

Emily H. Wells. Creating an Online LGBTQA YA Fantasy Database: Offering Alternatives Outside the Single Story. A Master's Project for the M.S. in LS degree. April. 2014. 64 pages. Advisor: Brian Sturm

This paper is an accompaniment to a Master's Project that involved creating an online database for LGBTQA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer/questioning, asexual) young adult fantasy novels that enabled user-friendly Boolean searching on criteria of interest to those searching for LGBTQA YA fantasy. Database search results featured a few of the search criteria, while clicking upon a search result led users to a detailed book entry that elaborated upon the relevant metadata as appropriate. Ninety-seven LGBTQA YA fantasy novels were included in this online database.

This paper includes a discussion of the motivation for the project; a description of the database design and rationale behind said design; a delineation of database scope; some analysis of LGBTQA novel metadata; and recommendations for future exploration.

Headings:

Fantasy

Gay literature

Web databases

CREATING AN ONLINE LGBTQA YA FANTASY DATABASE:
OFFERING ALTERNATIVES TO THE SINGLE STORY

by
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Project Objective

Objective: Create an online database for LGBTQA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer or questioning, asexual) young adult (YA) fantasy novels that enables user-friendly Boolean searching on criteria of interest to those searching for LGBTQA YA fantasy, taking care to display some metadata and content analysis for the search results. For the purpose of this project, I have primarily imagined an audience of LGBTQA young adults, but I believe most of the criteria would be of use to librarians, teachers, etc. with an interest in the subject.

Project Motivation

1.1 Why LGBTQA Young Adults?

According to the 2011 National School Climate Survey, 70% of LGBTQA students have been bullied due to their gender identities and/or sexual orientations and 18% of LGBTQA students have been physical assaulted. LGBTQA young adults tend to be at higher risk for anxiety, low self-esteem, drug use, homelessness, and suicide; according to one study, LGBTQA young adults are about four times as likely to attempt suicide as non-LGBTQA teens (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2013, p. 2). The statistics only get bleaker when specifically examining trans* persons. Fifty-five percent of trans* young

adults have been physically assaulted. Of those bullied trans* young adults, over half have attempted suicide (Jardine, 2013, p. 242).

LGBTQA youth clearly constitute a population segment in need of outreach – and a population that currently may not be adequately served. A recent study of LGBTQA collections in 125 high schools in Southern U.S. discovered LGBTQA themed novels to on average make up 0.4% of collections, an appallingly low number considering that estimates on the percentage of LGBTQA teens in the population range from 5-10% (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2013, p. 1).

Even in libraries that do have adequate LGTQA collections, locating the resources can be difficult due to inadequate subject headings. An evaluation of the Louisville Free Public Library's LGBTQA collection revealed that about 38% of the ALA Stonewall Book Award winners within the collection lacked any subject headings linking them to LGBTQA representation (Moss, 2008, p. 155). Additional research suggests that the problem of inadequate LGBTQA subject headings is not unique to this library. A study on the subject headings of 40 LGBTQA books (19 adult, 21 YA) in five major urban areas in Canada reported that fewer than half had LGBTQA subject headings. Although the study did find that LGBTQA YA novels were more likely than LGBTQA adult novels to have LGBTQA subject headings, the study also discovered that the LGBTQA YA novels were more likely to employ occasionally misleading LGBTQA umbrella subject headings (e.g. "homosexuality" for bisexual and gay persons) while the LGBTQA adult novels were more likely to use specific LGBTQA subject headings (e.g. "lesbian") (McClary & Howard, 2007, p. 157). Jardine's discussion on the miscataloging of trans* resources and the time-lag between LC subject headings and evolving trans* vocabulary

suggests that the Canadian issues with LGBTQA subject headings may be shared by the U.S. (2013, p. 254). Note that these study statistics only apply to books with main LGBTQA characters: books with key secondary LGBTQA characters are likely considerably even less adequately catalogued for LGBTQA findability.

The presence of potentially inappropriate or inadequate LGBTQA subject headings becomes even more important when one considers that many LGBTQA young adults may rely on those headings due to an unwillingness to openly seek help from librarians (Rauch, 2011, p. 13). That LGBTQA persons generally have a more than usual desire for privacy is no supposition: a 2007 study comparing self-checkout rates for LGBTQA and non-LGBTQA books discovered that LGBTQA books circulated 20% more via self-checkout (Jardine, 2013, p. 245).

An online LGBTQA YA database with adequate metadata is a way to address both privacy and materials findability concerns for a segment of the population in need of outreach.

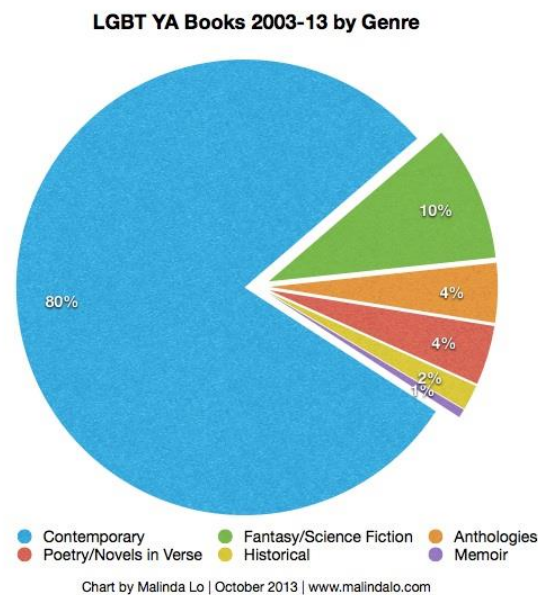
1.2 Why Fiction?

Identity formation is a key stage of adolescence. For LGBTQA teens, who have likely been bombarded with negative stereotypes through popular media and may very well live in environments hostile to LGBTQA persons, forming positive identities can be especially challenging. Delgado first spoke of the power of the counter-story for marginalized groups in the late 1980's (1989). As Alexander and Miselis state, these counter-stories are incredibly relevant to LGBTQA teens: "Positive, realistic portrayals of LGBTQ characters in fiction for teens can provide a valuable resource which can help

reduce feelings of isolation and despair” and aid in this positive identity formation (2007, p. 45).

1.3 Why Fantasy?

The majority of YA LGBTQA fiction seems to be realistic fiction, and many of those materials are “problem” novels or “issues” fiction in which the queer identity is the “issue” driving a large portion of the plot. In the annotated list of 22 recommended trans* titles from Rockefeller’s “Selection, Inclusion, Evaluation and Defense of Transgender-Inclusive Fiction for Young Adults: A Resource Guide,” only three titles include a fantasy or science-fiction element (2009, p. 305-309). The top 11 most commonly collected LGBT novels in the Hughes-Hassell et al. study are all contemporary fiction (2013, p. 12). In an interesting study on LGBT fiction (though one whose results have not been peer-reviewed), LGBTQA fantasy author Malinda Lo found the genre division in books with main LGBT characters published from 2003-2013 to be the following:



According to this graph, LGBT fantasy/science fiction constitutes only 10% of fiction with main LGBT character published 2003-2013, which isn't very much at all (Lo, 2013).

That said, a preponderance of LGBTQ YA realistic fiction does not in itself bespeak a need to highlight LGBTQ YA fantasy. I have chosen to focus on LGBTQ YA fantasy for two reasons. One, with the immense popularity of the “Harry Potter,” “Twilight,” “Percy Jackson,” “Hunger Games,” and “Divergent” book series and movie adaptations, science fiction and fantasy have become highly popular YA genres. Two, exploring fantasy provides a better opportunity to find and highlight works outside the “single story” of the problem novel. Adichie describes the single story as a story told so often that it shrouds the existence of other realities (2009). A single story does not necessarily have to be negative to be limiting. Fantasy offers a venue in which LGBTQ characters are more likely not to have their queer identity be *the* issue of the work; in fact, those gender and sexual identities are sometimes complete non-issues in fantasy, which might very well be refreshing for LGBTQ persons inundated with realistic descriptions of present-day homophobia elsewhere.

Some LGBTQ fantasy novels do include queer identity as an issue or even *the* issue of the novel (such as Francesca Lia Block's *Baby Be-Bop*). Increasingly high numbers of contemporary fiction are also stepping away from the problem novel format (such as David Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy*) (Downey, 2005, p. 91). However, fantasy seems like the genre least likely to fall into the “issue story” formula.

Design

1.4 Technical Basics

For this project, usability and functionality of the website were priorities, with unseen underlying design as a mere means to an end. Here is a basic explanation of how I created the separate portions of my final product:

- **Banner:** I used pixlr.com to edit together several copyright-free images.



- **Database:** I created my initial database using Microsoft Access due to the ease in which entries can be edited; using Billzip, I then transformed the Microsoft Access database into MYSQL commands. I next uploaded those database tables to a MYSQL database entitled ehwells_lgbtqa hosted on pearl.ils.unc.edu using those MYSQL commands. The database consists of five tables: books, tropes, triggers, chars (short for characters), and genres. The books table contains all information about the LGBTQA fantasy novels that can each be consigned to a single field, while the other tables contain information whose number of entries depends on the LGBTQA work being currently considered. One LGBTQA novel, for example, might fit only two genres, while another might fit three. Instead of limiting the number of genres, tropes, triggers, or characters to be listed, I simply created separate tables for these criteria and linked them to the main books table with the primary key for entries in the books table.

- **Website:** I hand coded the CSS styling sheet, HTML webpages, and PHP code drawing data from the MYSQL ehwells_lgbtqa database using Notepad++ as my editor. Finally, I used WinSCP to transfer these files from my local computer to my public_html folder hosted at ruby.ils.unc.edu.

The link for the website is the following:

http://ils.unc.edu/~ehwells/LGBTQA_YA_Fantasy/search.html. During the creation of the ehwells_lgbtqa database, SILS Technical staff requested a date after which they could delete the database. I decided on the end of May 2014, as I felt hesitant preserving the database for any considerable amount of time after I am no longer enrolled as a student. Therefore, the website search will cease to function after May 31, 2014.

1.5 How to Make Boolean Searching Simple?

When considering how to make basic Boolean searching intuitive for users, I examined several library websites as well as commercial websites with considerable search functionality. Finding a fairly standard format for AND search functionality proved simple. When searching for several criteria simultaneously, AND appears to be the default connector, so I decided to include that in the design of my search form. At this point, my planned website search form looked something like the following:

Criterion 1: ____OPTIONS FOR CRITERION 1____

Criterion 2: ____OPTIONS FOR CRITERION 2____

Criterion 3: ____OPTIONS FOR CRITERION 3____

Selecting option(s) for Criterion 1 and Criterion 3 would then result in an AND search, i.e. (selection for Criterion 1 satisfied) AND (selection for Criterion 3 satisfied) AND (Criterion 2 can be anything).

I next wanted to enable users to select a range of possible options within each criterion when appropriate, i.e. simulate OR search functionality. Finding a fairly standard format for OR search functionality proved a little more difficult. Several websites, such as the CVS website (www.cvs.com) and the UNC library catalog (<http://search.lib.unc.edu/search.jsp>), have a refinement option after the initial search that makes use of OR functionality for options within a criterion. As soon as a checkbox next to one of the options is checked, the search refines. The idea of checkboxes representing OR functionality appealed to me, but I decided to implement this functionality in the initial search form. My planned website form at this point resembled the following, with each 0 representing a checkbox:

Criterion 1:	<input type="checkbox"/> Option 1.1	<input type="checkbox"/> Option 1.2	<input type="checkbox"/> Option 1.3
Criterion 2:	<input type="checkbox"/> Option 2.1	<input type="checkbox"/> Option 2.2	<input type="checkbox"/> Option 2.3
Criterion 3:	<input type="checkbox"/> Option 3.1	<input type="checkbox"/> Option 3.2	<input type="checkbox"/> Option 3.3

Selecting Options 1.1, 1.3, 2.1, 3.2, and 3.3 would result in the following Boolean search: (Option 1.1 OR Option 1.3) AND (Option 2.1) AND (Option 3.2 OR Option 3.3).

I also wanted to include NOT search functionality in my search form, i.e. enable users to exclude works that satisfied certain criteria. Directly allowing users to switch between including and excluding options within a criterion made little intuitive or logical sense considering the current tentative search form format. Consider the following search, with bolded 0's representing a desire to include a criterion and bolded X's representing a desire to exclude a criterion:

Criterion 1:	0 Option 1.1	<input type="checkbox"/> Option 1.2	X Option 1.3	X Option 1.4
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If all the options are connected using OR functionality, this search would be the following: (Option 1.1 OR (NOT Option 1.3) OR (NOT Option 1.4)) = (Option 1.1 OR (Option 1.1 OR Option 1.2 OR Option 1.4) OR (Option 1.1 OR Option 1.2 OR Option 1.3)) = Option 1.1 OR Option 1.2 OR Option 1.3 OR Option 1.4. In short, this format would create nonsensical searches if all the options were connected by OR functionality. Linking all options by AND functionality would create coherent searches (a fact that websites such as the UNC Library catalog and Manga Fox make use of in their searches), but would eradicate the desired OR functionality. To include both OR and NOT functionality in my form, I decided creating several exclusionary criteria alongside the inclusionary criteria made the most sense:

Inclusive Criterion 1: Option 1.1 Option 1.2 Option 1.3

Exclusive Criterion 2: Option 2.1 Option 2.2 Option 2.3

Checking boxes for Options 1.1, 1.3, 2.1, and 2.2 would result in the following search: (Option 1.1 OR Option 1.3) AND (NOT (Option 2.1 OR Option 2.2)) = (Option 1.1 OR Option 1.3) AND NOT Option 2.1 AND NOT Option 2.2.

I applied these thoughts to the creation of the search form for my website, allowing users to select a range of inclusionary or exclusionary options when I judged it appropriate. Here is what the search form looks like:

INFORMATION ABOUT LGBTQA REPRESENTATION

General Homophobia Level: Violently Present Very Present Present On-Screen References to Existence Nonexistent

General LGBTQA Representation Rating: Problematic Some Issues Fair Well Done

LGBTQA Identity Diversity Rating: None Small Amount Fair Amount Considerable Amount Large Amount

LGBTQA Racial Diversity Rating: None Small Amount Fair Amount Considerable Amount Large Amount

LGBTQA Tropes to Include:

- Abused Butch Lesbian Coming Out Flamboyant Gay Girl's Gay Best Friend Kicked Out
 Killed Off Promiscuous Bisexual Queer Bashing Queer Villain Sexual Orientation Epiphany
 Suicide Attempt Token Queer Character

LGBTQA Tropes to Exclude:

- Abused Butch Lesbian Coming Out Flamboyant Gay Girl's Gay Best Friend Kicked Out
 Killed Off Promiscuous Bisexual Queer Bashing Queer Villain Sexual Orientation Epiphany
 Suicide Attempt Token Queer Character

Search for Type of Represented LGBTQA Character:

- **Gender Identity of Character:** Cis Female Cis Male Genderqueer Trans Female Trans Male
- **Prominence of Character:**
 - Referenced or Bit Character Minor Secondary Character Secondary Character Major Character Primary Narrator
- **Race of Character:** Person of Color White Person
- **Relationship Orientation of Character:** Monoamorous Polyamorous
- **Sexual Orientation of Character:** Asexual Bisexual or Pansexual Gay Straight

GENERAL BOOK INFORMATION

Exclude all midseries books?: Yes

General Racial/Ethnic Diversity: None Small Amount Fair Amount Considerable Amount Non-White Primary Narrator

Genres:

- Adventure Alternate Earth Contemporary Fantasy Fairy Tales Gateway Fantasy
 Greek Mythology High Fantasy Historical Fantasy Horror Mystery
 Paranormal Fantasy Politics & Intrigue Romance Sci-Fi Fantasy Short Stories Urban Fantasy

Page Count:

Point of View: Alternating POV 1st Person POV 3rd Person Limited 3rd Person Omniscient

Potentially Triggering or Otherwise Undesired Content to Exclude:

- Abused Body Dysmorphia Disturbing Imagery Drug Use Eating Disorder
 LGBTQA Hate Speech Non-con or Dub-con Racial Hate Speech Self Harm Sexual Scenes

Suggested Grade Level:

SORT BY:

SUBMIT:

1.6 What Metadata Matters?

Before adding criteria and options to the search form, I had to determine which criteria it was most important to include and what controlled vocabulary I would utilize for each criterion.

1.6.1 LGBTQA Representation

The main point of this database is its LGBTQA representation, i.e. that the YA fantasy included features LGBTQA characters. I judged knowledge about the precise LGBTQA identities of queer characters, the races/ethnicities of queer characters, the strength of LGBTQA representation overall for a work, the prominence of queer characters, the level of homophobia within a work, and the presence of LGBTQA tropes within a work to be of potential interest to searchers.

1.6.1.1 Discrete Identities

1.6.1.1.1 Rationale for Inclusion

Although libraries sometimes group all LGBTQA fiction under umbrella terms, patrons are often seeking representation of a specific identity. As people in different places under the umbrella tend to have different experiences, this preference is logical. This preference is also proven to exist: a study comparing some UK libraries' subject headings and the LibraryThing tags of various LGBTQA works revealed more precise tagging on LibraryThing, albeit tagging with a clearly uncontrolled vocabulary (Bates & Rowley, 2011, p. 442-3). Concerns that cis men seem disproportionately represented in LGBTQA fiction may make this identity discretization particularly important for other gender identities (Downey, 2005, p. 91).

1.6.1.1.2 Criteria and Controlled Vocabulary

1.6.1.1.2.1 LGBTQA Character Criteria: Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Relationship Orientation

I chose to include LGBTQA character gender, sexual orientation, and relationship orientation as criteria. Gender has the following controlled vocabulary: cis female, cis male, trans female, trans male, and genderqueer. Cis, a shortened term for cisgender, refers to someone whose gender identity agrees with the gender they were assigned at birth. Trans, a shortened term for transgender, refers to someone whose gender identity does not agree with the gender they were assigned at birth; instead, this person identifies as the other binary gender. Genderqueer is an umbrella term referring to non-binary gender identities; due to the scarcity of characters identifying outside the gender binary in the LGBTQA YA fantasy novels I read, further discretizing non-binary gender identities seemed ill-advised (Jardine, 2013, p. 241).

Sexual orientation has the following controlled vocabulary: gay, bisexual or pansexual, asexual, and straight. Gay refers to people who are romantically and sexually attracted to the gender they identify as. Bisexual and pansexual can have slightly different meanings depending upon whom one asks; for the purpose of this project, both refer to people who are romantically and sexually attracted to multiple gender identities. Asexual refers to people who are not sexually attracted to people. Lack of sexual attraction does not necessarily imply lack of romantic attraction, but due to the paucity of asexual characters in the LGBTQA YA fantasy I read, I thought it unnecessary to provide an additional romantic orientation criterion. Straight, or heterosexual, refers to people who are romantically and sexually attracted to the binary gender they do not identify as. As trans* (with trans* being used as an umbrella term for all non-cisgender persons) individuals can identify as straight, inclusion of heterosexuality as a sexual orientation option in a LGBTQA database is only logical (Califa et al., n.d.). Characters within

fantasy novels do not always explicitly state their sexual orientation. For the purpose of identification of characters in this database, persons who demonstrate attraction to the same gender are assumed to be gay unless they state otherwise or demonstrate attraction to another gender. Similarly, trans* characters are assumed to be straight unless they demonstrate otherwise.

Relationship orientation has the following controlled vocabulary: polyamorous and monoamorous. Polyamorous refers to people who can be romantically attracted to multiple persons at the same time and are open to pursuing simultaneous committed relationships with more than one person. Monoamorous refers to people who are generally not open to pursuing simultaneous committed relationships with more than one person (Tweedy, 2011, p. 1479). As four of the LGBTQ YA fantasy novels I read included prominent polyamorous characters, inclusion of relationship orientation as a criterion seemed advised. When characters do not clearly demonstrate themselves to be polyamorous, they are assumed to be monoamorous for the purpose of this database.

A note on the LGBTQ characters to be included in the chars database: Including the metadata for every LGBTQ character in a work would be superfluous. Instead, I only included the data for each LGBTQ character with a unique overall identity (considering gender, sexual orientation, and relationship orientation, as well as the yet to be discussed character race/ethnicity [see 1.6.1.2]), using the character who was most prominent in the work to determine the prominence rating (see 1.6.1.4).

All of the above criteria (character gender, character sexual orientation, and character relationship orientation) have OR search functionality on the form I created.

1.6.1.1.2.2 LGBTQ Work Criteria: LGBTQ Identity Diversity

In addition to allowing people to search for works featuring a character with a certain gender identity, sexual orientation, and relationship orientation, I also enabled people to search according to a work's general diversity of LGBTQA identities, which I graded on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). LGBTQA identity diversity is calculated as follows: Add one point for each gay character of a new gender and each bisexual/pansexual character of a new gender listed in the chars database for the novel. Add two more points for each trans male character of a new sexual orientation, each trans female character of a new sexual orientation, each polyamorous character of a new gender identity/sexual orientation combination, each asexual character of a new gender, and each genderqueer character of a new sexual orientation. Duplication of the same LGBTQA identities with different races does not add to the identity diversity score. Prominence is also to be disregarded when calculating this score. With this scoring system, a book could score more than 5 points (though it would be listed as 5 in the database); however, such a situation occurs rarely. I decided to give trans* gender identities, polyamorous relationship orientations, and asexual sexual orientations greater weight for the very fact that these identities are scarce in LGBTQA literature.

To demonstrate how the LGBTQA identity diversity grading works in practice, I will demonstrate on a selection of the books from the chars database.

Gender	Sexual Orientation	Relationship Orientation	Prominence	POC	Book_ID
cm	b	m	4	No	71
cf	b	m	5	No	71
cm	g	m	1	No	71
cf	g	m	1	No	71

Book 71 has a bisexual (b) cis male (cm) character, a bisexual cis female (cf) character, a gay (g) cis male character, and a gay cis female character. Book 71 gets +1 for each of those identities for a total LGBTQA identity diversity rating of 4.

Gender	Sexual Orientation	Relationship Orientation	Prominence	POC	Book_ID
cf	g	m	2	Yes	1
cf	g	m	4	No	1

Book 1 has two gay cis female characters in the chars database. Only one of these characters merits a +1 (as the rule is plus one for each gay person of a new gender), so the book only gets a 1 for LGBTQA identity diversity.

Gender	Sexual Orientation	Relationship Orientation	Prominence	POC	Book_ID
cf	s	p	5	No	79
cm	b	p	5	No	79

Book 79 has a straight cis female character (+0) and a bisexual cis male (+1) character. As the straight cis female character is polyamorous (p), that's an additional two points. As the bisexual cis male character is also polyamorous, that another two points (as the rule is two more points for each polyamorous character of a new gender identity/sexual orientation combination). The point total is 5.

Gender	Sexual Orientation	Relationship Orientation	Prominence	POC	Book_ID
cf	g	m	5	Yes	96
cf	g	m	4	No	96
cf	g	p	1	Yes	96
cf	b	p	1	No	96

Book 96 has three gay cis female characters (+1) and a bisexual cis female character (+1). One of the gay cis female characters is polyamorous (+2), as is the bisexual cis female character (+2). The point total is 6.

Work LGBTQA identity diversity rating has OR search functionality on the form I created.

1.6.1.2 Intersectionality: Considering Race

1.6.1.2.1 Rationale for Inclusion

Just as the experiences of a bisexual woman are likely not equivalent to the experiences of a gay man, so too are the experiences of a white gay man likely not equivalent to the experiences of a black gay man: intersectionality matters in representation. Concerns about the difficulty of finding non-white LGBTQA representation make criteria for race of LGBTQA characters especially important (Downey, 2005, p. 91; Naidoo & Vargas, 2011, p. 19). As searchers may be dissatisfied with racial diversity in their LGBTQA characters if it's not accompanied by racial diversity among the general characters, a criterion related to the general racial/ethnic diversity of a work also seems appropriate.

1.6.1.2.2 Criteria and Vocabulary

Race is a social construct (California Newsreel, 2003). As such, the races and ethnicities of our world often have no clear correlation to the imagined worlds in some fantasy subgenres (e.g. high fantasy). Primarily due to this issue, I decided to only distinguish between white persons and persons of color, with persons of color from alternate worlds being recognized primarily by the color of their skin. The variety of ethnic identities that I uncovered in the LGBTQA YA contemporary fantasy novels I read (such as African-American, Afro-Italian American, Maori, etc.) also influenced my decision to only distinguish between white persons and persons of color.

Search form criteria related to race include the following: LGBTQA character race, work racial/ethnic diversity, and LGBTQA characters' racial diversity. LGBTQA

character race is simply signified by whether a character is a person of color or a white person (for the reasons denoted above). The other criteria are a little more complicated.

LGBTQA racial diversity refers to the general racial diversity of the LGBTQA characters in a work, i.e. the proportion of LGBTQA characters who aren't white. For calculation of this rating, all LGBTQA characters from the database and all significant LGBTQA character not in the database due to LGBTQA identity duplication are considered. Here, "significant" LGBTQA characters include characters with a prominence level of at least 2 (see 1.6.1.4 for more information on character prominence). To calculate the LGBTQA racial diversity, divide the sum of the prominences of all the LGBTQA persons of color by the sum of the prominences of all the LGBTQA characters. If $0 < \text{result} < 0.2$, the score is 1; if $0.2 \leq \text{result} < 0.4$, the score is 2; if $0.4 \leq \text{result} < 0.6$, the score is 3; if $0.6 \leq \text{result} < 0.8$, the score is 4; and if $0.8 \leq \text{result} < 1$, the score is 5.

To demonstrate how the LGBTQA racial diversity grading works in practice, I will demonstrate on a selection of books from the chars database.

Gender	Sexual Orientation	Relationship Orientation	Prominence	POC	Book_ID
cf	g	m	5	Yes	96
cf	g	m	4	No	96
cf	g	p	1	Yes	96
cf	b	p	1	No	96

As all significant queer characters in book 96 are represented in the database, calculating the LGBTQA racial diversity score is simple: $(5+1)/(5+4+1+1) = 0.55$, which corresponds to a score of 3.

Gender	Sexual Orientation	Relationship Orientation	Prominence	POC	Book_ID
cm	b	m	4	Yes	89
cm	g	m	1	No	89

In book 89, more LGBTQA characters appear in the novel (*Resenting the Hero*) than are represented by the database entries; however, as none of those characters have a prominence of 2 or higher, they can be disregarded when calculating LGBTQA racial diversity. As $4/(4+1) = 0.8$, the score is a 5.

Gender	Sexual Orientation	Relationship Orientation	Prominence	POC	Book_ID
cf	g	m	4	No	104
cf	g	m	2	Yes	104

In book 104, one significant LGBTQA character (prominence of 2) appears in the novel (Jessica Spotswood's *Star Cursed*) and is not represented in the database (as there are two non-white gay cis female characters). As such, the LGBTQA racial diversity can be calculated as follows: $(2+2)/(2+2+4) = 0.5$, which corresponds to a score of 3.

The score for the work's general racial/ethnic diversity is slightly more subjective, though it also ranges from a score of 1 (low racial/ethnic diversity) to a score of 5 (high racial/ethnic diversity). A score of 1 corresponds to an entirely white cast of characters. One example of such a work is *Evil?* by Timothy Carter. A score of 2 corresponds to a cast of characters that only includes token non-white characters (generally prominence 2 or lower). One example of such a work is Holly Black's *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*, which includes a few non-white characters but none of a high enough prominence level. A score of 3 corresponds to cast of characters that includes at least one significant non-white character (prominence 3 or above). One example of such a work is *Ironside*, which has one African-American character with prominence level 3 and a few more very minor non-white characters. A score of 4 corresponds to a cast of characters that includes

several significant non-white characters in addition to at least one non-white character with a prominence of 3 or above. One example of such a work is Moira Moore's *The Hero Strikes Back*, which includes a non-white character with a prominence level of 4 as well as three other significant non-white characters. And a score of 5 corresponds to a work with a primary narrator that is not white, though the rest of the cast might be. *Sketchy*, for example, has a score of 5 due to its Afro-Italian-American narrator, although all the rest of the characters except for her father are white.

All of the above criteria (character race, LGBTQA racial diversity, and work racial/ethnic diversity) with more than two options have OR search functionality on the form I created.

1.6.1.3 Strength of Representation

1.6.1.3.1 Rationale for Inclusion

Representation in itself is insufficient if it's not good representation. As Manfredi notes in "Accept the Universal Freak Show," LGBTQA YA fiction used to primarily be about LGBTQA characters suffering due to their queer identity, often in works that presented that queer identity as something that merited suffering. Although current YA fiction has mostly stepped away from that trend, possible areas for concern remain, such as stereotypes, unchallenged misconceptions about queerness, negative representations of queer characters, inequitable treatment of queer and straight couples, etc. (2009, p. 26).

1.6.1.3.2 Criterion and Controlled Vocabulary

I used one criterion (LGBTQA representation) to rate a work's general LGBTQA representation as either problematic (score of 1), some issues (score of 2), fair (score of

3), or well done (score of 4). This rating is the most subjective of all my metadata; as such, it is also the metadata I have most thoroughly elaborated upon in each detailed book entry (see 1.7.2). Some questions I considered when rating books include the following:

- Are voiced misconceptions about queerness within the novel unchallenged?

If the narrator describes bisexual women as people who kiss other women to entice men, and nothing within the text contradicts her belief, that counts as an unchallenged misconception (such as occurs in P.C. Cast and Kristin Cast's *Marked*). Mercedes Lackey's *Magic's Promise*, on the other hand, explores a bevy of negative misconceptions about homosexuality, but the narrator himself skewers all of them.

- Do the LGBTQA characters' storylines or pasts seem to endorse negative misconceptions about queerness?

For example, in Francesca Lia Block's *I was a Teenage Fairy*, the only queer characters in the book (two gay men) were sexually assaulted as children, seeming to lend credence to the problematic notion that gay men are all turned gay due to sexual assault by a man in their youth.

- Are queer and straight couples given the same level of romantic and sexual demonstrativeness? If not, does this disparity make sense?

In Trudi Canavan's *The High Lord*, readers get to see kisses between all the straight couples; in contrast, the queer couple gets one hand-holding, despite the fact that one member of the queer couple is a narrating character. Similarly, in Amy Plum's *If I Should Die*, readers see several

straight make-outs and barely a hint of physical demonstrativeness from the queer couple. However, the POV of the book (1st Person of the straight protagonist) and the personalities of the queer characters at least in part explain this discrepancy.

- Are queer characters' sexual or gender identities unduly shrouded?

Kristin Cashore's *Fire* features a bisexual heroine that some readers might still think is straight after the close of the novel. The extremely coy manner in which her sexual orientation is treated seems more unnatural than natural. Pearl North's *The Boy from Illysies* only contains hints as to Selene's queerness, but this uncertainty makes sense considering that the POV character isn't Selene and Selene herself doesn't tend to volunteer unnecessary information.

- Are the queer characters positive or negative characters? If some of the queer characters are villains, is there a good balance between queer heroes and villains?

Jessica Spotswood's *Born Wicked* includes two canon queer characters, one who appears a manipulative villain while the other comes across as immature and selfish; the overall representation seems skewed negative.

Perry Moore's *Hero*, on the other hand, includes two gay male heroes and one gay male villain in a positive balance of heroes/villains.

- Do the queer characters seem like stereotypes? If the characters are somewhat stereotypical, do they seem like caricatures or humanizations of the stereotypes?

In real life, some LGBTQA people do seem to reflect the stereotypes. As such, LGBTQA stereotypes within literature are not necessarily harmful, especially as some stereotypical identities (such as flamboyant gay man) sometimes carry some stigma within and without the LGBTQA community; that said, LGBTQA characters who seem more like stereotypes than people are a problem. Olivia Samms' *Sketchy* includes a flamboyant gay man that seems little more than a caricature. Cole Gibsen's "Katana" series also features an incredibly stereotypical flamboyant gay man – and yet that character feels like a humanization of the stereotype.

- Are all (or most) of the queer characters killed off or suffering by the end of the book? If so, do the straight characters suffer similar fates?

In Jennifer Albin's *Crewel*, the only canon queer characters are killed before the story's end; these are the only major characters killed within this work. In contrast, in Libba Bray's *The Sweet Far Thing*, one of the two canonically queer characters dies, but so too does the straight narrator's love interest.

- If the book does try to address real-life issues like coming out and/or homophobia, does it do so in a sensitive manner?

Steven Arntson's *The Warp-up List* does include a positive queer character; however, her coming out becomes all about the straight narrator's reaction to it. Brigid Kemmerer's *Secret* instead focuses on the

narrating gay character in its sensitive description of the coming out process.

- Are the queer characters defined by their sexuality or are they three-dimensional characters? Do they have storylines unrelated to their queerness?

Books in which story narrators and/or the queer characters themselves seem to feel the need to remind readers of their queerness even when irrelevant to the current situation (such as the queer character in Olivia Samms' *Sketchy*) in essence reduce the queer characters to their queer identities. Queer characters having storylines unrelated to their queer identities is not in itself a necessity for good representation; after all, LGBTQA "problem" novels do indeed basically revolve around the issue of the queer characters' identities. That said, queer characters not having storylines unrelated to their queerness can point to a certain flatness to these characters.

LGBTQA character prominence, identity diversity, and racial diversity do not directly influence LGBTQA representation ratings, but may contribute to more positive answers to the previous questions. As the general LGBTQA representation rating is by its nature subjective, provision of a selection of four elaborations upon LGBTQA representation ratings from the ninety-seven detailed book entries may be instructive.

I gave Alison Goodman's *Eon: Dragoneye Reborn* a problematic rating (score of 1 out of 4) for LGBTQA representation. Here is the explanation I provided for my reasoning:

Prominent trans* characters in YA LGBTQA fantasy are rare, and Lady Dela is one of the more intelligent, brave, and capable characters in *Eon: Dragoneye Reborn*. Unfortunately, the problematic manner in which Eona describes her friend makes it incredibly difficult to enjoy her as a character. Eona may always get the pronoun correct, but she consistently talks about Lady Dela as if she's not a "true" woman. Eona talks about Lady Dela as a "man who lives like a woman," placing the emphasis on Lady Dela's physical body as opposed to her chosen gender identity. Eona also regularly applies masculine adjectives to her friend's characteristics, such as her "man's strength in her grip" or "her man's shoulder." Eona even goes to the extent of searching through Lady Dela's belongings for proof that she's not really female, ultimately judging that Lady Dela *is* a woman and just might be the most truthful person of all of them. Just like cis women can be traditionally feminine or tomboys, trans women don't have to fit one version of femininity. Eona's comments on Lady Dela's appearance might be there to remind readers that Lady Dela is transgender. The comments about how Lady Dela is a true woman might be there to make a point that even a trans woman can be one of the most traditionally womanly woman. Regardless of the intent, Eona's comments make it seem like gender is something that can be graded and seem to insinuate that Lady Dela will ever be seen as a trans woman, a "fake" woman" instead of a "real" one.

I gave Kristin Cashore's *Fire* "some issues" (i.e. a grade of 2 out of 4) for

LGBTQA representation. Here is the explanation I provided for my reasoning:

Although mention of the existence of queer men and women proceeds in a commendably natural manner through Fire's ability to sense people's attraction to her, Fire is much more coy in discussion of her sexuality. Discussion of her past romantic relationship with her female maid and discussion of the beginnings of her relationship with Archer are entirely incomparable: misinterpretation of the first as a close friendship might occur, while the second is clearly described as sexual. Only a later snide remark from a jealous Archer about the maid clarifies that the relationship was indeed romantic. There is no reason that Fire's sexuality could not be naturally revealed at an earlier point in the book. Fire is an interesting, complex character who directly contradicts the promiscuous bisexual trope; and yet labelling her as a great example of a bisexual character is difficult when her sexual orientation is so veiled.

I gave Cynthia Leitich Smith's *Feral Nights* "fair" (i.e. a grade of 3 out of 4) for

LGBTQA representation. Here is the explanation I provided for my reasoning:

The queer characters in *Feral Nights*, particularly Sergio, directly appear in the novel only for very limited number of pages. Readers will only know that Sergio is gay if they have read the prior books, which at least means that in the few pages he does appear he does not come off as a gay stereotype. Ruby only directly appears near the end of the book, but is discussed on various occasions prior to her appearance. Although readers get little chance to see Ruby directly, the twist that this supposed heterosexual, "easy" murderess is actually a lesbian heroine on a quest is brilliant in both its rejection of the queer villain trope and its dismantling of its seeming initial abidance to the oversexualization of female Asian characters. Ruby appears to be an extremely interesting character - but "appears" is really all that can be said at this point considering the time focused on her. Readers might also be slightly put off by a small reference to Yoshi nearly drooling when observing a female-female couple kissing at Sanguini's, as sexual objectification of queer women by heterosexual men is an issue in today's world.

I gave Steve Berman's *Vintage: A Ghost Story* "well done" (i.e. a grade of 4 out of 4) for LGBTQA representation. Here is the explanation I provided for my reasoning:

Although this novel doesn't include any queer persons of color, it nonetheless does show a not inconsiderable range: people of different ages and genders at different stages of self-acceptance and/or coming out. All of these people are developed, understandable characters even when they're not likeable (or in the case of the ghost completely sane). We see the most of the unnamed narrator, and he does not disappoint. His flashbacks to a grim past, his current somewhat uneasy equilibrium, and his stumbling into and outward of romantic relationships all ring true to the experiences of many LGBTQA teens.

The above criterion (LGBTQA representation rating) has OR search functionality on the form I created.

1.6.1.4 Prominence

1.6.1.4.1 Rationale for Inclusion

This database includes LGBTQA fantasy – but how prominent do the LGBTQA characters in a novel have to be to qualify a fantasy as a LGBTQA fantasy? As no one answer to that question exists and my chars database includes all mentions of different

LGBTQA identities (no matter how minor), I thought it advisable to allow readers to define the prominence of the LGBTQA character for whom they were searching.

1.6.1.4.2 Criterion and Controlled Vocabulary

The criterion for a LGBTQA character's prominence has the following possible scores: 1-Referenced or Bit Character, 2-Minor Secondary Character, 3-Secondary Character, 4-Major Character, and 5-Primary Narrator. A LGBTQA character is given a prominence level of 5 if that character is the work's sole narrator or among the work's primary narrators; secondary narrators, i.e. less common narrators, do not qualify (such as Zevi from Melissa Marr's *Carnival of Secrets*). If a LGBTQA character does not merit a prominence level of 5, their prominence rating is calculated as follows: First, determine the most major character besides the work's primary narrator(s). To accomplish this, search for various major characters' names using www.scribd.com or www.books.google.com (www.scribd.com preferred if work available, as this will provide access to the entire book) and select the character whose name appears the most times (www.scribd.com) or upon the most pages (www.books.google.com) as the most prominent character. To then determine the prominence of a LGBTQA character, divide the number of times the LGBTQA character's name appears (if available at www.scribd.com) or the number of pages the LGBTQA character name's appears upon (www.books.google.com) by the name or page count for the most prominent character. If $0 < \text{result} < 0.25$, the score is 1; if $0.25 \leq \text{result} < 0.5$, the score is 2; if $0.5 \leq \text{result} < 0.75$, the score is 3; and if $0.75 \leq \text{result} < 1.0$ the score is 4

For the sake of clarity, I shall demonstrate how to calculate LGBTQA character prominence for a selection of LGBTQA works. Melissa Marr's *Faery Tales &*

Nightmares is a short story selection. As all of the queer characters with unique identities serve as primary narrators of a short story, each queer character identity gets a rating of 5. Melissa Marr's *Fragile Eternity* is told in the 3rd Person Omniscient POV. Searching for various narrators' names via www.scribd.com reveals that Seth is by far the most frequently mentioned (733 counts). As such, the next most frequently mentioned character (Aislinn with 511 counts) is used as an upper bound when calculating the prominence of the novel's LGBTQA characters. *Fragile Eternity* contains two characters with the same LGBTQA identity. Niall appears 414 times. As $414/511 = 0.81$, Niall has a prominence rating of 4. Irial appears less often than Niall (30 times). As the highest of the prominence ratings for a LGBTQA identity is used for the LGBTQA identity prominence rating, the prominence rating for the white bisexual polyamorous men in *Fragile Eternity* is 4.

This manner of approximating a character's prominence has some weaknesses. Ideally, I would have access to the full text of all the LGBTQA books when defining prominence in such a manner. Not only did I only have access to the search functionality of www.google.books.com in some cases, in a few cases the excerpts at www.google.book.com were either scanty or completely unavailable so I had to use my own judgment in assigning character prominences. Such was the case for *Team Human*, *Chaos*, *Carnival of Secrets*, *Sketchy*, and *Tripping to Somewhere*.

This manner of approximating a character's prominence also assumes that a work will have main characters, i.e. that measuring prominence using the main character (besides from the primary narrator(s)) as the upper bound instead of the primary

narrator(s) makes sense. The primary reason I chose to do so was because measuring the name mentions or page mentions for a 1st Person POV character would be difficult.

The above criterion (character prominence) has OR search functionality on the form I created.

1.6.1.5 Homophobia

1.6.1.5.1 Rationale for Inclusion

I judged general knowledge about the level of homophobia in a work to be of likely interest to LGBTQA readers. Readers looking to avoid another “problem” story might like to select books with low homophobia; alternatively, readers searching for realistic levels of homophobia might prefer to select books with high homophobia. Readers who might be triggered by high homophobia levels might also prefer to only select works with low homophobia.

1.6.1.5.2 Criterion and Controlled Vocabulary

The criterion for a LGBTQA work’s general homophobia has a score of 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5, ordered from book worlds with the most negative views of queerness (1) to book worlds with the most positive views of queerness. This criterion does have OR search functionality on the form I created.

A score of 5 corresponds to a work in which readers see no evidence of homophobia. A score of 5 occurs for worlds wherein no homophobia exists whatsoever (such as Moira Moore’s “Hero” series) as well as contemporary fantasy novels in which readers might assume homophobia to exist due to the setting, yet see no evidence of it within the novel (such as Rachel Hawkin’s “Hex Hall” series).

A score of 4 corresponds to a work in which references to homophobia existing occur, but no evidence of homophobia occurs “on-screen.” Narrators themselves must be lacking in homophobia for this definition to apply, and LGBTQA characters’ actions must not be clearly informed by the existence of homophobia in the world. For example, in *The Demon’s Lexicon* by Sarah Rees Brennan, one character makes a passing reference to the fact that Jamie is bullied at school for being gay, but readers see no other evidence of homophobia’s existence and no evidence of Jamie’s experiences with homophobia clearly motivating his actions.

A score of 3 corresponds to works in which some evidence of homophobia is present “on-screen,” but to a relatively minor degree. For this rating to apply, a work’s narrator(s) must themselves not be homophobic. For example, *Shadow Walkers* by Brent Hartinger features a gay protagonist who has decided to stay closeted due to fear of people’s reactions; however, this protagonist does not suffer from internalized homophobia and no other evidence of homophobia appears in the work.

A score of 2 corresponds to works in which homophobia has a strong presence, but is not extreme. This level of homophobia does not lead to self harm or intense queer bashing (at least on-screen; passing references may be made to events that occurred in the past). A homophobic narrator (such as the narrator in Herbie Brennan’s *The Faerie Wars*) can contribute to this rating. *The Demon’s Covenant* by Sarah Rees Brennan qualifies for this rating due to one scene in which a gay character is cornered threateningly by bullies and the internalized homophobia demonstrated by another gay character through his attempts to get a beard of a girlfriend.

A score of 1 corresponds to works in which homophobia is extremely, and often violently, present. Five of the nine works with a 1 homophobia rating include flashbacks to or current descriptions of suicide attempts. One of the remaining four works includes a violent queer bashing that almost kills the protagonist (*Baby Be-bop* by Francesca Lia Block). Another of the four includes references to the death penalty for queerness as well as a narrating character who is so heavily closeted that he's magically suppressed all his sexual desires (*The Novice* by Trudi Canavan). Yet another of the four includes another closeted narrating character as well as one investigation revolving around a queer person being murdered due to his sexual orientation. The last of the four works features plentiful biphobia as well as a mother who is so transphobic that she caused her body-shifting child to develop a split-personality for each of the child's physical bodies.

1.6.1.6 Tropes

1.6.1.6.1 Rationale for Inclusion

LGBTQA “tropes” refers to familiar LGBTQA story threads, such as repeated storylines or character stereotypes. Allowing users to include or exclude these tropes enables users to seek out or avoid those familiar “single stories” of “problem” novels (sexuality orientation epiphany and coming out), dark stories that may deal with high levels of homophobia (abused, kicked out, killed off, queer bashing, suicide attempt), or familiar character types (butch lesbian, flamboyant gay, girl's gay best friend, promiscuous bisexual, queer villain, token queer character). I compiled this list of tropes through observing trends while reading the LGBTQA fantasy novels, drawing upon Malinda Lo's list of common LGBTQA stereotypes, and reflecting upon the past

troublesome need to torment LGBTQA characters mentioned by Manfredi (Lo, 2010; Manfredi, 2009, p. 26).

1.6.1.6.2 Criterion and Controlled Vocabulary

The various types of tropes listed on my search form are the following:

- Abused – refers to a LGBTQA person having been or currently being abused as a youth, or having been or currently being in an abusive relationship. Abuse here typically implies a certain duration of ill treatment and a familiarity between the abuser and individual abused.
- Butch lesbian – refers to lesbian characters who evoke at least in part the butch lesbian stereotype (“manly” woman who often is physically strong, practical, has short hair, etc.).
- Coming out – refers to a LGBTQA character revealing their queer identity to some persons while uncertain as to the positivity of those persons’ reactions. If a LGBTQA character has no qualms about stating their queer identity, the coming out trope does not apply.
- Flamboyant gay – refers to gay male characters who evoke at least in part the flamboyant gay man stereotype (“effeminate” man who tends to have difficult passing due to his fashion sense, delicate features, extreme emotions, etc.).
- Girl’s gay best friend – refers to the frequent times in LGBTQA literature when a gay male character is best friends with a straight female character. Typically, the female character is the work’s protagonist and the gay male character seems to lack any significant straight male friends.

- Kicked out – refers to a LGBTQA character having been or being kicked out of their home. This does not imply that the character was necessarily kicked out due to their sexual orientation, though that has proven to be most often the case in these LGBTQA fantasy novels.
- Killed off – refers to a LGBTQA character dying in any manner within a work or references to the deaths of other LGBTQA persons.
- Promiscuous bisexual – refers to bisexual characters who seem to have difficulty committing to relationships and/or can't make up their mind whether they are gay or straight.
- Queer bashing – refers to violence instigated due to a character's LGBTQA identity. Like "Abused," references to past incidents qualify a work for this trope.
- Queer villain – refers to the presence of at least one queer villain in a work.
- Sexual orientation epiphany – refers to a LGBTQA character realizing their sexual orientation.
- Suicide attempt – refers to a LGBTQA character attempting suicide (or a reference to past suicide attempts). This attempt does not need to be necessarily related to the character's queer identity.
- Token queer character – refers to novels in which readers only get to meet/see one queer character, though other queer characters might be mentioned. This trope does not imply that the queer character in question

is not a significant character, just that they're the only significant queer character.

As YA LGBTQA readers might very well wish to include or exclude these tropes, two criteria in my search form are devoted to tropes: an inclusive criterion and an exclusive criterion, both with OR functionality within the criterion.

1.6.2 Saricks Appeals Terms

1.6.2.1 Rationale for Inclusion

Saricks' appeal categories – pacing, characterization, frame and tone, style, and story line – speak to the underlying reasons why readers prefer works (Saricks, 2005, p. 66). Drawing to an extent from these appeal terms seemed logical, but directly adding the appeal categories and at least a fair sampling of their possible values to a search form seemed slightly problematic. Due to the relatively limited number of book entries in the database (97), a fair number of the Saricks appeals options would likely see little use. Moreover, the sheer number of possible terms to be listed in a search form making use of Saricks terms would be potentially overwhelming. In one sample listing of appeal terms, Saricks lists 28 possible options to describe story line (Saricks, 2005, p. 66). Providing a similar number of options for each appeal term would render my search form even more crowded than it already was. If I wanted to keep my search form in the same basic format as planned (i.e. criteria primarily with checkboxes to enable OR functionality), directly using the Saricks appeals terms as initial search criteria seemed ill-advised.

Instead, I decided to indirectly evoke Saricks appeals terms through genres, then directly draw upon them as appropriate in the extended book reviews (see 1.7.2) while discussing why readers might like or dislike a book.

1.6.2.2 Search Criterion and Limited Vocabulary

I decided which genres to include primarily through examining which genres fit the books I had read. The genre options in my search form are as follows:

- **Adventure:** Describes a novel with some sort of quest; these novels typically have a fair amount of action and a quick pace. This genre evokes the pacing and story line Saricks appeal terms.
- **Alternate Earth:** Describes a novel that takes place in an Earth very much like our own, with the exception that some kind of magic or magical creatures is known. As this genre directly describes setting, it evokes the frame Saricks appeal term.
- **Contemporary Fantasy:** Describes a novel that takes place in current day Earth. As this genre directly describes setting, it evokes the frame Saricks appeal term.
- **Fairy Tales:** Describes a novel that retells or re-imagines one or more fairy tales. This genre evokes story line and characterization.
- **Gateway Fantasy:** Describes a novel in which characters from today's world have found some way of traveling to alternate magical worlds. As this genre directly describes setting, it evokes the frame Saricks appeal term.

- Greek Mythology: Describes a novel that retells or re-imagines Greek myths or characters. This genre evokes story line and characterization.
- High Fantasy: Describes a novel that takes place in an imaginary world that often features rich world-building. This genre evokes frame.
- Historical Fantasy: Describes a novel that takes place during historical times in a world that bears some resemblance to this world's past; historical fantasy is typically slower in pace, with plentiful world-building. This genre evokes frame, as well as style and pacing.
- Horror: Describes a novel that seems in part designed to evoke fear. This genre evokes tone.
- Mystery: Describes a novel that has a significant mystery component, i.e. a component that revolves around trying to find the truth about some crime or secret. This genre evokes story line.
- Paranormal Fantasy: Describes a novel that includes paranormal creatures, meaning magical, human-like creatures such as zombies, vampires, shifters, merpeople, fae, demons, ghosts, angels, etc. This genre to a degree evokes characterization.
- Politics & Intrigue: Describes a novel that has at least one significant story line that involves complicated plotting, intrigue, court or high society politics, etc. This genre evokes pacing, story line, and frame.
- Romance: Describes a novel with a significant romantic subplot that is usually accompanied by some degree of romantic drama. This genre evokes story line and tone.

- Sci-Fi Fantasy: Describes a novel that blurs the boundary between science fiction and fantasy, likely due to the science being so fantastical as to seem like magic. This genre evokes frame.
- Short Stories: Describes a novel that consists of multiple short stories.
- Urban Fantasy: Describes a contemporary fantasy that has a gritty tone and tends to take place in a city; often, though not always, this genre is told in a sarcastic 1st Person POV. This genre evokes frame and tone.

The search form includes all these options for genre; selecting multiple genres initiates OR search functionality.

1.6.3 Content Warnings

1.6.3.1 Rationale for Inclusion

I decided to include possibly triggering content that could be excluded in large part due to Archive of Our Own (<https://archiveofourown.org/>), a popular fanfiction site in which the moderators and users generally take tagging of potentially triggering content very seriously (although writers can choose to state that they have neglected to include any content warnings).

1.6.3.2 Criterion and Limited Vocabulary

I decided which exclusionary options to include primarily through reading the YA LGBTQA fantasy novels and noting any material that some people might find troubling. In one case, doing so resulted in a trigger only present in one work that I still felt it necessary to include (trigger: eating disorder).

The trigger options are as follows:

- Abused – refers to a character being abused (physically, emotionally, and/or sexually) by an authority figure, partner, guardian, or family member.
- Body Dysmorphia – refers to character feeling acutely uncomfortable in their own body, likely due to a trans* identity.
- Disturbing Imagery – refers to violence, gore, or otherwise disturbing imagery.
- Drug Use – refers to scenes of characters doing drugs or references to significant characters doing drugs.
- Eating Disorder – refers to a character having an eating disorder (anorexia nervosa, bulimia, etc.)
- LGBTQA Hate Speech – specifically refers to the presence of “fag” or “faggot,” “dyke,” “tranny,” or “maricon.”
- Non-con or Dub-con – refers to a form of sexual contact occurring without consent or with dubious consent, or to threats of said undesired sexual contact occurring.
- Racial Hate Speech – specifically refers to “nigger.”
- Self Harm – refers to characters harming themselves intentionally and/or suffering from suicidal ideation.
- Sexual Scenes – refers to more than passing references to masturbation and/or sex scenes of varying degrees of explicitness.

Unlike the LGBTQA tropes, these content warnings apply to all a work, i.e. they are not LGBTQA-character specific. Like the LGBTQA tropes, some of these triggers do not have to receive focus to be met, e.g. a character briefly mentioning a past suicide attempt would hit the self harm trigger.

1.6.4 Additional Metadata

1.6.4.1 Rationale for Inclusion

In addition to the LGBTQA-specific criteria, the criterion inspired by the Saricks appeals term, and the content warnings typical of fanfiction sites, I thought it would be appropriate to include a few more general search criteria: midseries status of a book, page count, recommended grade level, and POV.

Book order tends to be important for most fantasy series, so allowing potential readers to exclude any midseries books seems logical, especially as it can sometimes be difficult to determine that a book is part of a series just from the cover. Although library websites do not typically enable searching or sorting by page count, in my experience, the question of length often comes up during readers' advisory. The ability to limit word-count on fanfiction sites like Archive of Our Own and Fanfiction.net also seems to demonstrate a certain demand for specifying length. As this database is primarily aimed at LGBTQA YAs of a range of ages, allowing users to search according to recommended grade levels also seems logical. And as POV preferences allude to Saricks appeals factors, I thought inclusion of POV apt.

1.6.4.2 Criteria and Limited Vocabularies

Exclusion of midseries books can be done by clicking a checkbox. Desired page count can be selected via a drop-down option with the following choices: <=200, 201-300, 301-400, 401-500, and > 500. Multiple POV options can be selected through checkboxes making use of OR search functionality (3rd Person Limited, 3rd Person Omniscient, 1st Person, or Alternating, i.e. switching between different POV styles or


different 1st Person narrators). Desired grade level can be selected as one of several drop-down options (6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, or adult). The recommended grades for each book were found via the NoveList website, using the listed journal evaluations for each book in the following order of priority (high to low): *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, and *Kirkus*. That is to say, if the *School Library Journal* were listed, I would include that grade rating; if not, I would use the *Booklist* grade levels if available; and if that weren't available, I would use the *Kirkus* grade levels if available. If none of those were available (as happened for *Unspoken*, *Spell Bound*, *The Dark Wife*, *Fragile Eternity*, and *Tripping to Nowhere*), I would instead proceed to www.worldcat.org to get a general idea about grade rating, then apply my own judgment.

1.7 What to Display?

1.7.1 Search Result

Out of a desire not to overwhelm searchers, I wanted to include only a manageable portion of my metadata for each immediate search result. I quickly opted to only include data from the books table. Pulling data from the books table is simply easier in terms of coding, as it involves pulling information from my results instead of using the primary keys from my results to access the other tables (genres, tropes, triggers, and chars). Pulling data solely from the books table is also logical as well as practical. Not only would inclusion of all chars/tropes/triggers/genres be potentially overwhelming, as the data from the chars, tropes, triggers, and genres tables are of variable length for each book, planning consistent formatting would be difficult.

Including all the metadata from the books table for each result would likewise be a little overwhelming. Including the title and author at the top of each entry (serving as a link to the more detailed record) seemed obvious, as did providing a picture, numbering each entry, and including the teaser summary. I decided that six other criteria could fit without the information being overwhelming, and settled upon homophobia, pages, racial diversity, general LGBTQA rating, LGBTQA identity diversity, and LGBTQA racial diversity. Higher numbers for the ratings (homophobia, general LGBTQA rating, LGBTQA identity diversity, LGBTQA racial diversity) generally correspond to more positive treatment of the LGBTQA characters. More precisely, a high homophobia score means a low presence of homophobia within the work (see 1.6.1.5); a high general LGBTQA rating means a positive treatment of LGBTQA characters and issues (see 1.6.1.3); a high LGBTQA identity diversity rating means a variety of different queer identities (see 1.6.1.2.2); and a high LGBTQA racial diversity rating means a high proportion of non-white LGBTQA characters (see 1.6.1.2). Here is one sample, the 41st result from a search for all database entries:

41.  **Katana ("Katana" #1) by Cole Gibsen**

Homophobia: 3/5	Pages: 375	Racial Diversity: 5/5
General LGBTQA Rating: 2/4	LGBTQA Identity Diversity: 1/5	LGBTQA Racial Diversity: 1/5

Summary: Raleigh's never been much of a fighter, so she's as surprised as everyone else when she dispatches some muggers with ease. What's this voice in her head giving her battle tips - and is that hot Asian guy for real with his talk of reincarnation?

1.7.2 Detailed Entry

Each detailed entry includes information on the criteria from the search form, a picture, a summary teaser, and some possible pros and cons to the book. Although some criteria like POV only require a simple statement, I decided to explain several other

criteria to a lesser or greater degree. The content warning lists included some parenthetical elaborations as appropriate. Racial/ethnic diversity, homophobia level, and LGBTQA characters all include a brief discussion as opposed to a simple rating. The representation rating is generally the most thoroughly explained of all the criteria, in part because it is such a subjective rating.

Here is an example of a detailed entry:



***Magic's Pawn* ("The Last Herald-Mage" #1) by Mercedes Lackey**

Related Works in Database: [Magic's Promise](#) and [Magic's Price](#)

Summary: 16 year old Vanyel's mask of icy arrogance keeps him safe, but are some things - or some people - worth sacrificing his safe solitude? His fostering with Savil, one of the most famed Herald-Mages of Valdemar, may just set Vanyel on the path to love, loss, and magic.

Pages: 349

POV: 3rd Person Omniscient, with Vanyel as the primary narrator

Genres: Adventure, High Fantasy, Romance

Recommended Grade Level: Adult

Content Warning: Disturbing Imagery (violent death), Self Harm (successful and thwarted suicide attempts, one of which involves the narrator)

Racial/Ethnic Diversity: All characters in this book appear to be white.

LGBTQA Tropes: Coming Out, Flamboyant Gay, Kicked Out, Killed Off, Promiscuous Bisexual, Sexual Orientation Epiphany, Suicide Attempt, Queer Bashing, Queer Villain

Homophobia Level: Homophobia is generally not socially acceptable within Valdemar. Some evidence readers see of this fact include the following: Vanyel's father trying to change his son's habits and keep all knowledge of homosexuality from him in fear that his clothes-loving, beautiful son will turn out queer; Tyndel mentioning that he was assumed to be "cursed" in part due to his homosexuality; Withen calling Vanyel a "perverted little catamite"; Vanyel at one point feeling he taints everything he touches due to his sexuality; and Moondance mentioning being kicked out, then queer-bashed as a youth. Nonetheless, all the narrators (except for Vanyel during his period of internalized homophobia) view homophobia as wrong.

LGBTQA Characters: The narrator's primary narrator is a young gay white man. Other key gay white male characters include Tyndel, Moondance, and Starwind. A gay white villain also has a minor role, and a young bisexual white man is passingly mentioned by one or two characters.

LGBTQA Representation Rating: Well done.

Although it's a disappointing that "The Last Herald-Mage" series has a wealth of queer male characters but nary a mention of queer female characters and problematic that the only canonically confirmed bisexual character is a passingly mentioned character described as a promiscuous and thoughtless person who can't make up his mind, *Magic's Pawn* does a spectacular job with the coming-of-age story of its primary narrator, Vanyel. Vanyel doesn't know what's different about him for a while: he just knows he's different. The frisson of rightness, followed by the shivering fear, when he learns that some men are sexually attracted to other men (but it's not quite respectable) may resonate with LGBTQA readers who have had that moment of realization only to be forced to think about the repercussions of such a truth. Vanyel's joy at a sexual and romantic relationship that finally feels right, his experiences with life in the closet, his occasional slippage into internationalized homophobia, and his interactions with his homophobic father may very well parallel many queer persons' experiences. And although Vanyel's discovery of and response to his sexuality constitutes an emotionally powerful portion of his storyline, it is by far from his only interesting storyline or the defining aspect of Vanyel's character. Lackey's other gay characters (Tyndel, Moondance, Starwind, and Krebain) similarly have storylines unconnected to their sexualities, as well as distinct personalities and functions in the story. Considering Lackey's number of gay characters, the inclusion of one gay villain can be seen as a positive: gay people can be villains as well as heroes, so providing both makes for a balanced perspective. Lackey also treats the trope of the flamboyant gay man trope in an interesting manner. Withen fears Vanyel may be gay due to his liking for fashionable clothes and slightly effeminate appearance, and he is proven right; however, Vanyel's character is far from a cardboard cutout, and he in fact consciously plays up the very traits Withen discourages. Presentation of gay characters like Vanyel - very emotional, fashionable, and beautiful - in a sympathetic, complex manner is important in a society with effemiphobia, though some readers might wish that Vanyel more actively defied the stereotype. Some readers might also be irritated that Vanyel only appears to be allowed to be happy for short intervals of time, with some perhaps taking the most umbrage at the precipitate brutal destruction of the novel's main queer relationship.

You might like this book if . . .

- You like character-focused coming-of-age stories in which the character's sexuality only plays one component, particularly ones in which the character feels things intensely.
- You'd be interested in reading about a young man realize his sexual orientation, abandon the isolation he once courted, and try to navigate a relationship with his beloved in a homophobic world.
- You can empathize with someone who feels alone, but fears expressing vulnerability by seeking meaningful connections.
- You like magic and adventure.

You might want to pass on this book if . . .

- You don't much care for relationships that quickly develop into love, even if extenuating factors exist and a few other characters describe the relationship as potentially unbalanced.
- You dislike tragic endings to your love stories, especially your queer love stories.
- You have little patience with angst.
- You're sensitive to scenes involving suicide attempts.

Scope of Database Entries

This database includes LGBTQA YA fantasy novels. LGBTQA as a literature descriptor here implies that the queer characters are significant (prominence level generally 2 or above). Moreover, although characters strongly implied and later canonically confirmed to be queer might be listed in my chars database (such as Selene in *The Boy from Ilysius*), a work must include at least one currently canonically acknowledged queer character to be eligible for inclusion. As such, the “Harry Potter” series does not qualify, because his sexual orientation is never stated in the books, though the author has since announced that he is gay. Works in which a canonically queer character as of yet has no inklings of their queerness also do not qualify. For example, as Daja only realizes that she is gay in *The Will of the Empress*, none of the books in the earlier “Circle of Magic” series qualify.

YA as a literature descriptor here primarily implies works explicitly marketed to YAs; however, I have also included some adult fantasy novels with very prominent queer young adults and a young adult “feel” to them. I have included 15 fantasy novels qualified as adult according to NoveList. Six of the “adult” novels (Mercedes Lackey’s “The Last Herald-Mage Trilogy” and the first three novels of Jim C. Hines’ “Princess” series) are qualified as juvenile literature or secondary school literature by www.worldcat.org. Three of the remaining adult novels (Ellen Kushner’s *The Privilege of the Sword* and the first two novels of Jim C. Hines’ “Magic Ex Libris” series) have “adult books for young adults” among their Novelist genres. All the remaining six novels have “Young Adult” listed among their top tags (i.e. no need to click on “see top shelves”) on www.goodreads.com.

I have obviously not had the leisure to include all LGBTQA YA fantasy novels that would fit within this scope, particularly as I have personally read or re-read all the database novels within the last year for the purpose of including them in this database. My sample is in essence a convenience sample, especially as determining the expected type of LGBTQA representation in some of the novels I read could be difficult depending on where I had unearthed the recommendation. My sample's status as a convenience sample means that extrapolation from any analysis I do of my results would not be statistically sound, though my analysis might suggest avenues for future research.

Limitations of the Online Database

This database currently possesses several weaknesses, the most primary of which is likely the relatively few number of books archived. This can lead to searches with no results should users try to search on too many criteria in conjunction. One possible solution to this dilemma would be inclusion of an automatically updating “expected number of results” on the screen as users are forming their search queries, as seen when clicking upon the filter button when looking at any of the fanfiction for a specific fandom at Fanfiction.net (such as the “Percy Jackson” series at <https://www.fanfiction.net/book/Percy-Jackson-and-the-Olympians/>). That said, this automatically updating number of results is most likely not the most efficient manner of searching.

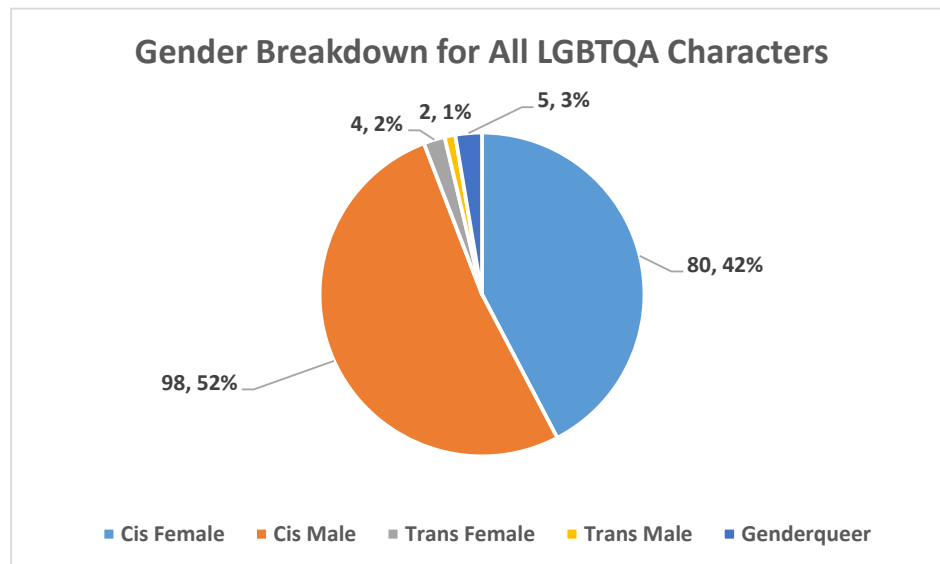
That the LGBTQA fantasy novels I read were a convenience sample also limits the meaningful analysis I can perform on my collected metadata, though this analysis may still suggest interesting possible trends or potential avenues for further research.

Analysis of LGBTQA YA Fantasy

1.8 Types of LGBTQA Characters Represented

1.8.1 Gender

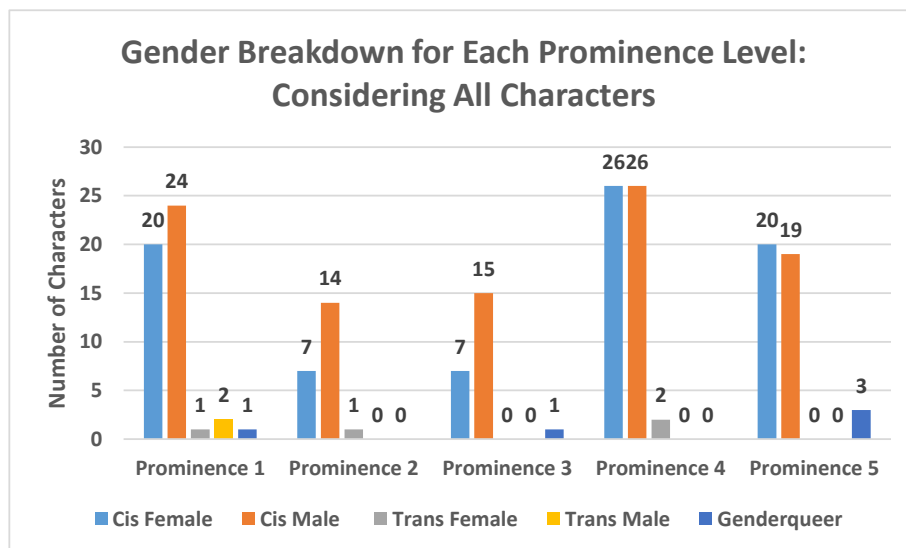
An initial look at the gender breakdown for all LGBTQA characters in the chars database indicates a minimal trans* presence and fairly equal numbers of cis female and cis male characters.



The small percentage of trans* characters, though sobering, is not a surprise. That cis male characters were so close in frequency to cis female characters is actually more surprising considering concerns about the preponderance of cis males in LGBTQA fiction (Downey, 2005, p. 91).

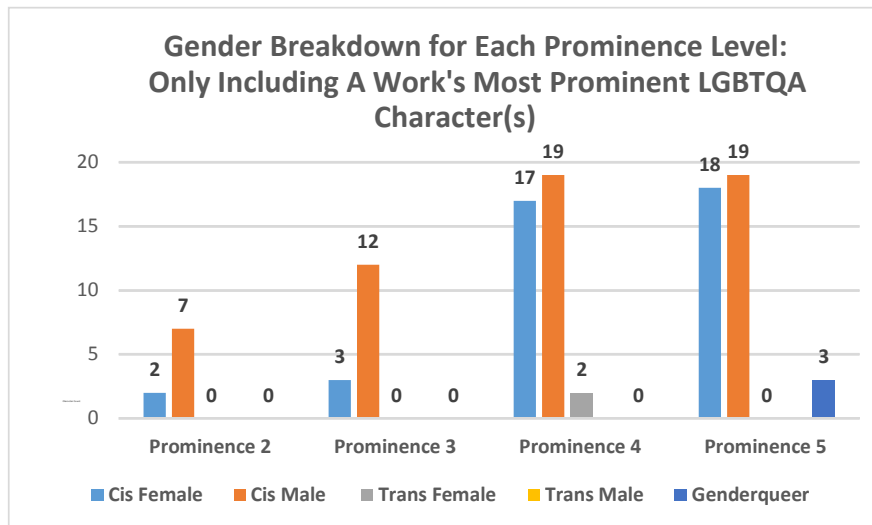
The above pie chart only shows that cis male characters are slightly more frequent than cis female characters (ten point difference in percentages) when considering all characters in the chars database. If cis male characters are significantly more common than cis female characters for high prominence levels, the discrepancy between concerns

about the preponderance of LGBTQA cis male characters and the results of my chart could be easily explained.



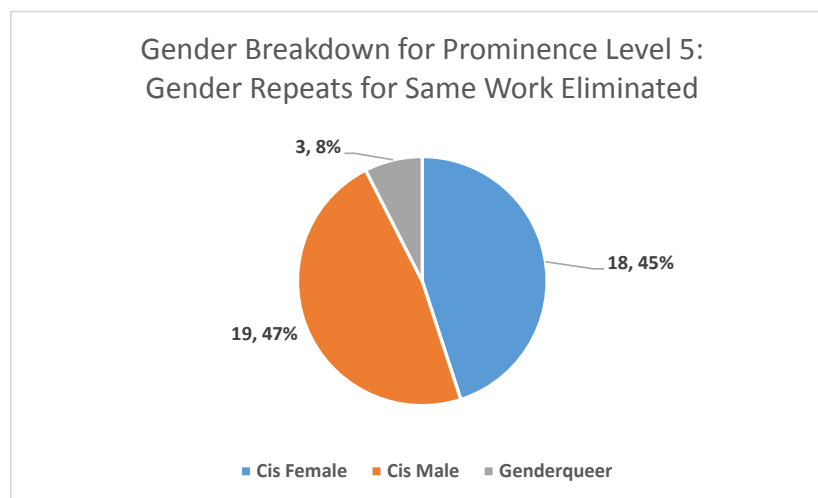
Interestingly enough, the opposite occurred: for my chars database, LGBTQA cis male characters tend to outnumber LGBTQA cis female characters for lower prominence levels (particularly levels 2 and 3) and be essentially equal in frequency to LGBTQA cis female characters at high prominence levels (4 and 5). If anything, the first pie chart overstated the frequency of representation of LGBTQA cis males in my database.

Another possible explanation for the discrepancy comes to mind: if cis female characters in my database are more diverse (according to race, sexual orientation, or relationship orientation) than the cis male characters in my database, the number of cis females might appear higher than the number of the less diverse male characters (as only unique LGBTQA identities for a book are included in the chars database). Limiting each book to the gender of its most prominent character (or genders if there is a tie) results in the following graph:



Cis female characters are evidently somewhat more diverse than male characters, as shown by some increase in the relative frequency of cis male characters. That said, the change is much smaller than one might expect. Also notable in this graph is the complete lack of any trans male characters.

The gender breakdown for prominence level 5 is as follows:



This breakdown is considerably different from Malinda Lo's own pie chart for gender representation for LGBT YA fiction 2003-13, with LGBT YA novels defined as novels with LGBT main characters (seemingly equivalent to my own prominence level 5) (Lo, 2013).

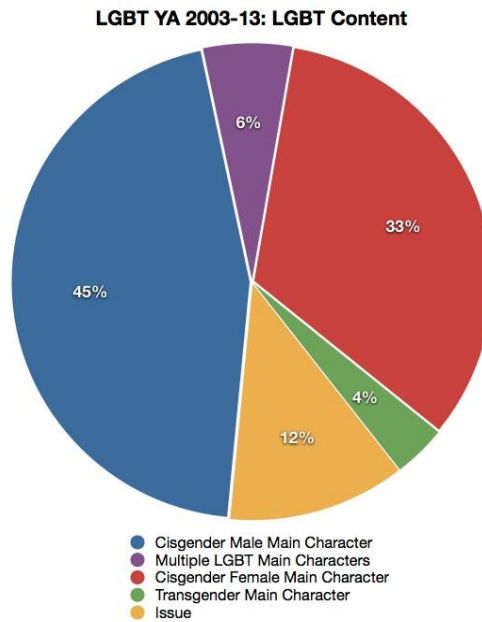
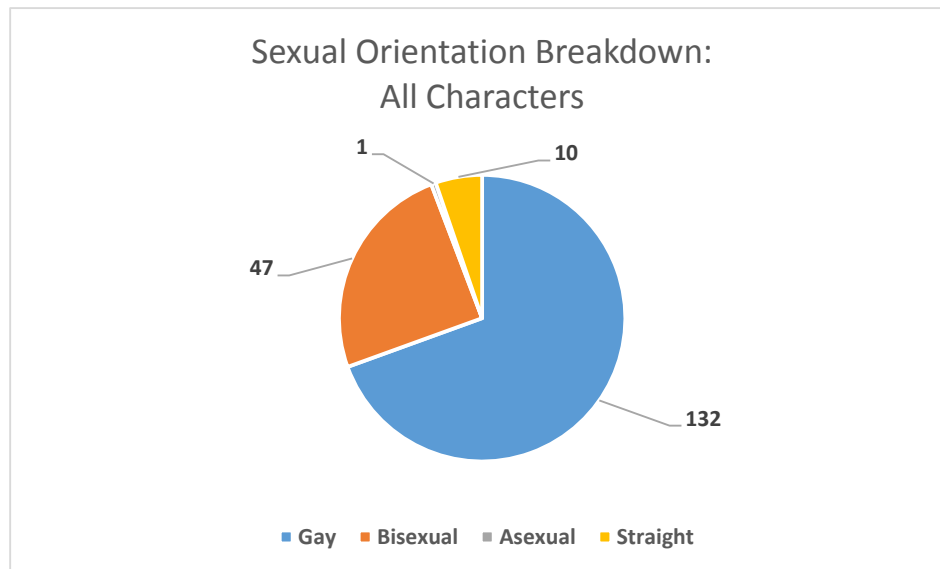


Chart by Malinda Lo | October 2013 | www.malindalo.com

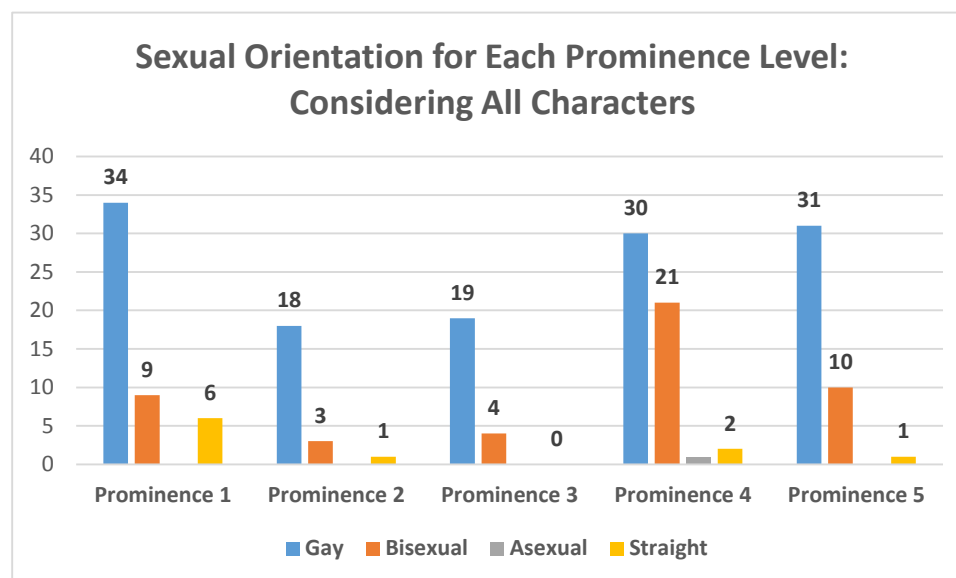
Of course, as my sample is only a relatively small convenience sample, the evidence is not substantial enough to conclude that LGBTQA YA fantasy tends to have a different gender breakdown than general LGBTQA YA fiction; however, the idea certainly merits further investigation.

1.8.2 Sexual Orientation

A pie chart for the sexual orientation breakdown of all characters reveals the prevalence of gay characters and the almost complete absence of asexual characters.

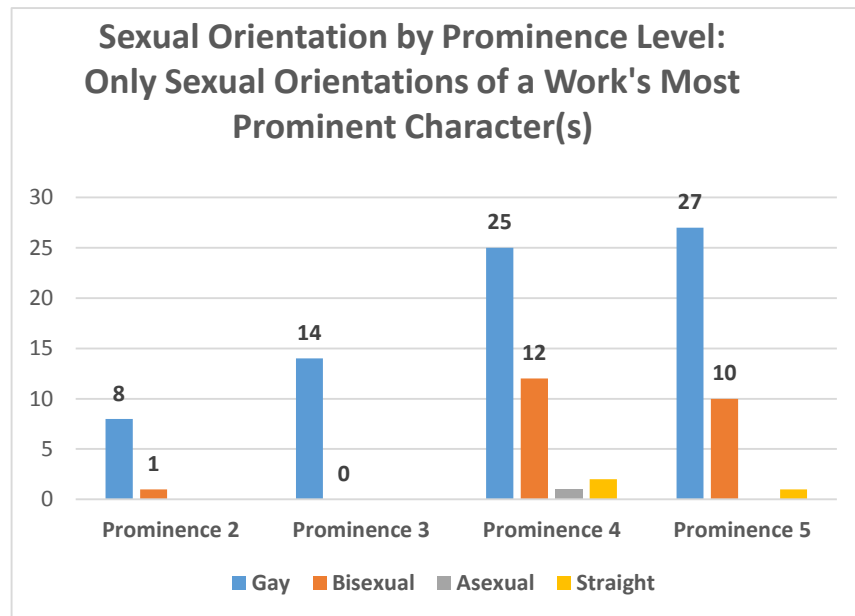


Possibly the most interesting part about a graph of sexual orientation of all database characters across prominence level is the fact that although bisexual characters are more than tripled in prominence levels 1, 2, 3, and 5 by the number of gay characters, the number of bisexual and gay characters at prominence level 4 is actually fairly close: 30 (gay) and 21 (bisexual).



The situation for bisexual characters actually proceeds to get worse when only considering the sexual orientation of a work's most prominent characters (i.e. only one

sexual orientation for work unless two characters with different sexual orientations tie for prominence).

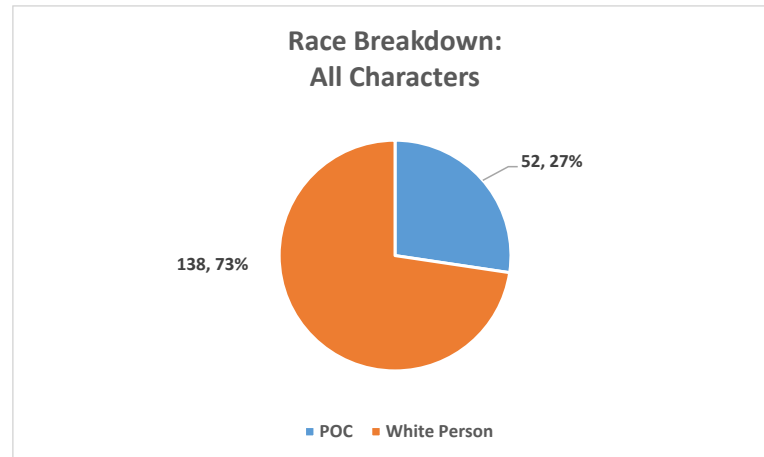


Although the gay characters at prominence level 5 are now slightly less than three times as numerous as the bisexual characters, the number of gay characters at prominence level 4 are now slightly more than two times as numerous as the bisexual characters at that prominence level.

Downey noted concerns about the preponderance of white cis gay males (2005, p.91); my database novels certainly seem to echo the prevalence of gay characters in LGBTQA fiction (p. 96).

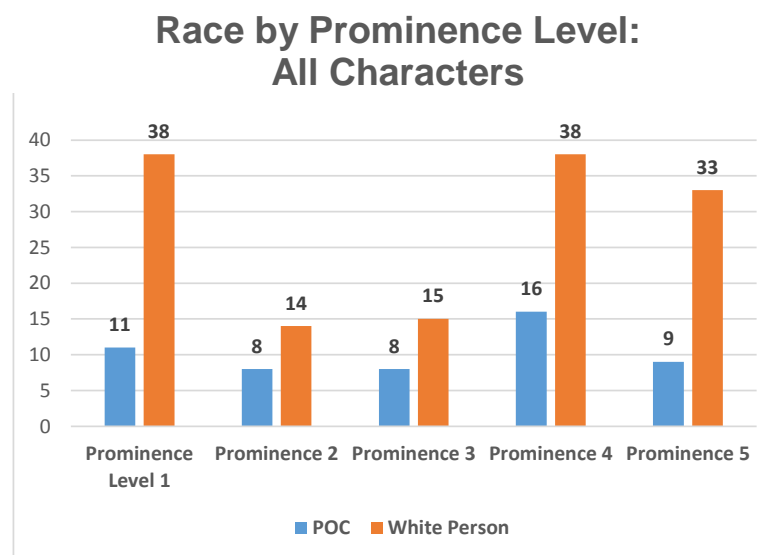
1.8.3 Race

My data also reflect concerns about the predominance of white LGBTQA characters (Downey, 2005, p. 91; Naidoo & Vargas, 2011, p. 19).

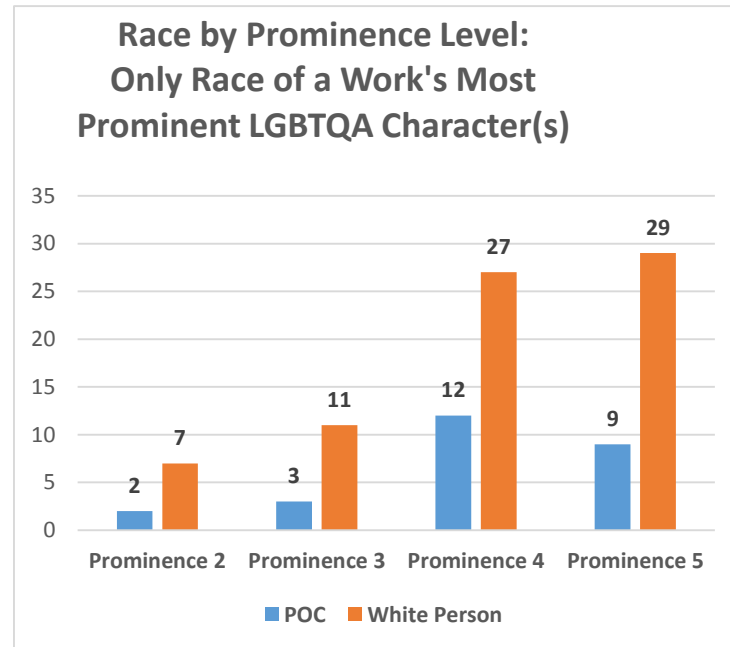


White LGBTQA characters are almost three times as common as LGBTQA persons of color in my chars database when considering all characters.

Examining character races by character prominence level reveals that LGBTQA characters of color are least common (relative to the white characters in their prominence level) in prominence levels 1 and 5.



Although racial diversity considerably worsens for prominence levels 2 and 3 when only considering the race of a work's most prominent LGBTQA character(s) (i.e. only one race for work unless two characters with different races tie for prominence), racial diversity slightly improves for prominence levels 4 and 5.

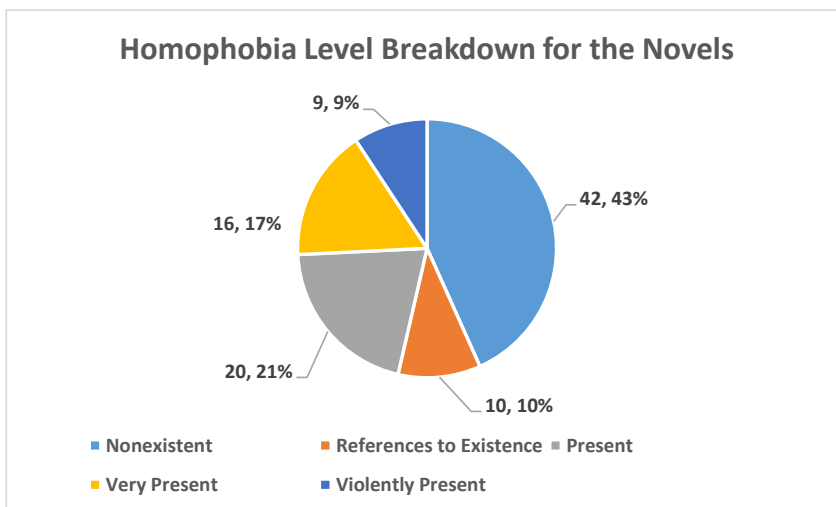


Despite this slight improvement, the race breakdown for level 5 (only race of a work's most prominent LGBTQA character[s]) is noticeably worse than the initial race breakdown for all characters: a drop from 27% POC characters to 21% POC characters.

Overall, my data reflects concerns about the predominance of white LGBTQA characters; however, I suspect these statistics may be improvements over past numbers, though I lack the data to support this supposition (Downey, 2005, p. 91; Naidoo & Vargas, 2011, p. 19).

1.9 Homophobia Levels

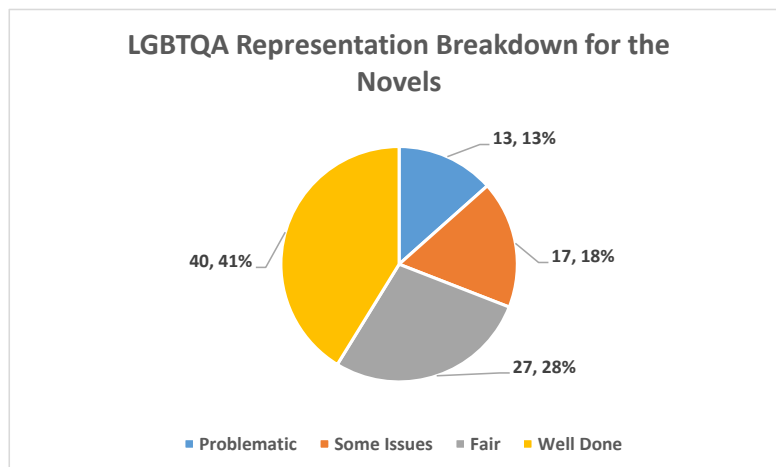
Considering that my creation of a LGBTQA YA fantasy database was in part motivated by a desire to offer alternatives to “issues” novels with their considerable homophobia, determining how many of the novels in the database lacked a high homophobia level seems pertinent.



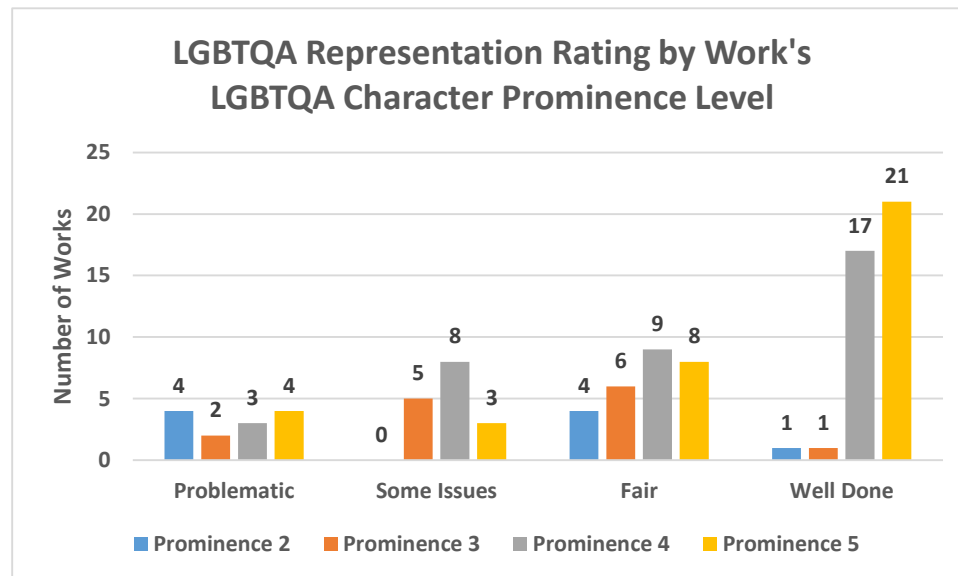
As almost half of the novels in the database contained a nonexistent level of homophobia, this database appears successful in offering alternatives to novels with realistic or escalated levels of homophobia.

1.10 LGBTQA Representation Ratings

The breakdown of the LGBTQA representation scores shows that although LGBTQA representation has generally improved since the days of LGBTQA characters' endless "deserved" suffering, issues still remain. About half of the novels received a "well done" rating (41%), but only 10% fewer received a "problematic" or "considerable issues" rating (31%).



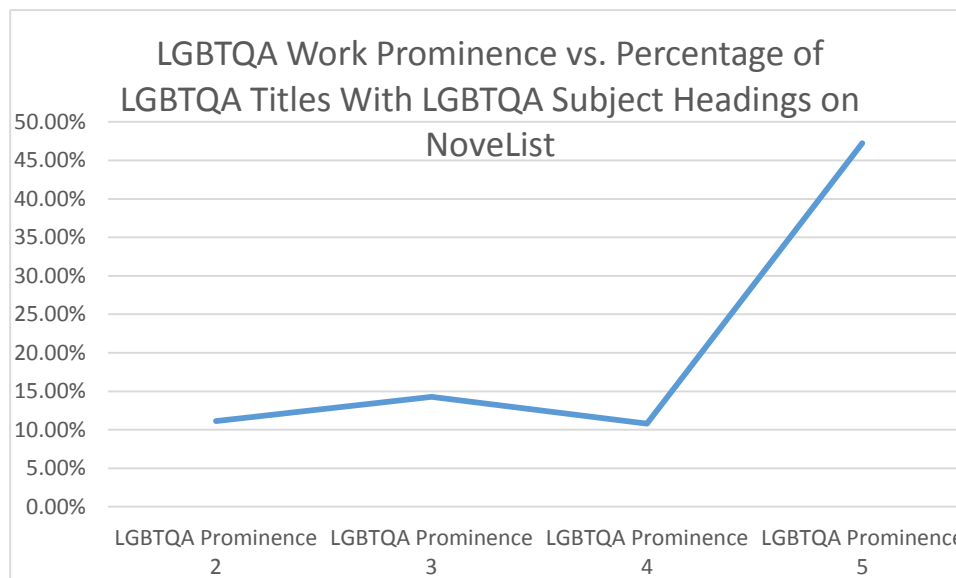
Examination of the novels' LGBTQA representation ratings by prominence level reveals that although prominence level does seem to have some association with rating, even novels with the highest prominence level can fall into the lowest representation rating (problematic).



In short, guarantee of representation is still not enough by itself: readers need assurance that the representation is good representation.

1.11 LGBTQA Subject Headings?

When collecting my data for the database tables, I also kept a record of whether each LGBTQA novel had some LGBTQA subject heading(s) on NoveList in a separate table (not part of the database). My results seemed to echo the findings of the Canadian study mentioned in 1.2.1: even for the inarguably LGBTQA works (i.e. works with a LGBTQA main character), fewer than half of the novels had LGBTQA subject headings in NoveList.



1.12 Conclusion

Creating this LGBTQ YA fantasy database has proven a rewarding, if time-consuming, process. If I had the leisure, I would enjoy adding more novels to the database, particularly because I believe no such resource like this (search capability, etc.) currently exists for LGBTQ fiction, let alone fantasy. If I did have more time, I would particularly seek out additional fantasy novels with trans* characters due to the very limited number of novels with prominent trans* characters in the database and the problematic manner in which most of those trans* characters were treated. Extrapolating from the graphs representing my sample in Section 1.6 would not be statistically sound – and yet some of the results suggest that LGBTQ fantasy might indeed differ from LGBTQ realistic fiction in manners of interest to LGBTQ readers and librarians eager to reach out to LGBTQ teens. LGBTQ fantasy and databases for LGBTQ fantasy seem like topics that would very well merit further examination.

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Appendix

1.13 YA LGBTQA Fantasy Novels Included in Database

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