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„Teaching the Taboo: LGBTQ Writing in the EFL
Classroom and the Representation of Lesbian Identities in
Selected YA Novels“

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Alina Beneder

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“Every gay and lesbian person who has been lucky enough to survive the turmoil of growing up is a survivor.

Survivors always have an obligation to those who will face the same challenges.”

- Bob Paris

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List of Abbreviations

AHS	Allgemein bildende Höhere Schule
BMBF.....	Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CLT.....	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
GLTB	Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Transsexual
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transsexual, Queer/Questioning
YA.....	Young Adult

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1. Introduction

As sexual orientation is a particularly private and sensitive topic, figures describing the number of people who do not identify as being heterosexual remain a rough estimate. As a result of this respect for privacy, official studies providing data concerning Austrians' sexual orientation have not been conducted yet. A Dalia Research online survey conducted in 2016, however, revealed that approximately 6.2 percent of Austrians identified as being clearly homosexual, bisexual, or transsexual, which is above the European average of 5.9 percent. The study also reported that the number of respondents aged 14 to 29 proved to be almost three times more likely to answer that they did not consider themselves heterosexual compared with the European average (Dalia Research). Moreover, the Dalia study showed that slightly more female participants identified as being part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) community than the male participants. Regarding the literary market and critical discourse, however, there is general consensus among experts that women play an inferior role within the seemingly open-minded LGBTQ community (Jimenez; Cummins).

Despite the growing visibility of the LGBTQ community and recent developments in legislation and politics within the past two decades, individuals who do not correspond to the heterosexual norm dominating European society continue to experience firmly established prejudice and manifestations of homophobia. As the developmental stage of adolescence is characterized by far-reaching insecurity and the fear of isolation as a consequence of otherness, young adults of the LGBTQ community are especially sensitive to the derogatory remarks and behavior of others (Silbereisen and Weichold 247; Berk 509f.). A study by McDaniel, Purcell, and D'Augelli (qtd. in Berk 510) shows that this type of devaluation frequently entails long-lasting mental damage that may lead to serious psychological disease, auto-aggressive behavior, and possibly to suicide attempts. From an educational perspective, therefore, it is not only vital to encourage LGBTQ students to explore their identities, but also to raise awareness within the peer group. Still, the Austrian AHS curriculum and official documents determining thematic areas relevant for learners' final examinations (*Matura*) suggest that sexuality generally remains a taboo topic in the Austrian foreign language classroom (BMBF *Lehrplan*; BMBF *Die*

kompetenzorientierte). As the AHS curriculum for languages also asks teachers to discuss issues that are of relevance for the respective target group, however, these indicators of a deeply-rooted disavowal of sexuality in classroom discussions, on the one hand, and the demand for addressing relevant topics central to the adolescent target group's reality of life, on the other, seem to be contradictory.

Therefore, until now, it seems that little attention has been paid to democratizing the literary canon used in the Austrian EFL classroom through incorporating LGBTQ texts. The quote by former top athlete and writer, Bob Paris, presented at the beginning of this thesis illustrates that, through hearing others' stories, fictional or otherwise, adolescents struggling with their sexual identity can be emotionally supported. Particularly when it comes to LGBTQ young adult (YA) fiction with female protagonists, however, research has shown little interest in detailed literary analysis examining the anti-lesbian bias that seems to manifest itself in the representation of lesbian characters and their relationships (Jimenez). As practical guidelines for teachers concerning the use of LGBTQ YA literature in the EFL classroom also seem to be rare, this thesis aims to raise awareness and equip language teachers with the background knowledge and necessary tools needed for successfully and responsibly approaching LGBTQ issues in their teaching.

Because of the great number of young adults concerned, and the lack of research on the subject matter, the following questions arise: to what extent can and should teachers, and language teachers in particular, incorporate queer issues into their teaching? And how can this be done appropriately and successfully? As one of the main goals of integrating a non-heteronormative perspective into the school context can be considered the democratization of classroom discourse, special attention must be paid to including the full spectrum of possible genders and sexual identities. Thus, this thesis aims to answer the following central research questions:

- What role can LGBTQ YA literature play in incorporating a queer perspective into the EFL classroom?

- To what extent can traces of an anti-lesbian bias be found in successful LGBTQ YA literature, and how does it manifest itself in the representation of lesbian relationships portrayed in the two novels under analysis?
- How can guidance be provided that supports teachers in successfully incorporating a queer perspective into their teaching through LGBTQ YA texts?

To arrive at satisfactory responses to these questions, this thesis is divided into a theoretical literature review and a literary analysis section based on these theoretical reflections. Subsequently, a section dedicated to the implications of these findings on pedagogical practice clarifies questions concerning the actual classroom use of LGBTQ YA fiction, and may serve as an inspiration to teachers who are considering incorporating queer YA texts into their lessons. In this context, special attention is attributed to a practice-oriented approach, providing guidance and activities based on – but not necessarily bound to – the two Lambda Award-winning novels, Jane England's, *Wildthorn*, and Sara Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, selected for this thesis.

2. Theory Section

2.1. Adolescence and Identity

To examine the significance of integrating a non-heteronormative perspective into the classroom context, I would like to use the following chapter as an introduction to the construction and development of the adolescent self. Thereby the basis for a discussion of the potential impact of engaging with LGBTQ issues and texts on both queer and heterosexual students can be laid. Obviously, conceptions of adolescence change over time just as society does. Nevertheless, critical discourse on adolescent identity construction is still highly shaped by theories formulated several decades ago, which is why I decided to combine both more traditional and innovative writing for the literature review section of this thesis.

Adolescence is defined as a phase of transition from childhood to adulthood that must not be confused with puberty. Although similar in terms of age, puberty solely refers to the various physical processes that result in young adults' ability to reproduce, while adolescence not only describes this physical dimension of maturation, but also the cognitive and social development of the subject (Sisk, Zehr 163). This transitional phase carries potential for both positive and negative change in young adults' lives: On the one hand, it may be an empowering chance to achieve independence and become a more mature individual; while on the other, it is accompanied by growing insecurity (Lerner and Steinberg 2f.). This insecurity can be interpreted as the result of the various daunting tasks adolescents are confronted with. Frequently, this struggle in the quest for identity leads to problems that not only manifest themselves in arguments with parents and peers, but also in inner conflicts (Berk 546f., 552).

Since 1904, when Stanley Hall, the first psychologist examining this special phase of transition, recognized that adolescence was a distinct state in an individual's development, psychological research has come a long way. In that early phase, there was general consensus among researchers that adolescence was a developmental stage characterized by exceptional stress (Lerner and Steinberg 1ff.; Berk 546f.). As John Head explains, Hall was curiously influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution, and argued that, at this stage, young adults must deal with the pressure created by the opposition between humankind's basic urges and the need to adapt to the demands of our civilized society (2f.). In the same vein, he refers to Sigmund Freud, who argued that adolescent struggles result from the inner conflict between the primitive *id* and the *super-ego*, the moral part of the mind. This conflict between Freud's *id* and the *super-ego* is then mediated by the more rational *ego* (ibid.). In contemporary research on adolescence, however, it has been established that adolescence is a time of mental and physical change that is not limited to the adolescent crisis and negative emotions, but that also offers various possibilities for positive change and individual development (Lerner and Steinberg 2f.). Therefore, current research tends to focus on the positive and productive perspective on adolescence, as well as on the factors encouraging an optimistic view of life and positive individual development (Silbereisen and Weichold 237). Another finding having far-reaching consequences for the field was the realization that adolescence

can no longer be described as one consistent phase within young adults' development, but rather as being separated into three distinct sub-stages: early adolescence (age 10 to 13), middle adolescence (age 14 to 16), and late adolescence (age 17+), each confronting young adults with a different set of developmental tasks (Garrison and Felice 65; Berk 490).

Recent theories by researchers working on adolescence tend to focus on issues of identity construction and the young adult self in these sub-stages. Before elaborating on particularities of the adolescent self and identity, however, it is essential to discuss the concept of identity as such. Historically speaking, the term, "identity," has experienced a fundamental change in meaning and has, at some point, found its way into everyday language. This excessive use of the term in non-academic contexts has been criticized by several researchers, including Erik Erikson, because the scientific signification of identity in psychological discourse goes far beyond its meaning in everyday use (Müller 15). Reflections on identity in the early phase of identity research by theorists such as Erikson, John Locke, and David Hume focused on the relationship between the individual dispositions and the desires of the subject on the one hand, and the various social expectations and constraints on the other (Müller 60). Postmodernist research, however, mainly discusses aspects of the subject's active participation in the process of his or her identity construction (Müller 63). For this thesis, it is exactly this postmodernist understanding of identity that proves to be most appropriate.

One of the main concepts in this postmodern context is Judith Butler's theory on the various forms of performative action. According to Butler, performative action or performativity essentially describes "that characteristic of linguistic utterances that in the moment of making the utterance makes something happen or brings some phenomenon into being" (*Performative* 28). She thus uses linguistic speech act theory to highlight the enormous power language holds. Still, the question might arise, in what way is research on performative speech acts connected to gender theory, queer studies, and identity construction? Butler clarifies this by referring to the moment shortly after an infant's birth, when medicines declare the individual either male or female. She argues that through the utterances, "It's a boy" or "It's a girl," the speaker actively participates in the process of gender and identity construction of the

infant, because this initial evaluation, ambiguous or not, will remain captured in legal documents and will, at least to some extent, shape others' behavior and attitudes toward the child concerned (Butler *Performative* 28f.). When discussing gender and sexual identity, it is vital to bear in mind the distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender. Butler explains that the assumption that gender is bound to sex, and the resulting binary idea of gender, is entirely unfounded (*Gender Trouble* Ch 1.2).

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler refers to the “doing” of gender (Ch. 5). She stresses the active participation of individuals in the construction of their identities, and gender in particular. When referring to a “doing” in the sense of an activity, however, Butler does not mean that individuals can independently compose their own identity and gender (*Gender Trouble* Ch. 5). When it comes to the formation of gender, and thus the construction of one's sexual identity, the societal norms and expectations of others inevitably shape an individual's self (Butler *Gender Trouble* Ch. 1.3). Nevertheless, these norms are not simply imposed on subjects as passive recipients, but only “inform the lived modes of embodiment [...] acquired over time” and may be contested or even entirely rejected (Butler *Performative* 29). In other words, norms created or advocated by others are internalized in multiple ways, so that they may appear to remain alien to individuals, while at the same time taking part in the process of their identity formation. Butler (*Performative* 30f.) argues that before being able to reject received norms, they first need to be enacted, which means that, subconsciously, individuals who do not correspond to these norms are at least partially formed by them and act them out actively. For gender norms, and norms of sexual orientation, the wide spectrum of possible identities reveals that being torn between multiple socially constructed traditional categories is not only common, but rather a *defining* characteristic (Butler *Performative* 30).

Returning to the particularities of identity construction among young adults, one must be aware that adolescence is considered the one stage in human development during which the self and an individual's identity experience the most dramatic change. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of the developmental tasks and changes that he or she has already been confronted with in

prior phases of human development,¹ because these function as the cornerstones on which more complex tasks are based. According to Susan Harter, during adolescence, individuals develop higher-order reasoning skills and become capable of critically reflecting on their *self*, which marks an end to the overly optimistic self-perception characteristic of earlier developmental phases; self-attributes frequently remain rather unrealistic in early and middle adolescence, however (72f.). Although adolescents may have already begun exploring individual features of their self, these distinct pieces have yet to be assembled in order to arrive at a coherent entity of the self (ibid.).

In addition to these cognitive developments, adolescents also experience social change, which manifests itself in the emotional separation from the parents on the one hand, and the increasing importance of both romantic and platonic relationships within the peer group on the other. Rainer Silbereisen and Karina Weichold argue that adolescents begin investing more time and effort into the relationships with their peers and tend to renounce activities with their families (247). Similarly, Erik Erikson points out that adolescents tend to attach disproportionately high importance to their peers' judgments and to the way others perceive them (80). Silbereisen and Weichold highlight that parents remain enormously important to young adults, however, although there is a shift in the areas of concern discussed with them. While social issues might be discussed within the peer group, commonly, adolescents continue to approach their parents regarding issues concerning their future, which is why they speak of a complementary relationship (Silbereisen and Wachold 247).

As a result of the immense importance of their peers' opinions, young adults are highly sensitive to discrimination and negative remarks uttered by others, which obliges teachers to encourage prudent communication and interaction among students as part of their educational responsibility. Thomas Brinthaupt and Richard Lipka state that the cognitive capacities developed in adolescence undoubtedly influence young adults' social behavior (33f.). They refer to Robert Selman, who highlights the remarkable improvement in changing perspectives and in developing

¹ See Lewis or Harter for a thorough discussion of the development of the self during early and middle childhood.

empathy, which he calls “mutual role-taking” acquired at that stage (qtd in Brinthaupt and Lipka 34). Therefore, promoting socially and culturally sensitive behavior is not only part of teachers’ educational responsibility, in order to guarantee a non-discriminatory learning environment, but also an opportunity to assist adolescents in fulfilling their individual developmental tasks.

Like the overwhelming majority of researchers working in the field, I consider a performative approach to adolescent identity construction most appropriate and useful for this thesis. Thus, I base my line of argument on a conception of adolescent identity that emphasizes the active participation of the individual in the process of identity formation.

2.1.1. Queer Identity and the LGBTQ Community

Even though struggles arising from the discovery of sexuality are characteristic of both heterosexual adolescents and of those who discover that their sexual preferences do not correspond to the heterosexual social norm, the latter must cope with additional stress due to the stigmatization of the LGBTQ community. Various studies on homo- and bisexuality have challenged homophobic prejudices and established that sexual orientation is predetermined by biological factors, more precisely, by the amount of androgens released prenatally that manipulate brain structures (Sisk, Zehr). In other words, it has been shown that sexual orientation is beyond the individual’s control, and is only one of the various characteristics with which a person is born. Homophobia and intolerance remain serious problems in Europe, however, and, more generally speaking, in the overwhelming majority of countries worldwide. Interestingly, an EU study showed that instances of homophobic discrimination seem to be significantly more common during adolescence and emerging adulthood than at later stages of human development (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 16). The impression of being different from the majority of the peer group, in combination with discriminatory remarks, frequently leads to the feeling of isolation, and thus to high emotional stress for the youths concerned (Berk 509f.).

Stephen McDaniel, David Purcell, and Anthony D'Augelli argue that, commonly, homosexual adolescents experience an inner conflict and initially disavow their same-sex preferences due to feelings of guilt and absent role models (87). As a result of this fundamental conflict, psychological disorders and auto-aggressive behavior can be triggered, which explains why the suicide rates among LGBTQ adolescents are significantly higher than those of heterosexual young adults (ibid.). From an educational perspective, therefore, it is essential to provide *all* young adults, regardless of their sexual orientation, with role models with whom they can identify, who accept themselves, and who openly act out their feelings. Through incorporating and promoting LGBTQ literature in the language classroom, learners might thus be encouraged to begin discovering and, in a second step, accepting their identities.

In both academic and non-academic discourse about sexual orientation, readers are confronted with a variety of different terms referring to those who do not correspond to the heterosexual norm of society, including *queer* and various acronyms, all referring to the same community, but slightly varying in their connotative meaning. As Corrie Joe Hammers explains, the concept of *queerness* refers to crossing firmly established boundaries and democratizes discourse in the sense of opening it up to a wider spectrum of possible non-normative identities (906f.). Therefore, the term is used to describe various sexual orientations and practices that exceed homosexuality, and challenges more strictly defined categories of identity. The inclusive nature of the term “queerness” proposes defining this concept by stating what it does not include, rather than enumerating the variety of identities and groups of people meant when using it. The various acronyms represent the opposite approach, such as GLBT, GLTBQ and LGBTQ, sometimes mockingly referred to as “alphabet soup” (Autumn; Elia; Petchesky), that also denote non-normativity, but explicitly mention the different identities meant. In more recent publications, we can identify a tendency toward using the latter two terms to include questioning identities as well. In this paper, the acronym LGBTQ has been chosen to refer to the queer community and its writing, not only because of the rising popularity of the term in academia, but also because of its contribution to the visibility of women in the community. As gay male issues continue to dominate both the field of Queer Studies and LGBTQ writing, foregrounding the role that women play in the community, by placing the “L” at the front, seems to be the appropriate choice given

the context and purpose of this thesis. The role that women play in LGBTQ YA literature, however, is discussed in more detail in a later chapter of this paper.

Regarding the LGBTQ community in Austria and Central Europe in general, several studies demonstrate that, despite the growing visibility of sexual non-normativity, homophobia and unfounded prejudice remain omnipresent phenomena. As previously mentioned, according to an online study conducted by the German market research institute, Dalia Research, in 2016, 6.1 percent of Austrians said they would explicitly consider themselves as being homosexual, bisexual, or transsexual. After having reformulated this question, and having asked whether the participants would identify as exclusively heterosexual, the data collected revealed that 10 percent of those surveyed answered negatively. The study undoubtedly has its limitations, because the sensitive nature of such a private topic leads to a strong influence of the precise formulation of the questions asked. Nevertheless, the benefits of this anonymous online survey concerning this private issue become evident when comparing these much higher results to other data collected in more traditional and official settings. Seemingly, the privacy that online questionnaires offer encourages more people to be open about their sexual orientation. The hesitant answers in official studies conducted by governmental institutions or universities is hardly surprising when taking a look at a survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2013. For the study, 1400 people representing each GLBT subgroup and each member state of the European Union were surveyed. The results reveal that 47 percent of respondents had experienced discrimination or harassment because of their sexual orientation within the previous year.

As Ellen Riggle and Sharon Rostosky point out, most studies they have conducted so far focus on how LGBTQ people experience “minority stress”, a “chronic or long-term social stress, over and above the general stressors of daily life” that is defined as being an “additional stress solely related, in this case, to LGBTQ identities” (10). Minority stress is triggered by social stigmatization and the discriminatory behavior of others, and may entail serious harmful effects on the mental and physical health of those concerned (ibid.). Moreover, Riggle and Rostosky claim that the intolerance of some religious institutions and their negative attitudes toward LGBTQ people who wish to act out their spirituality within the

community can be additional factors causing minority stress (10ff.). To counter this minority stress, exposure to positive stories and attitudes toward LGBTQ identities, and developing self-awareness, is vital (Riggle and Rostosky 11, 29).

Having discussed the various struggles the self experiences in adolescence, and having defined what identity means and how identity construction works in this transitional phase in human development, I now focus on the sexual dimension of adolescent identity before connecting these findings to literary theory. Thereby, a well-founded discussion about the potential YA literature carries in this context is achieved.

2.2. Adolescence, Sexuality, and the Relevance of its Discussion in Austrian Classrooms

As an institution all young Austrians are obliged to attend, school bears the responsibility of providing support for the individual development of children and adolescents in various fields. Since, in puberty, gonadal steroid hormones are released that manipulate adolescents' brain structures in a way that sexual impulses are triggered, the discovery of sexuality in adolescence can be considered a biologically predetermined phenomenon (Sisk, Zehr 163). Thus, it is little surprising that one of the most prominent developmental tasks already characteristic of early and middle adolescence is discovering one's sexuality in a number of ways that are not limited to physical relationships. Although especially intimate topics, such as sexuality and sexual identity, seem predestined to be discussed in children's and adolescents' parental homes, the assumption that all parents manage to accomplish these educational duties appropriately is unrealistic. As issues of sex education are essential to adolescents' personal development, school must ensure that all students receive quality sex education regardless of their social background.

Karlheinz Valtl claims that there is more to sex education than discussing the purely physiological aspects of sexuality, such as the prevention of sexually transmitted disease or unwanted pregnancy (14). He further argues that teaching certain values, such as self-determination and respect for human dignity is indispensable (ibid.). In other words, sex education also deals with political,

ideological, and ethical questions, and needs to go beyond covering issues of bodily change and reproduction. Although teachers commonly rely on colleagues specialized in the field of biology, entirely fulfilling a school's duties in sex education, and thus covering a variety of aspects of sexuality relevant for adolescents, will automatically involve other subjects as well. In this context, Norbert Kluge explains that, frequently, teachers take their lack of biological and subject-specific expertise as an excuse for evading issues related to sexuality in the classroom (61). Valtl's and Kluge's arguments are reinforced by a document entitled "Grundsatzlerlass Sexualpädagogik," published by the Federal Ministry of Education, which obliges Austrian schools to support children and young adults in the process of developing their "[s]exuelle Basiskompetenzen" (3). The document states that every teacher, regardless of his or her subjects and the age of the target group, could and should contribute to fulfilling these requirements (BMBF *Grundsatzlerlass* 3). Attention must also be paid to a positive and supportive attitude toward sexual pedagogy, and to enabling learners to come up with their own set of values, rather than adopting others' views (BMBF *Grundsatzlerlass* 3f.).

Despite this legal obligation to incorporate issues concerning sexuality and the construction of sexual identity into one's teaching, various indicators suggest that these questions are frequently being disavowed: As problems explicitly addressing sexuality can neither be found in well-established course books, such as *More!*, *Make Your Way*, and *Prime Time*, nor in the official document determining the topics relevant for the oral Matura exams (Gerngroß et al; Ireland and Kosta; Hellmayr, Waba, and Mlakar; BMBF *Die kompetenzorientierte* 12f.), it might be reasonably assumed that sexuality in general, and sexual non-normativity in particular, seem to remain *taboo topics* in the classroom. According to Webster, the term "taboo" is defined as being "the conception of the mystic dangerousness of a particular object" (14). The mystic nature of taboos is rooted in the term's etymological origin. It derives from the Samoan word, "tapu," brought to our cultural context by Captain James Cook (Williams 7f). In its original sense, "tapu" was a concept aimed at preserving the sacredness of people and objects by defending them against the harmful effects of condemnable actions (ibid.). In a study that examined how both novice and experienced teachers deal with taboo topics, Ronald Evans, Patricia Avery, and Patricia Pederson found that three out of seven topics considered to be taboo relate

to sexuality (297). Moreover, the results revealed that students in teacher education considered personal topics that were most likely to trigger strong emotional response as taboos that are inappropriate for classroom discussion (297f.). According to Evans, Avery, and Pederson, novice teachers fear that discussing these issues might expose their teaching to potential attacks, and might thus endanger their jobs. Despite comprehensible concerns, justified or otherwise, teachers' fears must be subordinated in the interest of young adults who will sustainably benefit from awareness-raising and the improvement of basic sexual competences.

Having made explicit why addressing a variety of issues concerning sexuality that go beyond its biological and physical dimension in the classroom is imperative, the following section examines the role literature may play in this context. Thereby, the theoretical reflections presented so far are transferred to a literary context, which serves as a basis for the literary analysis in the second section of this thesis.

2.3. The Role of Young Adult Literature in Adolescents' Identity Construction and (Sexual) Education

Karen Coats explains that YA literature has a great power over its readership, which is easily influenced in this transitional developmental phase in their lives (315f.). She states, however, that although this impact is tangible, critical literary discourse continues to focus on the classics of "capital L Literature," rather than discussing publications that may act as life-changers for young people (ibid.). Hence, Coats draws a comparison between the educational value of the classics of English literature and of YA fiction, claiming that solely YA texts may have "life-changing potential" (ibid.). Contrary to this claim, however, I am convinced that numerous capital L Literary texts may be of interest for young adults, and may have a considerable impact on the adolescent reader.

Nevertheless, I believe that most young readers might be more motivated and tempted to engage in the reading of YA texts due to reasons of accessibility. As both the conflicts depicted and the language used in YA publications tend to be closer to adolescents' reality of life, the narratives become more accessible for young adults, and may thus even "hook" reluctant readers. This is exactly what Coats refers to

when pointedly claiming that, in educational settings, YA literature is usually seen as “a gateway drug used to entice readers to try the harder stuff” (316). While acknowledging aspects of reader motivation, in this quote, Karen Coats also expresses her criticism concerning the fact that YA literature is frequently viewed as a minor and less sophisticated literary genre that only serves as an introduction to literary culture, rather than being the subject of literary criticism itself (ibid.). Furthermore, she criticizes the fact that, in educational contexts, YA texts tend to be reduced to tools for addressing social, cultural, and political issues, while ignoring their literary value (317). She argues that YA literature is perceived as “a house you pass on the way, and not a destination in and of itself” (ibid.). Therefore, I would like to make explicit that, although this thesis focuses on the educational value of YA fiction and its power in adolescent processes of identity formation, I do not reduce the genre and the publications under analysis to their functional aspects.

As YA literature frequently depicts controversial, sensitive topics and societal conflicts in an age-appropriate way, however, these texts certainly lend themselves to teaching critical literacy, and can be used to encourage learners in training their general critical thinking skills. According to Thomas Bean and Karen Moni, the value of YA literature lies in the *variety* of societal issues addressed, including conflicts within families, discrimination, abuse, and other controversial topics that are of particular relevance for adolescents (638). In contrast to dealing with these issues in more traditional and formal settings, such as in discussions between parents and adolescents, or even teachers and adolescents, Bean and Moni argue that reading YA texts offers the unique opportunity of assuming the perspective of a main character with whom they can identify. Assuming the protagonist’s perspective is usually facilitated by the immediate narrative situation created by the frequently used first-person narration (ibid.).

The following chapter provides insights into the genre of YA literature, and LGBTQ YA literature, as a minority subgenre, in particular. It discusses social and ideological issues that manifest in these writings, and provides the reader with information on their potential impact on young adults. The theoretical reflections on the impact of YA literature on young adults, however, not only aim to raise awareness concerning the influence of the various underlying values shaping these texts, but

also illustrate how valuable using them in classroom settings can be. Finally, the educational value of YA texts that reflect the entire spectrum of possible identities is discussed in more detail by primarily focusing on aspects of sex education.

2.3.1. Young Adult Literature and Identity Construction: Particularities and Mechanisms Influencing Adolescent Identity and Reader-Response Criticism

One of the main questions raised by YA fiction is, “Who am I?” We have already seen that adolescence is characterized by insecurity, and that acquiring the ability of at least partially answering this question is one of the main developmental tasks at that stage. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the experiences of characters in YA texts influence young adults in both their self-image and their concept of others. In this context, Louise Rosenblatt, pioneer in the field of transactional reader-response criticism, established that the reading process “is a kind of experience valuable in and for itself, and yet – or perhaps, therefore – it can also have a liberating and fortifying effect in the ongoing life of the reader” (*Exploration* 277). The following section combines insights gained from researchers specialized in the field of YA fiction and experts on general reader-response criticism and psychological theory for arriving at an extensive in-depth discussion of the connection between literature and adolescent identity construction.

Jessica Kokesh and Miglena Sternadori identified three main mechanisms that contribute to this influence on the reader: identification, parasocial interactions, and perceived realism (141-144). When defining what is meant by the mechanisms of identification, Kokesh and Sternadori (141) refer to Cohen, who explains that the term “identification” is used to describe the process through which readers begin experiencing the situation depicted in a text as if that very situation happened to themselves (Cohen 245). Despite certain similarities between identification and the second mechanism, parasocial interactions, there is one major difference: Instead of experiencing the same actions as respective characters, the reader establishes a relationship with them (Kokesh and Standori 142). It must be noted, however, that these two mechanisms are dependent on the authenticity conveyed by the narrative, which leads us to perceived realism, the final mechanism mentioned. Even though Kokesh and Sternadori explain that the impression of realism is central to a text’s

impact on the reader, the conception of realism, in this case, refers to consistency within the narrative, which is why texts belonging to the genre of fantasy or science fiction may be perceived as realistic and believable also (143). In other words, young readers must consider characters' experiences or emotions as authentic to be influenced by them. Despite the small sample size of adolescents interviewed, a study conducted by Kokesh and Sternadori found that the overwhelming majority of participants considered YA novels to be authentic, and thus identified with the characters and established parasocial relationships with them (155). Although the study does not claim to be representative by any means, the data collected indicates a trend that shows that the younger the audience is, the more likely they are to allow characters' decisions to navigate them through similar real-life situations (Kokesh and Sternadori 154). Naomi Johnson confirmed these findings, and claimed that YA fiction is far from being entertaining only, because the genre is highly political in the sense that it has "highly ideological content and consequences" (55). Furthermore, she referred to Kate Millett, who focused on female YA readership, and found that the representation of women in literary texts shapes their self-perception considerably, because they tend to treat them as a guiding resource that is supposed to lead them toward a happy life (qtd. in Johnson 55).

The immense power that reading has in adolescent identity formation processes is well illustrated through the effects of bibliotherapy in trauma treatment. As John Allan explains, events are experienced as being traumatic when objective and subjective aspects of trauma are combined. According to Allan, the objective part of trauma is the actual menacing event causing threats to the self, while the subjective part is the psychological response involving fear and a strong feeling of helplessness (4). As we have already seen that helplessness and a feeling of isolation are commonly experienced by young adults, the beneficial effects of reading discussed in this paragraph are not only valid for severely traumatized adolescents, but also apply to the regular struggles experienced in the adolescent quest for identity. In this context, Cart and Jenkins point out that the privacy that reading a novel offers is well appreciated by LGBTQ adolescents who still need to resolve inner conflicts concerning their sexual orientation (xvii).

As a consequence of the considerable impact YA writing may have on adolescents' identities, I consider it essential to raise awareness concerning social and ideological issues that leave their traces in YA texts. Thus, when dealing with children's and YA literature, it is important to bear in mind the fact that authors are usually no longer part of their intended target group. Therefore, the respective texts are based on the authors' conception of adolescence and the set of values they hold. As a result, the presence and absence of certain issues are dependent on the author's personal opinion on the question concerning which of them are appropriate and meaningful to the target group. Regarding sexuality and sexual orientation, the attempt to maintain innocence can frequently be observed, which is why multiple publications featuring enjoyable sexual encounters have become major scandals (Gill 28). As the outrage caused by YA novels, such as the controversial YA classic, Judy Blume's, *Forever*, or the more recent, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, illustrates, explicit sexuality in YA text carries high potential for conflict. The central question here, as raised by Michele Gill, is whether protecting children and young adults from issues that may be considered inappropriate for their age saves them from emotional distress, or whether these proceedings only leave them uninformed, and should thus be reconsidered (27). Returning to what has been said about LGBTQ identity construction, and about the impact the feeling of isolation may have, disavowing sexuality and sexual otherness through attempts to preserve innocence might thus have serious negative effects on adolescents.

In addition to discussing the mechanisms responsible for the considerable influence reading YA fiction has on adolescents, and raising their awareness concerning social and ideological factors, examining the impact of literary texts on their audience also demands a discussion of the underlying theoretical framework of reader-response criticism. Reader-response theory is an approach to literary criticism that focuses on the role of the reader in the meaning-making process. Frequently, this approach to literary theory is criticized due to its inherent danger of involving too much subjectivity. The following explanations, however, show that there is more to reader-response than subjective assumptions concerning individual emotional response to literary texts. According to Todd Davis and Kenneth Womack, reader-response criticism aims to make sense of the reading process by finding answers to questions such as the following: To what extent do different responses to literary

texts relate to one another? And, are all readings of a texts equally valid? (51) The shift in focus toward reader-centeredness becomes evident in Walker Gibson's explanations concerning the term, "mock reader," which he coined. Similar to the common distinction made between the author and the narrative voice, Gibson highlights the difference between the individual reader as a person and the "fictitious reader" or "mock reader [...] whose mask and costume the individual takes on in order to experience the language" and who is "an artifact, controlled, simplified, abstracted out of the chaos of day-to-day sensation" (266).

For this thesis, a transactional approach to reader-response criticism is employed. As Elizabeth Freund explains, transactive reader-response criticism is closely related to psychoanalysis, and provides us with interesting and valuable insights into human nature that can be applied to the author and the reader of a respective text, as well as to the various characters portrayed in it (113). Freund refers to Sigmund Freud when drawing an analogy between writing and reading fictional texts and daydreaming. As in daydreaming and fictional texts, worlds are constructed that reflect fantasies of the subject rather than reality, both are considered a way of secretly continuing childish and, thus, socially inadequate play (Freund 114f.). According to Freudian theory, daydreaming and fiction closely resemble nighttime dreams, which are manifestations of conscious and subconscious unsatisfied wishes and fantasies (ibid.). Norman Holland² takes up these psychoanalytic reflections and makes the Freudian *ego* central to his criticism. As Freund explains, Holland places special focus on the ego as a mediator between desire provoked by unfulfilled fantasies (*id*) on the one hand, and the need to deal with the requirements of the real world (*super-ego*) on the other (118). For Holland, reading is thus an interaction, a *transactional* process between the text and the defense mechanisms applied by the human ego, which is the reason why the individual reception of a text will always remain subjective (qtd. in Freund 118). Louise Rosenblatt raised another important factor in this context when she claimed that readers always apply their own expectations and personal attitudes to a respective text (*Literary Transaction* 36). Therefore, when adolescents begin

² See Holland for a more detailed account of his psychoanalytically marked literary criticism.

identifying with characters, it is common that a tension between the situation experienced and the individual values held by the reader is created (ibid.).

2.3.2. Using Young Adult Literature for Purposes of Sex Education and Awareness-Raising

While in children's literature, the disavowal of sexuality and motives celebrating innocence and eternal youth are common practice, YA literature can no longer neglect manifestations of physical love. As the adolescent target group of these texts is in a phase of transition from innocent childhood to adulthood, sexuality inevitably becomes an issue of special importance at that stage of human development. In the following section, I illustrate how valuable using YA literature for purposes of sex education can be, especially when dealing with queerness. Before discussing the positive impact of queering the literary canon in the EFL classroom, however, general educational aspects concerning sexually explicit YA writing must be addressed.

Traditionally, sexuality is considered as a particularly private topic that needs to be explored by young people themselves, and which can only be partly discussed with adults. As adolescents often feel intimidated when talking to parents and teachers when it comes to issues concerning their sexuality, the YA novel can serve as a safe space in which shyness does not hinder the discovery of their sexual identity (Bittner 360). According to Sara Hutchinson, one of the major points determining the educational value of YA writing is its degree of authenticity and the honesty in the representation of sexuality (317f.). Thus, she argues, an aesthetic approach to writing must be applied, so that the instructional purpose of the text remains subtle; otherwise, the narrative value of the text would suffer, and adolescents would be deprived of the possibility of interpreting situations as part of the narrative individually (ibid.). As a result of this obvious attempt to educate young people, the overtly instructional text might even lead to the opposite of the intended effect (ibid.). Hutchinson further explains that commonly, first-person narration makes a text appear more authentic and believable, because the narrator tends to be more personally involved in the situation described, which then creates a more intimate tone (321). In contrast to this intimacy, she argues, a third-person narrator frequently creates the impression of an instructing adult voice disrupting the action (ibid.).

Especially when it comes to portraying situations in which sexuality is addressed explicitly, the reader's facilitated identification with the protagonist via the first-person pronoun is another argument in favor of first-person narration (ibid.).

Hutchinson's line of argumentation, however, seems to be based on the idea of an omniscient third-person narrator creating an educational tone. My personal observations suggests, however, that current YA novels are typically narrated by either a first-person narrator or a limited third-person narrator who focalizes on one or more characters of the novel, which has a similar effect as the first-person narration promoted by Hutchinson.

Another point mentioned by Hutchinson, which proves to be particularly interesting, is that reading YA texts has the potential to offer adolescents insights into a variety of different situations and into the personalities of characters that they would not be confronted with in their group of friends (317). In the context of sex education, this would thus enable learners to gain insights into sexual experiences made by a variety of people having different sets of values, beliefs, and sexual orientations. In the context of this thesis, I am particularly interested in YA literature's potential to offer adolescents a queer perspective on love and sexuality, which is why I would like to highlight that LGBTQ YA writing allows young people normally not confronted with LGBTQ issues to discover the LGBTQ community from an insider perspective. Through these texts, readers are invited to immerse themselves in the characters' emotional experience of both the positive and negative aspects of their lives as members of a socially marginalized community that is confronted with prejudice and stigmatization.

Robert Bittner states that there is a significant difference between sex education and sexuality education (358). What he means by this differentiation is that there is more to be discussed than the physical dimension of sexuality and the sexual act to fulfill educational responsibilities. According to Bittner, sex-education programs in school contexts frequently focus on this physical dimension only, while other issues concerning sexual identity are underrepresented. Therefore, he argues, YA fiction serves as a complementary source for sex education, because it discusses topics such as love, commitment, and issues concerning the various forms of relationships also (358). While I consider the idea behind this terminological

differentiation valuable, and even essential to the discussion of the role of sexuality in an educational context, I renounce this distinction in this thesis, and use the term “sex education” due to its dominance in other research papers. Since the overwhelming majority of research done in the field does not differentiate between the two terms, this choice simplifies the following discussion. Nevertheless, I would like to point out that, in this thesis, the term, “sex education,” is used to refer to educational settings that include a variety of aspects concerning sexuality and sexual identity, and is not limited to the physical.

Based on Bittner’s argument, in school contexts, the YA novel allows young people to experience a variety of positive and negative sexual encounters, both heterosexual and homosexual. This way, Hutchinson explains, discussions about otherness can be triggered, and young readers can be persuaded to challenge discriminatory stereotypes and homophobia (317). Bittner further introduces the expression, “queering” sex education, which refers to introducing a non-heteronormative perspective, and which is also used in this paper. In this sense, Kirsten Helmer highlights that, to successfully queer sex education using LGBTQ writing, the respective texts need to go beyond the surface level and should offer more than the depiction of the various struggles faced by LGBTQ characters only, because this negative representation of LGBTQ identities provides a one-sided view (908). Rather, the publications should portray characters having complex sexualities and challenging heteronormative thinking and binary conceptions of gender (*ibid.*). In addition to complexity, LGBTQ YA literature used in the classroom should also include positive aspects of LGBTQ characters’ lives, such as supportive reactions from their families and peers, as well as loving and caring relationships. Thereby, Riggle and Rostosky claim, LGBTQ learners can be supported in accepting their identities and in being more positive about their lives (11). Helmer points out that using LGBTQ fiction in a school context in a reasonable and beneficial way, however, demands thorough planning and consideration of the various sensitive factors: Frequently, teachers lack the awareness to choose appropriate, and thus versatile, queer texts (903). In addition to choosing pieces of writing that depict positive aspects of LGBTQ people’s lives also, the thematic framework of their incorporation in the EFL classroom is essential (*ibid.*). In this context, Helmer highlights the problems caused by the use of LGBTQ themed writing when discussing issues such

as bullying or discrimination only. In this case, those who resist normative forms of gender and sexuality would be presented as victims of society, and the texts would fail to encourage LGBTQ students to be open about their identities on the one hand, and to make prejudiced learners challenge their homophobic assumptions on the other (ibid.).

In her article, *Codes, Silences, and Homophobia: Challenging Normative Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary LGBTQ Young Adult Literature*, Corrine Wickens identifies a difference between more traditional LGBTQ YA writing, which aims at countering homophobia but does not break underlying heterosexist norms, and novels such as Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy* (160ff.). In *Boy Meets Boy*, Wickens explains, societal norms become completely reversed, and homophobia is not only challenged, but entirely rejected, which makes this publication particularly interesting and valuable (ibid.). Helmer reinforces this argument by pointing out the difference between anti-homophobia work, and counter-hetero or cisnormative work. While anti-homophobia work aims to make learners understand sexual identities apart from the heterosexual norm, and challenges their homophobic stereotypes, counter-hetero or cisnormative work deals with countering and denaturalizing heterosexism and gender normativity (904).

2.4. The History of Young Adult Fiction and the LGBTQ Subgenre

As Michael Cart explained in his speech at the Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival, today, YA fiction is a "notably restless art, a dynamic, risk-taking literature that grows and changes as its context – culture and society – changes" and that "has expanded to embrace a wealth of genres and forms." This dynamic nature of the genre developing in step with society and relating to timely issues, however, was not characteristic of literature for a young readership before the 1960s. As Cart explained, in the 1940s and 1950s, texts aimed at an adolescent target group were constructed around relatively trivial conflicts restricted to the portrayal of white middle- and upper middle-class youths struggling with the question of which girl they would like to ask out for prom. Although the term, "YA literature," was not yet established, romance fiction for young readers, or "junior novels," as Cart calls them, had already experienced a certain success. Beginning in the second half of the

1960s, and then intensifying in the first “golden age” of YA literature, the 1970s, a counter-movement began, that led to the abandonment of these trivial and irrelevant topics and to a stronger focus on controversial issues (Cart). This shift in focus gave rise to the probably no less delicate “problem novel,” conveying a one-sided and unbalanced view on adolescent issues (ibid.). Except for a short period of time during the 1990s, the popularity of YA literature has been increasing steadily, and has indisputably reached an entirely new level in the early 21st century, when YA book series, such as *Gossip Girl*, *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, and the *Twilight* Saga, created a massive hype among children, adolescents, and even adult readers. In accordance with this observation, Cart claims that the explosion of the YA genre has generally led to a broadening of its readership, and thus of the publishing houses’ target group. This suggests defining recent YA texts by the age of the characters presented within the narratives, rather than the age of the fictitious readership, which becomes increasingly blurry.

Regarding the LGBTQ subgenre, Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins point out that, since the publication of the first YA novel with LGBTQ content, John Donovan’s *I’ll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*, in 1969, non-heteronormative YA writing has experienced a remarkable increase in popularity (2006: xv). Although Laura Jimenez confirms this observation, and identifies a constant rise in the annual number of LGBTQ publications, she also states that, in relation to heteronormative YA writing, LGBTQ issues remain disproportionately underrepresented. In 2014, Jimenez reveals, only 1.18 percent of all YA publications fell into the LGBTQ subgenre (407). Despite the growing visibility of LGBTQ issues, I would thus argue that non-heteronormative writing still has far to go to free itself of its marginalized status within the body of YA fiction. Historically speaking, as Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins point out, queer YA literature remained separated from heteronormative mainstream writing for a long time, and had the status of a “ghettoized subgenre,” but is currently becoming increasingly included in the body of YA writing (128). Cart and Jenkins explain that, by “their newly expansive inclusion of new forms, faces, genres, themes, voices, narrative strategies, and more,” recent LGBTQ YA publications even approximate trends and tendencies in mainstream YA literature (ibid.).

It must be noted, however, that literary publications in both mainstream and minority culture are shaped by overarching principles determined by the dominant culture and society of a particular period. In this context, the interpretation of the data collected by Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins reveals that, despite its minority culture status, overall publishing trends are also frequently mirrored in LGBTQ writing (*Appendix C*). Although the study conducted by Cart and Jenkins only considers YA novels published until 2004, and is far from being a representative analysis of current trends in LGBTQ YA fiction, the literary analysis in the second section of this paper demonstrates that phenomena such as narrative distancing can still be observed in recent award-winning publications. As Jerome Bruner points out, language, and the written word in particular, function as a mediator between what is being said and how this message is perceived (89). Thus, the creation of a certain distance can be considered a natural feature of both spoken and written text (*ibid.*). There are, however, techniques and methods that aim at extending this distance. Bruner claims that narration, meaning the conversion of what one intends to express into story form, is one of these methods (*ibid.*). For this thesis, I would like to take this idea further and argue that several factors within the narrative may contribute to establishing an even greater distance. Returning to LGBTQ YA literature, I suggest that distance to queer issues is commonly achieved through two mechanisms. First of all, a study conducted by Cart and Jenkins reveals that the overwhelming majority of LGBTQ YA novels published between 1969 and 2004 only feature secondary characters who identify as LGBTQ, while queer main characters remain underrepresented (*Appendix C*). In both Sara Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, and Jane Eagland's, *Wildthorn*, which are analyzed in detail in the analysis section of this thesis, however, narrative distancing manifests itself in the cultural or historical contextualization of the plotline. While the action of Farizan's novel takes place in modern Iran, Eagland's story is set in Victorian England, which means that both publications distance themselves from a contemporary Western cultural context. This issue, however, is discussed in more detail in the literary analysis section of this thesis.

As it has already been established that LGBTQ YA literature still remains a part of minority culture, characteristics of minority literature also apply to the texts under examination in this paper. Moreover, as the focus of this thesis is primarily concerned with examining narratives with lesbian protagonists and female authors,

several of these particularities of minority cultures not only apply to non-heteronormative writing, but also to the role that women play in literature and their persistent underrepresentation within the literary industry. When discussing minoritarian poetics, Vincent Leitch highlights the significant impact of the mainstream market on products of minority culture, because minorities that try to free themselves from an oppressing force are inevitably defined by their opposite: the oppressor (93). An example of this influence of mainstream YA literature on the LGBTQ subgenre is mentioned by Cart and Jenkins, who claim that LGBTQ YA texts published in the 21st century are becoming increasingly diverse in the narrative techniques used (130). According to their observations, among other innovations in the genre, non-traditional narrative situations, such as combining different narrative voices or using notes, e-mails, and instant messages to tell the stories of the protagonists, lead to more literary complexity, and thus to a positive revaluation of the genre (*ibid.*). As these developments were first introduced in heteronormative YA texts, and this trend has been taken over by LGBTQ writers, queer YA literature seems to be nearing mainstream culture.

As Leitch mentions, another important characteristic concerning the perception of an individual LGBTQ text is the fact that pieces of minoritarian writing are commonly perceived as being part of the entire body of publications (93). Commonly, this observation is referred to as the “collectivity” of minority genres. Applying Leitch’s claim of minority literature collectivity to LGBTQ YA writing, implicit intertextuality that results from the automatic association of a respective publication with the various tendencies and trends within the subgenre, as well as its historical development, is created. Therefore, for a well-founded analysis of LGBTQ YA texts, historical aspects of the genre’s development and some general trends must be introduced.

In contrast to its early phase, currently, non-heteronormative writing is gradually developing into a more integrated part of the total body of YA literature. Cart and Jenkins estimate that the number of annual publications in the United States has risen from one to four titles per year in the 1970s and 1980s, to seven to twelve titles per year in the 1990s and the early 21st century, which illustrates the development LGBTQ YA literature has experienced in terms of its visibility in the

market of YA fiction (xvi). More recent observations by Laura Jimenez even suggest that, in 2014, 47 books with LGBTQ characters were published (407).

In this context, Rebecca Hill emphasizes that LGBTQ YA literature has not only become more visible and popular, but has also advanced remarkably in establishing plot lines that no longer foreground controversies surrounding manifestations of a heterosexist norm, such as the issue of coming out (20). As Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins point out, early LGBTQ YA novels reinforced already existing stereotypes by portraying LGBTQ characters as “unfortunates doomed to either a premature death or despair lived at the darkest margins of society” (xvi). More recent publications, they argue, “present gay and lesbian characters in a more realistic light” and “as people of various ages, cultures, incomes, and perspectives, as the friends, family and neighbors, and mentors who are part of the social web of connectedness that teens of all sexual orientations navigate on a daily basis” (ibid.). This observation is affirmed by Caroline Jones, who highlights the substantial change the genre has experienced in terms of the main themes and conflicts depicted. Until the mid-1990s, traumatic experiences and the issue of coming out characterized LGBTQ YA writing, but contemporary YA literature since the early 21st century tends to focus on the development of individual characters who are accepting their feelings and acting upon their desires (76f.). As a consequence of this shift, recent publications celebrate the discovery of physical love, and the genre has opened up to the explicit discussion and depiction of sexuality, which is considered two of the most prominent and important evolutions of LGBTQ YA literature (ibid.).

Historically speaking, unlike mainstream YA literature, LGBTQ YA texts tend to disavow sexuality and aspects of physical love (Jacobs 50); however, recent publications, such as John Green’s and David Levithan’s *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, the first mainstream novel with LGBTQ content (Hill 20), confirm that the physical dimension of homosexual love is no longer being disavowed, but addressed explicitly. Another tendency characteristic of current LGBTQ YA writing is identified by Michael Cart, who claims that the content of LGBTQ YA publications is becoming increasingly innovative regarding the spectrum of different identities represented by the characters. According to his observations, the first publications featuring intersex,

gender fluid, and genderqueer characters, as well as various books with bisexuals and transgenders have been published recently. He thus argues that, in comparison to other areas of diversity, LGBTQ literature is “alive and flourishing” (Cart).

2.4.1. The Role of Women in LGBTQ Young Adult Literature³

As Peter Hunt states, literature aimed at a young audience was traditionally dominated by females, both in the writing and publishing process and the reception process (1). Undeniably, there is a persisting commonly held stereotype that education and childcare are typically female domains, and that women are naturally domestic human beings, particularly gifted in dealing with children. This also seems to be reflected in the dominance of women in professions characterized by close contact with children, primarily in teaching. Thus, the association of a young target group with females would logically suggest a female dominance in the YA literary industry, and within both mainstream and LGBTQ YA narratives. As the following chapter reveals, however, female authors and lesbian characters remain seriously underrepresented in queer YA fiction.

With the release of Nancy Garden’s *Annie on My Mind*, in 1982, lesbian love finally made its way into queer YA fiction. Even though it has already been shown that, in the 1980s, LGBTQ YA literature was still in its early phase, initially there were predominantly positive reactions to the novel’s publication. More than a decade later, however, a raging controversy arose that resulted in burnings of the book and in its banning from school libraries (Hill 20). Concerning timelier lesbian themed writing, June Cummins explains that, indisputably, there generally *is* a certain amount of YA texts featuring lesbian characters (402). Nonetheless, narrative distancing from lesbian issues, and their relative absence in critical discourse and award ceremonies, is common practice (ibid.). This impression is confirmed by a study conducted by Laura Jimenez, an expert on issues of representation in YA literature, who identifies as being part of the LGBTQ community herself. Her findings reveal that there is a significant underrepresentation of lesbian and female bisexual characters in queer

³ This chapter is partly based on ideas that have been developed for a language course (*English for Academic Purposes*) assignment submitted at the English Department of the University of Vienna in winter term 2016/17

award-winning writing. Jimenez coded and analyzed 18 YA novels that were either awarded the Lambda Literary Award or the Stonewall Book Award, two book awards that exclusively promote books by authors from, and books about, the LGBTQ community (410).

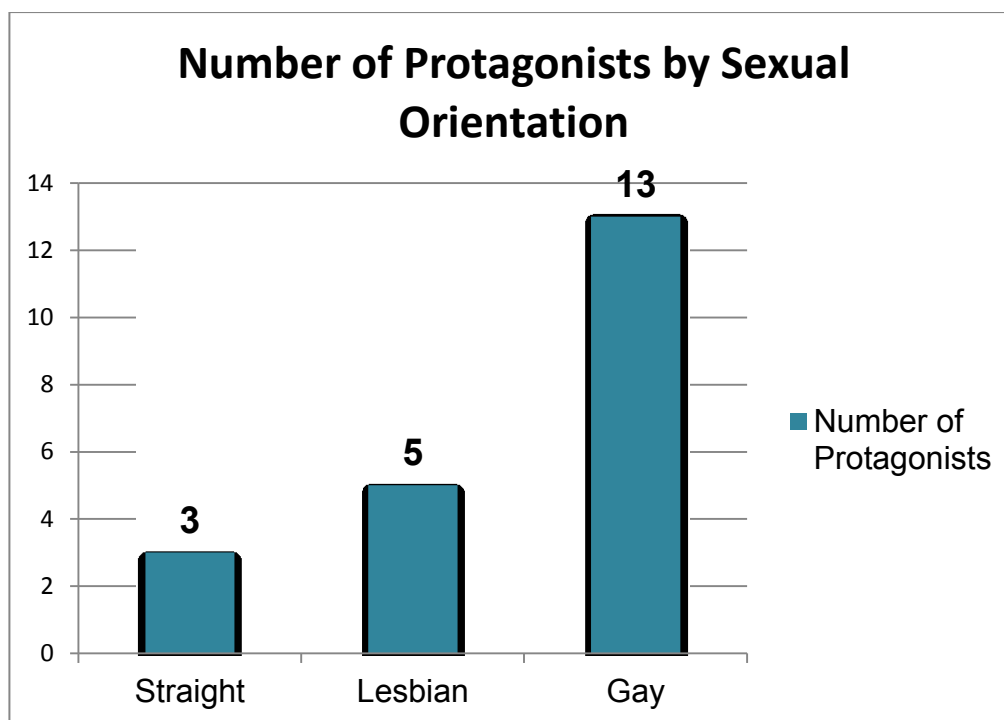


Figure 1: Representation of Sexual Orientation in Award-Winning Publications

By combining quantitative and qualitative research methodology, Jimenez found that only five out of 21 protagonists were described to identify as lesbians, which is illustrated in Figure 1. These findings suggest a clear dominance of gay, male characters in award-winning literature, which clearly contradicts the current trend in mainstream YA literature of celebrating strong female characters, and points toward an anti-lesbian bias in LGBTQ YA writing (Jimenez 415, 418f). In other words, even those book awards celebrating diversity and sexual non-normativity conspicuously undervalue lesbian themed publications.

Taking these observations into consideration, the insights gained from recently collected data by the Dalia Research study seem to be especially surprising. According to the study, more women than men identify as being homosexual, bisexual, or transsexual, which makes the underrepresentation of female LGBTQ

characters appear abstruse. Interestingly, statistics also reveal that women are more likely to experience manifestations of homophobia and harassment than their male counterparts. D'Augelli found that boys usually discover their homosexual feelings at the age of eleven or twelve, while it is rarely before the age of 14 or 15 that girls notice their interest in peers of the same sex (qtd. in Berk 510). As an explanation, he identifies the social pressure for becoming a heterosexual individual as being seemingly higher for girls than for boys (ibid.). Mallan takes this further and argues that female same-sex interest is still frequently considered to be only an experimental phase in individual development, or even a condition that needs special therapy ((*M*)*other Love* qtd. in Mallan (*Un*)*doing Gender* 15).

These findings indicate that there is an anti-lesbian bias in the presumably open-minded queer community, and since Trica Peterson and Deborah Gerrity found that internalized negativity as a response to societal norms is directly related to lower self-esteem among young lesbians, the problematic nature of the underrepresentation of female LGBTQ characters in YA literature, and the persisting inequality becomes evident (69). Cummins traces these observations concerning anti-lesbian tendencies back to the underlying inferior position of women's literature in the literary industry in general (402f.). She justifies this assumption by referring to blogger Nicola Griffith's findings that four out of five prestigious book awards are clearly dominated by publications depicting male protagonists, which is why she claims that books from, and about, women are simply not likely to be awarded renowned prizes (ibid.). Returning to LGBTQ literature and women's standing within the subgenre, Laura Jimenez confirms the underrepresentation of female authors being awarded literary prizes. Jimenez shows that, when it comes to the Stonewall Book Award, there is not a single award-winning publication by a female author. As in this thesis, I am particularly interested in the Lambda Literary Award, I consider discussing Jimenez's analysis of Lambda Award winners more valuable. According to Jimenez, six out of the 14 Lambda Award winners in her study are female, which suggests that this organization is more willing to value female writers' work compared to the Stonewall Book Award (412f.):

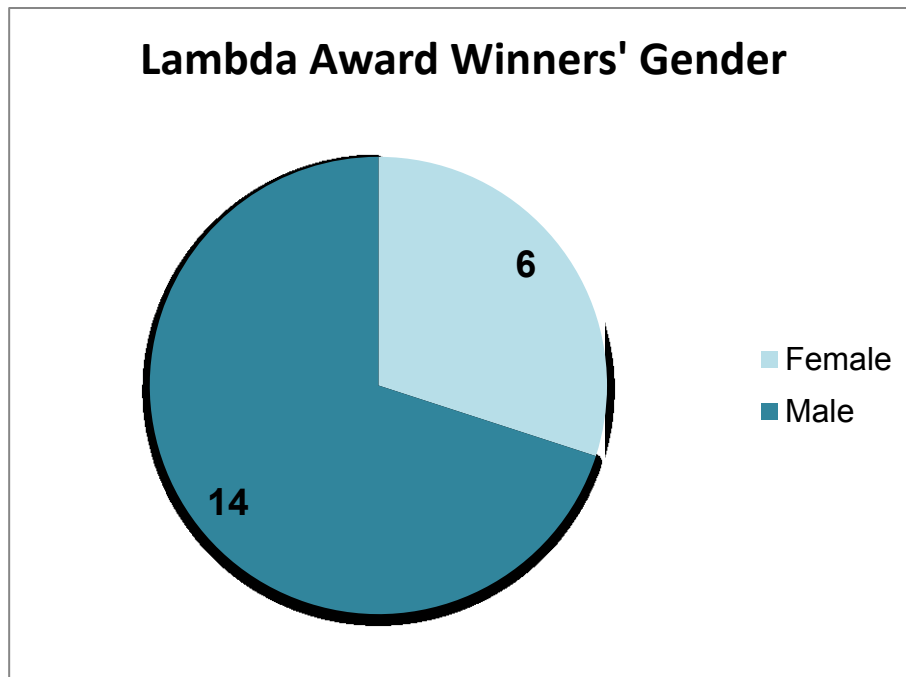


Figure 2: Award-Winning Authors of the Lambda Literary Award, According to their Gender

When analyzing possible causes for this anti-lesbian bias, it is essential to discuss particularities of socially constructed femininity in addition to aspects exclusive to lesbian identity. According to Kerry Mallan, the significance of conformity for girls is immense, which becomes particularly apparent when examining the YA literature market (*(Un)doing Gender* 17). Mallan further points out that the vast majority of publications aimed at a female target group focus on topics considered to be particularly “girlie” (*(Un)doing Gender* 16). She criticizes these “girlie style” texts’ messages about femininity and feminine sexuality, which are seldom positive and commonly founded on consumerist and competitive ideas only (*(Un)doing Gender* 16f.). When dealing with popular culture, it is thus essential to be aware of the industry’s economic interests that manifest themselves in all products created within this cultural framework. In this context, Mallan explains that commodity culture is deeply rooted in all cultural artifacts, including YA texts (18). In the same vein, Naomi Johnson argues that the traditional “girl meets the love of her life and becomes happy” storyline of romance novels aimed at girls seems to have become gradually replaced by narratives in which commodities become central to the protagonist’s search for love (55). Johnson explains that this is achieved by establishing a link between brands or consumer products and a desired “commercialized femininity” (ibid).

It must be noted, however, that similar phenomena can be observed when it comes to the representation of masculinity in YA fiction. Femininity and masculinity, as represented by commodity culture, therefore fortify the gender binary and aim to promote superficial and consumerist ideas to pursue commodity culture's economic interests ((*Un)doing Gender* 18). Through the reinforcement of traditionalist gender roles in various bestselling YA books and series, such as *Gossip Girl* or *The Clique*, heterosexuality is imposed on children and adolescents (ibid.), which might aggravate feelings of depression triggered by lesbian, bi, and trans girls' non-conformity. Hence, queering the literary canon in schools and introducing fresh perspectives is of topical interest.

3. Literary Analysis: Representations of Lesbian Characters and Relationships in Selected Award-Winning Young Adult Novels

As I have already illustrated, LGBTQ YA fiction is flourishing, and the number of annual publications featuring queer protagonists is increasing steadily. Nevertheless, it has been shown that both female authors and characters are underrepresented within the genre; especially regarding book awards. Even though the Lambda Literary Award for LGBTQ writing claims to celebrate diversity, only a small percentage of winning publications in the branch of YA fiction tell lesbian protagonists' stories. Even more interestingly, the two novels under analysis, Sara Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, and Jane Eagland's, *Wildthorn*, share several characteristics that seem to problematize lesbian relationships, as the characters' social environment attempts to force them into hiding, and even changing their identities. Thus, these award-winning publications predominantly seem to focus on the negative consequences of female homosexuality that are due to homophobic attitudes of others, and present the protagonists' experiences as homosexual women in a negative light.

When selecting the two novels under analysis in this thesis, I decided to choose particularly successful publications that have a comparable circulation, and have experienced similar public attention. As objectively measuring public attention and opinion tends to be problematic, I decided to exclusively consider publications that were awarded the same literary award for my analysis. The Lambda Literary

Awards (the “Lammys”) take place within the framework of the largest book fair in the United States, BookExpo America. The Awards were established in 1989 and exclusively celebrate LGBTQ literature published in the United States in 23 distinct categories (Lambda Literary *History*). In their mission statement, the organization highlights that “Lambda Literary believes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer literature is fundamental to the preservation of our culture, and that LGBTQ lives are affirmed when our stories are written, published and read” (Lambda Literary *Mission*). Thus, the organization’s main goal can be defined as establishing LGBTQ literature, a minority genre, as an important part of US literary culture. Interestingly, the organization has also initiated an LGBTQ “Writers in School” program, which invites LGBTQ writers to visit high schools and literature classes in colleges to begin conversations and critical discussions about queer literature, either in person or via Skype (Lambda Literary *History*). I consider this program, which aims at contributing to the organization’s main goal of promoting non-heteronormative writing, especially relevant for the context of this thesis, because these aspirations may serve as a role model for dealing with LGBTQ YA fiction in the Austrian EFL classroom as well.

The historical overview of all Lammy winners in the YA category, however, indicates that in the majority of categories there seems to exist a clear dominance of gay, male authors and characters in the award-winning publications (Lambda Literary *List*). As I have previously made explicit, Jimenez confirms this observation and calls for awareness raising, and, in a second step, for countering bias even in a seemingly open-minded organization (419).

Although both selected novels were awarded the Lammy in the Lambda Literary Children’s/Young Adult category, there has yet been little to no critical discourse on these LGBTQ YA texts. Therefore, I would like to use the following section for an in-depth analysis of the representations of lesbian identity and lesbian relationships in the last two publications featuring lesbian protagonists that were awarded the Lambda Literary Award. To arrive at a well-founded discussion of these areas of interest, I first examine the cultural and historical contextualization of the novels’ settings. Subsequently, character profiles are presented that aim to illustrate the representation of lesbian identity before moving on to the representation of the characters’ romantic relationships. In this context, particular attention is paid to the

implicitness or explicitness of sexuality in the novels, as well as to the other characters' attitudes and reactions to the protagonists' homosexual feelings and actions.

The analysis presented and the conclusions drawn obviously do not claim to be representative of the genre by any means, but show tendencies within award-winning lesbian fiction, and aim at raising – especially teachers' – awareness about issues of representation and the significant impact of YA fiction on adolescents.

3.1. Introduction to the Novels Under Analysis

3.1.1. *If You Could Be Mine* (Sara Farizan) – Lammy Award Winner for Young Adult Fiction in 2014

The two main characters of the novel set in modern Iran, Sahar and Nasrin, have been in love since their early childhood. Following the death of Sahar's mother, who was aware of her daughter's love for her best friend and seriously concerned about it, Sahar is left with her father, who struggles with depression and has trouble looking after himself. In addition to the pressure of caring for her father, Sahar prepares for the entrance exams for medical school to pursue her dreams of becoming a doctor. Nasrin, who was born into a wealthy and socially prestigious family, in contrast, is expected to subordinate to her parents' wishes, who have arranged her marriage to Reza, a young doctor. As the girls' mutual love is not only stigmatized, but also criminalized in Iran, their affection and bodily desire for each other must remain a secret, because they would have to face severe corporal punishment, even including the death penalty, for their lesbian love. Out of despair, Sahar fantasizes about a common future with Nasrin, and attempts to find a way to prevent her from marrying a man she could never love. After her initial plans of fleeing from their hopeless situation, Sahar becomes convinced that gender reassignment and becoming a man would save the two from their desperate faith. In her transitioning process, Sahar is initially assisted by a support group and Parveen, a transgender friend of Sahar's homosexual cousin, Ali. As Sahar engages with her cousin's friends and members of the support group, she starts discovering her true identity. Nevertheless, it is not before her first medical consultation with a surgeon specialized in gender

reassignment that she realizes that giving up her identity, and thus herself, to be with Nasrin, cannot be the solution to her problem. Shortly after the young girl's marriage, Nasrin becomes pregnant and begins suffering from severe depression resulting from her realization that she is trapped in a loveless marriage.

3.1.2. *Wildthorn* (Jane Eagland) – Lammy Award Winner for Young Adult Fiction in 2011

In her historical romance, *Wildthorn*, Jane Eagland presents to the reader seventeen-year-old Louisa, who does not correspond to the societal norms of femininity of the period. As the action is set in Victorian England, Louisa's aspirations of educating herself and becoming a doctor are considered inappropriate for an upper-class girl. In addition to her exotic professional ambitions, which displease her brother and mother especially, Louisa's family is also concerned by her unwillingness to find a suitable husband. Due to her unusual preferences, resulting from her atypical gender identity, Louisa is tricked into Wildthorn Hall asylum for the insane. At Wildthorn Hall, Louisa is not only stripped of her personal belongings, including her clothing, but also of her name and, ultimately, her identity. Lucy Childs, as Louisa is mistakenly called at the asylum, receives treatment resembling torture methods, and is defenselessly exposed to the doctors' orders, who interpret Louisa's claims that her hospitalization was illegitimate as confirmation of her insanity. In accordance with her enthusiasm for science and her atypical gender identity, Louisa discovers that she does not correspond to the societal norm concerning her romantic feelings for others either. Her strong interest in her cousin, Grace, makes Louisa become aware of her homosexual identity. After this first experience of unrequited lesbian love, Louisa meets Eliza, who works at Wildthorn Hall asylum, and with her help, she manages to escape. With Eliza, Louisa finally experiences a loving lesbian relationship, which, however, Eliza wants to keep a secret.

Louisa's story is told through various flashbacks that progressively reveal the reasons behind her involuntary hospitalization. The first-person narrator leading through the novel immediately makes the reader identify with the protagonist and experience the struggles she is forced to undergo. The story's protagonist is hospitalized because of her non-traditional gender identity and her sexual orientation;

however, in a wider sense, it is love that sets her free and allows her to escape, as it was Eliza who supported Louisa in her escape plans. Thus, Eagland's story also offers, at least to some extent, a positive perspective on female homosexuality, even though it includes various features, discussed in the following sections, which create a rather negative and depressing tone.

3.2. Social and Historical Context Within the Narratives

As attitudes toward sexuality, and homosexual desire in particular, are highly culturally specific, the following chapter provides the reader with the social and historical background knowledge needed for a well-founded analysis of the representation of the process of lesbian identity formation, and the characters' romantic relationships in the present novels. Although in this thesis, I focus on the representation of lesbian identities, each of the novels under analysis offer different additional aspects of LGBTQ reality. While Jane Eagland's novel, *Wildthorn*, lends itself for discussing the Victorian conception of femininity and gender identity, the analysis of Sara Farizan's text, *If You Could Be Mine*, also demands a discussion of transsexuality in Iran.

3.2.1. *If You Could be Mine* – Lesbian Love and Transsexuality in Contemporary Iran

Setting the action of her novel, *If You Could Be Mine*, in a country that criminalizes homosexuality and publicly executes homosexuals for acting on their feelings and desires, Sara Farizan chose a particularly hostile social context for the story's protagonist Sahar and her lesbian relationship with her best friend since childhood, Nasrin. As an Islamic republic, Iran's sexual politics, and Iranian law, are highly shaped by Islamic *Shari'a* law, as well as by other sacred texts, including the *Qu'ran*. In Islamic *Shari'a* law, multiple paragraphs and its differentiations might be incomprehensible from another culture's point of view. Through a thorough discussion of the legal situation of the LGBTQ community in Iran, and its standing in society, however, a deeper understanding of its representations in the novel can be ensured. Moreover, the narrative demands for discussing the Islamic Republic's attitude toward trans people and women's rights.

Similar to the Bible and other sacred texts, the Islamic *Qu'ran* explicitly addresses and condemns homosexuality. Janet Afary explains that *sura* 4:16, however, says that Allah forgives those who repent their sins (81). She further states that the *Qu'ran* does not include any *sura* prescribing that homosexuals should be punished to death (ibid.). Likewise, Islamic *Shari'a* law denounces homosexual activities, but leaves open the question of how violations of the relevant law should be punished (Afary 82).

Following the Iranian Revolution in the late 1970s, gradually improving human rights, and women's rights in particular, suffered a setback. As Afary explains, premodern rules of conduct and methods of punishment have been reintroduced and applied more commonly and strictly at that time (323). She further asserts that the Iranian legislative system began differentiating between men and women, on the one hand, and between Muslims and people of different faiths on the other (ibid.). In other words, different legal treatment, depending on the categories the respective suspect falls into, were introduced. The early 1980s were also the time when openly homosexual men began to fear severe punishment and even death (ibid.). When Muhammad Khatami was elected president in 1997, women's rights began improving significantly (Afary 329f.). Khatami directed the Republic toward a more liberal path, leading to more opportunities for expressing political criticism and to relaxed codes of conduct for women (ibid.). When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power, however, these achievements, and the emerging sexual revolution in Iran, came to an abrupt end (331).

Since the early 21st century, a young and resolute feminist movement has emerged that is willing to make a stand against this system of repression (Afary 332). Among other ways to express their criticism and discontent with misogynist politics, fashion, and their general public appearance, became key tools in their fight for equality (ibid.). As Afary explains, the young feminists who initiated the movement began extending the boundaries of women's rules of conduct by wearing eccentric make-up and tighter fitting clothing (ibid.). As a consequence of these acts of civil disobedience, these women are constantly in conflict with the morality police, which is also mentioned in Farizan's narrative, and is discussed later in this thesis.

Abouzar Nasirzadeh argues that, in a society in which gender segregation is practiced, sexuality becomes a taboo topic that must not be addressed in public. Homophobia, in combination with this general disavowal of sexuality, has led to the invisibility of the Iranian homosexual community (57). This societal invisibility is very much reflected in a statement made by Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who claimed that there were no homosexuals in Iran (Huffington Post). Nasirzadeh explains how denying the existence of homosexuals is common practice in the Middle East, and adds that, typically, religious leaders identify homosexuality as an imported Western phenomenon (57).

Although the Iranian gay subculture is rather small, a new critical discourse on sexuality and sexual politics has also made its way to Iran's homosexual community (Afary 351). In this context, Afary highlights the role of *MAHA: The First Iranian GLTB e-Magazine*, established in 2004. Although the magazine's publication has to happen underground, and publishers must remain anonymous, the journal, featuring interviews with gay rights activists and articles discussing various struggles relevant to the homosexual community, has a considerable impact on homosexual Iranians (ibid.). Even more importantly, *MAHA* magazine presents a more liberal reading of the *Qu'ran*, which criticizes the condemnation of homosexuals by arguing that the equality of all men, as a major Muslim principle, contradicts the condemnation and derogatory treatment of homosexuals (ibid.). The attempts to make Iranian society more tolerant for different sexual identities and lifestyles, however, have had little success yet (ibid.). Nevertheless, with the increasingly widespread use of the Internet in Iran, the lesbian and gay community have found a common platform over the past few years (Nasirzadeh 57).

Despite the current criminalization of same-sex love, Iran has a homosexual tradition that dates back to medieval times and the early modern era. During those periods, asymmetrical homosexual relationships, called *sighehs*, or courtships, both gay and lesbian, were common practice (Afary 79). For this thesis, however, I mainly focus on the tradition of female homosexuality in Iran. As Afary explains, in "sisterhood *sighehs*," the female version of these homosexual relationships, high value was placed on a long courtship. These relationships were by no means limited

to sexual actions, but also involved showing one's affection by giving each other presents and undertaking joint activities; heterosexual courtships, in contrast, were only tolerated premaritally, and tended to be considerably shorter (80). As the clear majority of heterosexual relationships in Iran only involved little romance, due to the fact that marriages were typically arranged at a young age, marriage politics, in combination with gender segregation, might have encouraged homosexual contacts in a society in which any physical contact with the opposite sex outside of marriage was, and still is, condemned (ibid.).

Surprisingly, however, the transgendered community has a quite different standing within the Iranian society. As Fatemeh Javaheri explains, Islamic law not only permits gender reassignment, but also encourages it by arguing that this is a fundamental human right, as long as an underlying medical condition has been diagnosed (368). The psychiatric disorder that allows sex change is referred to as *gender identity disorder* and frequently causes controversy. In Iran, gender reassignment is only authorized after the individual concerned has undergone a process that usually takes between half a year and two years, and involves multiple medical and psychological examinations (ibid.). In the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, gender identity disorder is defined as being composed of two main components: the individual's identification with the other gender, and permanent psychological struggles and unease caused by the feeling of being stuck in a gender role that does not reflect one's identity (American Psychiatric Association 302.6, 302.85).

Classifying issues concerning gender identity as a medical condition, however, provokes much debate and controversy in both psychiatric and sociopolitical discourse. One of the researchers criticizing the fact that transgender identity is considered a mental disorder is Judith Butler, who highlights the ambivalent position of trans people and trans rights activists toward the medicalization of transsexuality. The diagnosis of a medical condition definitely entails benefits, such as financial support in the transition process, but also implies having a disease, and thus being sick or abnormal, which may serve as a tool for the stigmatization of the trans community by transphobics (*Undoing* 75f.). Butler argues that this debate is largely based on different conceptions of autonomy: Financial assistance from insurance

companies that request medical certificates confirming a medical condition grants autonomy, but the pathologization of transsexuality sets limits to the individual's choice of one of the major ways of determining his or her gender identity (*Undoing* 76f.). Although Butler does not deny the advantages for trans people resulting from classifying non-traditional gender identities as a disorder, she highlights that its pathologization frequently has a destabilizing effect on them, which might even lead to suicidal thoughts (*Undoing* 78).

Even though gender reassignment is permitted under certain circumstances, Zara Saeidzadeh points out that there is a common misconception idealizing the transgendered community's situation in Iran. Although a *fatwa*, a legally binding religious resolution, by Ayatollah Khomeini makes sex change a legal medical procedure, transgendered people struggle with their depreciated social status and the medicalization of their sexual preferences and gender identities (251). Saeidzadeh further explains that, as a relatively new phenomenon in the Iranian public sphere, discourses about transsexuality tend to focus only on its legal and moral correctness, rather than on the implications for the individuals and their standing in society (269). Moreover, transsexuals who have undergone gender reassignment frequently experience exclusion, because Iranian society is based on the idea of binary gender. Thus, gender identities other than purely male or female are perceived as strange and inappropriate (Saeidzadeh 269f.). In other words, neither legal nor religious restrictions prohibit gender transition; however, discrimination and the hostile social attitude toward otherness threaten transgendered Iranians' quality of life.

As various essays on the relatively supportive role of religious leaders in the process of gender transition show, experts and LGBTQ rights advocates identify this official support as an attempt to entirely eliminate homosexuality in Iran (Bucar and Shirazi 417). A potential reason why homosexuality is so stigmatized in Iran might be that, in Iranian law, same-sex sexual acts are perceived as being equivalent to rape, which is why homosexuals are commonly charged with both criminal offenses (Bucar and Shirazi 418). As a result of this implied involvement of violence, however, defending those accused tends to be a particularly demanding task for gay rights activists (*ibid.*).

As for this thesis, I am particularly interested in the situation of lesbians in the respective cultural and historical contexts in which the narratives have been placed, I now focus on legal aspects of female homosexuality in Iran. While gay male sexual acts can be immediately punished by death, lesbian Iranians are usually sentenced to 100 lashes for their same-sex love; normally, it is not before the fourth conviction that lesbians have to face death penalty, because female homosexual acts are treated in another section of the Iranian penal code (ibid.).

3.2.1.1. Representations of the Socio-cultural Context in *If You Could Be Mine*

Throughout Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, the reader constantly senses the imminence of danger that results from the characters' fear of being detected by the authorities. The strict and prescriptive sexual politics in modern Iran are not only implicitly perceivable within the narrative, but are also addressed explicitly several times. As the comparison to Eagland's, *Wildthorn*, reveals, politics and society's hostility toward the characters' sexual otherness are remarkably present within this novel, because Farizan frequently refers to Iranian politics and extratextual incidents. This not only illustrates the dangerous and desperate situation the characters find themselves in, but also lends credibility to the narrative. Therefore, I use this chapter to illustrate how Farizan manages to make the reader aware of the risks the characters' secret relationship carries.

It was three months ago that Nasrin and I kissed [...] We are always around each other, so I don't think that anyone will suspect that Nasrin and I are in love. She worries, though, all the time. I tell her no one will know [...], but when we kiss I can feel her tense. She keeps thinking about the two boys who were hung years ago in Mashhad. (3)

As the passage above illustrates, the characters live in constant fear of being identified for what they truly are. In a conversation with her best friend and lover, Nasrin, Sahar tells her that she will find some way for them to live together as a loving couple. Nasrin, however, does not share Sahar's optimism and seems to have internalized modern Iranian society's hostility toward homosexuality more strongly. At this point of the narrative, the author refers to executions of homosexual males who

openly live out their sexual identity, which is common practice in Iran. By explicitly mentioning the public hanging of openly homosexual men, already mentioned in this paper, the imminence of danger is highlighted. This effect is reinforced by spontaneous remarks by the protagonist, such as, “The plunging necklines on Nasrin’s dresses can make her seem loose, which makes me uncomfortable. A bad reputation can be deadly” (18). As these examples reveal, death, as a consequence of openly showing one’s same-sex love, is omnipresent.

Sometimes when Nasrin and I kiss, Ayatollah Khomeini’s and Ayatollah Khamenei’s faces pop into my head [...] Khomeini, now deceased, became the Supreme Leader after the revolution [...] In school, they teach us that Khomeini brought justice and the will of God to the people [...] I’m not sure how much I believe that. The Ayatollahs’ photos are everywhere [...] and when I kiss Nasrin I feel like they are watching me. (12f)

Not only the omnipresence of punishment, including the death penalty, is emphasized throughout the novel, but also that of both Ayatollah Khomeini⁴ and Ayatollah Khamenei, who are glorified and considered prophets, having led the Islamic Republic onto the right path. Within the novel, the country’s glorification of Khomeini and Khamenei is reflected in the numerous descriptions mentioning the presence of their portraits hanging almost everywhere in public spaces. As the extract suggests, however, Sahar is critical about the value of the political change induced by their actions and fundamentalist religious beliefs.

Returning to what has been said about transsexuality in modern Iran, it is little surprising that the novel portrays several transgender characters and discusses the entire transition process involved in gender reassignment. The most prominent transgender character portrayed within the narrative is Parveen, who is described as an exceptionally beautiful and feminine young woman. She supports Sahar in her plans to undergo gender reassignment to have a chance to openly express her love for Nasrin and have a future with her that does not involve constant danger and fear of being caught by the morality police.

⁴ See Afary (191-192) for a discussion of the impact of Khomeini’s traditionalist politics and the compromises he made for semi-modernity

When Sahar realizes that Parveen was not born female, she is startled, and assumes that the transgender woman would be punished for her atypical sexual and gender identity. This is the point at which her cousin, Ali, introduces Sahar to the double standards concerning sexual otherness in Iranian politics and society: “So everybody knows? Is she going to get in trouble?” Ali shakes his head. ‘Like I said, it’s legal. The government even helps pay for the surgery.’ ‘But why?’ ‘Because they are trying to fix us.’ He says it with indifference, but I cringe. *Fix us*. That includes *me*” (49f.). In this dialog, Ali expresses his criticism, which is aligned with what has been said about the reasons behind the governmental support of gender reassignment therapy, i.e. minimizing the number of homosexuals in Iran and treating homosexuality as a Western phenomenon that does not exist in Iranian society. The passage quoted, however, is also representative of an important step in Sahar’s homosexual identity formation, because this is the point at which she begins to realize that she, herself, is part of the stigmatized homosexual community. This issue, however, is treated in more detail in one of the subsequent sections of this paper.

Another aspect previously addressed in this thesis is the modern feminist trend of opposing the restrictive dress code that obligates women to hide their bodies from the male gaze. Due to her too revealing outfit, Nasrin is arrested, and escapes torture only by chance. Doubts remain, however, concerning the question of whether Nasrin’s occasionally provocative appearance is an actual expression of her discontent with misogynist governmental regulations, and thus a form of political protest, or rather a simple fashion statement (80-82).

The final point I would like to analyze in this context is the response of other secondary characters to the protagonist’s and Nasrin’s homosexuality. Due to the dangers being open about their sexual identity entails, the narrative only features a small number of characters who are aware of Sahar’s and Nasrin’s mutual love: their mothers, Sahar’s cousin, Ali, and the two transgender characters, Parveen and Katayoun. While the reader learns that Sahar’s deceased mother knew about her homosexual feelings for Nasrin very early on, it is not before Nasrin’s marriage that *her* mother reveals that she has also been aware of their mutual love. What the two characters share, however, is their only little supportive attitude toward their daughters’ homosexuality. Sahar’s cousin, Ali, and Parveen, in contrast, support

Sahar in her quest for identity in various ways. Parveen agrees to assist her in the process of gender reassignment therapy to become a potentially socially accepted partner for Nasrin, and Ali encourages her to embrace her true lesbian self, and attempts to prevent her from transitioning.

Nevertheless, it is Katayoun's attitude toward homosexuality that I consider particularly interesting. As a transgender character, non-traditional sexual and gender identity are familiar phenomena for her. Therefore, her startled and scandalized reaction to homosexual couples exchanging meaningful looks at Restaurant Javan, a secret venue for homosexuals, which Sahar's cousin, Ali, is a regular at, seems to be unusual from a Western point of view. Katayoun, who has already completed her gender reassignment process to become female, reacts aggressively and offensively as soon as she discovers that Sahar decided to meet her in that particular restaurant with its diverse clientele. Katayoun's outburst results in Sahar slapping her, which represents the protagonist's willingness to challenge and fight against Iranian homophobic sexual politics. Sahar is bewildered by Katayoun's intolerant attitude toward sexual otherness, because she, as a transgendered character, represents a socially marginalized sexual minority herself. When the protagonist confronts her with the double standards she seems to have internalized, Katayoun reacts in disgust: "My illness is treatable. Their malady is a bargain made with the devil. The Republic knows that, the Koran knows that and you damn well better know that if you are to survive in this society" (151).

3.2.2. *Wildthorn* – Homosexuality and Normative Gender Roles in Victorian England

Similar to Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, depicting the struggles two young lesbian lovers must face in modern Iran, the action in the second chosen award-winning LGBTQ YA novel is set in an environment characterized by its negative attitude toward sexual otherness and atypical gender identities. As the novel's protagonist, Louisa Cosgrove, can neither identify with the gender norms, nor with the heteronormativity governing Victorian England, and is punished for her otherness, this chapter briefly describes how non-traditional gender identity and homosexuality were perceived in this particular historical context.

In the Victorian era, a period known today for its particularly repressive sexual politics, sexuality was considered a necessary evil, reserved for reproduction only. Kelly Boyd and Rohan McWilliam state that sex and sexual pleasure were disavowed and remained taboo topics that must not be discussed in public (339). They further explain that sexual double standards were particularly present within the Victorian age: While men could exercise their sexuality outside marriage, and did not have to fear harsh consequences or punishment, women acting upon their desires and expressing their sexuality were considered immoral (*ibid.*). These misogynist attitudes toward female sexuality are even manifested in medical science, which shows, for instance, in physicians' claims that women do not experience sexual pleasure as men do, and that the female orgasm does not exist (*ibid.*).

Despite the disavowal of sexuality in the public sphere, research has proven the existence of a private culture treating sexual issues more openly than one might think. Thus, it is not surprising that, because homosexuality had to be concealed, most homosexuals at that time were forced to either suppress their homosexual feelings and true self, or to live a double life (Showalter 371f.). Therefore, Elaine Showalter explains, a nocturnal homosexual subculture emerged that remained widely invisible to the general public (371).

As Jeffrey Weeks points out, compared with other cultures at the time, in the Western world during the Christian era, the stigmatization of homosexuality and the hostility toward those acting out their same-sex love were particularly common and prominent phenomena. Similar to what has been said about homosexuality in modern Iran, until 1885, homosexual activity in England fell into the legal code's section that discussed sodomy (Weeks 122). Thus, again, the action of a recent award-winning publication in LGBTQ YA fiction is set in an especially biased and hateful context in which same-sex love is criminalized and even punishable by death. Historically speaking, however, regulations on non-heterosexual activity tend to primarily focus on gay males rather than lesbians (*ibid.*).

3.2.2.1. Representations of the Socio-cultural Context in *Wildthorn*

In comparison to the other novel under analysis, strikingly less focus is placed on generating a comprehensive understanding of Victorian culture and society. Besides the obvious hostility of Victorian society reflected in Louisa's forced hospitalization due to her otherness, there are comparatively very few references to the social and historical contextualization of the plotline.

The one point I do consider interesting in the context of this analysis, however, is the novel's representation of gender norms, which is a dominating and restrictive issue within the narrative, and is eventually overcome by the story's protagonist, Louisa. Laura Jimenez argues that "[a]lthough this book deals with Louisa's sexual identity, *Wildthorn* is not a traditional coming-out story. Instead, it reads as a dark work of historical fiction highlighting women's helplessness in Victorian-era England" (417). Concerning the conception of femininity represented in *Wildthorn*, Eagland describes a misogynist society widely representative of women's standing within English society in the Victorian era. The historical correctness is illustrated, for instance, in Louisa's limited agency, which becomes especially clear when it comes to her future life and professional career. Regardless of her aptitude, for long stretches of the novel, Louisa's aspirations are not taken seriously, and she is not given the opportunity to pursue her wishes and dreams. As the following passage illustrates, the traditional distribution of gender roles deprives Louisa of her ambitious aspirations:

I'm going to be a hero.' [...] 'I wouldn't mind being an explorer or discovering a new country no one else has seen before. But what I'd really like is to be a scientist and discover a cure for – for typhoid or diphtheria.' [...] Beside me in the dark, Grace had giggled. 'Oh Lou, you are funny. You can't be a hero.' 'Why not? [sic] 'Because only men are heroes'. (46f.)

The quote emphasizes the misogynist zeitgeist of the era through Grace's statement that ridicules Louisa's confidence in her abilities by claiming that female heroism does not exist. Undoubtedly, the vast majority of heroes in history and mythology, including warriors, conquerors, and ancient Gods, were male, which might partly explain Grace's attitude toward her cousin's dreams. In more recent

publications, also in the genre of YA literature, however, successful novels such as the *Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins show that there is a current trend celebrating strong and independent female characters. When examining Louisa's character development within the narrative in more detail, however, traces of female heroism can also be identified in *Wildthorn*. Initially, the novel's protagonist is severely restricted in her agency, but, in the course of events, Louisa is given the agency her brother Tom and other male characters enjoyed from the beginning. In this sense, one could argue that her fight against societal norms is a heroic act and, therefore, an example of an empowering and positive representation of femininity that may contribute to the educational value of the narrative, which thus lends itself to teaching purposes.

Nevertheless, there is a clear claim of weakness as a particularity of female gender in the novel. This claim is not only reflected in other characters' reactions to Louisa's plans for the future, but also in the characterization of Louisa's mother and the medical recommendations made at Wildthorn Hall asylum. Through using lexical items related to weakness and vulnerability, and especially through instances of indirect characterization by Louisa's brother, Tom, Mr. Sneed, and Louisa herself, Mrs. Cosgrove's psychological stability and mental strength, for instance, are severely underestimated.

The misogynist attitudes of society also become evident in a passage in which Louisa is explained what her treatment at Wildthorn will consist of: "[...] Mr Sneed has prescribed a period of rest from reading for you – 'But that's absurd!' Ignoring my outburst, the doctor continues, 'And I would support him in that recommendation. Excessive study, especially in one of the fair sex, often leads to insanity'" (70). As the passage demonstrates, Louisa's surroundings are determined to keep excluding women from intellectual circles under the guise of protecting them from psychological distress. In addition to this attempt at excluding women, the quote also points toward a cleverly devised mechanism that aims at maintaining the power of the male elites present within the narrative. In Eagland's novel, inconvenient women threatening the social order are declared mentally ill, which allows those in power to invalidate resistance and critical remarks by oppressed women fighting for emancipation. In other words, the novel illustrates the oppression of women through restricting their

access to information and their personal freedom. Therefore, Louisa and other women challenging firmly established societal norms are forcefully admitted to Wildthorn Hall, sedated, and become exiles, receiving little attention at the asylum.

In the narrative, Louisa attempts to prove her mental clarity, but fails miserably because her behavior following the doctors' diagnosis is only considered a manifestation of her medical condition. Although it is primarily Louisa's non-conformity with traditional gender roles, and not her lesbian sexual orientation, which leads to her admission at Wildthorn Hall, the treatment's resemblance to conversion therapy is undeniable. From today's perspective, unconventional and gruesome therapy methods, reminiscent of torture, are used with the aim of preventing undesirable behavior resulting from patients' unwillingness to subordinate themselves to societal norms that prescribe gender identity and sexual orientation. The similarity to conversion therapy is reflected in the descriptions of Louisa's mental state following the treatment. It becomes obvious that, instead of curing a presumably diagnosed mental disease, these procedures lead to a destabilization of the patients' self. At the asylum, the characters are constantly weakened until the inconvenient and unwanted behavior is abandoned as a consequence of their ever-increasing mental instability.

As I have already mentioned in the theoretical section of this thesis dealing with the struggles homosexual adolescents' experience in the process of identity formation, a negative response to their sexual orientation frequently triggers high emotional stress, depression, and may even lead to suicide attempts. In the protagonist's case, the helplessness and depression resulting from this form of punishment for her otherness, incites Louisa to make arrangements for a potential suicide attempt: "I don't want to be shut up in my head again [...] If I had the Fowler's Solution now, I'd only have to swallow it all down and the arsenic in it would quickly do its deadly business. That would be the end of this misery" (227). What I consider especially remarkable about this extract is its euphemistic quality, downplaying the seriousness of this ultimate act of despair. Interestingly, Louisa's hope for true love allows her to forget about her misery and society's treatment of her. This becomes evident shortly after the quoted passage, when Eliza's visit encourages Louisa to

hide the poisonous substance and when she dissuades her from giving up her fight against her wrongful hospitalization (237).

3.3. Character Profiles of Lesbian Protagonists and the Representation of Lesbian Identity in the Selected Novels

In this section of my literary analysis focusing on issues of lesbian identity, I apply a model by Vivienne Cass based on a constructionist approach to identity formation. Cass divides homosexual identity formation into the following six distinct stages, which I briefly describe before utilizing them to create psychological character profiles of the selected novels' protagonists. It must be noted, however, that various researchers specialized in the field of psychology have developed models on homosexual identity formation that bear a close resemblance (Coleman; Troiden; Plummer). Nevertheless, I decided to apply the model by Cass,⁵ because it combines arguments of all the theorists mentioned, and has been proven to be a rather extensive, empirically tested, and particularly applicable theoretical model for this thesis. I would like to state, however, that just as every individual has their own unique identity, processes of identity formation are also highly variable and cannot be generalized. Consequently, the following section may be thought of as a purely descriptive model, rather than a set of prescriptive rules determining how identity formation is supposed to occur. Thus, the model presented serves only as a tool that facilitates abstraction and allows a description of similarities and differences of the two novels concerning the representation of this important process.

1. Identity Confusion:

According to Cass, individuals at this first stage begin realizing that some of their behavioral patterns may be considered homosexual, which usually leads to confusion, because their former self is questioned, and thus threatened substantially. She further claims that this is the point at which the majority of homosexual individuals come to a basic decision about whether they want to accept their identities and pursue the discovery of their homosexual self. It

⁵ The following discussion on the steps of homosexual identity construction is based on Cass (147-153)

must be noted, however, that this process can be interrupted and abandoned at any time.

2. Identity Comparison:

If the individual has accepted, at least to a certain extent, that he or she might be homosexual, Cass explains that comparisons to heterosexual peers are drawn, which frequently causes negative emotional responses. Depending on a variety of factors, including the individuals' attitudes toward the desirability of their otherness, again, homosexual identity formation might be foreclosed at this stage. Those who continue discovering their non-heterosexual identities frequently engage in conversations and contacts with like-minded individuals to escape from social isolation and the feeling of not belonging to the rest of the peer group.

3. Identity Tolerance:

Cass explains that, at this third stage, homosexuals typically begin to actively seek the company of individuals who are part of the homosexual community to exchange experiences. Rather than fully accepting their homosexual identity, gays and lesbians only *tolerate* their homosexuality at this stage. Another characteristic of this developmental stage is a certain kind of roleplay that becomes increasingly frequent. As the individuals slowly begin accepting their homosexual identities, homosexual contacts become even more important to them. Cass argues that this is the point at which homosexuals begin to develop different variants of themselves, depending on the situation they encounter. More precisely, both a usually heterosexual *public* version of the self, and a homosexual *personal* version are created and embodied, depending on the respective context the individuals find themselves in, as well as the sexual orientation of their peer group.

4. Identity Acceptance:

As a result of the homosexual contacts made during stages two and three, a more positive view on non-heterosexual identities is discovered. To avoid too much negative response, which might be threatening to the self, Cass explains that individuals attempt to find a balance between conformity with societal

demands and showing one's true homosexual self. This, according to Cass, is usually done by using "passing strategies," which include hiding one's homosexual identity by pretending to live a heterosexual lifestyle in certain situations.

5. Identity Pride:

According to Cass, the fifth stage of identity formation is characterized by the development of a certain pride in an individual's homosexual identity, and of a feeling of superiority over the heterosexual community. She explains that this motivates homosexuals to seek confrontation with the heterosexual community in a productive way to promote their identity and counter the stigmatization of their own community. As Cass explains, depending on the reactions one experiences, homosexual identity is either foreclosed or, in the case of positive reactions, negative prior expectations are not met, and a certain tension between these expectations and reality is created, which leads the individual toward the final stage of the process.

6. Identity Synthesis:

This final stage of Cass's model on homosexual identity formation describes the process of developing a more realistic view on both the homosexual and heterosexual community. Moreover, individuals seem to realize that even though sexual orientation is an important part of human identity, there are more aspects to one's character than sexual identity. As a consequence of this increasingly realistic perception, the view of one's own identity and the views of others are merged or *synthesized*, which leads to a more balanced and stable self.

3.3.1. Lesbian Identity

To understand how the process of the protagonists' identity formation is represented in the selected novels, I apply Cass's model of homosexual identity formation. Using this model to structure the following analysis serves as a starting point for a more thorough psychological analysis of the characters portrayed. Bearing in mind what has been said about authenticity and consistency within the narrative (see Chapter

2.3.1), the following section analyzes representations of lesbian identity in the two award-winning publications to arrive at an evaluation of the novels' educational value, as defined and explained in the theory section of this thesis. Beginning with Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, and continuing with Eagland's, *Wildthorn*, the following analysis of the representation of lesbian identity is divided into two main sections. First, I adhere to the model by Cass, before moving on to a more flexible analysis of representations of homosexual identity not explicitly addressed by the model.

As the following chapters show, it is not possible to perfectly apply all the steps suggested by the model to the characters' development throughout the narrative, but it provides assistance in abstraction, which enables us to move beyond the plot level of the novels. Moreover, the *missing* steps of identity formation prove to be interesting and insightful also, because these might point to factors hindering the protagonists' discovery or their true self.

3.3.1.1. *If You Could Be Mine*

In Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, the characters' identity formation is complicated not only by society's stigmatization of homosexuals, but also by the authorities' prohibition of same-sex love. As openly homosexual people fear the death penalty in Iran, maintaining secrecy is vital for the characters, but this also hinders the discovery of their own sexual identity. It is little surprising that, in an environment in which public hangings of homosexuals are common practice, internalized homophobia is a prevalent phenomenon.

In the novel, the internalization of homophobic prejudice and politics is illustrated, for instance, in the following quote: "Nasrin keeps telling me, 'We aren't gay, we are just in love'" (4). While in some social and cultural contexts this statement could be interpreted as a way of expressing one's discontent with social processes of labeling, in this case, the passage seems to point toward the characters' fear of perceiving themselves as what they really are. Although the characters recognize their romantic feelings for each other, Nasrin claims that they are not gay, which is an indicator of the not yet completed first stage of homosexual

identity formation, *identity confusion*, on her part. The oxymoron in the quoted line points toward Nasrin's denial of her homosexual identity, and thus toward her very limited acceptance of herself as a lesbian young woman. As the steps described by Cass's model on homosexual identity construction need to be undergone consecutively, an incomplete first stage suggests little personal development of the character throughout the narrative, and thus little applicability of the model's further steps in Nasrin's case.

In comparison to her best friend and lover, Nasrin, Sahar seems to, at least partially, accept the idea of being homosexual, although she is not particularly positive about it. Her negative self-image is reflected in passages such as the following: "Whenever I think of Nasrin in public or at school, I feel their eyes on me. Angry Grandpa is the most judgmental. His brow is furrowed as if to say he knows exactly what I am: a degenerate" (13). Sahar seems to ridicule Khomeini in the passage, whom she refers to as "Angry Grandpa," but it also reveals that she has not accepted her homosexual self yet. By referring to herself as a "degenerate," she expresses her internalized homophobia and reveals her lowered self-esteem resulting from her undesired otherness. Interestingly, Sahar's negativity concerning her own sexual identity remains widely unchanged, and there are no traces of a development of pride, which means that only the first four stages of homosexual identity formation are reflected in the character's evolution throughout the novel.

Although Sahar is aware of her own homosexuality, she fails to realize that her same-sex romantic feelings are one of the central points of her own identity, which becomes particularly clear at a later stage of the narrative, when Sahar naively considers undergoing gender reassignment to be able to share her life with Nasrin: "There's nothing I can do. I have no resources, no plan of attack. I'm just a girl. A girl. If only I were a man. A man with a hairy face who could slouch his shoulders if he wanted to and walk around with short sleeves in the hot sun. If only..." (68). In this extract, the reader discovers Sahar's naivety resulting from identity confusion. Rather than being ready to accept her homosexual self, she attributes more importance to her love for Nasrin, and is even willing to give up her true self for her. Her naïve train of thought, which becomes evident at this stage of the novel, represents young homosexuals' identity confusion. As soon as Sahar engages more actively in the

LGBTQ community, and exchanges experiences with like-minded people who at least partially understand the struggles she has to go through, however, she develops self-acceptance and experiences an evolution in her process of identity formation as she proceeds to steps three and four, *identity tolerance* and *identity acceptance*.

The role that religion plays in society's and the authorities' attitudes toward sexual otherness has been already discussed in a previous section of this thesis. Interestingly, both Sahar's and Nasrin's families are portrayed as not particularly religious, which shows, for instance, in the loose draping of the headscarves of Nasrin and her mother, which is mentioned several times. Sahar even takes off her headscarf as soon as she leaves the public sphere, regardless of the presence of men. In the narrative, Sahar is a character standing for political and religious criticism, which is, for example, reflected in the following passage:

Some women always wear head scarves in mixed company. The very religious ones look like black tents, with only their faces peering out from the folds of the *chador*. Covering my head has always made me feel foolish, but I respect a woman's decision to cover up as long as it's the *woman's* decision (44).

Besides showing that Louisa is not particularly religious, in the above quote, the first-person narrator expresses the protagonist's discontent with the Iranian misogynist politics of repression. Through putting the noun, "woman," in italics, Farizan highlights the character's criticism concerning state-dictated clothing regulations for females, who are ultimately deprived of any form of independence, including their choice of clothing. Sahar is thus portrayed as a liberal and feminist young woman, critical of societal norms in Iran, while at the same time she tolerates and accepts the religious convictions of others that make them want to conceal certain parts of their body.

As it has been shown that religion does not play an important role in the protagonist's life, and that Sahar is skeptical about traditionalist societal norms, it can be assumed that the negative image of her self is a result of unintentionally internalized homophobia only, and is not due to her own religious or moral convictions. Returning to what has been said about Cass's model, from a

psychological point of view, the negativity characterizing Sahar's self-image could be traced to the only partially completed process of identity formation.

When applying the model to the representation of the protagonist's lesbian identity, the complicating and hindering impact of Iranian society and homophobic legislation becomes evident. "Sometimes I get so angry I want to take off my *roosari* and run into the streets like a madwoman, my hair flying behind me waiting for Nasrin to pull at it" (8). At this point of the narrative, Sahar's negativity and her limited acceptance of her lesbian identity, on the one hand, and her unwillingness to subordinate to the pressure exerted by societal norms, on the other, are reflected in the first-person narrator's choice to refer to her as a "madwoman." The fantasy expressed in the passage seems to be symbolic of Sahar's urge to break free and finally start discovering her sexual identity, without being forced to hide. According to Karen Coats, exaggeration and engagement in one's overly rough, if not violent, fantasies are ways of coping with the dissonance created between the individuals' dreams and reality (326). This claim perfectly applies to the passage above, which suggests that through fantasizing about "run[ning] into the streets like a madwoman," Sahar not only expresses her wish to break free, but also dissolves the dissonance created, which ultimately makes this utterance a speech act. Karen Coats also mentions humor as an alternative way for negotiating this dissonance: "making fun of our ideals and our attempts at heroism softens our disappointment at their failure" (ibid.). This issue is discussed in further detail at a later stage of this thesis, when the representation of Sahar's and Nasrin's relationship is focused on.

Another point concerning homosexual identity formation, which proves to be of interest, is the opposition created by the comparison of the novel's representation of Sahar's and her cousin, Ali's, identity. Ali seems to be the archetype of a gay male who has fully accepted his homosexual identity and undergone all the developmental stages necessary to arrive at his true self. Nevertheless, his acceptance and openness is constantly being punished within the narrative. Ali lives a turbulent life, involving substance abuse and illegal trading on the black market, and is forced into exile after he is tortured due to his sexual otherness. As Sahar is an ambitious girl, who plans to become a doctor, a life in this parallel society would automatically mean

giving up a part of her self as well, which is one of the reasons why, again, she is limited in her agency.

3.3.1.2. *Wildthorn*

Louisa Cosgrove, or Lucy Childs, as she is mistakenly called at Wildthorn asylum, is a curious seventeen-year-old girl living in rural Victorian England. Louisa and her brother Peter grow up in a wealthy family that attaches great importance to its reputation and standing within society. While Louisa's father, a physician, devotes himself to his profession, her mother's responsibilities are limited to preserving the family's desired image by fulfilling her social duties. Although Louisa's family tries to force her into a traditional gender role she does not correspond to, her thirst for knowledge proves to be stronger than her family's expectations. The only encouraging family member, who, at least partially, supports Louisa in her plans to study medicine and become an independent woman, is her father, who dies of typhoid. Possibly due to the hostility of Victorian England's society, Louisa's coming out, again, is not part of the narrative, which means that the process of identity formation is not depicted entirely. Thus, the following analysis mainly focuses on the first four steps of the model of homosexual identity formation as defined by Cass.

I have already shown that, according to Cass, homosexual identity formation begins with a phase in which confusion dominates the individual's emotional experience. Identity confusion is particularly present within the novel; various flashbacks tell Louisa's story from an early age onwards and, besides her non-traditional gender identity, she does not seem to realize her homosexual feelings for a relatively long time. It is not before Louisa finds out about her cousins' wedding that she discovers her romantic feelings for Grace when sharing the same bed. As a result of this surprising self-revelation, Louisa experiences an inner conflict that corresponds exactly to the confusion characteristic of this developmental stage. The precise representation of this inner conflict, however, is discussed in more detail when dealing with their relationship.

Another factor that creates insecurity, and can thus be assigned to this first step of the model by Cass, is Louisa's unconventional gender identity that manifests

itself, for instance, in her special interest in science, which was, given the historical setting of the novel's action, considered unusual and even an undesirable engagement for females. In accordance with what has been said about homosexual children's tendencies to identify with their opposite sex peers' interests in the theory section of this thesis, Louisa also experiences situations in which she struggles with stereotypically feminine gender identity. Eagland makes these struggles explicit near the beginning of the narrative, when the first-person narrator expresses Louisa's dissatisfaction with a doll she received for her birthday, and the envy she has for her brother Tom: "For his tenth birthday, Aunt Phyllis had sent a folding penknife with a mother-of-pearl handle, two blades, a corkscrew and a pair of scissors. Compared to that, what use was a doll? Not for the first time, I wished I was a boy" (13). Throughout the narrative, Louisa's discontent with society's conception of femininity is frequently mirrored in conflicts with her elder brother. She envies her brother for receiving the more attractive birthday presents, but above all for his educational opportunities and his personal freedom, which Louisa herself is deprived of. In the passage quoted above, Louisa explicitly states that there were several instances when she would have preferred to be born male. As has been already explained in the theory section of this paper, this is characteristic of homosexual identity development during childhood, and does not have to be an indicator of gender identity struggles or transsexuality.

Louisa's urge to compare herself with both her seemingly superior cousin, Grace, but also with her brother, Tom, can be explained by the second step of homosexual identity formation according to Cass's model: *identity comparison*. As a result of her partial identification with particularities of male gender identity, such as her typically "boyish" interest in science and adventures, it is little surprising that both male and female characters serve as a point of reference for the comparisons drawn by her. Especially in the first part of the novel, the reader learns that rather than identifying with her cousin's feminine elegance and class, Louisa feels closer to her brother Tom, which aligns with her non-traditional gender identity.

The third step of identity formation, *identity tolerance*, is represented in a more indirect and subtle way than in Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*. As the narrative only features two lesbian characters, one of whom reveals her homosexual feelings

almost at the end of the novel, Louisa is limited in her possibilities to exchange views and experiences within the homosexual community. Thus, this third phase of homosexual identity formation can only be found in a reduced form within this particular novel.

Similar to the third step of homosexual identity formation, *identity acceptance*, which is the fourth step of Cass's model on homosexual identity formation, is only partially reflected within the narrative. Identity acceptance is characterized by an increasingly positive opinion on homosexuality and the formation of a homosexual peer group. After having escaped from Wildthorn Hall asylum, and having discovered her romantic feelings for Eliza, who shares her romantic feelings, Louisa's view on her homosexual self is constantly improving. Although Louisa is not yet aware of Eliza's sexual orientation at this stage of the narrative, she is the first character who supports her in the process of discovering her sexual identity, and who communicates that her homosexual feelings for other girls are perfectly natural and fine. This first positive reaction to her sexual otherness encourages Louisa to begin reevaluating her homosexual self, and almost leads her toward the fifth phase of identity construction as described by Cass.

As the reader learns in the epilog of the novel, Louisa would like to be open about both her homosexual identity and her loving relationship with her maid Eliza. Despite this manifestation of her increasingly positive view on her lesbian identity and her wish to come out, I would not speak of *identity pride* in the sense of the model, because the final two stages described by Cass are based on individual experiences made during, and as a result of, the act of coming out. As Cass explains, the stage of identity pride is characterized by the urge to confront heterosexuals with one's own different sexual orientation, and by feelings of superiority. Both characteristics, however, are not present within the narrative.

Since the present analysis reveals that the process of Louisa's identity formation remains incomplete due to the internalized hostile and homophobic attitudes of others, I argue that this incompleteness can be explained by the novel's historical setting, and thus by the Victorian normativity concerning sexual and gender identity. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that this fragmentary representation of

a lesbian character's quest for identity may point toward a certain unwillingness of going further, and portraying self-conscious lesbian protagonists and lesbian pride. This suspicion, however, could only be examined through an extensive analysis of a representative sample size of lesbian YA texts, which is not feasible within the scope of this diploma thesis, and will have to be left to other researchers.

3.4. The Representation of Lesbian Relationships Within the Novels

The following section discusses the representation of relationships within the two selected YA novels, and combines aspects from both the plot and linguistic level. In this context, I am particularly interested in the extent to which sexuality is present within the narrative, and how the physical dimension of love is represented in detail. While recognizing the limits of describing sexual acts in YA texts, due to issues of appropriateness to the age of the target group and censorship, I examine and critically reflect on the strategies used to address sexuality without being obscene. It is only logical that publishers typically do not seem to tolerate obscenity, violent content, or overly offensive language, because the commercial success of publications depends on their endurance in the YA literary market. As the past has shown, ignoring these guidelines on presumable target group appropriateness is frequently punished by banning the respective books, which would mean financial loss. Thus, one could suspect that regardless of the positive consequences on adolescents' sexual identity formation already established in previous sections of this thesis, several publishing houses are not willing to take the risk of explicitly describing sexual physicality and sexual intercourse.

3.4.1. *If You Could Be Mine*

Throughout the narrative, the relationship between Sahar and Nasrin is portrayed as very passionate and intense, which is already apparent from the novel's beginning onwards. It becomes clear, for instance, through Sahar's dramatic physical reaction to Nasrin's engagement: Sahar falls to her knees and throws up several times (25), which illustrates her immense love for her friend, Nasrin, on the one hand, and the hopelessness of the situation she finds herself in, on the other.

Regarding the representation of sexuality within the novel, the following extract illustrates that the characters' sexual encounters are described as passionate and sensual, and, in comparison to the other novel under analysis, in relatively great detail. As the analysis of Eagland's, *Wildthorn*, reveals, sexual desire is addressed more explicitly through detailed descriptions of their kissing, including their mouths' and tongues' exact movements. The sexual act itself, however, is not portrayed and omitted within the narrative.

Loud music pours from her room; it's one of our standard methods for masking our conversations – and other activities. I knock on Nasrin's door and she opens it. She grabs my arm and pulls me in, then slams the door shut and throws me against it, locking it from the inside. She crashes her lips urgently against mine. This is the most passionate I have ever seen her [...] Her teeth are bared and her tongue begs my mouth for entrance. I close my eyes and let her in. (63f.)

As the analysis of the representation of Sahar's identity formation in *If You Could Be Mine* has shown, Sahar and Nasrin both find themselves in a particularly desperate situation, and the representation of their relationship remains consistently negative throughout the novel. The irony and wittiness within the text, however, lighten up the negativity and hopelessness dominating the narrative. As Karen Coats explains, there is a tendency in recent YA publications to replace the particularly serious or earnest tone characteristic of problem novels with an ironic one (326). One of the explanations she offers for this popularity of irony within the genre, which also seems to apply to this publication, is that the problems and issues central to the novels' plotlines usually trigger intense emotional involvement (ibid.). She further explains that, through ridiculing a particularly unpleasant situation, a healthy mind manages to turn this situation into something more positive (ibid.). In the novel, an ironic tone is created in a variety of different ways. This tone can be exemplified by the way Sahar refers to Nasrin's fiancé, Reza ("Prince Charming" (137)), and an extract in which the first-person narrator establishes a comparison between the protagonist and a frog when referring to her insecurity and negative self-image: "He is a prince, and I am a frog. A hairy frog that is due for an eyebrow wax and breast reduction, with a sexual orientation that will get this frog imprisoned sooner or later" (26).

3.4.2. *Wildthorn*

3.4.2.1. Louisa and Grace

First, I would like to point out that Louisa's love for Grace remains unrequited, and thus there is no actual mutual romantic relationship between the two characters to be analyzed. Nevertheless, the discovery of her romantic feelings for Grace is a crucial step in the process of Louisa's identity formation, and the portrayal of her first love, if unrequited, allows the drawing of conclusions regarding the representation of the discovery of homosexuality within the novel.

Partly due to the one-sidedness of Louisa's love for her cousin, the relationship between the two is characterized by a certain inequality and an unbalanced distribution of power. Grace is idealized and described as superior in almost all respects, which, on the one hand, can be explained by Louisa's love for her, and the resulting unreliability of the first-person narrator focalizing on the protagonist, Louisa. On the other hand, however, the gradual changes in Grace's indirect characterization through Louisa's thoughts about her suggests that her idealization is partially rooted in Louisa's lack of confidence in her own otherness. As Louisa's self-image slowly improves, and as she starts accepting her non-traditional gender identity and sexual orientation, she also seems to begin questioning Grace due to her conformity to the societal norms she is critical of. Therefore, during the narrative, the reader experiences a reversal of the initially attributed roles, and a shift in power from the graceful, but passive and submissive, young lady, toward the exceptional heroine breaking with societal normativity.

Although their relationship is an example of unrequited love, the analysis of sexual associations and allusions on Louisa's part proves to be of particular interest. Overwhelmed by her sudden discovery of her feelings and desire for her cousin, the following passage illustrates how the first-person narrator describes Louisa's thoughts and perception of physical closeness. At this stage of the narrative, however, Louisa has not yet realized why her body reacts to Grace's company in such an unusual way:

I had always been happy, if a little shy, to share Grace's bed, but tonight, sinking into the feather mattress and breathing in the smell of lavender from the linen sheets, I was painfully aware of her body lying next to mine. If I moved a fraction of an inch, we would be touching. *Touching*. I couldn't relax. There was a tension in the pit of my stomach, my skin prickled as if an electric current were running through it, and my heart was beating fast. (100)

In the passage, the sexual tension experienced by Louisa is represented through the excessive use of lexical items associated with the body and physical experience. Through the repetition of the verb, "touching," and the additional emphasis added by putting it in italics, Eagland makes the reader aware of the strong physical dimension of her desire for her cousin. The lexical choices made referring to parts of the body, such as "stomach," "skin," and "heart," reinforce the presence of the physical and Louisa's longing for Grace's body. Another factor adding to the immediacy of sexuality in this situation is the sensual effect achieved through combining scent and touch.

Another striking feature of the passage is the presence of a latent negativity in the description of Louisa's sexual feelings, which is apparent, for instance, in the phrase "painfully aware of her body." The same effect is created by a comparison between the prickling sensation experienced by the protagonist, and the feeling of an electric current running through her body. In both cases, affection and desire, as generally positive feelings, are compared to a clearly unpleasant, if not harmful experience. Besides being a manifestation of sexual desire, the strong focus on bodily experience may thus also be interpreted as a type of self-protection achieved through establishing a certain distance to an unwanted part of the self, because at this point of the narrative, Louisa has not yet accepted that she might be homosexual. In the beginning of the protagonist's process of homosexual identity formation, this method of distancing manifests itself in the impression of a clear separation between the body and the mind. Without being able to find any reasons for her physical experience at this point, Louisa's body seems to begin acting self-sufficiently.

When reflecting on this experience, however, Louisa makes an important step in her process of identity formation: "I felt such a longing, a painful, lovely feeling that we might be like this always, that we might never be apart. And suddenly with a hot

rush it came to me: I love Grace, I love her. In a confused way I knew I didn't just love her as cousins do" (102). In the passage, the narrator describes how Louisa becomes aware of her homosexual feelings for Grace. In accordance with what has been said about early homosexual identity formation, this extract reflects the protagonist's confusion that results from being confronted with a new part of her self. As a consequence of Louisa's discovery of her same-sex desire, an inner conflict emerges that is mirrored, for instance, in the oxymoron "painful, lovely feeling." Besides illustrating Louisa's struggles with her homosexual feelings, the use of this rhetorical device draws the readers' attention to this inner conflict, which is then reinforced by the realization that her feelings will remain unrequited.

It must be noted, however, that Louisa is not only mentally confused by her feelings for Grace and the new part of her self she has just discovered, but that she is also worried about Grace's reaction to her homosexual identity. Interestingly, Louisa is not so much worried about society's reaction, although its attitude toward same-sex love is particularly hostile. Her indifference concerning firmly established societal norms is not only apparent in the realization of her dream of becoming a female physician in a time when women were not supposed to be working, but also in her urge to reveal her true identity regardless of the consequences for her standing within society.

3.4.2.2. Louisa and Eliza

"I'm thinking of Eliza, her expressions, the things she said. Especially that one thing. *I thought you were sweet on her*. She said it so simply. As if it were the most natural thing in the world. As if it were *all right*" (242). As the quote illustrates, in her relationship with Eliza, Louisa does not have to hide her true self, and she experiences how being open about her sexual identity feels for the first time. When talking to Eliza, Louisa is supported in her process of homosexual identity formation, since it has already been mentioned that positive reactions to one's sexuality are essential to identity acceptance. The significance of their, at this stage, platonic relationship is reflected by using the conditional to highlight Louisa's internalized homophobia. Thereby, the reader recognizes the protagonist's insecurity created by Victorian society's condemnation of otherness and the persistent negativity she experiences. The exceptional nature of Louisa's and Eliza's relationship is thus

emphasized by the opposition between societal norms and Louisa's hospitalization because of her otherness on the one hand, and Eliza's entirely positive image of Louisa on the other. Regardless of their surroundings, and encouraged by her romantic feelings for Louisa, Eliza seems to provide unlimited support for her, and even jeopardizes her job at the asylum. Through Eliza's self-sacrificial behavior, *Eagland* offers the first positive representations of lesbian identity and love.

I drift in and out of sleep, and when I open my eyes, Eliza is here again. She brings warm water and a cloth and she washes me, avoiding my injuries. Her hands on my bare skin are skilful [sic], soothing, and I don't want her to stop. Once, she lifts her head and catches my eye. I feel a sudden heat in my face and I'm glad when she bows her head again. (265)

Even though the passage is a description of Eliza offering Louisa medical treatment following her escape from Wildthorn, several linguistic choices shift the focus away from mere nursing activities. This extract of the protagonist's interior monolog proposes that, despite her severe injuries, Louisa enjoys Eliza's touch, which already hints at Louisa's romantic feelings for her. Moreover, the emphasis on the bareness of Louisa's skin, in combination with Louisa's embarrassed reaction to short periods of eye contact, creates a romantic if not sensual impression. Nevertheless, such sexual allusions remain implicit at this stage of the narrative. There definitely is explicit sexuality in the novel, however, especially in its epilog:

We pull our clothes off as fast as we can. [...] As we climb on to my narrow bed, the springs creak, making us giggle. And as we kiss, gently at first, my hands moving over the smooth warm curves of her body, her hands hot on my skin. But then our mouths become fierce, urgent, hungry, and soon we are dancing, my love and I, dancing together in a rhythm that's easy, sweet and easy... (348f.)

In contrast to the previous passage, which only has slight sexual connotations, this extract obviously describes a sexual act and combines sexuality and sexual desire with a certain degree of innocence. This is underlined by the characters' "giggling" as a reaction to the creaking bed, which suggests the idea of youth and innocent play. At the same time, the characters' desire for their bodies is tangible, which manifests itself in their urge to undress rapidly, and by the intensification of their kisses. In other words, the sensual description of their sexual encounter works up to a climax, which is left open in the end, and which allows *Eagland* to present the pleasure of the

sexual act without being entirely explicit about it. Another factor adding to the sensuality in the description of the sexual act is Eagland's metaphorical use of *dancing* to refer to the characters' rhythmically moving bodies during their sexual act. The rhythmic effect created by this metaphor is reinforced by the repetition of the adjective, "easy," enabling the reader to feel the rhythm of their movements. In the passage, the narrator thus manages to convey to the reader that a sexual act between the characters takes place, while at the same time avoiding overly explicit language and graphic representations of the act. This observation gives rise to the controversy surrounding the appropriateness of describing sexual intercourse in YA literature and the EFL classroom, which has already been introduced in a previous section of this thesis, and will be discussed in more detail in the sections dealing with pedagogical and didactic implications of the analysis.

It is noticeable that the representation of sexuality is entirely positive and describes an enjoyable experience for the two protagonists. Regarding the characters' openness about their lesbian love, however, the narrative does not provide an entirely positive account of their relationship. Although Louisa expresses the wish to come out as a couple, her partner, Eliza, does not agree, and the protagonist is not given the opportunity to openly express her self and her feelings for Eliza, who is disguised as her maid.

Although the word, "sex," or any synonymous expression, is not mentioned once, sexuality is neither disavowed, nor presented in a negative light. The narrative includes passages that explicitly describe the physical dimension of the characters' relationship and uses metaphorical language to refer to sexual desire and the sexual act. In an educational context, I would thus argue that there is little room for objection concerning the novel's appropriateness for classroom discussion, because there are neither devaluations of any lifestyle or identity, nor any traces of obscenity in either novels' representations of physical love.

3.5. Similarities Between the Novels: Narrative Distancing, Agency, and Hostility of Society Toward Lesbian Love

As the previous sections have already indicated, there are several similarities and common features shared by the two selected award-winning novels. The following chapter summarizes and makes explicit these parallels, but does not make any generalizations or identify general tendencies within the LGBTQ YA genre. Nevertheless, it may point toward certain trends in award-winning literature, and may serve as a basis for further research. Moreover, it emphasizes three major points that carry both educational potential and risks regarding the discussion of these novels in the EFL classroom: the different methods of narrative distancing used in the novels, the hostile attitude of the characters' surroundings toward their sexual otherness, and the development of the characters' agency throughout the novel.

As I have already highlighted in a previous section of this thesis, both narratives are set in a cultural or historical context other than our contemporary Western world. While these exotic settings create a distance to the adolescent reader, who should be able to identify with the characters through mechanisms of mirroring, the distance created may also protect learners from overly emotional engagement in the narratives. Moving away from the learners' own cultural context, and from their personal experience, provides them with the opportunity to engage more confidently, and thus more actively, in classroom discussions, because this demands less personal revelation and exposure. Therefore, abstracting from their own experience might be facilitated, and a more comfortable working atmosphere is created, which enables productive and lively classroom debates.

Regarding the discussion of the characters' agency within the narratives, the analysis reveals that, in both publications, the characters' autonomy is strictly limited. Roberta Seelinger Trites explains that, although YA literature focuses on the characters' personal growth and maturation, these processes are always addressed in connection with the distribution of power (55). She argues that, besides the portrayal of authority exercised by parents, which becomes visible within the overwhelming majority of YA texts, the books "teach adolescent readers to accept a

certain amount of repression as a cultural imperative” (ibid.). In the case of the two novels under analysis, however, this repression seems to be particularly strong.

In Farizan’s, *If You Could Be Mine*, the characters’ agency is limited, above all, as a consequence of society’s hostility and the imminent danger of being caught by the morality police, which would probably end fatally. In the novel, the characters’ fate is predetermined by societal norms and the power of Nasrin’s parents over their daughter’s future. Sahar does have a certain amount of agency, but the price she would have to pay for being allowed to fulfill her dream of living together with her partner, Nasrin, is too high. Similar to modern Iranian society, as depicted in Farizan’s novel, sexual politics in Victorian England were exceptionally strict. In Louisa’s case, however, the limitations of her agency are reinforced through her hospitalization into Wildthorn Hall asylum, where she entirely loses her autonomy and agency for long stretches of the narrative. Also, regarding her plans for the future, Louisa’s family initially seems to force her into a traditionally female role by preventing her from pursuing her career goals. As the narrative develops, however, it is exactly a consequence of her non-traditional identity, her relationship and love to Eliza, which returns to her a certain degree of autonomy, and which results in her successful attempt to escape from the asylum. Throughout the narrative, Louisa is constantly being empowered, she successfully gains her autonomy and is eventually even granted the opportunity to study medicine. Contrary to her convictions, Louisa’s mother fulfills her husband’s final wish of enabling their daughter to become a doctor.

In both publications, punishment and conversion therapy are addressed at some point of the narrative. In *Wildthorn*, Louisa is forcefully hospitalized in an asylum for the mentally ill and receives psychiatric treatment resembling torture methods. The nominal purpose of the treatment is to make her reevaluate her identity and subordinate to societal norms. In, *If You Could Be Mine*, in contrast, Sahar’s only possibility that would allow her to be open about her romantic feelings for Nasrin is gender reassignment, which, in its essence, can also be regarded a form of conversion. In both cases, society attempts to force the characters to abandon their self to achieve their goals, i.e. being released from the asylum in Louisa’s case, and being granted a mutual future with Nasrin in the case of Sahar. Moreover, both award-winning publications predominantly focus on issues of coming out, or more

precisely not coming, and little attention is paid to the positive aspects of lesbian relationships, except for short passages of the novels in which pleasure and the acting out of the characters' sexuality and romantic feelings are described. This is especially the case in Eagland's epilog, in which the sexual act between Louisa and Eliza is depicted. Furthermore, in this case, there is a limitation to the protagonist's happiness, because the characters are not open about their sexuality; not even toward their peers (347-350).

4. Pedagogical Implications: Appropriateness and Educational Potential of the Selected Novels

Having addressed general issues in identity formation processes, the impact of YA texts on adolescents, and having presented a detailed analysis of two award-winning YA novels with lesbian main characters, I use this chapter of my thesis to elaborate on the classroom use of LGBTQ YA fiction in general, and of the two novels under analysis in particular. In previous sections of this thesis, I have focused on the overall pedagogical potential of LGBTQ YA texts, while this chapter examines to what extent the incorporation of these publications may contribute to fulfilling language-specific curricular demands, and thus move from general pedagogy toward language-teaching methodology. The purpose of the following discussion is to assist educators in the incorporation of LGBTQ YA writing into their English lessons by, first of all, discussing the language-specific benefits this entails, before moving on to addressing general aspects of a text's language classroom suitability and applying these findings to the novels under analysis. Moreover, several activities are proposed that may serve as an interesting and useful inspiration for teachers.

Communicative approaches to language teaching (CLT), the Common European Framework for Reference (CEFR), published by the Council of Europe, and the Austrian AHS curriculum for foreign languages based on both CLT and the CEFR highlight the importance of attributing equal importance to all four main competences in language learning and teaching: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Council of Europe; BMBF *Lehrplan 2*). Moreover, the curriculum points out the significance of using a variety of authentic texts (BMBF *Lehrplan 3*). In the same vein, Tricia Hedge argues that when it comes to developing learners' reading

competence, a variety of text types and reading purposes should be combined to enable adolescents to make sense of a great range of texts, and thus to achieve optimum results (205). In the context of this thesis, however, I am particularly interested in the role that extensive reading plays in fostering learners' language competence.

As Richard Day points out, defining what extensive reading is, and what extensive reading programs may include, proves to be particularly difficult (298). Based on several points characterizing extensive reading proposed by Hedge (202) and Day's explanations (295), I argue that a comprehensive definition of extensive reading must include the following central aspects:

- Extensive reading demands for large quantities of longer stretches of text, regardless of their literary genre, including fiction and drama, as well as journalistic and factual texts.
- The main motivation for extensive reading is pleasure and personal interest, which is why, ideally, learners may choose the texts themselves and read them both in class and in their leisure time.
- The main goal of extensive reading is general understanding, which leads to a relatively high reading speed.

Richard Day and Julian Bamford identified ten principles central to extensive reading, out of which, the following three proved to be particularly interesting in the context of this thesis (137-144):

1. Material proposed for extensive reading should reflect a great variety of topics.
2. Learners should be allowed to choose the publications they are interested in.
3. Teachers are supposed to provide support and guidance throughout the reading process.

While I mainly chose to focus on the first principle to emphasize, once again, the importance of opening up the literary canon used in language classes to address a greater variety of topics and identities, the other two principles hint at a reasonable and valuable method of incorporating the extensive reading of LGBTQ texts in the

EFL classroom. Before going into detail concerning the particularities of the LGBTQ subgenre, general aspects concerning extensive reading must be discussed.

In the EFL classroom, the potential of extensive reading in its numerous forms has been confirmed by various researchers, and has become a well-appreciated building block for teaching reading competence in ELT methodology. Hedge argues that, besides playing a major role in developing reading competence, extensive reading also fosters learner autonomy and significantly increases learners' exposure to the target language, which is particularly interesting in contexts in which teaching time is limited (203f.). Thus, extensive reading for second language teaching and learning purposes is rising in popularity, which results in an expanding range of different literary genres and publications available in class and school libraries, as well as in researchers' growing interest in the potential of extensive reading (Hedge 200f.). Tricia Hedge mentions a controversy among researchers and teachers concerning which of the main approaches to extensive reading – class readers or class library method – proves to be most beneficial for encouraging learners' reading, and for contributing to the fulfillment of language-teaching aims. While the class reader method, in which every learner is given a copy of the same text, is a particularly “supervised,” and thus instructed, form of extensive reading (Day 297), the class library method demands less guidance and grants learners more autonomy in both their choice of texts and the organization of their reading and learning process (Hedge 215). The decision about which method is to be preferred frequently depends on the degree of control teachers want to have over the target group.

In the context of this thesis, the decision about whether using the class reader or the class library method as the more appropriate choice depends, among other factors, on the target groups' attitudes toward sexual otherness. Although in previous sections of this thesis I have already highlighted LGBTQ texts' potential to open young readers' minds, deeply-rooted homophobia within the group of learners, which results from learners' cultural and religious backgrounds, and which is frequently adopted from their social environment, is likely to hinder successful learning experiences. In such cases, it might be reasonable to apply a class library approach to extensive reading, so that learners who are not interested in engaging in LGBTQ issues are not forced to do so. Thereby, the risk of provoking derogatory and

offensive remarks, which may harm learners who either identify as being part of the LGBTQ community or who are still in the process of discovering their sexual identities, and that are beyond teachers' control, may be reduced.

Another interesting argument supporting the use of LGBTQ YA fiction in the EFL classroom is the distancing effect foreign languages might have on adolescents. Because, for the overwhelming majority of Austrian learners, English is not the language used to reflect on their identities, nor make personal confessions, using this foreign language as the medium of communication creates a certain distance between learners and the controversial issues addressed. Hence, the discussion about issues of sexual orientation within the framework of EFL classes is likely to demand for less self-revelation and thus for less emotional personal involvement. As a result, the additional distance achieved through the mediating foreign language opens opportunities for classroom discussion that are addressed later in this thesis.

Having elaborated on the extent to which LGBTQ YA literature may support students to reach their language learning goals, and on the reasons why the EFL classroom is particularly suitable for addressing LGBTQ issues, I now focus on guiding teachers in their use of LGBTQ YA literature to challenge homophobia and heteronormativity, and to raise learners' awareness of sexual otherness via the inclusion of a queer perspective in the EFL classroom. Returning to the AHS curriculum for foreign languages, the BMBF states that in the language classroom, teachers are obliged to select and discuss issues that encourage learners to become tolerant and open-minded young adults, and to sensitize them to the equality of all gender identities (*Lehrplan* 1). As previously mentioned, one of the main educational goals when attempting to open learners' minds to otherness, raise awareness, and educate them to become tolerant and open-minded young adults, is encouraging their critical thinking. Undeniably, reading and working with YA literature has great potential for developing learners' critical literacy, and for motivating them to question formerly held beliefs. This assumption is affirmed by Karen Coats, who points out that:

[a]s readers, we learn about the ways characters, indeed people, are constructed through their actions and the way society views those actions, through the impressions of others which are always more than half embedded in narcissistic self-impressions, and through more nebulous and abstract cultural expectations that help us fill in gaps in our experience with prefabricated subject positions. (318)

These prefabricated subject positions are deeply rooted in the readers' minds and inevitably shape their perception (ibid.). By highlighting and making explicit the factors influencing learner perception, progression in terms of their competence in critical thinking can be achieved.

As in the theory section of this thesis, I emphasize the role YA literature may play in sex education. I use the following paragraph for a brief discussion of both the potential and the limitations of the two award-winning LGBTQ YA texts in this specific context. Depending on one's conception of what sex education includes (see Chapter 2.3.2.), the educational potential of the texts under analysis is limited to the conveyance of a sensual and predominantly positive image of sexuality. Although the narratives describe sexual encounters and present them as a perfectly natural element of romantic relationships, they do not make the physical dimension of love a central issue. The characters do not reflect on the nature and quality of their sexual experiences, but their attention is on issues of their sexual identity and orientation.

4.1. Didactic Value of the Novels under Analysis According to Logan et al.

To go into depth at this point of the thesis, and to ensure a well-founded analysis of the award-winning novels' educational value, I make use of a well-established set of criteria that aims to guide teachers in their choice of LGBTQ YA literature for classroom purposes. For the exact same purpose, Stephanie Logan et al. identified eight factors determining whether a publication is of interest for pedagogical practice or not (32ff.). Following their criteria, I illustrate the educational value of the selected novels, Sara Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, and Jane Eagland's, *Wildthorn*, in the following table.

	Sara Farizan <i>If You Could Be Mine</i>	Jane Eagland <i>Wildthorn</i>
Curriculum Relevance	✓	✓
Literary Merit	✓	✓
Window and Mirrors	✓	✓
Social Justice and Equity	✗	✗
Stereotypes	✓	✓
Pride, Resiliency, and Self-Actualizing	✗	✓
Sexual Expressiveness	✓	✓
Offsetting Heterosexism and Homophobia/Challenging Heteronormativity	✓	~

Table 1: Educational Value of the Selected Novels

As I have already highlighted at a previous point in this paper, breaking down and reducing a literary text to a set of normative principles determining its educational value is highly problematic. Therefore, I invite teachers who are willing to incorporate LGBTQ YA fiction into their teaching to use the criteria with caution. The purpose of this discussion is to provide guidance and assist educators in making a pre-selection of potentially interesting and suitable publications; however, the following guidelines can neither replace a thorough target group analysis, nor the critical observation of current trends and timely issues triggering learners' interest. As the didactic success of the lessons centered around LGBTQ YA texts are highly dependent on learner motivation to not only read a whole novel, but also critically reflect on what has been

read, an educator's ultimate choice should be always based on a text's relevance to the target group.

The first criterion introduced by Logan et al., *curriculum relevance*, deals with the question of whether a book, and the issues discussed within it, are relevant to the topics covered by the curriculum, and thus dealt with in the English lessons. As Logan et al. argue, however, LGTBQ YA literature is curriculum relevant because it "enables responsible pedagogical practice" since it contributes to redressing social inequalities and ensuring equal opportunities for learners, which lead them toward achieving university and career readiness (32). This demands teachers' awareness and skill concerning "selecting, representing, and opening content for a wide range of students from many different backgrounds" (ibid.). Regarding the two novels under analysis, the criterion of curriculum relevance is not only fulfilled in terms of its use in opening learners' minds and achieving equality, but they also provide insights into other cultures and times, which makes the publications valuable for fostering learners' sensitivity to cultural differences, and thus developing their cultural competences.

Although the term used to describe the second criterion proposed, *literary merit*, sounds highly prescriptive and might provoke legitimate criticism, Logan et al. use the term in another context. Nevertheless, I would like to point out that the aspects discussed in the following paragraph are not intended to be evaluative or judgmental of YA novels' literary quality, but should rather guide teachers and provide support for justifying their choice of reading material for a language-teaching context. According to Logan et al., a text's literary merit, in terms of its potential for language teaching, is composed of two main points: textual complexity, and a respective text's capacity for making young readers challenge their beliefs and prior knowledge (32).

In terms of the vocabulary and structures used in the novels under analysis, both combine oral and colloquial expressions, and more complex constructions and higher-register vocabulary depending on the respective context within the narrative. In interior monologs and informal conversations between characters, colloquialisms dominate the texts, and the adolescent reader also encounters, for example, medical and juridical jargon in *Wildthorn* and *If You Could Be Mine*.

According to Logan et al., a text having literary merit also “engages adolescent readers in processes such as comparing, contrasting, hypothesizing, organizing, summarizing, and critically evaluating” (32f.). In both novels under analysis, the action is set in a different cultural or historical context; therefore, the narratives offer numerous possibilities for establishing comparisons to learners’ own cultural background. In the case of Farizan’s, *If You Could Be Mine*, for example, learners are granted insights into the lives and identities of sexual minorities in a country whose officials deny their existence, and in which openly homosexual people are executed. Inevitably, learners will begin comparing and contrasting the situation and stigmatization of homosexuals, as described in the novel, with their own cultural background. The same effect is created by Louisa’s forced hospitalization in an asylum for the mentally ill simply because she does not correspond to societal norms of Victorian femininity. While I have already pointed out the problematic nature of the constant negativity, which dominates long stretches of the narratives, the hostility of the characters’ surroundings may provoke emotional reader response, and may therefore carry the potential to encourage learners to evaluate and critically reflect on the hostile attitudes toward sexual otherness represented in the novels. Hence, the hopelessness and the negative representations of the consequences of the lesbian characters’ relationships may even be a factor contributing to the publications’ literary merit for classroom purposes, as defined by Logan et al. In the case of *Wildthorn*, however, another factor that adds to the novel’s literary merit is its narrative structure: Due to its non-chronological sequence of events and numerous flashbacks, readers are more actively engaged in the reading process, because they are forced to constantly reorganize and reevaluate what has been read so far.

The third criterion mentioned by Logan et al., *window* and *mirrors*, is particularly interesting for the examination of the educational potential of the two selected novels. *Window* opportunities enable learners to experience an unknown situation through a character’s eyes, and to figuratively use a novel as a window through which an alternative world becomes accessible (33). Opportunities for *mirroring*, in contrast, allow readers to identify with a character, because they recognize themselves in the character’s reflection (ibid.). This criterion is thus based on two metaphors coined by Rudine Sims Bishop, who argues that books can function as windows offering unknown perspectives, and give insight into various

worlds created by a narrator (ix). In this context, she adds that these windows simultaneously are “sliding glass doors”, which enable the reader to enter these worlds and eventually become part of them (ibid.). Bishop further establishes a relationship between windowing and mirroring opportunities when arguing that “[w]hen lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror”, as “[l]iterature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us” (ibid.). I thus argue that this third criterion builds on what has been said about the mechanisms involved in readers’ identification with the characters and the situations described within the narrative (see Chapter 2.3.1.). Whether a publication offers more window or mirror opportunities, obviously varies from reader to reader. Regarding LGBTQ YA fiction, window or mirror opportunities, and thus identification with certain characters, are largely dependent on the readers’ sexual orientation. While the depiction of struggles experienced by LGBTQ characters has high potential for mirroring (meaning reader identification with a respective character) for young queer readers, heterosexual readers might be less emotionally involved.

I consider it vital, however, not to reduce characters and the situations depicted within a novel to issues of sexual orientation. Although heterosexual readers may not be able to identify with LGBTQ characters in situations in which they experience the social and mental pressure resulting from their sexual otherness, overall motives and some aspects of the characters’ experience offer mirroring opportunities for both homosexual and heterosexual young readers. In the case of the two novels chosen for this thesis, the motives that are potentially relatable for most learners, regardless of their sexual orientation, include both forbidden and unrequited love as well as the characters’ insecurity and self-esteem issues. In *If You Could Be Mine*, Sahar and Nasrin experience the emotional distress resulting from their forbidden love, which offers mirroring opportunities for all readers who have feared a negative response to their feelings for a variety of different reasons, including pressure exerted by conservative parents and religious issues. The relationship between Louisa and Grace in Eagland’s, *Wildthorn*, however, depicts the struggles caused by unrequited love. Although the characters do not share the same sexual orientation, and Louisa’s hopelessness is partially due to her conviction that Grace is not interested in girls, the narrative mainly focuses on the protagonist’s low self-esteem and her feeling of being inferior to her idealized object of love. Thus, I

claim that regardless of learners' sexual identity, the novels chosen offer both window and mirror opportunities for the entire target group.

Regarding *social justice and equity*, the fourth criterion mentioned by Logan et al., the negative representations of lesbian love and relationships identified within the novels under analysis become an argument *against* their classroom suitability. The main argument concerning this criterion introduced by Logan et al. is that LGBTQ texts should support teachers in encouraging social equity (33). They claim that "literature deemed socially just and equitable will acknowledge power imbalances and oppressive structures of queer people so that readers can thoughtfully engage in conversations pertaining to power, privilege, disenfranchisement and marginalization" (ibid.). At the same time, however, they highlight that queer literature used for educational purposes should predominantly depict situations in which human rights and social justice are granted and promoted, rather than denied (ibid.). As the analysis of the two novels chosen reveals, homophobia and social inequality are criticized within the narratives, but ultimately left intact. In both publications, the protagonists are not able to be open about their homosexual identities, and thus do not experience social acceptance and equity.

Moreover, they argue, LGBTQ YA literature that is particularly suitable for classroom use and discussion counters *stereotypes* and overgeneralized simplifications that lead to false assumptions and negative images of particular groups of people (33). Logan et al. thus call for the use of literary texts that encourage a positive view on LGBTQ identities and counter stereotyping. Nevertheless, teachers "should also embrace books that feature characters who are gay and effeminate as well as lesbian and masculine," because "[t]hese archetypes, not stereotypes, need to be discussed so that students can engender the expressive tools needed to support all members of the queer community" (ibid.). According to their argument, Louisa's atypical gender identity in *Wildthorn* must not be considered a stereotype that associates lesbian sexual identity with traditionally masculine character traits and interests, but rather describes one of various possible identities that also deserves its place in classroom discussion. In contrast to the representation of lesbian identity in Eagland's novel, Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, portrays two lesbian characters whose personalities and interests stand in contrast to each other.

Similar to Louisa in *Wildthorn*, Sahar is an intelligent young girl, eager for knowledge and striving for heroism. She intends to become a doctor, which eventually would enable her to become an independent woman. Nasrin, in contrast, is portrayed as a not particularly ambitious and slightly naïve girl who is willing to adapt to the norms imposed on her by both society and her family. Unlike Sahar, she intends to marry young and consents to live in a heterosexual relationship in which she cannot be and reveal her true self. Due to its diversity in the portrayal of lesbian identity, I believe that especially *If You Could Be Mine* has great potential for countering stereotypical assumptions and generalizations concerning particularities of lesbian identity.

Regarding the fifth criterion introduced by Logan et al., *Pride, resiliency, and self-actualization*, only one of the novels under analysis seems to, at least partially, meet the demands expressed by the researchers. According to this principle, in LGBTQ YA literature that lends itself to educational practice, the focus of the narrative is placed on the characters' opportunities and the challenges they overcome, instead of allowing hopelessness and despair to dominate their experience (33). In other words, characters should profit from the struggles they must overcome by showing resiliency, which enables them to gain self-confidence in their identity formation processes. Logan et al. argue that, as a result of the self-confidence gained, "actualization, which is awareness followed by emancipation and empowerment," is achieved (ibid.). As the analysis of the two novels has shown, however, the narratives only sparsely portray the characters' increased self-esteem, but mainly focus on their hopelessness and limited agency. This negativity is particularly present within Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, because there is no denouement in the form of a positive ending for either of the two lesbian characters. In *Wildthorn*, however, Louisa evidently gains confidence in herself and her sexual identity, which even results in her willingness to come out as a lesbian, although her partner Eliza discourages her to do so.

Sexual expressiveness, the penultimate criterion presented in this chapter, widely aligns with the arguments I made when discussing sex education and the potential that YA literature carries in this specific context. Logan et al. state that the physical dimension of love, including innocent hugs and kisses and more sexually charged encounters, are relevant for the adolescent target group, because this is a central element of young adults' reality (34). They highlight the importance of

selecting publications that present sexuality as a natural part of adolescent life, but remain age-appropriate in doing so (ibid.). In both of the award-winning LGBTQ YA texts, this criterion, as defined by Logan et al., is fulfilled, although physical love is not central to the novel's action. As I have already pointed out in previous sections of this thesis, the controversy over explicitly describing sexual intercourse in YA literature is of particular relevance in a teaching context. Although authors such as Judy Blume have confidently incorporated explicit sexuality in their writing, the Austrian classroom context seems to demand a certain degree of sensitivity and caution in this context. Although I would personally argue that discussing sexual physicality in the EFL classroom may contribute to highlighting that sexuality is a perfectly natural part of human reality of life, school culture as well as the cultural background of learners must be taken into consideration when defining appropriateness of sexual explicitness and selecting reading material for a respective target group.

The final, and possibly most vital, criterion for selecting valuable and appropriate LGBTQ YA texts for classroom reading is defined as a novel's quality for *offsetting heterosexism and homophobia* and *challenging heteronormativity*. Logan et al. point out that "[e]ducators should select literature that identifies assumptions about heterosexuality that often regulate the social norms and language of a school with regard to topics of family, love, attraction, and sexual and emotional relationships" (34). In other words, heteronormative and homophobic beliefs and their manifestations should be challenged by the representations of queer identity and love within the novels. As a result of the dissonance between formerly held beliefs or stereotypes and newly gained positive impressions of homosexual love, awareness-raising about the importance of respectfully and thoughtfully dealing with sexual otherness might be encouraged. The extensive analysis of the two LGBTQ YA novels, however, has shown that heteronormativity is criticized, but remains widely intact.

In the case of Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, criticism of Iranian tradition and social norms is recognizable in the fate of both characters, and the description of Nasrin's emotional state in particular. As soon as Nasrin gives in to the heteronormative pressure imposed on her by both society and her family, and consents to an arranged marriage that will force her to live in an unloving

relationship, Nasrin begins struggling with the loss of own identity. While, as readers, we learn that Nasrin suffers from severe depression because of her early pregnancy, which ultimately binds her to her husband, Reza, we can imagine that Sahar is likely to find a better future, which is indicated toward the end of the novel. In the final chapter of the narrative, offering the reader a glimpse into the characters' future, one of Sahar's friends from medical school asks her for a date and cautiously reveals her romantic feelings for Sahar. She does so by asking whether she would like to come to Restaurant Javan, a gay hotspot, Sahar discovered thanks to her cousin, Ali. Although she does not immediately accept her friend, Taraneh's, invitation, this encounter points toward a positive future, potentially even including the beginning of a new romantic relationship for Sahar. In contrast to Farizan's novel, Eagland's, *Wildthorn*, scarcely addresses manifestations of heteronormativity. Heterosexual societal norms almost exclusively manifest themselves in Louisa's own insecurities about her non-traditional identity and her love for other girls. What is challenged in the novel, however, are the gender norms determining what is considered feminine or not, and which are imposed on Louisa, who identifies more with her brother's interests than particularly female character traits.

4.2. Personal Comments on the Implementation of the Novels into Classroom Practice

Both the literary analysis and the set of criteria proposed by Logan et al. suggest that neither of the novels would theoretically be perfectly suitable for use in the EFL classroom. As I already indicated, however, these models and theoretical reflections on the educational value and potential of LGBTQ literary texts may provide guidance for educators, but do not in themselves determine whether a novel can be reasonably used in an educational setting. It is predominantly the actual implementation and didactic contextualization of the novels that determines whether the goal of awareness-raising and opening learners' mind is fulfilled.

Regarding the actual classroom use of these texts, teachers and students in teaching programs must acknowledge the fact that the overwhelming majority of learners in a respective target group do not identify as being part of the LGBTQ community (Dalia Research). Moreover, both publications are set in historical and

cultural contexts that adolescents are most likely to have little knowledge about. Therefore, to successfully work with the publications, teachers must ask themselves how, and to what extent, learners can contribute to the subject matter.

In this context, I argue that rewriting tasks and projects, for instance, might be an exciting and valuable experience for learners, because they need to critically reflect on and reevaluate their reading experience before they can turn their observations and criticism into prose. Rewriting tasks could involve reworking passages the learners themselves identify as having potential for improvement, or finding alternative endings and fates for the novels' characters.

While I do not suggest changing the setting of the narrative and placing the novels' action into a contemporary Western cultural context, because this would deprive the narratives of their central conflicts, a suitable follow-up activity could include writing e-mails to the novels' protagonists explaining how sexual otherness is seen or even experienced in the learners' own cultural context. Thereby, they are invited to apply the insights gained through their reading experience to a context that is closer to themselves, and they might be encouraged to reflect on their own and their peers' sexual identities. This may then contribute to the learners' motivation to open their minds to otherness and the wide spectrum of possible identities they encounter each day.

5. Conclusion

GLTBQ YA literature is a constantly- and rapidly expanding genre that carries high educational potential. Although YA texts have already found their way into the EFL classroom for purposes of cultural and literary education, and the training of reading competence, this thesis has shown that the LGTBQ subgenre may additionally serve as a valuable tool for teachers to fulfill their statutorily determined responsibilities of passing on values such as tolerance, open-mindedness, and sexual diversity.

Since the target group of YA literature is not a group the author is part of, the genre is highly dependent on the definition of adolescence and on judgments about what is appropriate for the adolescent target group. The question of appropriateness is particularly present concerning the depiction of sexuality. Although YA literature would be an excellent tool for sex education, sexual explicitness carries the risk of becoming a target of severe criticism or subject to censorship, and is thus avoided by several publishers.

Based on a performative approach to the concept of human identity, gender has been defined as something that is “done,” and the individuals’ participation in the process of identity formation has been highlighted. As young adults are particularly sensitive to their peers’ opinions, I consider opening learners’ minds to otherness vital. Especially regarding sexual otherness, as a particularly private topic that tends to be disavowed, LGBTQ YA fiction carries great potential for, on the one hand, including LGBTQ learners by offering a queer perspective and, on the other, offering heterosexual students the opportunity to discover LGBTQ characters’ identities and experiences.

The anti-lesbian bias that seems to have crept into the LGBTQ subgenre motivated the literary analysis of Jane Eagland’s, *Wildthorn*, and Sara Farizan’s, *If You Could Be Mine*. The analysis revealed that both novels are set in extremely hostile social contexts, and that the characters’ agency is conspicuously limited for long stretches of the narratives. Moreover, in both novels, one or more characters are punished for their sexual otherness and are either hospitalized or nearly forced into gender reassignment. Another strikingly common feature of the two novels is

narrative distancing through placing the novels' action into either a different cultural context or another historical era. These choices create a greater distance between the reader and the LGBTQ issues discussed, and thus act against identification with the characters, a factor that has been identified as one of the main mechanisms influencing the readership, and therefore contributing to the young readers' identity formation processes. As the two novels mainly focus on the negative consequences of living with an atypical gender identity and sexual orientation, however, the distance created also reduces the risk of internalizing the homophobic statements and society's hostility toward atypical gender identity highlighted in much of both novels.

In Sara Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*, the presence of several transgender characters is notable, and points toward Michael Cart's observation that recent LGBTQ YA publications tend to be opening up to the full spectrum of possible identities. The representation of the main character's lesbian relationship with her best friend since childhood, however, remains consistently negative, which is at least partially broken up through the use of irony in Sahar's thoughts and comments on her desperate situation. In Jane Eagland's, *Wildthorn*, however, the hopelessness of the situation the protagonist, Louisa, finds herself in, is somewhat relieved by a supportive and understanding character giving her confidence and encouraging her to reevaluate her self-image.

Although, in this thesis, I have confirmed other researchers' suspicions that there is an anti-lesbian bias in the LGBTQ YA literary market, it has been shown that including lesbian identities in a positive way, and thus introducing a non-heterosexual perspective in the EFL classroom through using lesbian YA texts, is possible and valuable, regardless of the negative representations of female same-sex love that have also been identified in the novels under analysis. Although the application of the set of criteria for selecting LGBTQ YA literature developed by Stephanie Logan et al. points toward some weaknesses in the texts' suitability for educational purposes, it is possible to make use of negative representations of lesbian identity and lesbian relationships to raise learners' awareness of the subject matter through the rewriting activities proposed, as well as by encouraging critical reevaluation of the texts.

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⁶ Generally and only briefly mentioned book series are cited by giving the source of the first publication in the series.

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7. Appendix

7.1. Abstract

Based on the considerable impact of YA literature on adolescent readers already established in academic discourse, this diploma thesis discusses the role that YA texts challenging heteronormativity can play in the EFL classroom and in learners' identity formation processes. As Laura Jimenez and other researchers specialized in LGBTQ YA literature identified an anti-lesbian bias in the subgenre's literary market, this diploma thesis discusses the representations of female protagonists in two Lambda Literary Award-winning LGBTQ YA novels: Jane Eaglands's, *Wildthorn*, and Sara Farizan's, *If You Could Be Mine*. The thorough analysis of the two publications appears to widely confirm Jimenez's claim of a rather negative representation of lesbian love, due to the narratives focus on struggles resulting from society's hostility toward sexual otherness. As the Austrian AHS curriculum for languages highlights that teachers are invited to choose topics for classroom discussion that encourage learners to become tolerant and open-minded young adults, LGBTQ writing is not only a valuable resource for training learners' reading competence, but also for opening adolescents' minds and countering homophobia. For successfully making use of the texts' educational potential, their incorporation demands particular awareness and caution. Therefore, this thesis provides the reader with a detailed literary analysis of two award-winning YA novels portraying lesbian protagonists, as well as a thorough discussion of their educational potential, and guidelines for their classroom use.

Keywords: YA literature; Lambda Literary Awards; heteronormativity; LGBTQ; identity; EFL classroom; Eagland; Farizan

7.2. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Aufgrund des im fachlichen Diskurs bereits nachgewiesenen bedeutenden Einflusses von Jugendliteratur auf junge Erwachsene, behandelt diese Diplomarbeit die Rolle und Einsatzmöglichkeiten von nicht-heteronormativen Texten des LGBTQ Subgenres im Fremdsprachenunterricht und in weiterer Folge in der Identitätskonstruktion dieser Zielgruppe. Da einschlägige Fachliteratur auf eine unterdurchschnittliche Präsenz von weiblichen Protagonistinnen in LGBTQ Jugendliteratur hinweist, untersucht die vorliegende Diplomarbeit die Darstellung von lesbischen Charakteren und deren Beziehungen in zwei durch den Lambda Book Award ausgezeichneten Publikationen: Jane Eaglands *Wildthorn* und Sara Farizans *If You Could Be Mine*. Die eingehende Analyse dieser beiden Werke bestätigte die ursprüngliche These einer vergleichsweise negativen Darstellung von lesbischer Liebe weitgehend, da in den Erzählungen vor allem durch den homophoben sozialen und kulturellen Kontext bedingte Konflikte im Fokus stehen. Aus diesem Grund verlangt die didaktische Aufbereitung von Texten aus diesem vermeintlich weltoffenen und toleranten Subgenre nach besonderer Aufmerksamkeit. Somit soll der Lehrperson gelingen, dass Heteronormativität und Homophobie im Sinne der Förderung einer toleranten und kritischen Lebenseinstellung der Schüler_innen, nach welcher beispielsweise auch im österreichischen AHS Lehrplan verlangt wird, in Frage gestellt werden und sexuelle Vielfalt nicht problematisiert, sondern unterstützt wird. Aus diesem Grund liefert diese Arbeit nicht nur eine Diskussion zweier preisgekrönter Publikationen mit lesbischen Protagonistinnen, sondern auch Ausführungen zur pädagogischen Eignung und zur konkreten didaktischen Aufbereitung dieser. Unter Berücksichtigung aller in der Diplomarbeit präsentierten Faktoren kann zusammengefasst werden, dass sich die beiden analysierten Werke für den Englischunterricht mit Jugendlichen definitiv eignen, wobei es auf deren Kontextualisierung und didaktische Umsetzung zu achten gilt.

Schlagwörter: Jugendliteratur; Heteronormativität; LGBTQ; Identität; Englischunterricht; Eagland; Farizan