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## Re-writing the Script: Representations of Transgender Creativity in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction and Television

*Abstract: The transgender, gender-atypical or intersex protagonist challenges normative assumptions and expectations about gender, identity and sexuality. This article argues that contemporary transgender-themed young adult fiction and television uses the theme of creativity or the creative achievement script to override previously negative representations of adolescent transgender subjectivities. I consider three English-language novels and one television series for young adults and use script theory to analyse these four texts. Cris Beam's I Am J (2011) and Kirstin Cronn-Mills' Beautiful Music for Ugly Children (2012), both originally published in the United States, depict female to male transitions. Alyssa Brugman's Alex As Well (2013), originally published in Australia, foregrounds the experience of an intersex teenager, Alex, raised as a boy, but who, at the age of fourteen, decides she is female. Glee introduced the transgender character Unique in 2012, and in 2014 she continued to be a central member of the New Directions choir. The Swedish graphic novel, Elias Ericson's Åror (Oars, 2013), includes two transgender characters who enact the creative achievement script and fall in love with each other. Ericson's graphic novel goes further than the English-language texts to date. Collectively, these transgender, gender-atypical or intersex protagonists and central characters assert their creativity and individual agency. The transgender character's particular creativity ultimately secures a positive sense of self. This more recent selection of texts which date from 2011 validate young adult transgender experience and model diversity and acceptance.*

**Keywords:** transgender, creativity, young adult fiction, television, Glee, script theory

The transgender, gender-atypical or intersex protagonist in fiction, film and television for young adults challenges normative assumptions and expectations about gender, identity and sexuality. The majority of young adults or teens may not have a clear understanding of what exactly the term “transgender” means. On the other hand, they may well have seen Wade “Unique” Adams’ on-stage singing performances in *Glee* (Seasons 3 to 5: April 2012–May 2014). The focus in this article is on the successful enactment of the script of creative achievement by the adolescent transgender protagonist or central character. I use script theory here in two senses: the first sense is scripts that facilitate the comprehension of narratives and the second is scripts in human behaviour. In its first meaning, the individual reader or viewer possesses “conceptual representations of stereotyped event sequences”, and these scripts are activated in the memory when the reader or viewer can expect events in the sequence to take place in the text (Abelson 715). In its second meaning, human behaviour can also be understood in terms of sequences of events that are called “scripts” because they function analogously to the way a written script does, that is, scripts suggest a programme or prompts for action and events.

The transgender character who enacts the “creative-achievement” script is creative in a particular domain and follows a narrative trajectory or ordered sequence of events that develops that creativity in incremental stages into a more established and significant achievement at the close of the novel or television series. Such a script is very familiar to young adult audiences, for instance, the creative-achievement script in *Glee* consists of three main components or stages, all of which the transgender character progresses through. The first stage in the script introduces the transgender character’s creativity (“Saturday Night Glee-ver”: 17 April, 2012). The second stage develops the transgender character’s creativity, in this case, in the choir room performances throughout *Glee*’s Season Four (2012–2013). And the third stage in the script marks the social recognition of the character’s creativity, for instance, at Sectionals (“Thanksgiving”: 29 November, 2012), Regionals (“All or Nothing”: 9 May, 2013) and National Championships (“City of Angels”: 11 March, 2014).

Since 2011, at least two North American novels for young adults, Cris Beam’s *I Am J* (2011) and Kirstin Cronn-Mills’ *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* (2012), and one Australian young adult novel, Alyssa Brugman’s *Alex As Well* (2013), share a similar script. The script in the three novels under discussion also has a structure of three stages, namely the introduction of the character’s creativity, the develop-

ment of that creativity, and finally, the public and social affirmation of that character's creativity and most significant creative achievement to date. The aim of this article is to argue that the traditionally negative narrative trajectory associated with the adolescent transgender character has recently begun to be replaced with a more optimistic and upbeat script that foregrounds the motif of creativity.

### Transgender Subjectivity: A brief history

Transgender identity or subjectivity began to emerge at the same time as the gay/lesbian rights movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Transgender can be understood as an umbrella term that includes several cross-gender identities. However, it can also be understood to indicate, for instance, "gender transition without surgery or hormones" (Love 149) or a "specific commitment to living between the sexes" (Love 149). A number of terms that relate to transgender are themselves contested and subject to change; however when the phrase "transgender identity" or "transgender subjectivity" is used here in relation to the four texts under discussion, it refers to those characters who do not embody traditional gender norms and where there is a mismatch between the gender assigned to the individual at birth and the gender with which he or she later self-identifies. Transgender identity may therefore include the transsexual, transvestite or the intersex person. A transsexual identity is where the subject has permanently crossed over to the opposite biological sex. A transvestite identity is one in which the person cross-dresses temporarily to perform the opposite gender, but then reverts to an expression of gender that aligns with his or her biological sex, as does Billy Bloom in James St. James' *Freak Show* (2007). An intersex person has biological characteristics of both sexes. Transgender identity can be understood as a state where one can occupy the space between the masculine and feminine genders or, as Kay Siebler expresses it, "a transgender person is someone who occupies the borderlands between communities and identities" (77). Young adults who have not yet affirmed their preferred gender may be said to embody an ambiguous state in between both genders.

Versions of the word "transgender" first appeared in the 1970s. At that time, adult transgender subjects seemed at ease with performing a fluid subjectivity that combined elements of masculinity and femininity. Tim Curry's character of Dr. Frank-n-Furter in the cult classic *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) appeared on stage as a woman, dressed in a black corset with high-heeled boots and long

black gloves but also clearly with a “sexy bulge in his black briefs” (Siebler 75). Dr. Frank-n-Furter embodied both masculine and feminine attributes and made gender ambiguity fashionable: “If we did not want to be just like Curry *and* his character, we wanted to be his friend” (Siebler 75). The definition of “transgender” began to settle around the mid-1990s and, according to the editors of *Transgender Rights*, is “now generally used to refer to individuals whose gender identity or expression does not conform to the social expectations for their assigned sex at birth” (Currah et al. xiv).

Whilst transgender subjects have since the mid-1990s gained more visibility and acceptance, they still frequently experience “violence, misrecognition, racism, isolation and the ravages of capitalism” (Love 157). Nevertheless, a more empathetic attitude towards transgender subjects is also beginning to emerge, for instance, in several works of adult fiction, such as Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet* (1998) and Jeffrey Eugenides’ *Middlesex* (2002), both of which offer more humane representations of, respectively, transgender life and intersex subjectivity (Love 157-159). *Trumpet* is based on the biography of black Scottish jazz trumpeter Billy Tipton, who lived as a man, married and had a son, but was discovered after his death to have been born female. In *Middlesex*, Eugenides’ narrator Calliope was born female and raised as a girl until the age of fourteen, when Calliope becomes Cal and begins living as a male. I mention these two adult novels as they both seem to point to changes that have taken place in young adult fiction within the last five years, that is, the transgender character may be associated with musical creativity and the intersex character may now be the protagonist.

The recent publication of non-fiction works, for instance, Susan Kuklin’s *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* (2014), which centre on the experience of transgender and intersex children and teenagers, demonstrates a crucial awareness of some of the challenges that transgender youth encounter (Love 159). As Heather Love points out, “many of the fiercest gender battles are fought on the bodies of newborn infants, elementary school children and adolescents – it is during childhood that the violence of making gendered individuals imposes itself with greatest force” (159). Young adult literature, film and television may therefore have a particularly important role to play in modifying social attitudes towards transgender subjects in the real world.

That adolescent transgender subjectivity is even presented in novels and television series intended for young adults suggests changes in the ways that society views adolescence, gender and sexuality, as

well as fundamental shifts in the ways that society views transgenerism. At least three children's literature scholars, Kimberley Reynolds in *Radical Children's Literature* (2007), Lydia Kokkola in *Fictions of Adolescent Carnality* (2013) and B.J. Epstein in *Are the Kids All Right?* (2013), have argued that radical change is taking place in adolescent fiction even if a conservative standpoint is also still pervasive. Reynolds suggests that young adult literature is helping to drive these changing attitudes towards gender and sexuality by "moving beyond heteronormative stereotypes" (115). Further, she suggests that fiction for the young now includes a range of novels with characters who explore a variety of sexual orientations and partners (115). More recently, Kokkola has argued that the "emergence of 'radical' adolescent fiction depicting sexually active adolescents signals an underlying shift in how the social categories of childhood, adolescence and adulthood are conceived" (9). In B.J. Epstein's discussion of young adult novels with transgender characters, she is concerned that none of them is written by an author who "has been labelled or has chosen the label of transgender" (143).<sup>1</sup> In contrast to Epstein, my focus in this article is solely on representations of transgender characters, and not whether the author is transgender or not.

The transgender character in the four texts I examine is not punished for the transgression of gender norms. He or she does not become the victim of a hate crime, as in the films *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) or *A Girl Like Me* (2006). The transgender character is not admitted to a psychiatric institution, as is male-to-female Sage Hendricks in Brian Katcher's novel *Almost Perfect* (2009). Instead, the central character in the four focus texts asserts a narrative of resilience and demonstrates creativity, agency and a positive sense of self. The creative domain also offers the character a "safe" space. Reader and audience empathy is created for the character who may have to endure a lack of parental understanding, as exemplified by two protagonists who leave the family home prematurely, namely J in *I Am J* and Alex in *Alex As Well*. The two other transgender characters (Unique in *Glee* and Gabe in *Beautiful Music*) suffer threats and taunts from the peer group, which become more serious in *Beautiful Music* and are ultimately dealt with by the police. However, even if there is acute family discord or peer-group conflict, the transgender character is textually represented as overcoming such obstacles and consistently asserts the right to choose his or her gender identity. I use script theory to argue that the script for the adolescent transgender protagonist or central character has recently begun to change from one of victimisation and tragedy to one of creative achievement.

## Representations of Transgender Creativity in Young Adult Novels and Television

Scripts can be defined as generic ordered sequences of actions or events. They capture or encapsulate the central themes in a narrative and can be “matched” against other scripts or situations (Daintith, 2004). Scripts, which are a type of schema, are crucial to readers’ and viewers’ cognitive engagement with a text and the comprehension of that text. Readers and viewers use cognitive processes, such as the ability to categorise, to organise new information or knowledge into structured patterns of thought or schemas. Scripts and schemas therefore are malleable knowledge structures which can be readily modified and revised. Roger Schank and Robert Abelson were among the first to formulate the concept of a script (1977), such as their now-classic example of a restaurant script (42–47). When we visit a restaurant, we are greeted by a waiter who seats us at a table and gives us menus. We then read the menus, order our food, eat the food, pay the restaurant bill and leave. This script or a similar version of it is enacted each time we eat at a restaurant. In relation to children’s literature, John Stephens (2011) has employed the concepts of schema and script to argue that they are vital cognitive instruments in effecting cognitive change on the part of the reader. His discussion centres on six multicultural picture-books for young children, and I extend his application of script theory to discuss young adult fiction and television.

In the second meaning of script, the individual or character “performs” a script. Readers and viewers of young adult novels and television are already (at least implicitly) highly familiar with the creative-achievement script performed by a creative character, such as Rachel Berry in *Glee* (2009–). Rachel excels at singing, and her talent aligns her with other characters who sing in the glee club, with members of the on-screen audience who listen to her sing and with the real-world audience of *Glee*. We engage positively with her as a character because her creativity renders her attractive and likeable. She is represented as successful because her singing talent secures her a place at the New York Academy of Dramatic Arts, and her training there leads to professional opportunities, most recently as the heroine Fanny Brice in a Broadway version of *Funny Girl* (1964) (Season 5: 2013–2014). These examples help to demonstrate that the first meaning of script can be understood as belonging to the field of cognitive psychology whereas the second meaning of script can be seen as belonging to social psychology. In this particular example and in the four texts under discussion, the two fields come together.

In this analysis, each of the four transgender characters successfully performs a version of the creative-achievement script, a script that also facilitates a rapid understanding of the narrative. Wade “Unique” Adams in *Glee* was born male but presents as female in the choir room and on stage. She regularly performs with the entire glee club, but if the group is divided into males and females, she performs with the girls, as in the mash-up of Marilyn Monroe’s “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend” (1953) and Madonna’s “Material Girl” (1984) (“Girls (and Boys) On Film”: 7 March, 2013). Madonna’s dance sequence in the video for “Material Girl” is itself a pastiche of the Marilyn Monroe dance performance in Howard Hawks’ film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). In the updated musical number performed by the New Directions girls in the choir room, the camera moves rapidly between the girls who dance in formation. They are dressed in fuchsia pink strapless evening dresses that resemble the dress originally worn by Marilyn Monroe, complete with long pink gloves, high heels and a black fan. Unique and another female singer, Marley Rose, lead the vocals, and Unique is represented as creative, talented and accepted by her peer group. The song, which blends an iconic number from the 1950s and a popular chart success from the 1980s, revises and updates the performance of femininity when it is performed by the New Directions girls who include an African American transgender character.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the creative domain in Kirstin Cronn-Mills’ *Beautiful Music* is popular music and the creative-achievement script is enacted within this context. Teen protagonist Gabe, born female, named Elizabeth and known at home and at school as Liz, begins to present as male in his final year at school, albeit initially only in the context of his public access radio music show, “Beautiful Music for Ugly Children”. The three-component sequence to the creative-achievement script is activated from the novel’s first page, when Gabe presents his first-ever music programme. The second stage in the script is attained when Gabe is offered part-time paid work in a record store, Professor McSwingy’s (89) where he expresses his preferred gender identity more publically. Gabe reaches the third stage in the script when he is selected to participate in a public music competition for radio DJs (110). His fans offer him positive affirmation and treat him like a “rock star” and he says that they make him feel “like I have something decent to say. They make me feel like I matter” (112). The script varies when Gabe is unable to perform with his usual flair at the “Summer Mondays in the City” competition; however, his lack-lustre performance is explained and justified by his distress

at the life-threatening assault on his elderly musical mentor, John. John's injuries function as a serious obstacle in the progression of the script (Oatley 325), but he makes a full recovery and the novel ultimately affirms Gabe's compassionate nature, his creative abilities and positive sense of self.

Readers recognise and instantiate a modified version of the creative-achievement script when intersex protagonist Alex in *Alex As Well* is invited by one of the teachers at her new school to appear in a school fashion show (81). Alex was born with both male and female body parts but raised as a boy (with the androgynous name Alex) until the age of fourteen, at which point she suddenly decides to stop taking the hormone medication that has kept her male. The school's fashion show is represented as a turning-point for Alex who is able to admit to herself that she wants to perform femininity on the catwalk: "But I want to dress up in gorgeous clothes and strut up and down the runway like they do in the magazines, swishing my tail" (82). The use of "strut" and "swishing my tail" suggests the confidence that she will derive from this act, which she hopes will provide friendship, popularity and a sense of belonging. Readers cannot fail to understand her need to be visible and valued after a lifetime of not being accepted by her parents, teachers or peers.

The embodiment of both masculine and feminine attributes makes Alex's physical appearance very versatile, and her androynous look is immediately sought after by the fashion stylist, Lien, who is responsible for dressing the girls for the show. In what functions as the second stage in the script, Lien asks Alex to stay behind after the dress rehearsal and be photographed for the show's promotional material (123). At her first fashion shoot Alex is instantly recognised by the photographer as a talented model and is offered further work. Her first modelling experience not only pays her well (128) but also promises future economic independence, which is necessary as she has decided to leave home. It is worth noting, as Kim Reynolds points out in relation to Liam/Luna in Julie Ann Peters' *Luna* (2004), that the transgender character's early financial success can lend an air of unreality to the adolescent character's experience (129). Towards the close of *Alex As Well*, a photograph of Alex's face appears on billboards around Sydney and makes her both visible and fashionable. The third stage in the script is enacted when Alex finally takes part in the school's practice fashion show (214). As the novel concludes, outside her school is a giant billboard: "It's me up there, dressed like a girl dressed like a boy" (223). There is no confusion in the transgender protagonist's mind or self-identity; she is a girl who, for the purposes of a fashion shoot, wears a bowler hat and

a pencilled-in moustache.

The particular version of the creative-achievement script in Cris Beam's *I Am J* foregrounds J's long-standing interest in photography which he develops more purposefully from his eighteenth birthday. At the beginning of *I Am J*, J is an outstanding maths student who attends an academically selective school in Manhattan for gifted and talented students. J was born Jenifer but has self-identified as a "he" since he can remember (3). He lives in a small Manhattan apartment with both his parents who struggle to accept his wish to live as a male. In B.J. Epstein's survey of young adult transgender novels, she comments that this is her favourite novel partly because of the transgender character's diversity: J has a Jewish father and a Puerto Rican Catholic mother (147). J's mother arranges for him to live for a while with his closest friend Melissa and her mother Karyn. The arrangement is presented as temporary, but J remains there until the close of the novel, when he is about to move to upstate New York. The novel therefore directly addresses acute family discord and homelessness, which is an issue frequently faced by transgender youth (Grossman and D'augelli, 2006).

In the novel's final three chapters, the creative-achievement script gains momentum. On J's eighteenth birthday, Melissa and her mother give him three photograph frames and he is finally able to see one of his images "framed, matted, and professional" (226). Up until this point, he has only taken digital photographs, for instance, he mentions a photograph of a chicken in a cage and a chicken playing chess in Chinatown (232). At a support group for those "along the masculine spectrum", he begins to consider spaces where he feels safe and concludes that one of the most important safe spaces for him is "the space he saw when he looked through his camera and framed a really good shot" (247). Like Unique in the choir room, Gabe on his radio show and Alex on the fashion runway, J sees his creative domain as a safe space where he can be himself, express his gender identity and where he belongs.

In what functions as the second stage in the script, J assembles a photography portfolio and, with the encouragement and assistance of a friend, Chanelle, he applies to study photography at New York University (293). He also uses the same photographs to create a series that centres on close-ups of transgender young adults whom he has met at the homeless centre and at the masculine-spectrum support group. His acute sense of empathy means that he seeks out and focuses on subtle facial expressions or the look in someone's eyes. He is interested in details such as a tattoo or the scar from keyhole surgery where a female-to-male character has had breasts removed. He

enacts the third stage in the script when he selects five photographs for a public exhibition in a New York gallery where his best friend Melissa performs with a dance group (302). And finally, the novel closes with a formal offer to study photography at New York University and details on where to find the keys to his new dormitory room (326).

Creativity is self-evidently the central component of the creative-achievement script, just as the meal is the central component of Schank and Abelson's restaurant script (1977). As outlined earlier, the ordered sequence of events, or script, usually marks the introduction of the transgender character's creativity, its ongoing development and the social and public recognition of that creativity. In addition, the transgender character gains a sense of community through the expression of his or her creativity, a sense of empowerment as well as a sense of belonging. In *Alex As Well*, as already noted, Alex's financial success enables her to live independently. Gabe is paid for his work at Professor McSwingy's, and John also gives him a gift of twenty-five thousand dollars. Such creativity generates approval for the character, be it singing, dancing, modelling, presenting radio shows or taking original photographs.

### Affirming a New Gender Identity in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction and Television

The four focus texts offer progressive portrayals of adolescent transgender subjectivity that allow young adult audiences to align themselves with that transgender character. Each of the novels is primarily focalised from the transgender protagonist's point of view so that the young adult reader is positioned to understand and empathise with the thoughts and emotions of that character. There are multiple perspectives included within *Glee*, but the sustained and long-term commitment to including a transgender character's point of view is ground-breaking within the context of mainstream teen television, and it situates the transgender character firmly and clearly within her peer group, rather than on the margins.

The character's wish to transition and be either a masculine male or a feminine female seems generally to extend beyond a surface transformation of the body to include both an internal and external embodiment of only one biological sex. Heather Love suggests that a transgender identity may include a commitment to "living between the sexes" (149), but in three of the four texts under consideration, undergoing hormone treatment seems to be the coming-of-age ritu-

al. This is also reflected in the experience of many transgender teenagers in the real world, who save throughout adolescence in order to have sufficient money for hormone treatment and possible future surgery (Gray 2010). If teenagers under the age of eighteen have their parents' consent, they may seek treatment; as soon as they turn eighteen, they can legally seek out hormone treatment and surgery by themselves.

The central characters in the four texts under discussion do not desire to move outside systems that define sex and gender. They do not wish to embody gender ambiguity and all clearly self-identify in the gender binary as either female or male, even if that self-identification is not always clear to others. In other words, the characters confirm Siebler's observation that contemporary transgender subjects are now more likely to identify as either female or male. Unique in *Glee* takes birth control pills so that she can have larger breasts, or, as she puts it when referring to her breast size, "so my Bs become Ds" ("Sweet Dreams": 18 April, 2013). Gabe in *Beautiful Music* cannot afford hormone treatment or surgery although he mentions it in passing as a future possibility. Instead, he uses a chest-binder to flatten his breasts and has a strap-on in a box that he keeps under his bed. In *I Am J*, J actively seeks out hormone treatment or "T" injections to affirm his preferred gender. In contrast, in *Alex As Well*, Alex refuses to continue the testosterone treatment she has previously (and unknowingly) taken all her life. Siebler has suggested that "characters or people may define themselves as transgender, but they are modifying their bodies into the accepted codes for masculine male or feminine female" (75), and her observation is supported and endorsed by these four focus texts.

The desire for a masculine identity is most clearly expressed by both J (*I Am J*) and Gabe (*Beautiful Music*) as a wish to sound "masculine" and the literal voice becomes intimately linked with an authentic expression of masculine subjectivity. J is focused on T (testosterone) injections, which will lower his voice, give him muscles and promote the growth of facial and body hair. Without a deep-sounding voice, J finds it difficult to be heard: "With a new voice, J... would be marked unmistakably 'male' as soon as he ordered a slice of pizza or called a stranger on the phone" (282). The repetition of "m" ("marked", "unmistakably" and "male") draws attention to the word "male". Gabe is, unsurprisingly, equally focused on his voice, particularly given his work as a community radio DJ. He constantly "pulls down" on his voice to make it sound deeper. After Gabe's first five minutes on air, a fan contacts his radio programme: "I stuff my voice deep in my

chest and race to grab [the phone]" (2). When the voice sounds too high, squeaky or unmasculine, both characters have a sense of a mismatch between their minds and their bodies. Thus, hormone treatment becomes one way to align the transgender character's body with his sense of his gender identity.

Both *Glee* and *Alex As Well* use the concept of the makeover script to convey a powerful moment of transformation that is both physical and emotional, literal and metaphorical, and that anticipates a future permanent transformation or gender transition. A makeover is not usually associated with rule-breaking but when it forms part of an adolescent male's production of femininity, as it does for Unique (in *Glee*) and Alex (in *Alex As Well*), then a makeover clearly becomes transgressive. Specifically, the application of a range of beauty products is textually represented as having the power to turn an ugly duckling into a swan, or, in this instance, two male characters into females. An early episode in *Glee*'s Season Four ("Makeover": 27 September, 2012) foregrounds the themes of physical and psychological change and transformation. The theme is overtly played out through Rachel, who has recently moved to New York, and, simultaneously, through four members of the glee club in Lima, Ohio. All the characters speak of personal transformation, a theme that is highly relevant to the transgender subject, showcasing the exterior of a person catching up with the interior of a person or "the way a person feels inside".

The successful makeover in *Alex As Well* takes place in the opening pages of the novel and at this early stage in her gender transition confirms Alex's conviction about her own femininity. Readers quickly become aware that Alex, who is unusually tall and slim for a female, has potential as a model, particularly with her striking facial bone structure. The sales assistant at the Clinique counter in Myer's department store compliments her on being "naturally beautiful" (3), and assures her that make-up will "highlight her best bits" (3). The makeover gives Alex the confidence to leave her all-boys' school without telling her parents and enrol at a local co-educational school. The makeover script in both texts becomes symbolic of the wider transformation that later encompasses Unique and Alex's everyday lives.

## Introducing the Falling-in-Love Script in Young Adult Transgender Novels and Television

The four focus texts refrain from including sexually active transgender characters. In other words, the central characters do not activate

the falling-in-love script or enact a script of sexual adventure. They may be romantically interested in another character, may even kiss and embrace that character, but the focus texts stop short of representing sex acts on the page or screen. In this way, the genre mimics early examples of lesbian and gay fiction for young adults in which sex acts were largely absent or “alluded to only interstitially”, that is, in the gaps and silences left between words (Trites 106). That said, one of the novels mentioned earlier, Brian Katcher’s *Almost Perfect*, does contain the sexually active script and the two central characters, Logan and male-to-female Sage, do fall in love and have sex. However, *Almost Perfect* does not affirm the transgender character’s positive sense of self at the novel’s close. Sage is violently assaulted, she and her family move state and she reverts to being male.

The four transgender characters in each of my chosen texts all have someone in whom they are romantically interested; however none of the texts instantiates the falling-in-love script although each indicates that a romance may be possible in the future. The transgender protagonist may attempt to begin a new romantic relationship, but even if the transgender character is clear as to his or her gender identity, it is not always clear to others. In *I Am J*, in J’s second week as a male, he meets a girl called Blue. She does not know at the beginning of the relationship that J is biologically female and J’s need to withhold that information from her creates understandable difficulties in the relationship. Blue wants J to be her boyfriend and J is romantically interested in her. On their second date, he feels as if he is “starring in his own romantic movie” (132), and it seems as if J will fall in love. However, he is also in turmoil and unwilling to explain himself in ways that Blue can understand. With the intention of declaring his love, J later writes a poem to her with the help of a friend called Chanelle. But Blue decides that J must be gay because only gay boys can write such good love poetry (255). When he does finally reveal the truth, she has decided that the relationship is already over because they have lied to each other.

Romance is also there as a future possibility in *Beautiful Music*. At the outset of the novel, Gabe is convinced that a romantic relationship between him and his best friend Paige is “impossible” but as the narrative develops, Paige does seem to become increasingly romantically interested in him. When two other school friends, Mara and Heather, briefly flirt with Gabe, Paige’s reaction is one of jealousy. Towards the close of the novel, Gabe and Paige sleep in the same bed together (236) and their friendship undoubtedly shifts and becomes more romantic. Gabe even wonders out loud to Paige if he can be her

BFF (best friend forever) and boy FF too (250); *Beautiful Music* indirectly suggests that this is a genuine possibility, “at least she didn’t contradict me” (250).

The transgender characters in *Glee* and *Alex As Well* are male-to-female. Unique, in *Glee*, is romantically interested in male character Ryder Lynn, although she creates a false online profile, Katie, to express that romantic interest, a plan which ultimately works against her (“All or Nothing”: 9 May, 2013). Towards the close of *Alex As Well*, Alex, who is lesbian, begins to show romantic interest in another girl at school called Amina. They form a friendship and a close bond, but are only good friends within the text, that is, they are not physically intimate. The romance or falling-in-love script is therefore not yet enacted in the four texts that have been discussed throughout this article.

As suggested earlier, as young adult readers and audience members become more accepting of the transgender character, it is highly likely that novels and television series will include the falling-in-love script for the transgender character, as does the Swedish graphic novel *Åror* (Oars, 2013), written and illustrated by Elias Ericson. *Åror* centres on teen couple Mika and Izzy, both of whom are transgender and both of whom are creative. They also fall in love and have sex, and are together at the close of the novel.

## Conclusion

I have argued that transgender characters in the four focus texts may disrupt gender and sexual norms. They may inadvertently unsettle their social environments by bringing the gender binary into question. They may also upset a small minority of the peer group, several of whom seem unable to accept transgender subjectivity, but they are in the minority and always in the background.

The transgender character’s positive sense of self is expressed and developed in the four focus texts through the performance of the creative-achievement script. Young adult readers and viewers are already highly familiar with this script, which is very frequently enacted by heterosexual characters. As Stephens suggests, “changes made within a cluster allow [other social categories] to be conceptualised in fresh and non-threatening ways” (13). The transgender character is drawn into a positive story script of creative achievement that enables the character to form intersubjective relationships with others. The character’s creativity may be closely linked to the experience of being transgender: for instance, Alex (*Alex As Well*) looks

androgynous and J (*I Am J*) photographs transgender youth. Each character's sense of self and chosen gender identity is initially only expressed through her or his creative talent: for instance, Unique excels at singing but otherwise reverts to Wade; Gabe is a radio DJ but reverts to Liz at school. Each character's way of being in the world is enhanced through creativity and his or her individual resilience is also strengthened through creative talent. The transgender character is, for the most part, accepted by the peer group because of his or her creativity, and that talent also creates social bonds that make the transgender character feel safe and at home. Unique is a member of the show choir *New Directions*; Alex collaborates with other fashion models; J makes friends with other young people he meets at the support group and, in turn, chooses to photograph those individuals; Gabe finds friendship through his radio music programme and his group of fans. In other words, creativity builds acceptance, contributes towards a sense of belonging and creates reader and viewer approval for the transgender character.

Contemporary transgender norms suggest that individual subjects in the real world are now much less comfortable with gender ambiguity and instead prefer to enact either masculinity or femininity. The four transgender characters in the focus texts can be described as transgender but they do not want to occupy the in-between space or the "borderlands between communities and identities" (Siebler 77). In contrast, Mika, in Ericson's *Åror*, is eventually comfortable with the "in-between space". In the four English-language texts, they all want to be either a masculine male or a feminine female. Significantly, they all begin to transition through their creative domain. They do not keep their new gender "private" or "secret". Instead, they perform the new gender on stage, on the fashion runway, through photography and on the radio. To match their bodies with their sense of self, Unique (*Glee*) takes birth control pills, Alex (*Alex As Well*) stops taking the hormone medication that has kept her male and J (*I Am J*) begins to have testosterone injections. Only Gabe does not take hormone medication. Ultimately, all four characters, that is, Unique, Alex, J and Gabe, transition successfully.

In English-language novels and television for young adults, the transgender character does not yet enact the romance script, a script which otherwise occurs frequently in coming-of-age narratives. The character may be romantically interested in another character, may even briefly kiss or embrace that character, but is not yet able to sustain a romantic relationship. It will be interesting to observe how long it will be before the adolescent transgender character is represented

in English-language fiction or television as falling in love. Once the transgender character instantiates a blend of the creative-achievement and the falling-in-love scripts, as do Mika and Izzy in Ericson's *Åror*, then he or she will enact one of the most common scripts currently present for heterosexual, lesbian, gay and bisexual characters in young adult novels, film and television narratives.

*Biographical information: Kate Norbury's PhD thesis on creativity and creative scripts in young adult fiction, film and television was awarded in November. She has been a part-time PhD candidate at Macquarie University for the last five years. She received a BA in French and German from Cambridge University, a MA in Children's Literature from Surrey University, Roehampton, and has lived in Brussels and Rome. She has had articles published on trauma, LGBT young adult fiction, and gay subjectivities in film.*

## Notes

1 Ryan Kennedy is a self-identified transgender author, and has written a young adult novel together with Hazel Edwards, *f2m: the boy within* (2010).

2 *Glee* will conclude in 2015 so the script does not yet have an ending.

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