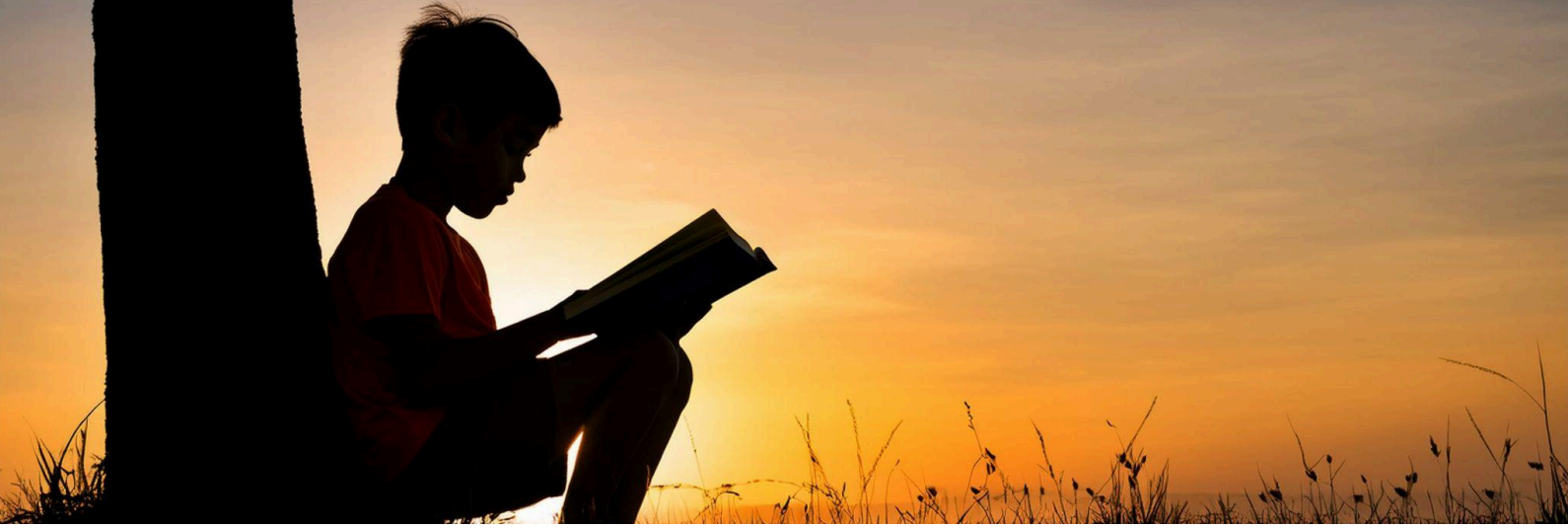

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Queering the Short Story Cycle for Young Adult Fiction

Chloe Cannell

Abstract
Queer Young Adult (YA) fiction is continuing to grow alongside the budding diversity of the wider spectrum of gender and sexualities in literature, and intersecting factors therein, but for the most part queer YA realism novels follow normative novel structures that may privilege a singular point of view. Writers for adults seeking ways to represent a diverse range of identities across characters and storylines have adopted the short story cycle. Maxine Hong Kingston, Louise Erdrich and many more short story cycle authors have used the form to explore identity and community, which are themes relevant to writing young LGBTQIA+ characters. Yet this form has been underutilised in YA fiction to tell queer stories. This article considers the potential of the short story cycle for writers telling queer stories to young people. I identify multiple perspectives, connected structure and fragmentation characteristic of the form to make it suitable for telling LGBTQIA+ stories, particularly for characters at the intersection of multiple identities. By reviewing notable examples and scholarship on cycles, I considered how key features were implemented in my own creative practice. My YA short story cycle features multiple intersectional LGBTQIA+ characters and explores themes of identity and community.

Keywords: *creative writing for young people, short story cycle, queer writing, queer young adult literature, LGBTQIA+ representation*

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> The [short story cycle] genre can […] work towards solving the problem of representing an entire community within the necessarily limited confines of a single work by balancing a variety of representations rather than offering the single representation provided by the novel or the individual short story.
>
> *Noelle Brada-Williams*

The short story cycle—a collection of individual short stories arranged and linked together to enhance the reader experience when read as a whole (Ingram 1971)—can offer diverse representations of identities and groups traditionally marginalised in mainstream literature. Representation of LGBTQIA+ characters in Young Adult literature, hereafter queer YA, has flourished in the past two decades, yet the wider range of sexualities and genders of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) community, and intersecting factors of race, class, ethnicity, disability, neurodiversity, body type, spirituality and more, are underrepresented. To increase a greater diversity of representation, it is important to address the ways writers tell queer YA stories by expanding on traditional narrative structures and forms by offering alternatives. The short story cycle provides writers with opportunities to queer conventional YA narratives. Here I 'deploy queer as a verb, to challenge and resist expectations or norms' (McCann & Monaghan 2009, p. 4). No singular story, or even collection, can encapsulate the range of identities within a community, but for writers seeking to portray a diverse range of identities across characters, I present short story cycles as a form with subversive potential for telling queer YA stories. In this article, I explore some of the reasons this form has been popular with authors bearing lived experience of marginalisation. Then, I identify the key features of the form that make it uniquely suitable for telling queer YA stories, alongside how my own creative practice is informed by scholarship and literature relevant to the form.

Scholars have differed on defining the form and its characteristics, highlighting the difficulties of settling on clear guidelines for studying and writing this form (D'hoker & Van den Bossche 2014). The term short story cycle was coined by Forrest Ingram (1971) in the first in-depth study of the form in his 1971 monograph *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*. The short story cycle is known by other terms such as 'short story sequence' (Kennedy 2009; Luscher 1989), 'short story composite' (Lundén 1999), and 'composite novel' (Dunn & Morris 1995). These definitions emphasise features of the collections such as how the stories come together or how they are interpreted, perhaps as short stories or a novel first (Smith 2018). Authors may have their own view on how to define their collections, but they

are more likely to be defined by marketing and by reception from readers, critics, and theorists (Clarkson 2015). I use the term cycle because of its emphasis on short stories as standalone works, the intention to be composed together (not arranged later as is this case with some short story collections), and the ending of the cycle returns to the conflict from the beginning (D'hoker & Van den Bossche 2014). There are many ways short stories are connected in cycles, such as a common locale and recurring characters and themes. The lived experiences of authors themselves has also informed the form's development.

Scholars Michelle Pacht and Rocío G. Davis have explored the rich ways American authors marginalised by nationality, race, class, gender, ethnicity, and/or geographical location, have utilised the short story cycle. Notable examples include Gloria Naylor's (1982) *The Women of Brewster Place*, Maxine Hong Kingston's (1976) *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, Amy Tan's (1989) *The Joy Luck Club*, and Louise Erdrich's (1984) *Love Medicine*. The cycle offered marginalised authors opportunities to be successful because they could earn income from the demand, at the time, for short stories while building their careers (Pacht 2009). Techniques used in the form were in line with many authors' own cultural approaches to storytelling including multiple voices, non-linear narratives and fragmentation (Davis 1997; Pacht 2009). For example, the use of multiple voices was typical to the oral traditions of First Nations and Chinese cultures, whereas Euro-American writers typically focused on the individual self over community (Pacht 2009). As Pacht says, 'the short story cycle exists outside the literary mainstream and therefore becomes particularly useful to marginalized authors wishing to depict marginalized communities' (p. 113). Although Pacht was referring to writers marginalised by ethnicity, there is a commonality in writing experiences of identity and community using multiple perspectives and literary tools like fragmentation to write from the margins. The potential for short story cycles to explore representations of marginalised communities has largely focused on stories centring on ethnicity and race; hence, I sought out literature on contemporary queer YA short story cycles.

Where Are The Queer YA Short Stories?

Queer YA short stories can be found in anthologies compiling multiple authors and single author short story collections. Anthologies can help showcase authors from identities and groups often underrepresented in mainstream publishing (Ramdarshan Bold 2024). The landmark YA anthology *Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence* edited by Marion Dane Bauer (1994) is the earliest example of an LGBTQIA+ themed YA collection, according to Jenkins and Cart (2018). A quarter of a century later, Australia's first LGBTQIA+ YA anthology was published: *Kindred: 12 Queer #LoveOzYA Stories* (ed. Earp 2019). Australian YA authors Kelly Gardiner and Jessica Walton have appeared on panels, separately, and endorsed the benefits of anthologies for authors and young readers to see diverse representation in and behind YA books (Corbett & Phillips 2020; Day 2019). YA scholar Melanie Ramdarshan Bold (2024, p. 52) argues

anthologies can not only represent marginalised voices, but they can also 'challenge white, cisgendered, non-disabled, heterosexual, thin-thinking normativity'. While the rise of inclusive anthologies signals a positive shift in uplifting underrepresented writers (Ramdarshan Bold 2024), I remained curious in how a singular author may approach a collection of queer YA short stories. A rare example of a YA short story collection where all stories contain LGBTQIA+ characters is Julie Anne Peters' (2007) *grl2grl: Short Fictions*. Given the paucity of single author queer YA short story collections, I expanded my search to YA more broadly.

Searching for a template of contemporary YA short story cycles proved difficult. American author Jason Reynolds' (2019) *Look Both Ways* uses the locale of ten city blocks to connect young characters on the way home from school, but with characters mostly aged 11 to 13, the novel sits in the middle grade category rather than YA. I was able to find some coming-of-age cycles. For example, the well-known short story cycles Sandra Cisneros's (1984) *The House on Mango Street* and Sherwood Anderson's (1910) *Winesburg, Ohio* follow the coming of age of their respective protagonists, Esperanza Cordero and George Willard (Ingram 1971; Karafilis 1998; Kennedy 2009). Yet again the readership is not the same for these texts as for YA novels; coming-of-age texts are distinct from YA in their focus on the protagonist's transition from childhood to adulthood. The absence of contemporary YA short story cycles, particularly with multiple LGBTQIA+ characters, points to a gap in the publishing market.

Yet there is a wealth of research on representations of LGBTQIA+ characters and themes in YA literature. The breadth of this research is wide-reaching, from the ways queer YA engages with historic and ongoing oppression (Matos 2024; Mason 2020), to interrogating the category of adolescence itself through a queer theory lens (Owens 2020). Sandercock's (2022) *Youth Fiction and Trans Representation* is the first book-length study focussed solely on transgender and subversive gender portrayals in stories for young people across mediums. Much of the queer YA scholarship is largely literary criticism, or for educational purposes (Blackburn, Clark, & Nemeth 2015; Bittner 2020 Rhodes 2009), signalling a need for more research exploring queer YA from the field of creative writing.

The use of the short story cycle to represent LGBTQIA+ characters is underexplored in scholarship. A rare example is Jean Lee Shaller's (2018) PhD research on writing transgender characters in their short story cycle *Kiss Your Comrades*. While Shaller's (2018) creative work is not intended for a younger readership, their creative practice investigation of communities and multiple perspectives is relevant to the cycle's potential for representing various genders and sexualities for an adolescent readership.

As part of my creative practice PhD, I produced my own work-in-progress contemporary YA short story cycle, *More Than Seven Colours*. It combines seven short stories featuring eight protagonists depicting a range of storylines, identities and experiences. I use the form to interweave the stories of multiple LGBTQIA+ characters

with intersecting identities, while endorsing individual, autonomous stories thereby using multiple points of view.

Multiple Perspectives

Normative singular point of view novels conventionally invite readers to identify with the main character, particularly in YA fiction where young readers are encouraged to identify with characters to learn about themselves (Nodelman 2017). Cadden (2000, p. 147) asserts 'in a single-voiced text there is one dominant and didactic voice with no representation of a legitimate alternative position', consequently readers are encouraged to passively accept this narrative authority and the messages contained within. Educator Lesley Roessing (2018, p. 139) contends the use of multiple perspectives is important for young readers to help build empathy for people with different viewpoints and 'avoid this risk of a single narrative' through consideration of various narrative threads. Cadden (2000) suggests multi-voiced narratives can be a strategy to present young readers with multiple ideologies to consider. These narratives have at least two narrators or focalisers based on Bakhtin's concept of polyphony referring to the 'representations of and relationships between a variety of voices and discourses' (Day 2010, p. 67). Bakhtin believed the novel as a genre to be inherently polyphonic, and McCallum's (1999, p. 23) analysis of this concept in YA fiction focussed on 'overtly polyphonic' texts which contained multiple voices and/or narrative threads. For example, David Levithan's (2013) *Two Boys Kissing* which is focalised on multiple adolescent LGBTQIA+ characters from the perspective of a collective of gay men who passed during the AIDS crisis in the US. Levithan (2013) uses second-person narration—evading the first-person narration typical to YA (Heyde 1999)—from the plural voice of the 'shadow uncles' (Levithan 2013, p. 3).

Day (2010) argues the investigation of polyphony is relevant to YA fiction because of the shared themes of identity development and understandings of power. All points of view have equal authority in overtly polyphonic texts and readers can see how these different and similar views affect and are affected by each other (Day 2010). Cadden (2000) argues texts with multiple focalizers are the most ethical because they avoid reinforcing one ideology. Blackburn, Clark and Nemeth (2015, p. 17) expand on Cadden's argument to 'assert that such texts are also the most queer because they avoid a single, static ideology and, instead, offer multiple and, at times, conflicting ideologies'. Returning to *Two Boys Kissing*, Levithan (2013) shows the collective of 'shadow uncles' narrating view the world differently: 'We are rarely unanimous about anything' (p. 8). Although they have similar and disparate ideological viewpoints, they must unite as one to overcome the damage caused by homophobia when the character Cooper attempts to take his own life (p. 189). The narrators defy their ghostly state in a moment of 'queer kinship' as Matos (2016, p. 66) calls it. Queer kinship, as popularised by Weston (1995), refers to alternative social practices and structures of family and community amongst LGBTQIA+ people, which may be constructed in opposition to families of origin, that may offer belonging, choice, and dependency. Matos (2016)

found Levithan represents 'groups that must learn how to cooperate in order to contest homophobia' (p. 64). Building on Matos's argument, I contend the plurality of voices of the 'shadow uncles', and the multiple focalised characters makes *Two Boys Kissing* a prime example of a YA author using polyphony to create a queer community within the narrative.

Normative novel structures hierarchically focus on one main character, whereas a polyphonic structure aligns with queer writing by not privileging a single point of view in representations of and about connections and community, as per ideals of collectivity and queer kinship. Polyphony is inherent to the short story cycle. In my work-in-progress, *More Than Seven Colours*, for example, the split narrative of Leana and Michelle in a romantic storyline offers two perspectives of parallel but divergent experiences navigating their first queer relationship. Both characters are openly bisexual yet their comfortability with disclosing their sexuality differs, and both experience biphobia in contrasting ways in their respective families. While both characters have narrative authority, their authority is challenged by their family's influence and societal attitudes towards bisexuality. The pairing of these characters questions the implicit power imbedded within monosexuality—attraction to one gender (Hayfield 2020, p. 9-10)—and more broadly heteronormativity. My stories may not directly deal with subverting or rejecting the power structures like cisheteronormativity[1]; however, my characters are given power and agency in a realistic setting based on our society which is affected by oppressive systems of power. As Day (2010, p. 68) writes, 'no voice—and no identity—exists in a vacuum'. By representing multiple voices marginalised in our society I aimed to undermine the notion of a dominant perspective. The demonstration of power and multiple ideologies through multiple perspectives makes polyphony, as Day (2010, p. 68) says, an 'effective tool for authors investigating repressed or disenfranchised groups' which is salient for LGBTQIA+ representation. The connectivity and community enabled via multiple perspectives necessitates a polyphonic structure depicting multiple characters and storylines.

Connected Structure

In addition to representations of communities, here referring to the LGBTQIA+ community, the short story cycle may build a community of the characters through the connection of self-contained stories. For cycles focussed on communities bearing lived experience of marginalisation, J Gerald Kennedy (2009, p. xiv) found they are likely to 'affirm an ongoing sense of community'. The self-contained short stories become interdependent when combined in the cycle, reinforcing the 'sense of community' of individuals coming together as a collective (Kennedy 2009, p. 194). The short stories are cohesive contained narratives without following the coherent singular narration and closure in traditional novels.

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[1]I use cisheteronormativity to extend heteronormativity (which focuses on sexuality) to norms around gender and sex that often rely on the gender binary and assumptions people are cisgender (Francis 2022, p. 3).

The independence and interdependence of stories in the cycle offer a unique benefit to telling stories of community and identity separately, and identity within community. Davis (1997) and Shaller (2018) recognise this is pertinent to characters with intersecting marginalised identities. For example, Amy Tan's (1989) *The Joy Luck Club* follows four Chinese mothers and their four American-born Chinese daughters, connected via collective identity experiences as immigrant women and the community they create themselves through a mahjong club. In Shaller's (2018) research on transgender characters they highlight 'being marginalised often requires having many selves to navigate different spaces' (p. 39). While identity is a common theme in YA realism, exploring identity with LGBTQIA+ characters offer ways for young people to imagine someone like them, someone they want to be like, or someone not like them, like a peer or relative. Identity formation may be understood as an internal character journey within an individual story as well as identity understood by other characters within the larger frame of the cycle.

Another benefit of the cycle's structure is how authors can use it to show differing views of the same characters. This may pose contradictory interpretations of characters across the cycle (Clarkson 2015). I utilise the cycle to explore the visibility of LGBTQIA+ identities for my characters in *More Than Seven Colours*. My characters Estrella and Michelle are so focused on the (in)visibility of their sexuality in their independent stories, that they may appear like they are hiding or under scrutiny depending on the context. However, the interdependence of the stories offers alternate views of them as cool, confident and collected by their peers. This is also uniquely beneficial for telling YA stories where adolescent characters are at a crucial stage in identity development.

The strategic use of the cycle to offer various representations of people sharing the same identity and community can also make perceivable potential stereotypes. As Clarkson (2015, p. 71) says,

> While these representations may seem clichéd when considered within each independent story, their impact and effect may be viewed differently when the stories are read interdependently, in the context of a cycle.

Potentially perpetuating negative or harmful stereotypes about marginalised groups is particularly relevant to my cycle which features characters across a range of identities with whom I do not share the same lived experience. Writing characters beyond my lived experience is a challenge at the crux of my PhD research. In future research I will continue my investigation into the progressive, problematic and nuanced ways writers, including myself, depict characters with intersecting axes of marginalisation, and provide a potential model for writers and researchers seeking to consult LGBTQIA+ people in telling and/or studying queer YA stories. One of the ways I address this ongoing challenge of writing beyond my lived experience is through the cycle form and structure because it makes perceivable stereotypical portrayals.

I present the following examples from my cycle to demonstrate how I considered representing both collective and individual identity within my cycle. In 'It's All Rosie', Jax is the child of a South African mother and white Scottish father, whilst in 'My Brother's Wife' Mirembe has a single Black mother and there is no mention of her father (although her older brother is an active father present in the story). These could be seen as troubling representations, reinforcing stereotypes that African-Australian characters Mirembe and Jax do not have present Black fathers in their stories. The perpetuation of the 'absent Black father' stereotype, or 'The Fatherless Home', was identified by children's literature scholar Sims [Bishop] (1982, p. 25) in children's literature from the 1960s featuring African American characters. My cycle is set in Australia so it is even more concerning this is a decades-old observation from the US context that could be applied to Australian African diaspora families for whom growing up in Australia or parenting as migrants poses unique challenges complicated by race and racism (see eds Clarke, Yussuf, & Magan 2019; Gatwiri & Anderson 2022). However, in the context of the larger framework of the cycle, readers can see Estrella has a present Black father and characters Benji and Leana, who are not Black, also do not have present fathers, thereby reflecting various constructions of family. Connecting these stories offered new meanings as they combined to build a cohesive and unified narrative, so next I consider the arrangement of my cycle.

There are many tactics writers employ to arrange a cycle, so I offer my choices in sequencing my stories. The short stories in my cycle were first drafted independently of each other with the intention to weave the thread of the Pride Club open mic event throughout each of them. This ending event is significant because it represents the cycle's themes of pride, belonging and embracing both individual and collective identity. I created mind maps and other diagrams to monitor the different stories and their connections via recurring characters and themes. After settling on the order of the stories, the links between stories were made more explicit through drafting. In arranging the stories within the cycle, I focus on composing a unified ending, character development, reader experience relative to different endings, and links between characters.

A cycle's framing stories are important because 'the opening text-piece tends to introduce the themes' and 'the closing piece sums them up and expresses the author's final thoughts on the subject' (Pacht 2009, p. 3). The school Pride Club is emblematic of the community and identity themes throughout *More Than Seven Colours* so the cycle begins and ends with the club. The cycle starts with Benji because he initiated the club. To provide an alternative view of the club to close the cycle, I turned to Tan as a character who had not yet interacted directly with the club. He feels inclined to attend the Pride Club open mic event with the support of his friends and with growing confidence after performing in the school musical. In short story cycles 'constituent stories tend to depict separate, completed actions in ways that novel chapters do not' (Kennedy 2009, p. 196), but this is where I diverted from the mould to gradually build across the stories towards a unified ending. Through Tan's perspective the reader

witnesses brief moments of growth for all characters—for instance Tan's desire to attend future club events signals his ongoing exploration of his sexuality and gender identity—even if the character's individual story may have rejected a satisfying closure. The overall themes I approached the cycle with remained throughout drafting, despite withdrawn stories and changing character directions and foci.

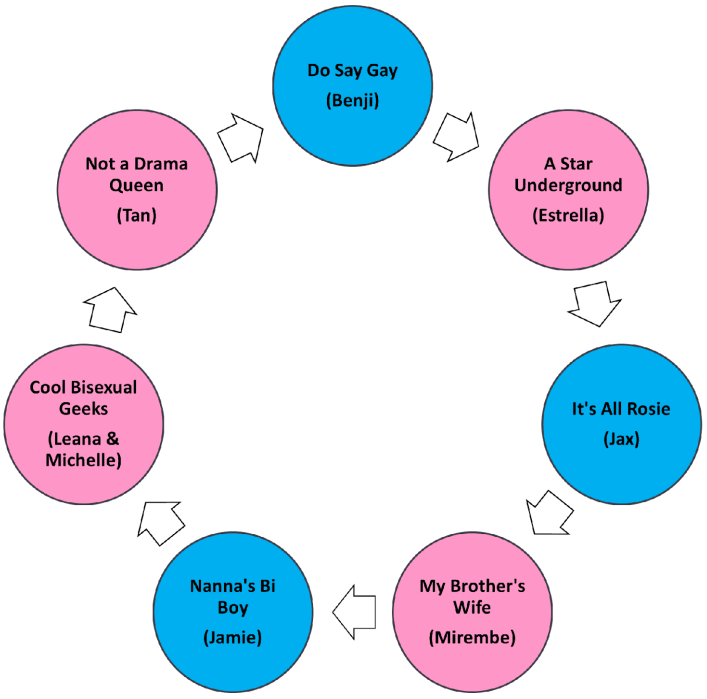

figure 1: cycle arrangement. Legend: pink 'happy' and blue 'sad'

Alongside themes and the unified ending, the individual story endings also informed the arrangement. I wanted the reader to weave through the lives of these characters and experience different emotions and endings. To avoid successive stories with unsatisfying closures for readers, I played with the order by first categorising stories in simplistic terms 'happy' and 'sad', as shown in Figure 1, as a starting point to work in from the framing stories. The stories of Estrella, Mirembe, Tan and the dual narrative of Leana and Michelle are 'happy' because they present hopeful new beginnings for the characters including blossoming romantic relationships, greater self-confidence and new or renewed artistic passions. Happy endings are significant for stories featuring LGBTQIA+ characters given early queer YA stories often linked a protagonist's sexuality with negative consequences such as alienation, violence, and even death (Colborne & Howard 2018; Jenkins & Cart 2018). Elsewhere, Jamie, Jax and Benji's stories provide fewer satisfying closures for readers as the complex, painful experiences of mental ill health, grief and fracturing family and friend relationships are unresolved. Readers can gain a sense of closure as they move through the interconnected stories. The interactions between characters also reaffirmed the arrangement of my cycle.

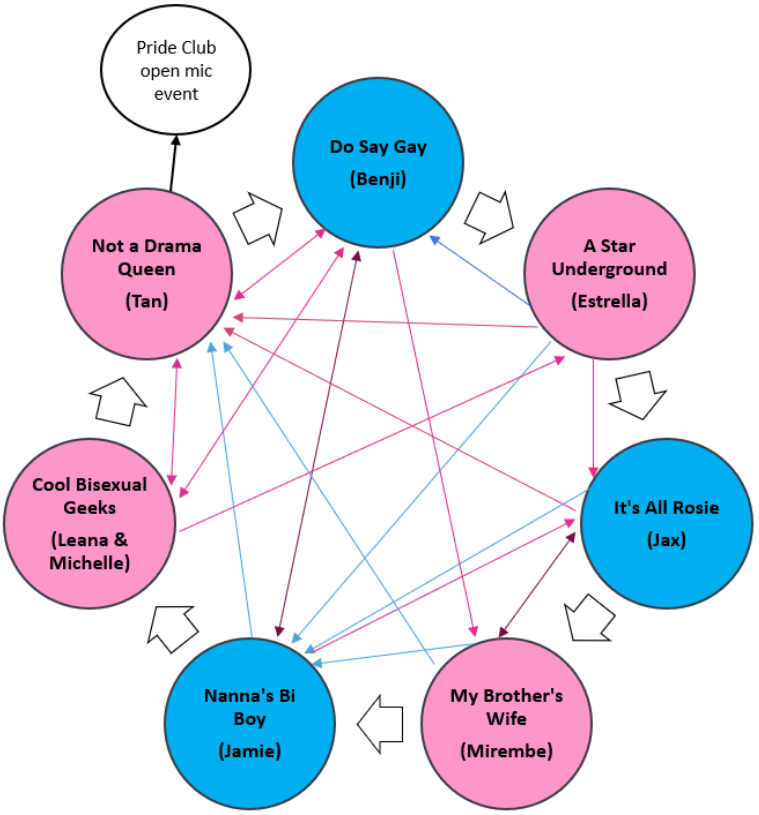

figure 2: cycle connections

Uniting the short stories helps create a larger picture of the identities and experiences that make up the disparate and connected lives of LGBTQIA+ individuals and the complex interactions in the community for people with differing experiences, backgrounds and more. Figure 2 makes visible what Pacht (2009, p. 137) calls the 'invisible threads' linking stories together. Some stories are ordered in succession because of the characters' relationship. For instance, Mirembe follows Jax and Tan follows Leana because of their strong friendship ties. Conversely, Benji and Jamie date but their stories were not dependent on their romantic relationship together, so their stories are at a distance in the order to avoid reinforcing their relationship as fundamental to their individual character growth. The short story cycle form allows me to create 'unity from separate stories' while holding space for tension in queer experiences (Nahrung 2016, p. 8). The arrangement of stories exemplifies 'in its very structure, the author's meaning' (Jauss, cited in Clarkson 2015, p. 21), thus themes of connectivity and community—and the links between different themes—is reflected in the arrangement of the cycle. Writers can also use the gaps between individual stories to expose connection or disconnection between characters. This leads me on to a key characteristic of the form that provides scope for telling queer YA stories: gaps as fragmentation.

Fragmentation

One of the ways the unique structure of the short story cycle differs from novels is the gaps between individual short stories. As Pacht (2009, p. 137) asserts 'meaning exists in the spaces between' stories and necessitates 'interpretive work be done by the reader' to fill the gaps 'for the larger text's meaning to become clear'. The gaps are a 'dynamic narrative component' (Lundén 2014, p. 59) which encourages readers to perceive how the overarching narrative continues beyond the pages of the self-contained individual stories. The active meaning making required of readers prompts consideration for YA's target readership.

Attention to active reading for adolescents has primarily concerned itself with literacy strategies in education research (McKnight & Allen 2018), but scholarship in children's and YA literature recognises benefits beyond educational value in reading for pleasure. Scholar Perry Nodelman (2017, p. 34) found alternative narratives—such as those found in short story cycles—invite young readers to 'create' and 'solve the puzzle'. All books intend for readers to piece together information, but fiction with disparate narratives may encourage readers to be 'detectives looking for clues in one narrative in order to account for events in another' (Nodelman 2017, p. 22). This reading experience can be both a 'discomforting' and 'pleasurable' 'challenge' for readers (Nodelman 2017, p. 34). While Nodelman writes broadly of alternating narratives in fiction for young readers, these points are relevant to the use of the short story cycle in YA.

Scholars D'hoker (2013), Davis (1997), Kennedy (2009) and Lundén (1999) describe the relationship between the individual short stories and collective narrative in terms of cohesion and fragmentation, which is a trait of cycles. Lundén (1999, p. 12) paid attention to 'the tension between variety and unity, separateness and interconnectedness, fragmentation and continuity, openness and closure'. Navigating these supposedly opposing binaries, particularly the tension between unity and fragmentation, in the relation between the individual stories and the cycle, can highlight the thematic tension between individual identity and collective identity or seeking community (D'hoker 2013). The fragmentation of the structure through the gaps adds more layers of meaning and furthers the interdependence of the stories. Writers can use fragments or partially complete narrative sections as a tool to resist textual patterns and consistency (Prosser 2009).

Many authors of short story cycles have employed the literary tools of fragmentation and non-linearity to explore experiences of marginalisation (Davis 1997; D'hoker 2013; Kennedy 2009; Pacht 2009). For example, as previously mentioned, authors Louise Erdrich (1984) and Maxine Hong Kingston (1976), in *Love Medicine* and *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* respectively, use fragmented and non-linear narratives in line with their cultural backgrounds (Pacht 2009). Erdrich and Kingston use repeated characters and settings to link the individual stories and foster connection, rather than detachment, between the characters (Pacht

2009, p. 123). Hence, writers may choose to navigate their identity both individually and collectively through this form.

Marginalised authors subverting conventional narrative arcs can be observed in queer writing. First Nations, non-binary writer Ellen van Neerven's (2014) book *Heat and Light* has a unique three-part structure often described as a short story cycle. However, creative writing scholar Kadmos (2018, para. 1) recognises the limits of applying 'western generic boundaries' to define and understand a First Nations text. Van Neerven adopted the short story cycle, in part, for its use of 'spaces' (or gaps) between stories which, Kadmos (2018, para. 7) finds, aids in developing themes of identity and belonging in different ways across the stories, from fluid selfhood to familial and cultural ties. Again, this reaffirms the gaps as spaces for shifting between collective and individual identity, but the gaps may also be uniquely suited to signifying queerness itself.

The strategic use of gaps in queer storytelling may symbolically resist rigid and homogenous understandings of sexuality and gender, per queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1993) definition of queerness as

> the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically (p. 8).

The openness between the self-contained stories in creating the whole cycle narrative operates on its own sense of queer time. I consider queer time in line with Halberstam's (2005, p. 12) observation 'queer uses of time and space develop … in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction'. Hence, the queer stories writers tell may reinforce dominant heteronormative or homonormative understandings of time that privilege linear progression. Writers can employ fragmentation as a literary strategy for queering time to subvert conventional narrative structure (Cannell 2019; 2018). A fragmented narrative can be used to broaden understandings of time and complement a diverse range of queer experiences for young people in YA fiction.

My stories within the cycle largely follow a linear trajectory towards the unified ending, but there are gaps between stories that suggest character growth that continues beyond the pages and individual stories that resist satisfying closures expected by the reader. This is particularly noticeable for Jamie's story which is fragmented while the rest of the cycle are short stories. The unresolved ending for Jamie, as he witnesses his mother's struggles with mental ill health, reflects the fragmentation often found in trauma writing (Haylock & Hermanoczki 2017). By considering the use of gaps as fragmentation and non-linearity in my cycle, I draw attention to another feature characteristic to the form that provides scope for telling queer YA stories.

Conclusion

For writers seeking more inclusive and queer ways to tell queer YA stories, I offer the short story cycle as a non-normative structure with subversive potential. I have observed gaps both in the market of YA fiction for the short story cycle, and scholarly gaps exploring the connection between short story cycle and queer YA. The popularity of the form with authors bearing lived experience of marginalisation highlights its benefits for telling stories of community and underrepresented identities. I recommend polyphony as a strategy, inherent to the form, to avoid privileging a single point of view, and foster connections and community as per ideals of queer kinship and collectivity. Through the literary element of polyphony in narrating YA, the multiple equal authoritative perspectives can provoke examination of identity development and power relations. The connected structure reflects themes of community, connectivity, identity, and the interactions between members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The independence and interdependence of stories can also enable deeper exploration of identity by offering differing views of the same character and making perceivable potentially harmful stereotypes.

By looking at my own creative practice, I illuminated the ways *More Than Seven Colours* as a cycle enables the arrangement of stories to build towards a unified ending, reinforce themes, enhance reader experience through different resolutions, and links between characters. Fragmentation and nonlinearity are already familiar narrative strategies to queer writing and the short story cycle so I emphasise how these literary tools are useful to explore identity and engage with temporality. The gaps between short stories in the cycle fragment the narrative, inviting active meaning making by young readers and constructing queer time. These reasons highlight the value of engaging the short story cycle form to represent diverse LGBTQIA+ experiences in YA fiction.

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