

April 2022

Disrupting Monolithic Representations of LGBTQ+ Youth: Moving Toward Intersectionality

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Recommended Citation

Jeffries, Matthew S.; S., Ashley Boyd; and Darragh, Janine Julianna (2022) "Disrupting Monolithic Representations of LGBTQ+ Youth: Moving Toward Intersectionality," *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*: Vol. 4: Iss. 2, Article 3.

Available at: <https://sophia.stkate.edu/rdyl/vol4/iss2/3>

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We are all complex, multi-faceted beings, and our gender identification and sexuality are just one small part of who we are. While positive and affirming representations of LGBTQ+ youth have increased in young adult literature (YAL) over the past few years (Blackburn, Clark, and Nemeth; Boyd and Bereiter; Jenkins and Cart), focused attention on the nuances of these characters as well as their multiple voices are still needed. When students read literature that represents their perspective, especially in their classrooms, they feel seen and affirmed (Crisp and Knezek 79). While titles exist (e.g., *I Wish You the All Best* (Deaver), *Felix Ever After* (Callender)), it is rare to see young adults in literature who identify as gender nonconforming or are at the beginning of questioning their sexual orientation, and even less often do we see how these factors intersect with other social identities such as mental health or race to provide an authentic portrayal of youth identity.

The 57 Bus: A True Story of Two Teenagers and the Crime that Changed Their Lives (D. Slater) and *Darius the Great is Not Okay* (Khorram) offer examples of complex lived experiences of LGBTQ+ young adults. Sasha from *The 57 Bus* identifies as genderqueer (and later agender), and Darius from *Darius the Great is Not Okay* is questioning his sexuality. Khorram shared of his character's identity, "for me personally, yes, I wrote Darius as someone who was questioning, and with the idea that he would eventually—past the end of the novel—grow to identify as gay" (Mizzi). We selected these books to highlight intersectional narratives that are important in showcasing nuanced lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people. For example, Sasha is diagnosed with Asperger syndrome and Darius is exploring his Persian culture and heritage. In each book, the authors illustrate the intersections in identities of LGBTQ+ youth and thus, they can be valuable additions in English classrooms that seek to disrupt monolithic representations of LGBTQ+ communities.

Monoliths within LGBTQ+ YAL

As Jenkins and Cart explain in the introduction to *Representing the Rainbow in Young Adult Literature: LGBTQ+ Content since 1969*, books with characters who identify as LGBTQ+ have a relatively short history, with 50 representations in the 70's and 80's combined, 82 in the 90's, 252 between 2000-2009, and 513 titles between 2010-2016 (xi). As inclusion of characters who identify as LGBTQ+ have increased throughout the decades, the representations have become more complex, diverse, and unique. In *Representing the Rainbow*, Jenkins and Cart identified a three-part framework for gay/lesbian characters: homosexual visibility, gay assimilation, and queer consciousness/community, categorizing the early novels of the 1970's and 1980's as largely coming out stories, falling under the "homosexual visibility" (xiv) category. Logan et al. write

This focus on the problem, the identity itself, often drained novels of in-depth character portrayals that teens could easily relate to and a lack of innovative plotlines. Still, they offered readers an opportunity to see protagonists acknowledging the existence of these identities (31).

More recent young adult (YA) LGBTQ+ texts have moved away from didactic and depressing coming out stories. These texts:

. . . may be classified as gay assimilation. These types of novels contain queer characters who exist in the context of their social circles. Their identities simply are and do not drive the plot or characterization of the novel. The sexual identity may have no significant meaning at all to the plot of the novel. More recently we are able to find novels that emphasize queer consciousness/community. In these novels we find that the characters

are not alone but are surrounded by supportive friends and family members, living full, realistic, and well-rounded lives. (Logan et al. 31)

With each passing year there are more and more YA books published with characters who are LGBTQ+, and the plots and characters of these books are arguably more complex and unique. The 2000's has introduced several new trends with regards to LGBTQ+ YA books including characters who are transgender and books that hint at bisexuality (Garden). Despite the increase in representation, however, gaps remain. Gay, cisgender, white male characters still dominate the existing body of work (Cart and Kaywell 6; Garden), and it takes effort to find characters who are multi-faceted with regards to sexuality/gender and race/ethnicity and ability.

Convergence of Identity and Intersectionality

Despite the fact that “intersectional identities thrive in today’s youth culture” (Durand and Jiménez-García 9), monoliths, or single type stories, have often been portrayed in LGBTQ+ YAL and are limiting. Teens need YAL that explores the convergences of identities and intersectionality. The convergence of identities and intersectionality may seem to be the same concept; however, this is a specious argument. Rather, the convergence of identities is the multitude of identities that someone holds (e.g., gay, white, cisgender man). In contrast, intersectionality focuses on marginalized social identities, which overlap in individuals and “account for multiple grounds of identity” (Crenshaw 2) that are affected by systems of oppression and discrimination.

These multiple grounds of identity, as Crenshaw explains, are rooted in colluding systems of oppression. In her foundational article, Crenshaw explains how Black women are not protected under race statutes because Black men do not experience the same systems, and they are not protected under gender statutes because white women do not experience the same

systems. Rather, Black women, in her example, are structurally unprotected because of these intersecting systems of oppression.

Collins and Bilge write, “[W]hen it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division... but by many axes that work together and influence each other” (11). These axes of social division or social identities also impact LGBTQ+ communities. Many LGBTQ+ people hold other marginalized identities, as no queer or transgender person is queer or transgender in a vacuum. As Audre Lorde points out, “[t]here is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (138). For example, and what we illuminate through our study in this article, is that LGBTQ+ people work through homophobic and/or transphobic systems all the time, and those who have other marginalized identities also navigate other systems (e.g., racism, ableism) simultaneously. However, YAL has just begun to explore the convergence of identities, and not necessarily the intersections, or the power dynamics related to LGBTQ+ people who hold other marginalized identities. Gill, discussing *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, encourages discussion of “why/how people of higher social economic status are accepted for being gay (as opposed to others) and what that might also mean for being a racial minority and openly gay” (81).

Intersectional identities in YAL not only reflect the diverse society in which we live, but also speak back to, as Gill explains, the fact that YAL has traditionally been “dominated by heterosexual white characters and stories that placate the middle class and enforce dominant culture” (80). Similar to Durand and Jiménez-García, who argue “representations of identity in recently published youth literature favor. . .discourses and texts that acknowledge youth identities as fluid, overlapping, and intersecting” (1) with regard to youth of color, we examine

two contemporary YA texts that explore different facets of intersectionality within LGBTQ+ representation. However, the two chosen texts stand out in that they represent intersectionality with regards to sexuality, race/ethnicity, and mental health (Khorram's *Darius the Great is Not Okay*) and gender identity and ability (Slater's *The 57 Bus*). Both serve to queer notions of the "linear development" and "long history of narratives around adolescents that attempt to structure aging and growth in hierarchical ways," (K. Slater 2) and instead challenge us to see the complexity that youth embody. In the following sections, we explore how these stories disrupt monoliths of LGBTQ+ YAL and can be used in classrooms to illuminate the often obscured experiences of LGBTQ+ people.

Neurodivergence and Gender Identity in Nonfiction

In *The 57 Bus: A True Story of Two Teenagers and the Crime that Changed Their Lives*, author Dashka Slater complicates the monolith of a heinous crime that occurs on an Oakland bus in November 2013. A review from the *School Library Journal* showcases the strengths of *The 57 Bus* when Parrott writes "Slater artfully unfolds a complex and layered tale about two teens whose lives intersect with painful consequences. This work will spark discussions about identity, community, and what it means to achieve justice." This vital story examines the lives of Sasha and Richard, both of whom have intersectional identities, and allows all readers an entrée to conversations about justice and intersectionality.

Sasha, a gender nonconforming white teen, is taking the 57 bus home from the private school that they attend when they fall asleep. Richard, an African American high school junior, who attends a different high school than Sasha, is also on the 57 bus. Encouraged by his friends in what is thought will be a harmless prank, Richard lights Sasha's skirt on fire. In that moment, everything for both of them changes. Sasha is taken to the hospital where they spend nearly four

weeks undergoing surgeries to treat the second- and third-degree burns that they have suffered. Richard is arrested the following day and is charged with two felonies, each considered a hate crime, thereby adding time to his sentence if convicted.

Slater begins the book with what occurs on the bus. She then details Oakland's complicated existence as a racially/ethnically diverse city, but with major income inequality and high rates of violent crime. The 57 bus travels through the more affluent parts of Oakland to the more impoverished areas of Oakland, a route that passes 120 blocks in the city. This set-up contextualizes the different lives that Sasha and Richard each has off the bus. Sasha's parents are married and middle-class, and Richard's mother and stepfather are working class.

The rest of the book is broken up into four parts. The first focuses on Sasha's gender exploration journey and their interest in language. In this section, the reader learns that Sasha was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome at age seven, which is an important part of their identity. In the second part, Slater centers Richard's upbringing, his goofy personality, and his recent commitment to turning his life around with the help of a program he has joined at school. The third part concentrates on the day of the fire and the few days afterward. The final part, titled *Justice*, explains what happens in Richard's trial and his time within the criminal justice system.

Sasha's parents, Debbie and Karl, are constantly supportive of Sasha. Despite having many questions, they embrace Sasha's differences and supported their creation of new languages that are more inclusive.

Slater writes of Sasha:

They thought about numbers a lot, and shapes, and the size of the universe. They drew imaginary subway maps and worked out math problems on a whiteboard the family kept in the breakfast nook. They were interested in space and Legos and trains and the ancient

Greeks. . . . Sasha couldn't say whether any of this was because they had Asperger's, because of course, they'd never *not* had Asperger's. (21)

Sasha's parents are also supportive when they came out as genderqueer, though they do not understand it completely. After Sasha comes out to them, Sasha posts on social media that they are genderqueer (later identifying as agender) and they do not identify as masculine or feminine. Dashka Slater writes, "Reading the post, and the congratulatory comments that followed it, Debbie and Karl were left scratching their heads. Apparently, something big had just happened, but they weren't entirely sure what it was. What did genderqueer even mean?" (30).

Unfortunately, Debbie can not necessarily separate gender identity/expression from sexual orientation: "Debbie's mind kept going to the sex part. Who did Sasha want to sleep with? After Sasha announced they were genderqueer, she asked for clarification. 'Who are you attracted to? Do you have sexual feelings for men?'" (D. Slater 32).

A week after the incident, Karl writes a letter to the parents and staff at the elementary school where he teaches. While he emphasizes fire safety and not making assumptions about what has happened, he offers information on Sasha's gender identity. He writes,

Being agender simply means that the person doesn't feel they are 'either a boy or a girl.' I realize this is a concept that even adults have difficulty wrapping their heads around. (My wife and I frequently slip up in our pronoun usage, much to Sasha's chagrin!) So I can't pretend that it's an issue that all young children will grasp. But what they certainly can and should understand is that different people like different things. Different people dress or behave or look different. And that's a GOOD thing. Sasha feels comfortable wearing a skirt. It's part of their style. They also frequently sport a necktie and vest. Sasha likes the look, and frankly, so do I. It makes me smile to see Sasha being Sasha. (188)

As Karl notes, he and Debbie have struggled with misgendering Sasha. This also happens the day of the incident when Debbie uses “he/him” pronouns instead of “they/them.” While Debbie and Karl have the best of intentions, sometimes they make mistakes. However, they try and correct themselves throughout the novel when needed. Sasha’s parents are shown to strive to be affirming of Sasha, but it is not shown whether or not they recognize the nuance of Sasha’s intersectional experience.

Engaging with Students

The 57 Bus is a unique selection for a classroom because of its ability to engage with a multitude of colliding, yet important systems. First, the book focuses on a crime against an agender person, but the author does not make them a victim. Incidents, like the one in this book, are more frequent for transgender and gender nonconforming people in the United States, but transgender/gender non-conforming people are much more than victims. In order to gain a deeper understanding, students might read additional narratives and compare and contrast them with the presentation of Sasha in this text. To further explore the intersectional aspects of the characters’ identities, teachers can ask students as they read: *How do Sasha’s identities as agender and neurodivergent affect them? In what ways do both create the person that Sasha is? How do they also lead to their systemic discrimination? What other elements of their identity are important to consider in an analysis of their character? Similarly, what are the intersectional aspects of Richard’s character, and how are they reflected in his systemic oppression?*

This book gives an up-close narrative of a young person who has a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome. Although the We Need Diverse Books campaign explicitly names disability as part of their definition of diversity (“We Need Diverse Books”), often in mainstream discourse,

disability is not considered a part of diversity. In her article, which encourages more literature with characters on the spectrum, Van Hart writes

Educators often promote consciousness of constructs that influence the creation of minority groups such as race, gender, sexual identity, and ethnicity. Historically, however, disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are viewed as problems that require a solution rather than a form of diversity to be respected and perhaps even celebrated. (27)

Van Hart thus notes that understanding other marginalized identities is imperative for changing the dominant narratives surrounding people with disabilities. We agree that people with disabilities are often viewed as troublesome or not worthy of attention, but we disagree with Van Hart's statement that most other marginalized groups are not seen in this way. For example, those who identify as LGBTQ+ have often been forced into conversion therapy to "treat the problem." Through the *57 Bus*, questions must be asked to understand both neurodiversity and gender identity/expression and how they interact with each other. Unpacking the historic treatment of both is also crucial to gaining a better contextual understanding. With teacher guidance, students might also explore additional nonfiction resources that report on hate crimes and compare them to what has happened to Sasha, perhaps focusing on their own geographic location and policies and laws that govern their state. Students could explore: *What are hate crimes? Do hate crime statutes protect marginalized people?* Then, they might consider how they can create more allies and advocates and design social action projects (Boyd and Darragh 75-76) to address this need, perhaps organizing a club in their school or a community awareness campaign for acceptance.

Rather than a victim, Sasha is shown in their fullness—happy, laughing, and with non-traditional hobbies. Richard is not framed as a monster, but as a person who has made a mistake. To humanize each character, students could complete a character map of them and note any of their own similarities and connections. They might investigate additional primary sources to learn who the real people on which the text is based are, and they could extend the text by composing additional scenes based on their research.

Last, students might deeply examine the concept of restorative justice, which is briefly discussed in the book. Restorative justice can offer repairing of relationships in lieu of lengthy punitive sanctions and can lead to lower recidivism rates (Bouffard et al. 469). They might design informative multimedia presentations and propose a plan for their own school to amend discipline policies in favor of more restorative attempts. They might invite guest speakers, such as lawyers or mediators, to learn more about this approach.

Mental Health, Culture, and Sexuality in Fiction

In a compelling tale of the search for identity amidst complicated intersections, Adib Khorram tells the story of protagonist Darius Kellner and his Persian family in *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* (2018). Born to a white father, Stephen, and an Iranian mother, Shirin, Darius struggles to find his place in Portland, Oregon. Trudon writes, “As a teenage outcast story, ‘Darius the Great Is Not Okay’ [sic] may seem familiar, but it’s layered with complexities of identity, body image and mental illness that are so rarely articulated in the voice of a teenage boy of color.” At home, he is bullied by his peers by derogatory name-calling and defilement of his personal property, all the while his father wishes Darius could just be “more normal” (60) and stand up to his tormenters. His family ventures to Iran to visit, for the first time, his dying grandfather, and he experiences the reactions of family members to his depression as they ask,

“what are you depressed for?” and tell him “to try harder” (102). Balancing these instances, however, are beautifully captured moments in which Darius engages in the rich cultural traditions of his family, learns of the Darioush the Great after whom he was named, and cultivates a friendship with another young man his age, Sohrab.

Establishing an instant connection, Sohrab and Darius form a close bond. Sohrab tells Darius, ““Your place was empty before. But this is your family. You belong here,”” (190) and Darius reciprocates a newfound sense of wholeness. Openly affectionate, Sohrab’s physical contact and comfort in sharing his feelings surprises Darius throughout the novel, challenging conventional notions of masculinity and gender in the United States. Darius opens up to Sohrab about his struggles with his father, his mental health, and his feeling of not being a “True Persian” (p. 31). Sohrab likewise shares that his own father is in prison and reveals his scuffles with his classmates due to his social positioning.

As their relationship develops, readers discern Darius questioning his sexuality and navigating his strong feelings toward Sohrab. Although Darius’s sexual orientation is not explicit in the novel, as mentioned earlier, Khorram has said that he did intend for Darius to be perceived as a questioning character (Mizzi), and in the sequel, Darius has a boyfriend. In the first text, readers can sense Darius’s sense of uncertainty as he showers after a soccer game with Sohrab and works to understand his physical reaction to the situation. When Sohrab asks him, ““So you don’t have a girlfriend, Darioush?”” Darius responds in the negative, noting “no matter how you answer that question people will always read too much into it” (214). Sohrab then asks, ““How come?”” and Darius “didn’t know how to answer” because he could not “lie to Sohrab” (214). These lines hint at Darius questioning his sexual identity but, as noted earlier, leave much to the reader to determine. Late in the novel, when Darius tells his father that Sohrab is the “the best

friend I ever had,” but knows “there was more,” yet, he “wasn’t ready to talk about more” (287), readers more firmly realize that Darius is questioning his sexual orientation. While the process of questioning is often addressed in literature, Khorram does not foreground this part of Darius’s identity like in other LGBTQ+ focused books. Rather, Darius is beginning to question his sexual orientation only slightly, or at least what is revealed to the reader. This portrayal demonstrates that questioning can take time and energy to fully understand one’s self.

With regard to the cultural aspect, we would be remiss not to mention that Iran is not a nation that has a tradition of being accepting of people who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. In fact,

the government of Iran... has proclaimed the Shia branch of Islam as a state, religion, and the vast majority of those living in Iran have to associate themselves with it. Even those who do not associate themselves with that branch of Islam have to live by the Iranian government interpretations of Shia Islam and abide by it. As in the case of Iran, the closeness of governmental and religious institutions restricts freedoms and dictates the permissibility of life, especially in areas related to sexuality (Blackburn and Deiri 51). Indeed, in parts of Iran, “homosexuality is considered a capital offense” (51). Najmabdi writes “in Persian, sex/gender/sexuality are tied together and are indistinct” (qtd. in Blackburn and Deiri 53). In fact, the word ‘sex’ does not translate directly into Persian (53). Thus, Darius’s narrative and his sexuality is also complicated by his geographic location in the novel and his family’s upbringing—all important intersections to explore.

The novel’s exploration of these intersections make it an important narrative for the classroom. As students read and uncover the traditions and locations that Darius details, they learn about Persian culture and can debunk typical stereotypes. Darius, for example, is surprised

that Sohrab has an iPhone and that his Mamou, his mother's mother, listens to ABBA. References to different Persian dishes and the ways they are employed to celebrate certain holidays are informative as well, and social class systems separating Sohrab, who is Bahá'í, from the Zoroastrians and Muslims can enhance students' understandings of social structures different from those in the United States. And yet, Darius's struggles to fit in are likely relatable. He cannot speak Farsi although his younger sister can, and he finds himself often feeling left out due to this linguistic barrier.

Throughout the book, Darius is navigating his cultural identity. Sometimes, he feels "very Persian" like when Sohrab gifts him a football jersey (241). At other times in the book, Darius feels marginalized from his cultural identity. For example, a family member comments that his dislike of a certain dish makes him "not very Persian" (182). These feelings intersect with his mental health. As they begin their trip, his mother notes "People in Iran don't think about mental health the way we do back home" (56), and while Darius is in Iran he struggles with feeling like an outsider on multiple levels. In addition, when he befriends Sohrab, whose cultural traditions involve deference, kindness, and a show of emotions, Darius questions his understandings of these behaviors and his own feelings toward his newfound relationship.

Engaging with Students

Darius the Great offers a multitude of options to engage in complex dialogues related to intersectionality. The intersections of race/ethnicity, mental health, and LGBTQ+ identities allow for robust conversations and projects. In addition, they allow for many students, especially multiracial students, to be seen in literature.

Students could conduct research projects on Iran, investigating the religious and social classes there as well as the history of the country. If they are not familiar with the protests

Sohrab refers to that led to his father's imprisonment, attention to this history would be key. Furthermore, students could keep a running dictionary to define the Farsi terms included, the many references to foods that might be unfamiliar, and the various titles that Darius shares. Teachers should be careful not to place a burden on Persian students to teach their peers; however, if students in a class wanted to contribute their funds of knowledge (Moll et al.133), they could help develop these lists and could likewise contribute their own if possible. It is the teacher's responsibility to find the balance to bring in student voices without tokenizing students and their experiences. Likewise, the class could investigate Darius the Great and create comparisons to additional figures, possibly from their cultures if different, who are held in a similar regard. They might explore how mental health is treated in Iran as compared to the United States and how sexuality and gender are viewed by various groups in each country. This conversation will require attentiveness to not condemn Persian culture or create a 'them versus us' dichotomy. Instead, a teacher could use this as a point to showcase how the United States could also do more for LGBTQ+ people. There are also several references to depression as hereditary, and teachers could invite a mental health professional from the community or a school counselor to discuss this topic and answer students' questions. This person could address how often perceptions of mental health intersect with cultural norms around the world.

Teachers might also ask students to journal consistently as they read, asking them about their own experiences feeling at times simultaneously like an "insider" and an "outsider." Teachers would likely initially want to define what it means to be "questioning" and have students trace that aspect through the book. To explore the intersectional aspects of Darius's identity, they might ask students: *How does Darius's feeling of questioning intersect with his*

culture? How do both affect his mental health? How do these overlapping factors contribute to the way he is treated by others, particularly his family and his peers at school?

With the knowledge gained from this reading and discussion, students might engage in projects such as awareness campaigns that advertise mental health resources or they might create their own student support organization if one does not exist at their school. They might also consider projects related to bullying and to building relationships across cultural lines. While teachers should be mindful of the “heroes and holidays” pitfall (Banks 6-9) in which cultures are celebrated and forgotten, students might wish to explore some of the food described in the novel alongside a study of the holidays to gain better insight into the culture under study. Again, students, parents, teachers, or local organizations might wish to contribute their own funds of knowledge (Moll et al.) to educate students for whom Iranian culture is new.

Teacher Preparation

As three white, cisgender scholars, we remain vigilant and open to critique in how our own lived experiences impact the research and teaching that we do, especially as related to social groups and experiences that are not our own. Besides some shared identities, we also hold divergent identities too. Matthew is a queer man who manages severe anxiety. He also serves as a university LGBTQ+ center director. Ashley is a straight woman raised in the rural Southeastern United States where she taught high school and is now a professor of English education. Janine is a straight woman in her twenty-eighth year of teaching, beginning her career in a high school in rural Appalachia and currently teaching courses on English teacher preparation and young adult literature.

We, the authors, having been raised in the United States, have lived our entire lives within white supremacy culture (Okun). In our practice with pre-service and current teachers

who are overwhelmingly white, we are uniquely positioned to challenge their worldview and help them understand how white supremacy culture operates in our country. We hope to dislodge them from expectations of perfectionism and either/or thinking (Okun), because diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) work requires humility, listening, and working together where a simple solution does not exist to dismantle systems of racism, homophobia, and transphobia. While these systems are daunting and overwhelming because of their normalization within society, we have an obligation to utilize our privilege to make cracks in these systems. Many of our students will need to start small because they are just beginning to unlearn problematic behaviors and histories. With that being said, we offer a few considerations when teaching YAL with characters who have intersectional identities.

- Take responsibility for mistakes. If you make a mistake during your lesson, return to it the next class period. This behavior models that no one always gets it right when talking about DEIJ and that, for the most part, you can address your mistake through open and honest reflection and authentic dialogue wherein you encourage students to share the power in the classroom and contribute their thoughts and feelings.
- Read up on current issues. If you are not sure about how LGBTQ+ people are currently treated in Iran or in the United States, inform yourself on current events. Another example of knowledge to have when teaching about related topics is the Black Lives Matter movement and how Black men are impacted by the prison industrial complex. This is important in contextualizing *The 57 Bus* and for current discourse.
- Practice, practice, practice what is unknown or unfamiliar. If Sasha's use of they/them pronouns is hard, practice them. If ensuring that when talking about Darius' race and

ethnicity, you slip into him just being Persian and not multiracial/multiethnic, then practice. Again, we do not always get it right, but it does not absolve us from trying.

- Provide students the opportunity to take action. Often when learning about intersecting systems of oppression students can feel hopeless or unsure of how they might address inequities. Crafting assignments and projects in which students can design and implement action related to their understandings are key (Boyd and Darragh 8). Allowing for student choice in topic and type of action can also ensure engagement and follow-through.

Conclusion

Both *The 57 Bus* and *Darius the Great is Not Okay* show readers that humans are composed of various facets. Sexuality and gender are part of those, and they are impacted by numerous other factors. None of us is one identity, instead we are many, often complicated and complex, identities. We assert that teachers can use YA texts that portray diverse, complex characters, like the ones above as a vehicle by which to analyze intersectionality. These provide an approach that helps readers in “understanding human life and behavior rooted in the experiences and struggles of disenfranchised people; and as an important tool linking theory with practice that can aid in the empowerment of communities and individuals” (Collins and Bilge 36). Helping our students nuance their identities as well as those of others can create more open-minded individuals who are ready to create more affirming communities.

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