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Question 2: Analyse the work of illustrators and, particularly, author illustrators who tackle difficult, sensitive and sometimes shocking themes.

Author Illustrators and the Importance of Queer Art.

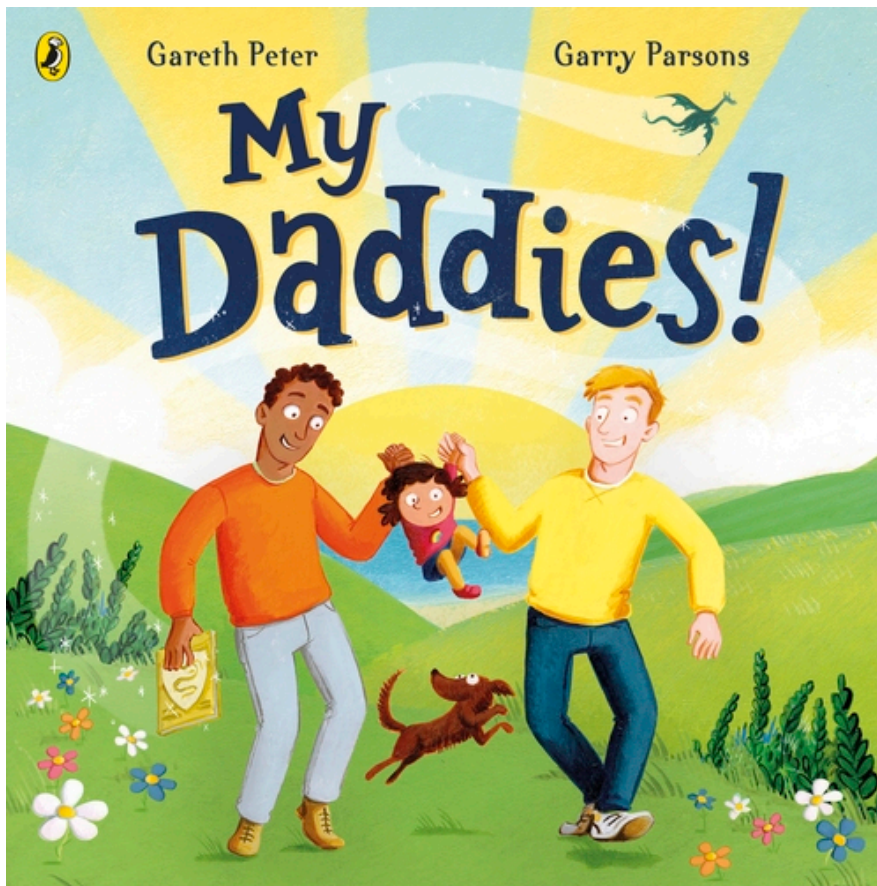
Introduction:

A look at picture books on queer themes and the authors that made them, Queer art has been a part of history for a long time and has been misunderstood by many historians and early literature of queer arts and writings destroyed by opposing political sides. Author illustrators of today are showing the importance of how to give a clear representation of the diverse identities of the world, in a light that shows the struggles and life of queer relationships through an artistic illustrative way. These themes often cover illustrations of an age of coming out as LGBTQ+, teenage queer relationships blossoming, but also the struggles that come with an identity that is often ostracized by society. These author illustrations also look at gender identity and the life of queer parenting, of how it should be normalized in a strict heteronormative world. There has always been backlash from right-wing political talking heads of power over the humanities of the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, which queer-

artists, illustrators and author illustrators have been subjected to book banning's in the US and other parts of the world. There seems to be a recurring theme with the political backlash that the queer community gets, historically literature and arts have been destroyed as an attempt to silence any progress being made by people and communities that want change, many author illustrators have had their work banned by right-wing government in the US in recent time and it proves the importance of their work.

Author Illustrators and the importance of Queer Representation:

There is a growing number of artists and illustrators that show representations of the LGBTQ+ community, these are often expressed through graphic novels, novels, picture books and the like. Some of these depict queer families, gender identity, sexuality and the struggles of life as a queer person.



My Daddies, by Gareth Peter & Garry Parsons (2021)

Inspired by his own experience of adopting with his partner, gay dad Gareth Peter wrote *My Daddies* so his sons – and other children with LGBTQIA+ families – could see themselves represented in books. Illustrated by fellow gay dad Garry Parson, the story follows a young girl who loves reading and goes on amazing adventures with her two dads.

Gareth Peter is an author of children's illustrative books; he has done many books on queer themes published by Penguin books, his work as an author shows the importance of storytelling through the eyes of a queer person, but also helping families and their children to understand that not all families look the same, that some children have same gender parents and it gives a strong representation for queer adopted parents, which their children in turn feel a sense of pride in the family-

that they are brought up in. There's little difference in how these children's books appear in their art style to grab attention, it helps to normalise the identity of different people in the world and blends together with other books on the topic and themes of families.

Further, by examining how gay fathers themselves wrestle with and respond to dominant ideas about families and gender, it pushes us toward a more nuanced understanding of how families and family life operate more broadly. It also encourages us to develop a deeper awareness of our own most basic assumptions about family, parenthood, gender, and sexuality, and how our daily actions and interactions have the potential to either uphold or resist dominant heteronormative discourses and institutions. Indeed, on a most basic level, exploration of the experiences of gay adoptive fathers has the capacity to stretch and enrich our national understanding of the sexuality, gender, and race contours of "family."

(Goldberg, 2012, p. 4)



Heartstopper Volume 1, by Alice Oseman (2019)

Heartstopper is an LGBTQ+ YA (young adult) graphic novel, the first graphic novel description follows, Charlie and Nick are at the same school, but they've never met – until one day when they're made to sit together. They quickly become friends, and soon Charlie is falling hard for Nick, even though he doesn't think he has a chance. But love works in surprising ways, and Nick is more interested in Charlie than either of them realised.

(Oseman, 2019, book description)

Heartstopper's story is one that tells many stories with the diverse range of characters that appear in the graphic novel series, the focus being on a homosexual-

relationship between two teenage boys that grow together with a captivating narrative that pulls the reader in and illustrations that go along with text as a traditional graphic novel. There's a lot of topics covered in the graphic novel series following the character development, of Charlie's relationship with Nick and how Nick is still discovering himself sexually, Nick not being out like Charlie causes some issues for him and his relationship with others. The graphic novel also covers homophobia in an education environment, trans representation and home difficulties, which sheds light on the realities of being queer in society. Having stories like these accessible to the queer public youth helps to validate the feelings of many that are growing up as queer and give a sense of belonging to larger society, that often stigmatises them. The stories also illustrate how queer individuals can also, like their heterosexual counterparts have healthy relationships, especially for youth growing up finding others like themselves. Having stories like these are crucial to society, because of their impact on future generations.

Alice Oseman – Impact

A large portion of Alice Oseman's success can be attributed to the fact that their novels are very relatable to young adult audiences. Especially the audiences that are not used to seeing themselves represented in popular media. As with 'Loveless' and portraying aromatic and asexual characters, so with 'Heartstopper' and portraying a transgender person of colour. Oseman's writing is beyond essential due to the volumes of rare representation that it brings.

(Jones, Hollywood Insider, 2022)

So once a boy is classified as having what are considered to be feminine characteristics, he becomes a visible target for homophobic abuse despite, apparently, whether he is gay or not. This raises important issues about normalization and how non-heterosexual identifying boys/men may take on what we identify as a form of straight-acting masculinity.

(Martino, 2003, p. 79)

Having some healthy representations of queer relationships and being gay in an education environment can help with giving a sense of hope to younger queer people, but this graphic novel does a remarkable job of showing the realities of being a younger queer person in school. It shows the true nature of the problems the systematic issues of society bring, like heteronormativity, binary gender restrictions, and social interactions of development in problematic upbringings.



Pink Is for Boys, by Robb Pearlman and Illustrated by Eda Kaban (2018)

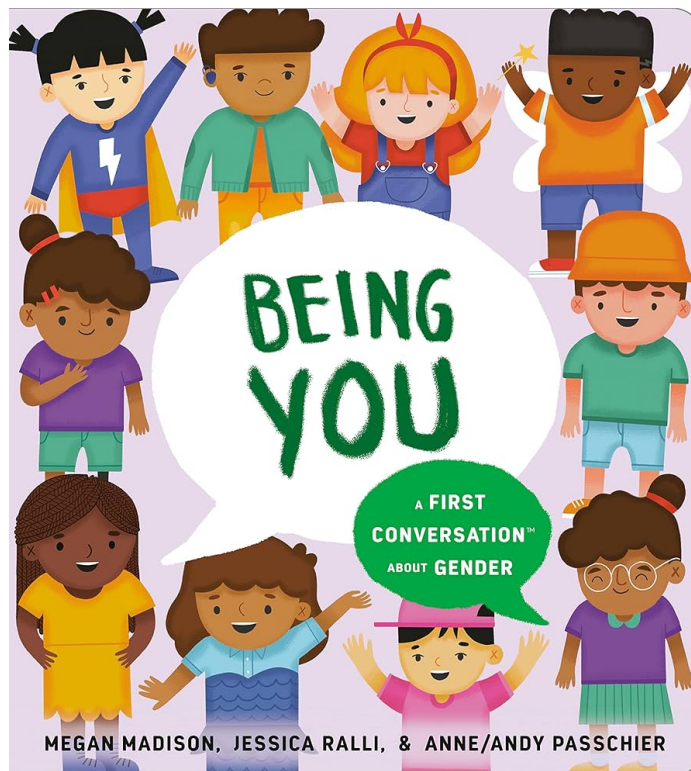
A brief description: Featuring a diverse group of relatable characters, *Pink Is for Boys* invites and encourages girls and boys to enjoy what they love to do, whether it's racing cars and playing baseball, or loving unicorns and dressing up.

This book helps to re-thinks and reframes the stereotypical blue/pink gender binary and empowers kids and their grown ups to express themselves in every colour. The colourful illustrations and meaningful text have a lot of impact on our ability to be more openminded and help children understand that it is more than ok to like things that are stereotypically for the other gender, which that stereotype to begin with can have damaging effects on society and the development of a child's life, even through adulthood. This book also investigates the different activities that boys and girls do and how both genders can do the same things as each other and helps to eradicate the unhelpful binary system of our society.

Our obsession with gender only increases after the little one is born. In the hospital, babies are given a pink or blue blanket. They come home in a pink or blue car seat that gets clicked into a pink or blue stroller, and they sleep on pink or blue sheets in their pink or blue room. Boys cuddle up to stuffed cars and trains, and girls have their “My First Baby” waiting in their nurseries. We do a lot to ensure that other people see the gender of our children.

(Brown, 2014, p. 4)

This obsession with knowing what gender our baby turns out to can be detrimental to their personal development and mental wellbeing, because of the many possibilities that the child turns out to be queer or even if not, they are still effected by the endless damaging effects that a gender binary stereotype can bring. Not only that but how the child grows up navigating the world through their past experiences, and ultimately having conflicting internal identity issues with one's sexuality, gender identity, or even not just being themselves around others that might also have had to go through the very same strict gender stereotypes and homonormative dynamics.



*Being You: A First Conversation About Gender, by Jessica Ralli and
Megan Madison (2021)*

Book summary: based on the research that race, gender, consent, and body positivity should be discussed with toddlers on up, this-aloud board book series offers adults the opportunity to begin important conversations with young children in an informed, safe, and supported way.

This book goes in depth to help educate children to understand the diverse range of peoples and helps adults explain these things in an easy-to-understand manner. throughout childhood we are taught that gender is an important social category and- that there are things we should or shouldn't do or want to be based on the sex we

are assigned at birth. Thanks to the help of hard work of feminists from early days and fast-forward to now, with illustrators designing these books to help navigate through the complex and vast identities. Children will continue to need support from adults that understand these needs and can validate the experiences, its important to help reframe the very language we use, to help with having an openminded conversation.

The Importance of Queer Picture Books and The Current Backlash:

In the 2021-2022 school year, more that 2,500 books were banned in the states across the US, while the number of books challenged doubled in 2022 compared with the previous year.

(Sullivan, NPR, 2023)

This is happening to many different books, novels, graphic novels and children's picture books. As LGBTQ+ rights have been progressing there has been backlash from right-wing government in the US and even the UK, there are many reasons as to why this is happening, one being the increase in trans liberation and changes that have been made over the years for the wider community.

With an increasing urgency, lawmakers and parents across the country are demanding that school districts remove books from their libraries that they've deemed as inappropriate – books that deal overwhelmingly with race, gender, and sexuality. In December, more than 600 authors, publishers, and bookstore owners-signed a statement condemning what they called an “organized political attack” that-

“threatens the education of America’s children” taking place via bans in at least 10 states.

(Masters, Advocate, 2022)

There have been many authors and illustrators that have been targeted during these banning’s and even some that have been mentioned here. This concept of being concerned with “inappropriate” books that only talk openly about the humanities of different identities such as, queer, trans, and anything to do with sexuality, is merely an excuse to silence queer people and then having no representation to show how our world isn’t as black and white as a heteronormative oppressive society may seem. Queer theory has helped try and put things into perspective for our society, to help understand the oppressive signals and how gender-binaries, systemic racism and sexual oppression has detrimental effects on human development and mental health.

The power of queer data

Gender, sex and sexuality data helps address many of society’s inequalities. Data enables us to know many people identify with a particular identity group, this group’s experience of services such as healthcare and education, and relative levels of advantage and disadvantage (which involves comparing data for one group against another group or a defined benchmark). Data can expose the effects of patriarchy, misogyny, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia on the systems and structures we rely upon to navigate our everyday lives.

(Guyan, 2022, p. 16)

This book talks mainly about queer data and how it is an important tool for a visual understanding of how many LGBTQ+ people there are (which is an ongoing data, but also not easily recorded). It also shows the importance of understanding the life of many queer people and others, knowing the statistics of a demographic. This in turn shows how important it is to have media that keeps queer people represented and stories that tell their truths in all its difficulties and triumphs. Queer people have always been subjected to erasure, so nothing of what's happening (with book banning's), is new and history continues to repeat itself whenever there is more progress being made.

A summary of queer erasure:

'Queer Erasure' is a heteronormative cultural practice where queer people are erased from cultural and historical narratives. This has been done using numerous methods such as censoring LGBTQ+ voices, destructions of records and through a process called 'straight-washing', where information about a historical figure is altered to comply with heteronormative protocols.

(Historia, Medium, 2020)

Conclusion:

In this essay I've looked at many different authors and illustrators, on the themes of queer identity and how these picture books, graphic novels and illustrations talk about many different and diverse range of topics such as, adoptive gay fathers and how they are just as worthy of parenting as their straight counterparts, through an illustrative children's picture book and looking at young queer relationships in an

educational environment, also books on gender and the challenges queer people face. There are many important representations of queer people shown in these books and I believe that these books have helped to have a better understanding of the importance of LGBTQ+ representation. These books are a great way for kids to understand and be more aware of the things that are apart of our world and helping kids navigate their way through life as a younger queer person, which having these stories in the first place makes a safe and healthy environment for them and their development. I also looked briefly into the backlash that queer books have had in recent years, which has resulted in book banning's around the world, and it's given an even more significant importance to the growing need for queer books as a tool, but also for one's entertainment. The realities of the book banning's show that we need to keep on committing to the cause of fighting for our human rights and that we need to protect queer youth now more than ever, in a climate of growing hostility from right-wing propaganda. Illustrators, artists and authors etc, can create a better environment for helping our own way of activism through a colourful vision, creating a safe space should always be a priority.

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