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Are You a Boy or a Girl?: Representations of Transgender Children in Picture Books

Joshua Hill

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Are You a Boy or a Girl?: Representations of Transgender Children in Picture Books

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ABSTRACT

This research was a critical content analysis of picture books that contained transgender children utilizing Butler's (2004, 2006) performativity of gender and recognizability of gender alongside Engdahls's (2014) wrong-body discourse. The question was, how do picture books about transgender represent various versions of queerness in children? This analysis was done by examining 20 total picture books which included 10 books about trans girls, six books about trans boys, and four books about nonbinary children. These 20 books were then broken down into eight books for a deeper analysis of the ways that queerness was represented. The findings included the ways in which these children both upheld gender norms and also resisted these same norms. The dress as a clothing item became the focal point for both trans girls and trans boys, with trans girls viewing this clothing item as the most important element of claiming their femininity. Trans boys had to reject the dress as a way to assert that they were not girls, but there were no other single items that defined boyhood for trans boys in the same way a dress defined girlhood for trans girls. The trans children resisted gender norms when they claimed a different gender identity than what was assigned to them at birth. In addition, they transgressed gender norms within their play and their bedroom decorations. Finally, nonbinary children illustrated queerness through their refusal to define their gender identity for others and their desire to exhibit both male typical and female typical play and gender expressions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Imagine yourself as a child. Do you feel like a boy? Do you feel like a girl? Do you feel somewhere in-between? When children are playing with dolls and painting mermaids, do you want to do that? When other children are building with blocks or playing soccer, do you want to do that, too, or do you want to do that instead of playing with dolls? Do your clothing and hairstyle match the way you think about yourself? When children are born, the doctor, the nurses, and even their own parents decide that the child is a boy or a girl and for some, as they get older, this does not feel correct. The children feel maybe there was a mistake made by the adults, that they are a girl, even though others see a boy body. They feel like they are a boy, even though others see a girl's body. There are even children who do not want to be labeled as either boy or girl. Sometimes they feel like they are a gender normative girl; they want to play with dresses, paint pretty pink pictures, and dance. Other times they feel like a gender normative boy, playing with trucks and getting dirty. Sometimes these children are transgender, the gender they are assigned at birth does not match the way they see their own gender. Just as there is no one way to be a girl or a boy, there is no one way of being transgender. Some transgender people like to conform to the gender expression that is expected of their gender identity, trans women who like to wear make-up or high-heeled shoes and trans men who like to wear a suit or have short hair. There are other transgender people who do not want to conform: they want to have the freedom to move between gender

expressions, one day wearing heels and the next wearing a tie or maybe both at the same time. Gender is fluid; it can and often does change over time.

As a way to explore this gender fluidity, I am focusing in this dissertation on books that feature children who mostly identify as transgender; however, not all of the books include self-identified transgender children. A few of the books include children whose gender identity is more fluid; the words and illustrations may contradict each other. Male pronouns are used for a child whose gender expression may align more closely with a feminine gender expression or female pronouns are used for a child whose gender expression is more masculine. These children may not yet identify as transgender or as another gender identity than what was assigned to them at birth, but this does not mean that, as readers, we cannot think about how these children might be beginning to socially transition even before they share their inner thoughts. In other books, the text and illustrations support a transgender identity for the child, but the author did not use that label. Perhaps this was because the book was an early example of the writing about transgender children and the label *transgender* would not have been acceptable to a publisher, or maybe the author does not want to label children as a way to allow them to grow into and be able to choose their own gender identity. Whatever the reason, I examine how the child presents themselves and then think about the possible gender identities for this child. All of the books about transgender children allow us to think about how gender is ever changing.

Terms in the Study

- Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB) and Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB). These terms are used to define how a person is assigned a sex at birth which may differ

from the gender that they are. (“LGBTQ+ Definitions – Trans Student Educational Resources,” n.d.).

- Cisgender is the term for those who are not transgender (GLAAD, 2016). “[A] cisgender man or cisgender woman is thus one whose internal gender identity matches, and presents itself in accordance with, the externally determined cultural expectations of the behavior and roles considered appropriate for one’s sex as male or female” (American Psychological Association, 2012, n.p.).
- Cisnormativity is the “cultural assumption that all people are cisgender” (Meadow, 2018, p. 264). This cultural construction serves to mark the assumed privilege of being nontransgender (Stryker, 2017).
- Deadname. “*Deadnaming* [sic] is using someone’s birth name when another name, often a name with different gender markers, has been offered” (Gino, 2015).
- Gender Identity is the internal sense that people have about how they understand their gender. Cisgender people’s gender identity matches their assigned gender at birth, whereas transgender people’s gender identity does not match their assigned gender at birth. This is not visible to others unlike gender expression (GLAAD, 2016).
- Gender Expression is the way that people communicate their gender identity: this includes hair style, clothing, pronouns, etc. These are the cues that most people use to understand another’s gender, although gender expression is not stable across time or societies (GLAAD, 2016).

- Gender nonconforming (GNC) is “a person whose gender expression is, or appears to be, different from what we would expect from their assigned gender” (“Glossary,” n.d.).
- Gender normative behavior/actions is the way I am describing the actions and behaviors of the children that would be typical of their gender expression. This de-essentializes the idea that gendered performance is attached to gendered bodies.
- I utilize Serano’s (2013) definition for genderqueer as “being neither woman or man, or as a little bit of both, or as being gender-fluid (i.e., moving between different gendered states over the course of their lives)” (p. 19).
- Heteronormative is “a way of being in the world that relies on the belief that heterosexuality is normal, which implicitly positions homosexuality and bisexuality as abnormal and thus inferior” (Blackburn & Smith, 2010, p. 625).
- LGBTQ+ is the acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. The plus sign is used as a way to expand this acronym to include the multiple gender and sexual identities that people may have (Gold, 2018).
- Misgender/misgendering “refers to the experience of being labeled by others as a gender other than one that a person identifies with” (*Gender Terminology Guide*, n.d.).
- Queer. Similar to Lester (2014), I use the word queer “broadly to refer to the potential multitude of nonnormative genders and sexualities, and to imply that these identities are not fixed categories or necessarily static identity markers. *Queer* also encompasses both gender and sexuality with regard to

heteronormativity, while maintaining that gender identity and sexual orientation are not dependent on each other” (Lester, 2014, p. 245). As S. J. Miller (2015) discussed, a queer position is not only applied to those who identify as a sexual minority, it is applied to anyone who does not fit into the normative definition for gender expression and/or sexuality.

- They. As the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary notes, the use of the singular “they” has existed within the English language since the 1300s and that many people use the singular “they” within their everyday speech and formal writing when the gender of the person is not known. This has more recently shifted to people who do not identify within a binary gender identity, male or female, using the singular “they” as their pronoun (Words we’re watching: Singular ‘they’, 2019).
- Transgender is “an umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries” (Stryker, 1994, p. 94). This idea connects with Norton's (1999) definition of trans children, “children whose experiences and sense of gender does not allow them to fit their sexed bodies into seamless accord with a congruent, conventional gender identity” (p. 415-416).

Statement of Problem

Over time, queer identification among young people has increased. How has this manifested in schools? Has an increase in queer identification correlated with an increase in anti-queer bullying and harassment? Here I explore the growth of queer identification in primary and secondary educational environments and the growth in bullying.

Queer Identities in Society and Schools

Since transgender identities are often included in the larger Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ)¹ communities, it is important to start by examining the number of people who identify within the LGBTQ community. In 2016, 4.1% of people surveyed as part of a Gallup Daily tracking identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender (LGBT). This was up from 3.5% in 2012 and represented approximately 10 million adults who identified as part of the LGBT community with an increase of about 1.75 million more people than those who identified within this same community in 2012. This poll found that most of the increase was from people born between 1980 to 1998, who this poll termed Millennials. Millennials were twice as likely as any other generational population to identify as LGBT. While this generation only comprised 32% of the overall population, they comprised 58% of the respondents who identified as LGBT (Gates, 2017). These statistics seem to show that more young people are identifying as part of the queer community.

Due to the way in which people might choose to describe their own gender and the fact that transgender-ness is not a monolith, it is often difficult to find accurate statistics of how many people in the United States identify as transgender: however, one poll found that “0.6% of U.S. adults identify as transgender. This figure is double the estimate that utilized data from roughly a decade ago and implies that an estimated 1.4 million adults in the United States identify as transgender” (Flores, Herman, Gates, &

¹ Since the terminology associated with the LGBTQ/queer community can vary from article to article, I will utilize the term that the individual studies use in their own reporting. When I am not utilizing a specific source, I will utilize the term queer as a way to encompass the vast array of sexualities, gender expressions, and gender identities that are included in these terms.

Brown, 2016, p. 2). The largest population of people who identified as transgender were 18-24 years old, with an estimated 0.7% of the population identifying as transgender (Flores et al., 2016). In another poll conducted by the Harris Poll on behalf of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), 12% of the Millennials who were part of this poll identified as transgender or gender nonconforming. This is twice the number of Generation X participants who identified as transgender or gender nonconforming in this same poll (GLAAD, 2017). These studies discussed that one of the possible reasons for the higher rates of young people identifying as part of the queer community might have to do with more general acceptance in U.S. society (Flores et al., 2016; Gates, 2017; GLAAD, 2017).

This trickle down of acceptance is reflected in schools as well, as more young people identify as part of the queer community. While there is limited data about students in elementary schools who identify as transgender, according to a study conducted by Harris Interactive for the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) (2012), “almost one in ten of elementary school students (8%) report that they do not conform to traditional gender norms” (p. xviii). While it is sometimes argued that young children are not yet ready to make these types of choices about how they wish to express their gender, some studies show otherwise. In a clinical study, 27% of children who displayed some form of gender dysphoria in toddlerhood will continue to have this same gender dysphoria into adulthood. This rate is higher in assigned female at birth children compared with those who are assigned male at birth (Meier & Harris, n.d.).

In a GLSEN national survey of secondary students, approximately 25% of the students identified as transgender, 11% as genderqueer and another 10% as another non-

cisgender identity, questioning, or nonbinary (Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, & Truong, 2018). While this study was targeted toward queer students, these numbers also seemed to indicate that many students within this community identify as non-cisgender. The Williams Institute at the UCLA Law School utilized state and local statistics to estimate that 0.7% of 13-17-year-old people identify as transgender (Herman, Flores, Brown, Wilson, & Conron, 2017). In a national study in 10 states and nine urban school districts, the Centers for Disease Control found that 1.8% of high school students identified as transgender (Johns et al., 2019). This wide range of percentages from 0.7% to 1.8% demonstrates the challenge in gaining an accurate survey of the number of transgender youths, but it also demonstrates that there is a significant number of youths who identify as non-cisgender.

Bullying Due to Queer Identities

As the 2017 statistics from GLSEN's National School Climate Survey that focused on secondary students demonstrated, 98.5% of the students surveyed heard the term "gay" used in a negative way ("That's so gay") and 95.3% heard other homophobic remarks at school. In addition, 94% of LGBTQ students heard negative comments about gender expression from fellow students, and 87.4% of LGBTQ students heard negative comments regarding transgender students. That same study noted 71% of LGBTQ students heard negative comments around gender expression from school staff, with 56.6% of LGBTQ students hearing homophobic remarks from teachers (Kosciw et al., 2018).

In another study, this time focused on elementary school age children, almost half of the respondents heard the term gay used in a derogatory manner, "that's so gay" or

“you’re gay.” Almost 40% of the same students noted that they heard others talk about things that boys should not do or not wear and one-third of students noted that they heard about things that girls should not wear or do in school (GLSEN, 2012). This same report also noted that “almost one quarter (23%) of elementary school students also report that other students in their school are bullied because they are girls who act or look ‘too much’ like boys or boys who act or look ‘too much’ like girls” (GLSEN, 2012, p. 23). In this same study from GLSEN (2012), it was found that younger girls tended to be more accepting of girls who were gender nonconforming than older girls; this same acceptance was not present in boys no matter their age.

This constant bullying by students and staff toward queer students takes a toll on these students. As the GLSEN (2012) research showed, there is a “connection between elementary-school experiences of bullying and a lower quality of life” (p. xiii). This same research showed that 42% of students who did not conform to traditional gender roles did not feel safe in school, while 35% said this bullying meant they sometimes did not feel safe enough to want to go to school. Less than half of the teachers in this study reported that students who were or who might grow up to be transgender would probably be comfortable in their school. They also said that while they would not discourage a student whose gender presentation was outside the norm, they would not encourage them to be themselves, either (GLSEN, 2012).

As part of a national survey on the mental health of LGBTQ youth, The Trevor Project found that 54% of transgender and non-binary 13-24-year olds considered suicide, with another 29% attempting suicide. This is compared to 31% of cisgender LGB people of the same age range who considered suicide and 14% who attempted suicide

(The Trevor Project, 2019). Meier and Harris (n.d.) discussed that when gender issues were addressed in ways that were supportive and non-judgmental, there were reductions of self-injurious and suicidal behaviors in transgender and gender nonconforming children. While any rates of suicide are tragic, the much higher rates of considered and attempted suicide among transgender and non-binary youth support the contentions that these students face intensive bullying during their schooling.

Research Purpose

Given the increasing number of students in all levels of schooling who identify as transgender, this research aimed to investigate the representations of transgender children in picture books. Picture books can illuminate this crossing-over and queering of socially constructed gender norms in children and provide a way for transgender youth to see themselves in books. In addition, this research was intended to examine ways in which these texts could allow for cisgender children to examine gender norms within their own lives through the characters in the books. Further, they provide a way for teachers to introduce and discuss the possible fluidity of gender expressions within a classroom. These book characters demonstrated different ways of gender presentation, both binary and non-binary, so while a cisgender child may not portray cross-gender behaviors, these texts allow them to explore other ways of thinking about masculinity and femininity.

In this research, I highlight the ways in which the transgender characters engaged in behavior that queered gender norms, pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable gender identity and gender expression. This research also examined times in which the transgender children did not queer gender norms. These were moments in which they conformed to stereotypical gender norms as a way to be recognized for their gender

identity or times where others did not accept their gender identity and they had to make more forceful claims to their gender identity.

Research Question

In this study I examined picture books about transgender youth through a critical content analysis. The research question was:

1. How do picture books about transgender children represent various versions of queerness in children?

Significance of Study

As noted in both the background and statement of problem sections of this chapter, transgender children need more support in schools. One way to support transgender students would be to supplement classroom materials with books that show representations of nonnormative gender identities. In addition, these books would support all children who might struggle with their own presentations of gender. As Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth (2018) noted about using queer texts in classrooms, even cisgender students are bullied for their gender presentation. They are called names and at times shunned by peers when their gender expression does not fit into cisnormative standards. By including books with transgender characters, teachers can introduce into the classroom multiple ways of being girls and/or boys. While many of the researchers (Bittner, Ingrey, & Stamper, 2016; Herzog, 2008; Malcom & Sheahan, 2019; Sciorba, 2017) who have examined depictions of transgender and gender nonconforming children within picture books have focused on presentations of Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB) children, this study included these texts and also moved beyond these texts to include Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB) children and nonbinary children. In addition, these

books could potentially be used within discussions of multicultural literature in early childhood classrooms (Bittner et al., 2016; Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Logan, Watson, Hood, & Lasswell, 2016; Smolkin & Young, 2011).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Since I am deeply influenced by both queer theory and trans studies, I utilized these theories throughout my study. These theories influenced this work, as they move against a gender binary that I believe is detrimental to people and especially to young children especially. The gender binary and accompanying gender norms create boxes that restrict children's expression of their selves (Ryan, Patraw, & Bednar, 2013). Children are expected to be a stereotypical representation of a gender. Boys are supposed to be tough, not show emotion, and not like school. Girls are expected to be emotional, not as active as boys, and like to read and be in school (Smiler, 2009). Both of these stereotypes contribute to the issues that exist around toxic masculinity (Elliott, 2018). I see my work as trying to undermine these stereotypes by utilizing texts about transgender children as a way to illuminate for children the multiple ways that you can be a boy and/or a girl.

Queer theory works to destabilize gender norms and gendered expectations; "to queer something or to use queer theory is to examine what is being normalized, the mechanisms through which norms are produced, and how they affect people and institutions" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 318). Within this dissertation I argue that picture books about transgender children create space in which to interrogate gender norms and how they are produced within early childhood education classrooms and texts for young children. These texts not only allow transgender and gender nonconforming youth to see

themselves, but also allow cisgender children to examine gender norms within their own lives through the characters in the books.

Queer Theory

Queer theory is comprised of many different scholars who discuss multiple different ways of thinking about the ways in which gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality are intertwined. Queer theory has a complex development. It partially develops from lesbian and gay studies and advocacy, in addition to poststructuralist work (Jagose, 1997; Sullivan, 2003). Queer theory draws from poststructuralist theorists that state that identity is not innate, it is created within cultures and is dynamic and fluid; “rather, the self is constructed in and through its relations with others, and with systems of power/knowledge” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 41). Blaise & Taylor (2012) state that queer theory looks at the idea that sexuality cannot be disengaged from gender, thus creating normalized sexuality because of normalized gender expressions, heteronormativity. This queer position is not applied only to those who identify as a sexual minority, it applies to anyone who does not fit into the normative definition for gender expression and sexuality (S. J. Miller, 2015). Queer theory posits that the ways in which sexuality is performed normalizes these behaviors; “queer theory is ‘queer’ because it questions the assumption that there is any ‘normal’ expression of gender” (Blaise & Taylor, 2012, p. 88).

Performativity of gender. One of the key tenets of queer theory that I use within my work is the idea of the performativity of gender. Butler (1988) discussed the idea of the performativity of gender in which the gendered actions people do reinforce their gender identity; “gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments

of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (p. 519). People cannot think about gender as a choice; people do not wake-up and decide to put on a gender like they put on clothing, they are constrained by gendered expectations (Butler, 1993). According to Butler (1993), gender is about the repeated performances of the gender norms; it is not a single act. Performativity is not saying people choose to perform a certain gender, but they are a certain gendered body because of their own reiterative process of doing a gender. This doing is constrained by societal expectations and norms; thus, people have to continue to do the same gendered performance as a way to continue to solidify their gender for themselves and for society. Butler (1993) discussed these repeated acts as a citational chain, as each act reinforces all of the previous acts; “in this sense, every ‘act’ is an echo or citational chain, and it is its citationality that constitutes its performative force” (Butler, 1993, p. 30). This citational chain begins with the performative act of naming the child’s gender based upon their genitalia at birth and continues through a person’s life (Butler, 1993; Stryker, 1994).

Recognizability of gender identity. Another key tenet that Butler espouses and that I utilized within this research are the ideas about the ways in which people have to make their gender identity recognizable to others. According to Butler (2004), people are viewed as human when their gender identity fits into what is recognized as a coherent gender identity. In other words, when another person knows if you are male or female, this is when your humanity is fully recognized. She argues that this recognition affects not only people’s experiences in the world, but also how they view themselves in the mirror or when they have to explain their gender to others such as medical professionals, or in the case of the children in these books, teachers, parents, or peers. Because their

gender identity cannot be defined by others, their humanness is brought into danger. They are living a precarious existence because their gender identity does not fit the norm (Butler, 2004, 2006).

Trans Theory

Stryker (1994) defined transgender as “an umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries” (p. 94). This definition is a more modern one that has grown out of the development of trans studies. The term transgender developed in the 1960s as a way to mark those who choose to live as their true gender, but not those who employed medical solutions (surgery or hormones). This definition of transgender people was contrasted with transsexual people, who utilized medicine to change their gender and transvestites, who temporarily changed their gender appearance for sexual purposes. Those who defined themselves as transgender were separating themselves from the other two identity categories (Stryker, 1994; Stryker & Currah, 2014).

As Rawson and Williams (2014) discussed, Virginia Prince is often credited with coining the term transgender in 1969 and then again in 1978, but Prince argued that gender was social, and sex was biological. For Prince, this meant that gender affirming surgery was wrong as you could not change a person’s sex. Prince wanted to control the way the term transgender was employed by others to exclude those individuals who identified as transgender, but who utilized any medicalized transition, including hormones and/or surgery. Despite Prince’s objections, throughout the 1980s the term transgender became an umbrella term for all who identified as nonnormative in their

gender identity or expression and then exploded in usage in the 1990s (Rawson & Williams, 2014).

This debate highlights the tenuousness of the terms that are used by and about those who identify as transgender. While transvestite was once acceptable in some contexts, it is no longer acceptable. The term transsexual was also used in a more general context to include those who identified as transgender and transsexual, especially by people outside of the transgender communities. Even now, as transgender is an umbrella term that is supposed to include all who are gender nonconforming, there are people who are transgender who would not identify as gender nonconforming. They believe that they conform to the gender that they are, not the gender that they were assigned at birth. In addition, there are people who are gender nonconforming who do not identify as transgender because of the social connotations of this term as related to wanting to transition to another gender. Those who are nonbinary may not want to conform to any gender and so they do not identify as transgender, as they are not crossing over genders as the word prefix” trans” implies.

Wrong-body discourse. Stone (1992) noted that the larger narrative about transsexual/transgender people being “stuck in the wrong body” (p.160) developed out of early gender dysphoria clinics. The gender dysphoria clinics in the 1960s needed a way to determine whether the individuals who were coming to the clinic actually had gender dysphoria which was viewed as a “correctable problem” (Stone, 1992, p. 160). Since there were no diagnostic criteria, many of the majority cisgender White men who were making the decision whether people could have gender-affirming surgery (which was known as a sex change or a sex-reassignment surgery) would ask questions to determine

whether this candidate actually had gender dysphoria. Quite often these questions were based upon the Harry Benjamin book, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966) which became the guide to determining whether transsexuals (the term at the time) should be allowed to medically transition. The central question within this book was whether the candidate for gender-affirming surgery felt like they were in the wrong body. Within these gender dysphoria clinics, the researchers and the transsexuals had different objectives, the researchers wanted to learn more about gender dysphoria while the transsexuals wanted the gender-affirming surgery. Because transsexual people's main goal was to have the surgery, they also read the Harry Benjamin book, and so they said that they felt like they were in the wrong body as they knew that this was the only way that the doctors would approve them to receive the surgery (Stone, 1992).

These cross purposes, the desire of the clinicians to learn more about gender dysphoria, and the transgender individual's desire to medically transition, create and reinforce the narrative of being stuck in the wrong-body. Since the clinicians were cisgender, they wanted to understand why it was that people - it seemed to be mostly men - would want to become the other gender. This was a foreign concept for them and as scientists, they felt it was their duty to learn about this idea, especially as it appeared to be a mismatch between the mind and body. Individuals who were transgender simply wanted to be able to medically transition. When trans people said that they were trapped in the wrong-body, this became understandable to the clinicians. If they had argued that they did not feel trapped but felt more comfortable in women's clothing or make-up, than they would have been viewed as mentally ill. We can see a view of how dressing as female could have been viewed as a sign of mental illness. The character Klinger in the

TV show MASH often wore stereotypically female attire, dresses, earrings, and hats that would be identified as indicative of women's wear. He never claims a female identity or even that he is trapped in a male body, but these antics were used as a way for him to try to indicate that he was not fit to be in the military. In a similar way, a person who was transgender, but did not use the right terminology, being stuck in the wrong-body, may have been dismissed as mentally ill or sexually deviant. This leads to the wrong-body narrative persisting into the present, with that phrase still often used by those who are transgender and are trying to explain to cisgender people about why they feel like they should be able to transition either socially or medically.

Bettcher (2014) revisited this idea of the wrong body discourse; "in what I call the 'wrong-body' model, transsexuality involves a mis-alignment between gender identity and the sexed body" (Bettcher, 2014, p. 383). She argued that the field of psychology said that transsexuality was a problem with the mind and gender-affirming surgery helped realign the mind-body connection. Bettcher (2014) divided this medical model into two versions: a weak model and a strong model. In the weak model, surgery made a person the sex that matched their gender by altering their physical appearance. And in the strong model, the "real sex is determined by gender identity" (Bettcher, 2014, p. 383) and the surgery only confirmed this felt identity. But as was pointed out in both versions, you are a man or woman trapped in the other sex's body (Bettcher, 2014).

Finally, I drew from the way that Engdahl (2014) discussed the wrong-body discourse. According to Engdahl (2014), the wrong-body discourse posits that transgender people are born in the wrong body, that their biology does not match their gender identity. This becomes problematic as it implies that biology, which is sometimes

termed sex, is static and essential while gender is socially constructed and fluid. This can serve to undermine transgender people's claims to the reality of their gender identity.

Because gender, in this case, is thought to be socially constructed and not materially real, those who claim a transgender identity are pretenders or liars; they cannot be a different gender than the biology that they were born with and their material body is the reality, not what they claim as their gender (Engdahl, 2014).

Stone, Bettcher, and Engdahl are describing the same idea, the wrong-body discourse which harms the way that trans people are represented, especially outside of a trans community. According to this model, trans people's bodies are wrong. They are trapped in an incorrect body and if they try to argue that they are not trapped, they can be viewed as mentally ill. This re-centers the cisgender body as the correct body and the transgender body as the "other", allowing for transphobia similar to the way in which using White bodies as the norm creates racism and male bodies as the norm creates sexism.

Picture Books and the Theoretical Frameworks

Picture books that feature transgender children may demonstrate the illusion of an essentialized gender identity that was established at birth. The transgender children may be gender conforming or gender nonconforming. Many of the transgender children do conform to the gender ideals; the trans girls do want to wear a dress and the trans boys do not want to wear a dress. But these books could also disrupt the idea of an essentialized gender expression for children whose gender expression is more normative, as they can see that transgender children were not born with a gender identity that is tied to their assigned gender identity at birth. These various representations of gender expression

allow transgender and gender nonconforming children to see themselves in books and to feel more confident in their own gender expression. These representations can also allow for multiple versions of masculinity and femininity within children. They can express an interest in cross-gender play or activities. The introduction of nonbinary children within texts also expands the definitions of gender identity in ways that can allow cisgender children to find ways to express their gender that are the most comfortable for them. A cisgender boy could be interested in reading a book about a girl character, an activity that could be considered gender nonnormative by their teacher and/or peers. In the same way a cisgender girl could want to play football with the boys during recess; again, a possible crossing-over of gender normative behavior.

While children's sexuality is often ignored within picture books, queer theory also postulates that there is a heterosexual matrix that intertwines these two different ways of being, gender identity and sexuality. When gender is understood as a social activity performed in normative ways, it cannot be understood without acknowledging heteronormativity, the idea that heterosexuality is the right and only way for men and women to exist in the world (Butler, 1993). This leads to heterosexual performance rewarded "for appropriate gendered behaviors and punish[ed] for deviating from the conventional or 'normal' ways of being either a girl or a boy" (Blaise, 2009, p. 453). Gender normative behavior is expected, encouraged, and reinforced in classrooms as a way of tying gender norms to expected sexuality, which is heterosexuality. This happens through common experiences like reading books about families that only include heterosexual couples, lining up children based upon perceived sex (boys in one line and girls in another), and activities like marrying the letters "Q" and "U" in an imitation of

heteronormative marriage ceremonies (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). These picture books unsettle these gender norms and hence, could unsettle the expected and essentialized heteronormativity of the early childhood education classroom.

The picture books that I examined also allowed me to utilize a transgender studies lens since these books were about transgender youth. Transgender is “an umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries” (Stryker, 1994, p. 94). This idea connects with Norton’s (1999) definition of trans children, “children whose experiences and sense of gender does not allow them to fit their sexed bodies into seamless accord with a congruent, conventional gender identity” (p. 415-416). Several of the picture books point to this disconnection between how the child is gendered by society and their own felt sense of self. In addition, Meadow (2014) pointed to the fact that the concept of a transgender child is still new within both medical and social circles. This leads to adults who are still struggling with the idea that while we might know that gender is not stable and that children are still developing their gender identity, we are not sure that they have the knowledge to claim a gender identity different from that assigned at birth (Meadow, 2014). How did the books that portray transgender-ness, handle this process of the child choosing their gender identity? And how does this choice allow queer children to understand their own ability to make this same choice? These picture books illuminated this crossing-over and queering of socially constructed gender norms in children.

Finally, some of the books discussed the idea that the child is stuck in the wrong-body, they are a girl trapped in a boy’s body or a boy trapped in a girl’s body. This taps

into the wrong-body discourse (Engdahl, 2014) that posits that trans people are trapped in the wrong body and that in order for them to be corrected, medicalization is needed. This medicalization is through hormones and/or surgery. Even though the children in these picture books are often elementary school children, ideas around the medicalization of transgender youth was still present at times: for example, within *I am Jazz* (Herthel, Jennings, & McNicholas, 2014).

Both trans theory and queer theory add that gender expression is a spectrum. People can exhibit more or less feminine and masculine gender expressions throughout their lives (Love, 2014; Nagoshi & Bruzy, 2010). Queer theory attributes this ability to move through and across gender expressions and identities to the instability of gender and that even the labels we use for gender are socially constructed (Blaise & Taylor, 2012; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013). The picture books about transgender children exemplify this fluidity of gender expression and identity, thus allowing for queer children to understand that their own fluidity is not abnormal. The multiplicity of gender expressions in the texts adds to the ability of transgender and gender nonconforming children to be able to author their own gender expression through the examples in the texts. Cisgender children are also able benefit from these picture books as they, too, discover multiple gender expressions through these texts, thus reducing bullying and allowing for a broader range of masculinities and femininities for themselves.

Summary

This chapter established the need for this research. The number of young people who identify as queer is increasing. This research aimed to examine how picture books about transgender children can highlight the multiple versions of gender available to

people through the use of queer theory and trans studies. These multiple representations provided ways for transgender and gender nonconforming children to see themselves in picture books. These texts also provided cisgender children a way to interact with and possibly identify with a child whose gender identity or gender expression is different from their own. These books demonstrated that being transgender is different for each individual: some transgender children wanted to fit into the societal norms for their gender identity and others wanted to be able to be more fluid in their gender expression and understanding. Finally, this chapter provided a list of the terms and concepts that will be utilized throughout this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this section, I will be discussing the relevant research about queer picture books. I am utilizing the term queer picture books as a way to differentiate these texts from what is often termed LGBTQ children literature or LGBTQ picture books. In my reading of the research, the term LGBTQ children's books often focused only on books about gay and lesbian families. J. Miller (2018) differentiated between what she termed old queer children's books, which focused on gay and lesbian families and new queer children's books, which focused on gender queering by the children. In this section, I am discussing both the new and old queer picture books that J. Miller (2018) referenced. Lester (2014) used the term queer-themed to describe the picture books that she researched, which included mostly books about gay and lesbian families. I am using queer picture books as a way to describe books where the themes surrounding self-identity relate to a child whose gender identity is different than the one assigned to them at birth, rather than the sexuality of the child or any of the family members. Similar to the way in which gay and lesbian identity was the main theme of many of the early books about these families, the child's gender identity was the main theme of these books when they were first published. This gender queerness later became less of a theme of these books and served as a descriptor for the child.

I begin with an overview of the research about queer picture books which highlights two different types of queer picture books: those that focus on queer families

and those that focus on queer children. This research is often framed by a reluctance inside and outside of academia to write and publish picture books about queer individuals; as Abate and Kidd (2011) note, “the children's picture book has been much more resistant to LGBTQ theming, in large measure because of the prohibition against the representation of any sexuality, much less queer sexuality, especially in childhood” (p. 6). This led to two different time frames in which picture books were written about queer people. Many of the books that were written and published in the 1980s and 1990s were about queer families. The books that were written about queer children appeared primarily in the 2000s. While books from the 1970s were sometimes included as part of the queer picture book movement, especially around gender norms for boys, the research showed that these books reified gender norms and heteronormativity (Herzog, 2008; Malcolm & Sheahan, 2019; Scieurba, 2017) and thus, did not queer gender norms for children.

Studies of Queer People in Picture Books

Queer Families in Picture Books

Most of the picture books published about queer people focused on the queer family; as Huskey (2002) noted, “picture books compulsively exhibit gay or lesbian adults connected by family ties to nonsexual, presumptively latently heterosexual child/children” (p. 68). According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), of the 3,700 books they received in 2017, only 13 of them were picture books about LGBTQ+ content (Tyner, 2018). When they examined the queer picture books, they found that, “most were about families in general or had secondary or tertiary LGBTQ+ parents” (Tyner, 2018, n.p.). The picture books with queer children often featured AMAB

children who dressed in stereotypically feminine clothing, dresses, or skirts (Tyner, 2018).

Multiple researchers have looked at these constructions of gay and lesbian adults with children. Sapp (2010) conducted a review and then extension of Frances Day's *Lesbian and Gay Voices: An Annotated Bibliography and Guide to Literature for Children and Young Adults* which had originally been compiled in 2000. Sapp (2010) utilized the books that Day used and then added additional books that were published from 2001-2010. This extended the original 27 children's picture books that Day found to a total of 53 books that were intended for children and portrayed homosexual or queer individuals and families. He identified a total of six themes that were found through the study of these 53 books: "visibility for same-sex parents, celebrations of family diversity, love and marriage, adoption, biography, and gender variance" (Sapp, 2010, p. 33). Sapp (2010) built upon the previous research that found that many of the books published from 1989-1999 were aimed at making LGBTQ+ families more visible. These books had titles that were obvious about their topics, including Lesléa Newman's *Heather Has Two Mommies* (1989) and *Gloria Goes to Gay Pride* (1991), and were intended to let the reader know exactly what was in the text and to make gay families visible within the children's book world. This concern for visibility was contrasted with the books published from 2001-2010. These books made the sexuality of the characters or families less prominent and focused on telling stories that featured gay or lesbian families (Sapp, 2010).

While Sapp (2010) does an in-depth review of the literature about gay and lesbian families, he also noted that there were no books about transgender children which would

have been true for his research, as the newest book he listed is from 2007. The first picture book about a transgender child is generally considered to be *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008), published after Sapp examined the books, but he appeared to try to unnecessarily add books about gender nonconforming children into his analysis. First, in a chart of books that the researcher examined are *Luna* (Peters, 2006) and *Parrotfish* (Wittlinger, 2007), which are both Young Adult books. Sapp (2010) did not utilize either of these books in his analyses, as he focused on picture books, but then why are they on this chart? In addition, both books are about transgender characters, so there could have been a note that there was a lack of picture books about transgender protagonists, but that in Young Adult novels this representation had begun to appear.

Secondly, within this research Sapp (2010) defined gender variance as either when female characters show stereotypically masculine traits, for example, strength as exhibited in *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1992) or when males can be more feminine, as demonstrated in *Oliver Button is a Sissy* (dePaola, 1979). According to Sapp (2010), these gender swaps allowed children to see a variety of gender expressions. While true in some ways, this idea also reinforced the idea that there are only two genders and that people fit into one of two gender identities. In addition, Sapp conflated gender identity and sexuality by repeatedly saying that books like *Oliver Button is a Sissy* (dePaola, 1979), *William's Doll* (Zolotow, 1972), and *The Boy Who Cried Fabulous* (Newman, 2004) are all about gay children. For example, Sapp (2010) said about *The Boy Who Cried Fabulous* (Newman, 2004), that the protagonist, Roger's, use of the word fabulous allowed him to be coded as gay; this assumes the reader understands how this word might be coded as gay within a certain cultural time and place and it assumes all

effeminate AMAB people are gay. This reinforced the stereotype about the effeminate AMAB person as gay, which negates the variety of possible gender expressions for people and reinforced the idea of gendered behavior so that gay men are all flamboyant and feminine in their gender expression. All three of these AMAB children may exhibit some feminine traits, but none of these children claim a gay identity. Overall, this portion of the article about gender variance needed a more in-depth examination of what the gender expressions of the characters meant within a wider context of possible gender expression, not just male or female, and without equating feminine behavior with gay men.

The heteronormative erasure of the queer family in picture books. Similar to Sapp's (2010) work, Esposito (2009) looked at books that also focused on creating visibility for queer families. She highlighted the ways in which books about lesbian families still mirrored heterosexual families with two parents and at least one child. This created a visibility for lesbian families to be acceptable to non-queer families. All of the books that Esposito (2009) examined fit either within the 1989-1999 timeframe that Day examined or the 2001-2010 timeframe of Sapp's (2010) further work with this same set of books. In addition, Esposito (2009) discussed four other themes: "the problematizing of not having a daddy, 'de-queering' of lesbianism, implication of children in the 'Don't ask, don't tell' policy, and the use of lesbianism as a catalyst for heterosexual growth" (p. 62). Within these picture book themes, the differences of the lesbian family were emphasized. The books then served to show how these families could find acceptance and be thought of as similar to the heterosexual families that surrounded the children within the text. One of the key points that Esposito (2009) made to support the idea that

the lesbian families in the texts were being made to appear less threatening was the idea of the “de-queering” of the lesbians who were heading these families. This element of these books served to strip what may appear as differences from the lesbian families to make them appear to be more similar to heterosexual families (Esposito, 2009).

Lester (2014) supported this contention that lesbian couples were being de-queered by discussing how this de-queering began with the illustrations of the mothers’ gender presentation. In these books, the lesbian couples were shown in ways that allowed for one of the partners to appear more feminine if one of the partners appeared more masculine. For example, in Tompkins and Evans’ (2009) *Oh the Things Mommies Do!: What Could be Better than Having Two?*, while the mothers were racially diverse, they all presented as either very feminine (wearing dresses, long hair, blouses) or one of the mothers was presented as more feminine and the other mother presents as more masculine (short hair, never wore a dress). By either making both mothers feminine or one partner feminine and one partner masculine, the picture book authors allowed for the continuation of heterosexual norms. Lester (2014) argued that readers were more comfortable when the gender presentation of the characters still fit within heteronormative standards, even if the implied sexuality of the characters was not heterosexual. Lester (2014) had no issues with books that show two women with one presenting more masculine and one presenting more feminine, but when these were the only presentations within lesbian partnerships, she believed these books did not illuminate the vast array of potential gender presentations within lesbian relationships. In addition to the two women who were presented with different gender expressions, these books contained at least one child the lesbians were parenting. This reinforced the idea

that relationships that did not include the parenting of a child were not valid. This led Lester (2014) to argue that many of the families presented in these books still continued the idea of a nuclear family with two parents and at least one child.

As Sapp (2010) mentioned in his analysis of gay and lesbian-themed picture books, Lester (2014) also found a focus on long-term partners who wanted to get married and have children. In many of the books that Sapp (2010) highlighted, the parents must adopt in order to have a child. These families (along with many of the books Lester [2014] highlighted), are animal couples that felt something was missing from their lives, and so they went in search of a baby. This meant adoption, although not always in the classic sense: in the true story of *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson, Parnell, & Cole, 2005) the penguin couple attempt to hatch a rock until a zookeeper notices their attempt and substitutes in an abandoned egg for the two male penguins to hatch. Lester (2014) discussed how these desires for a family only reinforced the heteronormative idea that a family must consist of two parents and a child, which erased any differences that queer persons may present. Schall (2017), noted that the books about LGBT families she examined showed that the goal for same-sex marriage was to be able to better raise children. Because these books focused on only a small section of LGBT peoples, those who were White and middle class and those who wished to have children, these books ignored the lived experiences of other LGBT people (Schall, 2017). These studies highlighted an increase in the number of books about queer families. Children were being exposed to more family variety within these picture books, including families that were gay and lesbian, but these books still created families that had to fit heteronormative ideals. Included in this heteronormative ideal was that belief the parents had to be in a

long-term partnership and want to have or already have children. This normalized queer families by erasing any differences these families may have from heterosexual families.

This erasure of difference to make queer families appear more similar to heterosexual families could be related to societal norms. Epstein (2012a) conducted a study in which he analyzed the connection between representations of LGBT parents and the societal acceptance of same-sex marriage throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, and Northern Europe, which he defined as Scandinavia and the Netherlands. Epstein (2012) noted a possible connection between a “cultural momentum” (p. 142) toward same-sex marriage or at least civil partnerships and books published about same-sex marriage for children. He stated that there were fewer books that highlighted same-sex couples (especially married couples) published in the United States and United Kingdom than were published in Northern Europe. He connected this to the higher societal acceptance of same-sex marriage and partnerships in Northern Europe (Epstein, 2012a). However, this study did not seem to contradict the prior research discussed. While there may have been more books that highlighted same-sex couples, these couples still appeared to be modeled upon heterosexual expectations for partnerships. As Epstein (2012a) pointed out, the books from the United States and United Kingdom also served to reassure children of same-sex parents that this was OK and that they are loved just as much as families with heterosexual parents. In a similar study, the same researcher posited that many of these books he analyzed were often geared toward queer families. He based this analysis on an afterword in one book and the idea that since the books all referenced multiple mothers or fathers, then they must be geared toward children who can identify with having same-sex parents (Epstein, 2012b).

While this may have been a weak case for explaining the intended audience for books about queer families, the alternative may not be any better. As Esposito (2009) noted, some of these books were focused on the education of heterosexual people about the normality of queer families. The visibility of queer families was brought to the fore when the children and/or the lesbian parents had to educate the heterosexual classmates and teachers about the existence of same-sex parents. When a teacher or student said that it was not possible to have two mommies or two daddies, the parents and often, the child, stated that it was possible, and this was the composition of their family. The focus of these books was on how the heterosexual individuals grew through learning about different families (Esposito, 2009). Esposito's discussion of this theme was focused on what happened within these texts, but this same idea could be applied to the intended audience of these books as well. The authors or publishers may have intended for heterosexual readers to see queer families in these picture books and realize that they are just like them, thus de-stigmatizing queer families. While de-stigmatization is overall a positive step, when this is based in making queer families the same as heterosexual families rather than acknowledging differences between queer and heterosexual families, it erases the unique challenges that queer families still face in society (Esposito, 2009).

This normalization of queer families to look like heterosexual families is not inherently an issue. The issue develops when these are the only representations of families that are seen within children's books. This is not even unique to queer relationships; there are few books with heterosexual couples who do not have children. These books are written for children and so it does make sense to include children as a main part of the story, but there could be picture books that focus on the entire family

with uncles or aunts who are queer and do not have children. There are books like *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* (Brannen, 2008) which do include a queer couple with no children, but even within this text, the uncles talk about wanting to have children. This book could be about the way a niece interacts with her uncles and their wedding, without the men needing to say that they want their own children.

The other critique that is leveled toward books about queer families is that these queer couples, especially lesbian couples, have gender expressions that mirror heterosexual couples, with one male presenting person and one female presenting person. As Lester (2014) points out, there is nothing wrong with showing that some couples do mirror heterosexual couples, but that this is not the only possible gender expression for a queer couple. There can be two lesbians who are both more masculine presenting or who are more feminine presenting. Gay male couples all seem to be presented in picture books as male presenting, but again this negates that some gay male couples may have a partner who is more feminine presenting. The overall issue with both the focus on children as part of a relationship and the way that lesbians must mirror heterosexual couple is that there is a lack of books about queer families. If there were many books about queer families, in which some couples mirror heteronormative families and some couples who do not, then readers could see a variety of different queer experiences. However, since this is not the case, criticism must be directed toward the limited number of texts in order to try and expand the way that queer families are shown in picture books.

A lack of intersectionality in books about queer families. In addition, all of the above studies discussed a lack of intersectionality within queer picture books. Many of the couples were White and middle-class with the occasional nonwhite family, but these

families were still middle class. Taylor (2012) examined four lesbian and gay-themed books - *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* (Brannen, 2008), *Molly's Family* (Garden & Wooding, 2004), *Mommy, Mama, and Me* (Newman & Thompson, 2008b), and *Daddy, Papa, and Me* (Newman & Thompson, 2008a) - that were available at the Columbus, Ohio library system to look for issues of homonormativity and queer intersectionality. The first issue that Taylor noted was that he could not find any books that fit queer intersectionality; there were only books that he identified as lesbian or gay-themed. Taylor (2012) identified queer intersectionality as helping “explain the processes involved in how interlocking systems of oppression inform, and are informed by, identity construction” (p. 137). Taylor (2012) used queer intersectionality as a way to look at the ways different identities such as sexuality, race, class, and gender presentation intersect.

All of the books Taylor (2012) examined highlighted White and middle-class people except *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* (Brannen, 2008), which was about guinea pigs. Likewise, these families continued the heteronormative model that was mentioned by Lester (2014) where marriage and then having a child were considered the ideal for any family whether they were gay or straight. Similar to Esposito (2009), Taylor (2012) also pointed out that in the book *Molly's Family* (Garden & Wooding, 2004), the partnership between the mothers became legitimized when the teacher confirmed to the class that Molly did have two mothers and this was acceptable as a family structure. In addition, Taylor (2012) noted that in Newman and Thompson's (2008b) *Mommy, Mama, and Me* the two mothers bathed their child and then kissed the child goodnight, whereas in the book *Daddy, Papa, and Me* (Newman & Thompson, 2008a) by the same author there was no intimate physical contact shown between the fathers and the child. The child even

initiated the good night kiss. The same author wrote these books and yet she treated the same-sex parents differently. The males were not shown performing the same physically intimate acts that the women were shown performing, as this may be thought to be “perverse, even pedophilic” (Taylor, 2012, p. 146) by some adults.

Utilizing Taylor’s (2012) idea of queer intersectionality to look at how books about queer persons intersect with other identities such as race or class, we also find that many picture books about queer individuals do not address race or class identities that may intersect with the individual’s sexual identity. Taylor (2012) discussed Kilodavis and DeSimone’s (2011) *My Princess Boy*, in which he termed the main character as racially indistinct, but then pointed out that the book did not actually address race or class as part of its main themes within the book. Lester (2014) pointed out that of the 68 books she examined, there were 102 queer adult characters, of which only 11 were nonwhite and another 10 could pass for White. She found six queer children and only one of them was clearly nonwhite. This whitewashing of characters only continued the ideals of White, middle-class homonormativity. These characters may be queer, but they were just like everyone else (Lester, 2014). Sapp (2010) found few books that featured parents who were People of Color (POC). He mentioned only four books with POC parents and of these four, it is unclear if more than one of them has a family that was both gay and POC, as in González and Álvarez's (2005) *Antonio’s Card/La tarjeta de Antonio*. This book was also notable as it was the only bilingual book that Sapp (2010) discussed in his study. While Sapp (201) did not discuss Newman and Romo's (2002) *Felicia’s Favorite Story* in the context of multiple identities (race and sexuality), he mentioned this story, which features a mother who was from Puerto Rico. Esposito (2009) discussed this same lack of

intersecting identities in relation to Elwin, Paulse, and Lee's (1990) *Asha's Mums* and Abramchik and Bradshaw's (1993) *Is Your Family Like Mine?* in which the books each featured lesbians of color, but Esposito did not interrogate the multiple oppressions these mothers go through. She argued that these books need to portray more complex characters to allow for a variety of experiences for families and children (Esposito, 2009). These books pretended that these mothers did not experience racism and sexism on top of homophobia (Esposito, 2009).

Similarly, Schall (2017) examined children's picture books about same-sex marriage and found little diversity in the racial, gender expression, or class status of the characters in the texts. This research utilized intersectionality and privilege theory as part of a critical content analysis to study these texts. She assessed a total of six books, examining them for intersections of identity, race and sexuality. Schall found that the books only portrayed White, middle-class, LGBT families and notes, "books such as these, where lesbian and gay characters of color are nonexistent, result from and perpetuate such beliefs, thus fitting neatly into dominant cultural, political, and economic systems" (Schall, 2017, p. 98).

Lester (2014) interrogated the class implications of the books that featured adoption because the couples in these books were all White and they adopted nonwhite babies. The couples had the means to afford adoption and in some of the stories, the parents talked to their adopted children about how some parents could not afford to keep their children, so they gave them to loving parents. This continued the narrative that White parents needed to rescue nonwhite babies through adoption so that they could live a better life (Lester, 2014). Sapp (2010) discussed *Felicia's Favorite Story* (Newman &

Romo, 2002) among several other books that showed adoption, and all featured multi-racial families because a generally White family adopted a nonwhite child. *Felicia's Favorite Story* (Newman & Romo, 2002) also featured a mother, Mama Linda, who is illustrated “with dark hair and a slightly darker complexion than Mama Nessa, a White New York native” (Lester, 2014, p. 258). These illustrations led Lester (2014) to point out that in this book, the only two “characters of color” (p. 258) were both born outside of the contiguous United States, but this story upheld the general ideas that the multiracial families in these texts were generally middle-class families who adopted from underprivileged countries, thus not altering the class concerns.

Having more books about queer families would benefit the framing of the normalization of queer families, and equally, more books written by queer people of color would increase the number of books about different queer families. The researchers (Esposito, 2009; Lester, 2014; Schall, 2017; Taylor, 2010) indicate many of these books portray a very specific version of queerness, one that highlights Whiteness and queerness. While the researchers do not specifically mention the need for more diversity among authors, this would address some of the lack of intersectionality that exists within books about queer families. New books about queer families would change the way they are represented in picture books, including more racially diverse queer people and illustrating that queer people’s challenges are different from those faced by heterosexual people.

Summary of the studies about queer families in picture books. As these studies indicate, many books published as early queer picture books were often about families. They focused on the parents’ sexuality rather than the gender identity of the child or the parents. The focus on sexuality was much more at the forefront of the book

toward the beginning of the publishing of these texts, for example *Heather has Two Mommies* (Newman & Souza, 1989). Later books shifted the focus away from the parent's sexuality to ways in which the queer parents were just like heterosexual parents; they loved and cared for their children. While there were more books about lesbian and gay parents with children, these books continued to reinforce heteronormative values such as binary gender roles and the need for marriage as a way to better raise children. Finally, these books lacked diversity of race or social class. The majority of the parents were White and all of them were middle class.

Queer Children in Picture Books

Studies of the early picture books about gender nonconforming boys. While the first book about a transgender character is generally considered to be Ewert and Ray's (2008) *10,000 Dresses*, the practice of writing picture books about gender nonconforming children dates back to the seventies. Sullivan and Urraro (2017) even included *The Story of Ferdinand* (Leaf & Lawson, 1936) as a story of a gender nonconforming male character as part of their analysis. Many of the scholars (Bittner et al., 2016; Herzog, 2008; Malcom & Sheahan, 2019; Sciorba, 2017) who discussed gender nonconformity in picture books focused on the presence of gender nonconformity in male characters specifically. Herzog (2008) noted that 1980 was the first year that homosexuality was no longer listed in the DSM (the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*), due to pressure from gay rights organizations, but there was the addition of GIDC (gender identity disorder of childhood). This diagnosis seemed to focus on male gender nonconformity and Herzog (2008) argued that there was a shift from the pathologization of homosexuality to gender nonconformity in males. So, rather than diagnosing as gay a

male whose gender presentation was abnormal, boys could now be diagnosed with GIDC. This just shifted the diagnosis but still punished the same behaviors (Herzog, 2008). In her essay about trans children, Norton (1999) discussed the medical treatments that existed for Assigned Male At Birth (AMAB) children who were too effeminate for their parents or society. She pointed to the idea that there was nothing wrong with the children, it was the adults in their lives who were transphobic and needed help. This was also a reflection of the shift from homosexuality as a mental disease to the diagnosis of GIDC, which served to punish children based upon their gender presentation if they appeared they could grow up to be homosexual (Norton, 1999).

Herzog (2008) focused his analysis on books written in the 1970s about gender-nonconforming males. He utilized *A Guide to Non-sexist Children's Books* which, according to him, "lists eighty-three early childhood books published between 1976 and 1980 that deal with characters of both sexes who do not conform to strict gender norms" (Herzog, 2008, p. 60). These books were influenced by second-wave feminism, the gender identity clinics that were developed at John Hopkins in 1965, and a University of California-Los Angeles project about children and gender nonconformity. Within this study of so many books, the author focused on two: Zolotow and Du Bois's (1972) *William's Doll* and dePaola's (1979) *Oliver Button is a Sissy*.

Herzog (2008) situated *William's Doll* (Zolotow & Du Bois, 1972) and *Oliver Button is a Sissy* (DePaola, 1979) within the historical discourse around gender presentation in boys (especially as related to the DSM standards) as ways to work against notions of gender normativity within AMAB children. Herzog argued that these books can serve as ways to socialize children to accept different masculinities and stated "by

destabilizing rigid notions of ‘proper’ gender roles, children’s books like *William’s Doll* and *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* reflect much feminist work of the era that aims to separate biological sex from gender and to question the concept of ‘natural’ gender roles" (Herzog, 2008, p. 67). However, Herzog also maintained that these books did not actually disrupt the gender binary. In the text for *William’s Doll* (Zolotow & Du Bois, 1972), while William did not define his reason for wanting the doll and was very specific about the appearance of the doll he wanted, his grandmother re-situated this doll in heteronormative terms, as practice for when he will be a father. Within *Oliver Button is a Sissy* (DePaola, 1979), Oliver’s otherness in female stereotypical behaviors was contrasted with the traditional masculinity of his father and the much larger boys who bullied him. In both cases, the boys’ non-stereotypical desires did not contradict expected gender norms and may not be all that gender nonconforming (Herzog, 2008).

According to Herzog (2008), early representations of gender nonconformity in AMAB children did not stretch the bounds of gender nonconformity in children generally and that many of the experiences of the gender nonconforming AMAB children in these texts were re-situated as part of a male experiences; for example, being a better father or being better at sports. Herzog focused on only two books, even though he acknowledged that there were 83 books listed in *A Guide to Non-sexist Children’s Books* and he chose the most widely read books. It is unclear if the books that were chosen were representative of the other books on the list in terms of the way that gender nonconformity is presented in these texts. For instance, in the early stages of this dissertation research I found the book *Jesse’s Dream Skirt* (Mack, 1979) which fits into the time period being discussed and was about a young AMAB child who liked to wear a

skirt. This gender expression is not connected to a future masculine gender presentation or to being a better father. While this book, and possibly many of the books in the entire guide, would be hard to acquire and Oliver Button and William continue to be popular books, how does the choosing of these two books represent the ways that gender expression was shown in the children's books of the late 1970s? Finally, this author could have interrogated why these two books are still so beloved when others from that same time period have been lost. This would seem to tie in with his findings that these books do not challenge stereotypical gender norms in the end and so they have been more acceptable in society than books that show AMAB children who wear a dress or transgress gender norms in ways that are not ultimately brought back to the ways in which these children can be better men later in life.

Studies of more recent depictions of gender nonconforming boys. The depiction of gender nonconformity has dramatically changed from the books of the 1970s that Herzog (2008) examined. Malcom and Sheahan (2019) examined books published from 1972-2014. Books prior to the 2000s tended to show male characters who had one gender nonconforming trait (they liked to dance or they wanted a doll) which was similar to Herzog's (2008) findings, but Malcom and Sheahan (2019) found that books after the 2000s tended to show more complex gender nonconformity. These boys were able to claim a transgender identity or wear a dress. This opened up the gender presentation options for children reading these books in addition to naming a transgender identity for children (Malcom & Sheahan, 2019). While the depiction of gender nonconforming boys has changed over time, the depictions of peer interactions and parental support have not changed according to these researchers. They found that all of the books they examined

had negative peer interactions including bullying. Parental support was generally positive throughout time with at least one parent supporting the gender nonconforming boy in all of the books. Finally, the researchers noted that while gender expression was often presented as a problem in the books they assessed, how that problem was addressed changed over time. They found that in books published prior to 2008, the problem of gender nonconforming boys was often solved through re-configuring the nonconformity as a positive trait; wanting a doll would make a better father or learning to dance would make you better at sports. This reinforced the child's masculinity. Malcolm and Sheahan (2019) found that for books published after 2008, the gender nonconformity was often solved through the acceptance of gender diversity. It was no longer the gender nonconforming boy who had to change, but those around them who had to accept the boy's gender expression (Malcolm & Sheahan, 2019).

In another study that focused upon gender nonconformity, Scieurba (2017) examined 12 books that focused on male-identified characters who performed non-masculine traits such as liking to bake, dancing, and smelling flowers. This author tried to ascertain whether these books provided alternative gender expressions for boys that were counter to traditional masculinity. She also attempted to look at the ways in which the characters in the books either gained or did not gain communal acceptance for their gender nonconformity. Ultimately, the researcher argued that even if the children in these books appeared to be happy or triumphant, the fight of a gender nonconforming boy was often "lonely and unremitting" (Scieurba, 2017, p. 290). This research then moved into the classroom arguing that these books can open up dialogue for students to think about and talk about various gender expressions.

The 12 books in this examination show the complex linkages between gender and children's interests and can open dialogue in K-12 schools related to the difficulties students face if they do not reside on the "right" end of the masculinity-femininity binary, or if they reside somewhere in the middle or beyond it. (Sciurba, 2017, p. 291)

While these books could be useful in the classroom, this researcher maintained that publishing still has a long way to go in terms of producing books about gender nonconforming characters (Sciurba, 2017).

There were a few issues with the research of Sciurba (2017) that should be mentioned here as well. First, her sample was based upon the books that Amazon.com recommended when she looked up picture books about homosexuality: *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson et al., 2005) for example. She argued that Amazon.com is a valuable resource as this is how many people, including educators, made choices about books to purchase. While this might be true, this reliance on Amazon.com to suggest books about gender nonconformity based upon a search for children's books about sexuality leads to a conflation of gender expression and sexuality. Second, the author also included *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008) and *I am Jazz* (Herthel et al., 2014) which were both about trans girls. While *10,000 Dresses* did not mention the term transgender within the text, it was clear that this identity label would be appropriate for Bailey. *I am Jazz* does state that Jazz is transgender. The inclusion of these books served to misgender these transgender characters. Sciurba (2017) even ignored the pronouns the characters used for themselves, in both cases female pronouns. Their gender identity is girl, not boy, so including them in an analysis that is focused on male characters is inappropriate. Finally,

this analysis lumps together all versions of nonconformity from Ferdinand the Bull to Oliver Button to Morris Micklewhite. While these characters are all versions of gender nonconformity, in a classroom discussion setting, wearing a dress may be more transgressive than wanting to dance. There might have been a way to discuss a gradual introduction of gender nonconformity, but this was not what was discussed in this article.

Studies about trans girls and gender nonconforming boys. Sullivan and Urraro's (2017) study encompassed 65 books, the largest number of books in any of the studies about transgender and gender nonconforming children aimed toward 3-8-year-old children. In addition to examining gender expression and the character's race, these researchers were also interested in books that included Spanish texts or were English and Spanish bilingual texts. This addition of Spanish language texts created an additional challenge for these researchers. They found no books that featured gender nonconforming or transgender children published in the United States that included Spanish within the book, so they reached out to bookstores and libraries in Spain. This additional search did not yield many more books for their study (Sullivan & Urraro, 2017).

Sullivan and Urraro (2017) began by analyzing the gender expression of the main characters. For their study, they split the main characters into three different groups, transgender, gender-creative, and books with characters whose gender identity was not defined or books with multiple characters and different gender identities, many of them gender nonconforming or transgender. In addition to these categories, Sullivan and Urraro (2017) eliminated books about characters that they termed “‘non-binary,’ referring to a proclivity towards items and/ or interests that are usually associated with a gender that is not assigned to them at birth” (Sullivan & Urraro, 2017, p. 44). These characters

were cisgender children whose interests were not stereotypical of their gender presentation: a girl who liked to use tools, for example.² Their findings showed that the characters in these picture books were generally raced White, most of them were assigned male at birth, and the characters either transitioned to a female gender expression or they displayed female stereotypical presentations. The authors also faced trying to analyze books written in Spanish or bilingual and found that there were very few of these texts available. They concluded with a discussion of the need to publish more books about transgender and gender nonconforming youth especially across a wider spectrum of racial and language experiences (Sullivan & Urraro, 2017).

This conclusion by Sullivan and Urraro (2017) supports the same conclusions that are made by the researchers who studied the books about queer families (Lester, 2014; Esposito, 2009; Taylor, 2012); that there need to be more books published about queer families and children as a way to illustrate the multiple ways that queer people exist in the world. Sullivan and Urraro (2017) bring the idea of the need for more books about non-English speaking queer people to the forefront. This lack of books about non-English speaking queer people also contributes to the lack of diversity that is present within these books. As noted earlier in this study, an increase in the number of books about queer people, especially queer people who are also People of Color, would begin to show the different experiences that queer people have within the world.

² The National Center for Transgender Equality defines those who identify as non-binary as “some people [who] don’t neatly fit into the categories of ‘man’ or ‘woman,’ or ‘male’ or ‘female’ (“Understanding non-binary people,” 2018). The characters that Sullivan and Urraro (2017) mention under the label non-binary do not seem to fit the accepted definition of this term.

In a study that aimed to “understand and portray non-heterosexualities” (Epstein, 2012b, p. 287), the researcher examined English language books from the United States and the United Kingdom across a broader spectrum of children’s books including picture books and young adult novels. The books that Epstein (2012b) surveyed span picture books like *Oliver Button is a Sissy* (dePaola, 1979) and *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008) to young adult novels including Peters’ (2004) *Luna* and Levithan’s (2003) *Boy Meets Boy*. While the focus for this research was on non-heterosexualities and hence, the sexuality of the main character, Epstein (2012b) also mentioned other forms of queerness as part of his analysis of these texts. He often noted that there were no picture books about non-gay and lesbian queer characters, “gays and lesbians are in children’s books, while bisexuals, transgender, and other nonheterosexual, or queerly heterosexual, characters are not” (Epstein, 2012b, p. 293). While he argued that there were no picture books about transgender children, he mentioned *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008) which he summarized as about a boy who liked to wear dresses. It is possible that because this picture book did not contain the term transgender, Epstein (2012b) did not recognize this as a transgender character even though there are several other researchers in this review who did term the main character Bailey as transgender. In addition, Epstein mentioned, *Parrotfish* (Wittlinger, 2007) and *Luna* (Peters, 2004) as young adult novels that are about transgender youth. He did analyze *Luna* somewhat more than *Parrotfish*, but he continually misgendered and deadnamed Luna; thus, his analysis of any books about transgender or gender nonconforming children may not have the depth that would have allowed for a more balanced discussion of these texts.

Similar to the way that Epstein (2012b) analyzed children's books across a wide spectrum of intended reading ages, Bittner et al. (2016) examined books that featured queer and trans characters. They examined a total of ten books, four picture books (*My Princess Boy*, *10,000 Dresses*, *I am Jazz*, and *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress*), five YA fiction books (*Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*, *Freakboy*, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*, and *Invincible*), and one YA nonfiction (*Beyond Magenta*). The authors gave a brief history of texts that feature gender nonconforming characters, some critical analysis of a few texts, and then discussed how these texts could be utilized in a classroom, by integrating into the analysis of the texts (Bittner et al., 2016).

The Bittner et al. (2016) article noted that the characters tended to fall into very stereotypically feminine presentations, especially Bailey from *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008), Jazz from *I Am Jazz* (Herthel et al., 2014), and even My Princess Boy from the book of the same name. This led the researchers to argue for the need for more gender fluid and nonbinary characters within picture books that can facilitate more discussions about how gender identity does not have to be tied to external markers like clothing or hair styles (Bittner et al., 2016). Lester (2014) also discussed this same issue in her research. In *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008), Bailey told her family that while she was born a boy, she was now a girl. This continued in other books where the main character asserted that while they were born one gender, they felt like the other gender. There was no allowance for the queering of gender or character who moved beyond the gender binary. These characters were either male or female (Lester, 2014). In the same argument that Sciorba (2017) made about picture books with male identified gender nonconforming children, Bittner et al. (2016) argued that while the books often lacked

nuanced discussions of gender, they did open the door for those discussions to happen within a classroom. Teachers can use these books about transgender and gender nonconforming children as a way to engage with their students about multiple gender presentations. This could lead to a more nuanced discussion about gender presentation and the fluidity of gender presentation both within and outside a binary gender system (Bittner et al., 2016).

This discussion by Bittner et al. (2016) about the lack of fluidity of gender expression holds true through all of the books they studied, but there also is room for teachers or researchers to add this fluidity back into the text. In *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008) Bailey continually says she is a girl, but her family tells her she is a boy. This tension is a point at which the reader can discuss the way in which Bailey's gender identity has shifted from what her family thinks to what she thinks. Bittner et al. (2016) are correct in asserting that there is a lack of nonbinary gender representation in children's books, especially picture books, but this is where researchers could also address how educators can illustrate the ways that gender identity and expression are fluid by using the texts that are available. This could also be done by looking at a larger sample size of picture books. The authors of this article wanted to discuss a wider range of children's books, but this also means that there was not a way to dig deeper into one set of books whether it is Young Adult or picture books. Additionally, there is a lack of books written for upper elementary and middle school students. This gap seems conspicuous if the authors were trying to discuss a wide range of queer children's books, from those for young children to those for teenagers.

In a study that fits within Taylor's (2012) "queer intersectionality" (p. 137), Crawley (2017) conducted a critical content analysis of nine realistic fiction and autobiographies of children whose gender identity was different than the gender identity they were assigned at birth. Crawley (2017) explained that he focused on books with realistic depictions of life rather than fantasy or animals as main characters because these realistic depictions allowed children to connect with these experiences now and not in the future or through an animal's imagination. He examined these texts to discover whether they provide alternative descriptions to the "dominant narratives related to race, social class, gender identity, and gender performance" (Crawley, 2017, p. 29). Similar to other researchers (Epstein, 2012b; Malcom & Sheahan, 2019; Sullivan & Urraro, 2017), Crawley (2017) found a lack of diversity in terms of racial and social class representation. This again illustrates the need for more books about queer families and children. However, it would not be useful if the books fail to take into account the multiple different ways race, class, and language affect the queer experience. Still, these books need to be written and include the ways people experience sexism, racism, classism, and transphobia.

New representations of queerness in children's books. J. Miller (2018) took much of the previous research one step farther. She wanted to re-examine the picture books about transgender and gender nonconforming youth to separate these books from previous books about queerness. She posited the idea of a "new queer children's literature" (J. Miller, 2018, p. 1) which separates itself from the older queer children's literature that focused on homosexual adults with presumed heterosexual, cisgender children. These newer instances of queer identity within children's literature were more

focused on the children whose identities were queered through gender expression. J. Miller (2018) described her project as seeking “to identify and to begin to define an emerging subgenre of children’s literature I suggest is part of a queer world-making project that is rendering gender creative and transgender youth visible to the youngest of audiences” (p. 23). She argued that these new queer books offer young children the opportunity to disrupt gender norms and understand that natal sex does not determine gender expression and identity (J. Miller, 2018).

J. Miller (2018) highlighted *Jacob’s New Dress* (Hoffman, Hoffman, & Case, 2014), *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* (Baldacchino & Malenfant, 2014), *Annie’s Plaid Shirt* (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015), and *I am Jazz* (Herthel et al., 2014) to discuss the ways in which these books allowed these queer children to thrive. While the children in these texts struggled with bullying at school, their parents were generally accepting and supportive of their gender identities. For children who read these books and who are gender nonconforming, this could create hope that someone will support their gender expression. Not all parents in these books supported the gender expression of their child though; the author also discussed how Bailey in *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008) found a chosen family in a neighbor girl after Bailey’s family rejected her gender expression. This idea of a chosen family was, for J. Miller (2018), a key part of this new queer future. This chosen family can stand in for the birth family when they do not accept the gender expression of the child. As J. Miller (2018) noted, this is the only book that she examined with an explicit narrative that embraced the chosen family, but that Jacob’s friend Emily also supported and fought for him in *Jacob’s New Dress* (Hoffman et al.,

2014). This meant that Jacob had the support of both birth and chosen family (J. Miller, 2018).

While this research does expand the texts that were used to discuss queer children, J. Miller (2018) missed a number of books about transgender children when she included only *I Am Jazz* (Herthel et al., 2014) as the only text about a transgender child. This researcher thinks about the other children as gender nonconforming, but this lack of discussion of children who are transgender ignores the children who are also queering gender norms by claiming a transgender identity. As Herzog (2008) and Malcolm and Sheahan (2019) show, there have been gender nonconforming children, especially AMAB children, in picture books since the 1970s, but what is new are transgender children in picture books. That J. Miller (2018) did not discuss these queer children undermines this analysis as new queer children's literature.

skelton's³ (2015) research separated itself from the previous research in that skelton took issue with some of the texts that were often named as supportive of gender nonconformity in children. skelton (2015) noted that while *Jacob's New Dress* (Hoffman et al., 2014), *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* (Baldacchino & Malenfant, 2014), and *Roland Humphrey is Wearing a WHAT!* (Kiernan-Johnson & Revenaugh, 2013) were all about boys with nonconforming gender expression, they all focused on the bullying of these gender nonconforming boys. While J. Miller (2018) seemed to view bullying as a side note with support given by chosen and/or birth families, skelton's (2015) point was that these texts focused too much on the bullying. skelton (2015)

³ skelton utilizes lower-case letters within the spelling of their name. I am honoring this same spelling by continuing the practice within this dissertation. In addition, skelton does not indicate any pronouns within the research, so I also am honoring this choice.

acknowledged that these books may help boys who wear dresses and that they might see themselves in the text, but that this is not enough; “it’s not enough to have gender-independent and trans children in books; we need to celebrate such children and give them narratives of their own” (skelton, 2015, p. 498). This author focused on books that did not include extensive bullying in the text or the other trope skelton found to be common in books about gender nonconforming and transgender children; the child must do something extraordinary to gain the respect of others. This author recommended *Made by Raffi* (Pomranz & Chamberlain, 2014), *Knit Your Bit: A World War I Story* (Hopkinson & Guarnaccia, 2013), *Backward Day* (Bergman & Diamond, 2012), *Rough, Tough Charley* (Kay & Gustavson, 2007), and *I am Jazz* (Herthel et al., 2014). According to skelton, including children having to prove their worth by being extraordinary and/or the child having to overcome bullying by parents or peers (skelton, 2015).

This article was also notable because the author claimed a nonbinary identity and it was written for *TSQ: Trans Studies Quarterly*, the journal specifically for research about trans issues. Both of these factors possibly change the way this article could be read and understood. skelton was possibly writing for themselves and their own understanding of their gender identity as it is shown in picture books. While other authors may also have been on the transgender spectrum, because we as a reader knew that skelton identified as nonbinary it can help us to understand why skelton was focused on books that did more than just highlight transgender and gender nonconforming children, but also celebrated them. skelton could also have been thinking about skelton’s own childhood and the books that would have been beneficial at that point in skelton’s life. In addition, the placement of this article in TSQ likely meant the reader of this article was also interested in ways

that transgender people were presented in society. This again supported the notion of finding literature that celebrated trans and gender nonconforming children and moved away from depictions of bullying. This does not change the conclusions of this article but could change the way the article is understood within a larger context of books about transgender and gender nonconforming youth. This article adds important considerations for future researchers including it is often not enough to just highlight those who have been historically oppressed, but that we also need to celebrate them for being who they are as people by giving them their own stories in books.

Summary of the research about queer children. The research about gender nonconformity and trans-ness within children's picture books has spanned studies that examined books published in the 1970s to books published in the 2000s. Many of these studies focused on picture books that featured children who were assigned male at birth but were trans girls or whose gender expression did not fit into stereotypical male gender presentation. These studies illustrated that gender nonconformity within AMAB children has shifted from the initial depictions of children whose gender expression focused on one element of nonconformity, wanting a doll or dancing, to books that show multiple levels of gender nonconformity. Several of these studies discussed a lack of diversity within the racial depictions of these children, but many of these studies did not focus on that as a large part of their analysis of these texts. Finally, several of the more recent studies have examined the same texts that were utilized in earlier research and have come to a more nuanced discussion of these texts. J. Miller (2018) focused on how these new queer picture books differentiate themselves from the previous generation of queer picture books. Other researchers pointed to the fact that these books are not entirely

supportive of transgender and gender nonconforming children when they focus on the struggles of these children.

Gaps in the Literature

This led to the gaps in the literature that I addressed within my research. First, much of the research (Herzog, 2008; Malcom & Sheahan, 2019; Sciorba, 2017) that looked at transgender and gender nonconforming children has focused on AMAB characters. While trans girls and boys who are gender nonconforming may seem to be the most noticeable and hence, most likely to be written about within picture books and research, there are multiple picture books that focus on trans boys and nonbinary children that also needed to be examined, especially as I looked at how these books represented various versions of queerness in children.

As Meadow (2018) discussed, trans boys often needed to make a large gesture, either by telling their parents they were trans or threatening or completing self-harm in order to be recognized as a trans boys because male typical behavior in AFAB children is not viewed in the same way as female typical behavior in AMAB children. Trans girls often have their gender expression policed much earlier than trans boys, including being labeled utilizing homophobic and transphobic slurs, such as sissy, fag, or girly-boy. Often trans girl's gender expression - liking stereotypically feminine colors or toys - causes parents to ask their children about their gender identity much earlier in their lives, often even before they enter schooling (Meadow, 2018). Girls who are gender nonconforming and possibly even transgender are often labeled as tomboys, a somewhat neutral-to-positive term. Coyle, Fulcher, and Trübtschek (2016) found that while the label of tomboy was, at times, viewed negatively by college students, the traits associated with

this label were often viewed ambivalently. Also, they noted that many adult women identified as having been a tomboy at some point in their life (Coyle et al., 2016). All of this associated research demonstrated the need to examine books about trans-ness in both AFAB and AMAB children as a way to highlight the multitudes of possible gender identities and expressions available to children.

Second, while the research has at times focused on books about children who queer gender norms, there has been little discussion about how the children in these books both queer and uphold gender norms. When researchers examined books about transgender children, they focused on family acceptance or bullying. This leaves out the children themselves and how they enacted their gender identity. This dissertation research examined those enactments of gender expression and gender identity; the ways the children in these books, at times, pushed against gender norms through the wearing of a dress even when they were assigned a male gender at birth or the refusal to wear a dress even when they were assigned a female gender at birth. This research also attempted to show that there is no one transgender experience and that the children in these books represented multiple ways of being transgender.

Summary

This literature review discussed the multiple scholarly articles that framed this research about the representations of transgender children in picture books. This review began with the articles about queer people in picture books. When picture books about explicitly queer people were first published in the 1980s, these books focused on the families, gay and lesbian parents and relatives. This later shifted to queer representations of individual children, transgender, and gender nonconforming children. This shift was

not clearly delineated, though; there were books that were written in the 1970s that have more recently been labeled as about gender nonconforming children. These books were analyzed beside the books that were more explicitly written about gender nonconforming children published in the 2000s. While the appearance of what are now termed queer children due to their gender nonconformity may pre-date the publication of the books about queer families, the books about gender nonconforming children were not written as a way to expand gender roles especially for AMAB children. These books did not queer gender roles and expectations for children. The books about queer families did, however, intend to bring new sexualities to light within the children's book world.

Finally, I discussed the gaps in the literature that I have noticed. There needs to be additional research that moves the discussion beyond just books about trans girls and gender nonconforming boys. There are multiple books about trans boys and nonbinary children that also need to be studied as a way to illustrate the various versions of queerness in children. In addition, research is needed that examines the ways in which children enact their gender identity to both uphold and push back against gender norms.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This study utilized a critical content analysis methodology to answer the research question, how do picture books about transgender children represent various versions of queerness in children? This chapter discusses critical content analysis, then moves to a description of the books that I examined, the data collection and analysis methods, my own positionality within this research, and finally, possible limitations within my undertaking of this research. This chapter is intended to demonstrate in detail the methodology that I undertook to complete this dissertation.

Methodological Stance

Content Analysis

Krippendorff (1989, 2004) described the way in which researchers who conduct content analysis interact with and interpret texts. He pointed to the fact that all texts are meant to be understood by others. The author or creator of the text intends for others to read or see the text. Often these texts were not created to be studied, but as a way to convey information or to entertain others. Krippendorff (2004) reminded researchers who conduct content analysis that texts are often not written with the intention that they will be used within research; they are living documents. They are created within a certain time and space to be understood often within that same context. This means that texts do not inherently have meaning, the meaning is brought to the text by the reader or interpreter. Because different people can and do interpret the texts, they

do not have only one meaning. As different readers interpret texts in multiple ways, diverse content can assess the same text in multiple different ways and all of them can be correct. In addition, one researcher's interpretations do not have to match another's interpretation(s) of the text. Content analysis is as interested in what is not said as is what is said within a text. The analyst is examining these texts for the ideological constructs that have been embedded in the text, often unintentionally by the creator and often unrecognized by mainstream readers (Krippendorff, 2004). This led Krippendorff (2004) to argue that the critical analysis of texts would not exist if researchers did not look at interpretations that existed outside of the mainstream view of a text(s).

Krippendorff (1989) discussed the importance of the systematic nature of content analysis. Content analysis is meant to treat all data equally in its analysis rather than privileging what was read first or last, as can happen when researchers do not systematically analyze the textual data. This systematization and equal treatment allows the researcher to develop a context beyond the socially understood context to a text, written or oral. Because the parts of the content are viewed as part of a whole, the researcher can see overall themes that may not be obvious in a casual reading of the text (Krippendorff, 1989).

Critical Content Analysis

Building upon the general concepts for a content analysis that Krippendorff (1989, 2004) highlighted, I conducted a critical content analysis (Beach et al., 2009; Short, 2017). A content analysis becomes critical when the theoretical framework that is used involves a critical theory, such as critical race theory, postcolonial theory, or queer theory. Critical content analysis research is not critical because of a methodological

choice by the researcher, the criticalness comes from the choice of a critical theory to “think within, through, and beyond the text” (Beach et al., 2009, p. 130). This criticalness also signals a centering of the analysis of this text as a political attempt to re-center the experiences of those who may be marginalized (Short, 2017). In general, critical content analysis brings a critical lens to a text or group of texts to examine them for underlying messages, especially those messages about the influences of power dynamics within society (Short, 2017). These critical stances allow readers to examine the misconceptions and stereotypes that exist within these books and society. These misconceptions become present within children’s literature because many books that are published are written by those who are outside the marginalized group centered in the texts (Johnson, Mathis, & Short, 2017). These texts become part of the social world of the children who read them, thus, informing the child’s understanding of those who are different from them (Beach et al., 2009).

Critical content analysis within my study. While I have found only two studies that utilized critical content analysis to examine books about queer populations (Schall, 2017; Fahrenbruck & Collins, 2019), there have been numerous studies that have applied queer theoretical tenets to the study of children’s books (picture books and chapter books). For example, Taylor (2012) utilized a “queer intersectionality framework” (p.137). As another example, Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan (2016) discuss queer children’s literature in much of their work, but in *Queering chapter books with LGBT characters for young readers: Recognizing and complicating representations of homonormativity*, they utilized a queer lens as a way to problematize the lack of representations of different forms of queerness within the set of books that are “post-

picture-books-but-pre-YA demographic” (p. 847). As my final example, Bittner et al. (2016) used the trans studies work of three different scholars (Halberstam, Britzman and Stryker) to critically examine texts about transgender characters within picture books and YA novels. This dissertation is situated within a similar realm of work as the scholars who have utilized queer theory and trans theory in their own analyses of queer children’s literature.

Critical content analysis and depictions of power. Critical content analysis ties the content analysis to critical theories that focus on the ways power is enacted in society; “a critical examination of issues of stereotyping and misrepresentation in literature, a deconstruction of books and societal issues that are reflected in representations of particular groups of people” (Short, 2017, p. 6). Queer theory and trans theory examine these stereotypes and misrepresentations. As I mentioned in Chapter 1’s theoretical framework section, queer theory looks at the idea that sexuality cannot be disengaged from gender, thus creating normalized sexuality because of normalized gender expressions, heteronormativity (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). This queer position is not applied only to those who identify as a sexual minority, it is applied to anyone who does not fit into the normative definition for gender expression and sexuality (S. J. Miller, 2015). Queer theory posits that the ways in which sexuality is performed normalizes these behaviors; “queer theory is ‘queer’ because it questions the assumption that there is any ‘normal’ expression of gender” (Blaise & Taylor, 2012, p. 88). This normal expression of gender creates a power imbalance between people who perform their gender “correctly” and those people whose gender expression is nonconforming (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). Trans theory brings in the idea of cisnormativity (Serano, 2013) where

the cisgender body is considered the norm and hence, unmarked, versus the transgender body. This leads to only the transgender child's gender identity being discussed, even when there are other children within the text whose gender identity may be nonnormative.

Critical content analysis processes. Short (2017) named seven processes that she believes researchers need to engage with in order to do critical content analysis. First, researchers need to “decide on a research purpose, questions, and texts” (Short, 2017, p. 7). The researcher has to read the texts as a way to establish how these texts work together in the overall purpose of the research. This begins with the researcher starting as a reader, not a researcher (Short, 2017). They need to read the text first through an aesthetic lens (Rosenblatt, 1994). As Christine Jenkins said in Beach et al. (2009):

The first reading is lost-in-a-book aesthetic reading. I start reading with a pad of small sticky notes, reading in an immersive manner while using the notes to mark the places in the text when I think, Huh? Or Huh! or Oh! as I surface from the text, however briefly. After that first reading, I go back to the marked places and consider the aspect of the text that made me pause. These points in the narrative are the genesis of inquiry and interpretive discussion. Thus, my task as a researcher is to locate places within the text that might encourage collaborative meaning-making among readers. (p. 134)

After this initial reading of the text, the researcher should start to make notes and develop ideas around the text (Short, 2017). After I had done the initial reading of all 20 picture books, I began to write notes about my initial thoughts, the texts, and the possible queer and trans theory tenets I needed to re-visit. These included what I was noticing about the

trans children and the people who surrounded them including parents, friends, teachers, and even medical professionals. This also included my initial thoughts on the ways in which the trans children worked to solidify their gender identity for themselves and others.

Next Short (2017) directs the researcher to “select and read deeply within a critical theory framework” (p. 8). The first reading of the picture books led me to think about how specific ideas from queer theory are applied within these books. As Jenkins mentioned in Beach et al. (2009), this first reading was an aesthetic read. I was reading the books to enjoy the books and to see how they might fit together as a whole body of literature. I was also noticing the illustration style and how this might or might not add to the overall enjoyment of the reading experience. As I was reading, I noticed that the trans girl characters all based their gender identity on wearing a dress. Whether it was Bailey in *10,000 Dress* (Ewert & Ray, 2008) or Phoenix in *Phoenix Goes to School* (Finch, Finch, & Davey, 2018) one of the common elements of the books about trans girls centered on the idea of femininity as symbolized by wearing a dress. On the other hand, stories about trans boys often included moments of the trans boys not wanting to wear a dress or ruining a dress as a way to indicate that they were not female. While there can be multiple ways to be a boy or girl, gender expression within most of these books centered on this one piece of clothing, a dress. This led me back to Butler’s books *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2006) and *Undoing Gender* (2004). As I read these theoretical texts, I saw how Butler’s work with performativity of gender and the recognizability of gender was appearing in these texts about transgender children.

Butler (2006) tied these individual gendered expectations to larger cultural discourses about how gender is constructed within a “heterosexual matrix” (p. 208). This matrix is based within the idea that in order for one’s gender to be intelligible it must exist within binary gender norms and normative cultural laws about heterosexuality. This connection of normalized gender expression with an assumed heterosexuality begins at birth, but for this study it is relevant as it is displayed within picture books about transgender children. These texts did not focus on the child’s sexuality, but they did focus on how the child’s gender identity is expressed. According to Butler (2004, 2006) this gender expression must fit within the gender binary of male and female, so I focused on how the gender expression of the children in these texts was emblematic of this gender binary focus.

Through a content analysis utilizing a critical lens, these marked behaviors became more visible in the text. Also, rather than accepting that the policing of gendered behaviors was normalized, critical content analysis allowed an examination of these norms. This methodology allowed me to connect the presentations of gender in these picture books to larger societal expectations for children’s gender presentation. For example, when a child refused to identify their gender for others, they were transgressing cultural norms connecting gender identity to sexuality and the manner in which the future sexual behavior of a child is policed through the gender presentation of the child. If someone does not know the gender identity of a person, then how are they supposed to know who the child should be attracted to within the heteronormative matrix?

In addition to drawing from Butler’s work, I also utilized trans theory, specifically the idea of the wrong-body discourse (Engdahl, 2014). Transgender studies sees itself as

a theory that is based in the bodily reality of people and it argues for the ways in which people's gender expression and identity are affected by cultural realities (Nagoshi & Bruzy, 2010). Since queer theory comes from a poststructural tradition that de-centers the material body in its analysis, trans theory allowed me to reconnect the way that the children in the books experience their body through their gender expression.

Serano (2013) mentioned that she felt as though while she was assigned one gender at birth, her innate sense of gender has always been feminine. This innate sense of gender was tied to these picture books as I examined the way that the protagonist's sense of gender is based in an internal sense of self rather than the external gender they have been assigned by others. The wrong-body discourse (Engdahl, 2014) focuses the transgender theory lens on the common narrative around transgender people as stuck in the wrong body. This narrative serves to essentialize the anatomy of the body, while acknowledging that gender is socially constructed. By creating this binary between sex and gender, this allows people to argue that transgender people can claim a gender identity, but their body betrays them. In addition, the wrong-body discourse often ties being stuck in the wrong body to medicalization, as though being transgender is a disease that can be cured (Bettcher, 2014).

It was also at this point that I read articles that discussed the analysis of the illustrations within picture books especially as it related to critical content analysis. As Sipe (1998) noted, the written text and the illustrations work together to convey the meaning within these books. "In a picture book, both the text and the illustration sequence would be incomplete without the other" (Sipe, 1998, p. 98-99), so as a researcher, I had to consider how both elements of the page, the words and the

illustrations, worked together or contrasted with each other to convey meaning for the reader. Similar to the work that Fahrenbruck and Collins (2019) did with the picture book *Heather Has Two Mommies*, I also examined the picture books about transgender children. The Fahrenbruck and Collins (2019) research focused on one text and its publication history, while my research focused on multiple texts, but I utilized the idea that elements of depictions of queer people have changed over time and so I needed to examine how the depiction of transgender children changed. Fahrenbruck and Collins (2019) also discussed the ways in which children may not see the hidden messages in texts, but that adults can illuminate those ideas. This, again, influenced the way in which I thought about how the text and illustrations may present contrasting images to children.

After immersing myself into the theoretical work and ideas around the examination of illustrations through a critical content analysis lens (Short, 2019), I re-examined a smaller set of books utilizing the theoretical perspectives focusing on the illustrations and finally, on the interplay between the illustrations and the words. These were two different rounds of analysis, but they looked at similar questions, including how the trans children were gendered by others, especially their friends, teachers, peers, and why or how the pronouns that were chosen for the trans child by the author. In addition, I thought about how the book's subjects enacted their gender, both the gender that is expected of them due to the gender they were assigned at birth and their own felt gender identity. This analysis allowed me to move beyond just examining one book to looking at how all of the children in these texts enacted their gender. This occurred throughout this process through analytic memos and notes in the picture books about different observations, within individual books and across the whole book set. The analytic memos

allowed me the space to think about how gender was constructed by the children. Short (2017, 2019) suggests writing memos that allow the researcher to write about the different themes developing from the texts. These memos include direct ideas or quotes from the theory and from the texts that are being analyzed by the researcher. Finally, Short (2017) notes that while they have outlined specific steps, each researcher will adapt these procedures to their individual project as I did in this dissertation.

Books for This Study

The books for this study were picture books that were written about children who queer gender norms. All of these children were transgender; that is, their internal sense of self does not match the gender they were assigned at birth (Norton, 1999). In addition, the books for this study contained human characters and not animals or other non-human protagonists. As Young (2019) noted, children need to see reflections of themselves as humans and not animals as is commonly written about in books about queer families. Finally, these books were all set contemporaneously, not within a fantasy or historical setting. This is for the same reason that children need to see human characters; contemporary children need to see reflections of themselves as they currently live their lives, and not in the past or some far away land.

Initial Selection of Books

The initial books for this dissertation spanned the years 1974 to 2019, with a majority of them focused from 2008 onward. I began with a list of 81 books (Appendix A) that had been collected based upon prior researchers' collections of work and my own knowledge and collection of books about transgender and gender nonconforming children. I relied heavily on Sullivan and Urraro's (2017) appendix of 64 picture books

they classified as about transgender and gender nonconforming children. I then reduced this book list based on how many of the books centered on the stories of cisgender children. Often, these books were about a cisgender child who exhibited a specific trait that made them stand out in a classroom or in their family, such as they wanted a doll, they liked to dance, they liked sports, or they did not want to wear a dress. These books may allow children to see that all children can participate in all activities, boys can dance and girls can like sports, but these books were about a gender nonconforming children whose gender transgression was limited to only one element of their identity and often, this nonconformity was normalized by the end of the book.

There were still books at this point in the research that included boys who wore dresses or transgressed gender norms in more than one way or whose gender nonconformity was not normalized by the end of the book. Next a group of books was eliminated because they were about nonhuman protagonists, leopards, teddy bears, or alligators. While some of these books were about characters that did identify as transgender - for example, Thomas in *Introducing Teddy: A Gentle Story About Gender and Friendship* (Walton & McPherson, 2016) - this research was focused on humans and their gender construction. As Kyle Lukoff discussed in an interview with Flynn (2019), children need to see representations of themselves, not nonhuman representations that they then have to interpret to understand how the ideas from the book can apply to their lives. This resulted in almost half of the books on this initial list being eliminated for this study. This list contained 44 books (Appendix B).

This list was again culled to limit the set of books to focus on books about transgender children. This time, books were eliminated to focus on contemporary fiction,

so fantasy, science fiction, and a single historical fiction book were eliminated. Also, there were two books that once I looked at them were non-picture books (*Tomboy Trouble* and *The Day Joanie Frankenhauser Became a Boy*). They were both early reader chapter books and hence, outside of the scope of this research. Finally, there was a set of books eliminated from the list at this point that were about boys in dresses (8 books). While these books are about gender nonconforming boys, these children often claimed a male identity at this point in their lives. These are two separate populations of children. Children who are gender nonconforming could later come out as transgender, but I was focused on books that specifically highlighted the various experiences of transgender children. The gender nonconforming children did not express any discomfort within their gender identity similar to the way that the transgender children displayed this discomfort in how their gender was perceived by others versus their own knowledge of their gender identity. Gender is fluid and so this may change as they get older, but since these were books, the lives of these children were held static. Readers cannot see if this gender nonconformity continues. In addition, other books were eliminated because the characters displayed generally gender nonconforming characteristics, liking pink or wearing nail polish; but again, these gender expressions did not seem indicative of further gender identity questions. This left me with a list of 20 books that contained both binary transgender identifies, trans boy or trans girl, and nonbinary transgender identities (Appendix C).

Process of Selection for the Books to be Further Analyzed

These 20 books were analyzed for how they displayed various forms of queerness within the written text to determine which books to focus the deeper analysis within my

research. This led me to choose a total of eight books. At this point I did a deeper analysis of eight of the books, three each from books about trans boy and trans girl and two books about nonbinary children, to look at deeper themes, such crossing over of gender boundaries within children, how they fit or do not fit into the social construction of gender, and the wrong-body discourse (Appendix D).

The process for selecting the eight books began with me reading just the text for the 20 books I had compiled about transgender children, ignoring the illustrations to see how the authors wrote about these trans children. Then from these books, I chose the books that I wanted to do a deeper analysis on, examining the illustrations and the text again for instances of queerness within these texts. These books were chosen for a multitude of reasons. It was easier to choose the books about the nonbinary children than trans girls and trans boys because there were fewer total books about nonbinary children. I found four books total, but only two of them had a narrative arc. *Call Me Tree/LLamame Arbol* (Gonzalez, 2014) does not convey a narrative arc. The same goes for *Meet Polkadot* (Broadhead, 2016). This book begins discussing Polkadot and their family, but then moves into defining gender and gender identity and expression for children. While these could be useful when discussing gender identity with children, this research focused on story picture books which contained a defined narrative. This left the books about nonbinary children, *Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?* (Savage & Fisher, 2017) and *They Call Me Mix/Me LLaman Maestre* (Rivas & Nuñez, 2018).

In order to select books about the trans boys and the trans girls, I wanted to span the publication dates beginning with the first book published about a trans boy or a trans girl and a second book that was one of the newest books about a trans boy or a trans girl.

In addition, I wanted to analyze a book that had a child whose gender identity was fluid and not as defined within the text by the use of the label transgender to describe the child. The books about trans girls that were further analyzed included *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008) which appears to be the first book published in the United States about a trans child, *Phoenix Goes to School* (Finch et al., 2018), the newest book I studied, about a trans girl, and *Julián is a Mermaid* (Love, 2018) which was the book about the child that I perceived as a trans girl based mostly upon the illustrations in this book. While Julián was described as a boy throughout the text, the illustrations painted a different picture, which led me to want to examine these illustrations in more depth and examine how the illustrations and the text support and contrast each other. These books about trans girls spanned ten years.

The books about trans boys included *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019), the newest book about a trans boy that I analyzed, *When Kathy is Keith* (Wong, 2011), the first book about a trans boy I found, and *Annie's Plaid Shirt* (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015) which is about what I perceived as a trans boy although this label never occurred in the text. While the print text never indicated this trans-ness, the way that Annie is illustrated and the way that they handle certain situations; for instance, buying and wearing a dress fits with the way that trans boys were presented in the other texts I examined. The illustrations and print were not as out of sync as they were in Julián, but they still did not always match, and the illustrations added to the print in ways that supported the assertions that I make about Annie's potential gender identity. These books spanned 8 years.

The books I chose did represent the other books that were not analyzed. They presented a picture of trans-ness that is similar to the other texts. While trans-ness is not a monolith, the books that were chosen for further analysis did not stray from the overall narratives about trans children that were presented across the entire set of 20 books that I researched.

Positionality

Positionality as a Teacher

My positionality within this research is primarily framed by having taught for nine years within early childhood classrooms, predominantly pre-k classrooms which served 3-5-year-old children. I do not know that I will ever forget the first time I saw a child whose play in an early childhood classroom did not fit into stereotypically gendered behavior. I was working on my master's degree and was in a university lab preschool classroom. There was a child who I perceived as a boy wearing a dress and playing with the blocks. He put the dress on and then was playing. The other students did not react, the teachers did not react, and to me what was most important, no parents who came into the classroom reacted.

While all of this went through my head in about 30 seconds, it was a light bulb moment for me. I took these ideas into my own classroom a few years later. I often saw young children who I perceived as boys who wore dresses in the housekeeping area. I ignored this, but my teacher assistant was worried about these boys. She did not feel it was right that they wore the dresses that were supposed to be for the girls. They should wear "boy clothing". We did not have any dress-up clothes other than the dresses and a few hats, so my assistant brought in some of her son's old clothing so that the boys could

wear clothing that she felt was more appropriate for them. While this did not necessarily mean the boys in the classroom stopped wearing the dresses, they did wear a wider variety of the dress-up clothing. The children I perceived as girls also wore the dresses and now the suits, ties, and vests that my assistant teacher had brought to the classroom. She did not comment on the girl's gender transgressions the way she did when the boys transgressed gender norms. This was also my first classroom; I did not think about trying to find books that may have reflected a variety of different gender expressions and I did not know that there were books available at that time that engaged with multiple gender presentations for children.

As I continued to teach, I saw teachers who gently and not so gently suggested to students that what they were wearing or playing with was not appropriate for their gender identity. These teachers would say things like, "if we make the boys wear a pink coat, maybe they or their parents will not forget to have a coat tomorrow". There were also comments from teachers and staff that one of the girls "is just as rough as the boys". I saw teachers who lined up classes by gender presentation, boys on one side and the girls on the other.

As I became aware of more books about different gender presentations, I tried to include them in my own classroom. I was lucky because at this point, I was in another university lab preschool where there was a focus on anti-bias education and where we could include these books in our read aloud times, something I did not often see in public school classrooms that I had taught in. This leads back to my desire to find ways for students to see a variety of gender presentations in the books they see in their classrooms – not only for their development as a person but also as a member of a just society.

Positionality as a Queer Person

In addition to my positionality as a teacher, I have to consider how my own queer positionality functions within the queer community. Since the queer community is not a monolith, there are multiple different ways in which to be queer. This leads to complexity in how to define and place oneself within the queer community. The positionality within queer communities, especially within the #ownvoices movement and insider/outsider perspectives on who should and should not write children's books, seems more complex than other identities. It is not possible to look at someone and know whether they are gay, straight, bisexual, transgender, gender queer, et cetera. Scholars within trans studies differ in their opinions on how transgender people should present themselves to the world. Stone (1992) argues that even those transgender people who are able to be stealth, to remain hidden and not be noticeable as trans, should be open about their gender identity. They should be out of the closet as a transgender person (Stone, 1992). In a contrasting opinion, Edelman (2014) posits that the idea of stealth appears differently in transgender versus lesbian, gay, and bisexual contexts: within lesbian, gay and bisexual contexts being stealth is hiding your sexuality but being stealth within transgender contexts means being able to appear as your self-identified gender. This complication around who appears to be queer means that some people may have to out themselves within lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender contexts, where safety may be an issue, in order to appear as an insider. Hence, the clear-cut insider/outsider binary that appears often around issues of race are not always as clear in queer contexts.

My own gender identity is important in this research as placing me as either an insider or outsider to this community even with the complications I have already

highlighted around the difficulties of this binary. I identify as genderqueer “as being neither woman or man, or as a little bit of both, or as being gender-fluid (i.e., moving between different gendered states over the course of their lives)” (Serano, 2013, p. 19). This identity is also termed nonbinary by some, but I prefer the term genderqueer. This identity is often not explicitly present for others; this is an internal feeling of being in-between maleness and femaleness or that my own understanding of my gender identity is fluid. I can and often feel like I exist between these two poles, moving back-and-forth between them. This is not a term that I would have known, let alone used for myself until recently, but this also adds to my own understanding of genderqueer-ness.

My gender identity understanding has changed and continues to shift and move. I have had friends tell me they thought I was gay. I have to assume that part of this is due to my gender presentation. They assumed I must be cisgender, so the only way to account for my more feminine gender presentation must tie into the stereotype of the feminine gay male. This ties into my genderqueer-ness, where I do not view myself as defined by masculinity or femininity, so others may struggle with these perceptions as well. This fluidity informs how I view the picture books I studied. This may allow me to think about the gender experiences of the children in the picture books. Are the children’s experiences of gender static or fluid? In a webinar including the transgender author, Kyle Lukoff, he mentions that he views all of the characters at the end of his book, *When Aidan Became a Brother*, as possibly transgender or gender nonconforming (Potter, 2019). Do other readers see this fluidity as well? While I can understand his point, would teachers reading this book in their classroom make the same point even if they knew the author’s intentions for this gender fluidity?

I am also an outsider to this community. In addition to the White privilege that I benefit from, I also benefit from the privilege of being male perceived. I am aware of this privilege and the fact that I do not have to deal with the misogyny that many women have to experience or the transmisogyny that Serano (2013) details in her work. This also colors my work within this study; do I miss elements of the text that another analysis might see? Do I miss elements of transmisogyny that are present under the surface either of the text or the way that the author presents a transgender character?

Limitations of this Study

As with all research there are multiple potential limitations to this study. First, the availability of the picture books that were used for the study was a challenge. Even though many of the books were written within the past ten years, most of them were published by smaller independent presses or self-published, which made finding copies of these books challenging. This limitation also influenced this research as I thought about the books that should be used, even if I can find copies of them for sale with some online searching, does this mean that a teacher can find a copy easily? If they cannot find a copy, this often means that a teacher may not use this book in their classroom.

Second, the definitions for gender nonconformity within males and females are different. Male gender nonconformity and trans girls were marked more readily and were written about more often within both research and picture books (for a discussion of this see Chapter 2). Female gender nonconformity was more challenging to define. Was a girl who doesn't wear a dress or pink gender nonconforming? Was a girl who likes to play outside gender nonconforming? Since there was not much research that addressed gender nonconformity within females within picture books, how should gender nonconformity in

girls have been defined and examined within picture books? This influenced how I thought about books that might have had trans children even though this was not explicit in the text.

Flanagan (2008) discussed cross-dressing within children's literature. Part of her analysis was about girls who dressed as boys, but many of these instances were of young girls who dressed as boys temporarily or for a specific purpose. She utilized Disney's *Mulan* as an example of a girl identified character who dressed as a male for a purpose, to enter the army. As this researcher noted, these cross-gender instances are often short lived and are different from individuals who identify as transgender (Flanagan, 2008). This means that while there are many books about girls who wear boy's clothing for a period of time or for a specific purpose, they all then choose to go back to a cisnormative experience. This led me, as a researcher, as having to define why one experience of wearing cross-gendered clothing may be an example of potential trans-ness while another book was not about a trans boy, but a gender nonconforming girl. This labeling as a limitation became most present within books that seem to be written about transgender children, but this term was never used in the text. The books in which the term transgender was not used, and yet I labeled the children as possibly transgender were *Julián is a Mermaid* (Love, 2018) and *Annie's Plaid Shirt* (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015). In both of these cases, I labeled the children's gender identity for them; they were not able to define this for themselves. While it may seem clear to me as a researcher that this child could identify as transgender since the term was never introduced into the text, this leaves the gender identity of the child open to interpretation. The child could identify as gender

nonconforming, non-binary, gender queer, or transgender, all of which could match the child's gender expression.

Summary

In this chapter I highlighted the research methodology I used for this study, critical content analysis. I began with a discussion of content analysis and then moved into critical content analysis. Critical content analysis adds a critical perspective, a way of examining the data to look at power dynamics within texts. I then moved to my own positionality as both an insider and an outsider within the queer community. Finally, I discussed the limitations of this study including the challenges of acquiring the books for this research and the way that I chose to label certain characters as transgender based upon my reading of the text, but in which the child themselves does not claim a transgender identity.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this dissertation, I utilized queer theory and trans theory to discuss the gender identity and gender expression for the transgender children in these picture books. However, these theories also remind us that gender identity is not static and that there is not one transgender experience. Transgender peoples are not a monolith. There are nonbinary people who identify as transgender and those who do not. There are transgender individuals who place their transgender identity above their male or female gender identity and those that will place their female or male gender identity above their transgender identity. People's identities are complex and how they are navigated in picture books is also complex. The books that I analyzed had elements that at some points deconstructed the gender binary and at other times supported the gender binary. This was similar to the ways in which queer people's lives can also demonstrate a complexity of trying to work against and work within the unspoken rules of the ways that gender is constructed within cultures. It was these various versions of queerness within children that I was examining in this research.

I considered a total of 20 books about transgender children, beginning with the first book about a transgender child, *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008) through books published in 2019. (Refer to Table 1 for a list of the books used, including the date of publication, the protagonist's gender identity, and the protagonist's name.) There were a total of four books about nonbinary

children, six about trans boys, and 10 about trans girls. This highlighted the ways that transgender-ness is often thought about in publishing and society as a whole where AMAB children’s nonnormative gender expression is marked more readily than AFAB children.

Table 4.1 Books with Protagonists' Names
Bold and Italicized= Focus books

Title of book	Year of publication	Gender identity of the protagonist	Protagonists' name
<i>10,000 Dresses</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>Trans girl</i>	<i>Bailey</i>
Be Who You Are	2010	Trans girl	Hope
<i>When Kathy is Keith</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>Trans boy</i>	<i>Keith</i>
Meet Polkadot	2013	Nonbinary	Polkadot
When Kayla was Kyle	2013	Trans girl	Kayla
But, I’m Not a Boy!	2014	Trans girl	Sarah
Call Me Tree	2014	Nonbinary	Tree
I am Jazz	2014	Trans girl	Jazz
About Chris	2015	Trans boy	Chris
<i>Annie's Plaid Shirt</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>Trans boy?</i>	<i>Annie</i>
<i>Are you a Boy Or a Girl?</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>Nonbinary</i>	<i>Tiny</i>
My Favorite Color is Pink	2015	Trans girl	Patty
Truly Willa	2016	Trans girl	Willa
Jack (Not Jackie)	2018	Trans boy	Jack
Jessie’s Hat Collection	2018	Trans boy	Jessie
<i>Julián is a Mermaid</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>Trans girl?</i>	<i>Julián</i>
<i>Phoenix Goes to School</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>Trans girl</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>
<i>They Call Me Mix/Me Llamán Maestre</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>Nonbinary trans</i>	<i>Lourdes</i>
Call Me Max	2019	Trans boy	Max
<i>When Aidan Became a Brother</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>Trans boy</i>	<i>Aidan</i>

While 11 years is a relatively short period of time, there were noticeable differences in the ways the books were written. Some authors used the same pronouns throughout the book and some authors' characters' pronouns changed as they transitioned from their assigned gender to their "authentic gendered self" (Ehrensaft, 2013, p. 10). There were also consistencies in the texts; trans boys' rejection of dresses and trans girls' embracing of dresses both highlighted the ways in which these children reinforced their gender identity constantly to force those around them to recognize the trans child's gender identity. These differences and similarities were further analyzed within a smaller set of eight books, three books about trans boys, three books about trans girls, and two books about nonbinary children.

In order to analyze these gendered expectations, I drew from Butler's (2004) discussions of gender performativity and recognizability. In addition, I utilized Engdahl's (2014) discussion of the wrong-body discourse to examine moments within these books when the trans child felt trapped in their body. There were also moments in which the child's family sought medical care to diagnose the child's trans-ness, which were also analyzed utilizing the wrong-body discourse since medicalization of the trans body is also an element of this theory.

The Doing of Gender in These Picture Books

To Wear a Dress or Not to Wear a Dress

Gender identity and gender expression are not synonymous. Gender identity is the innate sense of your gender, male, female, nonbinary, or genderqueer. This can be tied to the gender that you are assigned at birth or this can be different than your assigned gender. Gender expression is the outward appearance of your gender identity, hair,

clothing, pronouns, etc. (GLAAD, 2016). Since my research focused on picture books about children, much of the analyses was focused on the children's gender expression. I did take the child's gender identity into account when it was stated in the text and often used this as a way to gauge whether the way that the child was portrayed in the book - their gender expression - matched what they had expressed as their gender identity. When discussing gender expression, I utilized Butler's (2004, 2006) theories of gender performativity and recognizability. According to Butler (2004, 2006), gender is about the repeated performances of the gender norms; it is not a single act. This doing of gender is constrained by societal expectations and norms; thus, people must continue to do the same gendered performances as a way to continue to solidify their gender for themselves and for society. Butler (1993) discussed these repeated acts as a citational chain, as each act reinforces all the previous acts.

Trans girls and to wear a dress or not to wear a dress. The trans girls expressed their gender in multiple ways, longer hair, playing with dolls, liking the color pink, but the most consistent and often most defining was the way the trans girls expressed their femininity through the wearing of a dress. Within the first book about a transgender child, *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008), Bailey's entire story is predicated on the fact that she wanted to wear a dress. She dreamed of dresses and then wanted to create and wear them. After every dream, she talked to a family member about her desire to wear a dress; her mother, her father, and her brother each tell her she is a boy and boys do not wear dresses. In *Phoenix Goes to School* (Finch et al., 2018), Phoenix wanted to wear a dress to her first day of school. Phoenix lived as a trans girl, unlike Bailey, and the reader saw her wear a variety of clothing, dresses, shorts, and

pants, but she insisted throughout the text that it was important for her to wear a dress to her first day of school. While these are only two books, the idea of the importance of the dress as the single most important expression of feminine gender was echoed throughout all of the books about trans girls I analyzed.

The dress served as the way the trans girls within these texts expressed their femininity. The trans girls expressed a stronger cross-gender identity than the trans boys who I will discuss later in this chapter. They have always liked pink or dresses, even when they were not supposed to like these “girly” things. This connected these texts and the analyses back to Butler’s (2004) ideas about the performativity of gender. The trans girls continued to re-solidify their femininity through the wearing of a dress. While long hair may have served to also mark their gender expression, it was not enough for many of these trans girls. They knew that some male-identified people have long hair and so they could be mis-gendered if this was the main way they expressed their gender. Another possible marker of femininity could be make-up, but since these children were so young, often they did not wear make-up within these books. This left, for these girls, the dress as the way that they identified as a girl. If this conclusion was to be connected with Butler and the performativity of gender, it was not enough to express wanting to wear a dress once or twice; this expression of gender must occur over multiple iterations, as we saw with Bailey’s desire to wear a dress.

An example of this persistence on wearing a dress was shown again when Phoenix expressed some angst about wearing a dress to school and what others would think of her. Phoenix said in the text that she was afraid the older children would think that she was a boy in a dress and the illustration that accompanied these words showed

Phoenix in the center of a group of children who were laughing and pointing at her. Despite this anxiety Phoenix still viewed wearing a dress as an important part of girl-ness, so she insisted on wearing one. In spite of the fact that Phoenix did wear a dress to school on her first day, another student still asked her if she was a girl or a boy. This highlighted that for some, even a dress is not always enough to indicate the gender identity of a trans girl.

Julián in *Julián is a Mermaid* (Love, 2019) did not claim a trans girl identity, but their⁴ actions could indicate that they were nonbinary or a trans girl who has not yet told their family about their gender identity. Julián stated that they were a mermaid which did not necessarily imply a non-male gender identity, but when they became a mermaid, they had a pink tail and long hair which indicated a transition to a more feminine identity. We saw Julián seem to transition in their mind from a boy to a feminine mermaid. The features of this child were even more feminine, including longer hair and pinker lips when they thought of themselves as a mermaid. When Julián pretended to be a mermaid at their abuela's house, they utilized a curtain as what could be interpreted as a mermaid tail, but it also could remind the reader of a dress, thus continuing the connection between a dress and the expression of femininity for a trans girl.

This possibly non-cisgender male character expressed their imagination through the use of a curtain for a tail or dress, leaves from a fern plant as long hair, and a necklace from their abuela to complete their gender transformation. All of these elements transformed this character from a character with a more masculine gender presentation,

⁴ The pronouns that are used for Julián throughout *Julián is a Mermaid* (Love, 2019) are all male, but I am choosing to use gender-neutral pronouns as part of my argument that Julián may not be a cisgendered boy. They might be nonbinary or a trans girl.

short hair and wearing shorts and a tank top shirt, to one with a more feminine gender expression. This book ended with Julián involved with a parade which included people displaying a wide variety of gender expressions from the feminine (including what were perceived as women in long mermaid outfits) to masculine (perceived as men wearing pirate clothing) and everything in-between, including possible drag queens.

Trans boys and to wear a dress or not to wear a dress. Trans boys faced the opposite problem. Obviously, they did not want to wear a dress, but they often had to find ways to repeatedly express this desire to not wear a dress or other feminine clothing. As was explained in *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019), “And he always ripped or stained his clothes accidentally-on-purpose” (n.p.). In the picture that accompanied this phrase “accidentally-on-purpose” (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019, n.p.), we saw Aidan jumping in a mud puddle with an intense look on his face as though the only thing he could focus on at this moment was making as big a mess as he could, possibly ruining his hair in addition to the yellow, frilly dress that he was wearing. We also saw his friends nearby, but they had their palms out and appeared to be trying to move away from the mud splash. This phrase “accidentally-on-purpose (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019, n.p.) showed that this was not a one-time event. Aidan was repeatedly destroying his clothing because he did not like it or was not comfortable wearing the clothing that his parents decided were appropriate for his assigned gender. While it was acknowledged within the book that there were girls who did not like to wear dresses, Aidan did not feel like a different type of girl, he was a different type of boy. Later, after he came out as a trans boy to his parents, he mentioned taking better care of this clothing. Aidan also mentioned hating his name and his bedroom earlier in the book; again, the external features that

were associated with the gender he was assigned at birth did not fit with his gender identity, so he was now happy with the name he chose and the way that his bedroom was now re-decorated to fit with his male gender identity.

Within *When Kathy is Keith* (Wong, 2011), Keith insisted that he was a boy. He knew that the image he saw in the mirror was not him. He told his friends that he was a boy and they laughed at him. When he told his teacher or his parents that he was a boy, he was told he “is being silly” (Wong, 2011, p. 8) or that he “will grow out of it” (Wong, 2011, p. 10). Keith insisted that he was a boy and even asked Santa to make him into a boy for Christmas. When Keith asked Santa to be a boy, this event was reminiscent of Meadow’s (2018) discussions that often trans boys had to take drastic action to convince their parents they were boys. In Meadow’s (2018) discussions, this action was often self-harm or attempted suicide, even though Keith’s actions were not as drastic, this was deemed serious by his mother. She no longer dismissed Keith’s desire to be thought of as a boy, she listened to him and then Keith’s parents began to allow Keith to transition to a male gender expression. They allowed him to wear boy clothing and to change his name to Keith.

When Kathy is Keith (Wong, 2011) was the oldest book about a trans boy in this study and the differences between this text and the texts that followed were informative as to the ways in which books about trans boys have changed. The next picture book in which a character was identified as a trans boy did not appear until 2018, when two books published about trans boys, *Jack (Not Jackie)* (Silverman & Hatam, 2018) and *Jessie’s Hat Collection* (Barnes, 2018). This seven-year gap may explain some of the

differences that were seen between *When Kathy is Keith* (Wong, 2011) and the later texts.

Prior to his transition, Keith was always shown with long hair and wearing a red dress. This feminine clothing set him apart from all of the other trans boys in these later books. In all of the other books, the trans boys were shown wearing clothing that would be gendered male, for example, jeans, a baseball cap, or a suit and tie. Similar to Aidan, in cases in which a trans boy was shown with parents who wanted to dress them in feminine clothing, most of the time a dress, the child became very upset and refused to wear the dress. In several cases, the trans boy re-purposed the clothing to make it more masculine. In *Annie's Plaid Shirt* (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015), they⁵ created a suit from the White dress their mother bought them at the store. Jack in *Jack (Not Jackie)* (Silverman & Hatam, 2018) refused to wear a dress and wanted to wear his father's tie and hat. So, the fact that Keith was shown wearing a dress throughout much of this book did mark him as different from the other trans boys. Whether this was indicative of when the book was written, was hard to determine; however, this could undermine Keith's claim to maleness for some readers, especially if they are only reading the illustrations and not the words, because Keith was shown in a dress for most of the book.

In a similar way to Julián, Annie in *Annie's Plaid Shirt* (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015) did not claim a transgender identity and yet their actions suggested they might be a trans boy or nonbinary. The pronouns used for Annie in this book were all female, but this did not negate the way that Annie expressed their gender. Annie never claimed a trans boy

⁵ Similar to my use of they pronouns for Julián, I also chose to use gender-neutral pronouns for Annie as a way to signify the possibility of their gender fluidity.

identity, but this identity was supported within the text. Throughout the book, Annie was shown wearing clothing that was different than any other girl in the illustrations and identified them more closely with the way that the boys in this book were portrayed, jeans and sneakers, and they also rode a skateboard. When Annie's mother took them to buy a dress for their uncle's wedding, we saw Annie's facial expression was one of frustration and anger when they were wearing a dress. At one point in the illustrations, we saw Annie wearing a dress that was pink and the shoulders of the dress were puffy; these elements contributed to the femininity of the dress which was something that Annie was rejecting. While the reader does not see exactly how this transformation occurs, Annie re-purposed the dress that was bought for them into a suit similar to the suit that their brother was wearing and fashioned a bow tie to go along with the suit. This supported the contention that Annie was a trans boy or nonbinary and showing their family this gender identity through the clothing they chose to wear. This is similar to the way that Jack's mother within *Jack (Not Jackie)* (Silverman & Hatam, 2018) commented that he was telling them he was a trans boy through his clothing choices and other non-verbal actions prior to verbally telling them he was a trans boy.

Trans boys and trans girls do their gender in other ways. The idea of the trans child indicating their gender identity through their gender expression prior to telling their parents that they were transgender was often shown within the items that were present within their bedroom. Many of the trans children had bedrooms that contained items that would be gendered both male and female. Annie's bedroom was a mix of stereotypically masculine and feminine items. We saw a baseball bat, a dinosaur drawing, and outer space bed sheets, which would all be considered stereotypically male items. There was

also a baby doll, a unicorn stuffed animal, and other drawings that could have been gendered female. This mix of gendered items could indicate that Annie felt nonbinary or was a trans boy.

This mix of gendered items was not unique to Annie. Aidan and Phoenix also had rooms that showed a mix of items. Aidan had items in his room from when he had been assigned a female gender identity. While the reader only saw a small portion of Phoenix's room when she was going to sleep, it held a mix of dolls, a truck, a dinosaur, and appeared to be all blue. The dolls and stuffed animals would stereotypically be gendered female, but the color blue and the truck would certainly be stereotypically gendered masculine.

In addition, some of the activities that Aidan and Phoenix chose to do could also be considered nonnormative for their gender identity. Aidan was shown gathering flowers for his mother, an activity that could be stereotypically gendered female. Phoenix was shown engaging in different types of play that crossed gender barriers. She was shown playing with cars and trucks which would be gendered masculine and also leaping and dancing, which would be gendered feminine. All of these instances of a variety of gendered interests in the trans children's rooms illustrated that for many of these trans children, their play and interests were a mix of masculine and feminine. Referring back to Annie and their bedroom, Annie could be a gender nonconforming girl. They could change as they grow older and become less uncomfortable with dresses or they could still not like dresses to be a "different kind of girl" (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019, n.p.). But Annie could also realize that their gender identity was not feminine, that they were a trans boy or nonbinary.

Summary of the doing of gender by trans boys and trans girls. As I have noted, being transgender is not a monolithic identity; trans peoples have to figure out how they will express their gender identity for themselves. But within the texts that I examined were common elements that differentiated the experiences of trans girls from trans boys. The trans girls seemed to have a stronger cross-gender identity. The trans girls in these texts mentioned that they have always liked pink or dresses, even when they were not supposed to like these girly things. Teachers or parents told them that since they were assigned a male identity, boys did not wear dresses or boys did not like the color pink, that they should not wear dresses or like the color pink. These trans girls did like these feminine gender expressions, since this was part of the ways for them to solidify their gender identity. Because they were told that only girls liked these things, that meant that the trans girls had to continue to push to play with dolls or wear a dress as a way to re-solidify their gender identity. This connected back to the performativity of gender (Butler, 2004) as the trans girls continued to re-solidify their femininity through the wearing of a dress and liking stereotypically feminine items. But while they may have wanted to wear a dress, they often did not do this until they told their parents that they were a trans girl. This contrasted with trans boys, who often wore attire that would be considered stereotypically masculine and participated in stereotypically masculine behaviors, riding a skateboard or playing with cars and trucks. Trans boys often rejected dresses at the beginning, but then moved on to being boys in other ways, whereas trans girls continued to wear a dress in order to continue this performativity of gender. Trans girls also stated their intention to be a girl and then wore gender stereotypical clothing, trans boys tended to wear the clothing and then stated their gender identity.

Being In-Between Boy-ness and Girl-ness

While many of the children in these texts did identify with a binary gender identity, male or female, there were some children who did not identify their gender or identified as nonbinary. These children expressed a desire to explore both masculine and feminine gender expressions or at least the desire to move along this spectrum. Clothing and colors were not as important in these narratives. Within *Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?* (Savage & Fisher, 2017), Tiny's sister Fiona asked them, "are you a boy or a girl today?" (n.p.) This line served to illustrate that Tiny moved between these two poles. Tiny told or showed their family that some days they were a boy and on other days they were a girl. This also demonstrated that the family was aware of this movement along a gender spectrum and respected these choices for this child. Tiny was shown wearing a variety of dress-up clothing within this text, fairy wings, a doctor's coat, and a lion costume. All of these costumes showed that Tiny moved between masculine and feminine gender expressions. Toward the end of the book, Tiny was asked by a friend, if they were a boy or a girl and Tiny answered, "I am me" (Savage & Fisher, 2017, n.p.). This statement reinforced the notion that Tiny was not bound by gender labels. They did not view themselves tied to a specific gender identity. Tiny felt free to be themselves with the fluidity to move between gender expressions.

They Call Me Mix/Me Llanan Maestre (Rivas & Nuñez, 2018) described the author's, Lourdes, experiences and how they came to identify as nonbinary transgender. They discussed their experience growing up in which they, similar to Tiny, did not want to be identified as a boy or a girl. This book highlighted the ways in which binary gender identities made it hard for people who did not want to choose a gender identity. Even

though Lourdes was AFAB, they discussed their discomfort with wearing a dress, similar to some of the trans boy characters, but Lourdes also did not want to be labeled as a boy either. They felt like they were between maleness and femaleness. As Lourdes said about whether they were a boy or a girl, “Some days I am both. Some days I am neither. Most days, I am everything in between” (Rivas & Nuñez, 2018, p. 5). This feeling of being in-between was continued in the printed text when Lourdes discussed toys and made a note that toys were often divided, as some toys were supposed to be for boys, and some were supposed to be for girls. In addition to the written text, the illustrations showed a child who was perceived as a girl peeking out of a shelf of toys but looking uncertain as to which toys were for them. They may have wanted to play with the dolls and the trucks or the teapots and the dinosaurs. The text continued that this division of toys, clothes, and most everything made it harder for people who did not feel they fit into one gender identity or the other. They had to figure out if they can fit into the gender binary (Rivas & Nuñez, 2018).

Since Lourdes was an adult when they wrote this book, there were multiple ways in which this author and text differed from any of the other texts that I studied. Lourdes was able to choose the gender identity label that worked for them, nonbinary. This label may not be the one that many children would use to describe themselves, but as an adult looking back on their childhood, Lourdes could see how it fit their life. They also discussed how they became friends with other transgender people with whom they could create connections. Finally, Lourdes discussed their experiences as a teacher who talked to their students about different gender identities and gender expressions, letting them know that there could be fluidity and the students had the power to make this decision for

themselves and it could change. This set Lourdes' experiences and this text apart from Tiny and many of the other books about transgender children. Some of the other books like *Phoenix Goes to School* (Finch et al., 2018) and *I am Jazz* (Herthel et al., 2014) were co-written by a transgender girl with what I perceived as a cisgender adult. In addition, transgender male Kyle Lukoff wrote two books in the overall study, *When Aidan Became a Brother* (2019) and *Call Me Max* (2019), but Lourdes was the only author who was writing autobiographically about a transgender childhood as a transgender adult. This looking backward allowed for the use of a nonbinary transgender label as a way to discuss their gender identity lasting into adulthood. When one of the authors is a child writing about their current lives their gender identity could still change; as Phoenix discussed in an author's note, she used female pronouns and identified as a "gender nonconforming, transgender 7-year-old girl" (Finch et al., 2019, n.p.). This identity could change, and she could begin to identify as a transgender girl without the gender nonconformity or as a nonbinary person utilizing they pronouns. Lourdes knew how their gender identity developed from a child to an adult. When either a trans theory or queer theory lens are applied, gender identity is fluid throughout life and Lourdes' gender identity could continue to develop, but they also knew how they thought as a child and how they thought as an adult while writing this book. The picture books that were not autobiographical were not afforded this same perspective.

Summary of the Doing of Gender by Trans Children

The many ways in which the trans children did their gender demonstrated different varieties of queerness. Trans girls had to state their transgender identity before they could begin to wear a dress, which was often the cornerstone for these children of

their femininity. Trans boys often wore stereotypically masculine clothing and engaged in stereotypically masculine activities, but they often had to make their gender identity salient through the rejection of dresses. Nonbinary children had to find the space for themselves in their experiences that were often based in binary gender expectations. All of these children demonstrate that gender identity is not static, while they were assigned a gender at birth, they all rejected this gender assignment. They all found ways to make their gender identity more visible to others through a repeated doing of a gender expression that matched their authentic gender selves.

Are You a Boy or a Girl?: Being Recognized as a Gendered Being

According to Butler (2004), people are viewed as human when their gender identity fits into what is recognized by others as a coherent gender identity. In other words, when another person knows if you are male or female, this is when your humanity is fully recognized. She argues that this recognition affects not only people's experiences in the world, but also how they view themselves in the mirror. The questioning of their humanity also occurs when the trans children have to explain their gender identity to others such as medical professionals, or often in the case of the children in these books, teachers, parents, or peers. Because their gender identity cannot be defined by others and they have to explain how they identify, their humanness is brought into danger (Butler, 2004, 2006). (Refer to Table 2 which highlights the different ways in which the protagonists had their gender identity misrecognized by others within the text and by the author.)

Table 4.2 Protagonists and Gender Recognizability

Book	Protagonist	Gender Identity Not Recognized By		
		Author	Peer	Other Character
<i>When Kathy is Keith</i>	<i>Keith</i>	X	X	X
About Chris	Chris	X		
<i>Annie's Plaid Shirt</i>	<i>Annie</i>		X	X
<i>Are you a Boy Or a Girl?</i>	<i>Tiny</i>	X	X	
My Favorite Color is Pink	Patty	X		
Jessie's Hat Collection	Jessie	X		
<i>Julián is a Mermaid</i>	<i>Julián</i>			X
<i>Phoenix Goes to School</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>		X	
<i>When Aidan Became a Brother</i>	<i>Aidan</i>			X

Lack of Gender Recognition by a Peer

This lack of gender recognition that led to the dehumanization of a child came into stark reality within *Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?* (Savage & Fisher, 2017). On Tiny's first day of school, one of their peers, Buster, repeatedly called Tiny an it. As Buster said, "Tiny is not a he. Tiny is not a she. Tiny is an it!" (Savage & Fisher, 2017, n.p.). Buster did not recognize Tiny's gender identity. They did not appear to be a boy or

a girl. Tiny did not follow the rules of gender, according to Buster, Tiny liked to play with boys and girls, they liked to write, and they liked to play soccer. All of this led Buster to declare that Tiny was not a human, Tiny was an it. Tiny's humanity was negated by the fact that Buster could not recognize Tiny's gender identity especially since Tiny refused to tell Buster their gender identity.

While this was a more extreme version of the stripping of the humanness from someone whose gender identity was not recognized, there were multiple cases of similar questioning happening in this and other books in my study. Later in *Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?* (Savage & Fisher, 2017), one of Tiny's friends asked Tiny if they were a boy or a girl. Tiny responded "I am me!" (Savage & Fisher, 2017, n.p.). Tiny's gender expression did not appear to affect the friendships that Tiny was able to create with many of the children in the class and yet one of their friends still struggled with how to define Tiny. Similarly, in *Phoenix Goes to School* (Finch et al., 2018), Phoenix went to school wearing a dress and she was still asked if she was a boy or a girl. This may have meant that the child asking Phoenix her gender identity was aware that some boys wear dresses, that there can be gender fluidity, but the child still felt they needed to know Phoenix's gender identity. They needed to know what gender box to put them in, boy or girl.

This need to know others' gender identity permeates society including the practices of gender reveal parties and asking pregnant people the sex/gender of their baby. It was so widespread that it was mentioned in many of the books I studied and was the premise for *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019). After Aidan's mother told him that she was pregnant, he wanted to be the best big brother he could be. Part of his attempts to be a good big brother was to find ways so that the new baby did

not struggle with their gender identity in the same way that he did. Aidan worked to find good baby names, helped his father paint the baby's room, and even talked to his mother about his worries that the baby will be unhappy with the clothes they will have to wear, just like he was (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019).

Within *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019), there were multiple points in which Aidan was shown having to confront others' gendered expectations of him. Aidan was shown to appear upset when a woman asked his mother if the baby was a boy or a girl. Aidan was leaning against his mother's stomach hoping the baby could not hear what the woman said; since he did not like when people asked him if he was a boy or a girl, he thought the new baby would not like this either. In another example, when he was shopping with his father for paint for his new sibling's room, a store clerk asked Aidan if he was excited for the new brother or sister, Aidan responded that he was excited to be a big brother. The text then noted that Aidan was glad his dad was there as the store clerk seemed confused by this statement and appeared to want to ask another question (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019). While we cannot know if the store clerk was going to question Aidan's gender identity, Aidan expressed some nervousness that this might happen. Aidan was worried that the store clerk would not recognize him as a boy.

These issues around recognizability appeared in every book in this research. At some point, all of the trans children experienced a moment or moments where someone questioned their gender identity. Several of the children, including Keith in *When Kathy is Keith* (Wong, 2011) told people that they were trans. Keith told his parents, a teacher, and some friends that he was a boy and all of them dismissed this idea. His friends

actually laughed at him and his parents told him he was wrong. This lack of recognition led several of the children in these books (Carr & Rumbach, 2010; Leone & Pfeifer, 2015) to experience depression and for at least Kayla in *When Kayla was Kyle* (Fabrikant & Levine, 2013), thoughts of suicide. This questioning of their gender identity undermined the children's feeling of being human, leading to feelings of isolation and the notion that death would be better than life.

Julián and Annie experienced these gender identity questions differently, but they were not immune to the questioning even though they did not state that they were transgender. Repeatedly throughout *Annie's Plaid Shirt* (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015) Annie was shown participating in stereotypically male activities, riding a skateboard or breaking a piñata with the boys and cheering for them. In the illustration of Annie breaking the piñata, Annie was wearing shorts, a plaid shirt, and sneakers similar to the male perceived children in the picture. All of the female perceived children were wearing dresses. Annie's clothing and choice of activities marked them as different from the other girls. While the written text did not discuss Annie facing bullying or comments from other students, in one illustration it was shown that the girls were laughing at Annie. The body language from the girls shown in the illustrations made it appear as though the girls were whispering while pointing at Annie. Annie also experienced struggles with their gender being recognized by their family. Annie expressed frustration that their mother repeatedly wanted to buy them dresses even though they were not comfortable in this clothing. This led to Annie making the suit. This change from dress to suit underlined Annie's attempts to have their gender identity recognized. They did not want to be labeled as feminine; they were more masculine. As I have discussed prior, since Annie

did not claim a transgender identity, I cannot say that they were a trans boy, but these ways of being more masculine did show that Annie wanted to be recognized not as feminine, but as more masculine. These seemed to be clear attempts to have others recognize their gender identity as a trans boy or as nonbinary.

Julián did not have the same struggles around their gender identity being recognized. They also did not claim a transgender identity, but the way that they portrayed themselves indicated a possibly trans girl or nonbinary identity. The one moment in which Julián's gender expression was possibly questioned happened after their abuela took a shower. Julián wore a curtain for a mermaid tail or dress, fern leaves as long hair, and appeared to put on lipstick. When the abuela came into the room and saw them, Julián appeared nervous that they would be told that this was inappropriate for them. The abuela left Julián alone for a minute only to return with a necklace for them to wear and took Julián to a parade of mermaids, thus supporting Julián's desire to be a mermaid. The time prior to abuela giving Julián the necklace could have been when Julián was struggling with being recognized by their abuela, but also within themselves. Julián could wonder about their own gender identity and whether it was appropriate for them to be dressed as a mermaid. The support that Julián was given by their abuela reinforced their humanity and the way that Julián could choose to express themselves.

Authorial Intent and the Recognizability of the Children's Gender Identity

Rosenblatt (1994) discussed the idea that the reader interprets the text; much of the work is done by the reader as they digest the words on the page guided by their own background knowledge and experiences. It was more complex in the books I read about transgender children. There were times in which the way that the author presented the

child's gender through questioning at the end of the books or the way that the author used pronouns could change the way that the reader understood the gender identity of the child.

Gender recognizability and author's questions. In *Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?* (Savage & Fisher, 2017) the book ended by asking the reader, "do you think that Tiny is a boy or a girl? Does it matter if Tiny is a boy or a girl?" (n.p.) Both of these questions asked children to label Tiny as a boy or girl, even as it followed up with asking if this is important. The fact that the first question is asked implied that Tiny should choose or that the children should choose for Tiny. The authors may have been trying to make the point that Tiny's gender identity did not matter or that Tiny could choose to play with whatever they want regardless of their gender identity, but when they asked the reader to then name Tiny's gender, this undermined the idea that Tiny can choose a gender identity or not choose a gender identity. Taking the choice from Tiny also implied that Tiny is not human unless we as readers can identify their gender identity. What seemed like innocent questions may reinforce the point that the bully, Buster, made earlier in this book. If Tiny is not a boy or a girl, then Tiny is an it and hence, unworthy of our attention and playtime.

These types of questions not only appeared in *Are You or Boy or Are You a Girl?* (Savage & Fisher, 2017), they also appeared in *My Favorite Color is Pink* (Benedetto, 2015b) and *About Chris* (Benedetto, 2015a). In both of the Benedetto books, she ends these books with wonderings. In these wonderings the author posed different thoughts, for example, "I wonder why Patty wants to wear dresses" (Benedetto, 2015b, n.p.) and "I wonder why Chris dresses like a 'boy'" (Benedetto, 2015a, n.p.). These wonderings

seemed designed to elicit conversation between the reader and an adult or with others. These wonderings also undermined the gender identity that the child claims. The quotes I chose focused on the clothing, the gender expression of this trans child. While the author opened a door to conversations about the child's gender expression and possibly about their gender identity, she negated the choice that child has already made for their gender identity. Within *About Chris* (Benedetto, 2015a), Chris said they were a trans boy, so why wouldn't they want to wear boy clothing? When Benedetto (2015a) asked this question, it could be interpreted as saying that Chris was not born a boy so their wearing of male clothing was somehow wrong, or he should not be able to be recognized as a male. These questions and wonderings positioned the reader as the decider of what is and what is not appropriate in gender expression for another person.

Gender recognizability and pronoun usage. Another way that authors structured the readers' understanding of the character's gender identity is through the pronouns used for their characters. While gendered pronouns were not always used in these texts, especially when the story was from a first-person point of view, there were two different ways that pronouns appeared in the text; the same pronouns were used throughout the entire text or the pronouns changed within the text. When the pronouns were the same throughout the text, the pronouns used were based upon the child's authentic gender identity (Ehrensaft, 2013). For example, in *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008) Bailey was referred to as she throughout the book even when her family tells her that she cannot wear a dress because she was a boy. When the pronouns were consistent, they stayed the same even if people within the books contradicted the way that the character understood their gender identity. This consistency occurred not only in

10,000 Dress (Ewert & Ray, 2008), but in all of the books by authors who claimed a transgender identity, either trans male or trans female; the one book written by a nonbinary transgender author was *They Call Me Mix/ Me Llamán Maestre* (Rivas & Nuñez, 2018) which was written in first person; hence, no gendered pronouns were used for the trans child.

The other way that pronouns were used was that they changed throughout the text; they reflected the gender at the time that the narrative was taking place so before they came out as trans and then after they came out as trans.⁶ For example, this means that in *Jessie's Hat Collection* (Barnes, 2018), the pronouns used for Jessie were female prior to his telling his parents that he was a boy and male pronouns after he told them he was a boy. This change of pronouns was often not smooth since the pronouns did not change immediately for the trans child. Jessie told his parents that he was a boy on page 18 and then told his best friend on page 21, but in the text the pronouns were not changed until page 24. Female pronouns were used throughout the text until the pronouns finally did change. Within *When Kathy is Keith* (Wong, 2011), Keith insisted the entire text that he was a boy, telling his friends, his family, and his teacher that he was a boy, but female pronouns were used until almost the very last page of the book. In fact, Keith's mother is shown visiting multiple doctors to learn more about her child and they allowed him to change his name before the author then changed which pronouns were used for Keith. The way in which the author utilized pronouns throughout the story does influence the way that the character's gender identity could be understood. When the pronouns were

⁶ Within this section, I will utilize the gendered pronouns the children identified for their authentic selves, even if the authors changed the pronouns from male to female or female to male within the text. This is a way for me to not misgender these trans children.

consistent, the character's gender identity could be understood as the same as how they viewed themselves. Consequently, when female pronouns were used for Bailey, it was understood that Bailey was a girl even when her family did not support this gender identity understanding. When the pronouns changed, it could have reflected a changing understanding of the child's gender identity, but because the pronouns did not match the way that the child presented their gender identity, it could also negate the way that the reader understood the gender identity of the child. This misgendered the child and contradicted the way they understood their gender identity. The authors may not intend to misgender or contradict their character, but when the wrong pronoun was used, the reader might not believe the trans child represented the gender identity that they were claiming. At best, this could confuse a reader, especially a child; at worst, it served as a form of unintended denial of the humanity of the child to make their own decisions about their body.

Reinforcing and Resisting Gender Norms

Reinforcing Gender Norms

Gender norms exist implicitly in societies and they structure the way that gender is understood by others. As Butler (2004) noted, "norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce" (p. 41). While norms may not be explicit, their effect is seen through their appearance in people's lives. The trans girls in these books could not choose to wear a dress until they had disclosed their gender identity as female, but the trans boys could wear stereotypically masculine clothing such as a plaid shirt or a baseball cap. This

derives from the implicit ideas that exist within the United States culture in which girls can wear the clothing that is stereotypically considered for boys, but boys should not wear stereotypically feminine clothing. The trans children in the picture books I studied both reinforced and resisted gender norms throughout the text. Refer to Table 3 that illustrates the characters who resisted gender norms and those who reinforced gender norms. There was an overlap in which the two trans children who I highlighted as demonstrating instances of gender reinforcement also resisted gender norms at other points in their book. All of the children in these books except those who were nonbinary reinforced gender norms as this was the means to which they could gain recognizability for their gender identity from others.

Table 4.3 The Reinforcement of and Resistance to Gender Norms

Reinforcement of Gender Norms	Resistance to Gender Norms
Keith	Keith
Phoenix	Phoenix
	Bailey
	Tiny
	Annie
	Aidan
	Max
	Lourdes

Reinforcement of gender norms for nonbinary children. As mentioned in the previous section, *Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?* (Savage & Fisher, 2017) ended with questions about Tiny’s gender identity; specifically, whether the reader thinks they were

a boy or a girl. When asked their gender identity, Tiny did not choose one of the binary options but said, “I am me!” (Savage & Fisher, 2017, n.p.). When their peers asked Tiny their gender identity and when the authors asked the reader what they think Tiny’s gender identity should be, this served to re-center the binary gender options as the only options available to Tiny. Tiny was unable to not claim a male or female gender identity. They must choose one of these binary options or at least that was what was implied by asking the reader to make this choice for Tiny since they did not make the choice for themselves. This labeling worked to stabilize gender norms and to make these ideas static. This de-queered Tiny’s gender identity. As Lester (2014) noted, queerness can refer to the fact that “these identities are not fixed categories or necessarily static identity markers” (p. 245). When readers were asked to label Tiny’s gender identity, that identity is made static. Tiny may no longer move between boy and girl, wearing fairy wings at one point and being an explorer with a mustache at another point in their play. They now have to fit into the stereotype for their gender identity. If Tiny was a girl, they could wear fairy wings, but maybe not play with trucks or play soccer, as those activities are stereotypically for boys. If they were a boy, then they could play soccer with their friends, but possibly not wear the fairy wings as that is stereotypically for girls.

Reinforcement of gender norms for binary transgender children. Most of the books in this research were about trans children whose gender identity was binary; they identified as either a trans boy or a trans girl. Within these texts, trans girls all wore a dress as a way to confirm for themselves and others their gender identity; “...one, does not ‘do’ one’s gender alone. One is always ‘doing’ with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary” (Butler, 2004, p. 1). The trans girls had to continue to do their gender

through the wearing of a dress to make explicit their gender identity for those around them, even when these people were not present in the same space as the trans girls. This one way of being a female - wearing a dress - limited the ways in which femaleness could be understood by these girls. Phoenix (Finch et al., 2018) wore pants at points throughout her story. She engaged in stereotypically masculine play, playing with cars and trucks and building with blocks, and also stereotypically female play, dancing and playing with dolls. But when Phoenix needed to re-assert her gender identity and ensure that those around her understood that she was a girl, she relied on a dress. She had long hair which could mark her as female or she could paint her nails which is also stereotypically feminine, but she relied on wearing a dress to support her claim of girlhood. Phoenix even expressed some apprehension about wearing the dress as others may laugh at her because they misgendered her as a boy in a dress; however, Phoenix still saw a dress as the most important part of her gender expression. This importance of the dress is highlighted in the other texts I examined in which the trans girls either wear a dress the entire book (already socially transitioned) or as soon as they come out to their parents as transgender. In *When Kathy is Keith* (Wong, 2011) which was about a trans boy, Keith was shown in a dress for most of the book as a way to show the reader that Keith was a girl even as their words said they were a boy. This reinforced that girls must wear a dress even if they claim to be a boy. Keith was shown in clothing other than a dress when his parents finally believed him that he was a boy.

Trans boys in these texts were not shown with the same single item that marked them as male similar to the dress for the trans girls. The trans boys were shown to like or prefer hats or a tie and suit, just anything other than a dress. Trans boys seemed to have

more latitude in their gender expression. The important marker that they were not a girl is that they rejected a dress. This re-installed the dress as the single most important article of clothing that marked the difference between a female presenting person and a male presenting person. In addition, trans boys were generally shown wearing stereotypically masculine clothing, hats, ties, shorts, or pants from the beginning of the narrative, whereas the trans girls were not shown or allowed to wear stereotypically feminine clothing, a dress or pink clothes, until after they had come out as transgender. This led me to the conclusion that within these texts while there were multiple ways of being a boy, there was only one way to be a girl; girls must wear a dress especially in public situations in which others may be judging the gender identity of the child through their gender expression.

Resisting Gender Norms

In the previous section I discussed the way that gender norms were reinforced in these picture books. This section will focus on those moments within the text in which gender norms were resisted or queered. As Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth (2013) discussed queering serves “both as a way to name identities and practices that complicate or fail to fit the normative, stable formulation of these categories *and* as a way to name the process of that disruption and recognition” (p.145). The moments of resistance within these texts allowed the reader to see the trans children resisting gender normativity, from simply claiming a trans identity to engaging in both gender normative and gender nonnormative play to resisting gender labels entirely. Butler (2006) acknowledged that those who do not conform to gender roles risk being unrecognizable as a person, but also

Their persistence and proliferation, however, provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder. (p. 24)

These trans children opened up these matrices of options for readers, allowing them to see multiple ways of being boys and/or girls.

Claiming a transgender identity as resistance. For many of the trans children in these texts, the simple act of claiming and insisting upon a gender identity different from the one assigned at birth was an act of resistance. Bailey in *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008) continued to dream about dresses and asked different family members to help her to make these dresses even though each time she asked, she was told that she was a boy and that boys did not wear dresses. Keith in *When Keith is Kayla* (Wong, 2011) told his mother, father, and friends that he was a boy and was told that he was wrong. These trans children continued to assert their gender identity through resisting how others identified them. These children were doing their gender in ways that contradicted what they had been told their gender identity should look like. These children were asserting a bodily autonomy that is not always given to children.

Play as resistance. Some of the trans children engaged in play that moved both within and outside of gender norms. Phoenix (Finch et al., 2018) played with toys that were stereotypically appropriate for girls and for boys, while Tiny (Savage & Fisher, 2017) wore both fairy wings and an explorer outfit including a mustache within different moments of their play. Annie (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015), Aidan (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019), and Phoenix (Finch et al., 2017) all had a mix of gendered toys and items in their

bedrooms. They had dolls, cars, pictures of dinosaurs, and pictures of rainbows present in their bedrooms. Aidan (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019) was shown wearing a dress as a painting smock even after he had told his parents he was a boy. Even though Aidan did not want to wear a dress when he was gendered female, since he was now a boy, the dress could be repurposed as a painting smock. This allowed for a more complex understanding of the ways in which clothing did not have to represent a specific gender expression. In *Call Me Max* (Lukoff & Lozano, 2019), Max was talking to his friends about the fact that while he was assigned a female identity at birth, he was a boy. He talked to his friend Teresa about the fact that he liked to climb trees and play with insects so that made him a boy, not a girl. Teresa responded that she was a girl and liked these things too, to which Max said that may be true, but he was still a boy. Max also talked to his friend Steven about the fact that Max cannot be a girl because he did not like to wear dresses. Steven, who was wearing a dress, responded that he was a boy and he did like to wear dresses. Max said this was okay for Steven, but that Max knew he was a boy (Lukoff & Lozano, 2019). These moments of conversations between Max and his friends showed readers that there were multiple ways of being girls and boys, but that you can claim a gender identity that felt right to you, regardless of the gender expression that was stereotypically associated with that gender identity.

Being nonbinary as resistance. Finally, Lourdes (Rivas & Nuñez, 2018) claimed a nonbinary transgender identity. They discussed their discomfort with having to choose between boy-ness and girl-ness. This text also showed many of Lourdes' friends who were also nonbinary and/or transgender. These multiple gender expressions illustrated for the reader the many ways of expressing your gender identity. In this same text, Lourdes

showed how they, as a teacher, also showed their students the multiple ways of expressing your gender. Lourdes' honorific, Mx., also moved away from the gendered titles of Mr., Mrs., Ms., and Miss. This again demonstrated the ways in which gender can be queered. People can move along the gender continuum in ways that make them comfortable with the way they present to the world around them. Tiny (Savage & Fisher, 2017) demonstrated this movement when their sister asked whether Tiny is a boy or a girl today. Tiny moved along this continuum and so their sister wanted to know how Tiny identified in that moment or on that day. Tiny also refused to identify for others their gender identity when they engaged in play that crossed gender boundaries and even more directly, when asked their gender identity, Tiny said, "I am me!" (Savage & Fisher, 2017, n.p.). Both Lourdes and Tiny showed that gender does not have to be a binary identity, that people can move along this continuum in ways that make them comfortable. This movement allows for the resistance to gender norms in which readers may feel trapped.

Am I Trapped in This Body?: The Wrong-Body Discourse

Based upon Putzi's (2017) discussion of the presence of the wrong-body discourse (Engdahl, 2014) within Young Adult novels and the preliminary reading of the books about transgender children, these books were also analyzed for the wrong-body discourse (Engdahl, 2014). According to Engdahl (2014), the wrong-body discourse posits that transgender people were born in the wrong body, that their biology does not match their gender identity. This becomes problematic for trans theorists as this implies that biology - what is sometimes termed sex - is static and essential, while gender is socially constructed and fluid. This can serve to undermine transgender people's claims of the reality of their gender identity. Because gender, in this case, is thought to be

socially constructed and not materially real, those who claim a transgender identity are pretenders or liars (Bettcher, 2014). They cannot claim a different gender than their biology with which they were born, their material body is the reality, not what they say is their gender (Engdahl, 2014). This creates an essential gender identity that cannot be changed because biology cannot be changed without medical intervention (Bettcher, 2014). This leads trans children to experience tension in how they understand their gender identity versus how others see their bodies as representative of their gender identity. (Refer to Table 4 to see the texts in which the wrong-body discourse is discussed within this analysis.)

Ways the wrong-body discourse appear in the texts. Within the picture books I read, there were no discussions of hormones or surgery, even in the future for the transgender children, but often the transgender child said they were born or were trapped in the wrong body. As Jazz Jennings noted, “I have a girl brain but a boy body” (Herthel et al., 2014, n.p.). In this case Jazz was splitting her sex represented by her body from her gender represented by her brain. In *About Chris* (Benedetto, 2015a), Chris told his teacher, “It’s like this, Ms. Nina...from my belly button down--I’m a girl. But from my belly button up--I’m a boy!” (n.p.). In this case, Chris seemed to be literally splitting his body in half. He differentiated the top half of his body from the bottom half of his body. In both cases, the child was forced to separate their social gender from their understanding of their material body. Both Jazz and Chris represented how many of the children in these books began to understand themselves and their body. Their body was not theirs. Their body was a lie. What they see in the mirror and others see was not the truth.

Table 4.4 The Wrong-Body Discourse in These Books

Bold and Italicized= Focus books

Title of Book	Year of Publication	Gender Identity of the Protagonist	Protagonists' Name	Wrong-body Discourse
<i>10,000 Dresses</i>	2008	<i>Trans girl</i>	<i>Bailey</i>	<i>No</i>
Be Who You Are	2010	Trans girl	Hope	Yes
<i>When Kathy is Keith</i>	2011	<i>Trans boy</i>	<i>Keith</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Meet Polkadot	2013	Nonbinary	Polkadot	No
When Kayla was Kyle	2013	Trans girl	Kayla	Yes
But, I'm Not a Boy!	2014	Trans girl	Sarah	Yes
Call Me Tree	2014	Nonbinary	Tree	No
I am Jazz	2014	Trans girl	Jazz	Yes
About Chris	2015	Trans boy	Chris	Yes
<i>Annie's Plaid Shirt</i>	2015	<i>Trans boy?</i>	<i>Annie</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Are you a Boy Or a Girl?</i>	2015	<i>Nonbinary</i>	<i>Tiny</i>	<i>No</i>
My Favorite Color is Pink	2015	Trans girl	Patty	Yes
Truly Willa	2016	Trans girl	Willa	Yes
Jack (Not Jackie)	2018	Trans boy	Jack	No
Jessie's Hat Collection	2018	Trans boy	Jessie	No
<i>Julián is a Mermaid</i>	2018	<i>Trans girl?</i>	<i>Julián</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Phoenix Goes to School</i>	2018	<i>Trans girl</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>They Call Me Mix/Me Llan Maestre</i>	2018	<i>Nonbinary trans</i>	<i>Lourdes</i>	<i>No</i>
Call Me Max	2019	Trans boy	Max	No
<i>When Aidan Became a Brother</i>	2019	<i>Trans boy</i>	<i>Aidan</i>	<i>No</i>

Often the children struggled with deciding to tell their parents and others that they were not the gender that they were assigned at birth. These children were struggling with whether their parents would believe them. The children knew that there was a mismatch

between how their body appeared and their gender identity. These struggles were moments of the wrong-body discourse. The children felt trapped in a body that was not theirs and they did not know how to convince others that what appeared true was not true, they were not the gender assigned to them at birth. Within most of these texts, the children were not able to state an identity without having to fight against what was seen as the material reality of their body; they were born with male or female genitalia and that was what determined their gender identity. Sometimes within these books a doctor was the one who diagnosed the child as transgender. The child told their parents that they did not feel like they were the gender that was assigned to them at birth and the parents took the child to a counselor, but often it appeared to be the child's pediatrician, for instance in *I am Jazz* (Herthel et al. (2014) and *Be Who You Are!* (Carr & Rumbach, 2010).

Exceptions to the wrong-body discourse. Notably, books published in 2018 and 2019 no longer had elements of the wrong-body discourse. In addition, neither did books about nonbinary children, *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008), or *Annie's Plaid Shirt* (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015). This meant that in the smaller sample that I analyzed, only one book, *When Kathy is Keith* (Wong, 2011), contained any hints of the wrong-body discourse. Within *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008), there was no discussion of Bailey feeling trapped or any point in which Bailey stated their gender in any other term other than female. This text seemed to be an anomaly when examined alongside other texts. Within *Annie's Plaid Shirt* (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015) Annie doesn't express any bodily discomfort, which could be attributed to the fact that Annie is not yet openly trans or that Annie feels nonbinary.

We cannot know why this shift happened over time from the older books having discussions of the child feeling trapped in the wrong body to the newer books not having this element at all, but there could be multiple explanations depending on different factors. Within books about nonbinary children, these children were not trying to claim a binary gender identity, boy or girl, and so their body did not lie. It was merely their body and they could choose to express their gender in the way that fits the way they felt at that moment. Some explanation may also come from who was the author of some of these books. Kyle Lukoff wrote two of the books that appeared in 2019, *Call Me Max* (Lukoff & Lozano, 2019) and *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019) and so his experiences as a trans man also could have structured how he wrote trans boy characters. Since the transgender experiences was not the same for all people, his experiences of his gender identity were certainly different than Jazz Jennings experiences of her gender identity. Phoenix Finch, a trans girl, who co-wrote *Phoenix Goes to School* with her mother (Finch et al., 2018), may have had experiences that were more similar to Kyle Lukoff than Jazz Jennings. This did not explain all of these books, though, as several of them were written by authors who did not say they were transgender. The books that were published more recently may have benefited from the increased visible presence of transgender people in society, from Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner to Jazz Jennings. These examples may have led authors and publishers to accept that gender can be fluid and not fall back on essentialism as an explanation for how gender is understood. Even though Jazz Jennings was one of the authors of the book *I Am Jazz* (Herthel et al., 2014) which did utilize the ideas of the wrong-body discourse, her experiences as she matured

and the way that others saw her on television may have helped to contribute to an understanding of sex and gender as fluid.

When Kathy is Keith (Wong, 2011) is the one book in the small sample that mentioned the wrong-body discourse, but the publication date, 2011, aligned with the other texts that did mention this idea. The other note about *When Kathy is Keith* (Wong, 2011) is that when Keith told his parents, teachers, and friends that he was a boy, he did not mention being trapped, but in a series of illustrations we did see his mother visiting what appeared to be a counselor and a physician in addition to a school principal (there is a nameplate on the front of the principal's desk) after she was convinced that Keith was a boy and not a girl. The text that accompanied these illustrations mentioned Keith's parents going to doctors to learn more about Keith being transgender, in addition to talking to other parents and learning that Keith is not alone in his gender identity understanding. Keith was not shown in any of these pictures. While this may not have led directly to Keith thinking about his body as not matching his gender identity, it did seem to indicate that his parents, his mother especially, were exploring medical routes for Keith or that Keith was also attending counseling or doctor's sessions, but the reader was not shown this. The books that did not utilize the wrong-body discourse also did not mention or show any doctors or medical professionals. The trans child said they were a boy or a girl, which is different from what their parents thought when the child was born. Sometimes this difference was defined as being transgender and sometimes the term transgender did not appear in the text at all. In all of the cases though, the children in the more recent books, *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008), *Annie's Plaid Shirt* (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015), and books about nonbinary children did not focus on how the child's

body was different than their gender identity. These children did not struggle with being trapped in their body according to these books.

Summary

The analyses of these picture books showed that there were various versions of gender expression and gender identity available to and employed by the children within these books. There were children who identified as transgender even when that term may not have been used. Within the books that lacked the term transgender, the child may have identified as a girl who was assigned boy at birth, or a boy who was assigned girl at birth, but the text did not explicitly mention the term transgender. There were other texts in which transgender was defined as having a “girl brain but a boy body” (Herthel et al., 2014, n.p.). While other texts defined transgender as, “Trans means going across...Gender means being a boy or a girl. Or a little of both. Or not feeling like a boy or a girl” (Lukoff & Lozano, 2019, p.4). These definitions showed a progression of the terminology for transgender and the different ways that people think about this term, but also showed there were multiple ways of thinking about this term.

The question addressed within this dissertation was how picture books about transgender children can represent various versions of queerness in children. Lester (2014) highlighted the way in which queerness is about the nonnormative genders that appear within cultures and the fluidity of these genders. These results point to the fact that outside of a small group of books about nonbinary children, gender is still presented in a static and binary way in picture books. Trans girls still had to wear a dress as a way to be recognized both for themselves and to others as a girl. Trans boys did have more latitude in gender expression, but these books show that boyhood still had some

constraints around attire and choice of toys. This research also illustrated times in which even within the constraints of a binary gender identity, these children still resisted stereotypical gendering of play and toys.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study utilized a critical content analysis as a way to examine the representations of transgender children within picture books. Combining the ideas of queer theory and trans theory, this research examined the ways in which the cisgender body is normalized within picture books about transgender children through the representations of the transgender children as, at times, cisnormative. The findings indicate that while there could be multiple ways of presenting queerness within picture books about transgender children, often the same representations are shown. Trans girls are presented as wanting to wear a dress as the only way they can indicate their femininity. Trans boys have to be explicit in telling the adults in their lives that they are transgender, it is not enough to wear clothing that is stereotypically masculine. Finally, nonbinary children risk having their gender identity not thought of as a valid. These limitations lead to a wide variety of implications for teachers and students.

Discussion

The books examined in this study both portray a diverse category of existence but also re-inscribe the lack of diversity that tends to plague children's books in general. These texts reflect the same issues around a lack of diversity that researchers have noted about other queer books (Esposito, 2009; Lester, 2014; Taylor, 2012). The books not only lack racial and ethnic diversity, but also lack diversity in languages. In addition, a majority of characters in the books are portrayed as cisnormative.

Diversity Trouble

(White) trans children exist. Only four of the books in the larger set I studied – *Call Me Tree* (Gonzalez, 2016), *They Call Me Mix/Me Llaman Maestre* (Rivas & Nuñez, 2018), *Julián is a Mermaid* (Love, 2018), and *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019) – featured a child who was a Person of Color. This does privilege the experiences of White children who are transgender, as these are largely the only representations of trans children seen in picture books. As Sullivan and Urraro (2017) noted, there were very few books that were written in Spanish about transgender or gender nonconforming children. I found similar results with only two books that presented both English and Spanish in the text, *They Call Me Mix/Me Llaman Maestre* (Rivas & Nuñez, 2018) and *Call Me Tree* (Gonzalez, 2016). Both books were written in both English and Spanish with the texts in the different languages placed separately on the pages. While this does give readers of these languages a way to interact with this text, it does not allow for the child whose language experiences are a combination of Spanish and English. Again, this limits the representations of trans-ness and queerness that children see in picture books.

Trans children must pick a gender. This lack of diversity was also reflected in the number of texts that were written, with 10 books about trans girls, six books about trans boys, and only four books about nonbinary children. Within the books about nonbinary children, only two of these books have a narrative arc. The other two books are more poetic, *Call Me Tree* (Gonzalez, 2014), and *Meet Polkadot* (Broadhead, 2016), which is a discussion of gender and gender identity that is more informative and less

narrative. It is interesting to note, though, that the only two books that are written in Spanish and English are both about nonbinary children.

The higher percentage of trans girls represented in these books does fit with the research that showed gender nonconformity and trans-ness within AMAB children is noticed earlier and more readily than gender nonconformity and trans-ness in AFAB children (Meadow, 2018). The lack of representations of trans boys could connect with the societal ideas that girls can experiment with boy-ness, having short hair, playing rough games, and being involved in sports when they are younger. Boys are not given the same opportunities to experiment with girl-ness, and this is reflected in the number of books about trans girls and trans boys where books like *Annie's Plaid Shirt* (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015) can be dismissed as a book about a gender nonconforming girl, a tomboy, versus *Julián is a Mermaid* (Love, 2018), which is labeled as a book about a gender nonconforming boy or possibly trans girl.

Trans children live in a cisgendered world. Finally, other than in *Call Me Max* (Lukoff & Lozano, 2019) and possibly *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019), all of the other children that the transgender child interacts with are perceived as cisgender. Within *Call Me Max* (Lukoff & Lozano, 2019), one of Max's friends, Steven, is a boy who likes to wear dresses and one of his other friends, Teresa, is a girl who likes to climb trees and examine insects, which is noted as gender nonconforming within this book. In a video seminar, Kyle Lukoff mentions that he likes to think of the other children shown in a picnic scene in *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019) as all transgender (Potter, 2019), but this may not be obvious to the reader. The other books do not show multiple ways of being a boy or a girl in the same text that

includes a transgender child. This lack of representation of different ways for expressing gender only reinforces the ideas of a gender binary and may serve to isolate the transgender child. They are the one who is different, while all of the other children are the same, as cisgender and want to engage in gender stereotypical play.

Implications

Implications for Children

These books can benefit transgender, gender nonconforming, and cisgender children. As discussed in Chapter 1, while it is difficult to gauge the number of children who currently or will identify as transgender, the number hovers between 1%-2% for adults (Flores et al., 2016; Herman et al., 2017; Johns et al., 2019). These numbers seem to be on the rise as more young people identify as transgender. Since these numbers are still small, some of these transgender and gender nonconforming children may be left with little-to-no community; they may or may not have the support of their family and friends. These books can help provide that community for these children, as well as the mirrors (Bishop, 1990) these children need to see in books.

The breadth of these books also provides a wide variety of ways of being transgender. Within *Call Me Max* (Lukoff & Lozano, 2019), Max socially transitions to being a boy by telling his teacher to call him Max and by having his friends call him Max. It is not until his parents hear him playing with his friends that he tells them he is a trans boy. On the other hand, Aidan (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019) told his parents he was a trans boy before he dressed or engaged with the larger world as a boy. The same ability to socially transition by wearing the stereotypical clothing and hairstyle of a boy were not available for trans girls in these books, but these texts still provided ways for trans girls to

see others similar to them. It might give them the language to talk to a teacher or their parents about the fact that they think that the adults made a mistake when they were assigned a male gender identity at birth.

The books about the nonbinary children are where readers can see the widest experiences and discussions of the queer possibilities of gender within childhood. *Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?* (Savage & Fisher, 2017) shows Tiny engaging in multiple types of gendered play. They wore fairy wings at one point and played soccer with their friends at another point. Tiny was consistently asked to identify as either a boy or girl, both by a bully and by their friends. Tiny responded, “I am me!” (Savage & Fisher, 2019, n.p.) thus moving away from either of those choices. Lourdes in *They Call Me Mix/Me LLaman Maestre* (Rivas & Nuñez, 2018) demonstrated the ways in which the world is divided into binaries through clothing and toys. But Lourdes was able to also explain their nonbinary transgender identity since they were an adult writing about their own childhood. They explained to the reader that you do not have to make this choice; that they and others express their gender in the ways that are most comfortable to them.

Between Tiny’s and Lourdes’ stories, children can see opportunities to make active choices in their gender identity. These choices apply to not only transgender and gender nonconforming children, but also to cisgender children. While there is research that discussed how heterosexual children may begin to understand homosexuality through picture books about queer families (Ryan et al., 2013; Schall & Kauffman 2003), there is a gap about how books about transgender children can help cisgender children think about gender construction and multiple masculinities and femininities. When these books are read by and with children, this gap may lessen. All children, including cisgender

children, may begin to understand that gender expression can be fluid, that they can be a boy and still like things that are stereotypically thought to be for girls. In the same way that boys can make these choices, girls can also understand that they can like to wear pink or dance, but also want to play football outside during recess. Children can begin to think about how they do not have to stay within the bounds of the binary gender system. These understandings add to the way that children can choose to play with gender stereotypical toys, girls can want to be princesses and boys can want to play with trucks, but they can also make other choices as well. In addition, these actions do not necessarily move them away from being cisgender, but it provides a way for the child to understand other children or adults who are nonbinary, transgender, or gender nonconforming.

Implications for Families

All except one of the books within this study, *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008), portrayed the families of the transgender children as supportive. Bailey's family did not support her claim to being transgender as she was repeatedly told that she was a boy and she should not want to wear a dress. Within the rest of the books, the parents supported their children. In *When Keith Was Kathy* (Wong, 2011), Keith's family initially rejected his claim to being a boy, but later accepted that he was a trans boy. In other texts, for example *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019), the family accepted Aidan immediately and worked to help him to socially transition to boyhood. Since the majority of the texts showed the families accepting their children, this created a model for how other families can work with their children. These books provided a blueprint for families when their child tells them they are transgender. The stories showed parents who have to make adjustments in how they think about their child, they thought

they had a son when in fact they had a daughter or they thought they had a daughter when they had a son. These books showed love and care for the trans child and that is what these children need most.

These books also provided a way to talk to siblings of transgender children. If their sibling came out a transgender, this could be challenging for the other sibling. *Jack (Not Jackie)* (Silverman & Hatam, 2018) was written from the perspective of a cisgender older sister about her transgender brother. While this perspective does lead to some misgendering and deadnaming, within the text since it is written about how the big sister saw her brother as a sister until he came out, it also provided a way for families to talk about what it is like to have a sibling whose gender identity is different than what was assigned to them at birth. Finally, Fiona, Tiny's younger sister in *Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?* (Savage & Fisher, 2017), asked Tiny his gender identity at the moment when they are playing. This is another example of a way that a family can support a nonbinary child, they can be involved in asking the child what types of toys or games they want to play then or what clothing they feel best in wearing on that day. This allows the nonbinary child to make their own decision about how they want to express their gender. This support that is shown by families is what allows children to feel comfortable in their own lives and may possibly lower the suicide rate among transgender children.

Implications for Educators

Using these books in the classroom. The number of transgender and gender nonconforming youth in secondary and elementary school classrooms demonstrated that at some point in their teaching career, teachers could have a student who identifies as transgender or gender nonconforming. According to GLSEN (2012), elementary school

teachers reported that they feel they would be comfortable teaching a student who identified as transgender or gender nonconforming. Teachers also reported that while they have had a lot of training about diversity and multicultural issues, there has not been a lot of training about gender issues. Even though they do not have a lot of training about how to work with gender issues with their students, they did feel as though they and other school personnel have a responsibility to provide a supportive environment to students who identify as transgender and gender nonconforming (GLSEN, 2012).

These books help the children that read the books, and also help teachers to think about how to bring discussions about different gender identities and gender expressions into their classroom. Even though the number of young people who identify as transgender may be on the rise, it does not appear that teachers yet have the resources to work with transgender children (GLSEN, 2012). There have been studies that discussed how educators can utilize queer picture books with students. These researchers focused on two different threads of research. First, bringing the books about lesbian and gay families into educational settings for students to read and then discuss (Hartman, 2018; Ryan et al., 2013; Schall & Kauffmann, 2003; Van Horn, 2015). Other researchers have examined the messages that books about queer families and children provide prior to bringing these books into the classroom (Bittner et al, 2016; Crawley, 2017; Esposito, 2009; Lester, 2014). My dissertation research connects with the second set of studies. I was examining these books for the messages they portray, not necessarily how teachers could use these texts in their classroom. But looking forward to the ways that these books could assist teachers, these books could provide a way for teachers to open up their classrooms to different ways that gender can be expressed. *They Call Me Mix/Me Llamán*

Maestre (Rivas & Nuñez, 2018) was a book written by a nonbinary teacher about their experiences. This book ended with this teacher talking to their students about the multiplicity of gender identity and gender expression. This book could open the same avenues for other teachers. This book could be read as a way to start to think about how different people identify.

Beyond the written text, the illustrations provide another way to examine gender expression. Teachers can, and often do, use the illustrations in books to help support the text for students. They encourage students to tell the story through the pictures. The illustrations for the newer books about transgender children have become more engaging and interesting. While some of the books have limited details in the pictures, most of them provide interesting illustrations that not only support the story, but could help students stay interested in the story. Within *Julián is a Mermaid* (Love, 2018), the reader sees that Julián's body changes from having short hair and a boy presentation to longer hair, fuller lips, and a pink tail. While this is all in Julián's imagination, this does show a transition from one gender expression to another gender expression. The illustrations within this book are engaging and utilize bright colors as a way to bring the reader into the underwater world of Julián as a mermaid. By bringing the reader into the world and showing how Julián transitions in their mind, this could engage the reader's mind in imagining different ways to express their gender. The illustrations in this among all of the other picture books considered here provide a way for transgender and gender nonconforming students to see themselves in print and for cisgender students to see transgender students who may look like them.

Many of these books are about children who are experiencing childhood, a new sibling, their first day at school, or just going to school. The concern of some teachers that these books are about sex or present gender identity in graphic ways, such as discussing genitalia or body parts, is misplaced. These are books about kids. For example, *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Lukoff & Juanita, 2019) is about Aidan becoming a brother. The beginning of the book does explore Aidan's gender identity, but most of the book is about how Aidan prepares for a new sibling. He helps paint the baby's room and he wants to choose a name for the baby. These are all experiences that any child, regardless of their gender identity, could experience when there is a new sibling who will be entering the family.

Several of the books are about a child's first day at school and the nervousness around this event. *Tiny* (Savage & Fisher, 2018) discussed not being sure what they will do at school or who they will play with. *Phoenix* (Finch et al., 2018) was nervous about her first day at school and whether she will have any friends. In both cases, the experiences of going to school for the first time is a common one for all children. These books and many of the other books that featured children at school allow for teachers to read and focus on what it was like for the students in their classroom on their first day of school without having to solely focus on the gender identity of the transgender child. *Call Me Max* (Lukoff & Lozano, 2019) focused on Max's experiences at school and playing with friends, coupling this with a discussion of his gender identity. This book is longer and could lead to different types of discussions around gender identity, gender expression, and first-day nerves at school. These books provide a way to introduce topics around gender identity in combination with common life experiences for children.

The main argument against using books about queer children and families in schools is the same as the one about publishing these books; the children are too young or too innocent to understand these concepts. The idea that young children cannot understand these books as they have no concept of gender or sexuality was challenged by Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth (2013). These researchers pointed to the fact that while sexuality may not be an identity that is assigned to young children, gender certainly is, given the use of blue and pink as identifiers of gender, among other markers imposed upon children. Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth (2018) also pointed out that there is an assumed heterosexuality of all children. We see evidence of this when letter sounds are taught through the “marriage of Q and U” with one of the letters being represented by the AMAB child in the class and the other letter being represented by the AFAB children in the class or when children are lined up by presumed gender. Gender and sexuality are already present in schools whether or not teachers choose to teach about queer families and individuals (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). These books provide that space to acknowledge and talk about gender expression within school settings in addition to other common life experiences for children.

The addition of these books to classroom and school libraries. Several researchers suggested that teachers and school librarians include more queer books in their libraries as a way to give students more exposure to these texts. These authors also made some suggestions of how teachers could use these texts in their classrooms. Rowell (2007) pointed to the fact that there are not many books that reflect gay and lesbian families in libraries, classrooms, or discussions in children’s literature classes. These books were left out of the diversity narrative when diversity was brought to the forefront

in libraries, classrooms, and preservice teacher's education. These classrooms were including more multicultural books, but they were still leaving out books that reflected lesbian and gay families (Rowell, 2007). Knoblauch (2016) made similar suggestions about having teachers and school librarians add more books to their classroom and school libraries that reflected more diversity in terms of queerness. Both of these researchers discussed the reticence of teachers to include these texts or that teachers may self-censor these books from their schools, as they were afraid of how administrators and parents might react to these books in the classroom. Knoblauch (2016) suggested that teachers include books that may have queer secondary characters or utilize books, similar to the Todd Parr books about families, that allow teachers to discuss the diversity of families or gender expression without these elements specifically in the text. This does mean that librarians and teachers need to be willing to have these discussions about books that contain queer children. Some research (DePalma, 2016; Kelly, 2012) seems to indicate that some non-queer adults will re-frame books about queer families to re-center heterosexuality, adding in examples of step-families and divorced couples to explain having two moms or two dads rather than queer relationships (Kelly, 2012). While it is a possibility that some non-queer adults will re-center cisgender experiences to make books about queer children more cisnormative, these books are still needed in school and classroom libraries so that children can see these representations and teachers have the opportunities to talk about gender diversity.

Summary of Implications

Since there is no one way to be transgender, there is a need for more books about transgender children. Specifically, there is a need for more books about being a trans boy

and about nonbinary children. The books that do exist need to be present in classrooms more often. Since teachers talk about wanting to support all of their children, these books provide another way to support the students. These books can help teachers to move beyond whether they would tolerate transgender students in their classroom, as well as offer a way for teachers to show inclusion of all the gender expressions and identities of the students in their classroom.

Within education, there is a push to include more diversity in the classroom, often racial and linguistic diversity, but gender diversity must also be included. Children need to see themselves in the classroom, and books about transgender youth provide this. I began this dissertation asking you to think about yourself as a child and your gender identity and expression. Now I want you to think about the children that you come in contact with during your day whether they are your students, your own children, or the child that you see in the grocery store. As adults, we do not know what children are thinking and feeling. We cannot know whether a child is struggling with their gender identity until they tell us. We do not know if the child we perceive as a boy was assigned male at birth but is a girl. We do not know if the child we see in the grocery store was assigned female at birth and is now a boy. The books about transgender children allow us to open these doors for children to begin to think about their own and other's gender in new and exciting ways.

Future Research

This study suggests other research that needs to be done with books about transgender children. This includes taking the books into early childhood classrooms so researchers can examine how children and teachers read and understand the gender

identity and gender expression of the children in these books. Do the students have questions about how the child is presenting their gender? Do they wonder why Chris wants to dress like a boy similar to the idea that Benedetto (2015a) brings up at the end of her book? In addition, how do teachers understand these books? I read these books as a former early childhood classroom teacher and saw books about children trying to be children, worried about their first day at school, or wanting to be a good older sibling, but how are these books understood by other teachers?

The other line of research that occurred to me as I was conducting this research was about how gender nonconformity is thought of in picture books about gender nonconforming girls. I labeled Annie (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015) as possibly a trans boy or nonbinary, but I also understand how they could be thought of as a gender nonconforming girl. When I began this research, I found a lot of books about gender nonconforming boys, they wore dresses or they painted their fingernails, but finding books about gender nonconforming girls was harder. What does gender nonconformity in girls look like within picture books? Does it mean they do not wear a dress or that they do not like the color pink? Often, as Coyle et al. (2016) pointed out, gender nonconformity in girls is termed as being a tomboy, which did not have the same negative connotations for girls as being called a sissy does for boys. Meadow (2018) pointed to the fact that trans boys had to take more direct steps to indicate their transgender identity to their family. They had to tell their family directly that they were a trans boy or they committed self-harm to indicate that they were frustrated with their body. Trans girls' attraction to pink or dresses or princesses was often enough for parents and other caregivers to recognize their child's gender nonconformity and possible trans-ness, but a similar

affinity for stereotypically masculine things does not bring the same questions to the minds of AFAB children's caregivers (Meadow, 2018). So, where do gender nonconforming girls and trans boys find representations of themselves in books? Is it easier for them to find these representations because there are so many books, for example, that try to show girls that they do not have to like pink as with *Not All Princesses Dress in Pink* (Yolen, Stemple, & Lanquetin, 2010) or *Not Every Princess* (Bone, Bone, & Docampo, 2014)? But do these books, which purport to expand gender stereotypes for girls, actually do this or do they continue binary ways of understanding for AFAB children? If gender transgression for boys is overwhelmingly represented by wearing a dress, how is gender transgression for girls represented in picture books? These are the questions that books like *Annie's Plaid Shirt* (Davids & Balsaitis, 2015) bring to mind and should be considered in the same way that books about boys who wear dresses are analyzed.

Conclusion

This research has explored representations of transgender children within picture books. Utilizing a critical content analysis, I found that the ways that transgender children are shown within these texts are limited in most cases. Even though the transgender children were often limited in their gender identity and gender expression there were also times in which these children also worked to push the boundaries of gender identity and gender expression. They did this through simply being themselves and refusing to allow others to tell them they have to fit into the gender binary. This research has implications for students, families, and for educators. It creates ways for children to see themselves in books which should be a goal of every parent and educator. Ultimately, there needs to be

more books about transgender children and the books that do exist need to be read more within classrooms and in homes

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APPENDIX A

INITIAL SELECTION OF ALL POTENTIAL CHILDREN'S BOOKS FOR STUDY

Author	Book Title	Year of Publication	Gender Identity of Protagonist
Acosta, Alicia	I Love my Colorful Nails	2019	Gender nonconforming boy
Axel, Brett	Goblinheart: A Fairy Tale	2012	Trans girl
Baldacchino, Christine	Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress	2014	Gender nonconforming boy
Bansch, Helga	Odd Bird Out	2011	Cisgender male
Benedetto, Nina	About Chris	2015	Trans boy
Benedetto, Nina	My Favorite Color is Pink	2015	Trans girl
Bergman, S. Bear	The Adventures of Tulip, Birthday Wish Fairy	2012	Cisgender male
Bergman, S. Bear	Backwards Day	2012	Trans girl

Bone, Jeffrey & Lisa Bone	Not Every Princess	2014	Cisgender Girls
Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker	Ballerino Nate	2006	Gender nonconforming boy
Broadhead, Talcott	Meet Polkadot	2013	Nonbinary transgender
Carr, Jennifer	Be Who You Are	2010	Trans girl
Codell, Esmé Raji	The Basket Ball	2011	Gender nonconforming girl
Costa, Monique	When Leonard Lost his Spots	2012	Trans male parent
Davids, Stacy B.	Annie's Plaid Shirt	2015	Trans boy?
dePaola, Tomie	Olive Button is a Sissy	1979	Cisgender boy
Ewert, Marcus	10,000 Dresses	2008	Trans Girl
Fabrikant, Amy	When Kayla was Kyle	2013	Trans girl
Fierstein, Harvey	The Sissy Duckling	2005	Gender nonconforming boy
Finch, Michelle & Phoenix Finch	Phoenix Goes to School	2018	Trans girl
Funke, Cornelia	The Princess Knight	2001	Cisgender girl
Geeslin, Campbell	Elena's Serenade	2004	Cisgender girl
Gonzalez, Maya	Call Me Tree	2014	Nonbinary

Gould, Louis	X: A Fabulous Child's Story	1978	Nonbinary
Gruska, Denise	The Only Boy in Ballet Class	2007	Cisgender boy
Herthel, Jessica & Jazz Jennings	I am Jazz	2014	Trans girl
Hilton, Perez	The Boy with Pink Hair	2011	Cisgender boy
Hoffman, Mary	Amazing Grace	1991	Cisgender girl
Hoffman, Sarah & Ian Hoffman	Jacob's New Dress	2014	Gender nonconforming boy
Hoffman, Sarah & Ian Hoffman	Jacob's Room to Choose	2019	Gender nonconforming boy
Homan, Dianne & Maria Antonia Salgado	In Christina's Toolbox	1981	Gender nonconforming girl
Hovland, Henrick	John Jensen Feels Different	2011	Cisgender male
Ismail, Yasmeen	I'm a Girl!	2016	Cisgender girl
Jackson, Avery	It's Okay to Sparkle	2017	Trans girl
Jiménez, Karleen Pendleton	Are You a Boy Or a Girl?	2000	cisgender girl?
Johnson, Phillis Hacken	The Boy Toy	1988	Cisgender boy
Johnson, Myles	Large Fears	2015	Gender nonconforming boy

Judes, Mario-Odile	Max, the Stubborn Little Wolf	2001	Gender nonconforming boy
Kay, Verla	Rough, Tough Charley	2007	Trans man
Keene, M.F.	Bonnie Does Not Like Dresses	2015	Cisgender girl
Kemp, Anna	The Worst Princess	2012	Cisgender girl
Kiernan-Johnson, Eileen	Roland Humphrey is Wearing a What?	2013	Gender nonconforming boy
Kilodavis, Cheryl	My Princess Boy	2010	Gender nonconforming boy
Lantz, Frances	The Day Joanie Frankenhauser Became a Boy	2005	Gender nonconforming girl
Leaf, Munro	The Story of Ferdinand	1936	Cisgender male
Leone, Katie	But, I'm Not a Boy!	2014	Trans girl
Levy, Elizabeth	Nice Little Girls	1974	Gender nonconforming girl
Love, Jessica	Julián is a Mermaid	2018	Gender nonconforming boy
Lukoff, Kyle	When Aidan Became a Brother	2019	Trans boy
Mack, Bruce	Jesse's Dream Skirt	1979	Gender nonconforming boy
Magorian, Michelle	Jump!	1992	Cisgender boy

Martin Jr., Bill & John Archambault	White Dynamite and Curly Kidd	1986	Gender nonconforming girl
Mason, McNall & Max Suarez	Play Free	2012	Gender nonconforming boy
Mayeno, Laurin	One of a Kind Like Me/Único Como Yo	2016	Gender nonconforming boy
McAllister, Angela	Yuck! That's Not a Monster	2010	?
McGoon, Greg	The Royal Heart	2015	Trans girl
Milgrim, David	Time to Get Up, Time to Go	2006	Cisgender boy
Naylor, Willa	Truly Willa	2016	Trans girl
Newman, Lesléa	The Boy Who Cried Fabulous	2004	Cisgender boy
Newman, Lesléa	A Fire Engine for Ruthie	2004	Cisgender girl
Newman, Lesléa	Sparkle Boy	2017	Gender nonconforming boy
Phillips, Lynn	Exactly Like Me	1972	Cisgender girl
Reeves, Alice	Vincent the Vixen: A Story to Help Children Learn about Gender Identity	2018	Trans girl

Reichmuth, Beth	I'm Jay Let's Play	2017	Gender nonconforming boy
Rickards, Lynne	Pink!	2009	Cisgender boy
Rivas, Lourdes	They Call Me Mix/Me Llamán Maestre	2018	Nonbinary transgender
Savage, Sarah & Fox Fisher	Are you a Boy Or a Girl?	2015	Nonbinary child
Scamell, Ragnhild	Toby's Doll House	1998	Gender nonconforming boy
Schlein, Miriam	The Girl Who Would Rather Climb Trees	1975	Gender nonconforming girl
Silverman, Erica	Jack (Not Jackie)	2018	Trans boy
Skeers, Linda	Tutus Aren't my Style	2010	Gender nonconforming girl
Stiller, Laurie	Princess Max	2001	Gender nonconforming boy
Thom, Kai Cheng	From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish in the Sea	2017	Nonbinary
Van der Beek, Deborah	Melinda and the Class Photograph	1991	Cisgender girl
Walton, Jessica & Douglas MacPherson	Introducing Teddy: A Gentle Story about Gender and Friendship	2016	Trans girl

Winthrop, Elizabeth	Tough Eddie	1985	Cisgender boy
Wong, Wallace	When Kathy is Keith	2011	Trans boy
Wyeth, Sharon Dennis	Tomboy Trouble	1998	Gender nonconforming girl
Yolen, Jane & Heidi E.Y. Stemple	Not All Princesses Dress in Pink	2010	Cisgender girls
Zolotow, Charlotte	William's Doll	1975	Gender nonconforming boy

APPENDIX B

LIST OF BOOKS WITH TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NONCONFORMING CHILDREN

Author	Title of the book	Year of Publication	Gender Identity of the Protagonist
Acosta, Alicia	I Love my Colorful Nails	2019	Gender nonconforming boy
Baldacchino, Christine	Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress	2014	Gender nonconforming boy
Benedetto, Nina	About Chris	2015	Trans boy
Benedetto, Nina	My Favorite Color is Pink	2015	Trans girl
Bergman, S. Bear	Backwards Day	2012	Trans girl
Broadhead, Talcott	Meet Polkadot	2013	Nonbinary trans
Carr, Jennifer	Be Who You Are	2010	Trans girl
Davids, Stacy B.	Annie's Plaid Shirt	2015	Trans boy?
Ewert, Marcus	10,000 Dresses	2008	Trans girl

Fabrikant, Amy	When Kayla was Kyle	2013	Trans girl
Finch, Michelle & Phoenix Finch	Phoenix Goes to School	2018	Trans girl
Gonzalez, Maya	Call Me Tree	2014	Nonbinary
Gould, Louis	X: A Fabulous Child's Story	1978	Nonbinary
Herthel, Jessica & Jazz Jennings	I am Jazz	2014	Trans girl
Hoffman, Sarah & Ian Hoffman	Jacob's New Dress	2014	Gender nonconforming boy
Hoffman, Sarah & Ian Hoffman	Jacob's Room to Choose	2019	Gender nonconforming boy
Jiménez, Karleen Pendleton	Are You a Boy Or a Girl?	2000	Gender nonconforming girl
Johnson, Myles	Large Fears	2015	Gender nonconforming boy
Kay, Verla	Rough, Tough Charley	2007	Trans man
Keene, M. F.	Bonnie Does Not Like Dresses	2015	Gender nonconforming girl
Kiernan-Johnson, Eileen	Roland Humphrey is Wearing a What?	2013	Gender nonconforming boy
Kilodavis, Cheryl	My Princess Boy	2010	Gender nonconforming boy
Lantz, Frances	The Day Joanie Frankenhauser Became a Boy	2005	Gender nonconforming girl

Leone, Katie	But, I'm Not a Boy!	2014	Trans girl
Levy, Elizabeth	Nice Little Girls	1974	Gender nonconforming girl
Love, Jessica	Julián is a Mermaid	2018	Trans girl?
Lukoff, Kyle	When Aidan Became a Brother	2019	Trans boy
Mack, Bruce	Jesse's Dream Skirt	1979	Gender nonconforming boy
Mayeno, Laurin	One of a Kind Like Me/Único Como Yo	2016	Gender nonconforming boy
McGoon, Greg	The Royal Heart	2015	Trans girl
Naylor, Willa	Truly Willa	2016	Trans girl
Newman, Lesléa	Sparkle Boy	2017	Gender nonconforming boy
Reichmuth, Beth	I'm Jay Let's Play	2017	Gender nonconforming boy
Rivas, Lourdes	They Call Me Mix/Me Llanan Maestre	2018	Nonbinary trans
Savage, Sarah & Fox Fisher	Are you a Boy Or a Girl?	2015	Nonbinary
Schlein, Miriam	The Girl Who Would Rather Climb Trees	1975	Gender nonconforming girl
Silverman, Erica	Jack (Not Jackie)	2018	Trans boy

Skeers, Linda	Tutus Aren't my Style	2010	Gender nonconforming girl
Stiller, Laurie	Princess Max	2001	Gender nonconforming boy
Thom, Kai Cheng	From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish in the Sea	2017	Nonbinary
Wong, Wallace	When Kathy is Keith	2011	Trans boy
Wyeth, Sharon Dennis	Tomboy Trouble	1998	Gender nonconforming girl

APPENDIX C

LIST OF ALL BOOKS USED IN STUDY

Author	Title of book	Year of Publication	Gender Identity of Protagonist
Barnes, Nick	Jessie's Hat Collection	2018	Trans boy
Benedetto, Nina	About Chris	2015	Trans girl
Benedetto, Nina	My Favorite Color is Pink	2015	Trans girl
Broadhead, Talcott	Meet Polkadot	2013	Nonbinary trans
Carr, Jennifer	Be Who You Are	2010	Trans girl
Dauids, Stacy B.	Annie's Plaid Shirt	2015	Trans boy?
Ewert, Marcus	10,000 Dresses	2008	Trans girl
Fabrikant, Amy	When Kayla was Kyle	2013	Trans girl
Finch, Michelle & Phoenix Finch	Phoenix Goes to School	2018	Trans girl
Gonzalez, Maya	Call Me Tree	2014	Nonbinary
Herthel, Jessica & Jazz Jennings	I am Jazz	2014	Trans girl

Leone, Katie	But, I'm Not a Boy!	2014	Trans girl
Love, Jessica	Julián is a Mermaid	2018	Trans girl?
Lukoff, Kyle	Call Me Max	2019	Trans boy
Lukoff, Kyle	When Aidan Became a Brother	2019	Trans boy
Naylor, Willa	Truly Willa	2016	Trans girl
Rivas, Lourdes	They Call Me Mix/Me Llaman Maestre	2018	Nonbinary trans
Savage, Sarah & Fox Fisher	Are You a Boy Or a Girl?	2015	Nonbinary
Silverman, Erica	Jack (Not Jackie)	2018	Trans boy
Wong, Wallace	When Kathy is Keith	2011	Trans boy

APPENDIX D

FINAL LIST OF FOCAL BOOKS FOR DEEPER ANALYSIS

Author	Title of Book	Year of Publication	Gender Identity of the Protagonist
Davids, Stacy B.	Annie's Plaid Shirt	2015	Trans boy?
Ewert, Marcus	10,000 Dresses	2008	Trans girl
Finch, Michelle & Phoenix Finch	Phoenix Goes to School	2018	Trans girl
Love, Jessica	Julián is a Mermaid	2018	Trans girl?
Lukoff, Kyle	When Aidan Became a Brother	2019	Trans boy
Rivas, Lourdes	They Call Me Mix/Me Llamán Maestre	2018	Nonbinary trans
Savage, Sarah	Are you a Boy Or a Girl?	2015	Nonbinary
Wong, Wallace	When Kathy is Keith	2011	Trans boy