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“Kickstarting Empathy: Why Authentic LGBTQ+ YA Comics Remain Outside the Mainstream.”

Over the last decade, a number of cisgender, straight authors have written YA comics that feature LGBTQ+ characters, including Raina Telgemeier’s *Drama* (2012) and Kiwi Smith, Kurt Lustgarten, and Naomi Franquiz’s *Misfit City* series (2017-2018), among others. While these texts have garnered positive reviews, some critics have questioned the authenticity of these creators’ viewpoints, noting that missteps abound when it comes to the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation. For instance, in her essay “Springtime in the South is Like a Song in My Heart”: Raina Telgemeier’s *Drama*, the Romanticization of the Plantation South, and the Romance Plot” (2016), Michelle Ann Abate explains that Telgemeier’s grafting of an ostensibly pro-queer romance plot onto a heteronormative and racist cultural artifact calls into question her understanding of marginalized identities (355). In similar fashion, Smith, Lustgarten, and Franquiz’s *Misfit City* erases or marginalizes the history of the Nehalem people, thus undercutting their depiction of a queer Nehalem character.

The path to publication for gender nonconforming/queer comics creators has been less direct than that of their cisgender, heterosexual peers, despite the authenticity that they bring to their work and the strong fan following that their self-published webcomics and zines have garnered. In this presentation, I provide a brief history of the pioneers in LGBTQ YA zines, and I highlight the work of comics creators such as Mildred Louis, Mariko Tamaki, and Gabi Mendez.