I became acquainted with Paul Kwiatkowski's novel *And Every Day Was Overcast* (2013a) through *School Library Journal*'s "Adult Books for Teens" blog where the book was the topic of discussion in a post entitled "Explicit Content" (Flowers, 2013). In this post, the author, librarian Mark Flowers, poses the question: "When is a book too sexually explicit to recommend to teen readers?" Undeniably, Kwiatkowski's book would raise a number of red flags with many reviewers who have a teen readership in mind. It follows the story of a sex-obsessed teenage boy whose primary focus in life seems to be getting high on LSD[i] and losing his virginity. It contains photographs of what appear to be nude teenage bodies and a potential occurrence of bestiality. And generally, the narrator's longing for human connection, to be loved amidst an onslaught of torturous sexual desire, violence, questionable morality, and the spoilage of South Florida swamps makes for a vulgar, bleak and worrying book. However, I would argue that is it also genuine and truthful about the heavier side of the sexual culture of teens. Kwiatkowski's book, drawn from his own memories and personal collection of photographs from when he was a teen, is as close as one can come to recording in print what it can be like to be young and sexual. My question is this: how can this content be too sexually explicit for teens when it reflects the lived-experience of some, if not many, teens?

Ultimately, *And Every Day Was Overcast* was rejected from being recommended by *School Library Journal* as an "Adult Book for Teens". A line was drawn: *And Every Day Was Overcast* is too sexually explicit for teen readers. To be fair, even the many librarians who staunchly defend teens' intellectual freedom may find themselves in hesitation over this particular book; it does affront a boundary. Regardless, teens should have unfettered access to books, like Kwiatkowski's, that encourage a critical reading of complex narratives of sexuality, as opposed to a reading that assumes a simplistic transmission of what adults consider to be legitimate sexual knowledge for teens. Scholars such as Jeanie Austin (2016) have pushed for a centering of library practice on the lived-experience of teens, which recognizes teens as experts on their own lives and aids in abating problematic approaches to adolescence that guide teens towards what adults think they ought to become. This paper seeks to reframe what is considered to be legitimate sexual content for teens and, by extension, to redefine the boundaries of what is considered to be Young Adult (YA) Literature. I start this process by summarizing the current definition of YA Literature and critically analyzing how this definition does not always function to positively serve its intended readership. Based on this analysis, I provide a new frame for how YA Literature should be defined and support my argument for this change by analyzing Kwiatkowski's novel as an example of a book that captures the lived-experience of teens[ii] yet has been deemed unsuitable for a teen readership. I then end this paper with suggestions for how we can change the landscape of YA Literature in its

creation, classification, and usage in libraries to better serve this unique and diverse readership.

The Current Definition of Young Adult Literature

What is YA Literature? There is no singular definition of YA Literature as there is little consensus on how broadly or narrowly it should be defined. As Michael Cart (2008) indicates in his treatise on YA Literature for the American Library Association (ALA), "The term 'young adult literature' is inherently amorphous, for its constituent terms 'young adult' and 'literature' are dynamic, changing as culture and society — which provide their context — change". Some scholars, such as Nilsen and Donelson (2009), describe YA Literature as loosely as possible: as any literature that is read by teens. However, there is a distinct difference between YA Literature and the broader scope of all literature that is read by teens. YA Literature is a specific genre with a unique set of characteristics and conventions. The following section of this paper examines how YA Literature as a genre is collectively defined in our current historical moment:

1. Written for a Teen Audience

   As Nilsen and Donelson (2009) demonstrate, the most reliable way to identify a YA book is to see if it has been marketed by publishers as YA. This signals to the reader and/or purchaser that a book has been written or marketed with a specific audience in mind and the content likely follows the conventions of the genre. There is no definite consensus on who or what *young adults* are. Young adults have been defined as persons anywhere between the ages of 12-25. This age range, however, is too broad when we consider the actual content of YA Literature, which typically focuses on *teen* protagonists who are between the ages of 12 and 18. Although many readers of YA Literature are 18 and over, the typical audience is considered to be between 12 and 18. As Amy Pattee (2017) details, the New Adult genre has recently emerged as a separate body of literature intended for readers aged 18 to 25.

2. Written About Teens

   This criteria is relatively straightforward and easy to identify: the protagonist is a teen (12-18 years old). While YA Literature can include adult characters, the main story deals with the experiences and emotions that are unique to teens (Nilsen & Donelson, 2009; Stephens, 2007).

3. Written in a Teen Voice

   What exactly constitutes a teen voice is difficult to narrow down, can at times broach on stereotypical, and as noted by Caroline Hunt (1996),

because language especially is culturally situated, it can become quickly outdated and inconsistent with teen culture across time. Jonathan Stephens (2007) describes a teen voice as: "The lingo is modern. The pace, fast. The desires, youthful. The observations, distinctly teen" (p. 41). YA Literature is most often written from the first person and in the immediate past tense (Pattee, 2017; Stephens, 2007). Amy Pattee (2017), following Andrea Schwenke Wylie, identifies the unique type of narration found in YA Literature as immediate-engaging-first-person narration. Distinct from Adult Literature, this type of narration positions the narrator just within the immediate future of the story that they are describing. Due to the frequent use of immediate past tense, Holly West (2014), editor at Children's and YA imprint *Feiwel and Friends*, also notes that a teen voice does not usually come from a place of nostalgia. What a teen voice can most directly apply to is the protagonist's unique "observations": the first person narration that allows the reader to observe the inner thoughts and feelings of the teen protagonist.

4. Shaping Identity/Subjectivity as a Defining Theme

   Shaping identity/subjectivity is a significant theme that has been identified within YA Literature (McCallum, 2006; Nilsen & Donelson, 2009; Pattee, 2017; Stevenson, 2011; Trites, 2000). As Robyn McCallum (2006) argues, most of the themes present in YA Literature are underpinned with the journey towards subjectivity. Pattee (2017), in line with Roberta S. Trites (2000), describes this journey as an emotional coming-of-age that prepares the protagonist for the realm of adulthood. West (2014) defines this theme as an engagement with "firsts": first love, first sex, first tragedy.

5. Is Didactic

   YA Literature educates and socialises young readers through lessons of morality (Kokkola, 2013; McCallum, 2006; Pattee, 2017; Stevenson, 2011; Trites, 2000). As McCallum has written: "The educative and socializing potential of such fictions is a central concern that also shapes these fictions at the levels of both story and theme" (para. 20). Although YA Literature deals with a wide variety of complex real-life problems, a simplistic right or wrong answer is often written into the story to school teen readers on how to become good citizens. As Deborah Stevenson (2011) acknowledges in her historical examination of Children's and YA Literature, "We've never been in it just for the fun" (p. 181).

The Problem of Young Adult Literature

The problem with YA Literature as it currently stands is that it is assumed to be the "best" literature for teen readers. However, while the genre sets out to be a catch-all for the reading interests of teens, underlying cultural assumptions about what is considered appropriate content for teens severely limits its scope. The characteristic "Written for a Teen Audience" is where the nuances of what is considered appropriate for teens manifests. As McCallum (2006) writes:

> Fiction for young adults is, in general, informed by the values and assumptions about adolescence that are dominant in the culture at the time of its production: cultural assumptions about what adolescence is or should be, what adolescents are like or should be like, what they should be reading, and why. (para. 20)

Guided by adults' values and assumptions, their fears and moral panics, YA Literature does not always reflect the lived-experience of teens, or what is especially relevant to them, but what is considered safe and legitimate concepts for teens to be exposed to. Nancy Lesko (2012) argues that, "adolescence can be glimpsed as a *technology* to produce certain kinds of persons within particular social arrangements" (p. 42). In turn, fictional narratives of adolescence, especially surrounding sexuality, often uphold dominant ideals concerning gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and culture (Christian-Smith, 1990; Kokkola, 2013; Trites, 2000). This means that an overwhelming amount of YA novels feature white, middle/upper middle class, studious, chaste, productive, and heterosexual characters. As Emily Knox (2014) explains in her analysis of book challenges, moral panics related to "harmful" reading materials are often driven by a prevailing sense that society is in a state of decline, deviating from an ideal, and that objectionable books can have a direct effect on young people's behaviors, emotions, character and soul (pp. 174-177). For this reason, counter-hegemonic content in literature becomes overly mitigated and controlled, especially because teens are often thought to be impressionable, turbulent, and easily corrupted and therefore untrustworthy with complex or ambiguous content and ideas. Operating under this knowledge, the main function of classifying a book as YA can be viewed in this light: it is not just to label that book as being relevant to a teen audience, but to label it as being "appropriate" for them as well.

As a result, the characters, storylines, themes, and language that make up YA Literature as a genre often look very narrow in comparison to what I would consider the wider array of content in literature that is especially relevant to teens. Despite this, the assumption across YA Literature is that teens are "knowable" (Pattee, 2017, p. 225) by adults and therefore, it is possible to create a "best" Literature for teen readers and YA Literature is that literature. This assumption surfaces in practice when we consider the YA section of the public library. Is it a

space that contains the literature that is especially relevant to teens? Or is it really just a collection of YA Literature? One would assume that the two are conflated, but they do not always overlap. Then how do librarians decide what belongs there and what does not? And what does it signify to teens when a certain book can only be found in the adult section? The problem is not necessarily with YA Literature itself, but how its existence contributes to defining what is appropriate for teen readers. Many books are excluded from the YA canon because they do not conform to the rigid and conservative criteria of what is considered YA Literature. Because of this, YA Literature should not be a guide for what teens should or should not be reading. And it should not be considered a catch-all for the fictional reading interests of teens. It should be considered one genre in many that teens enjoy reading, not necessarily the dominant literature or the default choice. Given the problematic aspects of this genre in relation to its readership, it is simply too restrictive otherwise.

In light of this, one might think that it would be better to return to the world of pre-YA Literature where there was no literature specifically written with a teen readership in mind. However, it is still important for readers to see themselves reflected in the literature that they read. For teens, reading about characters their own age, in the same stage of life, in the same environments, and dealing with similar issues, is undoubtedly important. As Michael Cart (2009) has written:

> Teenagers urgently need books that speak with relevance and immediacy to their real lives and to their unique emotional, intellectual, and developmental needs and that provide a place of commonality of experience and mutual understanding, for in so doing, they bring the outsiders out of the darkness and into the light of community. (p. 5)

There needs to be a literature for teens that is different in some ways from Adult Literature. For teen readers, having literature that highlights the experiences of teens provides a means for a greater understanding of themselves and others and can affirm their sense of value and belonging within society (Baxley & Boston, 2014; Cart, 2007; Kaplan, 2011; Landt, 2006; Nilsen and Donelson, 2009). This is a strength of YA Literature for teen readers. Where the problem begins to manifest is when it needs to be decided what a literature "Written for a Teen Audience" looks like. What should it embody? For decades YA Literature has embodied the values of adults, one of which is the desire to see teens grow up into good citizens. Legitimizing traditionally "adult" content in YA Literature has the potential to free the genre to include more authentic, and diverse, stories of adolescence. In essence, there still needs to be a body of literature that is written about teen lives, but it needs to be considerably more radical, and consistently closer to the lived-experiences of teens, than it is in our current historical moment.

Redefining Young Adult Literature

Looking critically at the characteristics of YA Literature has allowed for the identification of problematic aspects of the genre, but little has been written on how to transform YA Literature. For example, the ALA recommends *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* as a source of determining genre when cataloguing. The entry for "Young Adult Literature" by Robyn McCallum is a brilliant critical analysis of the genre that every professional working with YA Literature should read. Yet, as a designated source for classifying fiction, what it effectively tells the reader is this: YA Literature is highly problematic, yet we continue to use many of the same questionable markers in its classification. How do we get beyond this? We can start by reframing YA Literature in a way that does not include the markers that make it problematic but still distinguishes it as a unique genre of literature.

What is YA Literature? I redefine it here as such: it is a story "Written About Teens*"* that is "Written in a Teen Voice". To a certain extent, it may also be whatever teens themselves say it is, influenced by the market or not. However, the point is that by shedding many of the other characteristics that are discussed above, this allows the genre to bypass problematic by-products of didacticism and stereotyping of teens and provides more opportunity for grounding narratives in the lived-experience of teens. It also works to maintain the distance needed to separate YA Literature from Adult Literature. For example, there are many coming-of-age stories that are rightly placed in the Adult Literature section, and this is because the narration, voice, language, or spirit that is distinctly teen is not present.

Classifying YA Literature as "Written About Teens*"* and "Written in a Teen Voice" does very little to change what is already considered YA Literature, but goes a long way towards including materials that have been previously excluded from the YA Literature canon. One of these excluded books is the text I have selected to analyze for this paper, *And Every Day Was Overcast* by Paul Kwiatkowski. This book represents a tension: although the content is realistic in relation to the lived-experiences of many teens it also falls well outside what is generally considered to be legitimate sexual content, behavior, or knowledge for teens. Using this text as an example, I will argue that this content *is* appropriate for teens and that it should actually be considered a part of the YA canon under a less-restrictive definition of the genre. I use textual analysis (McKee, 2003) to analyze this book. This analysis is informed by prominent theories on adolescent sexuality (Adams, 1997; Lesko, 2012), research on YA Literature (Kokkola, 2013; Pattee, 2017; Trites, 2000), and my own expertise and experience with the genre.

A Case Study: *And Every Day Was Overcast* by Paul Kwiatkowski

> Growing up in Florida was like developing in an afterlife, a different kind of paradise. A place where clouds lingered, passed slowly like giant Mickey Mouse gloves sweeping over my eyelids, hands masquerading as a shade, casting a spell. Everything about it felt alive, slow, brutal, seething, and batshit crazy. I thought of how much effort it took to recall a single memory of blue skies, and despite the years of constant sunshine, whenever I thought back to a specific memory, it seemed as though every day was overcast. (Kwiatkowski, 2013a, p. 276)

And Every Day Was Overcast is a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story that uses a combination of documentary photography and prose to candidly detail what it was like to grow up in suburban South Florida during the 1990s. It was published in 2013 by Black Balloon Publishing, a critically acclaimed independent publishing company in New York that includes in its mission statement a commitment to "…champion the unconventional and believe in the meaningful above all" ("Who We Are," n.d., para. 1). Before its official release, this arresting and singular novel was read and favourably reviewed by Ira Glass, the host of *This American Life*, in the *New York Times Book Review*. The book is described as an illustrated novel, containing 180 pages of photographs and roughly 50 pages of text. Although it is not always clear which is which, many of the photographs were taken by Kwiatkowski when he was a teenager (Kwiatkowski, 2013b). The more recent photographs include his documentation of the South Florida landscape and a number of portraitures of adult subjects that have been staged to fit within the story. The remaining images are digitized artifacts such as professionally shot school photographs, family photographs, hand-written letters, and metal mixed-tape jackets. All of these images, taken at different points in time and representing either fact or fiction, hang loosely from the written narrative to create the atmosphere of Paul's story of adolescence.

After reading *And Every Day Was Overcast*, I could understand why there was conflict over recommending this book to teens: by the third page, Kwiatkowski had already revealed his early hard-ons for cartoon characters, his desire to "face-fuck" Stephanie from *Full House*, and his up-until-dawn obsession with catching a glimpse of pornographic images in mid-90s television static. By the end of the novel, I definitely had questions about whether or not some of Kwiatkowski's photographs could be considered obscenity, pornography, or were taken without consent. As obscenity and pornography represent the legal limits of intellectual freedom of minors (American Library Association, 2007), the content does need to be reviewed and questioned. Kwiatkowski's photographs fall within these legal limits. For one, the images that appear glued to the covers of mixed-tapes are pornography, but they are not meant to be titillating. They are meant to capture and expose the memory of being young and becoming involved with pornography for

the first time. One of these photos is an image of a pig "penetrating" a woman, but it is grainy and there is no definite proof that anything illegal is happening. There are also a few photographs of naked young-looking girls in a school locker room, preceded by text that reads "God bless the girl who'd use my disposable camera to take photos of girls I liked in the locker room" (Kwiatkowski, 2013a, p. 187). But considering the legitimacy of the publisher, it is assumed these photographs were taken by the author as an adult and that the subjects are over eighteen and consenting to being photographed. This is not always readily apparent, but there are clues that point to these purely curated elements of the story. For example, Karley Sciortino, known for her sex-positive blog turned *Viceland* television show *Slutever*, makes an appearance clad in a yellow bikini pointing to a poster of a 90s heartthrob hung above her bed (p. 200). For legal reasons, the inclusion of adult subjects in this book about teens is both practical and necessary, but because the photos appear to be taken candidly, are gritty and imperfect, they also fit seamlessly into the narrative.

Based on the content of the book, it is likely that *And Every Day Was Overcast* was at least partially rejected for the "Adult Books for Teens" blog because of the potential uproar this book would cause with parents or conservative librarians if it appeared as a recommended teen read.[iii] Regardless, the more I read, the more I was convinced this novel was entirely appropriate for teens. The level of sexual content in this book is not and should not be an issue. Teens have sex. They are sexual beings who act on their sexual desire. At least some of them do. Approximately 43% of teens have had sexual intercourse by the time they are 19 years old (Abma & Martinez, 2017)[iv] with similar numbers reported for oral sex (Copen, Chandra, & Martinez, 2012). It seems counter-productive to deny this or to try and protect them from something that is already a part of their lives. Here, in Kwiatkowski's photographs, whether fact or fiction, we see images of teens living realistic sexually-aware lives: for instance, a couple embracing at school; a young man touching a girl's breast over-the-shirt while she laughs; snapshots of pornography that is shared amongst friends; someone jokingly performing fellatio on a cucumber; and a shirtless young Paul holding a girl close on a sofa. This content may make adults uncomfortable, but it is relatively ordinary behavior for some teens.

How sexuality is presented, not how much of it is revealed, should be the main subject of criticism when it comes to fiction about teen sexuality. YA Literature scholars such as Roberta S. Trites (2000) and Lydia Kokkola (2013) have rightfully critiqued that too often teen sexuality is over-accentuated in fiction and not situated within the full context of teens' lives. Doing so plays into the stereotyping of all teens as sexually-charged beings and not dynamic, autonomous, capable individuals. The narrator's hypersexuality is an overwhelming focus in *And Every Day Was Overcast*; however, this story is such a rare example of an

unrestrained narrative of teen sexuality (something that is sorely lacking in YA Literature) that this critique needs to be forgiven in order to assess the radical potential of this book. The novel is perhaps written about an unproductive, delinquent, hypersexual, morally-questionable teen but its defining quality is that it also reveals the heart of a dynamic young man that feels a depth of emotion and is driven by empathy to decide for himself, somewhat experimentally, the rights and wrongs of the world. The presence of hypersexuality does not overshadow these nuances of character in this case, but accentuates them by making it known that the narrator's thoughts and feelings are coming to the reader undiluted.

Aside from the graphic nature of Kwiatkowski's book, I do not see a major difference between this novel and many other vetted YA novels. Like the term "Young Adult" itself, *And Every Day Was Overcast* occupies an erratic and amorphous space in terms of genre, format, tone, voice, and theme. A review of the metadata assigned to Paul Kwiatkowski's novel shows that it is consistently classified and catalogued as a work of Adult Fiction. Its official Library of Congress Classification number[v] designates it as "American Literature, 2001-". In addition, catalogue records from major public library systems in the United States and Canada show its holdings in the Adult Fiction section or as a generic e-book.[vi] Officially, this book is intended for an adult audience. However, it is important to note that perceived audience is not always an absolute measure when it comes to defining genres of literature. As Stevenson (2011) reflects on the issue with audience and children's literature:

> It's interesting that [some historians] would rather include texts that don't fit their initial definition (books designed for children to read for pleasure) than change their definition – there is something so pervasive about that essential belief of children's literature as designed for children, not adults…that historians are resistant to finding a definition that encompasses the materials they actually view as important. (p. 181)

Classification and marketing that identifies intended readership are something that needs to be questioned, as they may represent imposed restrictions to certain groups of readers and not necessarily relevancy. For example, when Judy Blume's *Forever* (1975) first hit the shelves it was marketed by its publisher, Bradbury Press, as Blume's first "adult novel" (Foerstel as cited in Yampbell, 2005). In the case of *And Every Day Was Overcast*, what matters most in its classification is that it is, or could be, especially important or relevant to teen readers. *And Every Day Was Overcast* is just a book that might be relevant to anyone who is or has been young and had intense sexual feelings or is curious about those feelings. This most especially includes teens. That, to me, makes this book an example of YA Literature even if adults are assumed to be its intended readership because of its typically "adult" content. But in addition to this, as I will demonstrate, the content of the *And*

Every Day Was Overcast also embodies the two major and essential characteristics of YA Literature that I have highlighted above: "Written About Teens" and "Written in a Teen Voice".

Is *And Every Day Was Overcast* "Written About Teens"? Ironically, the Library of Congress Subject Headings assigned to the book have helped significantly in the determining this criteria by quite obviously stating that teens are indeed a major part of this book:

- Teenagers--Florida--Fiction.
- Teenagers--Sexual behavior--Fiction.
- Teenagers--Drug use--Fiction.
- Nineteen nineties--Fiction.
- Suburbs--Florida--Fiction.
- Photography, Artistic.
- Florida--Fiction.

Yes, the book is written about teenagers. The first photograph in the novel shows a young Paul, approximately eight years old, but the majority of the book is centered on his teenage years. It starts with his early sexual awakenings and ends with Paul mutedly disquieted by the tragic deaths of his peers that are happening around him, including the Columbine High School victims. Kwiatkowski unquestionably writes about teens and some of the highly-relevant (albeit disturbing) issues teens face and cope with in their everyday lives.

Is *And Every Day Was Overcast* "Written in a Teen Voice"? Matching this criteria is significantly more complex and open to interpretation. The voice of the narrator is thick with adolescence, but it is a retrospective account of the author's experience. The first paragraph of the first chapter reads:

> Memories of childhood humanize us as adults. With age, our version of that time is deformed then reassembled. What fragments bleed through are tailored to a narrative designed to hide vulnerability. (Kwiatkowski, 2013a, p. 14)

In contrast to his words, Kwiatkowski's book does the opposite of what he claims. It is a careful interrogation of vulnerability. Beyond this first line, that positions a very adult Paul as the teller of this story, the rest of the story follows the experiences of the teen protagonist with such clarity, specificity and honesty that immediacy becomes the most dominant perspective in the storytelling, not retrospection. The photographs in the book are also a major factor in the teen voice as a portion of the photographs were taken by Kwiatkowski as a teen. They ground the story in lived-experience that cannot be replicated through fiction alone. The text and curation of photographs may be altered by the perspective of an adult, but the photographs that were clearly taken by Kwiatkowski as a teen are artifacts of a real, complex, flawed, and troubling but rich life that was lived.

All YA Literature written by adults contains a certain amount of retrospection and reflection, but it is often hidden behind narrative techniques that distance the author's personal experiences with that of the main character's. For the most part, adult writers of YA Literature construct their subjects, and therefore narratives of adolescence can never truly be authentic or taken as a direct factual representation of all teen lives (Pattee, 2017). What is unique about autobiographical fiction is that it makes the relationship between adult writer and their construction of the teen protagonist more explicit. Kwiatkowski never attempts to hide the relationship between his adult self and the memories he has of being a teenager. In an interview with *Seeking Photography Magazine* he states:

> I'll never fully be able to express how I felt during the formative moments of my teenage years but I can articulate how I felt the last time I thought of a specific event or how the narrative behind an image resonated with me in hindsight. (Kwiatkowski, 2011, para. 22)

Acknowledging this relationship does not necessarily remove a text from being YA and I would argue that it can actually play an important role in making explicit the unavoidable fragmented and reassembled adult construction of the teen protagonist. Michael Cart (2007) shares that fiction "…enables us to eavesdrop on someone else's heart" (p. 16). *And Every Day Was Overcast* allows the reader to eavesdrop on the intimate details of the heart and mind of the teenage protagonist of this novel and that in itself makes this story indistinguishable from other vetted YA novels.

I think what concerns literary gatekeepers the most about a book like *And Every Day Was Overcast* is whether or not the narrator provides a "good" example for teens. Is young Paul a model for what every teenager should conform to be? Definitely not. His character and behavior do instill a sense of bleakness and worry. But he is also likeable, charming, admirable and familiar. There is merit to reading his story. It has nothing to do with learning how to be a good citizen, but that is far from the point of this book. The point is, essentially, to engage the reader emotionally, intellectually and aesthetically in finding beauty, empathy, and hope in a place which is otherwise severe, but also, just to enjoy a unique story. It is not meant to teach; didacticism is absent from this story and that should not be something to fear. I think it is time that we give teens the freedom to read literature that does not teach a lesson, or pass clear judgement, or contain messages of good citizenship. Not including content that requires active questioning removes the potential for nuance to exist in these stories. As we can see with Kwiatkowski's book, it is grim and bleak and challenges the boundaries of what is socially acceptable, but it is truly a captivating piece of literature, time, and experience. Teens deserve to have well-written and interesting literature available to them and there needs to be more acceptance of teens as familiar with and capable of navigating the difficult aspects of their lives. As Michael Cart (2010) rightly points

out, just as YA authors are often considered B-rate authors, teens themselves are considered B-rate citizens: "discounted, misunderstood, ignored, patronized" (p. 9). This is why it is especially important to recognize the less-than-savory aspects of teens' lives, because in avoiding this content we "discount, misunderstand, ignore, and patronize" this audience and by doing so contribute to reinforcing their disenfranchisement in larger society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are two areas in which I suggest the redefinition that I have proposed can be applied. First is in the writing of YA Literature. A literature for teens should come as close as possible to the lived-experience of teens. This requires us to acknowledge the imperfect, challenging, and perhaps unsettling aspects of everyday life that exist in the lives of teens and to relinquish the need to feel that teens need constant mitigation and intervention when they engage with these aspects in literature. A literature of this kind would constitute what Lydia Kokkola (2013) calls a "radical literature" (p. 213). As Jeanie Austin (2016) notes, "children and youth remain abnormal, strange, and queer to the world of adulthood" (p. 264), but there are fantastic works of YA Literature written by adults that tell more authentic stories of adolescence free from didacticism or overt stereotypes.[vii] Writing of this kind is best done by authors who have led counter-hegemonic teen lives: people of color, women, members of the LGBTQ community, misfits, rebels, nerds, and loners. Essentially, anyone who defies dominant cultural norms, or has lived a "queer"[viii] life, and may be more attuned to repressive/oppressive power structures. Both Jeanie Austin (2016) and Lydia Kokkola (2013) have directly acknowledged adolescence as a queer state of being. As Austin (2016) writes: "A shared history of surveillance, control, regulation, and enforced behaviors join childhood and queerness at the hip…" (p. 263). This intersection can bring about greater understanding when adults write stories about teens. We need to begin to actively privilege and celebrate more voices that tell a different story of adolescence, especially when it comes to sexual content. Someone like Kwiatkowski fits this criterion. He *is* a white male, but the life he represents in his book looks nothing like the status-quo ideal we see in most YA Literature. Kwiatkowski (2011) describes himself as "someone participating in life from the periphery" (para. 26) and the story of his teenage life on the fringe is very much like reading a confirmation that there are multiple ways of how a person should be.

Second is in the work that is done by practicing librarians when selecting and classifying books for YA collections. As literary gatekeepers, librarians do have an incredible amount of power to make change, even if it is in small ways. Librarians have a place in the line of production and distribution of books and contribute to the legitimization of content and knowledge, both accepted and controversial. Redefining the boundaries of what is considered YA Literature and

using it in daily practice is one of the ways in which librarians can begin to transform YA Literature into a genre that better reflects the lived-experience of teens. It starts with making an effort to break away from pre-selected lists of mass-marketed books for teens and selecting books from publishers, such as Black Balloon Publishing, that are already pushing boundaries. This supports queer texts and has the potential to influence the publishing market by making current controversial content more accepted and easier to sell for big publishing houses that are driven mostly by profit. It also starts with classifying books, such as *And Every Day Was Overcast*, as YA Literature. This would be a small radical act, but one that could lead to larger possibilities. As an institution, libraries need to look closely at who is classifying fiction, especially for teens, and there needs to be consistency across the field. Adopting a definition such as the one I have suggested has the potential to change how we, as a profession, view the genre and where we choose to place books in the library. These decisions, although small, send messages to many different audiences including teen readers, YA publishers, and YA authors.

To answer the initial question posed in this article: is *And Every Day Was Overcast* too sexually explicit for teens? Generally, no, it is not. For some teens it will be. For others, they may identify with it completely. Because this kind of narrative does exist in real life. Paul Kwiatkowski and the other figures in his story are a testament to that. I think the real question librarians should be asking is not "Is this appropriate for teens?" but, "Could this be especially relevant to and enjoyed by teens?". If the answer is yes, then the book belongs to them too.

Endnotes

[i] Lysergic acid diethylamide, a psychoactive drug commonly known as LSD or acid.

[ii] This statement does not assume that all teens live the same experiences. However, Kwiatkowski's experiences as a teen can be considered, at least in part, universal.

[iii] Although librarians are generally well-schooled on intellectual freedom, there is lack of education on sexuality in LIS education, which may account for this oversight. See Heather Hill and Marni Harrington (2014) "Beyond Obscenity: An Analysis of Sexual Discourse in LIS Educational Texts."

[iv] For younger teens, this report also shows that 13.5% of teens had sexual intercourse by age 15. In Canada, a 2009/2010 Statistic Canada survey showed that 30% of 15 to 17-year-olds and 68% of 18- to 19-year-olds reported having had sex (Rotermann, 2012).

[v] PS3611.W53 A53 2013

[vi] United States: Boston, New York, Los Angeles. Canada: Winnipeg, Hamilton.

[vii] See especially the works of Melvin Burgess, Francesca Lia Block, and Phoebe Gloeckner. Their works also tend to be highly controversial and contested.

[viii] Austin's (2016) linkage between childhood and queerness is built upon the work of Cathy J. Cohen (1997), who argues that queerness can be defined beyond non-heterosexuality and apply to any group that falls outside of dominant cultural norms (for example, women of color). Dominant cultural norms in North America have been well described in the context of adolescence by Nancy Lesko's (2012) *Act Your Age* and Mary Louise Adams' (1997) *The Trouble with Normal* as deriving from white, middle-class, male, heterosexual, Christian values.

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