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Queerness for Kids: A Content Analysis of LGBTQ Narrative Picture Books

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Queerness for Kids: A Content Analysis of LGBTQ Narrative Picture Books

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Abstract

Children's picture books function as socializers with both stated and subtextual messages (Aronson et al 2017, Capuzza 2019, Kern 2020, Sciurba 2017). Inclusive picture books contain messages that can affirm marginalized identities and broaden normative worldviews (Capuzza 2019, Epstein 2012, Mokrzycki 2020). However, there are often harmful norms and stereotypes even in inclusive literature (Capuzza 2019, Epstein 2019, DePalma 2014). This study analyzes the interplay of inclusive and normative messages within the context of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ) picture books. I compiled a dataset that represents a near-census of all narrative picture books containing at least one LGBTQ character published between 2010 and 2020. I aim to answer the questions of what LGBTQ narrative picture books are available and what messages they contain. I found 260 picture books, which were almost evenly split between gender and sexuality books. Over half the books in my near-census use the LGBTQ identity as the conflict of the story and the majority were set in the real world. Moreover, I find both normative narratives and stories that suggest a more inclusive direction within my sample. I consider my findings in relation to previous literature on inclusive pictures books in general, and the limited existing literature on LGBTQ picture books in particular.

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Introduction

Frankie is vivacious, opinionated, and confident. Short, round, and larger-than-life, they have a personality that fills up any room. Frankie is loudly queer, in both sexuality and gender. Frankie was the first queer person I met, either in real life or in literature, and they teach me more about being queer (and loud, and confident) every time I see them. Yet, for Frankie, the journey to becoming this proud, unapologetically queer person I know them as was fraught with uncertainty, confusion, and misunderstanding. They did not see any queer people represented in the books they read or shows they watched growing up. Further, they called it a "damn shame" that there wasn't more queer representation in their childhood media. Particularly while exploring their gender, Frankie wished they had more introduction to varied gender identities. They reminisced about the "super queer" feelings they had while reading *Ranma ½* by Rumiko Takahashi, a favorite manga of theirs as a child and the closest to gender queer representation they had. The main character of *Ranma ½* is a teenage boy who was cursed to switch gender based on whether he was splashed with hot or cold water. But though Frankie remembers being "jealous" of that power, they "didn't really investigate those feelings until well after [they] came out." They remarked, "I had questions about my gender from a young age, but I didn't have the language to process those feelings." This bears restating: they literally did not have the words to understand what they were feeling as the world around them privileged cisgender expression. They did not learn the term "non-binary" until high school (personal communication to author, March 26, 2020).

Yet, even in the relatively few years since Frankie and I were children, the landscape of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ) representation for children has started to change. Although LGBTQ literature for children and teens still represents a tiny fraction of

overall publishing, this constitutes a promising new trend toward more inclusive representation. Representation is important; indeed, research has shown that it is critical for kids' identity formation to see themselves represented in books in an authentic way (Aronson et al. 2017, Capuzza 2019). Reading gender-diverse children's books could provide the introduction to queerness to a child today that Frankie feels they lacked.

The relative rarity of LGBTQ characters in children's books makes it all the more important that parents and educators be able to evaluate those books and the messages they might send. Despite publishers' and authors' best intentions, it is not uncommon for books to unintentionally reinforce heteronormative or cisnormative stereotypes. This study is interested in how LGBTQ identities are represented in children's picture books that advertise themselves as inclusive. I, therefore, look to examine messages of specifically LGBTQ picture books, rather than how LGBTQ themes come up across all picture books. Picture books occupy the unique position of targeting young kids and the adults that read to them (Matulka 2008, Singer 2011). Because of the secondary adult audience, the themes and messages tend to be more complicated than early reader chapter books intended to be read by children alone (Lambert 2015, Matulka 2008). Moreover, I narrow my focus to narrative picture books. Non-narrative books are more explicit in their messages and intention to teach the reader, while narrative books tend to have more subtle layers of subtext, making them a better site for sociological interpretation (Crisp et al. 2017). Therefore, this study will seek to both examine the population of narrative LGBTQ picture books and provide a structure with which to understand the themes, messages, and tropes of this specific literature.

In my review of the scholarly literature, I establish first the function of inclusive picture books, noting their social significance as both identity and empathy builders. I introduce the

concepts of genre, narrative structure, illustration quality, and authenticity as metrics with which to judge inclusive literature. Although no book could ever be truly inclusive, I discuss the counterproductive effects of inaccurate or stereotypical representation in inclusive books. In this context, I review past research on homonormativity, cisnormativity, gender essentialism, and gender binary as they appear in LGBTQ picture books. Using this lens, my study adds to the literature by surveying the most recent books and analyzing how LGBTQ picture books may have progressed.

As I detail in my methods chapter, I analyzed a near-census of narrative LGBTQ picture books that were published between 2010 and 2020. I completed a coding sheet (see appendix 1) for each of the 260 books in my sample. I coded for "book demographics," i.e. author, illustrator, and publishing data, as well as content data, such as narrative structure, LGBTQ category, genre, tone, illustration quality, and themes. In order to better analyze the data, I split my sample into the following LGBTQ categories:

- Gay family: books that feature LGBTQ adults in the background, usually relatives of the protagonist.
- Queer love: love stories that center LGBTQ characters.
- Transgender: books that involve transgender characters.
- Gender benders: books that feature characters that maintain their gender assigned at birth, but engage in some activity associated strongly with the opposite gender.
- Gender queer: books that include characters who fall outside of the gender binary.

My analysis focuses on answering two central questions. First, what kinds of narrative LGBTQ picture books have been published in the last decade? Second, what factors are associated with the narrative construction of the LGBTQ picture books I reviewed?

To answer these questions, I divide my analysis into two chapters. The first chapter displays descriptive statistics about the sample as a whole. In this section, I review the salience of LGBTQ category, narrative structure, genre, tone, print quality, and themes in describing the

sample. I argue that LGBTQ category is necessary to accurately understand the effect of the other descriptors of the sample as different kinds of LGBTQ identities are portrayed differently.

To further explore how LGBTQ identities are constructed in LGBTQ narrative picture books, my second analysis chapter focuses on the messages, tropes, and plot devices central to each category's depiction of LGBTQ identity. In this chapter, I argue that many types of tropes and normative messages persist in every category of LGBTQ narrative picture books. However, I also find evidence of new directions beginning to appear in the sample, picture books that reject normative tropes or structures.

I conclude with a discussion of suggested future actions for scholars, authors, and educators. For future studies, I stress the importance of researching inclusive literature, in terms of reception, accessibility, and quality. For authors, I highlight the gaps in my sample, such as the non-existence of bisexual representation. For educators and librarians, I recommend balancing collections of inclusive picture books to ensure not only a range of identities are represented, but also that each identity is represented in a variety of ways.

A note on terminology:

The terms "gay," "queer," and "LGBTQ" have different connotations to different people. I use them almost interchangeably, with the following nuances. I use "LGBTQ" to capture the community of individuals who identify with diverse gender expression or sexual orientations. For me, this includes intersex, asexual, pansexual, and the many identities not mentioned by the letters of the acronym. In the context of the "G" in LGBTQ, I use "gay" as a descriptor for a male-identifying individual who is attracted to other male-identifying individuals. However, I also use "gay" to mean all kinds of same-sex attraction in order to denote when I am discussing

sexuality and the focus is on gender identities. In this way, my category "gay family" refers to families with queer parents, not just families of gay men. For the purposes of this study, "queer" can be used synonymously with LGBTQ or to mean an expression that is more radical or outside of normative binaries and relationship expectations. These distinctions and nuances will be clear in context.

Chapter 2: Scholarly Review of Inclusive Literature

Picture books, and indeed all media, promote norms and lessons to help children learn about the world around them (Aronson et al. 2017, Capuzza 2019, Epstein 2014, Lester 2014, Toman 2014). Their function as socializers lends particular sociological weight to the messages that a story might send to the children who utilize it to learn and grow (Aronson et al. 2017, Capuzza 2019, Kern 2020, Sciurba 2017). Moreover, inclusive literature can give insight into the norms and values that adults in the industry wish to promote (Singer 2011). However, the stated description of an inclusive book may not recognize the subtextual messages it contains (Malcom and Shehan 2019). Indeed, it is not uncommon for inclusive literature to contain stereotypes or rely on normative structures in the telling of its message (Capuzza 2019, Epstein 2019, DePalma 2014). It is therefore important, particularly in stories that are intended to be inclusive, to analyze whether a story is expanding, challenging, or reinforcing the status quo (Aronson et al. 2017, Capuzza 2019, Sciurba 2017). Inclusive literature can focus on celebrating any aspect of diversity—race, culture, ability, class, sexuality, etc. Analysis of every kind of inclusive literature is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, I chose to focus on LGBTQ picture books as a subset of inclusive literature. To contextualize my study, I first review the literature on the qualities and uses of inclusive children's books more generally. Next, I highlight the current scholarly literature on the successes and flaws of LGBTQ picture books, both historically and into the present. The last section of this literature review focuses on the limitations of the current literature and sets the stage for my own research.

Function and Significance of Inclusive Picture Books

Reading is an active and interactive process; particularly for picture books, because the adult is engaging the child through the book (Singer 2011). Picture books provide a venue for parents and children to connect and sharing this experience together had been proven to support literacy skills, familial closeness, and a sense of belonging (Aronson et al. 2017, Mokrzycki 2020). As literacy builders, picture books help children to develop critical thinking skills and an understanding of narrative and text (Mokrzycki 2020, Toman 2014). Particularly for young children, the interplay of picture and text in a picture book serves to foster pre-reading skills (Lambert 2015). Indeed, the picture book is ideal for engaging children in complex discussions as it allows them to make their own connections to the illustrations without requiring the ability to read on their own (Lambert 2015). These factors position picture books as ultimately key for academic success (Aronson et al. 2017, Toman 2014).

In addition to their educational uses, picture books allow children to understand themselves, build empathy for others, and make sense of their world (Capuzza 2019, Epstein 2012, Mokrzycki 2020). Within this capacity as didactic tools, picture books may have several functions for the child: mirrors, windows, and doors (Bishop 1990, Dorr et al. 2018, Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019). “Mirror books” show children characters like themselves, which improves self-esteem and emotional development. Children may also use a “mirror” narrative as a map for their own feelings and environment (Malcom and Shehan 2019, Toman 2014, Sciurba 2017). Conversely, never seeing oneself reflected in one’s books creates a sense of unimportance and invisibility in the child (Mokrzycki 2020, Naidoo 2012). A “window book” exposes children to other ways of being, which sparks curiosity, empathy, and understanding for people unlike themselves (Aronson et al. 2017, Bishop 1990, Brittner et al. 2016, Epstein 2014). “Sliding

doors" are books in which the child may imagine themself in the story, trying on different identities within the narrative (Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019). Through these functions, the importance of inclusive picture books is clear (Aronson et al. 2017, Naidoo 2012). In order to gain the benefits of identifying with a story, a child must see a representation of their lives and families in their books (Dorr et al. 2018, Naidoo 2012). Moreover, Aronson et al. (2017) found that reading racially-diverse literature boosted both self-understanding and literacy scores as the students of color were better able to remember plots that featured characters they could relate to. Other research has found that reading books that emphasize inclusive themes—such as positive difference, equality, and social justice—equips non-minority children with the critical thinking skills necessary to question unhealthy norms and teaches them to value marginalized others (Aronson et al. 2017, Capuzza 2019). These studies demonstrate the need for inclusive picture books in order to allow all children to access the identity construction and empathy building opportunities of picture books.

Picture books have a third role in child development, that of socializers (Aronson et al. 2017, Capuzza 2019, Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019). Through the story, a child gathers a sense of what is expected in society—simple messages like: "don't steal the other kid's toy on the playground" and more complicated and implicit conclusions like: "boys have short hair" or "heteronormative marriage is the desired outcome for everyone" (Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019). Children's biases about "normal" are built precisely this way, drawing on the media they see and hear as well as the experiences they have with parents, teachers, and other kids (Capuzza 2019, Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019). Picture books are a particularly interesting form of socializing media because they have a double audience. Indeed, picture books are produced and bought by adults, who ultimately decide what story the child should be exposed to (Malcom and

Shehan 2019, Toman 2014, Singer 2011). Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese (2019) write, "Challenging norms requires conscious effort from the adults who shape children's sense of what is normative" (428). Therefore, one can assume that the adults who produce and buy inclusive literature intend to teach a particular set of norms, centered around valuing marginalized others. Sociologically, then, inclusive picture books are both a tool for children's identity and empathy development and a marker of what some progressive adults wish children to believe. Teachers, librarians, parents, and other adults rely on picture books to teach children, using them to introduce difficult subjects, to illustrate a lesson, or to challenge a norm (Blackburn et al. 2016, Capuzza 2019, Epstein 2014, Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019). Indeed, research has shown that "honest," "accurate," "well-constructed" books can forge a path from bias to acceptance (Aronson et al. 2017, Naidoo 2012: 16).

Judging the Quality of an Inclusive Picture Book

There are several key factors in the construction of inclusive literature: narrative, illustration, and authenticity. Let us begin with narrative. When examining inclusive literature, narrative can be broken down into genre, tone, and incorporation of the diverse character (Aronson et al. 2017, Capuzza 2019, Forni 2020, Naidoo 2012, Sullivan 2017). Genre tends to be specific to the diverse population is featured. For example, African American characters are most often portrayed in stories of historical oppression, while Native American cultures are often featured in folklore-inspired tales (Aronson et al. 2017). By contrast, LGBTQ populations tend to appear in realistic-fiction set in white-suburbia (Naidoo 2012). If any given population is only portrayed in a single genre, the genre may start to define that group in the mind of the child—oppression of Black Americans may be thought of as historical only, Native Americans may start

to appear as mythical as the dragons in other folktales, LGBTQ folks may seem to have no history (Aronson et al. 2017). It is therefore important to maintain a balance of genres in any inclusive book collection to ensure the quality of the collection overall.

Tone is equally, if not more important, to the quality of a picture book. While exceptions to this are increasing, many inclusive books are not the playful, silly, imaginative titles children would be likely to choose for themselves (Forni 2020). Rather, many inclusive books attempt to educate the reader on a diverse identity (Aronson et al. 2017, Naidoo 2012). In an overly didactic book, the whimsy is sacrificed in service to the message the book is trying to send (Brittner 2016, Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2017). This loses sight of the reasons that children enjoy reading picture books: engaging with a plot and characters who are fun (Lambert 2015). While educational books certainly have a place in any library or classroom, true inclusion involves representation in all kinds of books, particularly the kind of book a child might request to read over and over (Aronson et al. 2017, Forni 2020).

Inclusion of a diverse character is a prerequisite of inclusive literature, but the structure in which a character is included affects the impact of the story on the child (Aronson et al. 2017, Epstein 2012, Forni 2020). In their study of multicultural picture books, Aronson et al. (2017) have nine narrative structures to represent the manner in which the diverse character was used in the story; I detail their two most common categories here: "Any Child" and "Beautiful Life." For Aronson et al. (2017), "Any Child" books featured "children of color in which racial or cultural group…are not a defining feature" (9). In a more general context, any child books feature a diverse protagonist whose diversity is constructed in the illustrations and is irrelevant to the plot. "Beautiful Life" narratives feature "positive depictions of a particular racial or cultural group experience" (Aronson et al. 2017: 8). Beautiful life books are most often a day-in-the-life slice of

diversity. Another useful categorization of inclusive picture books' narrative structure is the "Issue Book" (Forni 2020). Forni (2020) defines issue books as those that "explicitly present a simple plot that focuses on everyday life and potential problems of same-sex families, narrated from the child's perspective and trying to normalize this reality" (58). These books, in contrast to beautiful life books, emphasize the diverse identity as the problem of the story (Forni 2020). Any child books allow LGBTQ children to see themselves and their families in the range of roles that mainstream characters occupy—royalty, pirates, dog walkers, block builders, sandcastle destroyers, anything. (Aronson et al. 2017, Capuzza 2019). Beautiful life books function as windows into the lives of interesting individuals or communities (Aronson et al. 2017). However, both these kinds of books omit a discussion of oppression entirely, which can serve to invisiblize the continuing effect of that oppression (Aronson et al. 2017, Capuzza 2019). It is still important to recognize the violence and rejection that marginalized people continue to face, as issue books do, in order to fully represent their identities (Aronson et al. 2017, Capuzza 2019). A balance of narrative structures is needed in every collection to accurately provide both mirrors and windows for all children and to attain all the benefits of inclusive literature (Aronson et al. 2017).

Narrative, however, is only half of the equation in a picture book. Picture books are by their very nature a visual art form (Lambert 2015, Mokrzycki 2020). Illustrations should help tell the story of a picture book, but more than that, the pictures are what bring the story alive (Bang 2016). The text of picture books is necessarily simple, accommodating the audience of young children. The illustrations, therefore, need to bring the dynamic emotion and character to the story (Bang 2016). The interplay of text and illustration is one of the easiest ways of determining a quality picture book; uninteresting or clumsy illustrations will fail to engage their audience

(Bang 2016). This is a real concern for inclusive picture books as they are often self-published and therefore lack the budget for mainstream-quality illustrations (Naidoo 2012).

The above deals with "well-constructed," to quote Naidoo (2012) again, but what of "honest" and "accurate?" (16). The intended purpose of an inclusive book is to represent a diverse identity, but it can only achieve that goal if the identity is represented authentically (Aronson et al. 2017, Maji 2019). Authenticity has become a buzz word of inclusive literature since the 2015 social media movement #OwnVoices (Yorio 2018). #OwnVoices calls for diverse literature to be authored by individuals that possess the identity depicted to ensure the accuracy of the story (Yorio 2018). The movement posits that people from diverse communities are the best (and/or only ones) able to capture that community honestly (Yorio 2018). For its proponents, having an own voice author has become a short-hand for authenticity (Yorio 2018, Maji 2019). However, having an own voice author does not guarantee an honest and accurate representation (Maji 2019). First, an own voice author still only has one perspective and cannot be expected to accurately capture all experiences of all people in that community—for this reason, we need more inclusive books such that more perspectives and intersectional identities may be fully represented (Aronson et al. 2017). In addition, the intended audience of the book affects the style of writing and illustration (Maji 2019). Nigerian-born Maji (2019) found that own-voice books depicting Nigeria, but intended for western children did not accurately represent her own experience. Moreover, a book with an own voice author is not guaranteed to be free of norms and implicit stereotypes (Capuzza 2019). Thus, while we certainly need more books by own voice authors (and more diverse publishers, editors, and illustrators) to bring much

needed diversity to the industry,[1] such books must still be evaluated for honest and accuracy with multiple sources from the community they seek to represent (Aronson et al. 2017, Capuzza 2019).

Inaccurate or Stereotypical Inclusive Picture Books

Despite the good intentions of authors, illustrators, and publishers of picture books, inclusive picture books remain products of our society and we must be aware of the normative carry-overs in even the most progressive work. No book could ever be perfectly inclusive and, indeed, does not need to be to function as a mirror, window, or door for children. That said, inaccurate representation can perpetuate stereotypes, create biases, and serve to undermine the inclusive message (Bartholomaeus 2016, Capuzza 2019). In my discussion of categorization above, I discussed the possibility that a lack of variety in genre could create a single story of a marginalized group. This danger is also present in a story that portrays a character in a stereotypical way, even as a foil for another, non-stereotypical character (Bartholomaeus 2016). Bartholomaeus (2016) studied the response of six and seven-year-olds to feminist retellings of fairytales. She found that "intertextual resistance," or aversion to retellings that deviate from the familiar norm, tended to limit how the children incorporated feminist messages (Bartholomaeus 2016). She noted that children tended to prioritize the heteronormative storylines when they were present (Bartholomaeus 2016). From this, we can gather that the introduction of stereotypes can counteract inclusive messaging. I call this the "except-when-they-don't" paradox, after a gender

[1] Although this study is not devoted to the challenges facing own voice authorship, it must be noted that own voice authors can find it more difficult to get published and to be respected in a white-and-cisgender dominated publishing industry (Gonzalez 2018). It may therefore be necessary to change the publishing industry in order to increase the number of own voice authors.

inclusive picture book I read last year (Bouchey 2020). *Except When They Don't* by Laura Gehl (2019) presents gender stereotypes such as "boys build space ships out of blocks / girls delight in princess frocks… except when they don't" (8). This book unintentionally reinforces gender roles by spending so much time reiterating the very stereotypes it intends to combat (Bouchey 2020).

Because of the counterproductive effects of poor-quality inclusive books, it is particularly important to evaluate the books that we have for their accuracy, honesty, and construction. In this section, I have examined frameworks that apply to many inclusive books, regardless of specific identity depicted. However, as diverse communities are far from a monolith, it is important to evaluate the representation of each separately. Therefore, I focus the remainder of this study on the LGBTQ community and its representation in children's picture books. I begin by briefly highlighting important historical LGBTQ picture books, before moving on to a discussion of the findings of scholarly analysis on the subject.

Chapter 3: Scholarly Critiques of LGBTQ Picture Books

Brief History of LGBTQ Picture Books

The last forty years have seen an explosion of picture books featuring LGBTQ characters (Capuzza 2019, Epstein 2014, Naidoo 2012). This section provides a historical examination of LGBTQ picture books, touching on groundbreaking picture books in terms of both gender and sexuality books. Many books can be read through a queer lens, utilizing subtext and implication to identify LGBTQ content (Naidoo 2012). Many early gender books fall into this category (Naidoo 2012). The first gender book was published in 1936; *The Story of Ferdinand* by Munro Leaf portrays a bull who wants to smell the flowers rather than fight (Dorr et al. 2018, Naidoo 2012). This represents the beginning of a trend that bends gender norms by presenting a protagonist with non-typical presentation of gender (Capuzza 2019, Naidoo 2012). Gender bending books—stories featuring boys performing some feminine actions (wearing dresses, wearing pink, baking, playing with dolls, etc) and, more rarely, girls performing more masculine actions (wearing plaid, playing with trucks, etc)—are the most common type of gender book (Capuzza 2019). At least in terms of books published in the last fifty years, male gender bending has felt more radical than female and the "boys in dresses" trope has gripped the genre since the 2000s (Naidoo 2012). *William's Doll* by Charlotte Zolotow in 1972 and *Jesse's Dream Skirt* by Bruce Mack in 1979 are classic examples of gender benders (Naidoo 2012). Moreover, gender benders have been counted as precursors to more radical transgender and gender queer books, starting this transition with *X: A Fabulous Child's Story* by Lois Gould in 1978 (Naidoo 2012). Early gender-bending books attempt to redefine of gender-nonconforming activities within

traditional masculine norms in order to legitimize them,[2] roots one can still find in some more recent gender benders (Brittner et al. 2016, Malcom and Shehan 2019). However, Naidoo (2012) noted that many gender benders still "introduce children to the idea that cross-dressing is wrong—something they pick up easily from the social messages around them—and then reinterpret that message as an expression of individuality and normalcy" (38). As we discussed in Chapter 2, this approach does not necessarily promote inclusion.

The first recognized transgender picture book, *10,000 dresses* by Marcus Ewert, was published in 2008 (Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019, Naidoo 2012). Since then, other books, such as, famously, *I am Jazz* by Jazz Jennings and Jessica Herthel (2014), have gained notoriety and raised awareness of the demand for transgender characters picture books (Brittner et al. 2016, Owen 2016). There has been a significant expansion in recent years of books featuring transgender, gender queer, and gender bending characters (Brittner et al. 2016: 949, Malcom and Shehan 2019). I will show later in this study that the patterns set by the early gender bender books carry over into the new, more radical trans and gender queer books, as well as the recent gender benders.

In the 1980s, the first gay family books appeared. *When Megan Went Away* by Jane Severance (1979), *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* by Susanne Börsche (1983), *Heather has Two Mommies* by Lesléa Newman (1989), and *Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Willhoite (1990) are all historic examples of early sexuality books (Knopp-Schwyn and Francentese 2019, Naidoo 2012). Despite their controversial nature when they were first published, these books have become templates for subsequent portrayals of LGBTQ families in picture books (Naidoo 2012).

[2] To take *William's Doll* as an example, William's desire for a doll is accepted when it is rationalized as a masculine desire for fatherhood.

Many of the early gay family books focus on the "normalcy" of the queer subject, while some studies show that more recent books tend to emphasize a community's move from rejection to acceptance (Naidoo 2012, Miller 2019). In other words, some recent books have "shifted away from problematizing homosexuality and toward problematizing homophobia" in their portrayal of the queer family (Malcom and Shehan 2019: 918). Indeed, in this study, I will investigate whether the most recent sexuality books follow this trend.

Sexuality: Family or Romance?

At least historically, homonormative portrayals of marriage and family dominate depictions of gay and lesbian characters. (Naidoo 2012, Taylor 2011). Homonormativity privileges the LGBTQ characters that most closely resemble the heteronormative ideal—specifically, monogamous, child-rearing pairings that conform to expected gender roles and assimilate into mainstream society—and further marginalizes other identities (Blackburn et al. 2016, Crisp et al. 2018, Lester 2014, Taylor 2011). Indeed, research suggests that sexuality books often attempt to that queer families are "just like heterosexual families" (Epstein 2014, Lester 2014, Malcom and Shehan 2019, Owen 2016, Toman 2014). To that end, picture book depictions of queer families still commonly retain homonormative depictions of the two-parent family (Mokrycki 2020). Current research suggests that gay and lesbian characters most commonly appear in picture books as married or partnered parents in a two-parent household with latently heterosexual kids (Forni 2020, Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2017). Additionally, some researchers have found that queer relationships are usually not portrayed as strongly as heterosexual relationships often are, often lacking moments of meaningful touch between partners like hugs, kisses, hand-holding (Knopp-Schwyn and Francentese 2019, Martin and

Kazyak 2009). While this allows the LGBTQ family book to be less controversial, this may not challenge heteronormativity so much as it performs heterosexuality in a queer costume (DePalma 2017, Epstein 2019, Forrester 2016, Naidoo 2012, VanHorn 2015).

Moreover, in sexuality books, the protagonist is more likely to have gay or lesbian parents than to be gay or lesbian in their own right (Epstein 2019, VanHorn 2015). Indeed, historically there has been a strong bias towards gay family books over queer love books (Naidoo 2012, VanHorn 2015). Picture books featuring queer love stories exist, but often rely on animal characters or fairytale settings with adult protagonists to increase their acceptability (VanHorn 2015).

LGBTQ books are frequently censored and banned as inappropriate for children (Capuzza 2019, Dorr et al. 2018, Naido 2012). The idea that LGBTQ themes ought to be reserved for a more mature audience fails to recognize the constant normative privileging of heterosexual relationships in society (DePalma 2014, Dorr et al. 2018, Mokryzcki 2020). Romance and attraction between little boys and girls goes unquestioned in any number of stories and fairytales (Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019). Therefore, a dearth of LGBTQ love stories can construct queer sexuality as unnatural and inappropriate in contrast to heterosexuality (DePalma 2014, Mokryzcki 2020).

Gender: Bending, Breaking, or Confirming?

Gender books are simultaneously the oldest and most recent forms of LGBTQ books (Naidoo 2012, Capuzza 2019). There are marked distinctions between books with gender bending characters, transgender characters, and gender queer characters (Capuzza 2019). Indeed, as I will show, each subcategory of gender book relies on different norms and structures to

construct gender. Research has noted many holdovers from heteronormative standards in gender books, such as the widespread use of gender essentialism, gender binary, and presentation of gender creativity as abnormal (Capuzza 2019, Naidoo 2012). In sticking to conventional ideas of gendered activities and traditional standards of fixed, binary gender, gender books become more relatable to a wider audience, but can fail to represent the range of queer expressions (Capuzza 2019, Epstein 2014). Gender books, therefore, occupy an interesting and contradictory space in which they attempt to both queer our conception of gender and construct queerness within the context of normative structures (Capuzza 2019).

Gender essentialism is one such structure. Gender essentialism is defined by the assumption that all individuals of the same gender are intrinsically the same, causing them to have a natural affinity for the same things (Capuzza 2019, Sciurba 2017). Essentialism creates a "standard performance of gender," causing sparkles, pink, flowers, and dresses to be short hand for girl and sports, trucks, and dirt to be short hand for boys (Capuzza 2019, Sciurba 2017). In picture books, essentialist cues in appearance, coupled with pronoun use or declaration of gendered job titles or names, are frequently relied on as the primary ways of conveying gender (Brittner et al. 2016, Capuzza 2019). In other words, markers of appearance remain highly gendered, in that girls have long hair or wear dresses or pink, while boys have short hair and wear pants (Brittner et al. 2016, Capuzza 2019, Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019). In some ways, this is useful to quickly convey character with the illustrations, but is dangerous if overused. Capuzza (2019) noted a tendency for transgender books to fall into a hyper-essentialist characterization in order to prove the trans-ness of the character.

In contrast to the strong association of objects and gender in transgender narratives, gender-bending books attempt to decouple that connection (Brittner et al. 2016, Capuzza 2019).

Gender bender books attempt break essentialist notions of what toys are appropriate for each gender, as their protagonists play with opposite gender objects and clothing while still identifying as the gender assigned them at birth. (Capuzza 2019, Lester 2014, Malcom and Shehan 2019, Toman 2014). Indeed, some texts seek to masculinize wearing a dress with the language used to describe it, creating an image of "boy-ness" that is undisrupted by the dress (Brittner et al. 2016, Malcom and Shehan 2019). This construction attempts to present a wider range of masculinities than is traditionally accepted, although sometimes falls short due to the except-when-they-don't paradox (Bouchey 2020, Sciurba 2017). While gender books emphasize a child's right to choose their clothes or play with whatever toys they want, they do not question the gendered qualities of these objects (Capuzza 2019, Toman 2014, Miller 2019, Sciruba 2017).

The gender binary generally remains a fixed constant in transgender books; as with their toys, kids may choose their gender, but the choice is limited to boy or girl (Capuzza 2019, Lester 2014, Sciurba 2017). Moreover, not every gender transgression challenges heteronormativity (Owen 2016). A "coming out" narrative in which a transgender child goes from "boy" to "girl" still upholds the gender binary, especially if it describes the transition in essentialist terms (Capuzza 2019). The structure of coming out allows the story to more easily assimilate into mainstream discourse as it positions the transgender child as on their way to becoming a normatively gendered man or woman (Capuzza 2019, Lester 2014, Owen 2016). The transgender child is therefore recognizable as a normal "girl (or boy)," who performs stereotypical gendered activities, with the small matter of being born as a "boy (or girl)" (Brittner et al. 2016, Capuzza 2019, Owen 2016).

Gender queer identities are rare in current inclusive picture books, but not entirely unrepresented (Capuzza 2019). A growing number of books portray gender queer characters that

choose gender neutral names and pronouns and do not differentiate between essentialist "boy" and "girl" activities (Capuzza 2019). However, they/them pronouns and identity labels such as "nonbinary," "gender-fluid," "cisgender," and "gender queer" are unusual in gender books, as they prefer to simplify the concepts down to "boy" becomes "girl" (Capuzza 2019). Even sexuality books use simplified language, naming affinities (i.e. boy is attracted to another boy), rather than identity labels (Toman 2014). As children are primed for learning new vocabulary at this age, this is a missed opportunity for LGBTQ books (Capuzza 2019, Knopp-Schwynn and Fracentese 2019, Naidoo 2012, VanHorn 2015).

Acceptance, Rejection, and Bullying

Acceptance and rejection are strong themes throughout LGBTQ picture books (Capuzza 2019, Malcom and Shehan 2019, Toman 2014). There are very few LGBTQ books in which the main character does not receive some sort of acceptance from at least one peer or family member (Capuzza 2019, Miller 2019, Sciurba). Failing that, the queer character is almost always able to reach some inner self-acceptance (Capuzza 2019, Miller 2019). However, because of the emphasis on acceptance, bullying, teasing, rejection, and fear of rejection make up a significant portion of many LGBTQ picture books (Capuzza 2019, Toman 2014, Sullivan and Urraro 2019). Casting the LGBTQ identity as the source of the narrative's conflict can be interpreted as problematizing queerness, rather than uplifting it (Capuzza 2019, DePalma 2016, Epstein 2012, Malcom and Shehan 2019, Sciurba 2017).

Particularly problematic is the trope of the "exceptional queer," who is accepted only after they have proved themself useful to the mainstream[3] (Lester 2014, Sciurba 2017, Sullivan and Urraro 2019). The burden is on the queer character to prove themself worthy of acceptance, rather than on the community to change their discriminatory views (Capuzza 2019, Lester 2014, Malcom and Shehan 2019). The trope turns the positive theme of acceptance assimilationist in nature, encouraging the protagonist to be themself only so far as they can still fit in a heteronormative world (Capuzza 2019). Even with fully accepting communities, many queer characters exist in isolation from the LGBTQ community as the secondary characters depicted in LGBTQ picture books are almost always heterosexual and cisgender (Capuzza 2019, Toman 2014). The LGBTQ community, as a community, is rendered invisible, despite research showing the importance of connecting with role models who share one's experiences (Capuzza 2019).

Notable Absences within LGBTQ Picture Books

My frequent references to LGBTQ notwithstanding, research has found no picture books that feature a bisexual character (Epstein 2014, Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019). Indeed, marginalized identities such as gender queer, gender fluid, intersex, bisexual, asexual, or questioning are much less likely to make it into LGBTQ picture books as they are more difficult to simply explain and recognizably portray (Brittner et al. 2016, DePalma 2014, Sullivan and Urraro 2017). Therefore, not all of the LGBTQ community is represented in current inclusive picture books.

[3] *The Only Boy in Ballet Class* by Denise Eliana Gruska (2007) is a particularly clear example of this trope. Tucker is relentlessly bullied by both some older boys and his uncle for going to ballet class. This keeps happening until Tucker's dance skills win a football game. he is only celebrated when his dance skills proved useful to mainstream masculinity.

Research has noted that the characters in LGBTQ picture books are overwhelmingly white, middle-class, able-bodied, and living in a two-parent household set in a heteronormative world (Capuzza 2019, DePalma 2014, Epstein 2012, Lester 2014, Toman 2014). This simultaneously constructs queerness in the context of priveledge and invisiblizes minorities (Lester 2014). When people of color are present, their race or culture is not detailed; rather, these characters have brownish skin, but speak and behave exactly as white characters do (Miller 2019). Indeed, LGBTQ books have historically been written and illustrated by white, cisgender women (Brittner et al. 2016, Capuzza 2019, Naidoo 2012). My data replicates this finding.

Moreover, despite the exponential increase in publishing of LGBTQ fiction (across all age groups), they remain only four percent of the total books published, and picture books represent only ten percent of those LGBTQ books (Brittner et al. 2016, Capuzza 2019 Cooperative Children's Book Center 2018). The students who most need LGBTQ picture books are unlikely to see more than a few inclusive books, if any, in their classrooms or libraries (Sciurba 2017). Therefore, children are unlikely to get the balanced representation of inclusive books advocated by Aronson et al. (2017). These problems are troubling in a literature that purports to support the complex and diverse LGBTQ community. It is important to recognize the gaps in the literature so that we may be better able to include marginalized communities.

Gaps in the Scholarly Literature

As I have noted, the scholarly literature has split the subject of LGBTQ picture books into gender and sexuality books. This distinction narrows the study to avoid overgeneralization caused by too wide a focus, but misses the interplay of gender and sexuality that is present in reality. Only a few, older studies focus on both sexuality books and gender books and none of these perform a comparative analysis of the two categories (Lester 2014, Naidoo 2012, Toman

2014). Naidoo (2012) was the last researcher to perform a comprehensive survey of both gender and sexuality books, both gathering as many as possible and analyzing the result. My study hopes to build on Naidoo (2012)'s study by examining most recent decade of books.

Indeed, this is a field that is rapidly evolving. The gender books in Naidoo (2012)'s sample display different trends than those in Capuzza (2019)'s. Both public sentiment toward the LGBTQ community and the willingness of publishers to work with LGBTQ material has changed since 2012 (Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019). Indeed, court cases, visibility in the media, marriage equality, and online movements have all changed what LGBTQ material is considered appropriate for children to see (Baumle and Compton 2017, Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019). Recognizing the problems with our current sample of LGBTQ picture books does not discredit their value as mirrors, windows, and doors. Rather, analyzing the messages inherent in our representation allows us to use our flawed books to spark discussion of queer identities and heteronormative standards both. It is therefore important to examine whether the flaws in inclusive literature found by research continue to infiltrate our stories. Given the differing treatment of gay/lesbian, transgender, gender queer, and gender bending characters, a sample that includes both sexuality and gender is uniquely suited to produce a telling comparison. Building upon what we already know, my research evaluates the changing trends in LGBTQ children's literature.

Chapter 4: Methods and Frameworks

Based in the critical theories of inclusive literature I outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, I ask how LGBTQ experiences, relationships, and identities are characterized in narrative picture books published between 2010 and 2020. The rapidly evolving nature of this subject necessitates reevaluation of messages within the body of LGBTQ picture books as an increasing number are being published each year. To that end, this section details the parameters of my sample, my collection methods, key definitions and categorizations. Broadly, I seek to understand the picture books that have been published by categorizing them in terms of which LGBTQ identities they address and how, the narrative structure, genre, and message, as well as positionality of the author, illustrator, and publisher.

Determining the Sample

In this section, I detail the assumptions and definitions that shape my sample of LGBTQ picture books. In order to identify potentially qualifying books, I consulted library guides, book reviews, recommendation lists published online, and searched Amazon's "frequently bought together" and "similar to this…" features. I also examined the websites of known LGBTQ publishers[4] and awards[5]. I further searched the internet for LGBTQ books published each of the last 10 years to attempt to catch any books I may have missed. I acknowledge that my search may have missed some qualifying books, but I am confident that my sample is as comprehensive as possible. Through these methods, I reviewed 311 books, identifying 260 in my final sample. I consider this a near-census of LGBTQ narrative picture books of the period from 2010 to 2020.

In order to access the books, I reached out to my local libraries and combed YouTube for

[4] Such as Flamingo Rampant.
[5] Specifically, Lambda Literary Awards, Rainbow Book Awards, and Stonewall Awards.

read alouds. I also received grants to purchase books I was unable to access in these ways, from the Bates Student Research Fund and the Sociology Department Griffiths Fund. Four of the books I identified were out of print and I was unable to find them for purchase or at the library and was, therefore, forced to exclude them from the sample.[6] After compiling every potentially eligible book, I reviewed each to refine which books did and did not qualify for my sample.

With judgement calls inherent in my sampling method, I created a structure of careful definitions with which to base my decisions. First, I only considered books published in 2010 through 2020. Second drawing on the American Library Association definition, I define a "picture book" as a story intended for children, that is no more than 48 pages and includes an illustration on nearly every two-page spread (Matulka 2008). The industry average is 32 pages, with a range of 24-48 pages for picture books and as few as 16 for board books—books meant for children aged 0-3 (Matulka 2008). My sample includes both picture books and board books in order to capture the broadest age-range while still maintaining an audience of both children and adults (Matulka 2008, Singer 2011). For this reason, I excluded early reader chapter books as they are intended to be read by children alone and therefore are less complicated in storyline and message (Lambert 2015, Matulka 2008). In addition, I included only narrative picture books, which I have defined as picture books that contained a protagonist(s) and depicted a storyline with a beginning, middle, and end. Non-narrative books are more explicit in their messages and intention to teach the reader, while narrative books tend to have more layers of subtext, making them a better site for sociological interpretation (Crisp et al. 2017). I, therefore, excluded the

[6] *Girls Dance, Boys Fiddle* by Carole Lindstrom (2013), *Robin: A Gender Queer story* by Jack Fry (2015), *Yetta & the Fantastic Mom Suits* by Jano Oscherwitz (2016), and *Reg, Dave and Zach* by Nikita Chloe John and Mystique Ann U'Nique (2013).

following as non-narrative: informational books, intended to teach about an LGBTQ topic[7]; incidental books, featuring various non-primary characters in a more abstract message[8]; and historical books with no clear storyline[9] (Aronson et al. 2017). These guidelines shaped the selection of picture books based on format. I eliminated ten books for lack of narrative and five for lack of illustration or length.

However, the majority of the books (30) I cut lacked an explicit connection to an LGBTQ experience. Indeed, although I examined all books that were associated with LGBTQ, only books that explicitly contained an LGBTQ character within the storyline qualified for my sample. This excluded books that only imply LGBTQ non-primary characters in illustrations, but included books that have LGBTQ secondary characters such as parents, friends, or neighbors to the protagonist. I am not attempting to queer the books I analyze, but rather seek to establish what stated LGBTQ representation has already been published.

I operationalized the presence of LGBTQ characters in the picture books using the following set of definitions:

- Lesbian and gay characters show attraction to others of the same sex (either narrating their attraction in the text or visibilizing it in the illustrations with hand-holding, kissing, cuddling, etc.), or appear in a romantic relationship (or clearly implied romantic relationship such as co-parenthood) with a same-sex partner.

- Bisexual characters, if they were to appear, similarly would demonstrate attraction or appear in a relationship with two or more different gendered characters.

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[7] *The Gender Wheel* by Maya Gonzalez (2017) is an excellent example of an informational book. Gonzalez presents the complicated terminology of gender identity, carefully defining each in accessible language. The goal is to teach, rather than to tell a story.

[8] Such as *A Family is a Family is a Family* by Sara O'Leary (2016). *A Family is a Family is a Family* highlights all different families, from families with LGBTQ parents, to one parent families, to blended families, to families with lots of kids, to foster families. It does not specifically focus on LGBTQ families, but includes them as a small part of a larger message. This is what epitomizes an incidental book.

[9] See *This Day in June* by Gayle E. Pitman (2014) as an example of a historical book. This book does not feature a main character and a narrative plot. Instead, it teaches the reader about LGBTQ pride, its roots, and its celebration. However, I do include historical books that take a more biographical-narrative approach, following a single person through their life.

- Transgender characters declare a desire to change their sex assigned at birth or show a time in which they presented as a different gender. This is often punctuated with transitioning pronouns and illustrated by changing appearance.

- Gender queer characters fall outside of the gender binary in pronouns, radical rejection of appearance norms, or demonstration of both masculine and feminine-coded qualities, activities, or appearance.

- Gender benders maintain their birth gender but engage in some activity associated strongly with the opposite gender. When including gender bender books, I chose to exclude books that feature girls in STEM fields or sports, as those activities do not function as gender transgressive in the same way that boys wearing dresses do in today's society (Malcom and Shehan 2019, Miller 2019, Naidoo 2012).

I also made several distinctions surrounding books whose messages focused on celebrating difference in an allegorical sense; some of these allegory books I included as alluding clearly to gender or sexual identity difference,[10] others I decided not to include, because they were not clearly identifiable as dealing with LGBTQ themes.[11]

Coding the Content

My study analyzes the narrative construction of LGBTQ books, as such, my unit of analysis is the entire picture book, both text and illustrations. I examine messages contained in books, rather than children's reception of them due to the difficulty of research with young

[10] An example of this is *Red, a Crayon's Story* by Michael Hall (2015). Everyone believes that the protagonist is a red crayon because he has a red wrapper. But inside, he is really a blue crayon. The plot follows the crayon's journey to self-acceptance as a blue crayon. This functions as an allegory for being transgender, i.e. feeling one way on the inside, while your exterior presents a different way. While the word transgender is never mentioned, the connection is clear enough to include the book in my sample.
[11] Such as *A Crow of His Own* by Megan Dowd Lambert (2014). *A Crow of His Own* follows the new rooster in the barnyard, Clyde, as he struggles to replicate the legendary wake-up crows of the last rooster. While this story does deal with masculinity in the form of comparing "scrawny" Clyde to his rock-star predecessor, the overall message is about celebrating your individuality, rather than celebrating an LGBTQ experience. Additionally, the book features two male farmers, but this does not count as an explicit portrayal of the LGBTQ community either, as there is no hint to the nature of their relationship. They may be lovers, they may be related in some way, they may just be two workers on the farm.

children both in terms of review board ethics and gauging their thoughts on the stories. Similarly, I do not consider the manner in which caregivers and teachers read the books, focusing instead on the construction of the picture book. However, as picture books are designed to be read over and over, it is likely that children receive at least some of the explicit and implicit messages contained in picture books and that caregivers who provided the books with those messages in mind discuss and guide their children in the analysis (Martin and Kazyak 2009).

For each book, I collected data on narrative structure and content, as well as what I call "demographics" of the book (see Appendix 1). The demographic data I am interested in are publisher, published date, author(s)' race, sexuality and gender, and illustrator(s)' race, sexuality and gender. All of these data I found somewhere easily accessible to the public: online, in a public social media profile, contributor's personal website, or on the book jacket. If I could not find a specific demographic in these places, it was marked "unknown." Additionally, I coded for genre, tone, illustration quality, and themes. In terms of content, I collected data on the identity of the LGBTQ character and protagonist,[12] any stereotypes or tropes present (beginning with those identified in the literature review), and narrative structure. In my coding, I left numerous sections for quotes or moments that struck me as important and I then inductively coded those notes for themes, which I analyzed as part of my content analysis.

[12] Although I collected these data, I found it beyond the scope of this study to present an intersectional analysis of character demographics and narrative content. However, I can note the following broad statistics:

- In terms of race, 63% of protagonists and 53% of LGBTQ characters were white.
- In terms of gender, about 40% of protagonists were male, while just under 40% were female, and less than 30% were transgender or queer.
- The majority of characters were middle class.
- Notably, 80% of protagonists were children, compared to only 43% of LGBTQ characters.
- LGBTQ characters were about a quarter gay, a quarter lesbian, and the rest never mentioned sexuality. 84% of protagonists never expressed sexual or romantic attraction.

Additionally, I created five LGBTQ categories with which to sort each story. [13]

- "Gay family" books contain a gay, lesbian, or transgender parent or relative as secondary characters to a child protagonist
- "Queer love" stories involve romantic relationships between characters of the same gender.
- "Transgender" books simply contain a transgender character.
- "Gender benders" likewise contain a gender bending character or characters.
- "Gender queer" books involve clear recognition of non-binary gender expression.

A story could count for multiple categories if it met the requirements of each. For example, gay family and transgender could be paired if the parent was transgender. I used these LGBTQ categories as sub-samples to analyze the characteristics and trends in each as well as comparing and contrasting between sexuality (gay family and queer love) and gender (transgender, gender bender, gender queer) books.

Further, I specifically examined my sample for stereotypes and tropes found by prior research: 1) the gender binary and gender essentialism, 2) problematizing of the queer identity, and 3) family or peer acceptance. In my analysis of the gender binary and gender essentialism, I draw heavily on Capuzza (2019)'s definitions of gender binary: "Linguistic or visual depiction of gender identity or expression in either/or terms related to typical femininity and masculinity" (5) and gender essentialism: "linguistic or visual depiction of traditional cultural assumptions regarding similarities among people gendered feminine or among people gendered masculine in appearance or behavior" (5). Further, in keeping with the literature, I noted the frequency of coming out narratives that imply once-in-a-lifetime transitions versus gender fluid stories and the

[13] I coined these categories inductively during my previous work with LGBTQ picture books (Bouchey 2020).

application of normative explanations for transgender feelings such as wrong body discourse (Brittner et al. 2016, Capuzza 2019, Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese 2019, Sciurba 2017). These narratives problematize LGBTQ bodies as in need of alteration in order to be acceptable. Lastly, I tracked social acceptance for all LGBTQ characters, defining it as Capuzza (2019) did: "the linguistic or visual exclusion or inclusion of the protagonist from social relationships primarily because of their LGBTQ identity or that of a family member" (5). The presence or absence of these tropes, particularly in the most recent books (2019-2020), is critical to my analysis.

To assess the centrality of the LGBTQ identity to the plot, I employed the following narrative structures: "issue books" (Forni 2020), "any child," and "beautiful life" (Aronson et al. 2017). "Issue books" are didactic in nature; intent on normalizing the day-to-day lives of LGBTQ characters, they strongly emphasize queerness as the source of the book's conflict (Forni 2020: 58). In contrast, "any child" books are books where the LGBTQ identity is not central to the plot (Aronson et al. 2017). "Beautiful life" books are defined as positive stories of LGBTQ identity wherein that identity is crucial to the plot, but not problematized (Aronson et al. 2017).

This study furthers the literature by analyzing the most recent LGBTQ picture books. This is a field that is constantly evolving and therefore requires up-to-date analysis of the content contained within the books. I have, indeed, drawn inspiration from Naidoo (2012)'s comprehensive study of this topic, to attempt to answer the question of whether the books published in the last ten years differ substantially from those published earlier. The rapidity of change in this field justifies my work. Moreover, patterns in sexuality and gender books have been studied recently, but not typically in conversation with each other. Thus, by analyzing both halves of LGBTQ, this study expands the literature. Lastly, my near-census produced a

comprehensive sample of the most recent LGBTQ picture books published, thus examining a range of books. My study is limited by the fact that I cannot be sure that I found every eligible book, but nevertheless provides a large enough sample to have generalizability to the books I may have missed. My findings cannot be generalized to other forms of children's media, children's attitudes towards LGBTQ people, or perception of LGBTQ people in general.

A note on positionality:

My own positionality as a white, cisgender, feminist, queer individual from a liberal area may also affect my work, particularly in what activities I find transgressive for girls and what activities I deemed "not gay enough" to be in the sample. I have not attempted to be impartial when judging these books, as no one can truly separate themself from their positionality, but I have been careful and thoughtful throughout my research.

Chapter 5: What Kind of LGBTQ Books Appear in the Sample?

In this chapter, I aim to answer two central questions. First, what kinds of narrative LGBTQ picture books have been published in the last decade? Second, what factors are associated with the quality of the LGBTQ picture books I reviewed? To answer the first question, I examine LGBTQ category,[14] narrative structure,[15] genre,[16] principal theme,[17] and trends over time. In terms of the second question, I offer measures of publication quality and authenticity,[18] as well as set the stage for the next chapter's qualitative content analysis. I demonstrate that LGBTQ category and narrative structure impact each other and inform genre, theme, and tone. Additionally, while the overall number of books published quadrupled in the 11-year period I studied, I find some categories of books show clear changes over time, while others do not. The publication trends show that the majority of the sample was self-published, but that illustration quality did not always suffer for it. The majority of my sample was authored and illustrated by cisgender, white women. However, own voice authors differ notably on narrative structure compared with the sample as a whole. This chapter presents a macro view of the sample, examining overall tendencies and categories that structure the data. The subsequent chapter will examine the data through a more micro lens, focusing instead on the content of individual books with more qualitative details offered.

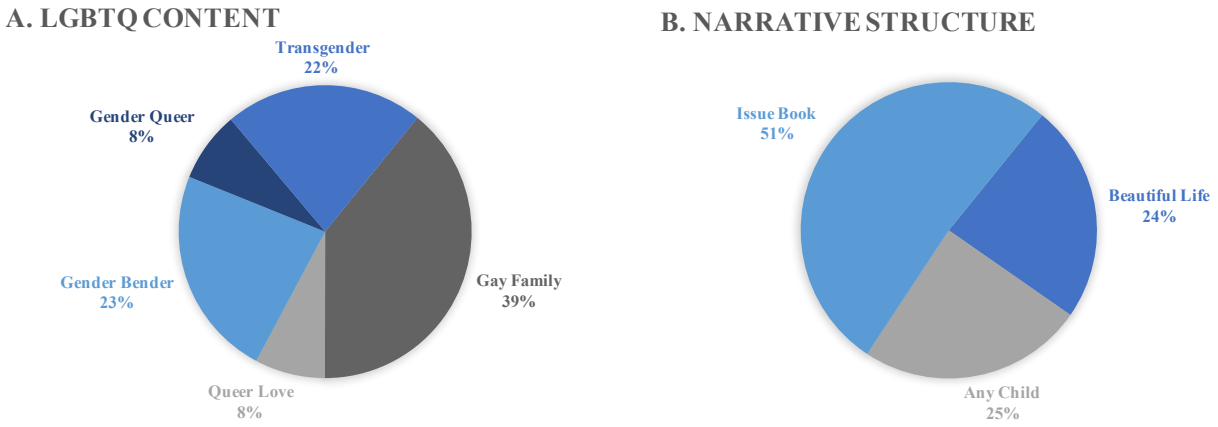
[14] Gay family, queer love, transgender, gender bender, and gender queer.
[15] Any child, issue book, and beautiful life.
[16] Realistic fiction, based on a true story, historical, fantasy, and anthropomorphic animals.
[17] Diverse family composition, gender transition, questioned individuality, parent-child relationships, celebrating individuality, same-sex relationships, weddings, acceptance, anti-LGBTQ sentiments, and other.
[18] Using own voice authorship as a proxy.

Categorization of the sample

My near-census of narrative, LGBTQ picture books yielded 260 books. These books fell into the LGBTQ categories in the following proportions: 39% of my sample consisted of gay family books, 23% were gender-benders, 22% were transgender, 8% were queer love, and 8% were gender queer (See Figure 1a). Of these, nearly half were sexuality books (gay family and queer love) and half gender books (transgender, gender bender, and gender queer). Thus, the sample is almost evenly split between books featuring gays or lesbians and books featuring gender transgressive characters. Moreover, the varying popularity of the different LGBTQ categories reveals secondary patterns. Namely, that gay family books are by far the most common type of sexuality book, while gender benders and transgender books are tied for most common gender book.

Another key descriptor, narrative structure, also produced clear trends. Over half the sample were issue books, with the remaining half split almost evenly between any child and

Figure 1: Distribution of Sample by Narrative Structure and LGBTQ Content



This graphic shows the overall tendencies of the sample in terms of narrative structure and LGBTQ category. The greys of Figure 1a represent sexuality books while the blues represent gender books.

beautiful life (Figure 1b). This general tendency suggests that the majority of LGBTQ narrative picture books structure their plots such that the LGBTQ identity features as the conflict.

However, these general tendencies are nuanced when analyzed jointly (Table 1). When examining the intersection between narrative structure and category, it becomes evident that either may be treated as the independent or dependent variable. From Table 1a, treating LGBTQ category as the independent variable, we can see that while the sexuality books seem fairly balanced between the three narrative structures, gender books all seem to favor issue books. Indeed, although half my sample overall are issue books, that number rises to three quarters

Table 1: Examination of the Interplay Between LGBTQ Category and Narrative Structure

A. Cross Tabulation of LGBTQ Category by Narrative Structure:

	Gay Family	Queer Love	Transgender	Gender Bender	Gender Queer	Total[19]
Issue Book	34%	35%	75%	58%	48%	50%
Beautiful Life	28%	48%	20%	16%	43%	26%
Any Child	38%	17%	5%	26%	9%	24%
Total	116	23	65	69	23	296

B. Cross Tabulation of Narrative Structure by LGBTQ Category:

	Any Child	Beautiful Life	Issue Book	Total
Gay Family	62%	42%	27%	39%
Queer Love	6%	14%	5%	8%
Transgender	4%	17%	33%	22%
Gender Bender	25%	14%	27%	23%
Gender Queer	3%	13%	7%	8%
Total	71	78	147	296

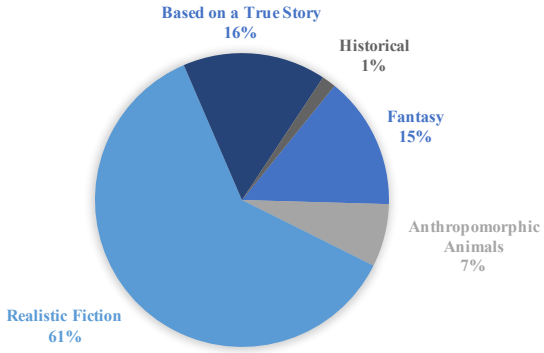
These paired cross tabulations reveal the relationship between narrative structure and LGBTQ category by switching which variable is treated as the independent.

[19] These percentages differ slightly from those depicted in Figure 1b due to the fact that some books are counted multiple times for their multiple LGBTQ categories. This is also why the total number of books is 296 and not 260.

when examining only transgender books. Conversely, when treating narrative structure as the independent variable, it becomes evident that the majority of any child and beautiful life books are concentrated in the gay family category, despite the balance within that category displayed by Table 1a (Table 1b). Taken together, these two cross tabulations suggest an interdependence of LGBTQ category and narrative structure.

Influential though they are, narrative structure and LGBTQ category are not the only important descriptors of the sample. Genre also provides insight into the overall composition of the sample, both alone and in conversation with the other descriptors. Indeed, an overwhelming majority of LGBTQ narrative picture books are set in the real world, either qualifying as realistic fiction or based on a true story (Figure 2). It should also be noted that the category of anthropomorphic animals (7% of the sample) also frequently contained books set in the real world, if from the point of view of a pet-protagonist, further bolstering the finding that LGBTQ narrative picture books most commonly feature real world settings.

Figure 2: Distribution of the Sample Across Genre



This chart shows the breakdown of the sample into different genres. Both "based on a true story" and "anthropomorphic animals" appeared inductively in the coding process.

This finding holds true for all but one LGBTQ category: queer love. The fantasy genre represents only 15% of my sample overall, but over half of queer love books fall into this genre (see Table 2). This suggests that queer love is more acceptable in a fantastical setting, perhaps as it is considered a more mature subject matter, despite the saturation of heterosexual love stories in children's literature.

Table 2: Cross Tabulation of Genre by LGBTQ Category

	Gay Family	Queer Love	Transgender	Gender Bender	Gender Queer
Fantasy	6%	52%	14%	13%	17%
Anthropomorphic Animals	6%	9%	11%	4%	0%
Realistic	68%	30%	52%	71%	74%
Based on a True Story	20%	4%	20%	9%	9%
Historical	0%	4%	3%	3%	0%
N	116	23	65	69	23

This table displays the preference for realistic settings for every category except queer love.

Differences also emerge between LGBTQ categories when looking at themes. Inspired by Naidoo (2012)'s list of themes,[20] I coded for the following themes:

- Diverse Family compositions / accepting a new family member
- Gender Transition / Transgender Journey[21]
- Parent-child relationships / adoption / birth
- Celebrating Individuality
- First love / Same-sex relationships
- Marriages / celebrations
- Social Tolerance / Acceptance

[20] "Adoptions/Births/Parent-Child Relationships, Social Tolerance/Acceptance, Celebrating Individuality, Illness/Sick Family Member, Antigay Sentiments, First Love/Same-Sex Relationships/Learning About Sexuality, Marriages/Celebrations, Diverse Family Compositions/Accepting A New Partner, Important LGBTQ Leader/Advocate, and Other." (Naidoo 2012: 77)

[21] This theme was added early in the coding process as it became clear that transgender books were best characterized by the coming out story, rather than any other theme.

- Anti-LGBTQ sentiments
- Illness / sick family member
- Important LGBTQ leader
- Other

As narratives are generally more complicated than a single theme, a single picture book could be marked with multiple of these options. However, during the analysis process, in order to establish trends, I created a list of principal themes. Most of the themes remained the same in my final list, however it is notable that both illness / sick family member and important LGBTQ leader[22] did not appear in my sample as principal themes. Additionally, I created the theme "questioned individuality" due to the number of books marked both "celebrating individuality" and "acceptance."[23] Methodology aside, the data on themes show that diverse family composition and gender transition were the most common themes, followed by questioned individuality, parent-child relationships, and celebrating individuality (see Table 3). Conversely, due to the combination of acceptance and celebrating individuality into questioned individuality, acceptance alone was not a common principal theme. However, acceptance was frequently a supporting theme or a fact of the setting. Supporting this, 73% of the characters in my sample were always accepted by their community, while only 0.8%[24] were never accepted. The remainder had one of the following outcomes: they were accepted by all at the ends of their books, accepted by those who mattered, or found a new, more accepting community. Roughly a quarter of the characters in my sample were bullied for their LGBTQ identity, often as part of a questioned individuality plot. However, that number rises to 41% when looking only at gender

[22] This is certainly due to my sampling method as there are many non-narrative examples of picture books about LGBTQ leaders.
[23] For a book to be marked with the theme of acceptance, the plot revolved around the LGBTQ character(s) being questioned and then emphasized the community changing in order to accept them.
[24] *My Dad Wears Pirate Shoes* by Gae Hall and *Jerome By Heart* by Thomas Sotto

Table 3: Breakdown of the themes

Principal Theme	Description	Count	Percent
Diverse Family Composition	*teaches about different kinds of families*	57	22%
Gender Transition	*follows the coming out of a transgender or gender queer character*	52	20%
Questioned Individuality	*positions a character's individuality as the subject of rejection*	43	17%
Parent-Child Relationships	*focuses on the relationship with the parent*	36	14%
Celebrating individuality	*sends a "be yourself" message*	34	13%
Same-Sex Relationships	*centers LGBTQ romantic relationship*	17	7%
Marriage	*revolves around a queer wedding*	12	5%
Acceptance	*focuses on the relationship with the community*	5	2%
Anti-LGBTQ sentiments	*rejects the validity of LGBTQ identities*	1	0.4%
Other	*principal theme not listed*	3	1%
	Total	260	100%

Many books include a combination of these themes, but this table only shows the data on principal themes. Only one book, My Dad Wears Pirate Shoes by Gae Hall (2012) had explicitly anti-LGBTQ sentiments, specifically anti-transgender.

benders, 30% for gender queer, and 28% for transgender characters, while falling to 8% for gay family books. As that statistic suggests, it is perhaps misleading to look at these data on theme without breaking the sample into LGBTQ categories.

Indeed, it clear that theme is highly dependent on LGBTQ category (see Table 4). Diverse family composition was the top theme for gay family books, while it accounted for less than 10% of the other categories. Similarly, gay family books dominate the parent-child relationships theme. The focus on diverse family composition may indicate an emphasis on normalizing gay families by presenting them as one of many kinds of families, contrasted with the centering of the individual relationship between parent and child seen in the parent-child relationship theme. Gender transition accounts for a substantial majority of transgender books and a sizable minority of gender queer books. Indeed, Capuzza (2019) also noted the prevalence of the coming out story in gender books. Questioned individuality was a top theme for gender benders. Queer love monopolized the same-sex relationships theme, indicating that queer love

Table 4: Cross Tabulation of Principal Theme by LGBTQ Category

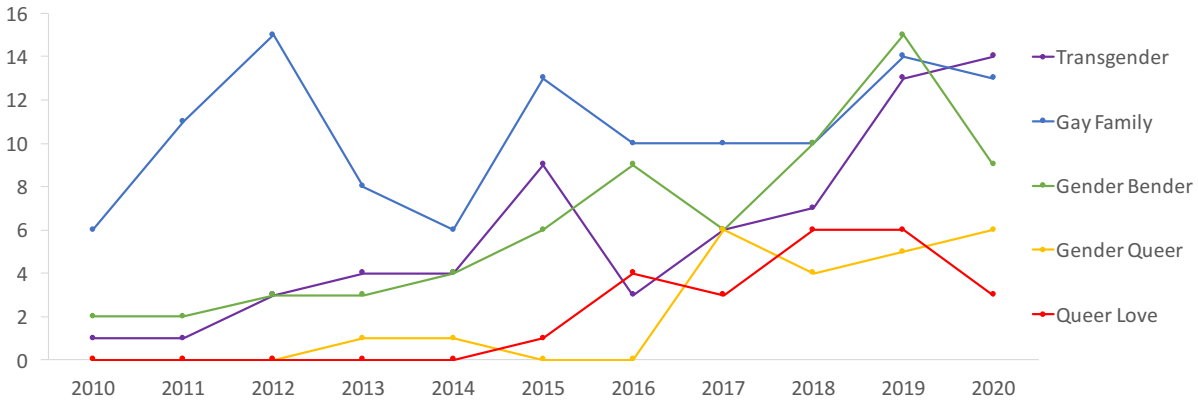
	Gay Family	Queer Love	Transgender	Gender Bender	Gender Queer
Marriage	7%	17%	0%	3%	0%
Same-Sex Relationships	3%	65%	0%	0%	0%
Diverse Family Composition	47%	0%	3%	4%	9%
Parent-Child Relationships	30%	0%	0%	3%	9%
Celebrating individuality	3%	0%	9%	33%	26%
Acceptance	1%	0%	3%	4%	9%
Gender Transition	4%	0%	74%	3%	17%
Questioned Individuality	3%	9%	8%	49%	26%
Anti-LGBTQ sentiments	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%
other	2%	9%	2%	0%	4%
N	116	23	65	69	23

This table shows the clear preference for one or two themes in each category.

was not generally a subplot to those books. Similarly to issue books, these top themes suggest that it is still the norm in narrative LGBTQ picture books to position the LGBTQ identity in the foreground of the story, rather than a mere characteristic as mainstream identities are used.

However, this study seeks not only to identify characteristics of the sample, but also to examine them over time (see Figure 3). As I mentioned in the history of LGBTQ picture books in Chapter 3, gender bender and gay family books are the oldest categories represented, appearing first in the 1970s and 80s respectively. Indeed, gay family books remain popular across the 11 years of my sample, but they are surpassed by gender bender books in 2019 and transgender books in 2020. This is supported by the literature that notes the growing popularity of gender books (Brittner et al. 2016, Malcom and Shehan 2019). Queer love books appeared first in 2015 and gradually increased. Gender queer books behaved similarly, although there was one gender queer book published in 2013, *Meet Polkadot* by Talcott Broadhead, and one in 2014, *Bobbi and Me* by Jeanne Kipke, before taking off again in 2017.

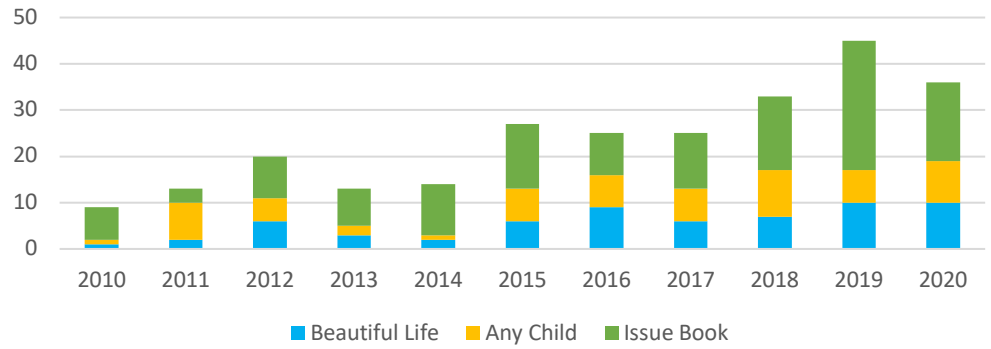
Figure 3: Number of Books Published per LGBTQ category from 2020 to 2010



This graph shows the progression of narrative LGBTQ picture books published over the 11 years studied.

The relationship between narrative structure and time is also interesting, although less dramatic (see Figure 4). From this graph, we can see that the relationship between the three categories does not change substantially over time. Issue books are the most common narrative format; this remains fairly consistent over time as well. This suggests that casting the LGBTQ identity as the conflict of the story remains equally salient in 2010 as 2020.

Figure 4: Number of Books Published per Narrative Structure from 2010 to 2020

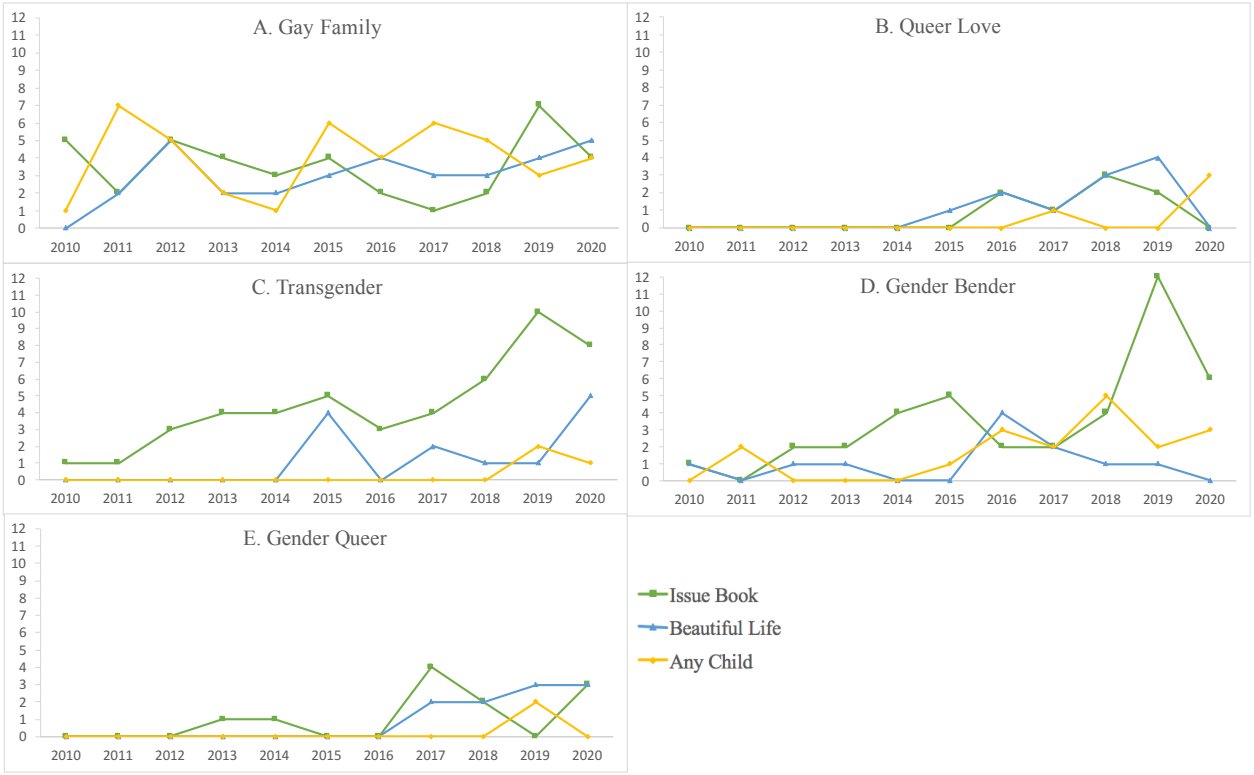


This graph shows the semi-constant relationship between narrative structure and time.

The graphs of Figure 5 elaborate the trends of LGBTQ category and narrative structure and presents them jointly over time. We can see that gay family books and gender benders follow no particular trend; an issue book is equally as likely to appear in any of the years as an any child or beautiful life book. This may be due to their relative age in the genre. Transgender and gender queer books both see a pattern of issue book as the first and most common type of book published, followed by beautiful life, followed by any child. It is notable that there are only 3 transgender any child books (5% of the transgender total) and 2 gender queer any child books (9% of the gender queer total). Queer love books first appear as beautiful life, then issue book, then any child. This follows a consistent pattern that the most common narrative structure appeared first. However, these LGBTQ categories are relatively new. Therefore, it is possible that as time progresses, all the categories might lose this pattern as more books are published and the category becomes more widely varied, as gay family has done. It seems likely that subjects that are considered controversial by society, as LGBTQ themes still are, would appear first as issue books as a way to acknowledge and then combat the possible biases of the reader. Perhaps as LGBTQ themes become more widely accepted, we will see more variety of books published.

In categorizing the sample, it became clear that each of the descriptors I outlined above tell multiple stories when examined alone and in conversation with other descriptors. Overall, the most common narrative structure is issue book, the most frequent LGBTQ category is gay family, realistic fiction is the most common genre, and the top principal theme is diverse family composition. However, LGBTQ category proved to be an important elaborating factor for all these tendencies. Gender books, particularly transgender books, are more likely to be issue books than sexuality books. Indeed, gay family books account for the majority of any child and beautiful life books. It is clear that this trend is complicated by time, as categories often begin as

Figure 5: Number of Books Published by Year, LGBTQ Category, and Narrative Structure



This set of charts emphasizes the progression of books published by dividing the sample by LGBTQ category and examining the narrative structure trends within each.

issue books and gain other narrative structures over time. In this framing, it is possible that gay family has simply had more time to develop any child and beautiful life narratives. An analysis of genre by LGBTQ category showed that for queer love books, the top genre was fantasy, although every other category was almost entirely comprised of realistic fiction. Indeed, principal theme was perhaps the most dependent on LGBTQ category as each category had almost entirely separate principal themes. However, the descriptive categorization above does not address questions of quality, either print or narrative. The next section will analyze illustration and publication tendencies in the sample, while Chapter 5 will delve more fully into narrative trends.

Print Quality and Authenticity

Picture books, unlike chapter books, revolve both around illustration and narrative (Lambert 2015). Therefore, although it is not the overall focus of my study, it is important to examine illustration quality, which is frequently tied to the resources of publishers. Only 18% of the books were published by imprints of mainstream[25] publishers, while 38% were published by small presses,[26] and 44% were self-published. A substantial portion of my sample potentially lacked the same amount of resources as mainstream publication houses to hire quality illustrators, format the story in a professional manner, or even acquire the desired quality of cover and paper. The number of self-published books and the fact that 17% of my sample had what I argue are poor quality illustrations,[27] combine to support that assertion. This is not to say that all self-published books are bad quality. To the contrary, less than 40% of them were. However, self-published books account for over 90% of the books with poor quality illustrations in my sample. Figure 6 illustrates a few examples of the books I counted as less than mainstream quality in illustration or design. Illustrations are very important to the way that children, particularly those who have not yet learned to read, engage with a picture book (Bang 2016, Lambert 2015, Mokrzycki 2020). Therefore, illustration quality is necessarily a factor in examining narrative picture books.

[25] I define mainstream publishers as publishing houses that have a large number and/or multi-national imprints. Some examples include Random House Inc., Penguin Books, Simon and Schuster, Harper Collins, etc.

[26] The category "small press" encompasses everything between mainstream and self-published. Most have few imprints, independent ownership, and specific missions. However, there are a range of publishers in this category. Candlewick Press, Lee and Low Books, and Flamingo Rampant are a few examples.

[27] Operationalized as actively taking away from the story by being distracting, confusing, and/or extremely sparse. This was a subjective judgment that was carefully positioned in the context of comparison with the other picture books in the sample.

Figure 6: Example covers of books considered less than mainstream quality

This figure represents cover art from some books that I classified as lower than mainstream quality.

The percent of mainstream published LGBTQ books shows an increasing trend over time, reaching 25% in 2020, potentially corresponding to an increase in print quality over time. The increase in mainstream publishers of LGBTQ picture books also potentially suggests an increasing acceptability of LGBTQ themes in mainstream children's literature, as those themes shift from small presses and self-publication into a greater share published by larger, mainstream publishers. More research on this topic is certainly needed to draw any conclusions about this, however.

Another quality-related concern of inclusive literature is authenticity. The identities of the author-illustrator team are often considered a proxy for determining authenticity as members of the community being written about are better able to capture a representative experience. While this view is not universal, some scholars argue that own voice books are more likely to be high quality and representative (Yorio 2018, Maji 2019). This study is not in a position to examine

this idea conclusively or deeply, concentrated as it is on narrative and content, but it would be remiss to dismiss authenticity as a factor.

In my sample, I identified 32% of the authors and illustrators (contributors) as queer,

Table 4: Demographics of Authors and Illustrators

Sexuality		Count	Percent
	Queer	179	32%
	Straight	179	32%
	Unknown	207	37%
Race/Ethnicity			
	White	397	70%
	Latinx	36	6%
	Black or African American	27	5%
	Asian	21	4%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	3	1%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2	0.4%
	Other	21	4%
	Unknown	58	10%
Gender			
	Female	343	61%
	Male	174	31%
	Gender Queer	32	6%
	Unknown	16	3%
Transgender			
	No	331	59%
	Yes	67	12%
	Unknown	167	30%
Total Book Contributors		565	100%

This table includes the author(s) and illustrator(s) of every book. Contributor sexuality was the hardest to determine from information available to the public. Illustrators were generally less visible online than authors. This explains the large "unknown" categories. Transgender separately from binary gender, such that a transman would count both as a trans "yes" and a gender "male."[28]

[28] Essentially, this amounted to the author or illustrator naming a partner in gendered terms somewhere easily accessible to the public and/or declaring themselves transgender or gender queer: online, in a profile or website, or on the book jacket.

while 32% identified as straight, and the final 37% were unknown (see Table 4) As noted by the scholarly literature, the books in my sample were most often written by cisgender, white women (Capuzza 2019, DePalma 2014, Epstein 2012, Lester 2014, Toman 2014).

Own voice books comprised 23% of the sample.[29] While there is not a clear trend of number of own voice books published over time, a clear discrepancy exists between own voice gender books and sexuality books: 30% of sexuality books were own voice versus only 16% of gender books.[30] Further, half of the sample is issue books, but only 38% of the own voice books are issue books. Therefore, in my sample, own voice authors are less likely to write stories which cast the LGBTQ identity as the problem of the story. While issue books are not inherently poor quality, an overabundance of them can lead to problematizing instead of celebrating diversity. The fact that own voice authors are less likely to write issue books can boost the quality of the picture book population overall. Again, the purpose of my study was not to prove the usefulness of own voice writing, but more scholarly attention should certainly be paid to this phenomenon.

A Macro Lens

In this chapter, we have examined the sample overall, detailing its major trends and tendencies. We have answered the question of what kinds of books are in this population, as represented by my near-census. My sample of LGBTQ narrative picture books tends toward issue books, real world settings, and specific patterns of theme, structure, and genre within LGBTQ categories and its authors and illustrators tend to be cisgender, white women either self-

[29] Operationalized as a gay or lesbian contributor of a sexuality book or a gender non-conforming contributor of a gender book.
[30] This may be impacted by the fact that gay or lesbian authors may more comfortably out themselves online.

publishing or working with small presses. This macro lens has allowed us to see the interplay of LGBTQ category and narrative structure, genre, and principal theme and population-level patterns of who is writing, illustrating, and publishing these LGBTQ narrative picture books. These descriptive percentages are important to understanding the overall composition of the sample.

However, at the beginning of this chapter, I asked a second question: what factors are salient in determining the quality of LGBTQ picture books? I have begun to answer that question in my discussion of illustration and publication quality, but there remains the central question of narrative quality. Therefore, in the next chapter, I change the unit of discussion from sample to book in order to examine the tools, tropes, and messages they utilize to create quality LGBTQ narratives.

Chapter 6: How Are LGBTQ Identities Constructed in picture books?

This chapter continues the analysis of LGBTQ narrative picture books by asking how LGBTQ narrative picture books construct their stories. As seen in the previous chapter, LGBTQ category informs other descriptors of the narrative. Therefore, this chapter splits the sample by LGBTQ category to better illuminate the specific tools, tropes, and messages used in each category to construct their chosen identity. I analyze both representative and unique books in each LGBTQ category to illustrate patterns of characterization and highlight possible new directions. Following in the footsteps of past studies, I hope to give the reader a broad grounding in characterizations of LGBTQ identities common in the sample. Throughout, I argue that normative structures and messages persist in LGBTQ picture books, often repeating narratives that, depending on the category, originated in the 80s or early 2000s. However, I also present examples of new directions apparent in the most recent books that subvert these normative tropes or avoid them entirely. I address sexuality books first, starting with gay family books, then proceeding to queer love books. Next, I move to gender books, analyzing first transgender books, then gender benders, finishing with gender queer books. I will end with a discussion of narrative constructions that appear across categories.

Gay Family

There are some plot devices, tropes, and messages that reappear constantly within the gay family category. The predominant message of the category is that love makes a family. This is true regardless of narrative structure, although in other ways any child gay family books can differ from beautiful life and issue books. However, subtext can tell a story that undermines that inclusive message, like that LGBTQ families are not normal and need to be legitimized or

explained to the reader. This is particularly common in issue books. Additionally, the trope of a "normal" family doing "normal" family activities except with same-sex parents is quite common across narrative structures. This trope serves perhaps more to perform homonormativity, than to represent the queer community. As for plot devices, almost all gay family books that attempted to explain their family composition did so using what I call a "diverse family lineup" or a list of different kinds of families. A question and answer format also emerged in a greater or lesser extent in books intent on explaining—rather than representing—the gay family. I examine these common messages, tropes, and tools below in the context of several books. To start, we will dissect the story that has become a template for subsequent gay family picture books: *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Lesléa Newman (1989).[31]

Indeed, there are many elements of this foundational story that remain in gay family books published in the last decade. Republished in 2016 without the artificial insemination scene, but otherwise the same, the plot of *Heather Has Two Mommies* has been replicated in part or almost in full by many gay family books. The story starts with Heather and her mommies playing together at home and in the park, proving themselves to be a happy and loving family. But then, at school, someone asks her about her daddy. She does not have a daddy and it occurs to her that maybe everyone else does? Before she can feel left out, her teacher suggests that everyone draw pictures of their families. This produces a diverse family lineup displaying different types of families, from two heterosexual parents, to two same-sex parents, to single parents, grandparent-headed families, etc. Looking at the families depicted, the teacher explains that "It doesn't matter how many mommies or how many daddies your family has…each family is special. The most important thing about a family is that all the people in it love each other"

[31] An own-voice author.

(27-28). In this synopsis of the *Heather Has Two Mommies*, we can see all of the big tools, tropes, and messages. It is therefore useful to hold *Heather Has Two Mommies* as a representative example of the gay family category, despite its age.[32] The quote above explicitly states the message, "love makes a family." The diverse family line up and the questioning of the validity of gay families also make an appearance.

The diverse family line up is a useful plot device in gay family beautiful life and issue books. It can be used to prove that there is no one definition of family or specifically reject the idea that a family has to have one dad and one mom with some number of kids. This shows a focus on presenting LGBTQ families as part of a range of legitimate families, be they heterosexual, single parent, or otherwise non-traditional, rather than an overall emphasis on the LGBTQ family in question.

An extreme example of the variety of devices used by gay family books, *Daddy and Papa's Little Angels* by Mystique Ann U'Nique (2013) forces an emphasis on normality, diverse families, and explaining gay family composition. Indeed, the book begins by employing the plot structure of gay-family-doing-normal-family-things to make the point that gay parents are good and valid parents. Then, it adds a secondary plot device of "bedtime stories" wherein Daddy and Papa read their son two stories that *Daddy and Papa's Little Angels* transcribes for the reader in full. The first bedtime story is a detailed explanation of the protagonist's adoption and family formation and the second is a diverse family line up with a strong moral of love makes a family. This combines the tropes of normal-family-doing-normal-family-things, the detailed explanation of how the family was formed, and the repeated use of the diverse family line up into one story.

[32] Because it was reprinted in 2016, I do count it in my sample, as I do *Jesse's Dream Skirt* by Bruce Mack (1979), which I shall analyze in the section about gender benders.

The book intends to legitimize gay families with this portrayal. However, by explaining gay families with this level of detail, *Daddy and Papa's Little Angels* risks reinforcing the problematic trope that gay families are not normal or legitimate without conforming to homonormative standards of family composition.

Let us move on to the question and answer format. *Heather Has Two Mommies* employs this tool to structure the conflict of the story, when a classmate asks the protagonist why she has two same-sex parents. However, to more fully examine the consequences of this structure, let us look at two books that expand the tool into the entire plot of the book. Namely, *A Tale of Two Daddies* (2010) and *A Tale of Two Mommies* (2013) by Vanita Oelschlager. The books are structured as a conversation between two kids, one asking the other questions about their family composition. The other child is questioning how the protagonist's family works with two same sex parents.[33] The parents appear only as impossibly tall legs or as hands. This puts all of the narrative focus on the activities they perform, rather than their personalities. Indeed, the structure of these questions tries to ascertain how the protagonist's family redistributes the traditional responsibilities of the mom, like hair braiding or comforting (*Tale of Two Daddies*), or the dad, like fishing and camping (*Tale of Two Mommies)*. This structure also implies that the reader, like the questioner, assumes that the mother and the father have fundamentally different roles in the family. Because of this, I find this format falls into the except-when-they-don't paradox of overstating norms in order to subvert them. Heteronormative ideals inform the questions asked, but are overtly acknowledged by the characters. This relates back to the struggle of gay family beautiful life and issue books to normalize them in the eyes of the reader.

[33] The boy asks the daughter things like "Who's your dad when your hair needs braids? Who's your dad when you're afraid?" and the girl responds calmly with "Poppa's the one when I need braids. Daddy is there when I'm afraid" (*Tale of Two Daddies* 5-8).

Who's Your Real Mom? By Bernadette Green (2020)[34] takes the format one step further. Elvi is impatient that Nicholas continues to try to answer the titular question, and starts making up more and more fantastical answers: "My real mom crochets hammocks for polar bears… and can clip a dragon's toenails while she's standing on her head *and* eating a bowl of spaghetti" (16-21). The illustrations display both moms acting out these wild claims in monochrome blue pallet, while the rest of the illustrations are all in warm yellows and browns. This reinforces the idea that these claims are obviously false and sets up the eventual admission that her real mom is "'the one who holds me when I'm scared. She's the one who tucks me into bed. And she's the one who kisses me goodnight.' 'Don't both your moms do that?' asked Nicholas. 'Exactly,' said Elvi." (22-30). While this book, attempts to position the reader such that the question "who's your real mom?" seems ridiculous, it is still using a formula that is based on the assumption a gay family structure is unusual and needs explanation. However, it does represent a progression in which these questions are portrayed, not as serious and valid, but as silly.

However, another recent gay family book, *Papa, Daddy, & Riley* by Seamus Kirst (2020) fails to display a similar commentary on the themes it reuses from *Heather Has Two Mommies*. Just like Heather, when Riley goes to school, someone asks her why she does not have a mom and which one of her dads is her actual dad. She is sad all day at school trying to decide which one she is going to pick as her "real" dad (12). When she gets home, her dads tell her that "love makes a family" and show her a diverse family lineup. The book tells the same story as *Heather Has Two Mommies* and tells it in the same way. That a book like *Papa, Daddy, and Riley* was published in 2020, containing very similar themes and plot structure to *Heather has Two Mommies*, suggests that a story struggling to legitimize gay and lesbian families is still relevant.

[34] Own voice.

Not all gay family books attempt to legitimize LGBTQ families. Notably, any child books frequently leave the parents in the background while the plot happens in the foreground. *Harriet Gets Carried Away* (2018) by Jesse Sima[35] shows Harriet accidentally getting swept up in an adventure with a bunch of penguins and having to find her way back to her two dads. In this story, it does not ever matter that her dads are gay as they are merely the backdrop for Harriet's adventure. Alternately, some any child and beautiful life books choose to position the gay parents in a large-scale heteronormative event, like a wedding or a baby shower, and let the event, rather than specific narration, legitimize the gay family. Still other books simply show a gay family in a variety of activities with little to no plot. This is especially common in those books that are paired, one with two moms, the other has two dads.[36] These books also allow their format and not their text to normalize the LGBTQ family.

Gay family books are more or less in the same point thematically that they were in 1989 when *Heather Has Two Mommies* was first published. As a category, they have not shifted in any particular direction. The explanatory theme of love makes a family remains at the center of many gay family books along with the plot devices of the diverse family line up and the question and answer format. While all these books attempt to tell an inclusive story, the subtext that LGBTQ families must be explained has remained throughout the sample has troubling implications. Indeed, the message that love makes a family combined with the theme of diverse family composition can shift focus away from the LGBTQ characters the book purports to

[35] Own voice.
[36] For example: *I Have Two Moms* (2019)/ *I Have Two Dads* (2019) by Colleen LeMarie or *Life with Mommy…and her Girlfriend* (2017) / *Life with Daddy…and his Boyfriend* (2019) by Noreen Spagnol. These book pairs tend to have almost identical plots and focus exclusively on activities performed with the parent.

represent and onto the idea that LGBTQ families deviate from the norm of a two-parent heterosexual family.

Queer Love

Queer love books have an almost entirely different set of plot devices and tropes from gay family books, despite the overall message being quite similar: love is love. Indeed, rather than a focus on quotidian activities of the protagonist and their family, queer love books tend heavily towards the fantasy genre, and with an emphasis on fairytales, and serious, committed love stories (see Table 2). These books subvert a fairytale romance that kids might already be familiar with as in the rescue-maiden-from-dragon plot subverted by *Prince and Knight* by Daniel Haack (2018)[37] and *The Bravest Knight Who Ever Lived* by Daniel Errico (2019) or the Cinderella story retold in *Maiden and Princess* by Daniel Haack and Isabel Galupo (2019).[38] That these books construct queer love within the context of fairytales both legitimizes the queer relationship as just as transformative and powerful as heterosexual relationships and fails to acknowledge queer love as every day. In this, fairytales are a powerful plot device, but not without drawbacks.

Indeed, *From Archie to Zack* by Vincent X. Kirsch (2020) is the only queer love book that tells the story of a childhood crush.[39] The book starts with the affirmation: "'Archie loves Zack!' 'Zack loves Archie!' Everyone said it was so" (2-3). These opening lines position the

[37] An own voice author.
[38] Own voice.
[39] The only other book that even attempts a real-world, childhood romance is *Jerome By Heart* by Thomas Scotto (2018). While *Jerome By Heart* also focuses on two boys, it does not define their relationship. Instead, it tries to walk the line between passionate friendship and queer love. In doing so, it does neither of these justice and ends up feeling more like an unhealthy, one-sided obsession.

central romance as accepted, unproblematic, the norm. On the edges of each page, Archie writes and rewrites a simple declaration of love for Zack, "from A. to Z. It's perfectly true. I love you very much" (14). Meanwhile, on the centers of each page, the pair have silly adventures on the beach, in a museum, or at band rehearsal. Near the end of the book, Zack reveals to the reader that he also has a love note he has been working on for a very long time. But it is still not perfect, so he does not give it to Archie. The book ends the way it began, "Zack loves Archie, Archie loves Zack. Everyone knew it was so." (31-33). This whimsical story contrasts with other queer love representations that are serious, adult, transformative, and long term. The most common age of first attraction is ten (Whitehead 2014). However, to recognize and name that attraction, kids should be presented with relatable role models. This casual, schoolboy-crush version of queer love is so important because it represents queer love as natural and normal in the same way that heterosexual love is. *From Archie to Zack* maintains a real-world, age-appropriate romance in the context of its whimsical illustrations. The romance is not fully developed, due to the characters' age, but that is what makes it feel believable and adorable. *From Archie to Zack* proves that a portrayal of childhood queer love can be age-appropriate.

Although relatively few in count and recent in the publishing world, queer love books are disproportionately set in fantasy settings, perhaps due to the perceived matureness of the subject. The trope of fairytale retellings can be very useful in presenting the material in a way that can be seen as no different from heterosexual romances. However, this approach misses the power of an authentic, natural portrayal of childhood queerness, particularly if the intended purpose is to include queer children, rather than to educate a mainstream audience.

Transgender

Transgender books have a range of tropes, messages, and tools that are used to illustrate the gender transition. As we saw in our discussion of themes, 74% of transgender books tell a coming out story (see Table 4). A similarly high percentage of transgender books are issue books. These two descriptive statistics help us understand the intense focus laid on the moment of transition between genders in transgender narrative construction. Even within the narrow context of the coming out story, there are several messages. First, be yourself. Second, gender is a personal identity disconnected from biology. These two messages promote transgender visibility and acceptance, however, when combined with the tropes of the coming out story, wrong body explanation, and the transition as panacea, this message can take on the subtext that acceptance hinges on a complete physical and social transition. Indeed, many books emphasize the gender binary and gender essentialism in appearance as tools to illustrate the gender transition. I will highlight these plot devices, tropes, and messages as they appear in books throughout the transgender books in my sample.

Be Who You Are by Jennifer Carr (2010)[40] represents this plot quite well. Jennifer Carr wrote this book about her daughter's transition. The book starts with wrong body discourse, "As far back as Nick could remember, he saw himself as a girl. He knew that his body looked like a boy, but it just didn't fit the way he felt inside. Nick felt like he had a girl brain" (1-2). *I am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings (2014)[41] uses almost exactly those same words to describe transgender, "I have a girl brain but a boy body. This is called transgender," (9). Both books use this language to simplify the concept of transgender to an age-appropriate level. However, this

[40] Not own voice, but mother of a trans daughter.
[41] Jessical Herthel is not own voice, but Jazz Jennings is.

"wrong body" definition of transgender is quite problematic, as Capuzza (2019) also notes. This framing of transgender asserts that the individual must know their true gender from birth and fix their body accordingly. When boiling gender down to an innate knowledge or implied biology of a "true" gender identity, the wrong body discourse upholds the gender binary even as it attempts to cross it. This definition therefore simplifies transgender to only one experience of it, erasing the process of discovering one's gender identity and invisibilizing non-binary and non-passing trans people.

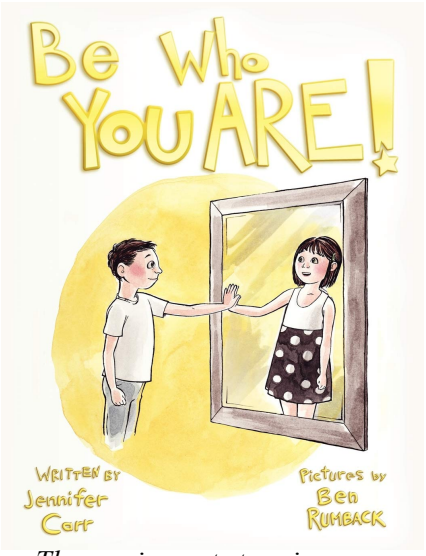
However, *Call Me Max* by Kyle Lukoff (2019)[42] purposefully subverts this trope. First, the book explains transgender clearly and broadly: "Trans means going across. Like how transportation means going from here to there. Gender means being a boy or a girl. Or a little of both. Or not feeling like a boy or a girl" (4). This definition does not connect gender to physical body. Moreover, not only does the book explicitly leave room for non-binary and queer expressions of gender, it does so in a way that does not add inaccessible complication to the definition. This is another critical subversion of a common transgender plot device: gender essentialism.

In transgender books, in contrast with gender benders, gendered items are important signifiers of gender. To take *I am Jazz* as an example, Jazz actively promotes her femaleness by surrounding herself with female-coded objects: "I hardly ever played with trucks or tools or superheroes. Only princesses and mermaid costumes" (12). This runs the risk of suggesting that to be transgender you must over-perform your gender. Even from the cover art of *Be Who You Are*, you can see the importance laid on essentialist clothing and hairstyle to visually signify the

[42] Own voice.

transition (see Figure 7). By contrast, *My Dad Thinks I'm a Boy?!* by Sophie Labelle (2020)[43] rejects essentialism as the only way to justify transgender characters. The main character, Stephie, a trans girl, introduces herself: "Hi! My name is Stephie. I'm 7 years old. I like bugs, *Ninja Dog,* and all sorts of books…and also, I'M A GIRL" before bemoaning her dad's stubbornness in insisting she's a boy when she's clearly not (1-6). This kind of characterization represents transgender people as more than just hyper-feminine or hyper-masculine, which is critical for true representation.

Figure 7: Cover art of *Be Who You Are* by Jennifer Carr.



The coming out story is represented in one image as Nick reaches out her hand to embrace herself how she feels on the inside.

Call Me Max has even more pointed refutation of essentialism. The story introduces two gender-bending friends for Max: Steven and Teresa. Teresa is a girl who like to catch bugs. When Max comments that he likes being a boy because he "like[s] climbing trees…and looking for gross bugs," she is mad. She retorts "we climbed this tree together! I also caught more spiders than you did" (18-21). This is explicit commentary on how wide gender expression can be. Similarly, when Max tells his new friend Steven that he "can't be a girl" because he "hate[s] wearing dresses," Steven exclaims, "This is my favorite dress. And I like being a boy" (22-23). Again, the reader is reminded that gender expression is personal, varied, and only needs to feel right to the individual. Max knows he is a boy without the use of essentialist props or wrong body discourse.

Moving to the final trope I highlight in transgender books, let us return to the cover of *Be Who You Are* in Figure 7. Nick has a neutral expression, while Hope, in the mirror, has a bigger,

[43] Own voice.

open-mouthed smile. This emphasizes the overall tones of the story pre- and post-transition; pre-transition is serious and hard, while post-transition is joyful and carefree. While not problematic on its own, this trope can be taken to an extreme that argues that the transition is a panacea. Like the wrong body discourse, treating the transition as a solution positions transgender bodies as the problem. Further, this trope reinforces the gender binary by problematizing anyone in between. By simplifying the benefits of living as the other gender, no room is left for questioning or non-binary gender expression. *When Kayla Was Kyle* by Amy Fabrikant (2013)[44] is a key example of this trope. Our protagonist, Kyle, goes through some harsh bullying and ostracism as he tries to fit in as a boy with the boys at school. At home, his father also critiques his gender performance, signing him up for sports even when Kyle hates it. Finally, after no one shows up to his birthday party, Kyle refuses to go back to school at all, telling his parents, "I'm not going. I can't go…I'm a mistake…I can't live like this anymore. I don't belong here. Everyone hates me. I want to live in heaven" (18). This is a heavy burden of despair for a character in a children's picture book. Kyle has no friends, hates his body and his school. He wishes he were dead. Then, later that page, his mother suggests this is because he feels like a girl. As soon as she is allowed to live as a girl, Kayla is happy, three best friends appear out of nowhere[45] to "[stand] by their friend" (24). Her entire life has been turned around by this gender transition. This scene epitomizes the problems of both reinforcing the gender binary and problematizing non-normative presentation in transgender picture books.

[44] Not own voice, but mother of a trans daughter.
[45] As previously discussed, it was a major plot point that she had no friends and that no one showed up to her birthday party, but once she fully transitions, three friends suddenly come into the story with cake and hugs.

I am not arguing that depicting positive effects of a gender transition is wrong or inaccurate. Indeed, positive, even life-changing, effects of gender transition have been documented in real transgender children (Ehrensaft 2012). However, when the gender transition is depicted with the power to transform a person's identity, social life, and personality, it condenses a trans character into little more than a gender identity. This runs the risk of giving trans children unrealistic hope that a transition will magically fix all of their problems and grant them acceptance from formerly bigoted friends and community members.

The coming out story—and its associated tropes and tools of wrong body discourse, gender essentialism and binary, and transition as panacea—is by far the most common kind of transgender story. This is a reason why transgender books are very rarely any child as the coming out narrative foregrounds the transgender identity as both foundational to the character and to the plot. However, there are three examples of transgender any child books. *Casey's Ball* by Kit Yan (2019)[46] is the only stand-alone book of these three.[47] The plot follows Casey, a young transgender boy, as he practices soccer and bonds with his team. The explanation of Casey's trans identity is exceptional in its off-hand tone: "I used to be on the girls' team and my uniform was blue, but now that everyone knows I'm a boy, I'm switching to the boys' team and getting this new green one instead" (4). After that, the book is about soccer. The fact that the transgender identity does not need to be explained, can just exist like any other identity marker, is so important. This book, therefore, highlights a possible step away from the coming out story as the only way to depict a transgender character.

[46] Own voice.
[47] The other two being *Max on the Farm* and *Max at the Talent Show*. *Call Me Max* is Max's issue book coming out story, while the other two show him as playing with his gender bending friends Teresa and Steven.

Gender Benders

Gender bender books take the opposite approach to transgender books. Instead of focusing on a moment of transition, gender benders focus on the message of "be yourself" in the context of play. Indeed, a typical gender bender plot features a boy who, contrary to the norms of his classmates, parents, or community, wants to play with a feminine-coded object like a dress or a doll. Gender benders attempt to make the point that play should not be gendered. However, in order to facilitate an eventual triumph over gender norms, those norms are presented and enforced. This is the classic except-when-they-don't paradox. These books risk affirming that there is a division between girl toys and boy toys, even as they encourage anyone to play with either kind. This story of gendered play has been around since the 70s, appearing in *William's Doll* by Charlotte Zolotow (1972) and *Jesse's Dream Skirt* by Bruce Mack (1979).[48] Although *William's Doll* is too old to be considered in my sample, *Jesse's Dream Skirt* was republished in 2019 and therefore makes an excellent place to begin discussing the messages, tools, and tropes in gender bender books: attachment to opposite-gender items and/or clothing, dress-up, supportive moms, unsupportive dads, and questioning classmates.

Jesse's Dream Skirt begins with a boy named Jesse who loves dresses and playing dress up in his mother's clothes, both very common plot devices. One day, he dreams of a beautiful, multi-colored skirt and asks his mom if they can make one just like it. His mother agrees, but warns him that the other kids at preschool might make fun of him for it. His teacher, Bruce, is very supportive, but there is quickly a group of jeering kids around Jesse, calling him a girl and a sissy.[49] Jesse, his dream skirt already tarnished in his eyes, bursts into tears and runs away. Bruce

[48] Own voice.
[49] This is one of the very few books that used a LGBTQ slur. While no books invoked "faggot" or "dyke," six books used "sissy" and three used "tomboy."

finds and comforts him and the pair rejoin the class. Bruce asks the kids, "Jesse loves his skirt, why are you making fun of him?" (24). The class discusses why a boy can and cannot wear a dress, with arguments ranging from because "that's what my daddy told me" (25) to it is just like girls wearing pants (27). Eventually one girl ends the argument with a discussion of how she feels in her baseball uniform, "it doesn't matter what I wear. I'm still me." (30). The story ends with most of the kids happily playing dress up and Jesse twirling excitedly in his dream skirt. This story, like *Heather Has Two Mommies* in the gay family category, serves as a template for many other gender benders.

In order to be considered a gender bender, the story must feature some sort of gender transgression, but the specifics of the gender bending object or activity are irrelevant but for thier association with the opposite gender. For example, in *Sparkle Boy* by Lesléa Newman (2016), Casey, wants a series of things that his older sister has, first a shimmery skirt, then glittery nails, then a sparkly bracelet. These feminine-coded items together fill the role of the skirt in *Jesse's Dream Skirt*. We can see this even in the covers of other gender bending boy books which feature sparkles, pink, dresses, dolls, dancing, and other feminine-coded items and activities (see Figure 8). The story then problematizes that gender transgressive play by introducing a character that polices gender norms. In *Sparkle Boy,* this is Casey's older sister, who repeatedly insists that boys do not get to play with anything sparkly. In addition, Casey is depicted with more typically masculine-coded toys, blocks and dump trucks, that he leaves behind in order to play with the gender bending items. The illustrations are, therefore, tacitly stating the standard that he is departing from with his love of sparkly things.

The set up for a gender bender requires this centering of an opposite-gender-coded item or activity. The idea of dress-up is key here as it maintains the emphasis on play, rather than

Figure 3: Compilation of the covers of selected gender benders

These books were selected for this figure because their covers show the clear association of gender bending boys with female-coded items such as glitter, skirts, purse, and pink. They are mostly issue books. These covers are not meant to fully represent the category, however, only to offer a visual indication as to some of the trends.

gender expression. Unlike transgender books, gender benders attempt to fight gender essentialism by decoupling the connection of objects and gender identity. Jesse and Casey both hold onto their identity as boys, despite their attachment to skirts. However, this serves to undermine the message that a child can play with whatever they want by consistently upholding the categorization of objects into the gender binary.

By contrast, *Teddy's Favorite Toy* by Christian Trimmer (2019)[50] avoids problematizing its gender-bending. This book has the mark of a classic gender-bender in that the main character, Teddy, loves his doll Bren-Da above all his other toys. In fact, instead of being an unexplained attachment, the book spends considerable time showing the reader how Teddy likes to play with Bren-Da,[51] building the reader's investment in the doll and Teddy's relationship to her without ever putting it into question. In fact, the conflict of the book is that Bren-Da's leg breaks and Teddy's mom accidentally throws her out. *Teddy's Favorite Toy* retains the core attachment to opposite-gender-coded object, but embraces that attachment as play, rather than as an implicit marker of gender. The story feels dynamic without problematizing any expression of gender. Teddy sits on a dump-truck in the middle of a train set and imagines an epic battle between Bren-Da, dressed in a pink polka dot dress, and a blue-haired troll. The story effortlessly mixes feminine and masculine coded items without ever calling attention to them.

Teddy's Favorite Toy does not problematize the gender bending play for the simple reason that a questioning classmate is never introduced. Consider another gender bender, *Jacob's New Dress* by Sarah and Ian Hoffman (2014).[52] This book starts in the dress-up corner at school with our protagonist, Jacob, dressing as a princess and a classmate, Christopher, telling him that

[50] Own voice.
[51] Tea parties, epic battles, and fashion shows.
[52] Not own voice, but parents of a gender bending son.

boys shouldn't wear dresses. Here, the plot devices of the questioning classmate are integral to story, as in both *Sparkle Boy* and *Jesse's Dream Skirt.* Indeed, Christopher spends the entire book judging Jacob, calling him names, and even stealing his dress off his body. Moreover, Christopher never changes his mind, arguing near the end, "I asked my dad, and he says boys don't wear dresses" (24). Even in the very last scene, Christopher calls Jacob a girl for wearing his dress. While Jacob declares that he can wear what he wants and runs off happily, "his dress spreading out like wings" (32), Christopher's arguments are never addressed. Indeed, they bring up a gendered pattern of acceptance. Jacob's mom and teacher, both women, accept his gender bending. Christopher's dad is adamantly opposed. *Jesse's Dream Skirt* also features a discussion of an unseen dad's disapproval. It is worth noting that both Jacob and Casey's dads are supportive, if hesitant, but the idea that dads police their son's gender expression comes up frequently. Indeed, in the previous section, we saw Kayla's dad, from *When Kayla was Kyle,* preforming a similar role. This tendency is also documented in scholarship on gender and parenting outside of picture books (Kane 2006, Sciurba 2017). Both of these tropes, the questioning classmate and unsupportive father serve to problematize the idea of gender bending.

However, this problematizing is not generally applicable to female gender benders. I have been discussing male gender benders heretofore because less than 30% of my gender bender sample is female. Partly, this is due to the fact that I specifically excluded many any child gender benders that featured female characters as not gender transgressive or LGBTQ enough to be considered in my sample.[53] As a consequence, the female gender bender books in my sample are all focused on gender identity, either questioning or celebrating it. It is therefore all the more

[53] For example, *Phoebe and Digger* by Tricia Springstubb (2013) featured a girl playing with a dump truck in a story that did not ever question her gender for it. And, therefore, the story did not feel gender transgressive in the way that Jacob or Casey do in their respective books.

notable that even with this sampling method, female gender benders are less likely to have the extent of bullying or questioning that male gender benders face. For example, Emma, in *Tutus Aren't My Style* by Linda Skeers (2010), tries to be a ballerina for a day, makes a mess of it, and decides that cowboys are more fun anyway. No one questions her, calls her a boy, or makes fun of her gender because she is not a good ballerina. Contrast this with Christopher's relentless teasing of Jacob or Casey's sister's outrage at his gender bending. Even *Annie's Plaid Shirt* by Stacy B. Davids (2015), a female gender bender book that follows a similar plot to the male gender benders outlined above, does not question Annie's femininity for choosing her plaid shirt over a dress in the way that Jacob is constantly reminded that dresses are a departure from traditional masculinity. This points to a double standard in our society around what is considered gender transgressive. Additionally, the female gender benders in my sample are more likely to be set in fantasy or historical settings, whereas male gender benders almost always occur in the modern world. This supports the view that modern girls are not held to the same strict, gendered rules that modern boys are.

Gender benders attempt to convey the inclusive message that anyone can play with anything. By extension, they attempt to combat the idea that some toys and activities are exclusively for one gender or the other. However, this message can be subverted by the tropes of questioning characters that restate the norms in order for the book to refute them. In the context of this except-when-they-don't paradox, the message becomes "there are rigid categories of boy and girl toys, feel free to play across those, but you might be bullied for it." Creating more any child gender benders, like *Teddy's Favorite Toy*, seems to be the way forward. If we distance the gender transgression from the conflict of the story, we may achieve a more credible "be yourself, play with whatever you want to play with," message.

Gender Queer

Gender queer books tend to follow the same general themes and plot devices of either gender benders or transgender books, depending on the narrative framing of the story. For example, *The Name I Call Myself* by Hasan Namir (2020)[54] is structured like a transgender coming out story, except that Ari comes out as non-binary at the end. However, more common is the gender queer books that function as a gender bender that performs both feminine-coded and masculine-coded play. *Jamie is Jamie* by Afsaneh Moradian (2018)[55] is a gender queer book that takes most of the tropes of a gender bender. The book starts with girls playing dress up and dolls while boys play with action heroes. But, by bouncing around and playing with all of the above, Jamie first confuses, then inspires the rest of their classmates. There is a fantastic line in the middle: "Xavier was confused. 'Wait a minute… is Jamie a boy or a girl?' 'I don't know,' said Alicia, 'but I can't wait to play with Jamie tomorrow. That was fun'" (20-21). The next day, everyone mixes up what they are playing with: both Joey and Cynthia play with the baby doll and Alicia and Xavier stage an epic dance battle with the action figures. The moral is clearly that play is not gendered, as with gender bender books, and that the assignation of boy things and girl things is ridiculous, something not achieved by many gender benders.

However, gender queer books, *Jamie is Jamie* included, do not generally address pronouns or specific vocabulary around gender identity. Jamie uses 'Jamie' in place of pronouns, as does *What Riley Wore* by Elana K. Arnold (2019). A few books—such as *From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish in the Sea* by Kai Cheng Thom and Kai Yun Ching (2017)[56] use they/them pronouns—but use of pronouns is rare, which is what makes *Jamie and Bubbie: A Book about*

[54] Own voice.
[55] Not own voice, written for her gender bending daughter.
[56] Own voice.

People's Pronouns by Afsaneh Moradian (2020) unusual. *Jamie and Bubbie* is the sequel to *Jamie is Jamie.* The book, therefore, starts with a gender queer protagonist with a little bit of backstory about playing however one wants. However, what is the most exciting about *Jamie and Bubbie* is that it manages to teach about pronouns without feeling like an informational book. The story frames its instruction about pronouns by introducing Jamie's great grandmother, Bubbie. Bubbie spends the story misgendering people accidentally, which is hilarious. But more importantly, Bubbie is serving as a model of how to retrain yourself to respect someone's pronouns. She takes the correction without argument and affirms that she will do her best next time. The book teaches that gender is not binary and pronouns are a personal choice. It shows that gender is something felt by the individual, not something that can be ascertained by a casual observer. And it does all this in a way that is not didactic. Given the lack of examples of they/them pronouns in this literature, this is an important step forward in acknowledging non-binary gender expression.

Gender queer books, like queer love books, are relatively few in number and therefore lack the breadth of tools, tropes, and messages apparent in other categories. Indeed, in the same way that queer love books borrowed from fairytales to gain a set of tropes, a lot of the tropes of gender queer books are borrowed from transgender or gender bender books. Gender queer books go beyond gender benders, however, in that they distance themselves from the gender binary. However, these books could do more to name the non-binary expressions they illustrate. By capitalizing on young children's ability to learn vocabulary, gender queer books could complete their representation with labels and pronouns.

Tools, Tropes, and Messages Across Category

Every category had a unique set of plot devices, tropes, and messages. Gay family books focus on diverse families and formats that justify the existence of gay families, either through depictions of "normal" family activities or by verbal justification to another character. Queer love books fall back on fairytales to legitimize their narratives. Transgender books emphasize the gender transition, telling various versions of the coming out story over and over. Gender benders and gender queer books attempt to decouple play and gender expression but rely on essentialist coding of objects and activities. However, what these categories all have in common is a desire to legitimize their LGBTQ identity. This is not surprising. After all, one of the main reasons to write an inclusive book is to increase the audience's understanding and empathy towards a minority identity. In this role, some books seek to explain queerness in the context of the norms that the reader is expected to already know, in addition to celebrating LGBTQ identities. This can explain why gender benders begin with the assumption that there are boy and girl toys or why the gay family book works backwards from the norm of a heterosexual, two parent family to better explain the queer one. This goal is a worthy one. However, the mainstream audience is not the only one. For a queer audience, books that are focused too heavily on the mainstream might feel less like mirrors.

Let us return, for a moment, to the question of authenticity. Authenticity means representing an identity in a way that is true to the real, every day people who have that identity. Therefore, I question what it says about who the literature is including when we focus mostly on married two-parent homonormative gay families or only on the moment of coming out for transgender characters. It is also notable that there are very few instances of a community of

queer people in these books. The stories most often happen in a context of cisgender, heterosexual communities.

However, there is a very small subsection of books that focused entirely on the queer community. I called these "It's a gay world" books. Instead of focusing on a LGBTQ protagonist, or having just a handful of LGBTQ secondary characters, these books are built on a cast of characters that are mostly, if not all LGBTQ.[57] *Bell's Knock Knock Birthday* by George Parker (2017)[58] and published by Flamingo Rampant is a good example of this. Bell is a non-binary kid having a birthday party and the book revolves around who is coming to the door. Pretty much everyone who comes to this birthday party is queer or gender bending: Ellie has very short hair and cargo shorts; Aych has mint hair, a flowery blouse, purple pants, and he/him pronouns; and Grandmani uses they/them pronouns, to name a few. The range and personality of the queer characters presented seemed to suggest that the contributors to the book lived in the queer community. At least, reading this book, I felt that these colorful characters reflected the queer community that I have personally seen and met. Books that present such variety of queer representation subvert the idea that LGBTQ people are the minority in the story with only one character to represent them. Were this type of book to become a trend, it could provide important mirrors and windows to readers of all backgrounds. It's a gay world books are exciting additions to the body of literature because they allow the reader to see many types of queer expression presented together as a community making its own norms, rather than in isolation.

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[57] Specifically, the it's a gay world books are the following five: *A House for Everyone* by Jo Hirst (2018), *Jamie and Bubbie: A Book About People's Pronouns* by Afsaneh Moradian (2020), *Bell's Knock Knock Birthday* by George Parker (2017), *Super Power Baby Shower* by Tobi Hill-Meyer and Fay Onyx (2017), and *It's a Wild World* by S Bear Bergman (2019).

[58] The book is own voice, because the illustrator is queer. I was unable to find information on the author, however.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how LGBTQ identities are depicted in recently published narrative LGBTQ picture books. Prior research has suggested that inclusive books may contain normative messages or themes that render them less inclusive than they intend. Contextualized by this finding, my study has sought to describe the population of LGBTQ narrative picture books and analyze the messages these books contain. Chapter 4 took a macro lens to depict the study overall. The following statistics highlight the overarching trends that appear in the sample:

- The sample is almost evenly split between sexuality and gender books. Gay family books are the most common category, followed by gender-benders and transgender books. Queer love and gender queer were both underrepresented in the sample.
- Over half the sample were issue books that used LGBTQ identity as the conflict of the story.
- An examination of genre showed us that an overwhelming majority of LGBTQ narrative picture books are set in the real world.
- The principal themes that arose were highly dependent on LGBTQ category, with each category sporting unique themes.
- There was evidence of some changes over time. For example, gay family books were the most popular kind of books for the majority of the sample, before being overtaken by gender benders and transgender books in 2019 and 2020, respectively.
- The books in my sample were most often written by white, cisgender women.
- The picture books were most often published by small presses or self-published, with an increasing proportion published by mainstream publishers.

When examined together, these data describe the trends and tendencies of the population of LGBTQ narrative picture books overall.

However, much like the LGBTQ community itself, there are distinct variations in books that feature different kinds of identities. Chapter 5 found that gay family books centered around

the message "love makes a family," but complicated the message with normalizing tropes and question and answer formats that positioned the gay family as an object to be explained. Queer love books were disproportionately set in fantasy settings, particularly noticeable given the concentration of every other category in realistic fiction. Transgender books featured, almost exclusively, the coming out story. In doing so, the messages of self-acceptance and validation of a transgender identity were burdened with the gender binary, gender essentialism, and wrong body discourse. Gender bender books attempted a similar "be yourself" message, albeit focused on play rather than gender transition. However, these books risked falling prey to the except-when-they-don't paradox as they stated gendered norms of objects and play in order to challenge them. Gender queer books focused on coming out, like transgender books, or on disrupting gendered norms of play, like gender benders. When combined with the overall statistics, these recurring messages, tropes, and tools illuminate the common structures that underlay the population of LGBTQ narrative picture books.

Indeed, although all categories produced different messages, tropes, and plot devices, my study has shown that normalization is still the goal of LGBTQ narrative picture books. From the macro view of the sample, it became clear that over half the sample were issue books. This argues that the majority of narrative, LGBTQ picture books structure their plots such that the LGBTQ identity features as the conflict. Moreover, common themes, tropes, and tools suggest that it is still the norm to position the LGBTQ identity in the foreground of the story, rather than background as mainstream identities are used. This suggests that LGBTQ identities are still in need of being explained, despite the promising increase in mainstream publication of LGBTQ themes. Normalization is not necessarily a bad goal as it can legitimize marginalized identities in the eyes of a mainstream reader. Indeed, to again quote Aronson et al. (2017)'s call for balance,

as long as we have a range of inclusive books, books that seek to explain the LGBTQ identity have their place.

Let us return for a moment to my friend, Frankie, who I introduced at the beginning of this thesis. They wish that, as a child, they could have seen people like them in the books they read. They wished that they had the vocabulary to express the feelings they were having about their gender. While, it would, no doubt, have been helpful for young Frankie to see LGBTQ characters such as the ones in my sample, I saw very few examples that provide a mirror to who Frankie is now. Aych from *Bell's Knock Knock Birthday,* gender-ambiguous, mint-haired, and hearing-aid-wearing, is much closer to a mirror for the loudly queer Frankie than the essentialist depiction of Jazz as a trans girl from *I am Jazz*, or the "play with whatever they want" version of gender queer represented by Jamie from *Jamie is Jamie*. I am not suggesting that Jazz and Jamie do not represent authentic experiences, but rather their single experiences are writ large across their categories. There was not a lot of emphasis on the kind of vocabulary Frankie wished for. Non-binary rarely came up. Diverse pronouns were rarely discussed or used. Transgender was depicted exclusively as the transition from one gender to the other. This emphasis on one type of expression erases other types of queer experiences, like Frankie's. In order to be truly inclusive, inclusive literature should provide mirrors and windows into a range of authentic experiences. Indeed, the literature is progressing. The books I categorized as "it's a gay world books" show real promise in breaking the tradition of focusing on the mainstream community. Books are becoming more inclusive in their definitions of gender and in the depictions of who can experience queer love.

Future Research and Suggested Actions

I end my study by offering some specific suggestions for future research and action. I present my thoughts by audience: scholars, writers, or educators. This study has attempted to gather up-to-date and comprehensive data on the current population of LGBTQ narrative picture books. However, this is a rapidly changing area of study. Therefore, this study should serve as a starting point for future research. Indeed, in five or ten years, another study should perform a census of LGBTQ picture books to investigate how the area has changed in terms of LGBTQ category, narrative structure, and message.

A limitation of my study is that I looked only at narrative picture books. Therefore, to expand upon the research I have presented here, others could investigate what explicit and subtextual messages are presented in informative, historical, and incidental picture books. Similarly, research on LGBTQ children's chapter books and young adult literature should be compared to that on LGBTQ picture books. A possible research question might compare what kinds of LGBTQ identities are most considered acceptable for kids and teens at each reading level. Indeed, many of the scholars I reference in this study sampled both narrative and non-narrative LGBTQ picture books, as well as examining chapter books (Brittner et al. 2016, Crisp et al. 2017, Dorr et al. 2018, Lewis 2015, Naidoo 2012).

Further research could study other kinds of children's media such as television or movies. Martin and Kazyak (2009) studied Disney princess movies in connection with the concept of heteronormativity, sexiness, and gender. Future studies could examine representations of LGBTQ characters in children's shows or compare the standards to which LGBTQ content is held as compared to heterosexual romance in children's shows. Media is a growing part of even

the youngest children's lives and thus examination of representation there would be a critical addition to the literature.

Another angle that future research might take is that of children's, parents', and educators' reception of LGBTQ picture books. Bartholomaeus (2016)'s work suggests that the intended messages of feminist picture books and the messages the kids she worked with understood were quite different. Similarly, Van Horn (2015) read LGBTQ inclusive literature to small focus groups to gauge reaction. These works could be expanded by more quantitative work to discover what inclusive or non-inclusive messages children internalize from reading picture books such as the ones in my study.

Likewise, it would be interesting to know what adults make of the books. Guardians and educators may read the books in a way that affects how they are received. It has been documented that different styles of reading books affects how children engage with picture books (Lambert 2015). More specific attention could be paid, for example, to discovering the precise effects of question and answer styles of reading versus simple readings versus discussions and activities after the reading is complete. Over and above children's reactions, future research could examine parents' and educators' concerns in reading LGBTQ picture books at home or in schools. Conducting interview with elementary school teachers about their educational intent in including LGBTQ texts has been done by a few scholars (Blackburn et al 2016, DePalma 2014, Martino and Cumming-Potvin 2016). This work could be expanded to include administrators and parents. Similar research could also measure the intent of authors of inclusive children's books, perhaps comparing the intentions of own voice authors and non-own-voice authors.

Further research could seek to determine the relationship between own voice and authenticity. Studies could ask whose authentic experience is getting published and why or question what compromises might own voice authors be forced to make to appeal more to a mainstream audience as Maji (2019) does in her blog post. Indeed, scholars could examine more closely the barriers that own voice authors face. Maya Gonzalez (2018), the queer, chicanx author of *The Gender Wheel* and co-author of *He, She, They, Me: Free to Be,* raised a red flag over the way the publishing industry disregarded her intellectual property and plagiarized her work. Future research could examine the structural and interactional practices of the publishing industry that disadvantage minority and own voice authors.

Likewise, it was beyond the scope of this study to examine the intersectional depiction of the protagonists and LGBTQ characters. Research has noted the prevalence of narratives that feature white, middle-class, able-bodied, and living in a two-parent household and are set in a heteronormative world (Capuzza 2019, DePalma 2014, Epstein 2012, Lester 2014, Toman 2014). However, the data that I did collect suggests that 37% of protagonists and 47% LGBTQ characters were people of color. This suggests that a future study could examine the portrayal of these characters in terms of both race and LGBTQ identity. Additionally, studies could ask whether characters of color were likely to be in the center of the story or in the background. The intersectional portrayal of multiple diverse identities is critical to complete representation.

I have measured quality in a carefully framed, but ultimately subjective manner here. Future research could choose other measures of quality or popularity. For example, narrative quality could be operationalized into a concrete series of markers that could be coded for and analyzed quantitatively. Sales data could stand in for popularity, giving an accurate representation of what LGBTQ stories are mainstream. In this vein, one could also examine what

kinds of books are bought for schools or for public libraries. Alternately building a tool that can categorize collections or an index of all LGBTQ literature, like the Diverse Book Finder created by Aronson et al. does for race, could be an excellent future project.

Additionally, more research could discuss the reasons that LGBTQ picture books are some of the most banned in schools (Capuzza 2019). These could become specific questions of local school policies or national questions of attitude towards LGBTQ. One could also ask which LGBTQ books were more likely to be banned and if some LGBTQ categories were deemed more acceptable than others. Indeed, accessibility of LGBTQ books should also be a central question for excellent quality books are ineffective if not widely available.

For writers, I highlight again the gaps in our population of LGBTQ picture books. Despite my repeated use of the acronym LGBTQ, there were no bisexual characters in my sample. This is a huge oversight, not only in representing bisexual individuals, but also in teaching that attraction can be fluid and apply to multiple genders. Bisexual characters, along with the child protagonists of queer love stories, deserve narratives that depicts queer love as natural and appropriate. The continued lack of these characters perpetuates the othering of queer love. Moreover, there were almost no transgender or gender queer love stories. This is a problem if the goal is to include all kinds of love.

Another gap in the population of LGBTQ picture books was gay families that are not two married parents. *Life with Mommy…and Her Girlfriend* by Noreen Spagnol (2017)[59] made specific commentary on this, but it was the only book to mention it. Many children have families that are divorced, or that involve guardians who are not married. To better represent the diverse

[59] Own voice, written to explain her dating life to her children.

kinds of gay families, we need gay family books that represent more than the two-parent homonormative family structure.

Indeed, to broaden representation, we need more any child gender books. The overwhelming majority of gender books are issue books and this impacts the way that transgender, gender bending, and gender queer identities may be seen. Therefore, more adventures with transgender or gender bending heroes rescuing kittens, slaying dragons, and making friends must be written to increase representation. Equally, more gender-expressive trans characters are needed to offset the number of essentialist depictions of transgender identities. Moreover, in gender queer books, considering use of they/them pronouns instead of leaving pronouns ambiguous can help build familiarity with non-binary expression.

Lastly, there is always room for creating characters with an intersectional lens such that a book might examine, for example, race and sexuality or disability and gender. People live at these intersections and may not find themselves fully represented by books that only deal with one or the other of their identities. Equally, it is important to recognize that no one book can represent everyone and to be clear about who, specifically, the book is trying to represent.

For educators, librarians, or parents, I hope that this study has underlined the importance of LGBTQ literary representation and highlighted the range of options for such representation. LGBTQ themes are sadly contentious in today's political climate, but it is important to remember—even, or perhaps particularly, for teachers and librarians in conservative communities—that a child's needs should not be political and that seeing one's self represented in books is particularly important if one does not see oneself celebrated in the community. Classrooms and libraries have enormous power to be safe spaces for queer children. Indeed, to quote Dorr et al. (2018)'s advice to librarians, "We need to step back, evaluate the child's needs,

and provide the resources and opportunities to allow the child to learn, question, and grow while encouraging others outside the LGBTQAI+ community to understand and develop empathy" (137).

My advice to educators, librarians, or parents hoping to build or increase their collection of inclusive picture books is to be mindful of balance. No single inclusive book, no matter how good, will be representative of everyone with that identity. No book, no author, no publisher could ever be totally free of the norms and stereotypes of the society they exist in. Nor, I argue, do they need to be. It is important recognize the many flaws inherent in the books we have, but if we waited around for the perfect tools, we will never effect change. Therefore, when building inclusive collections, pay attention to the range of identities displayed, the balance of narrative structures, the variety of themes, etc.

Additionally, when reading books to kids, discuss the book's topics with them. This can help to ensure that the children understand the message that you wish them to get out of the book as well as help to address any possible flaws. For example, someone reading *Jamie is Jamie* could introduce the idea of they/them pronouns and discuss the idea of gendered norms in a way that helps the kids to challenge them. Even flawed inclusive picture books have potential to build acceptance of difference, celebrate minority identities, and challenge the norm on many axes of diversity if we celebrate them as part of a bigger identity and discuss their flaws.

This thesis has attempted to categorize and analyze the population of LGBTQ narrative picture books. For scholars, I hope that this research can prove useful in posing future questions and examining LGBTQ themes in other kinds of children's media. For writers, I hope that this study has inspired you to write picture books that will fill the gaps and avoid the norms I have identified. For parents, educators, and librarians, I hope that the frameworks and inclusive books

I introduced may aid you in choosing inclusive literature to share with the children in your lives. I end with a quote from Dr. Aronson, whose class sparked my interest in inclusive picture books; she states some of the ideals to remember when working with inclusive literature: “the importance of positionality, apologizing when necessary (humility), and demonstrating change or growth of personal views” (Aronson 2020).

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Appendix 1: Coding Sheet

Start of Block: Book Demographics

Title of the book:

Author:

Author Sexuality:

- ○ Queer
- ○ Straight
- ○ Unknown

Author Gender:

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Queer
- ○ Unknown

Trans?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Unknown

Author Race

- ○ White
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ○ Asian
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ○ Hispanic
- ○ other
- ○ unknown

(completed for each author or illustrator)

Publication date:

Publisher:

Publisher type:

- ○ Mainstream
- ○ Small Press
- ○ Self-published
- ○ Can't tell

The Publisher Diversity focused?

Location published:

If Bilingual, what language?

Genre of the Book:

- ☐ Realistic
- ☐ Historical
- ☐ Fantasy
- ☐ Other

Awards?

Start of Block: Theme

Categorization of the book:

- ☐ Gender Bender
- ☐ Gender Queer
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Gay Family
- ☐ Gay Love
- ☐ Issue Book
- ☐ Any Child
- ☐ Beautiful Life
- ☐ Other

Which theme best describes the theme of the book?

- ☐ Parent-child relationships / adoption / birth
- ☐ Social Tolerance / Acceptance
- ☐ Celebrating Individuality
- ☐ Illness / sick family member
- ☐ Anti-LGBTQ sentiments
- ☐ First love / Same-sex relationships
- ☐ Marriages / celebrations
- ☐ Diverse Family compositions / accepting a new family member
- ☐ Important LGBTQ leader
- ☐ Teaching about an LGBTQ topic
- ☐ Gender Transition / Transgender Journey
- ☐ Other

Start of Block: Characterization

Who is the protagonist:

- ○ Gender?
- ○ Race?
- ○ Class?
- ○ Age?
- ○ Human?
- ○ Sexuality?
- ○ Notes on the Protagonist

Who is the LGBTQ character (s)?

- ○ Gender?
- ○ Race?
- ○ Class?
- ○ Age?
- ○ Human?
- ○ Sexuality?
- ○ Notes on the LGBTQ character

Is the LGBTQ identity the defining/only trait for that character?

Is disability portrayed in the story? If so, who was disabled?

Are LGBTQ characters portrayed as behaving unnaturally?

Do LGBTQ characters have a role as community leaders?

How are LGBTQ families represented?

- Nuclear, two parent
- Other
- Not represented

If other, how was the family constructed?

Is the LGBTQ community represented?

Start of Block: Setting & Plot

Where is the story set?

Is the tone of the story upbeat or negative?

- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative
- Other

Overall, are the LGBTQ characters portrayed positively or negatively?

How are LGBTQ relationships portrayed?

- Loving
- healthy
- committed
- monogamous
- family-focused
- none of the above

Does the narrative depict HIV/Aids?

Do LGBTQ identities cause embarrassment? (both protagonist is embarrassed of LGBTQ parent/family or family is embarrassed of LGBTQ child)

- Yes, always
- Yes, at first
- No, never

Are queer characters accepted by their community? (at least by the end)

Are queer characters accepted by their parents?

- Yes, always
- Yes, after a while
- No, never

Is the character only accepted after they do something exceptional?

Are queer characters (or characters related to them) bullied for being different? Where/How does the LGBTQ identity cause problems?

Does the narrative imply that sexuality is a choice?

Does the narrative imply that gender identity is a choice?

Does the book have a moralistic tone?

Does the book have a didactic / education-focused tone?

Does the narrative introduce negative anti-LGBTQ slurs and terms such as "Dyke" "faggot" "sissy" tomboy" etc.?

Start of Block: Illustrations

Are the illustrations color or black and white?

- Color
- Black and white

Are the illustrations photos, art, or both?

- Photos
- Art
- Both

Do the illustrations add more information to the story?

Are props like Rainbow flags or other pride flags or symbols (pink triangle etc.) used?

Do the illustrations depict the LGBTQ character as ordinary or exotic?

Are the illustrations of the same quality as mainstream picture books?

Appendix 2: Full List of Picture Books in the Sample

Gay Family:

A Tale of Two Daddies	Vanita Oelschlager	Vanita Books	2010
Christian, The Hugging Lion	Justin Richardson And Peter Parnell	Simon And Schuster Books for Young Readers	2010
Dad David, Baba Chris and Me	Ed Merchant	Corambaaf Adoption and Fostering Agency	2010
Daddy and Pop	Tina Rella	Molly Summer and Guess Who? Multimedia	2010
Mom, Mama, And Me... And How I Came to Be!	Tina Rella	Molly Summer and Guess Who Multimedia	2010
Stork MIA	Sandro Isaak	Lulu.Com	2010
Donovan's Big Day	Lesléa Newman	Tricycle Press (Imprint of Random House)	2011
Freckleface Strawberry, Best Friends Forever	Julianne Moore	Bloomsbury Usa Childrens	2011
Keesha & Her Two Moms Go Swimming	Monica Bey-Clarke & Cheril N. Clarke	Dodi Press	2011
Monday With Maxim, The Amazing Maltese	Phylliss Delgreco, Jacyln Roth, And Kathryn Silverio	Jumpskip Productions	2011
My Two Super Dads	Bronny Fallens	Self-Published	2011
My Uncle's Wedding	Eric Ross	Createspace Independent Publishing Platform	2011
Operation Marriage	Cynthia Chin-Lee	Reach and Teach and Pm Press	2011
Tale of Two Mommies	Vanita Oelschlager	Vanita Books	2011
The Different Dragon	Jennifer Bryan	Two Lives Publishing	2011
Tuesday With Mommy… And the Pterodactyls	Phylliss Delgreco, Jacyln Roth, And Kathryn Silverio	Jumpskip Productions LLC	2011
Wednesday, a Walk in The Park	Phylliss Delgreco, Jacyln Roth, And Kathryn Silverio	Jumpskip Productions LLC	2011
Bailey and Her 2 Dads	Troy Smith-Voelker And Heiko Voelker	Self-Published	2012
Hugs of Three: My Daddies and Me	Dr. Stacy Bromberg And Dr. Joe Taravella	Forward Footsteps, LLC	2012
Hugs of Three: My Mommies and Me	Dr. Stacey Bromberg And Dr Joe Taravella	Forward Footsteps	2012
I Am Special (Two Dads One)	Rachel S Huey	Self-Published	2012
I Am Special (Two Moms Edition)	Rachel S Huey	Self-Published	2012
Making My Family	Naomi Stern	Self-Published	2012

My New Mommy	Lilly Mossiano	Self-Published	2012
Some People Have Two Dads	Luca Panzini And Fabri Kramer	Self-Published	2012
The Child in the Fathers' Hearts	Paul Janson	Self-Published	2012
The Child in the Mothers' Hearts	Paul Janson	Self-Published	2012
The Lost Treasures for the Orphans	Carol Blazer	Self-Published	2012
The New Goldilocks and the Three Bears: Mama Bear, Mommy Bear, and Baby Bear	Beth Mcmurry	Self-Published	2012
The New Goldilocks and the Three Bears: Papa Bear, Daddy Bear, and Baby Bear	Beth Mcmurry	Self-Published	2012
Thursday With Helenna And Alex	Phylliss Delgreco, Jacyln Roth, And Kathryn Silverio	Jumpskip Productions LLC	2012
What Can You Do with Two Mommies?	Tara Theresa Hill	Lulu.Com	2012
Adopting Ahava	Jennifer Byrne	Dodi Press	2013
Cubby and The Bears--Free as The Wind	Hal Lanse	Self-Published	2013
Daddy and Papa's Little Angels	Mystique Ann U'Nique	Authorhouse	2013
Friday With Jerome In Jamaica	Phylliss Delgreco, Jacyln Roth, And Kathryn Silverio	Jumpskip Productions LLC	2013
My New Daddy	Lilly Mossiano	Spun Silver Productions	2013
Otis And Alice	Ariane Bertouille	Fitzhenry & Whiteside	2013, 2006 (in French)
Some People Have Two Mums	Luca Panzini And Fabri Kramer	Self-Published	2013
The Purim Superhero	Elisabeth Kushner	Kar-Ben	2013
Adopting Our Two Dads: A Story About the Leffew Family	Luca Panzini	Self-Published	2014
Gal and Noa's Daddies	Shosh Pinkas	Shosh Pinkas	2014
My Dad is a Clown / Mi Papá Es Un Payaso	José Carlos Andrés	Nubeocho	2014
Tell Your Story, Tell a Dream Birthday Cake	Angela Bermudez	Self-Published	2014

This Christmas Truck	J B Blankenship	Narragarden Llc	2014
Two Dads	Carolyn Robertson	Sparklypoo Press	2014
A Princess of Great Daring	Tobi Hill-Meyer	Flamingo Rampant	2015
Love is in The Hair	Syrus Marcus Ware	Flamingo Rampant	2015
Mia's Two Grammas	Judith Gomez	Self-Published	2015
Mummy and Mumma Get Married	Roz Hopkins And Natalie Winter	Captain Honey	2015
My Two Dads	Alphonso "Dr. Al" Buie	Dr. Alphonso A. Buie	2015
My Two Dads (My Family)	Claudia Harrington	Magic Wagon (Ado Books)	2015
My Two Moms (My Family)	Claudia Harrington	Magic Wagon (Ado Books)	2015
Newspaper Pirates	J Wallace Skelton	Flamingo Rampant	2015
Rumplepimple	Suzanne Dewitt Hall	Self-Published	2015
Stella Brings the Family	Miriam B. Schiffer	Chronicle Books	2015
The Zero Dads Club	Angel Adeyoha	Flamingo Rampant	2015
Two Moms and A Menagerie	Carolyn Robertson	Sparklypoo Press	2015
Wishful Wedding	A. S. Chung	Pigeonhole Books	2015
Good Bye Daddy	Heiko Voelker	Self-Published	2016
Heather Has Two Mommies (Anniversary Edition)	Lesléa Newman	Candlewick Press	2016
Home at Last	Vera B. Williams	Greenwillow Books (Imprint of Harper Collins)	2016
Keesha's South African Adventure	Monica Bey-Clarke And Cheril N. Clarke	Dodi Press	2016
My Two Dads Are Amazing	Pablo Fernández	Self-Published	2016
My Two Super Mums	Bronny Fallens	Little Train Publishing	2016
My Two Uncles & Me	Jeff Rivera	Createspace Independent Publishing Platform	2016
Old Dog Baby Baby	Julie Fogliano	Roaring Brook Press	2016
Real Sisters Pretend	Megan Dowd Lambert	Tilbury House Publishers	2016
The Flower Girl Wore Celery	Meryl G. Gordon	Lerner Publishing Group	2016
Baby’s First Words	Stella Blackstone And Sunny Scribens	Barefoot Books	2017
Life with Mommy... And Her Girlfriend	Noreen Spagnol	Friesen Press	2017
Pearl Power and The Girl with Two Dads	Mel Elliott	I Love Mel	2017
Pickles + Ocho	Dan Wellik	Beaver's Pond Press	2017

Rachel’s Christmas Boat	Sophie Labelle	Flamingo Rampant	2017
Rumplepimple Goes to Jail	Suzanne Dewitt Hall	Self-Published	2017
Super Power Baby Shower	Tobi Hill-Meyer And Fay Onyx	Flamingo Rampant	2017
The Adventures of Honey and Leon	Alan Cumming	Random House Books for Young Readers	2017
The Last Place You Look	J Wallace Skelton	Flamingo Rampant	2017
Willow and The Wedding	Denise Brennan-Nelson	Sleeping Bear Press	2017
Charlie And the Missing Hat	Jenny Worthington	Jenny Worthington	2018
Different Just Like Us	Lexi Layton And Tammi Croteau Keen	Civin Media Relations	2018
Harriet Gets Carried Away	Jessie Sima	Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers	2018
I Love My Two Moms	Jules Fox	Self-Published	2018
Kensie's Queen	Jennifer Leider	Self-Published	2018
Lucky Love & His Two Moms	Casey Lane	Lucky Love Press	2018
Mia's Family	Elliot Riley	Rourke Educational Media	2018
The True Adventures of Esther The Wonder Pig	Steve Jenkins, Derek Walter, And Caprice Crane	Little, Brown and Company	2018
Two Moms	Carolyn Robertson	Sparklypoo Press	2018
What Does a Princess Really Look Like?	Mark Loewen	BQB Publishing	2018
A Plan for Pops	Heather Smith	Orca Publishers	2019
Ghost’s Journey: A Refugee Story	Robin Stevenson	Rebel Mountain Press	2019
Honey & Leon Take the High Road	Alan Cumming	Random House New York	2019
I Have Two Dads	Colleen Lemaire	Self-Published	2019
I Have Two Moms	Colleen Lemaire	Self-Published	2019
Kenny Lives with Erica And Martina	Olly Pike	Self-Published	2019
Lennox Learns About Love	T J Watkins	Self-Published	2019
Life with Daddy and His Boyfriend	Noreen Spagnol	Friesenpress	2019
My Footprints	Bao Phi	Capstone	2019
My Mommy, My Mama, My Brother, And Me, These Are the Things We Found by The Sea	Natalie Meisner	Nimbus Publishing	2019

My Two Daddies	Joan Nicoletti Santangelo	Self-Published	2019
My Two Moms	Alphonso "Dr. Al" Buie	Self-Published	2019
Why Do I Have Two Mommies? A Journey in Self Discovery	Janai Akerele	Self-Published	2019
Wrestle!	Charlotte Mars, Maya Newell, And Gus Skattebol-James	Allen & Unwin Children's Books	2019
Auntie Uncle	Ellie Royce	Pow! Kids Books	2020
Goldilocks and The Five Bear Families	Olly Pike	Self-Published	2020
Jamie The Germ Slayer in a Place Called Little While	Suzanne Dewitt Hall	Self-Published	2020
Lucky Love Starts School	Casey Lane	Casey Danielle	2020
Mighty May Won't Cry Today	Kendra And Claire-Voe Ocampo	Bunny Patch Press	2020
Mom Marries Mum	Ken Setterington	Second Story Press	2020
My Maddy	Gayle E. Pitman	Magination Press	2020
Papa, Daddy, And Riley	Seamus Kirst	Magination Press	2020
Pickles + Ocho: Our Favorite Place	Dan Wellik	Beaver's Pond Press	2020
Plenty of Hugs	Fran Manushkin	Dial Books for Young Readers	2020
She's My Dad	Sarah Savage	Jessica Kingsley Publications	2020
Uncle Bobby's Wedding (Reprint Edition)	Sarah Brannen	Little Bee Books	2020
Uni The Curious Little Seahorse	B. Zielinska	Self-Published	2020
Who's Your Real Mom	Bernadette Green	Scribble	2020

Queer Love:

Prince Henry	Olly Pike	Self-Published	2015
Princess Li / La Princesa Li	Luis Amavisca	Nubeocho	2016
Rosaline	Daniel Errico	Pajama Publishing Inc	2016
Square Zair Pair	Jace Peeples	Zair Pair Books	2016
Worm Loves Worm	J. J. Austrian	Balzer + Bray	2016
I'm a Librarian	Brian Biggs	Harry N. Abrams	2017
Promised Land	Adam Reynolds And Chaz Harris	Self-Published	2017
Santa's Husband	Daniel Kibblesmith	Harper Design	2017

Jerome By Heart	Thomas Scotto	Enchanted Lion Books	2018
Last Week Tonight with John Oliver Presents a Day in The Life of Marlon Bundo	Jill Twiss	Chronicle Books	2018
Maiden Voyage	Jaimee Poipoi, Adam Reynolds & Chaz Harris	Self-Published	2018
Prince and Knight	Daniel Haack	Little Bee Books	2018
Sisters from The Stars	Amy Eleanor Heart	Heartspark Press	2018
The Prince and The Frog	Olly Pike	Self-Published	2018
I Am Billie Jean King	Brad Meltzer	Dial Books for Young Readers	2019
It's A Wild World	S Bear Bergman	Flamingo Rampant	2019
Lennox Learns About Love	T J Watkins	Self-Published	2019
Love Around the World	Fleur Pierets	Six Foot Press	2019
Maiden and Princess	Daniel Haack	Little Bee Books	2019
The Bravest Knight Who Ever Lived	Daniel Errico	Schiffer Kids	2019
From Archie To Zack	Vincent X. Kirsch	Abrams Books for Young Readers	2020
Julian At the Wedding	Jessica Love	Candlewick Press	2020

Transgender:

Be Who You Are	Jennifer Carr	Authorhouse	2010
When Kathy Is Keith	Wallace Wong	Xlibris Corporation	2011
Goblinheart	Brett Axel	East Waterfront Press	2012
My Dad Wears Pirate Shoes	Gae Hall	Createspace Independent Publishing Platform	2012
My New Mommy	Lilly Mossiano	Self-Published	2012
Meet Polkadot	Talcott Broadhead	Danger Dot Publishing	2013
My New Daddy	Lilly Mossiano	Spun Silver Productions	2013
The Adventures of Tina And Jordan	Jessica Lam	Self-Published	2013
When Kayla Was Kyle	Amy Fabrikant	Avid Readers Publishing Group (Imprint of Simon And Schuster)	2013
But, I'm Not a Boy	Katie Leone	Self-Published	2014
I Am Jazz	Jessica Herthel And Jazz Jennings	Dial Books (Imprint of Random House)	2014
Michael and Me	Margaret Baker-Street	Self-Published	2014

Tell Your Story, Tell a Dream Birthday Cake	Angela Bermudez	Self-Published	2014
A Princess of Great Daring	Tobi Hill-Meyer	Flamingo Rampant	2015
About Chris	Nina Benedetto	Createspace Independent Publishing Platform	2015
Jamie: A Transgender Cinderella Story	Olly Pike	Self-Published	2015
My Favorite Color is Pink	Nina Benedetto	Createspace Independent Publishing Platform	2015
Red: A Crayon's Story	Michael Hall	Greenwillow Books (Imprint of Harper Collins)	2015
Royal Heart	Greg Mcgoon	Pelekinesis	2015
The Gender Fairy	Jo Hirst	Oban Road Publishing	2015
The Zero Dads Club	Angel Adeyoha	Flamingo Rampant	2015
This Is My Zaza	Dawn James	Self-Published	2015
Introducing Teddy	Jessica Walton	Bloomsbury USA Children's	2016
Jack Wants to Be Jill: It's Okay to Be Me!	Cindi Walton	Self-Published	2016
Truly Willa	Willa Naylor	Self-Published	2016
Bell's Knock Knock Birthday	George Parker	Flamingo Rampant	2017
Bow-Wow-Meow	Blanca Lacasa	Nubeocho	2017
Bunnybear	Andrea J. Loney	Albert Whitman & Company	2017
It's Ok to Sparkle	Avery Jackson	Debi Jackson	2017
Rachel's Christmas Boat	Sophie Labelle	Flamingo Rampant	2017
Rebekah's Secret Grandpa	Andy Thornton	Self-Published	2017
A House for Everyone	Jo Hirst	Jessica Kingsley Publishers	2018
Jack (Not Jackie)	Erica Silverman	Little Bee Books	2018
Jesse's Hat Collection	Nick Barnes	Self-Published	2018
No Matter What	Adrienne E. Anzelmo	Createspace Independent Publishing Platform	2018
Phoenix Goes to School	Michelle And Phoenix Finch	Jessica Kingsley Publishers	2018
Sisters from The Stars	Amy Eleanor Heart	Heartspark Press	2018
Vincent The Vixen	Alice Reeves	Jessica Kingsley Publishers	2018
Backwards Day	S. Bear Bergman	Flamingo Rampant	2019
Call Me Max	Kyle Lukoff	Reycraft Books	2019
Casey's Ball	Kit Yan	Flamingo Rampant	2019
I Love Pink!	Trina Casey	The Real-Life Books	2019

It’s a Wild World	S Bear Bergman	Flamingo Rampant	2019
Max and The Talent Show	Kyle Lukoff	Reycraft Books	2019
Muffy Was Fluffy	Rikki Marie-Josée Dubois	Friesenpress	2019
My Awesome Aunty	Lise Frances	Mabel Media	2019
My Awesome Brother	Lisé Frances	Mabel Media	2019
My Awesome Sister	Lise Frances	Mabel Media	2019
My Awesome Uncle	Lise Frances	Mabel Media	2019
The Adventures of Tulip, The Birthday Wish Fairy	S. Bear Bergman	Flamingo Rampant	2019
When Aidan Became a Brother	Kyle Lukoff	Lee & Low Books	2019
Benny’s True Colors	Norene Paulson	Imprint	2020
Hilda The Rooster	Joy Wydra	Self-Published	2020
I'm Just Me!!	Kody Christiansen	Self-Published	2020
I'm Not a Girl	Maddox Lyons And Jessica Verdi	Roaring Brook Press (Imprint of Macmillian)	2020
Jamie And Bubbie: A Book About People’s Pronouns	Afsaneh Moradian	Free Spirit Publishing	2020
Max on The Farm	Kyle Lukoff	Reycraft Books	2020
My Dad Thinks I’m a Boy?!: A Trans Positive Children's Book	Sophie Labelle	Jessica Kingsley Publishers	2020
My Rainbow	Trinity and Deshanna Neal	Kokila (Imprint of Penguin Random House)	2020
Raven Wild	Caitlin Spice, Adam Reynolds, And Chaz Harris	Promised Land Entertainment Llc	2020
Sam The Fuzzy Caterpillar	Dorothy England	Kindle Self-Publishing	2020
She's My Dad	Sarah Savage	Jessica Kingsley Publications	2020
The Fighting Infantryman: The Story of Albert D. J. Cashier, Transgender Civil War Soldier	Rob Sanders	Little Bee Books	2020
Uni The Curious Little Seahorse	B. Zielinska	Self Published	2020
Were I Not a Girl: The True Story of Dr. James Barry	Lisa Robinson	Schwartz & Wade (Imprint of Penguin House Canada)	2020

Gender Bender:

Jesse's Dream Skirt	Bruce Mack	Zoetic Endeavours (Originally Lollipop Press)	1979, 2019
Oliver Button is a Sissy	Tomie Depaola	Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers; Reprint Edition	1979, 2017, 2019
My Princess Boy	Cheryl Kilodavis	Aladdin (Imprint of Simon And Schuster)	2010
Tutus Aren't My Style	Linda Skeers	Dial Books for Young Reader (Imprint of Penguin Young Readers Group)	2010
The Basket Ball	Esmé Raji Codell	Abrams Books for Young Readers (Imprint of Abrams)	2011
The Different Dragon	Jennifer Bryan	Two Lives Publishing	2011
Play Free	Mcnall Mason and Max Suarez	Max 'n Me Studio	2012
Roland Humphrey is Wearing a WHAT?	Eileen Kiernan-Johnson	Huntley Rahara Press	2012
The Worst Princess	Anna Kemp	Simon & Schuster Children's Uk	2012
Pirate Princess	Sudipta Bardhan-Quallen	Harper (Imprint of Harper Collins)	2013
Princesa: The Boy Who Dreamed of Being a Princess	Emmanuel Romero And Drew Stephens	Createspace Independent Publishing Platform	2013
The Adventures of Tina And Jordan	Jessica Lam	Self-Published	2013
Jacob's New Dress	Sarah And Ian Hoffman	Albert Whitman & Company	2014
Made by Raffi	Craig Pomranz	Frances Lincoln Children's Books	2014
Morris Micklewhite And the Tangerine Dress	Christine Baldacchino	Groundwood Books	2014
Pearl Power	Mel Elliott	I Love Mel	2014
A Peacock Among Pigeons	Tyler Curry	Mascot Books	2015
Annie's Plaid Shirt	Stacy B Davids	Upswing Press	2015
Drum Dream Girl	Margarita Engle	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt	2015
I'm a Girl!	Yasmeen Ismail	Bloomsbury Children's Books	2015
Large Fears	Myles E. Johnson	Self-Published	2015

Pearl Power and The Toy Problem	Mel Elliott	I Love Mel	2015
Big Bob, Little Bob	James Howe	Candlewick Press	2016
Clive And His Art	Jessica Spanyol	Child's Play International	2016
Clive And His Babies	Jessica Spanyol	Child's Play International	2016
Clive And His Hats	Jessica Spanyol	Child's Play International	2016
It's Me!	Nina Benedetto	Createspace Independent Publishing Platform	2016
Leah’s Mustache Party	Nadia Mike	Inhabit Media Inc	2016
One of a Kind, Like Me/Unico Como Yo	Laurin Mayeno	Blood Orange Press	2016
The Boy and The Bindi	Vivek Shraya	Arsenal Pulp Press	2016
Worm Loves Worm	J. J. Austrian	Balzer + Bray	2016
Bell’s Knock Knock Birthday	George Parker	Flamingo Rampant	2017
I Love My Purse	Belle Demont	Annick Press	2017
Princesses Wear Pants	Savannah Guthrie And Allison Oppenheim	Abrams Books for Young Readers	2017
Rumplepimple Goes to Jail	Suzanne Dewitt Hall	Self-Published	2017
Sparkle Boy	Leslea Newman	Lee & Low Books	2017
The Last Place You Look	J Wallace Skelton	Flamingo Rampant	2017
A House for Everyone	Jo Hirst	Jessica Kingsley Publishers	2018
Angus All Aglow	Heather Smith	Orca Book Publishers	2018
Ballet Boy	Anfaney Gladwin	Anfaney Gladwin	2018
Eleanor Wyatt, Princess and Pirate	Rachel Macfarlane	Imprint	2018
Julián Is a Mermaid	Jessica Love	Candlewick Press	2018
Rosa Loves Cars	Jessica Spanyol	Child's Play International	2018
Rosa Loves Dinosaurs	Jessica Spanyol	Child's Play International	2018
Rosa Plays Ball	Jessica Spanyol	Child's Play International	2018
The Absolutely Positively NO Princess Book	Ian Lendler	Creston Books	2018
Want to Play Trucks?	Ann Stott	Candlewick Press	2018
Big Boys Cry	Jonty Howley	Random House Books for Young Readers	2019
Call Me Max	Kyle Lukoff	Reycraft Books	2019
Dazzling Travis	Hannah Carmona Dias	Cardinal Rule Press	2019
Dracula Spectacular	Lucy Rowland	Macmillan Uk	2019
Harrison Dwight, Ballerina and Knight	Rachel Macfarlane	Imprint	2019
I Am Billie Jean King	Brad Meltzer	Dial Books for Young Readers	2019

I Love My Colorful Nails	Alicia Acosta And Luis Amavisca	Nube Ocho	2019
Jacob's Room to Choose	Sarah And Ian Hoffman	Magination Press (APA's Press)	2019
Mary Wears What She Wants	Keith Negley	Balzer + Bray (Imprint of Harper Collins)	2019
Max and The Talent Show	Kyle Lukoff	Reycraft Books	2019
Ogilvy	Deborah Underwood	Henry Holt and Co.	2019
Teddy's Favorite Toy	Christian Trimmer	Atheneum Books for Young Readers (Imprint of Simon And Schuster)	2019
Wrestle!	Charlotte Mars, Maya Newell, And Gus Skattebol-James	Allen & Unwin Children's Books	2019
Bling Blaine Throw Glitter Not Shade	Rob Sanders	Sterling Children's Books (Imprint of Sterling Books)	2020
Glad, Glad Bear	Kimberly Gee	Beach Lane Books (Imprint of Simon And Schuster)	2020
Jamie And Bubbie: A Book About People's Pronouns	Afsaneh Moradian	Free Spirit Publishing	2020
Julian At the Wedding	Jessica Love	Candlewick Press	2020
Max on The Farm	Kyle Lukoff	Reycraft Books	2020
Playing Wicked	Alex R. Kahler	Albert Whitman & Companyt	2020
Princess Kevin	Michael Escoffier	Francis Lincoln Children's Books (Quarto Group Imprint)	2020
Someday for Lucas	Andrés Antúnez	Andrés Antúnez	2020
Tabitha And Magoo Dress Up Too	Michelle Tea	Feminist Press	2020

Gender Queer:

Meet Polkadot	Talcott Broadhead	Danger Dot Publishing	2013
Bobbi And Me	Jeanne Kipke	Self-Published	2014
47,000 Beads	Angel Adeyoha And Koja Adeyoha	Flamingo Rampant	2017
Are You a Boy or A Girl?	Sarah Savage	Jessica Kingsley Publishers	2017
Bell's Knock Knock Birthday	George Parker	Flamingo Rampant	2017

From the Stars in The Sky to The Fish in The Sea	Kai Cheng Thom And Kai Yun Ching	Arsenal Pulp Press	2017
Stacey's Not a Girl	Colt Keo-Meier	Nine Lam	2017
Super Power Baby Shower	Tobi Hill-Meyer And Fay Onyx	Flamingo Rampant	2017
A House for Everyone	Jo Hirst	Jessica Kingsley Publishers	2018
Jamie is Jamie	Afsaneh Moradian	Free Spirit Publishing	2018
Kensie's Queen	Jennifer Leider	Self-Published	2018
Neither	Airlie Anderson	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers	2018
A Plan for Pops	Heather Smith	Orca Publishers	2019
Ho'onani The Hula Warrior	Heather Gale	Tundra Books (Imprint of Random House Canada)	2019
It's A Wild World	S Bear Bergman	Flamingo Rampant	2019
The Great Space Adventure	Ryka Aoki	Flamingo Rampant	2019
What Riley Wore	Elana K Arnold	Beach Lane Books	2019
Auntie Uncle	Ellie Royce	Pow! Kids' Books	2020
I Believe in Me!	Victoria Anne Darling	Darling Publications	2020
Jamie And Bubbie: A Book About People's Pronouns	Afsaneh Moradian	Free Spirit Publishing	2020
My Maddy	Gayle E. Pitman	Magination Press	2020
Tabitha And Magoo Dress Up Too	Michelle Tea	Feminist Press	2020
The Name I Call Myself	Hasan Namir	Arsenal Pulp Press	2020