark	McGuire, C.M.	2020	Swoon Reads	SFF
Belle Révolte	Miller, Linsey	2020	Sourcebooks Fire	SFF
Elysium Girls	Pentecost, Kate	2020	Disney Hyperion	SFF
A Curse of Roses	Pinguicha, Diana	2020	Entangled Teen	SFF
The Sisters Grimm	Praag, Menna van	2020	Harper Voyager	SFF
Ink in the Blood	Smejkal, Kim	2020	Clarion Books	SFF
Ghost Wood Song	Waters, Erica	2020	HarperTeen	SFF
Surge	Bradshaw, K.F.	2020	Wishbox Press	SFF

Appendix Two

The below table is a database of the fifty sapphic YA texts that make up the corpus of this project and includes the title, author, publication date, original publisher and genre of each text, as well as details of whether the text was a nominee or winner of a Lambda Award.

Title	Author	Published	Original Publisher	Genre	Lambda Nominee/ Winner
Lark in the Morning	Garden, Nancy	1991	Farrar Straus Giroux	Contemporary	Winner
The Cat Came Back	Mullins, Hilary	1993	Naiad Press	Contemporary	Winner
We're Not Alone	Isensee, Rik	1992	Lavender Press	Contemporary	Nominee
Dive	Donovan, Stacey	1994	Dutton Books	Contemporary	Nominee
Stir-Fry	Donoghue, Emma	1994	HarperCollins	Contemporary	Nominee
Good Moon Rising	Garden, Nancy	1996	Farrar Straus Giroux	Contemporary	Winner
The House You Pass on the Way	Woodson, Jacqueline	1997	Delacorte Books for Young Readers	Contemporary	Winner
Hard Love	Wittlinger, Ellen	1999	Simon & Schuster	Contemporary	Winner
Dare Truth or Promise	Boock, Paula	1999	HMH Books for Young Readers	Contemporary	Nominee
The Year They Burned the Books	Garden, Nancy	1999	Farrar Straus Giroux	Contemporary	Nominee
Finding H.F.	Watts, Julia	2001	Alyson Books	Contemporary	Winner

Empress of the World	Ryan, Sara	2001	Viking Juvenile	Contemporary	Nominated
Gravel Queen	Benduhn, Tea	2003	Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing	Contemporary	Nominated
Keeping You a Secret	Peters, Julie Anne	2005	Little, Brown	Contemporary	Nominated
Orphea Proud	Wyeth, Sharon Dennis	2004	Delacorte Books for Young Readers	Contemporary	Nominated
Rosemary and Juliet	Maclean, Judy	2004	Harrington Park Press	Contemporary	Nominated
Punk Like Me	Glass, JD	2006	Bold Strokes Books	Contemporary	Nominated
Split Screen	Hartinger, Brent	2007	HarperCollins	Contemporary	Winner
Among Other Things, I've Taken Up Smoking	Sweeney, Aoibheann	2007	Penguin	Contemporary	Winner
Love & Lies: Marisol's Story	Wittlinger, Ellen	2008	Simon and Schuster	Contemporary	Nominated
Ash	Lo, Malinda	2009	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	SFF	Nominated
Wildthorn	Eagland, Jane	2009	Picador	Historical	Winner
Huntress	Lo, Malinda	2011	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	SFF	Nominee
Pink	Wilkinson, Lili	2011	Allen & Unwin	Contemporary	Nominee
The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Danforth, Emily	2012	Balzer + Bray	Contemporary	Nominee

Ask the Passengers	King, A.S.	2012	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	Contemporary	Nominee
Kiss the Morning Star	Hoole, Elissa Janine	2012	Marshall Cavendish	Contemporary	Nominee
Silhouette of a Sparrow	Griffin, Molly Beth	2012	Milkweed Editions	Historical	Nominee
Adaptation	Lo, Malinda	2012	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	SFF	Nominee
Fat Angie	Charlton-Trujllo, E.E.	2013	Candlewick Press	Contemporary	Nominee
If You Could Be Mine	Farizan, Sara	2013	Algonquin Young Readers	Contemporary	Winner
Girls I've Run Away With	Argo, Rhiannon	2013	Moonshine Press	Contemporary	Nominee
Secret City	Watts, Julia	2013	Bella Books	Historical	Nominee
Lies We Tell Ourselves	Talley, Robin	2014	Harlequin Teen	Contemporary	Nominee
Forgive Me If I've Told You This Before	Stetz-Waters, Karelia	2014	Ooligan Press	Contemporary	Nominee
About a Girl	McCarry, Sarah	2015	St Martin's Griffin	Contemporary	Nominee
Girl Mans Up	Girard, M.E.	2016	HarperCollins	Contemporary	Winner
Not Your Sidekick	Lee, C.B.	2016	Duet Books	SFF	Nominee
The Midnight Star	Lu, Marie	2016	G.P. Putnam's Books for Young Readers	SFF	Nominee
Gravity	Rich, Juliann	2016	Bold Strokes Books	Contemporary	Nominee
Like Water	Podos, Rebecca	2017	Balzer + Bray	Contemporary	Winner

Dreadnought	Daniels, April	2017	Diversion Publishing	SFF	Nominee
Girls Like Me	Packebush, Nina	2017	Bedazzled Ink Press	Contemporary	Nominee
Girl Made of Stars	Herring Blake, Ashley	2018	HMH Books for Young Readers	Contemporary	Nominee
Sawkill Girls	Legrand, Claire	2018	Katherine Tegen Books	SFF	Nominee
The Grief Keeper	Villasante, Alexandra	2019	G.P. Putnam's Books for Young Readers	Contemporary	Winner
The Meaning of Birds	Brown, Jaye Robin	2019	HarperTeen	Contemporary	Nominee
All the Things We Do in the Dark	Mitchell, Saundra	2019	HarperTeen	Contemporary	Nominee
Wilder Girls	Power, Rory	2019	Macmillan	SFF	Nominee
You Should See Me in a Crown	Johnson, Leah	2020	Scholastic Press	Contemporary	Nominee