

Simon vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda

Contemporary Literature Portfolio

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Simon vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda is a young adult novel about a teenage boy who tries to deal with school, family, friendship, and his sexual orientation. Even though it's a young adult and a pretty light read, the issues discussed in this book are not very light.

First, the main character, Simon, is blackmailed by Martin, someone who is also in the school drama club with him. Martin has a crush on one of Simon's friends—Abby—and wants Simon to talk him up to Abby. If Simon doesn't do what he's asked, Martin will tell people in their school about Simon's e-mails to Blue—another boy who goes to their school and has been in a friends-but-flirty relationship with Simon for a few months. Simon and Blue don't know each other's identity because they've only ever communicated via e-mail, so Simon is worried that if Martin spreads his e-mails to the whole school, he will lose Blue. That, and the whole school will know he's gay. So, Simon plays along and does what Martin asks. The situation gets chaotic when Martin gets angry because Abby rejects him in the middle of the book, and writes that Simon is gay on *creeksecrets*, a Tumblr account that everyone in their school follows and reads. This leads to the next issue.

The second issue is coming out. Coming out is a big experience in the LGBT+ community, where someone who is on the LGBT+ spectrum tells people they trust that they are gay/lesbian/bisexual/else.

Honestly, the weirdest part is how they made it feel like this big coming out moment. Which can't be normal. As far as I know, coming out isn't something that straight kids generally worry about.

Becky Albertalli perfectly captures the bizarre and sad fact—coming out is not something that straight kids worry about. Straight kids will never have to strike up a conversation with their parents about their sexual orientation, because their sexual orientation is perceived as normal. As the default.

And then you hear about parents who are totally fine with homosexuality, but can't handle it when their own kid comes out. You just never know.

Simon is secure in his sexual orientation and embraces it, but he's not too excited about coming out to his family, even though he has faith that they would be accepting. The sentence above clearly shows how people—especially kids and teenagers—on the LGBT+ spectrum can never

be too sure about their family's response to their coming out. Coming out is very difficult. Some parents are completely okay with it, some parents are disgusted and would literally disown their child, some parents would say they accept it but then 'gently' nudges the child towards heterosexuality with intrusive comments about their sexual orientation. LGBT+ kids have to be extra careful, and it's sad.

I mean, I'm lying here on Nick's basement carpet, the site of so many Power Rangers transformations and lightsaber battles and spilled cups of juice—and all I want in the entire world is for Blue's next email to arrive. And Nick and Leah are still talking about the freaking TARDIS. They don't have a clue. They don't even know I'm gay.

And I don't know how to do this. Ever since I told Abby on Friday, I kind of thought it would be easy to tell Leah and Nick. Easier, anyway, now that my mouth is used to saying the words.

*It's not easier. It's impossible. Because even though it feels like I've known Abby forever, I really only met her four months ago. And I guess there hasn't been time for her to have any set ideas about me yet. But I've known Leah since sixth grade, and Nick since we were four. **And this gay thing. It feels so big. It's almost insurmountable.** I don't know how to tell them something like this and still come out of it feeling like Simon. Because if Leah and Nick don't recognize me, I don't even recognize myself anymore.*

I hate feeling so distant from Nick and Leah. [...] I don't know why keeping it from them makes me feel like I'm living a secret life.

Here, Simon is struggling with the idea of telling Nick and Leah that he's gay. Nick and Leah are his best friends for a very long time, but coming out feels so big. He feels distant from them by keeping a secret.

In the book, it's also shown how Simon faces harassment and bullying from some of the kids in his school.

- *I toss my backpack into my locker and pull out my books for English and French. No one has slid any homophobic notes into the slats of my locker, which is good. No one's etched the word "fag" into my locker yet either, which is even better. I'm almost ready to believe that things have gotten a little better at Creekwood. Or that no one saw Martin's Tumblr post after all.*

As I'm walking into the language arts wing, this football guy I hardly recognize almost runs directly into me coming down the stairs. I step back to steady myself, but he puts his hand on my shoulder and looks me right in the eye.

"Why, hello there," he says.

“Hi...”

Then he grabs me by the cheeks and pulls my face in like he’s going to kiss me. “Mwah!” He grins, and his face is so close I can feel the heat of his breath. And all around me, people laugh like fucking Elmo.

I yank my body away from him, cheeks burning. “Where are you going, Spier?” someone says. “McGregor wants a turn.” And everyone starts laughing again. I mean, I don’t even know these people. I don’t know why in God’s name this is funny to them.

- *For a minute, I’m confused, but then I follow Abby’s gaze to the back of the auditorium. And there’s this pair of random dudes in front of the double helixes who look a little familiar. I think they were in my health class last year. One of them is wearing a hoodie and fake glasses and a skirt over his khakis, and they’re both holding giant poster board signs.*

The first guy’s sign says, “How u doin’ Simon?”

And the guy in the skirt’s sign says, “WHAT WHAT—IN THA BUTT!”

The guys are grinding and some other people peek through the doorway laughing.

Those things count as discrimination. It’s harassment and public humiliation, which causes Simon to be upset and irritated. People in the LGBT+ community is vulnerable to discriminating acts like that.

The seriousness and consequence that comes from Martin outing Simon against his will is also described in the book.

“Simon, just—I seriously owe you an apology.”

I just kind of stand there.

He stretches his arms forward, cracking his knuckles under his gloves. “God, I’m just. I’m just so sorry. What happened in there. I didn’t know that would—I mean, I didn’t think people still did shit like that.”

“Right, who’d have guessed? Because Shady Creek is just so progressive.”

Martin shakes his head. “I just seriously didn’t think it would be such a big thing.”

I don’t even know what to say to that.

“Look, I’m sorry, all right? I was pissed off. The whole Abby thing. I wasn’t thinking. And then my brother basically ripped me a new one, and I was just . . . I just feel like shit, okay. And I deleted those screenshots ages ago. I swear to God. So can you please just say something?”

I mean, I almost start laughing. “What the fuck do you want me to say?”

“I don’t know,” he says. “I’m just trying—”

“Okay, how about this? I think you’re an asshole. I think you’re a huge fucking asshole. I mean, don’t even fucking pretend you didn’t know this would happen. You blackmailed me. This was—I mean, wasn’t that the whole goddamn point? Humiliating me?”

He shakes his head and opens his mouth to reply, but I cut him off.

*“And you know what? **You don’t get to say it’s not a big thing. This is a big fucking thing, okay? This was supposed to be—this is mine. I’m supposed to decide when and where and who knows and how I want to say it.**” Suddenly, my throat gets thick. “So, yeah, you took that from me. And then you brought Blue into it? Seriously? You fucking suck, Martin. I mean, I don’t even want to look at you.”*

He’s crying. He’s trying not to, but he’s seriously, full-on crying. And my heart sort of twists.

“So can you just step away from my car,” I say, “and leave me the fuck alone?”

He nods, puts his head down, and walks away quickly.

I get in my car. And turn it on. And then I just start sobbing.

Being outed as LGBT+ is a huge deal. Martin dangerously underestimated the consequence of doing it (*“I just seriously didn’t think it would be such a big thing.”*), and his action costs Simon his mental wellbeing. Coming out is a highly personal experience, and one has the right to do it when and where and how and to whom they see fit. Being outed is perhaps one of the worst things that could happen to someone in the LGBT+ spectrum, because there’s almost always discrimination that comes after that.

There are also some implications about racial privilege in the book. Simon is a white person, and even though he is gay and therefore be a part of minority when it comes to his sexual orientation, he still has privileges as a white man.

That’s the thing people wouldn’t understand. This coming out thing. It’s not even about me being gay, because I know deep down that my family would be fine with it. We’re not religious. My parents are Democrats. My dad likes to joke around, and it would definitely be awkward, but I guess I’m lucky. I know they’re not going to disown me. And I’m sure

some people in school would give me hell, but my friends would be fine. Leah loves gay guys, so she'd probably be freaking thrilled.

Simon is lucky to have a family that does not make a (too) big deal of his coming out. But if he were a woman of color (WOC) who grew up in an ultra conservative and religious family, the story would be entirely different.

Another interesting thing is when Becky Albertalli wrote, through Simon:

*As a side note, don't you think everyone should have to come out? **Why is straight the default?** Everyone should have to declare one way or another, and it should be this big awkward thing whether you're straight, gay, bi, or whatever. I'm just saying.*

***It is definitely annoying that straight (and white, for that matter) is the default, and that the only people who have to think about their identity are the ones who don't fit that mold.** Straight people really should have to come out, and the more awkward it is, the better. Awkwardness should be a requirement.*

Despite the heavy issues in the book, it's not completely a depressing book. The language is not complicated; Becky Albertalli uses simple descriptions and the modern "typical" language that teenagers use, as well as millennial/generation Z humor ("I can't even", "But I'm gay. GAY. Gaaaaayyyy", etc). There are many cute moments between Simon and Blue, whether it's before or after they know each other's identity. There are moments where the reader can feel that Simon is highly relatable when he has a crush on someone. The way he images many boys he meets to be Blue, how he freaks out over the simplest things, how he overthinks about his feelings, how he flirts with his crush. It's the typical teenage crush experience. And it's so nice to see that non-heteronormative relationships get depicted in the media too. LGBT+ people deserve to have more representation in the media. And the most important thing is, Simon gets a happy ending at the end of the book.