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The purpose of this research was to search for the existence of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey in the formation of the homosexual identity within the gay teen literature genre. Through latent content analysis of six representative novels, I coded for aspects of the hero's journey using the four stages of Troiden's homosexual identity formation Sensitization, Identity Confusion, Identity Assumption and Acceptance. I believe I found enough evidence to support this idea. The stages coded for were present in each novel so that there is sufficient evidence to support the conclusion that the hero's journey is an enduring theme within this genre.

Headings:

Characters and characteristics in literature.

Lesbians in literature.

Gay men in literature.

Coming out (Sexual orientation).

Heroes.

Symbols

THE HERO'S JOURNEY IN THE FORMATION OF THE HOMOSEXUAL
IDENTITY IN GAY TEEN FICTION

by
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Introduction

According to Joseph Campbell, within our psyches, there is a story waiting to get out and at times does so, whether we consciously wish it to or not. Something within us, this mythopoetic tendency, creates a story which echoes through myths, legends and even popular culture today. On a larger scale, Campbell described it as the “monomyth”, a term coined from James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*. It was the idea that all myths are one and that we universally respond to certain symbols used to communicate the monomyth.

One of those symbols is the hero. Campbell believes that there is only one hero, but he/she wears a “thousand faces”. In an exhaustive analysis of cultural heroes and his examination of the similarities he found, he discovered that most heroes go through certain common stages in their journey. He described those stages as the ‘Hero’s Journey’ and covers his theories in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In this book he describes a universally recognized process the hero goes through to attain the prize he seeks in his quest.

The hero’s journey also echoes the rites of passage we take in our lives. The most transformative rite of passage is the passage from childhood to adulthood. This rite celebrated in its various ways corresponds to the hero’s journey in the sense that the subject, either boy or girl, goes on a journey from which they return transformed, as a man or woman. Within that liminal period between childhood and adulthood, the

subjects endure challenges and overcome them with their own resources and with the guidance of a helper or mentor. Once they have proved their worth, they are entrusted with the responsibilities and privileges of adulthood. While western society may no longer have what we recognize as the highly ceremonial rite of passage of other countries, if you look close enough, you can find it in young adult literature. Stories of surviving the pressures and expectations of adolescence in high schools and middle schools have become our modern rite of passage into adulthood. The rites of passages described in young adult books are personal and internalized. And as Campbell has pointed out, the hero's journey is there echoed in the challenges the hero of our story faces, overcomes and is transformed by. I would like to extend this idea to young adult books about gay teens. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to show the presence of Joseph Campbell's model of the 'hero's journey' in the gay teen literature genre.

Literature Review

Hero's Journey

Structuralism began as a linguistic theory that proposed that language was a functional system, to be understood in the light of its aim: communication. So rather than taking a single sound and analyzing it in isolation, a structuralist examines it in relation to the sounds that surround it and how its structure affects its meaning. Other disciplines took up the theory of understanding the parts in relation to the whole as well. Levi-Strauss used the idea that rather than seeing the articulation of society as an 'organism', it could be looked at as 'a language'. Thus, when comparing the structures of two cultures or 'languages', aspects of human nature or 'universals' may be drawn out. (Leach 38, 40)

In 1927 Vladimir Propp used this theory to study Russian folktales and make a meaningful system out of the different functions he found. Propp felt that the only way to conduct a valid structural analysis of Russian folktales was if the scope and content of the material to be investigated had already been established. So he created a "system of generic concepts" which described a uniform sequence of events and functions. Among the variations he ran across, he found that while some events or functions may not be present, the sequence remained the same. This led him to the conclusion that, for the folktale, there was "only one system, only one sequence of events." (Levin 102-103)

In 1949, Joseph Campbell incorporated the structuralist approach and the psychoanalytic writings of Carl G. Jung into a comparative study of mythologies. What he found was the symbol of the hero's journey, a cosmic adventure of self-knowledge he called the 'mono-myth'. (Cousineau 4-5) Broadly structured, Campbell described the hero's journey in three segments: Departure, Initiation and Return. The Departure is

further separated into five other aspects; The Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, the Belly of the Whale, Crossing the First Threshold and Supernatural Aid. The Call to Adventure refers to the compulsion of the hero to begin his journey. It may be a quest for gold, to rescue a fair maiden or find Nirvana. Occasionally the hero may refuse the call through fear or laziness. He may also be tied to the world he knows too tightly to let go and cannot take the first step. However, the hero is destined to take this journey and so the aspects of the compulsion become even more urgent or more powerful as described in Campbell's Belly of the Whale. Next the hero must let go of what he knows and cross over into the mysterious and unknown. Once he has begun the journey, the hero may receive Supernatural Aid in the form of an old wise man or woman who will gift the hero with a weapon or advice on how to face the Challenges ahead.

The Initiation segment is also further separated into six parts; the Road of Trials, Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as the Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis and the Ultimate Boon. The Initiation segment is where the hero proves himself worthy of the gift or knowledge they are searching for. The Road of Trials is where the hero must fight beasts, answer riddles and face temptation. Culturally, Campbell found that there were many symbols, which altogether corresponded to the roles of the woman as a goddess, mother, temptress and destroyer. Similarly the role of a male figure corresponds to fatherhood. In either case, the hero must overcome them to shed his childhood and progress to adulthood. In some cases the hero reaches the Apotheosis stage, where he has met the challenges and by surpassing them he gets in touch with the various representations of the Divine. The Ultimate Boon is the treasure or knowledge the hero has sought.

The Return refers to the return and reintegration of the hero into society. Campbell divides this into six sub-headings; Refusal of the Return, the Magic Flight, Rescue from Without, the Crossing of the Return Threshold, Master of Two Worlds and Freedom to Live. In the Refusal to Return, the hero may be so charmed with the world he has discovered that he may not wish to return. The Magic Flight refers to the escape of the hero from the greater forces he may have disturbed to accomplish his quest. Rescue from Without describes how the world that the hero came from may provide assistance to his return. Crossing of the Return Threshold, similar to the Threshold at the start of the journey, separates the realm of adventure and the realm the hero came from. Master of Two Worlds describes the hero who can maintain the balance between the blessings he received in the other world of the supernatural or divine and the world of common experience and the mundane. Finally there is the Freedom to Live in which the hero is free from the responsibilities of his quest, yet armed with his new knowledge of himself, can begin to live his life with greater meaning. Aspects of the Departure segment of the hero's journey examined in this study are the Call to Adventure or Refusal of the Call, the First Threshold and the motif of Supernatural Aid. In the Initiation segment, I focus on the Road of Trials and for the Return segment I focus on the Freedom to Live.

These segments Campbell mentions echo the three phases in rites of passage found in Arnold van Gennep's *Rite of Passage*: rite of separation, rite of transition and rite of incorporation. Overall the rite of passage is a way to express a life crisis event, such as the transition from childhood to adulthood, in a ritual process to adjust people's behavior to their new responsibilities and identities. The 'rite of separation', referring to

the separation from a previous world, is also known as preliminal rites. The 'rite of transition', which describes a transitional stage, is also known as liminal. The word liminal comes from the French word *limin*, which means threshold, and is used to describe the transitional period in between the recognized states of status in van Gennep's study. Finally, there's the 'rite of incorporation', which refers to the incorporation into the new world known as post-liminal. (van Gennep 21) Generally, depending on the particular rite, these phases may not be equally important or elaborated. But the phase that concerns me is the liminal stage. It is in Victor Turner's "Betwixt and Between: the liminal period of the Rites de Passage" that this stage is closely examined, particularly in initiation rites of adolescence. His purpose was to further explore the liminal stage of identity assigned to initiates when they are no longer considered a child but not yet an adult. He examines the taboos and restrictions as well as the instruction the initiates receive in the new way of life their forthcoming status will entail.

In Gilbert Herdt's introductory article "Gay and Lesbian Youth, Emergent Identities, and Cultural Scenes at Home and Abroad" the rite of passage is used to describe the formation of the homosexual identity, particularly in the coming-out process. In this case, the worlds that homosexual teenagers are 'betwixt and between' are "the ordinary heterosexual lifestyles of their parents, on the one hand, and the adult gay and lesbian community, on the other." (Herdt 21) As mentioned, this life-crisis event is expressed in the larger experience of the formation of sexual identity and the understanding of its implications for gay and lesbian teens. To further examine this I turned to Richard R. Troiden's "The Formation of Homosexual Identities" which offers a four stage "ideal" model of homosexual identity formation.

Stage One is Sensitization, which generally occurs before puberty and where the issue of homosexuality is typically not even considered relevant to the child. This is the stage where lesbians and gay males “acquire social experiences during their childhood that serve later as bases for seeing homosexuality as personally relevant, that lend support to emerging perceptions of themselves as possibly homosexual.” (Troiden 50) Generally this is characterized by the child feeling different and set apart for either gender-neutral or gender-inappropriate behavior and/or interests. Herdt asserts that it’s the ‘assumption of heterosexuality’ that leads to these feelings and the social pressures to conform to gender-appropriate behaviors and interests.

Stage Two, Identity Confusion, is where homosexual adolescents experience inner turmoil over their ambiguous sexual status. Factors involved in identity confusion are: their perceptions of self are altering, they are experiencing heterosexual and homosexual arousal and behavior, they are aware of the stigma associated with homosexuality and they may have inaccurate knowledge of homosexuals and homosexuality. (Troiden 53) To come to terms with this confusion, homosexual teens will adopt various strategies to cope that range from denial of their homosexual feelings to acceptance.

During the third stage, Identity Assumption, “the homosexual identity becomes both a self-identity and presented identity, at least to other homosexuals.” (Troiden 59) This identity disclosure is the first part of the coming-out process. Also at this stage the homosexual teen begins to talk with other homosexuals and becomes better informed of the subculture. This initial contact with this new world can facilitate or hinder the formation of the teen’s sexual identity. This is also the period when the teen is confronted

with the issue of stigma and its management; which, once again, may hinder or facilitate the sexual identity formation. Eventually however, they begin to accept themselves as a homosexual which leads them to the fourth stage, Commitment.

Commitment refers to the self-acceptance and comfort with the homosexual identity and role, both internally, as in the perception of homosexuality as a valid self-identity, and externally, as in same-sex relationships and the disclosure of sexual orientation to heterosexual audiences. (Troiden 63)

Examined in terms of van Gannep's rites of passage and using Troiden's research, the rite of separation, for gay teens would refer to their feelings of alienation and separation caused by their dissimilar interests from their peers. In the rite of transition, gay teens will go through Identity Confusion and Identity Assumption, where they begin to find similarities between themselves and this other subculture and eventually begin identifying with it. In the rite of incorporation, gay teens have fully incorporated their homosexual identity within their lives and concept of self.

Research Question

I think that Troiden and Herdt show that the formation of the sexual identity is a process that adolescents go through in discovering and understanding their homosexuality and can easily be considered a rite of passage. I would like to compare this idea with Campbell's assertion that "the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (Campbell 30) So the hero's journey is a more elaborate rite of passage represented in mythology and legends. If the formation of the sexual identity for homosexuals could also be considered a rite of passage, could it be said that the literature that reflects this identity formation, that is commonly referred to as gay teen literature, is an elaboration of this rite of passage? This leads me to my research question: could we then assume that homosexual young adult literature incorporates aspects of the hero's journey?

Methodology

Content Analysis

The tool that I will be using to analyze the texts will be content analysis, which is defined by Holsti as “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti 56) I relied on Earl Babbie’s *The Basics of Social Research* to help develop a content analysis model. The way I used the content analysis model was by setting up a conceptual framework, which for the purpose of this research is the hero's journey. The units of analysis are the six chosen novels. The units of observation will be words or phrases that state or imply the development of the main protagonist's homosexual identity based on Troiden and Herdt’s research. The next step is to code for latent content within the novels. This will allow me to analyze the explicit as well as implicitly stated development of the protagonist’s homosexual identity.

I chose the titles used in this analysis by limiting my search to novels involving a main protagonist who is coming-out. I use the term ‘young adult literature’ to mean a novel with a target audience of young adults and a main protagonist who is a young adult dealing with contemporary issues as well as social developmental issues. This includes becoming emotionally and behaviorally autonomous, dealing with emerging sexuality, determining an individual set of moral, ethical, religious, and political principles and acquiring education and other experiences needed for adult work. (Elliot, Havighurst, Stover) Also, when I refer to the term ‘coming-out’ I mean the process gay males and lesbians go through as they discover their own sexual identity. This process is the acceptance or tolerance of the person’s sexual identity and the disclosure of this identity

to others. (Troiden) The teen protagonists in these stories deal with the outside world and all of the challenges that other teenagers face, compounded by the challenges they face from coming out to themselves and to others. In addition I didn't discriminate between male and female protagonists, but rather have sought to establish a framework to analyze this sub-genre, 'coming-out' fiction, of gay teen literature.

To conduct my research I chose six separate novels to examine by content analysis. The novels were limited to stories that contain teen protagonists that are beginning to identify themselves as homosexuals. I found these novels through bibliographic lists compiled by the Evanston Public Library at <http://www.evanston.lib.il.us/library/bibliographies/ya-gay.html> and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network of Colorado at <http://www.glsenco.org/Bibliography/Bibliography%20Full.doc>, The Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgendered Round Table of the American Library Association's bibliography for gay teens, and Amazon.com. Limiting the books to novels that have a gay teen as the main protagonist who is coming to terms with his or her homosexuality, the availability and number of representative novels was reduced to the six novels chosen: *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger, *Empress of the World* by Sarah Ryan, *Keeping You a Secret* by Julie Anne Peters, *Kissing Kate* by Lauren Myracle, *Rainbow Boys* by Alex Sanchez, and *Peter* by Kate Walker. A synopsis of these titles is included in the Appendix.

I've separated my research into individual groupings by Campbell's stages of the hero's journey: The Call to Adventure, Threshold, Supernatural Aid or Helper motif, The Road of Trials and the Return. Within each of these stages I have coded for words and

phrases that either explicitly or implicitly describe the coming-out process in regards to these stages. For the Call to Adventure I have coded for words that imply the protagonist's self-suspicion or knowledge that they are gay or the feeling of being different due to interests in gender-neutral or gender-inappropriate behavior. I included Campbell's the 'Refusal of the Call' in the Call to Adventure stage as well and coded for words and phrases that imply and express denial or an attempt at denial of the protagonist's sexuality. For the Threshold stage, I've coded words and phrases that describe the protagonist crossing over from the realm of assumed heterosexuality to the acceptance of their homosexuality, as it is outlined in Troiden's identity confusion stage. In my findings I also code for characters that conform to Campbell's 'Helper' motif, characters whose main role is to assist the protagonist such as a trusted friend or confidante or another homosexual who acts as a friend or mentor. In the 'Road of Trials' stage I coded for words and phrases that describe the challenges the protagonists face in coming-out, the stigmas associated with being homosexual and the strategies for dealing with the stigma. Finally, in the 'Return' stage I have coded for terms that describe the protagonist's new self-awareness and acceptance of themselves and the incorporation of their homosexuality into their identity, such as disclosure to nonhomosexuals. I have also organized my coding strategy in the following table:

Table 1.

Conceptual Framework	Units of Observation-Coding
The Departure: Call to Adventure/ Refusal of the Call	Self-suspicion, feeling different or alienated/ denial of self-suspicions of homosexuality
The First Threshold	Disclosure to self and other homosexuals of homosexuality
Helper Motif	Trusted friend, confidante, homosexual mentor and/or friend
The Initiation: The Road of Trials	Stigma, rejection, strategies for dealing with stigma
The Return: Freedom to Live	Acceptance, integration of homosexuality with sexual identity and lifestyle, disclosure of sexuality to nonhomosexuals

Results

Departure

The first stage of the hero's journey begins with the hero's Departure. We are presented with the hero and the world in which he lives and the responsibilities associated with his identity. Then something happens, a 'Call to Adventure' in which the hero is either compelled or lured into taking the first step in his adventure. Occasionally the hero may try to ignore or 'refuse the call'. However, the call to adventure is as much a command as it is an invitation. And if the hero tries to resist the summons, the forces at work will only become more powerful until the call can no longer be refused. For some, the call is an awakening moment. The hero has lived in his world, knows no other and would not normally cross over the boundaries that separate that world from the unknown; until the call awakens him and awakens his perceptions to something more. This awakening also serves to separate him from the rest of his society. He is aware of something they are not or are unwilling to face. But because the hero has been chosen, he is destined to go on this journey and, furthermore, is the only one qualified to do so.

Call to Adventure/ Sexual Awakening

For gay teens, this echoes Troiden's first stage of the development of the teen's homosexual identity, Sensitization. Coded for characteristics of the Call to Adventure are the teens' feelings of being different and alienated from his or her peers. This feeling can be caused by interests and behavior that contrast from those of their peers and are considered gender-inappropriate. Some may already suspect that they are homosexual, but are unsure of what that means; they are only aware that the subculture exists. This is

also the point where teens begin to notice similarities between themselves and this other subculture. Just as the hero's call to adventure may be "the awakening of the self" (Campbell 51), the gay teen begins to feel the pull away from perceived sexual norms and toward a more personally resonant sexuality.

In *Peter*, the title character suspects that something about him is different from the other dirt-bike riders. He is already placed in the awkward position of having to tell the other boys where they can and can't ride, since his absentee father owns the property they all ride on. And he's pressured to act masculine and show off to the other boys.

"But I like doing things slowly, taking my time and doing them right. Which is exactly what you *can't* do when the boys are around. As far as they're concerned, unless you tear about like a suicidal maniac, risking paraplegia at every tree, then you're automatically a queer or a marshmallow or whatever the word of the week happens to be. Real men bust their skulls! Only pansies *practice!* Get the picture?" (Walker 4)

"I've got to be careful down here myself. I'm only just accepted by these kids as it is. Being in all 'One' classes at school, and doing photography and coming top in English are considered highly unmasculine. I have to spit and swear and take an occasional leak against a tree to make up for it, otherwise I'd be considered a sus too." (Walker 11)

In the second example above, Peter uses the term 'sus' as a shortened term for 'suspected homosexual'.

Eventually Peter meets his older brother's friend, David. David is openly gay and provides Peter with another view of how homosexuals behave, which is at odds with the stereotype he's more familiar with.

"David wasn't a creep. He was nice. Ordinary. And that was my biggest problem, lining up those two images of him: being ordinary and being gay." (Walker 42)

At this point, Peter doesn't feel that this has anything to do with him. However, this will later cause Peter to reassess himself as the similarities between him and the subculture grow stronger.

In *Empress of the World*, Nicola is sent to a summer camp for the academically gifted at a university. During the Orientation she meets and befriends three other people; Isaac, Katrina and Battle. Later they all attend a hike where Nicola sprains her ankle and is helped back to the campus by Isaac. Eventually the rest of her newfound friends come by to check up on her. Amid the jokes and bantering, Battle gives Nicola a flower from the hike.

“After they leave, I write in my notebook.
isaac = smart, sweet, funny, cute but not too cute, super nice to me. all logic demands that i should have a crush on him.??
...i wish i knew the name of that flower.”(Ryan 42)

As her story progresses, her interest in Battle increases and works its way into her class assignment. The assignment is to describe something in an unbiased way and she chooses Battle as her subject. In her notebook she writes:

“She bites the skin around her cuticles, like I do. When I see blood on one of her fingers, I have the crazy urge to press one of my wounded ones up against it, so our blood will mix.
Stop.
This is not objective. This is not good scientific practice.
Infatuation is not good scientific practice.”(Ryan 64)

“My hands shook as I read those words again. Stupid, stupid, stupid.” (Ryan 64)

Nicola is beginning to notice her attraction to Battle and while she has yet to classify these feelings for her as homosexual, her instinct is to deny them. But again, as with Peter, Nicola will later reinterpret her feelings for Battle as homosexual desire, and the

initial refusal of the call will succumb to increasing psychic pressure to realize her true sexual nature.

In *Rainbow Boys*, Jason Carrillo is the high-school basketball star and already has begun to have homosexual desires as well as heterosexual desires. These conflicting desires confuse him, making him unsure of who he is.

“So why’d he continue to have those dreams of naked men- dreams so intense they woke him in a sweat and left him terrified his dad might find out? On those nights he lay awake trying to make sense of his feelings.” (Sanchez 3)

From the beginning of the novel, Jason has begun to enter Troiden’s Identity Confusion stage in which he begins to question his desires and suspects that he may be a homosexual. While he understands that he is different, he only has a vague idea of what that means. Of the several types of redefinitional strategies, strategies teens use to cope with their identity confusion, Jason chooses ‘acceptance’ (Troiden 58) and recognizes his desires as homosexual, which leads him to the Rainbow Youth Hotline and support group meeting.

In *Kissing Kate*, Lissa is dealing with the after effects of kissing her best friend, Kate. She is able to recognize her desire for Kate and the kiss as situationally homosexual. But she isn’t yet able to accept that she herself may be a homosexual.

“But it was one thing for someone else to be gay. It was something else entirely if that person was me.” (Myracle 84-85)

In *Geography Club*, Russell Middlebrook also knows that his desires are homosexual and has accepted this. But that knowledge separates him from everyone he knows.

“I was deep behind enemy lines, in the very heart of the opposing camp. My adversaries were all around me. For the time being, my disguise was holding, but still I felt exposed, naked, as if my secret was obvious to anyone who took the

time to look. I knew that any wrong action, however slight, could expose my deception and reveal my true identity. The thought made my skin prickle. The enemy would not take kindly to my infiltration of their ranks, especially not here, in their inner sanctum.” (Hartinger 1)

Russell has no one to confide in or talk to and admits that while he has friends, he is still lonely.

“The fact is, there’s a difference between being alone and being lonely; I may have not been completely alone in life, but I was definitely lonely.” (Hartinger 11)

He has access to the internet and talks to other gay teens online, but the problem is they aren’t real. At least, not in the sense he needs them to be.

Not all who become aware of their new desires accept them, however. In *Keeping You a Secret*, Holland has begun to notice her attraction to another student, Cece, who is also openly gay. She too, is going through the Identity Confusion stage and recognizes her desires as homosexual.

“She was in me, in my blood, invading every cell in my body. She was the one I wanted. She was the one I saw, felt, desired. This was wrong. He was wrong. It was all so wrong.” (Peters 99)

“...Was I? Gay, I mean? If so, what was I doing with Seth? Maybe I was bi. That would explain it. An open heart, willing to give and accept love wherever it came from. The feelings, the stirrings, the awakening senses with Cece, though, I’d never experienced those with Seth. With any guy.” (Peters 102)

She tries to explain and redefine these new desires, using a redefinitional strategy of seeing herself as ambisexual (Troiden 58), attracted to both men and women.

Eventually her feelings for Cece grow too strong and she tries to deny them altogether.

“Drown it out. Fight the force. You can do it, Holland. You’re strong. Resist. You can beat the forces of nature. You have to. Swim. Stroke. Count. Count. Can’t. Can’t. Can’t.” (Peters 125)

The 'Refusal of the Call', refers to the hero who tries to deny his destiny to go on the journey. But despite his reluctance, the internal voice calling him forward is irresistible ; it must be obeyed! The gay teen finds a similar situation; refusal of that inner voice is simply too painful. He cannot refuse because to do so would be to invalidate his own feelings, his self.

While I didn't code for this event, a common occurrence I found in the books researched was an avoidance strategy called 'immersion', that typically takes place in the second stage of Troiden's model, Identity Confusion. It's when the gay teen realizes that his behavior, thoughts or fantasies are homosexual in nature and tries to avoid them through various strategies. One of those strategies is called 'immersion', which is when the gay teen starts a heterosexual relationship at varying levels of intimacy in order to eliminate their homosexual desires. (Troiden 57)

In *Rainbow Boys*, Jason tries to bury his feelings by dating Debra, his girlfriend for the past year. By having sex with her he 'proves' to himself that he's not gay.

"That night he made it with her-a girl. Homos couldn't do that. Ergo, he couldn't be a homo." (Sanchez 3)

Similarly in *Keeping You a Secret*, Holland has a boyfriend, Seth. Confused by her desire for Cece, she tries to be a 'better' girlfriend for Seth. In both cases the protagonists are already in a heterosexual relationship, which, as time progresses, they find less and less fulfilling.

In *Empress of the World* and *Peter*, both of the protagonists only go as far as kissing someone of the opposite sex. While kissing may not be a lurid example of immersion, the purpose for doing so is to avoid the confusion and stigma that being a

homosexual causes. Nicola yearns for things to be “boy/girl simple” (Ryan 163). But for both protagonists, all it takes is a kiss to understand that this isn’t what they want.

The two novels where this didn’t occur were in *Geography Club* and *Kissing Kate*. They do, however, still go on dates, but for other reasons. In *Geography Club*, through his friendship with Gunnar, Russell is obligated into helping by accompanying his friend on a double-date. While he goes on the first two dates as a favor, he is black-mailed into going to the third one; Gunnar threatens to ‘out him’ at school. The dates with Trish are not a desperate effort to deny his homosexual desires, they in fact provide him with the impetus to pursue an intimate relationship with Kevin. In *Kissing Kate*, Lissa is asked out by Finn, a friend she’s met through Ariel. She agrees, but it’s not for any romantic purpose, rather it’s more of an act of kindness and obligation. As with Russell, as soon as her date ends, she runs back to Kate which leads to another kiss.

“Thereafter, even though the hero returns for a while to his familiar occupations, they may be found unfruitful.” (Campbell 56)

In the first four examples, the protagonists are running from the eventual acceptance of their homosexual desires. But in all cases, the act of being with someone of the opposite sex, even when the date or romantic moment is a farce, triggers the protagonist to take the next step in accepting themselves and desires as homosexual. They may run from who they are, but as the Call to Adventure is unrelenting, so is their sexuality which brings them back to the first steps of accepting who they are.

The First Threshold/ Acceptance of Self

The hero, who finally accepts the call to adventure, will then pass from the world he has known into the mysterious unknown. The First Threshold is the boundary or gateway the hero must cross, to begin his journey. Occasionally there are gatekeepers or guardians to keep the unworthy from leaving the community or known bounds of society. These guardians are terrifying, real or not, and only the hero responding to the undeniable call to adventure may pass them into the land of adventure.

For the gay teen, Identity Assumption, Troiden's third stage, is usually when he begins the process of 'coming-out' to himself and to other homosexuals. By this point, the teen acknowledges his homosexuality and can no longer hide from it. In his view, while he may accept this for now, he is unsure about whether he will continue to do so in the future. This aspect of his identity is not permanent. But what defines this moment, in terms of this research, is the varying degrees in which the teen protagonists begin to identify with their homosexual identity. This can range from simply acknowledging their homosexual urges to socially interacting with other homosexuals and becoming involved in the subculture through a relationship or the desire for one. This is when the gay teen moves from the model of his parents heterosexual relationship to accepting the option of a homosexual one. The gay teen only has vague ideas of what being homosexual means and what it implies. He is exploring unfamiliar and unguided emotional waters.

In *Peter*, Peter crosses the threshold when he allows David to hold him after he has just finished fighting with another boy.

“He put his arm around my shoulders. I put my arms around him and hugged him, pressed my face against his chest and listened to his heartbeat through his shirt.

It was like coming home, like finding the place you've always wanted to be, and I could have stayed there forever holding him." (Walker 124)

Ms. Winslow finds David holding Peter, which causes Peter to feel guilty. After David leaves, Peter gets on his motorbike and rides off. He understands his feelings for David, but it scares him and he tries to run away. He ends up crashing his bike instead and while he tends to his wounds, he finally allows himself to examine the possibility that he may be gay.

"I was scratched, burnt, my bike was probably a write-off, and I was probably gay. A girl had kissed me and I pushed her away, but a bloke had stroked my hair, and I'd melted all over him." (Walker 127)

Acknowledging that he has homosexual feelings later prompts Peter to eventually call a youth help line and speak to a counselor.

In *Empress of the World*, Nicola also comes to terms with her attraction for Battle. With only the mocking name of 'thespian lesbian' to identify her attraction to Battle, she's unsure what she should do next. However it's her attraction to Battle that clarifies what she's wanting. More importantly, while she wishes she didn't have homosexual feelings, she doesn't deny them either.

"It doesn't make sense. *Thespian lesbian, thespian lesbian*. How can I be a thespian lesbian when I filled up a whole notebook with ways to impress André? Then André's face turns into Battles, and I wish I could stop seeing her, wish I could stop thinking about what it would feel like just to touch her hair or hold her hand.
But I can't." (Ryan 66)

In *Rainbow Boys*, Jason already knows he has homosexual feelings. Through his friendship with Kyle, he begins to form a clearer idea of what the homosexual community is and is not. One night he and Kyle go to the movies together and Jason takes their relationship to a new level.

“Slowly one finger after another fell between Kyle’s fingers, until all intertwined. This was surely the climax of his life. Disaster was certain to follow, but he was ready to die happy.” (Sanchez 99)

In *Keeping You a Secret*, Holland also recognizes and accepts her feelings for Cece. But she also acknowledges the obstacles to moving the relationship to a deeper level.

“And I wanted to be with her, like all the time. Eliminate the obstacles, the people, the things in our lives that were keeping us apart: Brandi, Seth, Kirsten, society, me. Me? Make that my fear.” (Peters 127)

In *Kissing Kate*, after Lissa confronts Kate about the kiss they shared, Kate denies it meant anything. They begin to yell at each other and Kate eventually hangs up. Lissa angrily thinks to herself:

“But no matter how much we denied it, we both knew that what happened was more than an experiment or a drunken mistake. Otherwise, why would we care? We wouldn’t we just laugh about it and move on? What Kate and I felt was real, and screw her for pretending it wasn’t. And screw me, too. I was sick of running away.” (Miracle 134)

Lissa understands what the kiss means to them both. To explore what that means further will require her to accept that she may be homosexual and reassess her idea of herself.

In *Geography Club*, similar to Peter, Russell pushes away the sexual advances of a girl. He knows that isn’t what he wants, and this knowledge helps him to try to pursue something more than friendship with Kevin Land.

“Meeting the other members of the Geography Club, being open with them, had been important, but it had only been the preparation of the start of my journey. I’d learned about the places I wanted to go, I’d talked about them with my friends, but I hadn’t actually set foot outside my own door. The terrain of my own heart, the landscape of love, was still entirely unexplored. But people are right when they say the hardest step of every journey is the first, and I was scared.” (Hartinger 124)

He knows that by pursuing this relationship he is acknowledging the homosexual aspect of himself and is unsure what it means, but he knows it's what he wants.

Supernatural Aid/ Trusted Confidante

The hero's journey is plagued with pitfalls, traps and countless things to lure the hero from his quest. In many cases he would fail or make the journey that much longer if not for the assistance of a 'Supernatural Aid'. The aid could be a magical sword or item, but typically takes the form of the wise old man or woman. They caution the hero and gift him with advice and magical items that will assist him through the road of trials ahead. In a sense they bless the journey of the hero by lending their support; their presence indicates the favor of the higher powers and destiny.

For the gay teen, a characteristic of both Identity Assumption and the final stage, Acceptance, is the desire for the gay teen to confide in another person, to share their newfound identity and to have it recognized by another person. If the gay teen hasn't committed himself to his new identity, than he will be very selective in whom he tells. The many roles this confidante can assume underscore their importance in the development of the gay teen. The confidante can be a source of advice, affection, companionship, intimacy and/or source of forgiveness. But most importantly they offer a measure of acceptance which can be the strength the teen needs in order to go the last step and accept himself as well. And he'll need that strength for when he faces the challenges ahead: fear and rejection from the outside world for being who he is.

In *Peter*, eventually Peter breaks down and calls Life Line Telephone Counseling. The telephone counselor he speaks with listens as Peter explains his confusion over his

lack of feelings for a girl and his attraction to David. He further expresses his frustrations over how his parents expect him to behave. To this the counselor responds:

“‘It’s not for anyone to tell you what you should be,’ he said. ‘Not even you at this stage of your life.’
 ‘You reckon?’ I said. This was all starting to sound horribly vague.
 ‘Over the next few years you are going to be trying out lots of ways of relating to people, both male and female, and its important to stay open-minded. Especially about yourself.’
 ‘Um...yeah, but look, if I was gay, how would I know?’
 ‘That’s not a question I can answer for you,’ he said.” (Walker 141)

Essentially the counselor’s answer, which isn’t what Peter wants to hear, is that he’ll have to figure that out on his own and decide for himself. What Peter may not understand at this point in the novel, and what the phone counselor tries to explain, is that he’s free to be who he is. The gift of the helper, here, is that of nonjudgmental listening, support, and a strategy for dealing with the challenges ahead.

In *Empress of the World*, Nicola who has only recently recognized her attraction for Battle, she seeks comfort in Isaac and tries to tell him about her feelings. When she finds that she can’t bring herself to say anything, she has Isaac talk about his family instead. This is when he surprises her by talking about his aunt and her girlfriend.

“‘Laura?’
 ‘Yeah, she’s my aunt’s girlfriend.’
 ‘Girlfriend?’ I squeak before I can stop myself.
 Isaac thwacks the leafless branch lightly on the surface of the water. ‘Yep, that’s right! My aunt’s a big old dyke! Does that *bother* you?’
 I start laughing, the crazy kind of laughing that isn’t far from crying. ‘No,’ I finally manage to gasp. ‘And I bet it wouldn’t bother you if I said I thought I might be one too!’” (Ryan 102)

The validation Nicola receives from Isaac is unexpected, but welcomed and serves to calm some of her anxieties about her feelings for Battle and helps her feel less alone.

In *Kissing Kate*, Lissa finally talks to someone else about her feelings for Kate and has begun to trust a coworker and fellow student, Ariel.

“‘You don’t think it’s weird? Abnormal?’
 ‘What, that you like a girl? I think *you’re* weird and maybe a little abnormal, but not because of that.’” (Myracle 183)

Ariel, in turn validates who Lissa is. Eventually Ariel surprises Lissa by introducing Lissa to her cousin who is a lesbian in a positive and healthy relationship. Through her friendship with Ariel, Lissa has the chance to re-examine and re-evaluate her ideas of homosexuality. And like Nicola, Lissa has the companionship the friendship offers.

In *Rainbow Boys*, while Kyle’s role in the novel is as Jason’s love-interest, he also assumes the role of Jason’s mentor in the homosexual lifestyle. He encourages Jason to accept himself and helps make sense of his conflicting emotions.

“The more Jason thought about it, the more he realized that the only person in his life who really understood him was Kyle.” (Sanchez 154)

“In spite of the kiss, Kyle had helped him out a lot, not just with math, but with helping him realize it was okay to be bisexual or whatever and not be a total flamer like Nelson.” (Sanchez 154)

In *Keeping You a Secret*, similar to *Rainbow Boys*, the love-interest plays the role of helper. In this case, Cece tries to counsel Holland, when Holland decides she wants to come out. Unlike Kyle, Cece cautions Holland to wait until she’s graduated high school, which confuses Holland. Holland has yet to understand the consequences of her actions.

“‘Because I don’t want you to have to go through the bullshit.’
 ‘But-’
 She held up her hand. ‘You don’t know what it’s like.’” (Peters 159)

Cece knows what may happen to Holland and wishes to spare her the ridicule and rejection she is likely to experience for coming out. But she is only prolonging the inevitable and sooner or later, Holland will have to come to terms with her new identity and the stigma associated with it.

In *Geography Club*, a teacher is quoted as being approached by a student who is interested in starting a gay-straight alliance. The student isn't anyone in the Geography Club, but Russell is rumored to be 'The Gay Kid' and becomes an outcast among his peers. When no one else will sit with him, he sits with the school's primary outcast, Brian Bund. Afterwards, rumor names Brian Bund rather than Russell as the gay student, after Brian submits an application to start a gay-straight alliance at the school. Russell is no longer stigmatized for being a homosexual.

“‘Why?’ I asked.

He wouldn't look me in the eye, just kept staring at his book. 'There's already one Brian Bund,' he said simply. 'There d-d-doesn't need to be one more.' So he'd submitted the application to clear my name, just like I thought. He'd probably even back-dated it a day, to make it look more like the rumor was true and that he was The Gay Kid, not me. He was sacrificing himself in my place (just like You-Know-Who on the crucifix, or so some people think). How the hell did you repay someone for something like that?" (Hartinger 216)

Brian feels he is already an outcast and would rather spare someone else the experience of feeling like one too. His act of generosity will set the stage for Russell to make an important decision and offer the strength to face the Road of Trials.

The Initiation

The Road of Trials/ Social Stigma

The Road of Trials tests the hero to make sure he is ready and worthy for the knowledge or treasure he seeks. In some cases, this is when the hero is torn apart or beaten down literally or metaphorically. All that the hero once was: the old stratagems, the clinging to old truths, and status of childhood, do not work or do not apply any longer. So they must be stripped away so that the hero can emerge transformed, renewed. It is a purifying ritual, in which the hero can find redemption, hope or the treasure he's been seeking throughout his whole journey. This is what his quest has led him to, what it will make him fight for. And this is when the hero will perform incredible acts of courage and fortitude that make the stories worth telling.

“In the vocabulary of the mystics, this is the second stage of the Way, that of the ‘purification of the self,’ when the senses are ‘cleansed and humbled,’ and the energies and interests ‘concentrated upon transcendental things’; or in a more modern turn: this is the process of dissolving, transcending, or transmuting the infantile images of our personal past.” (Campbell 101)

For the gay teen, they are made aware of the stigmas that are associated with being a homosexual, and the possibility of rejection as well as physical abuse. It takes courage to continue on, despite the toll such knowledge will take in earning and the sacrifices made to attain it. And the teen always has the temptation of hiding himself and who he is away from the world and from himself as well. The final stage to acceptance of oneself and the integration of the teen's homosexuality is only one step away, but it's a huge step and the risks are great.

In *Peter*, Peter is accused of being gay, a ‘poofter’, because he was seen at the grocery store with David. He knows he can ‘throw David to the wolves’ (Walker 88), but

he doesn't. He also knows what could happen to him if they boys decide he's a homosexual.

“‘We’ll have t’ announce it in school assembly,’ Jason said. ‘*Will all the boys in the vicinity of Peter Dawson please watch their backsides...*’

The wouldn't do that exactly, but I knew what they would do. Pin notes on the school bulletin board about me. Write my name on every toilet door, and my phone number too. My bag would become the lunchtime football. I'd get jostled on the stairs. Everywhere I went, there'd be a foot sticking out, trying to trip me. I knew the routine. I'd seen it happen before, to kids who got labeled.” (Walker 88-89)

Later, Peter's father is asked what he would do if one of his own sons were gay.

“‘What about accepting him as he was?’ Mum said. ‘Couldn't you love him simply because he was your son?’

‘No, a man shouldn't have to accept that, being made a laughing stock by his own children. A man shouldn't have to accept that...’ (Walker 133)

Here the father admits he wouldn't accept the son. So now Peter knows that he may be rejected by his family should he be gay and he knows the abuse he'll suffer from his peers. But rather than denying his feelings, he decides to talk to David and tell him how he feels about him. Peter knows what the other boys would say if they knew and he knows that he would be rejected by his father. But he doesn't deny who he is and acts on it.

In *Empress of the World*, Nicola writes in her journal:

“i've started keeping track of the number of times i hear someone mutter the word 'dyke' in my direction-five times so far.

i guess i should be getting angry, or upset, but more than anything it's just odd-what has changed about me, that makes people want to call me this name? do i look different? it's not as though battle and i have been out necking constantly. not that i'd mind. or would i? i don't know-whenver we're outside, in public, something happens that keeps us from doing anything but holding hands. like magnets that repel each other if they get too close.” (Ryan 115-116)

The summer camp allows Nicola and Battle a safe haven from the world to explore their new relationship. Yet even then, they still feel the stigma associated with being homosexual. But neither of them denies what they feel for each other or pretends it doesn't exist.

In *Rainbow Boys*, Jason helps Kyle and Nelson after they have been attacked by other classmates. He takes them home to get cleaned up and after they leave, he faces his father.

“‘Don’t bring them here again,’ his dad sneered. ‘Hear me?’ I don’ wan’ any faggots in my house.’
Jason squared his shoulders. Later he would try to determine how he’d gotten the nerve for what he said next. ‘Well’-he took a deep breath-‘you’ve got one.’”
(Sanchez 198)

After Jason’s admission, his father attacks him and Jason fights back.

“Jason stared at his fist, disbelieving what he’d done. He immediately glanced up, expecting to ward off a new pummeling from his father, but instead he saw a pathetic, insecure man gaping back at him.
In that image, all the events of the past few months connected for Jason: going to the Rainbow Youth meeting; coming out to Debra; finding the confidence to tell Kyle about Tommy. Jason feared where the experience would lead him, not sure he’d survive. But now the culminating moment had arrived, and miraculously he was still standing.” (Sanchez 199)

So for Jason, all the challenges he has met and endured have prepared him for the confrontation with his father. In the end, he has the strength and will to fight back and stand up for himself.

In *Kissing Kate*, Kate tries to pretend nothing has happened and asks Lissa if she could help her with her homework.

“I almost got sucked in. It would have been so easy. But feeling needed was one thing; having your own needs met was another.” (Myracle 187)

So instead of pretending that they can go back to who they were and deny her new identity, she tells Kate to look it up herself. Kate is stuck in the stage Identity Confusion, and cannot progress beyond the stigma associated with being a homosexual. Lissa however, can, but must leave Kate behind in the process. Despite her feelings for Kate, Lissa makes the sacrifice.

In *Keeping You a Secret*, Holland is confronted by her mother. Rumor has spread around school that Holland has started dating Cece and it has finally made it way to Holland's mother. When she asks Holland if the rumors are true, Holland has the chance to lie and deny it but confesses the truth instead. Her mother's reaction is violent.

“Mom yelled at me, ‘I didn’t raise you to be a lesbian!’ She made it sound like the filthiest word in the English language. ‘It’s sick. Perverted. You’re perverted.’ Neal held her in a death grip. ‘It’s not like that.’ I reached for Mom, trying to calm her, explain. ‘It’s beautiful. We love each other.’ She broke free of Neal and charged me. Hit me again; just started slapping and punching my face and arms and anyplace her hands connected. Neal wedged between us, palming off her blows. Trying to. ‘You disgust me!’ she screamed.” (Peters 181)

Holland is kicked out of her home and flees to Cece's house. Cece's family allows her stay for the next several nights. In the meantime, Holland's mother changes the locks to the house and refuses to speak to Holland. Holland is facing an incredible amount of rejection, but she never gives in and with a great amount of internal strength she continues to live the life she's chosen.

In *Geography Club*, after Russell spent time as a social outcast for being a rumored homosexual, he's well aware of what's at risk. In light of Brian's self-sacrifice, Russell has a chance to go back to being the person people think he is. But Brian's kindness has also given Russell the courage to accept himself for who he is, despite what

anyone else thinks. And so when Russell has lunch at the cafeteria, he has the chance to sit with Kevin Land, with whom he's been having a secret affair. But then he sees Brian sitting by himself, once again the school's primary outcast and goes to sit with him.

Kevin tries to stop him,

“...‘You really think that’s a good idea?’

‘Yeah. I think it’s a great idea.’

Kevin was still whispering. ‘But Russell...!’ He didn’t finish the sentence but I knew what he was telling me. If I went through with this-if I actually sat down at Brian’s table again-there’d be no turning back. This time, there would be things I would be giving up forever. My visa to the Land of the Popular, for one thing, and probably even my return ticket to the Borderlands of Respectability.”

(Hartinger 224)

By sitting with Kevin, Russell would be hiding again, but by choosing to sit with Brian, even though he knows what could happen for doing so, Russell is taking a step toward fully accepting himself.

The Return

Freedom to Live/ Self-Acceptance

In many cases, the time the hero spends on his journey is finite. Eventually his quest must end and he must return to his lands. But this doesn't mean he must return as the person he was, and it's unlikely he could even if he wanted to. He has attained wealth, wisdom and/or power that will benefit him in life. But no matter what he brings back, there is the inevitable call of life which he, like everything else, must attend.

“He does not mistake apparent changelessness in time for the permanence of Being, nor is he fearful of the next moment...as destroying the permanent with its change.” (Campbell 243)

The final stage of the development of the homosexual identity is 'Acceptance' when the gay teen has fully accepted his homosexuality and has integrated it into his self-concept, the total sum of who he is. With this greater level of self-knowledge they can now focus finding healthy relationships and begin living life.

In *Peter*, Peter is counseled by David, when Peter goes to him and confesses his feelings for him.

“‘How did *you* know?’ I asked, wanting to hold him there a minute longer. He understood what I meant, and he didn't mind me asking. I think I could have asked him anything.
He sipped his coffee and wet his lips and said, as if he was telling me a secret, ‘I just kept falling in love with men.’
I'd only fallen in love with one-him-so I still wasn't sure.” (Walker 168)

“And maybe one day, in a couple of years time, if I still felt the same about him, I'd turn up on his doorstep again.” (Walker 170)

And so the option to wait, is still a valid option. Peter knows himself now and when the time comes, he will be able to find a healthy relationship.

“Not all who hesitate are lost. The psyche has many secrets in reserve. And these are not disclosed until required. So it is that sometimes the predicament following an obstinate refusal of the call proves the occasion of a providential revelation of some unsuspected principle of release.” (Campbell 64)

“How are we supposed to stand it? How the hell are we supposed to blithely pack our things and leave this place and pretend that everything is fine when we have to go back to the stupid, pointless, idiot, *moron* world again? It’s not fair!’ Battle looks at me as though she might cry, too. Lighten up, Nic. I take a deep breath.

‘Okay, I know-we’ll just chat online all the time. We’ll stop traffic on the internet.’

Battle smiles a little, and says, ‘Carrier pigeons.’

‘Singing telegrams. We’ll raise them to an art form.’

‘Smoke signals...’

I lean my head on Battle’s shoulder. ‘I want a happy ending, dammit.’

Battle says, ‘It’s not an ending. We’re not even in college yet, for God’s sake.’”(Ryan 211-212)

With summer camp almost over, Nicola is saddened by the loss of her relationship with Battle. But it’s not something she has to give up entirely, nor her understanding of her homosexuality. And as Battle counsels, they are still young and there’s plenty of time to worry about these things later. There is no rush and to wait is still a valid option.

Throughout the novel, *Kissing Kate*, Lissa has been plagued by a nightmare. It’s a replay of an event from her childhood, when she had wandered from her mother at the grocery store and was led by a stranger into the parking lot. Each time before she has gone too far, she wakes up. In real life, Lissa’s mother found her in time before they had gotten too far and the stranger had disappeared. After sacrificing her relationship with Kate and moving on with her life, Lissa finally finds a resolution in her dream. In this new version of the dream, once again Lissa is led away from the grocery store. However, this time she hears a voice calling for her from the store and describes to Ariel what happened:

“Was it...your mom?” [Ariel] said it gingerly, as if afraid of overstepping.

‘For a second I thought so, too. But it wasn’t.’

‘So who was it?’

I swallowed. I remembered how my heart, in my dream, had started pounding like crazy when at last I turned around. ‘It was me,’ I said. ‘Me when I was five, with my hair in two long braids.’ I tucked my legs in closer. ‘I was standing outside the store, and I was safe after all.’

‘Oh, wow,’ Ariel said.

‘Yeah,’ I said. I suddenly felt embarrassed. ‘And then I woke up. And I knew things were going to be okay.’

She gazed at me in this proud way. A little teary, even. ‘So the scary stuff *was* Kate,’ she said. ‘Kate and Ben and-I don’t know. Even me, I guess, pressuring you to be someone you weren’t. That’s the horrible fate you’ve been marching off toward all this time, even though deep inside you knew you shouldn’t.’

I stared at my jeans.

‘But you called yourself back,’ she said. ‘You called yourself back, and you were finally able to listen.’ (Myracle 197-198)

Ariel nicely sums up how reflections of recent events in Lissa’s personal life appear in the subconscious world of Lissa’s dreams.

In *Geography Club*, Russell talks with Kevin for the last time. Kevin pleads with Russell to let things go back to the way they were.

“We couldn’t go on like nothing had ever happened, because something *had* happened. A lot had happened, and it changed the way I looked at him.

‘Kevin...,’ I said.

He nodded, his eyes heavy. ‘Yeah. I know that won’t work. Russell, I’m sorry I let you down.’

‘It’s okay,’ I said, and it really was. I’d forgiven another friend. But sometimes just because you forgive someone doesn’t mean you still love them. This *Landscape of Love* is a very bizarre place.” (Hartinger 222)

Russell isn’t going back to being the person he used to be and has come too far to go back now. With the help of some of the former members of the Geography Club and Brian Bund, he creates the Goodkind High School Gay-Straight-Bisexual Alliance.

Jason in *Rainbow Boys* makes a similar decision by attending the Gay-Straight Alliance, which is partly organized by his boyfriend. And like Russell, Jason has gone too far to turn back now.

“Corey glanced down the hall. ‘You thinking of going to that meeting?’ he whispered. ‘What if Tech finds out? What do you think their coach would say?’ Corey’s advise confused Jason, but only for a moment. ‘It’s a gay and straight meeting,’ he said defensively. ‘Besides, it’s nobody’s business but mine.’ ...Corey clapped Jason on the arm. ‘Hey, do what you need to do, man.’ (Sanchez 232)

“His hand hesitated on the doorknob. He could still turn around. Then Kyle looked up at him and smiled. He motioned to the chair beside him. Jason took a deep breath, opened the door, and stepped inside.” (Sanchez 233)

Finally, in *Keeping You a Secret*, Holland has fully accepted her sexuality as well.

Her attitudes of homosexuality have shifted and she considers it a valid lifestyle, in spite of the rejection she’s received.

“She added quickly, ‘I just wish things would stay the same forever. Don’t you?’ God, no. If the cosmos hadn’t shifted, if I hadn’t risked change, I might never have found Cece. Found myself. I would’ve lived a lie, created a life around other people’s expectations.” (Peters 234)

“Things have changed. Her world seemed very small for me, confined and limited, while mine had expanded, illuminated, grown. I saw everything now through different eyes. Wide awake and focused.” (Peters 235)

Conclusion

I think there is enough evidence to say that in the novels chosen and coding for the events outlined, aspects of Campbell's hero's journey can be found. In the Departure, all of the protagonists experienced alienation and feelings of loneliness common to Troiden's Sensitization. As the heroes in Campbell's model are separated from the world they know, so do the emotions and desires of the protagonists set them apart. Some of the protagonists are able to identify their feelings as homosexual but are unable to identify themselves as such at this point. And so each story begins with the protagonist who may be surrounded by friends and family, yet is lonely and beginning to despair. Some try to ignore these feelings or even try to run away from them. But no matter which direction the protagonists take, their feelings, Campbell's 'Call to Adventure', will only grow stronger and lead them back to the same realizations or 'threshold' of understanding of themselves. As the differences from their peers become unavoidable and the connections to who they thought they were diminish, they begin to feel a connection to the homosexual lifestyle or to other homosexuals. Where once the homosexual aspects of the protagonists made them feel alone and unaccepted, they now make them a part of something greater: the gay community. As they explore this community they notice stronger similarities until they understand that this has been their community all along. Occasionally a friend will emerge from this community to help guide the protagonists, similar to Campbell's 'Supernatural Aid'. Other times the helper may appear to be an aspect of the world the protagonists no longer feel connected to, but these helpers embody surprising qualities. Some may reveal themselves to be homosexual as well, and others may validate the protagonists at a crucial moment.

Overall, both types provide much needed sources of strength and compassion that will aid the protagonist in the future.

In the Initiation segment, the protagonists find that this community comes with a price and will need to be fought for. The challenges are many and cruel and each protagonist pays a price. Aspects of their former lives haunt them, family members and friends reject them, and some even try to physically harm them. But their triumphs over the trials along the journey and the support of their helpers have given them the additional strength to succeed and the power to overcome the emotional pitfalls, and so the protagonists are successful.

In the Return segment, the protagonists emerge transformed and whole. They find that they never left who they were behind to become someone else, but have taken what they have learned into themselves. The aspects of themselves they feared or misunderstood are now accepted and cherished. Their lives experience a renewal and rebirth. Where once things in their lives were stagnant and meaningless, they are now infused with life, their actions and desires have become meaningful and significant and the future is something to anticipate rather than dread.

In *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell examines the 'Hero Today' as his last chapter. He concludes that the world no longer has any spiritually meaningful symbols. He feels that the purpose myths and legends once served were to give life a spiritual significance. Ironically none of the symbols we use today can do that for us because they have been created for that specific purpose. Campbell feels that for the symbol to be meaningful, it has to emerge on its own. By doing so and by relying on the dark depths of our unconscious a symbol will emerge that will resonate within us on a much deeper

level. “Consciousness can no more invent, or even predict, an effective symbol than foretell or control tonight’s dream” (Campbell 389)

In the novels examined, the hero that emerges is a young adult who has achieved a level of self-knowledge and self-acceptance, both of which act as sources of strength and guidance. Could it be said that this figure is a symbol that the gay teen reader who is going through the same life crisis event – the development of their homosexual identity – can draw on as a source of strength and guidance? I think there is enough evidence to suggest that this is possible. However, Troiden’s stages of homosexual identity used in this research are ‘emergent’; they appear in context to various social circumstances. Does this make the symbolic power of this figure emergent as well? It is important to remember that sexuality is an aspect of social conduct as well as biology, thus social circumstances can influence the nature and effectiveness of the symbol.

Also, by establishing Campbell’s hero’s journey as an enduring aspect in these novels, it allows us to examine the genre of gay teen literature in a new light. Characters that may have been studied in a purely sociological sense, social forces in relation to the individual, can consist of another dimension by examining the protagonist from Campbell’s anthropological perspective. The characters achieve an added depth to who they are and what they represent. I think this would enrich the study of gay teen literature.

For the intended audience, teenagers trying to make sense of their homosexual feelings compounded by the overall difficulties of adolescence, these novels may help in easing the anxiety and fear that life naturally presents us, through the stories told of

others going through the same trials. If these novels can offer that help and comfort, then they contain an aspect that should be considered, explored and cherished.

Appendix

Geography Club by Brent Hartinger

Russell Middlebrook, a young high-school student, wanders into a gay teen chat room and discovers another student from his school is gay. With the help of his friend, Min who turns out to be a bisexual, they gather together a group of gay, lesbian and bisexual students to meet in secret. They create the Geography Club in the belief that no one will be interested in joining. Slowly things fall apart as it becomes public knowledge that there is a gay student at Goodkind High School. Eventually Russell forsakes his values, the purpose of the Geography Club, for the love of Kevin Land, closeted high-school baseball star. All of which he loses as he is outed at school. With the help of the school outcast, Brian Bund, Russell creates a publicly known Gay, Straight, Bisexual Alliance Club.

Empress of the World by Sarah Ryan

During a summer camp at a university for gifted youth, high-school student Nicola Lancaster meets and finds a close group of friends. She also falls in love and begins a relationship with Battle Hall Davies. Over the eight weeks at camp, Nicola's relationship with Battle grows and faces hardship as they navigate their way through their feelings for each other.

Kissing Kate by Lauren Myracle

At a party, two close friends Lissa and Kate, share a kiss. Kate pretends nothing has happened leaving Lissa alone to sort out her feelings and desires. With the help of her newfound friend, Ariel, Finn and a book on lucid dreaming, Lissa comes to terms with her love for Kate.

Keeping You a Secret by Julie Anne Peters

Holland Jaeger, the senior class president, falls in love with a known lesbian student, Cece. Even though she tries to deny her feelings, she eventually begins a relationship with Cece and faces the challenges of being out at school, rejected by her mother and building trust in her relationship with Cece.

Peter by Kate Walker

Peter, a 15 year old dirt-bike rider, finds himself attracted to his older brother's friend, David, who is gay. As he struggles to understand his feelings for David, he also tries to deal with the pressures of adolescence and the stigma of being labeled a "poof", a homosexual. David's friendship and guidance helps Peter to understand that he can wait until he's older to pursue a relationship.

Rainbow Boys by Alex Sanchez

A story divided among three characters. Jason Carrillo, a high-school basketball star, who is in the closet, learns to come to terms with what it means to be gay and starts a relationship with Kyle Meeks. Kyle Meeks, a brilliant student, counsels Jason and faces the challenges of coming out to his family and classmates. Nelson Glassman, out and proud friend of Kyle, faces the challenges of being out in high-school. Eventually they create a Gay-Straight Alliance club at their school.

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