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The representations of LGBTQ themes and individuals in non-fiction young adult literature

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Abstract

Purpose – Social justice themes permeate the social studies, history, civics, and current events curricula. The purpose of this paper is to examine how non-fiction trade books represented lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals and issues.

Design/methodology/approach – Trade books published after 2000 and intended for middle grades (5-8) and high school (9-12) students were analyzed.

Findings – Findings included main characters' demography, sexuality, and various ancillary elements, such as connection to LGBTQ community, interactions with non-LGBTQ individuals, the challenges and contested terrain that LGBTQ individuals must traverse, and a range of responses to these challenges. Publication date, intended audience, and subgenre of non-fiction – specifically, memoir, expository, and historical text – added nuance to findings. Viewed broadly, the books generally engaged in exceptionalism, a historical misrepresentation, of one singular character who was a gay or lesbian white American. Diverse sexualities, races, ethnicities, and contexts were largely absent. Complex resistance structures were frequent and detailed.

Originality/value – This research contributes to previous scholarship exploring LGBTQ-themed fiction for secondary students and close readings of secondary level non-fiction trade books.

Keywords Social justice, LGBTQ, Informational texts, Young adult literature, Trade books

Paper type Research paper

This inquiry explored how trade books intended for middle grade and high school students incorporated and represented themes of sexual identity, particularly lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, queer, or non-binary identity (hereafter, LGBTQ) individuals. Previous empirical research examined young adult fiction with LGBTQ themes (Borah, 2016; Cart and Jenkins, 2006) and non-fiction children's trade books (Day, 2000); these studies, however, appear sparse and dated. Only non-fiction trade books intended for middle grades (5-8 grade) and high school (9-12 grade) readers were considered for this study. This content, genre, and targeted age range were carefully selected. There appears to be no research about recently published, LGBTQ-based young adult non-fiction trade books. I could locate no research about how the intended audience shapes how the included content is represented. There is a palpable need for research on LGBTQ curricula considering current social and political tensions. Recent judicial decisions and reactionary legislative responses emphasize the curricular necessity of LGBTQ content; the tensions between change and continuity are illustrated in the Supreme Court decision that ruled unconstitutional all state laws recognizing only heterosexual marriage (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015) and the North Carolina bathroom legislation that restricted legal protections for LGBTQ individuals and required transgender citizens use bathrooms assigned to their biological sex (North Carolina State Law, 2016). Three interdependent variables, which emerge from education initiatives shifting emphasis on what and how students should learn, contribute to the value of this research.

First, LGBTQ individuals experience conspicuous contempt and relational hostility, which manifests at times as anxiety and depression (Kosciw *et al.*, 2012). While all states must implement anti-bullying programs (Stuart-Cassel *et al.*, 2011), they differ in scope and sequence; there is no uniformity in curricula or implementation. Many states have mandated



LGBTQ topics within various grade levels and subjects (Russell *et al.*, 2006). Middle grades and high school social studies – specifically, civics, current events, social justice, and history – are a frequent place for curricular inclusion (Camicia, 2016). LGBTQ issues have also been mandated in lower grades and within various Kindergarten-12 (K-12) anti-bullying campaigns or social and emotional learning standards (Camicia, 2016). Curricular inclusion is important as democratic education is compromised when particular voices are disregarded (Apple, 2004), as Steven Camicia (2016) demonstrated in his juxtaposition of social, religious, and political tensions manifest in educational initiatives in Utah and California. The reactionary responses to radical change appeared within educational policy and curricula with starkly different results for each state. California prescribed a spiraled curriculum originating in fictional stories in the primary grades and extending non-fiction civics content in Advanced Placement US history; Utah's state-mandated curricula hardly recognized LGBTQ themes and individuals (California State Law, 2012; Camicia, 2016). LGBTQ-based trade books were a catalyst for curricular regulations in Utah and curricular integration in California. It appears, however, that no one has empirically examined the representation of LGBTQ individuals and themes within non-fiction trade books.

Second, contemporary education initiatives guide both content and strategy. The Common Core State Standard Initiative shifts emphasis on the genres students read in English and language arts and the types of texts students examine in social studies and history (SSH) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Fiction used to be ubiquitous in English and language arts (McMurrer, 2008; Wilton and Bickford, 2013), but English and language arts teachers beginning in the primary elementary grades now balance fiction and non-fiction. Topics with history, social studies, civics, or social justice themes are no longer the possession of SSH teachers. To supplement English and language arts changes, the National Council for the Social Studies (2013) recommends increased readings of multiple texts from diverse perspectives at every grade level beginning in elementary school. SSH teachers have traditionally relied on a single textbook (McMurrer, 2008; Wilton and Bickford, 2013), but now utilize multiple texts from or about different people who experienced the same event. These shifts are significant as all English, language arts, social studies, and history teachers are to position students to critically evaluate multiple perspectives of the same issue. Social justice themes and LGBTQ individuals are ideal additions to traditional social studies content because of the curricular connections to civics, current events, and history (Camicia, 2016); such themes and individuals also appear in various literature and trade books for English and language arts. Teachers, though, must be aware of how books represent (and misrepresent) LGBTQ issues when selecting multiple, quality books.

Third, the initiatives require educators to adjust their curricula, yet provide no materials and curricular guides. Teachers may view this as an unfunded mandate. Trade books, as noted above, are logical curricular tools valued differently by distinct groups. Students like their engaging narratives; teachers appreciate how books written at different reading levels can help learners of disparate abilities grasp the same content; principals welcome their comparably low cost (Schwebel, 2011; Williams, 2009). As trade books do not have the editorial review boards like textbooks, misrepresentations abound. Teachers cannot turn to academia because the research is incomplete. Researchers have explored LGBTQ-based fiction (Borah, 2016; Cart and Jenkins, 2006) and non-fiction trade books (Day, 2000), yet neither is current; new inquiries are necessary. Teachers remain unaware about each book until after purchase because publishers report only reading level, a brief summary, and perhaps graphic or violent content. Representation, with all its nuanced elements, cannot be easily measured and is not reported by book publishers and distributors. A curious teacher cannot trust online summaries or reviews because writers are likely non-experts (like teachers or parents) or those with a vested interest in the sale of the book (like authors

and editors). Researchers must fill the void, and research indicates even non-fiction trade books are unpredictable (e.g. Bickford, 2015; Bickford and Badal, 2017; Bickford and Schuette, 2016). Children's and young adult literature, for instance, increasingly include more female protagonists, yet gender representation is not balanced (e.g. Chick and Corle, 2012; Chick *et al.*, 2010; Eaton, 2006; Tschida *et al.*, 2014). Scholars have explored the prevalence and portrayal of (hetero)sexuality in young adult fiction (Callister *et al.*, 2012), profanity in adolescent fiction (Coyne *et al.*, 2012), and LGBTQ themes within young adult fiction and how representations have changed over time (Borah, 2016; Cart and Jenkins, 2006). One researcher has completed close readings of every LGBTQ-themed book published in the twentieth century, but findings were not empirically examined (Day, 2000). No one has empirically examined how LGBTQ people and themes are represented within recently published non-fiction trade books intended for middle and secondary students.

The inquiry has a cognitive constructivist theoretical framework (Bransford *et al.*, 2000; Lee, 2005; Nokes, 2011) and three presumptions. First, LGBTQ themes are necessary in school because they are relevant to society, which benefits from an engaged and civic-minded public. Second, trade books are imperfect because they are not comprehensive, yet they are a valuable curricular resource that can evoke students' interest in social justice. Finally, teachers should be aware of topics and themes trade books include and disregard.

Method

Inductive content analysis was used; it is a rigorous qualitative research method developed and refined in various fields (Elo and Kyngas, 2007; Kline, 2008; Krippendorff, 2013; Maxwell, 2010; Pillow, 2003; Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). Specific steps were taken to establish a current data pool extending from where past research ended. First, all LGBTQ-themed trade books published after 2000 were collected using the largest resources for young adult literature (Scholastic, 2016; Barnes and Noble, 2016; Booksource, 2016; Amazon, 2016). The Stonewall Book Awards List 2016, constructed by an LGBTQ committee sponsored by the American Library Association, was closely consulted. All fiction books were removed to ensure a non-fiction data pool. To consider how LGBTQ issues and people are differently represented in trade books for middle and high school students, the books' reading level was determined using triangulated data from, where available, Advantage/TASA Open Standard, Lexile, Grade Level Expectations, and Developmental Reading Assessment. Trade books targeting elementary students were removed. The data sample consisted of exactly half the total pool ($n = 53$; 50 percent) (see Appendix 1).

To generate empirically-based findings, both open coding and axial coding were utilized (Krippendorff, 2013). During open coding, a single question guided the reading as each book was evaluated for observable patterns and anomalies to the patterns (Appendix 2). Notes about emergent patterns were synthesized into tentative, testable codes for axial coding, which emerged into more than two-dozen questions (Appendix 2). Axial coding explored what was included, how it was represented (or misrepresented), and what was omitted. As an adult writer might incorporate content a young reader might not fully grasp, attention was paid to how content was included. It was determined whether the content would be reasonably clear to a typical student who reads at the book's intended reading level. The questions contained within the open coding and axial coding reviews align with previous content analyses of similar literature (Borah, 2016; Callister *et al.*, 2012; Cart and Jenkins, 2006; Coyne *et al.*, 2012). Microsoft Excel was used to organize the data. Data were disaggregated to determine patterns of, for example, a sexuality or demographic element. Disaggregation enabled the determination of the presence of patterns and their frequency.

Each step in this research – from the data pool to the data sample to the data collection and analysis methods – aligns with best practice (Krippendorff, 2013; Maxwell, 2010;

Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). The methods correspond with similar empirical research (Bickford, 2015; Bickford and Badal, 2017; Bickford and Schuette, 2016; Chick and Corle, 2012; Chick *et al.*, 2010; Desai, 2014). This study has no less than three limitations. First, the data sample ($n = 53$) comprised only half of the entire data pool. While the sample is appropriate and aligns with qualitative content analysis methodology (Elo and Kyngas, 2007; Kline, 2008; Krippendorff, 2013; Maxwell, 2010; Pillow 2003; Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009), a larger sample could have yielded more nuanced results. Second, trade books are contextually contingent to the time in which they were published, yet the dozens of authors and their myriad intents cannot be disentangled from the dates in which the content was published (from 2000 to 2016). These books were all published after Matthew Shepard's murder and during a time in which various LGBTQ-oriented laws were enacted by states and evaluated by the courts. Third, while all qualitative research protocols for inductive content analysis were followed (Krippendorff, 2013; Maxwell, 2010; Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009), human error is always possible.

Findings

The data pool included only randomly selected non-fiction trade books published after 2000 ($n = 53$). As nearly half ($n = 23$; 43 percent) of the books were published in the last third of the sampling period, there was a small but conspicuous increase in non-fiction LGBTQ themes, people, and issues (Table AI). A demonstrable pattern emerged regarding the sexualities included as main or significant secondary characters. Almost half of the trade books ($n = 25$; 47 percent) included multiple primary characters of diverse sexualities; gay and lesbian individuals were most common (Table AI). Of trade books that included a single LGBTQ character, most were gay ($n = 13$; 25 percent) or lesbian ($n = 9$; 17 percent) (Table AI). No trade book concentrated on a bisexual or asexual main or central character. Also, transgender or transsexual ($n = 4$; 8 percent) individuals, those questioning their sexuality ($n = 1$; 2 percent), and non-LGBTQ advocates ($n = 1$; 2 percent) were rare (Table AI). No other sexualities appeared. Most trade books centered on either white Americans ($n = 29$; 54 percent) or a diverse and undistinguishable mixture of races, ethnicities, and cultures ($n = 15$; 28 percent), as just a few had non-white American ($n = 3$; 6 percent), non-American ($n = 4$; 8 percent), or no central character ($n = 2$; 4 percent) (Table AI). Taken cumulatively, non-fiction LGBTQ-based trade books increased in number; white gay and lesbian American characters overshadowed non-white, non-American; transgender, transsexual, bisexual, and asexual figures were underrepresented or conspicuously absent.

Social psychologists, educational psychologists, and historians of sexuality and sexual regulation recognize the tenuous, multilayered terrain LGBTQ individuals must navigate and have historically traversed (Chauncey, 1994; Eder *et al.*, 2001; Kosciw *et al.*, 2012; Pipher, 1994; Rowse, 1977). LGBTQ individuals within nearly all trade books confronted multiple challenges ($n = 49$; 92 percent) with most encountering more than four distinct hazards ($n = 36$; 68 percent) (Table AI). The contested landscape, while different in every narrative, included various social (peers, family, generational, etc.), legal (marriage, military service, etc.), physical (victimization, incongruence with physical body, etc.), mental or emotional (confusion, questioning sexuality, stress, depression, etc.), and spiritual challenges. Rarely did a trade book center on a single challenge; those that did were largely memoirs about adolescence and social barriers to acceptance ($n = 4$; 8 percent) (Table AI). Trade books represented the distinct, layered, and numerous challenges facing LGBTQ individuals.

Non-LGBTQ individuals appeared in every book. They materialized as bullies, advocates, silent but aware bystanders, or bystanders oblivious to the protagonist's plight. Most central characters ($n = 38$; 72 percent) experienced bullies, advocates, and bystanders (Table AII), which mirrors the lived experiences of most LGBTQ individuals. A few central characters faced only antagonistic bullies ($n = 8$; 15 percent) or only apathetic or uninformed bystanders

($n = 3$; 6 percent); who appeared most frequently in memoirs about rural American or constrictively religious contexts (Table AII). Some central characters ($n = 4$; 8 percent) experienced near-universal support from numerous advocates (Table AII), which was anomalous for the data sample. In general, most trade books included advocates, bullies, and bystanders, which represents the experiences of most LGBTQ individuals.

The LGBTQ community is an admitted conflation, yet it is necessary for inquiry into the mosaic of possible support (Camicia, 2016). The LGBTQ community was present in nearly all trade books ($n = 50$; 94 percent); most books explicitly denoted an active community ($n = 34$; 64 percent) and a sizeable portion implicitly or vaguely referenced the community ($n = 16$; 30 percent) (Table AII). Locating and obtaining support from the LGBTQ community was essential as homophobia and heteronormativity assiduously emerged in every book, whether conspicuously ($n = 50$; 94 percent), inconspicuously ($n = 51$; 96 percent), or both ($n = 49$; 92 percent) (Table AII). While all LGBTQ individuals confronted acrimony, it was surprising more LGBTQ individuals tolerated vitriol and passively hoped for acceptance ($n = 50$; 94 percent) than intentionally and assertively resisted ($n = 38$; 72 percent) (Table AII). This perhaps was the result of the multifaceted support most LGBTQ individuals garnered from various individuals along with the diverse groups of people – the LGBTQ community, non-familial allies, and family members – confronting homophobia. An amalgamation of support and resistance to vitriol appeared in the vast majority of books ($n = 43$; 81 percent) (Table AII). Taken cumulatively, most LGBTQ individuals garnered support from the LGBTQ community and non-LGBTQ individuals, which LGBTQ individuals appreciated and deemed necessary due to the ubiquity of homophobia and heteronormativity.

Social studies teachers interested in social justice topics will value the diverse sexualities, various responses by non-LGBTQ individuals, the LGBTQ community, and assorted challenges. The frequent profanity and explicit sexual references in most books ($n = 31$; 58 percent), however, will likely give some teachers pause (Table AI). Almost half of the books ($n = 23$; 44 percent) could be viewed as questionable in classrooms because of vulgarity and graphic sexual content (Table AI). A comparable portion, though, were without vulgarity and graphic sexual content ($n = 22$; 42 percent) (Table AI). The high occurrence of profanity and overt sexual references suggests the books were intended for college and adult readers. A closer look at the reading levels, though, indicated most were written for the middle grade range ($n = 41$; 77 percent) with only a few targeting high school students ($n = 10$; 19 percent) or adults ($n = 2$; 4 percent) (Table AI). When the data were disaggregated, few books intended for high school or adult readers were profane and had explicit sex scenes ($n = 3/12$; 25 percent), yet many middle grade books were profane and contained explicit sex scenes ($n = 28/41$; 68 percent) (Table AI). It may seem counterintuitive that books intended for younger readers were more overtly profane, yet a consideration of the books' subgenre provides a possible explanation. Memoirs were profane ($n = 24/36$; 67 percent) more frequently than expository or historical texts ($n = 7/17$; 41 percent); middle grades books – or those intended for lower readers – were more often memoirs ($n = 30/41$; 73 percent) than in those intended for older students ($n = 6/12$; 50 percent) (Table AI). Memoirs had higher incidences of both profanity and overt sexuality with lower reading levels than expository or historical texts. One possible explanation is that memoir authors wrote in simpler prose and uncomplicated syntax to muster wider audiences. Another possible explanation is that memoir authors are not trained in the academy – known for esoteric language and pedantry – as authors of expository or historical texts might be. The former explanation (intended audience) appears more likely than the latter (authorial training), which relies on more speculation than observation. This is not to imply any sweeping claim about genre and authorial preparation. It is, though, an inference derived from observations and analyses of this specific sample of trade books.

A juxtaposition of the non-fiction subgenres of memoir ($n = 36$; 68 percent) and expository and historical text ($n = 17$; 32 percent) yielded other important findings (Table AI). There were no demonstrable differences in publication dates, diverse sexualities included, and the presence and proportion of bullies, advocates, and bystanders. There were, however, curious patterns involving race and ethnicity, the representation of the LGBTQ community, the number of challenges faced, and the protagonists' responses to various challenges (Tables AI and AII). Expository and historical texts included more diverse races and ethnicities ($n = 10/17$; 59 percent) than those including only White Americans ($n = 7/17$; 41 percent). Memoirs, in contrast, largely centered on White Americans ($n = 22/36$; 61 percent) (Table AI). Expository and historical texts seamlessly integrated the LGBTQ community more frequently ($n = 15/17$; 88 percent) than memoirs ($n = 19/36$; 53 percent) (Table AII). Stated differently, expository and historical texts contextualized LGBTQ individuals more broadly than memoirs, which positioned the protagonist more singularly. Similarly, there was a difference between subgenres in both quantity of challenge and concerted response. Expository and historical narratives detailed more challenges confronting LGBTQ individuals more frequently than memoirs. Most expository and historical texts ($n = 14/17$; 82 percent) included more than four distinct challenges whereas only a simple majority of memoirs did ($n = 22/36$; 61 percent) (Table AI). Expository and historical texts detailed active, intentional, conspicuous resistance to these challenges more frequently ($n = 15/17$; 88 percent) than memoirs ($n = 23/36$; 64 percent) (Table AII). Viewed broadly, expository and historical texts more holistically represented LGBTQ individuals, community, challenges, and patterns of resistance than memoirs, which were largely engaging yet limited on the intersections of power. This is not to suggest that either subgenre is unhelpful or that only one is worthy of consideration within a classroom. The subsequent section discusses the significance of research findings and offers suggestions for teachers.

Discussion

The movement for equitable treatment of and acceptance for LGBTQ individuals involves countless people, distinct contexts, diverse challenges, and various social, political, and legal elements. No book could cover every nuance, especially not one intended for middle grade or high school students. For each book, readers can find if and how it incorporated the reviewed content (Appendix 2 – content analysis) and how it compares with others in the sample (Table AI – grade level, degree of vulgarity, subgenre, LGBTQ, demography, and challenges; Table AII – sources of support, types of resistance, and types of intolerance). Issues and implications appeared for both scholars and practitioners.

Issues and implications for researchers

The inquiry identified distinct patterns of representation. Meaning can be derived when patterns are considered in relation to the findings of previous research. This subsection is intended to raise issues, not draw conclusions.

Books that are LGBTQ-based increased in comparison to previous research (Borah, 2016; Cart and Jenkins, 2006; Day, 2000). When the data sample is reduced to its core findings, the trade books typically centered on a singular character transcending a tenuous situation. The main character was generally gay or lesbian, white, and American. Diverse sexualities, races, ethnicities, and contexts were largely absent. Gay males distinctly outpaced lesbian characters ($n = 13/9$), which aligns with scholarship reporting an increase in – but still unequal balance of – female protagonists in comparison to male protagonists in trade books (e.g. Chick and Corle, 2012; Chick *et al.*, 2010; Eaton, 2006; Tschida *et al.*, 2014). Based on this sample, the gender-based gap has not closed. There also is inadequate representation of individuals who identify as bisexual, transgender, transsexual, questioning, or non-binary

identity, of which only transgender and transsexual had more than one central protagonist. The lack of demographic and sexual diversity appears as a concern.

Profanity and explicit sexual references appeared in a distinct portion of the trade books. When compared to the research literature, LGBTQ-based non-fiction trade books had comparable levels of profanity (Coyne *et al.*, 2012). The books in this sample were no more profane than literature intended for similar audiences. Profanity appeared as an ingredient of adolescence, which was similar to comparable literature. This study reported fewer depictions of explicit sexual content than similar trade books intended for teenage learners (Borah, 2016; Callister *et al.*, 2012; Cart and Jenkins, 2006). Sexuality was ubiquitous; sex was not. Sexuality was, at times, central to one's core identity and, at other times, one of many important elements that comprise an individual's core identity. Akin to other demographic elements, the protagonists insisted their sexuality be acknowledged, worked to obtain acceptance, and resisted ridicule. In these ways, most characters attained – or were close to attaining – the highest levels on the Cass (1979) Model of Gay and Lesbian Identity Development, a widely accepted six staged theoretical framework (e.g. Borah, 2016; Callister *et al.*, 2012; Cart and Jenkins, 2006; Coyne *et al.*, 2012; Day, 2000). A character first considers the possibility of being gay (Identity Confusion), grasps the implications (Identity Comparison), seeks other who are similar (Identity Tolerance), constructs a more positive view and prudently discloses to select others (Identity Acceptance), publicly identifies (Identity Pride), and, finally, accepts sexuality as but one element of a mosaic-like self (Identity Synthesis) (Cass, 1979, pp. 219-235). As every protagonist was beyond Identity Acceptance and at or nearing Identity Synthesis, sexuality was an integral element of self. As the Cass (1979) Model considers individuals' sexual identity development, it is not always an appropriate framework for all books. Some expository texts, for instance, did not always have a single main character and were not included in the previous statement. Beyond this nuance, findings about sexuality and profanity largely aligned with the research literature.

Exceptionalism, a historical misrepresentation, emerges when an anomaly is portrayed as typical (Schwebel, 2011; Williams, 2009). For instance, Frederick Douglass's escape from and life after slavery do not represent a typical slave's experience. If only Douglass's story was told, readers would generate unrealistic impressions of slavery. Douglass should be celebrated, but he should be contextualized as an anomaly. LGBTQ-based trade books frequently centered on the atypical. While common in literature, this is a concern within the field of social studies education because it is not historically representative (Bickford, 2015; Bickford and Badal, 2017; Bickford and Schuette, 2016; Collins and Graham, 2001). Exceptional historical figures deserve recognition, yet history is not only about the singular actions of a particular person; it is also about the manifest tensions when continuity confronts change and the historical significance of those involved (Seixas and Morton, 2012). The LGBTQ-based trade books had demonstrable patterns of exceptionalism. Teachers, though, can make curricular decisions to address the historical misrepresentation, which are provided in the subsequent subsection.

There appear to be, as noted above, no parallel inquiries within the social studies education field. While there are various studies on historical figures, this inquiry was thematic. Various individuals, however, emerged from these themes. The most comparable research might be the Black Freedom Movement (hereafter, BFM), which originated with slavery and continues beyond the traditional Civil Rights Movement. Scholars have explored various aspects of the BFM within children's books, young adult literature, and young adult trade books (e.g. Bickford, 2015; Bickford and Schuette, 2016; Schwebel, 2011; Williams, 2009). Individuals emerged to represent distinct eras or events – like Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King – much like the conspicuous protagonist in most LGBTQ-based trade books. In other words, iconic individuals

frequently overshadowed contemporaries in both LGBTQ and BFM trade books. The narratives for LGBTQ and BFM trade books often ended with noticeably upbeat messages. Scholars have characterized the latter as chronological ethnocentrism, a historical misrepresentation (Bickford, 2015; Bickford and Schuette, 2016; Schwebel, 2011; Williams, 2009). Similar conclusions can be drawn for LGBTQ-based books, especially considering reactionary resistance is seemingly ubiquitous and multifaceted. The types of resistances that LGBTQ and BFM individuals faced also differed. Within the BFM literature the central figures generally faced a clear, single antagonist, like a slave owner, or reactionary system, like de facto segregation. LGBTQ protagonists, however, confronted multifaceted resistances with various combinations and alterations. In these ways, findings about LGBTQ and BFM trade books curiously converged and diverged.

Issues and implications for teachers

LGBTQ individuals and issues are an important element of social justice curricula that benefit all students and citizens. Certain trade books are more likely to pique students' interests and complicate their understandings about the experiences of LGBTQ individuals. Teachers can make pedagogical decisions positioning students to view LGBTQ themes and individuals as a mosaic, which is more representative than many books present.

While all trade books had worthwhile attributes, some deserve special consideration. Linas Alsenas's (2008) *Gay America: Struggle for Equality* and Jerome Pohlen's (2016) *Gay and Lesbian History for Kids* are as close to comprehensive as perhaps is possible in middle and high school curricula. While both are similar in coverage and historical representation, Alsenas's *Gay America* has the complicated prose and syntax of a high school audience whereas Pohlen's *Gay and Lesbian History for Kids* could be used in either a middle or high school classroom. Ken Setterington's (2013) *Branded by the Pink Triangle*, with a haunting narrative about LGBTQ individuals' experiences within Nazi Germany, is positioned to be a whole class novel in an eighth grade (or above) class. Whereas *Branded by the Pink Triangle* is situationally focused to a historical era, other books center on a particular person and their historical contributions to the LGBTQ movement. Dustin Lance Black's (2009) *Milk* is a detailed biography of Harvey Milk; it is somewhat limited in scope to the political and social scenes in California in the 1960s and 1970s. Calvin Craig Miller's (2005) *No Easy Answers* historicizes Bayard Rustin's contributions to the Civil Rights Movement and the resistance he faced – from within and beyond the African American community – as an openly gay black male. LGBTQ issues are not absent in Miller's *No Easy Answers* but they are also not at the forefront, which aligns with how Rustin prioritized racial politics over sexuality politics (Anderson, 1997; Podair, 2009). Jeanne Cordova's (2011) *When We Were Outlaws* complements both Black's *Milk* and Miller's *No Easy Answers* well; Cordova incorporates similar locales and time periods yet considers the involvement in and implications of social movements, specifically those of women's and lesbian liberation, whereas Black's and Miller's biographies focus more on the social and political impact of a dynamic figure. In selecting a history-based topic for an LGBTQ unit, teachers should consider using LGBT-Inclusive Curriculum for Educators (2016), Unheard Voices: Stories of LGBT History (2016), Facing History and Ourselves (2016), and The FAIR Education Act (2012), for primary source material and history-based social justice lesson plans. Any number of combinations can easily balance the aforementioned lack of diversity and emergent exceptionalism within various trade books.

Various expository texts could move class discussions beyond the historical and into the contemporary, like for current events or of personal relevance. Students might also want answers to questions they only ask silently and in the safety of their minds. In prose accessible for middle grade students, Eric Marcus's (2000) *What If Someone I Know Is Gay?*, Tina Fakhrid-Deen's (2010) *Let's Get This Straight*, and Kathy Belge and Marke Bieschke's (2011) *Queer* all have chapters and sections centered on feelings, friends, family, parents,

religion, activism, and age-specific concerns for children, teenagers, and adults. Whereas these books are wide in scope, others are more focused. In legalese simplified for high schoolers, Lisa Keen's (2007) *Outlaw* attends to the various, sometimes unknown, and largely state-based LGBTQ-oriented legal regulations. Mara Christine Drummond's (2009) *Transitions* guides the reader through the choices available for transsexual teens (and their families). The texts noted here might be best used with supplementary readings from *Facing History and Ourselves* (2016) and *The FAIR Education Act* (2012), which provide evocative and free web-based curricula. Positioning the texts with these resources could appropriately represent the LGBTQ community as a mosaic.

Teachers might also want to consider using multiple books linked by a common theme. The murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay white male college student, in 1998 had a galvanizing impact on the LGBTQ community, America, and the world. The ghastly incident and resultant implications can be considered from various angles. Elements could include Shepard's slow, unconscious, and public descent after the initial lynching, the trials of Shepard's murderers, and the Kansas-based church that vehemently opposed Shepard, LGBTQ individuals, and allies. Romaine Patterson's (2005) aptly titled *The Whole World Was Watching* is a friend's account converging and diverging curiously from Matthew's mother, Judy Shepard's (2009) *The Meaning of Matthew*. In poetic prose invoking Shepard's attackers' venom and summons bystanders' outrage, Leslea Newman's (2012) *October Mourning* is figuratively unrivalled. These texts each incorporate contextually relevant, educationally questionable, and indisputably profane language that manifests through homophobia. If ever there was a time for teenagers to tolerate vulgar acrimony within classroom texts, these perspectives on Matthew Shepard present a convincing case. They can be grounded with primary source material from the trail and accompanying worldwide attention on Matthew Shepard: Online Resources (2016) and The Laramie Project: Dramaturgical Site (2016).

Not every book was mentioned here. Many narratives have dense prose, frequent digressions, and historical nuances many high schoolers – and most middle grade students – would deem unnecessary. These texts were perhaps too cumbersome for curricular integration. Other books were needlessly profane with explicit sexual references, either of which could elicit parents' ire and distract students from the social justice intent of the content. LGBTQ individuals and issues, though, cannot be ignored simply for convenience or because they have the potential to offend or make others uncomfortable. While Matthew Shepard's murder elicited outrage and promises for change, those promises are empty when countless and daily marginalization and historical disregard are obscured by curricula pointed elsewhere.

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Appendix 2. Content analysis

Open Coding Question: How do non-fiction trade books intended for middle grade and high school students represent the LGBTQ people, issues, and community?

Axial Coding Questions:

- (1) When was the book published? How might this influence the story that is told?
- (2) Considering the reading level, who is the likely intended audience (e.g. middle school student, high school student, or adult)?
- (3) Considering the sexual content and profanity, who is the likely intended audience (e.g. middle school student, high school student, or adult)?
- (4) What time or era is represented within the book? How might this influence the story?
- (5) Where does the story take place? How does the geographical location shape the story?
- (6) Who within the LGBTQ community is represented?
 - Lesbian
 - Gay

- Bisexual
 - Transsexual or transgender
 - Questioning
 - Asexual
 - Non-LGBTQ advocates (e.g. family member, friend)
- (7) What race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender are represented in the story? In what ways does this trait affect the story? Are there additional challenges faced by the LGBTQ individual due to their race, ethnicity, or nationality?
- (8) Do LGBTQ individual(s) face challenges?
- No
 - Yes
 - Social, interpersonal, or relational, like with friends, peers, or family
 - Legal, like marriage laws
 - Physical, like bullying or desperate to change one's sex
 - Mental or emotional, like intense confusion, stress, or depression
 - Spiritual, like tension manifest from identity and religious incongruence
 - Something else
- (9) How are the non-LGBTQ individuals represented?
- Bullies (e.g. physical, verbal, interpersonal, legal, legislative, religious)
 - Advocates (interpersonal support with or without active resistance to opposition)
 - Bystanders (whether aware or entirely unaware of LGBTQ issues and/or individuals)
 - Something else
 - Not represented
- (10) Is the LGBTQ community represented as a group and outside of a singular character or personality? Is it as a social group, a political group, or something else? Is it explicit and detailed or implicit and vague?
- (11) Is religion or faith present in the story? If so, which faith or religion? How is it characterized (e.g. constructive and supportive, resistant or unaccepting, deeply personal or individualized)? Was it explicitly detailed, implicit, or vague?
- (12) How does the author characterize or contextualize the contested terrain?
- Do the main characters confront homophobia, heteronormative, or heterosexist assumptions?
 - Are the LGBTQ individuals actively pushing for gay rights or acceptance?
 - Are the LGBTQ individuals passively hoping for acceptance?
 - Is there active or conspicuous anti-LGBTQ resistance?
 - Is there passive or hidden anti-LGBTQ resistance?
 - Does the main character receive support from diverse groups or people (e.g. non-LGBTQ friends, family members, LGBTQ-community members)?
- (13) Are there other, unmentioned (positive or problematic) elements of the trade book?

Authors	Grade	Vulgarity	Subgenre	LGBTQ	Race and ethnicity	Challenges
Alsenas (2008)	High	Middle	History	Multiple	W and NW Am	4-6
Andrews and Lyon (2014)	Middle	Middle	Memoir	Multiple	W Am	4-6
Beam (2007)	High	Middle	Memoir	Trans	W and NW Am	4-6
Bechdel (2006)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Multiple	W Am	2-3
Bechdel (2008)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Lesb	W Am	4-6
Belge and Bieschke (2011)	Middle	Middle	Expository	Multiple	W Am	4-6
Bergman (2009)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Multiple	W Am	4-6
Black (2009)	Middle	High	History	Gay	W and NW Am	2-3
Bornstein (2013)	Middle	Adult	Expository	Multiple	W and NW Am	4-6
Cordova (2011)	High	Middle	History	Lesb	W and NW Am	4-6
Coyote (2011)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Lesb	Non Am	2-3
Cruse (2010)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Multiple	W Am	4-6
De Rossi (2010)	Middle	Middle	Memoir	Lesb	W Am	2-3
Drummond (2009)	High	Middle	Expository	Trans	Indistinct	4-6
Fakhridd-Deen (2010)	Middle	Middle	Expository	Multiple	W Am	4-6
Ginoli (2009)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Gay	W Am	2-3
Gold and Drucker (2008)	Middle	High	Memoir	Multiple	W and NW Am	4-6
Golio and Scholl (2014)	Middle	Middle	Memoir	Multiple	W and NW Am	4-6
Hall and Jones (2011)	Middle	High	Memoir	Multiple	W and NW Am	4-6
Hart (2009)	High	Adult	Memoir	Lesb	NW Am	2-3
Hartzler (2013)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Quest	W Am	4-6
Hernandez and Rubin (2013)	Middle	Middle	Memoir	Gay	NW Am	Social Only
Hill and Schrag (2014)	Middle	Middle	Memoir	Trans	W Am	4-6
Keen (2007)	High	Middle	Expository	Advoc	Indistinct	4-6
Kuklin (2014)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Trans	W Am	4-6
Leleux (2007)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Gay	W Am	Social Only
Leviathan and Merrell (2006)	Middle	High	Memoir	Multiple	W and NW Am	4-6
Lowrey (2010)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Multiple	W Am	4-6
Lynch (2011)	Adult	Middle	Memoir	Lesb	W Am	4-6
Marcus (2000)	Middle	Middle	Expository	Multiple	Non Am	4-6
Martin (2011)	Middle	Middle	Memoir	Gay	Non Am	2-3
Miller (2005)	Middle	Middle	History	Gay	NW Am	4-6
Miller and Bley (2014)	Middle	Adult	Expository	Multiple	W Am	4-6
Moon and Lecezne (2012)	Middle	Middle	Memoir	Multiple	W and NW Am	4-6
Newman (2012)	Middle	Adult	History	Gay	W Am	2-3
Pasfield (2011)	Middle	Middle	Memoir	Gay	W Am	4-6
Passet (2008)	Adult	High	History	Lesb	W Am	Social Only
Patterson (2005)	Middle	Adult	History	Multiple	W Am	4-6
Pohlen (2016)	Middle	Middle	History	Multiple	W and NW Am	4-6
Poole (2010)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Gay	W Am	Social Only
Prince (2014)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Lesb	W Am	2-3
Radclyffe and Lynch (2012)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Multiple	W and NW Am	4-6
Rooney (2004)	Middle	High	Memoir	Multiple	W and NW Am	4-6
Rothschild (2008)	Middle	High	Memoir	Gay	W Am	2-3
Rousy (2006)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Gay	W Am	4-6
Savage and Miller (2011)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Multiple	W and NW Am	4-6
Schofield (2008)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Multiple	W Am	2-3
Schwartz (2013)	High	Middle	Memoir	Gay	W Am	4-6
Settington (2013)	High	Middle	History	Multiple	Non Am	4-6
Sheng (2010)	Middle	Adult	Memoir	Multiple	W and NW Am	2-3
Shepard (2009)	Middle	Adult	History	Gay	W Am	4-6
Trachtenberg (2005)	High	High	Memoir	Multiple	W Am	2-3
Wahls and Littlefield (2012)	High	Middle	Memoir	Lesb	W Am	4-6

Notes: Grade range (e.g. middle grade, high school, and adult) for Grade (specifically, reading level) and for vulgarity (specifically, profanity and explicit sexual reference) are denoted as middle, high, and adult; some LGBTQ component are signified in abbreviated terms (i.e. Lesb means lesbian; Trans means transsexual or transgender; Advoc means advocate; Multiple means various LGBTQ components); Race and ethnicity are indicated in abbreviated terms (i.e. W Am means white American; NW Am means non-white American; W & NW Am means both white and non-white Americans, Non Am means Non-Americans)

Table A1.
Grade level, degree of vulgarity, subgenre, LGBTQ, demography, and challenges

Authors	Non-LGBTQ	LGBTQ comm	Active push	Passive hope	Clear resist.	Hidden resist.	Multi supp	Hom
Alsenas (2008)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Andrews and Lyon (2014)	All	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Beam (2007)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bechdel (2006)	All	Imp	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bechdel (2008)	Bullies	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Belge and Bieschke (2011)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bergman (2009)	All	Exp	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Black (2009)	All	Exp	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bornstein (2013)	Bullies	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cordova (2011)	All	Exp	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Coyote (2011)	Advoc	Exp	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cruse (2010)	Bullies	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
De Rossi (2010)	Bystander	Exp	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Drummond (2009)	Advoc	Exp	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fakhrid-Deen (2010)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Genoli (2009)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gold and Drucker (2008)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Golio and Scholl (2014)	All	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hall and Jones (2011)	All	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hart (2009)	Bullies	Omitted	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Hartzler (2013)	Bystander	Exp	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hernandez and Rubin (2013)	All	Exp	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hill and Schrag (2014)	All	Exp	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Keen (2007)	Advoc	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kuklin (2014)	All	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Leleux (2007)	All	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Leviathan and Merrell (2006)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lowrey (2010)	All	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lynch (2011)	Advoc	Imp	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marcus (2000)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Martin (2011)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Miller (2005)	All	Imp	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Miller and Bley (2014)	Bullies	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Moon and Lecezne (2012)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Newman (2012)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pasfield (2011)	Bullies	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Passet (2008)	Bullies	Exp	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Patterson (2005)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pohlen (2016)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Poole (2010)	Bullies	Omitted	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Prince (2014)	All	Omitted	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Radclyffe and Lynch (2012)	All	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rooney (2004)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rothschild (2008)	Bystander	Imp	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Rousy (2006)	All	Exp	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Savage and Miller (2011)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table A11.
Sources of support,
types of resistance,
and types of
intolerance

(continued)

Authors	Non-LGBTQ	LGBTQ comm	Active push	Passive hope	Clear resist.	Hidden resist.	Multi supp	Hom
Schofield (2008)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Schwartz (2013)	All	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Settington (2013)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Sheng (2010)	All	Imp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shepard (2009)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Trachtenberg (2005)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wahls and Littlefield (2012)	All	Exp	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Non-LGBTQ signifies advocates, bullies, and bystanders, and all denotes all three; LGBTQ Comm (community) is represented as Exp (explicitly), Imp (implicitly or vague), and omitted; active push indicates the protagonists' intentional and active resistance to homophobia; passive hope specifies protagonists' optimism for tolerance but non-active resistance to homophobia; clear resist (clear resistance) represents conspicuous intolerance of LGBTQ individuals; hidden resist (hidden resistance) designates inconspicuous but manifest intolerance; Multi Supp (multiple support) signifies diverse support that originates within and beyond the LGBTQ community

Table AII.

About the author

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