Feeling Heard in a World that Wants to Silence Us: LGBTQIA+ Rep in Young Adult
Kansas City Convention Center, Level 2, Room 2504AB
1:45–3:00 pm

Moderator: Jenna Miller
Description: More anti-LGBTQIA+ bills are being introduced and passed at alarming rates, including book bans. In such a dark, dangerous climate, how can authors in that community feel motivated to keep writing stories? Five Young Adult authors bring a range of experiences to discuss the pull they feel to tell queer stories despite these challenges. We’ll talk about queer joy, relationships, and plots that drive us forward.

Housekeeping:
Welcome to Feeling Heard in a World that Wants to Silence Us: LGBTQIA+ Rep in Young Adult. Thank you for joining us today! A few reminders before we begin:
- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let me know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

Intros:
- I’m Jenna Miller (she/her), and I write Young Adult books about fat, queer, nerdy girls who deserve to be seen and have their voices heard. My debut novel, Out of Character, came out in 2023, and my next book, We Got the Beat, comes out February 20, both from HarperCollins. I’m honored to be moderating this panel today, and I’m going to invite each of the panelists to introduce themselves and their books.
- I’m Trang Thanh Tran (they/she), and I write scary and emotional stories for teens and adults. My debut novel, She Is a
Haunting (Bloomsbury), is about a house in Vietnam with a terrifying appetite that haunts a broken family.

- I’m Edward Underhill (he/him), and I write books about trans and queer teens falling in love and finding themselves. My debut novel, Always the Almost (Macmillan), came out in 2023, and my next book, This Day Changes Everything (also Macmillan), comes out February 13th. It’s a romcom about a grumpy trans boy and a sunshine queer girl who spend one life-changing day lost together in New York City. It’s basically Ferris Bueller meets Dash & Lily but make it trans and queer.

- I’m Julian Winters (he/him), author of the IBPA Benjamin Franklin Gold Award-winning Running With Lions; the Georgia Peach Award nominated Right Where I Left You; Junior Library Guild Selections How to Be Remy Cameron, The Summer of Everything, and As You Walk On By, as well as the upcoming Prince of the Palisades and my Adult romance debut, I Think They Love You. A self-proclaimed comic book geek, I currently live outside of Atlanta where I can be found swooning over rom-coms or watching the only two sports I can follow—volleyball and soccer.

- I’m Rachael Lippincott (she/her). I’m the #1 New York Times Bestselling author and coauthor of Five Feet Apart, All This Time, She Gets the Girl, The Lucky List, and Pride and Prejudice and Pittsburgh. I hold a BA in English writing from the University of Pittsburgh. Originally from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, I currently reside in Pittsburgh with my wife and daughter.

Opening remarks:
More anti-LGBTQIA+ bills are being introduced and passed at alarming rates, including book bans. In such a dark, dangerous climate, how can authors in that community feel motivated to keep writing stories? In our hour or so together today, we’re going to talk about the pull we feel to tell queer stories despite these challenges. We’ll also talk about queer joy, relationships, and plots that drive us forward before wrapping up with audience questions.

Discussion questions (30-40 minutes):
1. Let’s start by talking about your specific stories. What identities appear in them, and how do you approach that representation while understanding that not all experiences are the same?
2. Let’s talk about escapism vs. confrontation. We’re spoiled with so many incredible stories that focus on coming out and confronting backlash as well as escaping from it all and focusing on joy. Where do you all land with your stories, and why?

3. Writing stories in the current climate can feel daunting and at times even dangerous. What motivates you to keep going?

   - **Kids need these stories so they don’t feel alone**
     - **Edward:** This has been very important to me. Meeting readers who feel seen by what I’ve written is a constant reminder that I need to keep going. But I’ll also talk about how important it is for me to write these stories so I don’t feel alone. We talk about what we’re doing for readers, and that’s obviously the main goal, but writing has done a lot to help me, personally, and also to literally help me find community with other writers who care about these issues like I do, and that all helps me feel less alone too.

   - **Spite**
     - **Edward:** I definitely write out of spite. I’m really stubborn, and as soon as someone tells me I can’t do something, my immediate reaction is to try to figure out a way to do it. I’ll talk about how much that’s kept me going, even when things feel dark.

   - **Other**

4. Let’s talk about some of the positives of putting yourselves out there. What’s something good that’s come from your experience as an LGBTQIA+ author?

   - **Connecting with other authors**
   - **Connecting with readers**
     - **Edward:** It’s actually been positive for me to be out there as one more visible trans adult. I’m in my thirties, but for trans folks, that practically feels like being an elder. I want to be out here to force people around me to reckon with the fact that I’m here, I exist, and if they care about me, then they cannot ignore the issues that affect me. (I’m not really talking about bigots here—I’m talking about people who would say they are pro-LGBTQ, but also think they don’t know anybody trans and have never once had to reckon with what’s really going on for trans people right now.) It’s also been kind of wonderful to discover just how much space there IS now, even in the midst of the scary
stuff going on. I grew up in a time and a place when there was no space—even finding a little has been life-changing.

- **Other**

5. What's your top piece of advice for anyone in the audience looking to publish LGBTQIA+ stories?

- **Find your community**
  - **Edward:** Community, to me, is other authors. People you can vent to and dream with. With this, I'd also say find your champions and your team. For me, that's my agent (first and foremost) and then also editors. People who can fight your battles with and for you, so you aren't fighting every single thing alone. People who have got your back. What a friend of mine likes to call “accomplices,” not just allies.

- **Self-care/balance**
  - **Edward:** Balance to me also means making space for multiple things to be true simultaneously. I've gone through a lot of my journey waiting for the other shoe to drop—and it kind of has, at different points. But also, it's important to be positive and celebrate wins at the same time. Everything in moderation!

- **Determine your boundaries**
  - **Edward:** Reckon (ahead of time) with your boundaries: what will you be out about? What needs to remain private? What is yours and what can belong to others?

- **Remember the who and the why**
  - **Edward:** Who you are writing for, and why you are writing for them? It's easy to get sucked into sales numbers, rejections, and despair around the state of publishing as a marginalized author. That's where the who and the why can be grounding.

**Audience Q&A (20-30 minutes):**
We'll end by opening the floor to audience questions.