

“NOW I FEEL ‘TRULY’ LIKE ME!”:

A Discourse Analysis of the Ways ‘the Gaze’ Functions in Two Children's Picture
Books Featuring Transgender and Gender Variant Characters

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Meredith Farley BA ECS, Ryerson University, 2016

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ABSTRACT

“NOW I FEEL ‘TRULY’ LIKE ME!”:
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Featuring Transgender and Gender Variant Characters

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Meredith Farley
Program of Early Childhood Studies,
Ryerson University

Drawing on transgender, queer and feminist theoretical perspectives, I critically analyze two children’s picture books featuring transgender and gender variant characters. With these critical theoretical perspectives in mind, this discourse analysis examines the ways the books, both visually and textually, depict gender embodiment and the experiences of the characters. Using questions derived from these theoretical lenses, I analyze concepts of power, normalcy, difference, the gender binary, gender fluidity, intelligibility and unintelligibility. These concepts contribute to the dominant discourse of ‘the gaze’, seen in varying ways in the books. Children’s story books largely underrepresent the experiences of transgender characters, particularly books outlining, and explaining, a social gender transition. The majority of picture books with LGBTQ+ themes focus on same sex families and feature boys in dresses, thus centralize around disrupting the constraints of masculinity. I conclude this paper with recommendations for selecting, reading, and discussing books with transgender and gender variant protagonists. The central themes outlined in the academic literature illustrate that ‘the gaze’ and regulation of knowledge have a significant impact on what is visible in children’s books. This may ultimately affect children’s understanding, and appreciation, of gender variance and, hence, social gender transitions in early childhood.

Keywords: children’s picture books, transgender character, gender variance, discourse analysis, early childhood education and care

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DEDICATION

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Transgender and gender nonconforming children and their families constitute one of the least visible or understood parts of the LGBT community. They are just beginning to come into focus. Ehrensaft (2012, n.p)

Research Purpose: Finding the ‘T’ in LGBTQ+ Children’s Picture Books

In this Master’s Research Paper (MRP), I draw on concepts from feminist, queer and transgender theories to examine two picture books, *I am Jazz* (Herthel & Jennings, 2014) and *the Boy and the Bindi* (Shraya, 2016), written for children under the age of eight. The two books selected for my research feature a **transgender** or **gender variant** character and/or outline the process of a child’s **social gender transition**, that is, a change in all or some of the following: the child’s name, dress, **gender pronoun**, **gender expression** and, in some cases, legal documents (Ehrensaft, 2016; Pyne, 2014a). (All **bolded** text is defined in the glossary).

The approach to my analysis is broadly informed by gender scholars and activists: Butler, (1990, 2004); Ehrensaft (2009, 2011, 2016); Elliot (2010); Namaste (2000, 2005); Serano (2007, 2013); Stryker (2006; 2008) and others. The methodological steps whereby I approach this discourse analysis are adapted from the process designed by Aldred and Burman (2005) along with concepts from image analysis as outlined in Painter, Martin & Unsworth (2012). Overall, this research project takes a critical theoretical stance, which focuses on the ways that power subtlety functions in discourse to shape our worldview and consciousness, cultivating oppression (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2000).

My purpose in undertaking this project is fivefold:

- 1) To explore the ways in which transgender and gender variant protagonists are represented in children’s picture books designed to represent them.
- 2) To highlight the strengths and shortcomings in research and scholarly literature that arise for

transgender individuals under the sign of the **LGBTQ+** framework.

3) To enhance queer theoretical thought in early childhood studies (ECS) by emphasizing transgender theoretical perspectives.

4) To establish implications for the inclusion of transgender children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC¹) settings.

5) To offer insights for early childhood educators (ECEs) to consider while selecting, reading and discussing books with children about social gender transitions as well as transgender and gender variant characters.

I chose to analyze the words and images in children's picture books because they play a significant role in most children's lives, demonstrating to children what is valued in society (Stafford, 2012; Taylor, 2012). Very often, picture books are children's first experiences with reading, partly because visual storylines are more accessible than linguistic ones (Martin, 2014). They have the potential to generate rich dialogue, paint portraits of magical, or everyday, places and introduce them to adventurous, funny or memorable characters that become etched in their minds. A picture book may be: a fairy tale, a fable, a work of historical fiction, a narrative of contemporary life, a moral story with troublesome experiences that become resolved by the protagonist or a combination of these (Painter, et al., 2012). Overall, telling stories informs communities and teaches children about their social responsibilities (Elder & Holyan, 2010); indeed, picture books guide children in making meaning about the world around them. Thus, with Norton (1999), I argue that it is essential that transgender children's existence not be denied *and* be carefully considered in children's picture books.

¹ Langford et al. (forthcoming) use the term early childhood education and care (ECEC) reluctantly, since it reflects the separation of care and education. They maintain that a new term is needed that conceptualizes care and education as inseparable.

I now discuss the outline of this project. Following this introduction, I review the scholarly literature on transgender and gender variant communities and outline the methodological process, including the steps undertaken to select the picture books and a summary of each book. I then illustrate the process involved in creating ‘text’ from images and explain how the data was generated, organized and analyzed. This is followed by an analysis of the data and concludes with recommendations for creating gender inclusive ECEC settings and suggestions that support ECEs in making mindful decisions when choosing children’s books.

What is the Difference? Gender Variance and Transgender Embodiment

It is important to note at the outset that language when describing gender variance and transgender experiences is beneficial to identify. As Ehrensaft (2016) writes, language that refers to gender identity continues to expand as children identify themselves in a growing number of ways; suggesting, as Ehrensaft (2016) stresses, children are leading an aspect of the gender revolution. In that regard, the language used in this research may not be universally understood by all transgender or gender variant individuals and/or communities. In fact, language about gender diversity is in a constant state of flux. Although, in keeping with transfeminist thinker Julia Serano (2007), unless it is a direct quote, I adopt the term gender variant children to describe those who are “considered by others to deviate from societal norms of femaleness and maleness” (p. 49-50). Brill and Pepper (2008) explain that gender variance refers to behaviours, play preferences and clothing that veer outside of the ‘normal’ expectations of a child’s biologically allocated sex. I chose to use the term because it expresses variety and variation.

One of the first social categories children recognize is a person’s sex (Giraldo & Colyar, 2012) and gender variant behaviour can begin as early as a child’s second year (Ehrensaft, 2016; Brill & Pepper, 2008). There is a growing awareness that gender comes in more than two boxes;

hence, emerging ideas of a “**gender spectrum**” are forming (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 21). Susan Stryker (2008), a leader in transfeminism, conceptualizes the phenomena of transgender as “*the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place - rather than any particular destination or mode of transition*” (p. 1, emphasis in original). The term pertains to all people who defy, or do not fit into, normative sex/gender relations (Serano, 2013, Namaste, 2005) and, for many, a “search for a gender home is paramount” (Elliot, 2010, p. 52). Yet, Halberstam argues that some cannot simply move from one side of the gender binary to another, while others disregard a “fixed gender home” altogether; thus, Halberstam argues that everyone must “abandon their investment in comforting but tendentious notions of home” (as cited in Elliot, 2010, p. 52).

Certainly, there is no one definition of a “gender home” just as there is no one way to embody a transgender or queer identity. Furthermore, gender variance and transgender embodiment are not one and the same. For example, there are children who do not conform to Western society’s expectations of gender norms, however remain steadfast that their identities align with their assigned natal sex. There are those, too, who might not have access to the word transgender, but are certain that their designated biological sex does not represent their gender identities. A person’s gender may be **binary**, and it may be **fluid** or multifaceted, changing throughout the course of a lifetime (Ehrensaft, 2011, 2016).

Gender is political and society categorizes people into groups based on their unchosen physical differences (Stryker, 2008). Yet, for Stryker (2008), gender is an inside experience, one that becomes a social reality when it is shared. Therefore, when one’s gender expression is shared, but not affirmed - instead is discounted or considered just a phase - a negative gaze is

cast upon gender variance, reflecting poorly on children who remain “persistent, insistent and consistent” in their gender identity (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 56).

Gender as a ‘Special Topic’

Browsing in mainstream bookstores in Toronto, Ontario and popular Canadian online shopping websites, I began to form an initial awareness of the most accessible transgender themed children’s picture books. When I asked where to find them, I was guided to a ‘special topic’ section that housed a small collection of LGBTQ+ themed books. Granted, there were transgender themes among them; but, these were among a more robust selection of stories about different family structures, specifically ones with two mommies or two daddies.

This preliminary insight forms the backdrop of my work which seeks to investigate the relationship, and tension, in the LGBTQ+ acronym. I situate the argument that there are consequences of ‘erasure’ (Namaste, 2000) for transgender individuals within an overarching LGBTQ+ framework. Perhaps the location in the corner of the store reveals certain power dynamics or questions about visibility. Furthermore, having a ‘special topic’ section, I think, strengthens the ‘status quo’- or a divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Robinson, 2005a, p. 176; Serano, 2013; Zembylas, 2009).

This preparatory search also revealed that most books available featured ‘girlyboys’ (Ehrensaft, 2007) and/or children who were **assigned** male at birth and transitioned to **self-affirmed** female identities. These insights probed me to look for books with characters who were assigned female at birth and then transition to male identities; however, I found very few mainstream books published for this population. In these bookstores, there were several books about ‘tomboys,’ a term defined in the Merriam Webster Dictionary “as a girl who behaves in a manner usually considered boyish.” Yet, most of these books were found *outside* of the ‘special

topic' section. This might speak to Serano's (2013) analysis that suggests those assigned male at birth who transition to transgender women are viewed as more pathological than transgender men - thus positioning transgender girls or 'girly boys' (Ehrensaft, 2009) as 'special topic' worthy.

Here, I draw the early conclusion that most transgender themed books challenge the constraints of masculinity. A dialogue with LGBTQ+ librarian Elizabeth Chapman from Sheffield University in the UK and Jane Schmidt from Ryerson University in Toronto validated this observation (personal communication, May 2017). They also explained that this growing genre of stories was hard to track, given that so many are self-published. This factor makes them difficult to access as well as expensive and, I infer, makes them less likely to be found in ECEC settings. Valuable contributions from several self-published queer and transgender authors have been made²; however, I sought to analyze two recently published books that nearly any ECE in Canada might obtain with relative ease.

Considering Intersectionality

This project works to consider an intersectional approach by exploring the various threads of the gender theories. Butler (1990) contends that gender is socially constructed; but, her analysis is that no "single account of construction will do" and intersectional "categories always work as a background for one another" (p. xvii). Historically, and cross culturally, there have been many different systems for organizing people into genders; hence, gender varies from place to place and culture to culture (Lev 2004; Stryker, 2008). In fact, the Western gaze helped conceptualize the term transgender, which emerged as a result of the colonial encounter,

² See Appendix A for a Bibliography of Children's Books.

predominantly to colonize Indigenous bodies (Boellstorff, Cabral, Cardenas, Cotten, Stanley, Young & Aizura, 2014; Tallie, 2014).

Shapiro (2010) illustrates that research seldom focuses on the link between race and transgender identities. As well, Namaste (2005) adds an important criticism of feminist theory and activism by stating that feminists often reflect the values and experiences of certain white, Western, middle-class women. This has led to an emphasis on issues of heterosexism, neglecting other systems of oppression that operate in queer (feminist and transgender) communities (Taylor, 2012). Indeed, if racism is not resisted, heterosexism is reinforced (Serano, 2013; Taylor, 2012; Travers, 2014) and I argue that children's picture books have largely contributed to such a reinforcement.

What Does Sexuality Have to do with Children?

In our Western society, longstanding beliefs uphold the notion that discussions of sex and sexuality with children are 'taboo' and thus deemed irrelevant to the lives of children (Blaise, 2010, 2014; Brill & Pepper, 2008; Ehrensaft, 2016; Robinson, 2005b, 2012). In the context of ECEC, ideologies of childhood innocence perpetuate the idea that sex and sexuality are to be avoided (Blaise, 2005, 2010; Janmohamed, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2014; Robinson, 2005b, 2012). Notions of childhood innocence are linked to the dominance of developmental theories both within, and outside of, academia. There have been decades of research designed to reconceptualize developmental approaches using critical post-foundational theories, such as: postmodern, postcolonial, anti-racist, post-structural and queer, among others (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliott & Sanchez, 2015). Despite this, developmental theory still strongly guides the practice of ECEs, dominating the field in general (Janmohamed, 2010; Langford, 2010; Osgood & Robinson, 2017).

Ironically, even with the belief that discussions of sexuality are ‘inappropriate’, ECEC settings are often framed around subtle, invisible and acceptable heteronormative discourses. This is seen in children’s play, such as: mock weddings, mothers and fathers, kiss and chase, as well as girlfriends and boyfriends (Blaise, 2005, 2010; Janmohamed, 2010; Osgood & Robinson, 2017; Robinson, 2005a). Moreover, **cisnormativity** is perhaps even more pervasive and its silence is powerfully deep (Pyne, 2011). My experiences while working in ECEC for over fifteen years showed me that these discourses also extend to the ECEs themselves. Whether in the staffroom or learning environment, ECEs often emphasize celebrations along the lines of wedding engagements, marriage, honeymoons and motherhood, painting the powerful picture of healthy **heteronormative** and **gender normative** developmental milestones. This silence creates ‘dangerous enclosures’ (Pyne, 2014b) that suggest a linear pathway to ‘normal’ development - particularly, I argue, for girls and ECE practitioners.

Sex, Gender, Sexuality and Heteronormativity

In this section, I define **sex**, **gender** and **sexuality**; however, defining these terms is not as straightforward as one might expect. To do this, I draw on Stryker (2008), who explains that gender and sex are often used interchangeably, even in scholarly literature, creating significant confusion (p. 11). Often in these discussions, there appears to be a misunderstanding that sex, sexuality and gender are the same, but, as stated in the *Gender Spectrum Curriculum*, “the simple answer is [if there is one], they are not” (2017, n.p). Stryker (2008) explains that sex refers to biology and the words: male and female; whereas, gender is generally seen as socially constructed, referring to the words: man (boy) and woman (girl). Osgood and Robinson (2017) highlight the traits perceived to be associated with sex and gender. Males, for example, are thought to be rational, courageous and creative; by contrast, females are perceived to be

irrational, fearful and passive (p. 7). Historically, picture books have conveyed such attributes in this way (see Weizman, Eifler, Hokada & Ross, 1972), although this is slowly changing (see Williams, Vernon, Williams & Malecha, 1987) - but not with consistent improvement (McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido & Tope, 2011). To summarize the concepts of sex and gender: if a child is assigned female at birth, the expectation is that the child will come to embody 'proper' feminine traits. For a child assigned male at birth, masculine expressions are particularly preferred, a concept that is elaborated upon further in the literature review.

Finally, sexuality refers to how, and with whom, we act on our "erotic desires" (Stryker, 2008, p. 16), and heteronormative desires, the attraction between men and women, are considered to be 'natural' (Butler, 1990, 2004). Foucault (1978) discusses "the grid of intelligibility of the social order" (p. 93) and, drawing on Foucault, Butler (1990) outlines the naturalized process of heteronormalization as the merging of gender, sex and sexuality. This produces what Butler calls the "heterosexual matrix" or a "grid of cultural intelligibility" that naturalizes bodies, genders and desires (p. 151).

Before proceeding, based on my readings of transgender and queer theories, it is necessary to briefly define the concepts of intelligibility and unintelligibility. An intelligible person presents a comprehensible and easily categorizable body. Note that one's internal sense of intelligibility may differ from the way one's body is read by the external world. When some people are unable to make sense of another's body, their readings of this unintelligibility often lead to **transphobic** behaviour, such as exclusion and violence. This may force some individuals to present an intelligible persona to the external world, but one that is internally unintelligible. This is a protective mechanism to try to remain safe in a world that has much to learn about gender variance and transgender people (Ehrensaft, 2009, 2016). Many queer theorists rally for

unintelligibility as a radical stance against conformity; yet, transgender identities frequently rely on intelligible identities. I will consider these concepts more deeply throughout the analysis.

Returning to Butler's (1993; 2004) later work, she refers to "heterosexual hegemony": a model that maintains the idea that for individuals to be 'logical', or perhaps even considered 'human' (Butler, 2004; also see Stryker, 2008), their biological sex must convey an appropriate corresponding expression of gender. Underpinning the rigid relationships between sex and gender is the "heteronormative presumption": an assumption that everyone already is, or should be, heterosexual (Epstein & Johnson, 1994).

The social environment, like an ECEC setting or children's book, "essentializes identities by enforcing expectations of identity categories and, the repeated conforming performances of these, act as an essentializing force" (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2011, p. 437). In fact, Skattebol (2006) argues that in ECEC, the body is often used as a pedagogical reference point to establish and stabilize children's gendered identities based on society's expectations. These expectations, Serano (2007) argues, lie at the "core of all anti-trans discrimination" (p. 13-14). Perhaps it all begins with this gaze: 'expert' medical interpellation uses the "domain of language" to shift an infant from an 'it' to a 'she' or 'he' - it is through this naming, the girl is 'girled' and the boy is 'boyed' (Butler, 1993, p. 7). This 'girling' or 'boying' of the child is reiterated by various other authorities (including parents and educators) who reinforce this "naturalized effect" (Butler, 1993, p. 8), thereby excluding, and perhaps erasing (Namaste, 2000), the potential of gender variant and transgender identities. With these insights, my project strives to theorize gender and sex together, *apart* from the domain of sexuality. Clearly, this is essential if gender and sex are not to be lost in discussions of sexuality (Ingrey, 2014; Luecke, 2011).

Overview of the Project

My experiences and readings have led me to consider critical questions including: What does a transgender person or a transgender character look like? How do we *know* they are not already *present* in storybooks? These questions, and the following, are to be further explored.

Research Questions

This research is guided by the following specific questions:

1. How can the process of a child's social gender transition, or the experience of a gender variant and/or transgender child, be understood in two contemporary children's picture books?
2. How can feminist, queer and transgender theoretical perspectives be employed to shed light on the workings of two children's books with gender variant and/or transgender characters? Does any tension amongst these theories present itself in the text and/or images?
3. Are there common discourses that run through the texts and images in each book? Of the dominant discourses that emerge, which are useful, affirming, limiting or misrepresentative?
4. Taking into account transgender, queer and feminist theories, what textual and visual considerations may be useful to recommend to ECEs when selecting, reading and discussing storybooks with children?

I arrive at these questions through my interpretation of the scholarly literature, which illustrates that the vast majority of research in ECS taking up issues regarding LGBTQ+ populations focuses on queer theory and the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in the ECEC environment (see Atkinson & DePalma, 2009; Blaise, 2009, 2010; 2014; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Garcia & Slesaransky-Poe, 2010; Gunn, 2011; Robinson, 2005a, 2005b, 2012). In queer theory, discussions about heteronormativity and sexuality dominate, whereas conversations involving transgender identities are often limited (Ingrey, 2014; Luecke, 2011). In fact, when

research is conducted under the broad umbrella of LGBTQ+, sexuality is generally prioritized; consequently, gender “fades into oblivion” (Ingrey, 2014, p. 97, also see Lev, 2013).

Furthermore, Salamon (2010) contends that “the confusion of sexual and gender identity is grounded in the false presumption that gender transgression ... reveals something about sexual transgression, something that is perceived to be threatening” (p. 245). Thus, with a strong emphasis on sexuality, queer theory may be hard to implement in ECEC since it is often associated with ‘deviant’ sexualities, a ‘taboo’ topic for ‘innocent’ children (Biddulph, 2006; Janmohamed, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2014; Robinson 2005b).

Hence, the precarious position of same sex themes in children’s literature, and the even more precarious position of the ‘T’ within the traditional LGBTQ+ acronym, needs to be addressed. The overarching purpose of my research is to create visibility and, therefore, greater equity for transgender and gender variant children. Placing an emphasis on transgender theory, I believe, begins the process of greater gender inclusion, which may ultimately lead to more inclusive ECEC spaces.

Social Location

As an ECE and child care supervisor, I became increasingly aware of, and troubled by, restrictive assumptions of sexuality, gender and sex in ECEC environments. I was often asked by ECEs, at times in the presence of the children, why I did not have a husband or children. I realized that if I felt I was seen as different or unintelligible, there must surely be children and families who felt the same. I recall many instances that demonstrate, for me, the reasons gender should be re-conceptualized more broadly in ECEC. I recall, for example, ECEs giggling at a boy dancing in a tutu in the drama centre; I recall the trepidation that arose when a new child

arrived, with ECEs trying to *figure out* this child's gender because of their androgynous appearance.

In other contexts, questions about my topic's relevance in early childhood arise, taking the shape of questions such as: "Sexuality and ECEC?" or "How many transgender children can there be?" Considering this with Travers (2014), it is conceivable that more children would express gender in variant ways if gender flexibility were more the norm. In fact, our impression that transgender children are a small minority could be inaccurate (Ehrensaft, 2016; Travers, 2014). It is possible, too, that only a few ECEs work directly with a transgender child or support a child and family through a social gender transition. Even so, imagining that transgender children are rare and the implementation of transgender practices into ECEC settings, unwarranted, or as Robinson (2005a) contends, 'taboo' or 'risky', disavows the experiences of diversity in all children. I am cautious when using the term 'diversity' because it often becomes a 'catch-all' phrase, rendering it almost meaningless (See MacNevin & Berman, 2017).

As Norton (1999) reminds us, the visibility of transgender children is particularly important for *all* children and strives "toward joyful acceptance and compassionate inclusion of their trans sisters and brothers" (p. 415-416). It is for these reasons that I am interested in the dominant practices that hinder gender inclusion in ECEC, specifically the ways that transgender identities are represented in the realm of picture books, which might be visible in these settings.

Critical Reflexivity

Locating oneself within the research is a way to ensure accountability and build trust (Strega & Brown, 2015) in the reader. Consistent with Strega and Brown (2015), throughout this process, I engaged meaningfully with the research, clearly stating why I chose to focus on this particular topic and the specific critical gender theories. Drawing on my readings of the theories,

I went into the analysis with certain concepts in mind to orient me. They are as follows: the gender binary and gender fluidity; visibility and erasure (inclusion and exclusion); intelligibility and unintelligibility and notions of difference and normalcy. I also remained open to unexpected aspects in the stories, and critically considered the ways that the text and images worked together, or contrasted one another. This open approach revealed a more organic, nuanced way to examine, and answer, my research questions, generating rich new themes which exposed discourses I had not considered at the onset, such as ‘the gaze’, which plays a substantial role in the analysis/findings.

I engaged with critical reflexivity through discussions of the social and political history of the relationships between the “marginalized and dominant groups” (Strega & Brown, 2015, p. 5), which includes the relationships within the gender theories themselves. It was important to me to adopt a ‘strengths-focused research’ project; thus, I selected stories told by the transgender and queer communities, outlining protagonists’ resiliency, rather than focusing solely on the ways they were marginalized (Ball, as cited in Strega & Brown, 2015, p. 5). I strove to “reverse the gaze and investigate and problematize the other side of the equation” (Strega & Brown, 2015, p. 6), that is - dominant assumptions of gender.

Yet, as a non-transgender female, there are indeed drawbacks when writing about, and researching, transgender experiences from my vantage point. Here, Elliot’s (2010) social position is useful. She stresses that upholding the belief that we can never imagine what someone else is experiencing unless we are in the same position could be an excuse for not challenging normative environments. Thus, I feel an ethical responsibility to address the “socially prescribed,” normative order, without announcing any universal truths about my reading of transgender experiences (Elliot, 2010, p. 8).

Research Paradigm

The philosophical worldview underpinning this research is a belief that power and knowledge are social constructs; therefore, a social constructivist paradigm lends itself well to this research project as it suggests that reality, and knowledge, are socially constructed (Mertens, as cited in Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). This seems appropriate, given that many gender theorists consider the sex/gender dualism to be, *in part*, socially constructed.

However, this investigation is also guided by a transformative paradigm, which addresses issues of discrimination and oppression (Creswell, 2014). The transformative paradigm arose in the 1980's and 1990's (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), a time when feminist theorists increasingly began to challenge the dominant discourse of biologically determined, static sex role differences (Osgood & Robinson, 2017). The transformative paradigm surfaced because social constructivists' viewpoints failed to provide a far-reaching action agenda to support marginalized populations (Creswell, 2014; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

Since this research works toward welcoming gender investigation outside the gender binary while “re-thinking lives within it” (Stryker, 2008, p. 1), it is definitely fitting to adopt a transformative paradigm to critically explore the transgender phenomenon. Finally, feminist, queer and transgender studies are vital perspectives from which this analysis evolves and, in each of their own ways, these theories strive for change, visibility, justice and care.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, I point to some of the key theorists who critically engage with the gender theories, their relationships and the tension existing within them. The work of theorists Judith Butler, Diane Ehrensaft, Patricia Elliot, Virginia Held, Rachel Langford, Viviane Namaste, Julia Serano, Susan Stryker and others inform the lens through which children's picture books are analyzed. Prior to discussing the theoretical relationships, I outline aspects of each perspective.

Introduction to Gender Theories: Complex and Contested

According to seminal feminist ethics of care theorist, Virginia Held (2006), “feminism is a revolutionary program, since it is committed to overthrowing the deepest and most entrenched hierarchy of all—the hierarchy of gender” (p. 67). Yet, with the emergence of queer and transgender studies, the gender dualism and associated hierarchies have become complex and contested. Butler's (2004) ‘new gender politics’, Elliot (2010) explains, represent the ways that “**transexual**, transgender, **intersex**, **lesbian**, **gay** and feminist activist groups interact, both *negatively and positively*, to create trouble for the gender order” (p. 2, emphasis added). These ‘new’ politics unsettle ideas of “the hegemonic gender order previously attacked by feminists as well as by gay, lesbian, and queer theorists” (Elliot, 2010, p. 67). If one of the premises of feminism refers to “what women are or ought to be”, then disputes arise about who counts as a woman (Elliot, 2010, p. 18; also see Stryker, 2008). Elliot (2010) and Stryker (2006, 2008) are among the feminists who point to notions of agency, human rights and power while exposing the historical tension between growing transgender activism and longstanding feminist movements.

Feminisms and Emerging TransFeminism

Feminist thought has made important contributions to the advancement of women's visibility and rights. One of the primary aims of feminism was to systematically dismantle the

socially constructed systems that created gender based oppression between the two sexes (Davies, 1997; Held, 2006; Noddings, 2013; Osgood & Robinson, 2017; Stryker, 2008). For almost a century, feminist theories have made a vital impact on the study of gender; in fact, research on children's play and literature emerged from feminism's commitment to gender equity (Blaise, 2014; Osgood & Robinson, 2017). Weitzman et al. (1972) profoundly shaped the children's book industry as a "rallying point for feminist activism" (McCabe et al., 2011, p. 221). One instrumental branch of early feminism fell under the "umbrella of unilateral feminism ... a straightforward matter of women being oppressed at the hands of men" (Serano, 2007, p. 617). Specifically, Davies (1997) maintains that gender is constructed through language that creates a binary system of the "powerful and powerless" (p.11). These ideas formulate the gaze upon which we view women and men. Early feminism argued that characteristics associated with being male or female were not 'natural' - but pervasive, socially constructed messages (Osgood and Robinson, 2017).

The reconceptualist movement in ECEC is also critically engaging with feminist ideas; reconceptualizers are making visible the multi-layered political aspects of teaching and caring for children (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 25). For example, reconceptualizers who take up emerging feminist post-structural ideas investigate systems of power, positing that children are not merely passive recipients of social messages. Instead, they "negotiate, resist, constitute and perpetuate the cultural narratives of what is considered 'appropriate' and 'correct' gender performances" (Osgood & Robinson, 2017, p. 12; also see Blaise, 2014). Instead of passive recipients of socialization, in this approach, children *actively* 'do' and 'redo' masculinities and femininities, based on the social rules in their environments (Blaise, 2010, 2014), their daily lives and during "sex talk" generated in story time discussions (Blaise, 2010). Thus, feminist post-

structuralist concepts are useful for this project since they critically engage with language, power and the generation of knowledge, offering a lens with which to view the ways the characters ‘do’ gender (Blaise, 2010, 2014) in the textual and visual narratives.

However, many non-transgender feminists gaze upon transwomen's expressions of femininity and claim that these represent “an appropriation of female culture, symbolism, and bodies” (Serano, 2007, p. 13). Non-transgender feminists typically assume that transwomen are really men, therefore, often exclude them from feminist activism and thought (Serano, 2007; also see Elliot, 2010; Serano, 2013; Stryker, 2008;). One of Stryker’s goals is to situate transgender theory more broadly within feminism by pointing to different understandings of what counts as “legitimate knowledge” (Stryker, 2006, p. 9, also 2008), thereby disrupting this dominant gaze.

Stryker (2008) believes that it is through the combined efforts of transgender and feminist theories and activism, known as transfeminism, that the compulsory unity of sex and gender might be re-thought. This is beginning to take shape. Hines (2014) illustrates that within contemporary third wave feminism lies queer and transgender activism; therefore, ideas that the “multiplicity of gendered identities and representations that are not fixed to biological sex” are increasingly accepted (Hines, 2014, p. 85). Yet, these debates remain a source of contention for non-transgender feminists because many transgender people have been victims of transphobia by those “who could have been allies instead” (Elliot, 2010, p. 5).

Feminist thinking is changing what is sought and found while “reshaping concepts of women, in all their diversity of race, sexual orientation, and economic, ethnic, and historical location, demanding that women's experiences be seen as of equal importance with those of men’s” (Held, 2006, p. 61). Thus, this radical framework is “re-thinking life, society, and knowledge,” challenging patriarchy and how we live, and organize, our world (Held, 2006, p.

61). The gender binary is often an essential aspect of a feminist ethics of care framework and revolutionary questions about how we organize, and marginalize, people are more extensively considered by transgender studies (Stryker, 2008, p. 1). Clearly, transfeminism broadens the scope of ‘livable lives’ (Butler, 2004; Stryker, 2008) and must be considered among the growing diversity of women whom Held (2006) describes.

Hines (2007) extends the diversity of women described above by Held (2006) to include all transgender people, both as “the cared-for and the one caring” (Noddings, 2013, p. 4) because traditional feminist analyses around care neglect women’s experiences of diversity (Hines, 2007; Namaste, 2013). Namaste (2013) disrupts the idea that ‘women’s experiences’ must be the key factor that defines them, exploring the vast differences within the feminist experience. Yet, transgender narratives and lives are often eliminated in LGBTQ+ activism efforts due to the lack of understanding, respect and representation. Hines (2007) believes that education will inspire deeper, more inclusive care for transgender individuals, as well as prevent them from being excluded as caregivers (See Enke’s (2013) discussion of the Kimberley Nixon case).

Feminist ethics of care philosopher, Nel Noddings (2013), describes the complex concept of care, considering the “largely reactive and responsive” relationship between “the one caring” and “the cared-for” (p. 4). Reading Noddings and Hamington, care theorists Langford and White (2017) strive to reconcile another, yet related, divide - the care/education divide in ECEC. They conceptualize care as an ethical interaction: “a dynamic, multi-directional, reiterative, reciprocal and generative process” which considers notions of empathy and compassion, taking the goals of children seriously (n.p). These conceptions of care play a vital role in the analysis of both books in the current study.

Considering transgender lives from the standpoint of a feminist ethics of care must be realized, both clinically and from an ECEC perspective. This is necessary, since, for Held (2006), rights-based discourses deal primarily with “floor moral requirements beneath which we should not sink as we avoid the injustices of assault and disrespect” (p. 72). Care, however, concerns itself with “what is above and beyond the floor of duty” (p. 72). Thus, we need care *and* rights to move beyond erected binary beliefs about who women and men are. Within feminist and queer perspectives lies the question of “whether the knowledge and the material conditions needed to secure the well-being of transgender people will be fostered or undermined” (Elliot, 2010, p. 3).

Relations and Retaliation: Queer and Transgender Theories

Queer theory began to be taken up in education research (Britzman, 1995), and within the context of ECEC, in the 1990’s (Boldt, 1997; Cahill & Theilheimer, 1999). Arising from, and expanding, feminist post-structuralist ideas that challenged gender binaries, queer perspectives focused on the “mutually constitutive nature of sexuality and gender” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 210). Queer theory challenges notions associated with desire and sexual identity (Stryker, 2006); it blurs boundaries, turning them “inside out and backward” (McKinnon, 2011, p. 141). The queer agenda must “capsize stabilizing structures in society, indeed that is what is queer about being queer” (Taylor, 2012, p. 148).

Capsizing stable structures with queer theory, though, might diminish the certain “needs, interests and goals” (Langford & White, 2017) of those who strongly uphold binary representations of gender. Instead, I suggest we “re-think” (Stryker, 2008, p. 1) the binary, rather than entirely shattering it. Still, within the writings of the reconceptualizers of ECEC, while queer theory is considered, transgender studies are practically non-existent.

Stryker's (2006) impression of queer theory is that it is an "antiheteronormative" agenda which emphasizes a "homonormative approach" - one that privileges homosexual desire (p. 7). While Stryker (2006) contends that transgender theory, too, is "antiheteronormative," she posits that transgender theory is generally less concerned with issues of sexuality and desire, while being more receptive to questions of embodiment and identity (p. 7). Stryker (2006) writes about a personal experience with an individual in the 1990's who feared that transgender people were trying to infiltrate the gay and lesbian movement, claiming that transgender people upheld oppressive binary stereotypes, and were pathological (p. 1). This makes collaborative activism efforts difficult; yet, as Salamon (2010) explains, the strongest affiliation transgender studies have is with lesbian and gay scholarship. LGBTQ+ is often a sign of a coalition, with each aspect sharing similar challenges; but, this link creates "a certain confusion about what transgenderism is and what its relation to gay or lesbian identity might be" (Salamon, 2010, p. 242).

Performativity

Stryker (2008) argues that the sex of a body does not bear any compulsory or "deterministic relationship to the gender performance or social category in which that body lives" (p. 11). Gender is not biologically assigned. Butler (1990; 2004) states that gender is constituted through actions - dress, movement and speech. "Gender is a doing...identity is performatively constituted" by our expressions (Butler, 1990, p. 25). Initially, Butler's notion of gender as performative got into *trouble* and received some push back from the transgender community. Stryker (2008) explains that because transgender people had faced hardships in the actualization of the legitimacy of their gender identities, the suggestion that gender was merely a game - something to be simply put on and taken off at will - "felt galling" (p. 131). Stryker (2008) clarifies Butler's intention, which was to express that the reality of gender for *everybody*

is the “doing of it” (p. 131, emphasis in original). Gender is a language that we use to communicate to ourselves and to others (Butler, 1990; 2004).

Finally, transgressive gender behaviour is, however, not a new phenomenon. Transgender identities have been in existence for “as long as there have been expectations regarding human sexual and gender expression” (Lev, 2004, p. 8). Historical accounts illustrate that when the ‘T’ was first introduced to the acronym LGB, there were questions as to its significance (Gan, 2013). Furthermore, the gay and lesbian communities have made reference to transpeople as the “fake T” in the LGB movement (Salamon, 2010), their gender presentation seen as a lie, rather than an expression of a deep truth (Stryker, 2006, p. 9). Gan (2013) writes about early transgender activist Sylvia Rivera who spoke out in the 1970’s stating: “after all these years, the transgender community is still at the back of the bus” (p. 291). Based on my readings of contemporary literature, this historical insight is still relevant today in ECS research and ECEC environments, and even in LGBTQ+ positive frameworks that challenge heteronormative settings.

Detangling “Gender/Sex/uality”: Is Queer Theory Robust Enough for Transgender Experiences?

As is often seen in ECS, Blaise (2014) argues that discourses of sexuality and gender should be considered together; hence, she connects “gender/sex/uality” in order to understand the persistence of gender stereotypes (p. 115). This merger puts gender in a “marriage” that Salamon (2010) claims disguises “gender issues as gay issues” (p. 243). What happens in this ‘marriage’ are power imbalances, and discussions about the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in ECEC dominate, often silencing dialogue that involves transgender identities (Ingrey, 2014; Luecke, 2011). Transgender identities are not solely about sexuality. Transgender individuals might be said to ‘queer’ the biological aspects of the sex binary (Elliot, 2010), but ‘queer’ may not

actually reflect a transgender person's sexual identity or, I contend, their gender embodiment; indeed, "homosexual never was a signifier of gender" (Salamon, 2010, p. 244). In fact, I suggest that the merger of gender with sexuality detracts from the aim of creating inclusive spaces.

To summarize this section, I point to the fact that an analysis of children's books using transgender theory brings transgender experiences to the fore - a major contribution considering that, over a decade ago, McCarthy (2003) wrote: LGBT issues in education only gave "cursory attention to the 'T'" (p. 170). LGBTQ+ communities are frequently examined together; hence, in reality, "direct attention to issues of trans students is rare" (McCarthy, 2003, p. 170; also see Ingrey, 2014; Lev 2013). In the context of ECEC, I hold that transgender studies can expand the growing work that challenges heteronormative assumptions, thereby honouring children's gender embodiment. These critical gender theories, specifically transgender theory, offer useful vantage points for thinking about the stories and the characters in children's books.

Chapter 3: The Literature Review

In my literature review, I will critically examine academic articles, which take up discussions about gender variance and transgender phenomena in these areas: the broader world, the context of ECEC and in storybooks which might be found in these settings. Taylor (2012) writes that children's picture books are political and, thus, are contentious by nature. Indeed, it appears that "children's literature" is a "deceptively simple term" to define a "commodified, politically charged body of texts created, produced, and selected for use with children" (Norton, 1999, p. 415). For Taylor (2012), subjects in picture books are not static. Instead, they are "transitory constructs" which are seen differently based on the "time and space in which they are written" as well as the researcher's own positionality (Taylor, 2012, p. 141), theoretical understanding and goals. Exploring these complex layers, I feel, offers a deeper analysis of the reasons as to why certain material might be more visible in storybooks and what material is easily accessible to the public.

In this next section, I investigate the history of how gender variance, particularly effeminate boys, has been perceived in society by early 'sexologists'. As well, I explore the ways that the Western diagnosis has affected children and changed over time - moving from harmful restoration treatments to affirmative models of treatment and support. This segment highlights historical representations of gender in children's books, presenting the changing landscape of this powerful genre which has led to a surge in LGBTQ+ books.

Hegemonic Masculinity and 'Sissy Boy Syndrome'

The term 'hegemonic masculinity' signifies a dominant discourse which upholds and strengthens the hierarchical patriarchal gender order (Connell, 1987). Blaise (2014) points out that hegemonic masculinity is the cultural expression of the dominant form of masculinity, one

that regulates, and subordinates, any other kind of expressions of masculinity and femininity (p. 121). The concept of hegemonic masculinity is useful as a way to theorize how certain behaviours for boys are praised or admired, and how this results in the privileging of particular boys over other boys and girls (Bartholomaeus, 2012). Perhaps it is through hegemonic masculinity that effeminate boys and many transgender children are oppressed.

The main premise of the work of contemporary Western psychologist Ken Zucker and his colleagues Wood, Singh and Bradley (2012) carries with it the legacy of the controversial conversion therapy, utilized by seminal sexologists John Money, Richard Green and George Rekers in the 1950's and 1960's (Pyne, 2014b). Underpinning their work was the aim of correcting behaviours so that they were in step with the 'two-sex model' (Garner, 2014) in order to avoid future homosexuality (Bryant, 2006; Pyne, 2014b, Sedgwick, 1991). Eve Sedgwick (1991) reports that most of the early sexology literature focused on treating effeminate boys, a period Sereno (2007) calls "effemimania—an obsession with male femininity" (p. 243). Serano (2007) highlights John Money's notable investigation of gender variance in children, 'The Feminine Boy Project', which became a book entitled: *"The Sissy Boy Syndrome: The Development of Homosexuality."* This project was one of the most heavily funded at that time (Serano, 2007). I draw on Serano's (2007) notion of 'effemimania' as I point to the ways that this obsession may still be relevant today in children's picture books.

Byrant (2006) highlights historical documents which are useful when exploring debates surrounding the diagnosis of gender in childhood. In the 1980's, after more than twenty years of research primarily focused on femininity in boys, gender variance became an official mental health disorder recognized by the American Psychological Association (APA) (Bryant, 2006). While the diagnosis affects both sexes (Bryant, 2006; Serano, 2007), versions of the DSM

(namely the DSM IV) more deliberately targeted “‘male femininity’ which is viewed as far more psychopathological than ‘female masculinity’” (Serano, 2007, p. 240; also see Bryant, 2006).

These ideas might also be linked to the long line of thinking about women that has seen them described as “defective, deficient, and dangerous” (Held, 2006, p. 60). Moreover, since most of the ridicule made in reference to transgender people focuses on “men wearing dresses,” Serano (2007) argues that this mockery should be considered “**trans-misogyny**” instead of transphobia (p. 33). With a surge of boys in dresses within the genre of children’s books recently, I am led to wonder whether the predominance of books featuring transgender girls or ‘girlyboys’ strives to dispel myths, countering the dominant discourse of hegemonic masculinity, as well as reducing ‘trans-misogyny’ (Serano, 2007). In the next section, I outline the historical, social and political ways that certain gender embodiments have been pathologized.

Pathologizing Gender: The Western ‘Experts’

In the 1980’s, Gender Identity Disorder in Childhood (GIDC) first appeared in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual III (DSM) and, in this very same edition, homosexuality was removed from the list of mental illnesses (Bryant, 2006; Pyne, 2015b; Sedgwick, 1991). While seemingly progressive, upon further investigation, cause for celebration is questionable. Many argued that the stigma of homosexuality had not vanished; but rather, it was transferred onto gender variant behaviour in children (Bryant, 2006; Pyne, 2015b; Sedgwick, 1991).

Indeed, since the conception of GIDC, the diagnosis has been deeply challenged (Bryant, 2006) and despite being changed in the DSM V in 2013 - from GIDC to Gender Dysphoria (GD)- it is still highly contested. Pyne (2014b) writes that the DSM V explicitly states that gender variance itself is not a mental disorder; instead, the chief symptom of GD is a conflict involving a person’s natal sex, their bodies and the gender with which they identify. This change

was seen as a positive step by queer and transgender communities (Pyne, 2014b); unfortunately, though, it will not magically eliminate the issues many transgender people face in the “pervasive and pernicious transphobia that exists in society” (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010, p. 438). However, the APA still argues children, unlike adolescents and adults, may outgrow GD. Thus, while they are no longer pathologized in the same way they would have been previously, gender variant children are still not taken seriously by the DSM V (Berman, forthcoming).

Clinical Gaze of Parents and Educators. Zucker et al. (2012) also encouraged those who spent significant time with these children, such as parents and educators, to continue the ‘treatment’ in the absence of the ‘experts’ (Byrant, 2006; Ehrensaft, 2014). The aim was to eliminate children’s cross-gender interests - all play, friends and toys (Byrant, 2006; Ehrensaft, 2014; Pyne, 2014b) - perhaps including books and narratives in the setting. This was done in order to reduce the child’s cross-gender behaviours, the mission being to alter children’s social experiences and thereby discourage them from engaging in activities that appealed (Pyne, 2014b). Possibly storybooks that maintain the ‘status quo’ (heteronormativity and gender normativity) and stories about hegemonic masculinity, or appropriate expressions of femininity, would also have been considered more desirable.

The Emerging Gender Affirmative Discourses

More recently, academics taking up social justice and affirmative care approaches interrogate established biomedical frameworks, raising compelling questions about how to support gender variant children. In direct opposition to Zucker is Ehrensaft (2009; 2011; 2016; also see Brill & Pepper, 2008; Lev, 2004; Pyne, 2014b) who refutes corrective treatments, advocating for a gender affirmative model that supports the child and their gender, *however* they embody it. Ehrensaft’s (2016) gender affirmative model sees gender variations as healthy

expressions of the infinite possibilities of human gender - whether binary or fluid (p. 15). In agreement is transactivist and scholar Jake Pyne (2014b) who draws on Foucauldian concepts of power to argue that the “problem with gender nonconformity in childhood is within the power relations that act upon them,” not with the children themselves (p. 90). For Pyne, in order to achieve justice for children, what is considered ‘normal’ must be re-examined. An inclusive society must reorganize the gaze of the ‘expert’, away from the goal of achieving ‘normal’ functioning toward one of obtaining justice for children and their families (Pyne, 2014b).

Ehrensaft (2007) points out that the efforts of feminism and more socially visible queer identities in the media have generated increasing acceptance of more flexible gender norms, particularly for ‘girlyboys’. However, at the same time, Serano (2013) declares that the “media powers-that-be systematically sensationalize, sexualize, and ridicule trans women, while allowing trans men to remain largely invisible” (p. 50). Interestingly, while male characters continue to dominate children’s literature and are said to be favoured over female characters (McCabe et al., 2011), I found that transgender boy characters are largely invisible in children’s picture books. Perhaps there is less of a need to generate acceptance for those assigned female at birth who transition to embody boyhood – an embodiment more likely to be received in society.

Through the years, there have been many positive changes for LGB people, both socially and politically, and over the past few decades lesbian and gay people have secured many civil rights (Lev, 2013, p. 289). During the course of this research, a new law in Canada emerged. In June 2017, Bill C-16, an Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code, included the discrimination of gender identity and expression to be prohibited by law. Due to this law, progress is being made toward equity; yet, the passing of a Bill will not immediately eliminate the intolerance that many transgender individuals face on a day-to-day basis.

Nevertheless, it is a starting place.

A Historical Overview of Children's Picture Books: The Gender Problem

In Canadian children's picture books, "the gender problem" has been widely known and since the 1970's reports indicate that children's books feature more male protagonists (Skelton, 2015a, p. 501). The seminal work of Weitzman et al. (1972) offers an examination of "prize-winning picture books" which revealed that boys are more visible in leading roles, whereas girls and women are "greatly underrepresented in the titles, central roles, and illustrations"; indeed, when they do appear, they often take on passive, needy roles (p. 1125).

Later works by Williams et al. (1987) sought to update the study by Weitzman et al. (1972). Not surprisingly, Williams et al. (1987) discovered that males continued to be represented more frequently and, while the ratio of females to males was edging *closer* to equality, "storybook characters continue to walk the well-worn path of tradition" (p. 148, emphasis added). These stereotypes are seen in children's books, teaching materials and curriculum and they influence teachers' differential practices with boys and girls, which often include giving more instructional time and attention to boys. This is said to appeal to boys' interests and counteract the disdain for reading that many demonstrate (Osgood & Robinson, 2017; Skelton, Carrington, Francis, Hutchings, Read, & Hall, 2009), conveying the message that girls take up less space in society than boys (McCabe et al., 2011).

Gender in Children's Picture Books: Who is Visible?

Osgood and Robinson (2017) highlight research which illustrates that children from very early ages begin exploring their gender and sexual identities based on the narratives or cultural stories they are told by their families, educators, peers and the media (p. 5). If the gendered self is produced along "culturally established lines of coherence" (Butler, 1990, p. 24), what might

happen when one is not visible in the cultural and social world? In recent years, each of these gender theories challenges long standing, white Western frameworks that often depict certain subjects. Citing Myers, MacNevin and Berman (2017) point out that picture books need to function as mirrors that reflect a child's lived experiences and imagined possibilities for the future. However, there is a scarcity of books that fulfil this need for children of colour and, if they appear at all, are most often found in historical tales or as "background characters in someone else's story" (p. 836). Additionally, unchallenged, heteronormative (Stafford, 2012), 'tidy', intelligible Western narratives dominate children's books (Taylor, 2012). These messages work toward producing what Robinson (2012) refers to as the "heteronormative good future citizen" (p. 257).

Travers (2014) is concerned with intelligible representations, arguing that transgender children who are unswerving on the gender binary are more visible and, thus, more acceptable than those with ambiguous expressions (p. 59). Even LGBTQ+ children's picture books tell a certain kind of white Western narrative, emphasizing conservative families and middle-class norms (Hamer, 2017; Stafford, 2012; Taylor, 2012), all of which marginalize those on the outside by privileging more 'acceptable' subjects (Taylor, 2012). As well, picture books with gender variant or transgender protagonists generally feature a main character who is bullied repeatedly by peers and adults, or the main character has to achieve something truly exceptional in order to be accepted (skelton, 2015b). Where are the central characters whose gender is left open to interpretation?, skelton (2015a) asks. Here, *the Boy and the Bindi* makes a major contribution to gender creative literature as well as storybooks on a whole. (In fact, an intersectional approach that considers ethnicity, race, religion, body size, class, age and ability

offers a comprehensive and accurate picture of humanhood. That said, a deeper analysis of these additional aspects is beyond the scope of this research project).

Beginning to Tell Queer Stories

There has been an increase in the last twenty years of picture books which challenge heteronormativity by depicting queer families and same sex parents (Brant, 2016; Naidoo, 2012; Stafford, 2012; Sullivan & Urano, 2017), as well as novels for youth who “resist or reject conventional gender and sexual identities” (Abate, 2008, p. 40). Nevertheless, adequate representation of transgender and gender variant characters is rare (Abate, 2008; skelton, 2015a, 2015b; Sullivan & Urano, 2017). This is not entirely surprising given that Namaste (2000, 2005) speaks of the absolute neglect of everyday life for transgender people.

Notions of childhood innocence coalesce with thoughts presented by Norton (1999) about children’s books which touch on sexuality: children are “too chronologically young and sexually ‘innocent’ for discussions of ‘adult’ issues” (p. 40). It comes as no surprise, then, that the content of story books depicting same sex families has created controversy. These books are often contested and labelled as having “unnatural content” and, in some cases, banned from institutions (Stafford, 2012, p.195; also see Ehrensaft, 2012). When children’s literature arises from a certain way of life, or set of behaviours that has become less visible and influential in society, that genre will subside or even become dormant (Reynolds, 2011, p. 84). If books about gender variant or transgender identities are less accessible, stories with dominant ‘normative’ discourses may become children’s only reality.

Individually, heteronormative books might be “unproblematic”; but, “the effect is troubling,” or dangerous, when the ECEC environment is “*full of* heteronormative” stories (Kim Lim, 2017, p. 25, emphasis added; also see Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013; Sullivan &

Urano, 2017). Historical insights from Weitzman et al. (1972) apply similarly. Weitzman et al. (1972) imagine that when a girl is reading a storybook *full of* adventurous boys and men, she is very likely to feel less worthy. In this invisibility, a girl may imagine less for herself, fewer exciting possibilities, holding the belief that there is less creativity available to her for cultivating a “livable life” (Butler, 2004, p. 8).

In the stories and childhood reflections of transgender adults in Kennedy and Hellen’s (2010) work, the participants shared that they were often secretive about their identities in childhood. Arguably, children may suppress their identities, remaining unseen, if certain norms within their environment perpetuate the idea that they are different, the ‘other’ or simply valueless. This awareness stresses the importance of not waiting for diversity to become apparent; we can assume that diversity is always a part of our environments - invisible or not.

Transvisibility

This research is especially critical now that there is an increasing number of transgender children making themselves visible in schools (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Ingrey, 2014; Payne & Smith, 2014). It is essential for administration and educators to reflect on their own beliefs, perhaps even fears, of difference and the ways that “curricula, textbooks and everyday school practices...create powerful affective borders” (Zembylas, 2009, p. 194). Historically, when schools re-examined the social and cultural dimensions of the community, topics of sexuality were difficult to address due to dominant heteronormative practices (Biddulph, 2006).

Popular stories often portray idealistic messages and have the capacity to perpetuate, even subtly, dominant assumptions, values and beliefs by situating protagonists in a ‘normative’ or ‘healthy’ world (Stafford, 2012; also see Taylor, 2012). Yet, children and families need to see themselves reflected in the ECEC setting in ways that truly reflect their experiences both within,

and beyond, the books on the shelves. Discrimination of transgender children is also found in the *absence* of their everyday experiences. So, with Namaste (2000), I posit that transgender children and their families need to be an active part of the everyday, ongoing curriculum.

Thus, I chose to analyze picture books that reflect children's expression of *gender* and the diverse ways two characters embody *gender*. This, I posit, is more adequately accomplished through investigations outside of books about sexuality and same sex parenting. This focus is not to minimize the importance of LGBTQ+ books; of course, they play an important role. My work centralizes around Stryker's (2006) transgender theory, which is interested in the conditions that allow gender normativity to remain in the "unanalyzed background" (p. 3).

Conceptualizing Transgender Phenomena in ECEC: Challenging Gender Normativity

Research in ECS illustrates that children's 'natural' desires for play and dress are often favoured by educators and other children over their 'unnatural' desires and/or expressions of gender (Blaise, 2010; Taylor & Blaise, 2007). Thus, to align themselves with the social dynamics of the setting, children often regulate their own, and others', behaviour so they, and everyone else, fit in with the environment's expectations (Blaise, 2005; Taylor & Blaise, 2007). Hence, children's creativity appears limited and, as Blaise (2005) writes, rests on the requirement that they "perform gender right" in order to avoid being ostracized by their communities (p. 93). Investigating the notion of 'performing gender right', Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) draw on Davies' (1989) seminal work involving a reading of *The Paper Bag Princess*, finding that children strongly rejected the feminist characterizations of the girl character. Indeed, contemporary investigations of gender construction during 'princesses and pirates play' also revealed rigid sex/gender categorizations. This was seen in comments, such as: "boys are pirates; girl pirates are imposters" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 79). Critical transgender theory and

pedagogy could serve as a valuable tool for discussing ideas that arise in children's play and discussions at story time.

I close with an investigation by Giraldo and Colyar (2012). They focused on the ways some educators actively disrupted gender norms and stereotypes in an ECEC setting. One educator in their study felt that boys and girls should develop both sides of their gender traits equally. These findings challenge earlier studies which suggest that teachers prefer children's 'natural' desires for play and dress over the 'unnatural' (i.e. Blaise, 2010; Taylor & Blaise, 2007).

Summary of The Literature Review

The literature review outlines a broad historical and contemporary picture, highlighting a number of different factors which have affected the way that gender was seen throughout history, and still is today. By emphasizing the wider social context and some of the debates within the gender theories, I elaborate on how gender has been taken up in medical realms, activist circles and ECS research by reconceptualization movements. I also strive to demonstrate aspects of the complex history of gender, and some of the ways it has ended up in *trouble* over the years in children's picture books. This comprehensive, however not exhaustive, introduction and review of the literature, I feel, offers the reader a broader scope with which to view the analysis. In this overview of the project, I begin to reveal some of the implications that await transgender children if we continue to "read straight" (Britzman, 1995) - or 'read' gender in normatively rigid ways. In the chapter that follows, I outline the steps to the methodological process of this research.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This section highlights the process that evolved from this project's conception, detailing each stage of the research, which was designed to generate the most salient information possible from the images, text and overall stories in the picture books. This methodology consists of five stages which are supported by the rich theorizing that has been generated by queer, transgender and feminist scholars. These steps allowed me to identify dominant discourses and some of the “explicit and implicit normative practices” that are present in children’s picture books (Taylor, 2012, p. 137), as well as the tension these practices might generate within the gender theories employed. In this chapter, I reveal “the halcyonic haze of dominant discourse,” thereby bringing forth knowledge which is so often “denied a voice in daily life” (Taylor, 2012, p. 141).

I specifically selected and analyzed picture books that represent the lives of transgender and gender variant characters to emphasize ‘gender normativity’. In the context of these books, I was interested in learning whether transgender narratives become overshadowed by more established queer and feminist perspectives and whether tension exists. Namaste’s (2000) analysis of ‘erasure’ will be useful throughout my research. I propose that when research focuses on heteronormativity, it continues to erase transgender people and their narratives from the “cultural, social and institutional world” (Namaste, 2000, p. 2) and, for the purpose of this investigation, the world of children’s books.

The findings, derived from the close, critical readings of each picture book using feminist, queer and transgender theories, generated fruitful dialogue. This, I believe, will be useful in demonstrating ways in which ECEs might generate rich discussions with children and families, as well as recommendations for children’s books about transgender characters. Before outlining the methodological steps involved in the process, I illustrate what is meant by a

dominant discourse and how it specifically relates to the research questions I pose in this project.

What are Dominant Discourses?

With Davies (1997), I consider that the structure of language, and dominant storylines, create a profound effect. Feminist post-structural ideas from Davies (1997) call for a process of “*deconstruction*”, which can make “oppositional and exclusionary” hierarchies visible; actually, through exposure, the binary loses some of its power to hold current relations in place (p. 15, emphasis added). No question, the deconstruction of exclusive, dominant sex/gender binary discourses that marginalize the lives of women need to be made visible and interrogated. Yet, rather than dismantling the binary, I wonder whether “*re-thinking* lives” within the binary (Stryker, 2008, p. 1, emphasis added) might be more apt.

Thus, employing a discourse analysis that is informed by these debates, I consider, with Aldred and Burman (2005), three common elements that run across the various systems of DA. First, Aldred and Burman (2005) assert that language is structured as a way to construct and constrain certain sets of meanings about the world; second, they contend that the social world can only be accessed, and interpreted, through language and third, they maintain that language can only be studied by means of an approach that explores the way it functions (p. 5).

Reading Foucault, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) illustrate that dominant discourses are practices that govern how we think and act, including the ways we name and talk about certain things. Foucault argues that dominant discursive regimes organize our daily experiences of the world and exercise power over our thoughts by directing, or governing, how the world is constructed and what we see as ‘truth’ (as cited in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). For Davies (1997), while the concept of sex is not fixed, or based on two opposites, she argued that this is a difficult concept to grasp since we have lived within Foucault’s ‘regimes of truth’ in an unexamined

binary system for so long (p.10). Considering the ways that language and dominant discourses function, I seek to expose which discourses are privileged, which are erased and which are minimized in the children's picture books I examine. My work explores language and images, and what are presented as 'truths' for transgender or gender variant characters. In the section that follows, I highlight the preliminary stages of my data collection and analysis processes.

Trustworthiness and Soundness

Warrantability. All research processes of analyzing, reading, writing and disseminating privilege a researcher's perspective; so, in producing this account, I have a certain interpretive and editorial authority (Aldred & Burman, 2005). Namaste (2000) stresses it is imperative for researchers to understand transgender lives and experiences when gathering research data to deepen their knowledge. In the context of the words and images in the books I analyze, and with theorists like Namaste (2000), I want to affirm and make visible the experiences that transgender people face in day-to-day, "invisible functions of discourse" and the "taken for granted practices" in everyday life (p. 52-53). Elliot (2010) and Stryker (2006) support non-transgender perspectives; although, like Elliot, my position does render me "lacking a certain insider expertise" (2010, p. 5). In this regard, I broadly draw on the concepts and arguments of gender theorists to construct a study that is both trustworthy and sound.

To do this, I refer to Wood and Kroger (2000) who discuss several criteria that strive to keep qualitative DA trustworthy. One such specification is warrantability, which is vital to establish justification for my research claims (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Warrantability is co-constructed and thus rests upon shared knowledge (Wood & Kroger, 2000). In this regard, I strive for warrantability by engaging with multiple theories to construct meaning and contemplate ideas and insights with others as a way to avoid any "tragic misreadings" of

transgender experiences (Namaste, 2000, p. 9), as well as the words and images I analyze. Furthermore, warrantability is appropriate given that DA is subjective and does not purport to uncover any one universal truth (Rose, 2007; Taylor, 2012; Wood & Kroger, 2000). In that sense, traditional criteria, such as reliability and validity, are not suitable given that these seek to produce certain truths about research findings (Wood & Kroger, 2000). This project draws on some of the criteria suggested by Wood and Kroger (2000); these are: coherence, plausibility and fruitfulness.

Coherence. According to Wood and Kroger (2000), coherence refers to the set of analytic claims that are made about the text; indeed, claims must be clearly formulated in order to be viewed as coherent. A coherent claim is one that has accounted for “exceptions and alternatives,” broadly considering both general sequential patterns and the finer details (Potter & Wetherell, as cited in Wood & Kroger, 2000). I strive for coherence by making claims that are characterized by a clear, theoretically situated, explanatory scope. The visual and textual relationship, or “intertextuality”, is heavily considered and refers to the meaning making that is generated through a series of images and text, as opposed to looking only at one page (Rose, 2007, p. 142). The use of intertextual analysis in this MRP strengthens the coherence of my claims and I explicitly locate my statements within a wider social context (Wood & Kroger, 2000).

Plausibility. Wood & Kroger (2000) conceptualize plausibility as whether or not a certain set of claims is acceptable, or “seemingly true” (p. 176). They argue that a good interpretation should bring clarity, or a sense of insight, and direct attention to what is usually unnoticed. Indeed, I accomplish this by bringing transgender theories out from the “unanalyzed background” (Stryker, 2006, p. 3) to the heart of this study. This project is also plausible since I

heavily explore the different sets of claims within the gender theories, while actively and thoroughly relying on a comparison of different analyses (Wood & Kroger, 2000).

Fruitfulness. Finally, this study can be said to embody fruitfulness, which Wood and Kroger (2000) consider to be an “extra analytic criterion” (p. 175). Wood and Kroger (2000) point to Tracy who suggests that fruitfulness means that a good study should be “intellectually implicative for the scholarly community. It should suggest productive ways to reframe old issues, create links between previously unrelated issues and raise new questions that are interesting and merit attention” (p. 175). This project brings transgender theories to the fore, unlinking “gender/sex/uality” (Blaise, 2014, p. 115) to enhance emerging queer and feminist post-structural thought in ECEC.

Considering these criteria together, my encounter with the children’s picture books requires me to reflect continually upon, and engage respectfully with, the theoretical insights underpinning this study. This, I propose, is one way to avoid a non-transgender ‘expert’ approach. Finally, as a pedagogical concern, Britzman (1995) asks: “What is required to refuse the unremarked and obdurately unremarkable straight educational curriculum?” (p. 151). It is from the stance of gender normativity in children’s books that I explore, and expose, the dominant gazes from which this question stems. My goal is to cultivate an informed awareness and broader knowledge at both a personal and professional level.

Sample and Scope: The Process Behind the Book Selection

The first step in the process was to select the text for analysis, in this case, children’s picture books. Initially, I sought to find picture books that explained a character’s social gender transition to children. Due to the lack of available books describing this process, I expanded the sample to include books that illustrate the everyday life experiences of either a transgender *or*

gender variant protagonist. There appears to be a growing body of work that represents gender variant characters and, in the context of this growing genre, I am interested in the ways these characters, and their experiences, are represented. Deciding which criteria to include in this project invited me to consider carefully a variety of factors. In this next section, I identify and justify the reasons particular books were selected for analysis.

Humans and Animals. Animals are often characters in children's books and, as Reynolds (2011) articulates, they share many similarities with children since they are generally viewed as powerless in relation to adults. Animals are frequently featured in stories because they distance children from difficult topics such as: death, sex and violence (Reynolds, 2011). In some ways, then, animals shield children from Britzman's (1998) notion of 'difficult knowledge' which characterizes unsettling aspects of knowledge - knowledge which 'innocent' children are usually protected (Robinson, 2012). Animal characters are helpful for authors and illustrators wanting to minimize discussions about age, sex, class and ethnicity (Hamer, 2017; Reynolds, 2011). Though, Elder and Holyan (2010) contend that animals lack specific identities, so storylines can go in several directions, leading to conversations of a number of ethical issues of which adults might not be aware. Both animal and human protagonists are valuable for different reasons; but, for this project, I sought to explore books depicting humans having a range of human experiences.

Diversity of Characters. In this analysis, I want to make visible the voice of transgender artists given that, so often, transgender narratives are overshadowed or invisible (Elliot, 2010; Ingrey, 2014; Namaste, 2000, 2005; Stryker, 2006). Thus, the two books I ultimately selected are written, or co-written, by transgender authors; they are: *I am Jazz* and *the Boy and the Bindi*. The book *I am Jazz* was specifically selected for review because it is one of the first, of so few,

stories which explains a child's social gender transition. While I work toward adopting an intersectional approach with respect to gender theories, it is difficult to take up, in detail, the profound theorizing that has been produced by a number of other critical social theories. Future research projects which more deeply investigate the intersection of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, class and ability (to name but a few) would be useful in order to capture broader intersectional identities. In particular, *the Boy and he Bindi* offers an intersectional significance; yet, I am unable to adequately do justice to it given the scope of the MRP.

Sample Size. The challenge with analyzing children's picture books is not so much unpacking what the stories tell us, but in attempting to reveal the dominant discourses, or abstract details, of what stories do not say (Taylor, 2012). Rose (2007) contends that the rich textual detail in an analysis is far more important than the quantity (p. 150); therefore, I analyze a small sample of two books. Doing so, allows me to engage more deeply with the text and "visual grammar" (Painter et al., 2012), which arguably offers more profound insights than would have been obtained using a larger sample.

The Process of Data Generation and Data Analysis

Here, I outline the five stage process, as outlined by Aldred and Burman (2005).

- Stage 1: Generating the Text: Visual Analysis
- Stage 2: Making Connections: Elaborating the Discourse
- Stage 3: Identifying Objects and Subjects and their Value
- Stage 4: Rights and Responsibilities: Who Can Say What...
- Stage 5: ...And Why: Institutional and Broader Systemic Links

Stage 1: Generating Text from the Images

The above steps were useful to employ; however, once the process began, I realized that I needed broader guidance to extract the most salient information from the rich images in the books. Painter et al. (2012) argue that picture books need to be regarded as a significant aspect of

making meaning. They refer to a “bimodal” concept which is written language together with illustrations (Painter et al., 2012, p. 2). In order to generate the most meaningful details from the picture books, the visual aspects must play as vital a role as the text.

With Painter et al. (2012), I examined the concept of “visual grammar” by exploring the following: the relationships between a sequence of images and the text in children’s books; the range of potential points of view to be considered in visual narratives, and the opportunity for visual and emotional engagement with the reader (p. 2). Including a specific image analysis strategy allowed me to create a more sophisticated approach, whereby I was better able to extract subtle, relevant details that, as the analysis reveals, present powerful information. Thus, looking through gender theoretical lenses to critically consider what the discourse within the picture books is saying, along with the tools outlined in Painter et al. (2012) and Aldred and Burman (2005), allowed me to generate powerful meaning from the material.

Commitment. The first step Painter et al. (2012) suggest is to view the books using their concept of ‘commitment’. This enabled me to explore the ways the characters were depicted and whether the images commit to generating significant, or minimal, meaning. For example: the portrayal of a character with clear, detailed facial features is seen as generating more meaning than a visual representation of a character’s arm. Furthermore, the degree of repetition of certain themes also represents a strong commitment to a message. When an *image* with strong commitment is beside a detailed *written* description of the character, it is said to highly ‘commit’ to conveying an even deeper message (Painter et al., 2012). I utilized this meaning making system throughout the analysis to examine how extensively, and to what degree of intricacy, the images in the books commit to the messages they convey. This step, I maintain, offers vital information about the ways the gender theories interact with each other and, in particular,

generates insights into how transgender identities are portrayed in the books and where the power of naming identity lies.

Coupling. The second tool is ‘coupling’ (Painter et al., 2012). This is a way to analyze the consistency of ambiance, such as: vibrancy, colour palette, warmth and light in the images to determine if these complement, or juxtapose, the *feeling* in the verbal text. Other factors to consider are the visual emotions of each character that are conveyed through facial expressions, body stances and gestures, including whether textual attitudes complement, or contrast with, the visual emotions. Painter et al. (2012) suggest that the text and images need to be considered as a unit; thus, viewing the stories using the concepts of commitment and coupling guided the research process. Finally, the interpersonal relationships among the characters revealed key information about the commitment and coupling (Painter et al., 2012). Some of the ways to draw this information to the fore are to look at the characters’ actions, the settings, the overall tone and feel of the story as well as the characters’ affiliation with each other and the reader.

Stage 2: Making Connections Between the Discourses

Once the books were selected, I began by reading them daily, keeping in mind theoretical insights from my readings of transgender, queer and feminist thought. DA depends upon reading with “great care for *detail*” (Rose, 2007, p. 165, emphasis in original). In so doing, I began to establish the overall meaning in each book and the contribution each theory made to the research questions, or the “issue at hand” (Bowen, 2009, p. 33). “Freely associating” (Aldred & Burman, 2005, p. 14) with the text and images allowed me to engage deeply with the characters. I read each book with great care, noticing new material, and nuances, with each review. These careful readings revealed a number of “surprising and unsurprising” (Aldred & Burman, 2005, p. 14) parallels to emerge. While I was not surprised to uncover the dominant discourse of an

authoritative gaze, I was surprised that this had not been considered prior to the research. Thus, I realized it was vital to let the details of the material guide my investigation (Rose, 2007).

I allowed the discourses to organically emerge from the material, and remained open to new ideas, perspectives and insights. I was also amazed at how much the images ‘said’; indeed, they revealed the diverse ways that gender was conceived of in each of these picture books. Once saturation was achieved, that is, no new concepts or surprising material surfaced from the images, texts or storylines, I continued to the more formal analytic stages.

Stage 3: Identifying Objects and Subjects

The next stage outlined by Aldred and Burman (2005) involved identifying ‘objects’ to consider the meanings and values implied within them. Using this idea, as well as conceptions of commitment and coupling (Painter et al., 2012), I transformed the objects in the images into text. I paid careful attention to the ways in which the text and images worked together to generate and deliver a message to the audience. A significant object in *I am Jazz* is seen in her constant companion, her mermaid, and it goes without saying that the most notable ‘object’ in *the Boy and the Bindi* is his bindi. These, and other key objects, were generated into text, coded and placed in the category of the final dominant discourses discussed.

As an adult reader, it was impossible to position myself as a child reader; nonetheless, I was able to draw on the gender theorists and insights from discourse and image analysts to delve more deeply into this aspect of the exploration process. Not only was it useful to situate the reader, as Aldred and Burman (2005) suggest, but it was also important to identify different characters’ positions within the stories. This helped me to consider the roles that accompanied each of the subjects and whether they summoned the reader to act in some way or simply be a

passive observer (Painter, et al., 2012). During a discussion with my supervisor, I realized that analyzing picture books with children would be interesting future research.

In addition to the placement of the characters, I considered what was being communicated by their position and size, and whether these aesthetics functioned to carry a particular message (Aldred & Burman, 2005; Painter et al., 2012). It was useful to acknowledge that the same character might be positioned differently at different times in the story, and this nuance often produced profound implications (Aldred & Burman, 2005). Consequently, with Aldred and Burman (2005), I continually sought to analyze how the audience was situated.

Stage 4: Roles and Rights - Relationships of Hierarchy

Examining the relationships between the subjects and objects revealed traces of hierarchal relationships. In my analysis, I examined the relationships in each book separately, then reviewed the collective themes within the sample. This allowed me to understand some of the broader dominant discourses. After I established some ideas about the relationships between the subjects and objects in relation to my critical gender theories, I re-examined the connections and considered whether there could have been alternative versions of these relationships. I asked myself the following: Are the images saying something other than what the words express?; Does the position of anyone's body in the images tell a contrasting story?; If I look back on my analysis of the material, was there something I had not considered when using transgender, queer or feminist theories? and, if so, how do I know? Deep theoretical thought emerged the more I considered these critical questions.

Stage 5: Institutional Connections

Another aspect of the data analysis that was useful to consider were the values placed on certain institutions, such as: education, family, experts (doctors), marriage, social and medical

science, as well as the institution of spirituality. I reflected upon the ways in which any of these institutions were either reinforced, or undermined, in the stories. Another vital consideration was an examination of which character gains, or loses, within these institutions. This, I achieved by tracing subtle, or overt, relationships of hierarchy, including any knowledge of authority. I also looked for instances where protagonists were positioned as exceptional, or who ‘won’, as a way to redeem themselves from the ‘unredeeming’ quality of gender variance (see skelton, 2015b).

Summary of the Methodology

To draw this section to a close, I referred to Gee (2014) who explains that when we look at a statement in texts as actions, we merely focus on what is being done. But, when we look at statements as practices, we shift our focus from what is “being done” in the story to the broader “social, institutional and cultural significance” (p. 103-104). Practices occurring in the stories offered insights into the “larger sociocultural endeavours” and “institutional, social, and cultural support systems and values” (Gee, 2014, p. 104). Since I sought to investigate the broader cultural, institutional and social meaning for transgender and gender variant characters, Gee’s (2014) critical discourse perspective was helpful because transgender narratives are often erased in the “social, cultural and institutional world” (Namaste, 2000, p. 56). Drawing on these and other ideas, in the next section I offer a summary and an analysis of each picture book, and synthesize the findings and common dominant discourses.

Introducing the Books: *The Boy and the Bindi* and *I am Jazz*

Here, I offer a short summary of each book, a description of the character(s), and a brief outline of the setting and plot of each story. This first part begins to answer my first research question: *How can the process of a child’s social gender transition, or the experience of a transgender child, be understood in contemporary children’s picture books?* The next section

answers my second research questions: *How can feminist, queer and transgender theoretical perspectives be used to shed light on the workings of two children's books with gender variant and/or transgender characters? Does any tension amongst these theories present itself in the text and/or images?* Third, I close this section by revealing the common dominant discourses which strive to answer my third research questions, which are: *What are the common discourses that run throughout each of the texts and images? Of the dominant discourses that emerge, which are useful, affirming, limiting or misrepresentative?* After pointing out the overlapping discourses that are common in both books, at this stage I also highlight where the books had contradictory narratives. Finally, I present my last research question: *Taking into account transgender, queer and feminist theories, what textual and visual considerations may be useful to recommend to ECEs when selecting, reading and discussing books with children?* This is addressed in the discussion and recommendation portion of my MRP.

A Summary of *the Boy and the Bindi*

“It’s not a dot, says my Ammi— It’s not a spot, it’s a bindi!”

Written by Vivek Shraya and illustrated by Rajni Perera, in this book the reader is introduced to a South Asian boy and his mother. Due to the title, one assumes the story is about a boy. However, except for the title, his gender is not referenced once in the book. However, in keeping with the title, I will refer to the child as “the boy.” Yet, with Davis (1997), I consider that we become gendered through the particular discursive *patterns* made available to us (p. 9), and this was seen in the pattern of the *absence* of the child’s name and gender. Upon discovering a dot on his mother’s forehead, the boy expresses a consistent and growing fascination with this spot and asks his mom for one of his own. Once he discovers how “calm,” “safe and true” his bindi makes him feel, he declares he will never be without it. The book portrays an intimate

sequence of events that occurs between the child and his mother prior to, during and after receiving his own bindi. Without diagnosing or labelling gender, the book allows the audience to imagine and discuss a variety of gender identities and expressions.

The Author and Illustrator of *the Boy and the Bindi*

Vivek Shraya, an acclaimed poet, is an artist based in Toronto whose work spans the medium of film, music and literature. This is her first children's picture book and it was featured in the *National Post* on the Bestseller List (Shraya, 2017). The powerful illustrations were created by Rajni Perera, also an artist from Toronto, whose work illustrates the "coloured female body," gender, sexuality and popular culture (Shraya, 2016). This collaborative piece was awarded a 'Highly Commended Book' at the 2017 South Asian Book Awards. During a recent interview, Vivek said she wanted to dispel the myth that "brown parents were often disapproving of gender variance." Furthermore, she said if there is a sequel, the boy will either continue being a boy who likes wearing a bindi or maybe he will turn out to be a girl (Wool, n.d). This leaves the impression that the book might be somewhat of a biography, especially since, in 2017, Vivek told NOW magazine of her recently affirmed female identity.

Summary of *I am Jazz*

Being JAZZ, felt much more like being ME!

I am Jazz begins on a soft pink note, followed by images which unmistakably situate Jazz's gender as that of a young girl. Wearing fashion that is generally associated with girls and femininity, Jazz welcomes us into her story, along with her toy mermaid, which is never far away. This is a story about a child who is assigned male at birth, however from a very early age, expresses her identity as a girl. The book explains the child's social gender transition to affirm

her female identity and portrays some of the confusion and isolation the family experiences; but, it also emphasizes the pride and joy she and her family experience.

The Authors and Illustrator of *I am Jazz*

Jazz Jennings' book is auto-biographical, thus co-written by Jazz. Her co-author is writer Jessica Herthel and in Jazz's words: "[Jessica] helped me share my story, and without her dedication to the LGBTQ community, the book *I am Jazz* would have never come to fruition" (Herthel, 2017). The pictures were drawn by Shelagh McNicholas, who has written several books, many illustrating stereotypical feminine representations of gender. Jazz, now in her seventeenth year, is an author, an active transgender activist, as well as the co-founder and star of the television series *I am Jazz*. She is also the founder of an online support and resource community called *TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation* which offers education and resources. Not surprisingly, the foundation's mascot is a purple mermaid, one of Jazz's favourite things.

Summary

It is important to keep in mind Banks (2014) who writes that with regard to picture books, the "images are produced by human subjects in the context of, or in response to, human social action" (p. 394). Thus, they exist "independently of their creators, although they retain affective and agentic ties to them" (p. 394). The illustrations in both books are highly detailed, which demonstrates a strong commitment to the characters, their relationships with each other and the overall storyline (Painter et al., 2012), allowing the reader to connect with the protagonists and the plot in a meaningful way. The diversity in these two books alone suggests how vital it is to provide multiple narratives that consider class, race, ability, region and family structures. In each of their own ways, the storybooks illustrate how one might embody girlhood

and/or boyhood, or a place in between, on an unfixed journey for some and a search for a “gender home” on a stable binary for others (Elliot, 2010, p. 52).

Chapter 5: The Analysis

Concepts Used in the Analysis

As stated, my approach was broadly informed by key concepts stemming from critical transgender, feminist and queer theories. Banks (2014) writes, very often “visual analysis in the social sciences is ... treated as a superficial mode of analysis, lacking robustness” and this might be the case when visual analyses are used independently (p. 405). With Painter et al. (2012), I made meaning from the picture books by considering a “visual - verbal unity” (p. 3), carefully exploring what was happening in the text/visual dualism. Finally, I linked the analysis of the images and text to present some of the key findings clearly and succinctly, while discussing similarities and differences in the stories.

In the following section, I synthesize and consider the ways in which my readings of the gender theories, along with my personal and professional experiences, bring me to see certain common dominant discourses in the two books. The most predominant discourses I discuss are the authoritative and affirmative ‘gazes’. The authoritative or ‘expert’ gaze includes: the medical, parental, Western and school gazes. Alternatively, the text and images also reveal an affirmative gaze which is located through the lens of a feminist ethics of care, revealing the differing affirmation of the children’s parents. For the boy, the affirmative gaze is also seen through the gaze of a loving higher power. As well, how both children creatively use objects and elements to transcend the external gaze, and their own thoughts, reveals new ways to gaze at themselves.

Underpinning the notion of the gaze is the audience’s gaze and, in turn, the characters’ gaze upon the audience, both of which I deeply consider. Also, the gaze intersects with other discourses found in both books, that is, notions of intelligibility and unintelligibility as well as the gender binary, whether fixed or stable. In many ways, these discourses overlap and my

analysis presents some of the findings which demonstrate this. To begin, I discuss how an authoritative and affirmative gaze impact each protagonist. This analysis concludes with a summative discussion of the ways in which they present themselves.

The History and Implications of the Gaze. The gaze is commonly associated with notions of power, hierarchy and authority. With respect to transgender embodiment, Stone (1991) argues that “epistemologies of white male medical practice are a meaning machine for the production of the ideal body type” (p. 294). Since the lives of those who embody a “non-normative gender” rely on the meaning that is made, “the stakes for them are much higher than for others” (Elliot, 2010, p. 9). Thus, the notion of the gaze stems from the glare of individuals and institutions that uphold certain dominant frameworks.

Pyne (2014b) describes Foucault’s work, which exposes “... psychiatry and medicine as new sites of organized discipline and correction” (p. 82). Underpinning Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’ is “the ‘taken-for-granted’ character of how things are done” (Sanger, 2010, p. 265) in order to maintain the ‘status quo’. The ‘taken for granted’ operations gaze upon those with less than desirable qualities, perhaps those deemed what Butler (2004) calls, “less than human” (p. 2), or those ‘marked’ outside of the realm of “human” (Davis, 1997). The expert gaze pushes gender variant children into the preferred inside, where they are *made* to be intelligible based on the views and values of ‘expert’ clinicians (Pyne, 2014b, p. 90, emphasis in original).

With my theoretical understandings of each gender theory, I develop an interpretation of the text and images, which allows the dominant discourse of the ‘gaze’ to emerge from a number of different angles. Each angle stems from the overarching discourse of power. I also consider the fact that the audience's gaze varies depending on its own theoretical lenses, experiences,

ideologies, goals or beliefs. Ultimately, this gaze can lead to the regulation of books, especially if this gaze considers the content ‘taboo’ for young audiences.

The Male Gaze. Feminist Laura Mulvey (1975) coined ‘the male gaze’, a term demonstrating that the images of women are “passive material” for the “active gaze” of men, therefore, signifying patriarchal ideologies of order and power (p. 815). These ideologies mirror the content in children’s storybooks at that time. Weitzman et al. (1972) found that male characters often played active roles, whereas females were passive, if visible at all. Rose (2007) outlined feminist critique that argued that a ‘male gaze’ erases the active ‘female gaze’ - “Can women also see actively?” (p. 122). Furthermore, queer readings of a male gaze ask: What about men who gaze at men? (Rose, 2007). Transgender theories raise questions of ‘legitimate’ male or female embodiment; yet, transgender bodies are frequently subjected to the gaze of their closest allies in the gay, lesbian and queer communities (Elliot, 2010; Salamon, 2010; Stryker, 2006).

Normalizing gazes are articulated through various institutions, such as: clinics, hospitals and schools (Pyne, 2014b; Taylor, 2012). In this section, I define and consider the first branch of the gaze in this analysis: the powerful medical gaze, which is absent in *the Boy and the Bindi*, but very much present in *I am Jazz*.

What is the Medical Gaze? The medical gaze is a highly prominent, dominant discourse in transgender studies. The transgender community has had a long, fraught history with medical ideologies which scrutinize transgender bodies and identities under the microscope of what is considered ‘normal’ in Western medicine (Ehrensaft, 2016; Lev, 2004, 2013; Pyne, 2014b; Singer, 2006; Stryker, 2006, 2008). As discussed in the literature review, early sexologists, like John Money, sought to ‘cure’ ‘effemimania’ (Serano, 2007) in boys. The medical gaze is one whereby medical professionals establish evidence of physical [and mental (Lev, 2013)]

pathology in those “individuals (bodies) deemed different from the valued norm” (Singer, 2006, p. 601). Under the scrutiny of such a gaze, transgender embodiment, authority and expertise are “structurally undercut” (Singer, 2006, p. 610); in essence, doctors distinguish, or diagnose, transpeople as mentally ill, hence not capable of making decisions about their “bodies and lives” (Serano, 2013, p. 412, also see Lev, 2013). It is undeniable that diagnostic categories have an impact on the opinions people hold of others. Generally, these judgements fail to consider the broader institutional entities that determine, and define, pathologies (Lev, 2013), such as rigid ideas of ‘normal’, predominant in medical texts and discourses (Singer, 2006).

In the sections that follow, I highlight the findings, quotes, images and passages in the books, as well as generate a discussion of my analysis. In this first analysis, I describe the meaning that is made through the process of Jazz’s social gender transition, which takes place within a series of intersecting gazes and, of those, the medical gaze takes precedence.

The Analysis and Discussion

The Authoritative Gaze

The Medical Gaze. Medical discourse produces doctors, nurses, patients (Rose, 2007, p. 142), and the normal and abnormal body (Singer, 2006). At birth, the gaze of a medical ‘expert’ assigns Jazz male, based on the presence of her penis; so, in a way, she is fettered from the start. This natal sex assignment sets in motion the ways that others come to view her. For example, about her parents, Jazz says they “always thought of me as a boy,” despite her repeated self-affirmed feminine identity: “No mama. Good GIRL!” Her “insistent, persistent and consistent” (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 56) claims that she is a girl disrupt her parents’ essentialist knowledge about the way the world works, such as, claims that all women have wombs and all men have penises (Serano, 2013).

Here, I examine the gender and sex binary from the perspective of Butler's (1990) heterosexual matrix, highlighted in detail in the literature review. In Western society, girls and boys are categorized in order to make distinctions between them. Jazz's parents' understandings, like most people, appear to be aligned with Butler's heterosexual matrix, for example: My child was born with a penis; the doctor assigned a classification: "It's a boy!"; thus, he will come to embody masculine expressions, assuming an identity as a boy. Based on the predominance of the 'normative' images in the book, it is safe to assume her parents would imagine their son embodying manhood, taking a wife one day and having children of his own. Even so, gender/sex binaries fail to recognize that an imposed-upon assignment may differ from one's self-affirmed gender.

For Jazz, the process of acceptance progresses through various avenues and does not happen immediately - hence, her process is unlike the immediate affirmation the boy receives in *the Boy and the Bindi*. Jazz's self-expression is initially limited, due to deeply ingrained beliefs that rely heavily on gender roles and stereotypes. This is seen when, on excursions outside the home, Jazz "had to put on my boy clothes again. This made me MAD!" Her anger and separateness during these outings, as shown in the text and images, are highly palpable as she stands, crestfallen in "boy's clothes," staring at the girls dancing in tutus - a gender she, too, knows herself to be. Since Jazz does not come to embody boyhood, her unanticipated behaviours create confusion for her family, and she feels that "pretending I was a boy felt like telling a lie." There is generally some confusion that a transgender individual's denial of an assigned gender, like Jazz's sentiment that it feels "like telling a lie," is a critique of the sex/gender binary itself (Namaste, 2005). On the contrary. Transgender individuals, like Jazz, often claim a "different embodied position within that system" (Namaste, 2005, p. 7), seeking to cultivate lives on one

side of a distinct binary. Yet, distinct binary representations are “not queer enough” for some queer theorists who argue that the gender binary excludes individuals who feel no affiliation with either, or any, gender (Elliot, 2010, p. 36). However, in the image below, it is clear that Jazz longs for the side of the binary on which she is being denied, demonstrating that we live in a world where the binary is very much alive, especially for children.

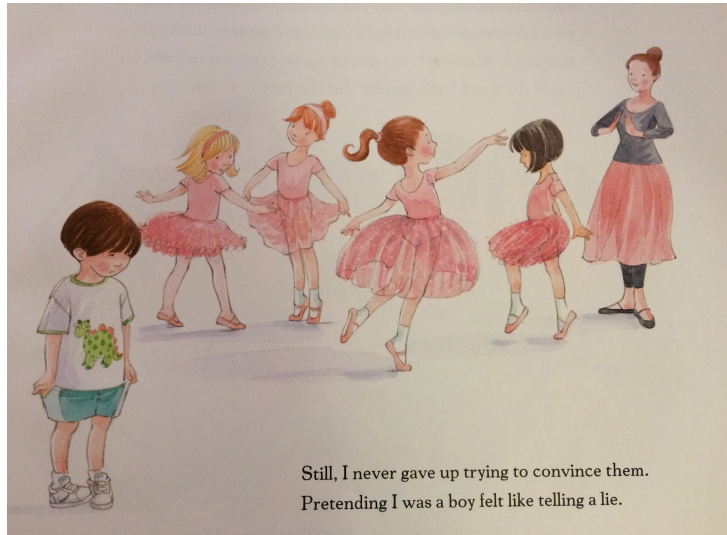


Figure 1: The illustration by S. McNicholas (2014) in *I am Jazz* demonstrates that “care is needed” (Langford & White, 2017), exclusion, gender binary representations and stereotypes. Copyright 2017 by Transkids Purple Rainbow Foundation. Reprinted with permission.

Considering this series of three images which portray Jazz’s social gender transition, I draw on the three step process to the ethical interaction of care designed by Langford and White (2017): “care is needed, care is given, care is received” (n.p). The confusion of Jazz’s family alerts them to the fact that a certain “care was needed,” which appears to fuel their sense of responsibility (Langford & White, 2017), causing them to take their distressed child to a doctor. There, Jazz hears the word “transgender for the very first time.” Thus, with the doctor, “who asked me lots and lots of questions,” we can assume that “care is given” through the process of

receptive attention, and listening (Langford & White, 2017) to, her responses.



Figure 2: The illustration by S. McNicholas (2014) in *I am Jazz* demonstrates that “care is given” (Langford & White, 2017), and the medical expert is imparting knowledge and clarity. Copyright 2017 by Transkids Purple Rainbow Foundation. Reprinted with permission.

The diagnosis of transgender gives Jazz and her family the language they need to make meaning of what is happening. Having this understanding means that her parents *allow* her to embody girlhood, although this knowledge also stresses that she is “different” from the other girls at school. One of the most obvious readings of her ‘difference’ is the presence of her penis; yet, queer and transgender theorists and activists often strive to move the notion of ‘difference’ away from the individual child in order to probe what society views as ‘normal’ instead (Lev, 2004, 2013; Pyne, 2014b; Serano, 2013; Travers, 2014).

With new information from the doctor, Jazz’s family supports her by saying: “We understand now. Be who you are. We love you no matter what.” This makes Jazz “smile and smile and smile”; indeed, here, “care is received” - made known by Jazz’s response, which offers her “perspective on the care” (Langford & White, 2017). Additionally, the message of care is conveyed through the strong commitment to joy, as seen in the repetition of the smiles in *both*

the text and the ‘coupling’ image (Painter et al., 2012).



Figure 3: The illustration by S. McNicholas (2014) in *I am Jazz* demonstrates that “care is received” (Langford & White, 2017) after her diagnosis.
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Quite notably, however, before this could happen for Jazz, the expertise of the doctor is required to care for the family as a whole. Since her identity differs from what her family expected when she was born, this act of care reveals the family’s “openness to the possibility of personal disruption,” or potential risks, as well as emotional implications (Hamington, as cited in Langford & White, 2017). Elliot (2010) outlines reactions from scholars and activists who argue both for, and against, a diagnosis of gender - illustrating a doctor’s ability to offer support and treatment through a diagnosis on one hand, and power and control on the other. In fact, some activists are uneasy about access to care if GD is removed from the DSM (Lev, 2013).

Yet, most transgender people do not have access to affirmative care (Lev, 2004, 2013; Namaste, 2000, 2005; Serano, 2007, 2013; Stryker, 2008). As well, many physicians lack training in this field, hence, any “authoritative knowledge” around caring for people with “gender issues” (Davy, 2010, p. 108). Too, there is an underlying principle of power in any diagnosis because it is always based on typical anatomy and “locates the site of deviance on the

bodies of social outcasts” (Singer, 2006, p. 601). These discussions lead me to wonder what might have happened to Jazz if she had had to continue to “pretend to be a boy” for much longer. Needless to say, there are debates among gender theorists about whether gender needs to be diagnosed at all, as well as contrasting views on how to support transgender and gender expansive children, as discussed in the literature review.

From Medical Affirmation to an Audience Gaze: “Coming Out”

The medical ‘gaze’ leads to a diagnosis for Jazz, who then *claims* this information by actively explaining it to us, the audience. As an audience member myself, I read our gaze as those of interested, supportive allies. When Jazz steps away from joyful play with friends, a look of hesitancy, or doubt, appears on her face. Here is another image demonstrating her separateness. She appears to be censoring information from her friends by situating herself close to the audience, inspiring a certain curiosity and concern in the reader.

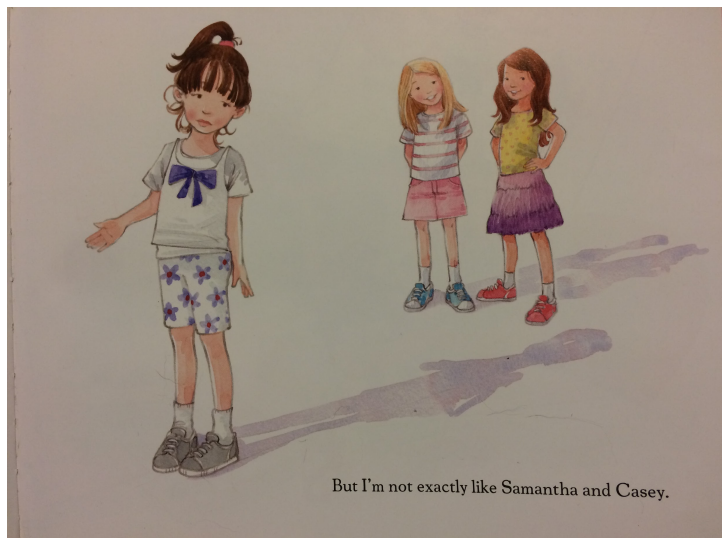


Figure 4: The illustration by S. McNicholas (2014) in *I am Jazz* demonstrates Jazz “coming out” to the reader, explaining that she is different from her friends. The shadow in the image signifies her physical distance from her friends, both in location and biology. Copyright 2017 by Transkids Purple Rainbow Foundation. Reprinted with permission.

Spencer (2014) writes that when transgender youth come to recognize their gender identities are regarded as socially unacceptable, they begin to censor their words and behaviours (p. 115). My reading of this scene is that if Jazz's friends had known, perhaps she would have told us *in* their presence; instead, she steps away from the smiling friends, gazes at the ground with toes curled inward, telling her allies, the readers: "I am not exactly like Casey and Samantha."

The text and images in the book *I am Jazz*, and Jazz herself, use a substantial amount of gender conforming language. My analysis strives to show how dominant this conforming language is and, reading the gender theories, the reasons this might be the case. Jazz's instability as a girl is evident in this scene, not in her physical appearance, but in her unsteady, tentative body language. In other images, she appears confident as a highly feminine girl, which exposes some of the tension among gender theorists who favour individuals who are hard to read on the "gender map" (Noble, 2006) and argue that intelligible representations are made more visible (Taylor, 2012, Travers, 2014). I contend that even though Jazz's exceedingly feminine embodiment appears to be a perpetuation of the gender binary, she transgresses biological assumptions of the binary. While embodying girlhood, she does not necessarily live a 'stable' version of this category. Thus, in attempts to break down the binary or encourage children to develop male and female sides equally, as discussed in Giraldo and Colyar (2012), there is, simultaneously, a risk of disavowing gender as Jazz would like to express it on the notion that it is progressively ideal to put her in a position of being androgynous, or unintelligible.

Considering the educator's suggestion in Giraldo and Colyar (2012), I question whether Jazz would *want* to develop her masculine side equally, especially since "pretending to be a boy felt like telling a lie." In fact, this "lie" might be the *very* part of her she wants to distance herself

from, and encouraging her to cultivate that side may, indeed, be traumatizing. Elliot (2010) synthesizes the literature that illustrates that some transgender people find ways to live with incongruent, unstable gender identities; yet, for many, the “search for a gender home is paramount” (p. 52), as it appears for Jazz.

This situation highlights the value of a feminist ethics of care, which takes into account the particularities of situations in order to establish the most appropriate response – one that meets the goals, desires and needs of the child involved (Langford et al., 2016; Langford & White, 2017). Conceivably, Jazz needs the ‘gender map’ that Noble (2006) rejects in order to guide her in cultivating her gender embodiment.

Born This Way.

“I have a girl brain and a boy body. This is called transgender. I was born this way.”

This one sentence requires considerable thought. This story is written for children and, as such, this sentence seems to be a straightforward way of explaining the “state of discord between ‘sex’ (her body) and gender identity (her mind)” (Hines 2010, p. 2).



Figure 5: The illustration by S. McNicholas (2014) in *I am Jazz* depicts Jazz explaining to us that she is transgender. As always, her mermaid is in tow. Copyright 2017 by Transkids Purple Rainbow Foundation. Reprinted with permission.

Questions arise, however, about the ‘nature’ or ‘innateness’ of gender when one claims to have been “born this way.” Gender is not innate, although biology is involved, and I explore

these notions, recognizing that there are no conclusive answers to questions this idea generates. Advocates argue for the removal of GID from the DSM, thinking that it will eliminate the stigma of mental illness (Gorton, 2013). Admittedly, a diagnosis leads people to perceive the diagnosed person differently (Lev, 2013). Thus, the visual evidence in Jazz's explanation and her drawings, seen above, direct the reader to "read the pictured body differently," possibly asking the audience to "re-view the image" (Singer, 2006, p. 608). When reading this book with children, it is important for ECEs to be prepared to discuss her statement.

Jazz's drawings offer the reader a clear picture of her *inside feelings*. Prior to her transition, the images reveal a sad boy, crying and alone under an array of clouds. Then, following her transition, we see a girl with arms raised high toward sunshine, open fields, flowers and soaring birds - the mermaid, her constant ally and companion.

With respect to "being born this way," medicine has gone to great lengths to understand the causation of the transgender phenomena (Gorton, 2013; Pyne, 2014b; Serano, 2013; Stryker, 2006, 2008). Many advocates say transgenderism lies in the physical anatomy and functions of the brain (Gorton, 2013, p. 647); however, Pyne (2014b) maintains that before the "problem" of gender variance can be "solved," its source needs to be traced to the medical gaze that constitutes what is 'normal' in society (p. 83). Reading and challenging Zucker's beliefs, Pyne (2014b) writes that one of the explanations for gender variance rests in "a cognitive impairment" and an inability to classify one's gender (p. 84). Other causes lie in 'deficient' parenting, absent fathers and overbearing, depressed mothers (Lev, 2013; Pyne, 2014b; Sedgwick, 1997). Nevertheless, transgender people often resist such inspections which treat them as anomalies (Pyne, 2011). Indeed, there are contrasting beliefs and debates as to whether nature or nurture is responsible for the transgender phenomena. These oppositional sites have led to a variety of explanations, and

related resistance, to any “evidence,” since findings generally arise under the gaze of the normalizing structures in society that Pyne discusses (2014b, p. 83).

Nature or Nurture. Serano (2013) deviates from the simplified “nature-versus-nurture” debates about gender, challenging those who contend that sex originates exclusively in biology; gender, exclusively in the social world (also see Gherovici, 2010). Instead, Serano (2013) recognizes that “biology, culture, and environment all interact in an unfathomably complex manner in order to generate the human diversity we see all around us” (p. 16; also see Ehrensaft 2009, 2016; Lev, 2004).

Serano (2013) explains that when people say that LGBTQ+ individuals are simply “born that way... **gender artifactualists** cringe” (p. 220). Also, considering this idea is Ghervochi (2010) who discusses Brill and Pepper’s (2008) book, marketed to professionals and families of gender variant children from birth to college. Ghervochi wonders: If there is gender variance at birth, “is gender merely innate?” (2010, p. 10). Additionally, Mallon (2009) states that words like nature, natural, biological or real, when applied to gender, often evoke strong emotional reactions in transgender individuals because these terms seem to question the legitimacy of their identities. Whether being “born that way” is accurate or not, this explanation has generated widespread acceptance, making it easier to “move through the world as an openly queer person” (Serano, 2013, p. 220-221). Thus, a certain amount of explaining is helpful because education and understanding lead to broader acceptance and inclusion (Hines, 2007).

Considering Jazz with Elliot (2010), many queer and non-transgender feminists take issue with transpeople wishing to live as the opposite sex, designating them as “dupes” of medical (and social) constructions of gender stereotypes (p. 97). Yet, reading Gilbert, Elliot (2010) claims that freedom from rigid sex/gender distinctions is in the movement from “one to the other

easily, not the questioning of stereotypical norms that undermine gender categories” (p. 95).

Finally, it appears that the reader is positioned differently from Stafford’s (2012) findings, which revealed that LGBTQ+ books often position the reader as both straight and homophobic. In *I am Jazz*, I do not read the positioning of the audience as transphobic; but rather, I imagine the readers being interested in Jazz’s experiences regardless of their gender identity. Most importantly, the reader could be a child who hears and sees themselves in the “mirror” in both books (Myers as cited in McNevin & Berman, 2017).

Parental Gaze. Perhaps, Jazz’s parents see themselves as good parents by allowing Jazz to experiment with her sister’s dresses at home, while ensuring that in public, she is seen in boy clothes to avoid the gaze from those who might see a boy in a dress as pathological. Ehrensaft (2009) points out that when children express consistent narratives about their gender and “are allowed to match their gender expression with their inner gender identity,” they benefit in almost all aspects of life, but if restricted from doing so, often become depressed or even suicidal (p. 22). It comes as no surprise that the rates of depression and suicide are higher among transgender youth, due to the social stigma and internal unrest that ensues when one’s gendered body and brain are out of sync (Ehrensaft, 2009).

Despite the images and text that convey Jazz’s sadness and anger through her slouched body and words like “MAD,” she “never gave up trying to convince them.” Jazz’s insistence that she is a girl disrupts her parents’ thinking, leading them to an ‘expert’ physician. Jazz and her family need, and receive, affirmative medical care. While the diagnosis of gender operates under the presumption that something is wrong, diagnosis also offers Jazz and her family clarity, and the freedom Jazz needs to claim her self-affirmed, female identity.

“Truly” Seen. In this section I turn to the book, *the Boy and the Bindi*. While, like many parents, the boy’s mother holds a certain authority over him, as seen when he asks permission for access to a bindi when he considers that he, too, wants to be “safe and true”: “Ammi, do you have one more to spare?,” his mother, without questions, happily and playfully reaches into her drawer and offers him the feminine object: “Ta da! This one is yours!” The boy’s mother creates conditions for his curiosity, ideas and inquiries so they are “legitimated and listened to, [in] a context where the child feels comfortable, confident, motivated and respected” (Rinaldi, as cited in Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 18).

Jazz’s experiences of an affirmative gaze sharply contrast with those of the boy. Jazz’s interest in clothing typically associated with girls is only partially honoured when she is “*allowed* to wear her sister’s dresses at home” (emphasis added). Thinking with Serano (2013), “certain gendered and sexual bodies, identities, and behaviors are deemed more legitimate than others” (p. 14). Thus, my reading of this, using transgender theory, is that she does not qualify as a “real” member of the category, so has to *borrow* items from her sister. Her sister, though, is given unquestioned, legitimate female membership and, as a result, can wear girl clothes without confusion or speculation.

Juxtaposing this, the boy can wear his bindi all the time; in fact, he carefully bathes in a way to ensure that “it would always have its place.” Not only can he wear it without being questioned, *or* asked to take it off outside of the house, his bindi is *his own*. It is not a borrowed object and his mother makes it clear that “this one is yours!” With an unencumbered experience and access to the feminine object, he discovers that his own yellow bindi makes him feel “safe and true,” allowing him to explore his gender creatively. Considering a feminist ethics of care with Noddings (2013), one could say the mother, or caring one, receives the child and *his* world

through “*both sets of eyes*” (p. 63, emphasis added). His mother embodies a dual perspective, seeing things from both her own point of view and that of the “cared-for,” her son (Noddings, 2013, p. 64). From this viewpoint, the boy receives his bindi, an object generating a third eye, thus *another set of affirmative eyes* that offer him unconditional care as he explores the infinite possibilities of an open gendered world.

Yet, Jazz’s family does not initially “interpret [her] goals and ideas”; however, they remain flexible enough to adjust to changes and new ideas (Langford & White, 2017) through “both sets of eyes” (Noddings, 2013, p. 63) - those of the doctor and her parents. Following the diagnosis, her parents *allow* her to express herself fully: “they *let* me wear girl clothes to school and grow my hair long and they even *let* me change my name to Jazz” (emphasis added). Thus, Jazz is at the mercy of a medical ‘expert’, that of her parents and their decision following the doctor’s assessment. Upon diagnosis, I imagine Jazz breathing a huge sigh of relief after so much insistence. I conceive of Jazz thinking - *I have been trying to tell you this for so long!* Despite countless images and pleas throughout the book, which clearly indicate that Jazz is expressing a girl embodiment, Jazz’s curiosity in all things feminine is only truly cared for, or “legitimated and listened to,” once the family’s own uncertainty is cared for, or “legitimated and listened to,” by the doctor (Langford & White, 2017). Stryker (2006) writes that many transgender people find themselves having to educate both their families and friends. Ultimately, Jazz’s gender seems ‘legitimized’ under the watchful eyes of her parents, doctor and siblings, who have some thoughts of their own.

Sister or Brother? Jazz performs gender (Butler, 1990, 2004) as seen in her pointed toes, curtsy pose, tutus, gowns and crowns, mirrors and hair accessories. The two images below, side by side in the book, convey the thoughts of her siblings; clearly, the words and images

strongly uphold binary depictions of gender. Jazz leaps onto the pages, capturing both the audience's attention and that of her siblings, while sustaining eye contact, or gazing at, the reader to whom she is explaining her story.

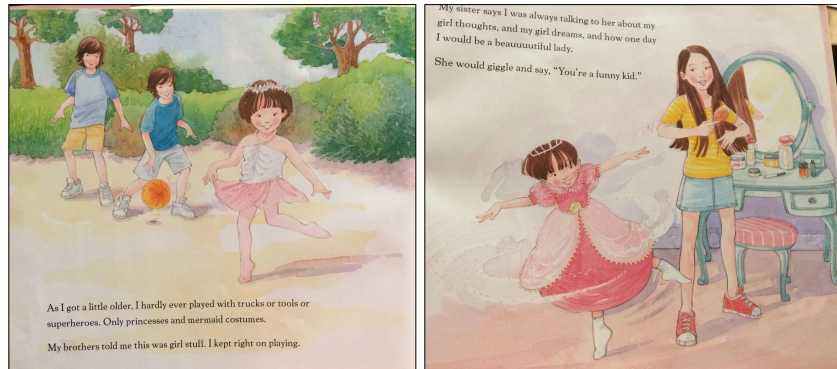


Figure 6: The illustrations by S. McNicholas (2014) in *I am Jazz* demonstrate her siblings' reaction to their 'brother's' 'girly' performances, and Jazz's refusal to conform. Copyright 2017 by Transkids Purple Rainbow Foundation. Reprinted with permission.

Jazz tells the reader that she “hardly ever played with tools or trucks or superheroes. Only princesses and mermaid costumes.” Her brothers’ reactions to Jazz’s interest in all things feminine appear endearing through their smiles; but, they do not see her as a girl, insisting that her interests are “girly things,” thus unsuitable for boys. What Blaise (2005) discovers is that girls often enact ‘girly girl’ femininity discourses through princess play through practices such as “wearing femininities, body movements, twirling (hair or skirt), curtsying, makeup, beauty, and fashion talk” (p. 85). We see this in Jazz, and also in her sister who is combing her hair in her room, recalling a younger Jazz’s “girl thoughts and her girl dreams,” remembering when Jazz imagined she would grow to “be a beuuuuuutiful lady!” Her sister considers her antics to be silly: “You’re such a funny kid.” Therefore, her brothers, her sister considers her an ‘unreal’ version of a girl, a category her sister can claim with ease.

These contemporary images convey similar gender stereotypes, revealed in Weitzman et al. (1972) and Williams et al. (1987). The boys are in active roles outdoors, whereas her sister is in the passive role indoors perhaps, too, cultivating “girl thoughts and girl dreams” that do not appear to extend beyond aesthetics, likely preparing herself for ‘the male gaze’. Considering “girl brain and girl thoughts,” the one and only time that Jazz is seen with books is prior to her social gender transition when she is still being referred to as a boy. Once her self-affirmed female identity is realized, the images contain no books and she never refers to them. Instead, the visual and textual grammar (Painter et al., 2012) primarily depict Jazz in a ballet tutu, cheering with pom poms, dancing with pointed toes and thinking ‘girly’ things, leading one to question what it means exactly to have a ‘girl brain’ with ‘girl thoughts’.

The Affirmative Gaze: A Gateway to Femininity

Access to femininity helps make up the dominant discourse of the ‘authoritative gaze’ in both books. As a young child, Jazz independently seeks femininity; still, her parents’ authority deciphers when, and how, she can *be* the girl she knows she is. Jazz’s father plays a caring role, with her mother playing only a slightly more predominant one. The commitment to include Jazz’s father in her access to femininity challenges a few assumptions, one being that females are generally considered more naturally nurturing than males (Held, 2006; Noddings, 2013; Serano, 2013). The affirmative presence of Jazz’s father also contrasts what is found in the literature: that fathers tend to have greater difficulty accepting their gender variant and transgender children (Brill & Pepper, 2008, Ehrensaft, 2011, 2016). The caring role the father assumes disrupts hegemonic ideas of manhood, including their deeper engagement with activities outside of the home. Therefore, the presence of Jazz’s father provides an example of both parents working together to support, and care for, their child.

The affirmative care seen in both families would have been less ‘visible’ if it had not been accompanied by the images. The drawings reveal a strong commitment to intimacy and care, indicated by the close physical and emotional connection, along with consistent eye contact between the characters (Langford & White, 2017; Painter et al., 2012). With Held (2006), care values relationships between persons and it involves empathetic understanding, which the commitment, and coupling, of the text and images below portray (Painter et al., 2012).

To highlight the boy’s access to femininity, I draw specifically on three sequential images in *the Boy and the Bindi*, which also outline Langford and White’s (2017) three step process to care.

The order of these images is important because they effectively present growing access to a gender embodiment, one that is unquestioned and intelligible to both the boy and his mother. This storyline reveals the process of coming to a place that is “safe and true.” While this essentialist language would be critiqued by many postmodern thinkers, the discourse presented here delineates what is ‘true’ for this particular child and family. Stryker (2006) argues that transgender theory may be considered postmodern insofar as it extends beyond contemporary “modernity of a knowable sex”; however, at the heart of transgender critique are epistemological concerns (p. 8).

Lev (2013) wonders: What might it be like if gender transitions and exploration were considered a “normative part of the diversity of human identity?” (p. 290). The unquestioning presence of the child’s mother in *the Boy and the Bindi* is an example of this and, hence, makes a valuable contribution to the genre by beginning to answer the ‘what if’ question Lev (2013) poses. Hines (2007) maintains that a lack of emphasis on subjectivity has led to a homogenous theorization of transgender. Indeed, a feminist ethics of care takes into account individual subjectivities (Langford et al., 2016) with a sensitivity to cultural differences (Held, 2006).

Hence, I seek to expose what the characters in both books might mean when using certain language, without critiquing the essentialist beliefs from which they stem. Arguably, both characters appear to be seeking truth and safety.

I turn to the following images which hold rich meaning and great potential in their ability to generate powerful discussions with a child or groups of children and, as such, are sites of critical reflection and analysis.



Figure 7: This illustration by R. Perera (2016) in *the Boy and the Bindi* demonstrates the child's fascination with, yet noticeable distance from, the mother's bindi. The mother appears disengaged with her son, and the bindi for which the child appears to be longing seems out of reach, illustrating that "care is needed" (Langford and White, 2017). Copyright 2017 by Arsenal Pulp Press. Reprinted with permission.

Curiosity. In the first illustration, the spacious bathroom with cool colours denotes a sense, or an atmosphere, of impersonal distance (Painter et al., 2012). Yet, the close proximity of their bodies and the warmth of the mother's skirt contrast the cool hues of blue and white porcelain. The vast height difference between them hinders eye contact and, since these reasons, the initial feeling is one of emotional separation for the mother's gaze is on her reflection in the

mirror. Perhaps her gaze signifies a preoccupation with aesthetics so as to appeal to the ‘male gaze’. However, each of the gender theories may suggest she has no interest in such a gaze.



Figure 8: The illustration by R. Perera (2016) in *the Boy and the Bindi* reveals the child's fascination with his mother's bindi. In the warm room, in contrast with the washroom, mom and perhaps the child's curiosity with femininity are within reach, demonstrating that "care is received" (Langford and White, 2017). Copyright 2017 by Arsenal Pulp Press. Reprinted with permission.

Closeness. In the image above, everything changes. Now, in what appears to be the boy's bedroom, his blue bedspread holds a delicateness in its appearance. The warm lighting of the room offers the intimacy that is lacking in the previous image. His mother is accessible, at his level; she is relaxed and inviting - I can literally feel the love. Wide eyed and full of wonder, the boy is seemingly admiring his mother's beauty and, of course, her bindi; however, the image does not make the bindi visible, or accessible, to the reader at the moment. I am as inquisitive as

the child who asks: “What’s so special about that spot?,” to which his mother replies: “It’s not a spot, it’s a bindi!” The compelling drawing invites us to consider the many possibilities that follow, luring us into the story.

Any gender, or femininity, that was out of reach for the boy immediately becomes available. By kneeling down, his mother reduces the authoritative position she possessed previously. We clearly see her earring, shaped like ‘the third eye’, offering visibility or access to a gender that may have been out of reach before. The third eye appears to be watching over them throughout this process. The readers’ tight porthole view of the mother-child dyad mirrors the tiny porthole window in the room. These ‘windows’ further emphasize the notion of a gaze, honing in on the pairs’ synchronized connection in the aesthetic harmony of the images and rhyming words echoing in the room. This intentional focus also heightens our attention to the emerging plants, magically growing at their feet. These symbolize, for me, the swelling growth of the child’s curiosity and, perhaps, growing gender embodiment. As well, the buds express the hope that accompanies access - in this case, access to femininity - that keeps the child “safe and true.”

Considering this scene with Noddings (2013), “the one-caring is sufficiently engrossed in the other to listen to him” and, she seems to take pleasure in what he asks. This image is “embedded in a relationship that reveals itself as engrossment and in an attitude that warms and comforts the cared-for” (Noddings, 2013, p. 19). A strong commitment to access to femininity is seen in the boy’s upward reaching body, which is accentuated even more by rocket ships, significant in their size and number, blazing in the same direction as his pointing finger. We see a poster that says “Saturn Returns” which represents a place far from our current gaze, certainly an unknown place. Now, with access to the child’s own femininity, the objects like the rockets

and planet potentially signify the child's "*movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place - rather than any particular destination*" (Stryker, 2008, p. 1, emphasis in original).

In this image, with a strong emphasis on movement, detail, growth and travel, it appears that a "search for a gender home" is paramount (Elliot, 2010, p. 52), while the destination is unknown and unquestioned. Ehrensaft (2016) writes that for many, gender changes and grows over the course of a lifetime; thus, the natural elements conveyed in the artwork mirror a growing belief that gender diversity is simply a part of humanhood (Ehrensaft, 2011, 2016; Elliot, 2010; Lev, 2004, 2013; Pyne, 2014b; Stryker, 2006, 2008 and others). Notably, for Serano (2013), "intrinsic inclinations arise as a result of natural variation, rather than being biological mistakes or defects" (p. 252).

Noble (2006) celebrates those who strive to embody an identity that is "so incoherent that they fail to register on the gender *maps* at all" (p. 130, emphasis added), a destination the child's rockets might be headed. Without pushing for such an incoherence, I read the rocket ships as objects that have been set in motion by his mother's affirmative gaze - the fuel behind the journey, so to speak, which might take the child right off Noble's (2006) 'gender map'

Additionally, alongside the surging *power* of the rockets is the *delicate* imagery seen in the new grass growing from the carpet. These contrasts of *power* and *delicacy* could be viewed as the dualism of *masculinity* and *femininity*, both of which appear to be accessible to, and a part of, the boy. Interestingly, while they are inside, which is common for female characters, the natural elements suggest the freedom of being outdoors, more typical for male characters (Weitzman et al., 1972; Williams et al., 1987). Noddings (2013) describes the great "chasm" that divides the masculine and feminine in each of us and she suggests that we enter into a dialogue

of “genuine dialectical nature in order to achieve an ultimate transcendence of the masculine and feminine in moral matters” (p. 6). This image engages with these matters, conveying another compelling dualism, indoors/outdoors, signifying both female/male aspects in the image.

Using transgender theories have also led me to wonder if the bindi offers the child access to femininity *or* access to a masculinity which challenges dominant assumptions of boyhood. Perhaps the *Boy and the Bindi* is a story about access to gender that relies neither on femininity nor masculinity, but transcends gender, by remaining nameless and undefined.



Figure 9: The illustrations by R. Perera (2016) in *the Boy and the Bindi* reveal the mother’s receiving of her first bindi and, then, her facilitation of her son’s desire for a bindi. In the warmth of the room, the child’s curiosity in femininity is not only within reach, but is offered. The room is also no longer intelligible as a bedroom, since it is overrun with growth. Copyright 2017 by Arsenal Pulp Press. Reprinted with permission.

Queering Tradition. While not side by side in the book, I situate these two images together because they represent a family’s cultural tradition, that is, the passing on of a bindi - from mother to child. In the first image, the mother is recalling the memory of her childhood: “My bindi tells me where I’m from. My bindi reminds me of my mom and when she gave me my

first one.” The artistic presentation of the mother and daughter commits to the message in an intriguing way. There are no visible facial features; probably the memory is distant and less accessible. But, the repetition of the three images highly commits to, and signifies, the importance of conveying the message of tradition. The young girl (the boy’s mother) lifts her face up towards her mother, whereas the boy and mother are face to face.

With Nodding (2013), I read this mother’s “attitude” as one beyond acceptance; it is “confirmation” (p. 64). Actually, this mother sees the best self in the boy and “works *with the child* to actualize that self” (Nodding, 2013, p. 64, emphasis added). In so doing, the mother also ‘queers’ the tradition, which was deeply steeped in mothers and daughters. The boy states: “She sticks it on my *bare* forehead.” The word “bare” might signify that there was perhaps something missing before, suggesting that “care is needed” (Langford & White 2017). He accepts the ‘queered’ tradition, in a room that is also ‘queered’, overflowing with unfathomable growth, nature and detail - bursting with life and love.

The plants in the room have now grown astronomically, making the bedroom unintelligible as an indoor space; even the blue bedspread becomes what appears to be the sea. The leaves cover the rocket ship wallpaper along with the *Saturn Returns* poster, and the porthole window gives the reader the impression that the mother and child are on a rocket ship of their own. The strong commitment to movement signifies transportation - the meaning of the word *transgender* being across gender (Stryker, 2008) - maybe, we have arrived, *or* are partway along a lifelong gender journey. The view through which we see this image now resembles an eye, possibly highlighting the audience’s own authoritative gaze. Here, I also consider this eye shape to be ‘the third eye’, committing to visibility, thus creating the possibility for both queer and transgender visibility in this story.

Me! in the Mirror. This series would definitely be incomplete without revealing the boy's reaction to his new bindi, or his perspective on the care received (Langford & White, 2017). I read the following image as a representation of the Lacanian “mirror stage” in which the image of ‘me’ is supported by the gaze of the ‘other’ (as cited in Elliot, 2010, p. 139-140); the ‘other’, in this case, may be his mother, his bindi or third eye. The gaze of the ‘other’ offers the child access to femininity and feelings of being “safe and true.” Possibly, without such access, the boy may continue to live in what Ehrensaft (2009) refers to as: “a ‘not-me’ body” (p. 23) or a ‘not me’ gender identity.



Figure 10: The illustration by R. Perera (2016) in *the Boy and the Bindi* demonstrates that “care is received” (Langford & White, 2017) since it highlights the child’s positive response to the reciprocity of care.

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Because there are only two central characters, I was drawn to this illustration which places a third toothbrush beside the “Super Cool” toothpaste. With the stigma that surrounds ‘girly boys’ (Ehrensaft, 2007), the name of the toothpaste may indicate it is “cool” to challenge the constraints of masculinity – and perhaps gender entirely. Depending on one’s positionality, or theoretical lens, the image likely draws various possibilities. Queer theory might image a second mother or a kinship outside of marriage. Feminist theory could imagine a single mother

with two children, or a wife in a caring role with a husband working outside the home. One transgender reading of this third toothbrush could be that it symbolizes the physical absence of a parent who is disapproving of the boy's growing interest in what is deemed feminine - the bindi. This might be insignificant to some; yet if noticed, could very well generate some interesting conversations.

A Private Warning of the Public Gaze

In the following image, Jazz is curled up in her mother's lap. She is now visible to her family and can begin to cultivate a "gender home" (Elliot, 2010, p. 52) on what was initially a confusing "gender map" (Noble, 2006, p. 130). An affirmative gaze between them is exchanged, clearly signifying that "care is given and received" (Langford & White, 2017). In this scene, Jazz's mother discusses how her social gender transition will make her different: "Mom said that being Jazz would make me different from the other kids at school, but that being different is okay."



Figure 11: The illustration by S. McNicholas (2014) in *I am Jazz* is an image of mom and Jazz having a discussion about how living as Jazz will make her different from the other children at school.

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With queer theory in mind, when Jazz talks about being ‘different’, but “being different is okay,” there is a danger that Jazz’s ‘difference’ may only be celebrated because it matches the status quo’, which Stafford (2012) considers assimilation, rather than a celebration of ‘difference’. Thus, engaging critically with concepts of ‘difference’ and ‘normal’ could help to ensure that books which offer explanations of a child’s social gender transition, or discuss ideas of ‘difference’, do not perpetuate the notion that ‘difference’ is okay, but only if you are “*just like everyone else*” (Stafford, 2012, p. 200, emphasis in original). A transgender lens might argue that Jazz herself wants to be, and be seen as, just like her friends.

I read this image as a *careful* warning to her daughter that not all of society is as warm and affirmative as her own family. In fact, many people have strong reactions toward children transitioning at a young age, calling the process “child abuse” or making “a pact with the devil” (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 51). Finally, a missing piece in the story is the conversation that Jazz’s family might have had with her educators prior to returning to school. This community might have played a vital role in the process of ensuring that her gender identity was respected by the school policies, as well as honouring her well-being *above* basic human rights (Held, 2006).

The School Gaze

Following her social gender transition, Jazz is not initially read as a ‘legitimate’ girl either at home *or* at school. Upon her return to the school, where she was originally known as a boy, she is gazed at confusingly and curiously by teachers and some of her peers. The more powerful ‘gaze’, however, is invisible, but blatant when she is excluded from one of her favourite things, the girls’ soccer team. Consistent with Serano (2013), here, Jazz is denied privacy at school and decisions regarding *her body* are made when “they wanted me to use the

boys' bathroom, and play on the boys' team in gym class.”



Figure 12: This illustration by S. McNicholas (2014) in *I am Jazz* demonstrates her exclusion from the same sex soccer team at school.

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Fair Game? My reading of her exclusion from the team is informed by essentialist thinking, which stems from the belief that all members of a certain group share a particular set of characteristics to be considered an admissible member of the group (Serano, 2013). People generally resort to essentialist thinking when considering categories they regard as “natural” or independent of social context or influence (Serano, 2013, p. 24). This kind of thinking influences much of the ideologies behind same sex sports teams and policies.

Travers (2013) outlines the literature which envisions a “transformative sporting future” that strives to eliminate “gender verification testing” (p. 5). With Jazz’s personal history, her gender transition exposed, she is “objectified” (Serano, 2013, p. 412) and her gender is subject to a type of ‘verification’ at school. Jazz also speaks of “kids who tease me ... this makes me feel crummy.” Children, too, often rely on essentialist ideologies to make sense of gender categories.

Frequently, these beliefs persist well into adulthood (Serano, 2013). We see this with the friends who “tease” Jazz, her “confused” teachers, as well as in the school policies, or lack thereof, concerning social differences.

The words normal and difference are used by Jazz and play a vital role in this scene. In fact, it seems that Jazz herself holds onto a certain amount of essentialist thinking, maintaining consistently that she is a girl embodying girlhood. Thus, her placement on the boys’ team “didn’t feel *normal* to me at ALL” (emphasis added). This statement appears to be shaped by the argument that Jazz feels *no ties* to the male category, a category that biological Western essentialist thinking bestows on her. Instead, Jazz’s own essentialism is apparent and seems to stem from what her brain is telling her, as explored previously - “No momma. Good GIRL!”

In many ways, Jazz’s fate rests in the teachers’ decision about which team she is *allowed* to play on. Jazz is “so happy” when her rights are finally granted and the teachers “changed their minds,” *allowing* her to play “on the same team as Casey and Samantha.” Intriguingly, the meaning word of ‘*cis*’, as in cisgender, is “on the same side of” and has come to represent, and draw attention to, those who embody ‘normal’ sex/gender (Pyne, 2011, p. 131). Jazz conceptualizes embodying the *same side* of gender as her ‘cis’ female peers and only refers to transgender after the doctor’s instructions. As this paper demonstrates, although biology is a factor, gender lies far beyond the gaze of body parts, clear-cut answers and decisions about gender, based on sex.

Yet, because of Jazz’s difference, the main one being ‘the penis issue’ (Serano, 2007, p. 50), Jazz’s gender embodiment is questionable, or unstable, despite her “insistent, consistent and persistent” (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 56) self-affirmed female identity. Her voice is squelched, and therefore erased from the social and institutional world (Namaste, 2000). Non-transgender bodies

often disappear from scrutiny and are regarded as “normal and unremarkable,” while transgender bodies are named “anomalies, drawing relentless scrutiny” (Pyne, 2011, p. 133). No wonder transgender children suffer more from depression, and worse. Stigma can be deadly. Her friends’ normative gender embodiment goes under the radar and their private lives remain their own.

With Langford and White (2017), I reflect on this scenario. Jazz’s response to the lack of recognition of her girlhood - being placed on the boys’ team - prompts the educators to act. They recognize the need to care for Jazz and make a clear decision to “act/care,” based on their interpretations of Jazz’s distress. For Jazz, care is received again because the educators remain fluid in their decisions. Indeed, it is times like these that children’s responses could “contribute to greater attunement between educator and child” (Langford & White, 2017, n.p.); Jazz’s reaction might serve to better inform future caring policies and actions at her school.

The White Western Gaze. In *the Boy and the Bindi*, the child is questioned by white schoolmates who want to know: “What is that dot above your nose?” Considering this scene, with Butler (2004), there are indeed advantages to remaining unintelligible, since intelligibility is generally regarded to be an effect of dominant social ideals. Butler (2004) argues that if people have no desire to be recognized within these social norms, their very survival may depend upon escaping them (Butler, 2004). Nonetheless, one’s sense of belonging may also be hindered by straying from societal norms (Butler, 2004), as we see in this playground scene.

I now draw on different gender theorists to situate the tension between the concepts of intelligibility and unintelligibility, discussed frequently by queer and transgender thinkers. Butler (2004), for one, draws comparisons between being ‘human’ (intelligible) and being ‘unhuman’ (unintelligible), explaining that an individual is seen as unintelligible when the “laws of culture

and of language find you to be an impossibility” (p. 30). Assuredly, in an unintelligible state, one’s access to the realm of humanity is limited (Butler, 2004) or even erased (Namaste, 2000).

According to queer theory, it is preferable to challenge dominant discourses of the gender binary by embodying an unintelligible gender, rather than acquiring intelligibility as a way to fit in with the dominant group. Intelligibility can also come at a cost which will “only do me in from another direction” (Butler, 2004, p. 3) – I imagine an internal direction that strays from what feels “safe and true” for the boy. These ideas present the challenges that many children face because gender norms are so predominant in society.



Figure 13: The illustration by R. Perera (2016) in *the Boy and the Bindi* highlights the boy’s difference which is juxtaposed by the questioning gaze of the dominant group. Copyright 2017 by Arsenal Pulp Press. Reprinted with permission.

This playground scene representing the sharp reality of an often transphobic, racist world contrasts shockingly with the open, affirmative facilitation of gender exploration in the boy’s home. Unlike Jazz, the boy does not appear prepared for this kind of confrontation. Butler (2004) writes that a body implies both vulnerability and agency; it exposes us to the gaze of others and both the affirmative touch (of the boy’s mother), as well as possible violence, seen above. These

questioning peers are ‘intelligible’ with their “unmarked membership positions,” which seemingly give them the illusion of being “representatives of the human race” and, apparently, able to speak authoritatively (Davies, 1997, p. 13). I draw on notions of intersectionality here: not only is the boy’s body “marked” as ‘other’ by virtue of his not being white, but by the bindi. I read the children’s gaze as threatening, a gaze that seems to stem from the threat of the ‘other’, or the brown boy with the ‘girly’ (Ehrensaft, 2007) bindi.

The group of children is situated around the boy, their hands up in inquiring poses, with a peer on a swing in the background, as though he is being surrounded; hence, he is clearly unintelligible in this white Western scene. The reader, too, appears to be positioned among the bullies as we gaze alongside them (as discussed in Stafford, 2012). In the boy’s own terms and through his own gaze, his body and identity are “culturally intelligible” (Singer, 2006, p. 610); therefore, he can only conceive of the others’ wanting what he has, the bindi, because it is so wonderful. In response to those who “stare,” the boy thinks: “Maybe they want a bindi to wear?”

Most of the images demonstrate the boy’s source of internal strength through connections that keep him visible, “safe and true,” despite the *unsafe* essentialist *truths* in society. While bullying is a major aspect of everyday life for queer and transgender people (Ehrensaft, 2016; Travers, 2014; Lev, 2013), the bullying in this narrative is minimal. The boy’s bindi or ‘third eye’ is “watching over me all of the time making sure I don’t hide everything I can be inside.” Thus, his “safe and true” feeling overpowers the gaze, or the “noise,” of his confronting peers.

The Gaze of a Higher Power

Playing God. In many respects, notions of medical expertise put a doctor, or medical establishment, in the role of playing God (Singer, 2006). The doctor in Jazz “changed everything” one “amazing day,” and so has the power to set her life on a different trajectory -

naturally, the entire family listens eagerly to the doctor's answers to their perplexing questions. However, in *the Boy and the Bindi*, 'God' is not associated with the medical realm. Instead, when the bindi is on, it seems to offer him a connection with an inner source, or a higher power, seen in images which demonstrate meditation, catapulting him *away from* the Western gaze.



Figure 14: The illustration by R. Perera (2016) in *the Boy and the Bindi* demonstrates the power and support garnered from meditation.
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*I do not have the words to say
But if I close my eyes and wait
My bindi turns into a star, and then
My forehead turns into the sky, that's when
All my fears fade out of sight
And my body feels so light -
Ammi was so very right!*

I read the above passage, and the image coupled with it, as representing the power of having access to a side of oneself (the bindi) that is generally seen in society as unsuitable for boys. The boy in the image is unhindered by any worldly burdens that define him as a boy child. Meditation propels him into another dimension - the galaxy - where sounds are muted, and he

“feels so light.” This place appears to be beyond societal rules about gender which read the boy and his bindi as unintelligible. Alas, these are silenced and society is erased instead.

Interestingly, Western clinician Ehrensaft (2009) discusses children who often call on God to “fix the mistake that seems so visible to them but so invisible to others” (p. 18). She writes that when anxious gender variant children call on God for help, the latter are “dialing the wrong number, and should instead have their parents phone a gender specialist” (p. 21). Yet, the spiritual journey the boy is on, and is very much an active part of, fills him with an inner well-being and a sense belonging; hence, at this time, he does not appear to require a specialist or diagnosis to “fix any mistake” (Ehrensaft, 2009).

An Internal Gaze

Prior to his bindi the boy explains to the audience that sometimes “I feel ugly like a blot or small like a dot.” Thus, his internal gaze considers him to be invisible, small and insignificant. Without looking at the audience, surrounded by bindis and jewels the same size as his tiny, slouched featureless silhouette, he is clearly miserable. Contemplating his feelings with Butler (2004), it must feel devastating “when you find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in your favor” (p. 30, emphasis in original). Below, I read the small, dark unrecognizable boy as

criticized by feminist and queer theorists for their stereotypical feminine portrayal; indeed, the same might be said for the images and language in *I am Jazz*. Furthermore, the label on the bindi package reads “Beauty Bindis,” which his mother keeps in a starlit, almost magical, drawer full of makeup, jewelry and accessories, such as “Fancy Girl” perfume. Despite the emphasis on beauty to describe his mother and her products, I read the boy’s use of the word “beauty” as a longing for an internal sense of peace, rather than an external “beauty,” often associated with women and aesthetics, attempting to appease the ‘male gaze’. The boy’s beauty stems from his growing, affirmative, ‘internal gaze’ - one that is “safe and true” for this particular boy.

Contrasting this, but complementing the argument, I contend, with Salamon (2010), that Jazz’s “internal sense of dysphoria” arises when her family, influenced by the “external world,” imposes what is expected of her, as he. Jazz’s dysphoria is seen in comments like: “pretending to be a boy felt like a lie,” and when forced to play on the boys’ team: “that didn’t feel normal to me at ALL!” Pyne (2014b) may argue that for Jazz, dysphoria arises *not* from her, but from the rigid beliefs that Western society holds about sex/gender binary expectations.

A diagnosis in the DSM means access to support; still, it also means that transgender individuals will be labelled as ill for years to come (Lev, 2013). Questioning the implications of these ideas with Norton (1999), I wonder “whether it really is senseless to say, not necessarily that a male-to-female transchild is a girl in a boy’s body, but that s/he is not a boy” (p. 429) - better still, *that Jazz is a girl and the boy has yet to tell us*.

Considering these scenarios, I draw on Elliot (2010), who points to Michael Gilbert, a transgender philosopher, who highlights a woman’s experience with her gender transition. This woman explains that established stereotypes of gender in society allowed her to clearly see “the differences between the masculinity she was fleeing and the femininity she knew was right for

her” (as cited in Elliot, 2010, p. 95). Conceivably, then, the stereotypes and binary representations in *I am Jazz* offer both Jazz, and potentially gender variant or transgender children a clear “gender map” (Noble, 2006, p. 130).

Creatively Under, Over and Outside the Gaze. Interestingly, elements of water and outer space play a valuable role in the books. Due to the weightless nature of these elements, the heavy burdens of expected social norms seem to dissipate for both children. The boy’s bindi leads him to meditation practice and the galaxy where he finds a higher power and a source of inner strength. Jazz’s mermaid is a central character, that is never far away. Not only does Jazz have this stuffed toy, but she also wears a mermaid costume that has a significance beyond what the text and images in the story can ‘say’.



Figure 16: The illustrations by S. McNicholas (2014) in *I am Jazz* exhibit Jazz’s creative use of costumes to express her girl brain, and conceal her boy body.
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Many young transgender children seek information about, and certain artifacts associated with, the gender to which they relate, usually desiring to wear clothes considered socially appropriate for that gender (Spencer, 2014). I wonder: Does the mermaid tail, which covers the entire lower part of Jazz’s “boy body,” somehow shield her “girl brain” from a body she feels is incongruent? In this mermaid costume, feasibly like the boy and his bindi, she is “safe and true”

from her unintelligible boy body self. When dressed up, wrapped up and tucked away, her penis is invisible to herself and the world. The above images also resemble fantasy play and, in some ways, mimic Disney characters, like *Cinderella* and *The Little Mermaid*. In the latter, Ariel sings about “access, autonomy and mobility”, while pining for subjecthood and the ability to participate in public (human) life (Sells, 1995, p. 179). In the film, Ariel mutilates her body, exchanging her fins for mobile human legs (Sells, 1995), whereas Jazz finds ways to conceal her body through play and dress.

Individuals in the transgender community have found numerous ways to alter, conceal or disguise their natal sex which disaffirms their gender identity. Despite the fact that there is very little scholarly literature on the subject of mermaids and transgender children, aside from Ehrensaft (2011), I suggest that the mermaid offers the perfect solution to what might be a troubling problem for Jazz. Bell, Haas and Sells (1995) draw on *The Little Mermaid*, which is a girl's coming of age story about the contemporary “costs, pleasures, and dangers of women's access to the 'human world' ” (Bell et. al., 1995, p. 13). Perhaps this signifies the risks associated with accessing the world as a girl with a penis. We see this not only in the mermaid costume, but in the other highly feminine attire she wears throughout the book, offering her greater access to the ‘female world’ to which she relates.

Jazz’s “over the top” or “exaggerated” gender expression would be critiqued by radical feminists who tend to reprimand transgender individuals for reinforcing the gender binary with hyperfeminine dress, insisting that transwomen are “caricatures trying to be ‘real’ women” (Serano, 2013, p. 83; also see Elliot, 2010). Radical feminist Janice Raymond, for instance, chastises transwomen for the fact that they “conform more to the feminine role than even the most feminine of natural-born women” (as cited in Elliot, 2010, p. 83). Jazz constructs her own

sense of girlhood, which involves dressing-up to imagine “that only what is represented exists” (Norton, 1999, p. 427). Jazz, as Norton (1999) outlines, does not appear to want to be discovered behind this disguise (p. 427).

Reading Lacanian concepts of the gaze of the ‘other’, and with the body in mind, Elliot (2010) wonders how the “forgetting of specific body parts and the ability to imagine the recovery of other parts might concern the trans subject” (p. 106). The ambiguity of the mermaid’s genitalia appears to catapult Jazz into a world of make-believe that allows her to step outside the ‘noise’ that her boy body inflicts on her girl brain. This seems to be much like the bindi which appears to magically blast the boy into a world where solace is found amidst the swirling stars. The image, of the boy, below resembles Jazz’s weightless hair and body under the water. In these elements, sounds seem to vanish and the boy says: “All the noise around is gone.” This statement might represent, for both children, the conflict related to their brains and bodies, as well as their inner and outer worlds within Western society.

Jazz’s drawings and mermaid costume appear to offer her gender harmony, internal happiness and pride: “Inside I am happy, I’m having fun. I am proud! *I am Jazz!*” Like the mermaid, hindered access to the ‘human world’ is a reality for both the boy and Jazz. Their ‘difference’, in some ways, creates difficulty in accessing this human world. We see this in Jazz’s ‘erasure’ (Namaste, 2000) from school washrooms and sports; we also see the difficulties presented to the boy when he is questioned by a large group of white schoolmates.



Figure 17: The illustration by R. Perera (2016) in *the Boy and the Bindi* demonstrates meditation which takes the child far from the Western gaze, and close to his third eye. Perhaps this image illustrates the child weaving his own '**gender web**', a three-dimensional construction based on three major threads: nature, nurture and culture - to arrive at the gender that is "me" (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 25), or "safe and true."

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Meditation appears to take the boy into the arms of a kind of "gender angel" which describes those who are called upon to "offer our children the freedom to weave their own gender web" (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 129), where the child's "fears fade out of sight." I question whether he would have been able to 'weave his own gender web', or find this internal compass, higher power or 'gender angel' (Ehrensaft, 2011, 2016) had it not been for the care of his physically, mentally and spiritually present mother. One final magical element is seen in the child's 'magic carpet', which proves to be fertile ground for a host of foliage that eventually becomes the tiara he creates to represent his growing gender. The elements of the galaxy, water and foliage represent freedom and seem to depict the children's most "profound desire to transform the fantastic (the fantasmatic) into the real" (Norton, 1999, p. 431).

Ultimately, both characters do just that.



Figure 18: The illustration by R. Perera (2016) in *the Boy and the Bindi* reveals the child's growing gender self, cultivating a gender that keeps the child "safe and true."
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Chapter 6: Practical and Theoretical Implications

In this chapter, drawing on my readings of the critical gender theories, I summarize some of the significant findings in my analysis. With a growing, and substantial, interest in research that disrupts heteronormativity using queer theoretical perspectives in ECS, this paper asks whether queer theory alone is robust enough, or even suitable as it is currently framed, to support gender theorizing in ECS. Thus, I illuminate the ways that the overarching gender theories work together, or collide, with vexing or contrasting ideas in the picture books. Here, one of the central questions which grew out of my research is what might be missing for transgender children, and in the story books that represent them, when we adopt the queer rhetoric of incoherence. In this regard, it is indeed my goal to situate the analysis more broadly outside of the LGBTQ+ framework. By doing this, the significance of my study, taking the shape of the inclusion of transgender theorizing in the ECEC reconceptualization movement, is highlighted. It is my hope that this paper may create a host of opportunities for dialogue and critical reflection in ECEC. By exposing the dominant discourse in the books, which focuses on an affirmative and authoritative gaze, the research and analysis were taken in a number of directions.

I begin by summarizing some of the key ideas, followed by a discussion of the theoretical and practical significance of this exploration. I conclude with recommendations for creating gender inclusive ECEC settings by way of selecting, reading and discussing transgender themed books, implicitly outlining the implications of not doing so. The discussion below reveals contentious relationships among feminist, queer and transgender theories and considers how they might be brought together to forge productive and useful dialogue (Elliot, 2010).

Intelligibility and Unintelligibility

In light of the various ways the gaze is generated during the analysis, I take note of sources of tension when considering these concepts. Perhaps the most clearly conceptualized description of these ideas is by Sullivan (2006) who discusses ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of embodiment. As the analysis and books reveal, the children vary in their expressions of gender. The general supposition in queer theory is that transgression is “good,” perhaps seen in *the Boy and the Bindi*, and conformity, “bad,” seen in *I am Jazz* (Sullivan, 2006, p. 560-561).

The implications of such distinctions are cause for concern. My worry lies with Gherovici (2010) who argues: “if a person is comfortable with their gender-body, whether congruent or incongruent with society, and their gender is affirmed by the people around them, they will feel ‘seen’ and validated by others” (p. 239). This responds to Namaste’s (2000) trepidation about the ‘erasure’ of transgender people. Jazz expresses her congruent, self-affirmed female identity, no longer “pretending to be a boy,” whereas the boy finds visibility through a gender creative world that opens up as a result of his bindi - regardless of how his gender incongruence is perceived by society. With his bindi, the boy is “safe and true” internally, as is Jazz who appears to have always known her internal ‘truth’. The boy’s creativity might be celebrated in queer circles, while Jazz’s early transition could be seen as eradicating incoherence (Smiley, as cited in Gherovici, 2010).

Questioning dominant assumptions in queer theory, Elliot (2010) asks: “If non-normative embodiments are to be celebrated in their unintelligible forms, what might become of those who embrace more conventional or intelligible gender categories?” (p. 2). Hence, based on Elliot’s (2010) question, transgender theory embraces Jazz’s stereotypical embodiment, despite the fact that it is a departure from feminist and queer goals. As for *the Boy and the Bindi*, he cultivates a

gender embodiment that is cause for celebration in feminist, queer and transgender communities. Elliot (2010) asserts that re-thinking the boundaries of being human is to advocate for an alternative ethical response to the hatred [or fear] of gender variant ‘others’, advocating for the intelligibility of the “(un)becoming other” (Sullivan, as cited in Elliot, 2010, p. 67). Moreover, Elliot (2010) wonders if it is “possible to dismantle the existing hierarchy between the intelligible and the unintelligible while holding onto these concepts as a basis for meaningful opposition to the status quo?” (p. 67). This notion underpins my recommendations for selecting, reading and discussing children’s books. Clearly, varying ways of expressing gender are valuable; to compare, or pin, them against one another feels like a departure from a feminist ethics of care as well as the goals and unique desires of the child (Langford & White, 2017).

Implications of Differing Family Processes

The process outlined in *the Boy and the Bindi* is an undefined, undiagnosed - unintelligible external, yet intelligible internal - gender which might lead to a variety of important discussions with children. His mother’s affirming facilitation of her son’s gender exploration highly embodies a feminist ethics of care. The boy’s access to the bindi travels through his mother’s own presence and trust in her son’s theories about gender and the bindi. Waddell (1998) describes the importance of a caregiver’s presence. She states: “in good circumstances, that is, if sufficiently held - physically and emotionally - by a containing presence, the baby [child] slowly derives a sense of having an internal holding capacity of his own” (p. 33).

As stated, this kind of presence is deeply felt by the reader as this mother ‘holds’ her son’s curiosity. The boy does not express a desire to be a girl, although this internal desire could be there. Instead, we watch his growing interest in what keeps his mother “safe and true,”

wanting the same for himself. In the process, he discovers something unexpected - a “calm,” unregulated beauty that is beautifully undefined. I interpret the boy’s response to the care of his mother, bindi, third eye and higher power as a growing belief in himself and his capabilities: “If a bindi can...bring beauty where there was not, maybe I can too...”

In their own ways, at the heart of both families’ actions lies a feminist ethics of care wherein the parents fulfill their responsibilities to their children (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Like many of us, in order to make sense of the world and make certain decisions, Jazz’s parents “relied upon ‘expert’ systems” which often present an “overwhelming amount of information and choices” (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007, p. 90). These vast choices mean that, on one hand, families have options when searching for suitable support while, on the other hand, they may be led by some ‘expert opinions’ into the ‘care’ of restorative treatments.

Jazz is a happy recipient of her parents’ and doctor’s affirmative decision to embrace her feminine identity by means of a transgender diagnosis. However, the reality for many transgender children and adults sharply contrasts Jazz’s experiences. Families are frequently torn apart by difficult decisions about how, when or whether to begin a social gender transition (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Ehrensaft, 2011, 2016). It is often the child’s caregiver who holds the child’s gender and if “gender-specific ministrations to the child” are too rigid, the child becomes stifled, possibly with devastating consequences (Ehrensaft, 2009, p. 19). This is an example of what Noddings (2013) describes as the conflict that occurs when the desires of the “cared-for” are not what the “one-caring” believes is best (p. 18). Some children flee abusive or unsupportive homes, finding themselves on the streets in precarious situations (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Ehrensaft, 2016) or in shelters that are often no better equipped to support transgender people (Namaste, 2000, 2005; Pyne 2011; Serano, 2013).

Just a Girl?

I feel like a girl trapped in a boy's body and I've felt this way since I was four.

-a child in Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 48

The boy challenges the sex/gender binary *without* any “insistent, persistent and consistent” (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 56) claims of embodying girlhood. Instead, his higher power is insistent that he “not hide” what is “inside”; thus, one might infer that his desire is not to hide his “true” self-affirmed female identity. Another inference is that he is not going to hide his “true” self-affirmed male identity either, which challenges dominant representations of hegemonic masculinity. Juxtaposing this, intriguing considerations and implications arise when contemplating Jazz’s transgender diagnosis.

Some children often have hostile responses to the word trans, reporting that the word is not a fit - “trans is not me” (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 250). Yet, a Western ‘expert’ gives Jazz a *new* word: “transgender.” Although, prior to using the doctor’s word, she clearly refers to herself as a “GIRL!” and a “beauuuuuutiful lady,” until she is told otherwise. Transgender people, like Jazz, often situate themselves as men or women, usually not seeing themselves as disrupting the sex/gender binary *whatsoever* (Lev, 2013; Namaste, 2005). Thus, a boy in a female body may precisely and unwaveringly categorize himself as a male (Lev, 2004), or “just a boy” (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 250). In fact, many transgender children often want to be seen as “just girls or just boys” (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 250), calling into question whether a child can claim an identity outside of being transgender. This begs the question: Who has the power to name a child’s identity? Would Jazz have referred to herself as ‘just a girl’ if she had not seen an ‘expert’? Considering this with Langford and White (2017), I believe it would be important to “check in” with Jazz to understand her perspectives on the care, and this new word which refers to her gender identity. Bearing this in mind, choosing not to identify as transgender likely would not stop others from

marginalizing a person as transgender, “othering” them and “marking” them as “different” (Serano, 2013, p. 282).

Intersecting Conceptions - or Gazes - of Childhood. I want to draw on a connection I made during the research process. The medical gaze coalesces with the notion of childhood innocence, which has created skepticism about children’s capacity to offer meaningful ideas about decisions affecting their lives (Albanese, 2009; James & Prout, 1997; Lundy, 2007; Mayall, 2000, 2013). Due to these ideologies, children are often acted *upon*, rather than viewed as active participants and partners in family decision making processes. Rightly so, adults have a responsibility to children emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually. However, Grindheim (2014) illustrates that a conflict exists between a child’s right to influence their life and their right to protection and care as a vulnerable member of society. Still, more and more scholars are advocating that children are capable, active social agents in their own lives (Mayall, 2000; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015); indeed, they play a vital role in co-constructing their identities and making meaning regarding the ways the world works (James & Prout, 1997).

Meadow (2014) makes a powerful statement:

Politically and personally, what does it mean to label a particular child transgender? If what an assigned male child tells you is that she is a girl, does the term transgender truly represent her personal identity? ... do these words even demarcate a particular form of personhood, or do they simply rebrand deviance while implying that the vast majority of children are safely gender normative? Fundamentally, do we, the adults, get to decide the answers to these questions? (p. 58).

The notion of innocence also plays a role in the kinds of books that are seen in ‘wholesome’ ECEC settings. Fear stems from the conversations these topics may generate, which are thought to be too big to bear for innocent young children (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al.,

2015). Finally, the objects in the stories, the mermaid and the bindi, appear to have profound, creative implications for the process of embodying a gender that is intelligible to the children. These objects give them the opportunity to transform themselves freely, using their own agency (Norton, 1999) - agency to fly or swim away from the “constraints of [their] condition” (p. 428), or the constraining conditions imposed upon them by Western society’s experts.

“Coming Out”

The implications of Jazz’s “coming out”, referring to the process in which a person acknowledges their transgender identity (Miller, 2016), are steeped in historical and social implications that are described by seminal queer theorist Deborah Britzman. During the AIDS epidemic in the 1980’s, Britzman’s (1995) analysis of the “no one is safe campaign” was that it was geared toward the protection of straight people (p. 160). Queer bodies, Britzman (1995) insisted, were seen as being ‘obliged’ to come out to the dominant population that had the ‘right’ to be safe from ‘deviant’ identities (p. 160). Considering that homosexuality and transgender identities have similar histories of ostracization and diagnosis, the implications of this seem obvious when Jazz’s mother warns her that “being Jazz,” or “coming out” to the dominant ‘normative’ group at school, could mean she would be considered “different,” and to some, ‘deviant’. This history illuminates the value of queer *and* transgender theorizing in ECS, as well as some of the social and political background that makes discussions about gender/sex/uality (Blaise, 2014, p. 115) difficult to implement and discuss.

Perceived ‘deviancy’ is indeed a barrier to queer and transgender inclusion in ECEC. I remain conflicted about the concept of ‘coming out’ myself; certainly, it is a contested area in LGBTQ+ communities as well. I clearly see how it ‘others’ those ‘obliged’ to reveal themselves to dominant society. Nevertheless, societal gender structures are still quite stabilized; thus,

knowing a child's transgender identity is critical in order to best support the child, and family, in an ECEC environment. Also, having books that explain the processes of a variety of affirmed gender transitions and explorations would be useful to garner knowledge, understanding, acceptance - *and* potentially tension and apprehension.

Implications of a White, Tidy Narrative

White, Western middle-class conservative narratives dominate children's books, upholding 'homonormativity', which is the maintenance of neoliberalism, monogamy, procreation – the 'normative' family as well as binary gender roles (Miller, 2016, p. 304; also see Stafford, 2012; Taylor, 2012). In many ways, Jazz's story can be added to this list. An aspect of the story's popularity might stem from the intelligibility of Jazz and her family. Jazz's nuclear family is presented as a 'domestic utopia' (Taylor & Robinson, 2005). This representation excludes differing kinships, along with some queer communities (Taylor, 2012). One implication of these narratives is the probable exclusion of a great many children who may not 'see' themselves in the storylines. For those who see aspects of their lives in the stories, thoughts of a livable life can be indulged in - they "know themselves to be possible"; however, for those who are still "looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity" (Butler, 2004, p. 31). No doubt, Jazz's story is important; yet, diverse renditions and stories are key in ensuring that all children recognize aspects of themselves in the picture books and their environment.

Contributing to the genre of picture books, *the Boy and the Bindi*, with no evidence of marriage, disrupts homonormativity from the perspectives of race, culture, gender and kinship. Since societal systems of oppression reinforce one another, many individuals experience multiple forms of oppression that rest *outside* representations of homonormative experiences (Stafford, 2012; Taylor, 2012). So, the implications of *the Boy and the Bindi* are grand, and speak to those

who are deeply concerned about white Western intelligible representations of gender in society on a whole (skelton, 2015a; Stafford, 2012; Taylor, 2012; Travers, 2014).

Chapter 7: Recommendations for: Selecting, Reading, and Discussing Transgender Themed Children's Books

The test of a successful children's text would then become, not its adherence, beneath the whimsy and invention, to a founding set of realist or idealist assumptions, but its capacity to reflect its characters' phenomenological and psycho-social reality. This needs to be accomplished with an intensity that could facilitate the engagement of the child reader's, or child auditor's, own perceptions, fantasies and desires. (Norton, 1999, p. 420).

Much can be learned about what children's picture books say about how the world works and what is valued in society (Reynolds, 2011). Both visually and textually, picture books have the potential to influence what is *seen* in ECEC settings and convey what is regarded as “normal, good, acceptable, important, unjust, or to be feared” (Reynolds, 2011, p. 35, also see McCabe et al., 2011; Taylor, 2012). Hence, the selection of books requires an “ethical encounter” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2005) to strive to determine their suitability. Clearly, selecting, reading and discussing quality books representing childhood, *and gender*, from different angles, is an important part of an ECE's work.

Gender is Always There

At the onset, it is critical to stress the importance of not waiting for a transgender, or gender variant child, to ‘show up’ in ECEC environments before creating inclusive settings (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Travers, 2014), which of course includes transgender and gender variant literature. This is particularly critical, given that many transgender and gender variant children are non-apparent (Kennedy & Hellen, 2010; Travers, 2014). Gender interactions in ECEC environments, and beyond, are always present. Gender runs through our daily actions; gender, more specifically the “gender problem” (skelton, 2015a, p. 510), is very prevalent in both historical and contemporary picture books. Some of the classics might be children's favourites;

nonetheless, they may not convey the kind of values ECEC environments want to portray today. Perhaps these can be read differently with children in ways that challenge the ‘status quo’.

Contemplating *any* children’s book from a more reflective angle is useful because, as Namaste (2000) writes, transgender people are *already in the world*; therefore, there is no reason to suggest that non-apparent transgender characters are not already present in the books. Norton (1999) argues that children’s literature does feature characters who are clearly transgender or, in some way, “fantasizing about transgenering” (p. 422). However, whether this is ‘seen’ or not depends on the theoretical and practical goals of the reading, and whether unsettling questions from the children are addressed, or ignored due to the educator’s own anxieties about the content (Britzman, 2000).

Educators influence which storybooks children see since, most often, they choose the books that are read in the environment (McCabe et al., 2011). Relatively recently, Stafford (2012) identifies that most “children’s literary criticism” tends to focus on literary quality, ignoring “issues of systemic power and privilege” (p. 195). Yet, more recently, as the number of books featuring transgender characters slowly increases, academics are starting to focus less on the quality of books and more on how the characters are represented and “how authentic those depictions are” (Bittner, Ingrey & Stamper, 2016, p. 948). Thus, it is imperative to adopt a variety of theoretical lenses while selecting, reading, and discussing children's books.

Selecting Stories

Mainstream children’s literature not only has few books with transgender characters, but there is a lack of commitment to the characters in those that exist, leaving both the story and the character flat, uninteresting and unlikely to be read in an ECEC setting. Through the process of my sample selection, I found that intimate portrayals were an important aspect of caring about

the story and characters. I concede with Noddings (2013) that grasping what a character “feels as nearly as possible is the essential part” (p. 16) of being drawn into the book. Noddings’ (2013) idea considers the relationships among the characters and the result of the conversations that are generated while reading the story together. From the children’s perspectives and active group dialogue, we can refer to the caring relationships in the stories, or lack thereof, when discussing the actions of the characters and what might lie at the heart of their intentions.

An important part of selecting books is to read them carefully with colleagues through a variety of different critical lenses. This awakens one to a deeper consciousness of the ways that gender embodiment is portrayed, illustrated and positioned. Collaborative dialogue opens up spaces for ECEs to “confront and critically reflect on our own entangled subjectivities and assumptions” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, et al., 2015, p. 186). This process generates an understanding of what the books are *saying*, beyond the storyline. With Noddings (2013) in mind, by looking past the actions of the characters, we can observe, and draw our attention to, the acts of commitment that are seen in the text and images of the subject who is actively performing them; indeed, this prepares us to discuss these actions purposefully with children.

Importantly, we need to examine whether gender variant or transgender characters are portrayed in extreme ways - visually or textually. Are they perpetually positioned as outcasts or victims? Do they eventually become heroes, winning others’ acceptance, thus overcoming their ‘deviant’ status? (skelton, 2015b). Furthermore: Are their ‘typical’ counterparts portrayed in ‘typical’ roles, with ‘typical’ appearances, leading ‘typical’ lives? Does the protagonist spend the entire book escaping the gaze of hateful bullies or family members? (skelton, 2015b)³.

³ See Appendix B for a list of other possible reflective questions.

As educators, we can discuss our unique differences while generating dialogue with children as to why certain beliefs are understood as ‘normal’ or ‘natural’. This may take the shape of questions such as: Who says only girls can wear dresses? Indeed, active dialogue with children about the female pirates being “imposters” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 79), using tools such as Davies’ (1997) “critical literacy,” opens up the possibility of becoming aware of the ways that “speaking-as-usual constructs themselves and others” (p. 25). These discussions are critical given that transgender people are often viewed as imposters (Serano, 2007).

Knowing what we know about the significance of the gender binary for some children, including those who transgress it, how can an ECE make room for the gender spectrum *as well as* “re-think” lives within it? (Stryker, 2008, p. 1). It would be important, I believe, that the story be linked to Langford and White’s (2017) steps: “care is needed; care is received and care is given” - much like the books analyzed. In their own ways, both selected books focus on care being given and received. An emphasis on care being needed relies too heavily on exclusion and bullying narratives, which are not entirely useful and paint a negative image of gender transgression (skelton, 2015b). These questions allow ECEs to contemplate the content in the books and the ways that difference, normalcy, intelligibility and unintelligibility are depicted. With Elliot (2010), one might ask: Can both intelligibility and unintelligibility be maintained in order to challenge the ‘status quo’? (Elliot, 2010).

If the ECEs’ efforts to choose books considered to be ‘unnatural’ are met with the community’s trepidation, ECEs can support anxious families by reiterating the importance of ensuring all children see themselves in the setting. Exposure to, and discussions about, human diversity are vital for all children’s learning. Lev (2004) argues that conversations like these might work toward ensuring that transgender ideas, and children, do not become pathologized in

the environment. Even so, ECEs cannot presume to change or accelerate a family's process, or their values and beliefs, just as they cannot single-handedly change the transphobic society in which we live. Lev (2004) maintains that this is not the professionals' role. Rather, the role of an ECE is to strive to change the climate in their specific environments as well as thoughtfully select, read and discuss transgender themed books in open and reflexive ways.

Reading and Discussing Stories

The transgender topic is still a new phenomenon in education and has not become integrated into teacher preparation programs in Canada (Ingrey, 2014). Educators express the need for more resources, strategies and opportunities for self-awareness as well as practical tools to disrupt gender stereotypes and cultivate more inclusive environments (Giraldo & Colyar, 2012; Luecke, 2011; Payne & Smith, 2014). Many educators seek “proven or correct methods when teaching LGBTQ+ issues” (Ngo, 2003, p. 120) since they feel ill-equipped to facilitate discussions about gender and respond effectively (Blaise, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2014; Robinson, 2005a) to the ‘trans problem’ (Payne & Smith, 2014).

Yet, some LGBTQ+ training material can reinforce, and problematize, the ‘other’ (Biddulph, 2006; Robinson, 2013). For this reason, equity work must be ongoing and approached with awareness as well as a willingness to negotiate, reflect and re-learn (Ingrey, 2014). Guidelines and policies are important; but, beyond the rules or ‘correct methods’, arguably “the greatest obligation of educators, inside and outside formal schooling, is to nurture the ethical ideals of those with whom they come in contact” (Noddings, 2013, p. 49). Considering the language we use is important since overt, and covert, messages are reiterated in ECEC settings through conversations with children, families and colleagues. Conceptualizing transgender in ECS will add to the richness of complex discussions that can arise during story time (See Blaise,

2010). Children's comments and inquiries, if carefully tended, have the potential to generate rich dialogue within the group.

It takes time, effort and mindfulness to select books and create spaces for dialogue that speak to, and recognize, transgender and gender variant children; so, no teacher should feel that they have to undertake this multifaceted work alone (Miller, 2016)⁴. There is a common perception that ECEs must have all the answers (Pacini Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Educators acknowledge the challenge involved in responding to gender during their interactions with children - interactions which do not always occur as hoped (Giraldo & Colyar, 2012). This places undue pressure on them to always say and do the right things. Yet, the reality is that ECEC practice is *not* simple; indeed, it requires active engagement with a supportive ECEC community, as well as theoretical contemplation (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Educators' fears about saying the wrong things may be felt by the children, conceivably shutting down conversations entirely. Our words, body language and actions need to convey to children that they are heard, seen and supported, and that their inquiries are taken seriously (Langford & White, 2017).

Educator beliefs influence how educators plan, implement and respond to spontaneous interactions in the classroom (Kintner-Duffy, Vardell, Lower & Cassidy, 2012). So, by knowing what are beliefs are and acknowledging and challenging them, we can generate better informed practices (Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Thornton & Underwood, 2013). Britzman (2000) argues that educators' worries and subsequent contemplations about particular situations seem, at first glance, to be efforts to "settle what seems unsettled" (p. 51). She contends that these anxieties also derive from the structural limitations of education. In this regard, educators need to prepare

⁴ See Appendix C for perspectives from the *Gender Spectrum Curriculum*.

themselves, not necessarily by seeking more knowledge, but by practicing tolerance of ambiguity in their social encounters. Britzman (2000) writes: “Educators will have to assume the position of philosophers and ethnographers and allow the idea that knowledge can be more than certainty, authority, and stability” (p. 51).

Clearly, inclusive classrooms involve much more than having a certain number of books that represent diverse identities and families (See MacNevin & Berman, 2017). Every child needs to see themselves reflected in the setting, and since there is no one way to see oneself, there must be a variety of ways to engage in open, active dialogue. Elder and Holyan (2010) explain that the practice of storytelling can “open up,” rather than “constrain,” children's contributions. It allows children to interpret social and ethical behaviour themselves. Open-ended storytelling, Elder and Holyan (2010) write, assumes there will be many messages and meanings within a single story so that, with each telling of the tale, there will be a different dialogue, thus many ways to see, or hear about, oneself.

Stafford (2012) reveals that same sex relationships in children's picture books are often positioned as ‘objects’ to be studied. Indeed, this must be considered, and challenged, to ensure that the readings selected do not ‘other’ transgender characters. However, given that our Western binary system is so entrenched, a certain amount of understanding of the transgender phenomenon is required. But, if picture books position gender variance and transgender stories as ‘special topics’ requiring ‘special guests’, notions of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are reinforced. This is noteworthy, given that Robinson (2013) maintains that bringing in outside professionals to “do the talk” reinforces the idea that sex, sexuality [and gender] are different from other areas of learning (p. 85). Thus, it would be vital for educators to feel prepared to talk with children and families about difference. Explaining stories, which are carefully considered using the questions

this research raises, may be a valuable tool for helping children understand their “trans brothers and sisters” (Norton, 1999, p. 415-416).

Surprisingly, and not, contemplating gender in children’s books and in ECEC settings has been a complex endeavour. One way to represent same sex families visually may be through images of children nestled between two moms or dads; but, representing transgender embodiment needs additional thought. I continually ask myself: Is the transgender or gender variant character androgynous? As we have seen in the books analyzed, some are, and some are not. My theorizing suggests to me that both coherence, and incoherence, need to be embraced. Both are key concepts to consider given that transgender children often “just want to be left alone to live as the boy or the girl they are” (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 250). Regarding this, I ask: What if the transgender characters were positioned as ‘just kids’, among many, in the story, without being ‘apparent’ or obliged to ‘come out’? (Britzman, 1995). This might not be on the ECEs’ radar without a transgender lens. So books, like *I am Jazz*, would be highly useful in learning about the process of a gender transition, alongside differing processes of gender exploration in books like *the Boy and the Bindi* - books that are *always* available in the setting.

I share Britzman’s (2000) worries about how educators might approach conversations about [gender transgression] and sexuality. Britzman (2000) asserts that educators need to listen to “startling questions and statements from their students, without closing down conversations or projecting their own concerns onto the students,” or hiding behind prejudice or anxiety (p. 51). Listening to, and striving to understand, what children are trying to express about themselves helps us to respond effectively, no matter what the topic (Ehrensaft, 2014; 2016). Being attentive to the direction of the dialogue could prevent certain messages from maintaining their ‘taboo’ status. Discussing the transgender and queer communities in a tokenistic manner, or in ways that

sensationalize or ridicule them (Serano, 2013; skelton, 2015b), defeats the very purpose of trying to include them - ‘othering’ them instead.

Controversial Characters, Banned Bodies, and Regulated Reading

Yet, as noted, when children’s stories deviate from what is considered healthy, utopian reading, they are heavily regulated (Reynolds, 2011; Stafford, 2012). As Reynolds (2011) illustrates, people involved in selecting books for children tend to be vigilant about what types of narratives are suitable. When individuals and/or groups of people believe a text transgresses acceptable boundaries, they are often radical in their opposition to it (Reynolds, 2011). Other points of contention are the reactions of parents. Their fears often generate concerns for the safety of their children in the presence of a ‘deviant’ child [or character], fears which can be hostile (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Gender Spectrum Curriculum, 2017; Payne & Smith, 2014). I believe this partly stems from the merger of gender/sex/uality (Blaise, 2014, p. 115) and the perception that these discussions are threatening for children. Radical regulation of children’s books makes them not only physically, but emotionally, harder to access, due to the ‘difficult knowledge’ that could be generated, thus ‘unsettling’ what ECEs may want to keep ‘settled’ (Britzman, 1998, 2000).

As noted early on in this MRP, the children’s book about a boy who likes to wear dresses, *Jacob’s New Dress*, received headlines recently when it was removed from the grade one curriculum in North Carolina, USA⁵. For me, this underlines the negative impression of gender variance, particularly effeminate behaviour in boys. It also exposes the trepidation that arises when bodies and identities move away from a desirable hegemonic masculinity and what it means to embody a ‘natural’ boyhood. This discloses a need to expand the notion of boyhood

⁵ See Appendix D for the Full Story of the Banning of the Children’s Book: *Jacob’s New Dress*.

and girlhood, and explore the consequences of not doing so. As such, the literature that children are exposed to and, maybe more significantly, the discussions that engage children with the storyline play a critical role in how children understand, and conceptualize, their own beliefs about the story and its characters. Before these discussions can begin, though, books with accurate representations of transgender and gender variant characters need to be written, and accessible, to the ECEC community. To do this, partnerships with the transgender community would be essential.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This has indeed been a fruitful academic experience. Underpinning this project lies the process of re-thinking (Stryker, 2008) the “gender problem” in children’s picture books (skelton, 2015a, p. 501), bringing transgender theories and activism to the fore to enhance the ways we have begun to ‘queer’ conversations with children. Through the process of both characters’ journeys in the picture books, I make visible some pitfalls and tension within feminist, queer and transgender theorizing. I outline some possible critical reflection for ECEs to consider when selecting, reading and discussing books, and creating environments that welcome gender investigation. Consistent with Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015), I maintain that critical reflective practice does not mean becoming preoccupied with what is right or wrong about representations of gender; instead, it invites us to look for new ethical relationships.

As we work toward creating a ‘gender spectrum’ and breaking down gender stereotypes in ECEC settings, we must still consider that the gender binary is heavily constructed - in all we do and see - in our Western world. Lest, how can we deny a child that which we, as a society, have constructed? Indeed, a feminist ethics of care must be considered, an outlook that takes into account the details of every given situation (Langford et al., 2016), offering children a variety of threads from the ‘gender web’ to weave a gender that is right for them (Ehrensaft, 2016).

In reading *I am Jazz*, one might more clearly see the need for a diverse range of books to affirm gender transgressions which are clearly not universal experiences. A representation of a privileged child’s social gender transition is but a beginning; yet, images of a highly intelligible Jazz, in my mind, can leave little room for those who might never feel comfortable on either side of the binary (Sullivan, 2006). While *the Boy and the Bindi* does not offer the clear-cut explanations of gender revealed in *I am Jazz*, it signifies that - like childhood and children -

gender may, or may not, follow a particular linear pathway. The implications of reading and discussing both books with children are important and, like Elliot (2010), I seek justice for the multiplicity of gender diversity and identity so that no-one is forced to choose among them.

Engaging in dialogue with children using a range of picture books from different genres that speak to the experiences of a diverse range of characters, reflecting various cultural and societal values, is a vital instrument for guiding children in accepting differing values (Weitzman et al., 1972). Inclusivity of diverse literature would help children, ECEs and families to understand what they, themselves, may be experiencing - or that of a peer, someone in their family, community or someone they have yet to meet.

I support transgender theory which does not abolish the gender binary; hence, with Butler (2004), I affirm that it is crucial to realize that, for some, a “livable life” requires a degree of stability (p. 8). Furthermore, and of great importance, this analysis strives to uncover ways in which both characters seek, despite some unfavourable conditions in society, to cultivate and embody genders that are “safe and true” for them - whether congruent or incongruent with society. With Stryker (2006; 2008), and before her, Butler (2004), I argue that sex, sexuality and gender need to be detangled if transgender theory and practices are to find themselves in ECEC settings, and in the storybooks read with children. Notably, ECEs play an essential role in the co-creation of gender affirmative environments and inclusive discussions.

Future Directions and Theorizing: Including Transgender Studies in the ECEC

Reconceptualization Movement

The aim of this research was not to present the best options available or a set of concrete steps or answers; but rather, it was to outline several considerations that could be involved in the process of selecting, reading and discussing children’s books. While this is in no way a

comprehensive overview of the available transgender literature for children, it strives to consider ways that all children's picture books might begin to form a "pedagogy of possibility that is rooted in gender equity and social justice" (Bittner et al., 2016, p. 948). Yet, justice cannot operate without care. This project attempts to carve routes to transgender roots in the field of ECEC and, thus, seeks to bring transgender studies into the centre of thought and action (Butler, 2004), as well as into the world of children's picture books.

Uplifted by the ECEC reconceptualization movement led by post foundational, critical thinkers, I explore the possibilities of merging transgender theory with this ever-expanding body of work. Stryker (2006) illustrates that there are a growing number of fields taking up transgender studies. Even so, our ECEC reconceptualization movement, while deeply engaged with feminist post-structuralist and queer theories along with critical pedagogy and critical reflection, does not explicitly theorize transgender thought. Indeed, as this analysis has shown, transgender thinkers often differ from queer and feminist ideas; thus, including transgender studies will advance our thinking about gender in relation to children. Broadly conceptualizing gender will also work toward creating more inclusive ECEC policies, practices and environments, in addition to inspiring thoughtful consideration of the materials that ECEs use, especially children's picture books. Thus, I urge ECEC reconceptualizers to also consider transgender perspectives.

Considering Transgender Theory within a Feminist Ethics of Care

The perspectives of social justice that Elliot (2010), Pyne (2014a, 2014b), Stryker (2006, 2008) and Travers (2013, 2014) engage with are vital; but, I believe it is utterly critical that gender justice approaches be considered *within* the framework of a feminist ethics of care. Emphasizing the importance of the child's mind/body dualism means that we consider that this

dualism can be expressed in different ways, as we see with Jazz: mind/girl; body/boy. What this signifies is that our perceptions of the mind/body merger cannot rely on Butler's heterosexual matrix, as discussed in the literature review.

This sensitivity requires the complexity of a feminist ethics of care. Based on my analysis, I imagine that this theory *already* includes transgender considerations in many ways. I say this because a feminist ethics of care focuses on the details that transgender embodiment requires. A transgender perspective within a feminist ethics of care might illuminate the reasons a child might choose to conceal her body in order to focus more deeply on her mind or the stereotypical aspects of her affirmed gender. Certainly, "if our society weren't awash in messages that what matters most about a girl is how she looks, we could all begin to step away from the artificial binaries" (Luecke, 2011, p. 152). This is not to say that ECEs are to focus solely on materials things, or over-emphasize femininity or aesthetics. However, Jazz is transgender and, in many ways, vulnerable; therefore, discussions about her embodiment must be approached with empathy and compassion. Thus, how Jazz and the boy wish to express themselves can be celebrated, as it would for any child. Ultimately, we need to carefully consider, and strive to meet, the unique needs, goals and desires of *all* children (Langford et al., 2016; Langford & White, 2017).

Appendix A
Bibliography of Children's Book with Gender Variant and Transgender Themes
List of Children's Books

- Baldacchino, C., & Malenfant, I. (Illustrator). (2014). *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress*. Groundwood Books.
- Bergman S. B., & Malik, S. (Illustrator). (2012). *The Adventures of Tulip, Birthday Wish Fairy*. Flamingo Rampant Press.
- Bergman S. B. & K. D. Diamond (Illustrator). (2012). *Backwards Day*. Flamingo Rampant Press
- Bryan, J., & Hosler, D. (Illustrator). (2011). *The Different Dragon*. Two Lives Publishing.
- Carr, J., & Rumbach, B. (Illustrator). (2010). *Be Who You Are!* Lightning Source Inc.
- Ewert, M., & Ray, R. (Illustrator). (2008). *10,000 Dresses*. Triangle Square.
- Fierstein, H., & Cole, H. (Illustrator). (2002). *The Sissy Duckling*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.
- Hall, M. (Author & Illustrator). (2015). *Red*. Greenwillow Books.
- Herthel, J., & Jennings, J., & McNicholas, S. (Illustrator). (2014). *I am Jazz*. Dial Books.
- Hoffman, S., & Hoffman, I., & Case, C. (Illustrator). (2014). *Jacob's New Dress*. Albert Whitman & Company
- Kilodavis, C., & DeSimone., S. (Illustrator). (2010). *My Princess Boy*. Aladdin
- Maclear, K., & Arsenault, I. (Illustrator). (2010). *Spork*. Kids Can Press.
- Rothblatt, P. (Author & Illustrator). (2011). *All I Want to be is Me!* CreateSpace.
- Shraya, V., & Perera, R. (Illustrator). (2016). *The Boy and The Bindi*. Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Walton, J., & MacPherson, D. (Illustrator). (2016). *Introducing Teddy*. Bloomsbury USA.

Other Resources

Chapman, E. (2015). *Recommended List of LGBTQ Children's Picture Books*. Retrieved from:

https://www.academia.edu/3150149/Recommended_list_of_LGBTQ_fiction_for_children_and_young_people

Flamingo Rampant Press. "Feminist, radically-diverse, LGBTQ-positive books for all children and families". Website: <http://www.flamingorampant.com>

Naidoo, J. C. (2012). *Rainbow family collections: Selecting and using children's books with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer content*. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC.

The Rainbow Owl. Books and resources for embracing and supporting trans and gender diverse children and young people. Website: <http://www.the-rainbow-owl.com/youngpeople-picturebooks/>

Williamson, L. (2016). *Top 10 books by transgender authors with transgender characters*.

Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2016/feb/01/top-10-books-transgender-authors-trans-characters>

Appendix B

Selecting books with transgender and gender variant characters using the concepts raised in this analysis, in addition to adaptations of Stafford's (2012) questions, ECEs can ask:

- Does this picture book create power imbalances through gender expression, race, sexuality, class, ability or appearance?

Stafford (2012) asks similar questions to Painter et al. (2012), such as:

- Is the reader drawn in with rhythms, patterns or themes? Stafford (2012, p. 196).
- Are the pictures visually stimulating? Do they ignite the imagination and draw the reader further into the story?
- Can the reader get to know the character - their uniqueness, humour and quirks?
- Might the reader be able to identify with the characters?
- Does an intriguing theme come through the story or is it merely a book about a moral message? (Stafford, 2012, p. 196).

Drawing on ethical questions raised in this paper, one could ask:

- Does the transgender character justify their 'worthiness' or 'humanness' (Butler, 2004) by indicating that they are "healthy," and therefore "not damaging"? (Stafford, 2012, p. 196).
- Is transphobia positioned as a problem that needs to be confronted in the book?

Appendix C

Perspectives from *The Gender Spectrum Curriculum*: 12 easy steps on the way to creating gender inclusive spaces:

Avoid asking children to line up as boys or girls, or separating them by gender. Instead, use things like “odd and even birth date,” or “Which would you choose: skateboards or bikes/milk or juice/dogs or cats/summer or winter/ talking or listening?” Invite students to come up with choices themselves. Consider using tools like the “appointment schedule” to form pairs or groups. Ask yourself: “Will this configuration create a gendered space?”

Do not use phrases such as “boys and girls,” “you guys,” “ladies and gentlemen,” and similarly gendered expressions to get children’s attention. Instead say things like “hey folks,” “listen up everyone,” “calling all readers,” “hey campers” or “could all of the athletes come here?” Create classroom names and then ask the “purple penguins” to meet at the rug.

Provide an opportunity for every child to share their name and pronoun. At the beginning of the year or new semester, back-to-school night or following a break, invite children and parents to share how the student would like to be referred to at school.

Have visual images reinforcing gender inclusion: pictures of people not fitting gender norms and “All Genders Welcome” washroom door hangers, for example.

When you find it necessary to reference gender, say “Boy, girl, or something else.” Use terms like “gender expansive” or “non-binary.” Talk about gender diversity in all people. If asked why, use this as a teachable moment about the incredible variations of gender that exist.

Point out, and inquire, when you hear others referencing gender in a binary manner. Ask things like: “Hmmm. That is interesting. Can you say more about that?” or “What makes you say that? I think of it a little differently.” Provide counter-narratives that challenge students to think more broadly about their notions of gender.

Find examples in the media, and elsewhere, that reinforce gender stereotypes or binary models of gender. When with others, call them out and explore them.

Be intolerant of, and interrupt, openly hostile attitudes or references towards other people’s gender every time you hear or observe them, but also use these as teachable moments. Take the opportunity to push the individual on their statements about gender. Being punitive may put a halt to the behaviour, at least in your presence.

Teach children specific language that empowers them to be proud of who they are, or to defend others who are being mistreated. “You may think that, but I don’t.” and “Hey, they’re called ‘private parts’ for a reason.”

Help students recognize and see the limitations of “all or nothing” language by helping them understand the difference between patterns and rules. Teach them phrases like: “That may be

true for some people, but not for all,” “frequently, but not always” or “more common and less common.” Avoid using “normal” to define any behaviours.

Share personal anecdotes from your own life that reflect gender inclusiveness. Even better, share examples when you were not gender inclusive in your thinking, words or behaviours and what you learned as a result including what you will do differently next time.

Do the work yourself. What are your own experiences with gender? What might some of your own biases be? What assumptions do you make about the gender of others? Share these reflections about your evolving understandings of gender.

Gender Spectrum Curriculum Retrieved from: www.genderspectrum.org • 510-788-4412
• info@genderspectrum.org

Appendix D
The Full Story of the Banning of the Children's Book:
Jacob's New Dress

One example in the New York Times (2015) revealed that Italy's conservative Mayor Bruganor banned forty-nine children's books that challenged normative assumptions of gender and gender stereotypes. Povoledo (2015) writes that, as the result of tireless activism, the Mayor reduced his list to only two books; both portrayed same sex families. This is an example of the moral panic that ensues when the boundaries of what is perceived to be 'appropriate' knowledge for children are transgressed (Robinson, 2012, p. 257).

Both the Canadian Library Association (CLA) and the American Library Association (ALA) list some of the most challenged books. A challenged book means there was a formal, written complaint made to a library or school requesting that the book be removed due to inappropriate content (ALA 2012). Of the ALA's list of the ten most challenged books in 2016, the first five were deemed controversial due to their LGBT content; the remaining five were contested because of other explicit sexual content, but notably written for adolescents. This suggests that stigma is still very much alive, affecting LGBT children and their families.

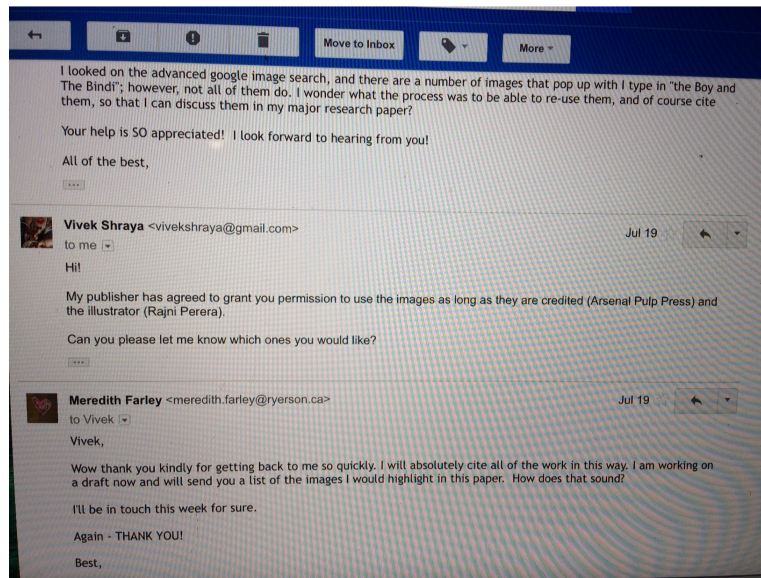
Even so, the CLA (2015) writes about its responsibility to the public in a revised policy which states: "Libraries have a core responsibility to safeguard and facilitate access to constitutionally protected expressions of knowledge, imagination, ideas, and opinion, including those which some individuals and groups consider unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable" (n.p). To this end, the CLA (2015) defends and promotes equitable access to the widest possible variety of expressive content, resisting calls for censorship and the adoption of systems that deny or restrict access to resources.

“Pro-Family Values”

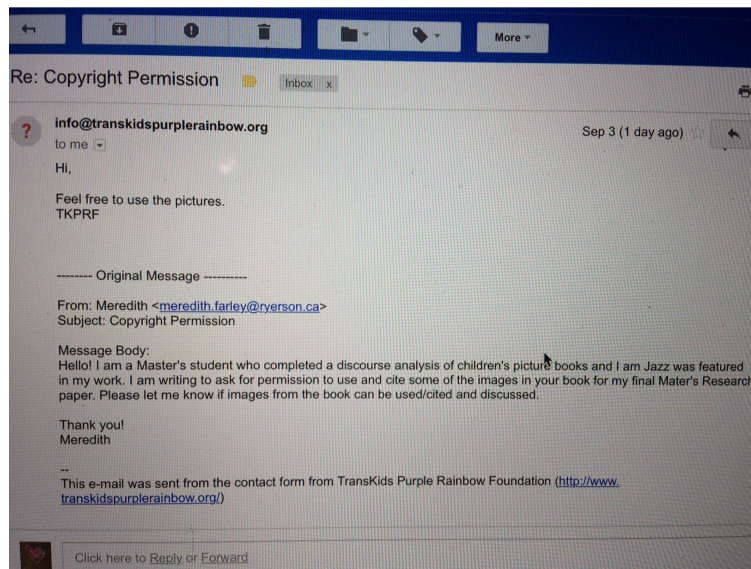
Even more recently, the Huffington Post (2017) outlined a story about one of the largest school districts in North Carolina, which banned the picture book *Jacob's New Dress* from the grade one curriculum. Khoo (2017) writes that the story has been criticized for encouraging children to be transgender, reiterating the stigma associated with transgender identities and, hence, limiting an understanding of what it means to embody a transgender identity. Namaste's (2000) analysis of 'erasure' is useful here, this book being one example of the widespread elimination of transgender lives and narratives in the “cultural and institutional world” (p. 2). North Carolina Values Coalition with 'pro-family' (ie. heteronormative and gendernormative) values claimed that it is not the work of schools to encourage boys to wear dresses; instead, schools need to teach “writing, reading and arithmetic” (n.p). Their argument minimized the significance of the relational aspects of school as well as a sense of belonging and well-being, which created an excuse to exclude, disguised under the pretext of sound academic content. *Jacob's New Dress* was replaced by a book, entitled *Red*. This tells a story of a crayon with a red wrapper that consistently draws in blue and comes to embody 'blueness' (Khoo, 2017).

Appendix E

Copyright Consent from Both Publishers



Email consent from Vivek Shraya and Arsenal Pulp Press (*The Boy and the Bindi*).



Email consent from TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation (*I am Jazz*).

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Glossary of Key Terms

Affirmed Male/Transboy: A person who was born anatomically female, but has a male gender identity (Brill & Pepper, 2008).

Affirmed Female/Transgirl: A person who was born anatomically male, but has a female gender identity (Brill & Pepper, 2008).

Assigned Gender: The gender one is presumed or expected to embody based on assigned sex at birth (Miller, 2016).

Assigned Pronouns: The commonly accepted pronouns that others use to describe or refer to a person based on actual or perceived gender (Miller, 2016).

Assigned Sex: The sex one is assigned at birth based on genitalia (Miller, 2016).

Cis-Gender: Cisgenderism refers to the assumption that bodily sex and gender identity are naturally aligned. Any deviation from this is considered unnatural and abnormal (Garner, 2014, p. 338).

Gay and Lesbian: A person who is physically, romantically, emotionally and/ or spiritually attracted to a person of the same gender (Miller, 2016).

Gender: Gender is generally considered cultural (although that understanding is changing). The sex of the body does not bear any necessary or deterministic relationship to the social category in which that body lives. Stryker (2008) explains that the words man (boy) and woman (girl) refer to gender. Gender is not inborn, although biology is a factor; instead, it is a complex “interweaving of nature, nurture and culture” (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 15).

Gender Artifactualists: Serano (2013) writes that “gender artifactualists often discount or purposefully ignore the possibility that biology and biological variation also play a role in constraining and shaping our genders” (p. 180).

Gender Binary: This is a system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two categories (termed woman and man) (Miller, 2016).

Gender Creative: This refers to the expression of gender in a way that demonstrates individual freedom of expression and that does not conform to any gender (Miller, 2016).

Gender Expression: This is how we externalize our gender, in contrast to gender identity which is an internal feeling. It includes everything that communicates our gender to others through how we speak, play and interact with others as well as our clothing, hair, mannerisms (Brill & Pepper, 2008).

Gender Fluidity: This conveys a wide, flexible range of gender expression, with personal appearance and behaviours that may even change from day to day. For some, gender fluidity

expands beyond behaviours and interests. A child may feel like a girl one day and a boy the next, or feel that neither accurately describes them (Brill & Pepper, 2008).

Gender Normativity: I use the term gender normativity as a way to highlight gender, which often becomes lost in discussions about sexuality in heteronormativity. Gender normativity is related to cis-normativity in that there is an expectation that sex/gender will correspond.

Gender Spectrum: This indicates different ways that children identify and express their gender - a space between binary opposites, or outside of the gender binary (Ehrensaft, 2016).

The **Gender Spectrum** works under the philosophy of the following ever growing affirmative model:

- gender variations are not disorders/pathologies
- gender variations are healthy expressions of the infinite possibilities of human gender
- gender presentations are diverse and vary across cultures, requiring cultural sensitivity
- gender involves an interweaving of nature, nurture and culture - no one stands alone in shaping gender
- a person's gender may be binary, fluid or multiple
- if people suffer from any kind of emotional or psychiatric problem connected to their gender, it is most likely because of the transphobia they are subjected to from the world outside
- if there is a gender pathology, we will find it not in the child, but in the culture (otherwise known as transphobia). (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 15).

Gender Variant: These are people who are “considered by others to deviate from societal norms of femaleness and maleness” (Serano, 2013, p. 49-50).

Gender Web: Gender is a three-dimensional construction that all children weave - based on three major threads: nature, nurture and culture - to arrive at the gender that is “me” (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 25) or “safe and true”.

Homosexuality This is a sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the same gender (Miller, 2016).

Homonormative/Homonormativity: This refers to the assimilation of heteronormative ideals and constructs into LGBTQ+ culture and identity. Homonormativity upholds neoliberalism, rather than critiquing monogamy, procreation, normative family social roles and binary gender roles (Miller, 2016).

Intersex: This term refers to those who are “born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the ‘standard’ definitions for female or male” (Serano, 2013, p. 34).

LBGTQ+: This translates to: “LGBTQ+ (L = lesbian, G = gay, B = bisexual, T = transgender, Q = queer and/or questioning and + to recognize other identities and individuals not explicitly included” (Serano, 2013, p. 21-22).

Non-Binary Gender: Non-binary refers to (a)gender that is broader, less defined, more fluid; it is a more imaginative and expressive matrix of ideas. It challenges power differentials by deconstructing and reconstructing ideas, rejecting disjunctures, unpacking gender and providing opportunities for new knowledge to emerge (Miller, 2016).

Non-Transgender: I use the term “non-transgender” for people who do not identify as transgender. As written above, the term cisgender refers to ‘normal’; the use of non-transgender, in my mind, takes the ‘abnormality’ away from transgender (See Elliot, 2010).

Passing: This term is used by transgender people to mean that they are seen by the public as the gender with which they self-identify (Miller, 2016).

Preferred or Chosen Gender Pronouns: These are self-selected and indicate how an individual prefers to be referenced. While there is an emerging lexicon of pronouns, it is best to ask an individual how one self-references (Miller, 2016).

Queer: The term queer also refers to a suspension of rigid gendered and sexual orientation categories and is underscored by attempts to interrogate and interrupt heteronormativity. It is reinforced by acknowledging diverse people across gender, sex and desires, as well as to bring the sexual to the fore. It embraces the freedom to move beyond, between, or even away from these concepts, yet to potentially return to later (Miller, 2016).

Sex: Sex is generally considered biological and reproductive (male and female refer to sex). However, there are more than two kinds of bodies Stryker (2008). Stryker (2008) explains that sex refers to biology and the words, male and female.

Sexuality: This refers to how, and with whom, we act on our “erotic desires” (Stryker, 2008, p. 16). Heteronormative desires, an attraction between men and women, are considered to be ‘natural’ (Butler, 1990, 2004).

Social Gender Transition: This refers to a change in some, or all, of the following: name, dress, gender pronoun, expression and, at times, legal documents (Ehrensaft, 2016; Pyne, 2014a).

Transgender: The term *transgender* is popular in Anglo-American communities, and is used as an umbrella term to include all people who do not fit into normative relations between sex and gender (Namaste, 2005, p. 1).

Transexual: The term *transsexual* refers to individuals who are born as one sex— male or female—but who identify as members of the “opposite” sex. They take hormones and/or undergo surgical intervention, usually including the genitals, to live as members of their chosen sex (Namaste, 2005, p. 1).

Transphobia: This refers to expressions of fear and hatred of trans people, taking multiple forms (Elliot, 2010, p. 5) such as: violence as well as exclusion from institutional policies, same sex activities and events (Serano, 2013).

Trans-misogyny: Julia Serano coins the term and writes: “Most of the anti-trans sentiment that I have had to deal with as a transsexual woman is probably better described as misogyny.” (Serano, 2007, p. 14).