Queering the ABCs: LGBTQ Characters in Children's Books

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Degree Name
MA (Master of Arts)

Program
Sociology

Date of Award
5-2014

Committee Chair or Co-Chairs
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Abstract
Over the past 30 years, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) groups have called for children's books to include LGBTQ characters and themes to help children understand our multifaceted social world. Few LGBTQ characters have appeared in children's literature. This qualitative study analyzes the text and images of 29 children's books published between 1972 and 2013 that have any LGBTQ characters. Books featuring lesbian and gay characters often presented them as conforming to heteronormative standards to find fulfillment. The majority of books with gender-deviant characters focused on boys harassed by other characters for their conventionally feminine behaviors. Surprisingly few books in this inclusive sample depicted any non-white characters. This study concludes by offering recommendations for how authors of children's books could approach this genre without reinforcing other long-standing inequalities tied to gender, race, class, and sexuality.

While LGBT, LGBTQ, and LGBTQ+ are often the most commonly used acronyms, a number of variations also exist. LGBTQIA: This acronym includes initials for queer, intersex, and asexual. LGBTIQA+: This variation stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual, and others that can include pansexual and non-binary. "Coverage of LGBTQ issues has moved beyond simplistic political dichotomies and toward more fully realized representations, not only of the diversity of the LGBTQ community, but also of LGBTQ people's lives, their families, and their fundamental inclusion in the fabric of American society," explains GLAAD, or the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.