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Positive Portrayal of Family in Children's Books with Homosexual Characters

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POSITIVE PORTRAYAL OF FAMILY IN CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS WITH
HOMOSEXUAL CHARACTERS

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ABSTRACT

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In today's highly diverse society, it is important to include information in children's education reflecting the diversity they will encounter in their lives. Family is an important aspect in the lives of all children as well as being a diverse aspect of society; it is important that all family structures have adequate representation in a school curriculum (Chapman, 1999). The first article in the American Library Association's (ALA) Library Bill of Rights (1996) states "books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation." This protocol is established by the ALA Library Bill of Rights and the knowledge that children learn about family structure in early childhood education; the problem this research will address is the way in which picture books with homosexual themes portray a family unit.

Justification

According to Chapman (1999), roles of family configurations in America have changed over time. Before the Industrial Revolution, the traditional family structure generally consisted of a father who worked, a mother who took care of the family in addition to assisting with other chores, and their children who were raised by both parents together. All members of the household contributed to the wellbeing of the family at large. After the Industrial Revolution, fathers were home less and became the main providers for the family. Mothers at home had the primary functions of raising the children and keeping house. The children's role lessened in that they weren't expected to contribute as much to the family's economic situation. The Industrial Revolution also eventually allowed for mothers to join the workforce. Despite these changes, it

still remains for many that the working father, the stay-at-home mother, and their children has become the definition of a traditional family.

Chapman (1999) points out that as technology and progress have changed society, society has also changed families. When American women became an important part of the workforce, other aspects of their lives changed as well, such as feeling the need to get married and the necessity to stay home and raise the children. They became more independent and asserted independence in their lives. They could choose to have children without the requirement of marriage. They could take care of themselves and not rely on a husband for food or money. Family structure has progressed so that children are no longer raised exclusively in the conventional norm of a mother-father-child-type of household. Family structures that have been considered alternative are becoming much more visible and prevalent in American culture and society and as such, it is becoming highly likely that children will encounter others from these nontraditional families on a regular basis. However, while this seems to be the case, not all diverse family structures are treated equally in children's education. Information regarding households that consist of parents who are gay or lesbian tends to be underrepresented, if represented at all, in school environments (Chapman, 1999).

In 2008, Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), Family Equality Council, and Children of Lesbian and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE) released the findings of a study they conducted regarding families that include parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). In addition to identifying that "there are more than seven million LGBT parents with school-age children in the United States," the organization also was able to identify how members of these families, both the parents and the children, were serviced by their school

systems (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008, p. vii). The authors discovered that members of LGBT families were often excluded from school activities and their needs were ignored.

Many believe that a child's family is the foundation of his or her life. Chapman (1999) stated "it is the basic tenet of many social scientists and educators that the life of a child is primarily guided and shaped by her family" (p. 4). In general observation of life, this can seem to be a truth. Often, many share the same values and beliefs of their parents. These values and beliefs influence how people behave, how they think, and how they interact with others in society. Therefore, it has become evident for educators that "there needs to exist a bond between the school and family where similar goals, values and norms are reflected" (Chapman, 1999, p. 10).

When it comes to positive portrayal of families with gay or lesbian parents, there seems to be an absence of books in school curricula. Rowell (2007) discovered that there are limited quantities of books with homosexual themes published, and those that are tend to be difficult to find due to the small number of copies printed. Chapman (1999) stated in her article, "literature, as one medium used in curriculum, serves as a tool to highlight differences and similarities and to validate experiences" in children's lives (p. 6). In spite of potential controversy, books that reference families with gay or lesbian members should be made easily accessible in school libraries so that the children who are part of these families are included in family identification lessons. According to Rowell (2007), "the lack of inclusive, gay-friendly picture books means some children cannot see their own lives or the full diversity of family life reflected in books" (p. 1). By including books that depict families with gay and lesbian parents, schools are enabling children who identify with this family structure to find themselves within the books which in turn will authenticate their experiences. If these books are excluded from the curriculum, it is not

only doing a disservice to the children of these families, but also to others in the school because it prevents them from being exposed to diversity, information about societal elements, and the possibility of learning tolerance for differences (Chapman, 1999).

In 1939, the American Library Association (ALA) created and adopted a list of intellectual freedom expectations known as the Library Bill of Rights. According to the ALA, this list should be used by librarians to determine how they will service their patrons. While the Library Bill of Rights are continuously updated in order to maintain their relevancy, the foundation of the Library Bill of Rights remains the same and supports the belief that everyone has a right to have access to materials that will fulfill their needs. When a library fails to provide access to books with homosexual themes, it denies patrons their fundamental rights granted by the Civil Laws and Constitutional Rights of the United States of America (ALA, 1996).

In addition to the ALA's Library Bill of Rights, the American Association for School Libraries (AASL), a subdivision of the ALA, has created national guidelines for teacher librarians to follow. The AASL *Standards for the 21st Century Learner* (2007) was created so that school librarians knew what skills and responsibilities students need to be taught in order to become successful learners. According to this book, "school libraries provide equitable physical and intellectual access to the resources and tools required for learning in a warm, stimulating, and safe environment" (p. 3).

While the AASL *Standards for the 21st Century Learner* (2007) are national guidelines recommending students have access to and be exposed to the diversity of the world, the State Library of Iowa and Iowa Department of Education (2007) recently set minimum requirements that school library programs must meet in order for the schools to meet accreditation standards. One requirement, II.1, states that the school libraries must provide a collection that contains

“materials that represent diverse opinions on controversial topics and are multicultural and gender fair” (p. 17). In order to do this, the libraries must have books with a variety of topics and points of view, including those some consider contentious, within their collection. If schools do not include books with homosexual themes within their collection, they could be considered in violation of this Library Bill of Rights standard.

Deficiencies

Even though families with gay or lesbian parents are becoming more commonly identified within society, the number of children’s picture books on the subject continues to be limited and accessing them seems to be even more of a problem. What little research has been done on the subject tends to focus on books that are available at the junior high and high school levels rather than the early elementary level. This paper will identify children’s picture books that positively portray families with gay and/or lesbian parents in order to explore the representation of family within this type of alternative family structure.

Significance

Families with gay or lesbian members are not exclusive to one state, or one city; they live all over the country. By allowing fear of controversy to limit the use of books with homosexual themes, schools place students at risk of being denied the right to showcase their family and the love they have for its members, unlike the children of heterosexual couples. As a result of providing access to positively reviewed books that portray the meaning of family while also containing a theme of homosexuality, schools are helping the children of these families to be a true part of the school community. Since family life is a main factor in children’s education, teachers need to be aware and comfortable with the gay and lesbian family structure in order to meet the needs of the students who are part of these families. Along with the teachers, school

librarians need to be aware of family diversity in order to adequately provide access to books in which students can identify with the situations and find themselves within the pages. By accomplishing these goals, the educators within the school are not only enabling children of gay and lesbian parents to be successful and have a safe, welcoming environment within which to learn, they are also giving other students exposure to the diversity they will come into contact with throughout their lives (Chapman, 1999).

Problem

The controversy surrounding children's books with a theme of homosexuality often does not acknowledge the positive portrayal of family in these children's picture books.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative content analysis is to explore the meaning of family as portrayed in positively reviewed children's picture books with a theme of homosexuality.

Research Questions

1. In what ways are families portrayed positively within favorably-reviewed or recommended children's books that have homosexual themes?
2. What aspects of family life are under-represented or absent from children's books with homosexual family structures?

Definitions

Family – “A family is a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family” (U.S. Census Bureau. 2010).

LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (This term will be used interchangeably in this paper with homosexual)

Assumptions and Limitations

An assumption underpinning this study is that examples of positive portrayals of family occur in favorably-reviewed picture books with a homosexual theme. However, the number and availability of positively reviewed books that portray children with gay or lesbian parents may be limited.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem that is identified in this research is how controversy surrounds some children's books without regard to the way gay and lesbian parented families of the stories are being portrayed. The purpose of this study is to analyze children's books with themes of homosexuality to assess how the meaning of family is being portrayed. Research that is related to this study falls into two categories: Understanding of family relationships and access of materials in a school environment.

Understanding of Family Relationship

Parents have always had a great influence over the children in their family. Allen and Burrell (1994) conducted a meta-analysis of research to determine if there is a difference between heterosexual and homosexual parenting practices and what effect those practices have on the children of the family. The problem the researchers tried to resolve was whether "the existing evidence indicate[s] that homosexual parents represent a series of parenting behaviors that are contrary to the best interests of the child" (p. 17).

To guide their research, Allen and Burrell (1994) were led by the question of whether there were any facts that supported the belief that gay and lesbian parents could not be good parents. The researchers used meta-analysis to complete their investigation. They used materials that were not only free of prejudice, but would have findings that would be consistent with others completing similar research of the topic. After searching through several databases, Allen and Burrell identified 17 resources that they gathered for use.

Once their research was coded and tabulated according to viewpoint and specific concerns, the researchers were able to determine that there was no evidence that showed homosexual parents were unfit due to their sexual orientation. In reality, this study provided evidence that suggested there was no difference in parenting skills between heterosexual parents and gay and lesbian parents. Children from both types of families had similar feelings regarding parent-child interaction and satisfaction with life. Allen and Burrell (1994) also found data indicating that homosexual parents did not have a negative influence over the emotional development of their children in regards to their sexuality and behavior at school.

While Allen and Burrell (1994) were able to provide information that showed no difference between heterosexual and homosexual parents within a family, it is important to also understand whether or not the dynamics of a family's structure dictate how children of those families will develop psychologically or emotionally. Identification of factors that create a familial bond between parent and child are needed in order to assess whether parents will have a stronger bond with only those children that have a biological connection or if the link can be as strong with children who are related by circumstance (Hamilton, Cheng, & Powell, 2007).

Hamilton, et al. (2007) assessed whether parents needed to have a biological link with their children in order to play a more active, qualitative role in the children's lives. The researchers compared parental involvement in the lives of adopted children and biological children. The researchers determined if adopted families with two parents had parent involvement that was comparable to families with two biological parents. They also distinguished if the parent involvement in families with adopted children was considerably affected by elements from society (Hamilton et al., 2007).

In order to answer these questions, Hamilton et al. (2007) utilized data obtained from the 1998-2000 Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten-First Grade Waves (ECLS-K) to evaluate a population that ranged from 12,950 to 13,899 families. The families were then separated into groups according to the type of connection the parents had with the child of the household. Most households (9,961) in this data analysis consisted of both parents that were biologically related to the child. The second largest group was the families in which only the mothers were biologically related (2,410). Other family structures that were included in the analysis were ones in which neither parent had biological ties to the child and ones where the child had non-parental blood ties to just one parental figure. All family structures were compared to the one that had two adoptive parents, as those were the focus of their inquiries.

In order to measure how involved parents were in their children's lives, the researchers considered different economic, cultural, interactional, and social capital variables. The number of children's books in the home, the access to home computers, and the child's enrollment in a private school were considered to be economic indicators of how much the parents invest in the child and his or her life. To establish what kind of skill activities parents did with their children, the researchers used factors they considered cultural. These include activities related to reading, math, and culture as well as additional activities such as sports. The interactional variables amounted to how often parents talked to their child and worked with him or her on homework, as well as how often they sat as a family to eat meals. Social capital makes up the last category in which variables were placed. The parents' activity in school, church, and their child's friends' families were the variables considered. To analyze all these variables and data, the researchers assessed the information in two steps. First, they used statistical regression models depending on

what the family type was. Sociodemographic measures were added in the second phase. These included age, race, size of family, income, and education.

After analyzing all the information, the researchers were able to establish that, in comparison to the biological children of parents and other family structures, children of adopted families tended to have as much if not more parental involvement in their lives. The sociodemographic status of parents, such as education and financial situation, also was higher in groups where the adopted child had two parents, due to the requirements of the adoption itself. This investment resulted in more parental involvement in the children's lives (Hamilton et al., 2007).

As Hamilton et al. (2007) set out to establish children did not have to be biological to have quality parental involvement in various aspects of their lives, Fitzgerald (1999) reviewed the literature to determine whether children of same-sex couples developed differently from children with heterosexual parents. Fitzgerald's (1999) three-tiered purpose was to explain why it is necessary to have a better understanding of this section of society, to establish whether a child needs parents of opposite gender in order to have appropriate developmental stages, and to determine if there needs to be more definition by the government in regards to the meaning of family.

After choosing and analyzing research studies that focused on gender identity, emotional, psychological, and social development, Fitzgerald (1999) determined that growing up in a household with gay or lesbian parents did not adversely affect the child's development in those domains. In actuality, the researcher was able to identify characteristics that indicated children of these families were well-adjusted emotionally, psychologically, and socially as well as much more accepting of diversity. In addition to these findings, Fitzgerald (1999) was also able to

identify information that showed a stereotypical belief concerning the sexuality of children who grew up in family that had gay or lesbian parents. The researcher was able to establish that having a gay or lesbian parent did not influence the child's own sexual identification. In fact, there was evidence that far more children who identified themselves as homosexual were raised by heterosexual parents.

In order to gain further insight on the long-term effects of growing up with gay or lesbian parents, Goldberg (2007) conducted phone interviews with 46 adults that had been raised with one or more gay or lesbian parents. The individuals that chose to partake in the study were recruited through postings listed on the Children of Lesbian and Gay Everywhere (COLAGE) and Families Like Mine websites. Both websites cater to individuals that are or were raised by homosexual parents. Each of the 36 women and 9 men that were interviewed for the study had to meet the requirements of being a child of gay or lesbian parents who was a legal adult (18 years or older).

In the nearly hour long interviews, Goldberg (2007) asked each individual questions that would assist the researcher in answering the study's questions regarding how much impact the gay or lesbian parents had on the individual's gender and sexual identification; their beliefs regarding gender, sexual identification, and family diversity; and whether being a male or female being raised by same-sex parents resulted in differing opinions on gender role diversity. The researcher then analyzed participant responses by "coding" the results according "social-constructionist and queer theories" and then recoding an additional five times in order to break down the results into more specific answer groups (para. 26).

Goldberg (2007) was able to determine that most participants considered themselves open to diversity and less likely to judge a person based on aspects that differed from what could

be considered the heterosexual norm. They felt their tolerant views were a result of being part of a family that was discriminated against due to their parents' sexuality. In addition to their accepting nature, a large number of individuals were much more aware of actions and behaviors that conveyed negativity towards the homosexual community. While their childhood rooted the beliefs and attitudes of tolerance in these individuals, Goldberg (2007) was able to identify information that indicated that these participants and others like them that grew up with gay or lesbian parents, were more likely to raise their children in an environment that promoted tolerance toward alternative lifestyles.

Accessing Materials in School Environments

In their respective studies, Fitzgerald (1999) and Goldberg (2007) were able to show that children who had exposure to diversity and homosexuality as youth had psychological and emotional development that was on par with children of heterosexual parents in addition to becoming open-minded and tolerant adults. These findings may indicate that if all children had access to similar information and education in diversity at school, perhaps society would be more accepting and empathetic towards differences.

Rubin (1995) conducted a study in which he surveyed school personnel in order to address the issue of how children of gay and lesbian parents tend to be underserved and potentially ignored by their school systems. The researcher wanted to know if materials available to children in the libraries at the elementary and middle school level were able to satisfy any requirement they may need in their psychological or emotional development. Obtaining the opinions regarding homosexuality that were held by the school's staff and other employees, as well as their thoughts on how the school and its curriculum could best service the children that

are part of a gay or lesbian parented family, was also something the researcher set out to evaluate.

Rubin (1995) conducted two separate surveys. Twenty-nine school employees from separate school districts that varied from under 250 to over 10,000 students comprised the first set of individuals. This first group, which was chosen by their enrollment in a specific graduate or master's class at two universities in the Midwest, asked their school's librarian to fill out a different survey and return it to the researcher. Ten librarians that worked in schools containing the K-12 levels, rather than the exclusive 9-12 level high school, completed and returned the survey.

As to the students taking the class, Rubin (1995) was able to identify a common practice of avoiding identification of gay and lesbian parented families as part of the alternative family discussions. Other information from the survey indicated the schools were failing to have a comprehensive curriculum in that they were not meeting the educational and developmental needs of all students, in particular those from gay and lesbian families. Finally, this study identified a trend among educators to hand over the responsibilities of educating students about this topic to other members of the community or working with children who are personally affected by homosexuality. As Rubin (1995) says, "it seems clear that an overwhelming majority of respondents are not willing to take *personal* responsibility for supporting students who grow up in a gay or lesbian home" (p. 38).

In regards to the librarian survey, it was shown that the school libraries had very few of the books from the list they were given. For the ones that were available, student access was minimal or non-existent.

The purpose of these surveys was to see if the schools had certain books with homosexual themes in their libraries. They were given a list of picture book and nonfiction book titles that included *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Leslea Newman and *Families* by Meredith Tax. The librarians were also asked what kind of access the students had to these books. The purpose was also to research the level to which school personnel were informed about the types of families that had gay or lesbian parents.

During analysis, Rubin (1995) tabulated responses according to their respective participants and sorted it according to frequency of responses. Rubin grouped responses to open-ended questions thematically in order to identify common thoughts and beliefs. Responses to the questions were reviewed to determine the rate of recurrence among those surveyed.

While Rubin focused on school staff and their beliefs and practices of including materials with homosexual content, another researcher focused on what the student population was able to access. In a quantitative study that had focused on student accessibility to books with homosexual themes, Gray (2006) assessed the accessibility high school students in school districts within Iowa's Keystone Area Education Agency have to literary works that contained homosexual content. The researcher hypothesized that (a) half the schools in AEA 1 have at least 25 titles from a list of 116 books with homosexual content, (b) that there would be a difference between urban and rural districts, (c) that half the libraries would own more "titles from a control group of recommended literature than from an equal number recommended titles containing gay and/or lesbian characters," and (d) that the schools that own the most books with gay and lesbian characters would have a certified librarian that selects library books for the school purchases for the library (Gray, 2007, p. 7).

The population of Gray's (2006) study was comprised of secondary schools in 45 school districts that were part of the AEA 1 region in northeast Iowa. After grouping the districts according to size of enrollment, the researcher created a list of fiction books and divided them into test and control groups that both contained 116 titles. The books in the control group were available fiction books commonly found in collections and the ones in the test group were obtained using the *Sears List of Subject Headings* for the subjects coming out so that the researcher knew they were specific to her purpose. The subject headings used were coming out (sexual orientation), gay civil rights, gay men, gay parents, gay teenagers, homosexuality, and lesbians. Once these numbers were established, Gray (2006) analyzed the data to determine whether her hypotheses were correct.

Of the five hypotheses, the first was unsupported. The second hypothesis, which evaluated the difference of titles held between rural and urban areas, was supported by the data. The expectation that schools would have more books from the control group rather than the test group also was shown to be true. The fourth hypothesis regarding the presence of a certified librarian involved in collection development was also correct. Finally, Gray's (2006) research showed that access to literature with homosexual themes is available but it tends to differ based on the location of the school district and whether selections were completed by a certified school librarian.

Gay and Lesbian Themes in Literature for Young Children

With a belief that exposure to alternative lifestyles needs to begin in early childhood in order to foster an attitude of tolerance, Sapp (2010) completed a review of children's literature with homosexual themes. The purpose of the study was to determine whether children's literature has changed in regards to the portrayal of homosexual characters as well as "to critique

the evolving quality of these works” (p.32). Sapp (2010) used a bibliography of books with homosexual content that was compiled ten years earlier as a basis for his book selection. In addition to the 27 books that comprised the bibliography, Sapp included an additional 26 books that had been written since the publication of the book list. The 53 books reviewed for this study included both fiction and nonfiction.

Once the titles were identified, each was reviewed with the following criteria: self-esteem, irrational fear or prejudice against homosexuals, characterization of the homosexuality within the book, language towards the homosexual characters, relationships, stereotypes, and erasure. These criteria were obtained from the original bibliography as that was what the creator of that list used. In addition to these criteria, Sapp (2010) added seven additional guidelines to use when reviewing each book. These guidelines included whether the books exposed the reader to a variety of perspectives, provided a pleasurable experience without being too forceful in its message, provided a correct portrayal of life, whether the story was well-written, if the elements of the story and book had coherence, if the story was creative and offered new ideas or perspectives, and whether the book was inviting and engaging.

In Sapp’s (2010) findings, while there were some changes in how they were written, six common themes emerged through the reviews based on the guidelines and criteria used to analyze the selection. The themes were “visibility for same-sex parents, celebrations of family diversity, love and marriage, adoption, biography, and gender variance” (p. 33). Although these themes were found within the selection of books Sapp chose, it was also shown that the older stories with homosexual content or themes “seem to be about increasing visibility and respectability, assuring others that same-sex families are like all families and that gays and lesbians are kind, caring and decent people” (p. 38). These 27 books obtained from the

bibliography had homosexual characters that were much more prominent and obvious to the point the story focused on that. The books with the newer publication date had homosexual characters but they were integrated within the story and did not always have such a major role. In the more recently published books, “same-sex parents have now gone from main characters to supporting characters as our children take the leading role” (p. 38).

While Sapp (2010) focused on books written with homosexual themes or content in order to support the belief that exposure to diversity and alternative life situations need s to begin at a young age, Schall and Kauffmann (2003) conducted a study on how children initially reacted when exposed to such literature.

Working with Kauffmann’s fourth and fifth grade students, Schall and Kauffmann (2010) chose a selection of books with homosexual content that centered on a theme that connected to what students were already learning about in class. The reasoning behind this integration was the fact that the researchers did not want “to teach or change the attitudes of children concerning gays and lesbians, [instead, they] wanted to identify the current perspectives and attitudes” (p. 37) of the students.

After introducing the topic of homosexuality through questions about verbal insults, the researchers had a class discussion with the students that was guided by the students’ questions. This initial discussion was followed by the researchers introducing the books to the students by reading one of the titles to the class. Throughout this reading, the researchers observed that the students did not pick up on the homosexual content until the end of the book. Initial responses to the read aloud book varied from surprised to disgust. During discussion following the reading, the researchers were able to identify that students who had exposure to homosexuality in their own lives were generally more accepting of the content of the book.

Once the students were allowed to browse the collection of titles that were provided, Schall and Kaufmann (2010) observed and documented the students' reactions to the books. While some statements were troubling to the researchers, they held back from interrupting because the students were providing authentic reactions to the stories. It was also observed that several students wondered why homosexuality had never been discussed before.

When observing students interacting with books that contain homosexual content was complete, Schall and Kaufmann (2010) found that "most students didn't see homosexuality as wrong, just different" (p. 42). In addition to a general tolerance, it was observed that the general majority of the students "wanted to be told the truth and wanted adults to recognize and respect their ability to process sensitive material" (pp. 43-44).

While Schall and Kaufmann (2010) recognized that the topic of homosexuality in schools is still highly controversial, they also were aware that there are ways of introducing the knowledge about this way of life through books that have other themes and areas of focus. Having the homosexuality integrated into a story that doesn't focus on homosexuality can show students real life scenarios and how interactions with homosexuals differ little if any from their heterosexual counterparts.

Summary

There are many types of families in society and, regardless of composition, it doesn't mean the children will suffer if they are part of a heterosexual, homosexual, biological or adopted household. Fitzgerald's (1999) research has shown that children who have parents who are gay or lesbian are not more likely to become homosexual themselves. The rates of homosexuality among children are similar between both types of parental units. Allen and Burrell (1994) were able to conclude that the sexual orientation of a child's parents does not have

a negative effect on child development. Children learn and develop at similar rates regardless of whether they are part of a homosexual or heterosexual household.

In addition to parental emotional influence, Hamilton, et al. (2007) used economic, cultural, interactional, and social capital variables to determine whether there was a difference between parental involvement in the lives of biological or adopted children. Their research was able to show that the parental involvement in the lives adopted children was as strong if not stronger than in families where the children were with their biological parents. The parental involvement Hamilton, et al. (2007) was able to establish supports Fitzgerald's (1999) research that suggested growing up in a household with gay or lesbian parents did not have a negative effect on the child's development in the domains of gender identity and emotional, psychological, and social ability.

Rubin's (1995) research indicated that because children spend so much time at school, educators could and should create an environment that promotes tolerance, open-mindedness, and an understanding of facts regarding homosexuality rather than the false myths and stereotypes that clutter modern day society. This type of environment meets the expectations that "all school staff have a responsibility and obligation to help meet the personal, academic, emotional, as well as social needs of every single student" (p. 59).

Finally, early in their research process, Schall and Kauffmann (2010) were able to establish that most information students already held regarding homosexuality was obtained through their siblings or other peers. According to the researchers, "no adults were mentioned as an information source" (p. 38). This lack of credible and reliable sources allowed for misinformation and stereotyping. This evidence could provide validation for Rubin's (1995) research results supporting a more prominent school role in teaching acceptance as well as the

belief that schools should be introducing students to materials with homosexual content at earlier ages and where adults can guide the knowledge learned. As Sapp (2010) said, “if educators wait until children are in the middle and upper grades, the task becomes one of unlearning prejudice instead of preventing it” (p. 33).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is a qualitative content analysis of positively reviewed children's picture books that have a homosexual theme. Creswell (2008) describes the qualitative research method as one where "the researcher relies on the views of participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words or text; describes and analyses these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner" (p. 46). As Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) further explain, an important aspect of qualitative analysis of information is that it "allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner" (p. 308).

Population

To complete this study, I chose a homogeneous sample of positively reviewed children's picture books that feature families with gay or lesbian adults. Because of the limitations of available resources, the copyright dates of the books ranged from 2000 – 2010. All titles, including *And Tango Makes Three* and *Uncle Bobby's Wedding*, were obtained through highly regarded resources for library collections. Using the search terms homosexuality, gay, lesbian, and homosexual parents, all books within this study were chosen based on their inclusion in the *Wilson's Children's Catalog*, which only contains materials that are positively reviewed; whether they received a starred review from *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *Kirkus*, or *Horn Book*; were award winners; received at least three positive reviews; or were listed on ALA's Best Book List within the last 10 years. A secondary search of the Children's Comprehensive Database using the same search terms and parameters was also conducted to ensure a

comprehensive list. (Appendix A). These books were purposefully chosen in order to “inform the research question being investigated” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 309).

Procedures

When one begins a qualitative content analysis, data needs to be collected early and analysis needs to follow a systematic approach. Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) suggest a series of eight steps be followed to make sure the process produces authentic and consistent results.

The titles for the sample were gathered from sources considered among the top resources in the field for building library collections and should be easily accessible to teacher librarians. This includes *Wilson's Core Catalogs* and *Children's Comprehensive Database* as well as publications such as *School Library Journal* and *Booklist* that review books for their users.

Data Collection

The book sample underwent directed content analysis. According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), when completing directed content analysis studies, the “initial coding starts with a theory or relevant research findings” (p. 390). Then initial coding revolved around the positive family characteristics identified in my literature review.

The first review of each book focused on the story's plot and characters. Hand coding elements using colored tags identified characteristics that indicated positive portrayal of family within the story. Four elements and themes guided the initial coding: signs of emotional love and affection between the parents and child, signs of physical affection between parent and child, equal parent involvement in the child's life including positive parental role-modeling, and family interaction with the community (see Appendix B). Each appearance of the desired element was marked within the text and counted to see how frequently it was found within the story.

Once the initial analysis was completed for all books, a review of notes and coding ensured consistency throughout the sample. After the consistency review was completed, tables were created to organize the information according to common themes and elements among the books in the sample (see Appendix B). From the tabular information, patterns were examined to arrive at conclusions.

As a test of the coding scheme, a sample coding procedure was applied for one title from this study's booklist. Multiple tags may have been attached to a single page of text if it contains multiple elements. Each element had its own unique color for clarity.

Data Analysis

The researcher organized the data according to the coding in order to see common themes and elements (Appendix B). Text was quoted or paraphrased to represent the manifestation of the themes in each book. Patterns that emerge revealed the qualities of the portrayal of families in these texts.

Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) state that "qualitative content analysis does not produce counts and statistical significance; instead, it uncovers patterns, themes, and categories important to a social reality" (p. 312) Through examination of patterns among the coded themes, characteristics of family portrayal emerged to provide insight into the nature of homosexuality as a factor in family life in literature for young children.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Data Analysis

This qualitative study was done in order to determine if there was a positive portrayal of families in picture books with homosexual themes. The picture books that were part of this literature review were selected based on their recommendation by a variety of book review publications and organizations that support the gay and lesbian community. The books chosen were also published within the last 10 years and have a strong family aspect.

Table 1 Book Titles

Title and Author	Interest Level	Copyright Date	Place and Publisher
<i>And Tango Makes Three</i> by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell	K-3	2005	New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers
<i>Uncle Bobby's Wedding</i> by Sarah Brannen	K-3	2008	New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons
<i>Daddy, Papa, and Me</i> by Leslea Newman	K-3	2009	Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press
<i>Mommy, Mama, and Me</i> by Leslea Newman	K-3	2009	Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press
<i>Molly's Family</i> by Nancy Garden	K-2	2004	New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
<i>In Our Mother's House</i> by Patricia Polacco	K-2	2009	New York: Philomel Books
<i>Antonio's Card</i> by Rigoberto Gonzalez	1-3	2005	San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press

<i>Christian, the Hugging Lion</i> by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell	K-3	2010	New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers
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In order to answer the two focus questions of this study, each of the chosen books was read then reread and coded to mark instances where positivity permeated the life of the family within the story. Examples of four themes desirable within stories that portray families positively were specifically sought within the text of the stories and the illustrations that accompanied the text. The four themes were love, affection such as hand holding or hugging, family involvement, and community interaction.

Table 2 Coding Themes

Book Titles	Love	Physical Affection (hugs, hand holding, etc)	Family Involvement	Community (interaction with those outside their family)
And Tango Makes Three	Parents cared for child; fed and protected child	Cuddling between parents and child	Parents teach child how to behave; teach to swim; Parents take turns caring for child; laughter and happy times	Mingle with other penguins; utilize same swimming and feeding areas
Uncle Bobby's Wedding	Uncle cared for child; spent time with child; comforted child; going out of way to spend time with child	Hugging; smiles; laughing	Uncle taught child life skills; included child in decision making; parents modeled tolerance, acceptance, other positive behaviors	Extended family came to celebrate occasion; support provided by friends and family
Daddy, Papa, and Me	Care for child; provide a happy	Hugging; cuddling;	Parents taught child life skills	n/a

	environment	dancing; playing	including cooking and behavior; equal parent child interaction	
Mommy, Mama, and Me	Care for child; provide a happy environment	Playing; hugging; comfort	Parents have equal time with child; parents teach life skills	n/a
Molly's Family	Caring for child; providing supportive environment	Hand holding; hugging; kisses	Family discussions; equal participation of parents in activities	Classroom discussions about different types of family; participation in school/family activities
In Our Mother's House	Cared for children; tended to children when sick; stepped outside comfort zone to please children	Hugs; cuddling; kisses	Taught children behavior skills; positive role modeling; celebrating diversity; traditions	Family support from neighbors; neighborhood get togethers; neighbors helping neighbors
Antonio's Card	Caring for child; spending time with child; helping child learn life skills; supported child's decisions	Hand holding; hugs	Both the parent and her partner helped child learn to read and spell;	Participation in school functions
Christian, the Hugging Lion	Cared for lion; got lion out of bad environment and provided a nurturing environment; made decisions based on what was best for lion's welfare	Hugging; cuddling	Taught and modeled behavior	Accepted by friends and community

Question one of this study's purpose was to determine what ways are families portrayed positively within favorably-reviewed or recommended children's books that have homosexual

themes. The coding has shown that all books reviewed have common elements that contribute to displays of love and affection within the family unit. The expressions of love and affection range from hand-holding to caring for and protecting the children throughout their lives. Sometimes, the expression of love and affection is vocalized within the stories, other times it's more subtle and indicated through actions seen in the pictures.

In *Mommy, Mama, and Me* and *Daddy, Papa, and Me* by Leslea Newman, the love and affection were major parts of the books as the relationship between parents and child was the main focus of the stories. There wasn't a page that didn't have the parents hugging, dancing, laughing or comforting the child. The atmosphere of the home as well as the parent and child relationship was very positive, happy, and nurturing. Everything was done in good nature and with a smile – whether in joy or in comfort.

And Tango Makes Three by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell is a picture book based on a real story of two penguins that lived in the Central Park Zoo in New York City. In this story, the desire of having a child was so strong by the male penguin couple that it became evident when the penguins treated a rock as an egg and cared for it as if it was real. They loved and nurtured that rock as the heterosexual couples did with their real eggs in order to get it to hatch. Once the zookeepers provided the two male penguins with a real chick to raise, the couple loved it as if it was the child they hatched and raised it as the other penguins raised their chicks.

Uncle Bobby's Wedding by Sarah Brannen dealt with a girl concerned over her favorite uncle marrying his partner and forgetting about her. While he was not a parent, Uncle Bobby still played a mentor and caregiver role to the child as he made it a point to spend time with the girl and teach her things such as sailing and the name of the stars. The uncle's partner was included in activities in order for the child to get to know him and let her adjust to the new relationship he

would be having with the family. Finally, to show he really did care and love his niece, Uncle Bobby included her in the planning of the wedding as well as providing her a role in the ceremony.

Christian, the Hugging Lion, another book based on a true story and also written by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, had one of the strongest expressions of love for a child by a parent when the two male parents made the decision to take Christian the lion to Africa in order to release him back into the wild. It was a difficult decision to make for the men because, although a lion, Christian was as much their child as if he were a human being. However, the men knew that an apartment in a city was no place for a lion and releasing it to its natural habitat was the only way for this lion to live and thrive as befitting the lion's wild nature. While letting Christian go was a sacrifice and one that meant the men would probably never see him again, it was an action they were willing to make so Christian could be happy and live a proper, healthy life.

In addition to the themes of love and affection, family involvement was looked for within each story as well as interaction with the community the characters were part of. *Daddy, Papa, and Me* as well as *Mommy, Mama, and Me* by Leslea Newman were the only two stories that lacked a community aspect due to the purpose of these stories focusing on the relationship between the parents and the children.

All stories in this review had equal parental involvement where each parent or adult taught the children skills that they would need in life. No instances of one parent or adult being a primary caregiver over the other were observed. In the story *In Our Mother's House* by Patricia Polacco, the parental role was consistently shared. For example, while one mother taught the children how to cook, the other taught the children how to build and repair things. In other

instances within the story, the mothers worked together to teach children other lessons or model positive behavior in the face of adversity.

As for the community interaction, all stories had some aspect of this with the exception of the two previously mentioned titles. Much of the story of *Molly's Family* by Nancy Garden as well as *Antonio's Card* by Rigoberto Gonzalez took place at the children's school. Community also played a big part in Polacco's *In My Mother's House* through neighborhood gatherings, neighbors helping the mothers and their children with building a tree house, participation in school functions, and enjoyment of community traditions such as trick-or-treating on Halloween. Brannen's *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* had a smaller circle of community by having extended family and friends make an appearance; however, the characters did go to public places without negative incidents.

The second question of this study was to determine what aspects of family life are under-represented or absent from children's books with homosexual family structures. Overall, there wasn't anything regarding the relationships between parents and children that seemed missing. All stories had some aspect of love, respect, and interaction with others. The one thing that several stories did lack was an influence of prejudice from community members which is an unfortunately common occurrence for families that have homosexual members. However, in the stories where a prejudice was present and addressed, it was a negative factor that tended to help strengthen the familial bonds as well as community bonds.

One example of prejudice strengthening familial bonds is in Rigoberto Gonzalez's book *Antonio's Card*. While Gonzalez had the child of his story feeling trepidation over others realizing his relationship with his mother's partner, the negativity that began with the child's

own misunderstanding turned into an appreciation for his mother's partner as he was able to see all the good and the love that their relationship had.

Polacco also addressed the issue of prejudice through the intolerance of a neighbor. The mothers dealt with the prejudice with grace and without additional negativity. It was also overcome in the story by the overwhelming support of the family's friends and neighbors. This was also the case in *Molly's Family* by Nancy Garden where it was an early belief by some children that Molly couldn't have two mothers. In this story, through subtle guidance of the teacher and Molly's interaction with her mothers, the children were eventually able to see that having parents of the same sex was acceptable. Overall, despite the prejudice aspect of family found in some of the stories, as in the other books, the interactions between the characters and community were almost always positive or had an eventual positive outcome to an instance of negativity.

3.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY

An objection that is found in American society is that homosexuality ruins the family structure and moral values. Stories that contain elements or themes of homosexuality have been objected to based on this belief. Therefore, this study was completed with the intention of examining how family is portrayed in picture books with homosexual characters.

Today, the concept of family is as diverse as the world's population. It's no longer mandatory to have one father, one mother, and children to form the family unit. As seen in the literature review of this study, families do not have to be biologically related to be as strong as those who are and the children are not adversely affected if the biological connection is not there. It is the love and respect among the people that provide the foundation for the family to function and provide an enriching environment for the children.

While these picture books did have an underlying theme of homosexuality, the main message of the stories was love and family. Love overcame any obstacles and any negativity directed towards the main characters. Often times, the homosexuality wasn't even expressly addressed. Having two mothers or two fathers was just how it was and attention was not drawn to the fact the characters were gay. In *Christian, the Hugging Lion* by Justin Richardson, homosexuality wasn't ever mentioned. It was simply implied. When reading this story, one may not even realize it without specifically sitting down and thinking of the situation.

The books in this study offer evidence of what Allen and Burrell (1994) discovered in their research regarding whether the parenting practices of homosexual couples differed from those of heterosexual couples. The researchers found that children in both kinds of families have

similar feelings regarding parent-child interaction and satisfaction with life. This indicates that heterosexual parents are not better parents and children with homosexual parents do not have an upbringing of lesser quality.

As Hamilton, Cheng, & Powell (2007) discovered in their study, the books that were part of my study provided evidence of diverse family structures that were equally loving and nurturing in nature. A biological relationship does not mean that there is a closer bond between parent and child. Families can have the same level of love and devotion if the children are adopted. The factor that makes the family bond strong is the element of love.

While people may object to the homosexuality due to personal beliefs, the overall message of happiness, love, and family should be what is considered important. The books in this study have shown that homosexuality is not always the prominent theme in stories with homosexual characters. These types of stories are just adding elements of society that are commonplace, yet rarely seen in picture books. In the end, besides being good stories for children to read, they are also useful resources for families and others to show love among family members as well as diversity and acceptance for all people and family structures.

Recommendations

Because of the diversity found in family structures in today's society, it is important that books that depict families with gay and lesbian parents are available to those that need them. All individuals who are part of this type of family structure are not always open with their community about the structure of their home life. This includes students. By making books with homosexual themes available in the library on the shelves with the rest of the collection, it is providing opportunities for students to find themselves in books and make personal connections.

In addition to that, it is also a subtle way for the school to show that the students and their families are accepted and that their life is not a reason for censorship.

In addition to having books with homosexual themes available for the school community to use, it is also important that these family structures are included in general instruction about families. A school is a safe environment for students to learn about the diversity found in society and it offers them to ask questions that they may not feel comfortable asking elsewhere. By leaving this important and ever-growing section of society out of basic instruction, it is forcing students to learn about these families through means that may create negativity towards homosexuality which can result in students having prejudice or hatred towards homosexuals and those that are involved in their lives. With the gay and lesbian community becoming more open and out in society, it is becoming more and more likely that all children will encounter others with homosexuality in their family. It is important that all are responsibly educated regarding families with homosexual members in order to show students that diversity such as this is not a negative thing. Books like the ones reviewed in this study can help all students understand that even though a child might have two mothers or two fathers, they are still part of a loving family. That is what is truly important.

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APPENDIX A

BOOK TITLES

Title and Author	Interest Level	Copyright Date	Place and Publisher
<i>And Tango Makes Three</i> by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell	K-3	2005	New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers
<i>Uncle Bobby's Wedding</i> by Sarah Brannen	K-3	2008	New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons
<i>Daddy, Papa, and Me</i> by Leslea Newman	K-3	2009	Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press
<i>Mommy, Mama, and Me</i> by Leslea Newman	K-3	2009	Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press
<i>Molly's Family</i> by Nancy Garden	K-2	2004	New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
<i>In Our Mother's House</i> by Patricia Polacco	K-2	2009	New York: Philomel Books
<i>Antonio's Card</i> by Rigoberto Gonzalez	1-3	2005	San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press
<i>Christian, the Hugging Lion</i> by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell	K-3	2010	New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers

APPENDIX B
CODING THEMES

Book Titles	Love	Physical Affection (hugs, hand holding, etc)	Family Involvement	Community (interaction with those outside their family)
And Tango Makes Three	Parents cared for child; fed and protected child	Cuddling between parents and child	Parents teach child how to behave; teach to swim; Parents take turns caring for child; laughter and happy times	Mingle with other penguins; utilize same swimming and feeding areas
Uncle Bobby's Wedding	Uncle cared for child; spent time with child; comforted child; going out of way to spend time with child	Hugging; smiles; laughing	Uncle taught child life skills; included child in decision making; Parents modeled tolerance, acceptance, other positive behaviors	Extended family came to celebrate occasion; support provided by friends and family
Daddy, Papa, and Me	Care for child; provide a happy environment	Hugging; cuddling; dancing; playing	Parents taught child life skills including cooking and behavior; equal parent child interaction	n/a
Mommy, Mama, and Me	Care for child; provide a happy environment	Playing; hugging; comfort	Parents have equal time with child; parents teach life skills	n/a
Molly's Family	Caring for child; providing supportive environment	Hand holding; hugging; kisses	Family discussions; equal participation of parents in activities	Classroom discussions about different types of family; participation in school/family activities
In Our Mother's	Cared for	Hugs; cuddling;	Taught children	Family support

House	children; tended to children when sick; stepped outside comfort zone to please children	kisses	behavior skills; positive role modeling; celebrating diversity; traditions	from neighbors; neighborhood get together; neighbors helping neighbors
Antonio's Card	Caring for child; spending time with child; helping child learn life skills; supported child's decisions	Hand holding; hugs	Both the parent and her partner helped child learn to read and spell;	Participation in school functions
Christian, the Hugging Lion	Cared for lion; got lion out of bad environment and provided a nurturing environment; made decisions based on what was best for lion's welfare	Hugging; cuddling	Taught and modeled behavior	Accepted by friends and community