

# The representation of transgender high school students in young adult literature

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► **To cite this version:**

Estelle Paradiso. The representation of transgender high school students in young adult literature. Education. 2019. hal-02333019

**HAL Id: hal-02333019**

**<https://hal-univ-fcomte.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02333019>**

Submitted on 25 Oct 2019

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**UNIVERSITÉ DE FRANCHE-COMTÉ – BESANCON**

**ESPE DE FRANCHE-COMTÉ**

**Mémoire de deuxième année de**

**Master « Métiers de l'Enseignement de l'Éducation et de la Formation »**

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**THE REPRESENTATION OF TRANSGENDER HIGH SCHOOL  
STUDENTS IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE**



Spécialité : Métiers de l'Enseignement de l'Éducation et de la Formation

Mention : 2<sup>nd</sup> degré – Anglais

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Session de juin 2019

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## INTRODUCTION

21st century and the rise of the internet is making the world more aware of minorities and giving them a safe space to be themselves and make their voice be heard. Social media has enabled women, people of color (poc), people with disabilities or mental illness, people who are part of the LGBTQIA+<sup>1</sup> spectrum etc. to share their everyday life, struggles and journeys. Thanks to this increase in online visibility, the general public is more aware of these communities and they are starting to gain greater representation in the media, movies and literature.

Even though feminism is, and has been trying, ever since the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 to challenge gender stereotypes and inequalities, our society still revolves around the notion of a fundamental binary opposition between men and women and the expectations that go with the biological sex one was born with. The definition of gender as a social construct, first defined by Ann Oakley (*Sex, Gender and Society*, 1972) has evolved over the decades and now encompasses many more genders than strictly 'men' and 'women' (for example, 'non-binary', 'genderqueer', 'agender', 'genderfluid' or 'neutrois' are genders that many people identify with)<sup>2</sup>. The academic disciplines of gender studies and queer studies call into question our society's normative binary system such as the fact that almost everything (from bathrooms to toys and soaps, even some jobs) is either aimed and marketed towards either men or women, boys or girls. Yet society 'at large' continues to view sexual identity in broadly binary terms. Even if people increasingly accept that masculine and feminine qualities and behaviors may be fluid, we are still raised to respect gender roles from early childhood and fear rejection if we digress from the norms that go with it, as can be noticed from the recent "no bra" and "no shave" feminist movements from women, which have received criticism from both men and women.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, , Intersex, Asexual/romantic.

<sup>2</sup> Definitions of these terms can be found in this book: Ashley Mardell, *The ABC's of LGBT+*, Mango, 2016, p.93.

<sup>3</sup> Irish Times, "Why does female armpit hair provoke such outrage and disgust?", 1 May, 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/fashion/beauty/why-does-female-armpit-hair-provoke-such-outrage-and-disgust-1.3877212>, accessed 2 May, 2019.

This is particularly problematic for transgender<sup>4</sup> people, especially people who do not identify as one of the two binary gender: they are a minority and going against the binary that is taught from a very young age, as a result, most transgender people experience discrimination, bullying, harassment and assault, especially at school. Even though the visibility of the transgender community is increasing, it is still very low and this lack of visibility leads to a lack of understanding and discrimination. One way to increase visibility is through literature, and more especially young adult literature. This medium enables the targeted teenage reader to experience what transgender characters (and many transgender people in real life) goes through, their prejudices and the way they feel about it. This can lead to a better understanding of transgender people and of their struggles.

This research will focus on the representation of transgender high school students in young adult literature : Is it stereotyped ? What parts of their lives are talked about ? Can young cisgender readers learn from these books ? How can schools be safer for their transgender students ?

I will base my analysis on three young adult books :

Two contemporary fictional novels :

- *Symptoms of Being Human* by Jeff Garvin (2016) is a first-person narrative story about Riley, a closeted genderfluid student who is going to a new school after being physically harassed at his old school. We learn about his internal struggles as a genderfluid person who cannot express their gender openly, their relationships with their parents and friends and the struggles they face in the binary world. No pronoun is given for Riley in the novel, so I will refer to them using the gender neutral “they/them” pronouns.

Unfortunately, it is not an own voices novel as the author is not transgender himself, but I chose it because it tackles interesting subjects such as body dysmorphia, struggling with pronouns and the binary system and assault.

- *If I Was Your Girl* by Meredith Russo (2016) is an own voices, first person narrative story about Amanda, who is also going to a new school. She has already transitioned and passes completely as a girl. The book tackles her integration at the new school and the reaction of her peers when they find out that she is transgender.

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<sup>4</sup> “An umbrella term for anyone whose gender identity does not match their sex and/or gender assigned at birth” (A. Mardell, *the ABC's of LGBT+*, *op.cit.*, p.14)

One non-fiction book :

- *Some Assembly Required* by Arin Andrews (2014) is a first person narrative about Arin, a transgender teenage boy. It tackles his transition, his parents' reactions, his friends' reactions, and meeting another transgender, Katie, who will become his girlfriend for a few years. I chose this book to have some actual, non-fictional, first-hand experiences of what being a transgender teen is like.

In order to answer the questions raised, I will first discuss the roles of young adult fiction, I will then analyse the struggles of the main character, and finally I will focus on the ways we can help transgender students have a better experience at school.

## THE ROLE OF YOUNG ADULT FICTION

In order to understand the representation of transgender characters in young adult literature, we must start by analysing the genre itself.

### 1. Characteristics of young adult literature

Young Adult literature is aimed at teenagers and young adults.

The main character is also a teenager and the story is often told using a first person narrative, which is the case for the three books in our corpus. First person point of view allows the reader to feel what the character is feeling, to understand what they are going through and be in their shoes.

The first-person narration of the three books we are working with enables the reader to be in the narrator's shoes, experiencing their feelings and makes reading this story more personal. Readers who are not very familiar with transgender people can learn more about what it feels like to be transgender and the everyday struggles that they face. Readers who are transgender can identify themselves with the character and find similarities between their own story and the narrator's.

Young Adult novels started to spread in the 1960s and still has some similarities with our contemporary novels:

“When the term first found common usage in the late 1960's, it referred to realistic fiction that was set in the real (as opposed to imagined), contemporary world and addressed problems, issues, and life circumstances of interest to young readers aged approximately 12-18”<sup>5</sup>

This is still relevant today, even though an increasing number of young adult stories are set in a fantasy world. The struggles of teenagers mentioned in this quote are represented through coming of age stories: It is said that teenagers are “coming of age” because they are leaving childhood and evolving towards adulthood, independence and confidence. Teenagehood is a time of construction of one's identity, of physical and emotional changes. According to Young Adult Library Association,

“young adults are beings in evolution, in search of self and identity; beings who are constantly growing and changing, morphing from the condition of childhood to that of adulthood.”<sup>6</sup>

Coming of age involves finding out who you are: “*The trope that all young adult literature has in common is the search for identity*”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Cart, "The Value of Young Adult Literature", American Library Association, May 8, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey S. Caplain, “Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century” in *The Alain Review*, Winter 2005, p.12.

According to Steven VanderStaay<sup>8</sup>, young adult characters go through three major phases (separation, margin and aggregation) in which the character becomes separated from their peers, stay separated and finally are reaccepted into society. In the two fictional novels that I will analyse, the characters become separated from their peers due to their physical differences, stay separated throughout the novel and finally have a happy ending in which they get more accepted by their best friends and family members and become more confident.

## 2. Aims of Young Adult Literature

Young Adult literature intertwines reading for leisure (following the readers' interests) and learning (following the leaders' needs) and often has a moral value.

The Young Adult Services Association acknowledges this fact by explaining :

“By addressing these needs, young adult literature is made valuable not only by its artistry but also by its relevance to the lives of its readers. And by addressing not only their needs but also their interests, the literature becomes a powerful inducement for them to read, another compelling reason to value it”<sup>9</sup>

In order for teenagers to be able to relate to the contents of a young adult book, the genre is forever evolving : for example in the 1960s, young adult books were set in the real world while nowadays a growing number of YA books are set in a fantasy world.

Recently, authors have sensed teenagers' growing interest in the representation of minority groups, whether it is about race, gender, gender roles, sexuality, religion etc. Diverse books also allow teenagers and young adults to feel represented and to read about something they are familiar with (for example : racism, bullying, discrimination etc.). The 'Diversity Reading Challenge'<sup>10</sup> is a great illustration of the importance readers give to stories about minorities as it has prompts such as reading a book with a Middle Eastern main character, about mental health, about a religious minority or about sexuality and gender identity during pride months.

As a consequence of today's teenagers' growing interest in the LGBTQIA+ community and their need to be more accepting of minorities, a growing number of YA books, whether they are set in the real world or in a fantasy world, include LGBT

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<sup>8</sup> Steven VanderStaay, “Young-Adult Literature: A Writer Strikes the Genre” in *The English Journal*, Vol. 81, No. 4, April 1992, p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> M. Cart, “The Value of Young Adult Literature”, *art.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Celebrity Readers, “2019 Diversity Reading Challenge”, 30 December, 2018, <https://celebrityreaders.com/2018/12/30/2019-diversity-reading-challenge/>, accessed 22 February, 2019.



characters (some popular titles are fantasies such as *Carry on* by Rainbow Rowell, *The Raven Cycle* series by Maggie Stiefvater, contemporaries like *I wish you all the Best* by Mason Deaver, or the historical fiction *The Gentleman's Guide to Vice and Virtue* by Mackenzi Lee).

Michael CART studied diverse books and their evolution and found that the number of queer books is increasing considerably :

“Speaking of diversity: I'm happy to report that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of LGBTQI ( Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex) books; a new record of 64 titles With such content were published in 2015. this is twenty-four more than were published during the entire decade of the 1980s and only eleven less than were published in the 1990s. the field is broadening, too. the Year 2015 saw the publication of two books with intersex characters; there were also three books about bisexuals, three about transgenders, and one each about genderfluid and genderqueer kids.”<sup>11</sup>.

This has been an important shift in the history of YA literature because it allows queer readers to feel understood as they can relate to the characters, and increases straight cisgender teens' understanding of their LGBTQIA+ peers:

“Another value of young adult literature is its capacity for fostering understanding, empathy, and compassion by offering vividly realized portraits of the lives – exterior and interior – of individuals who are un like the reader.”<sup>12</sup>

In *Symptoms of Being Human*, the educational aspect of the story is mostly introduced through Riley's blog posts, in which they explain their gender identity, comparing it to a compass so that other teens can understand:

“The truth is, some days I wake up feeling more “boy” and some days I wake up feeling more “girl”. And some days, I wake up feeling somewhere in between. It's like I have a compass in my chest, but instead of north and south, the needle moves between masculine and feminine. I know it's not like that for all gender fluid people-but that's the best way I can describe how it is for me.”<sup>13</sup>

In *Some Assembly Required*, Arin explains how gender reassignment surgery is done (p. 171-173)

### **3. The importance of Own Voices literature**

In order to avoid stereotypes, it is advised to read “own voices” literature.

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, ALA Editions; 3rd Revised edition edition, 30 Sept. 2016, p.11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Jeff Garvin, *Symptoms of Being Human*, Balzer + Bray, 2016, p.29.

“‘Own voices’ means that if you are writing a main character who is part of marginalized group, you are part of that group. If you are writing a trans\* main character, you are a trans\* person”<sup>14</sup>.

Own voices books are often based on the writer’s experiences and closer to what many transgender people go through than books which are written by authors who are not transgender themselves and may make generalizations on the subject.

Different people from different minority groups can have different experiences so authors who share the same characteristics as their characters can have a voice, tell their own story and write about their own unique experience, making the story more realistic, for example while some transgender people experience violent harassment, others do not and it is important to have representation for both of these experiences.

Some authors take own voices literature very seriously, for example the novel *If I Was Your Girl*<sup>15</sup> by Meredith Russo was written by a transgender author, has a transgender main character, a transgender model on the front cover and a transgender narrator for the audiobook.

Young Adult novels centered on a transgender character often takes place at school and focuses on the character’s relationship with their peers and how they grow to gain confidence and face their bullies.

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<sup>14</sup> Blue Crow Publishing, “What does #OwnVoices mean?”, Mar 30, 2018 <https://bluecrowpublishing.com/2018/03/30/what-does-ownvoices-mean/>, Accessed 16 March, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Meredith Russo, *If I Was Your Girl*, Usborne Publishing, 2016.

## **THE STRUGGLES OF THE MAIN CHARACTER**

According to GLSEN's 2015 National School Climate Survey which surveyed 10,528 American students between the age of 13 and 21, "*schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBTQ students*"<sup>16</sup>. They found that 43% of LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school because of their gender expression. They also state that "*People may make negative comments about transgender people because they can pose a challenge to 'traditional' ideas about gender.*"

This is often the case for students who are not completely passing as a binary gender (for example a trans boy who is not completely seen as a boy physically, or a non-binary person who looks androgynous).

Going through a big change be quite difficult, transgender people who transition in their teenagehood or adulthood experience a change in their gender expression, in their body if they use hormones, in the way their family and friends see them, and many have to come out several times during their life : often once as gay, and again as trans\* (for example Arin Andrews or youtubers Gigi Gorgeous, Miles' Chronicles, Aaron Ansuini, this has also been represented on TV through the TV show The L Word in which Max identified as a gay woman, then a straight trans man and finally a gay trans man).

### **1. Bullying by their peers**

#### **a. What is bullying**

Bullying is often triggered by a difference, a lack of connection and a lack of understanding of the other person.

In today's society, gender roles and stereotypes are still reinforced in ads, movies, books, supermarkets etc. Anyone who is too far from these standards can experience violent behaviours towards them, as they are seen as being 'different'. This is especially true for high-school students, who are more at risk of bullying and being bullied than other age groups.

According to the governmental website [stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov), bullying is characterized by three main actions:

- An aggressive behaviour
- An imbalance of power

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<sup>16</sup> GLSEN, "The 2015 National School Climate Survey : the experience of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools", 2016, p.19.

- Repetition, or potential repetition<sup>17</sup>

Bullying can be verbal, social or physical and can also take the form of cyberbullying.

According to the GLSEN survey, 9.4% of LGBTQ students surveyed have been assaulted at school based on how they expressed their gender<sup>18</sup>.

#### b. Verbal harassment

In the novel *Symptoms of Being Human*, Riley, a genderfluid character experiences bullying because their gender expression is often androgynous, they don't fit in the box "male" or "female" and this leads other students to try to categorize them: "*is that a girl or a guy?*"<sup>19</sup>(p.6), "despite me feeling neutral today, this guy clearly sees me as a guy" (p.11). The narrator emphasises the fact that everyone has to choose one or the other by using full stops when they say "*they want an answer : Girl. Or. Boy.*"(p.28). This is called cisgenderism, is based on the assumption of a cisgender norm. It includes behaviours such as :

"assuming that someone because a person looks masculine, they were assigned male at birth, or they have certain anatomy; calling someone "sir" or "madam" on the assumption that everyone is either male or female."<sup>20</sup>

On Riley's first day at their new school, students react negatively, wondering if they are a boy or a girl and referring to them using the pronoun "it": "*look what it's wearing*" (p.5). Because of Riley's gender expression, other students do not see them as a human being but rather as something different, they are dehumanizing them by using this pronoun.

Riley is also dehumanized when they are compared to an animal: "*her look shows more curiosity than contempt, as though she's observing some fascinating animal at the zoo*" (p.15). Humans are always categorized as girl or boy since birth, but because Riley doesn't look like either one they are seen as not human, as a completely different species worth putting in a zoo.

Insults are common between teenagers and in *Symptoms of Being Human*, the insults "*freak*" and "*tranny*" are used by the main character's peers. According to the

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "What Is Bullying", stopbullying.gov <https://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/index.html>, accessed 20 April 2019.

<sup>18</sup> GLSEN "2015 National School Climate Survey", *op.art.*, p.24.

<sup>19</sup> J. Garvin, *Symptoms of Being Human*, *opt.cit.*, p.6.

<sup>20</sup> Mag-John Baker and Julia Scheele, *Queer, a graphic history*, Icon Books, 2016, p.146

GLSEN survey, “Two-fifth of lgbtq students heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people, like “tranny” or “he/she”, often or frequently.”<sup>21</sup>

Transgender people, especially shortly after they start transitioning, are often purposefully misgendered by their peers. For example, in *If I Was Your Girl*, when Amanda is outed to the school, her boyfriend’s friends tell her “you’re not a girl”, call her “bro” (p.247-248).

#### c. Physical harassment

We learn from the first three chapters that Riley has had a bad experience at his old school, they experienced harassment at the cafeteria: other students trip them and slap their tray (p.19). For this reason, they were forced to avoid this place and eat somewhere else. Harassment caused Riley to separate themselves from their peers and to feel unsafe at school.

In both *Symptoms of Being Human* and *The Art of Being Normal*, the main characters experience physical assault by their peers who want to see their body, to check if they are “a boy or a girl”.

#### d. Cyberbullying

Teens often feel safer bullying their peers behind a screen as they are not facing the person directly and it can be anonymous, however cyberbullying is quite dangerous as the messages can spread quickly on the internet and be seen by many people.

In *Symptoms of Being Human*, Riley faces cyberbullying: a student has found their blog and is sending them messages telling them to kill themselves because they are “a tranny” and a “freak” who no-one loves (p. 229) which makes Riley have an anxiety attack.

## 2. Reaction of the school administration

According to GLSEN, many schools have discriminatory policies towards transgender students :

“Transgender students were often particularly affected by these discriminatory policies. Most were prevented from using their preferred name or pronoun and were require to use a bathroom or locker room of their legal sex. Many transgender students were also prevented from wearing clothes because they were considered inappropriate based on their illegal sex.”<sup>22</sup>

Gendered facilities can be a dilemma for some transgender students. For example, it can be difficult for a trans person in transition to know which bathroom to

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<sup>21</sup> GLSEN “2015 National School Climate Survey”, *op.art.*, p.15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p.35.

use. In *Symptoms of Being Human*, Riley is genderfluid but not out so they use their assigned gender- male-'s bathroom since they are not out at school. In *The Art of Being Normal*, Leo is out and passing so he uses the boy's bathroom and David/Kate is not out yet so she also uses her assigned gender's bathroom. However Arin Andrews, when he and his mom went to the school to tell his new school's administration he was trans they told him he could use the nurse's bathroom.

This issue is also raised on a legislative level: in 2016, the Obama administration sent letters to school districts telling them to “*allow transgender students to use the bathrooms that match their gender identity*”<sup>23</sup> and was planning to make this a non-discriminatory law. However, the Trump administration rejected this decision the following year: “*In a joint letter, the top civil rights officials from the Justice Department and the Education Department rejected the Obama administration's position that nondiscrimination laws require schools to allow transgender students to use the bathrooms of their choice.*”<sup>24</sup> According to Susan Stryker, these laws can scare the general public as “*A man, at any time, could enter a women's restroom, simply by claiming to be a woman that day-even registered sex offenders.*”<sup>25</sup>

Locker rooms can trigger anxiety for transgender students because even when they are allowed to use the room which matches their gender identity, their body will oftentimes not look like the other students'. In *Symptoms of Being Human*, Riley had to change in the boys' locker room at his old school triggered his anxiety: “*Being undressed in front of other people... it's hard. Especially on days when I don't feel like the gender I was assigned at birth.*” (p.293). He later resorted to wearing his gym clothes under his school uniform to avoid having to change in front of everyone.

Locker rooms are also isolated places where teachers rarely go: this led to Riley being physically harassed there by students who wanted to see their genitals (p.294)

Youtuber Sam Collins made a video called “*transitioning in High School*” in which he stated that locker rooms can be uncomfortable, for example a trans boy changing in the boys' locker room and being uncomfortable to take off his shirt because

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<sup>23</sup> Julie Hirschfeld Davis and Matt Apuzzo, “U.S. Directs Public Schools to Allow Transgender Access to Restrooms” in *The New York Times*, 12 May, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/13/us/politics/obama-administration-to-issue-decree-on-transgender-access-to-school-restrooms.html? r=0>, accessed 22 February, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremy W. Peters, Jo Becker and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “Trump Rescinds Rules on Bathrooms for Transgender Students” in *The New York Times*, 22 February, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/22/us/politics/devos-sessions-transgender-students-rights.html>, accessed 22 February 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Stryker, *Transgender History, Revisited edition*, Seal Press, 2017, p.230

he is wearing a binder underneath. He also experienced the administration not changing his name and attendance picture and a teacher taking attendance with the projector on, resulting in the whole class seeing the picture of him as a girl and his birth name<sup>26</sup>.

### 3. Relationships

Relationships can be difficult to deal with for transgender students and their loved ones. It can feel like the transgender person who is transitioning is becoming a complete other person and their loved ones can start to react differently towards them depending on their gender, as this sentence from Symptoms of Being Human explains : *“When a girl sees me as a guy, I usually feel dismissed and unworthy, or at best non-threatening. When a girl thinks I’m a girl, I get the feeling she’s comparing and judging me.”* (p.48)

#### a. Relationship with parents

Parents often set expectations on their kids very early on, starting with gender-reveal parties and the use of the color blue is it’s a boy and pink if it’s a girl. When the baby is old enough to play with toys, girls will often get dolls and boys dinosaurs or cars. Children quickly become aware of which toys are for girls and which are for boys. Riley writes about their experience with toys in a blog post, explaining how, at six years old, their father disapproved of them wanting both a doll and a power ranger (p.39).

Coming out can also create tension within the family. A transgender student’s home situation can be complex, as parents might not understand or accept their child being coming out as transgender. For example, even after Riley comes out to their parents as gender fluid, their dad gets angry and call them “bisexual” and thinks it’s a “phase”. A few chapters later, while talking to their therapist, Riley says that their father has calmed down, “Dad’s being cool about it” (p.302) but he “doesn’t believe it’s a real thing”, and their mom “accepts it without really understanding it.”. This is why educating people on what it is like to be transgender-or any other minority-is important. Riley then goes on to talk about why they think their mom has trouble understanding them: “I think she’s...disappointed. Mom likes to plan things - to pick out the colors and flowers and the clothes. I think the idea that she can’t take me shopping for a tux or a prom dress leaves her feeling kind of...cheated.” (p.303). Expectations are set on children from their birth based on their genitals and parents might feel like the life they had planned for their kid is falling apart.

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<sup>26</sup> Sam Collins, “Transitioning In High School”, youtube.com, 23 August 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQmzftgnlw>, assessed 20 April, 2019.

In *If I Was Your Girl*, even though Amanda's dad is very supportive of her, he still uses some words which can be seen as insensitive, for example he says "people like you" (p.91) to refer to transgender people, which reinforces the gap between cisgender, 'normal' people and 'others' and could have left his daughter feeling like she didn't belong.

Transgender students often experience misgendering during the beginning of their transition, as their family has to adapt from having used a particular name and a set of pronouns for years to using another name and other pronouns. Amanda experiences that in *If I Was Your Girl* as one day, her dad inadvertently calls her by her old name, Andrew, and she has to rectify him by saying "it's Amanda" (p. 81)

#### b. Relationship with friends and partners

In *If I Was Your Girl*, the main character comes out as transgender (MTF) to one of her friends. Her friend has always known her as a girl, since she is "passing", and has a very positive reaction : she asks "what's okay for me to ask?" (p.186) and they hug. She says that she had seen transgender people in movies and TV shows but assumes that they are not realistically represented. This scene is a great example of positive representation of coming out.

In *Symptoms of Being Human*, Riley has trouble figuring out which pronouns to use to refer to their friend's friends when they go to a LGBTQ+ club, they keep thinking in binary : "even after hearing him-or her-speak, I have no idea which pronouns to use, which gender label to apply".

One of their new friends also doesn't understand their way of dressing : they think that Riley is inviting others to bully them by dressing androgynous, that it's all Riley's fault : "'You invite it', he says, 'because you dress in a way that makes it nearly impossible for people to tell if you're a boy or a girl'."27 And even though this comment doesn't end in a quarrel between him and Riley, it is hurtful and should not have been said, it implies that Solo doesn't understand Riley's gender identity and gender expression, as he has never seen a person assigned boy at birth dress that way.

Romantic relationships can also be quite difficult for transgender teens.

In *If I Was Your Girl*, Amanda is outed to her boyfriend, Grant, he gets emotional and asks if this is a prank and if that makes him gay (p.243-244). Grant's friends then proceed to misgender her by saying she is "Grant's little boyfriend".

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<sup>27</sup> J. Garvin, *Symptoms of Being Human*, Ibid., p.92



A few chapters after that, Grant still has not gotten over it as he tells her “I wish you were never... I wish you were always...” (p.292), meaning that he wishes Amanda had always been a girl, physically, to which she answers “No, [...] I was *always* a girl, *always*.” because gender being about how someone feels, she has always felt that she was a girl in her mind and therefore was always a girl. Her answer shows that she is a strong female character willing to stand up for who she is. She will not let others belittle her because of her gender, or seeing her differently, which is a great moral to teach teenage readers.

Arin Andrews, who was in a relationship with Katie, a trans girl, also feared their relationship wouldn’t work out after Katie’s gender reassignment surgery: “*would she still want to be with me when she got back? Or would she want to be with a guy who had a fully functioning penis?*” (p.173). His fears turned out to be correct when, a few months later, she tells him “*Todd makes me feel like a woman. I need a man with a real penis.*” (p.223). Katie and Arin’s relationship shows how complicated dating can be because even between two transgender people who understand what the other is going through, the relationship can end because of one’s physical differences.

It is, however, important to remember that many transgender people are in happy, healthy, long term relationships.

#### **4. Mental Health**

##### **a. Dysphoria**

According to Ash Hardell, gender dysphoria is “*distress or unhappiness experienced because one’s gender does not match their sex and/or gender assigned at birth*” (p. 9)

“The experience of dysphoria is different for every trans person. For some, dysphoria is a subtle nagging dissatisfaction, while for others it’s an extreme, profound sorrow.

What’s more, there are also trans individuals who experience little to no dysphoria; it’s not a requirement for being trans.”<sup>28</sup>

Dysphoria can cause transgender people to feel very uncomfortable with their body, which can impact their day-to-day life negatively.

In *Symptoms of Being Human* Riley talks about gender dysphoria on their blog, writing:

“But no matter where my internal compass points, my body remains the same. And some days-maybe half the time-I feel alien inside it. Like I was born with the wrong parts. It’s a heavy, suffocating feeling-my doctor call it dysphoria- and it makes concentrating in class (not to mention surviving in the halls) nearly impossible.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> A. Mardell, *The ABC’s of LGBT+*, *op.cit.*, p.93

<sup>29</sup> J. Garvin, *Symptoms of Being Human*, *opt.cit.*, p.29.

The hardest days for Riley is when they feel like a girl but cannot wear girly clothes. This causes them to not feel authentic in their gender expression as their true self is hidden behind a more androgynous style that feels uncomfortable : *“pulling on my neutral/ambiguous jeans-and-tee combination feels particularly wrong, because what I really want to do is put on a dress. The dysphoria is going to be rough this morning; I can already feel the buzz in the back of my head.”*<sup>30</sup>

Having to wear a suit for a formal occasion also triggered Riley’s body dysmorphia as wearing it is *“killing any possibility of expressing [their] other, less acceptable self”* and led them to have a panic attack and having to go to the hospital (p.64-65)

Dysphoria being part of many transgender students’ everyday life, it could potentially affect their schooling negatively as it can lead to having trouble concentrating in class or having anxiety attacks.

b. Anxiety

Many transgender students experience anxiety linked to being different, the fear of being accepted and body dysmorphia.

In *Symptoms of Being Human*, anxiety is a big part of Riley’s life. They go to therapy to deal with it and there are regular mentions of the therapist’s methods to soothe anxiety (for example chapter 3, Riley almost has an anxiety attack but they practice breathing exercises their therapist showed them to calm down), which is quite uncommon in novels.

Anxiety can also be triggered by bullying: victims of bullying often feel anxious at the idea of going to school and getting harassed there. This can lead to isolation: for example, Riley doesn’t go to eat in the cafeteria anymore after being bullied there, and isolates themselves from the other students. They even state that they *“want to be invisible”* (p.4)

Many transgender characters have to deal with verbal, physical and cyber-bullying, they are often not accepted by some of their peers at school and have trouble making and maintaining friendships because of their differences. Isolation, as well as mental health problems, can hinder their academic results, that is why educator should be aware of these struggles in order to be able to help their students.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44

## WAYS TO HELP TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

### 1. The importance of having a support system

Having family and friends supporting transgender teens is essential for their well-being, it makes them feel understood and reduces the feeling of being completely different from everyone else.

Having supporting parents can make a big difference in a transgender student's life. According to TSER (Trans Students Educational Resources), 75% of students who did not have supporting parents reported having suffered from depression and 57% committed suicide while it was only 4% for students with supportive parents<sup>31</sup>.

For Riley, support comes from the website Queeralliance.org which "*helped [them] a lot, back when [they were] still trying to figure out what was going with [them]*"<sup>32</sup> as they found an article about a genderfluid person. Riley tried to support other people by creating their blog and replying to comments about being genderfluid and by participating to a "*trans health con.*" panel at the end of the book.

Riley also finds a lot of comfort in his friend Bec, around whom they can be themselves as we see when she invites them to go to a club and tells them "*come as you are*" (p.139). By saying that, they are implying that Riley can be themselves around her and that they don't have to hide who they are.

In order to find people they can identify with and to share their journey, Riley goes to '*the Q*': a '*gender and sexuality support group*' (p.153). This group is a safe space for transgender people to express their worries and get support from other trans people who understand what they are going through.

In *Some Assembly Required*, Arin also goes to a support group (p.128) where he met another transgender teen, Katie. She started transitioning before him and made him more confident in his choices.

### 2. Representation and activism

Representation is crucial for minorities. Seeing themselves in movies, on TV, in stories etc. in a positive way enables them to feel more confident and know that others are going through the same experiences. Caren Town writes:

"Several critics have directly addressed the role that adolescent fiction might play.

YA author Nancy Garden says that "gay and lesbian kids need to read about people like themselves, just as kids in other minorities do. They need to read about ordinary

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<sup>31</sup> TSER, *Why Support for Trans Youth Matters* poster, <http://www.transstudent.org/youthsupport/>, assessed on April 22, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.80

people who are gay and lesbian, and, also like kids from other minorities, they need to read about the artists, athletes, performers, educators, political figures, and other notables who have come from our community” (“Foreword” xii). Both ordinary and famous LGBTQ people should be represented in fiction for young adults.”

Being able to relate to a character is crucial for teenagers, that is why we need more diversity in who transgender characters are: people of color, with different religions and families, living in different places, having different mindsets and goals.

She also states that in the 1980s and 1990s, gay characters had negative experiences which did not convey a positive message to gay readers:

“Gay characters have evolved from “Jan Goodman’s “Out of the Closet, But Paying the Price: Lesbian and Gay Characters in Children’s Literature” (1983) supports Cuseo’s conclusions. Her study of 15 YA works from 1969 to 1983 revealed that it is “physically dangerous to be gay.” In almost half of the YA works she studied, gay adolescents continue to be victims of violence and tragedy, and implied “punishment” for being gay. Life for LGBTQ young people in fiction, she argues, is “bleak,” “lonely,” and filled with “severe hardships and misfortunes”.<sup>33</sup>

Today, many Gay characters face very little -if any- homophobia, showing the shift in society’s perception of gay people and the advancement of their rights (for example the right to marry). We can imagine that the same thing will happen to transgender characters in the future, when they will be more understood and accepted. It is important to show transgender characters who don’t experience much or any violence and exclusion, who are accepted by their family and friends to represent the positive experience that many transgender people get. As these novels could be considered pieces of activism, stories of victims of discrimination and bullying should exist, as many transgender students experience violence and spreading the message can help improve the situation, but it should be made clear that it is not the case for all.

Nowadays, education about what it is like to be transgender is widely spreading on the internet as it allows any transgender person to share their experiences and advice on social media platforms such as blogs, Instagram or Youtube.

“Even more significant than commercially produced Media is the explosion in user-generated content on online platforms like YouTube, which contains millions of trans-related videos, including “ how to transition” tutorials, video blogs and diaries, and visual documentation of the gender exploration and transition process, most of them oriented towards young people.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Caren Town, *LGBTQ Young Adult Fiction*, McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers. Kindle Edition p.315-316.

<sup>34</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, *op.cit.*, p.200.

These videos can be seen by a large number of people and are useful to transgender people as it gives them first-hand accounts of living as a trans person as well as educational information about transitioning such as taking hormones, dysphoria, ways the body changes, struggles etc.

*In Symptoms of Being Human*, Riley did some online research to try to understand their identity: “I’ve read dozens of posts on Bloglr and sites like QueerAlliance, but none of them get it quite right—at least, not right for me.”<sup>35</sup> They are also useful to cisgender people as they learn from a transgender person themselves what they are going through since many do not know of anyone who is transgender in their life. By showing that many transgender people exist and that they are as nice and friendly as any other person, the fear of the meeting a person who is different is reduced, and by understanding who trans people are the risk of discrimination lessens.

### **3. Solutions**

#### **a. Pronouns**

Transgender students are often misgendered by their peers and their teachers.

Brandon Darr and Tyler Kibbey<sup>36</sup> give a list of different gender neutral pronouns (they, ey, ze, xe, sie, hir, and mention their advantages (convey neutrality, singular ‘they’ has been part of the English language for centuries) and disadvantages (ambiguity, confusion, pronouns unknown to a lot of people). The authors advise universities to “integrate pronoun preferences into semester introduction” to avoid misgendering students. This would lead to “increased happiness” and “grade performance” as well as “create a safer environment for non-cisgender people”. Their conclusion was that using the pronoun “they” to refer to people whose gender we do not know as well as people who feel more comfortable being called ‘they’ is the better option, as ‘they’ is the most well know gender neutral pronoun. We should thus encourage students and teachers to use it more often.

#### **b. Organizations**

School clubs are a big part of the American High-School life. GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliance clubs) have been more and more popular, providing a safe space for LGBTQIA+ students to talk about what they are going through and take actions to raise

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<sup>35</sup> Garvin, *Symptoms of Being Human*, *op.cit.*, p.29.

<sup>36</sup>Brandon Darr and Tyler Kibbey, *Pronouns and Thoughts on Neutrality : Gender Concerns in Modern Grammar*, University of Tennessee, 2016.

awareness and acceptance of the community. GSAs are not mentioned in our two fictional books, but they are in *Some Assembly Required* :

“Gee, I wonder if they have any sort of LGBT student alliance here.”

The girl whipped her hair around. “We do!” she called out.<sup>37</sup>

According to GLSEN, only half of the schools have a GSA (54%)<sup>38</sup>, meaning that half of the schools do not have safe spaces for their LGBTQIA+ students, which increases the risk of isolation and bullying. It would be beneficial to have one, as they could act like Riley’s support group and allow LGBTQIA+ students to meet each other and share their experiences.

### c. Educating teachers

Teachers can sometimes put transgender students in a difficult situation without realising it, for example when Riley’s French teacher asked the class to choose a French name and gave them a list of names separated by gender and colour (blue for boy names, pink for girl names) (p.18). Teachers should be taught to avoid these extremely binary exercises. According to a Guardian article<sup>39</sup>, teachers should also be taught to “honour students’ choice of name” as well as “recognize and challenge transphobia” such as students misgendering another student. They should also talk about transgender people in the classroom, as “Hearing about transgender people in lessons can provide trans and cisgender students alike with role models.”, they give the example of looking at Laverne Cox’s roles in Drama class.

In order to feel safe and accepted, transgender students need to have a support system at home and at school. This can be done through the creation of LGBTQIA+ groups, which allow the students to meet other queer students and feel part of a supportive community. Having representation of transgender people during classes can also have a positive impact on transgender and cisgender students alike. Finally,

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<sup>37</sup> A. Andrews, *Some Assembly Required*, *Ibid.*, p. 187-188.

<sup>38</sup> GLSEN, *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>39</sup> Allie George, ‘How teachers can support transgender students’ in *The Guardian*, 29 October, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/oct/29/transgender-supporting-students-school-lgbt>, assessed on April 22, 2019.

teachers should be trained to understand transgender students, respect their name and pronouns, and stop any verbal or physical harassment they might observe at school.

## CONCLUSION

Young adult literature has to be entertaining to teenagers while representing what they are going through and provide a learning experience. Reading Own Voices literature should be prioritized as it gives a more faithful representation of what a minority group goes through, it should however be remembered that even own voices novels are fictionalized in order to be more entertaining and dramatic.

Young Adult Literature is in constant evolution, adapting to the readers' needs and interest. That it why, in the future, we can hope to find more books including diverse characters representative of today's diverse societies, including for example asexual/romantic characters, LGBTQIA+ people of color, disabled people of colour, religious minorities etc.

Even though it is important to show the struggles of the characters, because many people go through them, it would be beneficial to also represent minorities who are accepted by society and are seen as equal. Youtuber Emily Tressa makes this idea explicit in one of her videos, saying that because of the representation of transgender people in the media and on television, she "*went to high-school expecting everyone to hate [her]*" and insists that "*It's important to also have positive representation of trans people who are accepted*".

Finally, school being a hostile environment for many LGBTQIA+ students, the struggles that transgender students go through should be taught to educators and solutions should be provided to make school a safe environment for transgender (and LGBTQIA+) students so that they can feel accepted and understood.



## PROJET PEDAGOGIQUE POUR UNE CLASSE DE PREMIERE

### 1. Idée de séquence

Au lycée, nous parlons beaucoup des droits de la femme et du féminisme en mentionnant les suffragettes, ou encore les droits des personnes de couleur. Mais il est très rare de parler des personnes LGBTQUIA+, et surtout des personnes transgenres. D'après Caroline T.Clark et Mollie V. Blackburn, ceci est dû au fait qu'un professeur est perçu comme un fonctionnaire neutre :

“For some [students], teaching LGBT-themed texts seems impossible. They cannot imagine how teachers, especially novice ones, can do this work. This stance is often undergirded by a belief that teaching needs to be a value-free enterprise. Despite being personally antihomophobic, they believe that teachers must be neutral and apolitical in their classrooms.”<sup>40</sup>

Cependant, ce thème est intéressant pour faire passer des valeurs nationales telles que les valeurs de la République.

Je trouve cela dommage de ne pas mentionner ce thème à l'école car les élèves qui font partis de cette communauté peuvent se sentir exclus et incompris. Il est également important que les élèves qui ne font pas parti de cette communauté aient des informations dessus pour comprendre leurs camarades et leur société, réduisant ainsi les violences scolaires qui sont liées à l'incompréhension et aux stéréotypes. Dans 'Gender Bias and Stereotypes in Young Adult Literature: A Content Analysis of Novels for Middle School Students', Janet B. West mentionne l'importance de travailler sur des livres qui dépassent les stéréotypes de genre en classe :

“The suggestions to counteract the effects of gender bias and stereotypes in the classroom that are offered in both books include discussing gender issues with students, helping students explore and participate in a broad range of educational programs, raising students' awareness of ways in which gender bias and stereotypes are transmitted, and providing materials that depict both genders equally in nontraditional roles, activities, and occupations.”<sup>41</sup>

### 2. Choix de la classe de première

J'ai choisi de travailler avec une classe de première car ce sujet nécessite de la maturité, en effet, le sujet des personnes transgenres est tabou et incompris et nécessite de l'esprit critique pour dissocier ce que la société nous fait penser sur le sujet et la réalité.

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<sup>40</sup> Caroline T. Clark and Mollie V. Blackburn, “Reading LGBT-Themed Literature with Young People: What’s Possible?” in *English Journal*, Vol. 98, No. 4, March 2009

<sup>41</sup> Janet B. West, “Gender Bias and Stereotypes in Young Adult Literature: A Content Analysis of Novels for Middle School Students”, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, April 2010.

Cette séquence rentre dans l'entrée culturelle "Gestes fondateurs et mondes en mouvements" car nous parlerons de l'évolution de la représentation des personnes transgenres dans la société américaine, ainsi que les mouvements sociaux de lutte contre les discriminations et les iniquités.

Cette séquence peut s'ancrer dans deux notions :

- "Lieux et formes de pouvoir" car nous pouvons parler de harcèlement scolaire, de lutte sociale et du pouvoir du système législatif et son impact sur la population.
- "L'idée de progrès" car nous pouvons parler de l'évolution des droits sociaux, du changement d'attitude des personnes LGBTQIA+ et des stéréotypes.

### **3. Le parcours citoyen**

Le but de l'école étant de former des citoyens responsables qui respectent les trois fondamentaux de la République Française : la liberté, l'égalité et la fraternité.

Pour cela, le parcours citoyen a été créé en 2015. Voici la définition du parcours citoyen :

« De l'école au lycée, le parcours citoyen s'adresse à des citoyens en devenir qui prennent conscience de leurs droits, de leurs devoirs, de leurs responsabilités. Adossé aux enseignements, en particulier l'enseignement moral et civique (EMC), l'éducation aux médias et à l'information (EMI), il concourt à la transmission des valeurs et principes de la République en abordant les grands champs de l'éducation à la citoyenneté : la laïcité, l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes et le respect mutuel, la lutte contre toutes les formes de discrimination, la prévention et la lutte contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme, contre les LGBTphobies, l'éducation à l'environnement et au développement durable, la lutte contre le harcèlement.»<sup>42</sup>

Dans cette séquence, nous aborderons les valeurs de la République à travers les lois concernant les personnes transgenres (droit à l'accès aux toilettes et vestiaires de leur genre), la liberté d'expression de son genre ainsi que les discriminations, le harcèlement et les stéréotypes et comment les combattre.

Le but de cette séquence est de faire découvrir aux élèves les difficultés que peuvent avoir les personnes transgenres à s'intégrer à la société et le rejet dont iels sont victimes, ainsi que de les faire parler sur ce sujet qui est encore tabou de nos jours. Ceci leur permettra de mieux accepter leurs camarades transgenres dans le lycée.

### **4. Tâche finale**

La tâche finale sera une expression écrite et orale :

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<sup>42</sup> Ministère de l'Éducation, « Le parcours citoyen » <https://www.education.gouv.fr/cid100517/le-parcours-citoyen.html>, consulté le 22 Avril 2019.

‘You are a member of your school’s Gay-Straight Alliance. You are invited to participate at an event on International Transgender Day of Visibility on March 31st to talk about transgender high-school students. Write a 200 word speech and record yourself.’

Ce sera une expression écrite dont le niveau CECRL visé sera B2 : L’élève sera capable d’écrire des textes clairs et détaillés sur une gamme étendue de sujets relatifs à son domaine d’intérêt en faisant la synthèse et l’évaluation d’informations et d’arguments empruntés à des sources diverses

## **5. Objectifs**

### **a. Objectifs culturels**

Cette séquence sera riche culturellement : Les élèves verront des personnalités transgenres (Caitlyn Jenner, Arin Andrews), des grandes dates liées à l’acceptation croissante des personnes transgenres, ainsi que les organisations américaines telles que les GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance).

### **b. Objectifs linguistiques**

• **Objectif lexical** : nous aborderons le lexique lié à la lutte : to stand up for / against.

Lexique de l’égalité : equality, equity, to integrate, to mingle.

Lexique de la solidarité : solidarity, to stick together, to support, to promote.

• **Objectifs grammaticaux**

L’utilisation du pronom “they” en tant que pronom singulier neutre pour parler de quelqu’un dont on ne connaît pas le genre ou quelqu’un qui s’identifie avec ce pronom

La structure de but : to have to ..... in order to ....

La modalité : “transgender people may be different from the majority of the population but...” “ we must” “we should”.

Le Present Perfect pour lier le présent avec les faits/actions passées.

Le rebrassage des mots de liaison : le pronoms relatifs “which, “who” et “that”.

• **Objectifs phonologiques**

L’accentuation des mots dans la phrase pour rendre le discours vivant et mettre en avant les mots clés.

### **c. Objectifs méthodologiques**

Organiser ses idées.

### **d. Objectif pragmatique**

La forme du discours.

### **e. Objectif sociolinguistique**

Adopter un registre de langage adapté pour un discours (langage courant et soutenu).

#### **f. Objectif citoyen**

Lutter contre les stéréotypes. Découvrir des lois liées aux personnes transgenres et leur impact. Lutter contre les discriminations.

#### **6. Documents**

a. nous pouvons anticiper la séquence avec une image de Caitlyn Jenner<sup>43</sup>, une célébrité qui a fait son coming out récemment et qui sera sûrement connue des élèves.



b. Une vidéo sur “gender roles”

c. Un extrait de *Symptoms of Being Human* sur le fait d’être genderfluid

“NEW POST: BOTH AND NEITHER OCTOBER 1, 4:45 PM

My name is Alix. And the first thing you’re going to want to know about me is: Am I a boy, or am I a girl? Don’t worry. I’m used to it; it’s the first thing everyone wants to know—even when I’m standing right in front of them. And, even if they don’t come right out and ask, I can tell they’re thinking it, because they narrow their eyes or tilt their heads slightly to one side. At best, it’s invasive curiosity; at worst, open condemnation. Either way, they want an answer: Girl. Or. Boy.

Anyway, it’s not that simple. The world isn’t binary. Everything isn’t black or white, yes or no. Sometimes it’s not a switch, it’s a dial. And it’s not even a dial you can get your hands on; it turns without your permission or approval.

“Okay,” people say, “but you were born one way or the other. Like, biologically. Anatomically.”

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<sup>43</sup>Photograph by Annie Leibovitz, Vanity Fair, 2015, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/06/caitlyn-jenner-bruce-cover-annie-leibovitz>, consulté le 23 Avril 2019.

As if they have a right to know! As if, since I've so rudely failed to make it obvious, I ought to wear a sign.

Well, it's none of their damn business.

You think I'm unaware that my gender isn't immediately apparent to you? You think I didn't choose these clothes and this haircut specifically to avoid being stuffed into one pigeonhole or another?

I'm gender fluid. Not stupid.

/rant

Okay. I'm sorry. I don't actually want to antagonize you, imaginary reader. It's just hard to explain—but I'll try. Ugh. [...]

The truth is, some days I wake up feeling more "boy" and some days I wake up feeling more "girl." And some days, I wake up feeling somewhere in between. It's like I have a compass in my chest, but instead of north and south, the needle moves between masculine and feminine. I know it's not like that for all gender fluid people—but that's the best way I can describe how it is for me.

But no matter where my internal compass points, my body remains the same. And some days—maybe half the time—I feel alien inside it. Like the curves and angles are in all the wrong places. Like I was born with the wrong parts. It's a heavy, suffocating feeling—my doctor calls it dysphoria—and it makes concentrating in class (not to mention surviving in the halls) nearly impossible.

On days when it's really bad, dressing in a way that fits how I feel inside—a way that matches the direction my masculine/feminine compass is pointing—seems like the only thing that might relieve the dysphoria. But I can't always present myself how I want to. If I show up feminine on day one, people will assume I'm always a girl. Then, if I show up the next day dressed like a guy, they'll react: taunts, ridicule, even violence. I've seen it happen. Because I live in the most gender binary place in the known universe: Park Hills, California. [...]

#firstpost #genderfluid #GenderFluidProblems"

Symptoms of Being Human, Jeff Garvin, 2016, p.27-30"

d. Une vidéo de ABC News “Trump administration Reverses Transgender Bathroom Guidance”<sup>44</sup> qui pourrait mener à un débat.

e. Un extrait de *Symptoms of Being Human* sur le harcèlement :

“Halfway down the stairs, I notice how tightly I’m grasping the rail. I relax my grip and try to control my breathing—but when I make it to the bottom, I can’t help walking faster. The comments start halfway down the aisle.

“Nice hair, bro.”

“Dude, that’s a chick.”

“Oh shit, sorry, bro!” A burst of laughter.

I can’t tell who’s saying what, because I’m not looking—but it doesn’t matter. If this is as bad as it gets, I can handle it. I just lock my eyes on the menu board above the café line and keep moving. To either side of me, whispers persist, but after a few moments, it appears that I’ve survived the worst of it. And then:

“Dude. Is that the new tranny?”

It’s like someone pours a bucket of ice water directly into my stomach, freezing my guts. My head jerks in the direction of the voice.

I immediately recognize the blond guy with his arm in a cast, the one who practically bowled me over in the hallway: Jim Vickers. He regards me with sharp contempt, and I’m unsurprised to see that the brunette hanging all over him is the same one who called me “it.” Seated on either side of the couple are a thick-necked, stringy-haired guy with the name “Cole” printed across the back of his jersey and another, smaller guy with red hair and wire-rim glasses.

Finally, I locate Solo. He’s sitting across from Vickers, staring down at his tray in silence. I don’t know how I missed his big form, stuffed in between two guys in football jerseys. And then I notice that his Darth Vader T-shirt is gone—Solo is wearing a jersey, too. I stop in the aisle.

Solo’s on the football team?

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<sup>44</sup> ABC News, “Trump administration Reverses Transgender Bathroom Guidance” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdfkjZ3\\_LR4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdfkjZ3_LR4), consulté le 22 avril 2019.

At first I reject the idea—but I quickly reconsider. He’s certainly built like a football player. And back in the hallway, he not only knew Vickers’s name, but his position on the team. I should have realized it then.

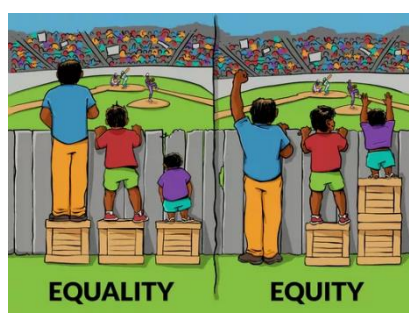
As if he can hear my thoughts, Solo looks up and makes eye contact with me. He shakes his head once, then looks back down at his tray like he’s trying to find a hair in his mashed potatoes. The ice water feeling spreads to my chest, and I turn and start walking again, as fast as I can. Somebody shouts, but I can’t make out the words over the sound of blood pumping through my ears.

I walk past the lunch line and turn left. Just beyond the Hardcores’ table, I see an outdoor hallway that leads away from the cafeteria and bends left behind the auditorium. I head for it; only a few more yards to go. Tears build up behind my eyes, and this time I’m powerless to stop them leaking down my cheeks.

As I’m passing the Hardcores, I notice a guy in a black peacoat sitting at the table—the one who sits in front of me in Government. He’s pale, with a long, narrow nose and a ring in his bottom lip, and he’s locked in heated conversation with another boy. But, as I walk by, he cocks his head and gazes at me with intense blue eyes. He turns to watch as I pass, but if he says something to me, I can’t hear it; I’ve already lowered my head and started to run.”

Symptoms of Being Human, Jeff Garvin, 2016, p.20-32”

f. Image permettant de travailler sur la différence entre “equality” et “equity”



g. Un speech pour préparer à la tâche finale, par exemple un extrait de “Jazz Jennings at the 2016 HRC Foundation's Time To THRIVE Conference”<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Human Rights Campaign, “Jazz Jennings at the 2016 HRC Foundation's Time To THRIVE Conference” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f54yitXKuQ>, consulté le 22 avril 2019.

## 7. Déroulé de la séquence

Cette séquence sera divisée en trois parties :

I - Transgender and gender roles : Cette partie nous permettra de définir les termes “transgender”, “gender”, “sex” et “gender roles” ainsi que de faire prendre conscience aux élèves de notre société binaire

II - A difficult daily life: Ici nous sensibiliserons les élèves au quotidien difficiles de certains élèves transgenres en lien avec la société binaire et le tabou du sujet.

III - Speaking up : Enfin cette partie nous permettra de finir sur une note positive et de réfléchir aux moyens qui pourraient être mis en place pour répondre aux problématiques vues dans la partie précédente.

En tant que rituel de début de cours, nous pouvons demander aux élèves de présenter une personne transgenre. Une liste de personnalités transgenres sera établie au préalable puis nous demanderons aux élèves de se mettre par groupes de deux, de faire des recherches sur leur personnalité grâce aux ressources que le professeur donnera (lien vers leur site web, articles ou vidéos) afin de faire une présentation d’environ trois minutes dans laquelle les élèves présenteront leur personnalité ainsi que “struggles” et “ways they help the transgender community”.

Voici quelques exemples de personnalités que nous pouvons proposer : Jazz Jennings, Gigi Gorgeous, Caitlyn Jenner, Laverne Cox, Ash Hardell.

Chaque élève aura un tableau à remplir pendant la présentation des autres :

	General information	struggles	Helping the transgender community
Name			
Name			

### a. Étape 1 : anticipation

Je commencerais ma séquence avec la photo de Caitlyn Jenner et demanderais aux élèves “who is this person?” “what do you know about her?” nous attendrons le mot “transgender”.



Je projetterais ensuite la définition de “gender” et la différence avec “sex” pour que les élèves ne les mélangent pas.

Je projetterais ensuite la définition des deux termes tirées du livre d’Ash Mardell *The ABCs of LGBT* pour confirmer ou rediriger leur réflexion :

Gender : “The state of being a man, a woman, both, neither, somewhere in between, or something entirely different.”

Sex : ““Either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and many other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions.” (Oxford Dictionary, 2016)

Je rejouterais ensuite la deuxième définition de “gender” tirée du même livre, “A socially constructed system of classification which typically perceives people as one of two binary genders -- man or woman -- and assigns a set of cultural expectations of roles, behaviors, expressions and characteristics to each person based on that classification.”

Pour finir, je demandrais aux élèves de définir le mot “transgender”

Nous demander en devoirs à la maison : find behaviours, expressions and characteristics associated to men and to women, classify them in a grid :

	men	women
Behaviours		
expressions		
characteristics		

Après la correction de ce tableau, nous pourrions visionner une vidéo sur “gender roles”

Ceci pourrait mener à un mini-débat sur les stéréotypes associés aux hommes et aux femmes

**b. Étape 2 : aborder les personnes dont le genre est fluide avec le document d., l'extrait de *Symptoms of Being Human*.**

Pour la compréhension écrite globale, les élèves devront retrouver :

- Type of document : a bog entry (within a novel)
- Main character : Alix
- Their gender : gender-fluid
- Main topic : people who ask Alix about their gender

Pour la compréhension détaillée, je demanderais :

- Explain Alix's gender in your own words.
- Problems : dysphoria, problems concentrating in class, bullying
- What does Alix compare gender to ? : a compass/dial
- Draw what you imagine it looks like.

La découverte de ce genre pourrait mener à une discussion sur les “gender roles” et les personnes qui ne s’identifient pas avec l’un des deux genres, ou avec aucun.

Ce texte pourrait aussi mener à une explication de l’utilisation du pronom “they” neutre, qui est le pronom que nous utiliserons pour parler d’”Alix” car ses pronoms ne sont pas mentionnés dans le livre.

En activité de production, nous pourrions demander aux élèves de créer eux-même un article de blog du style ‘journal’ où ils raconteraient se mettraient dans la peau d’une personne genderfluid et raconteraient une journée.

**c. Etape 3 : Problems at school**

Nous commencerons par un brainstorming en demandant aux élèves quels problèmes pourraient avoir les personnes transgenres à l’école. J’attendrais des réponses comme : bullying, making fun, embarrassing, using the correct pronouns.

Ensuite, nous regarderons la vidéo de ABC News “Trump administration Reverses Transgender Bathroom Guidance”

En anticipation, je projetterais cette image avec les consignes “describe” et “comment”



Je demanderais ensuite aux élèves “can you imagine a solution to this problem” et après discussion, je projetterais cette image pour confirmer leurs idées ou les mener vers une nouvelle idée :



Cette image est d'autant plus inclusive qu'elle comprend du braille.

Pour l'écoute globale de la vidéo, je demanderais aux élèves d'identifier

- Place
- People
- Main topic

Puis pour l'écoute détaillée :

President Obama's Legislation :

President Trump's legislation :

Argument for :

Argument against :

Reaction of the citizens:

Ce document nous permettra également de travailler l'objectif phonologique.

Nous travaillerons ensuite sur l'extrait de *Symptoms of Being Human* sur bullying.

En compréhension globale, je demanderais de repérer :

- People
- Place
- Main topic :

En compréhension détaillée :

- Problem :
- Physical reactions :
- Put yourself in the main character's shoes : imagine 3 emotions you would feel if this happened to you.

Après avoir parlé des problèmes, je demanderais aux élèves de se mettre en binôme et d'imaginer des solutions pour 3 des problèmes dont nous aurons parlé. Ils présenteront leurs idées à la classe sous forme d'expression orale en justifiant leurs choix.

#### **d. Etape 4**

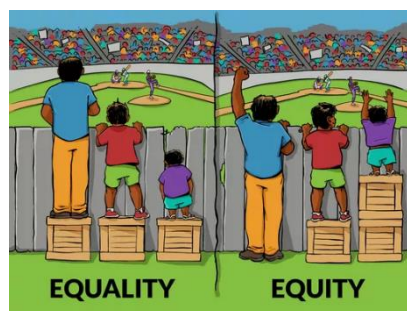
Les difficultés dont nous avons parlé avec les documents précédents nous mèneront à travailler sur "speaking up", ou comment faire entendre sa voix pour revendiquer ses droits.

Pour cela nous ferons un travail de groupe, chaque groupe travaillera sur un document vidéo ou écrit :

- Présentant les GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance).
- Expliquant les conseils qu'un élève transgenre peut suivre pour parler avec ses professeurs de son identité, de ses pronoms...
- Présentant une manifestation.

Chaque groupe fera un compte rendu oral à la classe, les autres élèves prendront des notes sur ce qui est dit.

Nous pouvons également projeter cette image et demander aux élèves de définir "equality" et "equity" et de trouver des exemples des deux catégories de mesures mises ou à mettre en place pour les personnes transgenres.



Dans cette troisième partie, nous travaillerons l'objectif grammatical de l'expression du but.

Cette séquence se terminera par un discours, par exemple celui de Jazz Jennings, afin de travailler la forme du discours.

### **7. Autres pistes d'exploitation du sujet**

Ce sujet pourrait également être mentionné brièvement dans une séquence sur "Feminism" en parlant des femmes transgenre qui étaient rejetées de ce mouvement autrefois, ou bien dans une séquence sur "bullying" en seconde.

### **8. Conclusion**

Cette séquence sur le genre permettra aux élèves de se rendre compte de notre société binaire et de se mettre à la place des personnes transgenres et des difficultés qu'elles peuvent rencontrer. Les élèves essayeront également de trouver eux-même des idées qui pourraient être mises en place pour aider les élèves transgenres à se sentir intégrés et en sécurité à l'école.

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