Normativity in Translated Young Adult Literature

How Diverse Dutch Young Adult Literature with Proper Queer

Representation Creates Counter-stories for Normative Standards

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ABSTRACT

Normativity refers to the social force enabling social norms and deciding what behaviour and gender identities are 'normal'. Through literature that features queer discourses, a counter-story is provided that can subvert such normative standards. Readers can be shown that sexualities and identities perceived as 'abnormal' are as valid as those labelled normative. Such counter-stories are especially important for young adults who struggle with their sexual and gender identity. They need to have literature they can relate to since this enables them to think more critically about their emotions and remind them they are not alone in their feelings. Through initiatives such as de Diversity & Inclusivity Code, Dutch cultural institutes attempt to ensure they represent the broad diversity of Dutch society. However, while the availability of queer young adult literature (YAL) has seen an increase in the global literary market, this thesis discovered there is still much to gain in the diversification of the Dutch literary field aimed at queer teenagers. The data indicated that the overall queer representation in Dutch YAL published in 2021 corresponds to the average of queer teenagers in the Netherlands. However, a closer look at these statistics showed that many sexualities and identities remain underrepresented or not represented at all. Additionally, the close readings revealed that heteronormativity is challenged in queer YAL, but cisnormativity remains present and largely untouched.

Keywords: normativity, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, Queer Theory, representation, diversity, queer discourse, young adult literature, YAL, LGBTQ+

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1 INTRODUCTION

As a booklover from the Netherlands who identifies as queer, I would have liked to see more LGBTQ+ representation in literature while growing up. Many popular young adult series, such as *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Twilight* (2005), or *Harry Potter* (1997), focused predominantly on the adventures of heterosexual characters and thus caused a lack of literary role models for LGBTQ+ teens. Consequently, it took a couple of years before I encountered books with characters with whom I could identify. While personal observation indicates that there has been an increase in queer literature in the past decade, it is still outweighed by normative narratives. It feels exceptional when a traditionally published book contains queer characters who play a significant role in the story. This is a problem, especially since many younger children who identify as LGBTQ+ could still benefit significantly from an increase in queer books.

Queer is an umbrella term used to refer to the LGBTQ+ community as a whole or by people who do not want to label their sexuality. LGBTQ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning. The plus sign at the end of the acronym stands for the broad range of sexualities that exist on the spectrum beyond the five mentioned and include, but are not limited to, pansexual, asexual, aromantic, polyamorous, genderqueer or non-binary. In this thesis, queer YAL is defined as literature that contains characters who do not identify as heterosexual (romantic and sexual attraction to the opposite gender) and/or cisgender (a sense of identity corresponding with their birth sex). Additionally, an active distinction is made between LGBT-inclusive discourses, which include queer characters but reinforce "heteronormativity and binary constructions of sex and gender", and queer discourses, which strive to suspend the distinction between 'normal' and 'abnormal' identities (Blackburn et al. 14). Normativity, in the context of this thesis, refers to "the social force that enforces social norms and thus the acceptable range of behavior and identity" (Lindsay "Normative/Normativity"). Queer discourses, as opposed to LGBT-inclusive discourses, aid in

subverting heteronormativity (heterosexuality as the norm) and cisnormativity (cisgender as the norm), consequently providing a story in which teenagers can find themselves reflected positively.

In 2021, Gallup did a study on LGBTQ+ identification in the U.S. through interviews with more than 15.000 American participants of 18 and older. The study contained a specific focus on adults of generation Z, identified as people between the ages of 18 and 23. It states that this generation is "far more likely to consider themselves as something other than heterosexual", exemplified by statistics that show that one in six adult members of gen Z is part of the LGBTQ+ community (Jones). Similar studies were done in the Netherlands. In 2018, three combined national studies (the SCP Leefsituatie Index, the Leefstijlmonitor, and the Veiligheidsmonitor) showed that among children under the age of 17, 9% of the girls and 7% of the boys are attracted to people of the same gender (Communicatie Movisie 2-3). Additionally, a study aimed at European youth between the ages 14 and 29 revealed that 16% described their sexuality as something other than just heterosexual, thus not limiting the question to homosexual or lesbian (Halim). These numbers show that, evidently, there is an audience of teenagers who would recognise themselves in queer discourses. Consequently, queer YAL must be available for those looking for it. Proper representation "validates their experiences and affirms their existence because it lets them know they are not alone in their struggles" (Kaur). The formative quality of YAL assists teens in coming to terms with their own identity, aiding them in shaping "their sense of possibility" (Clark and Williams 583). Additional to queer people benefiting from seeing themselves represented, it is beneficial for those who identify as heterosexual to be exposed to views that differ from their own. GLAAD, which is "the world's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) media advocacy organization" ("Exposure to LGBTQ representation"), is known for providing data on queer representation in media and "overall acceptance towards LGBTQ Americans" (Ellis

2). A survey conducted among 2031 non-LGBTQ Americans from 18 and over showed that when people are exposed to queer people through media, they are "more likely to accept LGBTQ people and be supportive of LGBTQ issues in comparison to respondents who had not been exposed" ("Exposure to LGBTQ representation"). Seeing queer characters normalises the existence of queerness, hence destigmatising it (Kaur).

The interest and advocacy to diversify mainstream literature has gained traction in the past years. This is partially due to increased public advocacy for more diverse literature, which has influenced the issue publishing houses face of "commerce versus culture" (Bold 45). Publishers' interest in profit makes them "cater to existing and dominant market demands", resulting in "fiction that caters to the mass market" (47). This type of fiction tends to be aimed at the dominant culture, and 'otherness', as Bold calls it, has in the past "been perceived as niche and thus unprofitable" (47). However, with the rising public demand for more diverse literature, books produced by mainstream publishing houses have tentatively started to include more queer representation now that they can see its monetary value. Malina Lo, a *New York Times* bestselling author of sapphic fiction, has kept track of LGBTQ+ YAL from 2011 until 2018. She states that in 2009, when her debut novel *Ash* was published, it was one of 27 books published by mainstream American publishers that included queer representation. In 2018, this number was 108, showing a 300% increase (Lo). The increase in queer literature, especially in the romance genre, is also noticeable in commerce. Instead of being limited to independent publishing houses and self-publishing, queer books now come from literary conglomerates and are broadly advertised to the public (Harris). Harris notes that this echoes a cultural shift driven by a public demand to see themselves represented in something "gay and happy" (Rizer in Harris). This is clearly visible in data provided by NPD BookScan, which offers statistics on book sales in de U.S. It stated that retail outlets sold 850.000 LGBTQ+ romance books in 2021, which was more than double the books sold in 2020 (Harris). On top of this increase in queer

publications, the publishing houses themselves are also adapting to the diversification of their market. Penguin Random House UK, for example, has been working on inclusivity strategies, stating that they want to "make books for everyone, because a book can change anyone" ("Books for everyone" 2). They do not just do this by diversifying the books they publish but also by ensuring that the working culture within their publishing house is diverse. Penguin Random House states that "to publish boldly and creativity, [they] need a workforce where a range of backgrounds and experiences are represented at all levels" (6). They keep themselves accountable by sharing annual inclusivity and diversity reports. While these did not report on the diversity of the books themselves, it did show that 19,9% of their authors and illustrators identify as LGBTQ+ and that 22% of their new hires in 2021 identified as such as well. This results in a queer diversity rate of 14,2% company-wide (37; 16).

As for the Netherlands, the Dutch cultural and creative sector created a code of conduct called the Diversity & Inclusion Code in November 2019. It aims to "ensure that the Dutch cultural and creative sector represents the broad diversity of Dutch society" (Vrijer and Matena 3). This Code, also called the D&I, is meant for all facets of the cultural and creative sector, including publishing houses. They state that the cultural sector cannot ignore the reality of a diverse Dutch society and that relating "to this reality means to respond to the diversity present in society. [...] Failure to utilize the potential of diversity necessarily means excluding part of society" (3). The D&I provides five principles to uphold, which can be summarised as knowing where the organisation stands on diversity and inclusion and actively embedding these stances into their vision to implement in future projects (4). The Code was, among others, embraced in the literary sector as well as by the Dutch government, which wields the D&I as a tool to decide which cultural sector is given subsidy (Rammeloo et al. 3). However, at the start of 2022, two and a half years after the Code was put in place, Boekwerk conducted explorative research to analyse the implementation of the D&I in the literary field and create a situation sketch. They

did this by sending a survey to a varied group of people active within the sector consisting of 203 authors, 129 translators, 63 bookstores and 31 publishers (Rammeloo et al. 4). When they were asked to grade the diversity of the offered Dutch books, publishers gave a 4,8 out of 10 on average, and other groups gave grades between 5 and 7 (Rammeloo et al. 6). This indicates that while the policies of the D&I might have been embraced by the cultural sector, it has not yet made much progress in increasing the diversity of Dutch books. Based on the beforementioned numbers, Boekwerk concluded that there remains room for improvement in the diversification of the Dutch literary market ("Nederlandse boekenaanbod kan diverser"). Additionally, in 2021, the Dutch research agency GfK surveyed a group of Dutch bicultural and/or LGBTQ+ people about consumers' reading and buying habits and their views on diversity in the literary field. This study revealed that half of the LGBTQ+ people value seeing themselves acknowledged in literature, and only 64% of Dutch LGBTQ+ people are satisfied with the queer representation in books. One in five finds that there are insufficient (children's) books that focus on diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Richards and Nagelhout 7; 60). This data, therefore, shows a great need and commercial market for queer literature in the Netherlands as well.

This thesis aims to research the literary representation of queer teenagers. Since young adult literature (YAL) is "literature written for readers between the ages of 12 and 20" (Alsup 1), the focus will be placed on this subsection. This does not mean that children from this age group do not have access to other books featuring LGBTQ+ characters. However, YAL portrays the lives and adventures of teenage characters and deals with topics regarding identity formation (Walczak 9). This thesis argues that literature meant for teenagers should provide an accurate reflection of the reality of a young adult, hence representing all queer and gender identities. There have been studies on the diversification of YAL in the past. Examples are B.J. Epstein's book *Are the Kids All Right* (2013), Laurie Barth Walczak's dissertation *The Ordinary Trip:*

Heteronormativity and Homophobia in Young Adult Literature from 1969 to 2009 (2014), and Malina Lo's collected statistics on LGBTQ YA literature. However, Epstein's book was published in 2015, Walczak's dissertation did not go further than 2009, and Lo studied American YAL and stopped in 2019. Due to the changing policies for the diversification of the literary field, such studies should be conducted regularly. Additionally, while these studies showed that the English literary domain is improving in its inclusion of queer representation in YAL, it remains to be explored how this influenced the literary field in smaller countries that publish literature in a peripheral language such as Dutch. While there are no clear studies on the balance between originally Dutch and translated YAL, it can be observed that these books from mainstream publishers are often of English origin. Consequently, the scope of this thesis focused on translated YAL, based on observations made of the YA literary field over the last couple of years, collected by being an avid reader of the genre. This assumption was eventually supported with data when the division between translated and originally Dutch YAL from the three largest publishing houses (determined by the number of books published, see chapter 4.3) was observed. For Blossom Books, 76,5% was translated, for Best of YA, 70%, and all books from Boekerij Fantasy. Based on the defined need for queer YAL, the diversification of the literary field, and these numbers and initial observations, this thesis was structured around the research question, '*To what extent is normativity present in young adult literature translated into Dutch by mainstream publishing houses in 2021?*'.

Quantitative research was performed by collecting data on all YA novels translated from English to Dutch in 2021 by mainstream publishing houses since these publishers have more considerable funds and, consequently, the most extensive reach. The choice for 2021 was made since this is the most recent dataset of an entire year. Analysing 2022 would have been more relevant regarding current developments, but since this research began in February 2022, not enough books were published to draw accurate conclusions. The list of translated YAL from

2021, which were 70 books, was analysed to define whether they contained queer representation and what queer identities specifically. A distinction was made between queer representation in a side character and the main character, as this influence how significant their storyline is in a novel. The results of this research can be found in chapter 4, "A Game of Numbers: Diversity in Dutch YAL".

Additionally, close reading was applied to three books featuring a main queer character. It was ensured that the books covered various sexual orientations and gender identities based on the data collected in chapter 4. These books were *Heartstopper Volume 1* by Alice Oseman (initially published in 2019, translated in 2021), *The Girls I've Been* by Tess Sharpe (published and translated in 2021), and *The Lady's Guide to Petticoats and Piracy* by Mackenzi Lee (initially published in 2018, translated in 2021). These books had, collectively, gay, bisexual, aromantic asexual, and lesbian representation. The close reading aimed to analyse the representation of queer characters and the society they lived in. A specific focus was placed on normative regimes, namely heteronormativity and cisnormativity. The close readings observed how the queer novels served a purpose in telling a counter-story for normativity and how the characters dealt with it if it was present. These readings can be found in chapter 5, "A Closer Look: Representation and Normativity in Dutch YAL". By first providing an overview of how diverse Dutch YAL is through quantitative data, the qualitative close readings show how queer people are represented in Dutch YAL. Combining both findings fits this research in the ongoing discourse surrounding normativity and the diversification of Dutch literature.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand why characters deviating from normative standards can positively influence young adults, it is first necessary to understand what this thesis defines as normativity. Consequently, this chapter will first explain what cisnormativity and heteronormativity entail and how queer people are influenced by them. It will initially outline the concepts in broader terms before narrowing the scope and explaining how diverse representation in YAL can aid in destigmatising sexualities and genders that deviate from the norm and how it provides a counter-story for young adults.

2.1 THE PROBLEM WITH NORMATIVITY

Queer Theory studies, among other things, sex, gender, and sexuality. Within this field of study, normativity is perceived as a central issue and one that is "a necessary site of radical activism" (Lindsay "Cisnormativtiy"). Three related concepts must first be defined to understand normativity: normative, normal, and norm. Something is *normative* when it is "the main part of a (statistical) distribution", meaning that the majority fits within that category (Lindsay "Normative/Normativity"). Lindsay exemplifies this with how most men identify with the masculine gender identity and most women with the female gender identity. Based on that logic, it is, therefore, *normal* for your gender identity to align with the sex you were born as, which results in cisgender being the *norm*. Lindsay states that "that which is 'normative' is that which is usual *and* that which is expected because it is usual" (Lindsay "Normative/Normativity"). Because this is perceived as the normalised way of being, social pressure arises to adhere to normative standards. *Normativity*, therefore, is "the social force that enforces social norms and thus the acceptable range of behavior and identity" (Lindsay "Normative/Normativity"). The question then arises, what is the impact of this social force, and what happens if someone does not hold the privileged position of falling within the 'normal' range of a type of normativity? This thesis specifically explores cisnormativity and heteronormativity in YAL. Since Lindsay

used the normative nature of cisgender as an example, cisnormativity will first be further explained.

Cisnormativity is "the idea that it is both normal and normative for a person's gender identity and biological sex to accord with one another (to be 'cisgender')" (Lindsay "Cisgender"). In other words, it is the assumption that someone who is, for example, born a woman also *feels* like a woman. This thinking is based on gender norms, grounded in the discourse of what it means to be a man or a woman. Judith Butler states that "gender is in no way a stable identity" but rather "an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (519). Gender performance is based on societal norms, on how a person is expected to behave according to the gender they were assigned at birth. What it means to be a woman, and similarly, a man, is, therefore, "a historical situation rather than a natural fact" (Beauvoir qtd. in Butler 520). A person's upbringing teaches them how to behave and their place within society, along with the norms they are expected to act on. Consequently, "human identities are not inherent or essential (that is, having an essence), but rather emerge out of social relations and discourse" (Lindsay "Queer Theory"). Because of cisnormativity, gender norms continue to be enforced and perceived as 'normal', inherently creating a systematic power dynamic between those who adhere to and those who deviate from them (Lindsay "Cisnormativity"). Foucault states that power exists in relation to something else and that behaviour is perceived as normalising when "it links the increase of capacities and expansion of possibilities to an increase in and expansion of the proliferation of power within society" (Taylor 47). When acting, or better said, *performing* socially approved behaviour increases the power someone has within a society, that behaviour is normalised. Cisnormativity is the social expectation, the normalised behaviour. This causes "systematic oppression that excludes transgender and other gender non-conforming identities, resulting in their marginalization, minoritization, oppression, and exclusion" (Lindsay "Cisnormativity").

Heteronormativity is also rooted in normalised behaviour. It is "a way of being in the world that relies on the belief that heterosexuality is normal, which implicitly positions homosexuality and bisexuality as abnormal and thus inferior" (Blackburn and Smith 625). While Blackburn and Smith limit their claim to homosexuality and bisexuality in this quote, this thesis includes the broader spectrum of LGBTQ+ identification. Those people are also placed opposite from heterosexuality and experience the same difficulties, such as dealing with homophobia. Homophobia is "the irrational fear or hatred of people who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ)" (625). While this thesis also defines the Q in LGBTQ as queer, including the entire LGBTQ+ spectrum, the phobia remains the same. Similarly to the systematic oppression resulting from cisnormativity, people who deviate from the heterosexual norm are placed in a marginalised position, facing oppression and exclusion because of who they are. Queer Theory believes that this is a reason to antagonise such norms, though it does not expect that normativity can be entirely overthrown. Their aim is to subvert it, hoping that by giving voice to the discourse, people will understand the absurdity of these norms and question whether there is a solid reason to view them as 'normal' in the first place (Lindsay "Cisnormativity"). This thesis aims to align with this stance by underlining the importance of YAL in subverting cisnormativity and heteronormativity and displaying the current state of affairs in translated Dutch YAL.

2.2   COUNTER-STORYTELLING IN YAL

Since normativity is closely embedded into our daily life, it has been difficult for those who do not fit into the normative boundaries to express themselves. Dym et al. note that having a strong sense of who you are as a person can help people navigate their daily life. However, self-identity and identity performance "are influenced by normative social and cultural representations" (3). Foucault states that "the operation of disciplinary normalization consists of trying to get people, movements, and actions to conform to this model, the normal being precisely that which can

conform to this norm, and the abnormal that which is incapable of conforming to the norm"
(Foucault 85). This results in a dichotomy in which 'normal' is placed opposite to 'abnormal'.
It is worth it to note that there is "a relatively positive connotation to 'normal' as compared to
a relatively negative connotation to 'abnormal'" (Lindsay "Queer Theory"). Queer Theory,
therefore, wishes to "abolish the idea that 'normal' is anything but constraining and oppressive
entirely" (Lindsay "Queer Theory"). One way to increase the reach of this discourse is for
cultural representations to reflect the broader range of its culture, including people whose
identity does not align with types of normativity. By opening up to other possibilities than the
norm, change can occur because "it is not the normal and the abnormal that is fundamental and
primary in disciplinary normalization, it is the norm" (Foucault 85). What is considered the
norm is susceptible to change depending on what a society believes is the right thing.
Consequently, the normative narratives of heterosexuality and cisgender are open to change as
long as suitable materials are offered to provide a perspective that differs from people's own to
show the error of their ways – namely, a counter-story.

 People on the LGBTQ+ spectrum do not fit within normative borders and can feel like
they are doing something wrong since "their identity comes into conflict with normative social
structures that prohibit or discourage people from identifying as LGBTQ" (Dym et al. 4). This
conflict also strongly influences queer teenagers, especially since their identity is still
developing (Alsup 3). Normativity is harmful to their sense of self. Therefore, counter-
narratives must be provided through the diversification of literature to subvert normativity's
effect. Literature says something about society, and "what children read is a topic of vital
importance because the ideas they get from books [...] will shape them and their larger culture
in the future" (Epstein 2). Counter-narratives, or counter-storytelling, is "a method of telling
the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (Solórzano and Yosso qtd. in
Huges-Hassell 214) that aims to "cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths,

especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado and Stefancic qtd. in Huges-Hassell 215). It is a way of using literature to provide readers with an 'abnormal' perspective, such as the point of view of a queer character, which can show them that what they "believe is inaccurate or false" and can "highlight exclusionary practices and policies" (Hughes-Hassell 215). This aids non-queer teens in reflecting on their behaviour and normalising the existence of identities that do not adhere to society's norms, but it also significantly helps queer teens. Counter-stories can help them come to terms with their own identity, e.g. by depicting the struggles of a queer youth discovering their sexuality or having emotions validated by seeing them mirrored in a fictional queer character. These stories are essential for young adults who already struggle with their sense of self through adolescence and are "confronted with the task of self-definition" (Kroger qtd. in Alsup 3). Alsup states that YAL poses the ideal genre to "prompt and support [...] positive identity growth" since it deals with "teen characters having life-like problems" (4). Books that fall within the YAL genre range from literature with themes "of interest to young people" (Bushman and Haas qtd. in Walczak 9) to books that have the "unique capacity to educate not only the mind but the heart and spirit as well" (Cart qtd. in Walczak 9), or books that contain "rites of passage and initiation, patterns of growth, conflicts [...] and identity crises" (Trites qtd. in Walczak 9). However, "all of these descriptions demonstrate that perhaps one of the most universal definitions of young adult literature is texts that deal with issues of identity formation" (Walczak 9). YAL has a formative quality for teen readers and can shape "their sense of possibility", something that is "vital for queer youth, who may never see themselves positively reflected in official school curricula" (Clark and Williams 583). Reading can trigger emotional responses from teenagers, which draw upon their "personal experiences and memories" and helps them "understand their emotions in a new way" (Alsup 4). Queer teenagers can only experience the opportunity for critical reflection of their emotions when they are given literature in which they can see themselves reflected. If they struggle with their sense

of self, queer YAL can help them work through their emotions and come to terms with their identity. Clark and Williams explain that Queer YAL serves "as resonant, emotional touchstones" for queer teens, aiding them in critically interacting with the world and developing an awareness of the layered nature of society (587). This thesis, therefore, focuses on YAL to analyse whether translated queer YAL provides counter-stories for normativity, thus aiding in the positive identity growth of teenagers.

2.3 DIVERSITY AND REPRESENTATION

Since this thesis will look at how diverse Dutch YAL is through quantitative research and analyse the representation itself, it is essential to define the differences between *diversity* and *representation*. While they are related, they do not mean the same thing. Diversity, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, refers to "the fact of many different types of things or people being included in something; a range of different things or people" ("Diversity"). Representation, on the other hand, is defined as "the way that someone or something is shown or described" ("Representation"). To connect these definitions to fiction: diversity is used to describe the variety and quantity of diverse characters included in a story, whereas representation looks at *how* they are included, focusing on their characterisation and overall behaviour. Blackburn et al. make a distinction between LGBT-inclusive and queer discourses. LGBT-inclusive discourses "often reinforce heteronormativity and binary constructions of sex and gender" and, consequently, only provide a "'sentimental education' [...] that insists that gay and lesbian people are just like straight people and thus erases significant differences" (12). Queer discourse, on the other hand, "strives to suspend sexual and gender identities rather than underscore them" (12). This does not mean that these identities are erased, but rather that the distinction between 'normal' and 'abnormal' identities is suspended. It puts heteronormativity on the stand "by acknowledging a variety of genders, sexes, and desires, as well as foregrounding the sexual, thereby challenging the notion of what counts as normal" (12). In

other words, they provide a counter-story for the normative narrative by showing the wide range of possibilities beyond the normative scope. This distinction between queer-themed literature is aligned with the difference between diversity and representation. It is not just enough to include LGBTQ+ characters in a story, hence increasing literary diversity. More important is how they are represented and what message it conveys, as this enables the subversion of normativity and can stimulate a more open-minded perspective among the novel's readers. Clark and Williams refer to David Levithan's book *Boy Meets Boy* (2003) as an example of queer discourse. This story shows "a world where sexuality does not constrain any possibilities, there is virtually no discrimination based on sexuality, and the protagonist recognizes and lives completely in his gay identity" (585). They state that Levithan's novel displays a utopian society which frees "teens to love who they want and pursue relationships without hatred" (585), providing an insight into what daily life could be without normative constrictions. In chapter 5 of this thesis, three novels were analysed to see whether they adopt a similar approach to destigmatising sexualities and gender identities, thus subverting normativity and providing teens with insight into what life should be.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research was divided into a quantitative and a qualitative section. Chapter 4 contains an analysis of statistical data of young adult books published in 2021 by mainstream publishing houses that included LGBTQ+ characters. The choice for mainstream publishing houses was made because their large following allows them to reach a bigger audience, which will thus have a more significant impact if they are seen as the norm. As no public data is available on which YAL publishing houses are perceived as the biggest, this thesis made an indication based on public perception. Statistics from the Dutch annual national social media investigation show that, among people between the ages of 15 and 39, Instagram remains the most-used social media platform in the Netherlands (Hoekstra, Jonkers and van der Veer 20-21). Additionally, Best by the Numbers analysed reading habits, which showed that 43% of Gen Z looks at social media for book recommendations (Kowalczyk). On Instagram, teenagers who enjoy reading can become part of the book community, also called bookstagram, on which they can share their love for reading. It is a community "sustained by an active and diverse community of readers, booksellers, and teachers" (Hammoudi 1). Publishing houses use bookstagram as a marketing tool and cater to the young adult audience by sharing book-related news. This thesis drew a correlation between the size of the Instagram accounts of publishing houses and their reach within the young adult target audience, considering that the more people who have signed up for their content, the more impact the books they share will have. Therefore, the reach and visibility of publishing houses among generation Z were measured by the number of followers they had on Instagram at the time of writing. The twelve publishing houses whose publications were analysed can be found in table 1.

Publishing house	Instagram handle	Followers
Best of YA *(imprint of Unieboek | Het Spectrum)*	@bestofyabooks	11,3k
Blossom Books	@blossombooks	13,8k
Luitingh-Sijthoff	@lsamsterdam	9,4k

(imprint VBK media)	@vibyoungadult	2,1k
Zomer & Keuning *(imprint VBK media)*	@zomerkeuning	4,5k
Uitgeverij de Fontein *(imprint VBK media)*	@uitgeverijdefontein	12k
Boekerij Fantasy *(imprint of Meulenhoff Boekerij)*	@bestoffantasy @boekerij	3,3k 14,3k
The House of Books *(imprint Overamstel Uitgevers)*	@uitgeverijthb @overamstel_uitgevers	5,6k 1,4k
Moon Young Adult *(imprint Overamstel Uitgevers)*	@moonyoungadult	5,1k
Querido kinderboeken *(imprint Singel Uitgevers)*	@querido_kinderboeken @uitgeverijquerido	6,2k 3k
Volt kinderboeken *(imprint Singel Uitgevers*)	@voltkinderboeken	3,5k
HarperCollins YA *(imprint HarperCollins Holland)*	@yaharpercollins @harpercollins_holland	2,7k 4,7k
Uitgeverij Rainbow	@uitgeverijrainbow	6,1k

Table 1: Dutch Young Adult publishing houses and their Instagram following as measured on 6 March 2022

To analyse the diversity in YAL, the translated YA books published in 2021 had to be collected first. This was done through a process of elimination. First, an Excel sheet of the CVDM (Commissariaat voor de Media) was requested for this thesis, which contained a list of all Dutch books published in 2021. Dutch literature is subjected to the fixed book price law, which ensures "that a book will be sold for the same retail price in every shop" ("Setting fixed book prices"). The CVDM keeps records of these publications. In 2021, this was a collection of roughly 12.000 books spread out over all genres and Dutch publishing houses. After filtering this list based on the selected publishing houses, a list of 3121 books remained. The data collected by Best By the Numbers on reading habits also contained statistics on readers' preferred genres, which showed that 53% of gen Z likes to read fantasy books, on top of the 49% that said they enjoy reading young adult fiction (Kowalczyk). Consequently, fantasy novels, even when not explicitly aimed at young adults, were added as a boundary on top of YAL to narrow the scope further. Part of the list of books could be tagged with their respective genre using offer brochures from publishing houses. These provide a distinction between the

different genres of books published, including fantasy and young adult books, and clarify whether a book is translated by mentioning a translator if this is the case. The books of publishing houses that did not have an offer brochure were placed in the correct category through a thorough search on Google, bol.com and Goodreads. The final list was further divided into six sub-genres of YAL: fantasy, contemporary romance, contemporary literature, science fiction (sci-fi), thrillers, and graphic novels. They were placed within their corresponding genre based on the genre tags found on Goodreads, the world's largest literary platform for readers and book recommendations ("About us"). As for the characters, they were divided into four separate groups overall to determine their role in the books, namely:

- The **main character (MC)** is the point of view (POV) character the reader follows throughout the story.

- A **side character (SC)** is a character who plays a significant role in the story without being the point of focalisation. This research only mentions them if their sexuality is anything other than heterosexual.

- A **minor side character (MSC)** is a character who only occurs sparingly throughout the story. This research only mentions them if their sexuality is anything other than heterosexual.

- A **love interest (LI)** is an SC that functions as the love interest for the MC. This research only mentions them if their sexuality is anything other than heterosexual.

After the margins of the dataset were clarified, the remaining books' narratives were analysed for their inclusion of LGBTQ+ characters. As initially laid out, this thesis defines queer YAL as novels in which the characters identify as anything other than heterosexual or cisgender. No limitations were set regarding sexualities and gender identities, as the scope beheld everything that fell underneath the LGBTQ+ umbrella. Additionally, it was necessary to properly distinguish between a character who presents as straight and a character who identifies as

bisexual or pansexual but is in a relationship with someone from the opposite sex. This makes them appear to be in a straight-presenting relationship, but it should not be tagged as heterosexual since it will erase the validity of their sexuality. Consequently, these characters were respectively marked as 'bisexual' and 'pansexual'. A character was only tagged as straight and/or cisgender if the literary text did not offer anything to contradict this notion. This thesis is aware that this aligns with heteronormative and cisnormative thought patterns. However, since the analysis focused on how queer YAL serves as a counter-narrative for normativity, it is believed that this can only be done when such a counter-story is provided through a canonically queer character. Time limitations restricted me from reading every book, which is why the alleged representation was determined through secondary sources. Four platforms proved invaluable during this process, namely kirkusreviews.com, queerbooksforteens.com, commonsensemedia.org, and booktriggerwarnings.com. The majority of the literary dataset could be found and defined there. To ensure that the data on one platform was correct, one of the other platforms, plot summaries or book reviews were used to substantiate the data. Regardless, this approach was not as thorough as reading the books, and some characters have likely slipped the scope of this methodology. Still, this thesis operates under the understanding that if a character plays a significant role in a story, they will be mentioned at least once throughout several digital sources. If not, it is apparent that their contribution to the narrative was not worth mentioning and, therefore, does not hold enough impact to be of value in this analysis. Chapter 4 presents the statistical data from the quantitative research, visualised in graphs and tables, along with an interpretation and analysis of how these results fit in the larger discourse surrounding diversity and representation in YAL.

In chapter 5, three books that included LGBTQ+ characters were given a closer look. The quantitative research clarified the various types of representation present in the analysed novels. Based on those findings, three novels of three different genres were chosen that

contained varying queer identities, namely gay, bisexual, aromantic asexual, and lesbian characters. By observing books with differing types of representation, explored through different fictional genres, the broadest perspective could be conveyed within the time available, opening up the possibility of analysing queer characters in relation to normativity from different angles. The genres were contemporary romance (in a graphic novel), thrillers, and historical fiction. The close reading involved analysing queer characterisation and observations of normativity in the fictional society. This analysis aimed to show whether normativity was present in novels told from a queer POV and, if so, how it was dealt with.

Firstly, a closer look was given to the authors to see whether they wrote the novels with a specific intention in mind and, if so, whether this came across on the page. This analysis was performed using secondary sources, such as author interviews in which they speak up about the diversity in their books. The scope of the close reading then shifted to *how* sexualities were represented. Characterisation happens both indirectly and directly. Indirect characterisation is transferred to the reader through the character's thoughts, actions, speech, and dialogue and is used to "guide the reader in making their own conclusions about a character" (Blume). On the other hand, direct characterisation is done explicitly by, for example, describing a character's physical appearance, passions, or pursuits (Blume). This research looked at both direct and indirect characterisation for the portrayal of the queer character, keeping in mind that not all representation is considered good representation. Canada's centre for digital and media literacy set up questions to "help negotiate the meaning and ideological messages behind media representations of queer people" ("Queer Representation in the Media"). These include thinking critically about whose voices are being represented and what this representation says about them. After all, negative representation can do more harm than good when, for example, queer people are represented "based on negative stereotypes, or constantly portrayed as bad or evil people" (Kaur). Other types of harmful representation are token representation (when a queer

character "either doesn't play a notable role" or "doesn't have their identity meaningfully explored"), queerbaiting ("the inclusion of scenes that suggest a character might be LGBTQ+ while maintaining a distinct lack of evidence in the story to confirm or deny it") or retroactive representation, which happens when an author claims that certain characters are queer "although nothing in the story definitively confirms it" (Kaur). The analysis looked critically at the character's portrayal while being aware of the distinction between LGBT-inclusive and queer fiction. The aim was to determine whether the characterisation of the queer character(s) merely served as sentimental value for the queer community or whether their story challenges "the notion of what counts as normal" (Blackburn et al. 12). Additionally, the fictional society was analysed. This part looked at cisnormativity and heteronormativity and, consequently, whether this led to oppression and exclusion of queer characters. It contained a critical observation of the fictional society and whether the queer characters behaved according to normative standards or rebelled against them. Chapter 5 thus examined whether queer YAL functions as a counter-story to normativity or whether it still conforms to certain norms.

4 A GAME OF NUMBERS: DIVERSITY IN DUTCH YAL

This analysis was divided into three. First, a critical analysis was done on how diverse the collection of YA books published in 2021 was. An overview of the amount of queer literature was provided, after which the analysis dived deeper to investigate how many sexualities were represented and how often queer characters were featured as the main protagonist. It is important to note that not the number of characters per book with a certain sexuality or gender identity was counted but rather the types of queer identities in the novels. A book was marked with a sexuality or gender if at least one character identified as such, but this does not mean that there were not multiple characters with the same sexuality. The second part of this analysis focused on diversity per publishing house to establish which is leading in the diversification of the YA literary industry. Lastly, a closer look was given at the division of diversity per genre. Within the borders of this thesis, YAL was divided into six sub-genres: contemporary romance, contemporary literature, dystopian fiction, fantasy, thrillers, science fiction (Sci-Fi), and graphic novels. This research is aware that graphic novels are not necessarily a genre. Still, since there were only three, they were fitted in the same category because the visual aspect of storytelling in graphic novels distinguishes them from the other books. The critical analysis in this final section investigated whether one genre is more likely to include queer representation than another. The raw quantitative data can be found in the appendix on page 52.

4.1 GENERAL DIVERSITY

The results are relatively optimistic when looking at the broadest scope – whether or not sexual diversity occurs within a book. As shown in figure 1, nearly half of the analysed books (34) featured a character who identified as anything other than heterosexual or cisgender. Additionally, 23,4% of the 70, which are 17 books, this character was the POV character. Considering that previous research discovered that 16% of the people below the age of 29 identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community (Halim), it appears that if quantity is the only
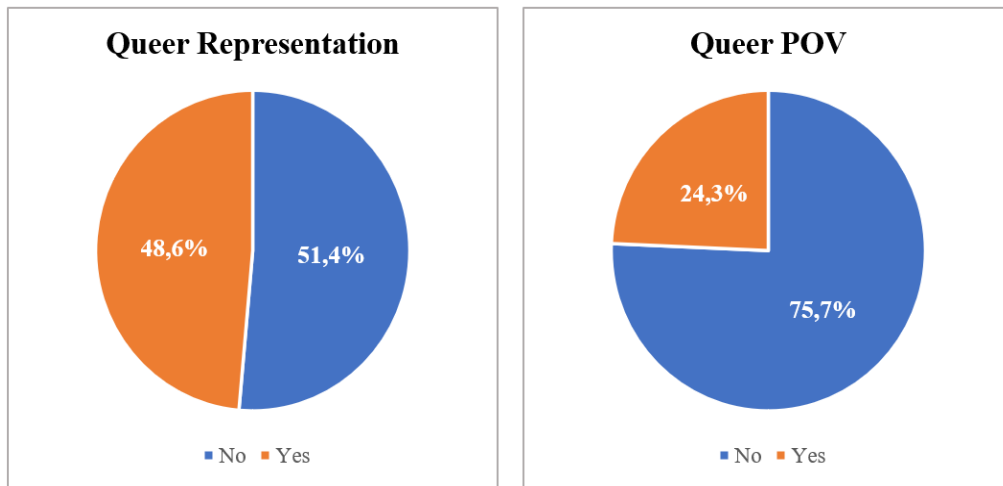
Figure 1: Two pie charts. The one on the left displays overall queer representation in the analysed YAL books. The one on the left displays how many of these books had a queer MC

valuable looked at, the representation of queer characters in YAL is above average. However, when the scope is narrowed, it becomes clear that this is not quite the case. The books were also analysed for the *type* of representation they contained, meaning the characters' sexualities and queer identities. Among the MC (figure 2), eight books had characters who identified as bisexual, seven as gay, three as lesbian, two as pansexual, and one as aroace (aromantic asexual). As for the SC (figure 2), fifteen books contained lesbian characters, twelve with gay characters, four with bisexual or pansexual, two with queer or transsexual, and one with a genderqueer character. At first glance, this also appears to be a varied range considering that eight different sexualities found a platform. Still, some only occur once or twice, and many sexualities are not represented. To properly interpret this, the data must be placed aside from
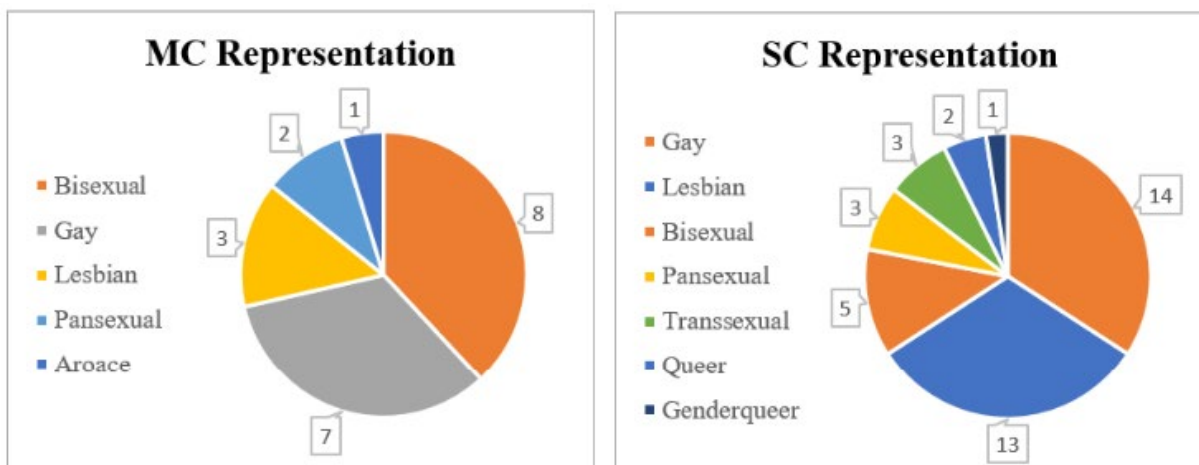

Figure 2: Two pie charts. The one on the left displays the sexualities represented by MC. The one on the right displays the sexualities represented by SC.

that of straight representation. Of all 70 books, 52 had a straight-presenting MC, and all featured at least one heterosexual character. Teens who identify as straight can find themselves represented in Dutch YAL without trying, whereas those whose identity falls upon the LGBTQ+ spectrum still have to put in the effort to find a book with an MC that is like them. Consequently, while this research shows that the translated literature offered to Dutch teenagers is relatively diverse, it also clarifies that it is not nearly as diverse as it could be. Surprising is also that none of these books features nonbinary characters, and the one genderqueer character is an SC in a novel told from a straight point of view. This indicates that cisnormativity, alongside heteronormativity, is still prominent in YAL despite the initial positive outlook of a 48,6% diversity rate. Considering that one in four LGBTQ+ teens use gender-neutral pronouns ("Pronouns Usage Among LGBTQ Youth"), this section of queer representation publishing houses still needs improvement.

4.2 DIVERSITY PER PUBLISHER

Figure 3 shows how the books that feature queer representation are divided among the publishing houses. Blossom Books appears to have the most representation, with nine books featuring a queer character and an equal division between books with only heterosexual characters and queer literature. Best of YA, De Fontein, and Luitingh-Sijthoff have relatively many books that do not feature any type of queer representation, making up respectively 64%, 87,5%, and 77,8% of their supply. Considering that, on average, 48,6% of YA books feature queer characters, these publishing houses rank below the mean. However, since Best of YA has published more translated YAL in 2021 than the other publishing houses, they are, on average, still the imprint with the second most queer books along with Boekerij Fantasy, as seen in figure

Diversity per publisher
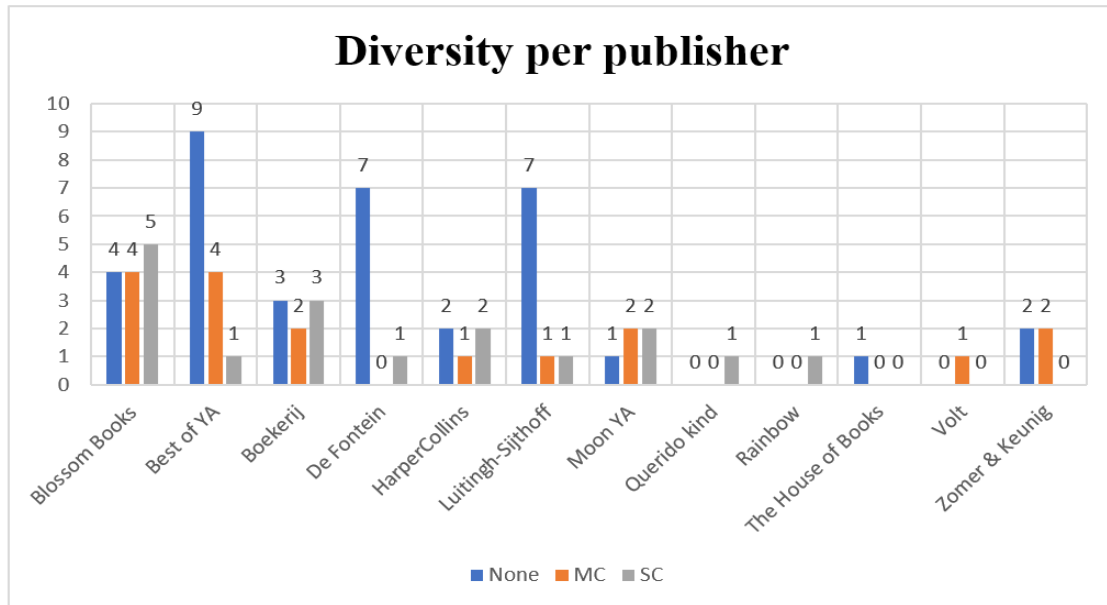
Figure 4: One bar chart. It displays the division of books with diverse sexual orientations per publishing house.

Queer books per publisher
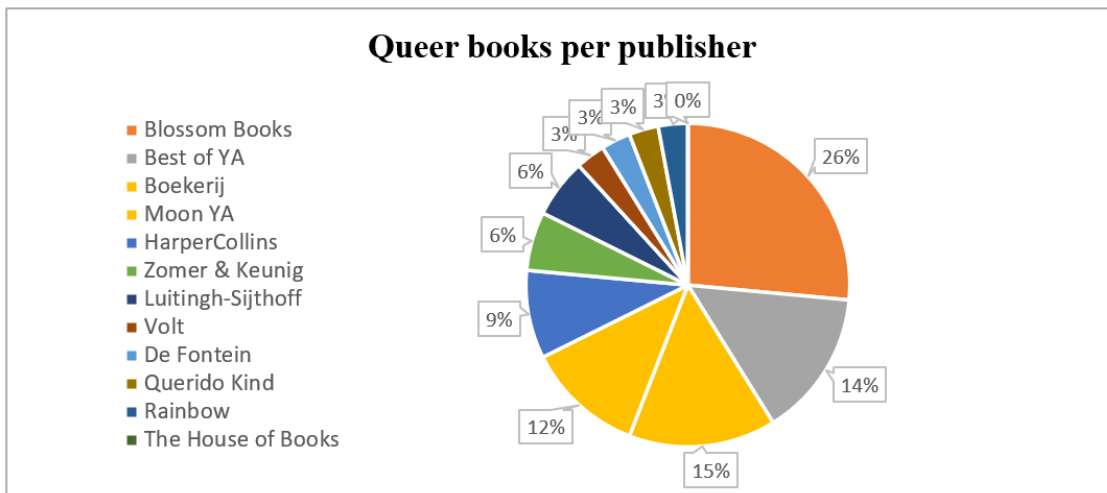
Figure 3: One pie chart. It displays the percentage of queer books (both MC and SC) per publishing house. The top three are Blossom Books (9 books, 26%), and Best of YA and Boekerij (both 5 books, 14,5%).

4. They both published five books with queer representation. The leading publishing house of queer literature appears to be Blossom Books, which published nine books with queer characters and is responsible for 26% of queer Dutch YAL available in 2021.

4.3 DIVERSITY PER GENRE

As can be seen in figure 5, half of the analysed books (35) were fantasy books. This genre was followed by contemporary romance (19 books). The other genres are relatively similar in quantity, with six thrillers, three books in sci-fi, contemporary literature, and graphic novels, and one dystopian book. Considering that the books allotted to those final five genres will not

Division of genres

- Fantasy
- Contemporary romance
- Thriller
- Contemporary literature
- Graphic novel
- Sci-fi
- Dystopian

50%
27%
9%
4%
4%
4%
2%
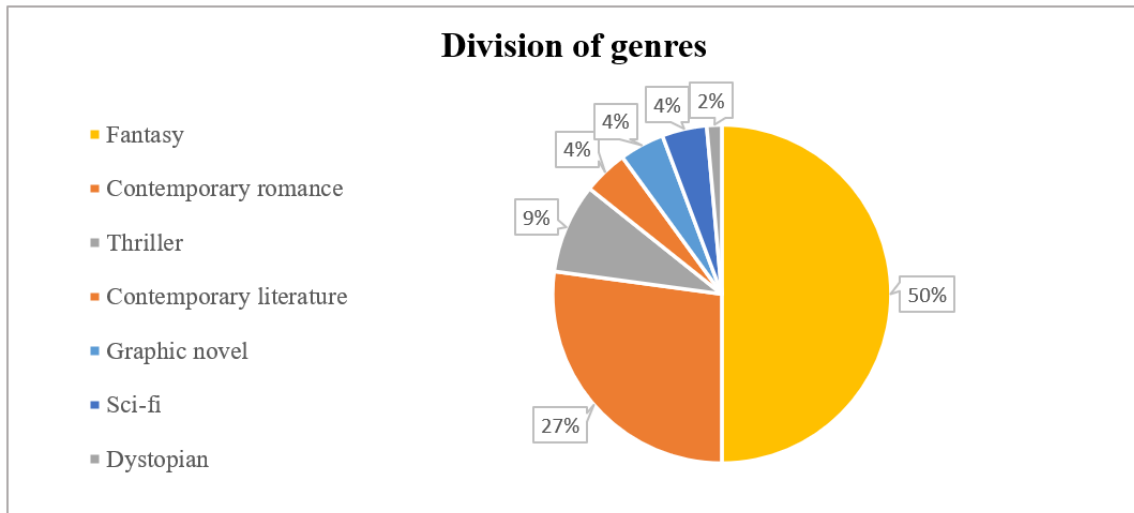
Figure 5: One pie chart. It displays a division of the various genres within the dataset of 70 books.

provide statistics that can speak for the entirety of the genre, the focus will be placed on the two

genres representing over three-quarters of the translated YAL offered to Dutch teens. While

more extensive research into those genres should be conducted to draw a more comprehensive

conclusion, there are enough fantasy and contemporary romance novels in this dataset to

provide an indication of queer representation compared to the average diversity rate determined

in 4.1. Figure 6 displays the division of diversity per genre. Of the 35 fantasy books, 20 (57,1%)

had no queer representation, nine (25,7%) did feature representation but through a side

character, and six (17,1%) had a queer MC. Overall, there were more books without

Diversity per genre

Genre	None	MC	SC
Fantasy	20	6	9
Contemporary romance	8	6	5
Contemporary literature	2	1	0
Thriller	2	1	3
Dystopian	1	0	0
Graphic novel	1	2	0
Sci-Fi	1	1	1
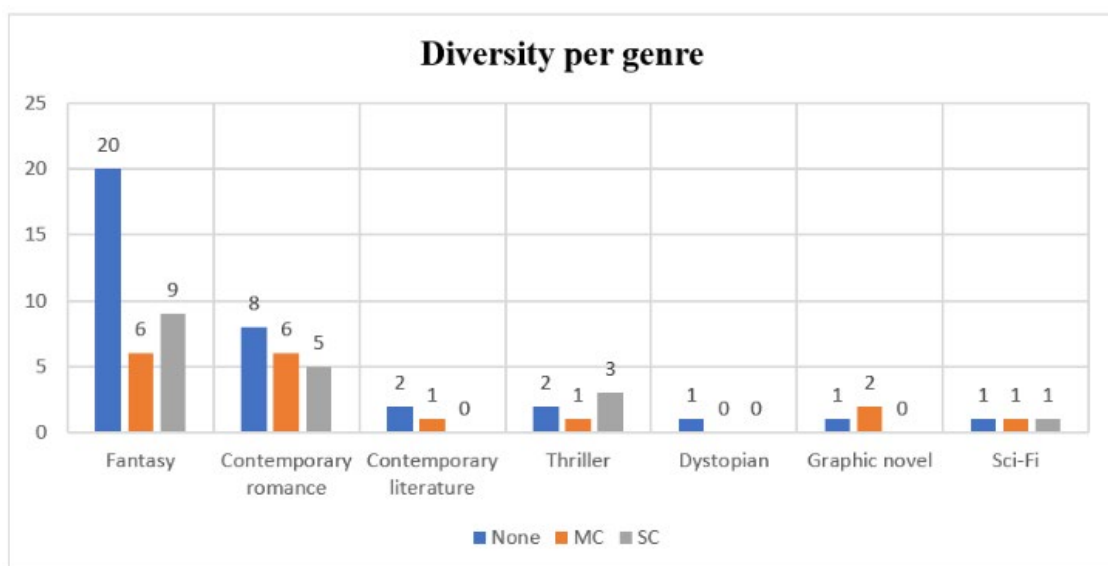
Figure 6: One bar chart. It displays how the queer representation was divided among the observed genres.

representation (20) than with it (15), which translates to 42,9% of the books featuring a queer character. This places the inclusion of queer characters in fantasy books just below the measured average of books with queer characters, which was 48,6%. Of the nineteen contemporary romance books, eight (42,1%) had no representation, five (26,3%) had a queer SC, and six (31,6%) featured a queer MC. This means that 57,9% of the contemporary fiction books published last year included queer representation, which is above average. Therefore, while fantasy had more queer books, the genre of contemporary romance features more representation in general. This aligns with the data provided by NPD BookScan on an increased commercial interest in queer romance novels (Harris).

5 A CLOSER LOOK: REPRESENTATION AND NORMATIVITY IN DUTCH YAL

This analysis focused only on the story's main characters (MC), meaning the POV characters. For clarity, quotes used to analyse the characterisation of the queer characters will be derived from the English editions of the books. In doing so, this research will remain legible to all. However, the title and the publisher of the Dutch version will be provided. The Dutch edition was cross-examined with the English version to compare whether the translation impacted the characterisation, and this was not the case.

5.1 ALICE OSEMAN – *HEARTSTOPPER: VOLUME ONE*

Dutch title: Heartstopper: deel 1

Alice Oseman is the author of the *Heartstopper*-series, which are contemporary graphic novels. They strongly advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and identify as aromantic asexual, with alternating she/her and they/them pronouns. She wanted to write a story that shows queer teens that "they deserve romance, friendship and love – that they can have full, joyful lives" (Oseman in Kelleher). Oseman states that while writing queer representation, she often takes "elements from [their] personal experience as a queer person" and that "much of Heartstopper comes from [her] own life" (Oseman in Sean Z.). When asked about queerbaiting, she says that she finds it "lazy and disrespectful" and that a fandom surrounding a book should be about "having fun, enjoying character chemistry, creativity, (for some people) exploring sexuality, and so much more good stuff. Not simply putting two male characters together and wanting them to bang because you find it hot" (Oseman in Sean Z.). Consequently, the representation in *Heartstopper: Volume One* (from hereon referred to as *Heartstopper*) is written to embody the ideals of queer literature rather than LGBT-inclusive literature. They wanted the story to have depth instead of merely gaining attention because there happens to be a romance between two boys.

Oseman initially started publishing *Heartstopper* as a webcomic via WebToons and Tapas in 2016. After a print-run of self-published copies, the first volume of the graphic novel was published through traditional publishing in 2019. Its Dutch translation followed two years later, in August 2021. *Heartstopper* follows the story of Charlie Spring and Nick Nelson. They both attend Truham Grammar School for Boys. A year before the start of the book, someone outed Charlie as gay, and he was bullied for it. Luckily, that does not happen anymore. Nick is on the rugby team and has heard about Charlie but has never spoken to him. When they are placed next to each other in their form group, they become quick friends, and Charlie starts to develop feelings for Nick. Nick, who previously believed he was straight, discovers that he has feelings for Charlie as well, which makes him question his sexuality and takes him on a journey of self-discovery throughout the novel (Oseman). Since *Heartstopper* is a graphic novel that uses both text and visuals, the quotes used for this analysis will consist of quoted dialogue and screenshots derived from the digitally published versions of the comic, which can be found on Tapas.io or Webtoons.com. This analysis focuses on the two MCs, Charlie Spring and Nick Nelson.

It is evident from the first panel (figure 7) that Charlie is a boy who likes boys, as he can be seen kissing Ben. Ben is not his boyfriend, though Charlie initially thought he was. However, later in the novel, Charlie explains that Ben "was just using [him] for someone to make out with... because [Charlie] was the only gay boy [Ben] knew" (Oseman 111). While they were together, Ben did not want anyone to know that he likes boys and was very concerned

Figure 5: comic panel from *Heartstopper Volume One* (Oseman 2)

about being found out. He forced Charlie to keep it a secret to ensure this did not happen. When Charlie discovers that Ben is cheating on him with a girl, he decides to break off his relationship via text message, to which Ben aggressively replies, "Why??? I don't understand. [For fuck's sake] we're not gonna

Figure 6: comic panel from *Heartstopper Volume One* (Oseman 14)

get caught" (Oseman 27). Ben's first instinct is to protect his social image, not his relationship with Charlie. This indicates the presence of heteronormativity in *Heartstopper* since the threat of being 'found out' carries a negative connotation. The implication is made that the other boys at Truman would react badly if they knew someone was attracted to boys. This is clarified further when it is revealed that Charlie was bullied when people found out he is gay, i.e. being bullied for deviating from the heteronormative standard. However, Charlie does not seem to be bothered by or question his sexuality throughout the story. He does not mind talking about having crushes on guys with his friend Tao (119), nor does he mind talking about being outed as gay with Nick (110).

Charlie's characterisation shows that he is secure in his sexuality but insecure about interactions with other people due to being bullied last year. Consequently, when he is placed next to Nick in his form group, he obsessively wonders why Nick is being kind to him and compares Nick's behaviour to that of the boys who bullied him (figure 8). It takes a while for Charlie to trust that Nick is genuine, but eventually, he accepts that Nick's kindness is not a ruse, and they become friends. This friendship is the start of Nick's discovery of his own sexuality. He is a rugby player and is friends with some of the people who bullied Charlie. Because of this, Tao is sceptical of Charlie's friendship with Nick, saying that Nick is "one of the rugby lads. He's friends with Harry Greene for God's sake. [...] He calls everyone 'mate'

and probably throws food at people on the bus" (23). Tao assumes that because Nick is friends with these people, he must have a similar mindset. However, the reader is provided with Nick's POV, which shows him genuinely enjoying Charlie's company, to the point where he notices Charlie running on another field and cannot take his eyes off him (figure 9).

As their friendship develops, it becomes clear that Nick's affection for Charlie also changes. His mother mentions that he seems "much more like himself around

Figure 7: comic panel from *Heartstopper Volume One* (Oseman 30)

[Charlie]" (157), and he finds himself longing for more physical contact with Charlie, such as holding his hand (180). These feelings are contrasted with a visual on the television where a man and a woman are kissing (figure 10, first image). This imagery is a visual representation of heteronormativity in media. It displays Nick's internal struggle with what he believed to be the normal way of loving since popular culture has shown him that a man is supposed to be attracted to women. *Heartstopper* explores all phases of Nick's internal struggle, providing representation for queer teens who had difficulty coming to terms with their sexuality. The first phase was their friendship, which developed into a crush that Nick did not acknowledge at first,

Figure 8: comic panels from *Heartstopper Volume One* (Oseman 181;192;194-195)

until eventually, Nick realises that what he feels for Charlie goes deeper than just friendship. Because Nick has never experienced anything like this before, he asks himself, "what is happening to me?" (187). In an attempt to understand it, he takes to Google to figure out whether he is gay and how it is possible that he likes girls but now has feelings for a boy (figure 10, second image). This, however, only raises more questions for him, and Nick is shown to be in distress because of his confusing feelings, asking for help from no one in particular with his head covered by blankets (figure 10, third image). His struggle with accepting his feelings for Charlie shows how heteronormativity has influenced his way of thinking. He finds it difficult to come to terms with this part of himself and instead tries to find an explanation for why he feels this way, despite not having one; it is just who he is. Still, by showing his struggles, teens who experience the same can find themselves represented. They are shown that it is not strange to feel this way or be scared at first. They can relate to Nick while simultaneously seeing Charlie's confidence regarding his sexuality. By providing a coming out in this narrative structure, queer teens are shown that it is okay to be confused but that it is not abnormal to deviate from a heteronormative standard.

For Charlie, Normativity is present most strongly in how he was treated when he came out and how he, at times, continues to be treated now that people know he is gay. When Nick thinks back to when this news spread through the school, he remembers the bullies saying that Charlie has "been getting a lot of shit for it" but that Truman "is an all-boy school", so "what did he expect?" (figure 11). These statements suggest that Charlie should not have been surprised that he was bullied for being different. They, therefore, underline the significant

Figure 9: comic panel from *Heartstopper Volume One* (Oseman 99)

impact of heteronormative thought patterns at Truman. However, because they are shared from

Nick's point of view, they are put into perspective. The bullies' behaviour is observed through

the lens of someone questioning their own sexuality, highlighting the embedded prejudice and

placing their comments in contrast with the mindset of someone who knows from experience

that their way of thinking is false. The result is that Oseman's normative society functions as

an emphasis for those reading the books that behaviour perceived as logical to some people,

such as giving someone a hard time for being gay in an all-boys school, should not be

normalised.

Oseman continues to defy false thought patterns by showing that queer people do not fit

within one stereotypical box, an approach that applies to both Nick and Charlie. Nick asks

Charlie to join the rugby team because he noticed Charlie is a fast runner. However, when Nick

lets his teammates know Charlie will join, Charlie's skills are questioned. They state that they

are sure Charlie is a nice guy but that that does not equal being good at sports. Some student

wants to know whether Charlie would even be interested in playing rugby because "everyone

knows he's gay" (Oseman 46). However, it only takes a week for people to notice that Charlie

fits in well with the team (figure 12). They realise they judged too early, considering the only

proper knowledge they had of Charlie was that he is gay. Nick
also argues that he doesn't "actually think being gay makes
you bad at sports", which is quickly downplayed by the other
teammate by saying, "I never said that!!" (Figure 12). Their
conversation highlights how, albeit unintentionally, prejudice
is linked to certain sexual identities. *Heartstopper* attempts to
break through this bias by displaying characters who do not
conventionally match the stereotypical image of, e.g., a jock,
showing that someone does not have to look or act a certain

Figure 10: comic panel from
Heartstopper Volume One (Oseman 62)

way to claim that identity for themself. The same applies to Nick. It is assumed he is straight because he likes rugby, is friends with people that act homophobic, and generally does not 'look' gay. As Tao phrases it, "just look at him. He's as straight as they come", to which Charlie says, "I know", agreeing with the statement that Nick does not fit the look and behaviour of someone queer (125). However, by writing Nick's discovery of his sexual identity, Oseman underlines that someone does not have to look or act a certain way to identify as LGBTQ+.

Overall, *Heartstopper* tells the story of Charlie, who is secure in his sexuality despite facing harassment for it, and Nick, who is coming to terms with feelings he did not expect to feel. The graphic novel aids in dismantling stereotypes of what a boy who is interested in boys is supposed to look or behave like. Heteronormativity is a substantial factor in the story, both internalised by Nick and in the society they live in. Still, by displaying normativity through the eyes of two queer teens, the flaws in this way of thinking are highlighted and addressed. As for cisnormativity, the story does not explicitly mention or show someone who identifies as anything other than cisgender. Consequently, no animosity or marginalisation was shown, though the comic does assume that everyone's gender accords with their biological sex. This can be because the characters grew up together and are thus already aware of their preferred pronouns. Still, it also results in a lack of representation of people who do not identify as cisgender. *Heartstopper Volume 1* is, therefore, not an active counter-story for cisnormativity. Oseman set out to give queer teenagers a story about romance, friendship and love, which is what *Heartstopper* succeeded at. It is a piece of contemporary high school fiction in which teens get crushes and get insecure about it. The only difference is that this time, the romance is queer. In doing so, it can be categorised as a queer discourse rather than an LGBT-inclusive discourse, as it actively aids the subversion of heteronormative standards.

5.2   TESS SHARPE – *THE GIRLS I'VE BEEN*

Dutch title: Mijn vele gezichten

Like Oseman, Sharpe, who identifies as bisexual, wanted to write a book because "representation is a big thing for [her]. [Her] life (like lots of people's) is full of family and friends of all sexualities, and everyone deserves to see themselves in books" (Sharpe and ABitCrazy). She believes in "the life-saving and transformative power of YA fiction" and that teens deserve to have something that speaks to them and they can relate to, which is why she tries to contribute to it through her novels (Sharpe and ABitCrazy). Her most recent thriller, *The Girls I've Been* (2021), is an example of this. It follows the story of Nora O'Malley. She was raised by a mother who was a con artist that targeted criminal men. Nora was taught these skills from an early age. Her mother made her adopt several different personalities throughout the years until Nora eventually escaped her mother's influence when she was twelve. She has been living freely with her older sister, Lee, for the last five years. However, when she visits the bank with her girlfriend Iris and ex and best friend Wes, it gets robbed at gunpoint. Nora has to use the skills from the girls her mother made her become to escape while simultaneously reminiscing the memories from her past (Sharpe).

In Sharpe's novel, the concept of identity stands central. As a con artist, Nora has lived many lives and has taken on many identities throughout her youth. While she sometimes struggles with distinguishing who she is and who her mother made her be, one thing she does not waver in is her understanding of her sexuality. Nora is presented as a character who is very secure with her bisexuality, a subject that appears as a fact rather than a point of debate throughout the book. Her sexuality is first characterised on the first page, where Nora thinks, "I could survive twenty minutes with my ex-boyfriend and new girlfriend" (Sharpe 11). Nora is currently dating Iris and has formerly dated Wes, both SC in de story. This leads the reader to assume that Nora identifies as either bisexual or pansexual, an assumption later confirmed when she contemplates her breakup with Wes. Nora thinks, "Wes and I didn't break up because I had

a big gay epiphany. Partly because I'm not gay. We didn't break up because I had a big bisexual epiphany, either. Even though I am bi. But we both knew that before Wes and I got together" (Sharpe 72). Her sexual identity is provided to the reader in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, without placing an extended focus on it being something that deviates from the 'norm'. In doing so, Sharpe partially normalises it in the story, although there are a couple of mentions of queerness being 'different'.

During a flashback of her childhood, Nora mentions a friend's mother, Diana, who was afraid her daughter would end up liking girls. She remembers, "*You're such a good influence, Samantha*, she tells me, and I don't understand it then, what she's actually saying. I don't understand what she's afraid of. I guess Diana would be surprised that the one dressed in frills turned out to be the one skipping down the rainbow path towards bisexual city" (Sharpe 102). Diana is afraid that her daughter identifies as queer because she enjoys playing roughly with her friends rather than behaving more femininely. Nora, who was personifying a girl named Samantha at the time, was told to be her exact opposite: "frilly and lacy and very, very pink" (101). Aside from the homophobia the mother displays towards her daughter, it is also an example of stereotypes connected to queerness. Because the daughter acts more masculinely, Diana fears she might be queer, whereas according to Nora, the traditional feminine behaviour of 'Samantha' would raise no suspicion. By addressing this train of thought, Sharpe highlights the divergent thought pattern aligned with a normative society, in which a certain kind of behaviour or preferred dress code would make you more likely to identify as LGBTQ+, rather than this being an inherent trait that a person is born with.

Nora also mentions an added roadblock that presents itself when you are attracted to girls: "when you're a girl who likes other girls, there's this little additional dance, because what if she doesn't? So you're not looking for red flags like a girl does with a guy – you're looking for rainbow ones" (Sharpe 30). With this, she compares red flags (a sign of danger) and rainbow

flags (a universally used symbol of queerness). She is referring to the fact that a person cannot assume someone of the same sex identifies as LGBTQ+, which is linked to the normative assumption that someone is heterosexual unless proven otherwise. It also shows that heteronormative thought patterns are present in queer people, as the act of 'looking' for signs that someone likes girls implicates that this is not something that can be asked outright. Similarly, Iris has not yet told her mother that she is attracted to girls and states that she has her "reasons for keeping stuff under the radar" (Sharpe 76). This implies that her mother discovering this part of her identity could potentially have consequences she does not want to face yet. The act of 'coming out' to someone is aligned with Nora's struggle to recognise whether someone falls upon the LGBTQ+ spectrum. In a heteronormative society, a person has to announce they are queer rather than have this be open to interpretation.

These examples show that normativity is still present in Sharpe's fictional world. However, keeping in mind that Queer Theory aims to subvert normative standards rather than believe they can be diminished altogether, Sharpe still succeeded in providing a queer character teens can relate to and look up to. Nora is presented as someone who has no issues with her bisexuality, and the few people she is close to are not fazed by it either. Sharpe's novel does not tell the story of a girl discovering she is bisexual but instead of a girl going through some horrifying experiences who happens to be queer. The romantic storyline in *All the Girls I've Been* plays a secondary role as it is already in place at the novel's start and remains a constant throughout the story. Her love for Iris serves as a drive for Nora to fight for those she cares about. With this, Sharpe provides a character in which people can recognise themselves without making their sexuality their main character trait. She has written a story in which a confident bisexual girl fulfils the heroine's role, making her everything *but* inferior to a heterosexual counterpart. As for cisnormativity, like with Heartstopper, it does not hold a specific point of focus in The Girls I've Been, other than that Nora adopts stereotypical feminine traits to achieve

what she wants, such as dressing 'frilly' around Diana. This behaviour shows the existence of gender norms and opens the discourse on what it means to be a woman or a man. It indicates that gendered behaviour is easily fabricated and not an inherent trait aligned with a person's biological sex. However, Sharpe does not explicitly address the existence of genders other than cisgender or further stimulate the discussion surrounding gender norms. This implies that cisnormativity is still embedded in *The Girls I've Been*.

5.3   MACKENZI LEE – *THE LADY'S GUIDE TO PETTICOATS AND PIRACY*

Dutch title: De expeditie van Felicity Montague

Mackenzi Lee, the author of *The Lady's Guide to Petticoats and Piracy* (initially published in 2018, translated in 2021), is openly bisexual. In an op-ed about how fans from her books now see her as trustworthy enough to come out to, she discusses how scary it was for her when she first came out to a friend. Lee states that she needed to "hear that [she] was okay, and [she] was going to be okay" (Lee, "Why Strangers Come Out to Her"), a task now placed upon her when fans entrust her with their identity. It made her reminisce about the importance of representation in fiction. Lee writes, "Sometimes it takes seeing yourself in someone else before you recognize your own reflection. Fiction can be a lighthouse – a light from a shore you don't yet know is there, guiding you toward it. And here am I, the lighthouse keeper, sending out the beam, the first person you see when you step onto the shore" (Lee, "Why Strangers Come Out to Her"). With this, she means that her novels are meant as a mirror to those seeking their identity and that she hopes she can help illuminate this search through fiction. One way she tries to achieve this is through her Montague Siblings series, a series of three books set in a historical period.

The Lady's Guide to Petticoats and Piracy (from hereon called *The Lady's Guide*) is a sequel to *A Gentleman's Guide to Vice and Virtue* (2017), which also featured queer MC. However, where the first instalment focused on the romance between Monty and Percy, who are bisexual and gay, the sequel has Felicity, an aroace character, as its MC, and Monty and Percy only make a brief appearance at the beginning. *The Lady's Guide* is set in the mid-1700s in Great Britain and starts with a marriage proposal gone wrong. Callum, a baker Felicity works for in Edinburgh, wishes to marry her, but she has no romantic feelings for him. Felicity only wishes to be allowed to study medicine, but this is not permitted because she is a woman. In a desperate attempt to be granted the opportunity to study regardless, she travels to Stuttgart for the wedding of an old friend, Johanna, who is marrying a doctor Felicity idolises. To facilitate this trip, Felicity accepts the help of a young woman sailor called Sim, who agrees to pay for the journey

as long as she is granted access to Johanna's house once they arrive. However, when Sim's true motives are revealed, Felicity becomes part of a perilous quest (Lee, *The Lady's Guide*).

Felicity is characterised as a woman who knows what she wants despite being halted on all sides by men whose worldview dominates the profession she is after: becoming a physician. This does, however, not diminish her passion. She states that "a year of men telling me I am incapable of this work only gives my pride a more savage edge, and I feel [...] that I am as clever and capable and fit for the medical profession as any of the men who have denied me a place in it" (lee, *The Lady's Guide* 16). Their dismissal only fuels her to continue fighting for a spot in a line of education she believes she deserves to claim, going as far as to travel to London and be granted an audience under false pretences. Felicity's determination and cleverness show her to be a bright young woman who is not afraid to take a stand, regardless of others' opinions. However, people do not understand why she cannot adhere to the norms allotted to females in her time. She does not want to marry, nor does she want to stop pursuing her passion. The men in her life chastise her for this, belittling her beliefs to be the wild dreams of a woman that will settle down eventually. Monty states, "Everyone wants things. [...] Everyone's got a hunger like that. It passes. Or it gets easier to live with" (84). Still, despite the lack of faith people have in Felicity, she does not let this stop her. She has adopted a clear goal for herself, a life she wishes to lead. And, as becomes evident, this life does not include a romantic partner.

Felicity is shown to be someone who does not enjoy physical affection. When Callum proposes, he tries to kiss her, and she contemplates the journey that had led her to this point. She thinks, "when Callum and I first met, I had been lonely enough to not only accept his employment, but also the companionship that came with it, which gave him the idea that men often get in their heads when a woman pays some kind of attention to them: that it was a sign I want him to smash his mouth – and possibly other body parts – against mine. Which I do not" (22). She continues to analyse the kiss by thinking, "It's nowhere near as unenjoyable as my

previous experience with the act, though just as wet and just as dispassionate a gesture, the oral equivalent of a handshake" (22). Her distaste for and apparent disinterest in physical displays of affection are the first indicators of a lack of sexual attraction. This is further emphasised when Sim and Felicity talk about how they envision their future, and it becomes apparent Felicity identifies as aroace. Her aromanticism is heavily implied when Felicity confides in Sim that she does not aspire to be married but merely wishes to have a house of her own and be surrounded by friends she considers her family. While Sim notes that it sounds like a lonely existence, Felicity states that "that sort of aloneness doesn't feel lonely to [her]" (311). Sim then counters that Felicity only feels that way because she has never been with someone. This is a common argument people are given when they confess they identify as asexual and/or aromantic, which inherently invalidates their sexual identity and corresponding feelings (Mehra). However, Felicity counters that she does not need to experience something to know that it is not something she desires, thus going against those arguments and providing a role model for queer teens who share similar emotions.

Regardless, Sim wonders if it would make a difference if Felicity was kissed by a girl and tries it, but it only solidifies Felicity's feelings towards physical displays of affection. She thinks, "It feels bold and shy both at once, like giving and taking. [...] But beyond the physical observations, it's nothing. Not wholly unpleasant, but neither something I'm anxious to repeat. Just a thing people do" (Lee *The Lady's Guide* 313). It does not matter what the person's sex is; Felicity simply does not enjoy the act, as is typical for someone identifying as asexual. Still, during this discussion, Felicity starts to think about how she feels about her sexual identity. It makes her realise that it comes with a different kind of loneliness, stemming from not having anyone who experiences life the same way she does. She thinks, "I feel strange suddenly, the old itch of fear that I am a feral girl in a domesticated world, watched by everyone with pity and concern. There are men like Monty, with perverse desires, but they find each other and

carve out small corners of the world, and likely women too who find themselves only drawn to the fairer sex. And there's me, an island all my own" (312). With this, Felicity means that there appears to be a place in the world for people who like people of the same sex, but for those who like none at all, there does not seem to be anyone who can relate to it. In that sense, the life Felicity wishes to live does not lead to loneliness, but loneliness can come from not having a mirror image to look into and see themselves reflected back. This is also the stance of this thesis and what Lee intends to achieve with her novels when she says that "sometimes it takes seeing yourself in someone else before you recognize your own reflection" (Lee, "Why Strangers Come Out to Her"). It is why queer teenagers must be provided with literature with proper representation, as this establishes that they are not alone in the way they experience the world.

The Lady's Guide shows how a woman can be confident in her sexuality and carry herself in a world run by men. In that sense, it is as much a queer novel as it is a feministic one, but those two factors enhance each other in Lee's work. Felicity is strong-willed in her desire to achieve as much as any male in her society. She knows that what she wants differs from the norm, the same way she knows that how she feels about relationships is not what is perceived as normal. Still, she does not settle by accepting a marriage proposal from a baker because it is the easier route, nor does she let herself be told she cannot practise medicine because she happens to be a girl. As Felicity repeats to herself throughout the book, "You are not a fool, you're a fighter, and you deserve to be here. You deserve to take up space in this world" (Lee, *The Lady's Guide* 107). Instead of letting herself be silenced by the pressure of a normative society, she continues to fight against it, and in that sense, *The Lady's Guide* can be perceived as quite empowering. Lee puts the queer discourse in contrast with a world that does not yet understand or approve of it, but through the eyes of Felicity, the novel comes layered in self-acceptance. Those around Felicity might not understand her, but she stands secure in her beliefs and does not waver as a trade-off for acceptance. This makes her a strong role model for

teenagers trying to come to terms with deviating from normative standards. As for cisnormativity, while the storyline focuses on the binary constrictions of gender norms and how Felicity rebels against them, there is no mention of a gender other than cisgender. However, an argument can be made that this story is set in the mid-1700 when the use of non-binary pronouns was not common. Regardless, no explicit counter-story for cisnormativity can be found in *The Lady's Guide*.

6 CONCLUSION

Fiction has the power to adjust a person's point of view and enable them to experience the world through the eyes of someone else. By providing literature told from the perspective of a queer teenager, issues come to light that would not be noted otherwise. Charlie's perspective shows how being bullied for your sexuality makes someone question kindness. Nick's perspective sheds light on figuring out your sexuality when surrounded by normative stereotypes, making it difficult to accept who you are. Nora's perspective gives insight into how it is to be secure in your sexuality in a world that still has some way to go, despite not being entirely sure who you are as a person. And lastly, Felicity's perspective shows that no matter what the world wants you to be, it is always best to stay true to who you know you are. Some of these truths are universal, but the difference is that in queer YA literature, they are explicitly aimed at queer teens, who might not have yet seen this side of themselves acknowledged in books. They are provided with lenses similar to their own to observe a world of fiction. While this thesis only looked at three novels and can thus not definitively say that heteronormativity is always present, these findings do indicate that this is common in YAL. Still, while it is present, perceiving heteronormativity through the point of view of a queer character rationalises it and places it in perspective. It provides insight into the logical flaws of seeing one sexuality as the norm and thus subverts heteronormativity. However, research with a larger quantity of close readings can give a more definitive answer on how often heteronormativity can still be observed in YAL.

Contrarily, while heteronormativity is challenged in the analysed books, cisnormativity was not. The quantitative data showed only one genderqueer character, an SC, in a story in which the MC presented as straight and cisgender. Since the close readings of this thesis focused on fiction with a queer MC, this novel was not analysed to observe whether cisnormativity was subverted. Additionally, none of the three analysed books mentioned 'abnormal' genders, therefore not playing a role in destigmatising gender identities that deviate from cisgender.

While the books breached the subject of rigid gender norms and stereotypes allotted to certain sexualities, opening up the conversation for identities that are not as black and white as the binary dichotomy of man-woman, there was no active focus on providing representation for those that fall upon the non-binary spectrum. These findings, along with the general lack of non-binary, genderqueer or trans characters, indicate that the diversification of gender identities in YAL is not extensive enough to provide a counter-story for cisnormativity or offer fiction in which teens with non-binary pronouns can find themselves represented. Additionally, the quantitative data showed that there is still a significant imbalance in how much Dutch queer YAL is available. While half of the books featured some queer representation (either through an MC or SC), it must be remembered that heterosexual and cisgender characters are present in every book, whereas some queer sexualities and genders were not represented at all. Strides are being made to diversify the available books through initiatives such as the Diversity & Inclusion Code. Still, this research aligns with their explorative results, which stated that one in five queer people finds there are insufficient books that focus on diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Richards and Nagelhout 7; 60). Still, while the quantity remains to be improved, the close readings did show that the quality of books featuring non-heteronormative narratives appears to be sufficient. Regardless, based on the changes in the field and the growing demand from consumers, as the data in the introduction showed, the Dutch literary field has not yet abided to the potential of the diversification of YAL.

A suggestion for further research could be to analyse the reading habits of those who read books with queer discourses and conduct surveys and interviews to determine what kind of literature is still missing according to the consumer. Additionally, the research conducted for this thesis was bound by time constraints. This forced the dataset to remain narrow, limiting it to literature aimed at young adults and only covering novels published from English to Dutch in 2021. Future research is recommended to expand on this thesis's findings by expanding the

scope. This can, for example, be done by including literature of Dutch origin, translations from languages other than English (such as German or French), comparing these results with data from previous years, or shifting the demographic to include literature aimed at adolescents or adults as well. It is also recommended to conduct a similar analysis on the books published in 2022. This would allow for cross-comparison between the findings of this thesis and the developments that occurred throughout the following year. Additionally, a more in-depth scope could be placed on the publishing houses by conducting interviews with their editorial staff and publishers to discover their approach to diversifying the books they offer, which can then be compared to their actual publications. Lastly, additional research should be conducted with a specific focus on cisnormativity. This thesis indicated that the diversification of genders is still underdeveloped in young adult literature. It would be interesting to see how this is currently present in the literary field and whether publishing houses have a set-out approach to improve gender diversity in the upcoming years.

Evidently, this thesis is all but a fragment of data on the diversification of YAL, and it is the hope that this research will develop in the years to come to continuously aid in improving queer discourse in literature offered to teenagers. It set out to answer the question, "*To what extent is normativity present in young adult literature translated into Dutch by mainstream publishing houses in 2021?*". It provided insight into the diversification of the Dutch literary market aimed at teenagers. While normativity is still present, both heteronormativity and cisnormativity, counter-stories are provided against the normative nature of heterosexuality and some steps were taken that made gender norms appear less rigid. The hope is that cisnormativity will also decrease in the years to come and that, eventually, those who identify as 'other' no longer have to struggle to find a piece of literature in which they are represented.

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APPENDIX

Raw data of books that contained no queer representation:

BOOKTITLE ENGLISH	BOOKTITLE DUTCH	AUTHOR FN	AUTHOR LN	PUBLISHER MAIN	PUBLISHER IMPRINT	GENRE	ROMANCE (Y/N)	REP (Y/N)	MC? (Y/N)	SEXUALITY MC 1
The Great Godden	De Godden broers	Meg	Rosoff	VBK	Luitingh-Sijthoff BV, Uitgever	Contemporary romance	Yes	No	No	-
Pride and Prejudice	Trots & vooroordeel	Jane	Austen	Blossom Books	-	Contemporary literature	Yes	No	No	Straight
An Emotion of Great Delight	Een intens gelukkig gevoel	Tahereh	Mafi	Blossom Books	-	Contemporary literature	Yes	No	No	Straight
Long Way Down: The Graphic Novel	67 seconden: de graphic novel	Jason	Reynolds	Blossom Books	-	Graphic novel	No	No	No	Straight
Scythe 1: Arc of a Scythe	Zeis	Neal	Shusterman	Blossom Books	-	dystopian	No	No	No	Straight
The Betrayed	De bedrogene	Kiera	Cass	Unieboek | Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Contemporary romance	Yes	No	No	Straight
10 Truths and a Dare	10 truths en een dare	Ashley	Elston	Unieboek | Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Contemporary romance	Yes	No	No	Straight
Tokyo Ever After	Tokio voor altijd	Emiko	Jean	Unieboek | Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Contemporary romance	Yes	No	No	Straight
A Court of Silver Flames	Hof van zilveren vlammen	Sarah J.	Maas	Unieboek | Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Fantasy	Yes	No	No	Straight
Summoner: The Battlemage	De strijdmagiër, Summoner 3	Taran	Matharu	Unieboek | Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Fantasy	No	No	No	Straight
Summoner: The Outcast	De outcast, Summoner 4	Taran	Matharu	Unieboek | Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Fantasy	No	No	No	Straight
Contender: The Champion	De overwinnaar, Contender 3	Taran	Matharu	Unieboek | Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Fantasy	No	No	No	Straight
Now a Major Motion Picture	Nu in de bioscoop	Cory	McCarthy	Unieboek | Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Contemporary romance	Yes	No	No	Straight
Daughter of the Deep	Dochter van de diepzee	Rick	Riordan	Unieboek | Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Fantasy	No	No	No	Straight
City of Brass	bronzen stad	S.A.	Chakraborty	Meulenhoff Boekerij BV	Boekerij	Fantasy	Yes	No	No	Straight
The Prison Healer	genezer van Zalindov	Lynette	Noni	Meulenhoff Boekerij BV	Boekerij	Fantasy	Yes	No	No	Straight
Dreams of Gods and Monsters	Godenslaap	Laini	Taylor	Meulenhoff Boekerij BV	Boekerij	Fantasy	yes	No	No	Straight
Fallen Crest High	Val voor jou	Tijan	-	VBK	De Fontein	Contemporary romance	Yes	No	No	Straight
Fallen Crest Family	Gek op jou	Tijan	-	VBK	De Fontein	Contemporary romance	Yes	No	No	Straight
Poisoned	Vergif	Jennifer	Donnelly	VBK	De Fontein	Fantasy	Yes	No	No	Straight
They Wish They Were Us	De insiders	Jessica	Goodman	VBK	De Fontein	Thriller	Yes	No	No	Straight
None Shall Sleep	Ik zie, ik zie..	Ellie	Marney	VBK	De Fontein	Thriller	No	No	No	Straight
American Royals II	Majesteit	Katherine	McGee	VBK	De Fontein	Contemporary romance	Yes	No	No	Straight
Happily Ever After	Lang en gelukkig?	Kelly	Oram	VBK	De Fontein	Contemporary romance	Yes	No	No	Straight
The Iron Raven	De IJzerraaf	Julie	Kagawa	HarperCollins	HarperCollins Holland	Fantasy	Yes	No	No	Straight
The Glass Queen	Breekbaar als glas	Gena	Showalter	HarperCollins	HarperCollins Holland	Fantasy	Yes	No	No	Straight
Witch's Oath	De Kinderen van D'Hara 4 - De Eed van de Heks	Terry	Goodkind	VBK	Luitingh-Sijthoff BV, Uitgever	Fantasy	Yes	No	No	Straight
Into Darkness	De Kinderen van D'Hara 5 - De duisternis in	Terry	Goodkind	VBK	Luitingh-Sijthoff BV, Uitgever	Fantasy	Yes	No	No	Straight
The Last Graduate	De Laatste Leerling	Naomi	Novik	VBK	Luitingh-Sijthoff BV, Uitgever	Fantasy	Yes	No	No	Straight
The Black Song (book 2 of Raven's Blade)	In de Schaduw van de Wolf 2 - Het Zwarte Lied	Anthony	Ryan	VBK	Luitingh-Sijthoff BV, Uitgever	Fantasy	No	No	No	Straight
A Pilgrimage of Swords	De Zeven Zwaarden 1 - Een Pelgrimstocht van Zwaarden	Anthony	Ryan	VBK	Luitingh-Sijthoff BV, Uitgever	Fantasy	No	No	No	Straight
The Kraken's Tooth	De Zeven Zwaarden 2 - De Krakentand	Anthony	Ryan	VBK	Luitingh-Sijthoff BV, Uitgever	Fantasy	No	No	No	Straight
The Kingdom	Het Koninkrijk	Jess	Rothenberg	Overamstel Uitgevers BV	Moon Young Adult	Sci-Fi	Yes	No	No	Straight
Stranger Things: Suspicious Minds	Verwante geesten	Gwenda	Bond	Overamstel Uitgevers BV	The House of Books	Sci-Fi	No	No	No	Straight
From Blood and Ash	Uit bloed en as	Jennifer L.	Armentrout	VBK	Zomer & Keunig	Fantasy	Yes	No	No	Straight
Grace and Glory	Grace and glory	Jennifer L.	Armentrout	VBK	Zomer & Keunig	Fantasy	Yes	No	No	Straight

Raw data of books that contained a queer SC:

BOOKTITLE ENGLISH	BOOKTITLE DUTCH	AUTHOR FN	AUTHOR LN	PUBLISHER MAIN	PUBLISHER IMPRINT	GENRE	ROMANCE (Y/N)	REP (Y/N)	MC? (Y/N)	SEXUALITY MC 1
The Inheritance Games	De erfenis	Jennifer Lynn	Barnes	Blossom Books	-	Thriller	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
The Hawthorne Legacy	De verloren erfgenaam	Jennifer Lynn	Barnes	Blossom Books	-	Thriller	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
Lore	Lore	Alexandra	Bracken	Blossom Books	-	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
A Heart so Fierce and Broken	Een hart zo vurig	Brigid	Kemmerer	Blossom Books	-	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
A Vow so Bold and Deadly	Een eed zo duivels	Brigid	Kemmerer	Blossom Books	-	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
You'll be the Death of Me	Jij wordt nog eens mijn dood	Karen	McManus	Unieboek | Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Thriller	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
The Queen of Nothing	verbannen koningin	Holly	Black	Meulenhoff Boekerij BV	Boekerij	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
Tithe	Water	Holly	Black	Meulenhoff Boekerij BV	Boekerij	Fantasy	yes	Yes	No	Straight
Valiant	Bloed	Holly	Black	Meulenhoff Boekerij BV	Boekerij	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
K-Pop Confidential	K-pop crush	Stephan	Lee	VBK	De Fontein	Contemporary romance	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
Blood & Honey	Bloed & Honing	Shelby	Mahurin	HarperCollins	HarperCollins Holland	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
Gods & Monsters	Goden & Monsters	Shelby	Mahurin	HarperCollins	HarperCollins Holland	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
Chain of Gold	Ketting van goud	Cassandra	Clare	VBK	Luitingh-Sijthoff BV, Uitgever	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
Sex Education: The Road Trip	Sex Education - De roadtrip	Katy	Birchall	Overamstel Uitgevers BV	Moon Young Adult	Contemporary romance	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
Breathless	Ademloos	Jennifer	Niven	Overamstel Uitgevers BV	Moon Young Adult	Contemporary romance	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
Instructions for dancing	Dansen voor beginners	Nicola	Yoon	Querido	Querido kind	Contemporary romance	Yes	Yes	No	Straight
On the Come Up	Niet te stoppen	Angie	Thomas	Overamstel Uitgevers BV	Rainbow	Contemporary romance	Yes	Yes	No	Straight

BOOKTITLE ENGLISH	SEXUALITY MC 2	SEXUALITY LI (SC 1)	SEXUALITY SC 2	SEXUALITY SC 3	SEXUALITY SC 4	SEXUALITY SC 5	SEXUALITY MSC
The Inheritance Games	-	-	Lesbian	-	-	-	-
The Hawthorne Legacy	-	-	Lesbian	-	-	-	-
Lore	-	-	Gay	-	-	-	-
A Heart so Fierce and Broken	-	-	-	-	-	-	Gay
A Vow so Bold and Deadly	-	-	-	-	-	-	Gay
You'll be the Death of Me	-	-	Gay				
The Queen of Nothing	-	-	Bisexual	-	-	-	-
Tithe	-	-	Gay	-	-	-	-
Valiant	-	-	Queer	-	-	-	-
K-Pop Confidential		-	Gay				
Blood & Honey	-	-	Gay	Bisexual	-	-	-
Gods & Monsters	-	-	Gay	Bisexual			
Chain of Gold	-	-	Bisexual	Gay	Lesbian	Genderqueer	-
Sex Education: The Road Trip	-	-	Gay	-	-	-	-
Breathless	-	-	Lesbian	-	-	-	-
Instructions for dancing	-	-	Lesbian	-	-	-	-
On the Come Up	-	-	Gay	-	-	-	Lesbian

Raw data of books that contained a queer MC:

BOOKTITLE ENGLISH	BOOKTITLE DUTCH	AUTHOR FN	AUTHOR LN	PUBLISHER MAIN	PUBLISHER IMPRINT	GENRE	ROMANCE (Y/N)	REP (Y/N)	MC? (Y/N)	SEXUALITY MC 1
The Lady's Guide to Petticoats and Piracy	De expeditie van Felicity Montague	Mackenzi	Lee	Blossom Books	-	Contemporary literature	No	Yes	Yes	Aroace
Phoenix Flame	Havenfall 2: Feniksvlam	Sara	Holland	Blossom Books	-	Fantasy	No	Yes	Yes	Bisexual
A Beautifully Foolish Endeavor	Een mooie vreemde ontdekking	Hank	Green	HarperCollins	HarperCollins Holland	Sci-Fi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Bisexual
Darkdawn	Nimmernacht 3 - Duistere Dageraad	Jay	Kristoff	VBK	Luitingh-Sijthoff BV, Uitgever	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Bisexual
The Girls I've been	Mijn vele gezichten	Tess	Sharpe	Overamstel Uitgevers BV	Moon Young Adult	Thriller	Yes	Yes	Yes	Bisexual
One Last Stop	De laatste halte	Casey	McQuiston	VBK	Zomer & Keunig	Contemporary romance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Bisexual
Aristotle and Dante Dive into the Waters of the World	Aristoteles & Dante duiken in de wateren van de wereld	Benjamin Alire	Sáenz	Blossom Books	-	Contemporary romance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Gay
Blackout	Blackout	Various authors	-	Unieboek	Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Contemporary romance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Gay
Fin & Rye & Fireflies	Fin & Rye	Harry	Cook	Unieboek	Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Contemporary romance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Gay
Heartstopper Volume 1	Heartstopper Deel 1, Nick en Charlie ontmoeten elkaar	Alice	Oseman	Unieboek	Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Graphic novel	Yes	Yes	Yes	Gay
Heartstopper Volume 2	Heartstopper Deel 2, Nick en Charlie worden verliefd	Alice	Oseman	Unieboek	Het Spectrum	Best of YA Books	Graphic novel	Yes	Yes	Yes	Gay
The Lost Book of the White	Helderwitte macht: Vloeken uit het verleden 2	Cassandra	Clare	Overamstel Uitgevers BV	Moon Young Adult	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Gay
Boyfriend material	Boyfriend material	Alexis	Hall	VBK	Zomer & Keunig	Contemporary romance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Gay
The Serpent's Curse	vloek van de slang	Lisa	Maxwell	Meulenhoff Boekerij BV	Boekerij	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Lesbian
The Lucky List	Bucketlist vol geluk	Rachael	Lippincott	Querido	Volt	Contemporary romance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Lesbian
Rule of Wolves	Het oordeel van de wolf	Leigh	Bardugo	Blossom Books	-	Fantasy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Pansexual
The Invisible Life of Addie Larue	Onzichtbare leven van Addie Larue	V.E.	Schwab	Meulenhoff Boekerij BV	Boekerij	Fantasy	yes	yes	Yes	Pansexual

BOOKTITLE ENGLISH	SEXUALITY MC 2	SEXUALITY LI (SC 1)	SEXUALITY SC 2	SEXUALITY SC 3	SEXUALITY SC 4	SEXUALITY SC 5	SEXUALITY MSC
The Lady's Guide to Petticoats and Piracy	-	-	Lesbian	Gay	-	-	-
Phoenix Flame	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
A Beautifully Foolish Endeavor	-	Lesbian	-	-	-	-	-
Darkdawn	-	Lesbian	-	-	-	-	-
The Girls I've been		Bisexual	-	-	-	-	-
One Last Stop		Lesbian	-	Transsexual	gay	pansexual	-
Aristotle and Dante Dive into the Waters of the World	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Blackout	Lesbian		-	-	-	-	-
Fin & Rye & Fireflies	-	-	Gay	Pansexual	Transsexual	-	-
Heartstopper Volume 1	Bisexual	-	Bisexual	-	-	-	Lesbian
Heartstopper Volume 2	Bisexual	-	Lesbian	Transsexual	-	-	-
The Lost Book of the White	Bisexual	-	-	-	-	-	-
Boyfriend material	-	Gay	-	-	-	-	-
The Serpent's Curse	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
The Lucky List	-	Lesbian	-	-	-	-	-
Rule of Wolves	Straight	Lesbian	-	-	-	-	Transsexual
The Invisible Life of Addie Larue	-	Pansexual	-	lesbian	gay	queer	-